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### Reports: The Retreat Master is - GOD! The Ignatian Spiritual Heritage Reanimated for Today's Higher Education Challenges

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# THE RETREAT MASTER IS — GOD!

## *The Ignatian Spiritual Heritage Reanimated for Today's Higher Education Challenges*

By Howard Gray, S.J.

**T**his is a summary narrative about a dense and extensive topic, that of the development of Ignatian spirituality within the culture of Jesuit higher education during the post Vatican II years. Two preliminary comments. First, because it is a summary this narrative skims the surface and simplifies the evolution of the narrative. Second, it is important to remember that we are talking about a culture that permeates all Jesuit higher education institutions and that culture is highly influenced by secular priorities and professional competition.

There are three aspects of Ignatian spirituality that I will emphasize. First, in the 1960s and early 1970s younger Jesuits and then many of their professional colleagues underwent a renewed experience of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola. Second, as a development of this religious experience, there emerged an appreciation for and then an appropriation of the importance of the Ignatian “way of proceeding.” Third, a network of Jesuit-lay programs has emerged that further the specific mission of the higher education as Catholic and Jesuit, that support the goals of learning and research, but challenge the exclusivity of the secular and competitive character of higher education.

### ***The Spiritual Exercises.***

In the early 1960s I made my final year of Jesuit formation under a modern master of the Spiritual Exercises, Paul Kennedy, the director of the British Province tertianship (the final year of Jesuit formation). Kennedy proved to be a major figure in a primarily continental

retrieval of the way Ignatius Loyola gave the Spiritual Exercises. Briefly put, Ignatius’ method was a minimum of explicit guidance from the director, or better, guide, of the retreat and an emphasis on the one making the Exercises experiencing the guidance of God. So important was this encounter with divine leadership that Ignatius counseled the human director or guide to support the encounter without offering too much advice. In other words, allow God to become the true director of the retreat. This retreat experience grew in importance throughout Jesuit formation and quickly became the inspiration for the so-called directed retreat movement that had a profound impact beyond Jesuit circles, touching the lives of religious women and men, diocesan priests, and lay colleagues. The direct experience of God, while not exclusive to Ignatian spirituality, became at once the touchstone of the way Jesuits interpreted the Vatican II mandate for personal religious renewal and for renewed apostolic energy in their various apostolates. The greatest gift Jesuits could offer their colleagues was the opportunity to experience the direction of God in their own lives through the Spiritual Exercises.

### ***Ignatian Way of Proceeding.***

The second aspect of the Ignatian heritage, stemming from the Exercises, was a habit of attending to the way God animates all creative reality. From their own educational experiences and eventually from their own work

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as educators, Jesuits had a profound appreciation for the power of knowledge, study, teaching, and research in all their ministries. It was not simply a matter of inspiration to work hard or to do whatever good they could in every work. It was also the ability to find what God was saying within every aspect of learning, art, and the sciences. It was also a reverence that extended to their students in their present vocation as learners and in their future professions. This attention to the God who reveals within the work of scholarship and teaching is a major aspect of what John O'Malley has so admirably laid out in *The First Jesuits*. The early Jesuits characterized this attention to the God who reveals as their "way of proceeding," their style of laboring to bring the priorities of the Kingdom preached by Christ into the reality of the world.

Let me suggest that a watershed moment in integrating the Ignatian way of proceeding with the institutional priorities of Jesuit colleges and universities was Assembly 89: Jesuit Ministry of High Education, which brought together representatives of the 28 Jesuit colleges and universities—some 900 Jesuits and colleagues to the campus of Georgetown University. Those participants in Assembly 89 heard Frank H.T. Rhodes, the president of Cornell University challenge the participants in these words, "Can the Jesuit presence in higher education bring us to a new world view, such as that put forward by the French Jesuit Pierre-Teilhard de Chardin (1881-

1955)?" Dr. Rhodes's challenge was a call for Jesuit colleges and universities, or better for Jesuits and their colleagues, to embrace and adapt the Ignatian "way of proceeding" in their labors in today's culture of higher education. From Assembly 89 to the present we have been mining the Ignatian heritage to respond to that still relevant challenge.

## Can Jesuit presence give us a new world view?

### *Exploring the Mission.*

If the Spiritual Exercises constitute the heart of Ignatian spirituality and if from this experience the early Jesuits formulated their own apostolic style of life and work, which they called "our way of proceeding," then fulfillment of that inspiration and the practical expression of the Jesuit way of proceeding were found in what the Jesuits called their mission. In Ignatian spirituality mission indicated the work that Jesuits discerned as theirs to accomplish as disciples of Jesus Christ. Early in their apostolic history, they established a plurality of ways in which mission could be accomplished from parishes to schools to retreat centers and in a variety of cultural settings beyond Europe to Africa, Asia, India, North and South America.

Moreover, in their efforts to define and to implement their mission Jesuits established criteria for any mission: adaptation to the specific circumstances of the people and cultures they served and an orientation towards what we now characterize as "men and women for others." The post-Vatican II Jesuit General Congregations have focused their contemporary mission on faith and justice, faith and culture, and inter-religious dialogue. Another outstanding development in Jesuit higher education has been the intense and effective cooperation between Jesuits and their lay colleagues. This cooperation has networked into regional and national efforts that challenge those in Jesuit higher education to envision new ways of defining the global future of Jesuit higher education. ■

