Ignatius on Dealing with Others (1541)

In this document, part of his instructions for the legates to Ireland (Alfonso Salmerón and Paschase Broët), Ignatius advises the men on how best to deal spiritually with the variety of persons they would encounter while also telling them to also avoid direct involvement in money matters. His instructions differ according to the legates' different audiences. For example, when “we are trying to win a person over and ensnare him for the greater service of God our Lord,” Ignatius suggests praise and patience. In the end, “we go in his door and come out our own.” Evidence emerges of Ignatius’s own bitter experiences with acquisitions of heresy, as when he urges caution: “In whatever we say, particularly when reconciling quarrels and conversing spiritually, we should be on our guard and presume that anything we say may or will become public.” This letter was written by commission, meaning it was written on Ignatius’s behalf by his secretary, Juan Alfonso de Polanco.

HOW TO DEAL AND CONVERSE WITH PEOPLE IN THE LORD

In dealings with anyone, especially with equals or those of lower rank and authority than yourselves, say little and be slow to speak. Listen long and willingly, until they have finished what they wanted to say. Then reply point by point, come to an end, and take your leave. If the person rejoins, cut the rejoinders as short as possible; your leave-taking should be swift and gracious.

In order to deal with and win the love of highly placed persons and superiors for the greater glory of God our Lord, first study their temperament and adapt yourself to it. With someone of choleric temperament, quick and merry in speech, adopt somewhat his own style of conversation in good and holy matters; avoid seeming grave, phlegmatic, or melancholic. With those who are by nature reserved, slow in speech, serious and weighty in their conversation, adopt the same manner, for this is what pleases them. “I have become all things to all men.”

Remember that when one person of choleric temperament deals with another choleric person, unless they are completely of one spirit, there is serious danger of their conversations ending in a clash. Hence, as far as possible, anyone who knows that his temperament is choleric should if possible, in every detail of his dealing with others, be well armed with an examen or some other reminder to be patient and not get upset with the other, particularly if he knows that the other person is unwell. In his dealings with phlegmatic or melancholic persons, there is less danger of a clash arising from hasty words.

In any conversation where we are trying to win a person over and ensnare him for the greater service of God our Lord, we should adopt the same procedure the enemy uses with a good soul—he always for evil and we always for good. The enemy enters through the other’s door and comes out his own. He enters the other’s door by praising rather than contradicting his ways; he cultivates familiarity with the
soul by drawing it to good and holy thoughts that bring the good soul calm. Then, little by little, he endeavors to come out his own door, drawing the person under the appearance of good to some harmful error or illusion, always for evil. In the same way, we, [acting] for good, can praise a person or go along with him on some particular good point, passing over in silence any bad points he may have. Once we have won his love, we will better get what we want. Thus, we go in his door and come out our own.

With persons we see to be suffering trials or discouraged, we should behave pleasantly, conversing at length and showing much contentment and cheerfulness, both interior and exterior, so as to counteract what they are feeling, for their greater edification and consolation.

In whatever we say, particularly when reconciling quarrels and conversing spiritually, we should be on our guard and presume that anything we say may or will become public.

In dispatching business be generous with your time; that is, if you promise something for tomorrow, do it if possible today.

While you retain the supervision it would be better for Messer Francisco to have charge of the fees. You will be better able to refuse or grant anybody’s request if the three of you never touch the money but instead transmit it through someone else to the designated recipient. Or else you could grant the dispensation or facilitate the matter after the person requesting it has paid the fee to the designated person brought you the receipt. Or adopt any other more convenient procedure, so long as all three of you can say you never touched any of the moneys of this mission.

[1] Francisco Zapata, a Spanish priest and aspirant to the Society, acted as treasurer for the legation.

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Original Source (English translation):

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