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“To know is to experience”

(Virginia A. Froehle, RSM)

Ignatian Spirituality among the Professors

By George W. Traub, S.J., and Debra K. Mooney

Ignatian spirituality will be animated in the lives of students if it is animated in the experiences of their faculty. An important characteristic of Ignatian pedagogy is the reliance “on professors to serve as models... both in and out of the classroom” (Mooney, *Jesuit Education and Ignatian Pedagogy*, 2003). As faculty in Jesuit higher education are supported and cultivate their attention to the divine Spirit in the ordinary events of their life, so too will their students. The habits of contemplation and reflection will be emulated. Real engagement with Ignatian spirituality in the professoriate will lead to real engagement within the ‘millennials’ in their classrooms. Despite socio-cultural challenges, we suggest that there is notable interest among faculty at Jesuit universities. As well, there are opportunities and resources for faculty to embrace. We present some of these below.

Interest

There is widespread appreciation and desire for a heightened experience of the spiritual dimensions of life among faculty. In a national review on spirituality within today’s professoriate, 81 percent of the more than 40,000 faculty surveyed described themselves as “a spiritual person” with more than half of those indicating “to a great extent”. Sixty-nine percent sought opportunities to grow spiritually and 47 percent believe that “Integrating spirituality in my life” is essential (Spirituality in Higher Education, Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA, 2005). It is likely that the relevance is even greater for faculty who have chosen to

pursue their academic vocation at a Jesuit college or university. For instance, when asked, “Which one of the six characteristics of the Ignatian Vision speaks most strongly to me?”, almost a third of the faculty at Xavier University identify with “Seeks to find the Divine in all things” (see box below).

Students, in contrast, are more action and deed oriented; 35 percent point to “Empowers people to become leaders in service”. Similarly, a group of faculty and administrators charged by President Michael J. Graham, S.J., to shape the future campus’s mission and identity, stated, in their final report, that “Indeed, for Xavier to fulfill its aspirations, Ignatian spirituality will need to become a more genuine and central element of every-

The Ignatian Vision, as perceived by percentages of faculty in a national survey.

- Sees life and the whole universe as a gift calling forth wonder and gratefulness. (20)
- Gives ample scope to imagination and emotion as well as intellect. (20)
- Seeks to find the divine in all things - in all peoples and cultures, in all areas of study and learning, in every human experience (and, for the Christian, especially in the person of Jesus). (30)
- Cultivates critical awareness of personal and social evil, but points to God’s love as more powerful than any evil. (7)
- Stresses freedom, need for discernment, and responsible action. (7)
- Empowers people to become leaders in service, “men and women for others,” “whole persons of solidarity,” building a more just and humane world. (16)

GIFTS OF OUR IGNATIAN HERITAGE

The Gift of Mission invites us to understand the history and importance of our Jesuit heritage and Ignatian spirituality. It compels us to attract and nurture students, faculty and staff who are interested in understanding and affirming this heritage. Mission at a Jesuit University focuses on the centrality of academic excellence, grounded in a Catholic faith tradition.

The Gift of Reflection invites us to pause and consider the world around us and our place within it. It calls us to infuse a culture of attention, reflection and reverence throughout the University.

The Gift of Discernment invites us to be open to God's spirit as we consider our feelings and rational thought in order to make decisions and take action that will contribute good to our lives and the world around us. All University stakeholders should be invited to participate in The Spiritual Exercises or other discernment exercises.

The Gift of Solidarity and Kinship reminds us to walk along side and learn from our companions as we journey through life, fostering a spirit of community both within and outside the University.

The Gift of Service Rooted in Justice and Love invites us to invest our lives into the well-being of our neighbors, particularly those who suffer injustice. This encourages and develops a culture of mutually beneficial community engagement as an expression of faith that promotes justice.

one's experience and contributions" (Report to the President, 2009). Furthermore, they "concluded that the essence of this spirituality manifests itself through an invitation to all University stakeholders – students, faculty, staff, administrators, alumni, trustees and friends – to embrace five expressions or 'gifts' of our Ignatian heritage" – Mission, Reflection, Discernment, Solidarity and Kinship, and Service Rooted in Love and Justice (see box above).

Challenges

While personal (and often unvoiced) interest in—and enthusiasm for—spiritual engagement is high, a number of socio-cultural and practical impediments prevents many faculty from a meaningful connection with Ignatian spirituality. For instance, rational, cognitive, and intellectual skills, so highly valued in general society and vital within the academy, can be (mis-)taken as oppositional to affective, introspective, and transcendent experiences. Such encounters have become devalued, even shunned. Similarly, survival in our very busy and fast-paced world relies on unfocused attention in order to multi-task as well as unrelenting energy to PRODUCE. Forgotten is the balance necessary to sustain worthwhile activity. The quality and pleasure in work has become less cherished than the quantity and hardship of producing it. Taking time for renewal, rejuvenation, and reflection has also become devalued. (Mis-)beliefs abound that only the indolent, "average performers," or those with less important responsibilities can afford such time. Being imbalanced and "too busy" are admirable traits today. An appreciation for "productive unproductivity" has been lost. It has been commonly stated that Ignatian values are counter-cultural. Now is the time, then, to

*"dry and cast upon sand
away from water."*

share widely the spirituality of "contemplatives in action" with scholars in Jesuit higher education as a resource from which they can draw strength and inspiration.

Opportunities and Resources

A small but significant minority of faculty have already experienced the Spiritual Exercises in Daily Life, and we will certainly continue to invite more of them to do so. But as Howard Gray, SJ, internationally recognized Ignatian scholar and teacher, is convinced, that way "demands a consistent outlay of time that many will not be able to sustain. Therefore, we need to create adaptations of the Exercises to fit the schedules and resources" of people who want to be more intimately involved in Jesuit work ("The Ignatian Mission" in *A Jesuit Education Reader*, ed. George Traub, 32; henceforth "AJER"). As such, we offer five interrelated suggestions for adaptation.

Sometimes we fail to see the Exercises as a treasure house of resources, one or other of which can be used to meet a particular need. Their power and effectiveness lay with Ignatius' ability to meet and "coach" each individual as such and to engage the whole person, not just the rational intellect. In our time, "scholars and practitioners of the Exercises have been rediscovering what Ignatius intuitively knew. There are parts of the human person (e.g., the 'right brain,' the 'unconscious')—crucial determinants of feeling, value, and action—that the rational, controlling mind does not touch. Rather, they are reached when the rational mind is 'in neutral,' and contemplative, aesthetic, and imaginative modes of knowing are allowed to operate" (Traub, *An Ignatian Spirituality Reader*, 118; henceforth "AISR").

Distinguished Protestant theologian Jim Fowler presents himself as a case in point. While he was teaching at Harvard and doing his initial research on faith development, he came to realize that his own spiritual condition was very needy; he was "dry, and cast upon sand away from water." Hearing his young Jesuit students talking about how an experience of the Ignatian Exercises was coming to be very important for them, Fowler mustered the courage to go to a Jesuit guide and ask for help. The guide listened attentively as Fowler described his pattern of allowing reason to dominate at the expense of feeling and suggested a way of praying

that he adapted from what Ignatius in the Exercises calls “Application of the Senses.” It is designed to draw the pray-er into intimate contact with Jesus in a gospel story. After several days, as Fowler tells it, “I discovered a porousness between my conscious and my unconscious mind. Images began to rise and meet images from the story. It was almost as if that part of me which is usually in control was in neutral... I got in touch with my needs, my hungers. I found a vulnerability. And I found a mediator. All this was in a way that I had not found from using my cognitive [purely rational] approach” (*AISR*, 137-38).

What about students?

Since we are concerned not just with faculty, but with students as well in this postmodern or post-postmodern age, the work of Boston College’s Tim Muldoon comes to mind. Muldoon sees Ignatian spirituality and in particular the “First Principle and Foundation” (which following Joseph Tetlow, S.J., he prefers to call the *Fundamentum* [Latin]) not as a doctrinal or rational exercise, but as “an invitation to imaginative play. What, it asks, might it be like if God took the time and care to create my entire life, moment by moment, in order that my acceptance of this creation—and my participation in it—might reflect beauty, as a work of art reflects the creativity of an artist? What might it be like if God were a person who invests in my very being, and places me in a world where I can use everything to achieve [such artistic] perfection? The postmodern person who is wary of arrogant claims to authority and truth can, in good conscience, accept an invitation to exercise imagination” (“Postmodern Spirituality and the Ignatian *Fundamentum*” in *AJER*, 293). Can you see yourself offering and explaining such an opportunity to a small group of colleagues or of students or of both?”

Twenty years ago the late Walter Burghardt, S.J., theologian and advocate for the justice dimension of good preaching, wrote an essay on contemplation. In it, he makes clear that contemplation has nothing to do with reaching some far-off realm in the heavens but is actually “a long, loving look at the real” (in *AISR*, 89-98). It allows us to appreciate reality in all its splendor and terror and wonder. Similarly, in 1997 Howard Gray first presented his interpretation of Ignatius’ basic model of spiritual development—what he teaches in his *Constitutions* about how human beings can grow. The formula is not very different from Burghardt’s sense of contemplation. The model says: be *attentive* to reality; *reverence*—that is, appreciate—what you see and hear and feel in all its particulars; and “then you will *find*

devotion [what Ignatius also called “consolation”], the singularly moving way in which God works in that situation” (*AISR*, 48).

Gray himself has used this paradigm again and again in his teaching and writings (*AISR*, 64-66; *AJER*, 196-200). We see it as the answer to a question people have when they hear the much used phrase “finding God in all things”—namely, how *do* I find God everywhere? Answer: Be attentive to reality; appreciate what you see, hear, feel; and you will find devotion, consolation, God at work there. It seems almost too simple to teach colleagues or even students, doesn’t it? But not so easy to practice in our present culture. One of us still

Instead of finding all our faults and sins, we find the movements of God.



Statue of Saint Ignatius, Gonzaga University.
Photo credit: Jennifer Raudebaugh

DAILY EXAMEN OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Thanksgiving

What am I especially grateful for in the past day...
 The gift of another day?
 The love and support I have received?
 The courage I have mustered?
 An event that took place today?

Petition

I am about to review my day; I ask for the light to know God and to know myself as God sees me.

Review

Where have I felt true joy today?
 What has troubled me today?
 What has challenged me today?
 Where and when did I pause today?
 Have I noticed God's presence in any of this?

Response

In light of my review, what is my response to the God of my life?

A Look Ahead

As I look ahead, what comes to mind?
 With what spirit do I want to enter tomorrow?

remembers the hesitation he felt when first taking time in class for silence to allow students to ponder and reflect on a question raised by a particular passage in a novel. "Dare I do this?" he wondered. "The students are paying big bucks for this course and here I am wasting time." Talk about an anti-Ignatian feeling!

The Examen

We come now to what may be the most important and useful resource in the entire *Exercises*—the Examen. The Examen is a brief gift of reflective time that Ignatius gave himself and recommended to others. He considered it the most important exercise a person could do each day. It invites us to find God by looking back over our past day. As practiced today, the living Ignatian tradition gives us a revised version of what Ignatius taught. Instead of "Examination of *Conscience*" (preparation for confession), thanks to George Aschenbrenner, S.J., and

others, we now have "Examination of *Consciousness*" (which opens out the perspective to everything in one's day). So instead of finding only our faults and sins, we are invited to find the movement of God in all the people and events of our day—to see ourselves, in retrospect, enveloped in the One "in whom we live and move and have our being."

To take this perspective little by little is to practice the art of "finding God in all things." The five points of the Examen can get you started if you are new to the exercise (see the box with the version we created with colleagues), but as you practice them, you can gradually adjust and adapt them to fit your own character and spirit. For example, some adaptations are thematic, dealing with environmental issues or service-learning experiences. Others are more feeling-focused. The Examen can then become a way of practicing attention to yourself and others, not just at the intellectual level, but at the level of heart/feeling/your whole being. This attention, we suggest, is appropriate for a good number of people in academe, where the hazard is to intellectualize the heart out of experience.

Many Jesuit high schools have found a way to include a short period of Examen in their weekly schedule. Could a college or university make Examen a campus wide priority? What would that entail?

It should be clear that we see the resources we have recommended as interconnected. Application of the Senses to an appropriate scripture passage, the *Fundamentum*, a long loving look at the real, Attentioness-appreciation-consolation, the Examen—are all part of the treasure house of resources in the living Ignatian tradition. Which one could you see yourself trying, and how would you present it, and to whom? ■



About the authors

The authors are colleagues in the Center for Mission and Identity at Xavier University. George Traub, S.J., is executive director; he is editor of two foundational books, An Ignatian Spirituality Reader and its companion volume, A Jesuit Education Reader (both 2008). Debra Mooney is assistant to the president for mission and identity and founding director of the Conway Institute for Jesuit Education.