

THEOLOGICAL TRENDS

SPIRITUAL THEOLOGY TODAY

FOR THE older and middle-aged generation of priests and religious, spiritual theology is still associated with Tanqueray's well-known compendium, *The Spiritual Life*. Published in its original French in the early 'twenties, it soon became a best seller on the religious book market. Translated into many languages, by 1930, it was used as a standard textbook by the majority of seminaries and religious houses for three decades.

At the very time it saw the light, however, new movements and trends were making their impact on christian spirituality. Romano Guardini gave new direction and intensity to the liturgical movement; existential philosophy was penetrating theological thinking; the ideas of Teilhard de Chardin prepared a more open attitude towards this world's values; the *nouvelle théologie* of Henri de Lubac and the *anthropologische Wende* of Karl Rahner were encouraging new approaches to theological investigations; and Yves Congar's ecclesiology was opening the way to a new self-understanding of the Church. Above all, the idea of *ressourcement* created a new interest in the study of the Fathers of the Church and in the Bible, leading to the rediscovery of the authentic sources of christian spirituality.

These developments, which paved the way for the *aggiornamento* of Vatican II, also shaped the nature of spiritual theology and contemporary spirituality. In order to understand better the new developments in spiritual theology and contemporary spirituality, we will try to clarify the relation between theology and spirituality; to establish the place and role of spiritual theology within the science of theology; and thirdly, to discuss contemporary spirituality in the light of current trends.

Theology and Spirituality

The term 'spirituality' in its modern usage derives from the french neologism, *spiritualité*, which has found its way into other languages, Its root, however, is in the Greek, in the pauline adjective *pneumatikos*, 'the spiritual' (man), his technical term for christian being (1 Cor, 2, 13-15; 9, 11; 14, 1).¹ From St Paul's time, the word has been used consistently to denote the harmonious unity that should exist between christian doctrine and life, theology and piety. In the New Testament, doctrine means also life, theology is always spiritual theology. When John, for example, is called the 'Theologian', it is because he is the evangelist who has

contemplated the mystery of incarnation and possessed the experience of faith upon which he reflected. He is thus the model of all theologians.²

The same understanding of theology dominates the patristic era. Theology is not simply intellectual activity, it is also the object of love, inseparable from prayer. The meaning of 'wisdom' in St Augustine's teaching, or the 'loving contemplation' of St Gregory the Great, may represent the kind of theology which is never separated from love. The unity finds its supreme expression in the golden age of monastic theology, initiated by Gregory and Augustine and developed by Anselm and Bernard, in which true theology by definition must be spiritual. It is only with Abelard that the term 'theology' begins to take on the colour of intellectual speculation: 'school' or 'scholastic' theology. Notwithstanding the foundation of the Schools in the twelfth century, the great theologians of the scholastic era still unify intellectual reflection with contemplation. So the Abbot Cassian's *Conferences* were the daily reading of Aquinas, and Bonaventure is known rather as the author of the *Soul's Journey into God* than as a commentator on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard—asceticism based on love:

Let no one think he will find sufficiency in a reading which lacks unction, any enquiry which lacks devotion, a search which arouses no wonder, a survey without enthusiasm, industry without piety, knowledge without love, intelligence without humility, application without grace, contemplation without wisdom inspired by God.³

It was only after the era of the great scholastic theologians, that theology gradually dissociated itself from spiritual life. The distinction between knowledge and love led to separation or even divorce. In reality, two theologies were developing: the one a scientific, theoretical and dry speculation; the other a pious, affective theology unrelated to solid theological doctrine. Formerly, it would have been tautological to call theology spiritual; but from the end of the fourteenth century, the tension between religious knowledge and spiritual life stretched to the breaking point:

The theologian became a specialist in an autonomous field of knowledge, which he could enter by the use of a technique independent of the witness of his own life, of his personal holiness or sinfulness. The spiritual man, on the other hand, became a *dévot* who cared nothing for theology; one for whom his own experience ultimately became an end itself, without reference to the dogmatic content to be sought in it.⁴

In the following centuries, there were some attempts to hold to the unity. For example, Ignatius Loyola writes at the end of his *Spiritual Exercises*, in his set of rules 'for the true mind and heart (*el sentido verdadero*) we ought to have in the Church militant':

The eleventh: to hold in high regard theology both positive and scholastic, for as it is the role of the positive doctors, like St Jerome, St Augustine and St Gregory, etc, rather to move the affections to love and serve God our Lord in all things; similarly it is the function of the scholastics, like St Thomas, St Bonaventure and the Master of the Sentences [Peter Lombard] rather to define and to explain for our own times whatever is necessary (Exx 363).

These and similar considerations can be found in the writings of both theologians and spiritual teachers; but on the whole, the chasm between theology and spirituality continued to widen until the end of the nineteenth century and beyond.

If it is true that only God can speak well of God, then it follows that to live according to the divine life is essential, if we are to study the things of God and to speak of them. It is only when the contemplative character of faith is grasped that it becomes the principle of a new kind of knowledge. This tendency to restore the connection of theology with life in the Church can be detected in the writings of M. Scheeben and J. A. Mohler. A resurgence in liturgical studies also advocated a return to the Fathers, and a creation of a theology which would be living contemplation as much as intellectual speculation.⁵

The 'real assent' of Cardinal Newman and the 'little way' of St Thérèse of Lisieux both point to this trend of bridging the gap between doctrine and spirituality. The letter of Leo XIII, *Testem Benevolentiae* (1893), stressing the importance of interior life as a basis for charitable and apostolic activity, is indicative of the same tendency. The spiritual conferences of Dom Marmion (for example, his *Christ the Life of the Soul* [1925]), with its dogma-centred spirituality, A. Tanqueray's appeal for a piety inspired by doctrine (*Dogmes Générateurs de la piété* [1926]), the attempt of E. Mersch to create a spirituality centred on the theme of the Mystical Body of Christ: all these contributed to the trend aiming at restoring unity between theology and spirituality. Some theologians began to consider mystical experience, not as something extraordinary and strange to christian life, but as the normal manifestation of a way to perfection; such as is found, for example, in the simplicity of a Thérèse of Lisieux or Charles de Foucauld. For them, the universal call to holiness implies also the universal call to mystical life. Among the representatives of this mystical movement, we find theologians of the calibre of A. Saudreau, P. Pourrat, J. Arinterro, R. Garrigou-Lagrange, and Dom Cuthbert Butler, the historian of Vatican I.

All these movements contributed in some way to the restoration of unity between theology and spirituality. But it had to wait for a fuller expression until the decades following World War II: the liturgical renewal; the more positive attitude in spirituality towards human values; and above all, the intensive biblical and patristic studies.

Towards a definition of Spiritual Theology

This development toward a closer unity between spirituality and dogma was no isolated phenomenon; it belonged to a more general desire to bring theology closer to human life and experience. In fact we can distinguish two phases in this movement: the integration of spiritual theology within itself, and also within the science of theology, which enable us to offer a theoretical and practical definition of spiritual theology.

It would seem that G. B. Scaramelli, S.J. (1867-1952) was the first to establish 'ascetical and mystical theology' as one of the sacred sciences; though it must be emphasized that the distinction between 'ascetical' and 'mystical' was never really satisfactory. P. Pourrat, in the first of his four volumes on *Christian Spirituality*, describes ascetical theology in terms of those exercises to which every Christian who aspires to perfection must devote himself; whereas mystical theology concerns the mystical union and its secondary manifestations.⁶

The difficulty with this distinction is illustrated by later writers such as De Guibert, Bouyer and others. In fact, its artificiality and arbitrary nature has given rise to a certain acrimony.⁷ These seemingly abstract and academic discussions brought about at least one practical result; the 'ascetical' and 'mystical' came to be accepted as two phases of the very same dynamism, two modes of experiencing the same life: that is, there was an implicit recognition of the unity existing between them. First, we find 'spiritual' and 'ascetical and mystical' used synonymously, as in the title of the french dominican periodical *La Vie Spirituelle*, founded in 1919, (through the jesuit *Revue d'Ascétique et de Mystique* only changed its title to *Revue d'Histoire de Spiritualité* in 1970). With the accent on the unity of christian experience, rather than on the classification of ascetical and mystical diversity, the ground was prepared for unification. Yves Congar was speaking in generally acceptable terms when he wrote:

There is only one theology, the science of the revealed mystery of God. This theology is principally speculative but it is also undeniably practical. For the God of revelation is not only object, but we know him also as our goal. . . . Certainly, moral and dogma are distinguished from one another. But we would gravely deceive ourselves if we separated dogma and moral as representing two independent systems of knowledge. . . . Moral cut off from the study of God's grace and beatitude . . . would hardly represent anything more than casuistry. This faulty moral would treat, as an extrinsic addition, some 'ascetical' considerations, valuable for the majority of the faithful, and some 'mystical' considerations, concerning particular and 'extraordinary' cases.⁸

In these reflections of Yves Congar, we find spiritual theology described, not as an external addition to theology but as (a) an organic part of the

science of theology, and (b) integrated into the renewed moral theology.

(a) Spirituality, then, is a theological discipline, since it is based on the principle of revelation. It treats the living God as the moving agent, the beginning and end of christian life, in the light of which it studies the structures of spiritual life, and its process of growth. It finds, therefore, its place in theology, not as some external part added to a casuistic moral theology separated from dogma, but as a discipline organically intergrated in the scientific study of the revealed mystery of the God who sanctifies.

(b) It is subordinated to a moral theology which is no longer some form of casuistry allied with canon law, but one whose subject matter is the same christian life as that of spiritual theology. As Joseph Fuchs has it: 'The object of moral theology is man's vocation in Christ and the moral obligations which follow from this'.⁹ Vatican II in *Optatam Totius* calls for this renewed moral teaching which is 'nourished by Scripture': that is, centred in the mystery of Christ, and the history of salvation, supported by a sound anthropology such as is taught in *Gaudium et Spes*.

It follows that spiritual theology is closely related to moral theology, since the object of both is to lead man to God as his fulfilment; and both embrace the entire itinerary of the christian life. The exact nature of this relationship is still a matter for discussion.

For St Thomas Aquinas, moral theology's subject is the coming from God and the going to God of the rational creature (*Summa Theol.* 2-2ae, prologue). The path is well-trodden: grace as the source of divine life, all virtues, gifts of the Holy Spirit, law, evangelical counsels, graces of contemplation, etc. In this approach, the entire christian life is included in moral theology. There is no easy way of finding any specific field and function for spiritual theology. On the other hand, moral theologians before Vatican II looked upon the study of precepts and obligations as their domain, whereas that of spiritual theology was to discuss the free commitment to counsels and the life of perfection.

Others, with Jacques Maritain, distinguished between the study of universal principles of action (moral theology) and the concrete applications of these principles (spiritual theology). Maritain thought that he was upholding the scientific character of spiritual theology, and at the same time retaining its basic relation to moral theology. He saw in St Thomas the model of a moralist, in St John of the Cross, of a spiritual theologian.¹⁰

The Carmelite, Gabriele di S Maria Maddalena, preferred to see the proper function of spiritual theology in its psychological approach: that is, in the study of the psychological manifestations of the development of supernatural life. This approach would not turn theology into psychology, but would evaluate the authenticity of spiritual growth in its concrete, dynamic, psychological conditions in the light of revelation.¹¹ Yet others, without denying the scientific character of spiritual theology, view it as a part of moral theology, and point to its distinctive aspect in its treatment of

christian maturity, as one of the practical functions of theology. Others, again, speak of the intensification of christian life, or consider it as a more detailed study of the means and manifestations of spiritual life, such as the life of prayer, contemplation, and so on.¹² This select list of various opinions may help us to see not only the close relation between moral and spiritual theology which is admitted by all, but also the difficulty in defining the proper field and task of these theological disciplines, at least in theory.

If, however, we examine the manuals of moral theology, we find that most pay scant attention to those aspects of christian life in which the divine revelation finds its highest expression: the life of prayer, contemplation, mystical experience, and so on. There is, therefore, an important field left for spiritual theology which is not covered by moral theology. A similar approach is advocated by those who see in prayer and all that is related to it the proper field of spiritual theology:

It must be admitted that spirituality is not the same thing as morality or more specifically, moral theology. This moral theology is also a science: the science of human acts, studied in the light of the Word of God. . . . It includes the consideration of christian perfection. . . . Spirituality, however, concentrates on those human acts whose reference to God is not only explicit but immediate; that is, it is considered above all with prayer and everything that is related to prayer in the ascetical and mystical life. In this, the character of explicit and immediate reference to God is absolutely essential.¹³

This 'immediate reference to God' indicates what some contemporary authors prefer to call 'the personal, historical and existential dimensions' of spiritual theology.¹⁴ Spiritual and moral theology are two complementary ways of looking at christian perfection. While moral theology treats christian behaviour in its universal structure as valid for every Christian, spiritual theology concentrates on its personal, historical and experiential dimensions: 'Hence the importance in spiritual theology of phenomenology, of the experience of the saints through centuries, of the experience today of all who are actually living the christian life'.¹⁵

It is this experiential aspect of the christian life which assures a specific role and domain for spiritual theology, illustrated in the following examples.

In 1951, Hans Urs von Balthasar published a biography of St Thérèse of Lisieux, not to add just another book to the vast literature on the Little Flower, but as a model for a theological hagiography. According to von Balthasar, the theological existence of a saint invites us to reflect on the mission of the saint sent to us from above; it is an 'exegesis' of revelation which may be called a method of 'supernatural phenomenology', that is, a study of the concrete personal experience of a saint as an act of God to be fulfilled in the life of the Church.¹⁶

A second example is found in Jean Mouroux's *The Christian Experience*. He distinguishes three levels of experience: empirical, experimental and experiential. The empirical, although lived experience, is partial, non-critical and superficial. The experimental is conscious, can be artificially reproduced, provoked; it concerns the measurable elements used by science. The experiential refers to the experience of the total person, built and grasped in a lucid consciousness which possesses itself. The religious experience would belong to this category, in which the unifying force of the person's whole life is under the direct action of God. Mouroux thinks that there is the possibility of a theology of christian experience which is more than just a self-realization of the person; it would be the structured realization of the christian vocation of a person. Such a study could develop some form of typology or structure of christian experience which would enable theologians to measure and discern the authenticity of christian life, and even of mystical experience.¹⁷

This structured realization of christian vocation may be illustrated by the traditional categories of the three ways: the *via purgativa* of the beginners, the *via illuminativa* of the proficient, and the *via unitiva* of the perfect. But Karl Rahner questions the validity of this 'stage-by-stage, step-like ascent' in christian life. This form of structuring is based on a neo-Platonic anthropology derived from Origen, in which the pivot is that total detachment in which all passion is spent. It reflects the stages of a biological growth which is inadequate for the illustration of spiritual development. So Rahner wishes to treat of experience in two stages: first, to take into consideration the life-situation (age, biological conditions, past history, etc); and then to consider the act in its moral intensity: is it a superficial act or an existential self-commitment?¹⁸

Having described the development from ascetical-mystical to spiritual theology, and having located the domain of spiritual theology within the science of theology and discussed its relation to moral theology, we are now in a position to consider a reasonably comprehensive definition.

One of the more recent attempts is Charles Bernard's: 'a theological discipline, which, based on the principles of revelation, studies the spiritual christian experience by describing its progressive development and elucidating its structures and laws'.¹⁹

According to this description, spiritual theology is a theological discipline, in that it is based on the principles of revelation, and presents salvation history in its twofold aspect: objectively, the actualization of God's covenant, and subjectively, the application of covenant to the diversity of historical conditions and to the uniqueness of the temporal and personal existence. Spiritual theology is also subordinated to dogmatic theology, since it relates man to God as the moving agent, the beginning and end of his spiritual life. But it is not simply the drawing of practical conclusions from theoretical (dogmatic) theology prior to any decision taken by the individual; for, while dogmatic theology is searching for the

deeper understanding of the content of our faith, spiritual theology concentrates on the personal experience of faith and the transformation which follows it.²⁰ It is both related and subordinated to moral theology, as embracing the entire itinerary of the christian life. But while the latter attaches more importance to the universal structures of human life valid for every Christian, spiritual theology is more attentive to its personal, historical and experiential aspects. Moral theology may lead the Christian to the full flowering of the christian life, but the structures, forms and moments of this growth are studied by spiritual theology.²¹ It presupposes the sciences of man. Its material object is man as he lives spiritually, as he is the receiver, the participant of the divine life. For this reason, spiritual theology may also be called in a certain sense supernatural anthropology. Finally, it endeavours to study the structures and laws of spiritual growth. It describes the various stages and development of spiritual progress, the meaning of authentic spiritual maturity.

Contemporary spirituality and spiritual theology

The great elements of the common patrimony of christian spirituality (Christ, Church, liturgy, grace, virtues, conversion, ascesis, etc) should form the essence of any christian spirituality of any age. However, christian spirituality has always been conditioned by historical sociological factors, influenced by great personalities (leaders, reformers, founders), by spiritual climates, and by the Church's needs. As a result, even the essential elements of a genuine spirituality have been presented in different ways, with changing stress on the various aspects of the same authentic spirituality. It is in this sense that we can speak of the history of spirituality, of different spiritualities, and of 'contemporary' spirituality.

Just as past ages enriched the spiritual heritage of the Church, so will our age have its positive contribution to this sacred patrimony. The spirituality of the first decades of our century was strongly influenced by the teachings of the various schools of spirituality which originated with the *devotio moderna* of the late Middle Ages and continued with the spanish and french spiritual writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Some of these were characterized by individualism, voluntarism, lack of sufficient attention to liturgy or the use of the Bible, phenomena often explained as reactions against the Reformation.²³

Since then, however, a change has taken place. The new interest in spirituality, the new spiritual movements emerging in recent decades, lead us to think that new forms of spirituality are taking place in contemporary Catholicism, and that these new forms are articulated by a sincere desire for an authentic spirituality based on the traditional sources of christian life, in order to enter into a fuller experience of the evangelical life.²⁴ It is still difficult to discern elements whose values are enduring from those

based only on short-lived enthusiasm; and it would be premature to attempt to bring them into a synthesis. But we can detect in them some basic orientations which can be articulated by the return to the sources of our faith: liturgy, scripture, the Fathers of the Church, and by a more positive attitude toward human values.²⁵

Liturgical renewal may be traced to Dom Guéranger (1875), who restored the ancient abbey of Solesmes. His approach was often criticized because of his over-preoccupation with the past. Pope St Pius X sought to bring about a more active participation of the people in the liturgical life of the parish. After World War I, the movement received new orientation and impetus with the emergence of the benedictine liturgical centres in Germany, such as Maria Laach, where I. Herwegen and O. Casel added theological depth to the liturgical celebration with their theology of mystery, based on the ideas of Scheeben and Mohler in the nineteenth century. Similar renewal was initiated under the leadership of Pius Parsch in Klosterneuburg, Austria.

There were also long controversies on the relation between liturgical and private prayer, that is, between its objective, communitarian dimensions and its subjective, individual dimensions. Pius XII's *Mediator Dei* in 1947 clarified the theological, pastoral and spiritual issues involved. After its publication, the movement became more pastorally oriented. The same encyclical paved the way also for those theological contributions which emphasized the relationship between liturgy and spirituality (Bouyer, Daniélou, Jungmann, Martimort, Vagaggini, and others). Their work is reflected in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of Vatican II.²⁶

Contemporary spirituality could hardly be understood without its relation to *ressourcement*; return to the sources of our faith — the scriptures and the Fathers. Chronologically, the biblical movement was preceded by the patristic revival. The rich spiritual treasures of the patristic heritage furnished new theological themes, long forgotten by scholastic theology. The *concept of history* is central to the theologies of Irenaeus, Origen and Gregory of Nyssa. Through the idea of history, they show that Christianity is not just an abstract doctrine, but the 'divine economy' by which God slowly raised humankind from its sinful state to prepare it for the coming of the Incarnate Word.

The Fathers stressed the *collective aspect of salvation* by presenting humanity in its solidarity, penetrated by a life already redeemed. We may mention also their *methodology*: how they presented the message of salvation, not by the analysis and dialectic of the later theology, but within the context of the liturgical celebration, or in the form of commentaries on the works of the bible for the nourishment of the spiritual life of the faithful.

Biblical studies up to the early 'forties were still dominated almost exclusively by research in literary criticism, by archaeological and philosophical concerns.²⁷

Milestones in the development of this movement are: the encyclical of

Leo XIII, *Providentissimus Deus* (1893), the foundation of the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome by Pius X in 1910, *Spiritus Paraclitus* of Benedict XV (1920); and, in a very special way, *Divino Afflante Spiritu* of Pius XII (1943), which gave new direction to the movement.

Soon after the publication of this encyclical, Catholic scholars began to present 'biblical theology' by drawing out the doctrinal content and spiritual meaning of the Scriptures. Others developed the christological dimensions of the Old Testament, creating fruitful discussions on the 'spiritual' interpretation of the Bible. New research began on typological exegesis, whose object was to establish connections between various texts and to focus on the relation between biblical events or personalities and the future events of the history of the Church.

From the end of the last century, a sharply defined social programme, proposed by the social encyclicals, became a part of the moral teaching of the Church. This new concern for social justice, necessitated by the rapid social and economic developments, may be viewed as a rediscovery of apostolic, pastoral and evangelical values, centralized in the various forms of Catholic Action.

This trend opened up a new, a more positive approach to the world with its social, political, economic and scientific values; it implied a more positive role on the part of the Church in the modern world. This trend became more and more one of the main preoccupations of the contemporary movements, exercising a strong impact also on contemporary spirituality.

Teilhard de Chardin, following M. Blondel and others, moved away from the traditionally negative attitude of the Church towards the world. His contention was that the encounter with God takes place in action first rather than in knowledge: it is through our work in the world that we encounter God. So the traditional flight from or contempt of the world slowly changed into a spirituality of 'presence' in and to the world.

This rediscovered 'Christian Humanism' was also advanced by well-known philosophers and theologians (among them Berdiaeff, Maritain, De Lubac, Dawson and Mouroux), to show that man can truly find his full development in the christian life. This 'incarnational spirituality' stressed the goodness of creation in spite of sin, nature's openness to grace and the necessity of human action for the fulfilment of God's Kingdom. Its leading ideas are incorporated in *Gaudium et Spes* of Vatican II, and provided the springboard for current theological thinking, on pastoral, social, missionary and lay movements, and on the foundation of the Secular Institutes.

The tenets of this incarnational spirituality have been challenged by the eschatologists, whose view on human reality is less optimistic. They stress the presence of sin and its consequences, teach the discontinuity between the earthly kingdom and the coming of God's Kingdom; above all, the fact

that the Kingdom of God is not achieved by human activity but by pure grace, that we are redeemed not by technology but by the precious blood of Christ.²⁸

The tension between these approaches to the world is still with us, particularly through the emerging interest during the late 'seventies in the 'theology of the cross', reflecting more an eschatological spirituality:

Ten years ago, no one could have foreseen that the moment would come when readers would turn again with ever-increasing interest to that aspect of the christian message, which, after Luther, was called the *theology of the cross*, and seek to appreciate why Christ and the Christian must carry the cross so as to enter into glory.²⁹

These briefly, are some of the main currents which brought theology and spirituality closer together, from the time of the Council and in the years that followed it.

Vatican II and spiritual theology

Although there is no conciliar decree exclusively treating the problems of spirituality, there is scarcely a document without its implicit references to and explicit instructions on christian spirituality. Vatican II follows a consistent christological line in its presentation of salvation history and divine revelation (*Dei Verbum*, 2); in its doctrine on Christ as the head and source of all graces and holiness (*Lumen Gentium*, 7, 28, 30, 50 and *passim*); in its rediscovery of the universal vocation to holiness and the means to attain it (*ibid.*, 39-42). It proposes the ideal of holiness to bishops (*ibid.*, 41 and *Christus Dominus*, *passim*), to priests (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 12-17), to clerics (*Optatam Totius*, 8), to laity (*Lumen Gentium*, 43-47, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, *passim*), to religious (*Perfectae Caritatis*, 1-3). Finally, it offers a basic orientation for a truly christian attitude towards the world in *Gaudium et Spes*, Part I: man's elevation through Christ to divine destiny; Part II: the sanctification of family life, culture, social, political, economic life, international order.³⁰

It was no accident that the years of the council coincided with the era of the 'death of God' theology, when God revealed himself as perhaps never before, as the hidden God, the *Deus absconditus*. Rather, it was providential that whilst technological man in his self-sufficiency denied any need for a transcendent God, the Church through her renewal reasserted her role as the *Sacramentum Mundi*, the visible sign of Christ's presence in the world, the extension of Christ in time and space, and the source of grace and holiness.

Spiritual movements and Spiritual Theology

In the 'sixties, when 'secularization theology' was rampant, no one would have suspected the renewed interest in spirituality such as we are

experiencing at present. Its primary source is undoubtedly the Spirit of Christ who continues to work within the Church in unexpected, mysterious ways. Vatican II did not initiate these movements, it merely intensified the desire for a more authentic christian spirituality.

God works through human factors; and it is the task of spiritual theology to reveal the relation between these human factors and the spiritual currents which reflect the needs of the contemporary society.³¹ Prominent amongst them is the need for re-establishing the communitarian, social dimensions of christian life after the long dominance of individualism in the spirituality of the past.

Christianity alone can give collectivity its true sense; and community spirit is necessary for Christianity to preserve its meaning. When the time comes to write the history of the present-day spirituality, we can be certain that this discovery will be one of the most significant of our century.³²

There is also the magnificent response to the need for social sensitivity especially towards the poor, the oppressed, the marginal groups of our society. While working for the poor, the members of these movements are often themselves attracted to evangelical poverty, based on the conviction that real poverty, simplicity and true fraternity can transform the world.

Finally, these movements answer the need of today's man for prayer, for interiority, Through their communal or individual prayers, they witness the need for a transcendent God, reacting against the immanentism and self-sufficiency of our technological society:

In this era, it can be said that Charles de Foucauld takes on the dimensions of the twentieth-century prophet: practising poverty, living in the midst of men without any particular apostolate, except of being Christ where Christ most needs to be, there, where he is not yet — or no more.³³

Spiritual Theology, as it reflects on current religious experience in the light of revelation, helps them to build their spirituality on the Christ-centred, ecclesial dimensions of the life of the Church.

These reflections on contemporary spirituality and spiritual theology make us aware of the central role of the Church in our spiritual lives and inspire us to turn again with filial trust to the Church, the source of holiness. The Church is like Christ; she repeats his joyous, glorious, sorrowful mysteries, Thabor and Calvary. She is like Christ who has appeared both as the glorious Messiah and as the 'carpenter's son' (Mt 13, 55), often the 'stumbling block' (Mt 21, 44) for many; yet she has remained the inexhaustible source of graces and holiness. In the words of Newman, 'The world grows old, but the Church is ever young'.

Eugene Megyer.

NOTES

- ¹ Josef Sudbrack, 'Spirituality', in *Sacramentum Mundi* 6, p 148. See also Dumeige, 'History of Spirituality: A key for Self-Understanding', in *Chicago Studies* 15 (1976), pp 55-70.
- ² Jean Leclercq, O.S.B., 'Jalons dans une histoire de la théologie spirituelle', in *Seminarium* 14 (1974), p 113.
- ³ *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, Prologue 4.
- ⁴ P. Evdokimov, *L'amour fou de Dieu* (Paris, 1973), p 4.
- ⁵ Cf Yves Congar, O.P., *A History of Theology* (New York, 1968), p 171.
- ⁶ P. Pourrat, *Christian Spirituality*, 4 vols (New York, 1922), preface, p v.
- ⁷ Cf J. De Guibert, *The Theology of the Spiritual Life* (New York, 1953); and L. Bouyer, *The Theology of the New Testament and the Fathers* (New York, 1963); for the theological polemics between A. Saudreau and A. Poulain, see *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 56 (1929), pp 107-27 and 177-206.
- ⁸ Y. Congar, *op. cit.*, p 262-63.
- ⁹ Joseph Fuchs, *Human Values and Christian Morality* (Dublin, 1970).
- ¹⁰ Jacques Maritain, *Distinguish to Unite: or The Degrees of Knowledge* (New York, 1959).
- ¹¹ 'Indole psicologica della teologia spirituale', in *Rivista di Filosofia Neoscolastica* 32 (1940), pp 31-42.
- ¹² R. Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., *Christian Perfection and Contemplation* (St Louis, 1947), pp 13-14; Y. Congar, *op. cit.*, p 265; C. V. Truhlar, *Structura theologica vitae spiritualis* (Romae, 1958), pp 11-12; Bouyer, *op. cit.*, preface, pp viii-ix.
- ¹³ F. Vandenbroucke, 'Spirituality and Spiritualities', in *Concilium* 9 (1965).
- ¹⁴ E.g., C. Bernard, 'La conscience spirituelle', in *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique* 41 (1965), pp 451-53.
- ¹⁵ R. Latourelle, *Theology, Science of Salvation* (New York, 1969), p 150.
- ¹⁶ *Thérèse of Lisieux: The Story of a Mission* (New York, 1953).
- ¹⁷ New York, 1954; esp pp 27-47.
- ¹⁸ Karl Rahner, 'Reflections on the Problem of the Gradual Ascent to Christian Perfection', in *Theological Investigations*, vol III, pp 3-23.
- ¹⁹ C. Bernard, *Compendio di Teologia Spirituale* (Rome, 1976), p 37.
- ²⁰ Hans Urs von Balthasar, 'The Gospel as Norm and Test of All Spirituality in the Church', in *Concilium* 9 (1969), pp 7-8.
- ²¹ Latourelle, *op. cit.*, pp 146-50.
- ²² Bernard, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-39.
- ²³ Louis Monden, *Sin, Liberty and Law* (New York, 1965), pp 203-04.
- ²⁴ A. M. Besnard, 'Tendencies of Contemporary Spirituality', in *Concilium* 9 (1965), p 25.
- ²⁵ Sudbrack, *loc. cit.*, p 156.
- ²⁶ C. Vaggagini, *Problemi e orientamenti di spiritualità monastica, biblica e liturgica* (Rome, 1961), pp 501-84.
- ²⁷ L. J. Rogier, R. Aubert, M. D. Knowles, *The Christian Centuries*, vol v (New York, 1978), pp 616ff.
- ²⁸ E. Ancilli, 'Orientamenti di Spiritualità contemporanea', in *Seminarium* 14 (1974); R. Aubert, *La théologie catholique au milieu du XXe siècle* (Tournai, 1954).
- ²⁹ M. Flick, 'The Birth of a Theology of the Cross', in *The Cross Today*, ed. G. O'Collins (Rome, 1977), p 1.
- ³⁰ H. De Lubac, 'Nature and Grace', in *The Word in History*, ed. T. P. Burke (New York, 1966), pp 24-40.
- ³¹ C. Bernard, 'Courants spirituels dans l'Eglise d'aujourd'hui', in *Seminarium* 17 (1977), pp 1116-29.
- ³² A. M. Besnard, *op. cit.*, pp 40-41.
- ³³ Vandenbroucke, *loc. cit.*, p 59.