Fact Sheet: The Jesuits and Saint Ignatius of Loyola

SAINT IGNATIUS, 1491-1556

- Born in Loyola, Castile (Spain).
- Canonized March 12, 1622.
- Became a knight in 1517, passionately devoted himself to battle. He fought for glory and was incredibly vain.
- In 1521, badly broke his leg in a battle against the French.
- While his broken leg healed, Ignatius read about Saints and decided to devote the rest of his life to God.
- In 1522, on his newly healed leg, Ignatius departed on a pilgrimage to Montserrat. He repented for his sins and embraced a view of Jesus as his personal savior.
- From 1522-1524, Ignatius composed his Spiritual Exercises, which were eventually approved in their final format by Pope Paul III in 1548. The exercises instruct Roman Catholics (and non-Catholics) to discern between good and evil spirits through intense prayer and meditation.

THE JESUIT ORDER, 1540-Present

- In the year 1539, Ignatius drafted a Roman Catholic sect called the Society of Jesus. Pope Paul III approved the Jesuit Order in 1540.
- The Order was largely concerned with teaching, education, missionary influence, and charitable works.
- Ignatius noted that a special vow of obedience to the Pope was “the cause and principal foundation” of his society.
- After Martin Luther’s 95 theses sparked the Protestant Reformation in 1517, the Jesuits were instrumental in the Catholic Counter-Reformation that reclaimed many of the newly converted Protestants in Poland, Hungary, and Germany.
- In 1773, Pope Clemente XIV disbanded the Society of Jesus.
- In 1814, Pope Pius VII reinstated the Society of Jesus

EXPERT OPINION: RELEVANCE OF JESUIT ORDER & IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY
Father Thomas Scirghi, S.J., Associate Professor of Theology at Fordham University

The significance of Francis as the first Jesuit Pope:

“While Francis did not aspire to the papacy, he won over the papal conclave by his speech, calling for the Church to go out from the Vatican and move to the ‘periphery,’ i.e., caring for the marginalized and the voiceless people. Also, I think this choice shows that the hierarchy recognized his Latin roots – where the Church is growing today.”

Influence of Ignatian Spirituality on Pope Francis:

“His sermons and talks provide an introduction to Ignatian spirituality. For example, (as just mentioned), his reaching out to the ‘periphery’ echoes the concern of Ignatius of Loyola and his ‘care of souls.’ Also, he has referred regularly to the ‘enemy,’ meaning the ‘evil spirit,’ the principle of distraction, who thwarts the desire to act in a moral manner.”

Is there a difference between the Catholicism of Jesuits and the Catholicism of other Catholic Orders?

“I am wary of stating that the Society of Jesus -- or any order of Catholic religious – ‘interprets Catholicism differently.’ This could suggest that the Catholic tradition is subject to relativism, i.e., people pick and choose what they wish to believe. But religious orders have a point of emphasis by which they evangelize (spread the faith as proclaimed by Jesus Christ). The early Jesuits focused upon the spiritual development of people, through the work of the ‘Spiritual Exercises’ as written by St. Ignatius of Loyola, and in this way, deepening their relationship with God. Eventually, the early Jesuits developed schools, but this is another story. Another order is the Franciscans who, following the example of Francis of Assisi, lived a life of poverty, caring for poor people, and through this simple lifestyle, were free from material concerns and ready to follow the will of God.”

Brenna Moore, Associate Professor of Theology at Fordham University

Pontiff’s appeal to Non-Catholics as a Jesuit:

“Pope Francis has returned to the humanistic style characteristic of the Second Vatican Council, keeping the message focused on people on the margins of society in a joyful, loving way that draws people in. So many of his actions are about connections beyond the Church walls.”

Christiana Peppard, Assistant Professor of Theology at Fordham University

Influence of Ignatian Spirituality on Pope Francis:

“I’d say that, from what I can tell, Pope Francis is Jesuit through and through. He trusts and seeks out the expertise of scientists and experts on ecological degradation and social science and other related fields. But he
also is extremely pastoral, looking to care for each person in their entirety
in the way that they are in the world and he really walks the walk while
talking the talk.”

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