

## Living Competence, Conscience, and Compassion

### Ignatian Education: From Foundational Insights to Contemporary Praxis

*by Daven Day, S.J.*

Ignatian Network introduces the first in a series of briefing papers entitled *Living Competence, Conscience and Compassion* that highlight different aspects of the Ignatian School Renewal. The briefing papers will appear from time to time as a stimulus to principals and teachers.

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It can be argued that most great movements have their genesis in simple, yet universal, insights. They have the inherent capacity to be developed at some depth, and possess the faculty for further refinement and fresh expression by later generations. Within such a process, Inigo Lopez de Loyola has proved to be no exception. Not that he was singularly original, but rather, like a poet, he could feel more sharply, and express more deeply, the experiences common to us all. Though his experiences were of their nature mystical, yet as a practical person, he could without delay set about translating them into constructive ways to help others. Being alive and open to the world, he possessed the rather rare capacity to synthesise - for to him there was nothing which could not be used in some way to give glory to God.

### **IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY IS A LAY SPIRITUALITY**

Coming from the early part of his life, these experiences of Ignatius centre on a cave at Manresa. For us, it is significant to note that because at the time Ignatius was a young lay man, essentially therefore, Ignatian Spirituality is a lay spirituality. It was only many years later that Ignatius attempted to translate his earlier spiritual vision into what it might mean when lived in religious life. This he did in the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus. Meanwhile, under his guidance, and with communal reflection, his companions translated that vision into apostolic strategies. Perhaps the most influential of these strategies concerned education, and in a particular way, secondary education. Since then, for four hundred and fifty years, succeeding generations of Jesuits and their lay colleagues have continued to adapt those same basic insights to contemporary needs.

Our own generation has witnessed a remarkable flowering of creativity centred on the spiritual insights of Ignatius. Once again, lay people have taken rightful ownership and leadership of Ignatian Spirituality. Women religious, whose congregations also comprise the Ignatian Family of Religious, are themselves discovering with considerable enthusiasm, the work still needed to explore the implications for women

of the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius. This same burgeoning of creativity has occurred in education when educators revisited the traditional insights of Ignatius. In simple language, the booklet 'The Characteristics of Jesuit Education' reflects the efforts of contemporary educators in Ignatian schools to distil, once again, the basic insights and principles of contemporary Ignatian education. In turn, this has prompted much discussion in revitalising, and frequently discovering for the first time, the potential of Ignatian education for integrating into a coherent world vision theology, philosophy, spirituality and education. Because of its built-in capacity for adaptation to cultural needs, together with its flexible pedagogical processes, Ignatian education is well positioned and perhaps destined, to become once more an international force through '*end of the millennium education*'. Intrinsically, its reflective processes endow it with an immediate international appeal.

Being integral to the original insight of Ignatius, these processes are interlocked with the insights themselves. In a real sense, the medium here is the message. In essence, by focussing on the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm of *context - experience - reflection - action*, this process together with other supporting reflective processes, can enable the contemporary educator and student to move confidently from insight through to practice. A further explanation of the Ignatian reflective educator at work is developed in Briefing Paper No. 2 entitled, 'Principled Reflecting and Acting - a Reading of Ignatian Pedagogy'.

### **IGNATIAN CONVERSATION**

The Jesuit historian, John O'Malley, S.J., and the scholar of the Spiritual Exercises, Howard Gray, S.J., both believe that Ignatius Loyola was given three basic and simple insights. The first, and the one O'Malley considers to be the most central, was *conversation*. To Ignatius, this was carried on at different levels: firstly, in making contact with oneself, by reflecting on one's own life; secondly, by dialoguing with one's God - being aware of the essential ingredient of each listening to the other, before going on to develop the dialogue; thirdly, returning to one's peer group, to share at some depth those matters of mutual importance; fourthly, linking back to God, as together with the peer group with which one has shared at some depth one's own faith journey to God; fifthly, moving to conversation with one's peers concerning planning those outcomes from the conversations which would help others; sixthly, again expanding these conversations with those other groups which share the same kinds of vision, and moving together with them, to further apostolic action.

The early Jesuits moved quite quickly and naturally into the ministry of education. In opening their schools, they explored those means by which they could take the basic insights of their founder, and translate them in ways that could influence the behaviour, the environment and the curriculum in their schools. It is not surprising, then, that contemporary teachers in Ignatian schools are still exploring the means by which they can achieve the same goals more effectively and more appealingly. It is natural to expect, therefore, that in an Ignatian school there will be a clear emphasis on the on-going development of personal commitment to Jesus; and that there will be among the teachers themselves, as well as with teachers with their students, that interest in sharing growth in this personal commitment.

Because *Conversation* itself suggests equality, one would expect in a contemporary Ignatian school a mutual respect between teachers and students, one enhanced by mechanisms enabling an '*open door*' communications policy. If faith journeys are ever to be shared, then teachers and students are not only to be told, but more importantly, they need to feel that they are on a journey together, and that the teachers are in fact but one step ahead of the students. Consequently, the teacher is to be seen as role model. In such a school, one would certainly not expect to see

serried ranks of desks for the students with the teacher sitting at a rostrum; such a scenario would scarcely be a symbol of journeying together. Rather, one would expect the architecture of the school and

the classroom to harmonise in reflecting an easy on-going relationship in which teachers inter-relate easily with students. Scholastically, one would expect that personalised learning would be wedded to diverse forms of cooperative learning and be operative in both the classroom and in the overall running of the school. Starting from the perspective of the administration, the basic insight of Ignatius would influence the whole areas of theory and praxis. The organisational pyramid which places the principal authoritatively at the pinnacle would seem to be the least likely model for an Ignatian school. On the contrary, the insight of Ignatius would be foundational to participative organisation which would permeate all facets of the school - through the organisational-management, the teaching processes, and then in turn through them to the students themselves. Correspondingly, the students would be expected to share the responsibility for the well-being and involvement of their fellow students.

That not all of these desired outcomes are evident in Ignatian schools should make us ponder. For, to adults, even though the insights may be expressed simply, when they are translated into real life terms, they can appear to be counter-cultural and disturbing. To educators, the basic Ignatian challenge concerns their accepting an openness and vulnerability to personal growth. It places administrators, teachers and students along the same learning curve; challenging all of them not only individually, but corporately, to learn, to grow, and to act coherently as a committed community; striving *'for competence, conscience and a compassionate commitment'*.

Initially, Ignatius appears not to have been as fully aware of the importance of team work as he later was. From quite early, his strong, personal charm and vitality attracted others to him, so that he was able to form firm and lasting friendships. Consequently, by the time that he had moved to the University of Paris and was attracting a number of like-minded and enthusiastic young men, he realised the need to bind them together as a group. This was a development of his insight on *conversation* in that the focus of such bonding was Jesus. Also, there was a strong need to develop a friendship among this group of men who already shared so much academically. All were to graduate as *'Master of Arts'* from Paris, and to their dying days, all would treasure a fast bond of affection for one another, and especially for Ignatius.

Translated into educational terms, an Ignatian school would place considerable emphasis on creating a culture of concern and pastoral care, in which all teachers and students would feel accepted, primarily for what they are and for what they might yet become. One would expect that *'space'* would be provided where both individual teachers and individual students were given the opportunity to

grow at their own pace. As a safeguard, mild and constructive discipline would ensure a framework through which students and teachers could make mistakes, and creatively learn from them. Where overzealous and punitive discipline can suffocate, conversely, a sound defining of boundaries allows mistakes to be made and at the same time provides support for growth by *'working through'* problems when they occur. Wisely, the Ignatian school understands that mistakes can be turned into positive opportunities for growth.

An Ignatian school should be a centre of hope and celebration where teachers, students and parents enjoy coming together. It was no accident that Ignatius referred to the early Jesuits as *"Companions in the Lord"*. Should one want a ready reckoner for determining how faithful is an Ignatian school to the spirit of Ignatius, then one need only ask, *"Do parents, teachers and students feel that they are Companions in the Lord?"*

### **IGNATIAN 'HOLY DESIRES'**

John O'Malley and Howard Gray identify a second insight, equally as simple as *conversation*, and in

essence flowing from it. In Ignatius' words, it was experiencing *holy desires*. Ignatius himself, as he lay for several months recuperating from a cannonball shot, fluctuated between holy desires of doing great things for God, and dreaming about the love of a woman, who was probably the Infanta of Spain. He found that after his worldly dreams, he was left listless and dissatisfied, and after his holy dreams of doing great things for God, he was filled with consolation and hope. Because Ignatius was at heart a dreamer, his legacy is not complete without passing on the significance of dreaming itself.

Dreaming does not just happen by itself in an Ignatian school. So easily it can be shut out by endless rounds of classes, followed by sport, intermingled with other extra-curricular activities, and then long journeys home on public transport. An Ignatian school should be a place where there are times for everyone to dream. Dreaming needs to be incorporated into the very life of the school. An Ignatian school will be highly creative; it will be a school where the *right-brain* activities flourish equally with those of the *left-brain*; where rewards for literature, music, art and creative thinking equal those for academic and sporting prowess. At the heart of all these processes is self-discovery. Though a truism it bears repeating, that all scholastic programs should have built-in processes for self-discovery and prodding the creativity and ingenuity of students, whether it be in the area of maths, science, music or the plastic arts. Closely linked to this insight is the importance of encouraging initiative in both teachers and students and wedding it to the expectation that growth-promoting change is essential; and that to change many times might become a gauge for growing maturity. This particular type of ability to change will surely break down the barriers of class, race and colour which so impede the development of creative freedom.

### **IGNATIAN 'HELPING OTHERS'**

O'Malley and Gray identified the third foundational insight of Ignatius as the desire *to help others*. This in itself was unusual, given that the prevailing spirituality of Ignatius' time would most likely have expressed the concept as, '*the desire to save souls*', or more specifically, '*to save one's own soul*'. Ignatius was later to confirm this action-oriented intuition in his well-known aphorism that, '*love is shown by deeds not words*'. In reflecting on this Ignatian insight, the early Jesuit schoolmasters placed an emphasis on educational outcomes in all their programmes. In a broad sense, for the Jesuit teacher, education became an apostolic instrument for serving God and the world. Father Kolvenbach would boldly express this insight in his contemporary re-wording of the Jesuit educational vision as *nurturing people, alive to God, in competence, conscience and compassionate commitment*.

Jesuit education has walked the tightrope of avoiding indoctrination by stressing the need to nurture self-discovery; and at the same time, it has stressed the need for training an informed conscience. Ignatius clearly knew what he wanted to achieve. Hence, because for an Ignatian school, there are clearly articulated learning outcomes, the contemporary Ignatian instrument of the *Curriculum Improvement Process* spells out clearly the profile of a student at graduation from an Ignatian school. This profile is more than an ideal for it has been prepared in each school by the teachers themselves. As such, therefore, it encapsulates the characteristics that these teachers reasonably believe can be expected in young adults leaving their Ignatian school.

These profiles register clearly that the graduates are maturing persons, on the threshold of adult life. All the values are modified by the proviso that these young adults are to be understood as '*graduates who have some understanding*', and who are '*beginning to interiorise for themselves*' these qualities. Those students who reach conclusions contrary to the desired Ignatian outcome are in fact our failures. This conclusion says nothing of the state of conscience of the particular graduate, but rather that the Ignatian school has failed to attract the student to the Ignatian vision. The present day outcome of Ignatius' desire *to help people* is pivotal in the focus of nurturing a faith imbued with charity, that acts justly. If the foundations of such an attitude are absent or stunted in a student leaving an Ignatian school, then, to that

extent, the school has failed in its Ignatian mandate.

The current international emphases on skills training, schools assessment and evaluation provide outcomes for achieving greater school accountability, and better preparation for later placing students in the work force. Because these outcomes are accepted as being important within an Ignatian school, they are integrated into its outcome profile of nurturing competent persons committed to human excellence.

### **IGNATIAN 'FINDING GOD IN ALL THINGS'**

Ignatius synthesised his own foundational insights in the single quest of '*finding God in all things*'. The Ignatian Pedagogy is a process that enables the school community, both individually and corporately, to become sensitive to the activity of God already active in the life of each community member, and in the life of the institution itself. For this reason, the Ignatian school is world affirming in its philosophy through realizing that God cannot be confined to the school. Secondly, its studies and its involvement should encompass the local, national and now the global community, as legitimate spheres for cooperating with God. This dimension of an Ignatian school will prepare the school community for stewardship of God's world. Such a service will be effective only if it is based on an academic excellence that is rigorous, free of cant and tested by reflection. An Ignatian school holds tenaciously that each member has a contribution to make, and that each person should be extended as far as possible in this challenge of service. Since the student is a threshold person, on the threshold of adult life, it is important to note that the Ignatian outcomes can be assessed only five, ten or fifteen years after the student has graduated. Though elemental at school level, Ignatian processes progressively introduce students to the possibilities of a sea change in attitudes and values; and through programmed and experiential learning expose the whole school community to the social and structural injustices currently crippling societies world-wide.

### **SUMMARY**

The insights of Ignatius were simple but profound, and I suggest so too should be the academic strategies derived from them. If we are to be true to Ignatius, it is essential that we strive for a clear picture of our goals, reflectively take time to articulate possible outcomes, and hone continually the skills of preparing learning activities, through all levels and departments of our institution. The key concept in understanding this approach, or this vision, is to realize that this venture is clearly counter-cultural; that it encompasses a quite profound attitudinal change. This can be achieved only through the Ignatian processes that bring about growth through the nurturing and forming of the three groups essential to a school community, namely, the parents, the teachers and the students. This challenge can be met, but possibly only after resolving conflicts, and only by dreamers who dare to dream and possess the courage to commit themselves to the long, hard but liberating haul of renewal. Ignatius expected this when he exhorted his Companions, *to give without counting the cost!*

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