

HISTORY

The Study of History and the Principles of Jesuit Education

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The spiritual exercises as created by Ignatius Loyola determine not only the core values of the Jesuits but also the educational principles and pedagogy of a Jesuit institution. In his discussion of the influences of the spiritual exercises of Jesuit education, President Graham suggested six different dimensions of the educational enterprise of a Jesuit college. A Jesuit education, he says, "must be holistic and integrated must be exacting but adaptable, must be reflective, must be ongoing, must be practical but located in a broad horizon, must be finally ordered to something greater." The study of history is not only the systematic examination of the significant events, people, and ideas that have shaped human societies but it also demands the kind of academic rigor, intellectual reflection, exacting rigor, and systematic order that the spiritual exercises suggest. Students of history are encouraged to see the broad changes, processes, and transformations that shape the past; yet at the same time students must be sensitive to the subtle differences and contradictions of the past. In particular history teaches students to be rigorous in their methods but also adaptable to the differences, as Loyola would say, "with respect to people, places, and situations." The study of history frees us from a narrow view of time and place and teaches us how to understand times and places which are not our own. It offers a frame of reference for making critical judgments and demands contemplation of the philosophical and ethical implications not only of the history we study but of our own assumptions and actions today. For perhaps the most relevant educational influence of the spiritual exercises for the study of history comes from the demand that education be placed within a broad horizon. "The purpose of the Spiritual Exercises," writes Loyola, "is the conquest of the self and the regulation of one's life in such a way that no decision is made under the influence of any inordinate attachment." A critical engagement with the past teaches students how to understand the attachments of the past as well as the attachments of the present. Students learn the historical origins of such attachments as race, class, gender, nationality, ethnicity, or religion. They learn how these attachments rise, how they transform, and how they affect the course of human history. By immersing themselves in the past and studying it critically within its own context, students acquire the very kind of broad horizon that a Jesuit education demands.

The Semester as a Spiritual and Intellectual Exercise

In his "Influence of the Spiritual Exercises on Six Dimensions of Jesuit Education," Graham further detailed the imaginative process of the spiritual exercises. "The full Spiritual Exercises are made in about a month," he says.

That month is divided into 4 weeks, each week is divided into days, each day is divided not into hours exactly but what Ignatius calls meditations. Those meditations have a kind of structure to them. The first part is a kind of input. He gives you something to consider. It may be an image he creates for you, or a script, often enough, most usually it's a passage from scripture, usually the life of Christ. The second piece is an imaginative reconstruction of what the scene is. For example, in contemplating the Nativity of Christ, he invites you to walk along with Joseph and Mary and the donkey, and go from inn to inn to inn and be disappointed, and then find your way to the stable, and Ohh! there's the baby, and all this. In the third part, he asks you to step back and talk to the characters in this play that has unfolded in your mind or maybe to talk to God out of this experience. He will often enough invite retreatants to repeat the meditations they have made to see if there's anything else there, to pick up details that may have escaped them the first time. And one of the tools he invites people to use in these so-called repetitions is the application of senses - How does the hay look? How do the cows smell? How do the sheep sound? - as a way to engage all of a person's faculties in entering into this scene in a very absorbing and compelling sort of way.

This is, essentially, the same task historians set for themselves and their students. The point is not only to learn and memorize the date of the Great Chicago Fire but rather to reconstruct and understand the entire scene. What

were the class and racial divides of the newly industrializing city? What did it mean to assign blame to a poor Irish woman and her cow? How did the destruction of the city challenge the modern ideologies of progress and order? Etc. Indeed just as Graham notes that one should notice not only the baby but the rest of the stable as well, so too should good history students notice both the fire and its larger social and cultural milieu.

However, this skill is hard to explain and difficult for students to master. It is not learned in a single class or a single reading but rather through repetition of the process of historical inquiry. Much like the spiritual exercises, the end result is what matters. It is only after 15 weeks of guidance, challenges, and encouragements that the pieces begin to fit and the students begin to change and challenge themselves. The guided process of historical inquiry encourages students to think both broadly about the world and specifically about their place within that world.