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Review – Patrick Saint-Jean, *The Crucible of Racism: Ignatian Spirituality and the Power of Hope*

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***The Crucible of Racism: Ignatian Spirituality and the Power of Hope.* Patrick Saint-Jean, S.J. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2022. xix. 180pp. \$24.00. Paper. 2021035133.**

Patrick Saint-Jean prophetically applies *The Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius of Loyola to racism. A crucible, Saint-Jean explains, was a container utilized in the medieval practice of alchemy in which “different elements were heated to extreme temperatures in order to create an entirely new substance. For me, the racism I encountered after I joined the Jesuits generated a space of both fire and transformation, both deep pain and startling new hope (11).”

The book is wisely organized in three parts. Part I, “The Crucible of Racism,” exposes the death-dealing reality of racism through the lens of his own experience in the Jesuits and society. This crucible scorches anyone who has experienced marginalization, whether Black, Indigenous, and other people of color, members of the LGBTQ+ community, or people who have experienced ableism or ageism.

Saint-Jean rightly names our time as the “Age of Breath,” and contextualizes his reflective analysis in the case of the police killing of George Floyd. This Age of Breath is calling all of us “to learn once more truly to breathe (14).” Every chapter ends with a very helpful racial examen.

Part II illuminates how the central themes of Ignatian spirituality, like finding God in all things, fosters “possibility thinking” (62) within the pain of the crucible of racism. Ignatian teachings cultivate awareness, community, and compassion and reconciliation as a “doorway to racial healing (61).”

Part III digs deeper into the four “weeks” of *The Spiritual Exercises*. The third part effectively draws upon James Cone’s *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* to facilitate an encounter with the suffering of the Black Jesus in our midst. The Black Jesus nurtures discernment in how white people need to die to personal and shared attachments to power, privilege, wealth, and control, among other attachments, that block humble, loving awareness of sisters and brothers and the possibility of reconciliation and resurrection.

White people need more of Saint-Jean's psychological expertise, especially through Fanon's psychoanalytic approach to help white people excavate the "arsenal of complexes" Fanon dissects in colonialism and racism.

The focus on awareness, while integral to Ignatian spirituality, may overlook deeper dynamics of white superiority and violence. For example, when he discusses police officer Derek Chauvin depriving George Floyd of breath, Saint-Jean writes that Chauvin and the other officers were "unaware that a police officer was dying beneath him (76)." ?? However, officer J. Alexander Keung testified that he took Floyd's pulse and told Chauvin that he could not find one. Officer Thomas Land testified that he attempted to help Floyd. Chauvin prevented any help. A deeper analysis of how anti-Black violence is structured into policing and broader culture suggests that white people and institutions need to begin by addressing our own complicity.

The racial examen questions could be better informed by social scientific analyses of intentionally segregated white socialization and cultural ecosystems. For example, white people embody "social alexthymia" in their social networks, the "sustained inability to relate to and understand the suffering of those who are oppressed (Bryan Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*, (117))." Repeated social scientific surveys demonstrate that 90 percent of white social networks are comprised of white people (see [PRRI's "American Bubbles: Politics, Race, and Religion in Americans' Core Friendship Networks,"](#) May 24, 2022).

I highly recommend this text for courses addressing the interconnections between spirituality and racial justice and for Catholic institutions seeking transformation into racial love and justice.

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