

THE TWO STANDARDS IN LEADERSHIP - HANDOUT

INTRODUCTION

The below reflection was proposed by Nikolaas Sintobin SJ in Drongen, in 2018 as part of the North-West Europe Ignatian Leadership Program.

With his meditation on the two standards, Ignatius offers a reading key for very different experiences. These experiences testify to a refined understanding, both of human psychology and of Christian spiritual experience. It is about two value scales we all recognise. The first one is very attractive, even though it is the dynamics of evil. The second dynamic is spontaneously not attractive at all. However, it is that of Jesus.

MAIN IDEAS

The Dynamics of Evil

Evil is the power that wants to destroy the human being. The "enemy" tries to isolate man from other people, to lock him up in himself, and thus to pull him away from real life. Ignatius teaches us that the evil one likes to take the form of the angel of light. Under the guise of the good, starting from something that at first is just good and therefore seems attractive, he eventually destroys the human being as a human being by destroying the relationship. This applies to the individual. But it also applies to a community.

He does this in two ways:

- The path of systematic self-overestimation
- The downward spiral: the path of systematic self-underestimation

a. *The path of systematic self- overestimation*

This first path seems attractive, at least in the beginning. It gets our spontaneous preference. Ignatius distinguishes three steps here. From step 1 follows step 2 and Step 3.

Step 1. RICHES (SELF-RELIANCE/GREED/ASSERTIVENESS)

Step 2. HONOUR (ARROGANCE/COMPLACENCY)

Step 3. PRIDE (LONELINESS-ISOLATION/DISTANCE)

Step 1: RICHES We will strive to acquire as much influence, money, apostolic prestige, knowledge, expertise, diplomas, power, interesting relationships,... as possible. Both personal and collective. These are all good things for the good cause. In itself, there is nothing to be said about this. Because, as this dynamic says, the more riches/means you have, the happier you become, the more efficient you become and the more successful you are. It will benefit our works. Our growing prestige will mean that we will be able to do more good. The more we are in control, the less we depend on others and can make the best decisions ourselves, the more we will be able to work from our own charisma and goals and the better we will be able to fulfill our mission.

Of course we also want to work together with others, but not too much ... Because what we do ourselves, we do better.

And gradually this wealth becomes an end in itself rather than a means. We are going to identify with our success, know-how and accomplishments, our self-confidence, our experience, our spirituality, our network, our recognition by our target audience ... Personal or collective. Because if you have more, can do more and know more, then you are more.

And if you have more, it is primarily due to yourself. A certain degree of complacency appears rapidly. Here are some examples:

- *See how well I am / we are, how efficient, how sympathetic, how social, how creative, how well this retreat centre is run.*
- *Actually I deal very well with my students, I can really say that I master my subjects. My classes are simply excellent. I always have my answer ready, and it is the right answer.*
- *My students are really lucky to have such a teacher.*
- *What a good thing for my colleagues that they are allowed to work with someone like me.*
- *Also for the diocese I am/we are a real gift. I hope they will realise it anyway.*
- *Fortunately, for our province/region or my organisation, there is at least one person of my level and competence.*
- *How on earth would our community or our institution be able to function if I were not there ... So good for our network that there is at least one work where everything is really in order: our planning, our personnel policy, our vision development They can at least take an example from us.*
- *Actually I am/ we are more or less irreplaceable. And in all modesty I just have to say that I owe it all in the first place to my own strength, talents, competence, creativity and work. Thank you very much, my God, that you have made me so good.*

Step 2: HONOURS Thus we end up in the second stage, that of the honour: everything is my/our own merit. I just owe it to myself.

- *It is because of our hard work and because of all the human and technical know-how we have developed.*
- *Meanwhile, the level of my colleagues, the other schools, the other retreat houses...my goodness. They are friendly people. At least, most of them. They can only do what they can. They do their best.*
- *You can't blame them for that anyway. But, as we have said, their 'level' leaves a lot to be desired. At the very least, we are professional.*

The conclusion is simply evident: since I have/am/know more than the others, I am also better than the others.

Step 3: PRIDE This brings us to the third stage, that of the pride. At my own level, in my function, and in my sector, I am going to regard myself as the centre of the world: the smartest, the best, the most interesting, the most efficient...

- *To some extent, I'm a bit the one who keeps the school going. What would happen if ever I were to leave this place?!*
- *What would happen to the community and to the province if they could not count on me? Luckily I can give some advice to our provincial from time to time. In this way, he can also hear something sensible from time to time.*
- *I am simply at the top of the pyramid and, in fact, even if I do not really want to admit that, I am looking down on the others. They have the right to exist. But I can't really work with them, let alone that I would need them.*
- *There is only one problem. At the top I am all alone. There is only room for one. That's me.*
- *I do not need the opinion of my colleagues. My conferences are simply superior. There is no need to listen to my students or my colleagues. They must listen to me as much as possible. The provincial has nothing to teach me. He just doesn't know what it's all about.*
- *I am simply better, I know better. What could I learn from others? What could cooperation on an equal footing bring me? By the way, I have also noticed that the others by now have, in fact, become somewhat frightened by me. People admire me, admittedly. But when I'm very honest, I find that they don't love me. They start to keep their distance.*
- *I am well aware that there are still weaknesses in my way of working and in our organisation. But I'd rather not talk about that. They do not matter much. I do realise that sometimes I don't know [have the answer] either. Some people refer to this as vulnerability. But it would be quite ludicrous if I showed that to my subordinates or colleagues. Besides, the attraction and persuasion of what I can and do know is so great that these imperfections no longer have any importance. By the way, who should I go to for advice or help? I would embarrass my partners with difficult questions to which they do not know the answer.*

A subtle form of this dynamic may be that you can see it in sharp focus and rightly at work with others - colleagues, fellow-brothers. And that, at the same time, you are firmly convinced that things are really different for you.

Ignatius likes to call the devil "the enemy of human nature". Well, the particularity of human nature – as wanted by God – is to be in relation, a relation of mutual respect and appreciation, to live and work with others. This is exactly what the enemy, starting from that so attractive wealth, successfully destroyed. The logic of wealth and pride cut me off from the others and destroyed the relationship. I am efficient and productive. Very definitely. But in the inside I have become a hard, lonely and complacent being. As successful as I may seem to the outside world, on the bottom I am actually an unhappy person. I am the prisoner of my "wealth", which is so attractive; my "treasures" have become my golden bars. I do feel somewhere that something is wrong. But I will not give up this deep secret for any money in the world. My "wealth" has led me to hell in a sly way. All these good qualities have, in a sense, been perverted. Instead of opportunities they have become obstacles.

b. The downward spiral: The systematic self-underestimation

The dynamics of evil can just as easily lead us into a downward spiral, that of systematic self-underestimation and of feelings of inferiority. It is the downside of the upward spiral. Ignatius does not speak explicitly about this. But, fundamentally, it is about the same thing: insisting too much on all kind of richness, in particular, the absence of some kind of richness.

Instead of considering yourself to be great, you believe yourself nothing. In your heart there is a voice that says:

- *I have nothing to offer, no special talents, I am not liked by my collaborators; I am simply too stupid, pedagogically a disaster, I stumble more than I speak, I have nothing to offer to my pupils, let alone to my colleagues.*
- *The mission I received from the provincial, that is just to keep me busy. They don't really know what to do with me, nor do I know it myself.*
- *In the community sharings or our staff meetings, I prefer to keep quiet, rather than to speak nonsense.*
- *If it wasn't that I had a permanent contract, I would be sacked tomorrow. If the superiors had known what I really am, they would never have allowed me to start as a novice. I'm just not worth anything.*
- *When I compare my organisation with the sister organisations of the other provinces, I feel like a small mosquito in front of an elephant.*

Everything is stuck and every step is one too much. If once in a while things go well, then you can't really accept it anymore. That must be an accident. A friendly word from a colleague must be flattery. An encouraging word from the director cannot be sincere. He simply understands what the problem is with me and so, at best, he felt sorry for me. It is simply the objective truth that I am an inferior being.

You are locked up in your own dungeon and you are your own prisoner. This time, the dungeon is not made of all your fantastic talents but of your limitations. You are the only one who has the key to unlock the prison cell, but the last thing you will do is use that key.

Your feelings of inferiority have become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Then it's just a small step from "I can't do anything" to "I'm nothing". You consider yourself to be a superfluous, awkward, deadweight, isolated from others, without value and dignity.

This attitude is particularly prevalent among younger people. But also in adults this is a logic in which you can get stuck.

The thoughts of running away/ quitting / suicide - "I'm done with it", are not far away anymore. Here, too, evil conceals itself in the form of good. After all, "your own disappearance/elimination from human society will give you and others peace and quiet".

Here, too, the relationship (= the specificity of being a human) is seriously disturbed, because of a distorted attitude towards riches or its pretended absence.

The enemy takes advantage of your vulnerability to destroy relationships here as well. You don't dare or can't ask for help. You sincerely believe that if you start to show your vulnerability to another person, all is lost. Now you have something of a front ... The fear, the shame, the inferiority mean that you hardly dare enter into an open relationship with other people, let alone with God.

Here too, as a human being, you are in danger of complete loss, through an overvaluation of wealth, now simply in the variant of not having certain forms of wealth.

The dynamics of good : the dynamics of Jesus

The dynamics of evil try to destroy the relationship with the others and to make life impossible. The dynamics of the good, this means the dynamics of the life Jesus teaches us, does exactly the opposite. Here, too, three stages can be distinguished. At first sight, they don't seem so attractive. But it is the golden path of evangelical life as way to God.

POVERTY (LIMITATION, POWERLESSNESS)

HUMILIATION

HUMILITY

The dynamics of Jesus starts from the experience that man is small and unfinished and is not self-sufficient. We need each other. If I dare to look honestly at my reality, then I am constantly confronted with my/our poverty. We do not live in a perfect world and always encounter the limitations, the smallness, the limits of knowledge and ability that characterize our human reality. This is true for my own personal imperfection as well as those of other people and of the organisations and structures in which we work. Whether we like it or not. We have too little time, we lack all kinds of know-how to be able to cope with it all on our own. We are making mistakes. We are poor and limited people and we need help. If we are honest, we can only conclude that we cannot live and work without the other.

- *I may have prepared the dossier so well, I may have done everything I could, and I may have done well, but the outcome is often different than I had foreseen.*
- *Our spirituality may be so rich, but for some people it just doesn't take hold, and for some problems it doesn't offer an answer.*
- *My personal experience of vows or marriage, community life, the concrete organisation of our retreat centre or our social centre, of our province ... if you look at it a little closer, there are problems everywhere. In theory, it's all very nice. Practice is different.*
- *We had worked out a fantastic project with our province, the financing was complete, the necessary people were found, there was a good communication and, nevertheless, it has become a big fiasco. A nightmare.*
- *Like every human being, I have talents. I also have limitations. Sometimes I myself have particularities, which mortify me. It can happen that I am confronted with this in a very unpleasant way.*

Spontaneously, a person prefers to avoid the experience of this poverty. It takes courage to look it straight in the eye. The awareness of this poverty simply hurts. After all, we want to be strong and independent. We want to be able to handle everything and everyone, on our own. Experiencing one's own powerlessness, limitation, injury and brokenness is a little humiliating. No healthy person longs for humiliation as such. No healthy person likes to be confronted with poverty. You do not desire it in your organisation, in your specific mission, nor with regard to yourself, in your family or in your community.

Nevertheless, Ignatius mentions this second step of humiliation as an important step in the imitation of Christ. And in his autobiography we see time and again how Ignatius does not shy away from humiliation. Sometimes, in his desire to identify himself more intensively with Jesus, he himself consciously searches for it. In his Spiritual Exercises, the same Ignatius regularly invites us to imitate the poor and humiliated Christ.

Indeed, let us not forget that it is the ultimate humiliation of the cross that will allow Jesus to experience and thus reveal to us the fullness of God's love. Perhaps, therefore, we too do not need to fear so much the experience of humiliation - humiliation in the footsteps of Jesus - which always comes at the wrong time and which always hits us where we do not want it to hit us. Perhaps we too can make sense of this humiliating but fundamentally unavoidable confrontation with our poverty in such a way that it can become a way for us to become more connected with the Lord and with God, and thus grow in authentic humility and real humanity.

Actually, you have the choice. Or you can refuse the confrontation with this poverty and the humiliation that goes with it. But then the risk is real that you end up in self-deception, running away from your reality. You can also face them and try to give them a place. Especially out of a desire to identify more with Jesus. Then it becomes a springboard to grow in truth and humility.

Being humble means accepting that you cannot do everything, that you are limited as a human being, as a group, as an organization, that you do not control everything , that you dare or desire to open up to the help and assistance of others, that you can receive, rather than just give yourself. Working together, making compromises, experiencing your limitations and dependence, is no longer a failure; the other, colleague, younger person or sister organization, is no longer a rival to whom you have to prove yourself; but a fellow partner from whom and with whom you can receive more life, in mutual trust, learn a lot and work out and experience exciting things. Humility makes you discover that all the beauty in life is ultimately a gift. You can only really give if you have learned to receive first. To need to receive, to know yourself dependent and vulnerable, is no longer an experience of failure. But it is a privileged way to live more to the full. Humility makes gratitude possible. Humility is the experience that it is the other that makes you great. In the end, for the believer, that other is God. Humility is the source and condition of joy par excellence. Humility makes a person gentle and shows the way to humor and healthy self-mockery. Humility means that imperfection is no longer seen as an obstacle, but as an invitation to enter into a real relationship with the other and to receive and learn from each other.

The dynamic that Ignatius extracts from the example of Jesus can serve as a spiritual pedagogy. It allows us not to have to endure human limitations as a tragic destiny. It teaches us that we should no longer be frightened or feel ashamed for being confronted with our smallness, vulnerability and even sometimes stupidity through the experience of humiliation due to our failures. It is not necessary to repress these experiences or rationalize them to make them harmless. We may, on the contrary, admit them, trusting that something good will result from it. In this way our poverty can become like a pathway to more human richness, and, for the believer, a springboard for greater intimacy with the Lord. Poverty can indeed become, paradoxically, a source of consolation.

Just as pride destroys relationships and our humanity, humility is an invitation to strengthen the relationship, with others and with God, and to make us grow towards more humanity

Both dynamics are present in our lives: in our attitude towards ourselves, towards others, and towards God... I have presented them in black and white. Rather stronger than weaker. To make it clear. Often things don't happen in such an obvious way. In particular, the dynamics of evil can be very subtle. It can be disconcerting to discover how much the dynamics of evil can sometimes manipulate you; how, behind noble motives, something sly can hide. It is only if you learn to recognise them that you can also learn to deal with them. And then you can really choose for the good in your life.