

Christian Spirituality 1.

What is Spirituality?
Types of Spirituality

Defining Spirituality

What is Spirituality?

"Spirituality" = derived from Hebrew *ruach*, which had a range of meanings:

- spirit
- breath
- wind
- that which gives *life* and *animation* to something

Spirituality:

- that which *animates* a person's life of faith
- that which *moves* a person's faith to greater depths and perfection

Defining Spirituality

What is Christian Spirituality?

Elements of Christianity:

- 1. *a set of beliefs*, found in the Creeds and doctrines of the Church
- 2. *a set of values*, based on:
 - hope and promise of redemption
 - love of others
 - denial of self
- 3. *a way of life*
 - The real, human life in which our beliefs and values are embodied and expressed
 - *Christianity Spirituality* is part of our *way of life* as Christians

Defining Spirituality

What is Christian Spirituality?

Christianity Spirituality is the *quest* for a *fulfilled* and *authentic* life, that involves

- taking the beliefs and values of Christianity
- and weaving them into the fabric of our lives
- so that they "animate," provide the "breath" and "spirit" and "fire" for our lives

Defining Spirituality

What is Christian Spirituality?

... spiritual maturity or spiritual fulfillment necessarily involves the *whole* person – body, mind and soul, place, relationships – in connection with the whole of creation throughout the era of time. ...spirituality encompasses the whole person in the totality of existence in the world, not some fragment or scrap or incident of a person

- William Stringfellow,
in *Politics of Spirituality*, p. 22

Defining Spirituality

What is Christian Spirituality?

Spirituality is a lived experience, the effort to apply relevant elements in the deposit of Christian faith to the guidance of men and women towards their spiritual growth, the progressive development of their persons which flowers into a proportionately increased insight and joy.

- George Ganss, "Introduction" to *Ignatius of Loyola*, p. 61

Defining Spirituality

What is Christian Spirituality?

Spirituality has to do with our experiencing of God and with the transformation of our consciousness and our lives as outcomes of that experience

- Richard O'Brien, *Catholicism*, p. 1058

Spirituality ... arises from a creative and dynamic synthesis of faith and life, forged in the crucible of the desire to live out the Christian faith authentically, responsibly, effectively, and fully

- Alister McGrath, *Christian Spirituality*, p. 9

Defining Spirituality

What is Christian Spirituality?

Quotes emphasize that **Spirituality**:

- involves the *whole* person (body, mind, soul, relationships), the *entire* fabric of our lives
- is a *lived* experience, a quest throughout our lives that involves
 - the weaving, a *dynamic synthesis*, of the *elements of the deposit of Christian faith* (beliefs and values) into the fabric of our lives so that they animate, give fire to our lives
 - a *growth, development, and flowering of our lives; a transformation of our consciousness and lives*
- involves *experiencing and knowing God* (not just knowing about God)

Defining Spirituality

What is Christian Spirituality?

- Christianity Spirituality** is the *quest* for a *fulfilled* and *authentic* life, that involves
- taking the beliefs and values of Christianity
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Defining Spirituality

Mysticism and Spirituality

Mysticism: *multiple meanings:*

1. approach to faith emphasizing *relational, spiritual, experiential aspects of faith* rather than intellectual
2. approach to faith emphasizing *inner experience*, perhaps to the point of actively rejecting intellectual approaches
3. specific schools of Spirituality in the 14th Century, including:
 - the "English Mystics" (e.g. Richard Rolle, Walter Hilton)
 - the "German Mystics" (e.g. Meister Eckhart, Johannes Tauler)

Defining Spirituality

Mysticism and Spirituality

Definition of **Mysticism** as an approach to faith emphasizing *relational, spiritual, experiential aspects of faith, the inner experience of faith* =
is encompassed in the definition of **Spirituality**

Types of Spirituality

Factors Which Shape Spirituality

Factors important in shaping **Spirituality**:

- theology (beliefs and values; dogma and ethics)
- personal issues
- denominational issues
- attitudes to the world, culture, and history

Types of Spirituality

Theological Variables

There are variations in the set of beliefs and values (the theology) of different Christians that can give rise to different Spiritualities

Examples:

- **veneration of Mary** among Catholics and the Orthodox
- different views of the **sacraments**
 - "doors" or "windows" to the real presence of God in the world, to the divine presence within creation, vs.
 - "tokens" and "placeholders" to remind us of the presence of God's grace

Types of Spirituality

Theological Variables

Examples (continued):

- different emphases on **redemption**
 - salvation through the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross
 - salvation through the Incarnation, the assumption, the "taking-on" of part of the created order by God

Types of Spirituality

Historical Variables

History defines the "horizons" of a Christian
and the available resources for
Spirituality

Examples:

- availability of the Bible
- ability to read

Types of Spirituality

Personal Variables

Personal variables that influence types of

Spirituality might be subdivided into:

- aesthetic (appreciation of, responsiveness to beauty)
- psychological
- sociological

Aesthetic sensibilities:

Examples: different views on what is the "beautiful" language, music, architecture for the worship of God lead to different types of Spirituality

Types of Spirituality

Personal Variables

Psychological differences:

Examples:

- verbal thinking. Spiritualities might include spoken devotions, sermons
- visual thinking. Spiritualities might include images, pictures, art, icons (as in the Orthodox church)

Types of Spirituality

Personal Variables

Sociological differences:

- includes differences in gender, race, class.

Examples:

- Gender: different ways of talking about God. Julian of Norwich (1342- after 1416) envisioned Christ in terms of motherhood. Feminist theology.
- Race: spirituality in Black Holiness Churches
- Class: 20th century New York City office workers versus monks in medieval France. Differences in aesthetic taste and literacy

Types of Spirituality

Denominational Variables

Catholicism

- church is a visible institution grounded in divine reality (a "sacrament")
 - includes a corporate sense of Christian community ("Body of Christ")
 - includes a corporate sense of Church authority
- strongly liturgical
 - *lex orandi, lex credendi*. The way you pray and worship determines the way you believe

Types of Spirituality

Denominational Variables

Catholicism

- strongly sacramental
 - emphasizes the "sacramental economy"
the idea that the benefits of Christ's saving work are communicated through the sacraments
 - sacrament of the Eucharist dominates the regular liturgical life of the Church, making present now the body and blood of Christ

Types of Spirituality

Denominational Variables

Catholicism

- emphasizes role of saints and the Virgin Mary as intercessors for the living and the dead
 - *veneration of Mary*: Hail Mary, Rosary
 - *prayers to the saints*: novena: 9 days of prayer invoking a particular patron saint for a cause

Types of Spirituality

Denominational Variables

Orthodoxy

- strong sense of historical continuity with the early church
 - emphasis on the writings of the early Church fathers such as Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, John of Damascus
- strong sense of tradition as a living resource for the present
- emphasis on salvation through the Incarnation and "deification." God became human so that we might someday become divine

Types of Spirituality

Denominational Variables

Orthodoxy

- use of Icons as "windows of perception" allowing a glimpse of divine reality (made possible through the Incarnation)
- emphasis on the Jesus Prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me (a sinner)"
- high regard of monastic life
 - most bishops are former monks
- Mt. Athos: ancient Orthodox monastery high on Mount Athos, a peninsula stretching out into the Aegean Sea

Types of Spirituality

Denominational Variables

Evangelical Protestantism

- emphasis on the Bible
 - spiritualities often involve public and private readings of the Bible
- emphasis on salvation through the death of Jesus on the cross
 - for example: Lutheranism and the "theology of the cross" versus a "theology of glory"
- emphasis on the need for personal conversion, sometimes to the point of emphasizing a need to be "born again"
- emphasis on converting others to Christ

Types of Spirituality

Denominational Variables

Anglicanism

- strongly liturgical
 - *lex orandi, lex credendi*. The way you pray and worship determines the way you believe
- sacramental
 - "doors" or "windows" to the real presence of God in the world, to the divine presence within creation
- emphasis on the Incarnation, the "taking-on" of part of the created order by God
- emphasis on the goodness of creation and the physical world (follows from *sacramental view of the world* and emphasis on the *Incarnation*)

Types of Spirituality

Attitudes to the World, Culture, and History

Four ways to view the relationship between Christianity and culture:

- 1. Christ against culture
- 2. Christ and culture in paradox
- 3. Christ above culture, the transformer of culture
- 4. Christ of culture

the "extremes:" Christ against culture versus Christ of culture

more "centrist:" Christ and culture in paradox, Christ above culture

Types of Spirituality

Attitudes to the World, Culture, and History

Christ Against Culture

The world is a hostile environment for Christ belief and practice. We should renounce the world. The Kingdom of God is in conflict with the secular Behemoth

- monastic spirituality of "contempt for the world"
- formation of alternative Christian communities among the Radical Reformers (e.g. Amish)

Types of Spirituality

Attitudes to the World, Culture, and History

Christ and Culture in Paradox

The world is *sometimes* in direct conflict with Christian belief and practice, and *sometimes not*

An authentic Christian life therefore

- involves a tension between the world and faith
- at times it must involve a struggle against the world

Types of Spirituality

Attitudes to the World, Culture, and History

Christ above Culture, the Transformer of Culture

culture is not perfect or evil, but can be elevated and transformed through the faith and work of believers

the world and creation is good, but imperfect, awaiting fulfillment

often involves spiritualities emphasizing a sacramental view of the nature and the Incarnation

Types of Spirituality

Attitudes to the World, Culture, and History

Christ of Culture

a strongly positive understanding of the relationship between faith and secular culture

Examples:

- "Imperial Theology" when Christianity was the official religion of the Roman Empire: Rome was the New Jerusalem, divinely ordained to govern the world
- 19th Century German Protestant Liberalism. Human history and civilization are being divinely guided towards perfection

References

Christian Spirituality. An Introduction.

Alister E. McGrath. Blackwell

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(Chapters 1 and 2)