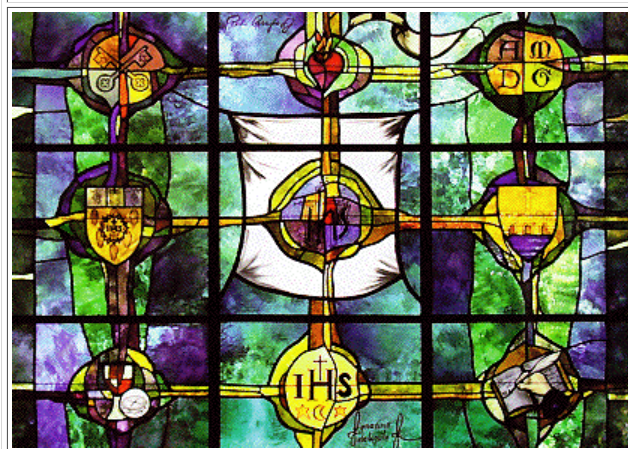


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The Spiritual Exercises

of Ignatius Loyola

Spiritual Exercises window in the Egan Chapel



Ignatius and his followers knew that anyone seeking God was not meant to wait for visions, but had only to seek God in an intelligent and humble way and then with God's grace could "find God in all things". His method involved *Spiritual Exercises* of the mind, memory, will and imagination. Analogous to running and swimming for the physical improvement of the body, these exercises of the spiritual faculties would enable one to find the divine will and to conform one's will to the will of God.

Nine of the many Jesuit retreat houses in the U.S.



Ignatius writing the Spiritual Exercises


When Ignatius underwent his remarkable conversion he recorded the movements and reactions of his spiritual faculties in great detail, and was inspired to organize them in a fashion that would guide others undergoing the same profound experience of God that he had. He experienced, composed and presented the Exercises as a layman, and was ordained much later. His Exercises were not a series of pious sermons or edifying notes to be read; they were prescriptions that were meant to put a person in direct communication with God. The exercitant who undertakes the Exercises becomes a self-learner by incessant self-activity striving to dispose himself to God's grace in order to attain the end for which he was created. Joseph Tetlow, S.J., speaks of the relevance of the *Spiritual Exercises* for the laity today.




Spiritual Exercises belong to the Church. On their own, they involve lay and Jesuit colleagues in fruitful ways. They create spiritual conversation and community, which Americans yearn for. They help religious women offer women's gifts to the Church in the world, and help the laity find their own gifts confirmed by prayer. They offer an assured way to find God working in all things and a feasible project of living contemplative in action. Just Christians in the marketplace.

Ignatius of Loyola created and conducted this apostolate for 15 years before he was ordained. Through it, everyone knows, he drew scores of men into the Company of Jesus. It surprises no one who knows the history that *Spiritual Exercises* are proving an astonishingly effective instrument of lay spirituality even in the postmodern era. They are being used for and by and with lay people in many formats all around the world and then supply the basis of sophisticated spiritualities for the marketplace. It is safe to say that more people are going through the one-on-one directed Exercises today than at any time in history. It is safe to say something more: *Spiritual Exercises* are being used as an apostolic instrument by better-educated laity. (Tetlow, 1994, National Jesuit News, Dec.)

Pope Paul III approving Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises

 In the past Companions of Jesuits like Gianlorenzo Bernini, who will be mentioned later, not only experienced the *Spiritual Exercises* but made them the operative principles of his life as well as a lifelong process. The Exercises are divided into four distinct sections called "weeks". The "Principle and Foundation" at the beginning of the *First Week* of the Exercises addresses the ultimate purpose of life and the created universe, making retreatants realize that the goal of their lives is to live with God forever: that God is not only their creator but is to be their eternal companion. It follows then that they should use everything at their disposal to help themselves attain that end. Everything should be ordered to God's plan for them, and they should not be too quick to make life decisions until they first see if the outcome will lead them closer to what God's will is for them. The *First Week* follows with considerations about the heinousness of sin and the havoc it wreaks in the individual and in society, about God's constant love, and about the urgency of turning from one's old ways and attitudes to gratitude and love and to a more devout life. John O'Malley has a concise summary of the *Spiritual Exercises* as well as this *Discernment of Spirits*.

The first Jesuit college in Coimbra, Portugal

If the purpose of the First week was successfully achieved, the individuals had found a new and happier orientation at the very core of their being and were thus set more firmly than before on the path to salvation. . . . That continuing movement in fact constitutes the precondition for engaging in the next three Weeks. 


Those Weeks were constructed with a view to confirming the First, while moving the person along to further issues. Was some other change, especially in the external framework of one's life or the kind of future one envisioned for oneself, possible, desirable, and now to be made? Such a change would not only deepen the original experience but would make one's life even more conformable to the life and teachings of Jesus, accepted by Ignatius without question as the best to which human beings could aspire.

As was Ignatius himself at Manresa, the person making the retreat was to be "taught by God". It was surely for this reason that the individual was to have at hand only a few books such as the Gospels. [Ignatius] warns the person guiding another in the Exercises that at the time of the election he should not try to influence the outcome one way or another, for "it is more appropriate and far better that the Creator and Lord himself communicate himself to the devout soul, embracing it with love, inciting it to praise of himself, and disposing it for the way that will most enable the soul to serve him in the future". He should "allow the Creator to deal immediately with the creature, and the creature with its Creator and Lord." This immediate action of God on the individual is the fundamental premise of the Exercises. (O'Malley, 1993, p. 39-43)

It is never easy to find God's will, so the art of discernment of spirits is central to the Exercises. Discernment is not simply a matter of rational logic, but rather an understanding of how to read the signs of God's will. It provides needed inspiration and illumination for dealing with the daily struggle of good and evil within ourselves and in the world about us. Discernment of spirits becomes an important art for ongoing discovery and revelation, and it presumes a vibrant, enlightened affective life. The final experience of the *Spiritual Exercises* is the *Contemplation to Attain Love*.

It consists of a final transition synthesizing the whole experience of the retreatant in a vision and daily way of life. For Ignatius the gift of God's love can be known in every human situation and experience. We can find in everything God working for us.

Saint Ignatius Loyola

In a recent article from *America* magazine Ronald Modras, a professor of theological studies at Saint Louis University,  speaks of the past influence of the *Spiritual Exercises*, the growing popularity of Jesuit spirituality in today's world and the increasing number of laity taking advantage of the opportunities to make these Exercises. He begins with the anomaly of Jesuits martyred in Elizabethan England while their inspiration, the *Spiritual Exercises* were more than welcome and even plagiarized.

Apparently Jesuit spirituality is not just for Roman Catholics any more. Maybe it never was. Back in 1954 Yale Professor Louis Marz pointed out in his book *The Poetry of Meditation* that Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* had a marked influence both on the spirituality and popular culture of Elizabethan England. Ensuing 17th-century English verse bore a similar Ignatian imprint. One finds it in the meditative poetry not only of Jesuit Robert Southwell but of such Anglicans as John Donne, George Herbert and Richard Crashaw. . . . It seems that Jesuit treatises on meditation enjoyed the same widespread popularity in late 16th-century England that they had on the continent. In England, however, the treatises had to be anonymous or falsely attributed. The Society of Jesus was outlawed, and its members were constrained to work underground. Given those undercover operations, it is not surprising that the Oxford English Dictionary gives as a secondary meaning to the word Jesuit "a dissembling person; a prevaricator." The Jesuits have come a long way from the connotations of "Jesuitical".

For Jesuits there was never anything like a flight from the world. As one early Jesuit put it: "The whole world is our home." . . . I believe it is what makes them congenial at once to Episcopal bishops and their fellow non-Jesuit, even agnostic, academics. As one proximate enough to observe Jesuits close up, yet distant enough to make out the forest from the trees, I am struck time and again at what, for lack of a better term, I can only call their *spiritual humanism*.

There is no understanding Jesuits without some idea of Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* . . . unquestionably one of the most influential books ever written. It has been published some 4,500 times, an average of once a month for 400 years. The number of copies printed has been estimated to be some 4.5 million--despite the fact that the book is about as dry and uninspiring as a teacher's manual. For that is what the *Spiritual Exercises* are, a how-to handbook with a set of directions for directors on how to discern and decide amid the cacophony of conflicting voices, how to hear the voice of God who speaks in the deeper stillness of the heart; amid the many options regarding what to do with one's life, how to respond. (Modras, 1995, p. 10-16)

Rubens' ANNUNCIATION illustrates
his thorough understanding of the
COMPOSITION of PLACE in the Spiritual Exercises



Jesuit Sodalities for Women as well as for Men

From the very start of the Society, Jesuit collaboration took many forms, their schools being only one. Another form included the *Marian Congregations*; membership in these *Sodalities* as they were later called, had various patterns, some for men only, some for women only and some mixed, but the goals were the same, the service to others, and their impetus came from the *Spiritual Exercises*. Ignatius directed many women in the *Spiritual Exercises*, as did the Jesuits after him. In fact he had a surprisingly sizable correspondence with women and these letters have been recently published. (Rahner, 1970) In his history of the early Jesuits, John O'Malley treats of the Sodalities and he also relates Ignatius' pioneer work for the rehabilitation of prostitutes. Many of these women were sincerely religious and were driven to their desperate situation by dire poverty.

The establishment of the "Marian Congregations" in 1563 surely signaled a new phase for the Jesuits. Even at the outset, the Jesuits wanted these congregations to support and promote a more deeply interiorized ethical and religious life. Jesuit reliance on the [Spiritual] Exercises gave it clear form. Of crucial importance in the Jesuit phenomenon was the fact that their congregations were not attached to parishes . . . and religious practices were chosen more freely.

Both male and female congregations followed the usual pattern of exercises in piety and works of mercy, including the women's receiving reformed prostitutes into their homes until they could be suitably placed elsewhere. . . . By 1543 Ignatius had founded in Rome Casa Santa Marta, and Jesuits elsewhere followed suit by engaging in various ways in ministry to the women. Although Ignatius is generally credited with being the first person to conceive such an institution, it seems a woman by the name of Laura Saliarda had tried to establish a similar one in Modena in 1535. (O'Malley, 1993, pp. 179, 196)

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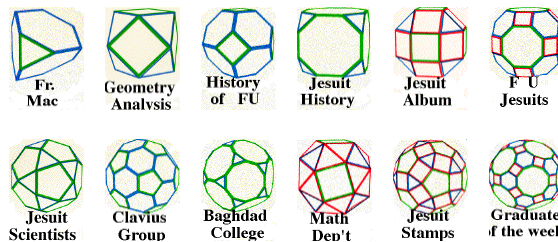
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