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Christian Spirituality



Illustrations by Michael O'Neill McGrath, OSFS

Spirituality is the in thing these days. Religious books and articles dealing with spiritual topics abound. Retreats of all sorts are gaining in popularity. Sales are brisk for taped lectures and retreat conferences. Everywhere one can find a range of personal growth and human potential programs, as well as various "new age" movements. People are interested in living fuller, deeper, more personal

human lives. Today there is a great hunger and thirst for more authentic spiritual life, in short, for spirituality.

But what do we mean by spirituality? Because of the wide range of movements and approaches, the term can be vague. In this *Catholic Update*, however, we will try to say what spirituality is, especially Catholic Christian spirituality. Maybe a good question to guide our inquiry is, "What is the 'spirit' in spirituality?"

Breath of life and love: Spirit in Scripture

Look at Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Native American or any number of religions, and you will find something shared in common: namely, the quest of the human spirit for something that is above us, that is bigger, deeper, "more than" the ordinary, surface reality of life. Christian

spirituality, though, stresses that we begin with the gift from above from the Holy Spirit of God. You could even define Christian spirituality as “our life in the Spirit of God” or “the art of letting God’s Spirit fill us, work in us, guide us.” But what is this Spirit and how does it work in us? A look at the Spirit in Scriptures points the way.

In Hebrew and Christian Scripture the basic meaning of spirit is very concrete. Whether the Hebrew *ruach* or Greek *pneuma*, the basic meaning is “wind/breath.” In the Old Testament, a few texts refer to the activity of God’s Spirit in creation (Gn 1:2; Ps 33:6), but



most often, it is seen empowering persons to do God’s work. Thus, Moses is led by God’s Spirit: “I will come down and speak with you there. I will also take some of the spirit that is on you and will bestow it on them, that they may share the burden of the people with you. You will then not have to bear it by yourself” (Num 11:17). The Spirit raises up judges to deliver Israel in times of distress, it rushes on Israel’s kings, filling them with wisdom, understanding and strength so that they might truly rule with justice and peace. David’s anointing is a key example: “Then Samuel, with the horn of oil in hand, anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and from that day on, the spirit of the LORD rushed upon David” (1 Sam 16:13).

The Servant of Yahweh receives the Spirit especially for establishing justice for the lands. We see evidence of this again and again in the historic and prophetic books of the Old Testament. Further, the Spirit of God works in and through prophets, moving them to speak and act on God’s behalf. Finally, some

texts look to the outpouring of God’s Spirit on all as part of the messianic age. Isaiah contains some of the most familiar passages. The “Spirit of God,” then, is the dynamic breath or power by which God achieves the divine purposes in the world, purposes of revelation, deliverance and the rule of justice and peace.

New Testament outlook

In the New Testament, Jesus is conceived through the power of the Spirit (Mt 1:18, 20; Lk 1:35). His ministry begins and continues in the Spirit (Lk 3:22, 4:1, 4:18). He preaches, confronts sin and evil, and brings healing (Mt 12:28) in and through the Spirit. At his death, he hands over his Spirit (Jn 19:30). At the Last Supper, Jesus had promised his disciples the gift of the Spirit (Jn 14:16-17), and when he appears to them on the evening of the day of the Resurrection, he fulfills that promise: “[Jesus] breathed upon them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (Jn 20:2).

Powerful witness to the work of the Spirit continues in Acts and Paul. The Spirit of Jesus is given to Christians making them one with Jesus and enabling them to continue his activity in the world. At Pentecost, the Spirit rushes on the disciples and through their preaching they are able to reverse, as it were, the effects of the tower of Babel. Thanks to the power of the Spirit at Pentecost, people of diverse languages are brought together in unity (Acts 2:1-11).

The Christian lives in and through and with the power of the same breath-Spirit as Jesus. “But whoever is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him” (1 Cor 6:17). The Spirit gives different gifts for the building up of the community in love and is the bond of union holding all together in Christ (1 Cor 12:13). The fruit of the Spirit in our lives is “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal 5:22-23).

The Holy Spirit makes us holy, calling each of us to be a saint, a holy person. For the Christian, then, “spiritual” refers to the whole of our existence, filled with the Spirit of Christ. We are so filled with this Spirit that Paul can say, “it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20).

Spirit, body and soul

Many Christians have learned that the spiritual life is primarily (if not exclusively) the life of the soul. To this way of thinking the body (and the world of matter in general) is spurned, dis-trusted, even despised as we seek to “save our soul.”

Yet nothing could be further from the revealed truth of Scripture. The biblical, Christian view is that spiritual refers to the whole person, body and soul, living under the influence of God’s Spirit. In the biblical view, matter is not opposed to the Spirit; only sin is. When St. Paul speaks of our whole person under the dominion of sin, weakness and death, he sometimes calls this “living according to the flesh” (Rm 8:5-10; Gal 5:16-26). This use of flesh should not be equated with “the body.” That body-soul distinction crept in well after Paul’s time and is not what he meant.

Christian spirituality, then, deals with the whole person—body and soul, thoughts and feelings, emotions and passions, hopes, fears, dreams—as we live in and with the power of the Spirit. And it deals with the whole life of the whole person, calling us to live this life to the fullest. The call and challenge of the spiritual life is not restricted only to some Christians (priests or religious, for example) but is addressed to all. All share the same Spirit and are called to one and the same holiness. This basic fact was much stressed by Vatican Council II.

Its Decree on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, devotes an entire chapter (Chapter 5) to this theme: Everyone shares one call to holiness in the Spirit (see box on last page).

Different spiritualities?

At times we hear talk of different spiritualities: Franciscan, Jesuit, lay, priestly, and so on. How can this be if there is only one Christian spirituality? The answer lies in the broad diversity of human experience. No one lives Christian spirituality in the abstract. We all live at specific and particular moments of space and time. All of us belong to particular religious communities into which we are born, in which we grow, are educated,

come to know and experience God. These circumstances shape our response to the Spirit's call. Differing times and places pose new challenges, new questions. They call forth different models of life seeking to respond to those questions and challenges.

In short, the concrete and changing circumstances of our lives cannot but affect the way we live out our Christian spirituality. It is on this secondary level that we can speak of different Christian spiritualities. These are but different responses to the one common Christian call to holiness.

At what point in history does one live? Christian life-style in the contemporary situation of a "global village" in the age of Internet and satellite TV is surely different, on the surface, from the Christian life-style of the early Church, of the Middle Ages, of the Reformation. Where in the world do we live? Here we can speak of Irish spirituality, or French, or Hispanic, Asian, American. (Some would even add a distinct "Californian" spirituality!) Different religious traditions within Christianity offer another factor (for example Orthodox, Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, and so on). So does our choice of vocation. Lay, religious, priest, married: Each of these contexts presents life



in slightly different ways, asks slightly different formation questions, poses different problems, proposes different models for inspiration and imitation.

During Christianity's 2,000-year history, certain charismatic figures have spearheaded religious renewals. Through the power of their lives and examples they attracted followers down through the centuries. Consider St. Benedict and St. Scholastica, St. Francis and St. Clare,

St. Dominic, St. Angela Merici, St. Ignatius Loyola. Certainly none of these individuals set out to found new schools of spirituality! They wanted simply to live the gospel life, to follow Christ fully and seriously to the best of their ability and in response to the needs of their times. Their example inspired others down through the ages to follow Christ as they did. Their followers pass on to us Benedictine, Franciscan, Dominican, Ursuline, Ignatian styles (or "schools") of spirituality.

Modern 'schools'

Today one often hears and reads of other spiritualities within the Christian community. Books are written and talks are given on adolescent spirituality, African-American spirituality, gay and lesbian spirituality, feminist spirituality. Whenever a meaningful community of life exists—a sense of identity, a sharing of joy and pain, of questioning and challenge, of searching and growing—we can legitimately discern a style of Christian spirituality.

Each of us lives his or her life at the intersection of a number of these different streams. For example, this author is (in no particular order) Roman Catholic, Franciscan, male, 1990's, American (further back, Irish and Italian) and Californian (northern California, to be precise!). While there is validity to each of these distinctions, we should note again that they exist on a secondary level. We are dealing with styles, expressions, modifications of the one basic Christian call to holiness in the Spirit. They all exist within and manifest the richness of the Christian community through the ages.

When a child latches on to a new idea, she or he can quickly assume that everyone else's ideas are now wrong. The same danger exists in Christian spirituality. "Our" spirituality all too quickly can begin to look like the only spirituality. We cannot lose sight of the fact that whatever style we may feel most at home in, it is only a secondary (even if inevitable) modification of the one Christian spirituality.

That's all well and good. The rosary is fine, one might argue, but centering prayer is really superior. Or another Catholic might accept the presence of a spirituality centered on small prayer

UPDATE Question Box

A Spirituality CHECKLIST

In the apostolic letter *On the Coming Third Millennium*, Pope John Paul II dedicated one of the three preparatory years (1998) "in a particular way to the Holy Spirit and to his sanctifying presence within the community of Christ's disciples." We cannot prepare for the new millennium "in any other way than in the Holy Spirit" (#44). In the light of this, we might conclude by pondering some questions:

- What gifts have I received which I can put at the service of God's Kingdom?
- Who are the heroes of my spiritual life? Whom do I look up to (saints, family, friends)?
- Where in my life am I reluctant to respond to the call of the Spirit into newness? Where do I fall back on habit, or let others decide for me?
- What signs of the Spirit at work in the world or in the Church do I discern?
- If one of the key signs of the Spirit is unity and peace, what do I make of the divisiveness so prominent in the Church today?
- What are some of the strengths of the style of spirituality I grew up in? What are some of its blind spots?
- Have I experienced Christian spirituality in other cultures? What did I notice that was different?
- If the gift of the Spirit is life, how much life am I willing to risk? How much life am I willing to settle for? How seriously do I take the call of Christ who came that I "might have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10)? This is the basic question of Christian spirituality. May we never settle for less.

groups meeting weekly, but feel that praying individual novenas is a superior path to God. Or we might say, "I find Hispanic devotions interesting, but why do they do so much at home instead of at church where they belong?" Here the danger is of spiritual chauvinism. The Christian is not called to spiritual isolationism or one-upmanship. Whatever the

The Spirit's Call to Universal Holiness

The Lord Jesus, divine teacher and model of all perfection, preached holiness of life to each and every one of his disciples of every condition. He himself stands as the author and consummator of this holiness of life: 'So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect' (Mt 5:48). Indeed he sent the Holy Spirit to all to move them inwardly to love God with their whole heart and their whole soul, with all their mind and all their strength (see Mk 12:30) and that they might love each other as Christ loves them (see Jn. 13:34; 15:12).

"The followers of Christ are called by God, not because of their works, but according to his own purpose and grace. They are justified in the Lord Jesus, because in the baptism of faith they truly become sons of God and sharers in the divine nature. In this way they are really made holy. Then too, by God's gift, they must hold on to and complete in their lives this holiness they have received. They are warned by the Apostle to live "as becomes saints" (Eph 5:3), and to put on "as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved a heart of mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, patience" (Col 3:12) and to possess the fruit of the Spirit in holiness (see Gal :22; Rom 6:22)....

"...The forms and tasks of life are many but there is one holiness, which is cultivated by all who are led by God's Spirit...."

—Lumen Gentium,
Dogmatic Constitution
on the Church, #40, 41

particular style, all are gifts of the one Spirit. The word *catholic* means, after all, "embracing the whole, the totality." Any truly catholic view will recognize that no one form captures all of the Christian life. Diversity manifests the richness of the Christian life.

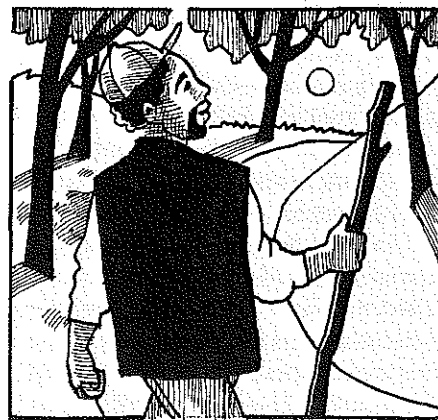
A unique spirituality?

That catholic worldview involves even one further dimension. Each one of us is an individual and unique person and represents a unique embodiment of Christian spirituality. There has never been before, nor will there ever be again, a spirituality exactly like mine, exactly like yours. No one else has the constellation of heredity, experiences, talents, values, hopes and dreams which characterize you or me as individuals. On this level, there are as many different spiritualities as there are persons.

What a wonderful aspect of God's creation! We can say in true humility that each of us gives to God something which God did not have before and would not have if we did not give it. That something is your and my unique embodiment of the risen Christ in this world here and now. This is one of the mysteries of God's gift of freedom. And it carries an awesome responsibility. No one has ever lived my life before. We have to be open to the God who calls us, as Abraham was called, into unknown futures. Jesus calls his disciples, "Come, follow me."

Living a full Christian life takes courage. Every Christian has times of doubt, confusion, uncertainty and struggle. What life-style of holiness am I called to? How can I follow Jesus in a consumer culture? Am I being faithful to my spouse, my children, my family, my community? Am I devoted to peace and to justice, to love? Do I spend enough time in prayer? Am I open to God calling me through my choices and relationships?

Are we willing to assume this much responsibility? That is a question each Christian must answer in his or her heart. Following legitimate religious authority does not mean giving up our freedom as sons and daughters of God. Some of us look for priests, pope, "religious" people, even a false reading of the Bible, to whom we can surrender our freedom in return for a security blanket. Yet refusing to take



responsibility for our calling is refusing to hear the voice of God calling us to new and fuller life. Personal responsibility means listening to the Spirit in our lives—speaking in our hearts, in our relationships, in our Church—and making life-giving choices. The guidance of parents, priests and counselors can be very helpful in discerning the Spirit, but the Holy Spirit is our most important spiritual director.

At the outset of this article we suggested that a guiding question for our exploration of spirituality is, "What is the 'spirit' in spirituality?" We see now that the spirit in Christian spirituality is the Holy Spirit, God calling us here and now in our hearts, in our families, in our Church and society. It is the same spirit that calls all of us. But since no two people are the same, our response to God's call will be as unique as each person, each child of God, who has ever lived. ■

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Hope and Concern - The Church and the Culture on the Eve of a New Millennium

Kelly Lecture
St. Michael's College
Toronto, Ontario
March 25, 1999

Ronald Rolheiser omi

I. Introduction

Some years ago, David Tracy wrote a fine little essay entitled: **Naming the Present**¹. In it, he tried to name, religiously and philosophically, the moment in history within which we are living. Like a meteorologist trying to read the weather, Tracy tries in this essay to read the inner weather of the present time, the movements of soul as manifest within the movements of history. This lecture, in its own modest way, will attempt something similar. It will try to name the present moment in terms of the hopes and concerns it carries for believers.

What is happening in terms of the movement of soul below the surface of present events today in Western history? How is this shaping our faith for good and for bad? What elements of hope are contained in this? What things should we, as people of faith, be concerned about?

Somebody once astutely stated that "*Not everything can be fixed or cured, but it should be named properly!*" The effort here, given the limits of time and space, will be precisely more at naming than at fully explaining. The result will be more of a skeleton than a detailed thesis. The hope however is that this, skeleton-type, listing of the hopes and concerns that the present moment carries can then help serve as a framework for development both within the areas spirituality and pastoral theology. Such is the hope of this lecture.

In the struggle to name something, it can be valuable to begin by seeing how people are reacting to it. So we begin in this fashion:

II. Spontaneous reactions to the present moment

In Tracy's attempt to name the present moment, he begins by pointing out *three* major reactions to it. I present here, briefly, his analysis²:

The first reaction, he calls *modernity*. This version of things sees what is happening today as simply more of the same, namely, more of what has been happening already for a long time. Rationality and technology are the ultimate values, Western life

and culture are superior to the rest of the world, individual rights supersede all else, and evolution in some form continues to triumph in history, despite problems. *Modernity* sees what is happening as essentially inevitable and good. The future will look much like the present, only better. We recognize this view in many of the forces that are driving our economies, driving globalization, driving our governments, and generally too driving our centres for higher learning. For *modernity*, often identified with the liberal, the present moment is good.

The second reaction, in his terms, is that of the *anti-modern*. This person sees the present moment as a time of trouble, a time within which many of the key traditions and values that have sustained us for thousands of years are being destroyed. For the *anti-modern*, continuing in the direction we are going will mean the death of all moral meaning and probably even of life itself. For an *anti-modernist*, we need to retreat to the past and reclaim the values we once had but have since lost, including the value of sacrificing for community rather than inflating individual rights. The cry here is for old-time religion, old-time family values, and old-time ways of organizing ourselves. For the *anti-modern*, often identified with the conservative, the present is bad.

The third reaction, Tracy calls *post-modern*. The *post-modern* person is equally suspicious of both past and present. He or she does not share modernity's enthrallment with rationality, the West, technology, science, globalization, the Internet, and most everything else we identify with progress. Neither is he or she enthralled with tradition, as is the anti-modern. For the *post-modernist*, there are many centres (not just the West), many meanings (not just rationality and what it produces), many avenues to the truth (and not just those espoused by liberals and conservatives), and, indeed, no clear way of even knowing whether the present moment is good or bad. For a *post-modernist*, hope lies in otherness, in the marginalized, in the mystic, in the artist, and in madness. For the *post-modern*, the present moment is both good and bad.

What one sees in these reactions is that the liberal, the conservative, and the post-modernist, each in his or her own way points out different strengths and weaknesses within the present time. In these different reactions then we see precisely the various hopes and concerns within the present moment.

What, more specifically, are these hopes and concerns as they impact us as believers?

III. Naming the present moment in terms of hope and concern

A) The more obvious - Secularization and the explosion of technology and information

What is most obvious and most analyzed within the present moment are the twin phenomena of secularization and the explosion of technology and information. There are libraries of good literature on this and the intent here is not to try to summarize that

research. For our purposes, *two* things need to be highlighted:

1) The marginalization of the religious dimension within ordinary life with the result that everyday consciousness is largely agnostic and we now have the curious phenomenon of unbelief among believers.

We live, to a very large extent, in a post-Christian culture within which the culture no longer carries the faith. To believe today, in anything more than a token sense, is to find oneself part of a cognitive minority, a cognitive deviant in fact. Already a generation ago, while teaching at Yale, Henri Nouwen commented that the dominant consciousness, even among seminarians preparing for ministry in the church, was agnostic³. God essentially has no place in the everyday consciousness of the culture and, surprising though it might seem, even in the ordinary consciousness of believers. The problem of unbelief today is almost as acute within religious circles as outside of them. This phenomenon is more novel within recent history.

2) An over-whelming, confusing, over-rich pluralism.

We are a culture that is rich in almost everything, except clarity. We are virtually drowning in information, in new discoveries, in entertainment, in competing ideologies, in competing values, in religious choices, in personal options, and in an explosion of technology and information that render most everything we learn (or buy!) almost immediately obsolete.

This affects more than just the decisions we make on what kind of computer software to purchase. More deeply, it shapes our psyches and our souls. Many effects, both positive and negative, might be mentioned here, two need to be highlighted:

** Daily we are losing our capacity for synthesis.*

We are a culture and a people that is long on analysis but short on synthesis. Today we know more about more things but are finding it increasingly difficult to form any picture of the whole. This is especially true of young people and it is becoming particularly true within the areas of values, ideology, spirituality, and religion. More and more we are seeing an eclecticism which, while very rich, is also very confusing. As a consequence we are seeing that less and less people can form for themselves a vision - political, moral, and religious - that is somehow whole, internally consistent, and is able to distinguish what is essential from what is accidental.

** A psychology of transience.*

We are a culture that is long on experience but short on commitment, long on openness but short on trust. It is becoming ever more difficult for us to believe in anything permanent, including commitment within personal relationships and within religion. This is not surprising, given that we fully expect that most everything we know

will soon be rendered obsolete.

We can see therefore that secularization and the explosion of technology and information, even in their more obvious manifestations, indeed do reshape the soul. This, as we shall see, is in fact a mixed blessing, that is, something not nearly as bad as the most paranoid conservative analysts would make it out to be and not nearly as good as the most naive liberal analysts would suggest. Secularism is a rich stream, though hardly a wellspring of purity. It carries with it significant elements of both hope and concern for the believer today.

However this is still the surface reality. Secularism and the explosion of technology and knowledge have a hidden, more important, face. Under the surface, a lot of things are fermenting. What are these?

B) Underlying Secularism: "three great divorces, six great ferments"

1) Spirituality versus Ecclesiology

A strange thing is happening in the Western world today. As the number of persons participating in our churches is dramatically decreasing the number of person interested in spirituality is proportionately increasing. We are witnessing a drastic decline in church life right in the midst of a spiritual renaissance. What is happening?

A divorce is taking place between spirituality and ecclesiology, between those who understand themselves to be on a spiritual quest and those inside our churches. The simplest way to explain this is to give an example.

Several years ago, an American author, Sam Keen, published a book entitled, Hymns to an Unknown God.⁴ Keen is no novice to organized religion since he holds both a master's degree and a doctorate in divinity. What he does in this book is to draw a distinction between spirituality (the spiritual quest) and religion (church life) so as to legitimate the former and denigrate the latter. He calls himself a "trustful agnostic", a "recovering Presbyterian" and wears a question mark rather than a cross around his neck. He understands himself as a searcher on a spiritual quest. But the path of spirituality, in his view, is not the path of organized religion. Every religion begins with the answers, he asserts, the spiritual quest begins with the opposite, the questions. For Sam Keen, within spirituality, unlike religion, you don't just surrender. You don't just obey.

Moreover, in this view, in the spiritual quest you never, in this life, really arrive. For him, once a person settles into the practice of a religion, he or she can no longer claim to be on a spiritual quest. Spirituality has been traded in for religion.

In saying this, Keen speaks for our age, articulating something that millions of men and women in fact feel and believe. Typical today is the person who wants faith but not the church, the questions but not the answers, the religious but not the ecclesial, and the

truth but not obedience. More and more typical too is the person who understands himself or herself as a "recovering Christian", as someone whose present quest for God has embittered him or her towards the church where there once was membership.

But this split is not just one-sided. The reverse, sadly, is just as true. We have more than enough church-goers who want the church but not faith, the answers but not the questions, the ecclesial but not the religious, and obedience but not the truth. The "recovering secularist", bears a striking similarity to his alienated cousin, the "recovering Christian".

The effect of this divorce is to separate two things which should ideally be mutually enriching, spirituality and ecclesiology. Today these are too isolated from each other. Ironically, both have never been richer in what they have to offer. Unfortunately too, as they are constellated today, both bring their own dangers.

So we turn to look at each of these in terms of what they offer vis-a-vis hope and concern for the believer:

a) Spirituality

What gives us cause for hope when we look at that rich ferment which the popular mind today calls spirituality?⁵ Among other things, we should note the following:

- Its openness, its tolerance, its sense of interconnection and universality, and its itch for harmony.
- Its emphasis on peace, justice, and the integrity of creation.
- Its views on gender and race.
- Its sense of aesthetics and its valuing of the beautiful.
- Its sense of God's goodness and forgiveness.
- Its tapping into traditions of the great world religions and the wisdom traditions within the great mythologies of various cultures.

What might be causes for concern for believers?

- Its naivete about energy, especially spiritual and sexual energy, i.e., its over-eagerness to shed all past taboos. ⁶
- Its tendency towards an impersonal God.
- Its capacity to compartmentalize life, morality, and God so as to render certain areas exempt from religious and moral scrutiny.
- Its adolescent attitude towards its Christian past, complete with an unhealthy projected anger.
- Its naivete about the importance and place of family.
- Its incapacity, for the most part, to elicit commitment and personal sacrifice. ⁷

b) Ecclesiology

What should give us hope when we look at the churches?

- They are the primary stewards of a rich, over-brimming tradition of revelation. They carry thousands of years of religious experience, including that of countless saints.
- Their own ongoing internal renewal, i.e., in terms of theology, scripture scholarship, liturgical revival, deepening moral sensitivities, and ferment for justice.
- Their non-negotiable demand for actual community.
- Their refusal, at least theoretically, to compartmentalize religion, morality, and God.
- Their concept of a personal God.
- Their time-tested taboos and boundaries regarding our relationship to energy, sexuality, and family.

What are the causes for concern when we look at what is actually happening inside the churches?

- Our own infidelity and incapacity to live up to our own ideals. All atheism is a parasite off of this.
- Our infighting - between denominations and within denominations. Sometimes, it seems, the concern is more to score partisan ideological points than to collectively pass on the faith to our own children.
- Our propensity to divorce our wisdom from life, i.e., we is often colourless, humourless, bland, anti-erotic, anti-aesthetic, and would be scandalized by Jesus of Nazareth.

2) Life versus Wisdom

Some years ago, I was visiting a Benedictine monastery in Belgium when an episode occurred that still haunts me. What happened? Well, you need to picture a scene to get the full impact:

It was April, but still very cold and the chapel where we had just celebrated the Eucharist and the cafeteria to which we had retired for coffee afterwards lacked somewhat both for heat and light. There were about a hundred of us present, monks and seminarians mostly, along with a few lay people. All of us were sombrely drinking coffee and making small talk, except for one child, a little girl of four. She, dressed in a smart, bright little coat, was skipping smack down the middle of the cafeteria, singing to herself, letting off steam after having been forcibly silenced during the long liturgy that had just preceded.

Maybe it was the cold and bad light or maybe it was the heavy monastic dress so much in evidence, but if the best Hollywood director in the world, or the devil himself, had

choreographed the thing, it could not have been set up better. Everything about that little girl spoke of life, while everything about the rest of us spoke of soberness, lack of colour, lack of life, age, and dram duty. If God were running a public relations campaign, this would not be the film to show by which to draw anyone to church. At that moment, for all the world, it looked like there was more real life in one little girl, who had just been released from church, than in all the rest of us, God-fearing, duty-driven, church-going, wisdom-filled persons, none of whom could skip publicly if our lives depended on it.

I walked out of that cafeteria not knowing exactly what to make of this, given that I have some empathy for both sides of the equation, and I have noticed a lot of similar contrasts since. We all have. How often does it appear as though what is happening in our churches is dead, duty-driven and sterile, in comparison to that powerful pulse of life that literally surges out of our youth, our rock stars, our athletes, our secular comedians, our raunchy sitcoms, and so much else in our world that seems a lot freer and full of life precisely because, like that little girl, it has been released from church?

Time and time again, it seems that life, colour, and energy take their source elsewhere, and not in the faith or in the church. A lot of the real energy that drives our world - and not just negatively in terms of greed and lust - does not emanate from the churches. A lot of joy, love, zest, and colour take their origins elsewhere.

There is a lot that needs to be reflected upon here because in the end what is at issue is considerably more complex than what is spontaneously suggested when we see a little girl happily skipping among sombre monks after having been released from church. What this suggests is that lately much of **life** is uninitiated by **wisdom** and much of **wisdom** is disconnected from **life**. What is being said here?

Too often today we confuse **life** and **wisdom**, or simply fail to distinguish between them. For example, we see a lot of **life** - raw energy, eroticism, colour, wit, intelligence, beauty, and health - simply divorced from wisdom, cut off from that which holds the community together at its heart. That is why something can be brilliant, funny, beautiful, healthy, and full of real energy and yet of itself be unable to deal with the real issues of meaning, community, family, suffering, death, wound, and forgiveness. You watch **Seinfeld** for fun, not for wisdom.

But the reverse is just as true. We often see a **wisdom** that is disconnected from life, that precisely lacks any real connection to energy, eroticism, colour, wit, intelligence, beauty, and raw health. That is why sometimes someone can deal with the issues of meaning, pain, death, and forgiveness and yet be unable to radiate any real energy or health. You go to church for wisdom, not for fun; at least that seems true lately.

One should never confuse Alanis Morissette with Mother Theresa, Jerry Seinfeld with John of the Cross, or Michael Jordan with Henri Nouwen. In one, we see more the raw beauty and pulse of God's life, in the other we see the maturity of God's wisdom. Part of our task is to bring them together. Since Scripture tells us that God is the one author of

all that is good, within both life and wisdom, a good composite of the face of God, I submit, would have both traces of Mother Theresa and Alanis Morissette, John of the Cross and Jerry Seinfeld, and Henri Nouwen and Michael Jordan. Lately, however, fewer and fewer people are able to bring these two together into one face of God.

Thus, we live in a culture within which **life** and **wisdom** are too separated from each other. Life does not enough enliven wisdom, just as wisdom does not enough initiate life. Each is pretty much on its own ... a fertile, living compost carrying clusters of hopes and concerns for the believer. What are these hopes and concerns?

a) Life

When we look at all those rich forces of life that surround us and pulse within us, tragically often totally secularized and even anti-ecclesial, what should give us cause for hope?

- We see the many faces of God in the beauty, power, colour, humour, and goodness of its raw energy and its achievements.
- The art that it creates.
- Its technological achievements (from new medicines to the internet) are helping improve the quality of our lives.
- Its simple capacity to cheer us up at times - sometimes there is no spiritual medicine as life-giving as art or even just a delightful distraction.
- It brings life - analogous to what young children bring to an aging family.

What might be the causes for concern for a believer?

- Its divorce from wisdom, from the heart of community.
- Its idolatry of achievement, celebrity, physical health, and sexual attractiveness.
- Its lack of vision of the cross.
- Its not-so-subtle arrogance towards the poor.
- Its limited horizon and its denial of death - the "nihilism of Seinfeld".

b) Wisdom

What hope does wisdom, even when too-divorced from life, bring?

- It is the chief steward for the wellsprings of tradition, divine revelation, and experience.
- Its capacity to inspire altruism and self-sacrifice.⁸
- Its knowledge of the cross.
- Its concern for the poor with their many faces.
- Its horizon, the infinite.

What are the causes for concern in the face of a wisdom that is too divorced from

life?

- Its present isolation from so many of the centres of importance within ordinary life.
- Its incapacity to initiate its own young - we are becoming more and more helpless to initiate our own children into responsible adulthood.
- Its propensity to self-protect rather than risk crucifixion in the real world.
- It does not often enough manifest a real love for the world and an appreciation for the beauty and goodness that are found there.
- Its propensity to timidity, anti-eroticism, and colourlessness.
- Its propensity to rigidity and even, at times, to fundamentalism.

3) Justice versus Piety

Ernst Kaseman, the renowned Scripture scholar, once commented that what is wrong in the world and in the churches is that the pious are not liberal and the liberals are not pious. He is right and that, in caption, names another tragic divorce that has taken place within Western culture, namely, private and social morality are too rarely found within the same person.

Too rare is the case where we see together in the same person, the same ideology, the same group, or the same church, an equal passion for social justice and for private morality, for action and for contemplation, for statecraft and for soulcraft, for politics and for mysticism. What this means is that the person who leads the protest group usually does not lead the prayer group, the person concerned with family values is usually not as concerned with poverty in the inner cities, and the social, political agitator generally lacks the personal integrity, selflessness, and calm of the mystic. The reverse is also true. This is far from ideal.

Ideally one should be equally concerned about both - liberality and piety, action and contemplation, private morality and social justice, the concerns of feminism and Green Peace and the ten commandments. Sadly today, these are mostly divorced from each other. Thus we live in a culture and, for the most part, in churches within which justice rarely informs piety and piety rarely expresses itself in committed social action. Too often they are lived out separately. Yet, each carries important hopes for the believer and each, certainly as it is being lived out concretely today, comes fraught with things that should obviously concern the believer. What are these hopes and concerns?

a) Justice

When we look at those groups and individuals who define the faith primarily by its dimensions of justice, what should give us cause for hope?

- A passion for justice and the equality of all peoples which is a centrepiece within the gospels.

- A preferential option for the poor which is a centrepiece within Christology.
- An insight into the structural, systemic nature of injustice, i.e., the insight that personal is political and the political is personal.
- A capacity to inspire secular martyrdom.
- A valuing of the integrity of physical creation.
- An actual influence upon politics.

What are the causes for concern, given the concrete way within which social justice often finds voice?

- Its more strident expressions.
- Its often ideological-driven adjudications.
- Its rather frequent cavalier attitude towards private morality, especially private sexual morality.
- Its naive faith in social change without a concomitant personal, interior conversion.
- Its lack of a theology of original sin and grace.
- Its incapacity to, within ecclesial circles, inspire joyous self-sacrifice.⁹
- Its lack of prayer.

b) Piety

What seeds of hope lay quietly fermenting within the hearts and circles of the pious?

- The deep personal call, which too is a centrepiece of the gospels, to every one of us to have a personal relationship with a very personal God.
- The call to personal conversion and to faith in God as the ultimate basis for social change.
- A biblical anthropology that includes a healthy theology of human nature (original sin) and the need for, and presence of, divine grace.
- A healthy sense of the importance of family and the non-negotiability of private sexual ethics.
- A capacity to inspire joyous self-giving within ecclesial circles.

What are the causes for concern?

- A tendency to bracket the Gospel's non-negotiable demand for justice.
- Too many simplistic "doctrinal" adjudications.
- A tendency to not take structural evil seriously enough and to simply identify private charity with justice.
- An often narrow, ad intra-focused, agenda.
- A propensity for self-protection over evangelization, boundaries over risk, the tendency to worry more about self-preservation than saving the world, i.e., the too frequent neglect of the fact that Christ came to save the world, not just the

church.

In summary then, given all the rich ferment within each of these, what might we name as the key traces of hope and concern for believers within the present moment?

IV. Summary - The Hope and Concern within the present moment

A)) Traces of Hope within the present ferment

- A new openness and tolerance, beyond former intolerance imposed by religion, gender, ethnicity, locale. The shedding of many old, unhealthy boundaries.
- Powerful life forces (both outside of and inside of the churches) pushing for justice.
- Major moral gains in the area of sexism.
- Major moral gains in the area of racism.
- Some major gains in regard to our practical theology of God - the old God of punishment and violence is being put to pasture!
- Major strides in Ecumenism - both within Christianity and with World Religions. A growing universal among all people of sincere heart.
- The positive moral and educational opportunities inherent within the advance of technology and communications, i.e., despite a certain moral downside, the explosion of information, especially as accessible through the Internet, is making education available as never before and is assuring that in the future no totalitarian group can ever again control information.
- A renaissance of spirituality within the secular culture.
- The emerging concern for ecology and the integrity of physical creation.
- A new humility and honesty within the churches.
- The "faces" of God that reveal themselves within the raw energy, colour, wit, and creativity within the secular culture.

B) Causes for Concern within the present ferment

- The growing split between spirituality and ecclesiology, life and wisdom, justice and piety.
- The growing "impersonalization" of God - and a concomitant decline in prayer.
- An increasing naivete about spiritual and sexual energy.
- The growing agnosticism of our ordinary consciousness.
- The "recovering Christian" syndrome.
- The growing idolatry of achievement, celebrity, health, and sexual attractiveness.
- A blindness, save for highly select places, to the poor.
- An ever-shrinking spiritual horizon - replaced by the nihilism of Seinfeld, entertainment, professional sports - and the denial of death.
- A dangerous and growing fundamentalism as a reaction to the ferment.
- The fragmenting and breakdown of community at every level: marriage, family,

church, neighbourhood, nation.

V. Naming the elements for a response

Given what the present moment is bringing, this ensemble of hopes and concerns, what might be the broad outlines for a Christian response?

At the broadest level, obviously our task is to try to bring together in a new marriage the rich polarities that we just analyzed: spirituality and ecclesiology, life and wisdom, justice and piety. But how to do this?

As a general principle, of course, it could be said that we should build on the hopes and try to address the concerns. Simplistic as that sounds, this is not without value. In essence, that is the task, indeed that is what it means to "read the signs of the times." More, of course, needs to be said. Where should we be going in the face of all of this? How might a believer act, given all of this?

My effort here, given the limits of time and space, will necessarily be modest. Rather than attempt to outline anything that would pretend to be a comprehensive, I will instead propose *four* principles which, if taken together, can, I believe, help us walk to where we should be going, even if for now we cannot always clearly think of where we should be going. In essence, these principles can help us do the next right thing. They might aptly be termed: *Guidelines to help us walk prophetically in today's world:*

1) Love the world, affirm it, and bless its goodness, energy, and life ...

Julian of Norwich once described God as "COMPLETELY RELAXED AND COURTEOUS, HIMSELF THE HAPPINESS AND PEACE OF HIS DEAR FRIENDS, HIS BEAUTIFUL FACE, RADIATING MEASURELESS LOVE, LIKE MARVELLOUS SYMPHONY; AND IT WAS THAT WONDERFUL FACE SHINING WITH THE BEAUTY OF GOD THAT FILLED THE HEAVENLY PLACE WITH JOY AND LIGHT."¹⁰

Jesus, it seems, agrees. The scriptures assure us that God's first look at this world is not one of condemnation, but of delight and blessing. God still smiles on this planet, albeit we often find it difficult to smile back and especially to smile at each other. As well, the scriptures assure us that all good things come from God. There is but one author of all energy, life, art, music, intellectual achievement, wit, graceful bodies, sexual attraction, and colour.

Our first task as believers, long before we begin to make any critical moral judgements, is to recognize this, that is, to recognize God's many faces as they appear in the world. A composite of God's face must run the gamut from Mother Theresa to Alanis Morissette, from John of the Cross to Jerry Seinfeld, and from Henri Nouwen to Michael Jordan. All that is one, good, true, and beautiful - not to mention graceful, colourful, and humorous - comes from God and both reflects God's face and God's creativity in this world. Our initial response must be to bless that life and energy and all the raw goodness,

beauty, and colour it brings. Like God, our faces must too be relaxed and courteous, radiating more blessings than curses, grateful to bask in the richness of an energy and diversity that speaks of a God whose heart and imagination certainly have more rooms than we can imagine. In our attitude, our countenance, and our preaching, we must then first of all bless the world we live in and delight in its richness. Long before we ever begin to point out what is wrong in this world, we must first of all love this world and recognize that it is for this particular world that God's son gave his life. If God loves the world, and we are assured by everything that Christ said and did that God does, then how can we do otherwise? ¹¹

Only when we have the prophetic courage to love the world and to bless it, as God does, can we begin to bring together the many faces that God takes in life and in wisdom and in spirituality and in ecclesiology.

2) Stand where the cross is erected, at the margins, where the poor find themselves ...

On the other hand, our world is also full of infidelity, sin, injustice, blind egoism, racism, and violence. Daily we see millions suffer hunger, exclusion, and injustices of every kind. Daily too we are made aware of hundreds and sometimes thousand of persons who are dying from violence. Self-centredness, greed, crass egoism, and the drive for power and privilege, it seems, are everywhere.

In the face of this, to be prophetic is to stand where the prophet stands, namely, at the edges, at that place where the cross of Christ was first erected and where it is still perennially erected, namely, where the poor find themselves ... where stands the excluded one, the unnoticed one, the insignificant one, the crucified one, the one who is alone against the mob, the one who is rejected but who, like Jesus, ultimately is the cornerstone for the building. ¹²

We must bless the world, but we must also stand at its edges, at the place where the cross of Christ is erected in each age. But how is this possible? Are these two not mutually exclusive? How can one bless the world and challenge with the cross, all at the same time?

An image, a model, might be helpful here: Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, in his **Mass for the World** shares how he understands the offering of the bread and the wine at the Christian Eucharist. When the bread is held up in offering, he says, we are holding up this world, with all its achievements, its legitimate glories, its real progress, and its many strengths. In offering the bread, we both celebrate and bless the world's triumphs. One second later however, we hold up the wine, crushed grapes symbolizing blood, and symbolizing too all that is so brutally crushed as all this progress moves forward. In offering the wine, we take our place beneath the cross. As believers we offer to God daily both the glorious and crushed bodies of this earth. We bless the former and identify with the latter.

So we bless this earth, even as we stand where the cross of Christ - the marginalized and the poor - stand. And what do we say to our world from there? Two things: words of confrontation in the face of the world's faithlessness and words of hope in the face of God's fidelity and power:

3) Confront the world's faithlessness and self-absorption from the place of the cross ...

Standing at that place where our generation erects the cross, we must speak words of prophetic challenge to our generation, never forgetting of course that, first, we need to hear them ourselves. What are those words? Where does our generation need most particularly to be challenged?

Infidelity perennially takes the same forms and our age is not novel in its weakness and sin. Like our ancestors, whom we tend to judge too harshly, we too struggle with a lack of heart for the poor, with a lack of courage to face personal sin, and with the tendency to constantly narrow our horizons. Hence, where our generation needs to be most particularly and prophetically confronted is on *three* counts:

** On how we treats our widows, orphans, and strangers.*

Beginning already hundreds of years before Christ, the Jewish prophets laid down a singular principle: The quality of our faith depends upon the quality of justice in the land and the quality of justice in the land depends upon how we treat three special groups of people - widows, orphans, and foreigners (those with the least status in the society). Christ not only endorsed this, he deepened it and made it a condition for entry into the kingdom. In Christ's vision of things, the last are first, the poor are central, there is no place of privilege, and the person who is the most marginalized and least powerful in any group is the cornerstone that binds that community together.

Our culture, despite a growing rhetoric to the contrary, does not do very well either in understanding this or in living it out. Simply put, widows, orphans, and foreigners still do not fare very well, anywhere in our culture. Hence we must try to make ourselves see how our present cult of affluence, celebrity, glamour, sexual attractiveness, achievement, physical health, and eternal youth blinds us to the poor. And indeed we are blind to them. Our culture offers nothing more than scraps to anyone who is not somehow economically, physically, or intellectually endowed. Widows, orphans, and foreigners (those who cannot work the system to their advantage and privilege) are still everywhere the crucified ones.

** On our lack of courage to look at personal sin.*

Beyond our culture's insensitivity to its poor, we also suffer from a concomitant callousness within personal conscience. More and more, we have less and less courage to

look at personal sin; and indeed to even mention the word itself. Crassly stated, when we feel the need to write long, angst-laden, treatises on why it is therapeutically dysfunctional for us to sing the timeless words of **AMAZING GRACE** ("*that saved a wretch like me*") it is time for some biblical prophet to step up and call us not just to conversion but simply back to sanity. Each of us needs to be challenged to appropriate the words of Paul: "I cannot understand my own behaviour. I fail to carry out the things I want to do, and I find myself doing the very things I hate." 13 Anyone who feels that these words do not apply to him or her is rationalizing. Moreover, when private conscience is calloused, so too will be our social action; when private conscience makes moral exemptions, so too will we discriminate in the way we act socially; and when private conscience rationalizes, we cannot hope to have real integrity at a wider level.

- *On our tendency to see things only against a temporal horizon.*

To live in faith is to see things always against an infinite horizon. We do not do well on this particular score. The weighty realities of death and eternal life are rarely factored into any of our equations, let alone our personal, life decisions. Even within church circles, death and eternal life are rarely talked about. It has become both easy and fashionable (so long as we feel healthy, strong, and not greatly threatened) to slide into a comfortable nihilism¹⁴ - within which distraction becomes a functional substitute for religion and we live as practical atheists in regards to having any real sense that this life is not all that there is. Our narrow horizon needs to be challenged.

Our generation needs to be challenged from the place where it erects the cross. In brief, only when we treat properly our most vulnerable members, only when we have the courage to look at our personal sin, and only when we no longer ignore the realities of death and eternal life in shaping our horizon and our decisions, will we begin to more happily wed the rich fermenting realities of spirituality and ecclesiology, life and wisdom, and justice and piety.

4) Offer the world the hope of the resurrection, hope beyond infidelity, sin, brokenness, and death ...

In Mark's account of the passion and death of Jesus we are presented with a curious little vignette, seemingly unimportant. Standing with Jesus as he is arrested is a young man, wearing only a linen cloth. This young man, full of youthful grandiosity, seems ready to follow Jesus to his death for he has obviously come prepared, already wearing his burial shroud, the linen cloth. However when the frenzied crowd seizes Jesus, the young man immediately loses his courage and flees naked into the night, leaving his burial shroud in the hands of the mob. Like all the others, despite his grandiose intentions, he too betrays Christ. However, that is not the end of his story. Jesus, of course, is crucified, but we are to hear of this young man again. On the morning of the resurrection, inside the empty tomb, the disciples meet this young man and he, again dressed in a linen cloth but now in the white robes of baptism, announces the resurrection of Jesus in words to this effect: "*Fear not, have courage, the power of God is*

greater even than every kind of death and every kind of betrayal. The power and forgiveness of God is infinite. Go forth and live your life in the face of this." ¹⁵

This incident is Mark's way of telling us that, in the resurrection, a new power and a new forgiveness is revealed in our world. God has power to bring death back to life and to grant us a new, gracious, and guilt-free life beyond betrayal and brokenness. These two realities, God's power and God's forgiveness, are the ultimate stuff of prophecy. The prophet's real task is to stand in the midst of death and betrayal and offer the hope of life, forgiveness, graciousness, and gratitude beyond them.

Perhaps nothing is as needed in terms of prophecy today (save the for the clear words that God is real) as are words that challenge our culture to live more in trust of God: confident that nothing is impossible for God, that God can do things in and with us that we cannot do by and for ourselves; confident that both we and our world can in fact be new, beyond the seemingly hopeless ruts of betrayal and conflict within which we habitually find ourselves; and consoled in the fact that even beyond every one of our worst inexcusable betrayals there lies an unconditional, forgiving embrace which asks for nothing in return ... and seems to have a sneaky sense of humour besides.

References and notes ...

1) David Tracy, **On Naming the Present: Reflections on God, Hermeneutics, and Church**, N.Y., Orbis Books, 1995.

2) This section on **Spontaneous Reactions to the Present Moment** is essentially a synthesis of Tracy's thought as expressed in his essay **On Naming the Present**, *ibid.*

3) Henri Nouwen, Early Chapters in his books, **Intimacy, Essays in Pastoral Theology**, Notre Dame, Indiana, Fides Publishers Inc, 1969.

4) Sam Keen, **Hymns to an Unknown God**, N.Y., Bantam Books, 1994.

5) The word "Spirituality", in this context, is obviously being used in an arbitrary and restricted sense, i.e., as characterizing a religious quest that takes place outside of or independent of the churches; e.g., as described by Sam Keen. That restrictive definition can and should be challenged, but it is useful here - as a huge caricature and oversimplification - because it helps catalyze the contrast and because it is in fact often understood today in exactly this way in the popular mind. I offer a much fuller definition, complete with more nuance, in the first three chapters of, **Seeking Spirituality** (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1998).

6) For a discussion on how our present culture is often rather dangerously naive about erotic and spiritual energy, I offer my own discussion of this: **Naivete about the nature of spiritual energy**, in, **Seeking Spirituality**, *ibid.*, pp. 21-29.

7) Cardinal Francis George underscores this point, among others, in a presentation made at the University of Chicago on January 9, 1999. Offering a critique of liberal Catholicism, Cardinal George asserted: *"Liberal Catholicism is inadequate in fostering the joyful self-surrender called for in Christian marriage, in consecrated life, in the ordained priesthood, even in discipleship itself. ... A sociological theory that defines the central value as autonomy is only with great difficulty able to hear a doctrinal or gospel call to surrender."* (Quoted in the **National Catholic Reporter**, by Robert McClory, January 22, 1999, p. 7,)

While it can be argued that the same point might well be made against much of conservative Catholicism, Cardinal George's point does have the ring of validity here ... even if it might also ring with a similar resonance elsewhere.

8) George, idem.

9) George, idem.

10) Julian of Norwich, **Enfolded in Love: Daily Readings with Julian of Norwich**, London, Darton, Longmann & Todd, 1980, p. 10.

11) For some further development on this I recommend the document, **Evangelizing the Poor at the Dawn of the Third Millennium**, document of the Thirty-Third General Chapter of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, 290 via Aurelio, 00165, Rome, Italy, 1998.

Thus, for example, at one point, the document offers this challenge: *"If God continues to believe in women and men, how can we despair of them? Humanity stands tall, alive, free, at peace with itself, at peace with creation, and somehow at rights with God. These are the people in our neighbourhoods, cities, and towns; everywhere giving us evidence that God still believes in us."* (Idem., number 8, p. 22.)

12) Again I recommend the theology which is articulated in the document just cited, **Evangelizing the Poor at the Dawn of the Third Millennium**, ibid., numbers 4-7, pp. 20-22.)

13) Romans 7, 15. (Jerusalem Bible translation)

14) Earlier we used the expression, *"the nihilism of Seinfeld"*. In essence, that captures what is being asserted here. Jerry Seinfeld, who is both a comic genius and a comic philosopher, has always stated clearly that his programs and comic skits *"are about nothing!"* Which is exactly what has made them so immensely popular. Perhaps he is too hard on himself because a lot of his material functions brilliantly as did the old, archetypal court-jester, namely, it deflates pompousness. This renders a valuable service. However, in the end, it is still a nihilism, albeit (and this is the point) a very

pleasant one.

15) Mark 14, 51-52 & 16, 5-8. Obviously my verbatim here is not a quote but a certain "rendering" of the text.

Find your spiritual pathway

Instructions:

1. There are **four words in each row across**. Look at the four words collectively and rank them:
 - a. Choose the word that is **most descriptive of you here and now** (not what you would like to be some day), and circle “5” in front of that word.
 - b. Pick the word that is **least descriptive of you here and now**, and circle “1.”
 - c. Circle a “3” next to the **second most descriptive word**.
 - d. Circle a “2” next to the **third most descriptive**.
2. **Do the same for each row.**
3. **When you are finished, total up the circled numbers in each vertical column** and write the sum in the box below each column.
4. Enter your four scores in the boxes on the next page. The **highest score** represents your preferred spiritual pathway.

5 3 2 1 independent	5 3 2 1 compassionate	5 3 2 1 spontaneous	5 3 2 1 factual
5 3 2 1 logical	5 3 2 1 creative	5 3 2 1 adventurous	5 3 2 1 thorough
5 3 2 1 straightforward	5 3 2 1 sympathetic	5 3 2 1 adaptable	5 3 2 1 systematic
5 3 2 1 visionary	5 3 2 1 idealistic	5 3 2 1 self-determined	5 3 2 1 dependable
5 3 2 1 demanding	5 3 2 1 committed	5 3 2 1 observant	5 3 2 1 organized
5 3 2 1 theorizing	5 3 2 1 curious	5 3 2 1 enthusiastic	5 3 2 1 realistic
5 3 2 1 original	5 3 2 1 expressive	5 3 2 1 playful	5 3 2 1 loyal
5 3 2 1 challenging	5 3 2 1 insightful	5 3 2 1 lively	5 3 2 1 responsible
5 3 2 1 clever	5 3 2 1 friendly	5 3 2 1 excited	5 3 2 1 traditional
5 3 2 1 questioning	5 3 2 1 imaginative	5 3 2 1 tolerant	5 3 2 1 detailed
5 3 2 1 decisive	5 3 2 1 personable	5 3 2 1 fun loving	5 3 2 1 devoted
5 3 2 1 tough	5 3 2 1 verbal	5 3 2 1 practical	5 3 2 1 conscientious
5 3 2 1 strategic	5 3 2 1 concerned	5 3 2 1 risk taker	5 3 2 1 reliable
5 3 2 1 change agent	5 3 2 1 supportive	5 3 2 1 troubleshooter	5 3 2 1 consistent
total, column 1	total, column 2	total, column 3	total, column 4

Path of intellect

Thomistic prayer

Column 1 score ____

About 12 percent of the population follows this path, using the syllogistic method of Saint Thomas Aquinas known as Scholastic prayer. The main emphasis is on the orderly progression of thought from cause to effect.

People of this prayer type prefer neat, orderly forms of the spiritual life, as opposed to the free-spirit, impulsive attitude of the Franciscan approach. Their spirituality is centered on the earnest pursuit of all the transcendental values: truth, goodness, beauty, unity, love, life, and spirit. Like Saint Teresa of Avila, they are willing to exert superhuman effort to achieve their goal.

Because of their disdain for second best, they seek total truth and authenticity in their lives and work hard to reach the whole truth about themselves, about God, and about sanctity. This intense pursuit of truth colors their whole spiritual life.

Books frequently call the Thomistic method of prayer "discursive meditation." In this type of prayer, one takes a virtue or fault or theological truth and studies it from every possible angle.

Change of behavior is an essential part of this prayer – it doesn't stay at an intellectual level. There's generally a bias against this type of prayer today because it was so much in vogue before Vatican II.

Path of devotion

Augustinian prayer

Column 2 score ____

The majority of saints are of this spiritual temperament, as well as 12 percent of the population (but half of those who go on retreats or belong to small faith groups).

This method uses creative imagination to transpose the world of scripture to our situation today – as if the scripture passage is a personal letter from God addressed to each one of us (like Saint Augustine picking up Romans 13 and reading a message pointed directly at him).

The essential element of this spirituality, going back to New Testament times (Jesus, Saint Paul, the early church fathers), is experiencing a personal relationship with God. Because they read between the lines and catch what is inexpressible and spiritual, those who follow the path of devotion best understand symbols and their use in the liturgy.

This path concentrates on meditations that loosen the feelings and expand the ability to relate to and love others. The stress is on the love of self, others, and God. Those on this path can follow the four steps of the *Lectio Divina*: listen to what God says in scripture; reflect prayerfully and apply it to today; respond to God's word with personal feelings; remain quiet and stay open to new insights.

Path of service

Franciscan prayer

Column 3 score ____

About 38 percent of the population are this spiritual type – but far fewer of this type come to church regularly.

Like Saint Francis of Assisi, those who follow the path must be free, unconfined, and able to do whatever their inner spirit moves them to do. They don't like to be tied down by rules.

One thing of Saint Peter impetuously jumping into the water to join Jesus as a typical action of this type.

Franciscan spirituality leads to acts of loving service, which can be a most effective form of prayer. The gospel stories about Jesus have a special appeal, particularly the Incarnation of God in the life of Jesus, the center around which Franciscan life and spirituality revolve.

Franciscan prayer is flexible and free-flowing, making full use of the five senses, and it is spirit-filled prayer. Those on this path can make a meditation on the beauty of a waterfall, flower, meadow, mountain, or ocean – all of God's creation.

There is more stress in prayer on the events of Jesus' life than on his teaching. Like Saint Therese of Lisieux, prayer is done with total concentration – as if this is the most important thing to be doing at this moment. Therese did all tasks knowing that each was a part of the harmony of the universe.

Path of asceticism

Ignatian prayer

Column 4 score ____

More than half of churchgoers practice this type of prayer of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. It involves imagining oneself as part of a scene in order to draw some practical fruit from it for today.

This spirituality goes back to the Israelite way of praying in 1000 B.C., to remember and immerse oneself in an event, thus reliving and participating in the event in a symbolic way.

This is how Ignatius meditated on the Nativity scene: "I will make myself a poor, little, unworthy servant, and as though present, look upon them, contemplate them, and serve them in their needs with all possible homage and reverence. Then I will reflect on myself that I may reap some fruit."

His preoccupation with order was evident in his *Spiritual Exercises*, which, writes Thomas Clarke in *Playing in the Gospel*, aimed at overcoming "disorderly affections, so that the retreatant may make a decision that is in keeping with God's will."

According to Clarke, "Most souls who are willing to endure the discipline of the 30 days of intense prayer activity of the *Spiritual Exercises* are rewarded with an unforgettable spiritual experience that frequently changes the whole direction of their lives."

STYLES OF PRAYER

LOOKING INSIDE YOURSELF

THOMISTIC

St. Thomas Aquinas

If you think you have this prayer style, you might...

...enjoy repeated prayers and actions (rituals), such as the Mass, and devotions like the Rosary and the Stations of the Cross (Viacrucis).

Prayers to Try:

- Using a book of daily prayers
- Praying the Rosary
- Going to Eucharistic Benediction
- Singing church hymns

IGNATIAN

St. Ignatius of Loyola

If you think you have this prayer style, you might...

...use practices from other faith traditions (like yoga) to calm your mind and body for prayer, go on pilgrimage or do Christian service.

Prayers to Try:

- Centering prayer
- Reflecting on Christian service
- Going on a retreat (TEC, Kairos)
- Singing Taizé prayer chants

WITH A GROUP

ON YOUR OWN

FRANCISCAN

St. Francis of Assisi

If you think you have this prayer style, you might...

...be inspired by nature; involve all of your five senses in prayer by using incense, gestures, music, dance or listening to the spoken word.

Prayers to Try:

- Using a guided meditation
- Praying in your own words
- Going outdoors to pray
- Finding God in current music

AUGUSTINIAN

St. Augustine of Hippo

If you think you have this prayer style, you might...

...be inspired by symbols and the Bible; see your friendships as reflections of your relationship with Jesus.

Prayers to Try:

- Setting up a prayer environment
- Praying with the Scriptures
- Keeping a journal as prayer
- Contemporary Christian songs

LOOKING OUTSIDE YOURSELF

Comparison Chart – Prayer Styles & Personality Types

Prayer Style	Thomistic	Augustinian	Franciscan	Ignatian
Spiritual Path	Intellect	Devotion	Service	Asceticism
Church Father	St. Thomas Aquinas	St. Augustine of Hippo	St. Francis of Assisi	St. Ignatius of Loyola
Apostle	St. John	St. Paul	St. Peter	St. James
Evangelist	St. John	St. Luke	St. Mark	St. Matthew
Biblical Figure	Abraham	St. Paul	St. Peter	Moses
100 Acre Wood	Pooh	Rabbit	Tigger	Eeyore
Peanuts	Charlie Brown	Lucy	Snoopy	Linus
Myers-Briggs Types	NT (intuitive-thinking)	NF (intuitive-feeling)	SP (sensing-perceiving)	SJ (sensing-judging)

Adapted from <http://thenoxfactor.com/files/NoxonMyers-Briggs.pdf>