SPIRITUALITY: A RESOURCE FOR THEOLOGY

Over the last ten years we have witnessed a renaissance—or an explosion—of interest in spirituality. It followed upon the ferment of the sixties, with the invasion of America by spiritual teachers from the Orient and the journeying of Americans to the East to find spiritual meaning. Closely allied to psychology, the interest in spirituality was buoyed along by the development of existential, humanistic and transpersonal psychology. For many, psychoanalysis led to the discovery of interiority, which launched them on a spiritual quest with a search for a spiritual path and a spiritual discipline. In the Catholic community by the end of the sixties the pendulum had swung from the flight into the world to a rediscovery of contemplation. After Vatican II had thrust Catholics into the world and had effected radical changes in external forms of religious life, many felt the need to ground themselves interiorly by rediscovering their own spiritual traditions, assimilating the findings of psychology and opening to the wisdom of the East.

Among the earliest signs of the reawakening of spirituality for Catholics were houses of prayer that mushroomed in the late sixties—with religious and lay members spending long periods of time cultivating the practice of prayer. The retreat movement itself was renewed by the return to the original Ignatian formula of the directed retreat, with emphasis on individual discernment and spiritual direction. The most dramatic development in Catholic spirituality was the charismatic movement, encompassing large numbers and flourishing in diverse groups throughout the country.

As interest in spirituality spread, there sprang up throughout the country workshops, institutes and programs in prayer, spiritual direction and contemporary spirituality. Academic programs began to appear on the campuses of Catholic universities, offering an M.A. and, in some instances, a Ph.D. in spirituality. Meanwhile academic programs in spirituality flourished in the Roman universities, for example, the Gregorian and the Angelicum. In publishing, spirituality supplanted theology as the best-seller in the religious field. Books on spirituality abound. The monumental publishing venture in the field is the Paulist Press sixty-volume series The Classics of Western Spirituality. The series is a witness to the need and the desire to recover the roots of our spiritual heritage.

During this period monastic spirituality has flourished. At a time when vocations are dwindling, certain contemplative monasteries are drawing more candidates than they can handle. Monastic spirituality is overflowing into the larger community. For example, stimulated by Transcendental Meditation, Cistercian monks have developed the method of centering prayer based on *The Cloud of Unknowing* and the Jesus prayer. This method of prayer, which is rooted in the classical

monastic tradition, is now being taught in numerous workshops and centers throughout the country. Christian monks and nuns have been bridging the gap between East and West. Following in the path of Thomas Merton, they have reached out towards the East. The international Benedictine and Cistercian monastic organization A.I.M. has focused its energies on dialogue with Hindu and Buddhist spiritualities. In the emerging dialogue of world religions, Christian monasticism has been at the forefront and will very likely continue to be, since it provides a natural bridge into Eastern spirituality.

But spirituality has not remained within the monastery. The post-Vatican II period has witnessed the emergence of a spirituality of action that is concerned with every aspect of life in the world. A major formulator of such a this-worldly spirituality was the scientist Teilhard de Chardin. More recently, liberation theology, dedicated as it is to radical orthopraxis, has created a new style of active spirituality. That spirituality is not banished from the political arena or the marketplace is verified by the fact that two of the leading spiritual personalities of our time have been secular leaders holding the office of Secretary-General of the United Nations: Dag Hammarskjöld and U Thant.

Finally, academic organizations have reflected the emerging interest in spirituality. For example, this meeting of the Catholic Theological Society has a continuing seminar and a special interest session on spirituality. At the American Academy of Religion meeting in the Fall, the metaphysically-oriented Whiteheadian process theology group had a special session entitled Spirituality and Social Transformation. The recent meeting of the College Theology Society had a major division on Spirituality East and West. The International Congress on Medieval Studies at Western Michigan University, which for years had been the center of Cistercian studies, had many sessions this year devoted explicitly to spirituality. For the second year now at the congress there was a section devoted to comparative spirituality, East and West.

What are the characteristics of this renaissance of spirituality? Taken as a whole, it cultivates both contemplation and action, attempting in certain instances to establish the link between the two. It is concerned with both modern culture and ancient tradition. It attempts to assimilate the findings of psychology and the social sciences while rediscovering the classical wisdom of the past. At the same time that it attempts to integrate its own resources—present and past—it reaches out toward the spiritualities of the East and towards a future which is evolving in the direction of global consciousness. It is here that the present renaissance may have its greatest significance, for it is precisely in the area of spirituality that the convergence of religions is being most strongly felt and systematically cultivated.

SPIRITUALITY AND THEOLOGY

What does this renaissance mean for theology? If theology grows out of the life of the Church, then contemporary theology should reflect

developments in spirituality and be enriched by spirituality. In a basic way, spirituality is experiential; it is bound up with praxis, specifically orthopraxis. As such, it should provide material for theological reflection. At the same time, spirituality should be enriched and guided by theology.

In this paper, I am viewing spirituality as experience and theology as the reflection on experience. Spirituality should be situated within the experience of faith, as a significant dimension of the total faith-experience. For it involves our experience of growth in the life of the Spirit, that is, growth in the life of faith towards that goal of union with the triune God that faith points out for us. Since growth is the central experience, the journey has been a primary symbol in spiritual literature, which has charted the stages of the journey, the role of the spiritual guide and the praxis which leads to the goal. Out of this literature has grown a separate division of theology, which in the Middle Ages was called *theologia mystica* and more recently in seminary training by the title ascetical and mystical theology. In this sense, spirituality is a branch of theology like moral theology. In the present paper, however, I am not focusing on this meaning of the term spritiuality, but rather on the more basic experiential meaning which includes praxis. And I am taking theology to mean primarily dogmatic-systematic theology, although indirectly I am including the other branches of theology, viewed as reflection on the total experience of faith.

Seen in this way, can contemporary spirituality be a resource for theology? Can spirituality as contemporary orthopraxis contribute to the emergence of new meaning in theology? My answer is an emphatic yes, but I must make certain qualifications. First, if we prescind from liberation theology, spirituality has not as yet had a significant influence on theology. Although there are many academic programs of spirituality on Catholic campuses, they have not produced a proportioned impact on theology. Can contemporary spirituality have such an impact? There is reason to doubt that it can. The trends in spirituality are diverse and diffuse; they often lack depth; where they are strong, they lack direct channels into theology. The greatest task for contemporary spirituality is to acquire depth and maturity by grounding itself in its spiritual roots, by appropriating the wisdom of its classical heritage. Its second task is to relate itself to contemporary culture—to psychology, sociology and the praxis of the secular world—assimilating with discernment the resources offered by secular wisdom. Thirdly, it must open itself creatively to the East, drawing upon this ancient wisdom and viewing itself as a partner in the spiritual quest of mankind. If it can achieve this threefold task, it can be a major vehicle in developing the new systematic theology of the future which, while being firmly rooted in its own historical identity, will take into account the total experience of mankind, Eastern as well as Western, secular as well as sacred.

If spirituality is to influence theology today, we must break down the barriers that have kept them apart. To do this we must understand the history that has shaped their relationship—at times in intimacy, at

times in isolation, at times in antagonism. The ferment today in spirituality has its counterparts in the past. In the early thirteenth century, poverty movements gave birth to the new mendicant orders, which deeply influenced the rise of university theology. In the fourteenth century, spiritual movements abounded, especially in the Rhineland and the Low Countries. These, however, had little influence on university theology since the latter had developed in a direction far removed from the spiritual experience at the base of patristic and early medieval theology. The tension between spirituality and academic theology was felt at the very founding of the universities in Western culture. What began as a tension soon became a split and eventually an abyss. By the later Middle Ages, the abstract speculation of the schools had drifted far from its experiential moorings. To this day, it is doubtful if this split has been healed. Throughout the centuries, we have been re-enacting the stages of the drama of the antagonism between academic theology and spiritual experience. The tension at first was produced by Aristotelian philosophy, then nominalism; in the ninteenth and twentieth centuries by biblical criticism, scientific historical studies and, more recently, by the social sciences.

In the light of this perennial tension, I will explore three periods in the past where harmony existed between spirituality and theology. From each period I will draw a specific example of how spirituality served as a resource for Christology. I have chosen Christology because it is an area of controversy today. Spirituality has much to say to this controversy. For it can call attention to the experiential base of theology, which has been largely overlooked; secondly, it can draw enormous riches from the past which have unfortunately been ignored. Throughout the history of Christianity great spiritual writers have deeply experienced the mystery of Christ and have channelled this experience into their theology. By seeing spirituality as a resource for theology, we can appropriate this richness for our needs today. I am presenting these three case studies, then, not as museum pieces from a dead past, but as dynamic, living resources for the present. By drawing upon the spiritual resources of our past, we can deepen our theology in the present, enabling ourselves to enter more creatively into the emerging global spirituality and theology of the future.

I will begin with the early patristic period, in which Christian theology remained closely linked with spirituality. Influenced by Greek culture, Christian spirituality took the form of a "gnosis," a way of knowledge and wisdom. Into this spiritual quest it incorporated the emerging philosophy of Neoplatonism. Drawing also from biblical sources, it blended these elements to produce Christian theology in the East and the West. Thus at an early stage a link was forged between spiritual experience, philosophy, theology and mysticism which persisted through the Pseudo-Dionysius and into the Rhineland mystics. In Augustine we find the classic example of this integration in the patristic period of the West. From Augustine's Neoplatonic spirituality I will explore his experience of Christ as the interior Teacher of Wisdom.

The second period under examination will be the early Middle Ages in the West, characterized by what Jean Leclercq has identified as monastic theology.[1] This is a spiritually based, experiential theology, deeply rooted in the monastic lifestyle of liturgy, *lectio divina*, contemplation and the symbolic interpretation of Scripture. Monastic theology contrasts sharply with the scholastic theology developed in the medieval universities in the thirteenth century. This monastic theology reached its climax in the Cistercian movement of the twelfth century, especially in the experiential theology of Bernard of Clairvaux. For my case study of Christology, I will draw from Bernard's experience of Christ as interior Lover, which he explored through a symbolic interpretation of the Song of Songs.

The third period to be explored will be the thirteenth century, when devotion to the humanity of Christ emerged in the West in the Franciscan movement. This devotion to Christ's humanity had an enormous impact on the later Middle Ages and subsequent history. It led to *The Imitation of Christ* and *The Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola. In its early phase this Christ-centered spirituality was closely linked to theology, which it significantly influenced. For my case study, I will draw from Bonaventure's Franciscan devotion to the humanity of Christ, which led to a transformation of his trinitarian theological perspective into one of the most Christocentric visions in the history of theology.

NEOPLATONIC SPIRITUALITY

It is a commonplace that Christian theology was born out of a meeting of the Judaic-Christian experience with Greek philosophy. What is not so widely acknowledged is that at the beginning of Christianity, Greek philosophy itself was taking the form of a spiritual journey, a quest for spiritual wisdom. As Louis Bouyer states, "When Christianity was born, the Greek philosophies were turning into religious philosophies. They tended to go on, as by an irresistible transition, from the search for truth to the search for salvation. Or, to put it another way, the 'truth' that they were seeking at this period was precisely 'salvation.' "[2] This search for knowledge and wisdom was developed by Clement of Alexandria and his pupil Origen as a Christian "gnosis." In the Greek spirit, it was a search for truth, for *logos* which opened up the infinite, incomprehensible divine Logos. In his *17th Homily on Numbers*, Origen states:

> For those who labor at Wisdom and gnosis, as there is no end to their efforts—for where will be the limit of the Wisdom of God?—the more we approach it, the more depths we discover; the more we examine it, the more

[1] Cf. Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. by Catharine Misrahi (New York: Fordham University Press, 1974). pp. 233-86.

[2] Louis Bouyer, *History of Christian Spirituality*, Vol. I: *The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers*, trans. by Mary P. Ryan (New York: Seabury Press, 1977), p. 212.

> we understand its ineffable and incomprehensible character; for the Wisdom of God is incomprehensible and inestimable.[3]

Outside of the Christian community the philosophical journey was being shaped by Plotinus into a mystical ascent. This Neoplatonic philosophy-spirituality flowed into Christianity, becoming the common matrix of both Christian theology and the Christian spiritual journey. This fact is crucial for developing a typology of Christian spirituality and mysticism. Running through the history of Christianity is a highly speculative spirituality which cannot adequately be separated from speculative theology. In fact, the two interpenetrate so profoundly that they are almost identical. It is not surprising, then, that this intellectual spirituality should blossom in what has been termed speculative mysticism. A speculative mystical ascent is found, for example, in Origen, Gregory of Nyssa and the Pseudo-Dionysius; in Augustine, Bonaventure and the Rhineland mystics. In fact, there is a reason to claim that the most characteristic form of Christian mysticism is speculative. Such a claim undercuts the widespread assumption that spirituality deals exclusively with affectivity or devotion, or is concerned merely with growth processes, devoid of any intellectual content. On the contrary, intellectual reflection is precisely the praxis of this form of spirituality. The ascent is through speculation (*speculatio*, in the Latin term).[4] The journey is a journey of the soul, it is true, but the path is through intellect.

What is the experience at the base of this spirituality? It is the experience of the intellectual perception of truth, which is sought through the praxis of intellectual contemplation. Such a praxis does not consist of merely abstracting universal concepts or exercising technical reason. On the contrary, it plunges much deeper into the intellectual realm through a mysticism of *logos*, which experiences truth as light, as ultimate reality itself shining in the mind. This intellectual *praxis* of metaphysical and epistemological contemplation has its counterpart in Oriental spirituality: for example, in jñāna yoga, and the spiritual path of Hindu vedanta, especially the non-dualism of Śankara.

In this praxis, spirituality and systematic theology coincide, for they share the common path of intellectual contemplation. In this praxis also, experience and reflection coincide, making spirituality a resource for theology and theology a resource for spirituality. A graphic example of this spiritual praxis can be found in Augustine's journey into his soul, where he finds the light of Christ as Truth shining in his mind.

Augustine's Experience: Christ Within

At the beginning of his conversion Augustine turned his gaze within his soul, as he describes in Book VII of *The Confessions*: "I was

[3] Origen, *17th Homily on Numbers*, 4; cited in Bouyer, *op. cit.*, p. 297.

[4] Cf. the chapter heading of Bonaventure's *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, and the note on speculation in my translation: *Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God, The Tree of Life, The Life of St. Francis* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), p. 59.

admonished by all this to return to my own self, and, with you to guide me, I entered into the innermost part of myself, and I was able to do this because you were my helper."[5] His inner journey was inspired, he tells us, by his reading the book of the Platonists.[6] Within his soul Augustine perceives an unchangeable light: "I entered and I saw with my soul's eye (such as it was) an unchangeable light shining above this eye of my soul and above my mind." He identifies this light with God:

> It was higher than I, because it made me, and I was lower because I was made by it. He who knows truth knows that light, and he who knows that light knows eternity. Love knows it. O eternal truth and true love and beloved eternity! You are my God; to you I sigh by day and by night.[7]

Not only is Augustine's perception intellectual, but the praxis by which he arrived at it is also intellectual. Again in *The Confessions*, he probes his mind and asks himself "what criterion I had to make a correct judgment of changing things and to say: 'This is as it should be, this is not.' " When he considered how he came to make these judgments, he again "discovered that above my changing mind was the unchangeable and true eternity of truth." He then went by stages, as he said, from sensation to the soul and to intellect, until finally "in the flash of a trembling glance, my mind arrived at That Which Is."[8] By means of a similar praxis he and his mother together made an intellectual ascent in the mystical experience they shared at Ostia shortly before her death:

> Then, with our affections burning still more strongly toward the Selfsame, we raised ourselves higher and step by step passed over all material things, even the heaven itself from which sun and moon and stars shine down upon the earth. And still we went upward, meditating and speaking and looking with wonder at your works, and we came to our own souls, and we went beyond our souls to reach that region of never failing plenty where *Thou feedest Israel* forever with the food of truth and where life is that Wisdom by whom all things are made.... And as we talked, yearning toward this Wisdom, we did, with the whole strength of our heart's impulse, just lightly come into touch with her, and we sighed and we left bound there *the first fruits of the Spirit*.[9]

Augustine identifies the unchangeable light of Truth specifically with Christ as Logos. His treatise *On the Teacher* is oriented to showing that Christ is the Teacher within: *Christus intus docet*.[10] As the Word of the Father in the Trinity, the Son is the total expression of Truth. As the light of Truth shining in the minds of all men, Christ is the Teacher, through whose illumination, we know whatever we know. By following the light of this Truth, the guidance of this Teacher, we grow in Wisdom, for he himself is the fulness of divine Wisdom. For Augustine, then, the spiritual journey is a path into the human mind, using the mind itself as

[5] Augustine, *The Confessions*, VII, 10; English translation by Rex Warner, *The Confessions of St. Augustine* (New York: Mentor Book, 1963), p. 149.
[6] *Ibid.*, VII, 9.
[7] *Ibid.*, VII, 10; trans., p. 149.
[8] *Ibid.*, VII, 17; trans., pp. 153-54.
[9] *Ibid.*, IX, 10; trans., p. 201.
[10] Augustine, *On the Teacher*, 14.

the vehicle of the journey; but instead of remaining in the finite dimensions of the mind, the journey leads to that point where God is more intimate to him than he is to himself. The unchangeable light of Truth interpenetrates his changing mind; Christ as Logos resides within the very structures of his consciousness, teaching him Truth and guiding him in Wisdom, even when he is not aware of Christ's presence. This experience of Christ in the mind is integrally spiritual, philosophical, theological and mystical. Here in the depth of the mind spirituality and theology coincide. Between the experience and thought there is no gap, no separation, for the experience is of the divine Thought who is the personal expression of the Father.

MONASTIC THEOLOGY

We turn now from the patristic period to the period of monastic theology. As with Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Augustine, spirituality and theology interpenetrated in this monastic period. However, the tone of monastic theology was less speculative than that nourished directly by Neoplatonic philosophy. Jean Leclercq has identified the theology of this period as "monastic" to distinguish it from the later scholastic theology. It developed in the West in the Benedictine monasteries of the early Middle Ages and reached a high point in the Cistercian milieu of the twelfth century, especially in the work of Bernard of Clairvaux.[11] According to Leclercq, monastic theology appears more and more to be a prolongation of patristic theology.[12] It developed its distinctive form from the spirituality pursued in the monastic environment. As Leclercq says, "In the cloister, theology is studied in relation to monastic experience, a life of faith led in the monastery where religious thought and spiritual life, the pursuit of truth and the quest for perfection must go hand in hand and permeate each other."[13]

The fundamental characteristic of monastic theology is that it is based on experience, specifically the experience of spirituality. "A certain experience of the realities of faith," Leclercq writes, "a certain 'lived faith,' is at one and the same time the condition for and the result of monastic theology."[14] This experience is cultivated within the monastic environment and through the praxis of the monastic lifestyle. According to Leclerq, "monastic speculation is the outgrowth of the practice of monastic life, the living of the spiritual life which is the meditation on Holy Scripture."[15] As part of its contemplative praxis, monastic theology draws from Scripture, not for proof texts or for scientific exegesis, but to discover its spiritual meaning, which can be tapped for spiritual growth. The specific techniques of this praxis are meditative reading called *lectio divina* and the symbolic interpretation of Scripture

[11] Leclercq, *op. cit.*, pp. 233-86.
[12] *Ibid.*, p. 233.
[13] *Ibid.*, p. 245.
[14] *Ibid.*, p. 264.
[15] *Loc. cit.*

on the three levels of spiritual meaning: the allegorical, the moral and the anagogic. In characterizing monastic theology, Leclercq states: "Everything comes back finally to a problem of spirituality; what is important is the way in which the work of salvation becomes man's possession in his interior life."[16]

This rich orientation towards spiritual experience stands in sharp contrast to the attitude of scholastic theology towards experience. Scholastic theology, according to Leclercq, "puts experience aside. It can subsequently hark back to experience, observe that it agrees with its own reasonings, and that it can even receive nourishment from them; but its reflection is not rooted in experience and is not necessarily directed towards it."[17]

Reflection on spiritual experience issues in monastic theology. The type of knowledge the monk was seeking did not differ from that sought in the practice of Greek "gnosis" which we explored in our previous section. Leclercq observes:

> On the whole, the monastic approach to theology, the kind of religious understanding the monks are trying to attain, might better be described by reviving the word *gnosis*—on condition naturally that no heterodox nuance be given it. The Christian *gnosis*, the 'true *gnosis*' in its original, fundamental and orthodox meaning is that kind of higher knowledge which is the complement, the fruition of faith and which reaches completion in prayer and contemplation.[18]

Bernard: Christ as Interior Lover

In Bernard of Clairvaux, monastic theology achieves its most eloquent expression. In his *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, he draws together the main themes of monastic theology, presenting a comprehensive treatise on spiritual growth by means of the symbolic interpretation of Scripture. His focus is on experience, affectivity and Christ as the Bridegroom of the soul, the interior Lover who at the height of the spiritual ascent embraces the soul with "the kiss of the mouth."[19]

In his *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, Bernard takes his point of departure from the opening verse: "Let him kiss me with the kiss of the mouth."[20] In monastic fashion he tells his monks who form his audience: "Today the text we are to study is the book of our own experience."[21] But he reads the book of his experience in the light of the book of Scripture, which he interprets symbolically in order to evoke and deepen his experience. In the classical tradition of Origen's commentary, he interprets the bride as the soul and the bridegroom as Christ. He explains his approach in an eloquent passage:

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 275.
[17] *Ibid.*, p. 278.
[18] *Ibid.*, p. 266.
[19] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, 2-4.
[20] Song of Songs, 1:1.
[21] Bernard of Clairvaux, *op. cit.*, 3:1; English translation by Kilian Walsh, *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux*, Vol. II: *Song of Songs I* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1979), p. 16.

> 'Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth,' she said. Now who is this 'she'? The bride. But why bride? Because she is the soul thirsting for God. In order to clarify for you the characteristics of the bride, I shall deal briefly with the diverse affective relationships between persons. Fear motivates a slave's attitude to his master, gain that of a wage-earner to his employer, the learner is attentive to his teacher, the son is respectful to his father. But the one who asks for a kiss, she is a lover. Among all the natural endowments of man love holds first place, especially when it is directed to God, who is the source whence it comes. No sweeter names can be found to embody that sweet interflow of affections between the Word and the soul, than bridegroom and bride.[22]

Bernard leads the soul through three kisses: the kiss of the feet, the kiss of the hands and the kiss of the mouth. These kisses symbolize the three stages of the spiritual life: purgative, illuminative and unitive. For the kiss of the feet symbolizes conversion, repentance and humility; the kiss of the hands, growth in virtue; the kiss of the mouth, mystical union with Christ the Beloved. This final stage Bernard describes from his own experience:

> I confess to you I have many times received the visits of the Word. I could not perceive the exact moment of his arrival. He did not enter by the senses, but whence did he come? Perhaps he did not enter at all, for he who enters comes from without. But I found him closer to me than I to myself. How can I perceive his presence within me? It is full of life and efficacy, and no sooner has he entered than my sluggish soul is awakened. He moves and warms and wounds my heart, hard and stony and sick though it be. It is solely by the movement of my heart that I understand that he is there, and I realize the power of his action when I see my evil tendencies disappear and my carnal affections quieted. . . . Once he leaves, everything falls back into slumber, all grows cold like a boiling pot of oil withdrawn from the fire.[23]

What does this mean for theology, specifically for Christology? It means that Christ is in the depths of the soul, at the roots of our subjectivity and the very center of our person. This is not primarily the incarnate Christ, but Christ as Logos, who penetrates our being with his presence and at times manifests himself in his power and love. Augustine finds Christ as Truth in the structure of the mind; Bernard finds Christ as Love in the dynamics of our affectivity. With Augustine through the praxis of "gnosis," we can reach this ground and be united to it as Truth and Wisdom. With Bernard through the praxis of love, we can reach this ground and be embraced by it in a union that is best described as a mystical marriage.

Both contemporary spirituality and contemporary theology can be enriched by Augustine and Bernard. For example, contemporary spirituality has been deeply influenced by depth psychology, from which it has drawn many resources. Yet depth psychology has set limits beyond which it will not pass; except for C. G. Jung, psychology has not explored the presence of the Christ archtype in the soul. Contemporary spirituality has been reticent; it has failed to take the lead and plunge

[22] *Ibid.*, 7:2; trans., pp. 38-39.
[23] *Ibid.*, 74:6f; trans., xxi.

boldly into the depth of interiority where Augustine and Bernard have discovered Christ. Perhaps it has held back because theology has not offered guidance. How many centuries have passed since theologians have seriously studied the mystery of Christ as interior Teacher and as interior Lover? If Christianity is to have a significant encounter with Oriental traditions, which for millenia have exercised varieties of a sophisticated praxis of interiority, it cannot ignore its own heritage which sees Christ at the very center of interiority.

DEVOTION TO THE HUMANITY OF CHRIST

In the history of Christianity one of the most significant developments was the emergence of devotion to the humanity of Christ during the High Middle Ages. Rooted in the West's sensitivity to the particular, the historical and the human, this devotion developed comparatively late in the history of Christianity. In the first millenium, Christ as Logos, as Pantocrator and Risen Savior dominated art, spirituality and theology. Through the centuries in western Europe, devotion to Christ's humanity germinated slowly. It was nourished by pilgrimages, by shrines housing relics, by the religious motivation of the crusades: to recapture the Holy Places where Jesus was born, walked the roads, preached, suffered and died. Relics of Jesus's historical existence were brought triumphantly to Europe: the true cross, the crown of thorns.

In the twelfth century within the monastic ethos, the focus of spirituality began to center on the human Christ, as can be seen in the *Meditations* attributed to Anselm and in Bernard of Clairvaux's cultivation of "the carnal love of Christ." However, it was Francis of Assisi who brought this devotion to its full flowering in the thirteenth century. Inspired to imitate Christ as fully as possible, Francis embraced what he discerned to be the gospel lifestyle of radical poverty. With tenderness and charm, he awakened devotion to the infant Jesus by creating a crib at midnight Mass at Greccio in 1223. Devotion to Christ's passion received its most dramatic expression when in 1224, two years before his death, Francis received the gift of the stigmata, the first recorded case in history.

The praxis of this devotion consisted of meditating on the historical events of Christ's life in such a way that one imagined the scene, entering into it as an actor in the drama. Out of this would come consciousness of Christ's virtues to be imitated in one's own life. Examples of this meditation can be found in Bonaventure's *The Tree of Life*, and the *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, formerly attributed to Bonaventure. Influenced by this tradition through the latter work, Ignatius of Loyola imparted to the praxis an organized method and detailed techniques. This praxis of meditation overflowed to a praxis of action: for example, the choice of the religious life, radical poverty, apostolic work. In such cases the ultimate motivation was always the imitation of Christ, especially compassion for the suffering Savior.

The relation of this devotion to theology is complex. It arose at the very time that scholastic theology developed in the universities. The

split between spiritual experience and academic theology was, in fact, widened by its emergence. The human emotions of tenderness and compassion, cultivated by the devotion, were even farther removed from the abstractions of the universities than was the mystical affectivity of monastic spirituality. There was, however, an exception in the early Franciscan school. Although based at the University of Paris, the early Franciscan theologians—Alexander of Hales and Bonaventure—were nourished by the twelfth-century monastic theology of the Victorines and Bernard of Clairvaux. In the case of Bonaventure, Franciscan devotion to the humanity of Christ was assimilated into his academic theology, issuing in a comprehensive Christocentric vision. In the next generation, this Franciscan devotion reached a high level of theological formulation in Duns Scotus's affirmation of the primacy of the incarnate Christ in creation.

Bonaventure: Christ the Center

It is interesting to trace the evolution of Christocentricity in Bonaventure's theology. His first period, at the University of Paris, is marked by a blending of monastic theology and the scholastic method. Strongly influenced by Augustine and the twelfth-century monastic theology of the Victorines, he develops a comprehensive theological system based on a dynamic notion of the Trinity and Platonic exemplarism. There is little emphasis on the humanity of Christ in shaping this vision. However, in his second period, when he composed his spiritual works, Francis and the devotion to the humanity of Christ have a central role, although he does not integrate this systematically into his theology. The turning point of his life came when he went to the mountain of La Verna in 1259. While meditating on the vision which Francis had seen thirty-five years before when he received the stigmata in that very place, he grasped its symbolic meaning. This was a vision of a six-winged Seraph in the form of the Crucified. The image of Christ crucified penetrated Bonaventure's spirituality. He saw it as the gateway into the spiritual journey. In the prologue of his treatise *The Soul's Journey into God*, he writes: "There is no other path but through the burning love of the Crucified.... This love so absorbed the soul of Francis that his spirit shone through his flesh when for two years before his death he carried in his body the sacred stigmata of the passion."[24] Shortly after writing this, he composed his series of meditations on the life of Christ entitled *The Tree of Life*, where meditation on the humanity of Christ, with emphasis on the passion, is the gateway into growth in the life of virtue. During the same period, he composed his biography of Francis in which he presents his patron as a most intimate imitator of Christ, precisely through his humanity.

In the third period, when he was engaged in controversies over Averroism at the University of Paris, the humanity of Christ transforms the structure of his theological system. Christ now becomes central; in fact, he uses the notion of Christ the center (*Christus medium*) as the

[24] Bonaventure, *op. cit.*, prol. 3; trans., pp. 54-55.

architectonic paradigm for his final theological *summa*: *The Collations on the Hexaemeron*. In the first of these lectures, which serves as an overture for a series of more than twenty lectures, he develops the theme: Christ the Center of All the Sciences (*Christus medium omnium scientiarum*). Christ is the metaphysical center, the physical center, the mathematical center, the logical center, the ethical center, the political center, the theological center. As center of these sciences, he is the center of the total reality studied by these sciences.

Christ is the metaphysical center in his eternal generation. Bonaventure refers to him as the central or middle person in the Trinity (*persona media*). Through exemplarism, we all come forth from this center, reflect this center and return to this center. Therefore, Bonaventure observes, each one of us should say:

> Lord, I have gone forth from you, who are supreme; I come to you, who are supreme, and through you, who are supreme. This is the metaphysical center that leads us back, and this is our whole metaphysics: emanation, exemplarity and consummation; that is, to be illumined by spiritual rays and to be led back to the supreme height. Thus you will be a true metaphysician.[25]

Christ is the physical center in his incarnation, since as a human person he is the microcosm of the physical world, embodying in himself the realms of the inorganic, vegetable, animal and rational. He is the mathematical center in his crucifixion. Just as the mathematician measures extremes, Christ measured the extremes of humility and suffering to bring about our redemption. "How great is the divine wisdom," Bonaventure states, "which worked out our salvation through the ashes of humility. For when the center of a circle is lost, it can be found only by two lines intersecting at right angles."[26]

Christ is the logical center in his resurrection. He is the middle term of a cosmic syllogism, linking the divine and the human. Bonaventure envisions a debate between Christ and Satan on the model of a scholastic disputation. Satan has deceived Adam with his deceptive logic, promising life and giving death. Christ subsumes the minor of Satan's syllogism, transforming its destructive logic into a creative conclusion. Out of his death on the cross, he brings forth the conclusion of his resurrection.

Christ is the ethical center in his ascension, since he leads men with him back to heaven through a life of virtue. He is the political or juridical center in his final judgment, for then he will establish the order of justice in the universe. Finally he is the theological center in the beatific vision, for he is the middle person in the Trinity, who draws us back to union with the Father.

Around the notion of Christ the center, Bonaventure has constructed an entire theological vision, which he proceeds to examine in detail throughout the subsequent lectures. He has produced one of the most thorough-going Christocentric systems in the history of Christian

[25] Bonaventure, *Hexaemeron*, I, 17: the English translation is my own.
[26] *Hexaemeron*, I, 24.

theology. But what is more significant for our purposes is the fact that this system was shaped by his devotion to the humanity of Christ. A spiritual-mystical devotion to Christ's humanity has led him to see the entire universe in Christocentric terms. Into this vision he integrates explicitly Augustine's experience of Christ the interior Teacher and Bernard's experience of Christ the interior Lover. For Bonaventure the humanity of Christ is not separated from Christ the Logos or the cosmic Christ.

This is a crucial point for contemporary spirituality and contemporary theology, which have focused heavily on the humanity of Christ. But both have a tendency to see the humanity in isolation from the other aspects of the mystery of Christ. Unlike the case of the interior Christ, there has been in Teilhard de Chardin a contemporary spokesman for a cosmic Christocentricity not unlike that of Bonaventure. However, in Teilhard's case, it is precisely the historical Jesus, in his humanity, that is not adequately treated in his theological vision. On this point, both contemporary spirituality and contemporary theology can learn from the early Franciscan movement, where devotion to the humanity of Christ was the very path into the fullness of the mystery of Christ.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we return to the question: Can spirituality—as experience and praxis—provide resources for theology? Contemporary spirituality and theology can learn from those periods in the past when creative energy flowed harmoniously between the two. The three areas of spiritual experience which we have studied—drawn from Augustine, Bernard and Bonaventure—provide resources, it is true, but first they present challenges. They challenge contemporary spirituality to deepen itself, by rooting itself more firmly in its classical heritage, thus appropriating to itself more abundantly the riches of the Christian experience. They challenge contemporary theology to examine its presuppositions so that it can more readily open itself to spiritual experience as a resource for its own enterprises. More specifically, they challenge contemporary Christology to become more experiential: to break out of the narrow confines of its current horizons and open itself to the breadth and the length, the height and the depth of the Christian experience of the mystery of Christ. This is all the more urgent now as Christianity faces the power of the Hindu and Buddhist experiences.

If contemporary spirituality and theology can respond to these challenges, then spirituality indeed can be a resource for theology and lead to the emergence of new meaning in theology. What that meaning will be is yet to be manifested. Yet the lines are already clear: it will be global, encompassing world religions, subsuming into itself all the multi-dimensional aspects of the secular world and the human. Theology cannot respond to this overwhelming task without the creative energies that surge from spirituality.

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