

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.

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.

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.

Three Dimensions of Spirituality

1. Existential Level: 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.

2. 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.

3. 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, 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...”

Review Questions

1. How would you define Christian spirituality?
2. What is the dis-ease within you that is longing for something more? What is that something more? How does God fit into the picture?
3. The twenty-first century brings us new challenges. What are some of these challenges, and how do you think the tradition of spirituality can address these?