

Ignatian Spirituality

St. Ignatius of Loyola was a shining star of the spiritual renewal and reform that emerged in 16th-century Spain. He continued the movement of spirituality from the desert and monastery into the world that began with St. Francis and St. Dominic. You might say that he carried this impulse even further as he founded the Company of Jesus who crafted what has come to be known as "Apostolic Spirituality." From the very beginning of this movement, Ignatius and his followers founded universities and colleges and had an effective outreach to the poor, especially in the foreign missions.

I. St. Ignatius (1491-1556)

- Ignatius was the soldier, wounded in battle, who became a saint. In 1521, he suffered a severe leg wound. During his recuperation, he began to read the about the lives of the saints. Ignatius had a profound religious experience that led him to reform his life and to become a soldier for Christ.
- Ignatius became a wandering ascetic for the sake of Christ.
- Through a number of extraordinary religious experiences (of the Trinity, Christ, and Our Lady) he was transformed from being a temporal knight to be a knight for Christ.
- He gathered companions around him. His group became known as the Society of Jesus.
- He founded colleges, universities, and charitable institutions. He had a deep love for the poor and the sick and a strong missionary spirit.
- After a vision at La Storta near Rome in 1537, he had a strong desire to serve others. This vision connected Ignatius and his companions with the Pope.
- Ignatius brought St. Francis's vision of bringing the friars from the monastery into the world to a new level. 1) Ignatius adamantly refused to allow the Jesuits to chant the Divine Office. He envisioned a clear correlation between prayer and ministry.
- In *The Imitation of Christ*, one of Ignatius' favorite works, Thomas a Kempis cautioned against traveling too much. Ignatius insisted that it was only by engaging in the pilgrimage implied in ministry that the Jesuit could hope to attain sanctification. 1) He gives going into the world a spiritual significance.

II. Ignatian Spirituality

- Ignatius's thinking and spirituality influenced many religious communities.

- When Ignatius stepped back and listened as a wounded soldier, he had a religious experience.
- Ignatius saw the world as the place where God calls us to experience our salvation. For him, the world becomes the monastery.
- Ignatius gives us tools for responding to the Lord's call and to living out our discipleship.
- When Ignatius discusses prayer, he emphasizes its affective dimension and the use of imagination. Ignatian spirituality is full of creativity.
- Ignatian spirituality shows us a way to move towards a deeper spiritual freedom. In some respects, this journey towards freedom parallels the monastic concept of purity of heart.
- Ignatius gives us a way of paying attention and becoming more aware. He teaches us to be more reflective as we live in the context of a very busy world.
- Ignatian spirituality is practical. There have been many interpretations of Ignatius's thinking throughout history. Some looked at his exercises as a rigid program. Today, most see Ignatius's vision as an attitude or outlook that can lead us closer to God.
- We are companions of Jesus and of one another. We do not live a spiritual life alone. Ignatius shows us a way of building relationships in the context of the world. The experience of the Risen Christ binds us together.
- Ignatius's spirituality is a spirituality of contemplation in action.
- "We are called to be men and women for others."

Review Questions

1. St. Ignatius challenges us to "find God in all things." Keep a journal in which you reflect and write about the ways to experience God in the details of your daily life.
2. St. Ignatius teaches us "to think with the Church." The Church is all of us. How do we remain loyal to the Church and at the same time call it to reform and renewal?
3. St. Ignatius models in his spirituality total generosity to God and service to others as men and women for others. Reflect on your own life and how you might move beyond a self-centered life and to live a more other and God centered life.

Ignatius had a vision of a way of contemplation that could be followed by everyone. The gift of St. Ignatius to the Church is his Spiritual Exercises. The Exercises are meant for all who want to grow in their relationship with God. At the

heart of the Exercises are his Rules for the Discernment of Spirits. The Examen is a practice of reviewing at least once a day where God has been acting in your life, how you are responding, and how you need to ask for forgiveness and healing as you continue into the next day. Other spiritual practices that have come from the Ignatian movement in spirituality are retreats, spiritual direction, and sodalities.

I. Spiritual Practices

- The Retreat: a periodic retreat became a regular feature in the pattern of piety followed by many people.
- Spiritual Direction: the Ignatian approach to spiritual direction is probably the clearest and most influential, developed to a high degree by early Jesuits.
- Sodalities: Jesuits adopted, modified, and promulgated confraternities of various kinds.
- Ignatius warns against indiscriminate use of methods of meditation by unschooled and unguided people.

II. The Spiritual Exercises

- The Spiritual Exercises trained the soldiers with an understanding of individual needs. Ignatius takes the classical faculties of the mind (memory, understanding, and will) and treats them in a systematic way, using them to cultivate an attitude of contemplation.
- Ignatius tells us that we will experience both consolation and desolation in our prayer. He develops a skillset of discernment.
- The purpose of the Exercises is to help a person become spiritually and apostolically decisive.
- God intervenes in our lives. As we become reflective, we gain a sense of our own personal salvation history.
- The Exercises are divided into four weeks or movements.

1) The first week corresponds to the purgative way. The First Principle and Foundation: "Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul. The other things on the face of the earth are created for man and to help him in attaining the end for which he is created. Hence, man is to use them in as far as they help him in the attainment of his end, and must rid himself of them in as far as they prove a hindrance to him. For we must make ourselves indifferent to all created things in as far as we are allowed free choice and not under any prohibition; consequently, as far as we are concerned, we should not prefer health to sickness, riches to poverty, honor to dishonor, a long to a short

life, and the same holds all other things; our one desire and choice should be what is most conducive for us to the end for which we are created."

We must begin with the notion of being loved and accepted by God, and then examine the things that draw us away from God. We look at sin from the perspective of God's mercy.

2) The second week corresponds to the illuminative way. (a) It begins with contemplation of Christ's kingship over the world. We move into the mysteries of Christ's life up to the Last Supper.

3) The third and fourth week correspond to the unitive way. The third week focuses on the Passion of Christ. The fourth week focuses on the joy of Christ and his followers in the risen life. We are now sent out into the world as disciples of Christ.

- The Spiritual Exercises reflect Ignatius's own experience.

III. Discernment of Spirits

- Not every good or spiritual experience is of God. Discernment involves paying attention to the movements that lead to God and those that lead away from God.
- Ignatius' Autobiography and Spiritual Diary reveal a mystic who knew the importance of religious emotions.
- The spiritual director helps a person to stay with the movements that lead towards life and God.

IV. Examen: The Examen is a way of carrying the Exercises into one's daily life. The Examen has several steps: Gratitude – Petition – Review – Forgiveness - Renewal – Transitions

- "Everyday mysticism"

Review Questions

1. The Examen is a spiritual practice that has helped countless people. Bring this practice into your spiritual life.
2. Pay attention to your desires, gives you a sense of God's desire / God's will for you. The practice of spiritual discernment is based on paying attention to one's desires.

3. If you have not made the Exercises, consider doing an eight-day retreat. If this is not possible, what is called the "Nineteenth Annotation" is a way of doing the Exercises over a long period of time (several months or longer) as you continue your daily home, work, or school life