

## A MODEL OF IGNATIAN ADVOCACY

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I am invited to offer a draft model for and overview of 'Ignatian advocacy': advocacy in an Ignatian spirit.<sup>1</sup> The overview will be modified in the light of later exchanges, especially at the workshop itself, in El Escorial, Madrid, November 2008. In using the word 'Ignatian' I refer to the 'way of proceeding' developed by St Ignatius Loyola that should permeate all Jesuit activities and apostolates: in this case, the practice of advocacy. This way of proceeding will be expanded below.

I make two preliminary observations:-

- What is presented here is precisely a 'model', a framework for a wide range of possible particular advocacy efforts. In that sense it is abstract. In different cases and settings, some elements will appear in the foreground, others will be less prominent, some even absent. Models are only useful insofar as they are schematic – and that means **simplified**. They are tidy whereas life is not tidy. Models are intended as an aid to reflection, but must not become weapons against the real. Secondly, there is always a question about how a model is **applied**, how far it is enlightening and how far it threatens to become a straightjacket.
- Advocacy is part of a broader process. The work of the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), for example, includes not only advocacy but capacity-building, and primarily the accompaniment of people in urgent need. It is the JRS tradition of **accompaniment and service** that gives JRS's advocacy its credibility. For a development agency, advocacy probably goes with the provision of funding to support the work of local partners. *Fe y Alegría* focuses on education for democracy and popular participation. For OCIPE, the Jesuit European Office, advocacy is one element of a mission that includes a general engagement, in and around the institutions of the European Union, on the relationship between Christian faith and political responsibility. This note, however, focuses specifically on advocacy itself, not on its broader institutional context. As will be seen, advocacy is not only that tip of the iceberg that is the direct conversation: it is the activity of the organisation insofar as directed towards influencing the policy of others.

I shall identify six fundamental elements of Ignatian advocacy. The first section is the longest and most complex, and the 'Ignatian' element will gradually receive more emphasis as we move through.

1. It is a critical and constructive engagement with centres of power.

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<sup>1</sup> This reflection draws on the work and experience of several colleagues and writers. I should mention especially Jacques Haers SJ, Elias López SJ, Dani Villanueva SJ, Raul Gonzalez SJ, Fernando Franco SJ, the participants in the 'Ignatian Family Encounter' in Nairobi, January 2007 and those involved in preparing the present advocacy workshop. This second draft has benefited from comments from some of the above, notably Fernando Franco and John Kleiderer: and also incorporates an interesting and recent institutional development in Brussels about 'lobbyists'. At this stage I also had sight of (but little time to integrate) a key document of *Fe y Alegría*, the final statement of its 2004 Congress in Madrid. Responsibility for the text remains mine.

## A. Content

- It is **critical**: something in a given situation needs changing, after all, or we would not be taking the trouble to do this work. We ‘advocates’ bring considered views on **how** it might be changed. Advocacy is more than ‘comment’, and it is not an entirely open, exploratory conversation, of theoretical interest only: it is directed towards the achievement of some change deemed necessary. For example, one definition of JRS’s advocacy is, ‘All JRS action aimed at modifying the way in which third parties treat refugees’.<sup>2</sup> It is one integral element of ‘policy work. Further, advocacy aims not only at behavioural change on the part of individuals (e.g. those with decision-making authority) but at a certain transformation, even though partial and selective, of political structures. Its practice is one element of responsible citizenship, participating in some political process, though usually without becoming aligned with any one political party. It is part of a general search for justice. Since justice is elusive this struggle often begins with the struggle against manifest **injustice**. (Philosophically speaking, there is no such thing as ‘justice’ except in complex tension with ‘injustice’, and vice-versa.)
- It is **constructive**: I remember that at the World Social Forum in Nairobi, January 2007, speeches of the opening ceremony were punctuated by condemnatory slogans: ‘Down with Bush!’, ‘Israel, Out of Palestine!’, and so forth. Such slogans, almost inevitable at major public events, may have a limited value in mobilising a mass movement, though their simple-mindedness perhaps alienates as many people as it attracts. Slogans can be positive too, such as ‘Make Poverty History’. Slogans are necessary in campaigning, as a verbal badge of allegiance to some cause: but slogans are not themselves advocacy. The organisations that used the slogan ‘Make Poverty History’ were simultaneously in dialogue with governments and with the international financial institutions about how this objective might realistically be achieved. Without that careful and detailed work, that at might at least in part convince others, nothing would have been achieved by the slogans except protest. Conversely, protest may be necessary and good, but needs advocacy to have any hope of being effective.

## B. Process

- Advocacy, therefore, is directed towards **conversation**: it seeks to include those we must challenge in the conversation, not to reject them. Sometimes, evidently, one may have no opportunity to do that (think of the Chinese protesters in Tiananmen Square in 1989); or others may simply refuse to engage with us; or the overriding need to defend people threatened by tyranny needs to be secret to be effective. We may still in that case need to **confront** oppressors, and protest might have a worthwhile, long-term effect: but confrontation, too, is not advocacy. Speaking of his experience of dialogue with both government and oil companies in Chad, Antoine Berilengar SJ has described a rhythm between cooperation and confrontation – always accompanied by **clarification** (even if certain interests might be served by obscuring things). It is important that the advocates, ‘never break the bridge’. This crucial and complex relationship between conversation and confrontation might well be further explored at the workshop.

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<sup>2</sup> JRS’s International Strategic Advocacy Plan, prepared by Raul Gonzalez SJ.

- It engages **with the structures of power and decision**, at appropriate and perhaps multiple levels – international, national, local; both political and commercial. The coalition of development agencies ‘Publish what you Pay’ has campaigned publicly for international companies to be transparent in their financial dealings with host governments: it has also advocated, by engaging directly with some such companies. The concept of ‘structures’ here may refer either to institutions and their systemic practices (the World Trade Organisation, the military of a given country, etc.) or to intangible but no less ‘real’ phenomena such as ‘international law’.
- Advocacy promotes the equitable sharing of power. The advocacy dialogue seeks not only to rectify some specific wrong, but to build mutual recognition and respect, and to include those groups (or their representatives) which are seriously affected by the bad situation but were previously excluded from the relevant discussions. Thus advocacy aims to build a sense of togetherness and co-responsibility for improving the quality of political life in general, by allowing the parties involved to share in a process of reflection.
- The first draft of this paper proposed a distinction between ‘advocacy’ and ‘lobbying’, according to which advocacy was defined as the promotion and defence of principles and lobbying as the application of pressure in order to promote or defend interests. (One US President is supposed to have told lobbyists, ‘OK, you’ve persuaded me. Now go out and put pressure on me.’). In this sense, lobbying is an appeal to the powerful that implicitly takes for granted – and therefore actually reinforces – existing power structures.

I still think this distinction has some merit. A certain kind of lobbying is most effectively conducted **on behalf of the powerful**. The European Parliament estimates that there are 15,000 lobbyists and 2,500 lobbying organisations working in Brussels in relation to the European Union. Many are well-resourced by highly organised commercial interests. In calling lobbyists to high ethical standards, the European Parliament has now proposed a formal register of lobbyists, requiring them to declare their financial status and interests. Lobbyists need to be monitored no less than the institutions they seek to influence.

On the other hand, the advocacy-lobbying distinction cannot bear much weight. Different people simply use the terms in different ways. Secondly, it is hard to make the distinction in some languages: the French term nearest to ‘advocacy’ seems to be ‘le lobbying’! Thirdly, in the US the notion of lobbying has a richer sense than that given above, so that lobbying is virtually synonymous with ‘advocacy at the governmental level’. The European Commission, supported by the European Parliament has recently defined lobbying in a similarly comprehensive way, as ‘activities carried out with the objective of influencing the policy formulation and decision-making processes of the EU institutions’.

Yet the European Parliament has also acknowledged, in line with Section 17 of the Treaty of Lisbon (Consolidated Version), that the churches are **not** to be classed as lobbyists (even though they – we – certainly seek to ‘influence policy’) but as partners in dialogue, etc.<sup>3</sup> The churches were so resistant to be defined as lobbyists that they lobbied to be called something else! Similarly lawyers are regarded by the Parliament as something other than lobbyists – though they often vigorously promote corporate interests rather than offering impartial legal advice.

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<sup>3</sup> Ironically, the Parliament’s second descriptive phrase for the churches, in contradistinction to ‘lobbyists’, is ‘interest representatives’: indeed it is clear enough that the churches have interests as well as principles’.

To sum up this specific point, it may be less useful to distinguish advocacy from lobbying than to commend an ‘Ignatian practice’ of **both advocacy and lobbying**. Instead a somewhat different distinction may be helpful. Lobbying is the direct processing of addressing parliamentarians, officials, executives, etc. This role will often be limited to a few, and is rarely possible for those at the grassroots. Advocacy is the whole matrix of activities that enable and support such lobbying. (Some of these activities may be forceful: strikes, marches, etc.) It is therefore essentially communitarian, as is explained further below. Meanwhile, this paper refers to the whole infrastructure of activities that support the attempt to influence decision-makers, not only the moments of direct interaction.

## 2. It is carried out from the perspective of the oppressed and excluded, in an open spirit

- Ignatian Advocacy is grounded in fundamental ethical convictions. It is part of a search for justice, not merely for the advantage of our own group. These convictions may apply at two levels; foundational moral principles (solidarity, economic and social justice) and juridical principles (national laws, international norms and standards).
- There is a specifically ecclesial and Ignatian perspective – the ‘preferential option for the poor’. When we represent those with little public voice, we need clarity about the positions of those for whom we advocate, as well as about our own convictions (and we must be clear where these two perspectives differ!). Therefore it is important to be in touch with value-based local leadership, and to ensure that our analysis fully takes account of theirs.
- However, as argued above, advocacy is never rooted in merely a set of slogans or formulae. In a real conversation, we have clear views and purposes of our own but need to respect our presumed opponents and be open to their views. Only in this way can something new emerge.
- Whatever the specific topic that gives rise to the need for advocacy, the reality of social and political exclusion, that is the frequent denial of effective political responsibility to entire communities, is itself an evil that is implicitly being challenged. That is why respect for those whose immediate interests are opposed is paramount. The principal good being sought is not the reversal of some particular pattern of dominance, but the establishment of a more equitable set of relationships. This ‘pattern’ may be quite complex. In the case of the oil industry in Chad, for example, there is a triangular configuration: the Government, the major oil companies, and the World Bank as a key facilitator and guarantor of the industry’s development. Civil society has had to struggle for a seat at the table. It appears that the engagement of the World Bank has helpfully undermined the previously cosy **bilateral** relationship, in which government and corporations could too easily collude at the expense of wider society. But unless and until local communities are included, the situation remains deficient. Hence the need, notes Antoine Berilengar, for accredited civil society ‘watchdogs’!

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Fernando Franco notes that St Ignatius too had very clear goals – for example, to promote Catholic education to limit the influence of the Protestant reformers. My argument in no way implies that principles are good and interests are bad. Historically speaking, more destruction has probably been worked in the name of principles than of interests!

### 3. It is a communitarian process

- Ignatian advocacy is practised in community, facilitates the building of community, and involves personal **encounter** with allies as well as with opponents, sometimes across borders. I think of the Ignatian Family Encounter in Nairobi, January 2007. To speak of community here means two things. At the operational level, such advocacy is essentially a collaborative endeavour, among different partners: more deeply, it is directed at that overcoming of injustice in the service of **reconciliation**, and therefore includes people who were previously excluded, especially the poor.
- For specific injustices are manifestations of or consequences of a deeper fracturing of human relationships. It is that fracture, that denial, which is the ultimate evil to be overcome. The excluded are almost by definition confined to ghettos, isolated (even from one another). But the interaction of, say, a business corporation with its neighbours may also amount to a denial of true relationships: for example, a mine that discharges poisonous waste into the local water supplies, and thus damages the health and agriculture of local people.

Therefore advocacy is not only an ‘issue-based process’. Community is **itself** an intrinsic value that requires deepening. The Jesuit General Congregation 34, Decree 3, paragraph 10, wrote that ‘Full human liberation, for the poor and for us all, lies in the development of *communities of solidarity* at the grass roots and nongovernmental as well as the political level, where we can all work together towards total human development’ (emphasis in original).

- Operationally, this community dimension entails:
  - **information-sharing**: in the age of the internet, it may be true that certain types of information are more widely available than before, by the grace of Google, etc. But if, for example, we are working in Brussels on a topic relating to the Democratic Republic of Congo, we need to know not only what is published on websites, but how those facts or events are **perceived and interpreted** by local communities in the DRC. Equally, those in the DRC may need information only available through those reasonably close to political institutions in Brussels: someone needs to know, for example, which MEPs are interested enough to commit themselves to an issue: that information is not to be discovered online. In this sense, campaigning is part of a broader healthy movement towards participatory democracy.
  - Probably **campaigning**: this may be understood as public lobbying (as opposed to secret lobbying). Campaigning entails a close attention to the use of the media. Effective media work can be an instrument of persuasion, even of ‘pressure’. A differentiated media strategy is often required: in Chad, ‘mass media’ are said to be government-controlled, so that only local radio is likely to be truly responsive to local communities. But ‘Ignatian advocacy’ must serve truth as well as justice and its campaigning will scrupulous in being as truthful as possible.

- in a globalised world, **networking**: this allows the various actors to pool expertise and to complement each other by working on different elements of a situation. For example, where local advocacy is impossible because of the dictatorial character of a regime, international advocacy may be possible, and may be especially urgent.
- agreement about **focus**: each group in a healthy network recognises other members' relative autonomy. For example, in OCIFE's Relationship Peace Advocacy Network project (RPAN) OCIFE is a partner, not merely an agent or delegate, of the African Jesuits. Where differentiated and complementary work is conducted among partners, the relationship between the partners themselves also needs careful attention: for example, about appropriate leadership within different elements of the shared work. This willing agreement may sometimes be difficult to achieve.
- therefore a sympathetic working understanding becomes indispensable. For example, northern and southern NGOs working together on globalisation often have significant differences of opinion and judgement. Typically, the southern NGOs seem distinctly more radical. Their direct and powerful experience of the costs of globalisation deserves the utmost respect, but may not be easy to synthesise with the northern perspective of what, in terms of advocacy, are the limits of the possible. Yet equally, the 'limits of the possible' may urgently need to be stretched (see the later reference to a necessary tension between prophetic and pragmatic advocacy), and it is important at least to be clear as to **who sets the limits**.<sup>4</sup>

#### 4. It involves contemplation, self-awareness, study, research, analysis

- In the Ignatian 'way of proceeding', advocacy is animated by a spiritual perspective: for example, the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius has a famous contemplation on the Incarnation. Ignatius asks us to imagine the Holy Trinity looking contemplatively and lovingly at the world – and being moved by that loving contemplation to the radical action of sending the Son 'to save the human race'. I do not suggest that the Holy Trinity is here practising advocacy! But a contemplative view of the world and its people (contemplative, in that people are appreciated for their own sake and not only for their usefulness to us) can inspire both analysis and action. For these require **motivation**, and the ultimate motivation of an Ignatian practice, inspired by the Gospel, is 'amar y servir'.

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<sup>4</sup> *Fe y Alegría* writes of the collaborative activities of Investigation and Analysis; Communication and Popularisation ('divulgación'); the 'creation of a social fabric'; the establishment of alliances and networks; and (finally, or as the culminating point) the relationship with decision-makers.

- A contemplative approach to situations will always be **reflexive**: that is, it will be aware of our own share in the responsibility for social injustice, so that we do not project all criticism outwards. It acknowledges our own need to change. The Buddhist writer David Brandon, who wrote a book called *Zen and Social Work*, recalled that his social worker colleagues liked to think of themselves as ‘catalysts’. He commented wittily that they spoke more truly than they knew. A catalyst is an agent that brings about change in chemical processes without being changed itself! In justice work there are no catalysts.<sup>5</sup> It is no less true, though, that the commitment to social justice can **result** in personal transformation: through the encounter with colleagues of manifest courage and integrity, and through the element of suffering that often touches those who face squarely the evil of the world and their own part in it.
- *Fe y Alegría* writes of ‘personal and institutional testimony’. In this sense, ‘testimony’ unites proclamation and the commitment to ensure that our practice is coherent with that proclamation. Always, therefore, there is a conscious openness to personal and collective conversion.
- Contemplation is never an escape from realities and facts; instead, it empowers us to face them without being dominated by fear. So as well as being inspired by contemplation, advocacy involves hard work and competence – for example, in the analysis of situations, theories and ideologies.
- One dimension of analysis and study is the **situation that concerns us**, in all its complexity – or as much complexity as we can grasp, given the necessary time-frame of our action, and the limits of our resources. In this connection, JRS’s Strategic document makes an important distinction between ‘political time’ and ‘academic time’. In other words, since advocacy seeks to rectify injustice and suffering, there may well be tension between the refinement of the analysis and its urgency. Advocacy may focus on structural injustice, with a correspondingly long-term perspective, highlighting the need for ‘quality’ research even at the expense of rapid results; or it may respond to immediate threats to people and their rights, in which case speedy work is essential even at the expense of nuance or comprehensiveness.
- Another dimension, to which I simply allude, is **formation for advocacy itself**. Advocacy itself needs preparation, planning, a conscious choice of methods, self-critical evaluation. The civil society work in Chad involves some monitoring of governmental budgets – no simple matter. Much of the work of *Fe y Alegría* is devoted to this activity.

##### 5. It has a clear framework of reflection and purpose

- Ignatian advocacy is rooted in the tradition and principles of Catholic social thought. At the heart of this thinking are the principles of the ‘common good’ (the sum of those social conditions that enable persons and communities relatively thorough access to their own fulfilment) and of the ‘universal destination of the goods of creation’. This latter principle undermines any notion of a right to private property on a scale that dispossesses others.

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<sup>5</sup> It has been suggested that this point needs further elaboration and reflection. That is another possible focus for the workshop itself.

- Such advocacy will therefore take seriously different analytic dimensions, as appropriate in any given context – sociological, economic, political, but also moral, philosophical and theological.
- It is equally rooted in and directed towards the apostolic action of Ignatian associations, lay movements and religious congregations. The advocates, of course, are not necessarily the same persons as those involved in practical measures of solidarity, fundraising, pastoral care, etc. If advocacy is Ignatian it is thereby ‘ecclesial’. (Part of the point of being the Church is that no one can or need do everything.) But the advocacy practised by JRS, for example, would lack authenticity and credibility without its accompaniment of refugees themselves.

## 6. It involves **discernment**

- Firstly and most basically, there is always a range of prior **choices** to make, such as which issues to focus on and how: what and who guides our sense of priorities?
- The Ignatian tradition embodies not only a process of reflection directed towards action, but entails **feeling**: that is, we believe that when we face significant life choices, God's Spirit can enlighten us about the decisions to be made, and their likely effects, precisely at the level of feeling. Human beings are not just ‘rational animals’. Feeling’, here, refers not to casual preference or whim, but to the deeper desires and passions of our hearts. When a baby cries persistently at night, a parent may ‘feel like’ turning over in bed to go back to sleep. But there are more profound feelings than the desire for untroubled sleep, and a good parent will be in touch with those. The Ignatian tradition dwells on the **sustained quality** of our feelings in order to discern’ which are of God, and which, therefore, genuinely enrich our lives and unite us with others. In this deep sense of the word, feeling must animate the search for justice no less than the care of children. Whereas Ignatius himself, in writing of discernment, primarily envisaged the specific life-choices facing an individual, our method assumes that the process is no less valuable when the ‘decisions’ facing us are about how we might act in the pursuit of social justice.
- In particular, experience shows that in matters of justice, such feelings usually need to be nourished by personal encounter with the oppressed – which can itself be transformative. Rigobert Minani SJ encouraged me to travel from Kinshasa to Katanga, an expensive journey, to see conditions in the mines there: ‘You have to see!’. It is quite difficult to sustain motivation in justice work entirely at one’s desk, for years and from a distance, without such personal experience.
- Specific advocacy processes will differ according to their particular contexts, and the nature of the situation being addressed. As Fernando Franco has asked, ‘Is advocacy the same in a ‘peace process’ that follows a violent and bloody confrontation as one in which we are fighting the injustices committed by a multinational corporation?’
- It will often also be necessary to discern **what** level of remedy we seek to commend. The two poles of this tension are
  - ‘prophetic’ advocacy, that holds up some ideal state of affairs: even if this is not readily attainable, the ideal must be stated so as to serve as a compass for the direction of current policy



- ‘pragmatic’ (but still principled) advocacy, seeking certain incremental changes in specific policies or practices.

Advocacy is never likely to be found at either pole of the tension, which is intrinsic. But it is important to guard against facile attempts to reject specific attempts at advocacy by criticising **what they are not**. The ‘prophetic’ stance may always be criticised as ‘naïve’ or ‘impractical’, the ‘pragmatic’ stance condemned as ‘compromised’ or ‘short-sighted’. The challenge might or might not be fair: discernment is required.

- Advocacy on justice issues will quickly bring the advocates into potential conflict with vested interests that (by design or not) appear to sustain injustice. Discernment will need to be applied to our own capacities to handle negative or hostile reactions, to our own attitude to conflict and to our ‘enemies’.

### Summary

I close by offering the briefest possible ‘summary of the summary’. The model of advocacy outlined here is:-

**‘Qualified’** – it is competent, supported by sufficient study and research

**Relational** – it is focused on people, not just issues, and goes by way of encounter

**Ignatian** – it is spiritual, attentive to deep feeling, intellectual, oriented to action.

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