



# Ignatian Approach to Anti-Racism

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*At the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry, students, faculty and staff share in the privilege of engaging in whole-person formation for ministry, teaching, and service rooted in faith. Drawing on the Ignatian spiritual and educational tradition assists us in meeting the challenge of the Magis: to be ever more attentive, reflective, and loving men and women for others as we seek the universal good and engage in the serious study of theology--understood as "faith seeking understanding" (St. Anselm).*

*To meet the challenges of graduate theological and ministerial studies in such a formational context, we offer an approach to anti-racism that draws on significant themes in the Ignatian tradition. Formation at the STM not only prepares us for ministry in the future, it recognizes the current ministerial contexts in which we serve, seeking to integrate our academic study with the personal, pastoral, and spiritual dimensions of formation. How might our discernment of God's call for racial justice challenge the way we minister and work right now? How might it call us to bring this challenge and discernment to our communities?*

*We see much value in engaging the work of anti-racism on a path of synodality, guided by the principles of Ignatian spirituality. Each principle is elucidated in comments found in the STM document "An Ignatian Approach to Study" and supplemented with comments and questions from the student-written "Ignatian Approach to Anti-racism."*

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## Discernment and Freedom

A distinctive characteristic of Jesuit education is the commitment to school the mind and the heart to see God in all things, learning to distinguish those choices that lead to God from those that lead away from God. The art and skills of discernment play a central role in sensitizing our minds and hearts to imagine God's desires for the world so that as individuals in community we can work for a world of justice and peace. A spirit of deep freedom must ground this life stance so that the individual and the community desire only what God desires. We are called to respond in generosity and trust, creativity and courage, humility and love, to collaborate with God in serving the needs of the peoples of the world.

- a. We must call to mind that racial justice is not *our* justice, but God's justice for which we are co-responsible.
- b. We must be willing to admit when we are wrong, but even more so to admit that our vision is incomplete. Discernment into and through disagreement leads us to a third, more perfect way.
- c. Freedom is mysterious. We must not lose faith in the Holy Spirit to guide our work and discussions, even when we feel we are failing, and even more so when we feel that others are failing. Freedom calls us to persevere in hope.

## Presuming Good Will

This statement of St. Ignatius can be applied not only to the interaction between a spiritual director and someone making the Exercises, but also to ordinary conversations and to interaction within the classroom. We recognize the passion and depth of conviction that all at the STM bring to the study of theology and ministry, and presuppose the good will of our teachers and fellow students. In keeping with the spirit of generosity and trust, we are called to discover the truth as a community of learners so as to follow Christ and serve God's people and the world.

- a. This presumption should apply to our disagreements and reservations as much as to comments or statements made
- b. We should allow this presumption of good will to take first place in our attitudes towards others, before any accusation of apathy, laziness, or moral compromise.

## Learned Ministry

In Ignatian spirituality, God and the world, faith and reason, are never opposed to one another; rather God is to be found in the world for those who know how to study and discern God's ways. Since all truth comes from God, we should have the courage to pursue the truth through academic rigor. Therefore, learned ministry calls us to critical thinking about faith, history, doctrine, Scripture, pastoral realities, and the signs of our times, with appreciation for all areas of human inquiry, which is essential to being ministers who can faithfully lead God's people in a just engagement with the world.

- a. We ought to hold in our minds that our ministry is always one of learning, never of mastery. Appreciating all areas of human inquiry calls us in this moment to listen to and learn from disciplines and churches which have reckoned more fully with their racist legacy than the Catholic Church has.
- b. At the same time, we are responsible for lifting up the voices of our tradition, particularly Black voices, who can teach us how to be more racially just.
- c. We must hold at the forefront of our hearts the Amazon Synod's (2019) call to unlearn, learn, and relearn our present modes of evangelization and ministry, intertwined as they are with colonialism, white supremacy, and the oppression of marginal voices.

## Contemplative Imagination

Imagination plays an important role in Ignatian spirituality, especially in contemplative reading of Scripture. We are asked to place ourselves in whatever story we are reading--to imagine the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and feelings we would experience as participants in the story. The goal of such reading is to make the story personal for us, so that we're not just reading about Sarah, Moses, Elijah, Jesus, etc., but encountering them. This style of prayer can be adapted and expanded, inviting faculty, staff, and students to place ourselves in the "story" of the STM community:

- a. Our work for justice should be inseparable from our prayer, and our prayer should nourish our work. Part of our responsibility is learning how to pray with a new focus on racial justice, with particular attention to how Jesus and Sacred Scripture show us paths forward.
- b. We should acknowledge that we are part of an ongoing story, for which we are responsible for writing only a small part.
- c. We should be wary of attempting to write others into supporting roles in our own story. Faculty, administrators, and students should all be allowed to influence each other's stories without being subjugated to someone else's narrative.

## Union of Minds and Hearts

The STM is an international community where students--men and women, lay and ordained--come together for formation in the Ignatian tradition to serve as learned ministers, scholars, and leaders in the church. While appreciating the diverse backgrounds and unique gifts of each person, we strive to embody St. Paul's vision of unity in diversity (Romans 12:5) in our shared mission to serve the people of God. As an alternative to the competition and rivalry which are so characteristic of many contemporary cultures, we are called to a spirit of collaboration, shared responsibility, and mutual support in all aspects of our common life--in the classroom, the liturgy, and social and pastoral activities.

- a. Even within movements for justice, a harmful spirit of competition and rivalry can cause hurt, violence, and marginalization, usually unintentionally. As a community on pilgrimage to the Kingdom, we must remember that we are called to get there all together, rather than to arrive "in first place."
- b. As we address issues of justice, we should be honest and transparent: this work will inevitably require shifts in power, accountability, and relationship that will make some or all of us uncomfortable. This discomfort ought not overwhelm our union in the waters of Baptism and the life of Jesus
- c. We have a ministerial responsibility to witness how the Church does racial justice; we should resist power struggles and model a kenotic love that invites everyone into deeper conversion in humility.