

SPIRITUALITY

- Topic: Prophetic Voices
Convener: Thomas McElligott, Saint Mary's College of California
Moderator: Ray Maria McNamara, University of Portland
Presenters: Annemarie S. Kidder, Ecumenical Theological Seminary, Detroit
Edward P. Hahnenberg, Xavier University, Cincinnati

The first of the two presenters, Annemarie Kidder, used the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola as an interpretative tool in a reflection on the prophetic voice of ETTY HILLESUM as found in her published diary and letters. Kidder began by first summarizing the *Spiritual Exercises* as a three step process whereby an individual grows in the awareness of the presence of God: (1) examining and monitoring one's self and soul as the dwelling place of God; (2) reflecting on self in relation to the world and other people; and (3) experiencing the unity of God, self, and the world, resulting in an ability to find God in all things and to become an instrument of God in the world. For the remainder of the paper, Kidder used direct quotes from Hillesum's writings to draw parallels between the three-step process named above and Hillesum's spiritual transformation; a transformation that changed her understanding of self, God, and the world.

The first stage of spiritual transformation, the monitoring of one's interior self, is reflected in Hillesum's growing awareness of her soul, first as the source of her strength and ultimately as the place where God dwells within her own person. This unfolding awareness of the presence of God within, gave way to Hillesum's experience of the second stage of spiritual transformation, a new way of seeing one's self in relationship to the world. In this stage, she began to recognize that her sense of identity in the world was shaped by who she was internally rather than by the defining presence of a male figure. She also came to understand that forgiveness of others begins with a forgiveness of one's self. Finally, Hilleum's spiritual transformation reached its fullness as she began to recognize a unity of self, God, and the world that left her with a pervading experience of peace and love so profound that she became the source of comfort and consolation for those awaiting execution, like herself, in the German concentration camp of Auschwitz in July 1942. Kidder concluded by highlighting the fact that in her diary, Hillesum gave witness to what Ignatius calls a contemplative in action, a mystic who discerns the Divine amidst the mundane, love amidst hatred, and a wholeness amidst external fragmentation.

In the second essay of this session, Edward Hahnenberg presented a paper in which he discussed vocational discernment as "prophetic discernment" using two different trajectories: the first Protestant, the second Catholic. Hahnenberg introduces the Protestant focus by highlighting Martin Luther's understanding of vocation; an acknowledgement that every work, every way of life can be considered a calling coming from God. This call entails a loving presence to others within the context of our daily lives. Hahnenberg then shifts to Karl Barth moves beyond Luther, claiming that vocation is broader than employment, broader than a

particular state of life or sphere of influence. Rather, vocation is the person, seen as a unique creation place by God in a particular time, at a particular place, and gifted with particular abilities, disabilities, experiences, and associations.

Hahnenberg uses the work of Karl Rahner to represent the Catholic approach to vocation or call. Unlike Barth who views call from a secular perspective, Rahner's understanding of vocation focuses more on the internal call of God found deep in the soul, specifically seen in the priesthood and religious life. Rahner approaches the issue of call by insisting that our unique individuality flows not only from nature but also from grace; a specific and unique event of love, the offer of God's very self. Basing his understanding of vocational discernment on Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*, Rahner describes a resonance that occurs when there is a "match" between one's basic sense of self before God and the concrete choice one is discerning. In other words, the Divine plan does not lie behind us in the mind of God; it lies out ahead of us in our actions lived in harmony with the gift of grace.

For Barth, vocation is the "place of responsibility" where the Divine call meets us; the whole context within which a particular person lives. Rahner, on the other hand, views vocation as less about where we are called from and more about what we are called toward. For both men, love of neighbor is a direct result of the Divine summons. Hahnenberg concludes by suggesting that discernment within the context of our postmodern and deeply pained world is one of extro-version—a turning outward, opening to the other, particularly the *suffering* other. This conversion gives rise to a spirituality that is shifted away from a directionless detachment towards an oriented openness—a spirituality of solidarity.

Both presentations generated several questions, comments, and suggestions for further research. In a brief business session following the discussion, various possible topics were suggested for the session in 2011, all focused on the convention theme of "All the Saints."

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