

# Ignatian Spirituality

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## ➤ Distinctives of Ignatian Spirituality



Aschenbrenner: "...this hunger, this longing, this yearning is for love. And Love, if vague and abstract, flighty and undependable, will never satisfy..." xi<sup>1</sup> ... the heart's desire is limitless. So our longing for love can never settle, finally, for the experience of some limited, finite, human love".

### I. A spirituality which emerged out of God's transformational work in and through Ignatius.

Our journeys are significant, and God invites us to allow God's spirit to shape us and our spirituality through them. The theology of the Exercises is incarnational and optimistic. It affirms the goodness of the world. But it also is acutely aware of the pervasive problem of evil. At the same time it is contemplative and service-oriented. Its basis in personal experience makes Ignatian spirituality an intensely practical spirituality, well suited to laymen and laywomen living active lives in the world

### II. Ignatian Spirituality as a Spirituality of Incarnation

<sup>1</sup> George Aschenbrenner - *Stretched for Greater Glory*.

The theology of the Spiritual Exercises is incarnational and hope-infused.

Ignatian Spirituality places great value on listening to the wisdom of our whole bodies.

- We are called into “sensing and tasting things interiorly” (Exx2).
- The term ‘feeling’ (sentir) is fundamental to Ignatian Spirituality, and includes the bodily senses, the affectivity, and the understanding.
- Most of us live in degrees of dislocation, where “each of these are pulling in different directions; where none of these three faculties is satisfied. When all three are brought together in a person’s interior world, then peace, growth and transformation take place”. – Javier Melloni
- Ignatian spirituality is about “an apprenticeship and a deepening in... spontaneously feeling with Jesus, and a discernment of what it is” - Javier Melloni
- “The gates of the senses”- Ignatius’ image to represent two-way aspect: receiving stimuli, decoding it, and then responding.
- Ignatius calls us to ‘educate’ the senses:
  - Looking -> seeing*
  - Hearing -> listening*
  - Tasting -> savouring*
  - Smelling -> relishing*
  - Touching -> kissing*
- “We may be born with eyes but not the power to look... We touch others, and even hug them, but so often this contact fails to become a true embrace”- Guillen
- The intension of Ignatian spirituality is to help us grow increasingly in our capacity to sense (sentir) God and then to respond to God as friend.
- The Examen becomes a time when we ‘pass our five senses over the day’. Reading Scripture, becomes entering into an encounter with the Word with our five senses – our whole being.

### III. Transformation of the imagination

Monty Williams: We live in imaginary worlds, and thus we have our own images of ourselves and of God, of others and of the world. Ignatian spirituality suggests that one way of allowing our images of ourselves and God to be transformed towards the Truth, is to intentionally invite God into our imagination and let the Spirit do its transforming work.

- It asks the questions: *Where is your false notion of God? Where does your false notion of God trap you?*
- Most of us live out of our hurts, and Ignatian prayer gives a process whereby we may be increasingly released from our default positions
- Ignatian prayer and The Exercises allow us to recognise that what we thought couldn’t be changed, can be; what we thought couldn’t be loved, is loved!

### IV. The sacrament of friendship

An Ignatian spiritual life focuses on God’s invitation to us to be an intimate friend: **John 15:15<sup>2</sup>** *I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know the master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from Abba God I have made known to you.*

- “Ignatian spirituality invites us into the sacrament of friendship which is a sacrament of God’s presence in the world . Therefore our spiritual friendship and accompaniment of others is sacramental (an outward visible sign of an inward or interior divine grace)” – Neil Viney (*Christ in a Grain of Sand*)
- All friendship is an echo of the inner life of the Trinity. The Trinity is epitome of friendship, and we are invited into that community of intimate friendship

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from The Inclusive Bible translation.

- Ignatian Spirituality begins with the fact that God loves me and you unconditionally. God says to us, “I want to be with you”.
- It is always invitational.
- This friendship does not so much offer security but rather rooted intimacy.
- “Honesty without love is brutality” – Fr Pat O’Sullivan
- “Some people make friends, others take hostages”. Freedom and sacred space are essential for authentic friendship. – Fr Pat O’Sullivan

#### V. **The apostolate of listening**

Ignatian spiritual direction is a partnership. It thus demands mutual respect and openness to the other’s frame of reference. It follows Ignatius Loyola’s admonition, “Let it be presupposed that every good Christian is to be more ready to save their neighbor’s proposition than to condemn it.” This highlights the importance of being aware of the other’s framework and trusting God to work with them in God’s own particular way.

#### VI. **Flexible.**

The Ignatian spiritual director does not impose a program on the directee. The manner of the direction is adjusted to fit the person’s personality, life history, and spiritual experience. The director “cannot know beforehand what he or she will suggest.”

#### VII. **What do you really want? Who are you really looking for?**

Ignatian spiritual direction attempts to uncover the deepest desires of the human heart. Typically, these are smothered by superficial desires for transitory things. Our most profound desires are shaped by the Holy Spirit and point toward new choices for spiritual growth and fruitful service.

- Notice in John’s gospel chapter 1- Jesus asks, *What are you looking for?* In John 20 Jesus asks, *Who are you looking for?*
- **Rules for discernment.**  
Ignatius’ Rules for Discernment of Spirits permeate Ignatian spiritual direction. These are methods for identifying inner movements, reflecting on them, and understanding where they come from and where they lead us.
- Discernment is learning how to read mystery

#### VIII. **“The heart has its reasons of which the mind knows nothing.”**

Ignatius Loyola’s conversion occurred as he became able to interpret the spiritual meaning of his emotional life. The spirituality he developed places great emphasis on the affective life: the use of imagination in prayer, discernment and interpretation of feelings, cultivation of great desires, and generous service. Ignatian spiritual renewal focuses more on the heart than the intellect. It holds that our choices and decisions are often beyond the merely rational or reasonable.

#### IX. **Detachment.**

“We should not fix our desires on health or sickness, wealth or poverty, success or failure, a long life or a short one.” Our desire is to obtain the freedom to make a wholehearted choice to follow God. (See also the Principle and Foundation)

X. **“Contemplatives in action.”**

Those formed by Ignatian spirituality are often called “contemplatives in action.” They are reflective people with a rich inner life who are deeply engaged in God’s work in the world. They unite themselves with God by joining God’s active labor to save and heal the world. It’s an active spiritual attitude—a way for everyone to seek and find God in their workplaces, homes, families, and communities.

XI. **“Men and women for others.” – Pedro Arrupe sj**

A deep commitment to social justice and a radical giving of oneself to others. The heart of this service is the radical generosity that Ignatius asked for in his famous prayer:

XII. **“The world is charged with the grandeur of God.”**

God is at work everywhere—in work, relationships, culture, the arts, the intellectual life, creation itself. As Ignatius put it, all the things in the world are presented to us “so that we can know God more easily and make a return of love more readily.” Ignatian spirituality and spiritual direction places great emphasis on discerning God’s presence in the everyday activities of ordinary life. It sees God as an active God, always at work, inviting us to an ever-deeper walk.

XIII. **Gerard Manley Hopkins as an introduction to bodily awareness**

GM Hopkins illustrates the creating presence of God in and through all things.

- To a large extent Hopkins embodies Ignatian spirituality, and as such is an illustration of some of the key aspects.
- Just as Inigo’s spirituality developed and found expression through his own journey so too does Hopkins, and indeed our own. As such, it is intensely personal, reflecting the tenet that TRUTH is not a hard marble pillar but dynamic and intensely personal: *I AM the way, the truth and the life.*
- Hopkins’ writing shows how he is in touch with detail and nuances around himself and within.
- Note Hopkins’ use of the five senses in all he sees and does.

**Excerpt 1**



“One day when the bluebells were in bloom I wrote the following. I do not think I have ever seen anything more beautiful than the bluebell I have been looking at. I know the beauty of the Lord by it. Its inscape is mixed of strength and grace, like an ash tree. The head is strongly drawn over backwards and arches down like a cutwater<sup>3</sup> drawing itself back from the line of the keel. The lines of the bells strike and overlies this, rayed but not symmetrically, some lie parallel. They look steely against the paper, the shades lying between the bells and behind the cockled petal-ends and nursing up the precision of their distinctness, the petal ends themselves being delicately lit. Then there is the straightness of the trumpets in the bells softened by the slight entasis<sup>4</sup> and by the square splay of the mouth. One bell, the lowest, some way detached and carried on a longer footstalk, touched out with the tips of the petals an oval not like the rest in a plane perpendicular of the axis of the bell but a little atilt, and so with the square-in-rounding turns of the petals...”

<sup>3</sup> the forward edge of the stem of a vessel, dividing the water as the vessel advances.

<sup>4</sup> A slight convexity given to a column as if to correct an optical illusion

## **Excerpt 2**

“When I consider my selfbeing ,my consciousness and feeling of myself, that taste of myself, of *I* and *me* above and in all things, which is more distinctive than the taste of ale or alum, more distinctive than the smell of walnutleaf or camphor, and is incommunicable by any means to another man[sic] (as when I was a child I used to ask myself : What must it be to be someone else?). Nothing else in nature comes near this unspeakable stress of pitch, distinctiveness, and selving, this selfbeing of my own. Nothing explains it or resembles it, except so far as this, that other men [sic] to themselves have the same feeling”.

*But by the grace of God I am what I am, and God’s grace toward me has not been in vain ( 1 Cor 15:10)*

## **Anima Christi (St. Ignatius of Loyola)**

Soul of Christ, sanctify me  
Body of Christ, save me  
Blood of Christ, inebriate me  
Water from the side of Christ, wash me  
Passion of Christ, strengthen me  
Good Jesus, hear me  
Within the wounds, shelter me  
from turning away, keep me  
From the evil one, protect me  
At the hour of my death, call me  
Into your presence lead me  
to praise you with all your saints  
Forever and ever, Amen

