

# Some Notes: An Introduction to Spiritual Theology in the Third Millennium

*Fausto B. Gomez, OP\**

Faculty of Sacred Theology, Ecclesiastical Faculties,  
University of Santo Tomas, Manila, Philippines

**Abstract:** The study titled *Some Notes: an Introduction to Spiritual Theology in the Third Millennium* is like an initiation into spiritual theology or Christian spirituality in Christian perspective. The paper presents a panoramic view of spiritual theology and Christian spirituality closely connected with moral theology. Hopefully the essay is like a tasteful appetizer that introduces the reader to the main course: plunging himself/herself into the spiritual, mysterious, and mystical world of perfection and holiness, contemplation and compassion, justice and love.

The study develops four major points. In the first place, is the important and relevant interconnectedness of moral theology and spiritual theology. In the second part, are the meanings of spirituality and Christian spirituality. In the third place, are the basic highlights of spiritual theology underlining the continuing relevance of the classics of Christian spirituality. In the final part of the article, some characteristics of spirituality for our time are pointed out and studied.

In the introduction and the conclusion of the article, the writer of these notes affirms humbly that he presents this warm appetizer on spiritual theology not simply as an academic exercise but as an invitation to a deeper spiritual, mystical, and evangelical life. St. Thomas Aquinas says that theologians – *doctores theologiae* – must teach in such a way that they contribute to the salvation of souls. The theologian is a man or woman of faith, a member of the community of disciples who witnesses the Gospel in his or her time.

**Keywords:** moral theology, spirituality, Christian spirituality, morality, holiness, asceticism, mysticism.

---

\*Fausto B. Gomez, OP can be contacted at [faustogomezb@yahoo.com](mailto:faustogomezb@yahoo.com).

## Introduction

This general, warm, and hopefully relevant introduction is a sort of initiation into spiritual theology. Initiation is described in general as “the initiation of a program, beginning, starting, commencement...” In particular, initiation refers to “the rite of initiation into a tribe, introduction, admission, admittance, installation, ordination, investiture...”<sup>1</sup> In Christian perspective, initiation refers to the “catechetical and sacramental introduction to the Christian mysteries as knowledge and experience.”<sup>2</sup> This introduction is presented as an initiation into spiritual theology in the third millennium. It develops the theory and praxis of spirituality, and of the spiritual and moral life of a Christian - of Christian life.

The paper may be described as a panoramic view of spiritual theology and Christian spirituality closely connected with moral theology. Hopefully the study is like a tasteful appetizer that introduces the reader to the main course: plunging into the deep, mysterious, and mystical world of holiness and perfection, prayer and compassion, justice and love. The writer presents this appetizer not simply as an academic exercise but also as an invitation to a deeper spiritual and mystical life. Thomas Aquinas says that theologians – *doctores theologiae* – must teach in such a way that they contribute to the salvation of souls. Commenting on St. Thomas, contemporary theologian Jean-Pierre Torrell writes: “Whether it takes the form of preaching or teaching, the publication of scientific or spiritual works, or any other communication of *sacra doctrina*, the service of the Word has always presupposed the experience of theological faith.” A theologian is a man or woman of faith, a member of the Church, a person who – as Chenu says – must witness the Gospel in his or her time.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>“Initiation,” *Oxford Thesaurus of English*, Second Edition Revised (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006): 467b.

<sup>2</sup> J. Castellano Cervera, “Iniciación Cristiana,” *Nuevo Diccionario de Espiritualidad*, eds., Stefano de Flores and Tullo Goffi, adaptation of the Spanish Edition by Augusto Guerra (Madrid: Ediciones Paulinas, 1983), 707. “Like the Middle-Eastern religions, characterized by esoteric doctrines and cults to which neophytes were introduced little by little, the Christian faith has also its own practices of initiation, its own *disciplina arcani*. The Creed, for instance, was explained “only before the reception of baptism. Detailed instruction followed baptism” (Gerald O’Collins, SJ, and Edmond G. Farrugia, SJ, *A Concise Dictionary of Theology* [Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 2001]: 121).

<sup>3</sup> Doing theology fully entails that the theologian possesses charity: Theology “is literally drained from the inside by the loss of charity”; “Without charity theology cannot bring its task to completion because charity alone gives it the dynamism to reach its end” (Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Christ and Spirituality in St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Bernhard Brankenhorn, OP [Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011], aa 32 and 39; see also *Ibid.*, 26-29); St. Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones de Quolibet*, I, q, 7, a, 2; quoted by Torrell, *Christ and Spirituality in St. Thomas Aquinas*, 39; Chenu, *La Foi dans l’intelligence* (Paris: Cerf, 1964), 134.

The writer of the text develops four points: first, the interconnectedness of moral theology and spiritual theology; second, meanings of spirituality and Christian spirituality; third, highlights of spiritual and mystical spirituality, and fourth, spiritual theology in the third millennium.

Through the text, “spirituality” and “spiritual theology” are used interchangeably. One may say with other writers that while “spirituality” refers more to practical spirituality or the paths to experience God, “spiritual theology,” to the systematic, academic reflection on the experiences of God. Both, however, present teachings and experiences of the saints and mystics.

### **Interconnectedness of Moral Theology and Spiritual Theology**

The first section of the article is a theological reflection on the identity of moral theology and its interconnectedness with spiritual theology or spirituality, an interconnectedness – the author suggests – that needs to be underlined today.

#### *Moral Theology, Morality*

According to St. Thomas Aquinas, theology and spirituality is “one and the same thing.”<sup>4</sup> After St. Thomas, moral theology and spirituality split: moral theology became often casuistic, and spirituality, pietistic. Today, moral theology and spiritual theology or spirituality are two autonomous theological disciplines, deeply and necessarily interconnected: both fertilize or reshape each other.

Theology is God talk, or the science of God, the knowledge of God through revelation. It is the science of Christian revelation. It is “the science which seeks to understand and forever rearticulate the life-giving Good News of God in Christ Jesus.”<sup>5</sup> Theology has spiritual, pastoral, and even “political” dimensions and ought to be always a contextualized, lived, and prayerful theology.

Theology is specifically one science: God is One. It takes up everything within God’s horizon. Theology deals with God and the things that have relationship with God, either as principle or as end. Theology has no subjective or specific parts. It has, however, different integral parts – different treatises. Theologians speak of Dogmatic Theology, Moral Theology, Spiritual Theology, Theology of Hope, etc. Theology is mainly divided, according to content, into dogmatic and moral theology, both parts of one theology: dogmatic theology has moral consequences, and moral theology, dogmatic premises. Dogmatic Theology guides people on the contemplation of the

---

<sup>4</sup> Paul Murray, OP, *The New Wine of Dominican Spirituality* (London: Burns & Oates, 2010), 112.

<sup>5</sup> Timothy E. O’Connell, *Principles for a Catholic Morality* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1978), 5-6.

truth about God One and Triune and his Creation: it is orthodoxy. Moral Theology points to women and men how to do the truth in love: it is orthopraxis. As Gustavo Gutierrez asserts, the purpose of theology “is – or should be – to contribute to making the Gospel present in human history through human testimony.”<sup>6</sup>

Christian faith is faith and morals. Indeed, Christianity is not a morality, but radically an experience of the paschal mystery. However, Christianity implies necessarily a morality, a way of being and acting. Once a person believes in Christ, she or he will inevitably face this moral question: “What must I do” (Acts 2:37), or “Who must I be and become.” The radical question of philosophical and theological ethics is what – or who – I must be.

The human person is fundamentally a moral or ethical being, that is, she or he is radically free and responsible. For some Christians, a person is moral if he performs some good deeds. This is true, perhaps, but not necessarily so. A person, a Christian is moral if he or she is good and does good actions – good in being and in doing. A morally good person has good loving options, attitudes, and actions. Theologian Richard Gula writes: “The more adequate understanding of moral life is not mere obedience to law but fidelity to life-giving personal relationships.”<sup>7</sup>

According to St. Thomas Aquinas, moral theology studies the human person as the image of God. The human person is the image of God, and moral theology points out to him or her the way to be a good image of God, that is, a creature and child of God, a brother or sister of all others, and a respectful creature of the universe. Moral Theology points out to all the way to follow Jesus Christ, the road for his disciples, who acknowledge the equal dignity of all human beings, and their equal and inalienable human rights.<sup>8</sup>

St. Thomas Aquinas gives a second definition of Moral Theology: “Moral Theology studies the movement of the rational creature towards God.”<sup>9</sup> This second definition stresses the fact that life is a movement towards personal and

---

<sup>6</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Spiritual Writings*, ed. Daniel G. Groody (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 250. Gutiérrez adds: “A theology that is not nourished by walking Jesus’ own path loses its bearings” (*Ibid*).

<sup>7</sup> Richard M. Gula, “Spirituality and Morality: What Are We Talking About?” in *Ethics and Spirituality*, eds. Charles E. Curran and Lisa A. Fullam (New York / Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2014), 48 and 56. Cf. Cornelius J. van der Poel CSSp, *The Search for Human Values* (New York / Paramus / Toronto: Paulist Press, 1971), 7-10.

<sup>8</sup> The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* begins the treatise of Christian ethics (or Moral Theology), entitled *Life in Christ*, with the admirable text of St. Leo the Great: “Christian, recognize your dignity” (CCC, Vatican City, 1992 and 1997), no. 1691.

<sup>9</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, STh, I, 2, Prol.: “*Motus rationalis creaturae in Deum*”; *Ibid* I-II, Prologue: “*De homine viatore secundum quod est imago Dei*.” The human person is the image of God because he possesses intellect, will, and freedom.

communitarian realization: to happiness, to perfection, to love, to heaven – to God. Human life is becoming more what one is on the journey to God.

Theological ethics is the science of Christian praxis. It is “the science of what man ought to be reason of what he is.”<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Moral Theology is a science, a normative science: the science of what man ought to be (man is a project, a becoming), by reason of what s/he is (a creature and child of God, and a sister/brother to all). In this definition, the human person becomes the fundamental criterion of ethics and morals. As someone has said, the human person is reality – what he or she is – and possibility – what he or she can become. The task of Moral Theology, a practical science, is to guide Christians – men and women of good will – to become authentic human beings, that is, free and responsible, and good Christians, true followers of Christ.

The people of God, the community of disciples, are called to live moral lives, to be missionaries of morality in the community. St. John Paul II writes in his encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*: “Evangelization also involves the proclamation and presentation of morality.”<sup>11</sup>

When authors speak of morality in general, they refer either to ethics or theological ethics. When traditional theologians speak of morality in fundamental moral theology, they refer to an essential characteristic of human acts as good or evil. In this case, morality is a quality of the human actions in relation to their norms (God, right reason, and conscience). Human acts are good if they are in conformity with the basic moral norms, and evil if not in conformity with these norms: radically, in conformity or nonconformity with natural law, or the law of being human, with human nature and God’s will. In Christian perspective, ethics is grounded on loving God, who first loved us, and neighbor (cf. Matt 22:37-39). Christian morality is the morality of the imitation of Christ, of communion with him in life and love. Moral theology and morality are clearly grounded on spirituality, on God’s grace and love, and lead to deeper experience of and loving union with the Blessed Trinity – and to eternal life with God.

Christian morality goes beyond human ethics: “What makes it religious and Christian is our belief that the One to whom we are ultimately responding in and through all the relationships of our life is God, revealed in Jesus as the love we

---

<sup>10</sup> Marc Oraison, *Morality for Moderns* (USA: Image Books, 1968), 3. Oraison says that he took it from A. Sertillanges.

<sup>11</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* or the *Splendor of Truth* (Vatican City, 1993), no. 107. Cf. Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II), *Acts and Decrees* (Manila: CBCP, 1992), nos. 102-115.

ultimately desire ... In this sense, the moral life is like worship. It is a response to the experience of God, and so it is spiritual in its roots.”<sup>12</sup>

### *Moral Theology and Spiritual Theology*

Initiation into spirituality is also initiation in spiritual and moral life. As mentioned earlier, for St. Thomas Aquinas, theology and spiritual theology is “one and the same thing.”<sup>13</sup> Similar is the stand of St. Bonaventure. For both doctors of the Church and the traditions they represent, theology is one, not yet divided at their time between dogmatic and moral theology. Spiritual theology permeated the different theological treatises such as the Trinity, Creation, Christology, grace and the sacraments, prayer, etc. It was – and is – more closely connected with moral theology or Christian ethics.

After Thomas and Bonaventure, and particularly since the Enlightenment, moral theology and spiritual theology became separated theological disciplines. By the 17<sup>th</sup> century, theology became divided in various other parts due to practical reasons: to make easier its study and exposition. Then some authors started to distinguish between ascetical and mystical theology on one hand, and moral theology on the other. Both, however, were still united. While the latter dealt mainly with the commandments and virtues as obligatory, the former dealt with the counsels and the perfection of Christian life beyond the commandments; or, according to other authors, while moral theology studies the commandments and counsels, ascetical/mystical theology studies the paths, aids, and degrees through the journey of Christian perfection.

By the 20<sup>th</sup> century, spiritual theology began to be called ascetical and mystical theology, already fully separated from moral theology, and focused on the three ascending ways of life, which are parts of Christian tradition: the purgative (struggle against sins and vices); the illuminative (practice of virtues, above all, charity or love), and the unitive (work of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit and mystical union with God).<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> R. Gula, “Spirituality and Morality: What Are We Talking About?” 50-51.

<sup>13</sup> P. Murray, *The New Wine of Dominican Spirituality*, 112. Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, *STh*, II-II, 1, 1.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Jordan Aumann, *Spiritual Theology* (Huntington, IN: The Sunday Visitor Inc., 1980; Philippine Edition: Manila: University of Santo Tomas, 1982), 13; Mark O’Keefe, OSB, *Becoming Good Becoming Holy. On the Relationship of Christian Ethics and Spirituality* (Makati, Metro Manila: St Pauls, 1997), 10-15. Writes O’Keefe: In the synthesis of ethics and spirituality of St. Thomas, “There may be a notional distinction between the moral life and the spiritual life, but not true separation can be made between them” (*ibid.* 58). Cf. Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, OP, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, 2 vols. (New York: Herder, 1948).

Up to the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, spirituality was still usually studied under moral theology with different names: devotion and piety, ascetical and mystical theology, theology of Christian perfection, and finally, spiritual theology or spirituality. Moreover, theological ethics generally dropped its starting point, beatitude or the final end or beatific vision, and became mainly the ethics of the commandments for the ordinary Christians, while spirituality, focused on the councils and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, the theological ethics for extraordinary souls.

Before Vatican II spiritual theology, or ascetical and mystical theology, was also called by some authors the theology of Christian perfection or the theology of spiritual life, and focused on sin and grace, prayer, virtues and vices, mortification, stages of the spiritual life, the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, and extraordinary phenomena, such as visions, revelations, levitations, raptures, etc.<sup>15</sup>

By 1920, spiritual theology was accepted, though not by all theologians, as a distinct branch of theology, separate from moral theology.<sup>16</sup>

In its Constitution on the Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (no. 16), Vatican II underlines that the sacred liturgy must be thought “under its theological, spiritual, pastoral, and juridical aspects.” In the Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, chapter V (nos. 39-42), Vatican II stresses the universal call to holiness: every Christian is called to holiness, to a holy life which is moral and spiritual. In its Decree on the formation of priests, *Optatam Totius* (no. 16), the Second Vatican Council links moral and spiritual theology inextricably with the mystery of Christ, and underlines the obligation of Christians “to bring forth fruit in charity for the life of the world.” Writes Charles Curran: “Vatican II’s teaching on spirituality has two fundamental assertions – the call of all Christians to holiness and perfection, and the fact that the answer to this call to holiness comes in and through our life in the world.”<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Antonio Royo Marin, OP, *Teología de la perfección cristiana* (Madrid: BAC, 1958); Antonio Royo Marin, OP, and Jordan Aumann, OP, *The Theology of Christian Perfection* (Dubuque, IA: The Priory Press, 1962); Joseph de Guibert, SJ, *The Theology of the Spiritual Life* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1968); Adolphe Tanquerey, *The Spiritual Life: A Treatise on Ascetical and Mystical Theology* (Westminster: Newman, 1948); Gustave Thils, *Christian Holiness. A Precis Ascetical Theology* (London: London Publishers, 1961).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Luigi Borriello, OCD, “Spirituality in Modern Times,” in *Compendium of Spirituality*, Vol. 1, ed. Emeterio de Cea, OP (New York: Society of St. Paul/Alba House, 1995), 57-59. Borriello writes: “By 1920 spiritual theology was accepted as a specialization in the field of theology, but not without a great deal of discussion and argument.” Borriello adds that this position was defended by theologians such as John Arintero, Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalene and Jacques Maritain, and later on was officially supported by Vatican II (*Ibid.* 59).

<sup>17</sup> Charles E. Curran, “How Vatican II Brought Spirituality and Moral Theology Together,” in *Ethics and Spirituality: Readings on Moral Theology*, no. 17, eds. Charles E. Curran and Lisa A. Fullam (Mahwah, NY: Paulist Press, 2014), 80.

After the Second Vatican Council, theology of Christian perfection is usually called spiritual theology.

In our time, in the Third Millennium, spiritual theology is an autonomous theological science or discipline, a special field of study developed in a multidisciplinary, ecumenical, and dialogical perspective. Today, theologians generally agree on the close link between spirituality and other branches of theology, particularly moral theology or theological ethics. Theology is one, and in a real sense, all kinds of theology are integral parts of this oneness. A Christian is asked by his/her faith to know it (dogmatic theology) and to live it (moral and spiritual life).

Christian life is a spiritual and moral journey to complete happiness with God. It is, centrally, a journey by steps of love and the other virtues that love – as the form of all virtues - vivifies. Virtues are rooted in grace and make people flourishing human beings and Christians: the theological virtues connect us directly to God and the moral human virtues, with other human beings and creation. How may one really separate moral and spiritual theology in Christian life which is one, moral, and spiritual at the same time?<sup>18</sup>

At present, many theologians speak of the close convergence between theological ethics and spiritual theology. An expert on the subject, Marciano Vidal writes: There is “substantial identity between spirituality and morals. The two dimensions are born from the theological life; they are fed by it and converge towards it. The theological life represents the unity of experience in Christian life.” Moral theology and spirituality have similar content and the same theological basis. Both refer to one and the same life which, born in the Trinity, is expressed in Christ by the Holy Spirit. Both, moreover, use substantially the same path to achieve that life, namely the theological virtues.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> William C. Spohn makes a neat distinction between morality and ethics on one hand and lived spirituality and reflective spirituality on the other. He explores the connections between lived spirituality and morality, and reflective spirituality and ethics. The writer of this paper prefers the general understanding of morality and ethics, and of spirituality and spiritual theology. (Cf. William C. Spohn, “Spirituality and Ethics: Exploring the Connections,” in *Ethics and Spirituality*, eds. Curran and Fullam, 62-64).

<sup>19</sup> Marciano Vidal, *Moral y Espiritualidad. De la separación a la convergencia* (Madrid: Editorial el Perpetuo Socorro 1997, 19; Id., “Teología Espiritual y Teología Moral,” *Atti del Congresso Internazionale OCD* (Roma: Ed. del Teresianum, OCD [Aprile, 2000]): 535-540. See also Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology. A Systematic Study of Christian Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 17-18; William C. Spohn, “Spirituality and Ethics: Exploring the Connections,” *Theological Studies* 58, No. 1 (March 1997): 109-123. “Christian spirituality refers primarily not to having extraordinary experiences but to how we handle ordinary, day-to-day experiences” (Gula, “Spirituality and Morality: What Are We Talking About?” 47).



After Vatican II, it appears that some moralists separated too much moral theology from spirituality. In this perspective, moralist S. Pinckaers affirms: “Moral theology has become the domain of obligations and legal imperatives and has set aside the question of happiness and perfection. Hence, it especially separates itself from spirituality and from parenthesis, which is a form of exhortation.” He criticizes this modern development by commenting: “According to St. Paul, the moral life is a form of spiritual worship.”<sup>20</sup> Spirituality speaks of becoming holy, and this requires moral living. Moral life and spiritual life – both – coincide essentially, and fertilize each other towards the same end: God’s eternal love and peace. For St. Alphonsus Maria de Liguori, the goal of life – as found in all his writings – is to lead people to holiness by the path of love. It is not proper therefore to continue speaking of a sort two-tiered view of Christian life: moral life for ordinary Christians and spiritual life for some extraordinary souls.<sup>21</sup>

Both – spirituality and moral theology – are necessarily linked to each other, closely interconnected, but are two different “sensibilities,” or tones, or accents: two branches of theology. Regarding spirituality, Vidal points out its specific traits: verticality, transcendence, and interiority. On the part of moral theology, he underlines the following columns: horizontality and exteriority.<sup>22</sup> Some other authors argue that the main difference between moral theology and spirituality is that while the former puts the accent on rationality, the second, on faith. In both, however, what matters most is faith: we are talking of moral theology or Christian ethics, and of spiritual theology or Christian spirituality. Moreover, while moral theology is more concerned with a life of virtues, spiritual theology with a life of union with God. Thus, we study the mystics more deeply in spiritual theology. What matters most, however, in moral as well as in spiritual life, is charity, and the growth of charity, although we may say with other authors that moral theology underlines the first two stages of Christian life – the purgative and the illuminative –, and spirituality the third – the unitive.

---

<sup>20</sup> Servais Pinckaers, OP, *Morality. The Catholic View*, trans. Michael Sherwin, OP (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2001), 7 and 93. Writes Enda McDonagh: “In Christian tradition, we speak of spirituality and spiritual theology: ascetical and mystical theology. We still do today; but they are part of moral theology, of Christian living” (*Doing the Truth: The Quest for Moral Theology* [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980], 64).

<sup>21</sup> Quoted by O’Keefe, OSB, *Becoming Good, Becoming Holy*, 15. Writes S. Gamarra: “La teología espiritual y la teología moral no pueden funcionar por separado; se necesitan mutuamente” - *Spiritual theology and moral theology cannot function separately; they need each other* (Saturnino Gamarra, *Teología Espiritual* [Madrid: BAC, 2007], 17).

<sup>22</sup> M. Vidal, *Moral y Espiritualidad*..., 19-23; *Atti del Congresso Internazionale OCD*, 542-544. Secundino Castro, OCD, commenting Marciano Vidal’s book *Moral y Espiritualidad*, writes that “experience” is preferred to “interiority” and thus avoid the danger of an “escapist” spirituality (cf. *Moralia* XX, no. 4 [1997]: 503-509). Cf. Curran and Fullam, *Ethics and Spirituality*, 17.

Theologians speak today of two different branches of theology, of moral theology and spiritual theology or spirituality. Spiritual theology then is an autonomous theological science or discipline, a special field of study. The writer of these notes wishes to underline that spiritual theology is indeed a branch of theology; however, as a specific subject matter of theology, which is one, one has to avoid the danger, on one hand, of isolating itself from moral theology and other theological subjects; and on the other, of the possibility of being diluted by too great an effort at conversing with all and falling into the temptation of disregarding or sidelining essential elements of spirituality's Christian and Catholic identity.

With other theologians, the author believes that still today moral theology and spiritual theology continue to be deeply interconnected. As Gula stresses, "they shape and reshape one another ... While we might want to distinguish the respective interests of spirituality and morality by focusing spirituality on our relationship to God, and morality on who to be and how to behave in the world, we ought not to separate them so much that we lose their mutual influence on one another."<sup>23</sup>

With those important notes in mind, the writer now focuses on Christian spirituality or spiritual theology.

## Spirituality and Christian Spirituality

### *Spirituality*

The word spirituality, which started to be used by the 5<sup>th</sup> century, is an English translation of the Latin term *spiritualitas*, which is related to the adjective *spiritualis*, the root of which is the verb *spirare* that means "to breathe," and *spiritualis*, "belonging to breathing or air." As breathing is needed to live, spiritualis, the spiritual is needed to live a life in the Spirit, which is fully lived by Christ and, through Jesus, in those born of the Spirit (John 3:7). *Spiritualitas* and *spiritualis* translate the Greek words used by St. Paul *pneuma* and *pneumatikos*. Paul understands *pneumatikos* as spiritual, and a person is called a spiritual person if s/he is guided by the Spirit, a graced life in the Spirit. On the contrary, a person who is "natural" (*psychikos*) and "fleshly" (*sarkinos*) lives according to the flesh (*sarx* or *caro*), to the senses, to what is "worldly." "Flesh" "does not refer to the body as such but rather to creatureliness," to "the law of the members" versus "the law of God" (Rom 7:22).<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Gula, "Spirituality and Morality: What Are We Talking About?" 58.

<sup>24</sup> James A. Wiseman, *Spirituality and Mysticism. A Global View* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 1-2. Wiseman adds: "To live according to the flesh means to live according to purely self-centered inclinations, which is inevitable in those who are immature in the faith" (*Ibid.* 1). Cf. Walter H. Principe, CSB, "Spirituality, Christian," *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. Michael Downey (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 931; see also 932-938; Wiseman, *Spirituality and Mysticism*, 1-4.

By the 12<sup>th</sup> century, historians affirm that spiritualitas was opposed to corporalitas (or materialitas) – to body or matter. This new understanding entailed certain disdain of the body and matter – the corporeal and material. Later, theologians retrieved the Pauline meaning, which prevailed thereafter. By the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the word spirituality was a very popular word closely connected with the following terms: devotion, piety, interior life, life of the soul, spiritual life, and finally, spiritual theology.

Historically, spirituality is centered on prayer, ascetic life, and personal devotions. It refers traditionally to the “interior life,” to “one’s self-awareness of presence-to-God.”<sup>25</sup>

Currently, spirituality is understood as the whole life of a person, a life that integrates personal and social life, faith and good deeds, prayer and work, love of God and love of neighbor, contemplation and work for justice and peace. Spiritual life includes both a religious experience and an ethical praxis. Spirituality leads to transcendence, to interior life, and to others. It is an inner and outer journey of the person.

Spirituality without adjectives can be understood as the inherent natural longing or desire for self-transcendence, for God. Spirituality is often described as a personal quest for meaning or as an inner journey. Gula writes: “The desire for meaning is the most easily recognized form of spiritual hunger.” This natural quest, this interior journey may or not be directed to God or the Spirit. This spirituality without God is described in various ways: within a bio-centric, or an anthropocentric, or a cosmic horizon as connectedness respectively with other living beings, or human beings, or with all, including inanimate beings.<sup>26</sup>

Spirituality may be described in various complementary ways. It is being and living in God’s presence, walking according to the Spirit, witnessing holistic harmony. The human person, the center of spirituality, is body-soul, interiority and relationship, open to God and to others – in, what Leonardo Boff calls, “altruistic service.” Thus, in a religious context we may define the spirituality of the human person as “the affirmation of life in a harmonious relationship with God, self, community, and environment that nurtures and celebrates wholeness.”<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Richard J. Woods, *Christian Spirituality God’s Presence through the Ages* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), 2. Cf. Wiseman, *Spirituality and Mysticism*, 3-4.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Woods, *Christian Spirituality God’s Presence through the Ages*, 5-7; Fernando Bermúdez López, *Espiritualidad en un mundo globalizado* (Madrid: San Pablo, 2011), Chapter 1: “Espiritualidad frente a espiritualismo,” 15-30; Gula, “Spirituality and Morality: What Are We Talking About?” 44; Yves Congar, *Faith and Spirituality* (St. Louis, MO: The Crossroad Publications Co., 1969); Reid Locklin, *Spiritual But Not Religious? An Oar Stroke Closer to the Farther Shore* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015).

<sup>27</sup> National Interfaith Coalition on Aging, 1994. Cf. Saturnino Gamarra, *Teología Espiritual* (Madrid: BAC, 2007), 33-36; Leonardo Boff, *El destino del hombre y del mundo* (Santander, 1978), 74; quoted by S.

All religions and religious movements have a kind of spirituality, or a way of life according to the spirit, to reason, to faith, to God's commandments, to the fundamental option or basic value of life. Thus, we may speak of different kinds of spirituality: Hindu spirituality, Buddhist spirituality, Islamic spirituality, Secular spirituality, New Age spirituality, etc. Within the Christian tradition, we talk of mainline Protestant Spirituality, Evangelical Spirituality, Orthodox Spirituality, and Catholic Spirituality.<sup>28</sup>

In the Catholic tradition there are three basic forms of Christian spirituality according to the three paths of living out the specific personal vocation, namely, priestly life, consecrated life, and lay faithful life. Moreover, and within the various religious orders congregations and priestly and lay movements and associations, there are different specific spiritualities, for instance, Benedictine or Franciscan spirituality, Opus Dei spirituality, Ascending Life spirituality, etc. Radically, Christian spirituality is one: the experience of God through Jesus Christ in the Spirit. Hence, as Simon Chan writes, "no single type of spirituality satisfies everyone."<sup>29</sup>

### *Christian Spirituality*

Christian spirituality is the spirituality – or the life – of the believers in Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of Mary, Brother and Savior. It is the spirituality of the followers of Christ, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (cf. John 14:5-7).

In classical theology, spirituality may be defined, with Jordan Aumann, as "That part of theology that, proceeding from the truths of divine revelation and the religious experience of individual persons, defines the nature of supernatural life, formulates directives for its growth and development, and explains the process by which souls advance from the beginning of the spiritual life to its full perfection."<sup>30</sup>

Gamarra, 36; Wil Hernandez, OSB, *Mere Spirituality: The Spiritual Life according to Henri Nouwen* (Makati City, Philippines: St. Pauls, 2015).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Stanley N. Gundry (ed.), *Four Views on Christian Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012). Speaking of "many spiritualities," theologian Francisco Del Rio writes: "We may admit the existence of 'many spiritualities' corresponding to the diversity of human Christian vocations, but we must always insist on the fundamental fact that all spiritualities overlap, not only in their recourse to the common objective elements which are the soul of all authentic Christian spirituality, but also in their recourse to the fundamental ascetical practices which monastic experience itemized for the first time" ("A Parish Priest and the Spirituality of the Religious in Active Life," *Boletín Eclesiástico de Filipinas* XLI, No. 459 [April, 1967]: 335). Del Rio is commenting Louis Bouyer, *Introduction to Spirituality* (Paris: Desclee Co., 1961), 239.

<sup>29</sup> Chan, *Spiritual Theology A Systematic Study of the Christian Life*, 21; James Martin, SJ, *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything. Spirituality for Real Life* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2010); Paul Murray, OP, *The New Wine of Dominican Spirituality* (London/New York, 2006).

<sup>30</sup> Aumann, *Spiritual Theology*, 22. For the author's explanation of the definition, read *Ibid* pp. 22-25. Guibert defines spiritual theology as "The science which deduces from revealed principles *what* constitutes the perfection of the spiritual life and *how* man can advance towards and obtain it" (*The Theology of Spiritual Life*, 11). See also, Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, OP, *Christian Perfection and Contemplation according to St.*

A well-known expert, Fr. Thomas Green, SJ, defines Christian spirituality as “the whole way of life, which is our response to the loving initiative of God revealed in Christ Jesus.” Underlining its social dimension, Daniel Groody describes Christian spirituality: “Christian spirituality is about following Jesus, living out the values of the kingdom of God, and generating a community transformed by the love of God and others.” He adds: “Lived out in its personal and public dimension, Christian spirituality is the way in which the invisible heart of God is made visible to the world.”<sup>31</sup>

Theologian Sandra Schneiders’ definition of spirituality, which is often quoted, reads: Christian spirituality is “that particular actualization of the capacity for self-transcendence that is constituted by the substantial gift of the Holy Spirit establishing a life-giving relationship with God in Christ within the believing community.”<sup>32</sup> She underlines relationship with God One and Triune in the community of disciples.

True Christian spirituality combines two intertwined dimension: transcendent and immanent, personal and communitarian, natural and supernatural, contemplative and active, temporal and eschatological. In his book *Spiritual Theology, A Systematic Study of Christian Life*, Simon Chan develops the main criteria – formal and material – of a true Christian spirituality for our age.<sup>33</sup>

The concept of Christian spirituality is complex and rich. Hereafter, we point out and explain briefly some of its basic dimensions. A radical dimension of all kinds of spirituality is its anthropological grounding. Spirituality is a journey to transcendence, to the Absolute, to God. It is the journey of every human person longing for happiness, for union with divinity. For Christian anthropology, the human person is created to the image of God One and Triune, recreated in Jesus, Son of God and Man-for-Others, and renewed constantly in the Holy Spirit.<sup>34</sup>

---

*Thomas Aquinas and St. John of the Cross*, trans. Sr. M. Timothea Doyle, OP (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, Inc., 1937).

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Green, SJ, *Come Down Zacchaeus: Spirituality and the Laity* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1988). Daniel G. Groody, *Globalization, Spirituality, and Justice*, Revised Edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015): 240-241.

<sup>32</sup> Sandra Schneiders, “Theology and Spirituality: Strangers, Rivals or Partners?” *Horizons* 13 (Fall 1986): 266; *Id.*, “Religion vs. Spirituality: A Contemporary Conundrum,” *Spirituality: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 3 (2003): 168-85. In another article, Schneiders defines spirituality as “the experience of consciously striving to integrate one’s life in terms not of isolation and self-absorption but of self-transcendence towards the ultimate value one perceives,” “Spirituality in the Academy,” *Theological Studies* 50 (1989): 678; cf. Wiseman, *Spirituality and Mysticism*, 4-5.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Chan, *Spiritual Theology. A Systematic Study of the Christian Life*, 22-39; Ronald Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality* (New York: Doubleday, 1999).

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Gamarra, *Teología Espiritual*, 39-43; Marti, *Teología Espiritual*, 53-85.

Christian spirituality is a Trinitarian spirituality. Our God is One and Triune, intimate union and communion. Holiness or perfection – the goal of spirituality – is loving union with the Father through Christ in the Holy Spirit, a union that issues compassion with all, principally with the needy and the poor. Christians and others may experience the Trinitarian presence of God in the harmonious soul: “My Father and I will love him, and we will come to him and abide in him” (Jn 17:20-24). Today there is a clear return to Trinitarian theology, in particular Trinitarian spirituality, to the point that some theologians speak of a possible “over-trinitarianizing” God at the expense of “the equally true monotheistic conception.”<sup>35</sup> Like Christian life, spiritual life is a Trinitarian life: the life of a son/daughter of God the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit. God is our Father: Filiation is a key word in Christian life. Jesus is the Son of God and the brother: Fraternity is the second key word. The believers live in the Spirit: grace, or charism, is the third key word in our Christian, moral, and spiritual life.<sup>36</sup>

Christian spirituality is creational spirituality: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are the principle of all things. God the Father is the creator of heaven and earth (Isa 45:18) to whom all creatures love and adore (Ps 95:6) and whose presence human beings contemplate in creation (Ps 92:4-7). Indeed, as Pope Francis put it, the deepest meaning of ecological ethics is transcendence.<sup>37</sup> God is the Creator of all that exists and also the Father of his children. From the Old Testament, and more so in the New Testament, God the Father – the Lord of heaven and earth (Matt 11:25) – is the merciful Father, who through his Son Jesus Christ heals and forgives (cf. Lk 15:12-32).

Christian spirituality is Christological spirituality. God anointed Christ with the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:38). The central focus of moral theology and spiritual theology is Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life (Jn 14:6) as unveiled by revelation. Christian spirituality focuses on the experience of God through Jesus Christ. St. Thomas Aquinas asserts that Jesus is the model of human and Christian conduct, and the exemplar of the human person who is “image” of God after Christ, who is “the image of God” (Col 1:15); by reason of his humanity Jesus leads human beings

---

<sup>35</sup> Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 28.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Jean-Pierre Torrell, OP, *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Vol. 2: Spiritual Master*, trans. Robert Royall (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), Part One: “A Trinitarian Spirituality,” 25 and ff. Cf. M. Oflada Mina, “Dios Trinidad: Mística de Dios. Fundamentos de la espiritualidad cristiana en el misterio como presencia efectiva,” *Studium*, Vol. LV, Fasc. 2 (2015): 227-273; Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 45-55. Pope Francis writes that the way to relate to others is through what he calls “a mystical, a contemplative fraternity,” which is capable of finding God in every human being and of seeking the happiness of others (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 92).

<sup>37</sup> Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* (Vatican City, 2015), no. 210.

to God.<sup>38</sup> St. Alphonsus Maria Liguori writes: “All holiness and perfection consists in loving Jesus our God.” Christ is “the heart” of catechesis and evangelization: Christ the Crucified and Risen Lord. Christian spirituality then is the spirituality of following Jesus, which includes essentially the way of the Cross: “The cross is at the core of any Christian spirituality, so much so that it is often referred in tradition as our only hope.”<sup>39</sup> Christians are called to be transfigured on the mountain of contemplation. This transfiguration, like the Transfiguration of Christ (Matt 17:1-9), gives them strength to go down from the mountain and walk patiently, compassionately, and even joyfully their own way of the Cross.

Christian spirituality is Pneumatological spirituality. There are various ways of describing Christian spirituality today. There is one, however, that is always there, its reference to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Blessed Trinity, is the sanctifier of all. Spirituality is walking according to the Spirit (cf. Rom 8:4), that is, biblically speaking, encountering Christ who is the Way, journeying to the Father who is the goal (Jn 14:6), and living in the Spirit. Christian spirituality “is guided or influenced by the Holy Spirit, who is given by the Father and the risen Christ in order to make human beings sisters and brothers of Christ and children of the Father, as well as to fashion both women and men into images of Christ (Rom 8:29, 16-17).”<sup>40</sup> As an autonomous theological science essentially connected with moral theology, spirituality could also be placed, as some authors already do, on the side of pneumatology. Spiritual theology is “life in the Spirit” and “theology of the Spirit.”<sup>41</sup> Spirituality or the theology of the Spirit connects deeply with the treatise of grace and of the virtues. Grace implies the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity appropriated to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of grace. Divine grace is an entitative habit that grounds the operative habits of the infused virtues. The supernatural habits of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit perfect the infused virtues, namely the theological and moral virtues.

<sup>38</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *STh*, I, 2, prologue.

<sup>39</sup> Groody, *Globalization, Spirituality and Justice*, 246. St. Alphonsus Ma, Liguori, quoted by Vidal, “*Teología Espiritual y Teología Moral*,” *Atti del Congresso Internazionale OCD*, 543.

<sup>40</sup> Principe, “Spirituality, Christian,” *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, 932. As the apostle Paul reminds the followers of Jesus, “a Christian life is a ‘spiritual life,’ which is a life enlivened and led by the Spirit towards holiness or the perfection of charity” (John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Vatican City, 1992, no. 19). Writes Simon Tugwell, OP: “Whatever else we may mean by spirituality, it is surely indisputable that our spiritual life must mean a life motivated and led by the Holy Spirit” (“Introduction,” *Early Dominicans Selected Writings* [New York / Ramsey / Toronto: Paulist Press, 1982], 5). St. Thomas studies the seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit after the seven virtues that according to him make a good Christian: the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, and the four moral (cardinal) virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance.

<sup>41</sup> Secundino Castro, OCD, *Moralia XX* (1974/4), 507-508. Cf. Antolín G, Fuente, OP, “The Action of the Holy Spirit,” in Emeterio de Cea, OP, *Compendium of Spirituality*, Vol I, 91 -103.

Christian spirituality is also Marian spirituality: Mary is the Mother of Jesus, the Mother of the Church, Mother of the followers of Jesus, and the disciple of disciples. As one reads in Vatican II Constitution *Lumen Gentium* (no. 54): The place of Mary in the Church is “the highest after Christ and yet very close to us.” Hence, as Vatican II Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (no. 4) affirms, “all (Christians) should devoutly venerate her and commend their life and apostolate to her motherly concern.”<sup>42</sup> Mary is the closest to Jesus his Son and to his work of redemption. In his Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, Pope John Paul II invites believers in Jesus to go to the school of Mary. The goal of the Christian devotion to Mary – to her Rosary – is not just learning what Jesus taught his followers, but “learning him,” “learning from her to ‘read’ Christ, to discover his secrets and to understand his message.”<sup>43</sup>

Christian spirituality is ecclesial spirituality. The Church is mystery of communion, *koinonia*. Christians are members of the community of faith, hope, and love, of the Mystical Body of Christ. Ecclesial communion is essential to spirituality, the spirituality of the apostolic community, which was – and is – a prayerful and sharing community (cf. Acts 2:42-47, and 4:32-35). From Vatican II on, the magisterium of the Church has promoted a more leading teaching role of the local churches as underlined initially by Paul VI regarding the social doctrine of the Church. Theologian R. Gula writes: “Christian spirituality requires stable, enduring relationship with a community of faith that shares common practices and stable convictions about who we are and who God is in Jesus and through the Spirit.”<sup>44</sup>

Christian spirituality is liturgical spirituality. The liturgy is source of spiritual life and its devout celebration constant fountain of growth in the spiritual life and

---

<sup>42</sup> Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, LG, 54; *Id. Apostolicam Actuositatem*, AA, no. 4. Christian tradition calls Mary Mediatrix, title that “neither takes anything from, nor adds anything to the dignity and efficacy of the only Mediator” (LG, Chap. 8). Benedict XVI said when visiting Fatima (May 12, 2010): “Mary is fully immersed in the one universal mediation of Christ.” Cf. Mary O’Driscoll, OP, “Mary in the Christian Life,” in Emeterio de Cea, OP, *Compendium of Spirituality*, Vol. I, 105 -116.

<sup>43</sup> St. John Paul II, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, October 16, 2002, 14. Cf. Vatican II, Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, Chap. 8 entitled “The Role of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the Mystery of Christ and the Church,” nos. 52-68. Paul VI writes: “The Church’s devotion to the Blessed Virgin is intrinsic to Christian worship” (Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus*, MC, Vatican City, 1974, no. 56). Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 971.

<sup>44</sup> Gula, “Spirituality and Morality: What Are We Talking About?” Cf. Paul VI, *Apostolic Letter Octogesima Adveniens* (Vatican City, 1981), 4; PCP II (Second Plenary Council of the Philippines), *Acts and Decrees* (Manila: Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), 1992; Gustavo Gutierrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells* (1983); Saturnino Gamarra, *Teología Espiritual*, 87-106. Gutiérrez writes: “The vigorous existence of local churches in places geographically and culturally far removed from Europe, the force of their voices, containing accents of pain and hope, the contribution of their theological reflection, and the new challenges this brings represents a most important event for the Christian faith” (Gutierrez, *Spiritual Writings*, 98).



experience of God. Salvatori Marsili points out and explains well the characteristics of a liturgical spirituality, namely: Christocentric, easterly, biblical, sacramental, and cyclical. It focuses on the Eucharist (cf. Jn 6:53), which according to Vatican II is “the fount and apex of the whole Christian life,” and “source and apex of the whole work of preaching the Gospel.”<sup>45</sup>

Christian spirituality is evangelical spirituality. The mission of Christians is to inflame the world with Jesus’ love, to be in this world as “living sources of water from which others can drink.”<sup>46</sup> Christian spirituality cannot be individualistic. It is communion of life among all the members of the Church. It is charity that leads believers to go out of themselves, to practice un-selfing and decentralization. Max Seckler puts it well: *amans simpliciter exit extra se* (simply he who loves goes out of himself).<sup>47</sup> Thus Christian spirituality is a spirituality of charity: *Spiritualitas autem vita per caritatem est* (“The spiritual life comes from charity”).<sup>48</sup>

Christian spirituality is an evangelizing and missionary spirituality: the Christian lives the mystery of Christ as “one sent” by him in the Church (Matt 28:19-20). The spirituality of the Christian is a missionary spirituality: “As the Father sent me I also send you” (Jn 20:21). As Christ was sent by the Father in the Spirit to preach the Good News, his disciples are also sent to the world. It is a “life in mission:” a spirituality “to live the mystery of Christ as sent.”<sup>49</sup>

Christian spirituality is mystical spirituality for all. All Christians – no first and second class Christians – therefore, are equally called to the mystical life, including the ordinary people whose strong popular spirituality Pope Francis calls “people’s mysticism.” The writer remembers the often repeated words of theologian Karl Rahner: “The Christian of the future will be either a ‘mystic,’ that is to say, a person that has ‘experienced’ something or ‘someone,’ or he will not be a Christian.”<sup>50</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Vatican II, *LG*, 11 and Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 5. Cf. Salvatori Marsili, “Principios de espiritualidad litúrgica,” *Cuadernos Phase: Liturgia y Vida Espiritual*, no. 52 (March 1994): 55-67.

<sup>46</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, EG 63 & 86. Cf. Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, Vol. 2: *Spiritual Master*, 180-182.

<sup>47</sup> Max Seckler, *Le Salut and l’histoire: La pensée de St. Thomas l’Aquin sur la théologie d l’histoire*, 1967; Quoted by Torrell, *Christ and Spirituality in St. Thomas Aquinas*, 36, footnote 54. See Vatican II, *LG*, 49-51.

<sup>48</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *In III Sent. D. 38, q. 1, a. 4*. With grace and charity, the other virtues are present: “*Per virtutes perficitur vita spiritualis*” (*STh*, I-II, 65, 2, s. c.). Cf. Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, Vol. 2: *Spiritual Master*, 19, n. 54.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (Vatican City, 1990), no. 88; Gamarra, *Teología Espiritual*, 83.

<sup>50</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (Vatican City, 2013), 124; see also *ibid.* 123. Cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, LG 40; CCC 2013. Karl Rahner, *The Theology of the Spiritual Life, Theological Investigations*, Vol. 3, trans. Karl-H. and Boniface Kruger (London: Darton, Longman & Todd), 1974. Mysticism is closely

Christian spirituality is eschatological spirituality. As pilgrims, Christians never lose sight of the end - of heaven. The ultimate goal of Christian spirituality – as of moral theology – is “the contemplation of the first truth in our homeland.”<sup>51</sup> Christian life is a moral, spiritual, and mystical life.

Christian spirituality is eschatological and temporal spirituality, that is, historical and social. As temporal, spirituality is a way of being a follower of Christ in a given *kairos* and time. After Vatican II in particular, spirituality is considered as inextricably linked with the love of God and love of neighbor, eternal life and transformation of the world, union with God and social - and eco-justice.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, this spirituality is also social - the human person is a social being. It urges not the old *contemptus mundi* (contempt of the world) or *fuga mundi* (flight from the world), as understood then, but Christian spirituality as a dialogue with the world and the commitment of Christians to contribute to make it a just and fraternal community.

One may talk today of various models of the Christian ideal of life – of spiritual and mystical life: the models of holiness, perfection, loving union with God,

---

connected with spirituality, and at times overlap in meaning and implications. Mysticism comes from *mysterion* (the Greek term *mustes*), or mystery that is derived from the verb *myein* meaning ‘to close’ – and refers to what is hidden or secret. Mysticism is akin to ‘ecstasy,’ something extraordinary; but this ecstasy is not necessary to live a mystical life: For Christian mystics, the really important thing is “to be fully convinced that Christ lives within us, and especially to act in accordance with that conviction” (Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism* [New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1991], xvi). As it has been affirmed, there are Christians who apparently had no ecstasy, like St. Therese of the Child Jesus, Thomas Merton, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Popes John XXIII and John Paul II, and many others, but had an intimate experience of God’s presence. “Mystical” refers to different degrees of the experience of God’s presence in life. The word “mystical” was already used in the V-VI centuries by the Pseudo-Dionysius. St. John of the Cross speaks of mystical theology as of secret wisdom infused by the Holy Spirit (cf. José Rivera and José María Iraburu, *Síntesis de espiritualidad católica*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition [Pamplona: Gratis Date, 1999], 8). Theologian Matias Castaño comments that while theology is a science, “mística” is life. The ideal is that theologians are also mystics like the Fathers of the Church who were both (“Comments,” *Diario de Avila*, May 8, 2005).

<sup>51</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Sent. I*, prologus, a. 3, q. 1; cf. ad 1; quoted by Torrell, *Christ and Spirituality in St. Thomas Aquinas, I. c.*, p. 176. Cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, chap. 7: “The Eschatological Nature of the Pilgrim Church and Her Union with the Heavenly Church,” nos. 48 -51.

<sup>52</sup> Vatican II: “The expectation of a new earth must not weaken but rather stimulate our concern for cultivating this one. For here grows the body of a new family, a body which even now is able to give some kind of foreshadowing of the new age” (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 39 and 21). Cf. Fausto Gomez OP, *Vatican II at Fifty: Moral and Social Teachings* (Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2013), chap. 5, “*Gaudium et Spes* Fifty Years Later,” 89-143. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983). Recently Gustavo Gutiérrez was asked: What is the place of spirituality in the theological task of the theology of liberation? His answer: “It is basic, if we understand it as a style of life and a way of being. As Chenu used to say: ‘It is spirituality the one that is behind theology.’ Spirituality as way of being and as practice” (In *Religion Digital*, May 7, 2017). Cf. Donald Dor, *Spirituality and Justice* ((Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1985); Anne Y. Koester (ed.), *Liturgy and Justice* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2002).

the following Christ, doing God's will, contemplative and unitive prayer, and the flame of love. The fundamental truth for all models is this: all believers are called to holiness, that is, to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity as love of God and neighbor, to the union with God, to doing his will, that is, the salvation of the world.<sup>53</sup>

After presenting the rich and complex meanings of spirituality and Christian spirituality, the writer continues his text by focusing on the foundations, historical development, and highlights of Christian spirituality.

### **Christian Spirituality: Highlights**

Christian spirituality has developed exuberantly through the centuries from the teachings of the Sacred Scriptures, through the Fathers of the Church, theologians, mystics, and saints, and the teachings of the Church in particular Vatican II, the Ecumenical Council for our age and time.

In this section, we encounter writers, saints, and mystics who have discussed theologically and lived personally the presence and experience of God, of Jesus, and the Spirit. In the first section, the writer underlines the biblical grounding of Christian spirituality, and presents briefly basic stages of the development of spiritual theology through the centuries. In the second section, he points out the continuing attraction of the mystics and a main work from each one of them.

#### *Grounded on Sacred Scriptures. Some Historical Notes*

The development of Christian spirituality is grounded on the sources of Revelation, that is, Sacred Scriptures and Tradition. The Old Testament (OT) and the New Testament (NT) are the necessary foundation of doctrinal and experiential teachings on spirituality.<sup>54</sup> In the OT we see how Abraham, Moses, and the prophets experienced the presence of God.

---

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Gamarra, *Teología Espiritual*, 92-202. Cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* 40; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1997, 2013. St. Thomas Aquinas writes: "The perfection of the Christian life consists simply in charity, but in the other virtues relatively" (*STh*, II-II, 184, 1 ad 2). Gula underlines four models: the ascetical, the incarnational, the contemplative, and the social activist (cf. "Spirituality and Morality: What Are We Talking About? 42).

Cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* 40; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1997, 2013; Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (Vatican City, 2013), no. 124; see also *ibid.* no. 123. St. Thomas Aquinas writes: "The perfection of the Christian life consists simply in charity, but in the other virtues relatively" (*STh*, II-II, 184, 1 ad 2).

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Vatican II, *Divine Revelation*, 15; Jordan Aumann, *Christian Spirituality in the Catholic Tradition A History of Spirituality*, 8-9; Richard J. Woods, *Christian Spirituality*, chap. 1, 1-9; James A. Wiseman, *Spirituality and Mysticism*, 21-42; Pablo Marti, *Teología Espiritual*, 25-31.

God created man and woman to his image and likeness (Gen 1:27). He created them with a longing for happiness, for transcendence – for God himself: “As a deer yearns for running streams, so I yearn for you, my God” (Ps 42:1); “Let your face shine on us and we shall be saved” (Ps 80: 3, 7, 19). This natural yearning of the human person is implicitly or explicitly a search for God: “If you search for God honestly and sincerely, you will find him” (Deut 4:29).

The Old Testament presents to believers the close covenantal relationship between God and his people of Israel: “You will be my people, and I shall be your God” (Jer 30:22). They are God’s people, “the flock of his sheepfold” (Ps 100:3). They are a people consecrated to God, and chosen by him (Deut 7:5), and called to be holy: “I am the Lord, your God; therefore, be holy, for I am holy” (Lev 11:44-45; Hos 11:9). The people are called to be holy but often they commit sin, repent, and God forgives (cf. Ezek 18:23).

Through the Old Testament, primarily in the prophets, we see the interconnectedness of spiritual life (worship of God) and ethical life (justice towards all, particularly the poor and needy). God is just and merciful and asks his creatures and children both - to worship him and be just: “Faithful love is what pleases me, not sacrifice; knowledge of God, not burnt offerings” (Hos 6:6; cf. Isa 1:15-19; Amos 5:14-15; Jer 7:4-7). Paradigmatic Text: “This is what the Lord asks of you, only this: That you act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with the Lord” (Mic 6:8).

The sources that speak of the knowledge and experience of God are all the books of the Sacred Scriptures, in the first place of the New Testament, and in particular, the Gospels and the letters of St. Paul, St. Peter, and St. John the Evangelist.

The Old Testament prepares for the New, and the patriarchs and prophets, for Christ in whom the spiritual, mystical, and moral life is centered. Jesus has “the fullness of divinity” (Col 2:9) and through him, by the power of the Holy Spirit, men and women become brothers and sisters, all children of the same Father, who is holy (John 17:11). Christ is the Holy One of God (Lk 4:34; 1:35; Acts 3:14); He is like the Father (Jn 17:10). The Spirit is the Holy Spirit (Lk 3:22, 4:1, and 10:21) and grace is the grace of the Spirit, who dwells in the graced soul (cf. 1 Cor 3:16-17).

Spiritual life implies an encounter between God and the human person. In this encounter, God and the human person are essential, but God is primordial - God, the Beloved, the divine Spouse. The objective of any spiritual and mystical life is to experience progressive divinization, a growing intimacy with God: to-be-one-with-God.

The other interlocutor of the encounter is the human person, is a creature of God that comes from God and, through Christ in the Spirit, returns to God. Through

the encounter with God One and Triune, the human being becomes with God's grace God-like: divine (cf. 2 Pet 1:4). Divinization is the progressive journey or path to become divine. Only the divine – God – can make women and men share in his divinity.<sup>55</sup>

For Christians, God's experience in life is progressive Christification: to-be-one-with-Christ.<sup>56</sup> The medullar focus of moral theology and spiritual theology is Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life (Jn 14:6) as unveiled by revelation. For Christ, the Kingdom, prayer, compassion, the cross are essential teachings. The Beatitudes (cf. Matt 5:2-10) are the magna carta of the spiritual, moral, and mystical life of his followers.

Like the prophets of the Old Testament, Jesus links spirituality and ethics, love of God and love of neighbor, prayer, and compassion (cf. Matt 9:13; Jas 1:27). St. John the Evangelist underlines emphatically the unity of love of God and love of neighbor. No one can love God if he does not love his neighbor (see 1 Jn 4:20). It is generally agreed that the two main characteristics of the spirituality of Jesus are: "his tender and intimate relationship with God," and "his compassion for the poor, oppressed and suffering."<sup>57</sup> There is no true Christian faith without the necessary complement of love of the poor (cf. Matt 25:31-46).

Christians are "called holy people in Christ" (1 Cor 1:2; Phil 1:1), and invited to be holy (1 Pet 1:15; Rev 22:11). For them and others, God's experience in personal life is progressive identification with Jesus Christ, who lives and shows the incredible experience of God as Father together with the experience of God as unconditional and universal love, principally of the poor and wounded neighbor (cf. Lk 4:18-19). The experience of the resurrection of Christ is an experience of the presence of Jesus: "I have seen the Lord." The apostles, especially Peter, Paul, and John show believers the path towards union with God in Christ, guided by the Spirit. Peter speaks of the divine grace that makes us "share the divine nature" (2 Pet 1:4). Paul talks of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in us and also of the identification with Christ (Rom 5:5; 1 Cor 2:1-2). John the Evangelist underlines repeatedly the unbreakable unity there is between love of God and love of neighbor (cf. 1 Jn 4:20),

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Jean-Pierre Torrell, OP, *Christ and Spirituality in St. Thomas Aquinas*, 177-178. Writes Torrell: "Spirituality is not something added on to theology – like the pious corollaries or afterthoughts in modern spiritual manuals – but is really an integral dimension of theology, something that springs from its very exercise" (*Ibid* 175).

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Anselm Grun, *La mística Descubrir el espacio interior* (Santander: Sal Terrae, 2012), 25-35. He writes: "The New Testament is not, above all, a doctrine on Jesus Christ but an initiation into the experience of Jesus Christ and, through him, the experience of God" (*Ibid*. 35). Cf. Saturnino Gamarra, *Telología spiritual*, 53-69; Bernard McGinn & Patricia Ferris McGinn, *The Early Mystics. The Divine Vision of the Spiritual Masters* (Mumbai: St Pauls, 2012).

<sup>57</sup> Richard Woods, *Christian Spirituality: God's Presence through the Ages*, 2; cf. *Id.*, 1-9.

and of the impossibility of this love to be present in merciless persons (I Jn 3:17-18; cf. Jas 5:1-6).

Spiritual theology, as a theological science and systematic reflection, has developed through the ages. A necessary stop that the author can only mention here is the holistic teachings of the Fathers of the Church, who, as Gustavo Gutierrez points out, “understood all theology as spiritual theology.”<sup>58</sup> Deeply connected to the chain of the development of spiritual theology are Origen and Gregory of Nyssa. Writes Charles André Bernard, SJ: “The homilies of Origen and Gregory of Nyssa on the Old and New Testaments depict the entire Christian experience as a search of God in Christ. We might rightly see in their exposition the beginning of a spiritual theology not yet systematic but rich in content and normative for the centuries that follow.”<sup>59</sup>

Jordan Aumann develops well the history of Christian spirituality. After considering spirituality in the Sacred Scriptures, he continues with the spirituality of the early Church, including the writings of the apostolic Fathers, and the *Didache*, Ignatius of Antioch, St. Justin, St. Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Clement of Rome, Origen, Tertullian, etc. Thereafter, he develops in different chapter monasticism of the East (the Eastern Fathers: St. Basil, St. John Chrysostom, St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Gregory Nazianzen, Pseudo-Dionysius, Evagrius Ponticus, Maximus the Confessor, etc.) and of the West (The Western Fathers: St. Jerome, St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, John Cassian, St. Gregory the Great, etc.). Aumann continues with spirituality of the Middle Ages (St. Francis, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Bonaventure), Dionysian spirituality (Meister Eckhart, etc.), and *Devotio Moderna* (Thomas a Kempis, etc.), Post-Tridentine spirituality (St. Ignatius, St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, St. Francis of Sales), Modern spirituality of the 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries (French spirituality, Jansenism, Quietism), and the twentieth century spirituality (St. Therese of Lisieux, Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity, Charles de Foucauld, Liturgical Revival, Missionary Expansion, Systematic Spiritual Theology).<sup>60</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Spiritual Writings*, 260. Cf. Benedict XVI, *The Fathers* (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, 2008). It is interesting to note that all the Fathers of the Church from the beginning speak abundantly on prayer, including the author of the *Didache*, Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus, treatise *On Prayer* of Tertullian, and the *Homilies* of Origen (cf. F. Cayré, *The First Spiritual Writers* [London: Burns & Oates, 1959], 67-73).

<sup>59</sup> Charles André Bernard, SJ “The Nature of Spiritual Theology,” in Emeterio de Cea, OP, ed., *Compendium in Spirituality*, Vol. I, 65-66.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Jordan Aumann, *A Christian Spirituality in the Catholic Tradition* (San Francisco and London: Ignatius Press and Sheed & Ward, 1985). See also Richard J. Woods, *Christian Spirituality God's Presence through the Ages* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007); Id., “Spirituality, Christian (Catholic), History of,” in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. Michael Downey (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 938-946. Like Aumann's *A History of Spirituality*, Woods' *Christian Spirituality* is a well-known textbook. Woods develops dynamically the history of Christian spirituality through 22 chapters beginning with *Jesus and His Followers. God's Abiding Presence* (chap 1, pp. 1-9), and ending with *The Third Millennium: Darkness before Dawn* (pp. 263-276).

With the general teachings on spirituality by the different religious movements and congregations, we have individual saints, mystics, and theologians that have significantly contributed in different historical periods to the growth of spiritual and mystical life. Author Anselm Grun mentions and explains briefly the specific contribution to mystical and spiritual development of the following: Origin (second-third century), Gregory of Nyssa (335-394), Dionysius the Areopagita (2<sup>nd</sup> century?), St. Augustine (324-430), St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), Meister Eckhart (c. 1260-1328) with his contemporaries John Tauler and Henry de Suso, Matilda of Magdeburg (c. 1207-1282), Gertrude of Helfta (1256-1301), St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) and St. John of the Cross (1542-1591), Francis of Sales (1567-1622), Jakob Bohme (1575-1624), Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), and Karl Rahner (1904-1984).<sup>61</sup>

Vatican II contributed greatly to a shift in spiritual and mystical theology by its innovative teaching on the sources of revelation, the Word of God, dialogue with the world, the necessary connection between prayer and love of neighbor, and by asserting unequivocally that all Christians are called to holiness and to a spiritual and mystical life.<sup>62</sup>

### *The Classics of Christian Spirituality*

Jesus is the mystic who best represents the experience of God – of perfect union with God. Jesus Christ is the Incarnate Son of God who shows us the way of progressive union with God as Father.<sup>63</sup> Mystical life is participation in God's life: the presence of God and personal experience or realization of this divine life particularly through the theological virtues. Basic columns of Christian mysticism are: God exists; God is personal; God desires a personal communion with each and every one of us.<sup>64</sup>

The journey to a continually deepening union of love with God goes from rejection of sin, and from mainly discursive and "talkative" prayer with some silent prayer of the beginners (purgative stage), through acquisition and practice of virtues and less discursive and more mental prayer of the proficient (illuminative stage) to "marital" union and contemplative and wordless prayer of the perfect (unitive stage).

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Grun, *La mística*, 37-88. See also. Wiseman, *Spirituality and Mysticism*, 165-232; Karl Rahner, *The Theology of the Spiritual Life, Theological Investigations*, Vol. 3, trans. by Karl-H. and Boniface Kruger (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974).

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Fausto Gómez OP, *Vatican II at Fifty. Moral and Social Teachings* (Manila: UST Publishing House, 2013).

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Grun, *La mística*, 25-35.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. John Michael Talbot, *The Way of the Mystics. Ancient Wisdom for Experiencing God Today* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2005), 7. Talbot writes: "The theological thread that weaves all these stories of faith (of the mystics) can be found in three foundations of Christian mysticism." Cf. Thils, *Christian Holiness*, 545-546.

All the saints and the mystics follow and imitate Christ. Their lives point always to Christ. The mystics experience God, the loving union with Christ in a deep way, and tell others about it. Treasures of Christian spirituality yesterday, today, and forever are the true classic spiritual texts. True classics of Christian spirituality are those “that stood the test of time by transcending cultural peculiarities and overly specific interests.” These texts are “enduring and endearing.”<sup>65</sup> While speaking on social dialogue in the context of religious freedom, Pope Francis writes: “Religious classics can prove meaningful in every age; they have an enduring power to open new horizons, to stimulate thought, to expand the mind and the heart.”<sup>66</sup> The great scientist Albert Einstein was asked near the end of his life, if he had any regrets. His reported answer: “I wish I had read more of the mystics earlier in my life.”

The classics of Christian spirituality are very important texts for spiritual reading, which is an aid to spiritual growth. For sure, any person interested in spirituality has read or will read the classics, among them, the following, although some others could certainly be included: On the Our Father of St. Cyprian (200-258); Life of St. Anthony of St. Athanasius (295/97-373); The Confessions of St. Augustine (354-430); Conferences of John Cassian (360-435); De Gradibus Humilitatis et Superbiae (On the Degrees of Humility and Pride) of St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153).

Visions of Hildebrand of Bingen (1098- 1179), The Little Flowers of St. Francis of Assisi (13<sup>th</sup> Century), The Cloud of Unknowing of an anonymous English author (latter half of 14<sup>th</sup> century), The Revelations of Divine Love of Julian of Norwich (1342-c. 1416), The Journey of the Soul to God by St. Bonaventure (14<sup>th</sup> century), *De perfectione vitae spiritualis* (On the Perfection of the Spiritual Life) of St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), The Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena (1347-1380), Commentaries on John’s Gospel of Meister Eckhart (1260 – 1327), and Imitation of Christ of Thomas a Kempis (1379-1471).<sup>67</sup>

The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), The Way of Perfection of St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), Spiritual Canticle of St. John of the

---

<sup>65</sup> Cameron, *The Classics of Catholic Spirituality*, xiv. Cf. John Michael Talbot, *The Way of the Mystics*. Writes Thils: “Reading the works of the mystics can be useful to all the faithful who aspire to spiritual progress” (*Christian Holiness*, 547).

<sup>66</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 256.

<sup>67</sup> Important and popular mystics in our age are St. Hildegard of Bingen, latest woman doctor of the Church (2012), and Meister Eckhart and his two distinguished students and disciples John Tauler and Henry de Suso, who spread his teachings. Cf. Woods, *Christian Spirituality*, 155-157. See also Frederick Bauerschmidt, *Why the Mystics Matter Now* (Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2003); John Michael Talbot, “The Way of Visions: Hildegard of Bingen,” in his book *The Way of the Mystics. Ancient Wisdom for Experiencing God Today*, 47-62; Yves Congar, “Tauler in his own age and in his permanent relevance,” in his book of essays *Faith and Spiritual Life* (London: Danton, Longman and Todd, 1969), 86-93.



Cross (1542-1591), Introduction to the Devout Life of St. Francis of Sales (1567-1622), The Practice of the Presence of God of Brother Laurence of the Resurrection (1614-1691), True Devotion to the Virgin Mary of St. Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort (1673-1716), Abandonment to Divine Providence of Jean-Pierre de Causade (1675-1751), The Way of the Pilgrim of the anonymous Russian Pilgrim (19<sup>th</sup> Century), The Story of a Soul of St. Therese of the Child Jesus (1873-1897).<sup>68</sup>

After carefully studying the classics, theologian Cameron concludes that he finds in them seven recurrent themes, namely the following: belief in God's love (1); God's mercy, sin, and the mode of the soul (2); the instrumentality of the Church and the communion of saints (3); the importance of prayer and struggles with aridity (4); the dynamics of detachment and holy indifference (5); the redemptive role of suffering (6), and devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary (7).<sup>69</sup>

### *Lessons from the Mystics Today*

All mystics speak to us of God and God's love, and of their experience of the existential presence of God in their lives; of Jesus Christ, who is their spiritual master, mystic and lover, and of the Holy Spirit, who dwells at the depth of the soul and gives Christ's grace and his divine Gifts. The mystics and saints speak to all, moreover, on humility, prayer, sin, suffering, creation, the poor, etc. They talk effectively with their teachings and, above all, with the moving testimony of their life.

There is within each human person a mysterious search for God. There is in the human soul a longing for divinization. In all religions, especially in the three Abrahamic religions, there is a desire to be one-with-God, to experience God in life. Experiencing God in Christ implies necessarily experiencing the neighbor, our brother or sister. St. Thomas Aquinas, theologian and mystic says that love of neighbor may be higher than contemplation. Aquinas writes: "Therefore, to labor for the salvation of our neighbor, even at the expense of contemplation, for the love of God and neighbor, appears to be a higher perfection of charity than if he would cling so dearly to the sweetness of contemplation as to be totally unwilling to sacrifice it even for the salvation of others."<sup>70</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Aumann, *A Christian Spirituality in the Catholic Tradition*; Woods, *Christian Spirituality*; Cameron, *The Classics of Catholic Spirituality*; Talbot, *The Way of the Mystics*; Wiseman, *Spirituality and Mysticism*.

<sup>69</sup> Cameron, *The Classics of Christian Spirituality*, 115-142. Writers on spirituality and on the classics of Christian spirituality highly recommend to Christians to go back to the classics: "If we were more familiar with the masters of Christian spirituality, then it would be less likely for young people to go after some oriental guru to slake their thirst for the spiritual" (Jacques Philippe, *Time for God A Guide to Prayer Life* [Manila: Sinag-Tala Publishers, 2004], 87).

<sup>70</sup> *De perfectione vitae spiritualis*, chap. 23; quoted by Martin Grabmann, *The Interior Life of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Co., 1951), 40. Romanus Cessario, *The Spirituality of St.*

Spiritual theology guides us towards a deeper experience of God in our lives, experiencing him in himself, in ourselves, in others, and in creation. There is a mystical dimension of creation, which is penetrated by the power and beauty of God. It is said of St. Catherine of Siena that her first book was the Breviary “after the stars and the flowers” (Pérez de Urbel). A mystic of nature, Jakob Bohme (1575-1624) writes: “You will not find a better book that will help you to know in depth the divine wisdom than a walk through a green meadow: there you will smell and taste the marvelous energy of God.”<sup>71</sup>

The mystics invite all Christians to be mystics today. All believers are mystics, meaning they all experience God, who is at the depth of the soul. Although mysticism has often been almost exclusively connected with extraordinary supernatural phenomena, in reality it is similar to spiritual life, to a good Christian life, which begins with the presence of God’s grace in the soul and develops through the realization of that presence. Mystical life, writes H. C. Graef, “is nothing else but the life of grace lived at its highest level.” For Meister Eckhart the beginning of a mystical life consists in “living a Christian life in all seriousness and fulfilling the established moral duties.” For his part, his brother Dominican Henry de Suso adds: the mystical life is “the way to live everyday life in freedom and in serene interior abandonment and to make of the daily conflicts and disappointments an opening to God and to the ground of our soul.” Karl Rahner teaches that all can be mystics by living well the daily life.<sup>72</sup>

### Spiritual Theology in the Third Millennium

Theologians speak today of a post-Vatican II spirituality and a spirituality for the third millennium. There is today a perceptible growing interest in spirituality in general, and Christian spirituality in particular. The masters of Christian spirituality continue and will continue exerting a basic influence on the spirituality of the third millennium. The classics of mystics and other great authors will also be read by many through this millennium. Today, moreover, a global view of spirituality includes more deeply and extensively than yesterday spiritual and mystical traditions in Asia, Africa and the Americas.<sup>73</sup>

*Thomas Aquinas* (<http://spirituality.ucanews.com/2014/01/28/the-spirituality-of-st-thomas-aquinas/>, accessed on January 28, 2017).

<sup>71</sup> H. C. Graef, *The Way of the Mystics* (Dublin, Cork: The Mercier Press, 1948), 2; Bohme quoted by Grun, *La mística*, 81. St. John of the Cross: *Pouring out a thousand graces, / He passed these groves in haste; / And having looked at them, / With his image alone, / clothed them in beauty* (*Spiritual Canticle*, 4-5).

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Graef, *The Way of the Mystics*, 43-64, in which he speaks of the trio: Eckhart, Tauler, and De Suso. Cf. also Grun, *La mística*, where he quotes Meister Eckhart (p. 54), De Suso (59), and speaks of Rahner (84-86).

<sup>73</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez writes: “The vigorous existence of local churches in places geographically and culturally far removed from Europe, the forces of these voices, containing accents of pain and hope, the

In his global view of spirituality and mysticism, author James Wiseman presents a concise and attractive history, premised with a good presentation of the nature of spirituality, three interesting chapters on regional spiritualities: chapter 8 on Asian Christian Spirituality; chapter 9 on African Christian Spirituality, and chapter 10 on Christian Spirituality in the Americas.<sup>74</sup>

In the fourth part of the paper – spiritual theology in the third millennium – the writer takes up briefly three relevant points: some currents, four concrete characteristics of a spirituality for the third millennium, and some guiding books for the journey.

### *Some Currents*

Spiritual theology, spirituality today faces great challenges, which may become opportunities or dangers – or both mixed up. The twenty-first century world, more and more the global village predicted by Marshall McLuhan, the “digital continent,” longs for God’s presence and experience.

We live in the age of globalization, technology, and secularization, a world permeated by aggressive atheism, extreme relativism, and new forms of persecution of Christians. We have, in the expression of Benedict XVI, a certain “spiritual desertification,” and, in the words of Pope Francis, a kind of “spiritual worldliness,” which is even present in some Catholic groups and movements that seek personal instead of God’s glory, self-love, and personal enhancement instead of the centrality of Christ, the liberation and salvation of others, in particular the poor. This spirituality (better, perhaps spiritualism) of self-enhancement (of “selfing” instead of “unselfing” or self-emptying ourselves) is described as “too narcissist and obsessed with personal happiness only.”<sup>75</sup> It is a spirituality qualified as “light,” as a “hedonism of the spirit” that, in the case of Christians, creates a Christ made-to-order according to personal taste and mold. It may mix elements from different religions. New Age, Neopaganism, and scientology are among these currents in spirituality today.<sup>76</sup>

---

contribution of their theological reflection, and the new challenges this brings represent a most important event for the Christian faith... The presence of those who are different from Western culture is now established but not always recognized: it will lead us to reexamine central texts of the Christian revelation that can throw light on the process under way and finally indicate the patterns of spirituality represented by the preferential option for the poor” (*Spiritual Writings*, 98-99).

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Wiseman, *Spirituality and Mysticism*, 165-233.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Pope Francis, *EG* 93-97; Benedict XVI, *Homily, Eucharist Opening of the Year of Faith*: October 11, 2012.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. “Editorial,” *Vida Nueva* 4/28/2013, <http://www.vidanueva>; Fernando Bermúdez López, *Espiritualidad en un mundo globalizado* (Madrid: San Pablo, 2011); Felicísimo Martínez Díez, *Espiritualidad en la sociedad laica* (Madrid: San Pablo, 2009).

That is not the whole and complex picture. There is today, on one hand, an apparent dissatisfaction with organized or structured religions and spiritualities. On the other hand, there is today a clearly growing attraction of spirituality, of “the spiritual exercise,” of the “interior life,” of the “occult.”

Surveys show that many people will say to you: “I am not very religious, but I am very spiritual.” And yet, these surveys tell us too that religious devotions are coming back and so are the increasing participation of people in pilgrimages and visits to the so-called “holy places.” Furthermore, prayer groups are mushrooming everywhere.

Certainly, in the desert of the secular world, many people are searching for the oasis of spirituality. There is indeed a growing longing among many peoples for the spiritual, the transcendent, the mystical, and the mysterious. There is in this world an increasing attraction of spirituality understood in a vague sense. Even atheists, agnostics, and indifferent people are searching for spiritual experiences, for a spirituality without God, or, as coined by French author Francoise Champion, is a wild spirituality.

Nowadays, some theologians speak of four levels of spirituality, namely: spirituality as a fundamental dimension of the human being; spirituality as the “experience” of God’s presence or of human integration through self-transcendence; the expression or formulation of that experience, and a systematic study of that experience and its formulation.<sup>77</sup>

Joann Wolski Conn notes five different trends in current studies on spirituality: “sustained attention to feminist issues, concern for the link between prayer and social justice, reliance on classical sources for answers to current questions, recognition of the value of developmental psychology and its understanding of the ‘self’, and agreement that experience is the most appropriate starting point.”

For his part, Richard Woods underlines six characteristics for any spirituality “for a possible future.” These are: holistic, biblically grounded, developmentally oriented, life affirming, socially and ecologically responsible.<sup>78</sup>

Paul Lin points out the following as essential elements of Christian spirituality, of Christian life today: The return to the Sacred Scriptures, liturgy and the Fathers of the Church; trust in and love of God as the foundation of spirituality;

---

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Michael Downey, *Understanding Christian Spirituality* (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1997), 40-44.

<sup>78</sup> Joann Wolski Conn, *Spirituality and Personal Maturity* (New York: Paulist, 1989); quoted by Principe, “Spirituality, Christian,” *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, 934. Woods, *Christian Spirituality*, 274-276.

some amplitude for contemplation, a path to help people love others, and the use of non-violence.<sup>79</sup>

Donald Goergen underlines that the third millennium spirituality faces four challenges: contemplation (dialogue with other religions and Christians), “the other” (dialogue of cultures), solidarity (dialogue with the poor), and a new cosmic vision (dialogue with creation). Goergen believes, which the writer of this paper fully agrees, that the greatest challenge of Christianity, of spirituality and theology in general today is “whether we live what we believe,” the challenge of “the next centuries will be that of orthopraxis.”<sup>80</sup>

Some theologians, moreover, speak today – as was mentioned earlier - of various models of the Christian ideal of life and spirituality: the models of holiness, perfection, union with God, doing God’s will, and following Christ. Richard Gula speaks of “the ascetical model, the incarnational model, the contemplative and the social activist” – these models complement each other.<sup>81</sup>

The currents of spirituality are numerous, diverse, and multifaceted. Among the many characteristics of spirituality today, we select hereafter the basic ones.

#### *Four Characteristics for Our Time*

Contemporary Christian spirituality tries to avoid two extremes: “spiritualism” (the individualistic and escapist fuga mundi and contemptus mundi) on one hand, and “activism” (or human and social promotion disconnected from prayer and contemplation) on the other. In other words, authentic spirituality tries to avoid an escapist spiritual life and self-righteousness, and a worldly activism overcrowded with external social activities. Many Christians with other religious people try seriously to follow the example of the mystics, the saints, the good Christians, who the more they were united to God in contemplation, the more they committed themselves to the neighbor, in particular the poor and wounded neighbor. Certainly, the saints are the ones who renew the world. Gandhi once said that our world needs saints not politicians.

Among the many characteristics or traits of Christian spirituality today that will continue tomorrow are the following: Christ-centered; charismatic/pentecostal; biblical, liturgical, and Eucharistic; grace-virtue-Gifts; feminine and lay spirituality;

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Paul Lin, “Thomas Merton on the Spirituality of the Christian,” *Chinese Cross Currents* 9, No. 2 (April 2012): 82-86.

<sup>80</sup> Donald Goergen, OP, “Spirituality: The Challenges for a New Millennium,” *Dominican Ashram* 20, No. 2 (June 2001): 81-94.

<sup>81</sup> Gula, “Spirituality and Morality: What Are They Talking About?” in *Ethics and Spirituality*, 42. Cf. S. Gamarra, *Teología Espiritual*, 92-202.

historical and eschatological; a contemplative and liberating spirituality; dialogical, ecumenical, and intercultural (from competition to cooperation), and global and contextual.

In this context, the writer of this study suggests four characteristics which should perhaps be in any Christian spirituality in the third millennium: a Christ-centered, mystical, liberating, and ecological spirituality.

Christian spirituality is yesterday, today, and tomorrow a Christo-centric spirituality wholly centered on Jesus Christ. Jesus is the only name under heaven that saves men and women (Acts 4:12). This is obvious, but always in need to be pointed out. Christians are followers of Christ. The central focus of moral theology and spiritual theology is Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life (Jn 14:6) as unveiled by revelation. Christ is “the heart” of catechesis and evangelization.<sup>82</sup> The greatest value of the human being is “the union with Christ and in Christ with the Father and the Holy Spirit.”<sup>83</sup> Jesus Christ, the Son of God and perfect man is the one who reveals to us the Father in the Spirit. He reveals man to himself and discovers to all the sublimity of their vocation. Christ, “the image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15), reveals to humanity the dignity of the human person, and raises human nature to its highest dignity. Moreover, Christ by dying on the Cross reveals to men and women the gravity of sin and their need of a savior. Christ is the universal Redeemer. In him, “there is no West or East, in him, there is no South or North.”<sup>84</sup>

True Christian spirituality is mystical spirituality. There is today a rebirth of mysticism and the attraction of mystical life. This mystical life is not an aristocratic and elitist one, possible only – it appears – for extraordinary souls; but a mystical life which is reachable by all faithful Christians. Mystical life is understood today as loving union with God the Father through Christ, his only begotten Son, and by the power of the Holy Spirit. As Vatican II made very clear, all Christians are called to holiness, to the mystical union with Christ, although only some might receive special graces or extraordinary signs of the mystical life which after all are not necessary at all as the mystics themselves affirm repeatedly.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Vatican II, Declaration *Nostra aetate*, 2; GS, 22; CCC, 426-429.

<sup>83</sup> Marti, *Teología Espiritual*, 90.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 22. St. John of the Cross writes: “We do not have to seek new visions or revelations; by giving us his Son, his only Word, He (God) has said everything in the one Word” (*The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, bk. 2, chap. 22, 3). Christ is the center in all cultural expressions of Christian faith. The author remembers the verses of John Oxenham: “In Christ there is no East or West, / In him no South or North, / But one great fellowship of love / Throughout the whole wide earth. / In Christ now meet both East and West / In him meet South and North, / All Christy souls are one in him, / Throughout the whole wide earth. (Quoted from William Barclay, *In Luke* 8:19-21).

<sup>85</sup> Writes Benedict XVI: “This sacramental ‘mysticism’ is social in character, for in sacramental communion I become one with the Lord, like all the other communicants” (*Deus Caritas est*, 13-14). Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, CCC, 2014). Pope Francis writes: “There is a mystical meaning to

Following Christian tradition, mysticism is always accompanied by asceticism. Writes Joseph Phan, OP: “Asceticism and mysticism are so intermingled that there is never a purely ascetical state or a purely mystical state.”<sup>86</sup> Spiritual progress implies asceticism and mortification. These lead gradually to abandon sin, live the Beatitudes, and embrace in a deeper and deeper manner the cross of life. Taking the way of the cross that leads to perfection is difficult. Writes John of the Cross: “The soul cannot possess not even reach those treasures (of wisdom and knowledge hidden in Christ) unless it first passes through the thicket of exterior and interior suffering.”<sup>87</sup>

Integral spirituality comprises a transcendent and an immanent dimension, love of God and love of neighbor, mystical and liberating, contemplation and action. It is, as Simon Chan asserts, neither “an ahistorical interiority” nor “an uncritical involvement in the historical (more often, sociopolitical).” Nevertheless, one cultural context may focus more on one than on the other dimension. For instance Philippine Theology stresses more its liberating aspect while other Asian cultures center more on contemplation.<sup>88</sup>

Every Christian is a follower of Christ and therefore a searcher of Christ in our world. Like the two followers of John the Baptist who wished to follow Jesus, he or she asks Jesus the question: “Rabbi, where do you live?” (cf. John 1:38-39). Jesus lives, is present in the Church, in prayer, in the Sacraments – in particular, in the Eucharist – and in the Word. He is present in the poor and needy.<sup>89</sup>

There can be no authentic Christian spirituality without a deep concern for and commitment to justice, a justice “informed” by charity, which is the form of all virtues in the sense that charity directs all virtuous actions to the end. As it is made clear in the Sacred Scriptures, there can be no true love without justice: love of God be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor’s person face” (*Encyclical Letter Laudato Si’*, 233).

<sup>86</sup> Joseph Phan Tan Thanh, OP, “The Mystical Problem,” *Compendium of Spirituality*, Vol. I, 169.

<sup>87</sup> *Spiritual Canticle* (B), str. 37, 4 and 36, 13; in Breviary, *Office of Readings*, December 14, Second Reading.

<sup>88</sup> Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 34. He writes: “A universally affirmative spiritual theology must be broad enough to take in the different contexts of the world where the church exists both in time and through time. It might not be practically possible to take in every context, but we must at least be sensitive to the major nuances that exist between the poles of transcendence and history” (*Spiritual Theology*, 31). Cf. Virginia Fabella et al. (eds.), *Asian Christian Spirituality: Reclaiming Traditions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992).

<sup>89</sup> Jose Antonio Mayoral, “Maestro, dónde vives?” *Vida Nueva*, 1 de noviembre de 1997, 27; *Ibid.*, 23-29. Mayoral writes: “The most intimate room of the house of the Risen Lord is the room of the needy. He who does not discover this room, does not know the Lord very well, because then he can only have a superficial encounter with the Lord.” Writes Gustavo Gutierrez, who likes to link mysticism and politics: “There is certainly a close relationship between mysticism and politics. Without contemplation, prayer, thanksgiving to God, there is no Christian life, any more than there is without commitment, solidarity and love of neighbor” (*Spiritual Writings*, 98).

is also love of neighbor, and love of neighbor is love of all neighbors, especially the poor and needy – a love that necessarily implies justice. Charitable justice is justice plus love. Charity is God’s love in us and, therefore, like the love of God, ours is primarily addressed to the poor and needy, as it is clearly shown in the Bible. In this context, the Asian Bishops wrote: “The search for holiness and the search for justice, evangelization, and the promotion of true human development and liberation are not opposed, but make up today the integral preaching of the Gospel especially in Asia.” St. John Paul II wrote at the beginning of the third millennium: “At the beginning of the century the issue that challenges most our human and Christian consciences is the poverty of countless millions of men and women.”<sup>90</sup>

The context of liberation today goes beyond the horizon of liberation theology to envelop all human groups that need liberation from oppression, injustice, discrimination, and marginalization, including children, women, the elderly, migrants, and refugees. At the closing of Vatican II (December 8, 1965), Blessed Paul VI stated that the model of the spirituality of the Council was the story of the Good Samaritan. Pope Francis underlines frequently mercy or compassion as the distinguishing characteristic of God and of the authentic Christian.<sup>91</sup>

In global context, the author underlines with many others a fourth concern for any spirituality today: ecological sensitivity and responsibility. Spiritual theology listens to the signs of the times. One sign, or a messenger of God’s word is, as Pope Francis makes powerfully clear in his Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si’* (LS) ecological awareness and responsibility. In a world of plenty many poor and needy do not share in it. In his ecological encyclical, the Argentine Pope repeatedly connects “the cry of the earth” with “the cry of the poor.”<sup>92</sup>

<sup>90</sup> St. John Paul II, *Message for the World Day of Peace* (Vatican City, January 1, 2000). Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, FABC: *Evangelization in Modern Day Asia* (Taipei, 1974), 23; Thomas Aquinas, *STh*, II-II, 23, 8. Cf. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia* (Vatican City, 1999); Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973); Segundo Galilea, *The Future of our Past. The Message of the Hispanic Mystics to Contemporary Spirituality*, Translated from the Spanish by Carmen Ll. Sayo, Second Printing (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 1986); Virginia Fabella et al. (eds.), *Asian Christian Spirituality: Reclaiming Traditions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992); Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Image Books, 1973); O’Keefe, OSB, *Becoming Good Becoming Holy*, 75-90; Terry Talstard, *They Spark in the Soul: Four Mystics on Justice* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1989); Donald Dorr, *Spirituality and Justice* (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 1985); Jesús Espeja, “Liberación y espiritualidad en América latina,” *Ciencia Tomista*, T. 111 (Enero – Abril 1984/1): 87-122; Daniel G. Groody, *Globalization, Spirituality and Justice*, Revised Edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015). For biblical grounding of justice/love, cf. Fausto B. Gomez, OP, “Biblical Teachings on Justice,” in his book *The Journey Continues: Notes on Ethics and Bioethics* (Manila: UST Publishing House, 2009), 105-140.

<sup>91</sup> Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus, The Face of Mercy*, Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy (Vatican City, 2015); *Id. The Name of God is Mercy. A Conversation with Andrea Tornielli*, trans. Oonagh Stransky (New York: Random House, 2916).

<sup>92</sup> Pope Francis, Encyclical letter *Laudato Si’* (Vatican City, 2015). Pope Francis connects repeatedly “the cry of the earth” with “the cry of the poor” (LS, no. 49 cf. nos. 10, 91, 94, etc.).



Some theologians speak of “cosmic spirituality.”<sup>93</sup> A mystical life, focused on the loving union with God, converses respectfully with and cares for nature.<sup>94</sup> Authentic spiritual theology helps people be socially and ecologically responsible.

*Some Contemporary Inspiring Books for the Journey*

Contemporary spirituality is a plural and varied spirituality continually enriched by saints, mystics, experts, writers – and ordinary people – and non-Christian brothers and sisters.<sup>95</sup>

Among the Christian authors that recently had or continue having a significant impact on the writer, and on many others, and for different reasons, he cites a few among them. Simone Weil (1909-1943), author of *Gravity and Grace* (posthumously published in 1952); Thomas Merton (1915-1968), author of *New Seeds of Contemplation*; St. Mother Teresa (1910-1997) of *Come Be My Light, The Private Writings of the ‘Saint of Calcutta’*; Anthony de Mello (1921-1987), *Sadhana: A Way to God*; Henri Nouwen (1932-1996), *The Return of the Prodigal Son*; Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988), *Prayer*; C. S. Lewis (1898-1963), *The Signature Classics*; Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945), *The Cost of Discipleship*; St. Teresa Benedicta of

<sup>93</sup> Theologian Aloysius Pieris connects powerfully God, creation, and the poor. At the end of his illuminating article entitled “Two Encounters in My Theological Journey,” he writes: In essence, “my experiences – insertion in the religiosity of Asia and insertion into its social problems – have brought me to an awareness of a spirituality that is not only an orientation towards God – an ultimate reality, a nirvana of renunciation – but also towards a cosmic involvement, manifesting the popular religiosity of the poor with whom Jesus identified himself” (“Two Encounters in My Theological Journey,” in R. S. Sugirtharajah (ed.), *Frontiers in Asian Christian Theology: Emerging Trends* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 146.

<sup>94</sup> One may say that, in general, and having into consideration their different historical and cultural environments, the mystics found in the earth the place and the grace to contemplate God. The author gives two examples: St. John of the Cross and St. Therese of the Child Jesus. In the second part of his *Spiritual Canticle* (14 and 15 stanzas) the soul encounters the Beloved and tenderly sings: *My Beloved is the mountains, / And lonely wooded valleys, / Strange islands, / And resounding rivers, / The whistling of love-stirring breezes, / The tranquil night / At the time of the rising dawn, / Silent music, / Sounding solitude, / The supper that refreshes, and deepens love.* In simple language, St. Therese formulates her youthful and refreshing notes on nature and its beauty. Contemplating the night, with her sister Celine, Therese writes in her enchanting *Story of a Soul*: “With enraptured gaze we beheld the white moon rising quietly behind the tall trees, the silvery rays it was casting upon sleeping nature, the bright stars twinkling in the deep skies, the light breath of the evening breeze making the snowy clouds float easily along; all this raised our souls to heaven, that beautiful heaven whose ‘clean reverse’ alone we were able to contemplate” (Manuscript A, Chap. V). On her way back to France from Rome, where she had asked Leo XIII to allow her to enter Carmel, young Therese, remembering the marvelous beauty of God’s creation writes: “... My heart longed for other marvels. It had contemplated *earthly beauties* long enough; *those of heaven* were the object of its desires and to win them for *souls* I was willing to become a prisoner.” (*Ibid.*, Chap. VI)

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Marsha Sinetar, *Ordinary People as Monks and Mystics* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986). Cf. Woods, *Christian Spirituality*, 271; James J. Bacik, “Contemporary Spirituality,” *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. Michael Downey (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 214-230. In the Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, Vatican II speaks of elements of spirituality in other religions: in Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. The Council Fathers highlight in particular “the spiritual bond” and “the common spiritual patrimony” that link Jewish and Christian faiths (*NA*, 2-3, 4).

the Cross, OCD, earlier Edith Stein (1891-1942), *Essential Writings*; *St. Elizabeth of the Trinity* (1880-1906), *Heaven and Earth* (Retreat Notes); John G. Arinterro (1860-1928), *La evolución mística*; Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), *The Phenomenon of Man*; Dorothy Day ((1897-1980), *The Long Loneliness*.<sup>96</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez (b. 1928), *We Drink from Our Own Wells. The Spiritual Journey of a People*, and Rick Warren (b. in 1954), *The Purpose Driven Life*.

The writer of these notes loves to read other Christian as well as non-Christian authors' inspiring works. In a world often permeated by books, novels that are filled with violence, lust and despotic power, it is refreshing to read inspirational and spiritual books that highlight interiority, spirituality, harmony, and peace. In this context, the writer remembers the little and meaty book *Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural* by sociologist Peter Berger (b. 1929). Many of the current books we mention in this final section are significant books – generally, best-sellers – for many people in our secularized world. These books, which help many enter the surprising world of the transcendent, mystical, and mysterious, are like rumors of angels – soft inspirational voices of the supernatural in our generally secular, indifferent and materialistic societies.

One finds joy and hope – among some others – in the following books: *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran (1883-1931), *Gitanjali* (Songs of Offering) by Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), *Man's Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl (1905-1997), *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1900-1944), *The Art of Happiness* by the (14<sup>th</sup>) Dalai Lama (b. 1935), *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* by Richard Bach (b. 1936), *The Alchemist* by Paolo Coelho (b. 1947), *Tuesdays with Morrie* by Mitch Albom (b. 1958), etc.

People yearn for God, with a longing that is a natural yearning which can be covered or buried but not erased. All sources point out in various ways and languages to the search for the meaning of life, for happiness, hope, love, compassion. Consciously or unconsciously, individually or in community, all persons are seekers looking for inner and outer peace – for God. St. Augustine said it well at the beginning of his *Confessions*: “You, Lord, have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”

In closing this part, one final point is made: the paper speaks of a spirituality for the present. Christians with many other human beings learn from the past – from the classics – and journey to the future of hope by loving fidelity to the present, a present permeated by God's presence and experience. Christian spirituality, Yves Congar says, is a spirituality of the present moment: the moment, this moment is a

---

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Aumann, *Christian Spirituality in the Catholic tradition*, Chap 10, *The Twentieth Century*, 261-277; Woods, *Christian Spirituality*, Chap 21, “The Twentieth Century. Crisis and Renewal, 243-262.”

treasure, the only thing in the hands of each person. Indeed, as Zen Buddhists teach, “Life consists of a series of moments either lived or lost.” The writers and teachers of Christian spirituality try to convince themselves, the disciples of Jesus and others of the need to transform every day’s life into “a spiritual worship that pleases God.”<sup>97</sup>

And thus we come to the conclusion of these notes on spiritual theology for our times.

## Conclusion

After discussing the interconnectedness of spirituality and moral theology, the nature of spirituality and Christian spirituality, and after pointing out some highlights of Christian spirituality, and the characteristics of Christian spirituality today, the importance and relevance of spirituality in the third millennium, we are ready to close our reflection.

The Sacred Scriptures, the writings of the Fathers of the Church, the magisterium of the Church, and the classics of Christian spirituality have guided Christians, and women and men of good will through the ages. May these with other current inspiring texts continue guiding men and women of the present age on their journey as co-pilgrims to God.

Spiritual theology or spirituality speaks of the experiences of men and women of God and their written testimonies. The goal of Christian spirituality or spiritual theology (both mean substantially the same) is not mainly knowledge on holiness but a holy life. Its ultimate goal is – like for moral theology – the beatific vision of God, who is the Holy One, who keeps inviting women and men to share in his divine holiness – to make us holy. St. Bonaventure writes: “Theology exists to serve contemplation and to make us holy; however, its first purpose is to make us holy.”<sup>98</sup> Theologian Torrell comments: “The practice of theology must cause the theologian to grow in holiness. Not only theologians are called to this as disciples of the Holy One, but their profession adds to this call a singular exigency: they should be holy because they are theologians.”<sup>99</sup>

---

<sup>97</sup> Yves Congar, *Faith and Spiritual Life* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1969), 205-214. Writes Congar: “What essentially matters is the presence of God in every moment of our life once it becomes oriented towards God, just as a flower rotating in the direction of the sun throughout the day.” Cf. S. De Fiores, “Espiritualidad contemporánea,” *Nuevo Diccionario de Espiritualidad*, ed. Stefano de Fiores and Tullo Goffi (Madrid: Ediciones paulinas, 1983), 467.

<sup>98</sup> Saint Bonaventure, *Comentaria in IV Libros Sententiarum, Proemium*, Q. 3.

<sup>99</sup> Torrell, *Christ and Spirituality in St. Thomas Aquinas*, 32. According to St. Thomas Aquinas, the end of theology is “the contemplation of the first truth in heaven;” and that the first truth is “the end of all our desires and actions.” The contemplation of the truth includes faith and charity, intellectual and affective aspects (cf. STh, II-II, 180, 7; Torrell, *Christ and Spirituality in St. Thomas Aquinas*, 29).

As it is pointed out at the beginning and at the end of these notes – and in between beginning and end – the greatest challenge of spirituality in the third millennium is, undoubtedly, correct practice, orthopraxis. The study of spiritual theology today is not just to know, but to practice: “To know and not to do is not yet to know” (Buddhist Proverb). One studies spirituality to search for God - for interior space -, to be transfigured, to preach the Good News of Jesus: charitable justice, merciful love, and courageous faith and hope. Miguel de Unamuno reminds all, in particular theologians that Christ did not write any book or article but gave us the best book: *palabras vivas* (living words). Theologians in general, and moralists and experts on spiritual theology in particular must try harder – the writer places himself in the first place - to give to our world not only academic and well-researched theological articles and books, but also living words, that is, living and witnessing their teaching. In our so called often described as a “post-truth” world, of “fake news” and “politically correct” stands, orthopraxis in spirituality and moral theology – in life – counts most. Indeed, *prius vita quam doctrina*.<sup>PS</sup>

## References

### *Sacred Scriptures*

Vatican II (Vatican City, 1962-1965). *Constitutions, Decrees and Declarations*.

*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, CCC. Vatican City, 1992 & 1997.

Aquinas. Thomas. *Summa Theologiae*, STh, II-II.

Aumann Jordan, OP. *Spiritual Theology*. Manila: UST Press, 1982; Id., *Christian Spirituality in the Catholic Tradition*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985.

Cameron, Peter John, OP. *The Classics of Catholic Spirituality*. New York: St Pauls, 1996.

Chan, Simon. *Spiritual Theology A Systematic Study of Christian Life*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998.

Congar, Yves. *Faith and Spiritual Life*. London: Danton, Longman and Todd, 1969.

Curran Charles E, and Lisa A. Fullam (eds.). *Ethics and Spirituality. Readings in Moral Theology*, No. 17. New York/ Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2014.

De Cea, Emeterio, OP (ed.). *Compendium of Spirituality*, Vol. I, Translated by Jordan Aumann, OP. New York: Society of St. Paul, Alba House, 1995.

Downey Michael. *Understanding Christian Spirituality*. New York / Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1997.

- Downey, Michael (ed.). *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993.
- Fabella, Virginia, et Al. (eds.). *Asian Christian Spirituality: Reclaiming Traditions*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992.
- Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC). *Evangelization in Modern Day Asia* (Taipei, 1974).
- Flores, Stefano de, and Tulio Goffi with Augusto Guerra (eds.). *Nuevo Diccionario de Espiritualidad*. Madrid: Ediciones Paulinas, 1983.
- Gamarra, Saturnino. *Teología Espiritual*. Madrid: BAC, 2007.
- Garrigou-Lagrange, Reginald OP. *Christian Perfection and Contemplation according to St. Thomas Aquinas and St. John of the Cross*. Translated by Sr. M. Timothea Doyle, OP. Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, 1937.
- Gómez, Fausto, OP. *Vatican II at Fifty. Moral and Social Teachings*. Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2013.
- Groody, Daniel G. *Globalization, Spirituality, and Justice*, Revised Edition. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015.
- Grun, Anselm. *La mística Descubrir el espacio interior*. Santander: Sal Terrae, 2012.
- Gutiérrez, Gustavo. *We Drink from Our Own Wells. The Spiritual Journey of a People*. Translated by Matthew J. O'Connell. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983.
- Marti, Pablo. *Teología Espiritual*. Madrid: Ed. Rialp, 2006.
- Murray, Paul, OP. *The New Wine of Dominican Spirituality*. London: Burns & Oates, 2010.
- Merton, Thomas. *New Seeds of Contemplation*. New York: New Directions Books, 2007.
- O'Collins, Gerald, SJ and Edmond G. Farrugia, SJ. *A Concise Dictionary of Theology*. Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 2001.
- O'Keefe, Mark, OSB. *Becoming Good, Becoming Holy. On the Relationship of Christian Ethics and Spirituality*. Makati, Metro Manila: St Pauls, 1997.
- PCP II (Second Plenary Council of the Philippines). *Acts and Decrees*. Manila: Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), 1992.
- Rahner, Karl. *The Theology of the Spiritual Life, Theological Investigations, Vol. 3*. Translated by Karl-H., and Boniface Kruger. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974.

Rivera, José and José María Iraburu. *Síntesis de Espiritualidad Católica*. Pamplona: Fundación Gratis Date, 1999.

Royo Marin Antonio, OP. *Teología de la perfección cristiana*. Madrid: BAC, 1958.

Talbot, John Michael. *The Way of the Mystics*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005.

Torrell, Jean-Pierre OP. *Christ and Spirituality in St. Thomas Aquinas*. Translated by Bernhard Brankenhorn, OP. Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011; *Id.* Saint Thomas Aquinas, Vol. 2: Spiritual Master. Translated by Robert Royall. Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003.

Vidal, Marciano, Moral y espiritualidad. *De la separación a la convergencia*. Madrid: Editorial el Perpetuo Socorro, 1997.

Wiseman, James A. *Spirituality and Mysticism: A Global View*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006.

Woods, Richard, OP. *Christian Spirituality God's Presence through the Ages*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007.

