

# Spirituality

By Rev. Fr. Nilindra Gunesequera sss

**Spirituality**, in a narrow sense, concerns itself with matters of the spirit. Spiritual matters are those involving humankind's ultimate nature, not only as material biological organisms, but as beings with a unique potential to relate to that which is beyond both time and the material world. As such the spiritual is traditionally contrasted with the material, the temporal and the worldly. Spirituality is the personal, subjective dimension of religion, particularly that which pertains to liberation or salvation.

In its simplest form Christian spirituality may be defined as 'Life in the Spirit.' Life in the Spirit has Trinitarian connotations, for the Spirit is part of the Holy Trinity. Besides, Jesus the Son of God taught that after his departure from the world in human form (Jn. 16:7), the Paraclete would come to lead the disciples to the full truth (Jn. 16:12), because although Jesus has much more to tell them, it would be too much for them to bear. 'Life in the Spirit' is dynamic, on-going and linked to the process of revelation. We venture a definition of spirituality as 'a fundamental methodology of discipleship based upon a particular ideology which is a set of doctrines organized in a systematic manner, in the personal quest for 'union with the Triune God through a following of the teaching of Christ.' The set of doctrines are formulated by the church. The particular ideology of the individual Christian believer is dependent on the prioritization of such doctrinal beliefs, which in turn is influenced by the individual's social circumstances. Therefore, for the Christian believer, 'spirituality' means one's existence in its manifold dimensions lived in harmony with the divine will.

The liturgical and Early Christianity Christians as personal mystery of Christ by baptism into the of Christ, nourished Lord's Supper saving presence and and expressed by bore witness to drew others to faith. is composed of a elements: God prayer, ministry, received various



theological texts of indicate that understood their lives participation in the begun in faith, sealed death and resurrection by sharing in the which celebrated his action in their lives, universal love that 'Life in the Spirit' and Christian spirituality constellation of images, community, asceticism, that emphases at different

times and for various reasons. Rearranging one element in the constellation affects all the others. Early Christian history exemplifies this principle.

## 1. A Synopsis of the Development of Christian Spirituality

By centering on the Sunday Eucharist celebrated in house churches or larger communities made up of rich and poor, educated and illiterate, men and women, early Christian spirituality reinforced certain feelings, insights, and convictions. Love, acceptance, reconciliation, hope, and the challenge to honest love and generosity were dominant feelings. Understanding various senses of scripture – literal, allegorical, moral, eschatological – was encouraged through preaching. The conviction was deepened that the community was the primary place where one meets the Lord.

Initial emphasis on martyrdom affected all later interpretation of Christian experience. Paul saw ministry as the imitation of Christ, but early Christian martyrs saw their experience as the closest imitation of Jesus. When martyrdom was no longer possible complete self denial was sought in asceticism and early monasticism.



Asceticism arose as a counter-cultural movement among Christians against the Christian Church that was too identified with Alexandrian, Antiochene, Byzantine and Roman Institutions. Asceticism was primarily a lay movement and had two dimensions: solitary, that tended towards excessive contempt for the flesh; and communal which stressed simple prayer that relished scripture and promoted the necessary attitudes for the interpretation of scripture: deep charity and purity of conscience.

Sayings of the desert fathers and mothers manifest profound realization that tradition is not a set formula but a continuity of life, lived according to the gospel.

Christian cultures absorption of ancient learning promoted an influential model and method of spirituality. Philosophical speculation became the ideal. Its method involved subjection of passion to reason. The ideal of virginity attained a moral and cultural supremacy in Christianity. For early Christians virginity meant not only a battle against tensions of unfulfilled sexuality, but a struggle against the force of social convention that swept a person towards perpetuating family kinship, and to 'mediate' between the divine and human. The emphasis was on the withdrawal of the 'self' from society's claims concerning family kinship in favour of establishing a network of faith relationships centered upon Christ and his gospel.

Medieval spirituality among the laity was characterized by a cult of relics, an almost magical understanding of sacraments, pilgrimages, Spirituality among monks and monastics flourished in various forms. For some, spirituality was based on a withdrawal into solitude.

hinged upon ministry of devoted to in cathedral Monks saw as the only the image of restored to this life. For genuine life was only outside structures and St. Their was based



For others, it an urban clerics including laity liturgy. monastic life place where God could be humanity in yet others, evangelical possible monastic (St. Francis Dominic). spirituality upon a

mendicant lifestyle. They wandered the countryside preaching the gospel and calling all to conversion. Living in poverty, they alternated periods of solitude with the preaching of the gospel and focusing on the humanity of Jesus in the incarnation and passion. For some monastics, such as Julian of Norwich, the constellation of elements that affected Christian spirituality was influenced by the image of god as mother. Feminine God images are found in the bible (Prov. 1:20; 8:1, 11; 9:1; Is. 42:14; 49:15). Most developed theology of the motherhood of God and the nurturing qualities of Christ occurred in the writings of medieval Cistercian monks. Many Cistercian abbots needed to supplement their religious authority with what they considered the feminine characteristics – gentleness, tenderness, availability – which they projected onto Christ their model of monk and abbot. Medieval spirituality interprets its experience of being human as one of being the image and likeness of God. Thus it continues patristic themes: grace as divinization; intellect, memory and will as reflections of the Trinity (cf. the cloud of unknowing); the image of God as given from the beginning yet tarnished by sin; and asceticism as the true way to develop the true likeness to God (cf. The Imitation of Christ). For medieval men and women such as Francis of Assisi and Clare, one becomes

one's true self through conformity to the model of true humanity: Jesus Christ. In the midst of wars and religious divisions of late western medieval history women such as Catherine of Sienna heeded the voices of their inner religious experience which urged them to redirect political affairs. Catherine of Sienna advised the Pope, Joan of Ark led armies. Thus, demonstrating the inseparability of religious and 'worldly' experience.

### 1.a. Spirituality in the Eastern Churches

Schism's in Christianity accentuated differences in spirituality. The eastern schism of 1054 A.D. was on account of disputes over papal authority—Pope Leo IX claimed he held authority over the four Eastern patriarchs and over the insertion of the *filioque* clause into the Nicene Creed by the Western Church. In Christian theology the *filioque* clause (*filius* meaning "and [from] the son" in Latin) is a heavily disputed clause added to the Nicene Creed in 589. It forms a divisive difference in particular between the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church centered on the relative divinity of the Father compared to the Son. In the place where the original Nicene Creed reads "We believe in the Holy Spirit ... who proceeds from the Father", the amended, Roman Catholic version reads "We believe in the Holy Spirit ... who proceeds from the Father *and the Son*". The addition is accepted by Roman Catholic Christians but rejected by Eastern Orthodox Christians. For the sake of clarity we reproduce a comparison between the Creed of 325 and 381.

#### Comparison between Creed of 325 and Creed of 381

The following table displays side by side the earlier (325) and later (381) forms of this Creed in the English translation given in Schaff's Creeds of Christendom, which indicates by brackets the portions of the 325 text that were omitted or moved in 381, but uses no typographical mark to indicate what phrases, absent in the 325 text, were added in 381.

First Council of Nicea (325)	First Council of Constantinople (381)
We <a href="#">believe in one God</a> , the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible.	We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.
And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father [the only-begotten; that is, of the essence of the Father, God of God], Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made,	And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds (æons), Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father;

being of one substance with the Father;	
by whom all things were made [both in heaven and on earth];	by whom all things were made;
who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man;	who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man;
he suffered, and the third day he rose again, ascended into heaven;	he was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried, and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father;
from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.	from thence he shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead;
	whose kingdom shall have no end.
And in the Holy Ghost.	And in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spake by the prophets. In one holy catholic and apostolic Church; we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.
[But those who say: 'There was a time when he was not;' and 'He was not before he was made;' and 'He was made out of nothing,' or 'He is of another substance' or 'essence,' or 'The Son of God is created,' or 'changeable,' or 'alterable' — they are condemned by the holy catholic	

and apostolic Church.]	
<b>First Council of Nicea (325)</b>	<b>First Council of Constantinople (381)</b>
Πιστεύομεν εἰς ἕνα Θεὸν Πατέρα παντοκράτορα, πάντων ὀρατῶν τε καὶ ἀοράτων ποιητὴν.	Πιστεύομεν εἰς ἕνα Θεὸν Πατέρα παντοκράτορα, ποιητὴν οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς, ὀρατῶν τε πάντων καὶ ἀοράτων.
Πιστεύομεν εἰς ἕνα κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν, τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ, γεννηθέντα ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς μονογενῆ, τουτέστιν ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ πατρὸς, θεὸν ἐκ θεοῦ ἀληθινου, γεννηθέντα, οὐ ποιηθέντα, ὁμοούσιον τῷ πατρί	Καὶ εἰς ἕνα κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν, τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ τὸν μονογενῆ, τὸν ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς γεννηθέντα πρὸ πάντων τῶν αἰώνων, φῶς ἐκ φωτός, θεὸν ἀληθινὸν ἐκ θεοῦ ἀληθινοῦ, γεννηθέντα οὐ ποιηθέντα, ὁμοούσιον τῷ πατρί·
δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα ἐγένετο, τὰ τε ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ καὶ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς	δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα ἐγένετο·
τὸν δι' ἡμᾶς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους καὶ διὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν σωτηρίαν κατελθόντα καὶ σαρκωθέντα καὶ ἐνανθρωπήσαντα,	τὸν δι' ἡμᾶς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους καὶ διὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν σωτηρίαν κατελθόντα ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν καὶ σαρκωθέντα ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου καὶ Μαρίας τῆς παρθένου καὶ ἐνανθρωπήσαντα,
παθόντα, καὶ ἀναστάντα τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ, καὶ ἀνελθόντα εἰς τοὺς οὐρανοὺς,	σταυρωθέντα τε ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἐπὶ Ποντίου Πιλάτου, καὶ παθόντα καὶ ταφέντα, καὶ ἀναστάντα τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ κατὰ τὰς γραφάς, καὶ ἀνελθόντα εἰς τοὺς οὐρανοὺς, καὶ καθεζόμενον ἐκ δεξιῶν τοῦ πατρὸς
καὶ ἐρχόμενον κρῖναι ζῶντας καὶ νεκρούς.	καὶ πάλιν ἐρχόμενον μετὰ δόξης κρῖναι ζῶντας καὶ νεκρούς·
	οὗ τῆς βασιλείας οὐκ ἔσται τέλος.
Καὶ εἰς τὸ Ἅγιον Πνεῦμα.	Καὶ εἰς τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιον, τὸ κύριον, (καὶ) τὸ ζωοποιόν, τὸ ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκπορευόμενον, τὸ σὺν πατρί καὶ υἱῷ συμπροσκυνούμενον καὶ συνδοξαζόμενον, τὸ λαλῆσαν διὰ τῶν προφητῶν. εἰς μίαν, ἁγίαν,

	καθολικὴν καὶ ἀποστολικὴν ἐκκλησίαν· ὁμολογοῦμεν ἕν βάπτισμα εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν· προσδοκοῦμεν ἀνάστασιν νεκρῶν, καὶ ζωὴν τοῦ μέλλοντος αἰῶνος. Ἀμήν.
Τοὺς δὲ λέγοντας, ὅτι ἦν ποτε ὅτε οὐκ ἦν, καὶ πρὶν γεννηθῆναι οὐκ ἦν, καὶ ὅτι <sup>[6]</sup> ἕξ οὐκ ὄντων ἐγένετο, ἢ ἕξ ἐτέρας ὑποστάσεως ἢ οὐσίας φάσκοντας εἶναι, [ἢ κτιστόν,] τρεπτόν ἢ ἀλλοιωτόν τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ, [τούτους] ἀναθεματίζει ἡ καθολικὴ [καὶ ἀποστολικὴ] ἐκκλησία.	

Over the centuries, the Eastern Churches developed a unique spirituality. For instance, medieval eastern spirituality which is well represented in the writings of Gregory of Palamas (1296-1359), demonstrates how *Hesychasm*, which is eastern Christianity's ancient tradition of contemplative monasticism was integrated into a doctrinal synthesis. He stated that the whole person is called now to enjoy the first fruits of final deification, and that this included social and political implications. A central feature of *Hesychasm* is prayer of the heart; that is, prayer of the whole person, including the body. Its aim is to be conscious of the grace of baptism that is already given but hidden by sin. Its method was influenced by Islam's joining of the holy name to the rhythm of breathing. It is important to remember that in eastern medieval spirituality, the term active life refers to the redirection not suppression of passions, and contemplative life refers to silence of heart. This means that a monastic could well be in the stage of active life, whereas a lay person could attain the stage of contemplation through silence of heart. This understanding is indeed challenging to contemporary religious and also monks who are content to follow time tables set for them within the context of religious community life or monastic life. Routine and repetition, even if it involves prayer and the celebration of sacraments, does not guarantee spirituality unless it engenders an authentic God experience.

Amongst the Eastern Churches, Russian Spirituality retained its medieval perspective into the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and these included: God is experienced in nature and history; icons (religious images) and beautiful liturgy is a powerful means of drawing believers and unbelievers into the mystery of God's saving presence; Christ is imaged as *Pantocrator* rather than as humble or suffering; Mary's motherhood is emphasized rather than her virginity; asceticism is imaged as labour, as constant effort rather than as war; the Jesus prayer is appreciated as a way to pray constantly. The Russian religious ethic stresses charity towards the destitute and the poor.

### 1.b. Spirituality in the Wake of the Reformation

The Reformation led to a new understanding of spirituality. Monasticism was no longer desirable as a special place to experience God. God was now seen as free to be present

intensely in all life. Celibacy was no longer the privileged stage of life to attain union with God. Instead marriage was valued and in some cases became almost an obligation for clergy. For Martin Luther, speech about God is speech about absence. God is met only in the cross of Christ, that is lonely despair, where there are no signs of transcendence, no conceptual neatness, no mystical assurances. Theresa of Child Jesus and John of the Cross would agree with Luther's conviction that one cannot contain nor control God. Luther and also authentic catholic contemplative tradition object to the perversion of contemplation into a mysticism that imprisons God in a set of human experiences. John of the Cross teaches the inevitability of the 'dark night' in which human desire is transformed and one's human projections unto God are eventually surrendered to allow authentic union with God in Christ. John of the Cross, Theresa of Child Jesus, and that knowledge of the only on God's terms, their self assertive to take the initiative in Carmelite reform of Child Jesus was friars through John of intent on making community of loving poverty and solitude completely disposed the sake of the needs



Luther would agree cross is possible when humans yield will, and allow God undeserved love. initiated by Theresa extended to the the Cross and was religious life a friends, living in in order to be to God's actions for of the church.

Theresa of Jesus communicated her experience of deepening prayer through the image of four waters. Her efforts at self knowledge and honest love (drawing water from the well) yield a greater capacity for receiving God's love (a water wheel eases the effort); fidelity in the desert of loves purification allows the full force of God's acceptance and love to inundate her (the river) with unusual gifts of intimacy and leadership in the church (rain).

Ignatius of Loyola spoke of the spiritual exercises as an adaptable, imaginative method of meditation and contemplation of scripture designed to assimilate the believer into the mysteries of Christ as a contemplative in apostolic action. After the Reformation catholic spirituality developed through French writers such as Madame Acarie, who would be known as Carmelite Mary of the Incarnation. Francis de Sales, bishop known for his warmth and sensitivity as a spiritual director compiled his classic treatment of laity's pursuit of holiness in everyday life in his work *Introduction to the Devout Life*.

There also arose in the catholic church Mystical Theology. Its aim was doctrinal and scientific study of the journey of the soul into contemplative union with God. All steps of the spiritual life were conceived as preparation for this union. 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century spirituality was like all previous spirituality was a creative response to God's presence discerned in events and ideas. The struggles of faith are seen in the work of Therese of Lisieux. Attempts to reconcile science and religion are seen in the work of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Concern to restore biblical prayer, share monastic riches with the laity, and reunite spirituality and theology motivated the liturgical movement. The

spirituality of Dorothy Day's spirituality of the Catholic Workers' Movement, the spirituality of the Little Brothers and sisters of Jesus inspired by Charles de Foucauld who lived a ministry of evangelical presence as poor workers among workers.

### **1.c. Spirituality in the Life of the Church since Vatican II**

The Constitution on Sacred Liturgy announced that the primary goal of the entire council was to intensify Christian spirituality, that is the daily growth of Catholics in Christian living. This was the primary reason of renewing the liturgy especially the Eucharist.



Dramatic consequences followed. Catholics shifted from an experience of going to watch (the priests say mass in Latin) to one of being drawn into an experience of active listening of scripture (Dei Verbum no. 21), read in their own language, responding in song, procession, antiphonal prayer, and participation in the Eucharistic meal of unity, remembering Jesus' saving teaching and action. The liturgical renewal of Vatican Council II set up expectations that one would receive adequate understanding of scripture and a call to conversion, warm welcome from an inclusive community and faithful witness to Jesus' ministry to the poor and the marginalized. Two themes on the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church affected spirituality: the universal call to holiness, and the call to the same holiness cultivated in various duties of life. Therefore, there emerged the Cursillo Movement, the Marriage Encounter Movement. Reversing the long tradition of viewing the world as inimical to the church, as a sphere divided from the sacred to be converted and taught, the Document on the Church in the Modern World affirms the

value of the world and confesses that the church could learn from the world and should be receptively reading the 'signs of the times.' Christian spirituality therefore becomes more authentically biblical, discerning God's presence in the midst of the events of history, as well as in the movements in one's inner spirit. Not only is the secular world affirmed as having something to teach the church, but also Protestants, Eastern Orthodox, Jews and all non Christian religions are approached with respectful attention to what they can contribute to catholic spirituality. 'Every branch of the human family possesses ... some part of the spiritual treasure entrusted by God to humanity, ...' (Gaudium et spes 86). The church's task is to uncover, cherish, and ennoble all that is true, good, and beautiful in the human community' (Gaudium et spes 96).

In conclusion we quote Thomas Merton as a paradigm of spirituality in the Post Vatican Church. Merton perceived the direction of God's Spirit in his life moving him from a desire to flee the world in order to find God in the sacred sphere of the monastery, to a realization that his former perspective was an illusion. Finding God was a matter of entering fully into himself and into every dimension of the world of human friendship, of action for justice, of humanity praising and seeking God in non Christian religions. Catholic spirituality since Vatican II has moved steadily in this direction rejoicing in the Spirit's gifts and facing the inevitable questions and discomfort associated with new pathways.

In the 1980's Sandra M Schneider explained the contemporary understanding of spirituality and the basic characteristics of the discipline. She argues that the distinction must be made between self transcendence as understood in a philosophical or religious sense. Self transcendence in the philosophical sense is based on a distinction between the material and the spiritual. The spiritual being understood as the capacity for self transcendence through knowledge and love which characterizes the human-being as a person. Thus in a philosophical sense all human beings are essentially spiritual, and actualize that dimension of selfhood through the establishment of human relationships. The religious meaning of spirituality is based on the conception of what constitutes the proper and highest actualization of the human capacity of self transcendence in personal relationships, namely relationship with God. Spirituality then in its religious sense refers to the relationship between the individual and God, pursued in the life of faith, hope, and love. The Christian meaning is a particular specification of the religious meaning indicating actualization of the capacity for self transcendence that is constituted by the gift of the Holy Spirit which gives a relationship to God in Christ within the believing community. In other words, a Christian actualizes the religious sense of self transcendence through the faith experience of the Trinitarian presence in the community through a process of self-giving through self effacement (cf. Jn. 13:1-9, 12-14; 17:11, 21-23) in imitation of the passion of Jesus. Christian spirituality therefore, is trinitarian, Christological, ecclesial religious experience.

## 2. Towards a Contemporary Personal Spirituality

From the foregoing discussion it becomes clear that the manifold dimensions of Christian spirituality include faith, morality, repentance and hope. Spirituality is a lived response to the resulting dynamic of the interplay between faith in the Trinitarian God that is demonstrated in a way of life which affects interpersonal relationship, the choice of good, and the vision for the future. Spirituality is a way of life based on interpersonal relationships with the God-head on the one hand, and human beings and the world at large, on the other hand. The said way of life will be formulated upon a set of doctrines organized into a cohesive whole, thus forming a religious ideology. Spirituality is a way of life based upon Christian ideology. Christian ideology is founded on divine revelation, and has a moral code.

For Christians, the divine will is announced and recognized through the workings of the Holy Trinity in the economy of salvation. The divine will always involves the distinction between good and evil in human relationships, and is therefore, associated with morality. The appropriate Christian response is deemed to be attained in self transcendence as per the teachings of Christ set forth inerrantly in the Holy Gospels. These represent the constellation of elements that affect personal spirituality. Let us now examine each of the **factors that shape ‘Christian Spirituality.’**

### a. **Belief in the Holy Trinity and a clear perspective of the practical implications that follow**

Contemporary Trinitarian theology gives priority to the narrative and symbolic discourse of Christian worship and proclamation. Narratives and symbols express cognitive meanings and refer to reality just as more ‘literal’ forms of discourse do. They perform this semantic function indirectly and in a complex way. Symbols make the realities to which they refer present. They orchestrate the participant’s experience of the reality which they disclose however ineffably. In religion, such forms of discourse are so closely bound to the faith experience that they give access that they are the primary and indispensable carriers of this living religious tradition. In between this primary Christian discourse and theology, there is the genre of doctrine.

As teaching is a function of proclamation, so doctrine overlaps and participates in the function of the primary discourse. Doctrine is an attempt to communicate clearly the cognitive and moral discernments of the Christian faith experience. Through the centuries the word doctrine has been associated with officially sanctioned church teaching. In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century the word dogma has come to designate doctrinal definitions of the highest level of the church’s teaching authority. A dogmatic definition could be viewed as a grammatical rule of Christian discourse the intent of which is to preserve from aberration the implicit grammar or semantic structure of the ordinary discourses of doctrine and theology.



The biblical experience of God in the OT has been basically described in terms of a proper name and an identifying description. Israel experience God as the one who encountered the people in the saving events of history. The encounter was conceived according to the model of a personal self introduction by means of a proper name Yhwh (Ex. 20:2). A sequence of saving events that came to constitute Israel's history eventually extended from the first saving act of creation to the final day of Yhwh. The distinctively Israelite mode of experiencing God accentuates the personal aspect of the divine mystery as the 'one encountering' via the mediation of historical events. As Lord of History, God's unity and transcendence of history are preserved. God's active agency in history was expressed through the dynamic metaphor of 'spirit of God,' 'word of God,' and 'wisdom of God' without jeopardizing God's transcendence and unity. Metaphors were used to express poetically the radical sense of God's immanence (i.e. to remain within) to creation (Ps. 51) – an identity between the divine spirit and the human spirit renewed through repentance; Job 28, Prov. 8, Sir. 24, Wis. 7 – the identification of the wisdom of God with the immanent meaning of creation.

The biblical experience of God in the NT has been described as Father, Son and Spirit. The God to whom the NT witnesses is this same Yhwh, but now the identifying description is the historical event of Jesus culminating in the historical event of Easter. The God of the NT witness is Yhwh whom Jesus called Abba, and who is now re-identified as 'him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead' (Rom. 4:24; 8:11; 1 Pet. 1:21). Sometimes the NT witness identifies Jesus with the divinity of the one who raised him. The spirit of God is the same spirit of prophetic and later Judaism, but now usually spoken of in reference to God's saving event in Jesus. The NT identifies God as the Father whose reign Jesus proclaimed and who raised him from the dead. The ascription of divinity to Jesus is pervasive in the NT., if we do not limit evidence to texts that explicitly call Jesus God (Heb. 1:8-9; Jn 1:1; 20:28). There are frequent application to Jesus of OT metaphors of divine immanence.



Jesus is identified in hymns (Col. 1:15-20; Heb. 1:1-4; Jn. 1:1-14). The image of sonship only gradually came to convey a firm sense of Jesus' divine status in the NT. The title son of God was initially confessed of Jesus in the light of his Easter exaltation celebrated as the fulfillment of the royal messianic Ps. 2 and 110. The initial connotation was messianic, and in sense 'adoptive' in that it was associated with the moment of royal enthronement (Rom. 1:3). In the gospel of John, the son 'imager' combines with the pre-existent wisdom 'imagery' to provide the most explicit NT confession of Jesus' divinity. The acclamation of Jesus as Lord (*kurios*) within the worship of Greek speaking communities which used the LXX (Septuagint) version of the OT, is a powerful attribution of the divine status to the Risen Jesus. The title *Kurios* was widely used in the LXX as a divine appellative (Pos. 110:1). The divine status of the Spirit of God can similarly be seen as pervasive in the scriptures. The OT Spirit of God, *Ruah Yhwh*, was the reality of God in the creature

empowering him with life (Ps. 104:29-30), prophecy (Mic. 3:8), discernment (Is. 28:5-6), holiness (Ps. 51:12-13), and an eschatological kingdom of justice, peace and freedom (Is. 11). The Holy Spirit of the NT is this same spirit of God now identified as the Spirit of Christ in the light of the Easter experience (Rom. 8:9). The derivation of such pneumatic empowerment from the Easter experience is evidenced in 1 Cor. 15:35-53 where Paul identifies the Risen Lord as the 'life giving Spirit' and sums up his description of the resurrection body with the expression 'spiritual body' – *soma pneumatikon*. As Rom. 8:9 shows this spiritual empowerment is due to the spirit of God dwelling in us. Paul attributes to the indwelling Spirit the empowerment to love (Rom. 5:5), to call God Father (Rom. 8:15), to pray (Rom. 8:26), to be free (2 Cor. 3:17), to prophecy (1 Cor 12:10). John also uses the Spirit-flesh antithesis (Jn. 3:1-10; 6:63). The dominant form of divine empowerment for John attributes to the indwelling Spirit is new life. This new life is not simply ascribed to the Spirit but is actually identified with the spirit (Jn. 4:10; 7:39; 20:22). In John the *Parakletos* compensates for the absence of within the Christian community of the physical earthly presence of Jesus, who was the first Paraclete. The Paraclete imagery of Jn. 14:16 is the high point of the biblical personification of the Spirit. The Paraclete is clearly differentiated from the Father and the son and is spoken of as 'proceeding' from the Father (Jn. 15:26) and as being 'sent' either by the Father (Jn. 14:26), or by the Son from the Father (Jn. 15:26; 16:7).

**We have argued in Section 1.c.** above that spirituality in its religious sense refers to the relationship between the individual and God, pursued in the life of faith, hope, and love, and that the Christian understanding of spirituality is based upon a particular specification of the religious meaning indicating actualization of the capacity for self transcendence that is constituted by the gift of the Holy Spirit which gives a relationship to God in Christ within the believing community. Therefore, we have concluded that a Christian actualizes the religious sense of faith experience of the Trinitarian through a process of self-giving (Jn. 13:1-9, 12-14; 17:11, 21-23) in Jesus. Christian spirituality is Christological, ecclesial religious spirituality of every Christian remains dependent upon sensitivity to the dictates of the Trinitarian presence of the God-head present within oneself (Rom. 5:5; 8:9, 11, 16, 26; 1 Cor. 6:19), in the sacraments (Mk. 14:22, 24; 1 Cor. 11:29), and in the community (Mt. 18:20; Jn. 13:1-9, 12-14; 17:11, 21-23). Surrendering to the God-head by a total acceptance of the divine will is at the heart of Christian spirituality. Prayer, morality, mortification, penance, and other ascetical practices merely sharpen our ability to obey the divine will in total surrender to the God-head. Although prayer, examination of conscience, contemplative methods, mortification and penance have been broadly categorized as 'spiritual exercises' the effectiveness of all such actions depends on the whether or not they facilitate a total surrender to the God-head through obedience to the



divine will manifested in the gospels (Mt. 7:24; Jn. 7:17; 8:26, 28, 38; 12:49-50; 14:10; 16:13), in the norms of Christian morality (Mt. 16:19; Jn. 13:34; Titus 2:1-5), in the teaching of the church (Mt. 18:15-19), and through one's legitimate superiors who act in good conscience (Titus 3:1).

### **b. Understanding the Economy of Salvation and Seeing in it a Reflection of One's Personal Pilgrimage of Faith**

Economy is a theological term used to refer to God's activity in the world, particularly with regard to the two dispensations of the OT and NT. Economy of Salvation refers to divine activity in formulating and sustaining the Sinaitic Covenant and its perfection in the New Covenant sealed by the crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus.

The first dispensations of the OT., was based on God's promise to Abraham. It was a promise made more than 430 years before the Hebrews came to live in Egypt. The original promise was that Abraham would become a great nation which would become a blessing to all nations. The promise would be specified in stages: first Abraham would be shown the land (Gen. 12:7), then he would be told that it would be given to his descendants forever (Gen. 13:15). God extended the benefits of this covenants to all Abraham's descendants. This covenant was unconditional (Gen 17:7).God bound himself to man unconditionally. The only demands placed on Abraham are to believe the covenant maker (Gen. 15:6), to walk before god and be perfect (Gen. 17:1), and to preserve the sing of the covenant (Gen. 17:1). God is bound to give Abraham a land, large descendants, and maintain a special relationship with him. The covenant has no sanctions. God renewed this covenant through a personal manifestation to Isaac (Gen. 26:1-5), and Jacob (Gen. 28:10-22). Since the covenant with Abraham is unconditional it cannot be broken and persists throughout the history of Abraham's descendants.



Therefore, God remembered this covenant with Abraham, despite the weaknesses and deceptions of his 'chosen instruments' and came to the assistance of their descendants. The weaknesses of the 'chosen instruments' are reflected in the following: a). Abram requested Sarai to pose as his sister (Gen. 12:12-13), Abram has a child by Sarai's slave-woman Hagar notwithstanding the divine promise of an 'heir' (Gen. 16:2-4), Jacob is a deceiver (Gen. 27:18-19). Of Isaac and Joseph, the biblical narratives do recount anything that would appear disparaging. God has condescended to act within the context of man made social customs. Therefore, God had to endure the perfidy of human pettiness which is amplified in jealousy, treachery, and hate. God overcomes the human frailty of his instruments. In this, God demonstrated His faithful and steadfast love.

Salvation history emerges only when the believing community acknowledges continuity of divine activity. The acknowledgement of divine inspiration of the Pentateuchal sources (JEDP) is adequate confirmation. J. C. von Hoffman (1810-1877) first spoke of *Heilsgeschichte* in German which means ‘redemptive history’, or ‘holy history,’ or ‘salvation history.’ Today, we use the term ‘salvation history’ to refer to events in the biblical narrative which manifest God’s deeds for the salvation of the world. God’s activity in the world. It involves the lives of specific chosen instruments, such as the Patriarch, the chosen people, the Judges, the Kings, and the Prophets, the Sages, and the Priests. Salvation History is meant to provide a blue print of the manner in which God deals with human beings in the process of establishing an everlasting union with them. The authentic Christian spirituality inevitably brings about coalescence between God’s activities in the life of the individual Christian and divine activity in the world. Authentic Christian spirituality dovetails God’s activities in the life of individual Christians into God’s activity in the world.



The watershed event in the awakening of Israel’s religious consciousness as a nation was the ‘Exodus.’ We offer a synopsis of R. de Vaux’s analysis of the history of the ‘Hebrew people’ from the time of their sojourn in Egypt.

- i. The exodus and the crossing of the Red Sea was considered trivial by non-participants as insignificant, secular, and non-religious. Many had fled Egypt prior to the exodus event of the Hebrews.
- ii. The group that marched out of Egypt were a ‘mixed multitude’ (Ex. 6:1; 10:27-29; 12:31-39; 14:5; Num. 11:1-6).
- iii. The triumph led to small scale celebration that dissolved into ‘murmuring’ in the wilderness (Ex. 15:20-23; 17:1-7).
- iv. A few like Moses and Aaron sustained their religious convictions of being delivered by Yhwh throughout.
- v. With the passage of time, Israel who had reached the ‘Land of Promise’ memorialized the flight from Egypt by highlighting divine providence. It served as the reason for Israel’s existence as a nation (Dt. 5:21-25; 26:1-11).
- vi. When the cult was established, the flight from Egypt was seen in retrospect as a procession culminating in liturgical celebration in cultic worship (Ps. 68).
- vii. When the liturgy was seen as becoming disassociated with lifestyle, and distanced from God’s salvific works, and was overshadowed by preoccupation with rubrics, financial gain or social status, then, God called forth prophets to initiate a reform.
- viii. Eventually, prophetic condemnations of liturgy became part of the liturgy (Ps. 22; 49; 95). Thus prophecy which underlined the need for

reform and renewal, became an integral part of liturgy. Liturgy implied on-going renewal.

Salvation history emerged when Israel's holy men and women succeeded in detecting God's presence within crucial events or national events. The Temple became the principal focus of worship and the liturgy was intended to lead people to godly lives in non-religious spheres. God's presence in Scripture and Liturgy was meant to be a beacon of light in guiding Israel's quest for the divine will. The climactic moment of salvation history dawned with the Incarnation. Jesus was presented as the new locus of meeting Yhwh (Jn. 1:51). Jesus was presented as replacing the Temple (Jn. 2:19), and personifying the meaning of religious feasts of Israel, such as the Passover, the Sabbath, and *Sukkoth* (Jn. 6:32-35, 51, 53; 7:23; 8:12; 10:7, 11). Similarly, authentic Christian spirituality involves a personal 'passing over' or departure, a leaving behind of old sinful ways which can be metaphorically described as 'sitting beside fleshpots of Egypt eating bread to the full' in order to experience divine providence in the midst of the desert of deprivation and suffering. It is meant to be a personal passover that will be celebrated at every Sunday Eucharist rejoicing in the presence of the Risen Lord, together with the entire Christian community, whereby a pledge is also made to live godly lives in secular spheres outside cultic celebration.

### c. The Personal Implications of Covenant

In ancient Hebrew society written documents were employed little or not at all. In its place the spoken word was invested with ritual solemnity. The deity before whom the spoken word was proclaimed guaranteed the fulfillment of the pledge or promise because of the threat of divine sanction. The covenant served as a written contract. The contracting parties were not necessarily equal. The Patriarchal narratives are full of covenants between individuals (Gen. 14:13; 21:22ff.; 26:26ff.; 31:44ff.; Josh. 9:3ff.; 1 Sam. 11:1ff.; 18:3ff.; 2 Sam. 3:11ff.; 5:3; 1 Kgs. 5:2ff.; 15:19; 20:34; 2 Kgs. 11:4; Is. 28:15, 18; Jer. 34:8ff.; Ez. 17:14ff.; Hos. 12:2; Amos 1:9). This relationship is transferred formula of the Yhwh and Israel. It is a greater and the lesser. G. E. Mendenhall has shown that the external form of the covenant resembles the suzerainty treaties imposed upon the vassal king as illustrated by Hittite treaties (Ancient Near Eastern Texts - ANET 203). In this covenant, Yhwh imposes certain duties upon Israel and in return promises to be their God. Israel accepts the obligation of worshipping only Yhwh by observing the commandments. Covenant supercedes contract in that it establishes kinship. God's covenant with Abraham was in Hebrew tradition the original basis for Israel's relationship with Yhwh, but the covenant with Israel itself was at Sinai (Ex. 19:1ff.). Two covenant rituals are mentioned in Ex. 24, perhaps from two different sources. In the ritual of sprinkling blood, the blood of the

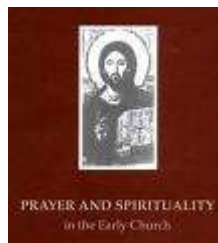


sacrificial animals is sprinkled on the altar which represents Yhwh, and on the people. The contracting parties become one blood, one family (Ex. 24:3-8). The other ritual procedure is the banquet. The common meal shared by Moses, Aaron and the 70 elders of Israel also symbolize a covenant union (Ex. 24:1-2, 9-11). The covenant confers upon Israel a particular sanctity (Ex. 19:5ff.).

The personal implications arising from such a view of biblical covenants is that while purity of faith must be maintained and syncretism avoided, bonding into community becomes an essential and integral part of covenanted life. As St. Paul exhorts the Ephesians 5:22-33,

‘Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church; however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.’

Israel thus also becomes a mediator to other nations (Jer. 7:23; 11:4; 24:7; Ez. 11:20; 14:11; Hos. 2:25). The salt of the sacrificial victim was also a sign of the covenant (Lev. 2:13) because in Arabic, to eat salt with another is to seal a bond of friendship. The covenant was also renewed (Dt. 28:69; Josh. 24:26). For Martin Noth, Israel began to exist as a tribal confederation with described in Josh. 24. Noth in the manner of the Greek united about a common shrine and The stele of Merneptah is a Noth, but it is quite probable that worshipped Yhwh existed before thesis reflects well with the tribal organization described in the book of judges and 1 Sam. 1-8. Covenant renewal was a sign of re-dedication which springs forth from thanksgiving. It evokes continued protection and patronage of Yhwh, and re-affirms commitment to covenantal obligations. In like manner, in the process of developing personal Christian spirituality the believer must celebrate the human dimension of the gospel by transforming communities and families into a ‘locus’ of



prayer, reconciliation and festive celebration, based upon a personal experience of God's providence experienced through the gift of one another.

#### d. Faith

Modern catholic theology maintained along with Thomas Aquinas that faith is 'the act of the intellect when it assents to divine truth under the influence of the will moved by God through grace.' The definition remains valid even today, but a fuller understanding can be arrived at by having recourse to sacred scripture.

The OT contains many instances of persons believing a message to be true (Gen. 45:26; Ex. 4:5, 8, 31; 19:9; 1 Kgs. 10:7; Jer. 40:14; Is. 53:1; Hab. 1:5). The Hebrew word used is *āman*. One believes in an inferior (1 Sam. 27:12), in a friend (Jer. 12:6; Mic. 7:5); in a servant (Job. 4:18). By this belief one professes that they are true and honest and can be depended upon. The Hebrew words <sup>e</sup>*munah* (Ex. 17:12 – solidity and firmness), and *emet* (truth) are nouns derived from the verb *āman*. In Is. 33:6 that which is firm gives security. In Ps. 36:6 God offers firm security because of His fidelity. In Hab. 2:4, *emet* (truth) signifies firmness and solidity, which concerning personal conduct means truthfulness or fidelity. The verb *āman* is also used to describe Abraham's faith in God (Gen. 15:6). Belief in this instance is to accept the divine promise with confidence in its fulfillment, and with it to accept the power and will of God to fulfill his promise. In the light of Gen. 15:1, it means accepting God as 'shield.' In Is. 7:9, it also means abstinence from all political and military action. To resort to political and military action would amount to a refusal to believe in God.



In the Synoptic gospels Jesus himself demands faith (Mt. 9:28; Mk. 4:36; Lk. 8:25). Faith in the Johannine gospel is acceptance of Jesus as the 'Sent One of God.' Faith in the Pauline letters is a manifestation of self giving love in imitation of Christ. In 1 Cor. 2:5, Paul says, 'Your faith should stand you in the power of God' (which is the cross – 1 Cor. 1:18) Faith in the NT is simply the acceptance of the crucified Jesus as the pathway to God; it is the acceptance of the claims he makes as the Son of God, and the demand he imposes of carrying the cross daily, and following him. Therefore from the perspective of personal Christian spirituality, faith is the unconditional acceptance of the words of Jesus as the path to salvation. Every individual Christian must cultivate the gift of faith (2 Pet. 1:1), for it is the starting point of his or her journey to the Kingdom of God. It of faith that Jesus said, 'For to him who has will more be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away' (Mt. 13:12).

### e. Sacraments and Sacramentals

Sacraments are the seven liturgical rites of the church through which participants experience the paschal mystery of Christ, are formed into the body of Christ, and grow in the life of grace. Therefore, understanding the sacraments in terms of their purpose and function affects the spirituality of Christians.

The English word ‘sacrament’ translates the Latin *sacramentum* and the Greek *mysterion*. In Wis. 6:22, mystery refers to God’s saving activity enacted in history. In the synoptics, the word mystery refers to the secrets of the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 13:11; Mk. 4:11; Lk. 8:10). In Pauline letters mystery refers to Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 2:7-10; Rom. 16:25-26; Col. 1:26-27; 4:3; Eph. 1:9-10; 3:3-12; 1 Tim. 3:16). The rites of baptism and Eucharist are known in the NT era (cf. Acts 2:41; 1 Cor. 11:17-34) but neither was called sacrament at this time.

Tertullian introduced the term sacrament when referring to Christian initiation. *Sacramentum* meant that which makes holy, the consecration itself, that which is consecrated and that to whom one is consecrated. For Tertullian, *sacramentum* meant a sacred action, object or means. In the writings of Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 387), Ambrose Chrysostom (d. 407), and John Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428), certain terminology is used, namely, *typos* and *aletheia*, signifying symbol and reality. For instance, what occurs in water baptism by way of symbolic imitation of Christ insures the reality of salvation enacted in the rite. Sacramental signs make present an aspect of Christ’s incarnate life, death, and resurrection so participants can share in those saving mysteries.



For Augustine all sacraments pertain to the *magnum sacramentum mysterium*. Augustine calls sacrament a sacred sign, a *signaculum*, a visible word. Sacraments are likenesses of what they signify. Augustine distinguished between the reality of Christ’s body and the effect of the sacrament when received. For Augustine, sacrament is a celebration in which the things commemorated, the passion of Christ, are applied. The Augustinian formula was *sacrum signum* – sacred sign. Lanfranc of Canterbury (d. 1089) spoke of *sacrae rei signum* – i.e. the sacrament is a sacred sign because it is the sign of a sacred reality. In the 13<sup>th</sup> Century Pope Innocent III stated that the form of the Eucharistic was bread and wine (a sacrament and not the reality), the truth is of the body and blood (both sacrament and reality), and the power is of unity and charity (reality).

The discussion is important to clarify our understanding of the relationship between sacraments and life? Are Christians passive recipients who are filled with divine grace by means of sacraments?

In the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, church was also seen as a means of salvation. Sacraments were regarded as instituted by Christ. Sacraments receive their precise

determination from the various stages of Christ's life and ministry. Sacraments were high points of the saving revelation of God in the church's present experience of Christ's redemption through the operation of the Holy Spirit. Sacraments were the self expressions of the church. Sacraments were thought of as part of how the divine economy of salvation is experienced in the present. Peter Lombard followed Augustinian tradition and defined sacraments as the visible form of an invisible grace, and that the sacrament produces the effect that it represents. Thus, arose the question whether the sacraments are effective by means of the sacramental rite itself or whether the worthiness of the participant minister affects the effectiveness of the sacrament. Sacraments were *ex opera operato* (the sacraments are effective by means of the sacramental rite itself), and not *ex opere operantis* (the work of the doer – or the moral rectitude of the minister and the participants).

For Thomas Aquinas the function of sacraments is to initiate, restore, preserve or intensify the life of grace in believers. Sacraments incorporates the Christian into the body of Christ, and confer the Spirit promised by the Risen Christ. St. Paul's reference to being buried with Christ in baptism, and walking in newness of life through Christ's resurrection (Rom. 6:3-5) forms an essential foundation for Aquinas' teaching. He describes a sacrament as a sign (following Augustine) of the Incarnate Word, his passion and resurrection, which sanctifies the participant. God accomplishes this through the humanity of Jesus manifest in the sacramental sign itself. Aquinas shows his reliance on the liturgy of the sacraments when he states that 'as a sign a sacrament has a three fold function. It is at once commemorative of that which has gone before, namely the passion of Christ, demonstrative of that which is brought about in us through the passion of Christ, namely grace, and prognostic (prefigurative) i.e. a foretelling of future glory.' When Aquinas describes how sacraments as signs cause grace, he distinguishes between two kinds of efficient causes, principal and instrumental. God is the principal cause; sacraments are the instrumental causes. Sacraments produce two effects: they are remedies for sin and "bring the soul to its fullness in things pertaining to the worship of God in terms of the Christian life, as a ritual expression of this." For Aquinas, sacramental character 'consist in a certain participation in Christ's priesthood present in his faithful ... just as Christ has the full power of a spiritual priesthood so his faithful are brought into configuration to him in that they share in a certain spiritual power relating to the sacraments and the things pertaining to divine worship.' The Council of Florence (1438-1445) gives the first authoritative statement of the church on the sacraments. As a declaration concerning essential elements of the sacraments it is taken almost *verbatim* from Aquinas.





The Benedictine monk Odo Casel in his work *The Mystery of Christian Worship* (translated to English in 1962) centered on the mystery of God present and active in the liturgy. He rediscovered the notion of liturgical memorial that is central to understanding Jewish liturgy and Christian sacraments. For Casel, the liturgy makes present the unique, unrepeatable mystery of Christ, realized historically in the past, and sacramentally represented in the liturgical commemoration. The essential point Casel reiterated was that Christians experience the mysteries of Christ anew in liturgy and the sacraments: they do not simply gain graces from Christ. Casel is more concerned with an inner attitude toward liturgical participation than exterior demonstrations of involvement, although the latter was not ignored. Anscar Vonier of Buckfast in his work *A Key to the Doctrine of the Eucharist* (1925) focused on the liturgical dimension of sacraments. Analyzing sacraments from the liturgical perspective led to an increased awareness of the Christological and Trinitarian foundation of sacraments. The grace of God comes through, with and in Christ: the self-offering of the church is in union with the unique offering of Christ to the Father. This Christological approach to sacraments is emphasized by Edward Schillebeeckx's *De Sacramentele Heilseconomie* (1952). Schillebeeckx asserts the unique and once and for all character of Christ's act of redemption and complements it by stating that this mystery is always offered through sacraments to the church. Christ is thus understood to be the central sacrament, manifesting God's love to the world. The 7 sacraments are specifications and manifestations of this original sacrament. Juan Luis Segundo the liberation theologian, who critiqued the cultic notion of sacraments, sought to determine the life relation of sacramental participation. A too facile celebration of sacraments can numb consciences to the social and political realities of living the Christian life. The challenge which engagement in sacraments entails is to live the justice and peace of God's kingdom which is experienced in sacraments. The liberative power of sacraments is thus to be channeled into a way of living life that reveals the liberative power of the gospel of justice and peace. Karl Rahner argues that sharing in the word is to share in what sacraments are at their foundation, signs of God's self-communication and self-revelation. This avenue opens up new possibilities for ecumenical dialogue about how sacramental acts specify the Word, and how common appreciation of the Word can lead to a common appreciation of sacraments. The traditional maxim, *lex orandi lex credendi*, the law of prayer establishes the law of belief, has been revived in contemporary systematic study of sacraments so that the liturgy becomes a major source of theological reflection. Rahner argues that church is the fundamental sacrament and that it is through the church one participates in Christ's redemption. Rahner maintained that contemporary exegesis makes it impossible to say that Jesus instituted 7 specific sacramental rites (such an approach had made the NT the source of proof texts for institution). Contemporary theology understands Christ as the original sacrament (*grundsakrament*) of the 7 ecclesial acts. Such an approach signals a shift from emphasizing Christ's presence in sacraments to the community's transformation

through sacraments: it also marks a shift from, emphasizing sacraments as things to sacraments as event. Another recent avenue of approach to sacraments is symbolism. The sacraments are essentially symbolic actions that affect participants at many levels with their polyvalence which denotes something that has many values meanings or appeals and their ambiguity in the sense of being indefinable. Symbol language has re-entered catholic theology about sacraments in the sense that sacraments are respected as real, symbolic encounters with God. In sacraments God reveals and grants salvation through Christ's paschal mystery in symbolic acts and words, at the same time the church worships God through Christ empowered by the Holy Spirit by means of active participation in gestural speech and symbolic actions. Sacraments are moments of God's self-disclosure which occur throughout human life. Sacraments are not exclusive channels of God's grace, yet they are central moments and privileged means of encountering God through Christ.

Sacramentals are sacred signs (S.C. 60) which bear a resemblance to sacraments in so far as they signify the effects especially of a spiritual; kind which are obtained through the church. Sacramentals differ from sacraments in the sense that their number is not limited. They are instituted by the church, and they achieve their effect by being placed *ex* the intercession of the *operantis ecclesiae*. Sacramentals include a variety of signs, objects and prayers – eg. The sign of the cross, statues, medals, blessed ashes, holy water, palms, grace at meals, stations of the cross, blessings, exorcisms etc.



Understanding sacraments from a Christological, ecclesiological, and symbolic perspective is important because it demonstrates the vital link between liturgy, discipleship and Christian morality which is based on the gospel life. Spirituality is to be understood as the outgrowth of interior transformation manifested in a Christo-centric lifestyle, resulting from a process of assimilation of the synthesis of faith responses to the Trinitarian Godhead within the individual and in the community, nourished by sacraments and sacramental, guided by the tenets of Christian morality founded upon covenanted life in Christ.

#### **f. Sin and Grace**

Manuals of moral theology which were compiled in the Scholastic era of the 13<sup>th</sup> Century were incomplete in that it focused on the distinction between mortal sins and venial sins. In the 1940's Christian moral theologians such as Tillmann and Haring began to argue that Christian morality must be related to and derive from revelation, and that the fundamental tenet of Christian morality must be the new commandment of Christ – 'Love one another as I have loved you' (Jn. 13:34).

Christian spirituality is influenced by the understanding of morality from which flows the concept of sin. The manner in which one seeks union with God will be affected by one's understanding of sin. The concept of sin will also shape the moral perspective of interpersonal relationships, especially, marriage, family life, priesthood and religious life, education, social justice, health care, geriatric care, trade and commerce, and politics.

Sin as a personal act can be understood in three ways: a). the reality and its meaning, b). the distinction between mortal and venial sin, c). sin as the pathway to death. The basic features of sin are portrayed in the story of the 'Fall' in Gen. 3:1-24. A known precept of God is deliberately violated (Gen. 3:1-6). At the heart of the outward act of disobedience is the inner motivation of desiring to transgress the limits imposed by God pertaining to human existence, by seeking the immediate pleasurable good promised through the satisfaction of behaviour. In wanting to be like gods, the progenitors sought the path of transgression of the divine precept. God himself who had made man and woman in his own image and likeness, had made them his representatives on earth by bestowing upon them the power of procreation, and commanding them to multiply and subdue the earth (Gen. 1:26-28), by garden to cultivate (Gen. 2:15). Yet, in seeking to be like gods, the progenitors sought to transgress the divine boundaries of accepted human conduct. Therefore, the story of the 'fall' presents sin as a revolt against God. This theme is reflected in various instances of sin recorded in the OT. In Num. 14:9; Dt. 28:15, sin is rebellion against God. Sages equated



(Dt. 32:6; Is. 29:11; Prov. 1:7). From a covenantal perspective sin was considered an act of unfaithfulness and adultery (Is. 24:5; 48:8; Jer.3:20; 9:1; Ez. 16:59; Hos. 3:1). However, sin cannot be simply limited to covenant violations because the prophets denounced sins of pagan nations who had no covenantal relationship with *Yhwh* (Ez. 20:7-8; Amos 1:2-3:2). St Paul states that pagans living outside the covenant knew of God through the 'Law written in their hearts' and they sinned by refusing to acknowledge the Creator in preference for the creature, and so, they were dragged down into their own immoral passions (Rom. 1;18-22; 2;14-16). Because sin is a transgression against the divine precept, it is rooted in human freedom and consists in an abuse of the gift of free choice (Sir. 15:11-20). Sin springs from the heart of the person and is an act involving a personal inner and enduring wrong (1 Sam 16:7; Jer. 4:4; Ez. 11:19; Ps. 51).

Sin is referred to in the OT by the Hebrew words – *hatta*, *pesha*, *awon*. *Hatta* (missing the mark) – is a wilful rejection of the known will of God. *Pesha* (rebellion) – is the rejection of God and his love. *Awon* (iniquity or guilt) is the distortion of the sinners inner being caused by the sin. The NT refers to the Greek words - *hamartia*, *hamartema*, *anomia*, *adikia*, *pseudos* and *skotos*. *Hamartia* and

*hamartema* are like *hatta*. *Anomia* means ‘lawlessness,’ and consists in rebellion and contempt for God and his Law. *Adikia* is injustice and is a refusal to accept God and his reign revealed in Christ, and to live in the justice of God. *Pseudos* is falsehood, *skotos* is darkness which are in opposition to the truth of God revealed in Christ who is the way, the truth and the life. Because God is the origin and destiny of all life, and the goal towards which all creation tends, sin which is a turning away from God brings destruction upon the human person. Sin is a refusal of the Father’s love (Lk. 15), and it is a refusal that is rooted in the heart. Sin is a free self determining choice to reject God’s offer of grace and friendship with disastrous consequences because God remains the origin and destiny of all creation. St. Paul particularly in Rom. 5:8 treats sin as the common human condition. Sin operates in the flesh. Sin which operates in the flesh renders the Law impotent because the Law merely sets standards which the flesh is incapable of attaining. Redemption therefore, is through the expiation offered by Christ on the cross.

St. Augustine, defined sin in two ways: a). as anything done, said or desired against the eternal law (*Factum dictum vel concupitum contra legem aeternam*), b). as turning away from God and turning towards the creature (*aversion a Deo, conversio ad creaturam*). Sin as rebellion against God takes on a special repugnance for believers because it becomes an act of ungrateful infidelity as Hosea makes clear. By sinning Christians exchange the life and freedom graciously won for them by Christ even while they were still sinners, in preference for renewed death and slavery (Rom. 6; Gal. 5). The core of the sinful act is the free choice of self determination whereby the sinner gives to himself a moral entity. As St. Thomas Aquinas says, human action is immanent, not transitive. It abides within the agent either to fulfill or perfect the agent if it is morally upright, or to destroy the agent if it is morally wicked. One makes oneself to be what one is, by the choices that one makes.

Catholic tradition distinguished between mortal or deadly or grave sin, and venial sin. Mortally sinful actions are opposed to the love and law of God and destroy divine friendship. Venial sins do not destroy divine friendship. Sacred scripture does not distinguish between mortal sin and venial sin although in the OT certain sins were able to be atoned for through expiatory offerings (Lev. 5-6). There were other sins against covenant community and God that could not be expiated (Lev. 7:25; 17:8-10, 14; 19:7-8). Even in the NT there is a distinction between the more serious and the less serious sins. Jesus distinguishes between the ‘beam’ in the hypocrite’s eye, and the ‘mote’ in the eye of the hypocrite’s brother (Mt. 7:5). In the Lord’s Prayer Jesus taught the disciples to beg forgiveness for their daily ‘debts’ (Mt. 6:12; Lk. 11:4), but threatened others with hellfire for their sins (Mt. 23:33). Also contrast Jam. 3:2, 1 Jn. 1:8 with 1 Cor6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21.

The Council of Orange (529 AD), rejecting Pelagian doctrine taught that even the upright Christian is guilty of sin. The Council of Trent in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century taught that not all sins deprive one of God’s grace; some are venial. Thomas Aquinas

maintained 3 condition are necessary if sin is to be mortal: grave matter, sufficient reflection, full consent.

More recently scholars of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century such as K. Rahner distinguished between fundamental option and the freedom that is exercised in the ordinary acts of free choice. The fundamental option is the disposition of the whole person to God. It is a fundamental freedom exercised at the very core of the human person. The object of this fundamental option is not any particular alternative to be adopted by ordinary free choice but rather it is the relationship of the whole person to God. Actions not likely to change one's fundamental disposition toward God are considered venial sins. Mortal sins provide the occasion for reversing one's fundamental orientation to God. But can it still remain possible that one could freely choose to engage in an act involving grave matter and still not act against one's fundamental option? Therefore, scholars such as Rahner distinguished between venial sins, grave sins, and mortal sins. Proponents of fundamental option recognize that one can change one's stance before God in particular acts of free choice.

The question therefore arises whether our entire moral-spiritual life depends upon an option of which we may not be consciously aware in a way that it does not depend upon very specific free choices of which we are acutely conscious? This seems unlikely. Rather, we may make or break ourselves as moral persons in and through the free choices that we make in our daily lives. It is true that certain kinds of free choices, the ones that can be rightly called commitments do orient a person in a definite direction and establish a person in a definite way of life. Therefore, it seems reasonable to conclude that there is a basic option for the Christian, namely, the option to become a Christian through baptism. This fundamental option, the act of living faith is a definite choice of which a person is conscious. The church teaches definitively that faith is the source of all justification and the beginning of our salvation, and that it is God's gift and that it is accepted by a free human act. It also states that this definite choice commits one to a life of good works. In addition some morally evil acts have been regarded by the church from the very beginning as incompatible with the specific requirements of faith, with the way of life to which one is committed in dying and rising to life with Christ in baptism. Such acts involve free choice engage in incompatible which one's oneself. The has definite only in respect believe, but what one is to from doing.



grave matter the knowingly made to them, is a choice with the life to act of faith commits act of living faith specifications not to what one is to do and to refrain

Since the time of Gregory the Great, seven sins have been listed as ‘capital’ sins or vices: vainglory (pride), covetousness (avarice), lust, gluttony, anger, envy and sloth. These are called ‘capital’ sins because they are sources for other sins. The catholic faith proclaims that every sin because of god’s surpassing love can be forgiven during this life. Still the scriptures speak of sins that cannot be forgiven in the sense that they constitute a terrible offence against the truth and the light, against the Holy Spirit (Mt. 12:31-32; 1 Jn. 5:16). In speaking of sin in this way, scriptures are



referring to a sin more radical than most mortal sins, for it is a sin whose nature blocks forgiveness.

Authentic Christian spirituality recognizes that through our willingness to do what we know is evil in the sight of the Lord we distance ourselves from God. Through a process of rationalization whereby we seek to justify such sinful and wicked actions, we exacerbate the estrangement progressively desensitizing ourselves to the divine presence and call, blinding ourselves to the light and the truth that God sends into the world.

Thomas Aquinas in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century attributes 3 meanings to the Latin word *Gratia*: 1). God’s grace as God’s own loving kindness and favour toward human beings, 2). God’s gifts themselves, 3). The thanks that fills the hearts of those who appreciate God’s love and god’s gifts.

The basic notion underlying the secular and religious use of the term ‘grace’ is the notion of favour. The theological concept of grace sums up God’s relations with the human race with special attention to the fact that these relations are loving, generous, free, and totally unexpected and undeserved. The NT., expresses the amazement, the deep appreciation and the gratitude which Early Christians felt for God’s salvation in Christ. Inner church controversies forced or impelled the outcome of the theology of grace: controversies on sin and forgiveness, on the need of infant baptism, on predestination and foreknowledge.

St. Augustine largely contributed to the development of the theology of grace, and this occurred in his writings against Pelagius, who uncovered the tension between traditional Christian conviction of amazed gratitude by arguing that unbounded rejoicing in the generosity of God showed in saving us apparently implied that we could not have saved ourselves. Pelagius maintained that if we really could not live a moral life without God’s help, then an intelligent and reasonable God could not hold us responsible and threaten to punish us when we failed. So, Pelagius argued that human beings are able even without God’s help to keep God’s Law and attain salvation. St. Augustine stressed the opposite, ‘Without Christ we can do nothing.’





The theology of grace in the Eastern Churches emphasized the transformation of human nature through Christ and the Spirit, which was referred to as divinization or goddening – *theosis* in Greek.

Up to the 12<sup>th</sup> Century the theology of grace was bound up with the question whether human beings were free and responsible if they needed God's help to live a good life. Aristotalian philosophy which maintained that the end or goal of some things existence and actions settled the question of what kind of thing it was, was also used by Christian theologians to describe Christian life as having its end and goal in the eternal possession of God in face to face beatifying vision. 'We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is (1 Jn. 3:2), sharers in the divine nature ...' (1 Pet. 1:4). In the synthesis of Thomas Aquinas a life freely directed towards God is the only way to fulfillment for the infinite hungers of the human spirit.

Justification, God's act of turning a sinner into a just person, is God's greatest work, greater even than the original creation. Grace in the sense of God's favour, benevolence and love is God's own self, eternal and unchangeable. Conversion is the opening of the human person to God's love in so far as that opening is a real change in the person, grace is the way of being of the one who receives god's favour. Grace in this sense is a new habitual orientation of the entire person toward god as personal goal and life. In this it is like a new nature and so comes appropriately provided with new powers. These new powers are the infused supernatural virtues of faith, hope and love.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, Martin Luther from his study of scripture concluded that all of Christian life is a gift, that God's graciousness is responsible for the first call and for every move on the way to salvation. Calvin pushed Luther's view's to its logical conclusion stating that if everything was due to God's work then an absolute and formal predestination was clearly a fact, and human free will played no part in one's being saved or lost. The church's response to the criticism of the Reformation was in the form of the Council of Trent. The Council of Trent formally incorporated into its binding teaching

the doctrine of the ancient Council of Orange affirming both free will and the gratuity of the beginnings of grace while denying predestination to damnation. Trent insisted that Christian sacraments were efficacious sacraments to confer grace.

The standard text book that prevailed up to the 18<sup>th</sup> Century was the treatise '*De Gratia*.' Grace was considered as actual grace and as sanctifying or habitual grace.

Different kinds of actual grace was distinguished. For instance, grace was elevating; it lifted the person to the divine level. Grace was healing; it remedied sinful tendencies which kept one from functioning well. Grace gave us new life in Christ.

The Baltimore Church stated that the redemption was the Grace was a bestowed on us Christ for our grace or habitual made the soul holy Actual grace was that enlightened our mind evil and do good. salvation, because nothing to merit perseverance is a



catechism of the American chief effect of Christ's gaining of grace for men. supernatural gift of God through the merits of Jesus salvation. Sanctifying grace was the grace that and pleasing to God. help of God that and moved our will to shun Grace is necessary for without grace we can do salvation. Grace of particular gift of God

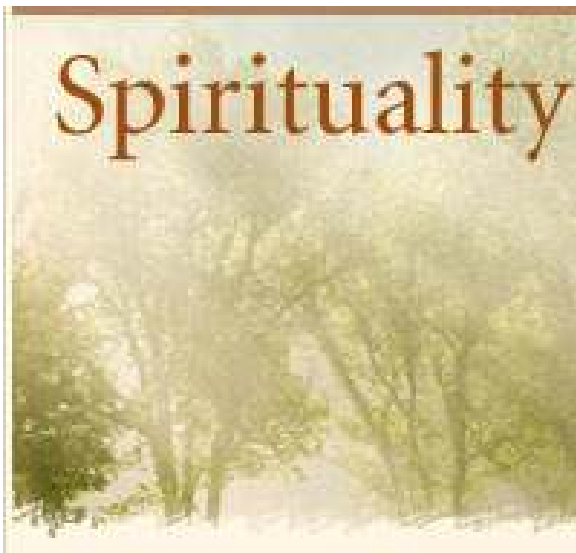
which enables us to continue in a state of grace until death. As these explanations make it clear the image of grace in Christian theology was that of an entity intermediate between the soul and God given in measured quantities according to merit.

In 1950, the encyclical *Humani Generis* stated that the church rejected polygenism because 'it in no way appears how it can be reconciled with the church's traditional doctrine on original sin.' In the area of grace catholic dogmas stipulated three main points: 1). The goal of human life is personal union with God in beatific vision, 2). To attain or even to make serious progress toward the beauty God has promised, is possible only with God's help, 3). God gives that help in a way out of proportion to all created nature granting human beings a share in God's own nature, God's knowledge, God's love. These three main points are dogmas which are propositions expressive of mystery, and therefore, can only be known by faith. Systematic theology neither demonstrates verifies, falsifies, nor improves upon dogmas but only makes them intelligible in every living context. The mystery implied in Rom. 5:5 'For the love of God is poured forth in the Holy Spirit who is given to us' – is the central mystery of grace.

Bernard Lonergan demonstrated that justification is a state of being linked to God in the love of friendship. God's love for the individual is not new or old but is always simply there. It is a call to imitate and eternal friendship. And like all invitations to intimacy and

friendship it is completely gratuitous. The offer is made to every human person. That love of friendship is identifiable only by faith. The mystery of grace is the mystery of God's self gift, and of God's moving human beings to be open to it and faithful to it.

K. Rahner defines grace as the free, unmerited and forgiving self communion of God. In the documents of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council the word grace occurs most frequently in an active sense: the grace to do something, the grace of apostolate, the grace of vocation, the grace of conversion, the grace of the martyr. The teaching of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council on grace brought on many changes among Catholics. In the sacraments, one has moved away from anything that could suggest automatism, even in the case of baptism of infants. Sacraments rightly administered means God's grace conferred but in practice one makes every effort, through preaching of the Word, reading of scripture, the gathering of community in loving celebration, to do all one can to promote conversion by setting the mood for conversion. But one does it in an atmosphere of trust, gratitude and faith which affirms implicitly that ultimately it all depends on God and must come from God. Prayer is the supreme recognition that one lives in God's presence, dependant on God, and hoping in God for everything.



### 3. Conclusion

Christian spirituality which is the vibrant living, personal encounter with the Triune God, has two dimensions: the ascetical and the mystical. Ascetical life is either the whole project of appropriating the divine gift of faith of the work of purification.

Ascetical practices are methods designed to restrain the influence of sin and maximize union with God. The whole work of asceticism is under grace, and grace is the mystical element of Christian life. Mysticism is the experience of grace, especially those acts which are consciously beyond ordinary initiative and control, such as contemplation.

Ascetical practices are human strategies for spiritual living or spirituality. The word ascetical derives from the Greek word *askesis*, which means exercise, training, disciples. Christian asceticism is concerned with elimination obstacles to the life of grace. Christian asceticism however, is not anti – human, anti – body, or anti – world. The primary reason for asceticism is discipleship, the Kingdom of God, the call to transcendence, and the demands of the eschatological reality of the gospel. Today's asceticism looks to the total human development, the human and the divine coincide, the goal is the integration of personal and social life in Jesus.

Christian spirituality is dictated by the self-effacing love of Jesus. It is a love that led Christ to give his love for the world. It is a love that is demanded of the disciples moral precepts enunciated in the Sermon of the Mount concerning forgiveness, the instructions concerning the sin of adultery, and how to deal with one's enemies. Disproportionate emphasis on cult at the cost of overlooking the importance of morality, distorts personal spirituality into a caricature, reducing it to mere pietism which is based on sentimentality.

Spirituality is the measure of discipleship. Authentic personal spirituality guarantees openness to God's Spirit. It is centered on the cross of Christ because it was the Passover of Jesus that paved the way for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Christian spirituality is also differentiated by the social ambience in which the believer witnesses to the gospel message. Spirituality is a lived personal commitment in faith made in the name of Christ, to particular individuals forming a covenantal relationship, in a specific social ambience. Therefore, although spirituality involves a set of choices that the believer makes, it also involves unforeseen human situations thrust upon him. Spirituality is the art of recognizing the presence of God in contemporary life situations, guiding and guarding the believer in a journey of faith together with a community.

