

# THE GREAT TRADITIONS OF CATHOLIC SPIRITUALITY – PART V

## IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY – IN THE SERVICE OF THE KING OF GLORY

I. The Ignatian tradition was inspired by St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), founder of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits.) That order, and the spirituality upon which it was based, was instrumental in the reconversion of parts of Europe and missionary activities during the Age of Exploration. It emphasized the strong, calm conquest of the mind and emotions that we may be at the greater service of Jesus Christ.

A. St. Ignatius was from a family of warriors and explorers and trained for military services. His spirituality built upon his military experience.

1. Ignatius was injured while heroically defending a castle at Pamplona in 1521 for the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. While recovering at a religious hospital, he read Ludolf of Saxony's The Life of Christ and a biography of saints called The Golden Legend. With this reading and time for prayer, he experienced a profound conversion that led him to desire to be a knight of Christ. He realized that the saints showed all of the courage, dedication, loyalty, and generosity of knights. The difference is that they served, not an earthly king, but instead the King of Glory.

2. After a time of discernment, he began studies for the priesthood in 1524. After 13 years of studies at Barcelona, Alcalá and Paris, he was ordained a priest in 1537.

3. Meanwhile, he had gathered a group of brothers who eventually went to the reformist Pope Paul III and asked for his approval for them to become a religious order, whose motto would be *Ad Maior Dei Gloriam* (To the Greater Glory of God.) The 1539 letter to Pope Paul III said that the order was for people who "would fight for God under the banner of the Cross and serve the Lord alone and His Vicar on earth." It said that the community was "founded primarily for the task of advancing souls in Christian life and doctrine, and of propagating the faith by the ministry of the word, by spiritual exercises, by works of charity, and expressly by the instruction of children and unlettered persons in Christian principles."

B. As a central part of his conversion and discernment, St. Ignatius developed what would become The Spiritual Exercises. He gradually reworked these exercises to be used by others. They were approved by Pope Paul III in 1548 and they are central in the Jesuit order and spirituality to this day.

- Pope Benedict XV endorsed The Spiritual Exercises and declared St. Ignatius to be the patron saint of spiritual retreats. Pope Pius XII said they "will always remain one of the most efficacious means for the spiritual regeneration of the world, but on the condition that they continue to be authentically Ignatian."

C. After working with the poor of Rome for a time, this order, the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) expanded rapidly throughout both Europe and the newly discovered lands East and West.

1. The Jesuits would become central to the Church's missionary activities in the Far East and the New World. The likes of St. Francis Xavier (1506-62), St. Jose do Anchieta (d. 1597), and the North American Martyrs of the seventeenth century were great heroes in the conversions of the Far East, South American and North America respectively.

2. Within Europe, Jesuit teachers helped to bring large parts of France, Germany and Belgium back to the faith, as well as keep the likes of Poland in the faith. The Jesuits also spearheaded attempts to reconvert England and Sweden.

3. In this context, the likes of St. Francis Borgia, St. Peter Canesius, and St. Robert Bellarmine stand out. St. Francis was the third master general of the order and a grand credit to his infamous family; St. Peter Canesius was the greatest missionary to reconvert parts of Germany and Switzerland, and St. Robert Bellarmine was a great Roman instructor. The latter two saints are considered patrons of catechists and doctors of the Church.

D. St. Peter Canesius (1521–97) was known for employing his great learning in defending and explaining the faith to people of all classes, ages and educational backgrounds. The man of kind habits and mild disposition helped re-conquer much of Germany and Switzerland for the Catholic faith.

1. Born to a reasonably well off family on the very day in 1521 that the Diet of Worms handed down judgment against Martin Luther, St. Peter Canesius had strong spiritual inclinations as a youth, but also a great deal of unruliness. He joined the Jesuits at the age of 22 and made great progress, both spiritually and academically. Over the next 30 years help found 15 universities and bring much of Germany back to the Catholic fold. In 1580, he then assisted in the foundation of a university in Fribourge, Switzerland, where he taught for the next 19 years. Pope Leo XIII called him "the second apostle of Germany after Boniface."

2. Although he had many administrative duties, he engaged in a prodigious amount of writing, including most famously

his catechisms for all ages, which were translated into 15 languages during his own time. Pope Leo XIII wrote, "He did not hesitate to descend from the heights of wisdom to the basics of writing. He undertook the instruction of children and even composed elementary writing books and grammars for their use."

3. St. Peter believed very strongly in reading his opponents' works, describing their views accurately, and responding to them with calm, rather than ridicule or parody. He once wrote to Lindatus, an aspiring writer that he should not engage in cheap rhetorical tricks or parody "it is the mob-orator's privilege to riot in such blossoms, not the part of a theologian. With such medicine, we do not heal the sick, but render them more incurable." And, when the 1567 Colloquy of Worms opened as an effort to help Catholics and Protestants understand and possibly agree with each other more, the Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand invited St. Peter Canesius, who began by (unsuccessfully) trying to hammer out what they agreed on. Pope Pius XI thus said that he stands as an example of our hope to reunite the Christian faith.

E. St. Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621) was also heavily involved in catechetical work, trying to increase all people's understanding of their own faith, especially in Italy.

1. His family was very devout, of the noble class, but also relatively impoverished; and they struggled to maintain their position in the rapidly changing society.

2. His parents were glad that he was studying for the priesthood, and his father had high hopes that he would rise to the cardinalate. His entrance into the Jesuits at the age of 18 seemed like a very unlikely path to that goal, but it eventually occurred all the same. Despite his ill health, he excelled at studies and teaching; and was assigned to preaching even before his ordination. Except for 3 year terms as Provincial of the Jesuit province of Naples and Archbishop of Capua, he lived mostly in Rome, teaching and leading the Jesuit Roman College and later serving as a cardinal and preeminent advisor and theologian to the popes.

- a. In the later role, he initially helped to negotiate a compromise regarding Galileo that allowed the scientist to

teach his ideas as a hypotheses but not proven facts. (And they had not yet been proved.) It was only after St. Robert Bellarmine's death that the controversy erupted again.

b. In 1617, he argued for a papal declaration in favor of the Immaculate Conception, the first known cardinal to do so.

3. As with St. Peter Canesius, he wrote voluminously in the face of administrative duties. St. Robert Bellarmine is especially known for his catechisms and The Controversies, his defense of the faith drawn from the lectures he gave at the Roman College. In writing and preaching, he especially emphasized the unity of eloquence, charity and wisdom, saying, "Eloquence without charity and wisdom is only empty chattering. Wisdom and eloquence without charity are dead and profitless. And charity without eloquence and wisdom is like a brave man unarmed."

4. With St. Benedict, but more so than almost anyone else, he believed in focusing on the person or task at hand. Thus, when a visitor was with him, he gave him total attention. And, when he was at prayer or studies, people marveled about how fixed his attention was.

5. With St. Francis, he also very strongly emphasized disciplining bodily pleasures. But paradoxically, that very discipline makes one joyfully see God's presence everywhere. Thus, in his last books, The Ascent of the Mind to God by the Ladder of Created Things describes all of creation as a sacrament that draws us to God if we are willing.

- Fittingly born on October 4, the memorial of St. Francis, he always considered that saint to be a central model of the spirit of poverty fitted for a Christian, especially one who wishes to excel in the spiritual life.

D. Although there is no women's side of the Jesuit order, Blessed Mother Theresa of Calcutta formed the Missionaries of Charity largely along the lines of Ignatian spirituality. In that order, there is a strong sense of a radical openness to the will of God, and a sense that it is a privilege to serve the poor, the beloved of Christ. There is also a special vow to be joyful.

II. Ignatian spirituality is based very heavily upon a very powerful notion of serving Jesus as the great King and Lord of heaven and earth. There is a strong emphasis on discerning the will of God and being courageous and dedicated in carrying out His will.

A. The centerpiece of St. Ignatius' work is the Spiritual Exercises, which were written as a guide for a 30-day retreat, although the work is common used for shorter retreats as well.

1. St. Ignatius begins the exercises with 20 "annotations," leading up to the goal of discerning God's will and viewing all in creation as simply a means to that will. As he says, "Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul. And the other things on the face of the earth are created for man and that they may help him in prosecuting the end for which he is created. . . . [Thus] it is necessary to make ourselves indifferent to all created things in all that is allowed to the choice of our free will and is not prohibited to it; so that, on our part, we want not health rather than sickness, riches rather than poverty, honor rather than dishonor, long rather than short life, and so in all the rest; desiring and choosing only what is most conducive for us to the end for which we are created."

2. The prayers described in the Spiritual Exercises, which are presumed to last about an hour, proceed along a certain pattern.

a. There is a preliminary prayer asking for guidance that all one's actions be directed toward God's will.

b. One then proceeds onto "preludes." In the prelude one uses the imagination to sense the subject of the meditation (e.g., the birth of Christ or conversion from sin) and ask God for something based upon this reflection for the sake of serving Him better (e.g., a joy at the presence of Christ or a sense of deep contrition.)

c. One then proceeds onto a point by point consideration of the matter for meditation, here using more the intellect.

d. One then makes a "colloquy" with Christ about the matter, asking Him for His guidance and strength to use our will to upon the will of God..

e. One then ends the prayer with an "Our Father" or other fixed prayers.

3. The Spiritual Exercises themselves focus on meditations that cover: (1) repentance from sins and a sense of the punishment due for them; (2) the earthly life of Jesus Christ up to Holy Week; (3) the passion and death of Christ; (4) the events from the Resurrection to Christ's Ascension. But the book also describes a number of other subjects of prayer, such as the Ten Commandment, the uses of the senses, and meditating word by word over prayers such as the Our Father and the Hail Mary that we say commonly.

B. There is a very strong notion that there are two kingdoms, one for God and one of evil, and that we cannot be neutral. One of the meditations in the second week of the Spiritual Exercises involves trying to "see a great field of all that region of Jerusalem, where the supreme Commander-in-chief of the good is Christ our Lord; another field in the region of Babylon, where the chief of the enemy is Lucifer."

1. St. Ignatius describes this life as a continual combat with the forces of evil, both for our own soul and for the world around us. As soldiers must train for physical combat through continuous exercises, so we must train continuously, by prayer, self examination of life, and sacrifice (especially of the will) to serve the king of glory. In asking Pope Paul III for approval of his order first, he described his rule as for men who would "fight for God under the banner of the Cross and serve the Lord along and His Vicar on earth." And Pope Leo XIII's encyclical on St. Peter Canesius was entitled Militantis Ecclesiae (Of the Church Militant).

2. There is a strong notion in Ignatian spirituality of not giving final honor to earthly authority. Legitimate civil authorities are to be obeyed, but with the understanding that their authority is simply for the practical purpose of helping society. Thus, the Jesuit missionaries to the New World were very willing to take on the French, Spanish, and Portuguese nobles to defend the rights of the Native Americans, and have been willing to take on dictators to this day. And St. Robert Bellarmine became famous (and somewhat controversial in Catholic circles) for his strong refutation of the idea that any human authority over temporal affairs is absolute. Anticipating arguments that would inspire the American Revolution, he wrote that power belongs to the people first, who may delegate it to whom they think best. He even, against much opposition, argued that the Pope's temporal authority over the Papal States, was a human creation, to be used only when helpful for the salvation of souls.

3. Ignatian spirituality certainly recognizes the primacy of grace in our spiritual lives, but also insists that we must make continued efforts, and receive continued instruction by God to win this battle.

C. St. Ignatius very much focuses on developing a *A*felt knowledge of Jesus@ and on using the imagination, feelings, reason, and all aspects of the human person to develop this knowledge. In meditating on Scripture and especially on the gospels, he advises deeply imagining oneself in the scenes, including focusing on very specific details (e.g., the individual people present, the time of day, the tension in the air.)

- In the Exercises, St. Ignatius advises that, when making an "election" one do such things as imagine how one's decision will be seen at one's own death and at the Final Judgment.

D. St. Ignatius also discusses at length the *A*discernment of spirits,@ i.e., the ability to discern whether an inspiration is good or ill, whether from God, from ourselves, or even from forces opposed to God. One of his principle rules is that a good inspiration will be challenging but will leave one with a lasting sense of peace in God=s presence, while an ill inspiration will be immediately pleasing, but leave one with a sense of unease.

E. Ignatian spirituality involves the ability to sense consolations and desolations and grow through them. Consolations are strong senses of God=s presence, which include both joy at His triumph and sorrow at sins. Developing consolations by focused prayer and detachment from desires are very helpful in discernment, as are consolations with no apparent cause. Desolations are sense of anxiety and turmoil that are not based upon difficulties in the world. They can be a result of laxity in prayer, or can be a trial sent by God to strengthen the person. In both cases, one=s response should be continued prayer (or revived prayer in the former case) and not making changes in plans during these times.

F. There is also a strong sense of building one's mind and controlling one's emotions, as a soldier would build up his body and reactions to fight for his country.

1. St. Peter Canesius, building upon his own experience, emphasized that control over emotions (particularly anger or a desire for worldly honor) is essential for anyone to present the faith. St. Robert Bellarmine emphasized that control over desire for glory or wealth is essential if one is to teach the faith, rather than oneself.

2. Jesuit spirituality emphasizes good education generally involving the disciplining of the mind. Even if the learning itself is not sacred, the practice of disciplining the mind is helpful to advancement for oneself and other people. Furthermore, any form of learning can contribute to the advancement in the faith. Thus, for example, St. Peter

Canesius wrote books that helped children learn the faith and learn Latin at the same time. And in his encyclical, Pope Leo spoke of how he employed knowledge of the sciences in the service of the faith.

G. There is thus an overall sense that, in all of this life, we are training, sacrificing, struggling, and thus advancing the kingdom of God of earth to be worthy of serving Him forever in heaven.