

failed to cope with population growth and worldliness. A new type of spirituality was required that would enable religiously consecrated people to live under a spiritual rule but, at the same time, work in the world. Thus, the advent of the itinerant Orders, the Franciscans and Dominicans. The former, with its insistence on **poverty** and working with **the poor**, has already been examined. The latter's rule stressed the importance of **teaching and preaching**.



What this simplistic summary highlights is that there is a real danger of any spirituality falling away from its original ideals. This happened in the Franciscan order on the death of St. Francis, when it was vociferously questioned whether absolute poverty should continue as part of their spirituality. This strength of feeling was so strong that it eventually led to a split into different categories of Franciscan friars.

Later, other spiritualities would arise, including that of St Ignatius Loyola for the Jesuits (Ignatian), St Frances De Sales for the laity, and the various mystical approaches like that in the book 'The Cloud of Unknowing', and the Carmelite tradition of St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross. The latter's book 'Dark Night of the Soul' is seen universally as a Christian classic. These will be examined later.

It is worth highlighting that there are different levels of spirituality. At the basic level are the essential **prayerful** spiritualities, often with particular **devotional practices**. Then, there are the **meditative** spiritualities, especially those that are based on **scripture**, like **Lectio Divina** (see later), or those based on the **Liturgy**, especially the **Mass/reception of the Eucharist**, and the **Divine Office**. Finally, there are spiritualities based on **contemplation**, following the mystical traditions that seek union with God (see later).

To conclude, the history of religious organisations, as of the Church itself, seems to be a process of spiritual fervour, then decline, the urge for renewal, and finally reinvigoration, before the cycle inevitably repeats itself. Have we not seen this in the Church in our lifetime?

Our Catholic Faith Prayer and Spirituality 2010-2011

14. Spirituality and Prayer in the Christian Era



1. Is there anything special about monastic spirituality?
2. What do you see as the distinction between the spiritualities of the monks and that of the friars?
3. Do you agree that there are different levels of spirituality?

Spiritualities Must Be Christ-Centred and Scriptural

It has already been emphasised that everyone who genuinely seeks God will already have their own spirituality, because the latter is nothing more than the particular actions, devotions and practices that are adopted by a person in order to reach God.

But, any authentic Christian spirituality must be **Christ-centred** and **Scripture-based** because the Scriptures, especially the Gospels, teach Christ. Scripture must unify all spiritualities as it contains the revelation of God, the truths that are valid for all people of all ages. It must also be emphasised that because the love of God forms the centre of the Gospel message then this **necessarily** means following the precept to love one's neighbour and the challenge of the even higher standard: **"love one another as I have loved you"**



Changes in Spiritual Emphases

Given the above basic premises, it is useful to gain an historical overview of some of the main movements in spirituality in order to get a measure of how different people at different times have sought to get nearer to God (or strayed in the process). There are different ways this could be done, but the method adopted here is to outline the spiritual emphasis of some of the main religious orders and key individuals, and the spirituality recommended for the laity that has remained in vogue to the present time.

Monastic Spirituality

There is always a certain tension between an individual who wants to pursue his/her love of God with a purely contemplative life as a hermit, and the person who wishes to serve him within normal society. In between is the cenobitic or monastic life, where people came together in community to lead a lifestyle that looked to merge the two. This lifestyle was governed by their Rule which, in effect, formed the basis of their particular spirituality.

Augustinian Spirituality.

St Augustine's monastic spirituality (end 4th cent.) centred on personal poverty, celibacy, **study** and **contemplation**, with emphasis on silence, humility, austerities, and fraternal charity. Little by little, though, contemplation was abandoned in favour of pastoral service.

Benedictine Spirituality

St Benedict of Nursia's monastic Rule (6th cent.) centred on **prayer** and **work**. Benedict highlighted the virtues of obedience, silence and humility and, to help reach the ideal of **contemplation**, the practices of **liturgical prayer** (meeting 8 times for psalms and readings), **Lectio Divina** or prayerful scriptural reflection (for 4 hours), and manual labour. The spirituality originally had no academic objective.



The Benedictine Reform

By the 8th cent., the emphasis had shifted from asceticism and manual labour into **liturgical** (especially the Eucharist) and **Lectio Divina** while the monastic community no longer represented escape from the world. An attempted reform by Benedict of Aniane (early 9th cent.) was not successful and it was not until the 10th cent. under the influence of the Benedictine community of Cluny that monasteries escaped from the influence of local nobles and bishops. The reform brought much greater emphasis on a **daily cycle of worship**.

The Cistercians

The Cistercian order (white monks) was founded by St. Robert of Molesmes in 1098, to follow the Rule of St. Benedict but with monks living a **more austere** life, one of greater simplicity, **less liturgy** and **academic** emphasis, and **more manual labour**.

The Itinerant Orders

The same search for a meaningful spirituality can be seen after the decline of the Cistercian Order, as traditional expressions of faith