

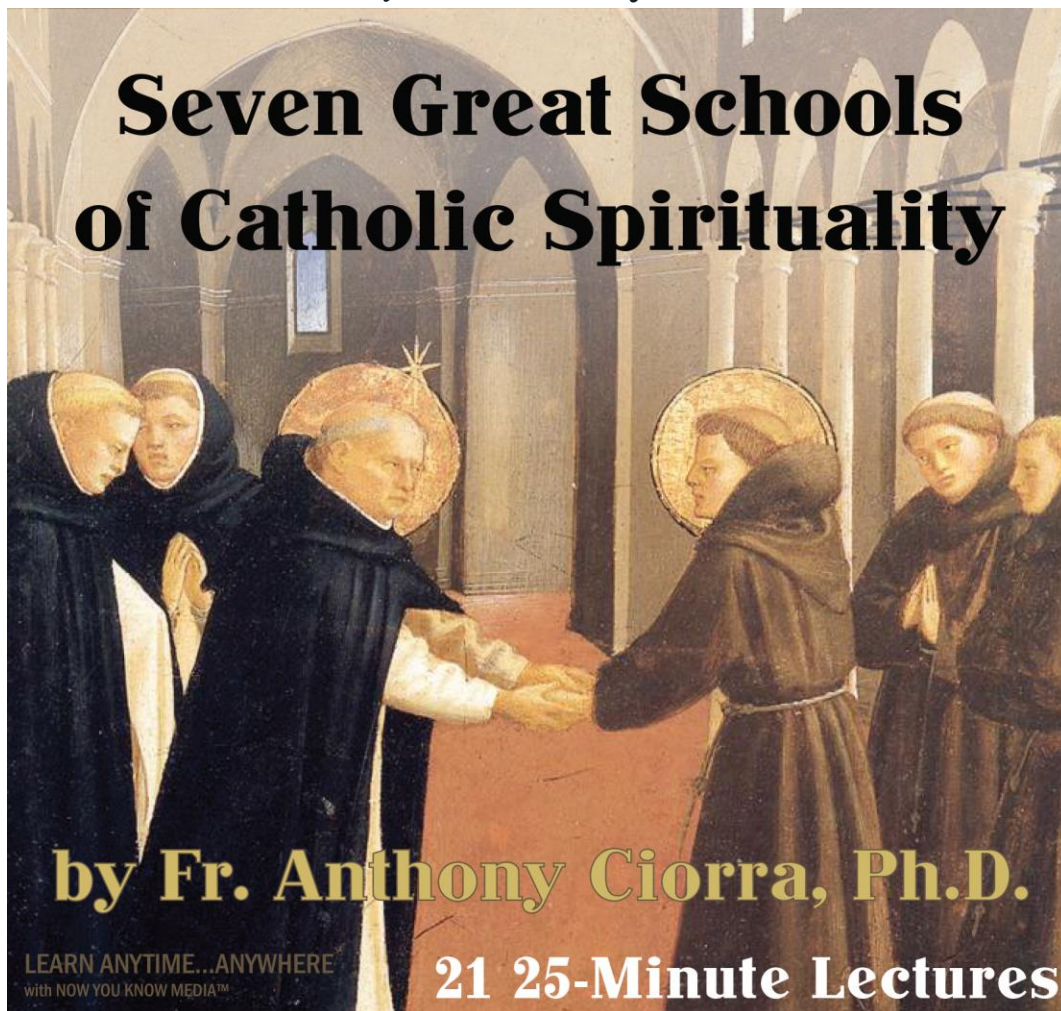
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STUDY GUIDE

Seven Great Schools of Catholic Spirituality

Presented by Fr. Anthony Ciorra, Ph.D.

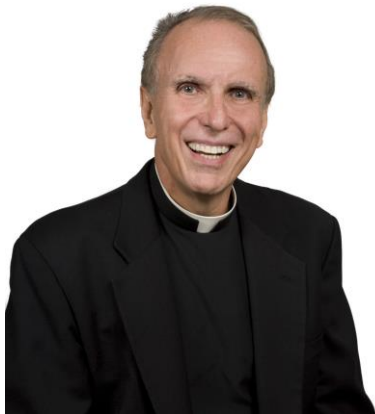


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Course Overview

Explore the rich spiritual movements of the Catholic tradition.

In this course, you will journey down distinctive paths to God and holiness from seven powerful schools of spirituality. You are likely familiar with one or more of these schools, but how many of us have benefited from the depth of all seven? By enjoying each lecture, you will discover what makes these seven schools unique as you become more attuned to the evolving movements of the Spirit.

Your professor is celebrated spirituality expert Fr. Anthony Ciorra, Ph.D. Under his guidance, you will explore how different religious founders developed new insights and charisms, adapting them to the cultures, times, and needs of different generations. Who were these founders, and what influences shaped their spiritual lives?

First, you will journey into the Egyptian desert, where the wisdom of the Desert Fathers and Mothers will inspire you. Then, you will see how the Monastic Movement flourished throughout Europe. You will also meet the preeminent mendicant preachers, St. Francis of Assisi and St. Dominic, who each founded influential orders based on the charism of poverty.

After that, you will travel to Mount Carmel to witness the founding of the Carmelites, whose mysticism flourished first under John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila, and carried on with such twentieth-century saints as Thérèse of Lisieux and Edith Stein. Next, you will witness the conversion of St. Ignatius of Loyola, whose command to go forth and set the world on fire continues to guide members of the Society of Jesus throughout the world. You will also explore the impact of Salesian spirituality and the Vincentian-Setonian tradition.

By studying these particular seven schools, you will discover how religious movements arise and transform countless lives over centuries. While these are only just a few of the many schools of spirituality, these seven eminent movements will give you greater insight into the influences of the Spirit throughout human experience. This course will spiritually inspire you with the richness of our Christian tradition.

Topic 1: An Introduction to Seven Great Schools of Christian Spirituality

Overview

In the introduction to this course, we consider the broad strokes of the seven schools in Christian spirituality that we identify as being great schools. We call these schools great because the founder who had the initial impulse in the development of spirituality unfolded something new, an element that brought spirituality to its next historical level. Those who embraced the insight of the founder usually nuanced it and applied it to new centuries and changing circumstances. As each new school emerged, it embraced an earlier tradition, built upon it, and then brought it to a new place. As we journey through this course, the challenge is to understand the evolving nature of each school and how this relates to your experience and the place you find yourself at this moment on your journey.

I. The Human Impulse towards the Transcendent

- Every human, without exception, is looking for “the something more.”
- St. Augustine: “Our hearts are restless until they rest in God.”
- We can move towards the transcendent in different ways.
- A spirituality of beauty:
 - 1) In his Apostolic Exhortation, “The Joy of the Gospel,” Pope Francis affirms the role of beauty in the spiritual life.
 - 2) We can see these seven schools of Christian spirituality as moments of beauty. The human spirit is moving towards the beautiful.

II. Seven Schools of Christian Spirituality

- Each group or movement builds on what went before it and transcends it, moving to the next step in the historical and global journey.
 - 1) Desert spirituality emerged in response to the institutionalization of Christianity and the end of the martyrdom era. Desert spirituality built on the scriptures and emphasized the desert experience, which focused on a withdrawal from the world.
 - 2) Monastic spirituality included components of desert spirituality and added a communal dimension to it.

- 3) The mendicant movements (Franciscan, Dominican, and Carmelite) built upon desert spirituality and the monastic tradition but moved the monastery into the marketplace.
- 4) Ignatian Spirituality gave an intellectual framework and methodology to spirituality. It was clearly a movement beyond monastic structures that still included the monastic spiritual tradition.
- 5) Salesian Spirituality: St. Francis De Sales and St. Jane de Chantal carried the best of the tradition through a spirituality that emphasized gentleness in the age of Jansenism. The seventeenth century saw a movement into apostolic spiritualities.
- 6) The Vincentian-Setonian Tradition: St. Vincent DePaul and St. Louise de Marillac created the framework for contemporary apostolic communities. St. Elizabeth Ann Seton brought that tradition to America.

III. Three Symbols for the Development of the Spirituality Traditions

- The Heart as spiritual home: all seven schools converge in the human heart. The human heart is the seat of wonder, and the seat from which we see and come to know God.
- The Rainbow: the colors of the seven schools blend together to create a gorgeous rainbow. They are seven manifestations of the movements of God. We should not look at these seven colors as separate entities. We should instead focus on the way in which the seven colors blend together and lead us to new places.
- The Onion: Each school of spirituality peels over a layer and brings the tradition deeper. Each school builds on the ones that preceded it. We should ask how we can integrate the seven strains and go deeper in our own spiritual lives.



IV. What Is Christian Spirituality?

- Christian spirituality arose within the Jewish spiritual tradition of God’s abiding love and presence.
 - 1) Jewish Roots:
 - (a) Exodus
 - (b) Covenant
 - (c) Prophets
 - (d) Psalms
 - 2) Christianity builds on its Jewish roots and brings it to a new place.
 - (a) There was a gradual movement away from Jewish laws and images of God.
 - (b) Matthew 4–6 reflects the new Christian worldview.
 - 3) There are four key components to Christian spirituality:
 - (a) It is Christocentric, focused on the life, teachings, and presence of Jesus Christ.
 - (b) It is Trinitarian.
 - (c) It is biblically rooted. Christian tradition is rooted in the text of the Old and New Testaments.
 - (d) It is ecclesial. Christian spirituality is lived in the context of community.

Review Questions

1. The basic human impulse is towards the transcendent. Reflect on your experience of the God in your life. To what extent is it God who is seeking you? Do you experience God as the “Hound of Heaven”?
2. Which of the seven schools of spirituality do you most identify with? How can you build on your basic instinct towards this spirituality?
3. What symbol do you resonate with: the heart, the rainbow, or the onion?

Topic 2:

Introduction Continued: Pathways to God

Overview

In this lecture, we will focus on the concept of spirituality. What is spirituality, and how does it manifest itself in the seven great schools we focus on in this course? In the broadest sense, Christian spirituality is not static but rather an evolving reality. As we journey through this course, the challenge is to understand the evolving nature of each school and how this relates to your experience and the place you find yourself at this moment on your journey. The richness of the Christian tradition is twofold, i.e., there is something in it for everyone, and everyone is challenged to get into the whirlwind of the Spirit that is doing in your life what it is doing in the tradition—evolving, pulsating, challenging your spirit, and bringing it to a new height and depth throughout your lifetime.

I. Spirituality and “Dis-Ease”

- In *Addiction and Grace*, Gerald May suggests that a sense of “dis-ease” and desire exists within each human person. What do we do with this sense of dis-ease and desire? According to May, our choices in dealing with these feelings define our spirituality.
- In the broadest sense of the term, everyone has a spirituality.
- It is important that we live spirituality in the context of a relationship with others. This is where community and religion come into the picture. Spirituality is expressed most deeply and profoundly when it is integrated with religion.

II. Spirituality throughout History

- One of the earliest expressions of spirituality can be found in the writings of St. Paul, who talks about the spirit or energy within each person that is reaching out for God.
 - 1) There is always a tension between the human spirit and human flesh.
 - (a) This dichotomy was further developed between the 5th and 17th centuries.
 - (i) In the 5th century, the word spirituality was used to describe advancing one’s quest for God.
 - (ii) In the twelfth century, the term spirituality began to be used in opposition to the word “body.”
 - (iii) In the 17th century, the word spirituality took on a negative connotation. It was used to describe someone who was out of touch with the reality of the material world.

- In the 21st century, there has been a deep interest in spirituality. Today, the term retains a sense of ambiguity.
- We should see the seven schools as developments in terms of the definition of spirituality, rather than a static and historically specific expression of spirituality.

III. Three Dimensions of Spirituality

- Existential Level:
 - 1) This dimension focuses on spirituality on its most basic level, in terms of lived experience. What is your personal experience of God?
- Spirituality of Groups:
 - 1) Each person is introduced into a particular social and cultural spirituality that presents Christian ideals and traditions in a specific way.
 - 2) Traditions that emerged in the context of the Church are continually expressed in new ways. The seven traditions are group experiences that have developed and evolved over centuries, up to and including the present day.
- Study of Spirituality:
 - 1) Spiritual theology as we understand it today is a recent development within the academy. The study of spirituality involves the integration of Christian theology and other academic disciplines.
 - 2) Spirituality is at its best when rooted in solid theology, while theology is at its best when it leads to a good spirituality.

IV. Moments of Grace

- We can look at the seven schools as moments of grace that became evolving traditions.
 - 1) These moments of grace had an impact on human society that would carry through several centuries.
 - 2) We should take note of how each of the seven schools transcends what came before it and includes it at the same time.
- Teilhard de Chardin's notion of evolution encapsulates this movement. Ronald Rolheiser wrote, "Teilhard de Chardin once said that God speaks to every element in the language it can understand. Thus God lures hydrogen through its attraction to oxygen. God draws everything else,



Teilhard de Chardin

including each of us, in the same way. There is, in the end, one force, one spirit, that works in all of the universe. The chemicals in our hands and those in our brains were forged in the same furnace that forged the stars. The same spirit that drives oxygen to unite with hydrogen makes a baby cry when it is hungry, sends the adolescent out in hormonal restlessness, and calls Mother Teresa to a church to pray. There is a discontent, another word for soul and spirit, in all things, and what those things or persons do with that discontent is their spirituality...”

Topic 3: Discovering God in the Desert, Part 1

Overview

One of the earliest movements in Christian spirituality was the withdrawal or movement into the desert. The spirituality of the desert is ancient and foundational to all spiritualities. The way each spirituality embraces the desert will vary, but every authentic spirituality will include the silence and solitude that we find in the cave of the human heart. It is an interesting phenomenon that, in today's busy technological world, the thirst and need for silence is becoming more palatable. All significant figures in the history of world who have made a difference in society have experienced periods of withdrawal, not for withdrawal's sake, but rather to deepen in the inner self so that it has more to offer others.

I. Rooted in the Scriptures

- The desert was a place where the Israelites came to know God and themselves. It was the context from which Jewish spirituality was formed.
- The New Testament begins with John the Baptist going into the desert. He comes to us from the desert with a basic spiritual principal: to repent, to change. It is a place where the human heart is purified. Jesus himself follows this tradition.
- In the Gospel of Matthew, we read about Jesus going into the desert and experiencing temptations from Satan.
 - 1) This is a template for desert spirituality, which builds upon the experiences of the Israelites, John the Baptist, and Jesus.
 - 2) Jesus withdraws in order to deepen his relationship with the Father and to purify his spirit.
 - 3) Jesus wrestles with three basic human temptations:
 - (a) Pleasure
 - (b) Power
 - (c) Relinquishing responsibility
 - 4) Desert spirituality resurfaces through the centuries.

II. The Development Desert Spirituality

- Desert spirituality flourished in the 3rd to 5th centuries, beginning with St. Anthony of Egypt.

- St. Anthony went into the desert not because he was running away from the world, but to seek the deeper way.
- Desert communities evolved around St. Anthony and the experiences of other early desert fathers and mothers.
- This early paradigm of Christian spirituality has retained importance throughout the centuries. It continues to be expressed in new ways.

III. The Religious Meaning of the Desert

- By its very definition, the desert is a barren and inhospitable place.
 - 1) It is a place where the human spirit is tested, refined, and forced to face itself as it is.
 - 2) From a religious perspective, the desert stands for an arena in which one submits to a spiritual test, meeting one's salvation or doom. The desert of life either brings us closer to God or pushes us away.
- We should see the desert in relation to other symbols in the scriptures.
 - 1) The Garden: Exodus 3:8
 - (a) The garden stands in contrast to our understanding of the desert. The experience of the garden was lost when Adam and Eve chose to move away from God. In Exodus 3:8, God is drawing the Israelites to himself, in the land of milk and honey.
 - (b) In the end, the desert is a place of transition, while the garden is a place of attainment.
 - 2) The City: Genesis 11:1-9
 - (a) In the Old Testament, the city is a counter-symbol to the desert, populated and civilized. However, it also readily suggests evil. In Genesis 11, the city is a symbol of division and movement away from God.
 - (b) The city is depicted as a distraction that pulls us away from the desert and from purity of heart.



St. Anthony Abbot by Francisco de Zurbarán,
ca. 1640

Topic 4: Discovering God in the Desert, Part 2

Overview

Spirituality of the desert is important for everyone's spiritual life. It is marked by a withdrawal from the vanities of the world. The desert leads us to find God and ourselves. The notion of stepping back into the spiritual desert is a paradigm for growth in the human experience. We often attempt to resist growth and transformation. Change is always difficult. Yet God never tires of seeking us. Desert spirituality is not meant to be harsh, because God is not harsh. We need not withdraw to a physical desert in order to experience the transformation that desert spirituality provides. How can we create deserts within our own hearts?

I. Temptation

- According to the teachings of the desert fathers and mothers, temptation increases as one moves closer to God. The basic human struggle, movement towards or away from God, takes place in the desert.
- We are attacked at our most vulnerable and lured by the narcotics of human living.
 - 1) Narcotics serve to deaden the pain of human life. In the desert, there is no running from the pain.
 - 2) The garden will come in God's time, not our time.

II. Common Themes

- Certain themes can be found in the writings of the desert fathers and mothers that apply to all desert spiritualities. Our challenge is to translate these themes into our contemporary lived experience.
 - 1) Fasting
 - 2) Longing for heaven
 - 3) Work
 - 4) Mutual harmony
 - 5) Stability
 - 6) Spiritual direction

III. *The Wisdom of the Desert* by Thomas Merton (1960)

- The great monastic centers of the 4th century were in Egypt, Arabia, and Palestine. In the 4th century, men and women left society behind and fled to the desert. They were the first Christian hermits. At the time, organized religion was more focused on structures than the spirit of Christianity. The desert fathers and mothers withdrew in order to better respond to the issues and problems of their time. From their perspective, society was a place where all men and women could seek God and live in the way that God ordained.
- The key phrase of desert spirituality is “purity of heart.”
 - 1) The stories of the desert fathers are stories of those who were on their way to purity of heart.
- Thomas Merton invites us to let go of the ego and self-will and open ourselves to the voice of the Holy Spirit. He suggests that, while desert spirituality is a part of our Christian tradition, it transcends all traditions and is meant to be embraced by all human beings.
- The desert fathers and mothers were pioneers.
- Merton writes, “What can we gain by sailing to the moon if we are not able to cross the abyss that separates us from ourselves? This is the most important of all voyages of discovery, and without it all the rest are not only useless but disastrous.”



Painting of Synkletika of Alexandria, from the *Menologion of Basil II*, ca. 1000 AD

Review Questions

1. Visit a local monastery. Spend some time and allow your body and spirit to slow down. If there is no nearby monastery, practice this activity in a park or hiking trail.

2. Fasting is a spiritual practice that is prominent in desert spirituality. Many seem to have drifted from this practice in the contemporary world. Give some thought on how you might rekindle the place of fasting in your life.

Topic 5:

Discovering God in the Desert, Part 3

Overview

The teachings of the desert fathers and mothers came from the spiritual figures living in the desert. They discerned reality and shared the wisdom that they found with others. The desert was a place of asceticism and prayer whose fruits were experienced in the wisdom of the desert fathers and mothers. *The Life of St. Antony* by St. Athanasius became the classic text for those who wanted to embrace desert spirituality. Antony became the model for living the Christian life in these early centuries. He continues the tradition of the temptations experienced in the desert by the Israelites, John the Baptist, and Jesus.

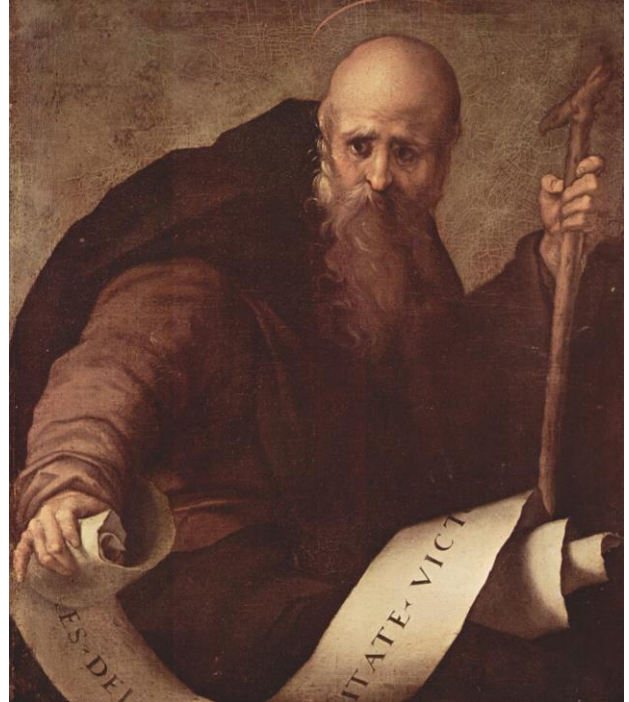
I. Writings of the Desert Fathers and Mothers

- The sayings of the desert fathers and mothers are characterized by a radical simplicity and a lot of common sense.
- They withdrew from the world and lived a radically simple lifestyle, exploring the deeper meanings of life.
- They constantly emphasized charity in their writings. Charity is at the root of all virtue, the ultimate test of whether these words were the work of the Spirit.
- Their asceticism was challenging but never severe.
- They prayed constantly. In their sayings, we see the fruits of their prayer.
- *Apophthegmata Patrum* (The Sayings of the Fathers)
 - 1) These sayings were meant to be carried into prayer and meditation.
 - 2) One could spend a lifetime reflecting on their wisdom.

II. The Life of St. Anthony of the Desert by St. Athanasius

- St. Athanasius' biography of St. Anthony became a template for all later hagiography—writings on the lives of the saints. It is the oldest monastic biography that we have.
- St. Anthony was born around 250 C.E. and entered monastic life when he was about twenty. According to legend, he lived until he was 105.
- *The Life of St. Anthony* shows the progressive state of desert life.

- 1) The ideal of desert life and the monk is progressive.
 - 2) At the time, the religious vows were nonexistent.
- Initially, Anthony was led along blindfolded by his passions and by everything that flattered him.
 - 1) In *The Life of St. Anthony*, asceticism is necessary to awaken a consciousness of self that is truly human and Christian. This is the basis for recasting the whole of existence.
 - What were the characteristics of the new monk in the desert?
 - 1) The monk or solitary is a poor person who recognizes that our riches are in God and God alone.
 - 2) The monk is a manual laborer. Work is the primary form of asceticism.
 - 3) The monk focuses on charity.
 - 4) There is a ladder-like quality to his life.
 - Anthony goes into the desert not to escape reality but to embrace it.
 - Certain practices that emerged in desert spirituality would also play a role in the monastic traditions:
 - 1) *Lectio divina*, the reading the Word of God
 - 2) Night vigils
 - 3) Constancy in all trials, humility
 - 4) Penances
 - Athanasius uses the temptation model (i.e., temptations of Christ in desert) as a template for this biography.
 - A return to the world takes place. Anthony brings what he found in solitude into the world.
 - In the biography, we see the emergence of certain rules for discerning what does and does not come from God. Later traditions will pick up on this.



St. Anthony Abbot by Jacopo Pontormo, 1519

- Desert spirituality is not meant just for the monk in the desert. Rather, the monk in the desert becomes a symbol for living the Christian life that all people, in one way or another, are called to embrace.

III. St. Anthony's Spirituality in Our Lives

- Anthony is convertible.
- There is a ladder-like quality to his life. Each step was preceded by a harder fall.
- He is completely dependent on Christ and God.
- He does good works.
- He transforms into the image of Christ.
- We can apply these themes to our spiritual journeys today.

Topic 6: The Monastic Journey, Part 1

Overview

In both the East and the West, monastic communities began to emerge out of the solitary desert experience. The need for community began to emerge in order to augment the experience of silence, solitude, and withdrawal from life that occurred in the desert. In a sense, monasteries were destined to become “hot houses” of prayer. They are places that the monk, the *monos* (to be alone) sought in order to find God. One might measure the health of the Church in any given age by the vibrancy of the monasteries. These continue to be places of prayer and renewal for individuals within the context of community.

I. Monte Cassino: Climbing the Monastic Mountain

- The monastery was a light on the hilltop for the world.
- Monasteries and monastic spirituality are very important in the development of the Christian life. Monastic life includes all that came before it—its biblical foundations and desert spirituality—while also transcending its past.
- You can measure the health of the Church by the health of its monastic communities in any given time period.
- Monasteries were preservers and transmitters of Western civilization. They became centers for spiritual life.



Monte Cassino. Photo by Zach Ricks / CC BY-SA 2.0)

II. Monastic Spirituality

- There are significant parallels between monastic and desert spirituality.
 - 1) Every one of us is called in some way to do what monks do and to emulate the rhythm and wisdom of monastic life.
 - 2) How does monastic spirituality call us to go deeper?
- Nuns and monks are people who have gone apart to be alone with God.
 - 1) “Monk” comes from *Monos*: to be alone, to be apart.
 - 2) Monastic spirituality means living the solitary life in communion with others.
- Those who embrace monastic life want to live the Christian life to the fullest, with an emphasis on the hidden life of Jesus.
- Monks and nuns seek union with the world through communion with God.
- Going into the monastery is no guarantee of freedom from distraction. The solitude sought in monastic spirituality is a preparation for the solitude that leads us to truer and deeper relationships with God and other people.

III. Historical Development

- Monastic spirituality is rooted in Judaism, specifically the Qumran community.
 - 1) The Qumran community was a monastic community located around the Dead Sea.
 - 2) It is speculated that John the Baptist was a part of this community. Whether or not this is true, both John the Baptist and Jesus were influenced by the monastic spirituality of the Qumran community.
 - 3) They concentrated on the expectation of the Messiah.
- The early life of the Church was communal. The Monastic tradition preserved this way of life after the persecution of the early Church ceased.
- There was a transition from the ideal of martyrdom as prepared for by asceticism, to the ideal of asceticism as the equivalent to martyrdom.
 - 1) The movement into the desert and monasteries signifies the post-martyrdom experience of the early Church.
 - 2) Monks and nuns sought life separate from the world in order to bring themselves deeper into the needs and concerns of the world.

- The great monastic fathers wrote rules for the communal lives of their followers.
 - 1) St. Benedict of Nursia's Rule became a paradigm for the West.
 - 2) John Cassian brought Eastern monasticism to the West.
- Monastic spirituality continued to develop over the centuries. Reforms brought various changes to the monastic tradition.
 - 1) Cistercian
 - 2) Camaldolese
 - 3) Carthusian
- Most monastic communities came to the United States from other countries in the 19th century.

IV. Monastic Spirituality in General

- There are certain characteristics of monastic spirituality that can be found across all monastic communities, though there are different points of emphasis.
 - 1) *Opus Dei*: the purpose of monastic life is to seek God. The work of God must be the center of their lives.
 - 2) Monastic obedience: monks and nuns are taught to listen more deeply in the context of solitude and of community.
 - 3) Monastic silence: monks and nuns have important rules and customs regarding silence in the monastery. Silence is practiced so that the human spirit can quiet down and listen to the voice of God.
 - 4) Moderation: moderation in all things is key. St. Benedict avoided extremes and embraced human nature.
 - 5) *Lectio Divina*: holy reading is highly emphasized in monastic spirituality.
 - 6) Monastic peace: monks and nuns have been advocates of peace throughout history.

Review Questions

1. Write in your journal your struggles with solitude in your life. Think about the role of community in your life. What leads you to community, and what leads you to withdraw from community?

2. Do you think monastic life was an escape from the world? Why or why not?

Topic 7: The Monastic Journey, Part 2

Overview

In this segment, we will look to some of the impulses and movements towards monasticism that would climax in the rule of St. Benedict. The beginnings of the coenobitic (community) life were with Pachomius. He institutionalized monasticism, giving it a structure and form. *The Life of Pachomius* was a paradigm for the components of monastic spirituality. It was John Cassian who transmitted to the West the monastic practices of the East and the teachings of Eastern monks. The *Conferences* of John Cassian are still an important text for contemporary monastic life.

I. Pachomius and Cenobitism

- Pachomius lived in the 4th century and served as a model for the coenobitic or community life.
- Pachomius transformed the monastic impulse by institutionalizing it. The abbot became the official head of the community.
 - 1) This structure gave rise to the cenobitic life, which supplanted more ancient forms of monastic life in the West.
 - 2) In the East, these two modes of monasticism continued to coexist.
- Pachomius was a convert, baptized in 307. At that time, he made a vow to live his life in service of others.
- He began to form a monastic community and imposed a more structured way of life under his leadership. Initially, Pachomius was unsuccessful. Eventually, a new group came and embraced the rule.

II. The Institutionalization of Monasticism

- Pachomius's community marked the beginnings of structured religious life.
 - 1) The community was organized hierarchically.
 - 2) Pachomius set out definite rules and regulations.
 - 3) The formal promise of obedience set the monk apart from the rest of society.
 - (a) Obedience dominated their whole way of life and functioned as the basis for their asceticism.
- There are two major objections to the reduction of monasticism to organized cenobitic life:

- 1) Especially in the East, monasticism was seen as spiritual liberty. A true monk did not conform to external ideals but to internal realities.
- 2) It is necessary to leave everything to God alone. Solitude, rather than the common life, is essential.

III. John Cassian

- John Cassian transmitted to the West the monastic practices of the East and the teaching of the Eastern monks.
 - 1) In the person of John Cassian, we see a synthesis of East and West, balancing humanness and ascetic ideals.
- He transmitted the best of the Egyptian monastic experience, enlightened by a balanced version of Evagrius and Origen.
- John Cassian presented a series of conferences that laid out the principles for monastic life.
 - 1) He based his vision based on three key concepts:
 - (a) Prayer
 - (b) Perfection
 - (c) Purity of Heart
 - 2) Asceticism is useless unless it bears fruit in charity. John Cassian emphasized the notion of purity of heart that leads to action. Purity of heart is the foundation and goal of monastic life.
 - 3) Cassian's most original contribution was the notion that asceticism leads to the perfection of charity. He held that charity was the best way to reach union with God.
 - 4) Cassian discussed a progression in monastic spirituality in the form of successive renunciations.
 - (a) The renunciation involved in asceticism
 - (b) The renunciation of vices
 - (c) The renunciation of everything that is not God



St. John Cassian

IV. *Lectio Divina*

- John Cassian stressed that contemplation should flow from the scripture.
- When we engage in the *Lectio Divina*:
 - 1) We become impregnated with the word of God.
 - 2) We begin to be enlightened.
 - 3) The soul becomes totally absorbed in God and God becomes absorbed in the human spirit.
 - 4) The divine presence is established within the human heart.

Topic 8:

The Monastic Journey, Part 3

Overview

St. Benedict of Nursia is the “Father of Monasticism” in the West. The Rule of St. Benedict is a classic text that had a profound impact on religious life in the Church and the Western world in general. It was this text and the living of the Rule in the monasteries that preserved the culture of Western civilization. The wisdom of St. Benedict can be seen in the balance of his Rule and the rhythm of the way of life that it proposes.

I. St. Benedict and Benedictine Spirituality

- St. Benedict and his sister, St. Scholastica, founded a monastery and a convent. When writing a Rule for his community, St. Benedict tapped into basic human experience and dynamics to create a container for spiritual life that transcended his particular monastery and began a movement that would prevail for centuries.
- The ultimate purpose of the Rule was to come closer to God.
 - 1) He built upon Pachomius, John Cassian, and other sources.
 - 2) Most, if not all human beings need a sense of structure in order to reach their goals.
 - 3) St. Benedict did not make a God out of structure. The structure was to be a path to God.
 - 4) St. Benedict avoided excessive practices. His purpose was to establish a school for the Lord’s service.
- The first word of the Rule is *obsculta*, to listen. St. Benedict invites us to listen deeply with the ear of the heart.
- Certain aspects of the Rule can apply to all of us.
 - 1) There is a rhythm to life that keeps a clear focus on seeking God.
 - 2) Benedict emphasizes practical needs.
 - 3) His Rule is based on the *ora et labora*, prayer and work. These are the pillars upon which Benedictine spirituality is based.



St. Benedict of Nursia by Hermann Nigg, 1926

II. The Life of St. Benedict

- The spirituality of the Rule, as opposed to Eastern spirituality, is conditioned by the simpler, less sophisticated culture of the West. We can get a sense of Benedict's personality and way of thinking by reading this text.
- St. Benedict was born in Nursia, Italy, around 480. As a young man, he studied in Rome, but eventually left the disorder and corruption of the city to become a hermit.
- After his hermetical period, a number of monks gathered around Benedict. His attempt to compel his fellow monks to live a more fervent monastic life failed. His first experience of coenobitic life ended when some of the other monks tried to poison him.
- At the time, Benedict was familiar with the disorderly varieties of monastic life in the East and West. He began to establish new communities at Subiaco. Finally, he went to Monte Cassino, where he wrote the Rule in the last years of his life.

III. The Original Form of Benedictine Life

- For Benedict, community was essential. The living out of charity is the primary ministry of the monk.
- The monastery should be self-sufficient. In a sense, the monastery would become a symbol of paradise on Earth.
- Benedict wanted to bring a sense of stability to life in the monastery. He encouraged community living rather than individuality.
- The abbot was the symbol of Christ around which the monks would gather, forming an apostolic community.
- All of the monks were originally laymen. The monastic movement was a lay movement. As monasticism became institutionalized, it became clericalized.
- Humility is at the heart of the Rule of St. Benedict.
- Daily life in the monastery consisted of a rhythmic balance of three elements:
 - 1) Liturgical prayer/chanting of the Divine Office
 - 2) Manual labor
 - 3) *Lectio Divina*
- Over the years, various developments and changes occurred, and various forms of Benedictine monasticism emerged.

Review Questions

1. Humility is the foundation of the Rule of St. Benedict. Humility leads us on the path to finding the true self, dying to the ego and rising as a new person in Christ. Humility comes from the Latin word *humus*, meaning “from the earth.” Meditate on who you are in the light of who God is, and see where this leads you on the path of humility.

2. Conversion of heart is an important theme in the Rule of St. Benedict. Think about the ways you need to change and spend some time praying for conversion of heart.

Topic 9: The Franciscan Vision, Part 1

Overview

St. Francis of Assisi was inspired to follow and embrace the human Christ, who took flesh and lived in the world. The impulse of St. Francis was to take the experience of the desert and the monastery and bring it into the world. He introduced a form of religious life in the thirteenth century that brought the monastery into the world. It is no exaggeration to say that St. Francis was radical in living the Gospel. His conversion was a “falling off the horse” experience of being wounded in battle. In his recuperation, God broke into his life and changed him forever. The symbol of his conversion, the change of heart, was his embracing of the leper. Before his conversion he abhorred lepers, but now he embraced and kissed them and found in them the face of Christ.

I. St. Francis of Assisi: “Mystic, Medieval, Italian” (1182–1226)

- St. Francis lived in a time and place that was experiencing a shifting economy. A focus on poverty was becoming more prevalent as a reaction to the extreme wealth seen in many of the monasteries. There were a lot of wandering preachers as well as many heresies emerging in the Church.
- In his spiritual journey, Francis gradually came to see a wider picture of God’s plan in the context of the world.
- He had an affective spirituality.
- Early Christian martyrs who died for their faith in a culture that viewed faith as a threat could be seen as precursors to the monastic life.
- With the conversion of Constantine came the emergence of the desert fathers and mothers from which comes the monastic tradition. In martyrdom, desert spirituality, and monastic life is the notion of unconditional surrender.

II. Franciscan and Dominican Orders

- Mendicant spirituality involved a movement outside of the monasteries and into the world. It was a new way of being in the world, bringing a new dimension to religious life.
- In the 13th century, there was a new interest in the Bible and the fathers of the Church.
- The emphasis on poverty seemed to be a remedy for the decadence in the Church and the monasteries.

- The orders founded by Francis and Dominic provided a solution to the monastic and canonical aspirations of the period by creating a new form of religious life. They both corresponded to the intellectual tendencies of the day.

III. Elements of Francis' Vision and Spirituality

- Even during Francis' lifetime, the Franciscan school was branching out in multiple ways.
- Francis was born in 1181 or 1182 and died in 1226. In his *Testament*, he reflects back on his life.
- Francis had a conversion experience in 1206 while recuperating from a battle wound.
- Lepers were seen as the outcasts of society. Before his conversion, Francis would avoid lepers, running the other way when he saw one. After his conversion, he would embrace them and eat with them.
 - 1) The embracing of the leper is reflective of a major shift within Francis, the beginning of a spiritual psyche that sees God in all of creation.
 - 2) His conversion was a process.
- Francis struggled with what path to take. He prayed before the crucifix at San Damiano, and God called him to rebuild the Church.
- He set about rebuilding churches but soon realized that he was called to rebuild the spiritual Church.
- In 1209, Francis wrote a simple Rule. From the biography tradition we know that this Rule was brief and simple, comprised mostly likely of several scriptural texts.
 - 1) Pope Innocent III gave it a verbal approbation.
- The Laudes was a form of preaching unique to the Franciscans in which listeners are invited by song to enter into the experience of prayer and the love of God.
- Francis traveled the world telling others about the love of God.



St. Francis of Assisi Receiving the Stigmata by Francisco de Zurbarán, 17th century

IV. The Stigmata

- Towards the end of his life, Francis received the stigmata, the wounds of Christ. This reflects his conformity to Christ.
- His spirituality was Christocentric.
- After receiving the stigmata, St. Francis's health began to deteriorate. The height of his mystical experience at La Verna was followed by a state of depression.
- Francis opened a new current and school of spirituality.

V. The Canticle of Brother Sun

- This was Francis' masterpiece. It is a magnificent expression of St. Francis' spirituality.
- The elements are reflections of the Trinity. All of creation reflects God.
- It is all about relationships.

Review Questions

1. Pray with the Canticle of Brother Sun. Do this by going outdoors and noticing the beauty of nature in the created world.
2. St. Francis used a form of preaching that was called the “Laudes.” It was a way of preaching that invited its listeners to experience God through song and possibly dance. Francis preached by example. What are some of the ways that you might “cry the Gospel with your life”?
3. St. Francis found God by embracing and living with lepers. What and who are the lepers in your life? Reflect on this and pray for the grace to embrace that which you find repulsive or distasteful.

Topic 10: The Franciscan Vision, Part 2

Overview

The experience of Francis lived on in his followers, notably St. Clare, St. Bonaventure, and John Duns Scotus, just to mention a few. The tradition of the Franciscan school has touched many hearts and minds, especially with its focus on the humanity of Christ and the needs of the poor. St. Clare represents the vision of St. Francis and brings in the feminine dimension of the Franciscan heart. St. Clare and St. Bonaventure carried on Francis's spirituality and added or emphasized different elements of it.

I. St. Clare (1194–1253)

- When St. Bonaventure became the Minister General of the Order, he looked to the Poor Clares and their way of life.
- Clare is especially notable for her accentuation of poverty.
- St. Francis received her into the convent in 1212. She escaped her wealthy family in order to seek a more spiritual life.
- Francis saw Clare as a spouse of the Holy Spirit. What Francis was doing in the outside world, Clare was doing within the monastery.
 - 1) Today, there is debate over whether life in the enclosed monastery was a choice or an imposition. At the time, a woman could not enter into the religious life outside of the context of the monastery.

II. Clare's Rule

- There are three prominent differences between Clare's Rule and Francis' later Rule, written in 1223. Clare emphasized:
 - 1) The practice of a material separation from the world
 - 2) The total permeation of everyday life with the pursuit of radical poverty
 - 3) The struggle to preserve the unity of mutual love and peace as a means of achieving sanctification
- Clare envisioned a return to the poverty of the Garden of Eden. This concept was present in an early Franciscan work, the *Sacrum commercium*.

- 1) Through this text, Clare saw poverty as the thing that led her to God and the fruit of her relationship with God.
- In her focus on poverty, Clare captured what was happening in various religious movements of the time. Poverty provided a means of renewal for the Church.

III. St. Bonaventure

- In 1259, St. Bonaventure was elected Minister General of the friars. He went to Monte La Verna, where St. Francis received the stigmata, in order to open himself to the experience of God. After coming down from the mount, he began to reflect on the spiritual life, the impulse of St. Francis, and the Franciscan Order.
- St. Bonaventure wrote three works that clearly articulate the vision of the Franciscan school.

1) *The Journey of the Soul into God (Itinerarium Mentis in Deum)*

- (a) In this work, he describes a theology of the spiritual path and expresses the vision of St. Francis. He invites us to experience what St. Francis experienced.
- (b) The *Itinerarium* contains seven chapters.
 - (i) Chapters 1 and 2 invite us to go out into the world and find God.
 - (ii) Chapters 3 and 4 invite us to go within ourselves.
 - (iii) Chapters 5 and 6 invite us to go beyond ourselves.
 - (iv) Chapter 7 invites us to be embraced by the crucified Christ.



St. Bonaventure into the Tree of Redemption by Vittore Crivelli, ca. 1490

2) *The Major Life of St. Francis*

- (a) This spiritual biography illustrates how the life of St. Francis parallels what Bonaventure described in his previous work. Francis exemplified the spiritual journey.

3) *The Tree of Life*

- (a) In the third part of the trilogy, Bonaventure presents his reflections on the Cross, inviting us to embrace and be embraced by the crucified Christ.
- St. Clare represents the vision of St. Francis and brings in the feminine dimension of the Franciscan heart.

Topic 11: Dominicans: The Order of Preachers, Part 1

Overview

St. Dominic was a contemporary of St. Francis. Legend has it that they met at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. These two figures were different in personality and temperament but similar in their impulse to bring the desert and monastery into the world and to live poorly and simply. Franciscans and Dominicans are considered mendicants, begging orders that depend on the goodness of God and the generosity of others for their daily sustenance. The heretical movements in the thirteenth century were critical of the wealth and opulence that they saw in some clerics. They called for reform of the church and the clergy. It was the decadence of the thirteenth century Church that led them to leave the Church. His way of preaching was didactic, emphasizing the centrality of truth.

I. St. Dominic Guzman (1170–1221)

- In his *Divine Comedy*, Dante aimed to criticize the corruption of the Church. Interestingly, Dante praised St. Dominic for his poverty and desire to spread the gospel through preaching.
 - 1) Dante included a piece about St. Dominic in the *Divine Comedy*. In this passage, Dante captured the spirit and influence of Dominic.
 - 2) Dominic had a passion for preaching the Word of God.
- St. Dominic started out as a canon. Even as a canon, Dominic's interest lay in preaching and the care of souls.
- Early in 1206, while travelling with his bishop, Dominic encountered a heretical group called the Albigensians. Dominic and his bishop hoped to convince the Albigensians of their heresy by presenting the truth in the example of their lives.
 - 1) Pope Innocent III granted Dominic permission to preach.
- The originality of Dominic's vision is documented in the primitive constitutions framed under his leadership between 1216 and 1220 and revised after his death by the general chapter of 1228.
- Dominic prioritized preaching.
 - 1) Dominic hoped to combat heretical ways of thinking and the distortion of the gospel. The Albigensian heresy developed in part as a reaction to the opulence and corruption of the Church. One of the reasons that he founded the Order of Preachers was to combat this heresy. His way of preaching was didactic, emphasizing the centrality of truth.

2) Dominic remained loyal to the Church but lived a life of poverty.

II. Elements of St. Dominic's Spirituality

- His vision was that the common life, liturgy, contemplation, and study were to be blended into a whole that would serve rather than hinder preaching. St. Dominic and his followers adopted the Rule of St. Augustine.
- Liturgical celebration was considered to be very important. He brought the praying of the Divine Office into the life of the friars.
- Contemplation was a point of emphasis. St. Dominic engaged in private prayer. Although Dominic never authored a treatise on prayer, a commentary called "The Nine Ways of Prayer of St. Dominic" was published one hundred years after his death.
 - 1) Bowing before the altar as if Christ were really present
 - 2) Preaching God's mercy while lying prostrate
 - 3) Performing acts of penance
 - 4) Genuflecting frequently before a crucifix
 - 5) Accompanying one's prayer with hand gestures and bodily movement
 - 6) Posturing oneself in the form of the Cross
 - 7) Arching the entire body heavenward
 - 8) Studying divine truth
 - 9) Praising God while traveling
- The *Lectio Divina* is brought into Dominican spirituality in a new way. Reflecting on the word of God is a form of contemplation.
- Nourished by prayer and the study of the Gospels, Dominic's preaching caught fire. The Order's motto became: "To praise, to bless, to preach."
- There was a place for study in his spirituality. This reflects a departure from St. Francis's preaching. St. Dominic had an agenda of combatting the heresies of his day.
 - 1) Dominican spirituality involves a communal and personal engagement with the Word.



St. Dominic by
Fra Angelico, 15th century

- 2) Dominic's vision made study a religious exercise.
 - 3) The inadequate training of preachers proved to be a primary source of the faith crisis within the Church at the time.
- In his form of government, St. Dominic emphasized a democratic way of life. Friars were to work all things out together. Dominic himself was obedient to the will of the community and allowed various currents to flow from his original impulse.
 - "Cry the gospel with your life."

Review Questions

1. St. Dominic was called to combat the heresies of his day, especially the Albigensians. What are some of the heresies of today? How do we preach truth with love and compassion?
2. Legend has it that the Blessed Mother gave the fifteen decades of the rosary to St. Dominic. This is meant to be a contemplative form of prayer, repeating a mantra and being aware of God's presence. Try praying the rosary in this way.
3. St. Dominic and the Dominican School emphasize truth. How was the truth of the faith handed down to you and how to you now hand it down to others?

Topic 12: The Dominicans: The Order of Preachers, Part 2

Overview

The Dominican movement in Christian spirituality was a source of renewal not only in the thirteenth century but also in subsequent centuries, up to and including the present time. Just as St. Bonaventure was the intellectual genius of the early Franciscan movement, so too was St. Thomas Aquinas for the Dominicans. His *Summa Theologiae* was his masterpiece that continues to influence theological minds. In addition, his great school of spirituality had many mystics and saints throughout the centuries, among them John Tauler, Henry Suso, Meister Eckhart and St. Catherine of Siena.

I. Thomas Aquinas

- Aquinas gave St. Dominic's vision a systematic theological expression in his extensive writings.
- Aquinas held a chair at the University of Paris but spent most of his life as a lecturer in Dominican houses.
- The *Summa Theologiae* is his masterpiece.
- His conviction that the intellect is primary and that love flows from knowledge is central to his theology. He affirms the incomprehensibility of God while holding that, through revelation, God has expressed the will to lead humankind to fulfillment.
 - 1) All being is good. Humans are made in God's image.
 - 2) His theology is not static. He recognizes that universal principles cannot be applied to individual circumstances without discernment.
- Teaching was Aquinas's form of preaching in the Dominican Order. He was faithful to Dominic's emphasis on study.
- Aquinas employed Aristotelian philosophy to develop his theology.
- St. Dominic's emphasis on prayer comes through in Thomas Aquinas.
- Aquinas' theology continues to influence the Church today.

- While praying before a crucifix, Aquinas had a vision of the crucified Christ. After this experience, Aquinas said “take all that I wrote and burn it.” At the end of his life, he integrated the head and the heart.

II. St. Catherine of Siena

- St. Catherine of Siena brought a feminine dimension to Dominican spirituality.
- She was born in 1347. She took the Dominican habit when she was 18. Catherine belonged to the Mantellate, a group of women associated with the Dominican Order. For several years, she lived as a recluse in her parents’ home, going out only for Mass.
- In 1368, she sensed the call to go out and work among her sisters. Her activity amongst the sick and destitute brought her notoriety.
- She became a spiritual mother. Others recognized her wisdom and spirituality.
- She was called upon to be a mediator of the intense politics of 14th-century Italy.
- Catherine, perhaps more than any other Dominican except Dominic, exemplifies the dynamic of contemplation and action. Her prayer and contemplation ultimately led her out into the world.
- She was a powerful influence in the Church and society in her day.
- From one of her letters: “Dearest Father, I beg you to fulfill my longing to see you united with and transformed in God. But this is impossible unless we are one with His Will. Oh sweetest eternal Will, to have taught us how to discover your holy Will! If we were to ask that gentlest most loving young man and most merciful father, this is how he would answer us: ‘Dearest children, if you wish to discover and experience the effects of My will, dwell within the cell of your soul’. This cell is a well in which there is earth as well as water. In the earth we can recognize our own poverty: we see that we are not—for we are not. We see that our being is from God. Oh ineffable blazing charity! I see next that as we discover the earth we get to the living water, the very core of the knowledge of God’s true and gentle will which desires nothing else but that we be made holy. So let us enter into the depths of that well—for if we dwell there, we will necessarily come to know both God’s goodness and ourselves. In recognizing that we are nothing we humble ourselves. And in humbling ourselves we enter that flaming, consumed heart, opened up like a window without shutters, never to be closed. As we focus there the eye of the free will God has given us, we see and know that His Will has become nothing other than our sanctification.”

III. The Rhineland Mystics (14th Century)

- Three figures epitomize Dominican spirituality in unique ways.
 - 1) John Tauler

- 2) Henry Suso
- 3) Meister Eckhart
 - (a) Eckhart has become an important figure in contemporary theology, especially in creation-centered spiritualities. Mendicant spirituality is an affirmation of the goodness of the human person and the beauty of God's creation.
 - (b) Eckhart was born in Germany in 1260 and died in 1329, shortly after a papal trial. Scholars today agree that he was unjustly condemned.
 - (c) Eckhart's spirituality is politically conscious, culminating in social justice. He rejected Neo-Platonism's threefold path of piety and expressed the journey towards union with God in a different way.
 - (i) *Via positiva*: Eckhart emphasized the goodness of creation. It was a theology of gratitude and praise. Jesus came to remind us that we were created in the image of God.
 - (ii) *Via negativa*: we experience God by letting go. Eckhart invites us to befriend the darkness and the nothingness.
 - (iii) *Via creativa*: "Our union with God is a fruitful union." Eckhart takes the notion of contemplation and brings it to a new place. We center by way of giving birth.
 - (iv) *Via transformativa*: he suggests building a new creation by way of compassion and social justice.



Meister Eckhart by Giovanni Bellini

Review Questions

1. Study was important in the formation of preachers and teachers in the Dominican tradition. Reflect on the amount of time you give to study and reading. How might you go deeper into study in your life?
2. St. Catherine of Siena was a powerful woman who was not afraid to confront the pope. Reflect on the role of women in the Church and how they might play a more important role, as did Catherine.
3. St. Thomas Aquinas is the Church's great theologian. He models for us that it is important for spirituality and Christian living to be rooted in good theology. Read a contemporary theologian (preferably a book, but an article would good as well).

Topic 13: Carmelites: Hermits and Friars, Part 1

Overview

The Carmelite tradition developed in a different way than Franciscan and Dominican spirituality. It began as a group of lay hermits in the thirteenth century. They modeled themselves on the prophet Elijah who lived in caves and found God not in the thunder but in the tiny whispering sounds (1 Kings 19). Elijah became the archetype of these early hermits who, following his example, lived on Mount Carmel. Early Carmelite life was lived in caves where solitude, silence, and prayer were the order of the day.

I. The History of the Carmelite Movement

- Hermits made a pilgrimage to Israel, joining other hermits living around Mt. Carmel. By 1206, they had a primitive structure and a leader. They asked for approval for their way of life.
- The Rule of St. Albert was established in 1214. The Carmelite life was to be marked by solitude, continuous prayer, silence, fasting, perpetual abstinence from meat, manual work, vocal recitation of the Psalms, and attendance of Mass.
 - 1) Initially, their way of life resembled the monastic structure.
- By 1237, a revised rule was approved by the Pope, establishing the Carmelites in Europe. They shifted from rustic hermits to highly educated priests.
 - 1) The first Carmelite nuns were admitted around 1452.
 - 2) Carmelite history is filled with minor and major reforms.

II. Carmelite Spirituality

- The Carmelites were a blend of hermits and mendicants. Following the example of Elijah, the Carmelite school teaches that one must master one's sinfulness by going into the desert and be purified by God.
 - 1) Solitude, self-denial, and devotion to Mary are significant themes in Carmelite spirituality.
- Since the 15th century, Carmelites have integrated a stark lifestyle with the promotion of an affective spirituality and mystical prayer.
- The Carmelite tradition has a prophetic edge, which is attached to their identification with Elijah.

III. The Carmelites Become Mendicants

- At the time that the Carmelites were establishing hermetical houses throughout Europe, the Franciscans and Dominicans were meeting the pastoral challenges of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. Carmelites were living in a time of reform within the Church.
 - 1) The purpose of the Council was to deal with heretical movements and decadence within the Church.
 - 2) Faced with these pastoral concerns, the Carmelites sought papal approval for a revision of their way of life that would make it possible for them to follow in the footsteps of the Dominicans and Franciscans.
 - (a) They received approval for their revised formula, and the Carmelites became friars.
 - (b) The hermits from Mt. Carmel were now allowed to settle in towns and to live a more communal life.
- Despite internal and external opposition, the Carmelites entered into the ranks of the Mendicants in the 13th century.
 - 1) There was a fundamental tension to Carmelite spirituality. Vital Carmelite reforms always returned to this tension.

IV. Symbols in Carmelite Spirituality

- The Prophet Elijah
 - 1) Elijah holds a significant place in Carmelite spirituality. Elijah had been a model for monks and hermits long before the Carmelites came onto the scene.
 - 2) Elijah is an archetype for Carmelite spirituality. He is looked upon as a symbol for the community.
 - 3) “I am zealous with zeal for the Lord God of hosts.”
 - 4) Elijah found God in tiny whispering sounds.
- Mary
 - 1) The chapel around which the hermits on Mt. Carmel situated their hermitages was dedicated to Mary.
 - 2) They are called the Brothers of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel.
 - 3) Towards the end of the 13th century, the Carmelites stated that their Order had been founded to honor Mary.

- 4) In the 15th century, devotion to Mary crystalized around Simon Stock's vision of Mary. The wearing of the brown scapular came to symbolize a dedication to Mary. The scapular has become a sign of affiliation with the Carmelite Order.
- 5) In the 17th century, Carmelites developed a Marian mysticism.
- 6) Up until the present day, the Carmelites continue the medieval custom of making their vows to both God and Mary.

V. Reform

- Reform is an important aspect of Carmelite spirituality. The founding and development of the Carmelite tradition indicates a sense of unrest. The tradition embodies desert spirituality, monastic spirituality, and mendicant spirituality. The convergence of these three traditions results in an ongoing tension in the Carmelite Order.
- By the early 15th century, Carmelites in northern Italy initiated a reform that came to be known as the Congregation of Mantua. The Mantuan reform sought to restore solitude, community life, and poverty.
- John Soreth was the most important Carmelite reformer prior to the 16th century. After his death, his reform was not sustained. Other reform movements sprung up.
- The reforms of the Carmelite tradition reached a deeper level when women were brought into the Carmelite community.



Our Lady of Mount Carmel and Carmelite Saints by Pietro Novelli, 1641

Topic 14: Carmelites: Hermits and Friars, Part 2

Overview

The sixteenth century witnessed a reform of the Carmelite friars and nuns through the life and writings of St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross. In a sense, they represent a return to the earlier asceticism of the hermits of Mount Carmel. The Carmelite reform was part of the larger reform of the Church after the Protestant Reformation. Thus, the emphasis on contemplative prayer, union with God, and solitude resurfaces and is reshaped by Teresa and John. The Carmelite School has produced spiritual giants who embody all of the impulses of Christian spirituality that were present up to the sixteenth century and carried these to new places.

I. St. Teresa of Avila

- Teresa of Avila lived from 1515 to 1582. She experienced a midlife conversion. Prior to this moment, she lived a more lax form of religious life in a Carmelite monastery.
- Solitude was unavailable to Teresa in the large and crowded monastery. She shaped a new model of Carmelite life with the foundation of San Jose in Avila. She limited the number of nuns allowed to live in the monastery in order to support a life of solitude and prayer.
 - 1) She symbolized her transformation by changing her name, referring to herself simply as Teresa of Jesus after her conversion.
- People began to come to Teresa and ask her to instruct them in prayer. She composed *The Way of Perfection*, in which she presented a schema of the spiritual life and reflected on the mystical manifestations of God.
- She wrote her classic exposition of the mystical journey to God in *The Interior Castle*. In it, she leads the reader through seven mansions, reflecting the spiritual journey.
- Teresa was beatified in the 17th century. In 1970, Pope Paul VI declared her the first woman Doctor of the Church.

II. St. John of the Cross

- John of the Cross lived from 1542 to 1591.
- Teresa of Avila handpicked John of the Cross to be her collaborator in the reform of the Carmelite Order.
- John was single-minded in his God-centered life. His passion for reform led him to be rejected by his brothers. His Carmelite brothers threw him into prison.

- While imprisoned, he composed many stanzas of his *Spiritual Canticle*. In it, he reflects the mystical notion of espousal with God. The darkness in John of the Cross is another form of spiritual poverty.
- He later wrote the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* and the *Dark Night of the Soul*.
 - 1) In the *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, John of the Cross returns to the tradition of Elijah, inviting us back into the cave.
 - 2) In the *Dark Night of the Soul*, he suggests that we find God in the darkness. He urges us to stay in our own spiritual darkness.
- For John of the Cross, the goal of the contemplative life is the transformation of the soul and the union of God in love.
- After Vatican II, especially from the 1980s onward, there has been an emphasis on reading the Spanish mystics.
- Both John and Teresa reflect the movement and development of Carmelite spirituality well into the 20th century.

III. St. Therese of Lisieux

- Therese of Lisieux lived from 1873 to 1897. She is one of the most widely known Carmelites.
- She was also declared a Doctor of the Church.
- There is a simplicity in her writings and lifestyle that sets her apart from other Doctors of the Church. Because of her extraordinary spirituality and influence on the Carmelite tradition, she is recognized as a key figure in the history of the Church.
- Therese of Lisieux lived and wrote about a spirituality that matured in the crucible of suffering. In the last 18 months of her life, the young nun endured a terrible darkness marked by temptations against faith. Ultimately, her faith protected her against suicide.
- The sources of her spirituality were the Bible, the writings of John of the Cross, and *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis.
- She lived out the Carmelite tradition in a humble convent in Lisieux, France.
- Therese of Lisieux is especially noted for her autobiography, *The Story of a Soul*, which she was commanded to write by her superiors.
 - 1) She wrote a passage indicating that she felt that her basic vocation was to love, which was tied to a spirituality of martyrdom.
 - 2) Therese was on fire with the love of God and a love of the world. She brings the world into her heart from inside the monastery.

IV. Modern Carmelite Figures

- Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity (1880–1906) is noted especially for her Trinitarian spirituality.
- Edith Stein (1891–1942) was a brilliant philosopher who served as an assistant to Edmund Husserl. She published an important study of John of the Cross. She was executed in a Nazi concentration camp.
- Carmelite spirituality has taken on many forms over the centuries. It brings us to new places with its focus on solitude that leads to deeper and reformed ways of contemplation.



St. Therese of Lisieux

Review Questions

1. St. John of the Cross writes about the God we find in the dark moments of life. The next time you feel lonely, anxious or depressed, don't run—stay there and find the God who calls you in those dark places.
2. St. Teresa of Avila writes about the purification that we need to experience before going into the castle of the spiritual life. Think about ways you need to change, to be purified in order to go deeper.
3. St. Therese of Lisieux never left her cloister but has been named patroness of the missions because of her deep love and concern for the needs of the world. As an expression of your love, bring the needs of the world, especially the missions in developing nations, into your prayer.

Topic 15: Saint Ignatius of Loyola: Soldier and Saint, Part 1

Overview

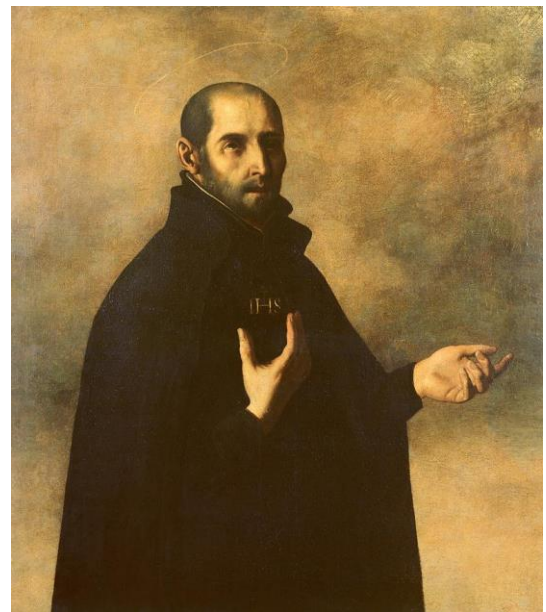
St. Ignatius of Loyola was a shining star of the spiritual renewal and reform that emerged in 16th-century Spain. He continued the movement of spirituality from the desert and monastery into the world that began with St. Francis and St. Dominic. You might say that he carried this impulse even further as he founded the Company of Jesus who crafted what has come to be known as “Apostolic Spirituality.” From the very beginning of this movement, Ignatius and his followers founded universities and colleges and had an effective outreach to the poor, especially in the foreign missions.

I. St. Ignatius (1491–1556)

- Ignatius was the soldier, wounded in battle, who became a saint. In 1521, he suffered a severe leg wound. During his recuperation, he began to read the about the lives of the saints. Ignatius had a profound religious experience that led him to reform his life and to become a soldier for Christ.
- Ignatius became a wandering ascetic for the sake of Christ.
- Through a number of extraordinary religious experiences (of the Trinity, Christ, and Our Lady) he was transformed from being a temporal knight to be a knight for Christ.
- He gathered companions around him. His group became known as the Society of Jesus.
- He founded colleges, universities, and charitable institutions. He had a deep love for the poor and the sick and a strong missionary spirit.
- After a vision at La Storta near Rome in 1537, he had a strong desire to serve others. This vision connected Ignatius and his companions with the Pope.
- Ignatius brought St. Francis’s vision of bringing the friars from the monastery into the world to a new level.
 - 1) Ignatius adamantly refused to allow the Jesuits to chant the Divine Office. He envisioned a clear correlation between prayer and ministry.
- In *The Imitation of Christ*, one of Ignatius’ favorite works, Thomas à Kempis cautioned against traveling too much. Ignatius insisted that it was only by engaging in the pilgrimage implied in ministry that the Jesuit could hope to attain sanctification.
 - 1) He gives going into the world a spiritual significance.

II. Ignatian Spirituality

- Ignatius's thinking and spirituality influenced many religious communities.
- When Ignatius stepped back and listened as a wounded soldier, he had a religious experience.
- Ignatius saw the world as the place where God calls us to experience our salvation. For him, the world becomes the monastery.
- Ignatius gives us tools for responding to the Lord's call and to living out our discipleship.
- When Ignatius discusses prayer, he emphasizes its affective dimension and the use of imagination. Ignatian spirituality is full of creativity.
- Ignatian spirituality shows us a way to move towards a deeper spiritual freedom. In some respects, this journey towards freedom parallels the monastic concept of purity of heart.
- Ignatius gives us a way of paying attention and becoming more aware. He teaches us to be more reflective as we live in the context of a very busy world.
- Ignatian spirituality is practical. There have been many interpretations of Ignatius's thinking throughout history. Some looked at his exercises as a rigid program. Today, most see Ignatius's vision as an attitude or outlook that can lead us closer to God.
- We are companions of Jesus and of one another. We do not live a spiritual life alone. Ignatius shows us a way of building relationships in the context of the world. The experience of the Risen Christ binds us together.
- Ignatius's spirituality is a spirituality of contemplation in action.
- "We are called to be men and women for others."



St. Ignatius of Loyola by Francisco de Zurbarán, 1600s

Review Questions

1. St. Ignatius challenges us to “find God in all things.” Keep a journal in which you reflect and write about the ways to experience God in the details of your daily life.
2. St. Ignatius teaches us “to think with the Church.” The Church is all of us. How do we remain loyal to the Church and at the same time call it to reform and renewal?
3. St. Ignatius models in his spirituality total generosity to God and service to others as men and women for others. Reflect on your own life and how you might move beyond a self-centered life and to live a more other and God centered life.

Topic 16: Saint Ignatius of Loyola: Soldier and Saint, Part 2

Overview

Ignatius had a vision of a way of contemplation that could be followed by everyone. The gift of St. Ignatius to the Church is his Spiritual Exercises. The Exercises are meant for all who want to grow in their relationship with God. At the heart of the Exercises are his Rules for the Discernment of Spirits. The Examen is a practice of reviewing at least once a day where God has been acting in your life, how you are responding, and how you need to ask for forgiveness and healing as you continue into the next day. Other spiritual practices that have come from the Ignatian movement in spirituality are retreats, spiritual direction, and sodalities.

I. Spiritual Practices

- The Retreat: a periodic retreat became a regular feature in the pattern of piety followed by many people.
- Spiritual Direction: the Ignatian approach to spiritual direction is probably the clearest and most influential, developed to a high degree by early Jesuits.
- Sodalities: Jesuits adopted, modified, and promulgated confraternities of various kinds.
- Ignatius warns against indiscriminate use of methods of meditation by unschooled and unguided people.

II. The Spiritual Exercises

- The Spiritual Exercises trained the soldiers with an understanding of individual needs. Ignatius takes the classical faculties of the mind (memory, understanding, and will) and treats them in a systematic way, using them to cultivate an attitude of contemplation.
- Ignatius tells us that we will experience both consolation and desolation in our prayer. He develops a skillset of discernment.
- The purpose of the Exercises is to help a person become spiritually and apostolically decisive.
- God intervenes in our lives. As we become reflective, we gain a sense of our own personal salvation history.
- The Exercises are divided into four weeks or movements.

1) The first week corresponds to the purgative way.

(a) The First Principle and Foundation: “Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul. The other things on the face of the earth are created for man and to help him in attaining the end for which he is created. Hence, man is to use them in as far as they help him in the attainment of his end, and must rid himself of them in as far as they prove a hindrance to him. For we must make ourselves indifferent to all created things in as far as we are allowed free choice and not under any prohibition; consequently, as far as we are concerned, we should not prefer health to sickness, riches to poverty, honor to dishonor, a long to a short life, and the same holds all other things; our one desire and choice should be what is most conducive for us to the end for which we are created.”

(b) We must begin with the notion of being loved and accepted by God, and then examine the things that draw us away from God. We look at sin from the perspective of God’s mercy.

2) The second week corresponds to the illuminative way.

(a) It begins with contemplation of Christ’s kingship over the world. We move into the mysteries of Christ’s life up to the Last Supper.

3) The third and fourth week correspond to the unitive way.

(a) The third week focuses on the Passion of Christ.

(b) The fourth week focuses on the joy of Christ and his followers in the risen life. We are now sent out into the world as disciples of Christ.

- The Spiritual Exercises reflect Ignatius’s own experience.

III. Discernment of Spirits

- Not every good or spiritual experience is of God. Discernment involves paying attention to the movements that lead to God and those that lead away from God.



St. Ignatius of Loyola by Peter Paul Rubens (1610-1612)

- Ignatius' *Autobiography and Spiritual Diary* reveal a mystic who knew the importance of religious emotions.
- The spiritual director helps a person to stay with the movements that lead towards life and God.

IV. Examen

- The Examen is a way of carrying the Exercises into one's daily life.
- The Examen has several steps:
 - 1) Gratitude
 - 2) Petition
 - 3) Review
 - 4) Forgiveness
 - 5) Renewal
 - 6) Transitions
- "Everyday mysticism"

Review Questions

1. The Examen is a spiritual practice that has helped countless people. Bring this practice into your spiritual life.
2. Pay attention to your desires, gives you a sense of God's desire / God's will for you. The practice of spiritual discernment is based on paying attention to one's desires.
3. If you have not made the Exercises, consider doing an eight-day retreat. If this is not possible, what is called the "Nineteenth Annotation" is a way of doing the Exercises over a long period of time (several months or longer) as you continue your daily home, work, or school life

Topic 17: Salesian Spirituality, Part 1

Overview

St. Francis de Sales (1567–1622) and St. Jane Frances de Chantal (1572–1641) ushered a gentleness, kindness, and compassion into seventeenth-century France. The impulse that they both shared towards a focus on love was extraordinary in that many of their contemporaries had Jansenistic leanings towards a more severe and rigid spirituality. We also see an important dynamic in their relationship that brings together the masculine and feminine. I would propose that this was one of the variables that helped them focus on a God who was loving and forgiving since it reflected the quality of their relationship. The fact that they were very different in background and temperament also accounts for a blending and balancing in their vision of the world and their images of God that we find in their writings.

I. St. Francis de Sales and St. Jane Frances de Chantal

- During Francis and Jane’s lifetimes, there was a strong Jansenistic thrust in French culture.
 - Their impulse foreshadowed some of the themes of Vatican II.
 - Both had intense personal experiences that colored the way they viewed the world and spirituality.
- 1) When Francis was at college in Paris, he was “tried by a state of extreme mental anguish, firmly believing that he was doomed to go to Hell and had no hope of salvation. This made him go cold with fear. However terrible his state of mind, he held fast in the depths of his soul to his resolution to love and serve God with his whole strength while his life lasted, and all the more lovingly and faithfully in this life, as he thought he would have no chance of doing it in the next...”
 - (a) Through prayer and divine intervention, Francis moved beyond this intense period of darkness and recognized a merciful and loving God. This experience is a lens from which we can look at what he writes and says.
 - (b) Jane’s husband was unfaithful to her and had a child with another woman. It seems that she was able to work through her anger and disappointment, moving towards internal forgiveness and reconciliation. He died after a hunting accident. She had to navigate her feelings towards the man who shot her husband. Going through these experiences made her a more loving and compassionate person.
- Together, they founded the Order of the Visitation, which exists to this day. Several other communities have been inspired by the teachings of St. Francis de Sales.

II. The Lives of St. Francis (1567–1622) and St. Jane (1572–1641)

- Francis and Jane shared a common vision for the spiritual life.
- Francis was university educated in law, theology, philosophy, and rhetoric. He was a man of the world, engaged in public life as a bishop of a diocese, spiritual director, writer, preacher, correspondent with people in all walks of life, and advocate of lay devotion
- Jane was a baroness, wife, mother, widow, foundress, and religious superior. Her world was monastic and feminine.
- Salesian spirituality is embodied in these two people. Francis was educated by Jesuits. They built upon Ignatian spirituality. Nonetheless, there is a marked difference in their approach.

III. Salesian Spirituality

- Jane’s writings primarily took the form of conferences and letters to her nuns.
- The overall motto of Salesian spirituality is “Live Jesus!”
 - 1) The motto reflects goal of making the gentle and humble Jesus live in the hearts of humankind.
- Francis’ best known works are his *Introduction to the Devout Life* and his *Treatise on the Love of God*.
 - 1) In the *Introduction*, Francis states the uniqueness of his spirituality: “Almost all those who have hitherto written about devotion have been concerned with instructing persons wholly withdraw from the world...My purpose is to instruct those who live in town, within families, or at court, and by their state of life are obliged to live an ordinary life as to outward appearances.”
 - (a) Francis builds on the notion of going out into the world, but focuses on ordinary people.
 - (b) The insight that everyone is called to holiness begins with Francis de Sales.
- The original plan was that the Visitation nuns would be unenclosed but Francis yielded to the wishes of the Archbishop of Lyons and made them cloistered. This reflects the beginnings of the impulse that women can be out in the world.
- The Salesian world is a world of the heart.
 - 1) The Salesian Christology can be summarized by Matthew 11:29.
 - 2) Francis and Jane are aware that human nature is wounded by sin, but emphasized that the healing of the human heart comes from receiving God’s love.

Review Questions

1. St. Francis de Sales models gentleness for us. We live in a culture that is anything but gentle. Try to slow down, pay attention to the people around you, and practice gentleness for a few days.
2. Francis and Jane wrote “Live Jesus” on all of their correspondence. Let those two words sink into psyche and repeat it every time you remember to do so throughout the course of one day.
3. Salesian spirituality calls everyone to holiness through the way of the heart. His thinking made its way into the Second Vatican Council. Think about holiness, what it means to you, and how you are called to sanctity.

Topic 18: Salesian Spirituality, Part 2

Overview

St. Francis de Sales envisioned God as Mother. He was not the first to have this insight, but such a notion was more the exception than the rule. The maternal understanding of God filters into the writings of Francis and Jane. Francis is often referred to as “the gentle saint” due to his mindset and his emphasis on relationships. Love begets love. Francis would propose that the love we receive from God spills over in the love that we give to others. Francis’ vision was shared by Jane Frances de Chantal. Salesian spirituality takes all of the currents in spirituality that preceded it and stamps it with love. It was and is a spirituality to be lived in the context of the world, one that embraces the ordinariness of everyday life.

I. Jane and the Visitation Nuns

- Jane approached her duties with a maternal energy. She was compassionate in her guidance of her spiritual daughters. Her nuns were brought to spiritual maturity not through fear or servile duty but through love.
- In her St. Basil’s Day colloquy, she describes the process of the spiritual life and birth into love of God as martyrdom. She builds on the spirituality of martyrdom and the Cross in a gentle and loving way.
- At the foundation of Jane’s spiritual growth was the Salesian belief that to be fully human is to become the lover of God one is meant to be. Under Francis’s guidance, she learned to live her life with gentle patience.
 - 1) Jane Frances de Chantal models the Salesian vision of the stripping of self.
- With Francis, Jane founded the first Visitation convent in 1610. By the time of her death, eighty monasteries had been established.
- Jane lived in a time of transition from the medieval to the modern world, in the midst of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation.
- Jane and Francis undertook the spiritual revitalization of their society through the devout life.

II. Highlights of Salesian Spirituality

- There was a movement towards secularization during Francis and Jane’s lifetimes. They both recognized that the remedy was not to judge but to call people into a relationship with God. Francis passed around leaflets inviting others into the spiritual life.

- In a sense, they were disciples of the humanism of the Renaissance. A Christian Humanism lies at the base of Salesian optimism.
- The road to sanctity is invitational.
- The spiritual life is an ascent. Both Jane and Francis emphasize the notion of accepting people wherever they are on their spiritual journey.
- Three words come up frequently in the writings of Francis.
 - 1) Inclination: the human spirit is inclined towards God.
 - 2) Appetite: we have an appetite for God.
 - 3) Desire: Francis invites people to get in touch with our deepest desires.
- Francis and Jane emphasize the importance of joy: “Strive to overcome all melancholy feelings and all sadness. Try to live in peace . . . The Israelites were never able to sing in Babylon because they kept thinking of their homeland, but I want us to sing everywhere.”
- He disliked gloomy spirituality. Salesian spirituality leads to love, gentleness, and joy.



St. Francis de Sales presenting the Philotea to Saint Jane Frances de Chantal
by Valentin Metzinger, 1753

Review Questions

1. St. Francis de Sales and St. Jane Frances de Chantal transcended their culture and taught a spirituality that was rooted in the scriptures. What are some of the things about our culture that we need to reject in order to root our spirituality in the scriptures and the way Jesus invites us to live?
2. Joy is an important fruit of Salesian spirituality. In fact, joy is a fruit of the spirit that we can use to judge the authenticity of any particular spirituality. Where is the joy in your life? If it is not there, why and what can you do to rekindle a spirit of joy?
3. One of the things that balances Francis and Jane was the dynamic between the masculine and feminine in their relationship. In no small way, this helped Francis to see God as Mother in his writings. Reflect on the relationships in your life. In what way are they help or a hindrance for your spiritual journey?

Topic 19: Vincentian Spirituality: Practical Charity, Part 1

Overview

St. Vincent DePaul, St. Louise de Marillac, and Elizabeth Ann Seton are the three major figures we will examine in this spiritual tradition. Vincentian spirituality was firmly rooted in the world. Vincent and Louise brought the practice of charity to the forefront in seventeenth-century France. His achievements in the history of Christian spirituality are quite remarkable. In an age when many still adhered to an inward looking spirituality tainted by Jansenism, Vincent brought the focus to the larger world in need of redemption through the practice of Christian charity. Vincent was a practical man so his teachings on charity were not amorphous platitudes and lofty ideals. He got to the heart of charity, i.e., that charity is the greatest gift of all and the most important quality to be cultivated among Christians.

I. Vincent: Journey to Freedom (1600–1625)

- Vincent was born in France in 1581 to a farming family.
- In his early life he decided to become a priest. He was motivated primarily by a desire for social advancement and wealth. He lied about his age so he could be ordained at the age of 19.
- While he was studying, he ran a small boarding school. When debt began to mount, he convinced a generous woman from Toulouse to write him into her will.
- From 1605 to 1607, Vincent disappeared. There is a legend that he was carried away by pirates. It is thought that he was sold into slavery, though this remains unproven.
- While in Paris, he took charge of a parish.
- Vincent was touched by a sermon he preached on the conversion of St. Paul.

II. Vincent: Apostle of Charity (1625-1660)

- He began a ministry to the galley slaves and founded the Confraternity of Charity.
- Other priests began to gather around him. He founded a community called the Congregation of the Mission. He told the first three priests that joined that their mission was “to aggregate and associate to ourselves and to the aforesaid work to live together as a Congregation and to devote ourselves to the salvation of the poor country folk.”
 - 1) The primary focus of the Congregation was service to the poor.

- 2) Vincent also got involved with the reform of the French clergy. He held retreats and workshops for the clergy.
 - (a) He gave Tuesday Conferences to priests.
- He met Louise during this time and helped found the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity
- Vincent shows us a way of love. His way was not spirituality; it was a way of life.
 - 1) Experience: Vincent paid attention and learned from his experiences. Action always followed experiences.
 - 2) Faith: after his conversion, Vincent had faith in Divine Providence. God was present in the activity. He built on Ignatius's notion of seeking God in all things.
 - 3) Practical wisdom: Vincent's life was shaped by three rules.
 - (a) Act with purity of intention and singleness of purpose.
 - (b) Consider an action as manifesting God's way when it effectively embraces the extremes. Affective love must always be expressed as effective love.
 - (c) Mirror God's fidelity to His own being and His great flexibility towards human beings. Vincent was firm and persevering in regard to goals, but flexible and gentle in regard to means.
- We can see from Vincent's work and spiritual life that he was extremely creative.
 - 1) He created "the Little Method."
 - 2) He developed a methodology called the Repetition of Prayer.
 - 3) Vincent shows us a way to God and a way of living in the world.
- "Surely, the great secret of the spiritual life is to abandon all we love to Him by abandoning ourselves to all God wishes in perfect confidence that all will be for the best. . . . He will take the place of father and mother for you. He will be your consolation, your virtue, and in the end the recompense of your love."
- "Sisters, an interior Daughter of Charity is one who devotes herself only to God. For what is the meaning of being interior if not to be occupied with God and with our neighbor?"
- The motto of the Daughters of Charity is "It is the charity of Christ that urges us on."

Review Questions

1. St. Vincent was known for his practical charity. Practice five acts of charity today.
2. The early Vincent was far from perfect, yet he changed and did great things for God through his service of the poor and the needs of priests. Spend some time praying about those things in your life that might stand in the way of your doing great things for the Lord and the Church.
3. The Catholic school system as we have known it in the United States is diminishing. How might we bring the pioneer spirit of the Vincentian-Setonian tradition to create new ways of educating people in the twenty-first century?

Topic 20: Vincentian Spirituality: Practical Charity, Part 2

Overview

St. Louise de Marillac became a companion to St. Vincent. They complemented each other with two very different personalities and skill-sets. Louise was the head person while Vincent was the heart person. What they shared in common was conversion of heart that came through the experience of the poor. Together, they founded the Daughters of Charity, a radical break with previous forms of religious life for women. The Daughters became “Nuns in the World,” and they became the model for all subsequent forms of active religious life for women. Elizabeth Ann Seton brought the spirit and way of life of Vincent and Louise to America. She founded the Sisters of Charity, who expressed the virtue of charity through education, especially of the poor, ignorant, and immigrants.

III. Louise de Marillac

- Louise came into Vincent’s life after his conversion.
- Louise’s early life was troubled. She never knew her mother. Her health was fragile. Her husband died in 1625 after a prolonged illness. The limitations of her childhood were always a source of anguish for her. This series of experiences plunged her into a dark night of the soul.
- Vincent became a spiritual guide for her in dealing with her discouragement. Her friendship and collaboration with Vincent became a healing force in her life. Vincent was always there to support her through trials and tribulations.
- Vincent helped her to become less reasoned and more spontaneous.
- Her service to the poor and involvement with the Confraternities of Charity gradually cured her depressed spirit.
- Louise was often restless and anxious. Vincent had a calming effect on her.
- Founding of the Daughters of Charity: Nuns in the world
 - 1) The form of consecrated life begun by Vincent and Louise became the norm for most religious congregations.

- Louise’s Spirituality:
 - 1) The centrality of Christ Crucified in Louise’s spiritual development is evident even in her earliest writings. Louise was able to take her own suffering and bring it to focus on the suffering of Christ on the Cross. She said that Christ is “the source and the model of all charity.”
 - 2) She emphasized the virtues of humility, simplicity, and charity.
 - (a) The notion of simplicity is reflected in the life she called her sisters to live.
 - (b) Humility and simplicity were Louise’s way of moving into charity.
- She urged her Daughters to be immersed in God, in whose love they would find nothing difficult.
- On the eve of Pentecost in 1642, a ceiling in the motherhouse collapsed. There were no casualties. Louise saw a sign of God’s special protection and a call to sacrifice everything to Him.
- When we look to Louise today, we see a woman who was transformed. Her writings present a new vision and speak across the centuries.

IV. Elizabeth Ann Seton (1774–1821)

- The legacy of Vincent and Louise is carried forth by Elizabeth Ann Seton.
- Elizabeth was the first American born woman to be canonized a saint.
- The theme of conversion emerges in her life in a new way.
- Elizabeth was married to William Seton. Her family fell into financial misfortune. William died of tuberculosis in Italy. Elizabeth loved William very much. She was distraught by his death.
- Elizabeth was inspired by the Eucharistic faith of Antonio Felicchi and converted to Roman Catholicism when she returned to New York.
- After experiencing rejection from family and friends, she went to Emmitsburg and founded the Sisters of Charity, modeled on the way of St. Vincent and St. Louise. Elizabeth and the Sisters of Charity established the parochial school system in the US.
- “She lived only for her sisters and for the performance of her holy duties...”
- Vincent, Louise, and Elizabeth exemplify the highest virtue, the most important aspect of walking in the footsteps of Jesus. They show us how to live a life of charity in the context of the world.



Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, 19th c.

Review Questions

1. St. Louise struggled with darkness and depression and identified with Christ crucified. Look at the cross of Christ and identify with the poor and oppressed of the world.
2. St. Elizabeth Ann Seton loved the Eucharist; this is what brought her into the church. Reflect on the Eucharist and its place in your life.
3. Vincent, Louise, and Elizabeth are three very different personalities who find a common ground in charity. How might this be a model for uniting diverse populations within the Church around a common mission?

Topic 21: Conclusion

Overview

The conclusion of this course brings us back to the beginning. Our starting point was that schools of spirituality emerged through persons who had an insight or impulse that responded to a particular need at a particular time in history. This impulse became a school when others would carry and develop the insight in subsequent centuries. The challenge for the twenty-first century is how we move towards a synthesis of all that has gone before us. The current impulse is towards unity and synthesis. Living within “silo” spiritualities is not the way to address the changing needs of our times. We need to cross borders among spiritualities. In addition, theology and spirituality must engage in dialogue with psychology, the social sciences, economics, and science. We are on the cusp of new mysticism.

I. The Twenty-First Century

- Today, the human family is going through a global transformation.
- Teilhard’s evolution of human consciousness is unfolding.
- Where are we now, and how do we come back to the image of the one heart of God, the colors of the rainbow, and peeling the last layers of the onion?
- We need to look at the bigger picture and see the universe in a new way. This requires disengaging ourselves from any particular religion or spiritual tradition in order to see things from a global perspective.

II. Border Crossing

- We are living in an axial moment, moving into a deeper consciousness and a greater unity, especially in the convergence of new spiritualities.
- These Seven Great Schools of Spirituality are traditions on the move. They build upon each other, and are converging and on the brink of a new creation in the blending of spiritualities and traditions.
- Now, we are called into unitive thinking and challenged to move beyond silos and to allow walls to collapse in order to move into the oneness of God. While we may be rooted in a particular spirituality, we should attempt to move beyond our comfort zones.
- Rahner’s three epochs:
 - 1) When the first Jews became Christians
 - 2) The conversion of Constantine

3) The 21st century: Rahner predicted the rise of a world religion.

- Through technology and globalization, we are both brought closer together and pulled further apart.
- Now, we live in a new moment of grace. There is a coming together of disciplines: theology, spirituality, psychology, social sciences, economics, and science. The same can be said of religious traditions. We need to get in touch with our collective wisdom.
- We are called to move beyond an individualistic mysticism to a “we” mysticism.
- We are now living in a time of transition. We are called to a radical transformation through the transformation of human consciousness. As walls break down, we open ourselves to the prompting of the spirit.
- The convergence of spiritualities is a work of beauty.

III. Characteristics of the New Spirituality

- Holistic
- Ecumenical
- Socially just
- Peaceful
- Life Affirming
- Developmentally oriented
- Ecologically responsible
- Gender inclusive
- An end to dualism
- The marriage of contemplation and action

Review Questions

1. To which spirituality are you most attracted? Why?
2. What contemporary issues are most important to you, and what does that tell you about your spiritual home?
3. What are some of the ways that you might move out of your comfort zone and begin to embrace a new way of praying?
4. How might the dialogue among religions converge into a synthesis of spiritual traditions? In what ways can we learn from other Christian traditions and non-Christian traditions, especially Jews and Muslims?
5. Some say that it is a curse to be born in a time of transition. We live in such a time. Do you feel cursed or blessed?
6. The Second Vatican Council called for a renewal of structures and a change in our approach to the world. How might the council be a guide as we grasp for new expressions of spirituality?

Suggested Readings

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