

IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY AND THE ORDER OF MALTA

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THE SOVEREIGN MILITARY HOSPITALLER Order of St John of Jerusalem, of Rhodes and of Malta, more simply known as the Order of Malta, was founded in Jerusalem in the eleventh century as a fraternal order dedicated to caring for pilgrims and the sick. As a chivalric order, the knights soon took to protecting pilgrims and the Christian Holy Land, maintaining a military tradition for many hundreds of years. In 1113, Pope Paschal II recognised the Order in his bull *Pie postulatio voluntatis*, and the second Master of the Order, Raymond du Puy, issued the first statutes and Rule a few years later. The Order is a religious lay order, with a unique membership structure. Its members in the first class, known as professed knights, take religious vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, living consecrated lives, but not in community. Members of the second and third classes, the latter being by far the most numerous of the 12,000 or so knights and dames today, promise adherence to a Christian life in accordance with their state as married or single Roman Catholics.¹

Although the Order of Malta today focuses a great deal of attention on the spiritual development of its members, the historiography of the Order has generally failed to provide a thorough analysis of its spiritual roots. This is true for a number of reasons. First, there is a dearth of primary sources concerning the Order's foundation and its early spiritual values. Blessed Gerard, the founder, left no writings of his own and no specific Rule for the Order.² Second, over the years there have been several

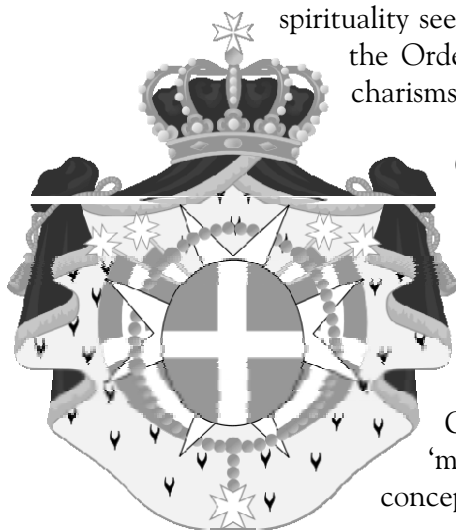
¹ See Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of St John of Jerusalem of Rhodes and of Malta, *Membership in the Order of Malta: Regulations and Commentary* (Rome, 2011), 17–19. Although not necessarily relevant for a discussion of spirituality, the Order is at once a chivalric order and a sovereign nation recognised by the UN and over 100 nations with which the Order exchanges ambassadors.

² Many of the most respected histories are silent on, or pass quickly over, the origins of the Order's spiritual values. See, for example, Bertrand Galimard Flavigny, *Histoire de l'Ordre de Malte* (Paris: Perrin,

contradictory interpretations of the Order's early spiritual values. Some historians have claimed that the Order was inspired by the Rule of St Benedict, while other recent and more definitive studies point to the influence of St Augustine's Rule on Master Raymond du Puy (1120–1160) and his early collection of laws and regulations.³ Third, the Order's tradition has been one rooted in action, not necessarily in philosophical or theological accomplishments. Its legendary exploits, both in serving the poor (*obsequium pauperum*) and defending the faith (*tuitio fidei*), have been celebrated by contemporaries and chroniclers for centuries, and these—rather than its spirituality—have defined the Order in the literature.

For these reasons, the Order lacks a specific spirituality that is clearly derived from its original foundation. From the point of view of other religious orders, this may appear as a weakness. Viewed from another perspective, however, it may in fact be a decided advantage. Not tied to a specific spirituality, knights and dames, under the guidance of the Order's chaplains, utilise an array of rich spiritual traditions within the Church. One of those traditions is that of St Ignatius Loyola, as articulated in the *Spiritual Exercises*. In fact, there are many reasons why Ignatian spirituality seems particularly well suited to assist members of the Order to discern their roles, carry out the Order's charisms and advance their own spiritual development.

In an essay written several years ago, the Grand Master, Fra' Matthew Festing, discussed his views on the first class of the Order, but these reflections also have relevance for the spiritual life of all members. He characterized a Knight of Justice as 'a monk in the world—a layman who has dedicated himself to the life of the Order and the service of God and the Church through the Order'.⁴ This notion of a 'monk in the world' summons to mind Ignatius' concept of a 'contemplative in action'. The Order's



2006); H. J. A. Sire, *The Knights of Malta* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1994); Ernle Bradford, *The Shield and the Sword: The Knights of St John, Jerusalem, Rhodes and Malta* (New York: Dutton, 1973).

³ See Alain Beltjens, *Aux origines de l'ordre de Malte: de la fondation de l'hôpital de Jerusalem à transformation en ordre militaire* (Brussels: Poot, 1995); Cosimo Damiano Fonseca, 'The Origins of the Vocation to the Knights of St John', *Journal of Spirituality*, 9, 'Order of Malta: Fundamental Directions for a Renewal' (2008), 17–26; Anthony Luttrell, 'The Hospitallers' Early Statutes', *Revue Mabillon*, 14 (2003).

⁴ Matthew Festing, 'The Grand Master's Reflections', *Journal of Spirituality*, 9, 'Order of Malta: Fundamental Directions for a Renewal' (2008), 7.

knights and dames have one foot firmly planted in the world. They work in a dizzying array of professions in government, healthcare, business and education. Apart from the first class, they may not literally be ‘monks in the world’, but each and every member is called to be a ‘contemplative in action’; and St Ignatius and his *Spiritual Exercises*, which he wrote for lay men and women, may well offer one of the most compatible and helpful spiritualities for knights and dames of Malta.

The Call of the King

In the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius asks that we consider the call of a noble king, a virtuous temporal leader who raises his voice to inspire knights to follow him. The call is to overcome injustice and oppression, to battle the evils that beset humanity. Recognising the goodness and nobility of this leader, Ignatius considers, ‘how, consequently, if someone did not answer his call, he would be scorned and upbraided by everyone and accounted as an unworthy knight’ (Exx 94). But our end in life is not to serve a temporal leader, no matter how virtuous he may be. If good knights, says Ignatius, are rightly moved by the summons of an upright, but human, king, how much more motivated to serve should they be when the call comes from the true King, Christ our Lord? Put another way, the *Spiritual Exercises* asks that we consider Christ’s appeal, made directly to us:

My will is to conquer the whole world and all my enemies, and thus to enter into the glory of my Father. Therefore, whoever wishes to come with me must labor with me, so that through following me in the pain he or she may follow me also in the glory. (Exx 95)

The Call of the King speaks to every Christian but, in its imagery and directness, it seems to address the knights and dames of Malta in a particular way. Later in the *Spiritual Exercises*, this chivalric imagery, which reflects so well the traditions of the Order of Malta, is expanded upon in the meditation of the Two Standards: ‘one of Christ, our Supreme Commander and Lord, the other of Lucifer, the mortal enemy of our human nature’ (Exx 136). In meditating on the thought of knights rallying to the banner of Christ, Ignatius asks us to reflect on the nature of Our Lord’s leadership.

Now let me look at Jesus Christ, who calls himself ‘the way, the truth, and the life’. I notice how gently, but insistently Jesus continues to call followers of all kinds and sends them forth to spread his good news

to all people, no matter their state or condition. Jesus adopts a strategy which directly opposes that of Lucifer: try to help people, not enslave or oppress them.⁵

This call, even as Ignatius envelopes it in the military imagery of knights assembling under opposing banners on the massive plains of Jerusalem and Babylon, is actually heard in the human heart. It is the grand conflict of opposing forces, the good of Christ and the evil of the world, which plays out in every human being. Like the knights of St John of Jerusalem who chose the cross of Christ, we are challenged by the *Spiritual Exercises* to reflect upon this great battle, and to respond to Christ's call with courage, 'the first virtue for a knight' of Malta.⁶ In this, we are called to light not darkness, to love not selfishness, to obedience not wilfulness, to humility not self-love, to the spirit of poverty not slavery to wealth.

In answering this summons, we are encouraged by Ignatius to pray for the insight to understand 'what is really going on in the world and the power to act in accord with that insight'.⁷ This would, no doubt, be useful to knights and dames who, every day, live and work in the world in profoundly entangled and involved ways. Ignatius realised that this entanglement sometimes makes it difficult to distinguish between the false values of the world and the true values of Christ.

The Order, in certain ways, also recognises this difficulty. It warns of the 'dangers and toils of this world',⁸ the pitfalls that the world often places in the paths of its 'contemplatives in action'. For example, professed knights are exhorted to,

Take this sword in your hand as the means to carry out the promises you have made, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. With the help of God, you will be inflamed with hope, justice and charity and you will bravely offer your spirit to God and your body to the dangers and toils of this world.⁹

⁵ David L. Fleming, *Draw Me into Your Friendship: The Spiritual Exercises. A Literal Translation and a Contemporary Reading* (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), 113.

⁶ Karl Gloser, 'Daily Virtues for a Knight and Dame of the Order of Malta: Reflections of a Moral Theologian', *Journal of Spirituality*, 8, 'Human Virtues—Christian Virtues, Events, the Young' (2008), 28.

⁷ *The Dynamism of Desire: Bernard J. F. Lonergan SJ on the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius Loyola*, edited by James L. Conner and others (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2006), 207.

⁸ Constantino Gilardi, 'Knightly Virtues According to the Rite of Profession', *Journal of Spirituality*, 8, 'Human Virtues—Christian Virtues, Events, the Young' (2008), 45.

⁹ Gilardi, 'Knightly Virtues According to the Rite of Profession', 45.

Further, it is only necessary to recall the first words of the Daily Prayer of the Order, ‘Lord Jesus, Thou hast seen fit to enlist me for Thy service ...’ to recognise the similarity in world-views between Ignatius and the Order. With their investiture, knights and dames have answered the Call of the King. They have gathered under the standard of Christ to confront ‘the dangers and toils of this world’. In the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius reminds us of the Call and our response, helping us to meditate upon our roles in the army of Christ, strengthening us to continue our work in the world and encouraging us to recommit ourselves to Christ’s banner.

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The Examen

Two important realisations flow from the fact that knights and dames of Malta are called to be ‘contemplatives in action’ or even, in the case of the first class, ‘monks in the world’. The first is that contemplatives need to root their work in the world in prayer and reflection; the second is that God is present in all things in the world. These are two very central and interconnected Ignatian concepts and make the spirituality of St Ignatius relevant to the Order.

Ignatius sees the Examen as an important means for noticing where God is acting in a person’s life. He encouraged his followers to make two Examens every day, recognising that an active life in the world requires reflection as a foundation. The everyday lives of knights and dames, firmly located in the world, can easily consume their waking hours. Work, family, philanthropic activities—all of these time-consuming tasks leave little opportunity for reflection. Unless we consciously set aside time for self-examination, which Ignatius expected from his followers, we are apt to become so caught up in our daily routines that we will certainly be men and women ‘in action’, but hardly very ‘contemplative’.

As men and women in the world, members of the Order must recognise the presence of God in all things. James Martin puts it this way:

The *contemplative in action*, according to St Ignatius Loyola, not only contemplates the active world and sees wonderful things, but also sees in those wonderful things signs of God’s presence and activity. The contemplative in action is deeply aware of God’s presence even in the midst of a busy life. It is a stance of awareness. Awareness of God.¹⁰

¹⁰ James Martin, *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything: A Spirituality of Real Life* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 391.

The Examen, in fact, is a useful vehicle to help knights and dames both to find God in everything and to step back reflectively, so as to engage the world more effectively beneath the banner of Christ. Ignatius' somewhat formulaic approach to the Examen, although off-putting to some, is particularly well suited to the busy lives of knights and dames. Ignatius presented the Examen in five steps and suggested it as a prayer for midday and for evening. Some people might see the Examen as a way to end the working day, perhaps the last fifteen minutes in the office before leaving for home. Others might find it works better as a midday reflection, closing the door or finding a quiet corner before returning from lunch. Still others might experience it most effectively as a prayer at night, just before retiring.

There are many good explanations of the Examen by modern writers.¹¹ In every case, however, commentators on *Spiritual Exercises* underline the fact that the Examen prayer is intended to help people find God in their daily lives. Finding God in all things means recognising God's small interventions and graces in the routine of daily life, graces which often go unnoticed or are simply taken for granted. For knights and dames, Martin's approach to the Examen is appealing in its practical simplicity, for it recognises that, in the midst of a clamouring and distracting world, '... it's easier to see God in retrospect rather than in the moment'.

Before you begin, as in all prayer, remind yourself that you're in God's presence, and ask God to help you with your prayer.

1. Gratitude: Recall anything from the day for which you are especially grateful, and give thanks.
2. Review: Recall the events of the day, from start to finish, noticing where you felt God's presence, and where you accepted or turned away from any invitations to grow in love.
3. Sorrow: Recall any actions for which you are sorry.
4. Forgiveness: Ask for God's forgiveness. Decide whether you want to reconcile with anyone you have hurt.
5. Grace: Ask God for the grace you need for the next day and an ability to see God's presence more clearly.¹²

The Examen, prayed once or twice a day for fifteen minutes, offers an important reflective respite to knights and dames. It helps to remind us

¹¹ See, for example, Martin, *Jesuit Guide*, and David L. Fleming, *What Is Ignatian Spirituality?* (Chicago: Loyola, 2008). Both provide practical approaches that are relevant for knights and dames.

¹² Martin, *Jesuit Guide*, 97.

that God is present in our everyday lives and in all our human experiences. For 'contemplatives in action', this is an important reminder. The Examen also enables members of the Order to reflect on their relationship with God, to renew their responses to God's call made at their investitures and to live out, with the nurturing strength of prayer and meditation, their vocation to be 'in the world, but not of world' under the banner of Christ.¹³

Making Decisions

The Grand Master and the leadership of the Order have called for members to consider the first and second classes, professed knights, and knights and dames in obedience. This requires careful reflection and prayerful decision-making, as the Order's then Cardinal Patronus, H. E. Pio Laghi, wrote in 2008:

In a religious and Christian sphere, and in the light of the Word of God, 'vocation' indicates the action by which God calls someone, on his loving initiative, and the response of that person in a dialogue of loving and responsible participation. In this sense God is indicated as 'He who calls': He calls us to life, to existence, to perform a role in the history of salvation, 'according to his own design and the grace bestowed on us in Christ Jesus' (2 Timothy 1:90).¹⁴

Fra' Duncan Gallie specifically encourages members to 'discern' their ongoing roles, activities and vocations within the Order. He points to Obedience and Justice as potential choices for knights and dames in the context of God's specific call to 'each one of us to play a definite role that He has foreseen from all eternity'.¹⁵ This 'call to holiness', which is perhaps the most important theme of the Second Vatican Council, is a universal call. Thus, it is a call to all members of the Order, and answering it requires discernment and prayer.

In keeping with the understanding that God is in all things, St Ignatius' Rules for Discernment apply to the great and small questions in life. Once we accept, says Ignatius, the fact that nurturing and developing a loving relationship with God is the principal goal in life, then all our decisions must be run through this filtering screen. Our discernment, then,

¹³ An extrapolation from John 17:11–16: '... they are in the world They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world'.

¹⁴ Cardinal Pio Laghi, 'Vocation', *Journal of Spirituality*, 9, 'Order of Malta: Fundamental Directions for a Renewal' (2008), 13–14.

¹⁵ Fra' Duncan Gallie, 'Prayer for Vocational Discernment and Formation', *Journal of Spirituality*, 10, 'Introduction to Prayer' (2009), 105.

is about choosing options that bring us closer to that goal. While it is not possible fully to explain here the ‘election’ process outlined in the *Spiritual Exercises*, it is nonetheless worth summarising a few of Ignatius’ key insights that can help us become more adept at making decisions that lead to holiness.

First, Ignatius reminds us that all choices—even the most important ones in life, such as marriage or deciding on a career—are not ends in themselves; they are merely a means to build and strengthen our relationship with God. Second, Ignatius asks us to approach each decision without prejudices or preconceived notions; he asks us to be ‘indifferent’, not in the sense of not caring, but in a spirit of objectivity and freedom. Third, he tells us that discernment is a prayerful process only applied to aid in choosing between or among *good* options. We are not, of course, deliberating about choices that involve immoral, unethical or sinful options.

Ignatius gives very practical advice about decision-making, describing three levels of choice: one that is, upon reflection, unmistakably clear; one that is less clear and requires deeper thought and discernment to arrive at the preferred option; and one that is most difficult because we cannot seem to decide between two good choices. As Martin describes the latter: ‘[t]here is no *Aha!* moment. There is little clarity in prayer.’¹⁶ The *Spiritual Exercises* itself devotes considerable time during the Second Week to advice ‘for making an election’ and to the specifics of doing so when confronted with each of these types of choices. For example, experiencing ‘consolation’ or ‘desolation’, the use of reason and logic, and the role of feelings and imagination: all provide important insights for prayerful and effective decision-making.

The ability of knights and dames to respond genuinely to their individual ‘calls to holiness’, and to discern, in particular, their ongoing vocations within the Order can be significantly aided by Ignatius and his *Spiritual Exercises*. In words reflective of the Exercises, Fra’ Duncan Gallie urges ‘prayerful discernment’ for knights and dames:

In a discernment process, we can become aware of the voices of God, ourselves and the world and the devil. By turning away from and ruling out the voices of the world and the devil, greater clarity is gained. One is ready to make the free choice of a deepened vocation when our own voice echoes that of the Lord’s.¹⁷

¹⁶ Martin, *Jesuit Guide*, 319.

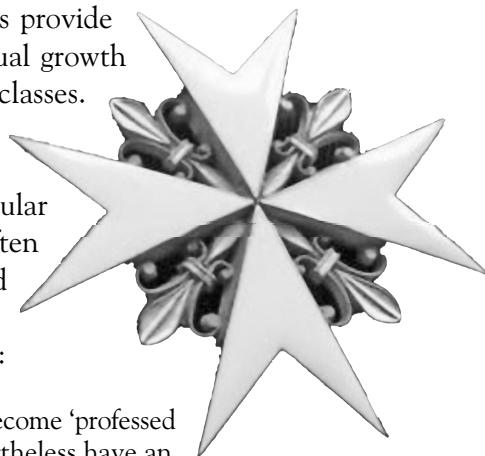
¹⁷ Martin, *Jesuit Guide*, 109.

Gaillie goes on to recognise that ‘it may be difficult to distinguish these voices without the help of appropriate counsel’.¹⁸ Perhaps for some in the Order, this ‘appropriate counsel’ may come from St Ignatius Loyola and the Spiritual Exercises.

The Banner of Christ and the Cross of Malta

One of the great strengths of the Order of Malta is the care and concern that it unfailingly displays for its members’ spirituality. In innumerable ways, the Order’s leadership and its chaplains provide varied means and opportunities for the spiritual growth and development of knights and dames of all classes. This spiritual development is, today, nurtured around the world by the many rich traditions of Catholicism through a chaplaincy of secular and religious priests. Knights and dames are often reminded that theirs is a religious order and that, regardless of their ranks, they are called to holiness within the framework of the Order:

Even if they do not have a vocation to become ‘professed religious’ by taking the 3 Vows, all nevertheless have an obligation to live the spirit of the 3 Vows as it applies to their state of life. All Members are called to a life of prayer This prayer life must of course find its practical expression through work for Our Lords the Sick.¹⁹



The Spiritual Exercises provide an effective pathway and a practical companion to knights and dames as they answer their continual call to holiness. ‘Monks in the world’ or ‘contemplatives in action’, the Order’s members are challenged by their many, everyday choices to be ‘in the world, but not of the world’. They are asked to develop a ‘deep and generous Christian devotion’ and to nurture a prayer life that will give them the strength to enter the world’s fray each day under the banner of Christ.²⁰

In vivid language, reminiscent of the Order’s own history, the *Spiritual Exercises* reminds knights and dames of their response to the Call of

¹⁸ Martin, *Jesuit Guide*, 109.

¹⁹ Martin, *Jesuit Guide*, 107–108.

²⁰ ‘Daily Prayer of the Order of Malta’, available at <http://www.orderofmalta-federal.org/retreats-and-days-of-reflection>, accessed 26 May 2014.

the King. Through the Examen, Ignatius provides an effective way for ‘contemplatives in action’ to strengthen their resolve to bring Christ into the secular world. With the rules for the discernment of God’s will, Ignatius offers a structured framework to make ongoing decisions about Malta ministries, works, responsibilities and vocations. St Ignatius saw God in creation and all creation as gift from God, a gift that was given to humanity to help us to know God more readily and to love God more easily. As Fleming says:

The choices we make in our daily life in this world push us away from God or draw us closer to Him. Ignatius sees God as present, not remote or detached. He is involved in the details of our life. *Our daily lives in this world matter.*²¹

The knights and dames of Malta live entangled, even entrenched, in this world, but they work in the world under the banner of Christ and the cross of Malta. Ignatius recognised the challenges involved in carrying the banner of Christ in the world. He saw the importance of seeing God in all things. He understood the need for reflective examination and for prayerful decision-making, so critical for ‘contemplatives in action’. In the end, and in many ways, his is a life vision and a spirituality that gently speak to knights and dames of Malta, as to so many Christians, that restore their spirits and refresh their souls, and that help them to live out the charisms of the Order in the world today.

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²¹ Fleming, *What Is Ignatian Spirituality?*, 3 (italics mine).