

Christian Spirituality (Roman Catholic Perspective)

Spirituality is basically, as Edward Kinerk says “the way in which he or she lives in accordance with basic values”.¹ It shows the life-style of a person and presumes a belief system that he/she holds on to and which justifies all his/her actions. It is not accidental and momentary or impulsive behaviour rather it presupposes permanency and continuity. In the words of Hans Urs von Balthasar spirituality is “the way in which (an individual) acts and reacts habitually throughout his life according to his objective and ultimate insights and decisions”.² It is an art of *Weltanschauung*, a viewing glass of the world, through which an individual judges, decides and acts. Spirituality ultimately gives direction to his/her life as well.

Spirituality is also relational in the sense that it is also concerned about how one relates to oneself, to others, to the nature and eventually to God. However, spirituality is presented in the contemporary age in a secular garb dissecting its link with religion if not with God. But Abraham Maslow says that ‘a profoundly religious person integrates both the mystical and legalistic and the institutional element in a religion and lives a spirituality that is the sum total of mystical experiences and religious practices’.³ Justice cannot be done to the study of spirituality if the transcendent aspect of human life is not given its due place.

Spiritual life is the sum total of responses which one makes to what is perceived as the inner call of God and “when the individual has decided to make this call the centre of activity and choice, he or she may be called a spiritual person”.⁴ Such an understanding of spirituality recognizes the usefulness of certain practices and exercises in order to grow as a spiritual person. Spirituality, moreover, is sustained and tinted by the belief system that it holds on or by the charisma of the extraordinary person who through his/her spiritual endeavour leaves footprints for others to tread upon. Due to its affiliation to particular a school of thought or a teacher of truth spirituality flows into many streams such as Hindu spirituality, Christian spirituality, Eco spirituality, Buddhist spirituality, Sufi spirituality, Franciscan spirituality, Gandhian spirituality, etc. The core of a particular school of spirituality is the life and message of that particular teacher or master who has shown the way.

Roman Catholic Spirituality

Christian spirituality is a relationship that a Christian experiences through his/her encounter and communion with Jesus which leads him/her, as St. Paul says, “to walk in the

¹ E. Kinerk S.J., “Toward a Method for the Study of Spirituality”, in: M. Gorman, Gorman, M., Ed., *Psychology and Religion*, Paulist Press, New York, 1985, pp.320-324, here p.320

² H.U. von Balthasar, H.U., “The Gospel as Norm and Test of All Spirituality in the Church” in: C. Duquoc, Ed., *Spirituality in the Church* Vol. 9, Concilium, 1965, p. 7

³ Cf. A. Maslow, *Religion, Values and Peak Experiences*, Viking, New York, 1970

⁴ B. J. Groeschel, *Spiritual Passages. The Psychology of Spiritual Development*, Claretian Publication, Bangalore, 2003, p.4

Spirit” (Romans 6, 11). “Christian spirituality is always rooted in the experience of Jesus”.⁵ Roman Catholic Spirituality is the distinctive way of life inspired by faith in the precepts of the Gospel of Jesus Christ but received from the Roman Catholic tradition. It is historically shaped by holy persons and the founders of various religious orders and as well as by the teachings of the *magisterium* (teaching office of the Church).

Judeo-Roman & Greek Influence

The roots of Christian beliefs and practices are in Judeo-Roman and Greek cultures. Christian spirituality has derived the way of covenantal relationship with God from Jewish tradition and dualistic approach to human self from the Greek culture. Pomp and grandeur has been inherited from the Roman culture. The Jewish people encountered Yahweh through their Exodus experience and understood themselves as ‘a chosen race’ with whom God has made a covenant. The Law of Moses was their guiding principle in their social and religious behaviour and the Temple of Jerusalem, the centre of their cultural and political activities. Hence their life is centred on these three entities: the Covenant, the Law of Moses and the Temple.

For the Greek Gnosticism and Platonism there are two worlds in reality, one is the invisible world of ideas and the other the visible world of matter. The former is spirit, good and immortal whereas the world of matter is tangible, evil and perishable. The human person is the combination of spirit and matter, soul and body. The physical body is a hindrance, a burden, sometimes even as a tomb of the soul. But the human is endowed with reason to subdue his/her body in order to direct the soul in the right path. Matter is ipso facto the source of evil, and that redemption is accomplished by right conduct and following the moral values discerned by the reason. Hence, salvation is nothing but liberation of the soul from its entanglement in the physical world and lead back to the heavenly world of ideas. St. Augustine who exercised strong influence over Christian theology and spirituality was very much inspired by the dualism of Manichaeism. Hence, spirituality for him is a way of subduing the evil body in order to liberate the soul imprisoned in it. Augustinian theology of spirituality still continues to have a sway over the life of the Church.

Thanks to the Edict of Milan (313 C.E.) Christianity inherited imperial privileges and life-style from the Roman emperor. What was part and parcel of royal court culture was adopted into religious practice. Due to Roman influence spirituality was to be understood as practicing of rituals and rites in order to attain favours both material and spiritual. In spite of these cultural influences Christian spirituality emerged in the course of history with its specific characteristics.

Tenets of Roman Catholic Spirituality

“Christian spirituality is the cultivation of a style of life consistent with the Spirit of the Risen Christ within us and with our status as members of the Body of Christ”.⁶ The salient characteristics of Christian spirituality are: 1) Christological, 2) Trinitarian, 3)

⁵ George A. Lane S.J., *Christian Spirituality: An Historical Sketch*, Loyola University Press, Chicago, 1984, p. v

⁶ Richard McBrien, *Catholicism, 2 Vols.* Winston Press, Minneapolis, 1980, Vol. II, p.1057-58

Pneumatological, 4) Biblical, 5) Communitarian, 6) Sacramental, and 7) Eschatological, 8) Developmental and 9) Diaconal.

1. Christological

Christian life is founded on the faith in the Risen Christ and discipleship is the core of Christian spirituality. As St. Paul says in his Letter to the Romans, ‘it is leading a new life through our union with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ’ (Chapter 6) and finally it reaches the culmination point to say that “it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2, 20). The final goal of Christian spirituality is ‘Christlikeness and restore the image of God (2 Peter 1, 4) as created by God in the beginning’ (Genesis 1, 26-28).⁷ The spiritual classical by Thomas a` Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (1441 C.E.) begins with words of the Lord: “He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness” (John 8, 12). Hence, Christian spirituality is walking in the footsteps of Jesus also in his suffering and death. St. Francis of Assisi is a fitting example of sanctity for following suffering Jesus as St. Bonaventure describes him in his biographical sketch about Francis. “In all things he wished to be conformed to Christ crucified, who hung on the cross; poor, suffering and naked... He strove to conform himself to Christ and to imitate him perfectly – while living to imitate Christ living, dying to imitate Christ dying, and after death imitate Christ after death-and he merited to be honoured with the imprint of Christ’s likeness.”⁸ Spirituality in the Catholic tradition is imitating Christ as a faithful disciple bearing “the marks of Jesus Christ” (Galatians 6, 17) and completing in one’s own body what is lacking in His sufferings (Colossians 1, 24) and ‘knowing Christ and sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death and eventually inherit the power of his resurrection through the Holy Spirit’ (Philippians 3, 10).

2) Trinitarian

Christian spirituality is leading a life of the Trinitarian communion. Human person, created as the *imago Dei*, reflects the nature of the Triune God and enters into communion with the Him. ‘Through the transforming power of God’s love (I John 3) Christians become partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1,40)’.⁹ The imperative of Jesus, “be perfect as my heavenly Father is perfect”(Matthew 4, 48) demands to be fully immersed in the Trinitarian communion. “All that the Father is mine; therefore I said that he (the Spirit) will take what is mine and declare it to you” (John 16, 15). Hence, St. Bernard says that Holy Trinity sustains us in the spiritual life:

...those whom the Son first humbles by word and example, and upon whom the Spirit afterward pours out love, these the Father receives at length in glory. The Son makes us disciples. The Paraclete comforts us as friends. The Father raises us up as sons (and daughters). And because not only the Son but also the Father and the Holy Spirit are truly called Truth, it is agreed that one and the same truth... works in these three steps. The first

⁷ John R. Tyson, *Invitation to Christian Spirituality*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1999, p.2

⁸ Ewert Cousins, Ed. *Bonaventure*, Paulist Press, New York, 1979, p.118

⁹ Cfr. John R. Tyson, 1999, p.7

teaches us like a master. The second comforts us like a friend or brother. The third embraces us as a Father does to his son.¹⁰

A Christian should live in communion with the Trinity. It inspires his/her every thought and action, sustains him/her, guides every aspect of life and brings it to the final culmination of eternal beatitude.

3) Pneumatological

Roman Catholic spirituality emphasizes the role of Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. Without the power of the Spirit none can confess that Jesus is Lord (I Cor 12, 3; 1 John 4,4). The Holy Spirit gives the believers the privilege of the sons and daughters and empowers them to call God, "Abba, Father" (Romans 8,16; Galatians 4,6) and it produces good fruits such as, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, etc. (Galatians 5, 16-26). St. Catherine of Siena says that 'Holy Spirit is the waiter who serves (Christians) my (God's) gifts and graces'. "It is by the power of the Holy Spirit that Christians are changed into the 'likeness of Christ' 'from one degree of glory to another... from this comes the Lord who is the Spirit' (2 Cor 3, 18)".¹¹

4) Biblical

The monastic spiritual tradition has already recommended to the inmates of the monastery to be regular to the practice of *Lectio Divina* (literally means 'divine reading' – meditative reading of the Scriptures) by which the passages from the Holy Bible is read and meditated upon. *Lectio Divina* is done in four steps: First reading a passage from the Bible (*lectio*), then reflecting on the read passage (*meditatio*), thirdly making response to the passage (*oratio*) and finally entering into contemplation (*contemplatio*).¹²

However, the Roman Catholic Church has learned to use profusely the Sacred Scripture since Reformation. Vatican II document on Sacred Scriptures, *Dei Verbum* (DV), emphasizes the use of the Bible in the life of the Church:

The sacred synod also earnestly and especially urges all the Christian faithful, especially Religious, to learn by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures the "excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:8). "For ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ." Therefore, they should gladly put themselves in touch with the sacred text itself, whether it be through the liturgy, rich in the divine word, or through devotional reading, or through instructions suitable for the purpose and other aids which, in our time, with approval and active support of the shepherds of the Church, are commendably spread everywhere. And let them remember that prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture, so that God and man may talk together; for "we speak to Him when we pray; we hear Him when we read the divine saying" (DV 25).

The Catholic Church has understood that the Bible is the guiding map of Christian spirituality; hence it recommends a prominent place in the Christian worship.

¹⁰ Quoted in Ibid. 30

¹¹ Cr. Ibid.pp.28-29

¹² Cfr. Thelma Hall, *Too Deep for Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina*, Paulist Press, New York, 1988

5) *Communitarian*

Christian spirituality is also an experience of pilgrimage journeying along with the believing community. The *Acts of the Apostle* describes the life of the Early Christians in terms of communion built by the breaking of the bread (Eucharist). ‘Those who received the message of Christ were baptised. And they gathered together, prayed the Psalms praising God as one heart, broke the bread and ate together, and sold their belongings and shared so that no one was in want among them’ (Acts 2, 42-52). *Koinonia* was considered to be the hallmark of the Christian community. When the Desert Fathers sought holiness and sanctity in solitude and hermitage the cenobitic monastic tradition came up emphasising the need of *koinonia* in attaining holiness. St. Benedict in his *The Rule* describes the way of attaining perfection by living the Christian life in community. His ‘Twelve Steps to Humility’ emphasises on love as the path of perfection and humility and obedience as prerequisites for perfect love. St. Francis of Assisi went further demanding absolute poverty from his monks depending solely on the charity of the community and the neighbourhood.

Roman Catholic Church has rediscovered the communitarian aspect of spirituality from the celebration of the Eucharist in the Christian community. Vatican II document, *Lumen Gentium* (No.11), and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (No. 1324) highlight that ‘Eucharist is the source and summit of Christian life’. However, Gustav Gutierrez criticises the wrong bent that the monastic tradition has given to Christian spirituality making it as individualistic and as it is possible only for a minority of elitists. He says, “Spirituality is a community enterprise. It is a passage of a people through solitude and dangers of the desert, as it carves out its own way in the following of Jesus Christ. This spiritual experience is the well from which we must drink. From it we draw the promise of resurrection”.¹³ Spirituality is nourished in the Eucharistic community and binds the members into family, leads them for fullness of life and demands a practice of global spirituality dethroning all forms of injustice and exploitation and realising the reign of God here on earth.¹⁴ The liberative potential of Christian spirituality is rediscovered in the Eucharistic celebrations that take place in the Basic Christian Communities. Karl Rahner says that the evidence of the power of *koinonia* experienced is seen in the Basic Christian Communities.¹⁵

The communitarian aspect of Christian spirituality is expressed by the tenet of the Catholic creed: ‘We believe in the communion of saints’, (*communio sanctorum*). Lawrence Cunningham says that ‘the consultation of the saints serves both a paradigmatic and a prophetic function for Christian spirituality. It is paradigmatic because the saints offer us models for pursuing and practising Christian spirituality and that are road-tested and reliable; it is prophetic insofar as the luminous sanctity of the saints’ lives carries with it –

¹³ *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, Orbis, New York, 1984, p. 136

¹⁴ Cfr. Tissa Balasuria, *Eucharist and Human Liberation*, Orbis, New York, 198

¹⁵ Cfr. *Practice of Faith*, p. 167-175

either implicitly or explicitly – a judgement upon our own lives and values’.¹⁶ In this regard, the devotion to Virgin Mother Mary has a very important role in Catholic spiritual tradition as she holds a significant place in the *communio sanctorum*. She is ‘hailed as pre-eminent and as a wholly unique member of the Church, as its type and outstanding model of faith and charity’ (*Lumen Gentium* 63-68). E.R. Carrol underlines ‘the three foundational elements with regard to the Marian devotion: 1) veneration and reverent recognition of the dignity due Mary as the holy Virgin Mother of God; 2) invocation or the calling upon Mary for her queenly intercession on our behalf; and 3) acts of consecration and dedication that are based in our willingness to imitate her virtues’.¹⁷ Mother Mary is acclaimed in the Catholic tradition as a co-pilgrim who accompanies us in our path of holiness by her example and prayer.

6) Sacramental

Spiritual life is the sum total of responses which one makes to what is perceived as the inner call of God and “when the individual has decided to make this call the centre of activity and choice, he or she may be called a spiritual person”.¹⁸ He/she lives his/her spiritual life by imitating Christ in the best way possible. Imitation of Christ occurs through symbols and signs as well as certain practices and exercises that are known as sacraments. And sacraments are interwoven with the liturgical life of the Church.¹⁹ As St. Augustine says, ‘sacraments are the visible signs of the invisible grace’. For St. Francis de Sales ‘the principal means of uniting oneself to God are the sacraments and prayer’.²⁰ The Catholic Church recognizes seven sacraments as the privileged presence of Jesus accompanying the members of His body, i.e. the Church. Each sacrament is a personal encounter with Him at a specific stage of one’s life. For example, in Baptism Jesus welcomes us as children of God, the Father and we become the members of His body. The Eucharist is spiritual food that strengthens us and the Sacrament of Reconciliation shows us His compassionate heart so that our sins are forgiven and we are reunited with him and the community. Confirmation assures the continued presence of the Holy Spirit in us to lead a life of faith as adult member of the body of Christ. The Sacraments of Marriage and Holy Orders give a special grace to undertake a particular way of life and sustain us to be faithful to our commitment. The Sacrament of the Anointing at the sick bed gives the healing presence of Jesus in our physical weakness. Thus sacraments are means of living the Christian spirituality in a very effective and fruitful way.

There are also other ‘para-sacramental or para-liturgical practices recommended by the Church for the growth in holiness, such as personal prayers and popular devotions like Rosary, Eucharistic adoration, meditation on the Way of the Cross, Examination of Conscience and Contemplation, etc. They are in a sense necessary tools of spiritual growth.

¹⁶ *The Meaning of Saints*, Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1980, p.83 and also refer John R. Tyson, 1999, p.38

¹⁷ Cfr. John R. Tyson, 1999, p.39

¹⁸ B.J. Groeschel, *Spiritual Passages. The Psychology of Spiritual Development*, Claretian Publication, Bangalore, 2003, p.4).

¹⁹ John R. Tyson, 1999, p.22

²⁰ Peronne Marie Thilbert, *Francis de Sales, Jane de Chantal: Letters of Spiritual Direction*, 1988, p.102

If spirituality is based on the belief, then it could be said that the beliefs are born out of the lived experience of the divine. As the ancient Latin axiom says, *lex orandi is lex credenti* (the rule of prayer is the rule of belief). St. Thomas Aquinas says that ‘prayer is a rational expression of our willingness to submit ourselves to God’s will and it has to be continuous in order to ascertain the constancy of our commitment to God’. He says further,

“Human being has to do certain things not so as to change God’s plan by their acts, but in order to bring about certain effects by their acts, according to the pattern planned by God. ... Similarly, in the case of prayer we do not pray in order to change God’s plan, but in order to obtain by our prayers those things which God planned to bring about by means of prayers, in order, as Gregory says, that our prayers should entitle us to receive what almighty God planned from all eternity to give us.”²¹

The para-liturgical practices are supposed to prepare one to receive God’s grace through the sacraments. The best and most effective form of prayer is the practice of contemplation, which leads to the union of the soul with God. Contemplation, according to Thomas Merton, is “the response to the call of God, Who has no voice, and yet Who speaks in everything that is, and Who, most of all, speaks in the depths of our own being: for we ourselves are words of His”. Through contemplation the spiritual person realises his/her self as an *imago Dei* and becomes aware of the final destination of this life, which is none other than the union with the Eternal Being. Therefore, “contemplation is the highest expression of man’s intellectual and spiritual life. It is that life itself, fully awake, fully active, and fully aware that it is alive. It is a spiritual wonder. It is spontaneous awe at the sacredness of life, of being. It is gratitude for life, for awareness and for being. It is a vivid realisation of the fact that life and being in us proceed from an invisible, transcendent and infinitely abundant Source. Contemplation is, above all, awareness of the reality of that Source. It knows the Source, obscurely, inexplicably, but with a certitude that goes beyond reason and simple faith”.²²

However, there is a danger with the usage of para-liturgical practices. One may tend to be satisfied with the preliminary practices of spiritual life not taking the trouble of really entering into communion with the divine. Unfortunately the practice of popular devotions occupying the centre stage sidelining the spiritual communion with God through sacramental celebrations is not a rare occurrence in the life of the parish communities in the Catholic Church.

7) Eschatological

Christian spirituality has an eschatological hope as it presupposes the fullness of life at the end of time. It is an anticipation of the eternal bliss promised at the end of life. Jesus began his ministry proclaiming the dawn of *reign of God (basileia Theo)* and called for a radical conversion of heart (*metanoia*) (Mark 1, 15). Hence, the life of a Christian is nothing but

²¹ Cfr. Simon Tugwell, *Albert and Thomas: Selected Writings*, Paulist Press, New York, 1988, pp.476-489

²²T. Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation*, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, 1972, pp.5-6

an effort to realize the *reign of God* here on earth by following the precepts of the Good News. Faith in the *reign of God* gives us twofold grace, namely first and foremost it gives us the courage to challenge the evils in the society in order to create a just and peaceful community here and now.²³ Secondly it gives us the courage to face death and hope for a life after death. Like St. Paul we could also challenge: “Death, where is your sting?” (1 Cor 15, 55-56). The reign of God has been already inaugurated by the death and resurrection of Jesus, which gives us assurance of partaking in the fullness of the life after our earthly demise. St. Catherine of Siena says, ‘Death gives these souls no difficulty... They long for death, and so they say, “Who will free me from my body? I long to be set free from my body and to be with Christ’ (Phil 1, 23). And as such as these say along with Paul, “Death for me is in longing, and life in patience”.²⁴ Faith in the risen Lord leads one to await the Lord’s return (*Parousia*) in full glory. Christian spirituality is a life carried through by a living hope in the coming of the Lord in order to restore justice for all and bring to fulfilment of the *reign of God*, when the Son of God will come in full glory and will create a new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21, 1-3), where God will be all in all and there will be no tear, nor pain but the full presence of perfect peace (*shalom*).

8) Developmental

The life of holiness and sanctity is a gift from God, however one has to cultivate and nurture it by responding to it in a generous way. The classical approach to Catholic spirituality involves three stages of growth: *via purgativa* (the way of purgation), *via illuminativa* (the way of illumination), and *via unitiva* (the way of union). The means and goal of Christian spirituality is perfect union with Christ. In order to arrive at this communion with Jesus one has to purify himself/herself from all blemishes. Though salvation is not obtained by own merit and received as gratuitous gift in faith, good works should accompany it and flow from it in order to make oneself worthy for the gift of fullness of life in God. The stage of purgation is marked by acetic practices.

Asceticism in Catholic spirituality stems from ‘desert theology’ of the First Testament, emerging from the sojourn of the people of Israel in the desert for forty years before they reached the Promised Land. ‘Desert’ since then has become a symbolic testing ground where one may experience a change of heart by proving obedience to God the Creator. In the Second Testament Jesus prays and does penance for forty days in the desert before his public ministry (Matthew 4,1-11, Mark 1, 12-213, Luke 4, 1-13). Jesus demands self-denial as a price for discipleship when he says, “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matthew 16, 24). Acts of self-denial and penance are ways of reliving the desert experience in spiritual life. Hence, ‘desert spirituality’ is following the spiritual quest through prayer in solitude and asceticism. In the Early Church hermits like St. Antony of Egypt (251-356) inspired Christian spirituality by a very severe ascetic life; but so many followed him in the desert that the desert became a city.

²³ Gutierrez, 1984, pp.9-18

²⁴ in *Dialogue* 84, p.154

In the stage of illumination the soul is enlightened by the word of God and the gift of the Holy Spirit to discern the proper way of responding to God's love and to be faithful to His commandments. St John of the Cross describes the stage of illumination after purgation as a way of total transformation. "In thus allowing God to work in it, the soul (having rid itself of every mist and stain of the creatures...) is at once illumined and transformed in God, and God communicates to it His supernatural Being, in such wise that it appears to be God Himself, and has all that God Himself has".²⁵

In the third stage the soul and God have become one. It is a stage of perfect communion which transforms the finite being to reflect God's glory to the full measure. There is no more duality and complete fusion of the soul in God's infinite love. Such a loving union with God leads naturally to a life of perfect love of the neighbour.

9) Life in Charity

Christian spirituality is a dynamic act of self-less love which is manifested through service to the poor and needy (*diakonia*). Jesus himself defines his way of life as 'not to be served but to serve and to offer himself as a ransom for many' (Mark 10, 45). He came down and took up human life and emptied himself on the cross so that we may have fullness of life (Phil. 2, 6-11 & John 10, 10). And his greatest commandment is love; and only those who showed compassion and kindness to others will be rewarded with honour on the day of Last Judgement (Matthew 25). Hence, Christian spirituality as imitation of Christ consists in serving those who are poor and afflicted. Mother Theresa is an epitome of such spirituality,²⁶ which Catholic Church values very highly as the proper way of following Jesus Christ.

...Because we cannot see Christ we cannot express our love to Him; but our neighbours we can always see and we can do for them what, if we saw Him, we would like to do for Christ.

Today, the same Christ is in people who are unwanted, unemployed, uncared for, hungry, naked, and homeless. They seem useless to the state and to society; nobody has time for them. It is you and I as Christians, worthy of the love of Christ if our love is true, who must find them, and help them; they are there for the finding.

Christians stand as the light for the others... for the people of the world. If we are Christians we must be Christlike.²⁷

Catholic Spirituality values the works of charity as the effective and meaningful way of imitating Jesus Christ as he himself has commanded: 'Love one another as I have loved you' (John 13, 34).

After discussing at length different aspects of Christian Spirituality according to Roman Catholic perspective it is still very difficult contain it within a definition. There are so many streams in spirituality though there is a unanimity as for the goal and purpose of spirituality, as John R. Tyson would call it. 'There is a remarkable diversity within Catholic tradition when it comes to the question of 'how' this pilgrimage should be

²⁵ Cfr. *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Book II, ch.5

²⁶ Cfr. Mother Theresa, *A Gift of God: Meditations and Prayers*, Harper & Row, New York, 1968

²⁷ *Ibid.* pp.27-31

meaningfully pursued'.²⁸ Let me give in the following pages an outline of different streams of spirituality within the Catholic tradition but with an apology that what is offered is only a foretaste and an invitation for greater enjoyment of the enormous treasure offered by so many spiritual persons in the course of two thousand years of Christian era.

Monastic Spirituality

Since the fourth century through the Edict of Milan (313 B.C.E.) Christianity became an imperial religion. Hence leading a spiritual life became impossible due to abundance of royal patronage and worldly power. Those who wanted to lead a life of sanctity and holiness secluded themselves from the society. Spiritual life was considered as a call given to the chosen ones who deserted the worldly life and went to the desert. But by the end of fourth century people began to seek in monasteries. St. Basil the Great (ca.330-379 C.E.) founded one of the first monasteries and wrote his famous *The Long Rules* to guide those who took up monastic life with him. However, St. Benedict of Nursia (480 - 550 C.E.) is considered to be the Father of Western Monasticism. He established his first monastery in Monte Cassino, Italy and wrote *The Rule* for his monks. The key principles of monastic spirituality are: *ora et labora* (pray and work). He introduced the prayer form with help of the Word of God called *Lectio Divina*, which consists of four stages, namely: Reading, Reflection, Prayer and Contemplation. The monks mostly lived in community but their spiritual search was an individual attempt to overcome sin and to grow in the life of the spirit. Rigorous penance and unconditional obedience was expected of the monks in order to lead their spiritual life. In the course of time chastity and then celibacy became sine non quo for attaining holiness; hence marriage and family life became less valuable forms of spirituality. A spiritual person was the one who practiced the evangelical virtues of poverty, celibacy and obedience, remained within the monastery totally cut-off from the world and indulged himself/herself only in prayer and in the affairs of the monastery.

Pastoral Spirituality

The monasteries became places of public scandal and the spirituality was measured in terms of worldly pleasure, riches and honour. The abuses in the Church during the Middle Ages paved the way for the Reformation in 1517. However, the Dark Age in the history of the Church was also marked by the emergence of extra-ordinary spiritual persons like St. Bernard of Clairvaux, St. Dominic, St. Francis of Assisi and St. Clare, etc. who reformed the monastic life and gave a new impetus to spirituality. The followers of St. Dominic and St. Francis were instructed not only to follow the evangelical counsels of poverty, celibacy and obedience but also to take up pastoral care of the Christian communities by preaching and serving.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153 C.E.) was a Benedictine monk but he reformed the Benedictine spirituality giving importance to pastoral work along with the life of prayer and work within the monastery. His main work, *On Loving God* describes a soul's loving relationship with God. Human beings created in the *imago Dei* are united with God, hence for St. Bernard spirituality is trying to attain the perfection in union with God through *caritas* (charity).

²⁸ Cfr. *Invitation to Christian Spirituality*, p.3

Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179 C.E.), hailing from a noble family, took the vows of religious at the age of fifteen in the Benedictine monastery in St. Disibod, Germany. She was a versatile person talented in music, theatre, art and showed great interest in life-sciences and medicine. She is a fitting example for the combination of spiritual quest and intellectual pursuit. Her master piece, *Scitio vias Domini*, describes her twenty eight visions, which explain her theology of spirituality. For her spirituality is nothing but generous response to God's call to be united with him and to serve others with the faculties given by God. She writes in her first vision: "But from the One Who is enthroned upon the mountain many living sparks go forth, which fly about those images with great sweetness. This means that many exceedingly strong virtues come forth from Almighty God, daring fire in divine glory; these ardently embrace and captivate those who truly fear God and who faithfully love poverty of spirit, surrounding them with their help and protection".²⁹

St. Dominic de Guzman (1170-1221 C.E.) a Spanish Benedictine priest seeing many heretics, who were misleading the common people felt the need to preach the true teachings to them and offer a new type of pastoral care to address the spiritual needs of the growing cities, one that would combine dedication and systematic education, with more organizational flexibility than either monastic orders or the secular clergy. Hence St. Dominic established *the Order of Preachers*, who would be later called after him as the *Dominicans*, to proclaim the word of God and the teachings of the Church. Dominican spirituality is characterized by poverty, devotion to orthodox teachings of the Church, love for preaching the Word of God and contemplation of the sacred humanity of Jesus Christ. Dominicans gave importance to personal prayer in spiritual life and they spread the popular devotions like Rosary in order to help the people to grow in spiritual life. Dominican spirituality values the importance of intellectual formation for a meaningful life of faith. St. Thomas Aquinas is one of the erudite theologians from the Order of Dominicans, who answered the critics that there was no place for physical labour in Dominican spirituality by saying that intellectual pursuit and teaching were equal to the Benedictine practice of spirituality and in fact they are considered as superior forms of contemplative prayers.

Meister Eckhart (1260-1327 C.E.) from Thüringen in Germany is one of the leading persons who lived Dominican spirituality in a meaningful and contagious way. He was very much influenced by Neo-Platonism and Thomas Aquinas. He tried to attain spiritual perfection of the soul through reflection and various practices by detaching the soul from temporal things and affections in order to find union with God in stillness and silence and in grace and love. "Some simple people think that they will see God as if He were standing there and they here. It is not so. God and I, we are one. I accept God into me in knowing; I go into God in loving. There are some who say that blessedness consists not in knowing but in willing. They are wrong; for if it consisted only in the will, it would not be one. Working and becoming are one... in this working God and I are one; He is working and I am becoming".³⁰

²⁹ Columba Hart & Jane Bishop, *Hildegard of Bingen: Scivas*, Paulist Press, New Jersey, 1990, pp.67-69

³⁰ Edmund Colledge & Bernard McGinn, *Meister Eckhart. Teacher and Preacher*, Paulist Press, New York, 1986, pp.185-189.

“How a soul, elevated by the desire of the honour of God, and of the salvation of her neighbours, exercising herself in humble prayer, after she had seen the union of the soul, through love, with God, asked of God four requests”. Who is that soul!? She is none other than St. Catherine of Siena (1347-1380 C.E.), acclaimed as the ‘Doctor of the Church’, who was not only a teacher of mysticism but also a social activist, nursing the victims of plagues and regional wars of her time in Italy.

But in no way, does the creature receive such a taste of the truth, or so brilliant a light there from, as by means of humble and continuous prayer, founded on knowledge of herself and of God; because prayer, exercising her in the above way, unites with God the soul that follows the footprints of Christ Crucified, and thus, by desire and affection, and union of love makes her another Himself”...

So, that soul, wishing to know and follow the truth more manfully,addressed four requests to Supreme and Eternal Father. The first was for herself; the second for the reformation of the Holy Church; the third a general prayer for the whole world, and in particular for the peace of Christians who rebel... in the fourth and last, she besought the Divine Providence to provide for things in general, and in particular, for a certain case with which she was concerned”.³¹

She became a tertiary (lay member) of the Dominican Order in 1365 C.E. and her most popular work is *The Dialogue of the Soul* in which she describes her spiritual experience in her conversation with God. St. Catherine of Siena stands as an exemplary model for Dominican spirituality.

Franciscan spirituality, following the life-style of Francis of Assisi (1182-1226 C.E.), is characterized by a life of poverty, celibacy, obedience, love of nature, and practising charity to the poor and needy. Franciscan spirituality is focused on walking in Christ's footsteps, understanding God by doing what Christ asked, experiencing and sharing the love of God rather than indulging in intellectual disputes about God. St. Francis emphasised on not holding big properties and estates contrary to the life of monasteries at that time. He embraced apostolic poverty and a mendicant life-style as most committed way of following Jesus Christ and proclaiming the reign of God. St. Francis was also against violence and warfare. In the midst of disastrous Fifth Crusade in 1291 C.E. St. Francis crossed enemy line at the warfront to meet al-Kamil, the Sultan of Egypt and a nephew of the great Muslim warrior Saladin, in his camp on the banks of the Nile in order to bring about peace by pleading with the Sultan to stop violence. Though St. Francis did not succeed in his mission but his revolutionary ideas called Christians to live harmoniously with Muslims; his courageous and peaceful encounter with the Sultan became contagious. Many young people followed the example of radical poverty and compassionate fraternity of St. Francis and soon the Franciscan Order was established with the motto: *Pax et bonum* ("Peace and the good"). He wanted his followers to disown all titles and honours and to live in community. The Franciscans are supposed to be “Friars Minor (*Fratres Minores*)”, which means ‘the lowly brothers’ who are supposed to cherish humility and obedience as their chief virtues. *Clare di Favarone*, a young girl from a rich family in Assisi left her family and joined St. Francis and wanted to lead a life of poverty and prayer. With the guidance of St. Francis she formed a religious order for women with the name: ‘Poor Ladies of Assisi’ who were later called “Poor Clares”.

³¹ Quoted from Catherine of Siena’s *Dialogue of the Soul*, in <http://ccel.wheaton.edu.pdf>. version

Franciscan spirituality consists of five steps: 1) total surrender to Jesus Christ, 2) life of poverty and service, 3) life of constant prayer, 4) life of sacrifice and suffering with Christ, the Crucified and 5) appreciation for the revelation and encounter with God through nature. St. Francis' classical, *The Canticle of Brother Sun*, epitomizes his spiritual union with the nature and the divinity.

Ignatian spirituality is named after St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556 C.E.), who started the Society of Jesus, which stood as a bulwark against the onslaught of Reformation. As he was lying down wounded as a soldier he read the lives of the saints and decided to become one like them. He felt the call to defend the Church from the allegations of the reformers and to support the Pope in safeguarding the unity among the Christians. Hence he instructed his companions who were the pioneering members of the Society of Jesus to do following things: daily examination of conscience, discernment of the will of God, finding God in all things, witness the resurrection of Jesus Christ and to do everything 'for the greater glory of God' (*Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam – AMDG*). He wrote *The Spiritual Exercises*, as a manual for the members of the society to assist them in spiritual life. Ignatian Spirituality has incorporated many things from other spiritualities like Franciscan and Benedictine and established an active and original path of spirituality, which wants its followers to be 'contemplative in action'. The Jesuits, inspired by Ignatian spirituality, became during Counter-Reformation defenders of papal authority and Catholic teachings. Thanks to the missionary works of Jesuits priests Roman Catholic Church spread to all the continents of the world.

Carmelite spirituality is the way of life of the hermits who lived on Mt. Carmel in Israel. It is characterised by interior detachment, silence, solitude, the desire for spiritual progress and insight into mystical experiences. St. John of the Cross and St. Theresa of Avila are the two great Carmelite mystics who revamped the Carmelite Order and gave a new vigour and vision to it. In his spiritual classics, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, St. John of the Cross explains how the soul can attain the union with God by purgation and mortification of desires that are sinful. He rewrote the traditional "three ways" of mysticism and explained it with biblical references in the manner of bridal mysticism. In spiritual life, there are two 'dark nights;' the first one is the dark night of the senses and second, the dark night of the soul during which the individual renounces everything that might become an obstacle between the soul and God and then experiences the pain of feeling separated from God, unable to carry on normal spiritual exercises, as it encounters the enormous gap between its human nature and God's divine wisdom and light. Once the dark nights are wiped off by the illumination of the Holy Spirit the soul moves up the 10-step ladder of ascent towards God and enjoys the full communion with Him.

St. Theresa of Avila explains in *The Interior Castle* the Christian spiritual life in a metaphoric way describing it as castle made up of seven mansions for which mental prayer is the entrance. She envisions Christ as the bridegroom of the soul and one has to attain the spiritual marriage (living and lasting union) with Christ. Through this union with Christ one becomes Christ-like or divinised. For St. Avila Theresa Christian spirituality is a fusion of Martha and Mary, action and contemplation. "This, my sisters, I should like us to

strive to attain: we should desire and engage in prayer, not for our enjoyment, but for the sake of acquiring this strength which fits us for service” (*The Interior Castle*, Mansion VII, ch.4).

Humanistic Spirituality

The spiritualities of pastoral care combined prayer with praxis in other words in unified contemplation with action; however their main stress was on the *cura animarum* (saving the soul). The spiritual communion of the soul with God is expected to bear fruits through good works but the most important result of the spiritual union is the beatific vision at the end of the life. René Descartes’ dictum, *cogito ergo sum*, ushered in the Modern period giving importance to Rationalism and Positivism; highlighting human dignity and freedom. The Modern Age brought in the separation of the sacred from the secular and reasoning was considered the touchstone of human activity dethroning faith. The birth of behavioural sciences emphasised the development of human potentials as the hallmark of spiritual growth. Hence spirituality was adjudged as manifestation of the personality traits of an individual lived in the concrete situation within the social network of relationship. Therefore, pursuing spirituality means undertaking various steps to ignite the inner core of an individual to make him/her more alive, alert and active in order to assist him/her to lead a meaningful life with maximum creativity, productivity and fulfilment. Spirituality was about self-development, which was understood as discovering of the true *self* and developing it as intended by oneself. It is the discovery of the self, which leads you to enlightenment and contentment. Contentment is a state where one does not consciously "need" or "want" anything, but has a sense of complete fulfilment, a status of eternal bliss for which the human life craves. Spirituality is also relational in the sense that it is also concerned about how one relates to oneself, to others, to nature and eventually to God. In short, spirituality is a sense of *Oneness with Self*, *Oneness with Nature* and *Oneness with Everything*— a realisation, which makes one free from of stress, tension, depression, etc. and fosters integral growth of the individual. In the Modern period many religious orders were established with the spirituality of action and contemplation emphasising the personal growth and personal fulfilment here on earth. For example, St. Francis de Sales (1567-1622 C.E.) founded the ‘Order of Visitation of Mary’, St. Alphonsus Maria de’ Liguori (1696-1787 C.E.) the ‘Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer’, St. John Bosco (1815 – 1888 C.E.) formed the Order of ‘Salesians of Don Bosco’ and they were all concerned about practising the love of the neighbour especially by giving care for the poor and needy. Charity became the focus of Christian spirituality. St. Francis de Sales writes in his work, *To Madame Brulart on Christian Perfection*, how one through the love of the neighbour can attain spiritual perfection.³²

The ways by which we can unite ourselves to our neighbour are very much numerous; but I will mention only a few of them. Since God wants us to love and cherish others, we must see our neighbour in Him. This is the counsel of St. Paul who orders servants to serve God in their masters and their masters in God (Eph. 6, 5-7). We must practice this love of our neighbour and express it

³² Peronne Marie Thilbert, *Francis de Sales, Jane de Chantal: Letters of Spiritual Direction*, Paulist Press, New York, 1988, pp.102-107

outwardly; and even if at first we seem to do so reluctantly, we must not give up on that account, for this feeling of aversion will, in the end, be conquered by the habit and good dispositions that result from repeated acts. We must bring this intention to our prayer and meditation; having begged God for His love, we must ask Him also to grant us love of others, especially of those persons we have no inclination to love.

However, spirituality was also at times presented in the Modern age in a secular garb dissecting its link with religion if not with God. There are some who would say: “I am spiritual but not religious!” Interest in a *religion-less spirituality* is gaining ground because of the polarised understanding of religion, namely religion as a mystic experience and as an institution. However, as Abraham Maslow says ‘a profoundly religious person integrates both the mystical and legalistic and the institutional element in a religion and lives a spirituality that is the sum total of mystical experiences and religious practices’.³³ The demands and dictates of Modern period thus streamlined Christian spirituality to indulge more in *caritative* activities to alleviate the sufferings of the others. Humanistic spiritual approach received a jolt in the arm in the Vatican II Council, which spearheaded the liberation aspect of Christian spirituality and opened the door for inter-religious approach to spiritual quest.

Vatican II and Christian Spirituality

Vatican II is indeed a watershed in the history of Roman Catholic Church, which renewed the Church in many ways. It reformed the area of spirituality in three ways. First and foremost, it augmented the growth of the spiritual movements among the laity. Church as *the People of God* is called by God to sanctify themselves through their ordinary lives, by the works of charity and devotion cultivated in the family, the domestic church, in the neighbourhood and parish life as well as in the workplace. All the three are paths to holiness. Thanks to the teachings of the Council many lay spiritual initiatives have started to spread in the Christian communities, who emphasize the necessity of both an interior union with God and fraternal relationship with the neighbours in the Christian as well as secular community. Secondly it emphasised the importance of works of mercy and justice along with spiritual activities of prayer and meditation. Christian spirituality was redefined in relation to the mission of Church in a two-fold way, namely mission *ad intra* and mission *ad extra*, mission within and mission without to the society at large. Spirituality emerging from the missionary mandate of the Church emphasised the liberation of the poor on par with salvation of the soul. Thirdly Vatican II acknowledged the possibility of salvation outside the Christian revelation. Hence, spirituality could also be enriched through dialogue with other religious traditions.

The biggest contribution of Vatican II to spiritual theology is the assertion that the call to holiness is not a prerogative of a few chosen ones but rather a call given to all to lead a life of holiness. Hence, lay people are encouraged to lead spiritual life based on the values of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to build the reign of God here and earth. Thanks to the impetus from the Council teachings many lay spiritual movements sprang up in the Catholic Church. A few examples of such lay spiritual movements are: *Catholic Charismatic Movement*, *Schönstatt Movement of Families*, *Focolare Movement*, *Sant*

³³ Cf. Maslow, A., *Religion, Values and Peak Experiences*, Viking, New York, 1970

'Egidio Community, Opus Dei, and Legion of Christ which advocates the *Regnum Christi* spirituality.

Liberation Spirituality

Though spirituality is preoccupied with the self and its dealing with the *Eternal Being* it is no way be locked up with the self alone. In other words it is far from being individualistic and *selbstzuechtig* (self-seeking). According to liberation theology spirituality necessarily leads to liberation from sin. And sin is understood in all aspects of human life. It refers not only to the individual's rebellion against God but also the evils in the society or the structural sin, which enslaves and exploits the poor people. Liberative spirituality centres on the Exodus experience of the people of Israel who encounter Yahweh as the Liberator. As Gutierrez says in his book, *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, genuine spirituality is spontaneously expressed through *the preferential option for the poor* and solidarity with 'the dispossessed and marginalized' and by facing even 'martyrdom' in their struggle for liberation. Authentic spiritual person is in midst of the world though he/she is not of the world. He/she permeates the world through his/her radiance stemming from the encounter with God. Such a spiritual person sows in the world the seeds of the contemplation and nourishes the world with the fruits of his/her encounter with the Eternal Source. Thus spirituality leads one to perfect harmony with oneself, with others and also with the entire nature thanks to one's encounter and union with God. The *Nazareth Manifesto* of Jesus, which Jesus read in the Synagogue of Nazareth from the texts of Prophet Isaiah, serves as the foundation of liberation spirituality: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour" (Luke 4, 18-19).

At the heart of Jesus' teaching and ministry was a spirituality that longed to collaborate with the Reign of God. This is what was behind the face that Jesus revealed to his neighbours, especially to the poor and the marginalized. According to Monseñor Oscar Romero collaboration with the Reign of God is motivated by the hope that if we do our part God will do his for the salvation of our countries (Romero, July 1977). Collaboration with God's Reign, faithful to the reality in which we find ourselves, is what turns ordinary Christians into Saints and it is founded on five provisions, referred as "the five pillars of a Christian Spirituality of Liberation": contemplation, poverty, universal fraternity, Eucharist and the cross.³⁴

Though liberation spirituality values salvation in terms of socio-economic and cultural liberation it leads ultimately to the fullness of the realisation of the reign of God here on now. The definitive goal of liberation spirituality is fullness of life for all in the reign of God built on the Gospel values of justice and mercy. Such a spirituality calls for a non-violent, just, compassionate and contemplative action in solidarity with the poor so that finally God will be all in all.

³⁴ Gilberto Cavazos-Gluz, OFM, "The Seven Pillars of Liberation Spirituality"

in: www.academia.edu/1694749/Seven_Pillars_of_Liberation_Spirituality/ accessed on 12.10.2015

Liberation spirituality has unfolded itself into different forms dethroning the culture of death and demanding the fullness of life for all, not only for the humans but also for the world of nature and the entire universe. The recent encyclical of Pope Francis, *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home*, emphasises the need of the eco-spirituality and outlines in it how the entire humanity can live it in order to stop the imminent danger that the universe faces due to the self-made destructive ways of the humanity. At the outset, eco-spirituality, according to *Laudato Si*, demands ‘a profound interior ecological conversion of all, whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the whole world around them’ (No. 217). And Pope Francis emphasises the purpose of human life as he says, “all creatures are moving forward with us and through us toward a common point of arrival, which is God, in that transcendent fullness where the risen Christ embraces and illumines all things. Human beings, endowed with intelligence and love, and drawn by the fullness of Christ, are called to lead all creatures back to their Creator (No. 53). And he says further that ‘living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of Christian experience’ (No. 217). And as Leonardo Boff says, we need to have ‘an ecologically sustainable spirituality’ since the entire creation is groaning for the realisation of the fullness of time, when God will be in all and all will be in God’. It is not a pantheistic approach to spiritual journey but ‘*panentheistic (all in God and God in all)*’ way to realise the reign of God here on earth.³⁵ Pope Francis has infused new blood in understanding spirituality; let us hope his flock follows him in his challenging yet prophetic spirituality needed for our time in order to overcome the culture of death.

Inter-Religious Spirituality

Vatican II ‘Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions’ (*Nostra Aetate*) acknowledged the values of the other religions. *Nostra Aetate* says:

The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. Indeed, she proclaims, and ever must proclaim Christ “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6), in whom men may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself (NA 2).

Moreover, *Gaudium et spes*, Vatican II Constitution on the Church in the Modern World wants that the Christians learn to appreciate the richness in other cultures and adapt them to the life of the Church in a particular context and in the light of the Gospel of Christ.

The Gospel of Christ constantly renews the life and culture of fallen man, it combats and removes the errors and evils resulting from the permanent allurements of sin. It never ceases to purify and elevate the morality of peoples. By riches coming from above, it makes fruitful, as it were from within, the spiritual qualities and traditions of every people of every age. It strengthens, perfects and restores them in Christ. Thus the Church, in the very fulfilment of her own function, stimulates and

³⁵ Cfr. *Cry of the Earth and Cry of the Poor*, Orbis, New York, 1997

advances human and civic culture; by her action, also by her liturgy, she leads them toward interior liberty (GS 58).

Hence, Catholic Church understands inculturation and inter-faith dialogue as part and parcel of her mission to proclaim the Good News. In the recent decades Catholic spiritual practice has incorporated from Buddhist and Hindu meditation methods. For example, the great pioneer in exploring Buddhism was a German Jesuit, Hugo Enomiya Lassalle, a survivor of the nuclear attack on Hiroshima. He did intensive Zen practice in Japan after World War II and was recognized by his Buddhist teacher, Yamada KounRoshi, as a qualified Zen Master. He wrote about his experiences in *Zen Weg zur Erleuchtung (Zen - way to enlightenment)*. After the Second Vatican Council, Enomiya Lassalle led Zen retreats for Christians around the world.³⁶

Another example of Buddhist and Catholic exchange of spiritual traditions took place in the 1960s at Gethsemane Abbey near Louisville, Kentucky, where Thomas Merton and the Dalai Lama had several conversations on monasticism and meditation. The interreligious encounters between Buddhists and Christians have led to closer relationships with each other bringing forth a fresh perspective on traditional themes and spiritual practices. Christians practice meditation methods from the Buddhist tradition, sometimes learning from Buddhists but often from other Christians who incorporate Buddhist meditation practice into their lives as Christians. Now there are number of Catholics who have mastered Zen and offer integrated meditation course with Christian and Buddhist methods.³⁷

Hinduism especially the *Advaita* philosophy of Vedic tradition has inspired many Christians. Sri Ramana Maharishi was one of the leading Hindu gurus of the twentieth century who influenced the French priest, Jules Monchanin (who later renamed himself *Parmarupiananda*) and the French Benedictine monk, Fr. Henri Le Saux (*Abhishiktananda*) both took on the lifestyle of a Hindu *sannyasi* and founded the *Satcitanada Ashram* (also known as *Shantivanam*) on the banks of river Kaveri near Tiruchirapalli in order to explore the unity of Hindu-Christian spirituality. They spent years agonizing over the conflict between Christian Trinitarian faith and the Hindu Vedic experience of non-dualism of Advaita. According to the Vedas spirituality is the '*theanthropocosmic integration*' of human person with nature as well as with the Divine who is the primordial source and ultimate goal of human life³⁸ whereas Christian spirituality was rather dualistic emphasising *cura animarum (saving the soul)* by faith in Jesus Christ. Spiritual initiatives in Christian Ashrams try to find a viable integration of both the traditions, which have their long and rich historical traditions not always in an amicable atmosphere. Whether they have succeeded or will they succeed in their attempt is a question awaiting answer in the future. But let me conclude quoting one of the great

³⁶ Tablinger & Co, 1968

³⁷ Cfr. Ama Samy, *Zen Meditation for life and death, Christians and Therapists*. IJA Publications, Bangalore, 2006

³⁸ Cf. Sivaraman K., *Hindu Spirituality: Vedas Through Vedanta* Vol. I, Motilal Banarsidass Publication, Delhi, 1995, p. 26

spiritual persons of this century, Pope John XXIII, who said at the wake of Vatican II in 1959: “The things that unite us are greater than those that divide us.”

Christian Spiritual Classics (Catholic)

Below are few spiritual classics in use among the Catholics:

St. Augustine: *The Confessions*
 Bernard of Clairvaux: *The Commentary on Song of Songs*
 Julian of Norwich: *The Revelations of Divine Love*
 Catherine of Sienna: *The Dialogue*
 Brother Lawrence: *Practice of the Presence of God*
The Cloud of the Unknowing (1380)
 John Banyan: *The Pilgrim’s Progress*
 Walter Hilton: *The Scale of Perfection* (1396)
 Thomas a` Kempis (1380-1471): *The Imitation of Christ*
 Theresa of Avila: *The Interior Castle*
 John of the Cross: *The Ascent of the Mountain* and *The Dark Night of the Soul*
 Francis of Assisi: *The Canticle of Brother Sun*
 Francis De Sales: *The Introduction to the Devout Life*
 Ignatius of Loyola: *The Spiritual Exercises*
 Hildegard of Bingen: *Scivias: Book of Life’s Merits*
 Thomas Merton: *The Seven Story Mountain*
 Gustav Gutierrez: *We Drink from our Own Wells*
 Leonardo Boff: *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (1997)

Selected Readings:

Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda: A Christian Approach to Advaitic Experience*, rev. ed. I.S.P.C.K., Delhi, 1984
 Ama Samy, *Zen Meditation for life and death, Christians and Therapists*. IJA Publications, Bangalore, 2006
 Balasuriya, Tissa. *The Eucharist and Human Liberation*, Orbis, New York, 1980
 Casaldáliga, Pedro and Vigil, José María, *Political Holiness: a Spirituality of Liberation*, Orbis, New York, 1994
 Downey, Michael, *Understanding Christian Spirituality*, Paulist Press, 1997
 Dreyer, Elizabeth & Burrows, Mark S., *Minding the Spirit: the study of Christian spirituality*, JHU Press, 2005
 Groeschel, B. J., *Spiritual Passages. The Psychology of Spiritual Development*, Claretian Publication, Bangalore, 2003
 Gutierrez, T., *We Drink From Our Own Wells. The Spiritual Journey of a People*, Orbis, New York, 1984
 Haering, Bernhard, *A Sacramental Spirituality*, Sheen & Ward, London, 1965
 King, U. *Christian Mystics: The Spiritual Heart of the Christian Tradition*, Simon & Shuster, New York, 1998
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 Levinson, D., *The Seasons of Man’s Life*, Ballantnie, New York, 1978

- McGrath, A.E., *Christian Spirituality*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1999
- Merton, T., *Seeds of Contemplation*, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, 1972
- Pieris, A., *Love Meets Wisdom: A Christian Experience of Buddhism*, Orbis, New York, 1988
- Rahner, Karl, *The Practice of Faith: A Handbook of Contemporary Spirituality*, Crossroad, New York, 1986
- Rozanne, Elder, Ed., *The Spirituality of Western Christendom*, Cistercian Publications, Michigan-Kalamazoo, 1976
- Sobrino, J., *Spirituality of Liberation: Towards Political Holiness*, Orbis, New York, 1988
- Timothy P. Weber, *The Treasury of Christian Spiritual Classics*, Thomas Nelson Publications, Nashville, 1994
- Tyson, John R. (Ed.), *Invitation to Christian Spirituality. An Ecumenical Anthology*, Oxford Press, London, 1999
- Van Kaam, A., *Formative Spirituality*, 5 Vols., Crossroad, New York, 1983-92

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