Chapter 1

What is Spirituality?

In her classic book, *Mysticism: The Nature and Development of Human Consciousness*, Evelyn Underhill suggests that human beings are vision-creating beings rather than merely tool-making animals.[1] In other words, they are driven by goals that are more than mere physical perfection or intellectual supremacy. Humans desire what might be called spiritual fulfillment. For this reason, an enduring interest in spirituality should not surprise us.

This book is intended to be a guide for the historical study of Christian spirituality. However, at the outset this raises a basic question about what exactly we intend to explore. If the history of "spirituality" is not simply coterminous with general religious or cultural history, what does it cover? Clearly, "spirituality" is an influential category within the overall history of a religion such as Christianity and, indeed, of wider culture. It both has an impact on culture and is also influenced by it. However, even if the concept of "spirituality" is not entirely free-standing, it still needs to be distinguished from broad historical studies of Christianity. These will discuss religious institutions such as the papacy, or movements such as the Reformation, or the interaction between the Church and political or social events (e.g. the role of the Church in the medieval crusades or nineteenth-century social reform movements), or the overall impact of Christianity on wider culture (e.g. its relationship to the arts).

With these exclusions in mind, a history of Christian "spirituality" is likely to cover those people, movements, texts, or artifacts as well as practices that relate directly to the promotion of wisdom about how to lead a "spiritual life." This history will cover both how such a

life has been understood and also how it has been practiced at different times and in different places.

Origins of the Word "Spirituality"

The origins of the word "spirituality" lie in the Latin noun *spiritualitas* associated with the adjective *spiritualis* (spiritual). These ultimately derive from the Greek noun *pneuma*, spirit, and the adjective *pneumatikos* as they appear in St Paul's letters in the New Testament. It is important to note that, in this context, "spirit" and "spiritual" are not the opposite of "physical" or "material" (Greek *soma*, Latin *corpus*) but of "flesh" (Greek *sarx*, Latin *caro*), which refers to everything that is contrary to the Spirit of God. The intended contrast is not therefore between body and soul but between two vastly different attitudes to life. Thus, a "spiritual person" (see 1 Cor 2, 14–15) was simply someone within whom the Spirit of God dwelt or who lived under the influence of the Spirit of God.

This Pauline moral sense of "spiritual," meaning "life in the Spirit," remained in constant use in the West until the twelfth century. At that time, under the influence of the "new theology" of scholasticism, influenced by Greek philosophy, the concept of "spiritual" began to be used as a way of distinguishing intelligent humanity from non-rational creation. Yet, the Pauline moral sense and the supra-material sense of "spiritual" continued side by side in the thirteenth-century writings of a theologian like St Thomas Aquinas. Interestingly, the noun "spirituality" (*spiritualitas*) during the Middle Ages most frequently referred to the clerical state. So "the spirituality" was "the clergy." The noun only became established in reference to "the spiritual life" in seventeenth-century France – sometimes in a pejorative sense. It then disappeared from theological circles until the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries when it again appeared in French in positive references to the "spiritual life" as the heart of Christian existence. It then passed into English via translations of French writings.

The use of the word "spirituality" as an area of Christian study gradually re-emerged during the twentieth century, but it was only after the Second Vatican Council in the early 1960s that it began to dominate and to replace older terms such as ascetical theology or mystical theology. The emergence of "spirituality" as the preferred term to describe studies of the Christian life increased after the Council until it was the dominant term from the 1970s onwards. This expressed an implicit shift in values.

First, it countered older distinctions between a supernatural, spiritual life and our purely natural, everyday one. Second, it recovered a sense that "the spiritual life" was collective in nature rather than predominantly individual. Third, it was not limited to personal interiority but integrated all aspects of human experience. Fourth, it re-engaged with mainstream theology, not least biblical studies. Finally, it became an area of reflection that crossed the boundaries between different Christian traditions and was often a medium for ecumenical growth. By the end of the twentieth century, this had extended further into the wider ecumenism of interfaith dialogue.

Contemporary Meaning

"Spirituality" is a word that defines our era. A fascination with "spirituality," often contrasted favorably with "religion," is a striking feature of our times and is presumed to be open to everyone. So, in broad terms, how is "spirituality" defined today? The answer is not simple because the word is used in such a wide range of different contexts. However, contemporary literature on "spirituality" regularly includes some or all of the following approaches.

First, spirituality concerns what is holistic – that is, a fully integrated approach to life. The basis for this lies in the fact that historically the concept of "the spiritual" relates to another concept, "the holy." This translates the Old English *hālig*, "whole" or "complete," and is also related to the ancient Greek *holos*. In this sense, "spirituality" is best understood not so much as one element among many in human existence but as the integrating factor in life – attending to "life-as-a-whole." Second, in contemporary understanding, spirituality is also engaged with a quest for the "sacred." The "sacred" in religious spiritualities such as Christianity is closely related to beliefs about God but in wider culture also nowadays refers to rather broad understandings of the numinous (sometimes embodied in nature or in the arts), the undefined depths of human existence or to the boundless mysteries of the cosmos. Third, spirituality is frequently understood to involve a quest for meaning, including the purpose of life, and for a sense of life direction. This association with meaning and purpose is in many ways a response to the decline of traditional religious or social authorities, particularly in Western cultures. Because of its association with meaning, contemporary spirituality implicitly suggests an understanding of human identity and of personality development. An interesting example of the way this has been

applied was the concept of "spiritual development" in some 2004 documentation for English secondary schools produced by the UK Office for Standards in Education. In this context, "spirituality" is defined as "the development of the non-material element of a human being, which animates and sustains us." The purpose of including this in the school curriculum is: "…about the development of a sense of identity, self-worth, personal insight, meaning and purpose. It is about the development of a pupil's 'spirit'."[2] "Spirituality" is also regularly linked to the concept of "thriving" – what it means for humans to thrive and how we come to thrive. Finally, contemporary definitions of spirituality often relate it to the quest for ultimate values in contrast to an instrumentalized or purely materialistic approach to life. Thus, "spirituality" not only suggests a self-reflective life rather than an unexamined life but also overlaps in significant ways with ethics and moral vision.

These contemporary approaches to spirituality provoke some critical questions. First of all, is spirituality essentially a personal or even an individualistic matter or is it also inherently social? Interestingly, on the Web, the majority of available definitions of spirituality emphasize inner experience, introspection, a subjective journey, personal well-being, inner harmony or happiness. Here, spirituality does not connect strongly with our social existence. This also provokes another question as to whether spirituality is more than another useful form of therapy – concerned with promoting everything that is comforting and consoling. In other words, can there be such a thing as "tough" spirituality and is spirituality capable of confronting the destructive side of human existence?

Some critical commentators on the contemporary phenomenon of spirituality, such as Jeremy Carrette, are deeply skeptical about these developments, suggesting that the current enthusiasm for "spirituality" is nothing more than another off-shoot of consumerism.[3] There is considerable justification for this assertion in consumerist "lifestyle spirituality" that promotes fitness, healthy living and holistic well-being. However, at the beginning of the new millennium there are also signs that the word "spirituality" is expanding beyond an individualistic quest for self-realization. It increasingly appears in debates about public values, the further development of professional fields, or the transformation of social structures – for example, in reference to healthcare, education, business and economics, the arts and more recently the re-enchantment of cities and urban life, and even the need to recover a sense of the "spiritual" in politics. Academically, "spirituality" has now begun to appear in disciplines well beyond the confines of theology or religious

studies such as philosophy, psychology, and the social sciences.[4] This means that even a specialist area of study such as Christian spirituality must take note of many disciplines, methodologies, and domains of practice.[5]

The contemporary interest in spirituality is part of a broader process of cultural change during the late twentieth century. For a range of reasons, inherited religious and social identities or value-systems were seriously questioned. As a result, many people no longer see traditional religion as an adequate channel for their spiritual quest and look for new sources of self-orientation. Thus, "spirituality" has become an alternative way of exploring the deepest self and the ultimate purpose of life. Overall, the spiritual quest has increasingly moved away from outer-directed authority to inner-directed experience which is seen as more reliable. This subjective turn in Western culture has created a diverse approach to spiritual experience and practice. Nowadays, spirituality frequently draws from different religious traditions as well as from popular psychology.

People who no longer call themselves "religious" often wish to describe themselves as "spiritual." They express this in the values they espouse and the practices they undertake to pursue a meaningful life. Two British examples illustrate this. A major survey by David Hay, an academic scientist with a long-standing interest in spiritual experience, covered the period from 1987 to 2000. It showed that the proportion of people who did not attend a place of worship yet believed in a "spiritual reality" increased from 29% to 55%. Some years later, sociologists Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead researched contemporary religious and spiritual attitudes in North West England. They concluded that what they called "holistic spirituality" was gradually replacing religion in an evolutionary development because it was a better fit with contemporary needs. The problem with this developmental interpretation is that it operates within very specific boundaries. If the study of history teaches us anything, it is that making such assumptions about a complete rupture with the past, in this case a religious past, is a risky move. Even the ways we perceive the present moment are ambiguous. While, in terms of Western societies, it may be true that increasing numbers of people in non-traditional settings explore a diversity of spiritual theories, experiences, and practices, it is also true that other often young and intelligent people are converting to very conservative forms of Christianity or Islam as their answer to the problem of ultimate meaning in what they feel to be a confusing and dangerous world. If we move beyond Western cultures to take into account Asia, Africa,

and Latin America, assessments of the definitive death of conventional religion are even more questionable.

When we turn to people in Western countries who continue to identify with Christianity, we see that they too increasingly adopt a mixture of spiritual genres and borrow from across the boundaries not only of spiritual traditions but also of religious faiths. For example, the Dutch social anthropologist Peter Versteeg has analyzed the current work of Roman Catholic spirituality centers in the Netherlands. These have created an interesting place for themselves on the religious-spiritual landscape, positioned somewhere between the institutional Church and the world of alternative spiritualities. The qualifying adjective "Christian" may only refer to the fact that such centers have a Christian origin. However, what is on offer is frequently identified simply as "spirituality" without any explicit reference to Christian beliefs.[6] A similar eclecticism may be detected in the programmes of many Christian retreat houses and spirituality centers throughout the Western world.

This approach to spirituality among contemporary Christians raises complex questions about how we understand the way a religious tradition such as Christianity functions in radically plural contexts. The French social scientist and expert on Islam, Olivier Roy, borrows the word *formatage* or "formatting" from computer language in his analysis of the process whereby religions and their spiritual traditions are "reformatted" to fit the norms of the different cultures within which they exist.[7] This "reformatting" may occasionally be "from above" when religious authorities consciously seek to adapt to new cultural-social realities. However, "reformatting" is more frequently "from below." Here, in informal and less theoretical ways, and sometimes in contrast to the attitudes of religious authorities, classic themes are reformulated, spiritual practices are adapted, or new ways of life are adopted to re-express a tradition. Something crucial remains identifiably "Catholic" or "Protestant," "Carmelite" or "Ignatian." Yet, at the same time, fundamental ways of understanding such designations and their expressions change in significant ways.

What is Christian Spirituality?

In the twenty-first century, we exist in a globalized and radically plural world. In such a context, Christian spirituality is nowadays situated explicitly in a world of many cultures and many religions. Of course the origins of Christianity lie in the Middle East and in Judaism even

if later on European perspectives came to predominate. In the contemporary context, Christian spirituality is an important part of the critical dialogue between faiths. This process will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.

However, the contemporary taste for eclecticism raises some new questions about the uniqueness or otherwise of Christian spirituality. There are clearly overlaps between the values and concerns of religious spiritualities. All of them are based on a framework of transcendent beliefs, whether these are explicitly God-related (as in the Abrahamic family of faiths) or not (as in Buddhism). Religious spiritualities also share other characteristics such as foundational scriptures, some visible structures, sacred spaces, and spiritual practices. Yet, each religious tradition is clearly distinguishable from the others.

Thus, we shall discover throughout this book that while Christian spirituality has Jewish origins, it soon developed a distinctive flavor and content. Indeed, as we have already noted, Christianity is the original source of the word "spirituality," although it has now passed into other faith traditions, not least Eastern religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism.[8] In Christian terms, spirituality refers to the way our fundamental values, lifestyles, and spiritual practices reflect particular understandings of God, human identity, and the material world as the context for human transformation. In Chapter 2, we shall examine the foundations of Christian spirituality and what the key overall features of Christian spirituality are. We shall see that all Christian spiritual traditions are rooted in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, particularly in the gospels, and in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Christian spirituality is fundamentally concerned with following the way of Jesus Christ. However, the varied spiritual traditions throughout history are also attempts to reinterpret these scriptural values and teachings within specific contexts and cultural circumstances.

Spirituality and Mysticism

One particular question that frequently arises in the contemporary study of spirituality is the relationship between "spirituality" and "mysticism." In broad terms, many contemporary Western approaches frequently treat "spirituality" and "mysticism" as virtually synonymous. "Spirituality" implies an exploration of the depths of human existence and the ultimate purpose of life and a quest for deeper wisdom. The notion of "mysticism" additionally suggests that we may

have immediate encounters with and perhaps an experiential "knowledge" of the mystery of God or the Absolute.

For some Christians, the idea of mysticism is more problematic than spirituality. Until recently, most writing concentrated on it as a category of intense religious *experience*. This results in several problems. First, it separates mysticism from theology – the ways we seek to speak about God. Second, it removes mysticism from the public world into the realm of private inwardness. Third, it concentrates on states of mind and emotions experienced by a limited number of people as a result of intensive meditative practice or ascetical discipline. This tends to separate "mysticism" from the Christian life in general.

In its origins, the noun "mysticism" is relatively modern – first appearing in France in the seventeenth century (*la mystique*). The adjective "mystical," from the Greek *mystikos*, is more ancient as a description of the deeper dimensions of Christian practice and theology. To grossly oversimplify, from the second century CE onwards the word began to be adopted by Christians to signify the hidden realities of the Christian life – whether the deeper spiritual meanings of the Bible or the inner power of Christian rituals and sacraments. As we shall see in Chapter 2, around the beginning of the sixth century an anonymous Syrian, known as Pseudo-Dionysius, adopted the term "mystical theology" to indicate also an engagement with the mystery of God. However, the main point is that, in Christian terms, "mysticism" is rooted in the call of all Christians in their baptism to enter deeply into the "mystery" of God through exposure to the scriptures and liturgy. Equally, mysticism is a *gift* from God rather than something achieved through human effort.

Bernard McGinn, an important contemporary writer on Christian mysticism, notes that "mysticism" takes many different forms, but he attempts a working definition. Mysticism refers to "those elements in Christian belief and practice that concern the preparation for, the consciousness of, and the effects attendant upon a heightened awareness of God's immediate and transforming presence."[9] Mystics are simply those people who believe in and practice their Christian faith with particular intensity. The great mystical writers are adamant that they are describing a *process of life* not altered states of consciousness.

In summary, therefore, spirituality is best understood as the broader concept. Mysticism is merely one aspect of Christian spirituality – a kind of intensification of the Christian spiritual path. It is important to note that the historic role of spirituality and mysticism within Christianity is ambiguous. Many Christian traditions such as Western Catholic and Eastern Orthodox value both. However, some Protestant Christians

remain deeply suspicious of mysticism partly because it seems to overemphasize the importance and power of the experiential in our relationship with God. However, as we shall see in Chapter 4, writings on Christian mysticism from the medieval period onwards are *not* purely experiential. They also question the adequacy of conventional theological *language* about God. Thus, the great German mystic, Meister Eckhart, loved to cite St Augustine on speech about God: "If I have spoken of it, I have not spoken, for it is ineffable." Christian mysticism underlines that the truth of "God" (the "God beyond God" as Eckhart suggested) is ultimately beyond all theological categories and doctrinal definitions.

The Study of Spirituality

Nowadays, the study of Christian spirituality has established itself as an interdisciplinary field rather than merely a subset of Christian doctrine or of Church history. Indeed, the role of interdisciplinary study has become a central methodological principle of spirituality.[10]

The criticism used to be leveled at spirituality that it sought to use as many methods and tools as possible only because there was no adequate sense of disciplinary identity. There is certainly a "cheap" interdisciplinarity that merely plunders the language of different disciplines without a real literacy in those disciplines. However, at its best, interdisciplinary study is not a matter of expediency but is a principled position. Late modern or postmodern theory promotes the breakdown of closed systems of analysis, based on a post-Enlightenment mechanization of knowledge. This demanded that academic disciplines be clearly separated, autonomous, free-standing, and pure. This recent breakdown of closed systems of thought has also underlined that the ways we think are necessarily bound up with power issues. Thus, in this context, interdisciplinary study is not merely a potential enrichment of the ways we approach what we study, for example, spiritual classics, but is also a discipline (*áskēsis*) of learning to live with what is multi-dimensional rather than simple and relatively easy to control.

Because Christian spirituality engages with the traditions of a specific faith community, certain disciplines are necessarily involved in its study. Sandra Schneiders, one of the key figures in the modern development of Christian spirituality, describes these disciplines as "constitutive," that is, inherently associated with the Christian nature of what is being studied. She identifies the "constitutive disciplines" as the history of Christianity and scripture. In addition to these, there are what she calls "problematic

disciplines." These are those disciplines that allow access to the particular theme or problem that is being studied. Schneiders identifies the leading "problematic disciplines" in the study of spirituality, depending on the context, as psychology, the social sciences, literature, and the sciences. Schneiders is also clear that the study of spirituality is not purely intellectual or abstract. It is also self-implicating and therefore transformative. On her reading, theology as a discipline lies somewhere in between the two categories. However, my own view is that while it is important to move away from thinking of Christian spirituality as derived in some simple way from religious doctrines and their first principles, it is nevertheless impossible to detach a wider understanding of theology from the study of Christian spirituality at any point.[11] Equally, the self-implicating nature of the study of spirituality may act as a subversive reform movement within the wider field of theology by reminding it of its fundamental transformative purpose and resisting the temptation to reduce theology to a purely objective-scientific method.

One specific area where there is a fruitful dialogue between theology and spirituality is the interrelationship between spirituality and Christian ethics (or moral theology). This is paradoxical given that in classic Roman Catholic theology the predecessors of spirituality, ascetical and mystical theology, used to be considered merely as dependent subdivisions of moral theology. Indeed, it could be argued that traditional approaches to ethics or moral theology helped to reinforce the split between theology and spirituality. Both moral theology and ascetical theology were preoccupied with sinfulness and the enfeebled nature of the human condition. This overpowered any deeper theological consideration of Christian understandings of human existence or of the quest for holiness and gave the impression that ascetical theology had very little if anything to say theologically in its own right. It appeared to deal merely with some subsidiary (even optional) aspects of the moral life which was itself derived from dogmatic theology.

Nowadays, however, Christian ethics is no longer focused primarily on the rightness or wrongness of particular actions. There has been a shift from abstract actions to the human agent. Here, spirituality and ethics find a common language in a renewed theology of the human person (anthropology) and of grace (God's action in and for the world). There is an increasing awareness of the basic unity between the ethical life and the spiritual life. Among the themes that focus on the joint task of contemporary spirituality and Christian ethics are how we understand "virtue" (i.e. what enables a person to become fully human aided by God's action or "grace") and "character" or what we should aim to *be*,

rather than merely do, if we are to become fully human persons. Christian ethicists increasingly emphasize that our ultimate guide to goodness is not abstract codes of behavior or moral rule books but the presence within us of God's Spirit. This indwelling of God grounds the recovery of a fruitful relationship between ethics and spirituality. Yet, these are not wholly synonymous. Spirituality in its fullest sense includes the whole of a person's or a group's spiritual orientation. In that sense, spirituality overlaps with ethics but cannot be reduced to it.[12]

Spirituality and History

If we now return to the history of Christian spirituality, it is important to underline the degree to which Christianity is explicitly a historical religion. Crucially, the central Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, that God took on a human existence in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, situates the divine at the very heart of human history.

> By affirming that all "meaning," every assertion about the significance of life and reality, must be judged by reference to a brief succession of contingent events in Palestine, Christianity – almost without realizing it – closed off the path to "timeless truth."[13]

Thus, Christian spirituality affirms "history" as the context for spiritual transformation. Even Augustine's future-orientated theology of history, one of the most influential Christian historical theories, did not render contingent history meaningless, even if it distinguished between sacred and secular "history." While he rejected a progress model of history and believed that no age could be closer to God than any other, the thread of sacred history ran through human history, and every moment was therefore equally significant.[14]

In approaching the relationship of spirituality and history, a fundamental factor is how we view the importance of history itself. Western cultures these days sometimes appear weary with the notion of being involved in a stream of tradition through time. It is not uncommon these days for people to believe that history signifies only the past – something interesting but not critical to our future. "Tradition" is perceived by some people as a conservative force from which we need to break free if we are to live a more rational existence. The desire for immediacy encouraged by consumerism also produces a memory-less culture. Perhaps the most powerful factor during the twentieth century

has been the death of a belief in history as a progressive force. This evaporated in the face of two world wars, mid-century totalitarianism, and the horrors of the Holocaust and Hiroshima.

Despite contemporary doubts, a historical consciousness is a human necessity. It reminds us of the contextual nature and particularity of spiritual values. Indeed, attention to the complexities of history has been a major development in the study of Christian spirituality over the last thirty years. One reason why the study of Christian spirituality now pays greater attention to the complexity of historical interpretation lies in an important change of language associated with the Second Vatican Council in the early 1960s. The phrase "signs of the times," coined by Pope John XXIII and repeated in the Council documents, effectively recognized that history was not incidental to, but the context for, God's work. Faith is not opposed to history, and no separation is possible between religious history and world history.[15]

Spiritual traditions do not exist on some ideal plane above and beyond history. The origins and development of spiritual traditions reflect the circumstances of time and place as well as the psychological state of the people involved. They consequently embody values that are socially conditioned. For example, the emphasis on radical poverty in the spirituality of the thirteenth-century Franciscan movement was not simply a "naked" scriptural value but a reaction to particular conditions in society and the Church at the time – not least to what were seen as their prevailing sins.[16]

This does not imply that spiritual traditions and texts have no value beyond their original contexts. However, it does mean that to appreciate their riches we must take context seriously. Context has become a primary framework for the study of spiritual traditions. Spirituality is never pure in form. "Context" is not something that may be added to or subtracted from spiritual experiences or traditions but is the very element within which these find expression.[17] This contradicts an older conception of Christian spirituality as a stream of enduring truth in which the same theories or images are simply repeated in different guises.

Interpretation

If we take context seriously, yet also seek to approach spiritual traditions from other times and places for the spiritual wisdom they contain, questions of interpretation arise.[18] We are inevitably aware of different cultural and theological perspectives when we read a text from another

time or place. If interpretation is to serve contemporary use, we cannot avoid the question of how far to respect a text's assumptions. Certain responses are naïve. We may ignore the author's intention and the text's structure entirely and simply pick and choose as it suits us. The opposite extreme is to assume that only the author's intention matters. Even assuming that we can accurately reconstruct this, such an approach subordinates our present horizons to the past. Both approaches assume that the "meaning" of a text is simple. A more fruitful, but more complicated, approach to interpretation is to engage in a critical *dialogue* with the text. This allows the wisdom of a text to challenge us, while at the same time it allows our own horizons their proper place. The possibilities of a text, beyond the author's original intention, are evoked in a creative way by the new world in which it finds itself.

The example of music is helpful in understanding this approach. Musicians interpret a score. Performers cannot do simply anything and call it a Beethoven symphony. Although they may be technically faultless in following the composer's instructions, a good performance is *more* than this. It will also be creative because the composer did not merely describe how to produce notes but sought to shape an experience. This image of performance leads us to the heart of the interpretative process. Without ignoring the technicalities of a text, we uncover new and richer meanings every time we read or perform it.

These comments about context in relation to spirituality are now widely accepted. However, a comparison of three classic histories of spirituality written during the twentieth century soon reminds us of how substantial changes have been. P. Pourrat's four-volume *La Spiritualité Chrétienne* was published shortly after the First World War.[19] His unified approach to spiritual doctrine led him to suppose that the same theology of prayer, virtue, or spiritual growth was found in all spiritual traditions. Different approaches to spirituality differed only in presentation. Pourrat also limited his attention to monasticism and mysticism with virtually no reference to lay (or "popular") spirituality.

Louis Bouyer's three-volume (in the English edition) *A History of Christian Spirituality* was published in the early 1960s around the time of the Second Vatican Council.[20] Bouyer was still preoccupied with the essential unity of spirituality and often lacked an awareness of differences between traditions of spirituality. However, in other respects, his approach was a considerable improvement on Pourrat. The cultural perspective was broader, lay spirituality had more substantial treatment, and his third volume offered a relatively sympathetic

treatment of Orthodox, Protestant, and Anglican spiritualities. However, women were still largely invisible.

Finally, the three Christian volumes within the Crossroad series, *World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest*, appeared in the late 1980s.[21] These differ vastly from Pourrat and Bouyer, both of whom worked within a Roman Catholic perspective. The *World Spirituality* volumes are ecumenical and international collections of essays by a range of scholars rather than a grand survey by a single author. The history of spiritual traditions is understood as plural, linked to specific contexts. The volumes offer a degree of balance between Eastern and Western Christianity and make other efforts to express the cultural plurality of spirituality. The spirituality of lay Christians and women's perspectives are better represented. Where these volumes are still relatively weak is in their treatment of Christian cultures in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

Any adequate historical analysis of spiritual traditions must address a number of critical questions.[22] First, in any tradition or text, how was holiness conceived? Which categories of people were thought of as holy? What places or things were deemed to be particularly sacred – and, negatively, who or what was excluded from the category "holy" or "sacred"? For example, close association with sexual activity (marriage) or with the material world (manual labor or commerce) was for many centuries difficult to connect with ideas of holiness. Second, who creates or controls spirituality? For example, to what degree does the language of spirituality reflect the interests and experience of minority groups such as clergy or monastic personnel? Third, what directions were not taken? In other words, to what degree has it been assumed that the choices made were in some absolute way superior to those that were rejected? For example, what were the real motives for the condemnation as heretics of the medieval women's spiritual movement, the Beguines? Was it a genuine concern for the spiritual welfare of laypeople or a suspicion of laypeople not sufficiently under clerical control? Finally, where are the groups that did not fit? For example, why was it that, within the Western Catholic tradition, the experience of lay Christians, particularly of women, was largely ignored until recently in the formulation of spiritual theory?

All historical studies involve choices, and this affects our interpretation of spiritual traditions. First, *time limits* are chosen. In other words, writers decide on the appropriate boundaries within which to date spiritual movements and thus to understand them. For example, our sense of the continuity or discontinuity between the spiritualities of the

Middle Ages and the Reformation may be affected by an apparently simple matter of how and where authors divide a multi-volume history.[23] Second, traditional histories reveal a *geographical bias*. We make assumptions about where "the center" and "the margins" are in the history of spiritual traditions. For example, until recently, the spirituality of Irish Christianity was often treated only in relation to its absorption into a homogenized Latin Christianity around the eleventh and twelfth centuries rather than on its own terms. Third, we choose *certain evidence as significant*. So, for example, if studies of spirituality concentrate exclusively on mystical texts or monastic rules, the impression is given that spirituality is essentially literary, is to be found exclusively in privileged contexts, and may be distinguished from mere devotional or "popular" religion.

Despite the wariness of many people in the contemporary West about institutional religion, the place of history in the study of spirituality is a reminder of the positive power of religious-spiritual tradition. Without some sense of tradition, an interest in spirituality lacks something vital that can only be gained by a renewed attention to historic Christian spiritualities that have had such an influence, explicitly or covertly, on Western culture.

Types of Spirituality

Any attempt to write a history of Christian spirituality confronts the question of how to organize into an intelligible pattern what otherwise may seem to be a series of unrelated themes. First, I have found it helpful to identify four major "types" of Christian spirituality – although, in different ways, these types are present in the spiritualities of all the major world religions. "Types" of spirituality are essentially distinctive styles of wisdom and practice with shared characteristics. It is then possible to develop a comparative framework (what is called a typology) that enables us to compare the four types and to understand the differences between them. However, we need to use typologies with caution. These are useful tools to help us analyze the complexities of spirituality. However, we must remember that they are *interpretations* of reality rather than purely descriptive.

The four types are "ascetical-monastic," "the mystical," "the active-practical," and finally the "prophetic-critical." These types sometimes overlap to some degree. Thus, ascetical forms of spirituality may have mystical elements. Each type tends to be characterized by a broad

worldview, based on religious assumptions. The different types of spirituality foster self-transcendence via a movement away from what they see as the "inauthentic" towards what is "authentic." Broadly, in terms of spiritual growth, the inauthentic can be summed up in terms of a sense of limitation or lack of freedom. Each of the four types of spirituality seeks answers to such questions as *where* transformation is thought to take place (context), *how* it takes place (practices and disciplines), and *what* its ultimate purpose or end-point is (destiny or completion).

The "ascetical-monastic" type sometimes prescribes special places such as the wilderness or the monastery. Characteristically, it also describes practices of self-denial, austerity, and abstention from worldly pleasures as the pathway to spiritual growth and moral perfection. The end in view is a condition of detachment from material existence as the pathway to eternal life. This type will be further explained in Chapter 3.

The "mystical type" is associated with the desire for an immediacy of presence to God frequently through contemplative practice. It does not necessarily demand withdrawal from everyday life but suggests that the everyday may be transfigured into something wondrous. The mystical type is often associated with intuitive "knowledge" of God beyond discursive reasoning and analysis. The ultimate purpose is spiritual illumination and a connection to the depths of existence. The mystical type will be developed towards the end of Chapter 4.

The "active-practical type" of spirituality in a variety of ways promotes everyday life as the principal context for the spiritual path and for a quest for authenticity. In this type of spirituality, we do not need to retreat from everyday concerns in order to reach spiritual truth or enlightenment. What is needed for spiritual growth is within our reach. For, in the words of Jesus, "The Kingdom of God is among you." Because it emphasizes finding God in the midst of everyday existence, this type of spirituality is accessible to everyone and not simply to groups dedicated especially to the ascetical life or with the opportunity for extensive contemplative practice. This type of spirituality seeks to find spiritual growth through the medium of ordinary experiences, commitments, and activity, including the service of our fellow humans. It plays a central role in Chapters 5 and 6.

Finally, the "prophetic-critical" type of spirituality goes beyond the simple practical service of other people in the direction of an explicit commitment to social transformation and social justice as a spiritual task. As we shall see in Chapter 7, while it is possible to argue that historic spiritualities have always had prophetic or critical elements, an explicit attention to prophetic-critical spirituality and its development as a clear

"type" only really emerged fully during the twentieth century in response to certain critical social and political situations.

Periods and Traditions

Apart from the concept of "types" of spirituality, two of the most common organizing frameworks in histories of spirituality are "periods" and "traditions." Because neither of these are straightforward, they need a brief comment.

"Periods" implies an essentially chronological approach to history.[24] However, choosing particular time boundaries to divide up a history of spirituality is not straightforward but involves choices. For example, in writing a section about "spiritualities of the Reformation" do we emphasize continuities with the Middle Ages or do we emphasize a complete rupture? More generally, do we take a short view of history or the long view both backwards and forwards from the "main events"? Sometimes, our choice of starting dates and ending dates for a spiritual movement or tradition will also depend on whether or not we give exclusive attention to "official" history and on what our geographical focus is.

The other frequently used framework for histories of spirituality is in terms of "traditions." There has been some debate about whether Christian spirituality should be treated as essentially a single reality or as a plurality of different traditions.[25] In fact, the question of unity or plurality is a matter of viewpoint. On the one hand, all Christian spiritualities take the life and teachings of Jesus Christ as their fundamental starting point. On the other hand, different traditions of spirituality emerge precisely when people seek to respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ in the context of their own time and place.

As a fundamental point, a "spiritual tradition" generally implies a great deal more than the practice of a single exercise of piety or devotion. Rather it embodies some substantial spiritual wisdom (usually encapsulated in certain texts or ways of life) which differentiates it from other traditions. However, is it possible to say when a particular form of spirituality has clearly become a *tradition* in the fullest sense rather than simply a passing phase? This is not straightforward particularly when the form of spirituality emerged relatively recently. Some broad guidelines may help us. First, is there clear evidence of the existence of a generation of practitioners that had no first-hand experience of the founder(s) or origins of the tradition? Second, has the tradition established certain classic texts or documentation or structures for the transmission of the

tradition? Third, has the spiritual wisdom shown itself clearly capable of moving beyond its own time and place of origin?

Finally, the notion of how a "spiritual tradition" is interpreted and handed on has been further expanded in the movement known as "traditioning" developed by Hispanic Christian theologians in North America. This new approach confronts the complex issue of re-appropriating or even sometimes resisting historic spiritual traditions. The fundamental question is how Christian spirituality transmits itself, and how it is received across cultural boundaries. There is clearly a question of content – that is, something quite specific is handed on or "traditioned." However, "traditioning" focuses far more on the *process* of transmission. There are four key principles. First, we should attend more closely to the process whereby classic traditions, born in one culture and already reshaped by transmission across time through a number of other cultures, now enter a new cultural context. Second, we must value *lo cotidiano* – that is, "the everyday." That is, the authentic re-appropriation of spiritual traditions takes place in relation to the questions and situations of daily life in the local community. Third, there is a need to give a higher valuation to popular religion – a powerful reality in religious cultures originating outside a European-North American hegemony. Approaches to Christian spirituality and to particular spiritual traditions have often been limited by predominantly conceptual or intellectual presuppositions. Popular religion embraces expressions of the spiritual and sacred in rituals, devotions, cultic objects, shrines, and practices such as pilgrimage. Finally, "traditioning" invites us to consider how the transmission of spiritual traditions depends not simply on clergy or technical "experts" but also on a consensus of reception among the rest of the local Christian community who in reality are the "ordinary" transmitters of tradition.[26]

Conclusion: Criteria of Judgment

By way of conclusion, the great variety of personalities, texts, practices, and values that may appear under the heading of "spirituality" underlines the need for clear criteria to evaluate claims to spiritual wisdom. This is illustrated particularly sharply by the quasi-spiritual ceremonial and even quasi-mystical aspirations of Nazism or Italian fascism. These movements have sometimes been described as forms of "spirituality." However, such quasi-spiritual but destructive movements are best

described more in terms of anti-spirituality. While this is an extreme case, it seems vitally important to be able to judge the authenticity and adequacy of teachings, practices, and movements with a spiritual flavor or that make apparently spiritual claims. Some Christian thinkers have developed criteria for evaluating religious or spiritual teachings.

The work of the American theologian David Tracy may be taken as an important example. First, it is vital to show that a religious or spiritual tradition meets the basic demands of modern and healthy understandings of human life. Tracy calls this approach "criteria of adequacy." Beyond this basic human level lies a further level concerning issues of faithfulness to a specifically Christian understanding of reality and human existence. Tracy defines this as "criteria of appropriateness."

The application of criteria of adequacy should not be thought of as a reduction of Christian spirituality to purely secular norms. What it implies is that spirituality cannot be innocent of generally accepted developments in human knowledge. Nor can it ignore the ways in which previously over-confident views of human progress have been undermined by the painful historical events of the twentieth century. To put it simply, we have to take into account the new worlds opened up since the nineteenth century by evolutionary theory, psychology, and the social and political sciences, and more recently by cosmology and quantum theory. Equally, our theology and spirituality can never be the same after the horrors of Auschwitz and Hiroshima.

Tracy suggests three broad criteria of adequacy. First, every religious interpretation of experience needs to be humanly meaningful. That is, it must be adequately rooted in common human experience. Second, the religious understanding of experience should be intellectually coherent. Third, any spiritual tradition needs to throw light on the underlying conditions of life. In other words, does it have anything to say about whether our human confidence in life is actually worthwhile?[27]

In relation to Tracy's criteria of appropriateness, in general terms, any spirituality needs to relate us to a God worthy of our loving commitment.[28] Equally, an adequate understanding of Christian spirituality must relate in some way to the classic Christian beliefs. For example, the language of God-as-Trinity and of the Incarnation acts as a critique of distorted spiritualities that are preoccupied, in a narcissistic way, with "self-realization" or self-improvement.[29] Within the limits of legitimate diversity and of valid emphases, healthy spiritualities should generally reflect the *whole* Christian gospel rather than be selective in an unbalanced way. Certain questions illustrate this point. What models of holiness are presented? Is the view of human nature holistic

or is it dualistic with a low theology of human embodiment? Equally, is there a balanced and healthy evaluation of human sexuality? Understandings of prayer and contemplation are central in Christian spirituality. Does a particular spiritual tradition view Christian life as rooted in the vision of a common humanity and in a single vocation based on baptism? Or is it elitist, giving priority to special groups or particular lifestyles? Does a given spirituality promote a balance between contemplation and action? Christian spirituality of its nature cannot avoid the question of tradition. So, in a particular spirituality, what is the role of scripture and of the wider tradition? Finally, an important question is whether a spiritual tradition has a developed sense of ultimate human purpose and destiny (what is known as "eschatology"), and specifically one that encourages an appropriate balance between "the now" and "the not yet."

Notes

1 Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: The Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness*, Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1993, pp. 16–17.
2 Office for Standards in Education, *Promoting and Evaluating Pupils' Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development*, London: OFSTED, 2004, p. 12.
3 Jeremy Carrette and Richard King, *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion*, London: Routledge, 2004.
4 The magisterial work of Kees Waaijman, *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods*, Dudley: Leuven: Peeters, 2002, explores the breadth of the new academic field.
5 On the increasing variety of disciplines and definitions in relation to spirituality, see Peter Holmes, "Spirituality: Some disciplinary perspectives" in Kieran Flanagan and Peter Jupp, eds., *A Sociology of Spirituality*, Aldershot/Burlington: Ashgate, 2007, pp. 23–41.
6 Peter Versteeg, "Spirituality on the margins of the Church: Christian spiritual centres in The Netherlands" in Flanagan and Jupp, eds., *A Sociology of Spirituality*, pp. 101–114.
7 See, for example, Oliver Roy, *Secularism Confronts Islam*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.
8 For more details on the history of the term "spirituality" and of its equivalents in the history of Christian spirituality, see Philip Sheldrake, "What is spirituality?" in *Spirituality and History: Questions of Interpretation and Method*, revised edition, London: SPCK and New York: Orbis Books, 1995.

9 Bernard McGinn, "Mysticism" in Introductory Essays, Philip Sheldrake, ed., *The New SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, London: SCM Press, 2005, pp. 19–25, quote at p. 19 (in North America, *The New Westminster Dictionary etc*, Louisville: Westminster-John Knox Press). See also B. McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century*, New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1991, General Introduction, pp. xi–xx.

10 On this point, see Sandra Schneiders, "The study of Christian spirituality: Contours and dynamics of a discipline" in Elizabeth A. Dreyer and Mark S. Burrows, eds., *Minding the Spirit: The Study of Christian Spirituality*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005, pp. 5–24. Another useful essay is Schneiders, "Approaches to the study of Christian spirituality" in A. Holder, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Spirituality*, Oxford/Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005, pp. 15–33. Both these volumes also contain other important essays on the field of Christian spirituality and the study of spirituality. Some other significant books on the overall field are the magisterial volume by the Dutch scholar K. Waaijman, *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods*, Leuven: Peeters, 2002; B. Lescher & E. Liebert, eds., *Exploring Christian Spirituality: Essays in Honor of Sandra M. Schneiders*, New York: Paulist Press, 2006; D. Perrin, *Studying Christian Spirituality*, London/New York: Routledge, 2007; and Agnew, U., Flanagan, B., and Heylin, G., eds., *With Wisdom Seeking God: The Academic Study of Spirituality*, Leuven: Peeters, 2008.

11 See Schneiders, "The study of Christian spirituality," 7–8.

12 For explorations of the connection between ethics and spirituality, see the collection of essays, *Spirituality and Ethics*, Michael Barnes, ed., *The Way Supplement*, 88, Spring 1997. See also Anne E. Patrick, "Ethics and spirituality: The social justice connection" *The Way Supplement*, 63, 1988, 103–116. For a Protestant perspective that reengages spirituality with ethics, see James M. Gustafson, "The idea of Christian ethics" in Peter Byrne and Leslie Houlden, eds., *Companion Encyclopedia of Theology*, London: Routledge, 1995, pp. 691–715. A recent approach within the Roman Catholic tradition is William Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics*, New York: Continuum, 2000.

13 R. Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge*, London: Darton Longman & Todd/ Boston: Cowley Publications, 1990, p. 1.

14 See the classic work on Augustine's theory of history, R.A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St Augustine*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970, especially Chapter 1 "History: Sacred and secular."

15 G. Ruggieri, "Faith and history" in G. Alberigo, J.-P. Jossua, and J.A. Komonchak, eds., *The Reception of Vatican II*, Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1987, pp. 92–95.

16   J. Le Goff, "Francis of Assisi between the renewals and restraints of feudal society," *Concilium* 149, 1981 ("Francis of Assisi today"), passim.

17   P. Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History: Questions of Interpretation and Method*, London: SPCK and New York: Orbis Books, 1995, pp. 58, 84–86, 167–168 and M. de Certeau, "Culture and spiritual experience," *Concilium* 19, 1966, 3–31.

18   For a summary of problems associated with interpreting and using texts and traditions from the past, see Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History*, Chapter 7.

19   P. Pourrat, *La spiritualité Chrétienne*, 4 vols., Paris: J. Gabalda, 1918.

20   L. Bouyer, *A History of Christian Spirituality*, 3 vols., London: Burns & Oates, 1968.

21   B. McGinn, J. Meyendorff, and J. Leclercq, eds., *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1985; J. Raitt, ed., *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1987; and L. Dupré and D. Saliers, eds., *Christian Spirituality: Post-Reformation and Modern*, New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1989.

22   Sheldrake 1995, Chapters 3, 4, and 7.

23   Raitt 1987, Introduction.

24   Sheldrake 1995, Chapter 4.

25   For a summary of this debate, see Sheldrake 1995, pp. 196–198.

26   On the principles of "traditioning," see Orlando O. Espin and Gary Macy, eds., *Futuring Our Past: Explorations in the Theology of Tradition*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2006.

27   David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order*, New York: The Seabury Press, 1975, pp. 64–71.

28   Tracy, *Blessed Rage for* Order, pp. 72–79.

29   See Catherine LaCugna, "Trinitarian spirituality" in Michael Downey, ed., *New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1993, pp. 968–971.