

Living as an Episcopalian 4. Spirituality

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1. What is Spirituality?

1.1. Definition

What do we mean by "Spirituality"?

We can achieve intellectual knowledge of:

- the creed
- the catechism
- stories of the bible
- works of biblical criticism
- systematic theologies
- the reality of death, the transience of our lives

We must then ask:

- how do we "take to heart" the implications of this knowledge for our lives and the world?
- how do we illuminate the "world of our inner lives" with the "light" of this heartfelt knowledge?

- how do we change the patterns of our daily lives, our sense of time and space, to reflect this heartfelt knowledge?

Spirituality can be thought of as the quest to make make our intellectual knowledge truly heartfelt.

1.2. Quotes: What is Spirituality?

“the quest for a fulfilled and authentic Christian existence, involving bringing together:

- the fundamental ideas of Christianity
- the whole experience of living”

- Alister McGrath. **Christian Spirituality**

“ . . . fundamentally, spirituality has to do with becoming a person in the fullest sense, . . . ”

- John Macquarrie, **Spirit and Spirituality**

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

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

"Spirituality is a lived experience, the effort to apply relevant elements in the deposit of Christian faith to the:

- guidance of men and women towards their spiritual growth
- the progressive development of their persons which flowers into a proportionately increased insight and joy"

- George Ganss, **Introduction to Ignatius of Loyola**

2. Theology and Spirituality

2.1. Heartfelt Theology Can Change Our Lives

Many theological doctrines and beliefs can change our attitudes, our view of the world, and our lives if they are "heartfelt." These include:

- creation
- the Incarnation
- the Trinity
- redemption
- the Resurrection
- consummation of all things
- the sacraments; a sacramental universe

2.2. Creation

Implications of the Christian theology of the Creation:

- creation is good
- there is no need to "withdraw" from the world
- it is important to care for creation
- something of God may be known through the creation
- the wonder evoked by creation is not accidental
- the study of creation is worthy and noble
- human nature:
 - human beings are created "in the image of God"
 - human beings are made by God and for God: **"You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in you."** (St. Augustine)
 - it is impossible to be fully human without acknowledging God as creator and redeemer

2.3. The Incarnation

2.3.1 Introduction

God entered our world and became fully human.
“Incarnation” is from the Latin, “being in the flesh”

The Christian theology of the Incarnation has implications for:

- our knowledge of God
- the suffering of God
- the goodness of flesh and blood, the human body
- human destiny

2.3.2. Implications for Our Knowledge of God

What is God like?

- Jesus is the “image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15)
- To encounter Jesus is to encounter God
- In the Eastern church: justifies use of icons to help visualize the divine

2.3.3. Implications for the Suffering of God

Can God Suffer?

- In becoming human, God has experienced human pain and suffering
- We can turn to God knowing that God has experienced first hand human suffering

2.3.4. Implications for Human Destiny

For Eastern Christianity, God became human so we can someday become divine

Maximus the Confessor (580-662):

- each human being is an image of the divine logos
- purpose of human nature is to acquire similitude with God. That is: the movement of human kind is towards communion with God or “deification”

2.4. The Trinity

2.4.1. Introduction

The Christian theology of the Trinity tells us:

- The Godhead is a community of being
- All is shared, united, mutually exchanged
- Father, Son, Spirit are differentiations within the Godhead, evident in the human experience of grace and redemption

The Trinity has implications for:

- 1. the way we comprehend God
- 2. the way we view prayer

2.4.2. Trinity and The Nature of God

“if you can comprehend it, it is not God”

- St. Augustine

St. Augustine here summarizes our complex understanding and wonder of God. The Trinity:

- preserves the mystery, majesty and glory of God
- its **“mystery is like a cliff: we may not be able to scale it, but we can stand at the foot of it, touch it, praise its beauty. So it is with the mystery of the Trinity.”** (Leonardo Boff,

Brazilian liberation theologian)

2.4.3. *Trinity and The Nature of Prayer*

Our prayer and worship often involves trinitarian framework

- “through the Son”
- “in the Spirit”

This framework expresses that prayer:

- is not a purely human activity, but
- involves the Holy Spirit moving, prompting the believer to turn to God

2.5. Redemption

There are four central themes/facets of the Christian theology of the redemption:

- the cross as sacrifice
- the cross as victory
- the forgiveness of sins through the cross
- the love expressed by Jesus dying for us on the cross

Redemption stresses for us:

- the costliness of human salvation
- the reality of human sin and the love of God for sinners

2.6. Resurrection

The Christian theology of the Resurrection:

- means Jesus is risen Savior and Lord
- affirms belief we will be raised from the dead, that death has been conquered

The Troparion of Easter in the Byzantine liturgy expresses this eloquently:

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

2.7. The Consummation of All Things

The Christian theology of the consummation of all things in a heavenly Jerusalem reminds us of:

- the destination of our earthly pilgrimage
- the promised land

We can look forward to the “beatific vision” of God:

- to see God face to face
- impossible now, just as it is impossible to look directly at the sun

2.8. A Sacramental Universe

The duality of our experience in this world:

- we are embodied beings existing in a very material world
- we can feel intimations of beauty, mystery, meaning through this material world (a bush, a flower, a sunset. . .)

A “sacramental” view of the universe links the two pieces of this duality:

- the material world is good

- the material world can be “door to the sacred”

The fundamental basis of a Sacramental View of the Universe is that:

1. *the material world is good:*

- created by God
- in the Incarnation, God freely took on embodied existence, lived in space and time

2. *the material world can be a door to the sacred:*

- God is both:
 - *transcendent* reality beyond the world he has made
 - *immanent* reality who dwells in this world and is active in it

2.9. The Themes of Anglican Spirituality

Anglican Spirituality has in particular emphasized:

- creation
- the Incarnation
- the sacramental universe

These emphases reflect the Anglican conviction that:

- nature has an inherent goodness (creation; sacramental universe)
- sin is often the misuse of good things
- Christian faith is concerned for the whole of life (“body” and “soul”) (Incarnation)
- our purpose is to seek God’s glory, not just avoid sin

3. The Bible and Spirituality

3.1. Reading the Bible

We should consider four stages in reading the bible (as described by Guigo II, prior of the Grand Chartreuse, d. 1188):

- 1. reading (*lectio*)
 - begin an encounter with God
- 2. meditation (*meditatio*)
 - focus, concentrate upon meaning, imagery
- 3. prayer (*oratio*)
 - the appropriate response to our encounter
- 4. contemplation (*contemplatio*)
 - our entrance into the presence of God

3.2. Biblical Images

3.2.1. Mental Images and Themes for Spirituality

The scriptures give us many mental images and themes to contemplate:

- the feast
- the journey
- the exile
- the struggle
- purification
- the desert
- ascent
- darkness and light
- silence

3.2.2. *The Feast*

The kingdom of God is like a feast:

- a great banquet thrown in celebration of
 - a marriage (Luke 14:15-24)
 - the return of a prodigal son (Luke 15:11-24)

It suggests:

- an abundance satisfying human hunger
- invitation
- celebration and rejoicing

3.2.3. *The Journey*

The theme of Journey is seen in:

- the wandering of the Israelites in the desert before entering the Promised land
- the return to Jerusalem after years of exile in Babylon

Early Christians were called "followers of the way" (Act 9:2, 24:14).

We too are followers of the way and our lives are journeys to the heavenly kingdom.

3.2.4. *Exile*

In the Old Testament, the Jews were exiled in Babylon after the capture of Jerusalem 586 BC.

In the New Testament, Paul reminds us that:

- Christians are "citizens of heaven" (our true home)
- Life on this earth therefore is a period of exile from the heavenly Jerusalem

3.2.5. *The Struggle*

The struggle of being a Christian can involve external struggles against foes of Christianity, our own internal struggle with temptation, as well as our own "wrestling" with God. We find all of these in the Scripture:

- "putting on the full armor of God" (Ephesians 6:10-18); Christians like soldiers (2 Timothy 2:3):
 - 1 external struggle against those hostile to Christianity
 - 2. internal struggle against temptation
- Jacob's wrestling with an angel (Genesis 32:22-32):
 - 3. struggle with God

3.2.6. *Spiritual Purification*

Images in Scripture of the need for purification include:

- Day of Atonement ritual (Leviticus 16). Preparation needed before entering into the presence of God
- the need for cleansing from sin (Psalm 51:2, 7)
- Revelations 7:14: "being washed in the blood of the Lamb"
- the use of water in the sacrament of baptism

3.2.7. *The Desert or Wilderness*

Images of wilderness in the Scripture include:

- the wandering of Israel in the desert wilderness
- John the Baptist in the wilderness
- Jesus' withdrawal to the wilderness for 40 days

The wilderness or desert can move us to:

- seek retreat from the world's distraction and temptation; place to focus on God and spiritual life

- contemplate life as a wandering through a desert wilderness

3.2.8. Ascent

Biblical images of ascent include:

- Moses ascending Sinai to receive the law
- Jesus ascending mountain for the transfiguration
- Jacob's dream of a ladder between heaven and earth

Ascent as a symbol of transcendence has been the theme of great works of Christian spirituality:

- St. John of the Cross (1542-91). *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*
- Thomas Merton. *Seven Storey Mountain*

3.2.9. Darkness and Light

Images of darkness and light in the scripture include:

- At creation: darkness = chaos and confusion
- God's presence and power as illumination
 - Isaiah 9:2 "people who walked in darkness see a great light"
 - John 8:12: Jesus the light of the world
- Moses approaches God through darkness and cloud
- Paul: we are "seeing through a glass darkly." Suggests darkness:
 - as an image of doubt
 - as a symbol of sin
 - as a symbol of divine unknowability

3.2.10. Silence

Images of silence before God in Scripture:

- Habakkuk 2:20: whole earth should be silent in the presence of the Lord in the temple
- Job 40:1-3: Job reduced to silence, aware of his foolishness in the sight of God
- Revelations 8:1: "silence in heaven"

Humanity is reduced to silence confronted with the majesty and awe of God

A movement of spirituality in the Eastern Christianity called *hesychasm* arose in the 8th century:

- *hesychia* = tranquillity and silence
- called for an inward silence to focus on God
- involved the "Jesus prayer:" "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me" (Luke 18:38)
- Gregory Palamas (1294-1346) wrote: allowed a vision of the "divine energies;" divine essence beyond human reach

4. The Rhythms of Faith

4.1. Structuring Time

4.1.1. The Christian Week

Sunday:

- day on which resurrection of Jesus celebrated
- "space" set aside for physical rest and spiritual refreshment

Wednesdays and Fridays: "fast days" in early Christian communities

- Wed: day Christ betrayed
- Fri: day Christ crucified

4.1.2. The Christian Year

Advent:

- focuses on two “advents” or comings of Jesus:
- in humility, as an infant
- second coming in glory

Christmas:

- celebration of the birth of Jesus, the Incarnation

Lent:

- preparation for Easter
- period of repentance
- 40 days reflects Jesus’ time in the wilderness before his public ministry

Easter:

- Jesus is Lord
- death conquered; Christian hope for a personal resurrection

4.1.3. The Christian Day

Monasticism had the goal of continuous prayer; “habitual recollection:” a constant sense of God’s presence in the whole of life.

The day was structured into 7 times of prayer (“offices”) during day and one time at night:

- Mattins
- Vespers
- terce (latin for third)
- sext (latin for sixth)
- none (latin for ninth)
- Compline (final time of prayer before bed)
- Prime (early morning prayer)

The 1979 Book of Common Prayer has “offices” for four times during the day

4.2. Liturgy and Prayer

theology ↔ worship and prayer

lex orandi, lex credendi. The way you pray shapes what you believe (and visa versa)

Prayer is “responding to God, by thought and by deeds, with or without words”

The kinds or types of prayer include:

- adoration
- praise
- thanksgiving
- penitence
- oblation
- intercession
- petition
- “centering” prayer

5. Community and Spirituality

Anglican spirituality includes a sense of the church as “corporate, liturgical, sacramental,” a community of members who:

- find their center in common worship
- go out into the world to serve according to the gifts and opportunities given them

This sense is based on:

- an Incarnational faith
- the goodness of creation (creation = a pouring out of the being of God)
- a sacramental view of the universe

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