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**THE IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY ON PRAYER LIFE AS A MEANS FOR GROWTH
AMONG THE BENE MARIYA SISTERS IN BURUNDI**

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In Spirituality

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my departed father, André BUZOYA and my beloved mother Adélaïde NIYIBOGORA who taught me to pray from my childhood. To my beloved Bene Mariya Sisters in their longing for their prayer and service to the families.

To all religious who follow the Ignatian Spirituality, I dedicate this work to them.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I give thanks to almighty God, for his love, strength and protection during my studies and writing of this piece of work.

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I am so grateful to my supervisor, Sr MARIA FELIX, who offered me immense encouragement and constant guidance and honest criticism during the research process.

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My profound gratitude goes to all who in one way or another contributed to the success of this work. May the Triune God bless you all!

STUDENT DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this long essay is my original work achieved through my personal readings, scientific research and critical reflection. It is submitted in partial fulfillments of the requirements for the Diploma in Spirituality. It has never been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit. All sources have been cited in full and acknowledged.

Signed.....

Name of student: Sr. NIZIGAMA Yvonne, IHM

Date.....

This long essay has been submitted for examination with my approval as the college supervisor.

Signed.....

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Date.....

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The Congregation of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary called locally (Bene Mariya) was founded in Burundi in 1958 by His Lordship Joseph Martin, first Bishop of Ngozi Diocese, and northern Burundi. This local name “Bene Mariya” (in plural) and “MweneMariya”(in singular) means “daughter(s) of Mary” since the Kirundi word “Mwene” stand for someone’s child (MweneYozefu = Joseph’s son or Joseph’s daughter).

The first sisters made their profession on 22/8/1958. The Congregation’s charism is summarized in the following: "Helping families to live according to a Christian spirit". Moreover, the sisters shape their lives after the pattern of the Holy Family of Nazareth.

From the beginning of the congregation; the sisters are formed in the way that they have to do everything for the sake of God’s glory. In 2018, the congregation had more than 300 members. They are in different countries as Burundi, Tanzania, Italy, Chad and Niger.

There reasons that pushed Lordship Bishop Martin to found the congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Among them there is the existence of many Christian families in Ngozi in the 1950s and the lack of priests and religious to deepen the faith of those families. Also, at that time, families needed support because even though they were Christians, there were some which practiced polygamy and others paganisms.

Seeing the vital importance of the families in a society and a Church that evolve rapidly, He founded the Bene Mariya Sisters. From the beginning, he asked them to put all their energies towards the sanctification of families¹.

The founder was a man of faith and wanted his daughters grow in faith, too. That is why from the beginning, he always told them to be faithful so that they may carry the same faith to the families they are called to help. On the 10th of February 1963, Bishop Joseph Martin sent

¹ « *Constitution de la Congrégation des Sœurs du Cœur Immaculé de Marie* », dites Bene Mariya, (Ngozi, 1987), 5.

this message: "All this is a work of grace, but a grace that will be embedded in a faith and deep convictions."² Convictions that will be established in prayer according to Ignatian spirituality, righteousness and simplicity, sense of forgetting of self for the service of Christ, a sense of charity and disinterestedness ... In this spirit of generous abandonment, the Bene Mariya have only to trace their furrow straight, without looking back, in confidence.

Thus, given that the founder of this congregation is a Missionary of Africa, he chose Ignatian spirituality for his Daughters because he knows its value. He knows his value, because the Congregation of the Missionaries of Africa follows Ignatian Spirituality.

In the current work entitled "Ignatian Spirituality as a Means for Growth in Prayer Life among the Bene Mariya in Burundi", the researcher will investigate how the Bene Mariya relies on Ignatian spirituality in their prayer life, especially in their meditation; recollection, retreats and other spiritual exercises.

1. Background of the Study

In the congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, known as Bene-Mariya, the Sisters live the Ignatian spirituality according to the spirit of their Founder Mgr. Joseph Martin. They organize their personal and community prayers according to the exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. Thus, as the congregation's charism is to make the Christian spirit flourish in the families of the whole world. If they have a good growth in prayer, they will have a force for preaching the families and these families will in turn become the nurseries of the Christian religious vocation.

This is why Research wants to study the importance of Ignatian spirituality in the prayer life of the Sisters Bene Mariya who chose this Spirituality as a guide.

In order to understand the meaning and orientation of the Ignatian spirituality, it is worth studying first what the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola are, their forms, their valiousand

²« *Constitution de la Congrégation des Sœurs du Cœur Immaculé de Marie* », dites Bene Mariya, 9.

the challenges that can be prevented from the fruits of these exercises. More practically, those exercises are a compilation of meditations, prayers, and contemplative practices developed by St. Ignatius Loyola to help people deepen their relationship with God. The most common way of going through the Exercises now is a “retreat in daily life,” which involves a months-long program of daily prayer and meetings with a spiritual director.

This study will help the sisters Bene Mariya in following the wish of their founder as far as prayer life is concerned. Thus, each Mwene Mariya who will read the result of this research will grow in her the idea to do the examination of conscience to see that she is still in the spirit of Bishop Joseph Martin.

2. Purpose and Aim

Prayer is the center. In fact, the whole consecrated life is centered on the prayer without which the community life can't be better because where there is a prayer; there is love and unity through which people live like brothers and sisters. Without prayer, there is no way to live out religious vows and engage in mission as a consecrated person.

The attention and enthusiasm generated by the researcher on this topic comes from the prayer life experience in the congregation of the Bene Mariya sisters today since the researcher herself is a member. This essay will focus on the preconditions of an authentic prayer life. In fact, according to the founder, the Bene Mariya must be faithful consecrated women, who remain steadfast in the mission of Christ.

Therefore, the purpose of this research is to help broaden the understanding of St. Ignatius of Loyola's prayer life as the basis for being happy religious women who serve Jesus Christ in the families of the world. It is Ignatian Spirituality that will be the main means to achieve the congregation's goal. Moreover, the study will show how the Ignatian spirituality is a means to grow in the life of prayer among the Bene Mariya sisters.

3. Problem Statement

Some members of the Bene Mariya congregation risk forgetting the pillars of Ignatian spirituality on which the Bene Mariya lives, while their life is heavily centered on prayer according to Spiritual Exercise of St. Ignatius and it is even the center of their apostolate.

However, our contemporary society is exposing many factors which affect prayer life of Bene Mariya Sisters as they are working in modern society which is moving in high speed. Some of these factors are for instance lack of time for common prayer, fatigue, technology and lack of silence because of noisy world. These factors tend to lead to the tendency of putting the interest on the achievement or what they do than who they are. In this case prayer becomes easily affected by activism.

4. Study Objectives

The objectives of this study include:

- To investigate the forms of prayer according to the spirituality of Saint Ignatius among the Bene Mariya sisters in Burundi.
- To identify the value of prayer in religious life as MweneMariya.
- To explore the challenges on the prayer life of the Bene Mariya Sisters according to Ignatian spirituality.

5. Justification of the Study

The attention and enthusiasm of researching on this topic is raised from the lived experience of prayer according to Ignatian Spirituality in congregation of Bene Mariya Sisters today. This essay will therefore emphasize the prerequisite of an authentic prayer life "according to the Spiritual Exercise of St. Ignatius" of Bene Mariya Sisters to be faithful consecrated women who stand firm in the mission of Christ. In fact the whole consecrated life is centered on prayer without which community life can be in chaos because where is prayer

there is love and unity, were people live as brother and sisters. Without prayer there is no way to live religious vows and be committed to the mission as a consecrated person.

Therefore this research will help in the broadening the life of prayer which is the basic to be happy religious women who serve Jesus in the poor and all kinds of suffering with passion and compassion.

6. Scope and Delimitation

As stated earlier, prayer in the line of the Ignatian Spirituality, is practiced by many religious congregations including the Jesuits, the White Fathers, the Congregation of Bene Mariya ... However, this research will be limited to the congregation of the Bene Mariya sisters particularly in Burundi.

7. Difficulties and how to Overcome them

The difficulties that are associated with this research work are as follows: Insufficient resource materials for research work; researcher's personal problem of language for proper expression in a well organized manner and problem of citation, footnoting and bibliography of the research work.

In order for the researcher to overcome the above foreseen difficulties, the following ways would be employed: Searching for the resource materials from College's library and community library; trying to use good language for proper expression of ideas and referring to the Tangaza Topographical Norms.

8. Methodology

This essay will focus on prayer, including the exercises of Saint Ignatius as it has been since the foundation of the Bene Mariya sisters. The researcher will use the Congregation documents, books, as well as documentation on the internet. It will be enriched with personal reflections based on lived experiences to make it more realistic.

CHAPTER ONE

THE FORMS OF PRAYER ACCORDING TO THE SPIRITUALITY OF SAINT

IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to get an overview of the meaning of prayer according to St. Ignatius of Loyola. We shall see different explanations of prayer according to Saint Ignatius of Loyola. Different forms and types of prayer shall be discussed. Thus the many prayers according to Saint Ignatius are explained by their Exercises. This Chapter will say about the Meditation, Contemplative Prayer, Daily Examination, General Examination of Conscience, the Way to do the General Examination, the Ignatian Retreats, the Silent Guided retreat, the Spiritual Exercises in Daily life and the Individually Guide Retreat.

1.1. The Spiritual Exercises

1.1.1. Meditation Prayer according to Saint Ignatius

You begin your meditation by placing yourselves in God's presence. Imagine that God is looking at you with tender love. If we are aware of somebody's presence then we pay more attention to him. Silence is very important. The example of Elijah and his mountain experience. God spoke to him not in the noise, but in the silent breeze. Thus the meditation according to St. Ignatius process different steps:

a) Read the Word of God

First step in Ignatian method is the use of the Memory. Read! But remember that you are not reading a "Normal" book, but the Bible that is truly "The Word of God."

Having given his freedom, Ignatius seeks to give God his mind and heart. What is the first part of his inner self that he offers? It is his *memory*.

In Ignatius's understanding of the human mind, the concept of memory refers to more than just particular memories. Memory includes everything that had entered into his consciousness to make him who he was whether or not he could actually remember it. It forms the foundation of his present identity, including his hopes for his future.

The fathers of the Second Vatican Council, writing of Christ's Passion, said that "the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery."² Ignatius discovered in his own life that the Holy Spirit was able to use all the experiences that had shaped him all the traumas he endured, as well as the mistakes he made along the way to bring him to the love of Christ³.

b) Understanding

This second step is a reflection. You take into account the following questions. Who is present in the scene? Where is he? What is he doing? Why? What is the meaning of this happening? When is this happening? How does this affect me? In other words the who, what where, when, why, and how of the scene. Remember that the Word of God is like a two edged sword that can cut marrow from bone. It is active today as it was many years ago. All of this is done not as an academic exercise but as a means to entering into union with God.

c) Affections of the Heart

Now we have arrived at the heart of meditation and it is the movement of the heart. Once the will/heart has been sparked by some thought then we have arrived at the essence of prayer. What might be some example of affections of the heart? Here they are: love, thanksgiving, gratitude, praise, worship, wonder or awe, contrition and sorrow, trust and confidence, desire to offer oneself as an oblation, petition and supplication, fears and securities to be brought to the Lord, anger, past wounds, confusion and doubts, questions (like Job), resting in the Lord

³ Related: fatherbroom.com/blog/2013/02/practical-steps-to-make-good-ignatian/ step of meditation prayer according to st ignatius du 21/2/2020

(Come to me all you who labor, Mt 11:28-30)), proposals to change, yearning for God (Like the deer that yearns for the running streams, so my soul longs for you , O Lord...).

It is totally in keeping with prayer to return to the well that is to revisit the Biblical passage. At times it might seem as if the well is dry. You might even compare mental prayer to fishing. At times it seems as if no fish are in the pond or they might be asleep or avoiding the line. Then zoom! The bait is eaten and the catch. God at times seems to hide Himself so that we search His face all the more ardently.⁴

It could be that in prayer your soul is going through a process of purification called aridity. This might be called a “Desert-experience”. If one has no spiritual direction, the neophyte might be deluded into believing that he is not praying but wasting time. On the contrary, God is purifying his heart. The love is becoming all the more pure. Remember the words of St. John of the Cross: “Seek the God of consolations and not the consolations of God.” This great Mystical Doctor warns us of the danger of “Spiritual Gluttony” going to prayer only to feel good and receive sensible delights. Married people cannot always be on a perpetual honeymoon! Reality sets in quick in the married life as well as in the mystical life.

d) Perseverance.

A key note in success in prayer as well as in the lives of the saints is the capital importance of perseverance. Jesus praises the insistent widow who hounded the unbelieving judge simply because she did not give up. Likewise, we should never give up in our pursuit of God in prayer. The woman Doctor of the Church, St. Teresa of Avila, reminds us of this with these poignant words: “We must have a determined determination to never give up prayer.” Athletes are trained to fight until the end; so athletes of Christ engaged in the Spiritual

⁴ Related: fatherbroom.com/blog/2013/02/practical-steps-to-make-good-ignatian/ step of meditation prayer according to st ignatius du 21/2/2020

Exercises should fight and persevere until the end of life, well- aware of the crown of glory that awaits the winner in heaven!

e) Colloquy

This is a heart to heart conversation with God. One should always close with this conversation with the Lord. However, one colloquy or many colloquies can be present during the period of prayer. St. Teresa of Avila calls prayer as simply spending a long time in silence with the Friend I know loves me! Great! Friendship with God!

Jesus said to St. Faustina that God communicates with every soul in a different way. Like a snowflake or fingerprints everybody has to learn his own prayer style⁵. St. Ignatius invites us to a Triple colloquy. Converse with Mary then end with the Hail Mary; then with Jesus and pray the Anima Christi; finally converse with the heavenly Father and end with the Our Father.

f) Revision

This is a very important step in Ignatian meditation. It consists in a review of what happened during the course of the meditation, specifically, reviewing how God spoke to you. Being aware of this and noting this can be of great service to be aware of the different ways that God communicates to you individually.

1.1.2. Contemplative Prayer according to Saint Ignatius

Ignatius was convinced that God can speak to us as surely through our imagination as through our thoughts and memories. In the Ignatian tradition, praying with the imagination is called contemplation. In the Exercises, contemplation is a very active way of praying that engages the mind and heart and stirs up thoughts and emotions⁶.

⁵ Related: fatherbroom.com/blog/2013/02/practical-steps-to-make-good-ignatian/ step of meditation prayer according to st ignatius du 21/2/2020

⁶Note that in other spiritual traditions, contemplation has quite a different meaning: it refers to a way of praying that frees the mind of all thoughts and images.

Ignatian contemplation is suited especially for the Gospels. In the Second Week of the Exercises, we accompany Jesus through his life by imagining scenes from the Gospel stories. Let the events of Jesus' life be present to you right now. Visualize the event as if you were making a movie. Pay attention to the details: sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and feelings of the event. Lose yourself in the story; don't worry if your imagination is running too wild. At some point, place yourself in the scene.

Contemplating a Gospel scene is not simply remembering it or going back in time. Through the act of contemplation, the Holy Spirit makes present the mystery of Jesus' life in a way that is meaningful for you now. Use your imagination to dig deeper into the story so that God may communicate with you in a personal, evocative way.

We might initially worry about going beyond the text of the Gospel. If you have offered your time of prayer to God, then begin by trusting that God is communicating with you. If you wonder if your imagination is going "too far," then do some discernment with how you are praying. Where did your imagining lead you: Closer to God or farther away? Is your imagining bringing you consolation or desolation?

Some people find imaginative prayer difficult. They may not be able to picture the scene easily, yet they may have some intuition or gut reaction to the story. Or they may hear or feel the story more than visualize it. In a spirit of generosity, pray as you are able; don't try to force it. Rest assured that God will speak to you, whether through your memory, understanding, intellect, emotions, or imagination⁷. Here is how Ignatius Loyola proposes to contemplate the nativity in the booklet "Spiritual Exercises", after the usual preparatory prayer.

The first preamble is history. This is the history of the mystery. Here it will be that Our Lady, as may piously be believed, seated on a donkey as we meditate, Joseph, and a servant carrying an ox, to go to Bethlehem to pay the tribute that Caesar imposed to all these regions.

⁷ K. O. Brien, "*The Ignatian Adventure*", 71.

The second preamble: A composition, representing the place. It will be here, with the view of the imagination, to see the road from Nazareth to Bethlehem, considering its length, its width, whether it is flat, whether it passes through valleys, or whether it ascends. Likewise, look at the place or cave of the Nativity, whether large or small, low or high, and how it was arranged.

The third preamble: this will be the same as in the preceding contemplation and identical in form with it.⁸

We continue to contemplate the early life of Jesus. We notice how Jesus grows up in a particular social, economic, political, and religious context. Even in the comforting stories of the nativity, we see the beginnings of opposition against Jesus. We cannot separate the saving work of Christ from the world, as if God were throwing a lifeline down from heaven and pulling us up. Instead, God saves in the world.

God continues to save us in the details of our lives today, in the beauty and messiness of our world. As we pray in the midst of daily life, we may become more sensitive to the joys and tragedies of our world and to the needs of people around us. In accompanying the Holy Family in their flight to Egypt and their return to Nazareth, how can we not feel the plight of millions of displaced persons in our world? How can we not be more attentive to the supports and the pressures that young families experience today?

Contemplate the Gospel scene, as before, with your imagination. Become a part of the scene as if you were there. Enter a conversation with those present, as in a colloquy.

In the Gospel contemplations, Ignatius often instructs us to pray “so as to draw some profit”. This does not mean that we have to be “productive” when we pray, analyzing the text to find some insightful application. The review of prayer is a better time to use the intellect to draw real world applications.

⁸ L. J. Puhl, *“The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius”*, 42

In contemplation, we let our prayer affect us and touch our hearts. We allow memories, emotions, desire and longings be stirred as God wishes⁹

1.2. Daily Particular Examination of Conscience.

In the judgment of St. Ignatius, is of greater moment than the general one, and of even more importance than meditation itself, because it enables us to run down, one by one, our defects and thus overcome them the more easily. Besides, if we examine ourselves thoroughly on some important virtue, we not only acquire that virtue, but all the others related there to. Thus, while we advance in the practice of obedience, we perform at the same time acts of humility, of mortification, and we exercise ourselves in the spirit of faith. Likewise is to acquire the virtue of humility means that we are perfecting ourselves in the practice of obedience, of the love of God, of charity, since pride is the chief obstacle to the exercise of these virtues. There are, however, rules for the choice of the subject of examination, and for the manner of performing it.¹⁰

Thus, St. Ignatius tells us that this particular examen involves three periods of the day and two examinations of conscience.

The first time is that in the morning, as soon as the man rises, he ought to purpose to be carefully on his guard against that particular sin, or defect, of which he wishes to correct and amend himself

The second time, after dinner, the man ought to beg of God what he wants, to wit, the grace to remember how often he has fallen into that particular sin or defect, and to amend himself in future; and thereupon let him make the first examen, taking account of his soul of that particular thing proposed, whereof he wishes to correct and amend himself, ranging through

⁹ Kevin O. Brien, « *The Ignatian Adventure* », 144.

¹⁰ L. J. Puhl, « *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* », 21

the time hour by hour, or period by period, beginning from the hour that he rose even to the hour and moment of the present examen; and let him score on the top line of the figure as many dots as are the times that he has fallen into that particular sin or defect; and afterwards let him purpose anew to amend himself until the next examen that he shall make.

The third time, after supper, the second examen shall be made also from hour to hour, beginning from the first examen until the present second examen, and let him score on the second line of the same figure as many dots as shall answer to the times that he has fallen into that particular sin or defect.

St. Ignatius encouraged people to talk to Jesus like a friend. End the Daily Examen with a conversation with Jesus. Ask forgiveness for your sins. Ask for his protection and help. Ask for his wisdom about the questions you have and the problems you face. Do all this in the spirit of gratitude.¹¹

1.2.1. General Examination of Conscience

In general, there is a distinction between the particular examen, which aims to change one particular feature or defect in one's behavior, the examen of consciousness, which is a more nuanced reflection, and the general examination of conscience as used before the sacrament of penance. This last method is called examination of conscience because it is a review of one's actions from a moral point of view, reflecting upon one's responsibility and looking at one's sins and weaknesses in preparation for repentance, in contrast with the examen of consciousness which does not focus on morality even if sins will emerge during the review of the day.

The examination of conscience is in essence the awareness of the action of God in us: He always acts; he never ceases to love us. The practice of examination, therefore, is to enter into dialogue with God, in confident prayer, asking him to open our heart, our mind, to

¹¹ L. J. Puhl, *"Thes Spiritual Exerces of St Ignatius"*, 21

understand at what times of the day we have been with him or away from him. It's not so much a comparison with standards, but talking with the Lord, telling him about our thoughts and feelings.

The general examination of conscience is a simple form of prayer directed toward developing a spiritual sensitivity to the special ways God approaches, invites and calls.

It may be done at the end of each day, though it can be done more frequently as the person feels drawn. The more frequently performed, however, the more natural it becomes and more a way of growing into an ever-closer relationship with God. It can take anywhere between five and fifteen minutes, although it does not matter how long one spends. The important thing is to open oneself to recognizing and responding to God's movement in your heart.¹²

1.2.2. Way to do the General Examination

The general examination, which every good Christian should make in order to know and to improve him, comprises five points, says St. Ignatius.

The first point is to return thanks to God Our Lord for the benefits received. This is an excellent exercise, at once consoling and sanctifying, for it brings into relief our ingratitude, thus preparing the way for contrition, and at the same time it sustains our confidence in God.

The second is to ask grace to know the sins and cast them out. If we want to know ourselves it is in order to reform ourselves, but we accomplish neither without the helping grace of God.

The third is to demand of the soul an account from the hour of rising to the present examen, taking hour by hour or period by period; and first of thought, then of word, and afterwards of deed, in the same order that has been mentioned for the Particular Examen.

¹² J. Rickaby, *"The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius"*, New York, 1930, 44

The fourth is to ask pardon of God Our Lord for the faults. In fact, we must not lose sight of this, that sorrow is the principal element of the examination and that this sorrow is mainly the work of grace.

The fifth is to purpose amendment with His grace. This resolution, to be practical, should bear upon the means of reform. He, who wills the end, wills also the means. The recitation of the Our Father is a fitting conclusion for this examination, bringing before our eyes the glory of God which we must seek, and uniting us to Jesus Christ in our supplication for the pardon of our sins and for the grace of avoiding them in the future¹³.

1.2.3. General Confession and Communion

A General Confession, as understood by St. Ignatius of Loyola is a form of Confession whereby one spends 3 to 10 days preparing for a confession of all one's 'sins up to that time. The main goal of the "general confession" is to turn one's life from one of sin to a more devout one. The *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* has done much to popularise this form of confession, with such a confession being the significant end-point of the First Week of his Spiritual Exercises¹⁴.

Whoever, of his own accord, wants to make a General Confession, will, among many other advantages, find three in making it here.

The first: Though whoever goes to Confession every year is not obliged to make a General Confession, by making it there is greater profit and merit, because of the greater actual sorrow for all the sins and wickedness of his whole life.

The second: In the Spiritual Exercises, sins and their malice are understood more intimately, than in the time when one was not so giving himself to interior things. Gaining now

¹³ J. Rickaby, "*The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*", 449

¹⁴ L. J. Puhl, "*The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius*", 26.

more knowledge of and sorrow for them, he will have greater profit and merit than he had before. The third is: In consequence, having made a better Confession and being better disposed, one finds himself in condition and prepared to receive the Blessed Sacrament: the reception of which is an aid not only not to fall into sin, but also to preserve the increase of grace.

This General Confession will be best made immediately after the Exercises of the First Week¹⁵.

1.3. Ignatian Retreats

A retreat in the Ignatian tradition is a process of prayer and reflection that follows the rhythm of revelation from creation, sinfulness and reconciliation to the life of Jesus; his passion and death; and his resurrection. The Ignatian retreat climaxes in a prayer that celebrates our participation in the loving engagement of God with the world i.e., the so-called Contemplation to Attain Divine Love. Thus, a retreat is a focused encounter with God that centers on the quality of my personal response to God's self-revelation in prayer and reflection¹⁶.

Ignatius organized the Exercises into four "weeks." These are not seven-day weeks, but stages on a journey to spiritual freedom and wholehearted commitment to the service of God.

The first week of the Exercises is a time of reflection on our lives in light of God's boundless love for us. We see that our response to God's love has been hindered by patterns of sin. We face these sins knowing that God wants to free us of everything that gets in the way of

¹⁵L. J. Puhl, *"The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius"*, 27.

¹⁶<https://www.catholicworldreport.com/author/salai-sean> du 25/7/2019

our loving response to him. The first week ends with a meditation on Christ's call to follow him.

The meditations and prayers of the second week teach us how to follow Christ as his disciples. We reflect on Scripture passages: Christ's birth and baptism, his sermon on the mount, his ministry of healing and teaching, his raising Lazarus from the dead. We are brought to decisions to change our lives to do Christ's work in the world and to love him more intimately.

The third week of the Exercises, We meditate on Christ's Last Supper, passion, and death. We see his suffering and the gift of the Eucharist as the ultimate expression of God's love.

The Fourth week, we meditate on Jesus' resurrection and his apparitions to his disciples. We walk with the risen Christ and set out to love and serve him in concrete ways in our lives in the world.

a) Prayer in the Exercises

The two primary forms of praying taught in the Exercises are meditation and contemplation. In meditation, we use our minds. We ponder the basic principles that guide our life. We pray over words, images, and ideas.¹⁷

Contemplation is more about feeling than thinking. Contemplation often stirs the emotions and enkindles deep desires. In contemplation, we rely on our imaginations to place ourselves in a setting from the Gospels or in a scene proposed by Ignatius. We pray with Scripture. We do not study it.

The discernment of spirits underlies the Exercises. We notice the interior movements of our hearts, and discern where they are leading us. A regular practice of discernment helps us make good decisions.

¹⁷L. J. Puhl, *"The Spiritual Exercise of St. Ignatius,"* 13.

All the characteristic themes of Ignatian spirituality are grounded in the Exercises. These include a sense of collaboration with God's action in the world, spiritual discernment in decision making, generosity of response to God's invitation, fraternity and companionship in service, and a disposition to find God in all things. Spiritual integration is a prominent theme of the Exercises: integration of contemplation and action, prayer and service, and emotions and reason.

b) How is an Ignatian retreat different from other retreats a Catholic or Christian might make?

The Exercises are geared toward making a decision: a life choice, a reformation of a choice or a deepening and renewal of a choice already made. It's the dynamic of the Exercises of a choice under the inspiration of God that distinguishes the Exercises from simply "a prayerful time of reflection."

c) What are the best reasons for someone to make an Ignatian retreat, either preached or directed?

An Ignatian retreat has to be adapted to the temperament, the time available and the personal spiritual history of each individual. For example, can this person sustain solitude? Is this person familiar with the discipline of daily prayer? Is this person familiar with the Christian/Catholic tradition? The discerning assessment of readiness has to emerge from a relationship with a woman or a man who asks about a retreat.

d) Why would someone want to make an Ignatian retreat today?

This again will depend on the history, temperament and past religious experiences of an individual. God calls in any culture, chronological moment or circumstance. People ask about

the Ignatian retreat for a variety of initial reasons. The real discernment is to note how the reasoning for entering the Exercises becomes “rearranged” by the action of God during a retreat¹⁸.

e) What’s your advice to someone who is making an Ignatian retreat for the first time?

Get rest, pray for an open and generous heart, and do some preliminary reflection like Ps 23 or the first recorded words of Jesus in John’s Gospel: “What are you looking for?” and then “Come and see (Jn 1: 38-39)”. Gently engage a person’s desires for the retreat experience, be that retreat long or short.

1.3.1. The Silent Guided Retreat

In our bustling noisy world, 30 days of silence away from your phone, tablet or PC could be a challenge. What you can be sure of is you will be undertaking a great adventure of faith and life. You pray usually four or five separate hours each day. You prepare for each hour, and then at the end of it you spend 20 minutes looking back at what you did and felt¹⁹.

You meet your guide every day to talk about your prayer experience. Were you up, were you down? Was it easy to pray, was it hard? Is some glimmer of a desire beginning to take shape? Do you know Jesus better? What was going on in your spirit?

Each day your guide will tell you what to do next. This is described in the book - all 30 days are mapped out with material for each hour of prayer. This is a structure to help the guide understand what you are experiencing. There are four phases to the Spiritual Exercises, each taking about a week; facing the reality of sin in the world and in my life and acknowledging God’s merciful love, contemplating Jesus’s life and praying to come to love him and to follow

¹⁸L.J.Puhl, *“Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius”*, 15.

¹⁹<https://www.catholicworldreport.com/author/salai-sean> du 25/7/2019

him more intimately, it is in the course of this second period that Ignatius introduces exercises to help you to make or confirm a major life- choice, contemplating Jesus in his passion and death andcontemplating Jesus in his resurrection.

1.3.2. The Spiritual Exercises in Daily Life

You can also make the Spiritual Exercises alongside your normal life and work. You commit to pray and reflect for a certain amount of time each day and meet with your retreat guide once a week for 7-12 months. You share your experience over the past week and your guide offers material for the coming week. What are the Spiritual Exercises for?

The Spiritual Exercises are suitable for: anyone who wants to deepen their relationship with God. People making an important life decision and seeking God’s will, people preparing themselves for a life of service or ministry and who want that service to be focused on God.He already engaged in any active ministry, pastoral work, teaching, chaplaincy, ordained ministry.

Thus, in Spiritual Exercice, Ignatius introduces us to the primary and perhaps the most important strategy that will show us how to be free: looking at Jesus. His life is our example and our standard: his mercy and his faithfulness, his truthfulness and his courage, his magnanimity and his love. Again and again, Ignatius recomments to us to meditate on and deepening an inner relationship with Jesus, his person and his deeds, we are “shaped” by him, and our lives subsequently gain clarity and depth.²⁰

1.3.3 Spiritual Direction

²⁰ Stefan Kiechle, *“The Art of Discernment”*, Avec Mariya Press, Indiana Province, 2005, 39.

Christian spiritual direction or spiritual accompaniment is the support you receive from another Christian to enable you to pay attention to God's personal communication with you. Your spiritual director will help you to respond, to grow in intimacy with God, and to live out the consequences of your relationship with God.

Spiritual accompaniment is a particular kind of listening and helping activity which focuses on a person's implicit or explicit relationship with God and seeks to nurture it. All of us have experiences which are felt as spiritual, whether they take place washing dishes, climbing mountains, attending church, or in silent prayer and whether or not they are barely perceptible or earth shaking. Spiritual accompaniment pays attention to these experiences and lets them develop and deepen so that they become part of a continuing conversation with God.

1.3.4. Individually Guided Retreat

With the exception of the full Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius, individually guided retreats do not follow a fixed programme of meditations. Your personal retreat guide seeks to help you locate the areas it could be most fruitful to pray with and ponder over. In this way you make your own personal retreat with its own focus and dynamic, following the promptings of the Holy Spirit²¹.

You will usually see your guide once a day for between half and three quarters of an hour. A second daily meeting is occasionally arranged for people who are new to retreats. The time between prayer periods is most profitably spent alone and in silence. The silence is not intended as a penance, but to release your creative potential and help you get in touch with what is deepest within yourself. Many of us spend so much time rushing about that we take our fundamental options in life for granted. It is within the focused space promoted by solitude and silence that God can be heard speaking and making him known.

²¹« *Constitution de la Congrégation des Sœurs du Cœur Immaculé de Marie* », dites Bene Mariya, 20.

What you get from a retreat depends on the particular grace God wants to give you at this time. If you are open, you will be graced by God, though not always in the way you expect. It is good to start a retreat with a completely open mind, open to self, to God and to your guide. Don't expect instant solutions and try to avoid entering a retreat determined to sort something out once and for all. The best approach is to come with a simple desire to be with God and to listen to God's voice: "Speak Lord, your servant is listening" (1sam 3: 11). The best stance is one of generous openness.

Many retreatants just enjoy spending a few days of quiet and relaxation. For some it is a time to try out new methods of prayer and find those which are helpful to them. Others are confirmed in the decisions they have already made. Some are given help in discerning the ways in which God is calling them. Others may manage to face a block within themselves, a block to loving, or to developing a deeper relationship with God and with others.

Conclusion

The reflection of this chapter was about the meaning and form of prayer according to the spiritual exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. It explained what is meditation, contemplative prayer, General examination of conscience, general Confession and Communion, Ignatius retreat, individually guided retreat, the silent guided retreat and Spiritual direction are in prayer life for Bene Mariya Sisters. For those who follow the Ignatian Spirituality, Saint Ignatius clarified the way to follow by their spiritual exercises.

CHAPTER TWO

PRAYER ACCORDING TO THE IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY AS THE SOURCE OF AUTHENTIC CONSECRATED LIFE FOR THE BENE MARIYA SISTERS

Introduction

This chapter will focus on the personal and community prayer lived by the Bene Mariya following the example of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. This prayer is understood as the stick of the journey that St. Ignatius of Loyola had used to achieve perfect conversion. The Bene Mariya Sisters must therefore follow the path of Saint Ignatius in their consecrated life because they have chosen the Ignatian spirituality as their guide. The Bene Mariya Congregation relies on the spirituality of Ignatius in their prayer life, especially in their meditation, examination of conscience, monthly recollection, accompanied retreats, other spiritual exercises as well as in the spiritual direction in the manner of Ignatian spirituality.

A prayer is the opening of mind and heart to God. It is also a lifting of mind and heart to God. Think of the Ignatian method of prayer named after Ignatius of Loyola²² as a sort of virtual experience of the Scripture where you read the Scripture and then create in your mind a short film about what you read. With Ignatius as our guide, our imagination becomes a way to help us know and love God. We try to grow in our awareness that God can be found in all people, in all of creation, actively at work in the world. Our way of praying helps us to pay more attention to God, and helps us understand and identify His actions in our lives and in the world around us.

²²During the years 1553–1555, Ignatius dictated his autobiography to his secretary, Father Gonçalves da Câmara. This autobiography ("Autobiografía de San Ignacio de Loyola" in Wikisource in Spanish) is a valuable key for understanding his Spiritual Exercises. It was kept in the archives of the Jesuit order for about 150 years, until the Bollandists published the text in Acta Sanctorum

2.1. Meditation

St. Ignatius of Loyola invites us, after reading the passage to enter into the text by imagining ourselves as one of the characters in the story. Ignatius says that we should see, hear, smell, and touch each facet of the event. As we experience the gospel scene, we are called to be aware of how we respond on a feeling level and to consider what it might mean for us at this time²³.

As one enters into the scene, sometimes there is the desire to be there. So a person can place oneself in the scene, perhaps as an observer, as one lining up for healing, or as one helping others to come to Jesus. Some people's imaginations are very active so they construct a movie-like scenario with a Gospel passage. Others will enter the scene with verbal imagination, reflecting on the scene and mulling over the actions²⁴.

Meditation appears as a necessity in our religious life. It responds to the need for interiority, the need to ask oneself, to know oneself better. Path that leads to the unity of body and mind, it is present in all traditions. A source of calm, meditation has physiologically measurable effects and promotes a better and more positive outlook on life.

According to the exercises of Saint Ignatius, meditation knows different stages as follows:

2.1.1. Before the Meditation: Three Kinds of Preparation

To succeed in these holy exercises, it is absolutely essential to prepare oneself for it. There are three kinds of preparations, all of which are necessary: the distant preparation, the next preparation and immediate preparation.

a) Distant Preparation

It consists in the habitual recollection that comes from the memory of the presence of God, and in fidelity to the resolutions taken in the previous meditation. The acts of the virtues

²³ T. H. Green, *Opening to God: A Guide to Prayer*, 44.

²⁴ T. M. Gallagher, *Meditation and contemplation. An Ignatian Guide to Praying with Scripture*, 15.

practiced in the day can be considered as part of the distant preparation, since they are meant to fuel the fire of the next meditation²⁵.

b) Approach Preparation

It is necessary, the evening before, to dispose the subject of meditation, by reading it, or by reflecting carefully, to divide it into a certain number of points. It would be tempting for God to come before Him without knowing what we are going to talk about. After having gone to bed and before becoming tired, use a few moments, for example the time of a Hail Mary, to recall the time at which one must get up and the main points of the meditation that one must do. In the morning, to remove from his mind any other thought than that of meditation, and to begin to work out of a holy and salutary confusion to propose to oneself this comparison: how would a soldier appear before his King, in the middle from his court, what would be his worries and his shame if, after having received from this prince a multitude of goods, he was convinced of having offended him seriously.

Another time thinking of the multitude of his sins, to imagine that one is chained to be present in the moment to the Sovereign Judge in the same state where is a criminal worthy of death, when led is, charged with irons, in the court that must judge him. Interested of those thought where other similar related to the subject of meditation, dressing...

c) Immediate preparation.

The immediate preparation consists in placing ourselves in a special way in the presence of God. St. Ignatius recommends that we stand for the space of an Our Father. In a prayer to ask grace to make the meditation well, and in this prayer to make a little act of self-humiliation, and be sure to invoke our Lady and St. Joseph.

²⁵ B. Emmanuella, « *Spiritualité Ignatienne* », Classe notes, 23.

Then follow the preludes and the points of meditation. After reading each point we should reflect²⁶.

2.1.2. During Meditation

One must be less inclined to think much than to understand and to taste the truth that one meditates. It is not the extent of the knowledge and the depth of the reflections; it is the feeling and the inner tastes which saturates the soul and fill its desires. So, a thought touches us and arouses in us feelings of devotion, stop us until the heart is completely satisfied, without worrying to get through.²⁷

Thus, prayer is the best way to understand if you are in consolation or desolation. Honest prayer will help you understand if you have closed your heart to God for some reason. Prayer will bring you peace as you do the right thing, even when it's causing you grief. Prayer will gently warn you that you are avoiding God's invitation and thus growing weaker in your faith, hope, and love.

A person dwells in a state of consolation when she or he is moving toward God's active presence in the world. We know we are moving in this way when we sense the growth of love or faith or mercy or hope or any qualities we know as gifts of the Holy Spirit. If I am becoming more kind with people, and I experience this movement as life-giving and Christlike, I am in a state of consolation.

Consolation can hold many emotions and experiences. Consolation does not mean that I feel constantly happy or at peace. In fact, sometimes when I am doing precisely what God is leading me to do, I might feel negative pressure from others, or I might find the experience a

²⁶ Louis L. Martz, *"The Poetry of Meditation"*, Yale University Press, 1954, 25.

²⁷ C. M. Alexandre, « *Méditation pour tous les jours et fêtes de l'année selon la Méthode de St. Ignace, sur la vie et sur les Mystères de Notre Seigneur Jésus Christ* » (Lyon, 1857), 4.

challenge because I'm growing and learning. Yet if I sense in my spirit that I'm going the right way, this spiritual reality consoles me whether the day is bumpy or smooth.

A person dwells in a state of desolation when she or he is moving away from God's active presence in the world. We know we are moving in this way when we sense the growth of resentment, ingratitude, selfishness, doubt, fear, and so on. If my outlook becomes increasingly gloomy and self-obsessed, I am in a state of desolation. I am resisting God or, if not actively resisting, I am being led away from God by other influences.

Desolation also holds many emotions and experiences. If I'm in desolation, I might try to alleviate the discomfort by drinking too much or seeking distraction through more work or social events. The food and drink and activity might feel quite good, but they are not leading me to greater joy, peace, and love. In fact, "false" consolations can help me avoid the true consolation of God's presence²⁸.

Here are three useful opinions in these painful moments: The first is observed with more care and attention all the rulers and opinions recorded here to facilitate the success of the meditation. Examine how you observe these rulers; to reform what is defective. The second is convinced yourself that if you persevere to strike with courage, faith, and confidence at the door of the divine mercy, it is not possible for it to remain closed. The third is observed when one has done all that depends on oneself; one must abandon the rest to the will of God, and believe that he allows this aridity only because it is advantageous to us. This feeling of humility and submission is often the most effective way to engage God to give us grace to pray.

2.1.3. At the End of the Meditation

a) Resolution.

²⁸ C. M. Alexandre, « *Méditation pour tous les jours et fêtes de l'année selon la Méthode de St. Ignace, sur la vie et sur les Mystères de Notre Seigneur Jésus Christ* », 8.

You must never finish the meditation without taking one or more practical resolutions, which can be performed the same day.

b) Offering of resolution

One then offers his resolutions to God, begging him to bless them, and imploring to be faithful with the help of the Blessed Virgin, the good angel and the patron saints.

c) Spiritual Bouquet

It is still very useful to do, on the end of the meditation, what St. Francis de Sale calls the spiritual bouquet, and of which he teaches the practice in these terms: "those who have walked in beautiful garden do not come out willingly without taking four or five flowers to keep and feel them along the day, so our mind having traveled some mystery through meditation, we must choose one, two or three thoughts, which we will find most to our taste and the most useful for our advancement, for us to re-live the rest of the day, and to enjoy their good odor spiritually, but this is done in the very place of meditation, by walking about it, or talking about it time later, in silence and in recollection."There is no need to change spiritual bouquet with each meditation; a thought that one taste can serve several days, several weeks, and even several months.²⁹

2.2. Repetition Prayer

Repetition is the return to a previous period of prayer for the purpose of allowing the movements of God to deepen within the heart. Through repetitions, we fine-tune our sensitivities to God and to how he speaks in our prayer and in our life circumstances. The prayer

²⁹ C.M.Alexandre, «*Méditation selon la Méthode de St Ignace, sur la vie et sur les Mystères de Notre Seigneur Jésus Christ*», 11.

of repetition teaches us to understand who we are in light of how God sees us and who God is revealing himself to be for us.

Repetition is a way of honoring God's word to us in the earlier prayer period. It is recalling and pondering an earlier conversation with one we love. It is as if we say to God, "Tell me that again; what I heard you saying?" In this follow-up conversation or repetition, we open ourselves to a healing presence that often transforms whatever sadness and confusion we may have experienced the first time we prayed.

In repetitions, not only does the consolation (joy, warmth, peace) deepen, but the desolation (pain, sadness, confusion) frequently moves to a new level of understanding and acceptance within God's plan for us.

To use this method, select a period of prayer to repeat in which you have experienced a significant movement of joy, sadness, or confusion. You might also select a period in which nothing seemed to happen perhaps because of your lack of readiness at the time.

To begin, recall the feelings of the first period of prayer. Use as a point of entry the scene, word, or feeling that was previously most significant. Allow the Spirit to direct the inner movements of your heart during this time of prayer.³⁰

2.3. Discernment of Spirits according to Saint Ignatius of Loyola

To "discern" means to try to figure out what God wants us to do. How do we know? How do we find out? It's not easy. Fortunately, St. Ignatius of Loyola offers time-tested guidelines for the discernment of spirits to help us discover what God is calling us to do in the big and small decisions of our lives including vocational discernment that we have found extremely practical and helpful both in our personal discernment as well as in helping others discern what God is calling them to.

³⁰<https://www.marquette.edu/faith/ignatian-principles-for-making-decisions.php> 18/10/2019

Ignatius assumes in his discernment of spirits that God communicates directly with each one of us in our hearts, minds, and souls through various interior movements; our feelings, thoughts, and desires. However, Ignatius was not so naïve as to think that all of our thoughts, feelings, and desires were caused by the Holy Spirit. Some indeed are holy desires that come from God, while others come from other sources negative spirits ultimately from what he called “The Enemy of our Human Nature. “Thus, the trick is to figure out which of our inner desires, thoughts, and feelings are from God, and which ones are not. To help us with this, Ignatius developed overtime his rules or guidelines for the discernment of spirits. At the beginning of the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius spells out seven basic attitudes or qualities that a person must have as preconditions for entering into an authentic discernment process seeking God’s will. They are the following.³¹

2.3.1. Openness

We must approach the decision in question with an open mind and an open heart. We cannot find God’s will for us if we enter into the decision-making process with a pre-conceived outcome based on our self-will, biases, and what Ignatius calls “attachments,” that is, an attitude of “I already have my mind made up, so don’t confuse me with the facts!” “Attachments” refer to areas in our lives where we limit freedom and put conditions on a decision. An example could be: “I’ll go to college anywhere as long as it’s within a day’s drive of my parents’ home.”

2.3.2. Generosity

To enter into a decision-making process with such openness requires a generous spirit with which we, with a largeness of heart, put no conditions on what God might call us to. This is like writing God a signed “blank check”; letting God fill in the amount and content of the check. Only a generous person would do this.

2.3.3. Courage

³¹<https://www.marquette.edu/faith/ignatian-principles-for-making-decisions.php> 18/10/2019

Such openness and generosity require courage, for God might be asking something difficult, challenging, and risky of us. It takes courage to give up control and trustingly put the decision in God's hands while seeking God's will over our own. There's no telling where God might be calling us; whether to be a religious sister or brother, a priest, a lay minister working for the Church, a lay missionary, or a married parent of a large family. To be that open and generous takes courage.

2.3.4. Interior Freedom

To make such a prayerful, generous, courageous decision requires interior freedom. Ignatius describes three types of people and their differing approaches to decision making³²:

a) **The first type is “all talk and no action.”** This kind of person is full of good intentions but remains so distracted by his or her busyness about so many relatively inconsequential things that they never get around to the “one thing necessary,” namely, God's will for them. Not to decide ends up being their decision. For example, I have experienced people “discerning” a possible vocation to religious life or priesthood for so long without ever making a decision that they end up becoming too old to enter.

b) **The second type of person does everything but the one thing necessary:** These people may do all kinds of good things in their life but don't face the central issue of what God is calling them to. But they do not know to adjust their priorities to what God is asking of them and thus put God's will first in their lives. An example could be, “I'll enter into any career as long as it will support me in an upper middle class lifestyle.” This would preclude a lot of options God might be calling us to!

³²L. J. Puhl, *“The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius”*, 117.

c) The third type of person is the only one who is truly free: Their whole and deepest desire is to do whatever God's will is for them with no conditions attached. This is the attitude necessary to authentically find and follow God's will for us.

2.3.5. A Habit of Prayerful Reflection on one's Experience

How can we hear God's call if we're not listening? How can we listen, if we're not praying? To make a prayerful decision, we must first pray, putting aside a significant portion of time on a daily basis to quiet ourselves, put ourselves in God's presence, and listen to what God is saying to us in the interior of our hearts.

2.3.6. Having one's Priorities Straight

There is a ruthless logic to Ignatius's spirituality. If serving God, our Creator and Lord, is the ultimate goal of our lives, then everything else in our lives must be kept in the subordinate position of a means to that end. This means that things such as opportunities, experiences, and relationships are to be valued and chosen only insofar as they contribute to our ultimate goal in life and rejected insofar as they deter us from that goal. "What we want above all is the ability to respond freely to God, and all other loves for people, places, and things are held in proper perspective by the light and strength of God's grace. ...In coming to a decision, only one thing is really important; to seek and to find how God is calling me at this time of my life. God has created me out of love, and my salvation is found in my living out a return of that love. All my choices, then, must be consistent with this given direction in my life."³³

³³ E. Mullan, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola* New York, 1914, 16.

For example, states of life such as marriage, single life, religious life, or priesthood are means to serving God. So, we must put serving God first, and then choose whichever state of life that might be the best way for us to serve God.

2.3.7. Not Confusing Ends with Means

Ignatius comments: “It becomes obvious how easy it is for me to forget such a simple truth as the end and goal of my whole existence when I consider the manner in which choices are often made. Many people, for example, choose marriage, which is a means. They then only secondarily consider the service and praise of God our Lord in marriage, though to follow God’s lead in my life is always our human project. Many people first choose to make a lot of money or to be successful, and only afterwards to be able to serve God by it. And so too in their striving for power, popularity, and so on. All of these people exhibit an attitude of putting God into second place, and they want God to come into their lives only after accommodating their own disordered and self-centred attachments. In other words, they mix up the order of an end and a means to that end. What they ought to seek first and above all else, they often put last³⁴.”

One of the examples of confusing ends with means mentioned above is a person who first chooses to make a lot of money and be successful and only afterwards look at how they might serve God with this. A person like this in effect puts God into the second place, only wanting God to come into their lives after first choosing what they want. They mix up the order of an “end” and a “means to that end,” not putting first things first.

Having these seven essential attitudes of openness, generosity, interior freedom, prayerful reflection on experience, having one’s priorities straight, and not confusing ends with means, the discernor has their satellite dish pointed in the right direction in order to receive

³⁴ E. Mullan, *“The Spiritual Exercise of Ignatius of Loyola”*, 169.

God's signals. Possessing these qualities is the precondition for hearing God's call through an authentic discernment process.³⁵

Then, St. Ignatius recognized that affective consolation and spiritual consolation frequently run hand in hand but not always. That's also true of affective desolation and spiritual desolation. Hence, he saw the need to formulate three rules for the discernment of spirits.

Rule 1: Be attentive to False Consolations: Affective consolation is usually the work of the Holy Spirit, unless it eventually leads to less trust in God, hope in salvation, or love. So the first basic rule of discernment of spirits is, follow affective consolation unless it begins to result in long-term spiritual desolation. When that occurs, you should stop following the seeming consolation, because it's very likely to be a false consolation sent by "the enemy of our human nature," to quote St. Ignatius. Spiritual desolation means we are moving away from God. That's always a signal to reexamine any decisions or actions that might have led to the false consolation masking a spiritual estrangement. It is usually a good idea to do this with a person or persons of spiritual experience and maturity.

Rule 2: Never make a Life Decision in a Time of Affective or Spiritual Desolation: Both affective and spiritual desolation can impair judgment and induce confusion and sadness. For that reason, desolation will almost always lead to bad long-term life decisions, which is challenging to grasp even with the benefit of spiritual consolation. This is why St. Ignatius counselled that you should never make a life decision when you're experiencing desolation, either affective or spiritual. He hastened to add that the desolation will soon give rise to consolation, at which point you can make much better decisions. It is always worth the wait. Some followers of the saint considered this most fundamental and important rule for making progress in the spiritual life.

³⁵<https://www.marquette.edu/faith/ignatian-principles-for-making-decisions.php> 18/10/2019

Rule 3: The Evil one can come as “an angel of light”³⁶: The devil usually dissuades us from our good intentions by trying to discourage us, but sometimes the deceiver offers thoughts that appear to be aimed at building our spiritual life. However, the real intention of these temptations is to discourage us in the long term. For example, say you’re in a state of fervour about improving your spiritual life and your love of neighbour. In the midst of this fervour, a thought might come to you: “If half an hour of daily prayer is good, then three hours must be better.” You begin your new discipline, but you find yourself growing progressively tired. You don’t have enough time for your family and work. You find yourself snapping at people and looking down on them.

You start to believe that God is a taskmaster who expects at least three hours of prayer each day from you, and you resent that He isn’t giving you the graces you expected from all this effort. In the long run, you can feel cynical and discouraged about your faith and all because the evil one succeeded in pushing you beyond your limits. This is why discernment of spirits is so important!

When the devil cannot tempt a person to give up prayer and turn from God, he can tempt you to try to do something perfectly good but in an exaggerated manner. He’ll encourage you to adopt an unrealistic timeframe or take on too many spiritual goals at once. He may try to make you think you can grow spiritually through your own willpower without help from God, and present an image of God that is stoic and demanding.

If we find that a pious decision or resolution might be exaggerated and burdensome – so much so that it’s leading to spiritual and affective desolation, then we simply need to ratchet it down a few notches to correspond to our own potential and to the timetable and will of the Holy Spirit.³⁷

³⁶ Timothy M. Gallagher, “*Discerning the Will of God*”, 102.

³⁷<https://spitzercenter.org/am-i-listening-to-god-or-the-other-guy-three-rules-for-discerning-spirits/13/10/2019>.

2.3.8. Application of the Senses

What do you see? Are there people? What are they doing? Insert yourself into the scene. What are you doing there? What are your feelings? Sometimes in your prayer the story can change and take unexpected twists. Allow this to happen. Often something very significant is revealed to you in the changes³⁸. Talk to the character in the story. Is Jesus there? Talk to him about what he is doing. Is there anything you want to ask him? Does he ask you anything? Listen to what Jesus says to you. Spend time in prayer in the company of Jesus. Is Jesus touching someone? What can you see?

Recall what one is doing in engaging with the Word of God and what one desires from this encounter. God is present and because God is present you rely on God. Close your eyes and reconstruct the scene in your imagination. See what is going on. What the blind man asks Jesus? How do the others react to him? What is the attitude of Jesus' disciples? What are the people saying to one another? What emotions fill their words?

Imagine a setting in which you can talk with Jesus and listen to him speak to you. Take one or two minutes of contemplation, time to rest silently in God's presence. As adults, we come to recognize more and more that God speaks to us using the language of silence. Take a few moments at the end of your reflection to enter into a few silent moments with God. Through reflective prayer you can begin to more readily recognize God's presence in your daily life. As you have finished this time of prayer, you should take a moment to speak person to person with Christ saying what comes from the heart³⁹.

2.4. Examination of Conscience

³⁸ T. M. Gallagter, "*Meditation and contemplation: An Ignatian Guide to Praying with Scripture*", 12.

³⁹ T. M. Gallagter, "*Meditation and contemplation. An Ignatian Guide to Praying with Scripture*", 12.

“The examen is an immediate solution to the problem of what do I pray about? The answer is: everything that's happened to you today. You might have the impression that your everyday life is the dreary same old, same old. It isn't. Daily life is rich and meaningful. Every encounter, every challenge, every disappointment, and every delight is a place where God can be found.”⁴⁰The examiner helps by directing our attention away from ourselves. "Woe is me" prayer is basically self-centred. But examiner prayer is God-centred.

Thus, the examen helps us to avoid dichotomy between the sacred and the mundane or worldly. God speaks to us through the works we do and the people we encounter. Even though the examen takes only a short time between fifteen minutes to half an hour, it helps us to put reality together and in relationship with God. That is why we are able to thank God, ask for forgiveness where we failed, and make resolutions for the future in the various steps recommended in doing the examination of conscience.

Examination of consciousness includes the various dimensions of my relationship: “my relationship with God, my relationship with myself, my relationship with the world of things and my relationship with other people.”⁴¹

Awareness of the events that took place in my day in these relationships is heightened in the presence of God who guides our minds and hearts to make resolutions for a holistic growth. Bringing the totality of our experiences in prayer makes our faith more incarnational and balanced. Prayer helps us enter more profoundly into the realities of this world in order to transform the world into a better place to live⁴².

For most people most of the time, prayer is hard. It is especially difficult not to mention unsatisfying when people experience it as formal, dry, and repetitious. But what might happen

⁴⁰ J. Manney, *“A Simple, Life-Changing Prayer: Discovering the Power of St. Ignatius Loyola's Examen”*, Loyola Press, 2011, 57.

⁴¹ J. Govan, *“Atool for Holistic Growth”*, St. Louis: Review for Religious, 1988, 319.

⁴² Melchior M., *“Challenges in Spiritual Direction”*, Nairobi, 2019, 121.

if you discovered a simple prayer that changed all that? What if you discovered a prayer that changed you? In a *Simple, Life-Changing Prayer*, Jim Manney introduces Christians to a 500-year-old form of prayer that dramatically altered his perception of prayer and the way he prayed.

The prayer is the examiner, which St. Ignatius of Loyola developed for the purpose of nurturing a reflective habit of mind that is constantly attuned to God's presence. What makes the prayer so powerful is its capacity to dispel any notion that God is somewhere "up there," detached from our day-to-day tasks and concerns. Instead, the examen leads us into a relationship with a God who desires to be personally caught up in the lives of those whom he created. By following five simple yet powerful steps for praying the examen, we can encounter the God who, as Scripture tells us, "is not far from each one of us" the God whose presence in our lives can make all the difference in the world.⁴³

Examination of conscience is part of our ongoing relationship with God (1Cor 11: 27-28). It exposes our need to be forgiven. To scrutinize our own soul also allows us to discover a sin that is perhaps the cause of our suffering.

To evaluate one's spiritual state is not only to confess one's sins to God. It is to avoid sinning in the first place. Jesus encouraged his followers to "watch and pray so that they do not fall into temptation" (Mt 26:41). In our quest for holiness, Jesus does not want Satan to catch us unawares.

With or without technology, it pleases God that we are paying attention to the state of our soul in a healthy way. To ascertain and confess our sins keep us humble before him. And above all, it helps us understand the depth of His grace and love for us.

⁴³J.Manney, *A simple, Life-changing Prayer: Discovering the Power of St Ignatius Loyola's Examen*", 75.

Thus, it understands three times and two examinations of conscience every day according to the exercises of Saint Ignatius⁴⁴.

The first time is in the morning, immediately on rising, one should resolve to guard carefully against the particular sin or defect with regard to which he seeks to correct or improve himself.

The second time is after dinner?, he should ask God our Lord for the grace he desire, that is, to recall how often he has fallen into the particular sin or defect, and to avoid it for the future.

Then follows the first examination, he should demand an account of himself with regard to the particular point which he has resolved to watch in order to correct himself and improve. Let him go over the single hours or periods from the time he arose to the hour and moment of the present examination, and in the first line of the figure given below, make a mark for each time that he has fallen into the particular sin or defect. Then he is to renew his resolution, and strive to amend during the time till the second examination is to be made (Ex.n°25).

The third time is after supper. He make the second examination, going over as before each single hour, commencing with the first examination, and going up to the present one. In the second line of the figure given below, let him make a mark for each time he has fallen into the particular fault or sin (Ex. n°26).⁴⁵ Thus, the MweneMariya Sister will make the examination of conscience (Canon 664), according to the pedagogy of the exercises⁴⁶.

2.5. Annual Retreat and Monthly Recollection.

“The Ignatian Exercises are for us a school of prayer. After experiencing the month of Exercises during the initial formation, we will relive it in the most important moments of our

⁴⁴L. J. Puhl, *“The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius”*, 21.

⁴⁵ L. J. Puhl, *“Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius”*, 21.

⁴⁶« *Directoire de la Congrégation des Sœur du Cœur Immaculé de Marie* », dites Bene Mariya », 3.

consecrated life. The annual retreat and the monthly recollection will also deepen our prayer life”⁴⁷.

The first thing we need to impress upon retreatants is the quest for the Eternal. If they are not part of that quest, we are wasting our time. Perhaps they are following a secondary quest where they will end up frustrated, or they will end up deluded with a certain amount of fake consolations and will go nowhere. In other words, this is Ignatius’ approach. Jesus wants people to approach the kingdom with this disposition. Do they approach the retreat with this same disposition when they stand before the kingdom and say: “I will sell everything to get this precious pearl, everything”?

This is the kind of attitude we are talking about. This is what Ignatius is inviting us to in “The First Principle and Foundation.” Do we have the attitude that Paul expressed in the Epistle to the Philippians: “I had all these things, but all of this is garbage, nothing, all of this is loss compared to gaining Christ?”(Ph 3: 8) This is essential for beginning the retreat.

Remember that the annual 30-day retreat according to the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius is 4 weeks long. The first is to take the measure of the presence of evil, of lies, and of all things that lead to death in the world and in one. He alone can renew the heart of man. The week usually ends with the sacrament of reconciliation. It is not uncommon, in practice that this week lasts up to 10 or 11 days⁴⁸.

The second week is a journey with Christ in his itinerant life in Galilee. It begins with a meditation on the Incarnation and ends with Palm Sunday. To the contemplative mysteries proposed by Ignatius, the spiritual accompanist of the retreatant is free to add other scenes of gospels not mentioned in the booklet. The guide always adapts to the spiritual needs of the

⁴⁷« *Constitution de la Congrégation des Sœurs du Cœur Immaculé de Marie* », dites Bene Mariya, 20.

⁴⁸In annotations 18b and 19 of the book, Ignace suggests that some retreatants should not be led to go beyond the first week if they do not fulfill the conditions of psychological balance, spiritual maturity and physical health.

retreatant he meets daily in a particular conference. Throughout these meditations, the retreatant asks that an inner knowledge of Jesus be given to him to receive a fruit that gives direction to his personal life.

During the third week the retreatant lives with Christ the drama of his passion that is from Bethany to his burial after death on the cross. Annihilation before the beloved Christ at Golgotha, who from his cross even recreates every man and man.

In the fourth week Jesus Christ resurrected is contemplated in his apparitions to his mother and to the apostles and disciples. They find in Him the strength to proclaim Life and spiritual freedom by witnessing the presence of God.

Thus during the four weeks, the experience of the Spiritual Exercises is proposed in its entirety for a decision or the choice of a background orientation to better follow Christ.

Engaging in such an experience represents a significant investment and this retreat may not be appropriate for everyone at all times of a personal journey. To put it briefly, the Spiritual Exercises are a way to follow Christ more, and to better discover what He personally calls us to the stage of life where we are.

2.6. The Spiritual Direction.

Not only during the religious formation, is spiritual direction necessary in the religious life. We need to know that no one is a good judge of oneself. The spiritual direction is cut between the two, because of the difficulty we have in discerning the religious dimension of our experience.

In ecclesial life the spiritual direction consists of a partnership that involves a helping relationship to further guide one's life and choices according to the Gospel. The accompanied person must feel free and confident. The accompanist may be a priest, religious or lay person recognized by the Church for this service.

The spiritual direction is a meeting with three people: you, your spiritual director and the Holy Spirit!⁴⁹ It is also the latter who is the true protagonist of the meeting: That is why it is important to invoke at the beginning of your interviews to ask him the grace of docility, because as said the Gospel of John "The wind blows where he wants and you hear his voice, but you do not know where he comes from or where he is going" (Jn 3: 8).

2.6.1. Purpose of Spiritual Direction

God created man in his image, thus giving him the freedom to know Him and to love Him (Gen 1 – 2). This initiative freely taken by God requires the same freedom in your response. Indeed, it is free that the soul can love and enter into dialogue with God. But if you want to know and love God better every day, you must be faithful to Him. This is what spiritual guidance is about: giving you the right means to grow in the spiritual life.

2.6.2. Attitudes *sine qua non*: Sincerity, Humility and Docility

You must understand that your director spiritual does not win anything. He is there to help you, to listen to you, and in no case to make decisions for you. He is the doctor of your soul: If you do not tell him sincerely your difficulties and your doubts ... he can neither guess them nor help you.

This sincerity also translates into putting into practice the advice that your Spiritual Director gives you. Your Spiritual Director knows them by your talking. Because docility is the practical expression of faith. When Peter walked on the waters, he first made an act of obedience: "*Lord, command me to walk with you on the waters*" (Mt 14:28). And this obedience has been rewarded by the miracle.

⁴⁹M. Felix, "*Direction of Spirituality*" (Class Notes, Tangaza Univeristy, 2018)

The honesty and humility demands surrender or a letting go of our desire for control, security, esteem, and approval. Honesty and humility call us to reflect, as Ignatius did, on the patterns of our life that deflect us from the way of Christ. Thus, the examination of conscience became integral to the spirituality of Ignatius. He encouraged those who came to him for direction and confession to persist in a thorough examination of their soul. This examination of conscience that Ignatius developed and expanded as the examen of consciousness is basic and foundational for authentic inner healing⁵⁰.

Ignatius identified and named his sinfulness on the way to aligning his intention with the intention of God present within him. Only God's love and grace made this possible.

This same love and grace is available to us. With confidence in God's help, we can look forward to the freedom brought by God's forgiveness and by honesty with ourselves.

“Thus, self-surrender to God in the manner of St. Ignatius of Loyola is indisputably a sign of spiritual growth and maturity. A good spiritual director will help a directee not only to experience the presence of God in prayer but also to walk with God in daily life. Walking side by side with Jesus in daily life means receiving guidance and teaching from him, surrendering our freedom, plans, and all that we have and possess to him. We cannot have a companion on the journey of life day by day and hide or put a limit to what we share together”⁵¹.

2.6.3. Some Distinctive about Ignatian Spiritual Direction

A theological vision rooted in the Spiritual Exercises. The theology of the Exercise⁵² is optimistic. It affirms the goodness of the world. But it also is acutely aware of the pervasive problem of evil. At the same time it is contemplative and service-oriented.

⁵⁰L. J. Puhl, « *The Spiritual Exercise of St. Ignatius* », 118.

⁵¹ M. Marandu, “Challenges in Spiritual Direction”, Nairobi, 2019, 112

⁵² *The Spiritual Exercises grew out of Ignatius Loyola's personal experience as a man seeking to grow in union with God and to discern God's will.*

Flexible: The Ignatian spiritual director does not impose a program on the directee. The manner of the direction is adjusted to fit the person's personality, life history, and spiritual experience. The director "cannot know beforehand what he or she will suggest."

A partnership: Ignatian spiritual direction is a partnership. It thus demands mutual respect and openness to the other's frame of reference. It follows Ignatius Loyola's admonition, "Let it be presupposed that every good Christian is to be more ready to save their neighbor's proposition than to condemn it."

Ignatian spiritual direction attempts to uncover the deepest desires of the human heart. Typically, these are smothered by superficial desires for transitory things. Our most profound desires are shaped by the Holy Spirit and point toward new choices for spiritual growth and fruitful service.

Rules for discernment: Ignatius Loyola's rules for discernment of spirits⁵³ permeate Ignatian spiritual direction. These are methods for identifying inner movements, reflecting on them, and understanding where they come from and where they lead us.

Conclusion

Chapter two explained how each of the MweneMariya Sisters is to live their prayer according to the spiritual exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. Thus, Ignatian Spirituality is a source of the various paths that lead to eternal life. The one who devotes herself to it discovers her own path. Her journey is a development of her election by God Himself. She must therefore be attentive to be able to distinguish the differences in stages that this path opens for her.

The Ignatian method of praying is all about finding God in his creature using senses if you believe that God is always present any time and everywhere, you must respond by your

⁵³ St. Ignatius of Loyola began to learn about the discernment of spirits while convalescing from serious battle injuries. He noticed different interior movements as he imagined his future.

presence too and receive his abundant graces. Given that we are created in his image and resemble, we have the capacity to encounter Him in the Scriptures, where He reveals himself for us and communicates to us his love.

Thus, among the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius, the examination of conscience became integral to the spirituality of Ignatius. That is because the examination of consciousness is in our daily life. This Chapter shows it in meditation, contemplation, and spiritual direction.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CHALLENGES THAT SISTERS BENE MARIYA FACE IN THEIR PRAYER LIFE

1.0. Introduction

In previous chapter we have explained how each of the Mwene Mariya Sisters is to live their prayer according to the spiritual exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. This chapter will highlight some challenges that she faces in our life of prayer.

3.1. Temptations or Distractions

In his Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius uses three metaphors to describe how the enemy works against us⁵⁴.

The first, Ignatius claims, the enemy is both a tyrant and a weakling. Each time we listen to his voice and accept his words as truth, he gains more and more power. He is like a bully, a tyrant who knows when he has the upper hand. But if he is resisted he shows himself to be a

⁵⁴ L. J. Puhl, *"The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius"*, 93.

coward who immediately backs down from a challenge. Imagine for a moment a small voice which whispers to you that you are not good enough, not smart enough, not attractive enough, not funny enough, not popular enough and never enough. When you listen to that voice and accept it as truth, it becomes stronger and stronger and will eventually lead you to self-disparagement and despair. But when you stand up to it, when you claim your true identity as a beloved child of God, when you resist its accusations and affirm the truth of what God says about who you are, you will find that it ceases instantly. It cannot gain a foothold unless it is allowed and encouraged. The enemy is like a tyrant when we give in to him, but like a weakling when we resist in the strength God gives us.

The second, Ignatius says, the enemy is like a seducer. A person whose aim is to seduce another or to draw him into evil loves, to act in secrecy. This won't hurt anyone, he assures us. Let's make a secret pact; no one needs to find out. When we find ourselves acting in secret, unable to be open with others about what we are doing, we ought to recognize that we have been conscripted into evil. The enemy loves to bind us to secrecy; he is like a seducer who lures us into the shadows⁵⁵.

The finally, Ignatius says, the enemy is like a military commander who studies the weaknesses of the opposing forces and attacks at the weakest point in their defences. Evil comes to us when we are most vulnerable. It seeks out the cracks in our defences and forces its way through. Know yourself. Know where you are most vulnerable. Guard with special intention those places where you are most susceptible to temptation. Trust that God will strengthen you in these very areas, as you look to God for strength and help.

The spiritual life is a journey in which we gradually become that which God has declared us to be beloved children, loved and cherished by the One who has created and redeemed us. The journey leads upward, but there are evil forces at work against us, temptations

⁵⁵ Melchior M., "Ignatian Discernment", *An African Perspective*, 29.

that pull us down or lead us astray, and may well cause our ruin. How can we resist them? By fleeing to God, by trusting wholly in his strength rather than in our own, by clinging to our true identity in God and abiding in that Love from which nothing can separate us.

Jesus shows us another way. In the gospel story we read of three temptations with which he is faced (Lk 4: 1-13). First, the evil one entices him to turn stones into loaves of bread, perhaps to satisfy his own hunger, or perhaps to satisfy the hunger of others and thereby win their favor and admiration. Henri Nouwen, the great spiritual writer of the 20th century, describes this as the temptation to be relevant⁵⁶.

The second temptation takes the form of a challenge. The evil one takes Jesus to the holy city and places him on the pinnacle of the temple. He challenges him to throw himself down because the angels of God will rescue him and prove to all the uniqueness of his relationship with God. This, Nouwen says, is the temptation to be spectacular.

Finally, the evil one takes him to a high mountain and shows him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. “All these I will give you,” he says, “if you will fall down and worship me.” This third temptation Nouwen refers to as the temptation to be powerful.

All three temptations represent enticements to pride, to self-sufficiency, and self-aggrandizement. They are attractive and appeal to our desire to be important, distinctive, and special. They are enticing “riches” that lead us to a false identity which is the direct product of worldly “honor” and which leads us to pride.

We see here the pattern of the evil one, enticing us with riches, flattering us with honor, and leading us to pride. And we see the way of Jesus, inviting us to embrace our poverty, to depend entirely on God, and to offer ourselves in loving service to God’s work of redemption in the world. This is the way Jesus teaches us and shows us by his own example. This is the path to eternal life, he says; it is the only way to God.

⁵⁶ Henri J. M. Nouwen., *“The Way of the Heart”*, On Sale, 2009, 13.

Perhaps you might take some time today to reflect on the riches that are yours, and on their potential to be gifts to be used in God's service or to be sources of worldly honor that could lead you to pride and eventually separate you from God.

St. Ignatius of Loyola, a 16th century Spanish saint, suggests that the intention of the evil one is always to draw us into pride, and that there is a predictable pattern in the way in which we are enticed. First, he says, we find ourselves tempted to covet whatever seems to make us rich. It may be material wealth or physical attractiveness or intellectual ability or reputation, status, or power. When we find ourselves possessing these things, we are tempted to bask in the recognition, honor and esteem that the world gives us because of them. Puffed up by the deference and honor given us by others, a false sense of personal identity and value emerges which leads to pride. Riches, says Ignatius, lead to honor, and honor leads to pride. Pride separates us from God. We become convinced of our own self-sufficiency and think we have no need of God. Rather than seeing wealth or beauty or intellect or power as gifts given us by God to be used for God's glory, we bask in the honor they bring us and gradually drift into pride, cutting ourselves off from God, the giver of all good gifts and the source of life itself⁵⁷.

3.2. Shifts from Individualistic Models of Discernment

The community's "discernment is not said to be sound or unsound because it has or has not found God's will, although it may possibly turn out that it is said to have found God's Will because it is sound."⁵⁸ What is required from the discerning community is openness to the Spirit and willingness to undertake the process of discernment.

There is a need for a shift from the individualistic models of discernment to a communal discernment. In the modern world there is too much "individualism, too much change and confusion in the social values, too much interest in material things and too little respect for

⁵⁷ L. J. Puhl, *"The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius"*, 46.

⁵⁸ Toner, *"Discerning God's Will: Ignatius of Loyola's Teaching on Christian Decision Making"*, 70.

authority.”⁵⁹ Alongside the growth of individualism, there is a profound belief that becoming mature is becoming independent, self-actualized and being able to direct oneself. This kind of thinking has far-reaching social and moral consequences. The subjectivism and relativism of the New Age Movement is a typical expression of individualistic ways of understanding discernment by interpreting everything to justify moral attitudes.

Such individualistic thoughts have spread all over the world especially within the circles of the New Age Movement whose presence is globally felt. Needless to say, with the phenomenon of globalisation, the world has been reduced to a “global village”⁶⁰ with profound techno-economic, socio-political and cultural exchanges. We are currently living in an age in which the mass media constitutes not only a world but also a culture and civilisation with the capacity to build or to degrade authentic human civilisation. The complex heterogeneity and fluidity of this idea escapes the discerning capacity of many individuals in religious communities as well as in the small Christian communities and they have already overwhelmed a number of youths. Under such circumstances, there is a deep-fel need and urgency for “mutual interdependence”⁶¹ through communal discernment.

“The rightful understanding and interpretation of the laws of social life which the Creator has written into people’s moral and spiritual nature cannot be felt by individuals who may wish to mislead others. The human community that is constituted of intelligent persons and led by the Holy Spirit has the duty and obligation to guard against such misconceptions of the natural and scientific laws, and promote mutual respect for each one’s full spiritual dignity.”⁶²

3.3. Risks and Difficulties of Community Discernment

⁵⁹ Melchior M., *“Ignatian Discernment: An African Perspective”*, Nairobi, 2013, 43.

⁶⁰ John Paul II, *“The Church in Africa”*, Nairobi, 1995, 55.

⁶¹ “Gaudium and Spes,” in the Documents of the Second Vatican Council, Nairobi: Paulines Publication Africa, 2013, 357.

⁶² Melchior M., *“Ignatian Discernment, an African Perspective “*, 44.

One of the temptations a group may fall into is pride. The group can make a mistake and if they do not have sufficient humility and respect for the larger community, they become divisive. The group may be tempted to pride when it erroneously considers itself as superior to the rest and as having a special access to the Holy Spirit. For example, a religious group or a religious community may claim to have found God's will through a discernment process and refuse to heed to the direction of Parish Council.⁶³

Inappropriate method and lack of commitment to undertake the process of discernment⁶⁴ with patience can cause failure and consequently discouragement. The community must be ready to give as much time and effort as required, and as possible, in the concrete circumstances of their life. The Spirit may guide them slowly and even painfully and they may be tempted to give up discernment⁶⁵. Unrealistic expectations for quick results may lead to discouragement and the false conclusion that communal discernment does not work.

Another challenge may result from the cultural diversity of the community which may lead to cross-cultural misunderstanding. Cultural disparities within a community can be a source of prejudice, misunderstanding, and chaos, and may even cause emotional pain or suffering. Cultural prejudices can bring divisions in community and thus become stumbling blocks for community discernment.

Communal discernment is not only difficult but also impossible if we allow cultural difference to divide us. There is a temptation to judge people by their tribe, nation or race even before listening to what they have to say. At times we refuse to accept what is said even when it is true, simply because of our deep-rooted cultural and self-opinionated positions. This mentality blocks mutual dialogue and exchange.

⁶³Melchior M., *"Ignatian Discernment, an African Perspective"*, 66.

⁶⁴Toner, *"A Method for Communal Discernment of God's Will"*, 51.

⁶⁵Toner, *"A Method for Communal Discernment of God's Will"*, 58.

Mutual listening and dialogue requires openness to other cultures. There must be willingness to clarify what we say and also to ask what is meant, rather than simply pre-judging from what we think. The discussion involved in communal discernment is not a debate but a dialogue. There must be explicit willingness and effort to go beyond debate to dialogue in which God's leadership is acknowledged.

3.4. Personal Crisis or under Time Pressure

Personal crises often show up as physical symptoms: nervousness, sleeplessness, or digestive and intestinal problems. One may be able to suppress dark feelings of grief, rage, emptiness, desperation, or loneliness, but the physical signals will be unmistakable.

Such crises also manifest themselves in disordered relationships. They cause tensions, resentment, belligerence, and withdrawal from people. They are often paralleled by a spiritual crisis: prayers become dry and empty, and one begins to lose interest in God who appears distant and unapproachable, perhaps even threatening or unjust. Ignatius calls this crisis "spiritual desolation"⁶⁶.

The best advice Ignatius has for someone at this stage of a crisis is not to make a decision at such a time. Those who are not in touch with themselves, with others around them; or with God can be influenced all too easily by the evil spirit. Anyone who is stuck in a crisis ought to focus on making an effort to get out of this state before he or she even considers making a decision. In the presence of a good predisposition, one can decide in favor of good, positivethings backed by sound motives⁶⁷.

The first thing one will need to change is the situation, which will require a decision, in order to get out of the crisis. While this observation may seem obvious, remember that even in a situation like this it is advisable to refrain from immediately reversing a previous life

⁶⁶ L. J. Puhl, *"The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius"*,92.

⁶⁷ S. Kiechle, *"The Art of Discernment"*, 95.

decision. It is important to create as much physical and temporal distance from the situation that created the tension as possible, in order to find oneself and re-establish one's relationship with God.

An additional complication that is often tied to a personal crisis is the pressure of time. External, pre-established time frames are frequently at odds with the slower, inner clock. If time pressure is added to the crisis and subsequently heightens it, many people are in danger of collapsing. What to do?

At first, one can try to reduce the pressure of time by refusing to become intimidated by the "just-do-it" craze and hectic pace of our modern world. One can take only small steps in pre-established time intervals, or one can refrain from quiet reflection. Those who do not possess inner peace ought to do everything to find it as soon as possible. Those with a tendency to procrastinate can perhaps interpret time pressures as an opportunity. Used fearlessly and prudently, the pressure can sometimes lead them toward the desired clarity.

On the other hand, those who have a tendency to make rash decisions but who typically do not feel pressured, are frustrated by long waits. They can take advantage of a predetermined time frame. It may encourage them to prudently delay a decision and lead to a point where they will approach the decision more level headedly and with a greater degree of maturity⁶⁸

Conclusion

The chapter three have discussed about some challenges that Bene Mariya Sisters can face in our life of prayer. They can face to Temptations or Distractions, Shifts from Individualistic Models of Discernment, Risks and Difficulties of Community Discernment, and Personal Crisis or under Time Pressure.

⁶⁸ S. Kiechle, *"The Art of Discernment"*, 97

About the temptation or distractions, Ignatius claims that the enemy is both a tyrant and a weakling. Each time we listen to his voice and accept his words as truth, he gains more and more power.

Thus, Shifts from Individualistic Models of Discernment, this chapter insists that in the modern world there is too much individualism, too much change and confusion in the social values, too much interest in material things and too little respect for authority.

Also, the Personal Crisis can even cause some illness such as tensions, resentment, belligerence and withdrawal from people.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

This research has been discussing the topic The Ignatian Spirituality on Prayer Life as a Means for Growth among the Bene Mariya Sisters in Burundi. This topic is divided in to three chapters.

The first chapter presented the forms of prayer according to Ignatius of Loyola. According to Spiritual Exercise of Saint Ignatius, prayer is a natural outcome of close relationship between us and God. It is not something mysterious or esoteric or something that we learn how to do in school. Prayer is conversation. By the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius, this chapter have explained what meditation, contemplative prayer, General examination of conscience, general Confession and Communion, Ignatius retreat, individually guided retreat,the silent guided retreat and Spiritual direction are.

Chapter two explained how each of the Mwene Mariya Sisters is to live their prayer according to the spiritual exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. Thus, Ignatian Spirituality is a source of the various paths that lead to eternal life.

With Ignatius as our guide, our imagination becomes a way to help us know and love God. We try to grow in our awareness that God can be found in all people, in all of creation, actively at work in the world. Our way of praying helps us to pay more attention to God, and helps us understand and identify His actions in our lives and in the world around us.

Thus, chapter three showed us some challenges that we can meet in our prayer life. The distractions or temptations, shifts from individualistic models of discernment and risks and difficulties of community discernment can impede our relationship with God. Here the invitation is to pay attention to our prayer life which is the center to our commitment and to our religious vocation.

Finally, prayer and apostolate ministry are two wings which should fly together in the life of religious especially in the life of Bene Maria sisters. What we have to put in mind is that our apostolate ministry is the fruits of prayer without prayer it becomes empty, and prayer without fruits doesn't exist because prayer supposed to be manifested in our daily experience with our brothers and sisters. We are called to be faithful to our personal prayer and communal prayer because it is a motor of our being.

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