

IGNATIAN INDIFFERENCE - Reflections

Introduction:

St. Ignatius, in the “Principle and Foundation” in his book of The Spiritual Exercises, teaches us that the **PURPOSE – THE WHAT FOR - OF OUR EXISTENCE** is: “**To know, to love, and to serve God and so to attain our salvation - eternal happiness**”.

He tell us that the **NORM - or the way - to accomplish the purpose of our existence is to use all created things only as means.** (*Using them only, in so far as they help us to fulfill the goal for which we were created*)

However, experience teaches us that we – human beings - find it very hard, well nigh impossible, to follow the norm. A nearly irresistible attraction towards created things keeps dragging us to them, thus taking us away from God.

Often enough, we use created things not as means to reach God, but as ends in themselves. We want comforts, wealth, health, honors, pleasures, etc. at any cost, thus forgetting God. Nay, in a way, we allow those created things to take the place God. **We crave for created things as if they were the final purpose of our existence.**

From birth, we are naturally inclined to be “inordinately attached” to creatures. As a result, we forget the norm of order and we stray from God. Ignatius forcefully tells us that to be able to follow that norm, **we must get rid ourselves of all ‘inordinate affections and attachments’**. As long as forgetting God, we remain attached to created things, we shall never be able to possess God – namely, attain salvation.

This explains why for St. Ignatius the first **priority or objective of the Retreat** is the uprooting of all ‘inordinate attachments’. In the first Paragraph of the book of the Exercises he writes:

“By the term Spiritual Exercises is meant every method of examination of conscience, of meditation... and every way of preparing and disposing the soul to rid itself of all inordinate attachments, and, after their removal, of seeking and finding the Will of God in the disposition of our life for the salvation of our soul”.

Ignatius, in Para 23 of the Spiritual Exercises, tells us that “**indifference**” to all created things is a must in order to find the will of God in our lives:

“Therefore, we must make ourselves indifferent to all created things, as far as we are allowed free choice and are not under any prohibition. Consequently, as far as we are concerned, we should not prefer health to sickness, riches to poverty, honor to dishonor, and a long life to a short life”

The same holds good for all other things. Then he concludes in the following manner:

“Our only desire and choice should be what is more conducive to the end for which we are created.”

In other words: **‘Indifference to all created things is the way to find the will of God and fulfill it!’**

Meaning and Nature of Ignatian Indifference

1. In the dictionary the word ‘indifferent’ & ‘indifference’ have two meanings: `

‘Negative’ one = not caring for, not interested in something.
‘Neutral’ one: = having no inclination for or against something.

2. Ignatius uses the word **indifference** in the **neutral sense**; namely, we have to bring ourselves as far as possible, to the point of not having an inclination either for or against any created thing.

3. **Even in its neutral meaning, indifference can be of two different types:**

Affective indifference: at the feeling level.

Willful indifference: at the volition level

4. For instance: if a guest is asked whether he would like to have tea or coffee, he may reply, *“for me it is indifferent, it’s just the same”*. In his reply, he may mean either of two things:

Affective indifference: *“I equally like them both” I like coffee and tea equally*

A willful indifference *“I am willing to take any”. I want whatever is more convenient to the host.*

5. **Willful indifference is not in the liking or not liking of one thing or another, but in the willingness to take any.** In that case, it is the will that considering all the circumstances and options, decides what would be more conducive towards the goal for which I was created.

6. St. Ignatius expects from the one making the Retreat to acquire that ‘willful’ indifference’ to all created things. **He has to bring himself to the point of being willing and ready to take anything whatever or do anything at all that helps him most to attain the goal for which he was created.**

7. **Human beings, unaided by God’s grace, by nature, are not and cannot be ‘affectively indifferent’ to all possible things:** for instance to sickness, dishonor, death, poverty. Short life and other similar things.

8. **Yet, with God's grace, we have to strive to become 'willfully' indifferent to anything that is not God. .**
9. **This willful indifference – hard as it may be to us human beings - is a necessary prerequisite to find the will of God in our lives and carry it out.**

Consequences of The Ignatian Indifference.

Willful Indifference means death to all inordinate attachments

- By not being attached to one thing more than to another, I remain like the needle of a balance in a resting position. I am standing in the middle, ready to move to one side or to another as soon as the Will of God is manifested.
- Perfect indifference is synonymous to a perfect 'willful' detachment, death to inordinate attachments.

Willful Indifference does not imply lack of interest or a "not caring attitude"

- On the contrary, it implies the greatest possible attachment to God, of course, and an unqualified caring for God's Will. Any other possible attachments are assumed and absorbed, so to say, in that only unconditional attachment to God alone.
- Sanctity essentially consists in our being attached to God. Thus, we could establish the principle that, the greater our willful indifference is to all created things, the greater our union with God our Creator, and the higher our degree of holiness will be.
- Actually speaking, the following words mentioned below imply each other. :
INDIFFERENCE= DETACHMENT FROM CREATURES = ABSOLUTE
ATTCHMENT TO GOD = LOVE FOR GOD = SANTITY = PERFECTION.

Ignatian Indiference Brings Spiritual Freedom

For God's love, for Christ's Love I should be willing and prepared:

- To be Rich or to be Poor
- To be clever or to be dull,
- To be handsome or to be ugly,
- To be strong or to be weak,
- To be attractive or to be repulsive,.

- To be educated or to be illiterate,
- To be healthy or to be sick,
- To be active or to be jobless,
- To be considered or to be forgotten,
- To be loved or to be ignored.
- To be Successful or to A Failure,
- To be honored or to be despised,
- To be rewarded or to be passed over,
- To be popular or to be unknown,
- To have friends or to be lonely,
- To live long or to die soon.

On neither can I set my Heart

- In both I can equally serve God
- Each is a gift of God,
- And as such of equal value.

This only truly matters

- To lovingly choose whatever God Wills
- And to generously carry it out,

Because:

- He loved me into existence,
- Because in Him I am, I move, I live.

(Adapted from A. Goodier)