

Sacramental Spirituality

SPIRITUALITIES, UNDERSTOOD AS MODES of lived religious experience, manifest themselves in vastly diverse ways. While part I focused largely on this history of and the theo-philosophical foundations of sacramentality, part II focuses on particular pansacramental spiritualities; that is, part I presented the theory (theology) while the present chapter offers the experience (spirituality), and then part III will explore the interdependence between the two and the resulting implications. In this brief introductory opening chapter of part II, I begin with a commentary on one of the foundational examples of pansacramental spirituality in Western Christianity: Ignatian spirituality and the Ignatian principle. I then offer three substantive case studies, each of which approach sacramental spirituality with various emphases.

The first case study examines Thomas Merton's sacramental spirituality and its concrete influence on his understanding of geographical 'place.' In his late years, 'place' became a dominant theme in his journals as he entertained the possibility of relocating. I draw on his contemplative method and theological anthropology in order to situate his sacramental worldview and its influence on his self-perceived 'place' in the world. His journey for a new place, understood in light of his sacramental spirituality, offers insight into his self-understanding and contemplative method. The role of sacramental language as a mediator offered a constructive medium for Merton as he pursued these questions.

The second case study embarks on a project of comparative theology and interfaith learning, from a Christian perspective, by exploring the spirituality of Nicholas Black Elk, the Lakota Catholic of Pine Ridge, South

Dakota. In particular, I examine four aspects of Black Elk's spirituality: the sacred hoop, the sacred pipe, the making of relatives, and the sacredness of all things. By examining the spirituality of one outside the Christian tradition, the Christian is able to better understand his own sacramental spirituality and become less scandalized by the possibility of multiple religious belonging.

The third case study turns to the literature of Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* and Wendell Berry's Port William stories as a source for sacramental spirituality. In particular, I examine anti-dualism in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, kenotic *theōsis* in Father Zosima, and the pansacramental vision of Wendell Berry's Port William Characters, all of which exhibit a spirituality connected to the sensual as mediated through sacramental categories. In the process a sacramental spirituality surfaces in a way 'of apprehending the whole of reality'—a new 'way of seeing.' The strength of employing sacramental language, which can successfully mediate between God and world, allows for the retention of an immanent God that dwells in the world, yet is not reduced to the world as such (thus a taste panentheism). The gifted prose of Dostoevsky and Berry assists in articulating this spirituality in a manner that strict philosophy and theology might not otherwise be able to do.

The Ignatian Principle

"Finding God in all things" serves as the Jesuit motto of spirituality drawing on St. Ignatius of Loyola of sixteenth century Basque nobility. This Ignatian Principle has grounded the flourishing of the largest Roman Catholic order of priests that relentlessly stresses the importance of education and remaining committed to the mission of representing the way of Jesus in all corners of the globe. His spiritual method has played an important role in affirming God both in and beyond the world. Foundational to this spirituality is a deep and reverent sacramental appreciation of finding God in all things, in which Ignatius provides an approach to understanding the pansacramentality of the cosmos. In this chapter, I draw out his spirituality, situate it within his particular context, and point to some of its theological implications.

In order to understand one's spirituality, it ought to be situated within his or her particular context. Hence, Ignatian spirituality cannot be separated from sixteenth century Spain and Basque nobility. Since the story of Ignatius is quite well-known, it is only necessary to point out a few key contextual details here. Though a contemporary of Luther, it would be misleading to place their spiritualities and respective theologies alongside

one another. This would be to oversimplify the matter, for the complexity of their contexts must be recognized in order to interpret their particular spiritualities.

Friedrich Richter, in *Martin Luther and Ignatius of Loyola*,¹ provides an engaging study on the respective contexts of Luther and Loyola. Whereas Luther's context might be characterized as one of progressive, Germanic, intellectual, and revolutionary fervor, Ignatius' context might be characterized as one of conservative, Spanish, mystical and Catholic traditionalism. At the time, Luther's Germanic context was rooted in the mind emphasizing logic, reason, and nature whereas Ignatius' context was rooted in the supernatural and supersensory, which both stressed and went beyond the sensual. Remarkably, the two great figures share much in common. Ignatius was born eight years after Luther and had his profound near-death conversion experience eight years after Luther had his near-death conversion experience. Both struggled with scruples in their ascetic life. Whereas Luther, due to his scruples, left the monastic life and rejected it as unbiblical, Ignatius delved deeper into asceticism with a renewed attitude. Armed with this new religious orientation, Ignatius understood these practices not as a means to merit God's grace, but rather as a means to give thanks to God. Shortly after his temptation to kill a 'Moor' at Montserrat, he writes that he, "decided to do great penances, no longer with an eye to satisfying for his sins so much as to please and gratify God."²

Ignatius was raised in the Loyola castle dreaming of knighthood and chivalry, and his first vocational path was that of a soldier, which was cut short when he was struck by a cannon-ball in a local skirmish. Hence, he was not one to neither back down in a fight nor succumb to setbacks, but rather pushed through times of struggle with the stubborn discipline of a soldier. This is evident in his perseverance through ascetic scruples. It is not surprising to find military imagery in his *Spiritual Exercises* and the *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*. He envisioned the Jesuits as an army of God, made up of soldiers for Christ, subordinate to the Superior General and the commander-in-chief (the vicar of Christ, the Pope), who were sent out on missions throughout the world. With his dream of military fame cut short, Ignatius became determined to "lay aside his [armed battle] garments and to don the armor of Christ."³

Ignatius' spiritual method clearly portrays this particular context and military background. A priority of the month-long *Spiritual Exercises* is

1. Richter, *Martin Luther and Ignatius Loyola*.
2. Ignatius of Loyola, "The Autobiography," chap. 2, sec. 14.
3. *Ibid.*, chap. 2, sec. 17.

to lead the retreatant through a discernment process in discovering what God's will is for him or her in the world. It is to discern and accept the mission of God's will. The *Exercises* stress the 'application of the senses' and imagination. For example, in the "Mediation on Hell" in the first week, the retreatant is asked to

imagine the length, breadth, and depth of hell . . .

ask for an interior *sense* of the pain suffered by the damned . . .

see with the eyes of the *imagination* the huge fires . . .

hear the wailing, the shrieking, the cries . . .

by [the] *sense of smell* . . . *perceive* the smoke, the sulphur, the filth, and the rotting things

by [the] *sense of touch* . . . *feel* how the flames touch the souls and burn them.⁴

The concrete sensory imagery functions to make impressions on the retreatant progressing through the exercises. Each exercise and mediation follows a similar pattern in order to bring the retreatant to discern the will of God. The heart of this sensual spirituality climaxes for the retreatant in the final contemplation of finding God in all things.

Consider how God dwells in creatures; in the elements, giving them existence; in the plants, giving them life; in the animals, giving them sensation; in human beings, giving them intelligence . . . consider God labors and works for [you] in all the creatures on the face of the earth; . . . he is working in the heavens, elements, plants, fruits, cattle, and all the rest—giving them their existence, conserving them, concurring with their vegetative and sensitive activities, and so forth . . . Consider how all good things and gifts descend from above.⁵

This passage, and many similar to it throughout the *Exercises*, provides the foundation for the Ignatian principle of 'finding God in all things.' Ignatius' worldview resonates with Aquinas in the sense that all things, people included, strive to realize their *telos* of serving and moving towards God. Thus God is to be found in all things in so far as they reveal, and assist with the movement towards, this *telos*. Rahner, a Jesuit himself, suggests that one must first understand the love of all things before one can find God in all things (the Ignatian Principle). Central to the pursuit of attaining the

4. Ignatius of Loyola, "The Spiritual Exercises," *Ignatius of Loyola*, Week 1, 5th Exercise, 65–70 (italics mine).

5. *Ibid.*, Week 4, "Contemplation to Attain Love," 235–37.

love of all things, is the movement towards *indiferencia* and, paradoxically, understanding God as beyond all things. In the context of spirituality, this is the experience of *indiferencia* in one's life, and theologically this entails understanding God as both in all things and beyond all things. This entails the possibility of a panentheistic cosmology. *Indiferencia* here does not refer to a negative apathy to all things of the world, but rather it calls for an indifference to things of the world in order to return back to God and the love of all things. "By *indiferencia* is meant the willing readiness for any command of God, an equanimity resulting from the awareness that God is always greater than all we know of him."⁶ In this sense, *indiferencia* is a very positive attitude indeed. Indifference here pertains to remaining indifferent to the pull of worldly desires and one's own selfishness rooted in sin. Think here of a soldier following his commanding officer's orders regardless of the soldier's aversion to those orders. The soldier is detached in a certain sense. This Ignatian detachment is the approach of indifference toward the obstacles of the created world in order to free oneself from them and humbly accept the will of God will no matter what that might entail. For instance, remaining indifferent to worldly desires includes rejecting the desire of wealth over poverty, health over illness, and so on. Whatever one's worldly lot may be, the Ignatian call to remain indifferent to it opens one to happily and humbly accepting God's will. Rahner remarks, "From such an attitude of *indiferencia* naturally results in the ongoing readiness to hear a new call from God to tasks other than the present ones; to continually be willing to leave those areas in which one wanted to find and serve God."⁷

Ignatian spiritual piety calls for, then, both an indifference to the world, since God is beyond the world, yet also an openness to finding God in the world through the attainment of the love of God in all things. "In short, such an *indiferencia* is a looking for God in all things."⁸ This *indiferencia* begins in the Ignatian call of *fuga saeculi*,⁹ thus flight from the world leads back to immersion in the world through indifference. Paradoxically, flight from the world is the way of deeper immersion in the world. This Christian flight from the world is not the negation of the world, which is perhaps more similar to what the Buddhist, Gnostic, or neo-Platonist¹⁰ might hold for differing reasons. *Fuga saeculi* does not entail anti-materialism, nor

6. Rahner, "The Mysticism of Loving All Things in the World according to Ignatius," 154.

7. Ibid., 152.

8. Ibid., 155.

9. "flight from the world"

10. For a challenge to the presumed Platonist rejection of materialism, see Ward, *God and the Philosophers*, 4–13.

does it entail the rejection of the world as some form of cosmic trash, but rather, according to Rahner, the Christian flight from the world "is only the response and necessary gesture toward the God who freely reveals and discloses himself and who gives himself to us in freely given love."¹¹ In one's acceptance of the God who comes through faith, and not the negation of the world as such, he or she is then "able to accept by grace their service in the world, which is his world and creation after all, as a path to him who is beyond the world," continues Rahner, "so that people will not only encounter the absolute God as in radical contradiction to the world but also as in the world."¹² To immerse oneself in the world with an open will to the will of God, it is first necessary to "flee the world" in indifference and remain open to the discernment process.

One paradoxically detaches in order to attach. One flees the selfish obstacles of the self and world in order to remain open to the God who is beyond the world. She then immerses herself back into God's world open to God's will in all circumstances. Thus, "Ignatius moves from God to the world, not the other way around."¹³ After one surrenders to the will of God and becomes indifferent to his or her own will and accepts the will of God, who is beyond the world, he or she is thrust back into the world in order to carry out God's will. This *indiferencia* is manifested in the will of the person. It is similar to how a military soldier might negate his own will and submit to the will of his superior and the mission given to him. *Indiferencia*, then, is a necessary prerequisite for the Ignatian principle of finding God in all things.¹⁴ First, one 'lets go' to his or her own will and remains open, or indifferent, to the will of God. Second, one gains the courage to reject all former paths to God as the only paths to God and remains open to looking for God in all things. In short, Ignatius turns empiricism on its head thus rejecting the adage that "seeing is believing" and affirms "believing is seeing." One must come to *believe* in the God, who is beyond all things, in order to *see* God in all things (recall Chauvet's mention of Levi-Strauss in chapter six on necessity of belief in order for a symbol to effect what it signifies). Rahner puts it thusly, "since God is bigger than everything else, he can allow himself to be found in our flight from the world and he can also come to meet us in the streets of the world."¹⁵

11. Rahner, "The Mysticism of Loving All Things in the World according to Ignatius," 152.

12. *Ibid.*, 153.

13. *Ibid.*, 154.

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*, 155.

Within his *Exercises*, Ignatius gives his society the *examen* [of the consciousness], a method of seeking God in all things and receiving the freedom to allow God's will to be carried out in the world. It proceeds in five steps. The first step emphasizes the Ignatian principle of finding God in all things. Before the final four steps (reviewing one's day, contemplating one's emotions, praying, and looking ahead to tomorrow), the first step calls for the recognition of the all-pervasive presence of God, no matter where one happens to be. Since God is the creator of all creation, including persons, and God is in all things by way of their being, God is always present—so goes the thinking here.

In a way reminiscent of Hegelian reconciliation (which is examined more in-depth in chapter eleven), Ignatius has synthesized what Rahner believes the study of religion has mistakenly separated from one another, namely the “flight from the world” on one hand and “mission within the world” on the other hand.¹⁶ Herein is a cosmic worldview which preserves the “infinitely knowable-ity” of God, while allowing for the finding of God in all things. God is deemed “infinitely knowable” in a Thomist-Rahnerian sense, which does not refer to the ease of which one can know God, but rather refers to the idea that there is so much content in God that should be known but cannot be. A distinction must be recognized between the knowability of the content of God and the human ability to know God. It is not as if there is nothing about God to be known, rather a person can know God and since God's content is infinite, there is always more to be known. This entails the unknowable-ity of God in a certain sense. In short, due to God's infinite content to be known, God remains infinitely knowable, thus also unknowable to humans—since humans cannot know God completely and perfectly.

Though Ignatius may not have had a contemporary panentheistic cosmology in mind, his spirituality affirmed a pansacramental cosmology that allows for the manifestation of God in all things. Unlike many panentheistic constructions of the cosmos, Ignatian panentheism (be it ontological or not¹⁷) places stress on God as beyond the world. It is precisely through this affirmation of God beyond the world that paradoxically allows for God to be found in the world (through all things). For, “God is more than [our images and concepts of God, whether natural or supernatural]. And as the one who is more than the world, God has broken into human existence

16. Ibid.

17. Philip Sheldrake notes that, “in Ignatius' sense of the ‘liberality’ of God, God dwells in all things and all creatures exist in God . . . All that exists, exists only in God . . . He is not reflecting about the ontology of created things but about how humans may perceive and relate to them” (Sheldrake, *Spirituality and Theology*, 141).

and has burst apart this world and what theology calls, 'nature.'"¹⁸ God is simultaneously in nature and beyond nature, thus in Ignatius we find a clear rejection of pantheism and a tendency towards pansacramentality.¹⁹ What allows for this tendency begins in the flight from the world in order to come back to the world in order to find God in all things in a sensual manner, as portrayed in the *Exercises*. Sacramentality and sacramental language assists in bridging this spirituality of Ignatius with an Ignatian theological understanding of God as both in and beyond the world. To borrow a phrase from Rahner (who draws on Aquinas), God remains the 'mystery' that is 'infinitely knowable;' that is, God is knowable only to a certain extent, thus one might find God sacramentally in all things, yet God simultaneously remains infinitely beyond all things.

For the purposes of this book, and especially part II here, The Ignatian principle of "finding God in all things" serves as a backdrop against which the following three case studies can demonstrate the particularity of lived religious experience spirituality). Further, it begins to make clear the pansacramental and panentheistic construction of the cosmos in which the Ignatian motto can be nuanced to "finding all things God" pansacramentally.

18. Rahner, "The Mysticism of Loving All Things in the World according to Ignatius," 148.

19. It would be anachronistic to suggest that Ignatius was an explicit panentheist since he did not use this term nor did he delve into its metaphysics. At best, one might make the argument that he has an implicit (and metaphorical) panentheist in similar way that Aquinas was, but I do not find that tenable or necessary at this point.