

Affectivity

Contemporary developments enable greater precision on the role of the affections in the spiritual life than is found in most traditional literature.

Bernard Lonergan distinguishes non-intentional from intentional feelings. Non-intentional feelings include states like anxiety and fatigue, which have causes, and trends like hunger and thirst, which have goals. They are non-intentional inasmuch as they do not arise out of an apprehension of their causes or goals or of any object. They occur, and from their occurrence one diagnoses the cause or goal. Intentional feelings are responses to apprehended objects. The major classes of objects to which they respond are, on the one hand, the satisfying or dissatisfying, and, on the other hand, values. The two classes are not mutually exclusive, for what is satisfying may also be truly worthwhile; but they are also not mutually inclusive, for what is genuinely worthwhile may also be disagreeable. The differential is that value carries us to self-transcendence, and on that basis Lonergan distinguishes vital, social, cultural, personal and religious values in an ascending order.

The link between feelings and values highlights the role of feelings in decisions and discernment. Ignatius of Loyola speaks of three times of decision. In each instance affectivity is a criterion of what method to employ and what course of action to choose. In the first time, one has been so moved by God that one has no doubt what to do. In the second, one is agitated and experiences alternations of consolation and desolation, and must practise what Ignatius calls the discernment of spirits. And in the third, one is tranquil and so is antecedently disposed to employ more rational means, such as weighing the pros and cons of the various alternatives.

These moments are exhaustive of all possibilities. Either there are no further questions about what is to be done (first time) or there are (second and third times). And if there are, either one is moved affectively in diverse and conflicting directions (second time) or one is not (third time).

Ignatius identifies the criterion both of what method to employ and of what course of action to choose with what he calls equanimity or equilibrium. Thus, in the second time, when affective apprehension is only of possible values, one should choose what leads to equanimity. In the third time, a test is whether one preserves and deepens the equanimity that enabled one to employ this method in the first place. The first time is so clear precisely because it places one in such a state of equanimity that there is no need for further deliberation. (The practice of discernment is also engaged in independently of such

moments of decision. Discernment is a matter of noticing constancy in, or departure from, the state of equilibrium.)

But what precisely is this state of equilibrium? It is a ground of affective self-transcendence. More precisely, such equilibrium is constituted not by homeostasis but by the creative tension or functional interdependence of limitation and transcendence. That tension is felt in the sensitive psyche, and these feelings are ciphers, indeed criteria, of genuineness. Concupiscence is the tendency to distort the tension in either direction. Sin is capitulation to that tendency. Grace preserves us in the inner harmony felt in the psyche as the equanimity or equilibrium that enables us to transcend ourselves.

The origination of such equanimity is complex, but besides more or less normal favourable circumstances in a person's life, there is the experience that Ignatius calls consolation without a cause. Karl Rahner interprets this as consolation with a content but without an apprehended object. In this sense, consolation without a cause is in its originating moment non-intentional, at least in that it does not arise from the apprehension or representation of any object. One is in love, and then one discovers who it is whom one loves. Subsequent moments, of course, are intentional, and Ignatius tells us we must watch them very carefully.

One way to monitor this course (or to engage in what today is called an examination of consciousness) is by attention to symbolic responses. A symbol is an image of a real or imaginary object that evokes a feeling or is evoked by a feeling. One's affective state can be mediated to oneself by the symbols to which one responds, including the dreams of the morning, in which the subject anticipates engagement in his or her world.

Lonergan identifies sanctifying grace with the dynamic state of being in love with God, loving with God's love, the basic fulfilment of our conscious longings. In proportion to the consistency of that state, affectivity is of a single piece. Religious and affective development converge in their finality when the goal of each is a dynamic and habitual state of being in love.

See also Discernment; Emotions; Eroticism; Examination of Conscience/Consciousness; Sexuality.

Robert M. Doran, *Theological Foundations I: Intentionality and Psyche*, Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1995; Robert M. Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001, chs 2, 6–10; Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999, pp.

30–41, 57–69, 101–24; Bernard Lonergan, *A Third Collection*, Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985, chs 3 ('Mission and the Spirit'), 7 ('Healing and creating in history') and 11 ('Natural right and historical mindedness', esp. pp. 174–5); Karl Rahner, *The Dynamic Element in the Church*, trans. W. J. O'Hara, Montreal: Palm Publishers, 1964, pp. 84–170.

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Affirmative Way

The Affirmative Way is knowledge of God and an experience of God disclosed through the Christian mysteries of creation and incarnation. As knowledge of God and as a way of speaking about God, the Affirmative Way holds that the creation is the result of God's activity and that God is truly manifested in the world. However, it also emphasizes that scriptural images and concepts describing God are always analogical. Everything positive in them must be ascribed to God but in a way that preserves the difference between God who is also more than (eminently so, to a higher degree) and 'beyond' any single attribute or naming of God. The Pseudo-Dionysius in the *Divine Names* suggests that the more God is 'like' light, the more likely humans are to create an idol out of an attribute. Thus in the use of affirmations of God, it is always necessary to assume that God is both similar to the affirmation and also dissimilar to it.

The Affirmative Way is often referred to as kataphatic spirituality or mysticism in its distinct way of apprehending God's self-disclosure to the recipient through the transparency of the cosmos, the natural world, the person of Jesus Christ, symbols, relationships and sacramental worship to God in and through created realities. The experience of God is mediated through the creation and human consciousness.

The Affirmative Way is rooted in the conviction that the cosmos is our home and that according to the teaching of the First Vatican Council (1870) 'God . . . may be certainly known by the natural light of human reason, by means of created things, because ever since the creation of the world, his invisible nature has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made (Rom. 1.20); but that it pleased his wisdom and bounty to reveal himself and his eternal decrees in another and a supernatural way; as the Apostle says: "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son" (Heb. 1.1–2)' (DS 3004).

The Affirmative Way celebrates the original blessing and goodness of the created world and

responds to it with gratitude, praise and even ecstasy. The beauty of the cosmos and of its incredible variety of creatures leads to appreciation, communion and 'mystical amazement'. The creation itself becomes the primordial sacrament of God's presence to humanity. The distinction between God and the created order is maintained through a theology of panentheism, in which everything is *in God* and thus God's presence may be experienced in and through the creation. In a time of ecological devastation and crisis wrought by humanity's failure to realize its interdependence with the earth, this appreciation leads to justice-making and compassion for the earth itself.

Together with the cosmos itself, Christians believe that Jesus is the incarnation of God, the 'image of the invisible God' (Col. 1.15) and that through Christ, believers experience God (John 14.9 and 1 John 1.1–2). As Edward Schillebeeckx asserted, Christ is the primordial sacrament of encounter with God. Thus, a Christ-mysticism is central to the affirmative way for Christians. If Christ is the image of God, and humanity is made in this same image, then the Christian Affirmative Way constitutes the mystical transformation of the Christian into this Christ transparency.

As a way of approaching God, the Affirmative Way includes meditating on the central symbols of faith, especially as described in the Scriptures, often an affective relationship with Jesus fostered through imaginative contemplation of Christ's life, ministry, death and resurrection through texts and/or material images, and through the progressive assimilation of these mysteries through the Eucharist and its liturgical seasons. It may include, together with the creation itself, all of the material culture of Christianity, including sacraments, sacred places, pilgrimage, service, the use of devotional objects, and popular devotions.

It might well be argued that the Affirmative Way is the predominant spiritual path of Christians in their life of faith. As a mystical path, no less than the often preferred apophatic way, mystical experience in this path may develop through an increasing simplicity of interior processes and a deepening transparency of the Christian mysteries to a real union with God through this more holistic and embodied process.

See also Spirituality, Liturgy and Worship (essay); Art and Spirituality; Beauty; Creation Spirituality; Ignatian Spirituality; Incarnation; Kataphatic Spirituality; Nature Mysticism; Pilgrimage; Ritual; Sacramentality and Spirituality.

Harvey Egan, *Christian Mysticism: The Future of a Tradition*, New York: Pueblo, 1984; Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation Spirituality*, Santa Fe, NM: Bear & Co. Press, 1983; Dorothee Soelle, *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001.

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African Spirituality

1. *The rich history of African Christianity.* The vast African continent is characterized by diversity with various ethnic and cultural groups existing side by side. The rich spiritual traditions of Africa pre-date recorded history, and yet are of value for the twenty-first century, as evidenced by the burgeoning interest in African spirituality. There is no one single African spirituality due to the fact that Africa boasts a large variety of diverse religions, inter alia, African Traditional Religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Christians now number over 393 million. The African Initiated Churches (AICs), which have over 6,000 denominations in South Africa alone, the largest of which is the Zion Christian Church, portray evidence of a spirituality that is truly culturally based, and is not held hostage to western norms.

Africa's rich spiritual heritage was not always seen in a positive light by Western dualistic scholarship. Early Christian missionaries often ignored the spiritual heritage of the indigenous peoples of Africa. However, from about the 1960s, a distinctly African theology began to take shape, giving academic form to earlier, more 'popular' African Christian preaching, insights and practices. This process was accelerated with the now famous speech of Pope Paul VI to the bishops of Africa in Kampala, Uganda in 1969, in which he stated that African history is 'a drama of charity, heroism, and sacrifice, which makes the African Church great and holy from its very origins'. Highlighting the contribution of early North African writers, inter alia, Tertullian, Origen, Augustine, and Cyprian, Paul VI urged African Christians to give a genuinely African expression to the Christian faith.

Such appreciation of African culture and its value for Christianity came at a time when many African countries were seeking independence from their colonial rulers. It was just the encouragement that African theologians needed to bring the richness of an African world view into dialogue with Christianity. Notwithstanding the aforementioned multiplicity of spiritual traditions in Africa, it is possible to delineate certain general features that constitute an African spirit-

uality. Five elements will be discussed, with particular reference to the interface between African traditional spirituality and African Christian spirituality.

2. *African traditional spirituality and African Christian spirituality.* Although contemporary estimates with respect to the adherents of African Traditional Religion are approximately only about 10 per cent, the culture and spirituality of Africa remains powerful and pervasive. This is clearly seen as follows.

A. *Awareness of the deity.* In African traditional spirituality, prayer is based on the belief that the visible world is influenced by, and indeed dependent on, the invisible world. The Zulu people speak of the Supreme Deity as *Nkulunkulu* (the Great, Great One) who is called upon to assert his/her presence on all of life. Life-death, good-evil, love-hatred, all of these are bound up in the world. Since the deity ultimately triumphs over evil, his/her power is readily available in coping with the exigencies of life. Africans live with a sense of the presence of the deity who can be called upon at any time for help.

African Christians have a strong awareness of the spiritual dimension of life, including God, angels, evil spirits and Satan. Many of Africa's inhabitants live in close proximity to death, suffering, illness, oppression and uncertainty. For African Christians, God is not just a name, still less *deus absconditus*, but a real and powerful presence. Prayer is an appeal to a living God and salvation is understood in concrete terms.

B. *Creation and a holistic world view.* Within the African world view the presence of the deity is manifested in creation. The whole cosmos is an epiphany of the divine; hence, all of creation is good. Concretely, this means that all of creation is sacred and all the fruits of the earth are worthy offerings to the Lord. It is for this reason that some religious groups in Africa worship in sacred groves or forests while others congregate for worship on mountains or near rivers.

African Christian spirituality is holistic and incarnational. There is no separation between the sacred and the secular, the spiritual and the physical. Rather, all of these are woven into a seamless robe of Christian experience. Thus, African preachers such as Archbishop Tutu move effortlessly from prayer to social justice. Religion, morality, dancing, praying, eating, laughing and communal worship – everything from the mundane to the mystical – are all part of African spirituality.

C. *Family/Community.* African spirituality is essentially communal in nature. At birth a person is incorporated into the life of the family

and larger community. This gives a profound sense of belonging and a sense of identity which forms the foundation of personal development. Almost all African languages have a proverb that expresses this: *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (in Zulu): 'A person becomes a person with others.' Therefore, hospitality is an important value in African life, encompassing members of the extended family. It can, however, exclude enemies or strangers who might be potentially dangerous to family interests. As such Christianity challenges this concept of hospitality so as to extend it to all.

African Christian experience is also strongly communal. Participation and belonging to the wider group is central, and particular attention is paid to facilitating harmony and communal well-being. This is particularly true of church services, weddings, funerals, Easter Celebrations (which receive much more attention than the feast of Christmas) and women's or youth meetings. All believers are one in the body of Christ.

D. *Ancestors.* Since Africans live with a profound sense of the bond between the visible and invisible, and due to the value of the extended family, African spirituality has deep respect for the ancestors. Relationships with those who have made a positive contribution to the family, clan or tribe continue after the death of the person. The living members of the community recognize the gifted heritage of the ancestors and thus accord them special veneration. The ancestors become mediators between the living and God, the protectors of the family and the guardians of morality.

In African Christian spirituality, there are intense debates concerning the role of ancestors. At one extreme, the ancestors are embraced as an essential part of African culture and are sometimes seen to be part of the 'great cloud of witnesses' of Heb. 12.1. At the other extreme, they are rejected as part of a pre-Christian past. Some African Christians venerate the ancestors, the *badimo* (in seSotho), as an essential part of their heritage and identity, but not as mediators between themselves and God, since Christ is now the complete sacrifice and mediator.

Certain African scholars portray Christ as the Proto-Ancestor: he is the Mediator, who is ever-present, giving life and watching over his descendants; he is the Eldest Brother of the anointed ones (*Mulaba-Mukulu*), the model to be imitated; he is also Healer and Chief; above all he is the Liberator who brings his people out of suffering into the promised land.

E. *Public worship.* The notion of religious activities separate from other aspects of life is not to be found in traditional African spirituality.

Unlike Christians who gather for public worship on a Sunday, no one particular day is used for public worship. Rather, public gatherings and rites of passage such as birth, puberty, marriage and death are all times of worship, celebration and community interaction.

African Christian spirituality, especially as reflected in public worship, is filled with music, song and rhythmic movement. Popular songs and choruses have simple lyrics, and repetition invites identification with the deeper, experiential meaning of the words, engendering a religious experience and a sense of belonging. The rituals exert a creative power in the lives of worshippers, and there is a strong sense of the immediacy of God's presence.

In many churches, ample opportunity is provided for extempore and individual responses to God. Less formal liturgies express the orality characteristic of traditional African ritual, allowing for participation by a large number of people in public worship. The Bible is important, and African Christians are proud to be 'the people of the book'. Preaching is central, especially in African evangelical and charismatic churches. Exuberant sermons, often using rhetorical devices, such as repetition of key phrases, images, allegories and stories are common, not only in Sunday services, but also at funerals, weddings and other gatherings.

3. *African spirituality and contemporary challenges.* Given the inroads of secularism, the harmonious view of life and relationships, characteristic of traditional African spirituality, is currently under threat, especially among young people. John Mbiti's famous statement that Africans are 'notoriously religious' may no longer strike such a strong chord. Therefore, perhaps two of the most important issues for African Christian spirituality are *inculturation* and *moral formation*. A rediscovery of the foundational values of African culture can enrich Christianity, and can in turn be deepened by gospel values, leading to societal transformation, on the African continent and elsewhere.

African spirituality offers a holistic way of life, and as such can be of benefit to Western Christianity, infusing the latter with insights and experiences that have largely been forgotten in our postmodern world.

E. Fashole-Luke et al. (eds), *Christianity in Independent Africa*, London: Indiana University Press, 1978; John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, London: Heinemann, 1969; Burnet Ntsikana, *The Life in Ntsikana: His Prophecies and His Famous Hymn*, Staten Island: Mission