

Jesuit Polymath of Madrid: The Literary Enterprise of Juan Eusebio Nieremberg (1595–1658). D. Scott Hendrickson.

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Juan Eusebio Nieremberg was one of the most prolific and widely read authors in Europe and America during the seventeenth century. Born in Madrid, the only son of a German couple in the service of Empress María of Austria, Nieremberg studied in Salamanca and

Alcalá and, against the wishes of his father, became a member of the Society of Jesus. His works include some eighty treatises in Latin and Spanish, some of which were translated into other languages, including Arabic and Guaraní.

The main objective of D. Scott Hendrickson's book is to demonstrate the presence of Ignatian spirituality in some of Nieremberg's Spanish works; in this respect, it constitutes a response to Hugues Didier, the author of the most important monograph on the Spanish Jesuit, published in 1976, who questioned how closely Nieremberg adhered to Ignatius de Loyola's teaching in the *Spiritual Exercises* and considered that the author's spirituality was based principally on Neoplatonism. Without denying the influence of Neoplatonism or Neo-Stoicism on the intellectual development of the author, and acknowledging the transformation that Jesuit religiosity had undergone since the order was founded in 1540, Hendrickson maintains that the Ignatian notion of spiritual discernment, which may be defined as the "search for God's will in one's life" (21), is crucial for understanding Nieremberg's approach to writing as well as the rhetorical techniques he employs in his texts. Hendrickson analyzes some of Nieremberg's most popular works in order to demonstrate that, whatever the content, they all have a common objective: "to provide readers with a better knowledge of the world they inhabit and to discern God's will for it and for themselves" by helping them to assimilate that knowledge "in such a way that they order their lives accordingly" (198).

The book consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 provides an intellectual profile of Nieremberg as a Jesuit and his approach to the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises*, with particular emphasis on the "Rules for the Discernment of Spirits." Chapter 2 analyzes the use of exempla in the *Práctica del catecismo romano* (1640). By means of stories set in Castile, with figures from everyday life as the main characters, these exempla would promote "self-awareness" so that "listeners may begin to examine the self and assimilate the teachings" (85). Chapter 3 examines the *Curiosa filosofía* (1630) and the *Oculto filosofía* (1633), two natural-philosophy treatises, understood as invitations to decipher God's plan in nature and to assimilate its spiritual lessons. Chapter 4 studies one of Nieremberg's most popular treatises, *De la diferencia entre lo temporal y lo eterno* (1640). Hendrickson points out that contempt for earthly matters, which characterizes this work, should not be interpreted as an expression of his world view but as a rhetorical device designed to motivate disenchantment with earthly possessions in order to better discern the benefits of divine grace in the temporal world. The final chapter is concerned with the treatise *Causa y remedio de los males públicos* (1642), part of the literature that proposed reforms to reverse the decline of the Spanish Empire. For Nieremberg, the decline of the empire was divine punishment for the lack of prudence and discretion of the body politic as a whole. By reading his treatise, the king and the governing officials would acquire necessary knowledge of the situation in which the society found itself and initiate a change of behavior and penance for sins committed that would lead to recovery of the health of the nation.

A superficial reading of Nieremberg's works leads to an interpretation of him as an author without a specific spiritual program who was open to various doctrinal currents of the time. The desire to correct individual behavior and direct it toward salvation by contemplating

nature or recounting moralizing exempla could be linked to a number of philosophical and religious traditions. However, Hendrickson demonstrates that this general schema present in many of Nieremberg's works is unequivocally set within the context of Ignatian religiosity, which amounts to shedding light on a spiritual dimension in Nieremberg's work that has hitherto not been noticed. In this respect, the book is essential reading for those interested in Jesuit studies and the intellectual history of early modern Spain.

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