SPIRITUAL EXERCISES, SACRAMENTAL IMAGINATION, AND AESTHETIC PEDAGOGY

LATIHAN ROHANI, IMAJINASI SAKRAMENTAL DAN PEDAGOGI ESTETIS

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ABSTRAK

Bagaimana kita dapat membuat pengalaman berpartisipasi dalam Latihan Rohani berbuah di dalam kenyataan kehidupan sehari-hari? Dengan metode jukstaposisi, kita dapat menemukan bahwa imajinasi sakramental adalah jembatan antara Latihan Rohani dan realitas kehidupan kita sehari-hari. Latihan Rohani menyediakan metodologi untuk membuat imajinasi sakramental kita menjadi hidup. Imajinasi sakramental inilah yang kita hidupkan kembali setiap kali kita berpartisipasi dalam berbagai perayaan sakramental. Dalam Latihan Rohani kita diundang untuk terlibat melalui penerapan imajinasi sakramental ke dalam pengembangan komitmen kita kepada Tuhan. Tingkat kesadaran dalam komitmen inilah yang akan menjadi indikator bagi perkembangan diri estetis kita. Demikian pula, dalam menghidupi berbagai sakramen Gereja, imajinasi sakramental kita yang terasah dan terlatih lewat Latihan Rohani akan menuntun kita untuk mengapresiasi nilai estetis dalam menjadi pribadi yang semakin berkomitmen dalam kasih kepada Allah dan sesama.

***Kata Kunci**: Latihan Rohani, imajinasi sakramental, sakramen-sakramen, estetis, pedagogi Ignasian, Leonardo Boff*

ABSTRACT

How can we relate the experience of encountering God during the *Spiritual Exercises* and our experiences after we return to our daily life? Juxtapositioning the two, we can find that sacramental imagination is the bridge between the *Spiritual Exercises* and the realities of daily life. The *Spiritual Exercises* provide us with the spiritual discipline to make our sacramental imagination alive. It is also this sacramental imagination that we relive every time we participate in a sacramental celebration. In the *Spiritual Exercises*, through applying our sacramental imagination, we are invited to engage with the development of our commitment to God. The level of awareness in this regard will be an indicator for the flourishing of our aesthetic self. Similarly, in the life of the sacraments of the Church, our polished and trained

sacramental imagination will guide us to see the beauty of becoming a person ever more committed to the love of God and others.

Keywords: Spiritual Exercises, sacramental imagination, sacraments, aesthetic, Ignatian pedagogy, Leonardo Boff

INTRODUCTION: PRAYER IN THE *SPIRITUAL EXERCISES*

Prayer is an art. That is especially true when we are entering the *Spiritual Exercises*. Those who have experienced life transformation through undergoing the *Spiritual Exercises* will agree that prayer is more than just an individual effort to conquer oneself. Prayer is an art precisely because it contours our personal encounter with God's grace. The aesthetic dimension of prayer in the *Spiritual Exercises* consists in the acceptance of the exercitant of his/her own divine image granted by God. Ann W. Astell locates this aesthetic dimension in the obedience of freely accepting this personal image from God. She mentions, "Ignatius refuses to impose any particular image, lest it block the original work of art that God seeks to realize in each individual as a divine likeness."[1] Thus, we cannot say, "That person is gifted in prayer" as if a person can invoke God's grace according to one's own desire. Prayer becomes art when we allow the movement of the Holy Spirit to shape our freedom in searching for the will of God.

Prayer becomes art when we recognize that, first of all, it is God's initiative to reveal himself to us. And this revelation is entirely God's gift to the one who prays. Hence, prayer is an art because the one who prays meets with the Artist himself. The Artist in prayer is not us. It is God. Similarly, with an artist who paints on a canvas, God is the Artist, and we are the canvas. We need to maintain the stillness of our surface in order to let God paint what God wants. In this sense, our effort in prayer should be an effort to entrust our surface to the artist, to make every brush stroke or splashes of paint from God's hands land properly on our surface.

[1] Ann W. Astell, *Eating Beauty* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 196.

Even though this may seem to be somewhat passive, it is actually the active dimension of our prayer. As God's canvas, in prayer we realize that we are nothing but a particular type of canvas. There is no one perfect canvas. Just like the surface of every canvas is created out of its woven strands, each one of us provides God with a different pattern of strands on the surface of our canvas. Sometimes, there is also dirt or other materials entrapped within the strands. Sometimes we are not so 'white' as a canvas. We are not a perfect canvas. We need to actively accept this reality while surrendering it to God.

Prayer thus needs to follow a kind of 'regulation'. I put the word 'regulation' in quotation marks because I want to avoid the strict sense of the word. The *Spiritual Exercises* are known as a method of prayer which is filled with many regulations. More than simply regulations on how to do different types of prayer (meditation, contemplation, or *lectio divina*), we must not forget that all of these regulations were first of all St. Ignatius's own fruit of reflection. They are his own way of formulating the deepest experience of encountering God authentically through following the movement of the Holy Spirit.

Thus, we shall follow the directives in the *Spiritual Exercises* without forgetting that they are meant to bring about our own 'authentic' way of encountering God through the Holy Spirit. The Catechism of the Catholic Church clearly states the meaning of authentic prayer from different schools of spirituality as that "refractions of the one pure light of the Holy Spirit."[2] The *Spiritual Exercises* are a means for us to support our own cooperative openness to the movement of the Holy Spirit. This is also the reason why we have to be careful not to belittle them. It is through these directives that we can recognize how God is trying to speak to us through the teaching of St. Ignatius of Loyola.

We inherited the *Spiritual Exercises* as the methodology of St. Ignatius to encounter God through intimacy with the Holy Spirit. Jesus himself mentioned that he is "the way, the

[2] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #2683-2684.

truth, and the life" (John 14:6). Just as Jesus provides us with the path needed to reach the Father, so St. Ignatius provides us with a spiritual discipline to follow a path guided by the Holy Spirit leading to the Father. However, the discipline of the *Spiritual Exercises* will not provide us with an extraordinary path. Indeed, the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius are influenced by the mystic experience he received at the Cardoner. However, the discipline of the *Spiritual Exercises* provides a more concrete and far-reaching pedagogy rather than just a glimpse of personal ecstasy for the exercitants. The Cardoner mystical experience influenced St Ignatius' view of all reality in a more holistic way. It also influenced his own personal life as an apostolic endeavor. Harvey D. Egan summarizes this mystic as an all-encompassing guide to experience life in its depth. He mentions "Cardoner experience altered radically the way Ignatius viewed all reality. His particular mystical horizon was born."[3]

This research aims to reveal the sacramental view of the *Spiritual Exercises* which affects the retreatants' engagement with God's grace throughout their daily experience. The importance of this research lies in the fact that the *Spiritual Exercises* offers more than just a limited period of self-cultivation during the retreat. The link between *Spiritual Exercises* and our daily engagement with God's grace is sacramental imagination. The repeated structure of prayers in the *Spiritual Exercises* reveals the process of creating habit in cultivating our imagination to become sacramental imagination. Thus, the point of view of Sacramentology as a hermeneutical methodology is also needed in order to reveal the relevance of the *Spiritual Exercises* with our daily realities as the locus of God's grace. Through this process we will eventually arrive at the conclusion that the *Spiritual Exercises* cultivates our sacramental imagination by providing us with an aesthetic pedagogy.

[3] Harvey D. Egan, *Ignatius Loyola the Mystic* (Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1987), 44.

FROM IMAGINATION TO SACRAMENTAL IMAGINATION

The *Spiritual Exercises* inspires many retreatants personally. That is undeniably true. But, at the same time, it also nurtures the sacramental imagination of the exercitants. As such, it does not only lead them to move inwardly in order to be one with God. More importantly, it leads them to love God throughout the multifaceted realities of this world. The spiritual discipline of the *Spiritual Exercises* leads us to encounter and cooperate with the triune God's economy of salvation in this ever-changing world. Only through allowing the imagination to be guided by the Holy Spirit can the exercitant relive this kind of prayerful experience also the daily life after the retreat.

The *Spiritual Exercises* guide the exercitants to move from personal sanctification to social sanctification. This is the direction of one's progress during the *Spiritual Exercises* which works in tandem with the development of their prayer. The imagination of the exercitants is the perfect instrument for this prayer. Rather than trying to force our mind to know, to uncover secrecies behind the unknown, or to uncover the logical connection among random occurrences in society, our imagination is properly employed if we can start appreciating the existence of profound simplicity in the love of God. St. Ignatius teaches us that "it is not knowing much, but realizing and relishing things interiorly, that contents and satisfies the soul." (The *Spiritual Exercises* #2) Imagination helps our hearts to contemplate when it leads us to move from acknowledging and then appreciating the profound simplicity of all existence. Starting with our own personal existence, we can use our imagination to internally relish the spiritual interconnectedness among created beings. Taking the time to dwell within this inner relishing is what St. Ignatius encouraged us to do through 'repetitions.'

Prayer repetition is more than just meditating the same prayer materials consecutively. It is a period for the exercitants to hone in on the movements of their emotions during prayer. The work of imagination leads the emotions to recognize the movements of God's grace behind

every desolations or consolations. The aim of repetitions is to make the heart even more receptive to the unique guidance of the Holy Spirit leading us throughout these spiritual movements. The *Spiritual Exercises* utilizes the power of imagination to direct our intellect, memory, and will to create a habit of spiritual discernment. The research of Moshe Sluhovsky recognized this link between imagination and spiritual habit when he mentions, "it is through divine grace, intellectual cognition, and methodic exercises of the imagination that one learns how to differentiate among these spirits and to discern their impacts."[4]

When the heart becomes ever more docile to the movements of the Holy Spirit in our emotions, we can focus our attention to the directions of God's leading hand. Our imagination itself becomes more than just a creative faculty for thinking outside the box. It becomes a sacramental imagination because it is imbued with and led by our faith in the invisible and merciful God. St. Ignatius did not use the word 'sacramental imagination' itself. But his mysticism is clearly a sacramental mysticism. In this regard Egan comments that "the Exercises show clearly Ignatius's sacramental, katapathic emphasis. …The Exercises foster an increasing transparency of the images, symbols, and mysteries of salvation history."[5]

Sacramental imagination is more than just a way of seeing everything as connected with God. Nor is it a daydreaming about finding the hidden presence of God in our life. It is about the symbolic composition of our existence as a channel of God's grace in this world. In the *Spiritual Exercises*, St. Ignatius encourages the exercitants to do the composition of place vividly[6]. He directs the exercitants to apply their senses as a part of composition of place. But we need to understand that these senses are not merely our bodily senses but the integration of our spiritual senses with the bodily senses. During our liturgical prayer, when we see a certain "symbol," we probably ask, "What does it mean?" Surely, symbols are often said to be a

[4] Moshe Sluhovsky, "St. Ignatius of Loyola's "Spiritual Exercises" and Their Contribution to Modern Introspective Subjectivity," *The Catholic Historical Review*, vol. 99, no. 4 (October 2013): 654.
[5] Egan, *Ignatius Loyola the Mystic*, 142, 144.
[6] Cf., The *Spiritual Exercises* #159, 208, 226.

medium of meaning. But the richness of a symbol goes beyond the lexical meaning being conveyed through it. Symbols provide us with a recognition of the real beauty.

When we use our imagination in personal prayer or in the liturgy, we apply the use of symbols because symbols allow us to compose our own position in the midst of a constellation of meanings. In regards with the use of symbolism in our daily life or in liturgy, Christina M. Gschwandtner mentions that Paul Ricœur's understanding of symbolism as an augmentation of reality can help us understand the reason behind the use of symbols in our liturgical prayer. She mentions, "Ricœur thinks of symbols as establishing a clear connection between the verbal and the nonverbal, inasmuch as the symbol 'corresponds' to something in our experienced reality."[7] The beauty of symbols is revealed through our own engagement with the mystery revealed through the symbols.

Symbols are beautifully attractive as long as they offer us a glimpse into the mystery and pull us into the mystery itself. Symbols are beautiful because they express an existential depth which continually attracts us to enter into it. Composing our lives as the symbol of God's living grace is a process of continually engaging with the inexhaustible depth of the mystery of God's transcendent grace. When we realize that our imagination alone is not enough to capture this depth, we infuse it with our faith so that we can try to enter into the mystery behind each grace that we receive. Gradually, what we perceive as pure symbol becomes a sacrament. This contemplative process will nurture our imagination so that it will become sacramental imagination.

The transformation of one's imagination through the *Spiritual Exercises* has its background in the transformation of imagination of St. Ignatius himself. The research of Ivan Platovnjak regarding the importance of imagination in Ignatian spirituality recognized that the faith journey of St. Ignatius redirected to God his way of utilizing his imagination for his

[7] Christina M. Gschwandtner, *Reading Religious Ritual with Ricoeur: Between Fragility and Hope* (London: Lexington Books, 2021), 125.

conversion. He mentions, "Ignatius did not transform his imagination by himself with his own mind or through spiritual activities. Rather, it was transformed by God who revealed Himself to him by the grace of imagination."[8] Similarly, when we try to contemplate the Holy Family and we start to imagine the realities of our own family, we place ourselves in a constellation of meaning about the reality of holiness within a family. We may find that it is the depth of familial love that gives the meaning of holiness to every hardship each member endures for their family. If one member cannot offer the presence of familial love, each other's trust and self-abdication will gradually diminish. The process of continually trying to dwell in this loving relationship within our family itself is the mystery behind what makes a family holy. The trajectory of this awareness will lead us to the faithful God, whose unconditional love always pulls us mysteriously back to him, as a member of his holy family.

In this example, our imagination becomes sacramental when, from the various realities of enduring love in our own family, we gather as manifestations of holiness, the projection of God's own abundant love given as grace to each family. Through sacramental imagination, we will not only be able to imagine the complexities of loving other people as something holy. We will also be initiated into penetrating through the profound mystery of God's faithful love. Even though we can never fully understand this profound mystery, we are left with the desire to want it more. Sacramental imagination, eventually, does not give us the satisfaction of capturing the whole reality of God's mystery. It gives us the motivation to reinitiate ourselves into everlasting dialogue with the source of the mystery itself.

SACRAMENTAL IMAGINATION IN THE LIFE OF THE SACRAMENTS

Sacramental imagination becomes the bridge between our prayer during the *Spiritual Exercises* and the profound realities of God's mysterious grace in our life which we celebrate

[8] Ivan Platovnjak, "The Importance of Imagination in Ignatian Spirituality," accessed July 11, 2023, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330998742_The_importance_of_imagination_in_ignatian_spirituality

through the sacraments. What is the role of sacraments in our life? It is to liberate the grace of God from the oppression of our hectic life. Indeed, we can receive the seven sacraments (most Catholics will receive six sacraments) as if they were merely regulations from the Church. However, the sacraments are more than that. They are symbols of God's liberating grace in our life. Leonardo Boff, in his book *Sacraments of Life, Life of the Sacraments*, provides us with a clear link between sacraments and the symbols of grace in our everyday realities.

Boff starts his explanation on sacrament by acknowledging the human ability to decipher meaning. According to Boff, every human being has as the initial endeavor in their life "to read and to interpret."[9] Our life's experience, according to Boff, is the environment of our process of deciphering meaning. During those courses of experiences, we encounter various objects within events that fill us with awe and wonder. To find the cause of that awe and wondering is the starting point of our deciphering process. Once we are able to decipher it, we domesticate that cause as our own treasure, as a certain meaning of a certain event. Eventually, we get used to the object. We become *habituated* to the object. We long to make another encounter with the object that gives it a certain meaning.

This human ability to decipher meaning, Boff mentions, is called a *sacramental* way of perceiving this world in the sense that "things are bearers of salvation and a Mystery."[10] Within this frame of thinking, every object of human experience has the possibility to become sacrament. The tendency to widen the scope of the word 'sacrament' has been acknowledged in the field of sacramental theology. Patrick Sherry, for example, recognizes St. Ignatius Loyola's spirituality as a proof for understanding the sacramentality of the world. He mentions "we can both honor the development of the traditional sacramental theology of the Church and at the same time welcome modern discussions of the wider sacramentality of things, …, as well

[9] Leonardo Boff, *Sacraments of Life, Life of the Sacraments*, trans. John Drury (Washington: The Pastoral Press, 1987), 1.
[10] Ibid., 4.

as perhaps articulating St. Ignatius of Loyola's ideal of finding God in all things."[11]

When a certain object is deciphered, the object then becomes a symbol and the event accompanying that object becomes a source for a ritual. Thus, when a deciphered meaning is to be called up again from a certain symbol, one needs to re-evoke the event accompanying that symbol (i.e. by performing a ritual). Boff explains this by telling the story of how his family's remembrances come back to life whenever he drinks from his family mug, or sees the cigarette butt his father left him, or even eats bread that to him is as not tasty as that of his mother. Sacramental perception allows those symbols from his family to become a real part of his life, which gives a series of meaning to Boff himself. Boff also realized that, on the other hand, it is he (Boff) himself who transforms objects from his family into symbols of meaning into sacraments. And it is also he who allows those meanings to penetrate his life and make it effective in his own life.

Thus, what really happens during the process of sacramental perception is a transformation from what is immanent (i.e., the objects: cigarette butt, bread, mug, etc.) into something transcendent (i.e., the meaning which the objects brought, the remembrance of persons in Boff's family). At the same time, the presentation of a meaning from the object makes the object itself becomes a 'transparent' medium for the meaning. In short, the structure of sacramental thinking is: a movement from the immanent' s transparency to the transcendental reality. This is the structure of deciphering sacramental perception in our experience.

The immanent-transparent-transcendent structure of sacramental perception will lead us to the recognition of another dimension within our worldly experience: the religious dimension of our experience. When every object we meet during the course of our worldly experience can make present the transcendental reality (that is, what is beyond the physical

[11] Patrick Sherry, "The Sacramentality of Things," *New Blackfriars*, vol. 89, no. 1023 (September 2008): 589.

existence of the object itself, for example memories of a person contained inside a locket), our transparency to the object brings us closer to the Absolute Reality behind every object. Eventually, this structure will lead us to the recognize the ultimate transcendental reality: God.

Boff admits that this revelation of divine reality depends on our faith in God. He states "[i]nsofar as people allow themselves, by toil and effort, to be taken and penetrated by God, they are rewarded with the divine transparence of all things."[12] Human faith, in this regard, can be defined as our ability to perceive God's divine revelation during the course of our history. Everything then becomes symbols not only of mundane reality but also, and foremost, of divine reality. This reality is located within every object, every event, every human life story. The accumulation of life-stories as history is the place where the divine reality is revealed to people. In other words, this world and its history itself is a sacrament (in its most divine sense of the word) since it *indicates* and *reveals* God. Boff concluded that "revelatory function a sacrament reveals, communicates, and expresses God present in it."[13] The sacraments function as facilitators of our encountering God. And it is this encounter that becomes the center of our relationship with God.

What we celebrate as Christians, essentially, is the encounter between God and us through the sacraments. In Christianity, the celebration of that encounter began with the history of the Hebrews in the Old Testament. It is rooted in their history of God's saving act throughout His encounters with the Hebrews' forefathers (i.e., the prophets), and culminated in the history of the 'direct' encounter of God and humanity through Jesus Christ as the Son of God through whom God's message of salvation is renewed. Throughout this story of encounter, sacraments in Christianity point to a single meaning: God's love for us which graces us with salvation.

What has developed since the time of Jesus as Church (that is, the gatherings of those who have faith in Jesus, who deciphered meaning from Jesus' life history) is the bearer of that

[12] Boff, *Sacraments of Life, Life of the Sacraments*, 30.
[13] Boff, *Sacraments of Life, Life of the Sacraments*, 31-32.

history of salvation. Boff insists on our need to be convinced that Jesus is the author of the sacraments of the Church. It is through encounter with Jesus that we are able to learn of God's love and salvific plan for us. Therefore, the remembrance of Jesus as it is preserved and celebrated within the Church is the focus of sacraments in Christianity. The Church, in turn, is to be called the living sacrament of Jesus Christ. Not only is the tradition of Jesus being preserved within the Church, he himself also becomes the sole source of grace for the faithful, to the extent that their daily lives will in turn becomes media of grace for the world. Eventually, our engagement with the 7 sacraments will lead us to perceive the existence of the whole world as imbued with the incarnational dimension of Jesus Christ and thus open the way for sacramental perception of the whole world. Following Boff, Granados expresses the importance of this perception when he mentions, "all reality is sacramental, because in it God manifests himself and acts. …The Ignatian motto—to see God in all things and all things in God—takes on renewed meaning as an expression of this new mysticism of open eyes."[14] Jesus, in short, becomes the living sacrament through the existential being of the Church.

The unity of Jesus and his faithful inside the Church is not limited only to Sundays or church buildings, but is also integrated to the totality of Christians' life dimensions. Hence, God exists through the Church when God's grace penetrates the whole dimension of human life. That wholeness of human life is symbolized in the Church as seven major moments of human life during which God is present. Those seven major moments as fundamental axes of human life are symbolized in the seven sacraments of the Church.

The sacrament of baptism celebrates our birthday here on earth not only as a biological birth but also as a grace from God in becoming children of God. The sacrament of the Eucharist celebrates the support God grants us not only through our daily meal but also through the sharing of divine life through Jesus. The sacrament of reconciliation celebrates the

[14] José Granados, "The Liturgy: Presence of A New Body, Source of A Fulfilled Time," *Communio: International Catholic Review,* 39 (Winter 2012): 532.

remembrance of the Father's love which leads us to return to the embrace of the Father. The sacrament of confirmation celebrates the grace of God which supports the transition of our faith into mature faith. The sacrament of matrimony celebrates the grace of life-sharing through unity in God's love with our life-partner. The sacrament of anointing of the sick celebrates the grace of surrendering to God every suffering during sickness and near-death moments. The sacrament of ordination celebrates the grace of special life-offerings through unity with God as his servant in the Church. These are the moments which come to be celebrated as our own encounter with God's major moments of salvation in human lives. What was celebrated as the remembrance of Jesus' teachings is now joined with the reality of our own lives as we participate in the celebration.

The integration of sacraments throughout the faithful's entire life is effective as long as our sacramental imagination perceives them as channels of God's saving grace. Our active participation in becoming the living grace of God through the sacraments cultivates our own desire to perceive everything in our life as the sacrament of God's grace. Anthony Godzieba beautifully explains the necessity of relating the sacrament with our desire. He mentions, "[w]hat sacraments 'want,' then, is our transformation by means of these intensities, an effect that can occur only when we fulfill the most fundamental 'desire' of the sacraments: that we participate."[15] The efficacy of the sacraments is, needless to say, *ex opere operato* from God's point of view. However, what is needed from us as our response is to make this grace of God alive within us. In other words, our acceptance of the meaning of each sacrament, of letting God's grace through the sacraments which transform the person who receives them, is an absolute need. Even if God's grace is definitively victorious, it needs our cooperation in affirming that we will cooperate with God's grace in order to make it effective in concrete ways.

There are always two ways of deciphering the grace of God through the sacraments.

[15] Anthony J. Godzieba, "The Catholic Sacramental Imagination and the Access/Excess of Grace," *New Theology Review* (August 2008): 23.

The sacraments, as explained previously, are essentially symbols. According to Boff, the faithful must be able to put away the "diabolic movement" and get closer to the "symbolic movement" which the sacraments could induce[16]. The "symbolic movement" brings human closer to God, in order to unite them God. The "diabolic movement" brings in human the feeling of threaten by God's presence through the sacrament. The signs of "symbolic movement" are linked with faith. They nurture faith by expressing it, by making it concrete. It also brings together the three dimensions of time into a single act of salvation from God. It remembers the past, celebrates the present, and anticipates the future. On the contrary, the "diabolic movement" tends to distort sacrament into mere ritualism, or spiritual satisfaction, when one receives it repeatedly without the consciousness of its meaning. It can also be a kind of magical symbolism which tends to treat sacrament as self-fulfilling energy that does not need human cooperation. The act of human affirmation of God's saving grace through symbolic movement is what leads humans to an experience of ongoing conversion. Sacrament is more than a performed ritual or a magical symbolism. It must be enlivened by those who receive it. In Boff's words, "A sacrament without conversion is condemnation. A sacrament with conversion is salvation."[17]

Thus, our engagement with God's grace through the seven sacraments liberates the grace of God in our daily life. God's grace can be hidden under the dust of our hectic days. But it can also be hidden under the guise of a routine life of faith as norms, which actually may shackle our true encounter with God. The ever-renewed question that always reappears in our consciousness as persons of faith is 'Do you want to see your life experience with the eye of faith?' Answering 'yes' to this question means that we allow it to be deciphered not as a mere human experience but as an 'encounter with the divine' experience. By answering 'yes', we also allow ourselves to be transformed eventually into a 'living sacrament' of God, an '*alter Christus*'. And this is precisely the role of the *Spiritual Exercises* within our sacramental life:

[16] Boff, *Sacraments of Life, Life of the Sacraments*, 83-85.
[17] Ibid., 92.

to reveal the beauty of the exercitants through nurturing their commitment to live in God's grace.

SACRAMENTAL IMAGINATION AND THE AESTHETICAL PEDAGOGY OF THE *SPIRITUAL EXERCISES*

The *Spiritual Exercise* seeks to actualize the highest beauty of a person through praying with various living sacraments in the life of the exercitants. St. Ignatius encourages the exercitants to formally receive the sacraments of reconciliation and the Eucharist in order to sustain a deeper progress in doing the exercises.[18] However, we must be aware also of the fact that the *Spiritual Exercises* lead the exercitants from finding each one's personal beauty into finding the beauty of all things created by God. St. Ignatius employed the use of imagination throughout the *Spiritual Exercises* in order to embody God's grace in our life through the recognition of the graces brought by Jesus' life and mission. However, in the last contemplation, St. Ignatius wants us to specially recognize that grace as a symbol of God's true love. Heinrich Pfeiffer, SJ recognizes the direction of transformation of our imagination in the *Spiritual Exercises*. He mentions, that when "retreatants engage in the final 'Contemplation to Gain Love,' they imagine themselves 'standing before God our Lord, and the Angels and the Saints interceding for [them]' so that they might receive the grace of true love."[19] Towards this transformation, the sacraments which each retreatant formally receives during the Exercises are directed. During the *Spiritual Exercises*, the conversion of each exercitant is actualized by receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation and is then nurtured through the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

Throughout the whole journey of the *Spiritual Exercises*, this conversion is exercised

[18] Cf., The *Spiritual Exercises* #18, 19, 42, 44, 209.
[19] Heinrich Pfeiffer, SJ, "St. Ignatius and the Art of Andrea Pozzo," trans. Richard Moszka, *Artes de México*, *Arte y espiritualidad jesuitas II: Contemplación para alcanzar amor*, no. 76, (September 2005): 96.

along with the aesthetic cultivation of the retreatants. Juan Plazola mentions that "Ignatian spirituality was thus aligned with an appreciation for and practice of creative art leading to spiritual contemplation."[20] Needless to say, our beauty is more than an external beauty. Our aesthetic self becomes transparent due to its transformation into transcendental beauty. It is a beauty that is refined as we try to overcome challenges from life through various trials and errors. It is not only our talents that are developed through various trials and errors, but also our own committed selves.

St. Ignatius reminds us that it is in becoming an obedient servant like Jesus that we can nurture our commitment to do our best while accepting our limitations as human beings. The meditations and contemplations after the first week are meant to be the trigger to further awaken the capacity to love within the exercitants. Our prayers during the *Spiritual Exercises*, then, become an exercise for self-transformation of the exercitant so that it does not become a result of mere personal endeavor in becoming a good person. Instead, it comes as the result of habitually self-appropriating every life experience as the mediation of God's grace. Patrick H. Byrne explains that "[s]elf-appropriation heightens our awareness and understanding of ourselves as attentive, intelligent, reasonable, responsible and loving."[21] We can see the real beauty within us when we experience the transformation of our true self into an obedient servant who is willing to love like God.

Sacramental imagination plays an important part in this awakening process. St. Ignatius wants the retreatants to really adhere to the application of the senses during prayer. These senses are spiritual senses which work in conjunction with our bodily senses. Just as our bodily senses are imbued with muscle memories, our spiritual senses are imbued with memories of commitments. St. Ignatius warns us that our contemplations should not be an

[20] Juan Plasola, SJ, "Ignatius of Loyola and the Art of the Jesuits," trans. Christoper Winks, *Artes de México, Arte y espiritualidad jesuitas II: Contemplación para alcanzar amor*, no. 76, (September 2005): 93.
[21] Patrick H. Byrne, "Discernment and Self-Appropriation," *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia Inhabiting the Frontiers of Thought: The Contribution of Jesuit Philosophers to 20th Century Philosophy* (2020): 1420.

experience of becoming spectators or movie directors. We need to be mentally active while contemplating. We need to activate our spiritual senses through reliving the memories of commitments as our background in contemplating the life of Jesus. In this way we can activate sacramental imagination in our daily life as the instrument of God's grace.

What are memories of commitment? Every day, surely, we must strive with all our might. But at the same time, we also need to maintain the awareness that our ability is not infinite. This awareness will enable us to surrender to God, the source of our strength, when we are confronted with the limits of our ability. By surrendering to God as we strive, we are committing our lives according to the divine truth. Vincent J. Duminuco mentions that "in the process of the *Spiritual Exercises* a perfect description of the pedagogical role of teacher as one whose job is not merely to inform but to help the student progress in the truth."[22] If we remain faithful in this process of growth, we will move beyond external beauty and become aware of the transcendent beauty of life. Each time we are able to surrender to God's truth in our efforts, we transcend our own beauty and draw closer to his beauty. We use symbols every day in our lives to point out and to make us aware of the invisible divine truth that continues to beautify our lives. With the help of symbols, we inscribe the various stages of our own growth efforts getting closer to the divine truth so that we may become ever more aware of the presence of this beauty. Herein lies the actualization of memories of commitment.

Eventually, throughout the whole of the *Spiritual Exercises*, the exercitants will get accustomed to engage with their living symbols in order to evoke the memories of commitment. Hence, the *Spiritual Exercises* build a kind of discipline within the exercitants so that they can always relive the experience of encounter with their own aesthetic self which is inseparable from the divine aesthetic. In turn, this discipline will become a living pedagogy for the

[22] Vincent J. Duminuco, "Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach," in *Ignatian Pedagogy: Classic and Contemporary Texts on Jesuit Education from St. Ignatius to Today*, ed: José Mesa (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2017), 376.

retreatants to cultivate their ongoing conversion in an aesthetic way. Spiritually awakened persons are those who are sensitive to and follow the movement of the Holy Spirit towards divine truth. They are the ones who can sense and understand the spiritual context of everything in life as an art in itself, just as God is the main artist in our prayer.

THE AESTHETIC PEDAGOGY OF THE *SPIRITUAL EXERCISES* FOR EDUCATION

What is the contribution of sacramental imagination as the link between the *Spiritual Exercises* and to our own daily realities? I would like to propose an application of sacramental imagination by way of embodying aesthetic pedagogy from the *Spiritual Exercises* to the field of education. As mentioned, symbols are a medium which conveys meaning. But at the same time, they also invite us to reach the ultimate beauty of life. Therefore, symbols are not used only to point to the end of a historical event or a thing's existence.

When an event in our personal history ends, memories about it continue. When things that have existed in this world end, traces of them remain. Memories of our loved ones or the geographic location of our home remain within us for the rest of our lives. Although our memory may leave us with only a few traces, those memories and traces of our life continue to exist and sustain our lives with a foundation on which to hope for a better future. In this sense, symbols are said to have educational power. To educate children about spirituality, symbolic literary approach has been developed as one of its tools. It is "an approach that favors a process of retrieval of the meaning that had been generated in the past and is now fading."[23] Through the power of symbols, we are able to return to our original state and continue to grow even more. Symbols, thus, not only support our life by their anamnestic power. They also gradually educate our life's commitment as the locus of our aesthetic self.

Education can employ the use of symbols to cultivate memories of commitment for

[23] Adrian-Mario Gellel, "Towards A Symbol Literacy Approach in the Education of Children," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, vol. 23, no. 2 (2018): 114-5.

the students. We can use, for example, the symbol of the cross in the classroom in a contemplative way. We all know that the cross is no longer a symbol that points to the punishment of criminals for their sins. More than 2,000 years ago, Jesus, who testified to God's great love through his various ministries, renewed the meaning of the cross. He who was slandered by the scribes and Pharisees of the time and put to death on a cross by the Roman army transposed the old meaning of the cross after he was resurrected from the dead by the power of God. This transposition gave a new meaning to the cross. The cross came to be used as a symbol pointing to the triumph of God's love that transcends the complex and multifaceted realities of our daily struggle in loving. The cross can be used as a symbol to reflect upon the depth of our own commitment in testifying about God's love in our life.

In the classroom context, we can apply methods of the *Spiritual Exercises* to contemplate the beauty of Jesus' cross in the context of the dedication of a person trying to be committed to God's love. Through the symbol of Jesus hanging on the cross as the trigger, we can help the students to relive their own experiences in commitment to love others like Jesus. For example, we help recall memories of the students' experiences in doing social work through contemplating the testimonies of social workers. Juxtaposition of Jesus' own commitment in carrying the cross with the social workers' own experience of trying to dedicate themselves in social work will help the students to transform their own motivation in dedicating their lives to help other people in need.

In her effort to utilize sacramental imagination to teach Catholic Social Teaching in the classroom, Susan Crawford Sullivan mentions that cultivating motivation is the crucial aspect in this matter. She found that "[s]tudents actively consider how civic, moral, and religious traditions (Catholic or other) may have shaped their motivations for doing this type of work and learn to articulate why they feel called to engage in social change leadership."[24]

[24] Susan Crawford Sullivan, "Catholic Social Teaching, Community-Based Learning, and the Sacramental Imagination" in *Becoming Beholders: Cultivating Sacramental Imagination and Actions in College Classrooms*,

The message is clear: without the use of symbols from our traditions, especially our faith tradition, to keep the heart's motivation to serve others alive, social work will become just another duty or even worse, burden. Jesus' commitment to love revealed through the symbol of the cross will trigger this kind of transformation in dedication. It is through rising from a fall after carrying the burden of the cross that we can be sure about our hearts being open and alive for other people. This kind of awareness will reveal the aesthetic dimension of our own progress in becoming coworkers of Jesus in carrying the cross.

The aesthetic methodology of the *Spiritual Exercises* can help us in the field of education by liberating the beauty each student has. The beauty of *becoming* a fully balanced person is seldom realized. When education tends to provide tools for mastering information technology, the *Spiritual Exercises* can help us in liberating the aesthetic development of students in order to nurture their social commitment in a proper direction. I do not intend to criticize the informational technology as the cause of difficulties in social engagement. I simply want to underline the complex change of our social interactions in the social networking system. The thoughts of Katherine G. Schmidt illustrate the need to remedy this change. She mentions that "our social configurations are not only changed by technology, but that the picture is much more complicated. In fact, our technological habits reflect deep changes in our social configurations."[25] A person's beauty is revealed in more than just that person's proficiency in gathering information. Fidelity in commitment is the measure of our aesthetic self. This indicator is invisible. Nevertheless, it is an essential indicator of our life's development. And that is next direction of our future task in applying the *Spiritual Exercises* in the virtual era.

eds: Karen E. Eifler & Thomas M. Landy (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2014), 153.

[25] Katherine G. Schmidt, *Virtual Communion: Technology of the Internet and the Catholic Sacramental Imagination* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2020), 105.

CONCLUSION

Sacramental life is essential in making the *Spiritual Exercises* bear fruit in the life of the exercitants. Just as the Catholic Church engages with sacraments as the living symbols of God's grace, so the *Spiritual Exercises* provide us with a methodology to really engage with the symbols of our own commitment to cooperate with God's grace. Through the use of sacramental imagination, we can recognize the depth of beauty which God instills throughout the realities of our lives. Sustained by God's grace, we are led to recognize the various stages of commitment in our life. The various symbolic encounters we experience through the *Spiritual Exercise*s will be transformed into symbols of our thankful heart. In this way, the *Spiritual Exercises* utilize the power of symbols to help the exercitants realize their transcendental beauty. In this regard, we still need to develop various interdisciplinary methodologies to exercise the use of sacramental imagination in the field of education.

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