

**Christian
Spirituality 2
Theological
Foundations for
Spirituality**

Introduction

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

Introduction

Theological beliefs and doctrines that we will consider:

- **Creation**
- **Human Nature and Destiny**
- **The Trinity**
- **The Incarnation**
- **Redemption**
- **Resurrection**
- **Consummation**

For each, we will review:

1. summary of what it means (the "theology")
2. its implications for spirituality
3. examples of its use in spirituality

Creation

1. Theology

God is the creator and sustainer of the world

Ways of conceiving the creative activity of God:

- **1. Emanation**

- Creation of the world is an overflowing of the creative energies of God
- Just as the light from the sun reflects the sun's nature, so the creation reflects God's nature

- **2. Construction**

- God is a master builder

- **3. Artistic Expression**

- Creation is the "handiwork of God," a beautiful work of art expressing the personality of the artist

Creation

2. Implications for Spirituality

Affirms:

1. the goodness of creation
 - no need to withdraw from the world to get close to God
 - caring for the world (the environment, all creatures, and human beings) is spiritually important
2. something about God may be known through God's creation
 - to study nature is to learn something of the wisdom and majesty of God
 - the sense of wonder evoked by the world (stars at night...) is part of the wonder of God

Creation

3. Examples

Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179)

- abbess of Rupertsberg, near Bingen
- influential woman spiritual writer of the Middle Ages
- wrote *Scivias*: 26 visions related to the nature and destiny of the cosmos
- also important composer

Creation

3. Examples

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

- widely regarded as America's greatest theologian
- first President of Princeton University
- wrote of the good and beautiful things within creation as the "shadows of divine things" (God's wisdom and beauty)

Human Nature and Destiny

1. Theology

Humanity is created in the "image of God,"
(Genesis 1:27)

- the basis for the relationship between each person and God

Human Nature and Destiny

1. Theology

Three positions on how this relationship develops and grows:

1. primarily a human achievement
 - Orthodoxy
 - John Wesley's doctrine of "entire sanctification"
2. human action in cooperation with the grace of God
 - Augustine: "**God operates without us, and cooperates with us**"
 - Christian life a collaboration between the believer and God
3. the grace of God acting upon an essentially passive human nature
 - Reformed and Lutheran writers

Human Nature and Destiny

2. Implications for Spirituality

Humanity has been made *by God and for God*

- Augustine: **"You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in you"**
- it is impossible to be fully human without seeking to find God and deepen our relationship to God

Human Nature and Destiny

2. Implications for Spirituality

Deepening our relationship to God involves "opening" ourselves up to God's "grace."

Analogies:

- Alan of Lille (d. 1202/3): grace of God is like the sunlight. We can choose to open or not to open the shutters that allow the sunlight to shine our house
- Johann Geiler of Keisersberg (Cathedral of Strasbourg preacher 1478-1510): grace of God is like the wind. We can choose to unfurl the sails of our boat to take advantage of the wind

Human Nature and Destiny

3. Examples

Jean-Pierre de Caussade (1675-1751)

- felt to offer some of the best meditations on opening ourselves up to God
- *Self-Abandonment to Divine Providence*: speaks of "dynamic" surrender to the will and way of God. The "dynamic" nature of the surrender:
 - believer must discern the will of god
 - believer then makes the active decision to surrender / submit to the will of God
 - God then can bring about the good that God wills for the believer

The Trinity

1. Theology

There are three "persons" (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) in the *one* God, characterized by:

- **Perichoresis** = "*mutual interpenetration.*"
God is a "community of being" in which each "person," maintaining its identity, interpenetrates the others and is interpenetrated by them
- **Appropriation.** While it may be "*appropriate*" to think of a particular act (e.g. creation, redemption...) as being the work of one "person" of the Trinity, nonetheless *all three "persons"* are always involved in every outward action of the God. The Trinity always works as a unity

The Trinity

1. Theology

The Trinity is a mystery, impossible for human beings to fully comprehend

- Augustine: **"if you can comprehend it, it is not God"**

The Trinity

2. Implications for Spirituality

1. Human language and imagery is incapable of fully capturing the richness, wonder and immensity of God
 - God is ultimately a mystery to which the only appropriate response is adoration and devotion
2. Worship and Prayer always has a "Trinitarian" framework. We worship and pray "*to God, through Christ, in the Spirit.*"
 - prayer and worship are not fully human activities, but involve the Holy Spirit moving and prompting the believer to turn to God

The Trinity

2. Implications for Spirituality

3. The Trinity models a perfect community of equals, united by a bond of love (Perichoresis)
 - the same love that binds the Trinity is the same love that God has for the creation

The Trinity

3. Examples

Richard of St. Victor

- medieval writer
- explored implications of mutual love within the Trinity for spirituality

"St Patrick's Breastplate"

- ancient Irish hymn, work of Celtic spirituality
- explores the immensity of the Christian vision of God

The Trinity

3. Examples

"St Patrick's Breastplate" (The Trinity)

**I bind unto myself today
The strong name of the Trinity,
By invocation of the same,
The Three in One, and One in Three.**

**I bind unto myself today
The virtues of the star-lit heaven,
The glorious sun's life-giving ray,
The whiteness of the moon at even,
The flashing of the lightning free,
The whirling wind's tempestuous shocks,
The stable earth, the deep salt sea,
Around the old eternal rocks.**

I bind this day to me for ever,

**By power of faith, Christ's incarnation;
His baptism in Jordan river;
His death on Cross for my salvation;
His bursting from the spiced tomb;
His riding up the heavenly way;
His coming at the day of doom;
I bind unto myself today.**

**I bind unto myself today
The power of God to hold and lead,
His eye to watch, his might to stay,
His ear to hearken to my need.
The wisdom of my God to teach,
His hand to guide, his shield to ward;
The word of God to give me speech,
His heavenly host to be my guard.**

Incarnation

1. Theology

The second person of the Trinity -- Jesus Christ, the Logos or Word, the Son of God -- is fully God and fully Human - definitely stated at the Council of Chalcedon in 451.

"The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw his glory – the glory, such as belongs to the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14)

Incarnation

2. Implications for Spirituality

1. Jesus is the "image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15), the "stamp" or "exact impression" of God's nature (Hebrews 1:3)
 - God is most reliably known in the person of Jesus Christ. To encounter Jesus is to encounter God
 - true knowledge of God is thus humanly possible, for God revealed God's self in fully human form in Jesus
 - justifies use of images (e.g. icons in Orthodoxy) in our seeking of God

Incarnation

2. Implications for Spirituality

2. In becoming fully human, God fully involved God's self in the suffering and pain of creation
 - we can turn to God in prayer knowing God is a "fellow sufferer," who can truly understand our own human sufferings

3. In becoming fully human, God affirmed the goodness of the creation, of physicality and sensuality

Incarnation

3. Example

Icons in Orthodoxy

- visual images of God used in the worship and devotion of God
- a window through which divine reality can be glimpsed

"Previously there was absolutely no way in which God, who has neither a body nor a face, could be represented by any image. But now that he has made himself visible in the flesh and has lived with people, I can make an image of what I have seen of God . . . and contemplate the glory of the Lord, his face having been unveiled."

- John of Damascus (675-749)

Redemption

1. Theology

The salvation of each person and of the world is grounded in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ

Four themes / images of the meaning of the cross and resurrection:

1. **Cross as sacrifice.** Jesus' death on the cross was the perfect sacrifice
2. **Cross as victory.** A victory over sin, death, and Satan
3. **Cross as the basis for forgiveness of sins**

Redemption

1. Theology

Four themes / images of the meaning of the cross and resurrection (continued):

4. **Cross as a demonstration of God's love for humanity.** Out of love for creation and humanity, Jesus suffered the agonies of this world, taking upon himself human suffering, to lend dignity and meaning to human suffering

Redemption

2. Implications for Spirituality

1. Shows the *costliness* of human salvation.
Our personal salvation has been achieved at immense cost (the suffering of God)
 - affirms the immense worth of salvation and the Kingdom of God
 - affirms the immensity of our own personal value in the sight of God
2. Affirms the *reality of human sin*
3. Affirms the *love of God for sinful human beings*

Redemption

3. Examples

Devotional literature on the cross as the basis of meditation on the costliness and wonder of redemption

1. Isaac Watt's (1674-1748) hymn "When I survey the wondrous cross"

**When I survey the wondrous Cross
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.**

**Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
Save in the Cross of Christ my Lord
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to his blood.**

**See from his head, his hands, his feet
Sorrow and love flow mingled down;
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet?
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?**

**Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were an offering far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.**

Redemption

3. Examples

2. Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556) Spiritual Exercises. Invites reader to engage in a dialogue with Christ dying on the cross

Imagine Christ our Lord before you, hanging upon the cross. Talk to him about how the creator became a human being and how he who possesses eternal life submitted himself to physical death for our sins.

Then I shall reflect on myself, and ask:

What I have done for Christ?

What I am now doing for Christ?

What ought I to do for Christ?

As I see him like this, hanging upon the cross, I shall meditate on what comes to mind

Resurrection

1. Theology

Jesus Christ rose from the dead:

- the tomb where his body lay was witnessed as being emptied
- his disciples saw him and experienced him as someone living
- his disciples began to preach about Jesus as the living Lord
- his Resurrection was without precedence in Jewish thinking. The Pharisees believed only in a resurrection at the end of time; the Sadducees believed in no resurrection

Resurrection

2. Implications for Spirituality

The Resurrection, celebrated at the festival of Easter, the most important Christian festival of the year:

- affirms Jesus as risen Savior and living Lord
- affirms the Christian hope of:
 - a personal resurrection
 - eternal life in a world where God reigns and God's desire for the fulfillment of each person brought to reality
 - that death need not be feared

Resurrection

3. Examples

Hymn of joy for the Resurrection: Easter
hymn in the early 18th collection *Lyra
Davidica*

**Jesus Christ is risen today, Alleluia!
Our triumphant holy day, Alleluia!
Who did once, upon the cross, Alleluia!
Suffer to redeem our loss. Alleluia!**

**Hymns of praise then let us sing, Alleluia!
Unto Christ, our heavenly king; Alleluia!
Who endured the cross and grave, Alleluia!
Sinners to redeem and save. Alleluia!**

**But the pains that he endured, Alleluia!
Our salvation have procured, Alleluia!
Now above the sky he's king, Alleluia!
Where the angels ever sing! Alleluia!**

Resurrection

3. Examples

Poems and liturgies of the believer's hope of rising with Christ:

- George Herbert (1593-1633):

**Rise, heart; thy Lord is risen. Sing his praise
Without delays,
Who take thee by the hand, that thou likewise
With him mayst rise.**

- "Troparion" of Easter in Byzantine
Liturgy:

**Christ is risen from the dead!
Dying, he conquered death!
To the dead, he has given life!**

Resurrection

3. Examples

Meditations on the defeat of death through
the Resurrection: John Donne (1571/2-
1631)

**Death be not proud, though some have called
thee**

**Mighty and valiant, for thou art so,
For, those, whom thou thinks'st, thou dost
overthrow,**

**Die not, poor death, nor yet canst thou kill me;
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be.
Much pleasure, then from thee, much more
must flow,**

**And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.**

Resurrection

3. Examples

**Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings and
desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,
And poppy, or charms can make us sleep as
well,
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou
then?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
And death shall be no more, Death thou shalt
die.**

Consummation

1. Theology

There will be a final consummation of all things in a "heavenly Jerusalem"

The Kingdom of God, which has begun like a planted mustard seed with Jesus, (is "now"), but which has not yet reached fruition ("not yet"), will achieve its final consummation

The community of the faithful will live in the total presence of God in an eternal realm depicted in parables as strongly communal -- a banquet, a wedding feast, a city (the New Jerusalem)

Consummation

2. Implications for Spirituality

The tension in this life between the "now" and "not yet" of the Kingdom of God

- life can be envisioned as a pilgrimage to the New Jerusalem, the heavenly city
- life can contain "glimpses" of the "promised land"

The "Beatific Vision"

- just as the human eye cannot cope with the brilliance of the sun, in this life we are incapable of coping with the full glory, radiance and beauty of God
- in the New Jerusalem, we will finally be able to behold God in all God's beauty and glory, the "love that moves the sun and the other stars" (Dante)

Consummation

3. Example

Writings of Bernard of Cluny (1100-1150).

His classic vision of the New Jerusalem:

**Jerusalem the golden
With mild and honey blessed
Beneath thy contemplation
Sink heart and voice oppressed.
I know not, O, I know not
What joys await us there,
What radiancy of glory
What bliss beyond compare.**

**They stand, those halls of Zion
All jubilant with song,
And bright with many an angel,
And all the martyr throng.
The Prince is ever with them,
The daylight is serene,**

**The pastures of the blessed
Are decked in glorious sheen**

**There is the throne of David
And there, from care released,
The shout of them that triumph,
The song of them that feast.
And they, who with their Leader,
Have conquered in the fight
For ever and for ever
Are clad in robes of white.**

**O sweet and blessed country
The home of God's elect!
O sweet and blessed country
That eager hearts expect!
Jesu, in mercy bring us
To that dear land of rest;
Who art, with God the Father,
And Spirit, ever blessed.**

References

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(Chapter 4: Theological Foundations for
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