
UNDERSTANDING
IGNATIAN

and

✠ JESUIT ✠
SPIRITUALITY

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IN CONVERSATIONS ABOUT THE MISSION AND IDENTITY OF JESUIT INSTITUTIONS, two phrases are often used interchangeably: Ignatian Spirituality and Jesuit Spirituality. Yet, it may be helpful to clarify the meaning of each of these and make a distinction between them. This examination is not a mere word-game but rather an attempt to make these ideas more accessible.

IGNATIUS SPIRITUALITY

Ignatian Spirituality grew out of the unique, personal relationship that Ignatius experienced with God. This journey began as Ignatius recovered from a severe battle injury and continued throughout his life. Central to this spirituality is the realization that God is actively at work, revealed through and encountered in the world—in all creation:

people, events, nature. It is a realization that all that is, is a gift from God. That “all the things in this world are created because of God’s love and they become a context of gifts, presented to us so that we can know God more easily and make a

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return of love more readily” (Spiritual Exercises No. 23; Fleming, S.J.: Literal Translation). It is a keen awareness and attentiveness that invites us to see beyond the immediate to recognize the Divine; and once that Presence is recognized, to be moved into action, service and love. For Ignatius, love always moves a person to service.

During his initial conversion experience, Ignatius began to keep notes on the interior changes and feelings he was going through. These notes eventually were developed into the Spiritual Exercises. As time passed, Ignatius guided others through this process of conversion and they had a personal experience of God. These people followed his guide but had their own individual experience.



It is noteworthy that Ignatius went through his conversion experience, composed and later shared the Spiritual Exercises long before he was a priest and before he began a religious community. In fact, about 20 years passed from his time in Manresa to the founding of the Society of Jesus. Thus, this is the spirituality of a non-cleric shared with other lay people. It is out of the Spiritual Exercises that the Society of Jesus came forth; the Spiritual Exercises did not come out of the Society of Jesus. This is unlike other schools of spirituality, for example the Benedictines and Franciscans, which began in the monastery then eventually was shared with people outside the religious community. The Spiritual Exercises are intended to be a spirituality for busy people, people engrossed in the world, people facing the tensions and pressures of daily life and decision making. Everyday people, not exclusively priests or members of a religious community, were the original audience of this spirituality.

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JESUIT SPIRITUALITY

On the other hand, Jesuit Spirituality is more focused than Ignatian Spirituality. It includes not only the Spiritual Exercises and writings of Ignatius but also the Constitutions, Decrees of the Congregations, and decisions made since the founding of the Society that relate to the governance of the Order and have been passed down to today. In short, Jesuit Spirituality has to do with the particular way Ignatian Spirituality is lived out within the Society of Jesus.

Understanding this distinction is important for the future of the Ignatian heritage. Ignatian Spirituality is accessible to everyone, not just members of the Society of Jesus. Ignatian Spirituality offers the opportunity to recognize and respond to the active presence of God in all that surrounds us, the events and the people we encounter in our daily routine. Our open,

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conscious response leads to an ongoing personal relationship with God and the action that flows from that relationship clarifies who we are and why

we do what we do. Programs offered at Jesuit educational institutions to gain a better understanding of its mission and identity are not an attempt to create “little Jesuits”. Rather, they are an opportunity for individuals to share in and experience the vision of Ignatius. They are an invitation to share in this spirituality. It is this vision, this understanding of God active and revealed through creation and constantly at work in creation, which sets the foundation for learning. In fact, this vision is the foundation for all that is done. The more wonders of creation are investigated and understood, the deeper we—and our students—grow in a personal relationship with the Divine.



All that is, is a
GIFT
from God.



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