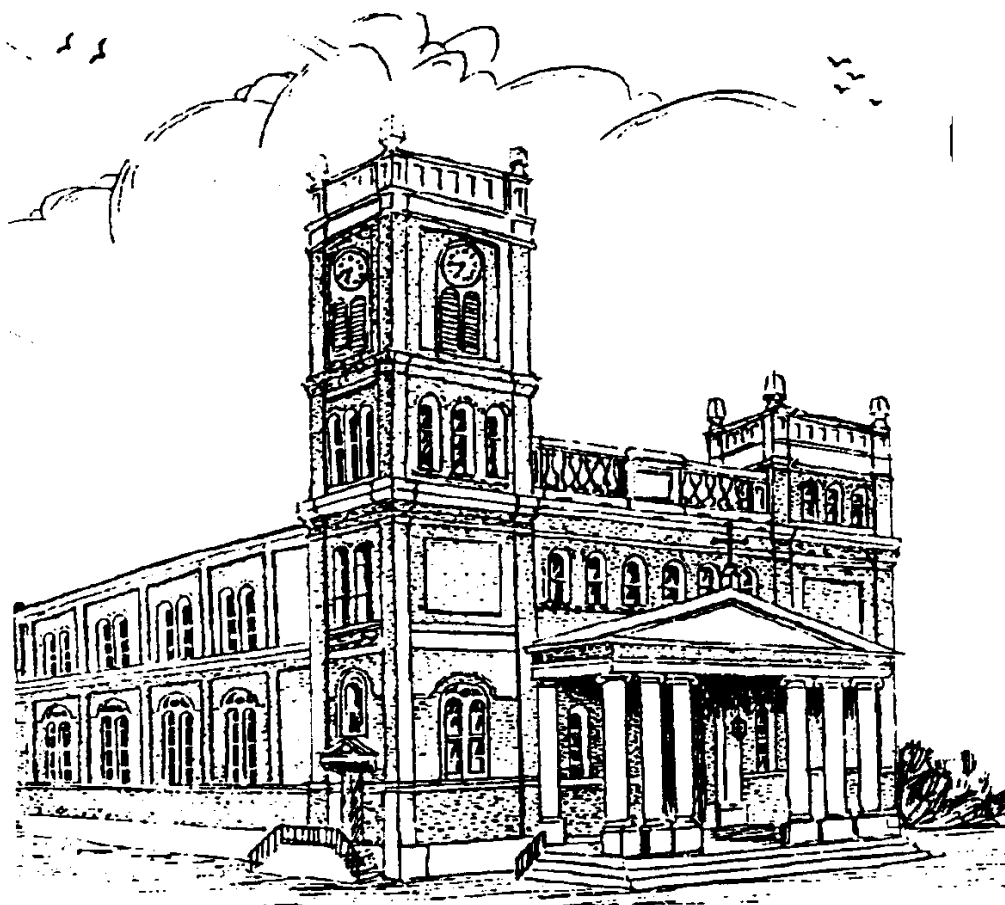


Spirituality Today

**Getting in touch with the deeper self
Naming it and acting upon it.**



**A six week Workshop
By
Fr. Michael Tracey**

January 2001

**Our Lady of the Gulf Church
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Spirituality Today

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A. You Are Here! How did you get Here?

There has been a tremendous revival and interest in the spiritual in recent years. Many factors have contributed to that interest. Here are some:

1. Nuclear Power and Capabilities:

Hiroshima – August 6, 1945 changed the way we see ourselves politically, morally, and culturally. Prior to that event, cataclysmic destruction rested in the hands of gods; now it rests in us. Other present century events such as concentration camps, recent testing of nuclear weapons by France, India, etc. solidify such concerns and capabilities.

2. Loss of Respect for Authority:

Vietnam War taught us not to trust those in authority. Other scandals such as Watergate, Irangate, recent Clinton revelations compounded. Scandals in the Church such as pedophilia, scandals of televangelists, exposed faith healers, etc. challenged the credibility of the church.

3. No More Frontiers to Conquer:

President Kennedy and the Camelot era challenged us to explore space, to put a man on the moon. Once it was done, basically we had closed the frontier. There was no farther place to run to, to dream of, to test ourselves against, or to exile our malefactors to; and there was no boundless supply of natural wealth. The sense of challenge, of excitement, of validation was gone. We began drowning in minimalism, in simplicity.

4. Exposure to other Cultures:

The Vietnam War exposed us to drugs; the ability to opt out, to disengage from society and our obligations to it. Exposure to other cultures also exposed us to other religions, especially Eastern religions as well as ancient ones: Buddhism, Zen, Taoism and Shintoism – all offering a way to enter into and engage the transcendent and spiritual. Rock groups, including the Beatles, had it fashionable. In the Catholic Church, Thomas Merton, exposed his readers to Eastern religions.

5. Universal Consciousness:

People like Joseph Campbell exposed us to the idea of myth; psychologists, Freud and Jung opened up the relationship between religion and psychology; Commentator Bill Moyers, challenged us to question religion.

6. Psychology/Psychiatry replaced Religion:

Seeing ourselves as invincible, we discovered we didn't need an intervening God so we went looking for fun without God. Psychiatrists and psychologists took the place of clergy. They opened the land of the interior to the ordinary person. We had think ins, live ins, love ins.

7. Global Village:

Marshall McLuhan introduced us to the global village. Mass immigration and our resulting awareness of the global village, eroded our old ways – “old” as in the Eurocentric approach to life. The impact of television shaped every part of us. Urbanization moved America from a goods-based way of life to a money-based way of life.

B: You Are Here! Where is Here “Spiritually?”

All the above have impacted how we relate as believers. Polls indicate that 93% of people believe in God. Between 70-80 million people claim to be active in church (i.e. attend at least once a month.) Nine out of ten Americans indicated that they pray frequently. So, where are we “spiritually?”

The Barna Research Group of California surveyed the unchurched, asking a simple question: “Why don’t you go to church?”

- 74% said they don’t because they don’t see any value in it and can connect with God elsewhere.
- 61% said churches have too many problems
- 48% said they simply don’t have time. Sunday is their only day to relax.
- 40% were bothered by the church being too money-oriented.
- 12% said they don’t attend because they do not believe in God.

The books we read tell a lot about us spiritually. What kind of books do we read? We read books about the spiritual, sacred or religious matters.

1. Near-death experiences:

Some have had such experiences: the tunnel or passageway, the light, etc. Such experiences motivate us toward goodness. They are also both consoling and frightening.

2. Angels:

They are only angels of the light and so are safer and closer to us. They offer us a sense of security and are proofs of another.

3. Ancient Wisdom:

Our lack of rootedness challenges us to search for a frame of reference. Karen Armstrong’s, A History of God; Don Crossan’s, The Historical Jesus, the Gnostic gospels, are all efforts at connecting us to the divine. In the Catholic Church, books like Catechism of the Catholic Church, and Pope John Paul’s, Crossing the Threshold of Hope, root Catholics.

4. Native American:

We try to discover the Native American experience and see if it speaks to our journey. Joseph Campbell’s books on myth, Robert Bly’s book, Iron John, talk about the primitive, the masculine, and the feminine.

5. Self-Help:

The self-help idea and books began with Alcoholics Anonymous and its Twelve-Step program. Self-help books are appealing to people who are seekers. Because we are disjoined, dislocated, we need help to purge ourselves of what ill us. Such self-help books seek more the well being of the subject rather than a contemplation of the sacred. This category of books is filled with books by Scott Peck, John Bradshaw, Deepak Chopra, etc. etc.

6. Fiction:

In this category, we include religious fiction or inspirational fiction. The Joshua series by Fr. Girzone is a prime example as also are books by Paulo Coehlo, including “The Alchemist,” “Veronika Decides to Die.” In Protestant circles, Frank Peretti would be another example. All fiction, regardless of its type or origin, rests first upon the basic human principle that everybody loves a story and everybody wants to be entertained. For most Americans, story touched the heart at its deepest.

C. You are Here! What do you Want?

As a nation of seekers, what do we really want? If we know what we want, can we describe it?

1. Health:

We want wellness. Health care, technological advances, push us in that direction. We want health of body, mind and spirit.

2. Financial Security:

We want financial security. We don't want the wolf barking at our door. We want security, permanence and forever and money is part of the equation. Recent stock market troubles unravel us.

3. Power:

We jockey for power, dominance, and prestige. We want power over life, over ourselves, over others. The corporate ladder beckons us to climb. Power is high on her “wish” list.

4. To be Safe:

We want to be safe in our homes, safe from natural disasters like floods, tornadoes, and fires. We want to live in a safe environment, etc.

5. To Fit In:

“What about me?”, “Where do I fit in?” No one wants to feel like an outsider, feel awkward, disenfranchised. We all want a place, a spot, a context, an anchor, and a home.

6. Purpose:

We all want a purpose. We all want to survive. Often we are not able to put it in words but we know it is there.

7. A Style:

We want to be perceived a certain way. We want to be recognized. We want to be noticed. We want to be free and self-determined.

D. You are Here! What do you Desire?

“*Hope is desire in the skilled hands of God.*” – Sabastian Moore.

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploration
Will be to arrive at where we started
And know the place for the first time.
Through the unknown, remembered gate
When the last of earth left to discover
In that which was the beginning;
At the source of the longest river
The voice of the hidden waterfall
And the children in the apple tree
Not known, because not looked for
But heard, half-heard, in the stillness
Between two waves of the sea.
Quick now, here, now, always –
A condition of complete simplicity
(costing not less than everything)

- T.S. Eliot, *Little Gidding* – 5

The cost is always the problem. How can the church offer both the promise and the price at the same time? Promise without price becomes sweet sentimentality; price without promise becomes shame, burden, and grief.

The cost is everything as reflected in St. John of the Cross' The Ascent of Mt. Carmel:

To come to the pleasure you have not
You must go by a way in which you enjoy not.
To come to the knowledge you have not
You must go by a way you know not.
To come to the possession you have not
You must go by a way in which you possess not.
To come to be what you are not
You must go by a way in which you are not.

“God desires us before we desire God because God’s desire makes us desirable which we must be in order to desire anything at all.

In the new creation, we feel the creative touch of God's desire stirring us in our desirability to desire nothing that can be named until this nothing is named as the cause of our desire which, being the cause of desire, is desirable.

Thus, through the slow skill of grace in nature, the lover becomes the lovely.

In our experience of each other, on the other hand, the lovely comes first seen with the eyes of arousal.;
we do not awake to being loved except by one who loving us makes us desirable and thus able to love and touching us stirs our desirability to want without object until at last the lover becomes the lovely.

- Sebastian Moore.

We might think of desiring as a constant state of "just wanting", a continuous wanting-I-know-not-what mentality. Wanting this or that cannot possibly be the start of the wanting process. Without thinking, we might say "wanting" is a state of emptiness wanting to be filled, but if we think deeper, the opposite is really the case. The desire to be desired stems from the certainty of being desirable. This is part of our self-awareness. Awareness is self-awareness. All religion and spirituality is based on that awareness. It is coming to "know what we already know."

1. Knowing you know:

What happens when you know something you didn't know before? Isn't it passing from "knowing" to "knowing you know?" when we are trying to get someone to understand something we're saying, we say, "You know. You know. Don't you?"

2. We already Know it:

Plato said that education brings out what we already know. We have a hunch that we already knew it.

3. Not admitting knowing you Know:

Sometimes, fear deceives our knowing. For example, the Germans instinctively must have known about the concentration camps, must have known that there was something terribly wrong but fear did not allow that "knowing" to move to "knowing they know."

4. Premonition Knowing:

Sometimes we have a premonition of things. We have a sense that something is going to happen before it does happen.

5. Deja-vu Experience:

The Deja-vu experience or "I have been there before" sense. We get the sense that something we're feeling or sensing now reminds us that we've had the same experience before.

6. **Near loss Knowing:**

Sometimes we may take a person for granted. Then something happens. Maybe we almost lost them through illness or an automobile accident or some tragedy; then, we're forced to know them differently, a kind of second knowing.

E. You are Here! What do You Hope For?

Hope is the only adequate response to death. First of all, we have sidelined, covered over death in our modern world. So there is no need for hope. Secondly, we have become more individualistic, cultivating the idols of consumerism, growth and progress that we have replaced hope with optimism. Individuality is more at home with optimism whereas hope makes too many other-centered demands, too many social demands. Thirdly, the old way of thinking about and explaining hope will not suffice. We live in times of transition so we seek new understandings of the concept of hope. Finally, we're not sure what we can hope for. Some might hope for a better world; others might hope for the next life, immortality, and resurrection.

Hope is a universal phenomenon and is implicit in everything we do. In many cases, hope arises out of a sense of unease with the way the world is; arises out of a certain sense of dissatisfaction with the status quo.

1. **Hope versus Optimism:**

Optimism is the acceptance of the law of growth and the theory of human progress. Optimism tends to ignore the ambiguity of the world in which we live and the presence of so much evil within the world. Optimism is a kind of presumption that neglects the realities of pain, suffering, and evil. In contrast, hope struggles with the ambiguity of life, of existence and tries to respond by challenging us to imagine new possibilities, other alternatives. The logic of optimism is "more of the same". The logic of hope is the logic of imagination.

2. **Hope versus Despair:**

Despair takes place when hope is disappointed and becomes lost. In general terms, despair might be seen as the anticipation of the "non-fulfillment" of hope. Despair happens when a person realizes they are no longer on the way; when fulfillment in the future no longer seems possible; when the "not yet" will never happen.

Trust is the essential element of hope. Without trust, there is no hope; it is the absence of trust that brings about despair and resignation. Resignation can involve an attitude of accepting circumstances without leading to despair.

3. **Our Restless Nature:**

St. Augustine reminded us that our hearts are restless until they rest in God. Thomas Aquinas reminded us that there is a natural desire to see God. Karl Rahner reminded us of the "experience of self-transcendence."

4. Relational Beings:

We are by nature relational beings. Hope arises within us when we encounter the world of human beings.

5. The “Not yet” of Life:

We have a capacity to experience the “not yet” of life; that sense of unrealized potential within humanity and the world around us.

6. Hope in Creation:

A close look at creation in action gives us reason to see hope in action. We see creation renewing itself, moving toward fulfillment, bringing end to poverty, disease, and hunger. Creation is filled with beginnings and endings, origins and destinies. Creation is also much older than the human species. In creation, we also see the hand of God at work.. by reflecting on hope in creation, we can have hope in the future, especially in the face of adversity because God sustains and transforms.

7. Hope and Jesus:

The preaching of Jesus helps us to embrace the present and future; both this world and the other world. The hope he offers is both immanent and transcendent, prophetic and apocalyptic.

F. You Are Here! Are You Hungry?

“Centuries ago, St. Augustine said: *elong to the Church who do not belong to God. And many belong to God who do not belong to the Church.*”

“When it comes to religion, many of the most thoughtful young adults are really post-denominational. They want spiritual experiences and the ethical responsibility it implies, but they are not committed to the us-versus-them ideology that has accompanied so much of the history of institutional religion.”

- Matthew Fox

During the past few decades, trends indicate that religious practice is on the decline, while at the same time, people show a greater interest in spiritual matters. In other words, are people becoming more spiritual and less religious? Yes! Why is this so? What does it say about human beings? How can they be spiritual without being religious?

Many of these people who are spiritual but not religious, exhibit a keen sense of nature; are capable to thinking and reflecting for themselves; are articulate due to their educational level as well as having the capacity to relate.

“We are witnessing a movement of our time motivated or driven by a creative evolutionary force over which we humans have little or no control. We are being carried along by a new surge for meaning, which, contrary to many religious beliefs, is not drawing us away from the world but plunging us more profoundly into it, not alienating us from the divine but re-connecting us with the God who co-creates at the heart of creation.”

- Diarmuid O’Murchu

James Fowler wrote extensively about spiritual unfolding in people’s lives. These are the stages he enumerates:

1. Are You Awake?

This is the awakening stage and it can be triggered by a series of circumstances and events that revolve around the question of meaning or the lack of it in a person’s life. This awakening stage does not appear to be really a religious or spiritual awareness.

2. Are You Confused?

We move from the awakening stage to a stage of internal confusion. People doubt their own experience. They might even try to deny it or rationalize it or they might try to explore it. They may feel angry or confused as a result of it. If the confusion continues, it can be both disturbing and disorienting.

3. Are You Ready to Join?

Then the person, either through their own initiative or through the prompting of peers, may decide to join a group of like-minded persons. They may join a sharing group; a justice and peace group; get involved in a group project; work in some charitable setting; seek advice from a rabbi, minister or priest or they may even engage in some formal worship.

If such a person seeks advice or engages in some formal worship, people might be inclined to give them answers rather than try to understand and appreciate what is happening to the person.

4. Are You Ready to Grow Up?

The person matures in their searching. They tend to become more mature, not because they have found answers, but they begin to feel comfortable and are accepting of the questions and mystery that continues to unfold in their lives. The person, when they reach this stage, may not go to church or talk about God, but they some deep experience continues to transform them and colors their life and value system.

5. Are You in this Together?

Following the preview stage of maturation, the person begins to universalize their faith experience. They begin to see everything differently. They begin to see the inherent goodness of everything around them, especially creation. Sometimes, an element of naivete enters in where they have a tendency to deny the existence of pain, suffering and injustice in the world. They encounter the tension between faith and works for the first time.

6. Are You at Home with Yourself?

In order to get to this stage of faith, one has to go through a long struggle to ground one's conviction in the concrete and the practical. Very few people really reach this stage. This final stage has various characteristics:

- a): A sense of inner peace even in troubled times.
- b): A commitment to ethical standards in work and lifestyle.
- c): A practical spiritual routine develops – prayer, meditation, worship, etc.
- d): A decision to continue to develop one's own spiritual journey in practical ways.
- e): A decision to become involved in cultural and social movements to address injustices.

Other commentators reflect a similar pattern in the development of the various stages of people's spiritual hunger. Here we include a few for comparison.

Wusterhoff in his book, Will Our Children have Faith? lists the following stages:

- a): Experienced faith: children experience faith first through experience.
- b): Affiliative faith: becoming part of a group, belonging. E.g.: Confirmation, Bar mitzvah, Christmas, weddings, funerals, etc.
- c): Searching faith: putting away childhood things; questioning, doubting, transitional.
- d): Owned faith: mature faith; owned faith; faith become central to one's life.

McCollough in his book, Heads of Heaven: Feet of Clay lists the following stages:

- a): The Innocent: reflection of parents faith; fantasy, imagination.
- b): Literalist: children's Bible stories; see things literally.
- c): Loyalist: adolescence; loyalty to group.
- d): Critic: questioning, disillusionment with established church.
- e): Seer: open to see other perspectives.
- f): Saint: total commitment and total integration; fulfillment to faith journey.

G): **You are Here! How did you get so Hungry?**

How did we get so hungry? If religion is supposed to feed us, why do so many people leave official religion and branch out on their own search? Has religion failed us? What is religion? What is spirituality? Which comes first – religion or spirituality? How does religion help or hinder our spiritual search? Can religion be too confining? How can it help us make sense of our deepest yearning? What has been its track record? What do we expect of religion anyway? Do we expect too much or too little? How can we take a fresh look at the role of religion in our lives?

As a people and as individuals, we are always **drawn into something bigger and deeper** than ourselves, even when we are thrown into the melting pot of confusion, pain and meaninglessness which is often part of the struggle of life. We are always grappling with issues of meaning; always asking “why.” We do this at every level of our lives.

The idea of being drawn into something bigger than ourselves is often complicated by first of all, **a reaction to oppression and repression of the past** and this shows itself in our tendency to dismiss all structures and even authority. We are not willing to tolerate restrictions. We want to “break out,” defy convention, present norms and expectations. This happens both on a political and religious level.

There is a certain security in keeping things organized, balanced and in synchronization. We are uncomfortable with chaos, confusion, imbalance, and disarray. Yet, we know that **chaos, confusion, imbalance are prerequisites to growth and change** so that the creative forces can best work in their true environment. Doubt and uncertainty are necessary ingredients in the journey to mature faith and an integrated spirituality.

Scott Peck begins his book, The Road Less Traveled with the statement, **“Life is difficult.”** He begins his sequel, Further Along the Road Less Traveled, by saying “Life is complex.” **Life is complex.** Complexity is part of the innate quality of all living systems. No one field of study, area of knowledge can possibly know all there is to know about life. Each area offers a piece of the puzzle and offers a limited knowledge to help us grasp the whole. This demands a certain open-ended approach to life. Openendedness is risky because it challenges us to open to areas and possibilities that have yet to be discovered or even explored.

God’s spirit blows where it will. We cannot control or manipulate it. Often, we cannot discern where it will blow or how it will blow or how it will affect us. We have to be open to the expansive nature and approach of God, which we cannot contain or comprehend with our finite minds. We are discovering that the more we know, the less we really know; that we have no choice but to accept that we are part of a reality that is greater than ourselves; a reality that draws us deeper into life; challenges us to accept that chaos and confusion is part of that evolving reality and that, no matter how we try to box in life, it remains complex and defies our efforts. We are invited to trust in the spirit of God that blows where it wills.

How did we move from spirituality to religion?

Major shifts took place some 10,000 years ago with the beginning of **the Agricultural Revolution**, which lasted to the 1600's when the second shift took place, namely **the Industrial Revolution**. Each, in their own way, brought about paradigm shifts that colored our approach to religion and spirituality. Each, in their own way, had their good points and bad points.

Humankind developed a deep sense that the **earth was their friend**, to be treated with respect and gentleness; to be cared for with dignity and pride; to respect its cycles and built-in laws.

On the other hand, negatively, a **strong sense of possessiveness** as well as greed developed. The more people were given, the more they wanted. If they didn't get it legally, they got it by force. Tribal rivalry took over and this became the microcosm for the idea of nationhood. People become more autonomous and self-reliant. They sought to conquer to build wealth and comfort, thus they began to sow the seeds of modern warfare. A movie, such as The Field, starring Richard Harris, portrays the greed and doggedness of people and the land.

The **Industrial Revolution** brought its own expectations and chaos. From now on, the force of law was based on the values of **control and conquest**. A masculine, patriarchal approach prevailed. Dogmatism and certitude developed. We made God into our own image and likeness and, consequently, began to play God ourselves. Because we made God into our image and likeness, we deduced that God spoke as we spoke and acted as we acted. Because of this mentality, we used God to justify almost anything, including slavery, apartheid, warfare.

Whether we like it or not, **religion has a shadow side**. Some denounce religion vehemently; some crusade against it; some say it is an opiate. Sometimes, when we meet people who disagree with the way religion is lived or practiced, we tend to see their comments or attitude as a threat. Many people have been hurt by religion and, rather than confronting and challenging such hurt, guilt, pain, they often opt out. Yet, they still respect religion because deep down religion stamps them with a sense of fear and unworthiness.

Some of the ingredients of the shadow side of religion are as follows:

1. Fear:

Religion proclaims a loving God, yet, people are paralyzed with fear. Preaching enhances that feeling of fear. This fear reminds the person that, no matter what they try or how good they are, they are still unworthy.

This fear is engendered in various ways:

a): **The right way:** There is only one right way to set straight your relationship with God. Often this approach is seen more in fundamentalist religions.

b): **Abandonment:** There is no hope for you unless you completely abandon yourself to a certain religious adherence.

c): **Bitterness:** Because of the above, we spearhead rage and bitterness at the offending religion. Often it is also focused on God.

2. Escapism:

Because we are expected to abandon ourselves completely, it becomes easy to excuse ourselves and opt out of facing the daily challenges of life. We even shrink from moral and ethical responsibilities. This approach is often enhanced by the dual approach to life: the world is bad and the afterlife is good.

3. Moralism:

Religion claims to have a higher, more perfect wisdom and so claims the right to legislate and dictate what is acceptable, especially morally. This is often done, without taking into account the culture or surrounding circumstances. Often this moralism and the legalism it creates; instead of freeing people, controls them.

4. Control:

While all religions claim to be at the service of humanity, by enlightening and guiding them; it often dominates and controls. We get into turf wars and speak of “mine is better than yours” which we use to proselytize.

5. Idolatry:

All religions claim to know and mediate the mind of God and how God rules the world. Sometimes, this claim can become a god unto itself.

How do we Reconnect with our Spirituality?

We have taken a look at the development of religion and some of its shadows. Now, we must ask the question: How do we reconnect with our spirituality?

“The Body is the very universality of things... My matter is not a part of the universe that I possess totally. It is the totality of the universe that I possess partially”

- Teilhard de Chardin

Formal religion goes back 4,500 years. Our spirituality goes back at least 70,000 years. Creation is essentially spiritual. G.M. Hopkins says, “*the world is charged with the grandeur of God.*” Humans, from their first moment of existence, have engaged that creation. They have prayed and worshipped long before formal religion began. Rituals, beliefs, customs existed long before formal religion. We may call it by various names: paganism, magic, witchcraft, divination, shamanism, totemism, etc. Rather than sitting back and judging them, we need to discover what they say about the human search for a spirituality. As a civilized society, we need to transcend our inclination to judge these as dark, ignorant and pagan.

Religion has allowed us to become disconnected, disconnected from our cosmos. Yet, we yearn to be connected, to transcend, to pursue the ultimate, to articulate our relatedness both to each other and to creation. Spirituality is part of the tapestry that weaves it all together.

We reconnect with the spiritual by exploring its deeper dimensions:

1. Search for Meaning:

We seek meaning in life. Life often seems broken, filled with toil and disappointments, so we crave to make some sense out of it that would help us make things worthwhile. We cannot tolerate meaninglessness for very long. Something deep within us pushes us to discover meaning. This urge to find meaning is built into us as humans. It is the force behind everything that exists.

We have this need to come home to ourselves, to befriend ourselves, to learn more and more what it means to be human and how we fit into the great array of creation. The search for meaning is part of the fabric of our lives. This search for meaning pursues us, drives us even after we become frustrated and have given up. It keeps challenging us.

Victor Frankl found his search for meaning in the concentration camps. We all find it or avoid it in different places and at different times.

2. Transcendence:

G. K. Chesterton once said, “there are only two things that satisfy the soul: a person and a story.” Our search for meaning is a reflection and a part of our desire for and participation in transcendence. This desire helps keep alive in us a sense of wonder, awe, mystery and surprise, which we cannot control. This desire for the transcendence keeps us open to the Divine and invites us to live and work in conjunction with that Divine as we interact with it and with our world. God is transcendent and calls us to transcendence; to go deeper and further, to do more, to try harder, to change our lives, to venture further into new areas.

3. Relatedness:

We are not isolated individuals. We do not live in isolation. It is not either/or. It is both/and. The capacity we have to relate was there long before we learned to speak. We relate to places, things, creation. We relate with mind, heart and gut. How we relate is central to our understanding of life.

The search for meaning, the desire for transcendence and our relatedness become the cornerstone of our spirituality. The more we probe these attributes, the more we discover our spiritual story and are able to not only relate to it but are also impacted by it.

H. You Are Here! Where will you Eat?

Now that we know we are hungry, where do we eat? What is our heart saying to us? We must listen to our heart. As Catholics, we must listen to it from a Catholic perspective? What is that Catholic perspective?

“The Catholic religious experience is sacramental: it encounters God in the events, objects, and persons of every day. The Catholic imagination is analogical: it pictures God as being similar to these events, objects, and persons. The Catholic religious story is cosmic: it believes in happy ends in which grace routs both evil and injustice. The Catholic religious community is organic: it is based on a dense network of local relationships that constitute the matrix of everyday life.”

- Fr. Andrew Greeley, How to Save the Catholic Church

There have been various developments in Catholic spirituality. They include:

1. Lay Spirituality:

In the past, lay spirituality was an abridged version of priestly spirituality, which was an abridged version of monastic spirituality. Today, a more genuine lay spirituality is developing. In America, the Catholic Church is no longer an immigrant church. Movements such as Cursillo, Marriage Encounter, weekend retreats, the Charismatic Movement, exposure to Eastern spirituality has opened up and made available to the ordinary person a myriad of prayer forms. One of the caveats of such movements is the danger that they become basically inward looking movements.

2. Small Christian Communities:

Movements such as RENEW and RENEW 2000 in this country have allowed the ordinary person to experience small Christian communities. The RENEW movement has parallels in the Latin American experience of the Comunidades de Base groups. Small groups continue to meet, to hear and respond to the Lord's call, and, because of it, to act upon it. The concept of small groups will continue to have far-reaching implications for our spirituality.

3. Scripture Studies:

Many movements and experiences have opened up the Scriptures to Catholics. In the past, the Scriptures were the exclusive domain of Protestants. Opportunities to study and pray the Scriptures enrich the lives of Catholics as more and more Scripture courses are being made available to them.

4. Prayer

A multiplicity of books are available today for Catholics who wish to deepen and enrich their prayer life. Retreats, workshops, exposure to various forms of prayer enhance such enrichment.

5. Psychology and Religion:

In the past, the Catholic Church looked upon psychology and the behavioral sciences with suspicion. Yet, behavioral sciences have helped us to understand the human person, both their physical, emotional, moral and spiritual growth patterns.

6. Social Consciousness:

We are discovering that our religion is not a “me and God” but it also includes a social consciousness where we promote social change. The Catholic Church has been at the forefront of social ministry through such programs as Catholic Social Services, St. Vincent dePaul, food banks, political activism, social justice and ecology.

7. Marriage and Family Life:

Present statistics estimate that one-third of children in the United States will have divorced parents by their eighteenth birthday. The diminution of Catholic schools and the rise in inter-religious marriages have contributed to this trend. The changing role of women in the Church and the quality of the relationship between men and women in the church is critical.

8. Theological Shift:

In the past, our Catholic theology and spirituality was based more on a fall-redemption approach. Now, there is a trend toward a creation-centered approach. The fall-redemption approach is based on an acknowledgement of humanity’s fallen nature and the need for redemption. The creation-centered approach emphasizes humanity’s place in the divine order of things.

The Catholic perspective on spirituality has four main ingredients, which will help us decide which item on the menu that best suits our appetite.

1. Ecclesial:

The sense of church, community is central to the Catholic mentality. We relate to church differently. In the past, we were schooled in the hierarchical model. It provided us with a sense of stability, security, solidarity and continuity between the past and the present. A liability it had was to stifle creativity, diversity and dialogue.

Avery Dulles, in his book, Models of the Church developed various models or ways of looking at church. These include the hierarchical, the church as sacrament, as servant, as herald. His latest model is that of “community of disciples.”

“The disciple is by definition one who has not yet arrived, a learner trying to comprehend strange words and unravel puzzling experiences. To be a disciple is to be under authority and correction. It is to be still on the way to full conversion and blessedness of life... the concept of discipleship makes it clear that each member of the church is under personal obligation to appropriate the Spirit of Jesus. Church membership, so conceived, is neither a passive acceptance of a list of doctrines, or abject submission to a set of precepts, but rather the adventure of following Jesus in new and ever changing situations.”

- Avery Dulles, A Church to Believe In

2. Incarnational:

In the past, the church defined itself in opposition to the world. It was in the world but not of the world. It saw the world as evil and corrupt. The church challenged people to focus on God and not be lured by the world. Now we are beginning to see the world, not as evil, but as redeemable; that creation is basically good.

3. Service:

Lay spirituality takes on a service dimension because lay persons are called upon to evangelize the world and workplace. Consequently, lay persons are becoming involved in movements such as pro-life, social justice, human rights, peacemaking, volunteering, etc.

4. Liberation:

Because we are interconnected and social beings, we have become more aware of our responsibility to liberate people from situations and structures that infringe on their dignity as human beings. This calls for creative ways to not only liberate and offer solutions but also to become persons of hope. In many lands around the world, the Spirit is stirring and empowering people to demand their liberation from oppression. This movement began in Latin America in the 1960's and generated a whole new understanding of what it means to be a Christian.

They began to read the scriptures anew, seeing the face of God as Liberator, liberating the oppressed. The Hebrews became the first people He freed, giving them their own land and continued with them from generation to generation. Jesus championed the cause of the poor and the marginalized, fearlessly confronting the abuses of wealth and power.

I. You are Here! What's on the Menu?

So far, we have looked at some of the factors that contributed to the renewed interest in spirituality in recent years. We have reflected on some of the trends in spirituality as seen in the kinds of books people read. We have tried to look deeper at what each of us wants in life, what we desire, what we hope for. We have discussed how, what we want, desire and hope for affects our deep down hungers. We have reflected on how religion has tried to answer such challenges – its successes and failures and we have looked, in particular, at developments in the Catholic Church which makes us more aware of our spiritual hungers. Now, we take a look at some of the various forms of spirituality that are developing in the Catholic Church in an effort to satisfy the human heart's hunger for wholeness.

We will now map out the various threads of the tapestry that makes up Catholic spirituality today: Various forms of spirituality exist. They are as follows:

Contemplation and action; feminine spirituality; masculine spirituality; liberation spirituality; journey spirituality; story spirituality; creation centered or Celtic spirituality; small group spirituality; journey spirituality; black spirituality.

Main Entrées:

1. Contemplation and Action:

Franciscan, Fr. Richard Rohr said: *“In America people possess many things that they call time-saving conveniences, and yet they run around and never have time. In an affluent society where the soul's longing is projected outward, we have much more information, but much less wisdom. Wisdom means dealing rightly with the information, but information has become a consumer item in its own right. We have no place deep inside us to bring this information to, so we can integrate it there and transform it into wisdom. Hence our social system may produce many specialists, but very few wise men and women. And in the end we're short of knowledge, wisdom and time.”*

Contemplation is, first of all, a deeper seeing. This leads to a reverent response to that seeing. Something stirs within us to help us realize that God is the soul of the world. It reminds me that God is inside me, at the center of my being, as well as the source of my being.

Thomas Merton said, “contemplation is always beyond our own knowledge, beyond our own light, beyond explanations, beyond discourse, beyond dialogue, beyond our own self. To enter into the realm of contemplation one must in a certain sense die: but this death is in fact entrance into a higher life. It is a death for the sake of life, which leaves behind all that we can know or treasure as life, as thought, as experience, as joy, as being... Contemplation is also the response to a call: a call from Him who has no voice, and yet Who speaks in everything that is, and Who most of all, speaks in the depths of our own being: for we ourselves are words of His.”

Action has two components: *awareness* which is openness to what is true and real in the human and the divine, and *freedom*, which is the responsive dimension, the ability to say “yes” freely to God.

There has always been a tension between contemplation and action. This tension can have two dangerous results. Quietism, which is retreat into long periods of prayer instead of action, or activism, which is to plunge into action with no time or energy for prayer. The real challenge is to create a balance between both. How do we create such a balance? Robert Kinast suggests “a spirituality of engagement. He says this kind of spirituality is a spirituality *“in which life experiences are the source or starting point for the encounter with God. The engagement in real-life situations leads the minister to reflection on the experience, which in turn leads to an identification with God’s action in Scripture and to prayer and sharing with others.”*

Rohr says that *“most people in the Western world have never really met the person who they themselves are. Because at every moment all our life long we identify ourselves either with our thoughts, our self-image, or with our feelings. We have to find a way to get behind our thoughts, feelings and self-image. We have to discover the face that we already had before we were born. We have to find out who we were all along in God before we did anything right or wrong.”*

2. Feminine Spirituality:

“We are very good at waiting. As women we have waited for centuries for our husbands, our fathers, our sons, our brothers, for all of the men in our lives to listen to the message we bring, a message of love and peace, of justice and true equality, of the shared humanity of all God’s creations, of hope in a truly shared life in church and society. This is the message we, as women, have been the unheard and ignored bearers of from time immemorial. In all truth we have been waiting with Mary Magdalen, since Christ’s death and resurrection for our words of wisdom to not only be heard but to be believed... The wisdom of women must be a multicolored, multihued tapestry which startles those who behold it into a new consciousness, a new understanding of what it truly means to be one in Christ Jesus” - Diane Hayes, at symposium entitled “The Wisdom of Women.”

In the past, Catholic spirituality was one of repression and righteousness. Our religion has developed the Father God concept, not the Mother God concept. The patriarchal image of God presented in the creation story; namely *man* rules over and names creation, while *woman* is the bearer of the children as well as being the instrument through which sin and death came into the world; is still with us today.

Patriarchy has three basic aspects:

Possession and control: against everything in life that needs to be controlled & conquered

Androcentrism: the male is projected as the stronger, the better, the more authentic.

Sexism: exclusive ordering of life by way of gender to advantage of the male species.

Mary Daly, critiques the patriarchy approach and enunciates the *Eight Deadly Sins of the Fathers*:

1): Processions:

We adopt procedures to get people involved but such procedures are often imposed from on high, giving the impression of generate a new way, but discovering it is just another form of manipulation and oppression.

2): Professions :

mystifying knowledge and expertise by creating specialties and specialization for the purpose of lording it over people.

3): Possession:

because of control and manipulative nature, we dictate how gifts should be used. The love of power does not have the capacity to nurture anything that it cannot explain or control.

4): Aggression:

destructive violence, perpetuated by men, often directed at women.

5): Obsession:

male lust and its many projections, treating women as sexual objects.

6): Assimilation:

putting women in life-inhibiting structures.

7): Elimination:

ruthless envy or jealousy, making women feel they don't really exist.

8): Fragmentation:

“divide and conquer” mentality, undermining initiative, replacing it with apathy.

Two approaches to reform have developed in the feminine approach to spirituality.

1): Reformist:

language, concepts and rituals need to be re-thought, reformulated to uncover a deeper, more inclusive meaning that has been thwarted.

2): Radical:

The system are so corrupt and depraved by male exploitation and domination they it is beyond redemption and needs to be abandoned completely.

What are some of the components of feminine spirituality?

They are as follows: relationship, passion, imagination, resistance and solidarity. Let us now reflect on each component:

1. Relationship:

The male approach is to structure everything in a hierarchical mode. Relationships are expected to function from the top down; everyone is expected to “know their place” and guidelines are often drawn up to keep things in place. It seems to emphasize difference and separation, isolation and exclusion.

The feminine approach is that everything is interconnected and interdependent; everything needs everything else to realize its full potential. This demands a different paradigm than the hierarchical mode. It demands more a community sense, requiring openness, trust and freedom.

2. **Passion:**

In the past, in prayer, the person praying was instructed to get rid of all mental distractions because they were a hindrance, especially if they were entertained. Consequently, many people became scrupulous and neurotic as well as anxious. The ideal holy person should not be involved in life; should keep a sense of aloofness; not show any concern for the world because it is transitory. Because women are persons of feeling, they are naturally passionate and were seen as temptations and so are to be shunned.

Feminism is trying to bring back the idea of passion. Whether we are man or woman, we are all endowed with “fire in the belly”, that inner drive toward depth and intensity which shows itself in various ways, especially poetry, eroticism, sensuality, playfulness.

In our Western culture, we have become so preoccupied with hedonistic escapism and apathy that our passion has become narcissistic and often self-destructive.

3. **Imagination:**

In the West, we are very logical. Often this, inhibits our creative imagination. The intuitive spirit and creative spirit, as expressed by women, is bursting forth. Without it, we are confined to minimalism, dogmatism, self-righteousness and possibly idolatry. The “quantum theory,” which shows “the whole is greater than the sum of the parts” requires a new way of looking at life based on intuition, insight, expanded consciousness, dialogue and creative experimentation. It rejects the old way of doing things and invites us to a new way of thinking, seeing and acting.

4. **Resistance:**

According to Herbert Marcuse, if an institution is to be successful it must make unthinkable the possibility of alternatives. The will-to-power drives all major institutions and allows them to be self-perpetuating where they can guard their “turf” and continue the status quo. They maintain the system and gradually alienate those who do not wish to come on board.

Resistance is a grassroots movement, which calls people to be prophetic. This is done in various ways:

a): **Conscientisation:** this is educating people to change perceptions, understandings, attitudes so they can view reality holistic and more creatively.

b): **Active protest:** Patriarchal approach is to use words to criticize without acting in changing the injustice. Protests is a more “gutsy” approach which involves a deeper commitment toward something that a person deeply believes in. Protests offend the respectability of the patriarchal culture.

Active protests can take many forms, including loyal disobedience where a person or group tries to undermine the “divine right” that a man-made system or organization used to lord it over people. Every human system can and should be questioned. Active protesters operate on the premise that truth arises from creative dialogue.

Another form of active protest includes the formation of alternative communities that allow people to interact, be interdependent and mutually engage one another.

5. Solidarity:

Feminists look for another way of exercising power, namely through solidarity; empowering others. Empowering was usually done from the top-down; now it is challenged to become a grassroots movement. The solidarity begins to surface when people, especially those on the fringes, tell their story, their struggles, their hopes. This often becomes a liberation movement. Sometimes solidarity can take the form of passive or active resistance or both. There is also the risk of getting it wrong, of evening ending up with anarchy.

Marie Harris, in her book: The Dance of the Spirit: The Seven Steps of Women's Spirituality, suggests five steps to a woman's full possession of her soul:

a): Awakening:

a woman simply needs to call a halt – to draw back from the dusting and dishes, from the clients and patients and kids – and ask: “Hey! What am I doing?” The play, *La Cage aux Folles* says: “I am what I am, and what I am needs no excuses.”

b): Discovering:

who that unique woman is. This is the time to take each wound and turn it into a weapon – not a vindictive lash with which to get back at loveless parents or eons of patriarchal exploitation or the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. The woman who has taken possession of herself will assess her unique assets and liabilities and turn them to better use.

c): Creating:

this is turning the self outward, questioning, resisting unquestionable dogma and empowering others to begin to change the world, even a little at a time.

d): Inhabiting:

this is inhabiting her self in serenity, to be at home with herself. Such a woman can never be dispossessed or deserted.

e) Nurturing:

taking time to read, to nurture the soul, to animate the spirit; to live rather than survive.

3. Masculine Spirituality:

In the past, spirituality in the Catholic Church has been male-oriented. The vast majority of writing on spirituality was from men, mostly men who lived so in solitary lives in monasteries. It was written from a male point of view and was expected to be applied to both male and female.

Years ago, gender roles were more established than today. A man “knew” his place as the “breadwinner.” He was characterized by assertiveness, competence, individuality, strength and responsibility.

Culture and conditioning has impacted how we see men and how men see themselves. This shows itself in the area of relationships. Relationships for men are often frustrating because they are often accused of being “distant” and “aloof.” “Psychic numbing,” the loss of emotional and psychic capacity in men, keeps them out of touch with their bodies, unable to relate to others and susceptible to a host of addictions and compulsions. As a result, they feel lonely, disconnected and unable to enter into meaningful relationships.

The way men have been socialized has led to this inability on the part of men. Boys are not held as much as girls; boys are left alone more in their cribs than girls. When held by parents, boys are positioned so that they face away while girls are held in a way that draws them into their mothers.

This form of socialization of the male has repercussions. First of all, could it create an anti-feminine bias where the boy grows up to be the man who both loves and hates the feminine. Is it no wonder that women are seen as objects to be used and not people to relate to. Do they merely exist to make a man happy, rather than become partners with him? Secondly, how does such socialization of the male affect the way he sees God? If God is seen as neither male nor female, but fully both, how difficult is it for a man to relate to such a God? Thirdly, if a man has problems with relating to the feminine, we will have problems with intimacy, his own body and sexuality.

Another key area is the **relationship of father and son**. A mother can teach her son intimacy; a father can teach him about separation, identification and differentiation. The desire for a father’s love is so strong that if a young man is abandoned either geographically or emotionally, he will seek out a surrogate father who might be an authority figure, a celebrity, an athlete or a successful businessman. The absence of this desire for a father’s love is often called “Father Wound.” Because of this, men are not able to relate to other men, to women or to God.

If a man does not feel connected to men or the masculine spirit, then he has difficulty relating to God, the source of his being. So, how can he be present both to himself and to his God? He needs ways to relate to all facets of his personality so he can appreciate the goodness that makes him male and relate to the maleness of God.

Philip Culbertson, in his book The New Adam, says that there are twelve stumbling blocks that hinder the development of a masculine spirituality: the identification of God as Father; the fear of the feminine; the domination by tradition-centered males of literature in theology and spiritual direction; the suppression of a broad range of human emotions; the valuation of self-sufficiency; the misunderstanding of reciprocal relationships; the insistence that “doing” is more manly than “being”; not knowing who they are when they aren’t in charge; the heritage of body-soul dualism and the dismissal of body and sexuality; the need to control, the valuation of the hierarchy, the fear of chaos and spontaneity; the assumption that incompleteness or an

unpredictable result is a sign of failure; the presence of linear over circularity, as conditioned by male anatomy and phallogentrism.

Patriarchy projects its concepts on to God. It sees God as:

a): someone who is in control of everything; controls even creation.

b): someone who is seen as head of a pyramid – king, dictator, rules by command, decree, expects obedience, submission; punishes transgressions.

c): someone who is almighty, all powerful,; is strong, active, and triumphant.

d): someone who is in control, in charge.

e): someone who is male and masculine; feminine qualities are seen as inferior.

How have such concepts of God affected our theology?

a): Dualism: instead of both/and, there is either or.

b): Hierarchy: know your place if you communicate with Him.

c): Power: can accomplish great things; can control things.

d): Aloneness: is separate from world; apart, autonomous.

Culberton concludes that the “*traditional literatures of theology and spirituality are so dominated by culturally conditioned male assumptions that they provide too narrow a range of options for men to explore either the fullness of human spiritual capacity or the richness of the godhead.*”

How do we help the male to discover his “soul.” John Bradshaw says soul has to do with a state of being fully human. Thomas Moore says “soul is not a thing, but a quality or a dimension of experiencing life and ourselves. It has to do with depth, value, relatedness, heart and personal substance.”

It is suggested that there are four major forms of masculine energy common to the universal experience of men. These forms of energy are made possible by the energy provided by the archetypes of **King, Warrior, Magician, and Lover.**

a): King:

this is the primary archetype. It reflects centeredness and security. To access this means a man moves away from disorder and chaos, into stability and calm; move away from impotence and sterility and into creative and fecund masculine energy.

The shadow or passive side of the King is the Weakling, which reflects losing the ability to protect, provide and procreate.

b): Warrior:

it provides the energy to create, defend and extend. It is vital to our world building. It enables a man to have focus, clarify and absolute allegiance. As well, it allows men to be dedicated, courageous, loyal, persevering and decisive.

Its shadow or passive side is the sadist and masochist. Men are driven to abusing others or abusing themselves.

c): Magician:

magician was seen as the keeper of secret knowledge. All societies have magicians, holy men, witch doctors, shamans, astrologers, seers, wizards, and prophets. The Magician provides 1): the capacity for profound reflection, analysis, insight and intellectual discovery. 2): the capacity to transform both personally and socially. 3): the capacity to develop new insights, technologies for the good of society.

d): Lover:

has the ability to create and energize the soul of a man giving him an appetite for life. It empowers men to delight in, to appreciate and to enjoy life. This energy is expressed in the musician, the poet, the artist, and the dancer. When a man accesses the Lover he encounters aesthetic consciousness, profound passion, deep feeling, sensuous experience. In early childhood, most men experienced shame about their sexuality, passion and emotions.

In his book, The Warrior's Journey Home: Healing Men, Healing the Planet, Jed Diamond suggests ten things men must do.:

- 1): Balance the desire to "do" with need to "be."
- 2): Understand and heal confusions about sex and love.
- 3): Transform ambivalent feeling toward women and children.
- 4): Express grief over absence of the father and risk getting close to other men.
- 5): Change self-hatred into self-actualization.
- 6): Acknowledge wounds and heal body and soul.
- 7): Uncover basic root of insecurity.
- 8): Acknowledge and heal hidden childhood abuse.
- 9): Explore the origins of violence and change destructive behavior.
- 10): Return to the spirit of the true warrior.

Now that we have reflected on some of the insights into the male psyche, we are now able to see what men can offer to future generations in the area of spirituality. David James says, *"First, men can expand the horizons of love, commitment, passion, leadership, and justice for their children. Mature men can offer society images of mutuality, cooperation, and harmony with others and the planet. They can teach their sons that passion, commitment, focus, spirituality, and justice are hallmarks of the masculine spirit which springs from the deep reservoirs of a man's soul. Next, men can extend a spirit of loving protection, encouragement, independence and equality to their daughters. The 'new warrior' recognizes that women are co-heirs in God's economy of creation, and offers them respect and gratitude for the gifts and presence they bring to the world. Finally, men can confirm that masculine power is good and not something to be feared. The power of the 'new warrior' will advance the restoration of a society that languishes in ambivalence, hostility, and despair. The contribution of men possessed of a vibrant and committed spirit has been envisioned, but not yet fully realized. But, with the 'world waiting in the wings,' the time for rebuilding is overdue."*

4. Liberation Spirituality:

In 1971, Fr. Gustavo Gutierrez, a Peruvian psychologist, theologian, and author, wrote the highly influential A Theology of Liberation. While some critics said the work was imbued with Marxist concepts, others hailed its message of hope, clothed in a new idiom. Originally developed in Latin America in the 1960s, liberation theology is a controversial religious thought that has gained widespread acceptance, especially in Latin America. To many, it is the duty of Christians to support the rights of the poor and oppressed. But among its extremist proponents, liberation theology has been used as an apologia for revolutionary upheaval in the Third World that strives to link the imperatives of Christian charity with the dictates of Marxist class struggle.

What distinguishes liberation theology from the mainstream of church thinking is its strong emphasis on social change. Two new voices in particular, who now are household names, surfaced with the new movement, Leonardo Boff from Brazil and Jon Sobrino from El Salvador. In general, however, the official church, particularly the Vatican, has looked upon their work with censure.

From the viewpoint of Liberation Theology, Christians are called upon to build the Kingdom. This involves participating in the struggles for the liberation of those oppressed by others. We are called by the Spirit of Truth that will set us free (John 16:13), leading us to complete freedom. This spirituality brings us into solidarity with all people, committing ourselves to liberation so that the Lord may lead us in His own unique way to salvation.

A spirituality of liberation must be centered on conversion to the neighbor, the oppressed person, and the exploited social class. To be converted is to commit oneself to the process liberating the oppressed, through analysis of the situation and action to be taken to remedy that situation. This conversion is a lifetime process; otherwise, what is gained can easily be lost. Because conversion is both a call and a practical involvement in an unjust situation, conversion involves a change in social and political structures. Without a change in these structures, there is no authentic conversion.

Another aspect of liberation spirituality is a sense of gratitude, the realization that everything is a gift from God. Because all is gift, we cannot adopt a passive attitude, but must actively work for the beneficial use of all God-given talents. When we encounter obstacles that hinder the full use of gifts, it is easy to become discouraged, so an attitude of prayer is imperative.

Finally, being challenged to conversion because of the gratuitous nature of God, we must be persons of joy, hope. This allows us to encounter others more intimately despite obstacles. Liberation spirituality is a call to live the Magnificat (Luke 1:47-49), which assures us that the powerful will be dethroned and the lowly exalted, where the rich are sent away empty and the needy are filled.

“The nature of our world is to be difficult, to be problematic. Our challenge is to enter into that struggle, dive into the difficulties, not to remove ourselves from this hard world. We, bearing God, suffer with each other.” Nancy Mairs

5. **Journey Spirituality:**

During the past decade, there has been a tremendous increase in the number of “nothing books” published. These books are filled with blank pages so the writer can commit to paper his or her inmost thoughts and ideas in a personal journal. In a sense these books are sophisticated diaries. Most writers use them to plot their days. Over a period of time, they reflect the many ways a person grows and changes.

Journal keeping is a popular and insightful pastime. Pope John XXIII, who convened the Second Vatican Council, kept a journal, which was published after his death. It gives us a rare glimpse into the man whose actions revolutionized the Catholic Church.

Numerous workshops on journaling have provided participants with some guidance on how to approach journal keeping. Journal keeping is a unique form of prayer, because it allows the writer to communicate the personal thoughts that become prayers. Committing one's thoughts to paper allows a more transparent view of life's journey.

Journal keeping is also an opportunity in prayer to heal the broken places in our lives. It allows us to understand the hurt, and draw renewed strength from the healing power of expressing those hurts.

One of the most famous journal-writers was Anne Frank, the Jewish girl whose diary recounts her family's experience hiding from the Nazis during the Second World War. She found journal-keeping emotionally balancing, courageously affirming, and spiritually enriching. She wrote, "I can shake off everything if I write; my sorrows disappear and my courage is reborn."

Thoreau, reflecting on his experience of living alone On Walden Pond, writes, “*At a certain season of our life we are accustomed to consider every spot as the possible site for a house. The only house of which I had been the owner before, if I except a boat, was a tent. I went into the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential fact of life. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms.*”

“Humanity does not pass through phases as a train passes through stations, being alive, it has the privilege of moving always yet never leaving anything behind.” C.S. Lewis

“Do not say, ‘it is morning,’ and dismiss it with a name of yesterday. See it for the first time as a new-born child that has no name.” – Rabindranath Tagore

“Your house is the last before infinity, whoever you are.” – Rainer Marie Rilke

“Writing is a form of therapy; sometimes I wonder how all those who do not write, compose or paint can manage to escape the madness, the melancholia, the panic-fear which is inherent in the human situation.” – Graham Greene

6. **Story Spirituality:**

We are aware of the two sides of the brain – the left brain and the right brain. The left brain analyzes reality. It believes that knowledge and its interpretation is enough to understand the whole of something. It sees things as either-or. The left brain cannot deal with paradoxes; it can't stand contradictions. The right brain is exactly the opposite. It recognizes reality through synthesis. It argues from its understanding of the whole back to the parts. And it comes to see reality through symbols and images. The right brain is concerned with things like symbols, song, or art. But they're true only when they allow the opposite side to be true as well.

Buried inside the rubble of societal conditioning in every adult, there is the "child." The world of a child is the world of wonder, newness, anticipation—a world filled with stories with happy-ever-after endings. We have discovered that the "once upon a time" story is timeless. Story is our attempt to resonate and represent our experience of life, love, and relationships. Through a retelling of the Christian story, we are able to encounter ourselves in our own story. Our story is our identity; it marks the stepping stones of our path through life.

The rediscovery of story can be attributed to many factors. First, there has been a trend to go back to the ultimate source—God in Jesus. Jesus didn't preach theological doctrines, dogmas, positions, or treatises. Instead, he told stories. They didn't need clarification, because their message was obvious to the audience of the time. Second, the growing awareness of the influences of the left and right sides of the brain, and the re-emphasis on the creative right brain has helped to bring story back into focus. Left-brain people are more logically oriented, they tend to clarify, define, and bring closure to things.

Right-brain people are more imaginative and creative, the prophets, poets, and pastors who never lost the capacity to wonder, enjoy, be amazed, and take delight in the mystery that surrounds them. Third, some social commentators suggest that we have rediscovered story as a reaction to television, which is devoid of personal contact. Fourth, because we live in a computer age, where things are processed at lightning speed, and we are inundated with facts, figures, trends, we are forced to always react to outside factors. The story—our own story—gives us more control and allows us to renew our interest in traditional values.

Our story is very much intertwined with God's. God's story shapes us to the extent that we accept it, allow it, and listen to it with our hearts. Unless we hear God's story, we can't be formed, transformed, created, and recreated.

Stories will always be popular because they contain the stuff of human existence. They heighten our curiosity and demand repetition. They are bridges that connect people of all cultures, age groups, and ethnic backgrounds into a common universal human family. Stories help us to remember, to reflect on the power of the word. They are both the basis of hope and the power to escape from the boredom of life.

Fr. John Shea, in his book, Stories of God: An Unauthorized Biography, says “*if God made man because he loves stories, creation is a success. For humankind is addicted to stories. No matter what our mood, in reverie or expectation, panic or peace, we can be found stringing together incidents, and unfolding episodes. We turn our pain into narrative so we can bear it; we turn out ecstasy into narrative so we can prolong it. We tell stories to live.*”

The Christian strategy has always been to gather folks, break the bread, and tell the stories. Christian symbols are woven into stories of God: symbols of rescue and covenant, judgment and apocalypse, resurrection and Parousia, hope and justice.

William R. White says, “*we are a forgetful people. We need storytellers. We need someone to lay the drama of God’s love before us. We need to be reminded of the uncommon grace of God. We need to hear the stories of the almost-too-good-to-be-true promises of God, the story of good news in the midst of the world’s bad news.*”

Fr. William J. Bausch, in his book, Storytelling: Imagination and Faith, suggests that a story has twelve characteristics:

a): Stories provoke curiosity and compel repetition:

A good story is like a secret: too good to be kept. Stories are sought, bought, caught, and taught, and that’s their nature too.

b): Stories unite us:

Stories are the stuff of our existence. They connect us

c): Stories are bridges:

They connect us to our culture, our roots. Every people, nation and community have stories and myths that preserve and prolong the traditions that give them their identity. A person without a story is a person with amnesia.

d): Stories bind the human family together:

Harold Goddard says, “the destiny of the world is determined less by the battles that are lost and won than by the stories it loves to believe in.

e): Stories help us remember:

They help us remember our past, our history, our glories, and our shame

f): Stories use a special language:

Someone once said that there are three kinds of language: daily talk, nighttime talk, and storytelling. Storytelling is daytime talk because it makes sense. It is nighttime talk because it is rich in images that can happen in a story but not in everyday life. Story is the thread that binds out conscious and unconscious lives together and, in the richness that results, intimates the presence of mystery.

g): Stories restore the original power of the word:

Even though words have been devalued, it still has power, especially the spoken word. To know something’s name was to have power over it. That is why Adam could name the animals in creation. The words don’t convey something, they are something.

h): [Stories provide escape:](#)

Escapism is a good thing at times. It takes us from our immediacy and gives us a chance to regroup, reform, and reenter life. Every parent knows the calming power of a story to a child. The story allows us to escape from boredom and we escape from reality when the world is too much for us. We also need to escape from hurts and the story helps us.

i): [Stories evoke our right brain:](#)

We are told that we must be cool, calm, collected, reasonable, unemotional, in control, and analytical. Einstein said, we are intellectual giants but moral pygmies. This is because of the left brain domination. We learn to live only with our heads and not with our hearts and so we have lost a profound source of truth about ourselves and our world.

j): [Every story is our story:](#)

Joseph Campbell says that there is only one story and one hero, and he or she wears many faces, including our own. Everyone is born onto a path. Everyone, from the start, is on a journey. And a journey has two inseparable companions: conflict and new beginnings.

k): [Stories provide a basis for hope and morality:](#)

It is the imagination that gives birth to hope, and it is the story that is the imagination vehicle.

l): [Stories are the basis for ministry:](#)

Ministry to others and for others really begins at the intersection between God and his people revealed in their stories and conversations. Stories are not only the basis for ministry; they are also a fruitful guide to discerning when in ministry love must come before law.

Thomas Downs says, *“to be a person is to have a story. Without my story, I have no identity. I do not know who I am, or what I am about. If you have no story, how do you know where you’re going; and if you’re going somewhere, how will you when you get there.*

A story is made up of steppingstones along the footpath, markings up the side of the mountain, curves and detours along the highway of life. A story tells about struggle, without which life would be boring. My personal story tells of the zigzags in my life – the transitions and transformations.”

According to Fr. Bausch, story and sanctity go hand in hand and he indicated that there are six links between them:

a): [Learn the story:](#)

Learning the story has a two-fold target. It means learning the larger story of revelation, of God and his movement in history. Then it means learning the smaller story of ourselves, of God’s movement in our own personal history. God’s story often provides the key to our own story. Sometimes we are too close to ourselves that we fail to see the pattern.

b): Own the story:

To own the story means to accept the whole of it, the whole of our lives, the light side and the dark side. Owning the story is giving ourselves the total acceptance that God gives us. In accepting the dark side, it also means accepting his “amazing grace.”

c): Contemplate the story:

We must contemplate, give time to the story in order to see the hand of God at work in our story. This will help us to better understand the pattern and nuances and perceptions in our story.

d): Pray the story:

This means dialoguing about it so we can see its spirit; can enter into conversation with God and this helps us fight the powers of darkness.

e): Share the story:

We share the story with a confidant, a soul friend who helps us discern. Secondly, by sharing it we evangelize others. Thirdly, we are moved to do something, change society.

f): Celebrate the story:

We must celebrate it liturgically; witness to us in a larger, worshipping community that meets to celebrate God’s saving action.

7. **Celtic Spirituality (Creation):**

“*Heaven lies a foot and a half above the height of a man.*” – old Irish saying

Fr. John Donohue, in the prologue to his book, Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom, writes: “*It is strange to be here. The mystery never leaves you alone. Behind your image, below your words, above your thoughts, the silence of another world waits. A world lives within you. No one else can bring you news of this inner world. Though the opening of the mouth, we bring out sounds from the mountain beneath the soul. These sounds are words. The world is full of words. There are so many talking all the time, loudly, quietly in rooms, on streets, on television, on radio, in the paper, in books. The noise of words keeps what we call the world there for us. We take each other’s sounds and make patterns, predictions, benedictions, and blasphemies. Each day, our tribe of language holds what we call the world together. Yet the uttering of the word reveals how each of us relentlessly creates. Everyone is an artist. Each person brings sound out of silence and coaxes the invisible to become visible.*”

Esther de Waal, in her book, Every Earthly Blessing, captures the essence of Celtic spirituality when she says, “*life was lived on two levels – the practical tasks of daily life are done for their own sake carefully and competently, but simultaneously they become signs of God’s all-encompassing love. A thing is done well not only for itself but because of the part that that plays in God’s world. It matters that the butter is made well or that the herds are driven carefully since God himself is involved. He cares about the things of his world. Work is, after all, a matter of partnership with him, something through which he may be better known. Celtic spirituality is deeply incarnational. It is through his world, in its totality, however mundane and down to earth, infused with the sense of the*

all-pervading presence of God. This is God's world, a world to be claimed, affirmed and

Characteristics of Celtic Spirituality:

1. Living in touch with nature:

Celtic spirituality came out of a society that was rural and tribal based in which personal relationships were of paramount importance – not only relationships between people, but relationships with the wild creatures and with material things, and not least, between this world and the next. It came out of a people who were not afraid to carry over their earlier pagan, pre-Christian beliefs into Christianity and fuse the old with the new.

Celtic Christian spirituality shows a love and respect for the physical environment; a sense of wonder and awe at the divine residing in everything. This idea is influenced by the pagan spiritual heritage, which addressed God as “lord of the elements.” In the stories of the saints, they are often found establishing their monasteries and oratories in places where the Druids often taught and worshipped. This attitude of respect for nature shows itself in their care for animals, birds and all creatures.

2. Love of learning:

Christian Ireland was a place where monastic schools flourished and where stories of saints were first written down. Scholars came from all over Europe to study, travel around and be inspired by these communities. The Irish brought this love of learning to the rest of Europe.

Thomas Cahill, in his book, How the Irish Saved Civilization: the Untold Story of Ireland's Heroic Role from the Fall of Rome to the Rise of Medieval Europe, chronicles the spread of such learning to mainland Europe and beyond.

3. Yearning to travel, explore the unknown:

This was probably due to the migratory nature of their pagan ancestors; maybe it was due to the fact that they lived so close to the sea and were affected by the rhythm of its tides; maybe they were unconsciously influenced by the Judeo-Christian spiritual heritage of travel to foreign lands.

In contrast to the “red martyrdom” for Christ or “the green martyrdom” of participating in severe penitential practices, they faced “white martyrdom” of living years far away from home for the sake of the gospel.

There were three kinds of pilgrimages. First of all, a person left his or her country in body only; the spirit might still be left behind. Secondly, was when a person was detained in his or her own country under someone else's authority, while their heart and spirit had left much earlier. Finally, a person left their country altogether – in mind and body. These were the perfect pilgrims. Because of their appreciation for God's nature and their desire to see the holy places and meet people different from themselves, they yearned to travel.

Three monks arrived in Cornwall, England and informed King Alfred of Wessex, “*we stole away because we wanted for the love of God to be on pilgrimage, we cared not where.*”

Pilgrims, monks and exiles undertook a *peregrinatio*, a pilgrimage, not because some abbot told them, but because, somehow, this was their destiny. St. Columbanus wrote “*let us concern ourselves with heavenly things, not human ones, and like pilgrims always sigh for our homeland, long for our homeland. It is the end of the road that travelers look for and*

desire, and because we are travelers and pilgrims through this world, it is the road's end, that is of our lives, that we should always be thinking about. For that road's end is our true homeland. Don't let us love the road rather than the land to which it leads, lest we lose our love for homeland altogether. For we have such a homeland, that we ought to love it. So then, while we are on the road, as travelers, as pilgrims, as guests of the world, let us not get entangled with any earthly desires and lusts but fill our minds with heavenly and spiritual things."

4. Love of silence and solitude:

This seems paradoxical to their loved of exploration and travel; yet they valued solitary places and times of silence. They probably sought out these because of their intense involvement with people. An atmosphere of silence was encouraged in the monasteries.

Why did people go into monasteries in the early Celtic Church? The monastery became a kind of landlord, a patron of the arts, a dispenser of alms and hospitality. It was also a place to practice contemplation that would lead men and women to God. Or course, the monasteries played an important role in local life as centers of learning and culture.

Solitude was seen, not so much as a place or state of mind and heart; rather it was the ability to enter into the desert of the heart, the poustinia, the inner cave of the heart. It involved that inner attentiveness to God, a continual stream of contemplation, which becomes possible even in the midst of crowds, noise, and the demands of daily life.

5. Understanding of time:

The Celtic cross is a supreme example of how the Celts viewed time. The circle around the beams of the cross seems to calm and console the loneliness and pain associated with the two cross beams.

The earth is seen as a circle. The year is a circle. Each season blends into the next and has its own rhythm. Even the day has its own rhythm. We have our own rhythm – we appear, live on , feed from and return back. The ocean has its own rhythm through the ebb and flow of the tides. Humans also have a rhythm, four seasons: spring, summer, autumn and winter.

Eternal time is woven into our human time. Oscar Wilde said, "*We think in eternity but we move slowly through time.*" There is part of the eternal within us which is not vulnerable to normal time.

Shakespeare wrote in one of his sonnets:

*Like as the waves make toward the pebbled shore,
So do our minutes hasten to their end.
Each changing place with that which goes before
In sequent toil all forwards do contend.*

They appreciated time as a sacred reality, blessed and already redeemed by God's overflowing compassion. They see a fullness to time now and this is often expressed in the old saying, "when God made time, he made plenty of it." So, for them, the present contains within itself both past events, which continue to live on, as well as the seeds of future events waiting to be born.

6. Appreciation of ordinary life:

They valued the daily, the routine, and the ordinary. They found God, not so much at the end of time when the reign of God finally comes, but now, where the reign of God is already being lived by God's faithful people.

7. Value of kinship relationships:

Anam Cara. They had a fostering system where children of one family frequently were brought up by another family or tribe thus opening up wider world of learning to each child. The mentoring that went on was called Anam Cara, or soul friend.

In the early Celtic Church, a person who acted as a teacher, companion or spiritual guide was called an "Anam Cara." Originally, it referred to someone to whom you confessed, revealing your hidden secrets, someone to whom you confided your inner being. If you had an anam cara, you belonged, you were respected. When someone understands you, you know that you belong, that you fit in. In our culture today, we talk about friendship but a relationship with an anam cara was more than just friendship, it was intimacy, an intimacy that involved trust, belonging, sharing of the soul. Irish blessings reflect that mentality.

8. Importance of grieving and having sense of humor:

"Supreme egotism and utter seriousness are necessary for the greatest accomplishment, and these the Irish find hard to sustain; at some point, the instinct to see life in a comic light becomes irresistible, and ambition falls before it." – William Shannon

They were a people who were intimately acquainted with suffering and loss. They knew from experience that there was a time to cry and express their tears. The practice of keening was highly valued, professional mourners gathered round the casket, wakes, told stories. Aware of the fragility of life and of human relationships, they knew how to laugh long and deeply and how not to take themselves too seriously.

8 Small Group Spirituality:

The base or small community movement started in Latin America about the same time liberation theology did. The two developments supported each other. People organized themselves into small groups to study scripture together, to see what it had to say to their life situation. As they learned, they began strategizing and pooling their resources to bring about social change that the scriptures demanded. This push for reform became threatening to the civil and even church authorities.

In an age when people can get swallowed up in large parishes and become anonymous and marginalized, small groups can give them a sense of belonging and support.

In the past two decades, small-group movements have played a central role in the development of the Catholic. Through the Charismatic Movement, thousands of people have been able to hear the prompting of the Holy Spirit and lead a more enriching prayer life.

Through Marriage Encounter, many couples have had their marriages renewed and have been given a process through which to deepen their communications. Through Cursillo, many adults have been able to deepen their faith commitment, and through the RENEW process, thousands around the world have discovered the depth and beauty and applications of the Scriptures as they gather in small groups to share their faith.

The above-mentioned movements have touched a responsive chord in the lives of many Catholics. They have discovered fulfillment and opportunity to develop toward a more mature faith and prayer life.

Why are small groups so appealing? People join small faith-sharing groups because they have a desire to grow. Life is a process of growth, but often we become stagnant and need a breath of fresh air, new ideas, and new challenges that will help us on the journey.

People join a small faith-sharing group because they wish to be part of a community, to experience life together, to share, to pray, to support each other, to challenge and be challenged, and to find the support and strength to reach out in service to others.

Six Essential Elements

Certain elements need to be considered when developing or analyzing small Christian communities.



1. Prayer:

The first element seems obvious enough, but must not be taken for granted. Prayer gathers the group in the name of the Lord, present among them. A commitment to two types of prayer is required: personal and group. In personal prayer, each member gives significant time to prayer each day as he/she is able, praying for each member of the group and for the larger church community. Group prayer during the community gathering links each member to the Lord. Prayer, interjected at various places throughout the meeting, is a celebration of the group's commitment to the Lord and each other, as well as to the larger church community. What has become increasingly clear to me is that the group's prayer must be more than a perfunctory recitation of a common formula.

2. Support:

What motivates most people to join small groups and communities is the desire for personal support. Learning how to provide support adequately, but within the limitations of a faith-sharing group, merits careful consideration by both the individual and the whole community. Support primarily means that people feel welcomed as they are, understood in terms of what they are going through (whether joys or struggles), and accepted regardless of others' judgment about how they are handling their particular situations. People can freely express in the group their personal and family concerns, their struggles with faith, and their concerns about work, the neighborhood, or other arenas of public life. I summarize these as faith and life concerns: personal and public.

3. Reflection

Support by the group allows participants to gain perspective on what is happening in their lives. It also helps the individual and group to move beyond open expression to considered reflection. The quality of this reflection contributes greatly to the cohesion and life of the group. How the Lord is present to each person and how well that experience is shared will determine the group's growth. A level of trust is built over time, which, while it might include a few struggles and arguments, allows the members to become both honest and reflective. As with support, reflection should be focused on life and faith: personal and public.

It may be that people simply need to be able to express themselves without extensive reflection at a given meeting, but in the long run, reflection moves the group beyond fundamentalism (when it comes to faith) and sentimentalism or self-pity (when it comes to personal or public relationships). At the same time, reflection and learning without allowing for the free expression, which is part of support, can reduce the process to intellectualization and leave the participants personally untouched.

4. Learning:

The obvious next step after reflection is learning. The group gains understanding by engaging in careful analysis and extensive consultation with sources of information. This can be the explicit purpose of a group, such as a Bible study group (which may need to give some time to support and prayer as well as learning). Too often, though, learning is a missing element in small Christian communities. In most materials published today there is a great emphasis on Scripture and the Sunday readings, yet many of the commentaries are "lite" on content and on questions that probe more deeply than asking merely, "How does God speak to me through this passage?" Using substantive materials and inviting an "expert" now and then can stimulate and renew the group.

Learning may include trying to establish firmer foundations for one's faith. It can also entail social analysis. Here the group asks not only "what?" or "how do I feel about this?" but "why?" Participants take the steps necessary to understand why something is happening. For example, an increase in homelessness in the neighborhood may lead a group beyond charity to steps that actually reduce the homelessness. Knowing the world in which we live and the social elements that contribute to it is essential to our faith life if we are to make any impact at all with the message of Christ.

5. **Participation**

The small community is part of the whole of the church community. The parish should be the nurturer of the communities within it. Each small community should be "known" and encouraged by the parish staff.

All parishes can and ought to include opportunities for small community experience. Parish leaders must be very clear about the purpose(s) for small communities, providing the structure, materials, and leadership to support the purpose. Small community participants need encouragement to go beyond personal support and "sharing" to deeper reflection, learning, and especially action. Restyling the parish so that all groups and meetings adopt the elements used in small communities enriches the parish. Participants should strive to be participating members of the parish in both worship and ministry. Some approaches to small Christian communities are designed specifically to increase the parishioners' sense of belonging to their parish. Many people want to belong to a small Christian community for personal prayer and the support they lack in their family life; it is important for parish leaders to realize that and to take it into account when designing the small communities.

Some advocates of small communities see them as alternatives to parish life, not sub-communities of parishes. The term that has come to be used for such alternatives is "intentional communities" (a misnomer given that few people's involvement in church communities is unintentional). Typically, they are groups of educated, liberal, white Catholics. However segregated any church community may be because of neighborhood housing patterns, these alternative or intentional communities are by definition more segregated, imitating the Protestant history of socially defined denominations. The challenge for the church seems to be maintaining the catholic character of heterogeneous parishes, while providing opportunities for people to enjoy the "intimacy" of homogeneous communities-people who literally or figuratively speak the same language.

6. **Mission:**

Mission should be approached as integral, rather than as an add-on, to the meeting. It is not the mission of the group to provide prayer, support, faith reflection, learning, and participation. Rather, the mission of Christ and of the church is the mission of the group. The community, as in the house churches of the Pauline tradition, must include all six elements in order to spread the good news. Individually and publicly, each member expresses the mission in everyday living, while also participating as a community with other small communities or a parish organization.

8 Eco-Spirituality:

The rapid growth of the human population and the application of modern technology to nature has brought the planet to a crisis point. Air and water are polluted, vast forests have been destroyed, other natural resources are being used up at an alarming rate, many plant and animal species are in danger of becoming extinct.

People are waking up to the gravity of the situation. Our own survival is at stake. Theology supports our instinctive love of and commitment to nature and the planet. We try to educate and push for legislation toward a more reverential interaction with our planet and its sensitivity.

Thomas Berry is one of the leading thinkers in the area of ecological spirituality. Drawing from his involvement, Michael Dowd says, *“the fact that Earth is a living being just makes good, common sense. The physical structure of the planet – its core, mantle, and mountain ranges – acts as the skeleton or frame of its existence. The soil that covers the grasslands and forests is like a mammoth digestive system, into which all things are absorbed, broken down, and recycled. The oceans, waterways, and rain function as a circulatory system that provides life-giving blood, purifying and revitalizing the body. The vegetation of the planet, the algae, the plants, and the trees, provide its respiratory system, its lungs, constantly regenerating the entire atmosphere. The animal kingdom provides the lower functions of the nervous system, a finely tuned and diversified series of organisms that are sensitized to environmental change and have provided the first stages for the advent of humanity. Humanity itself can be understood as the capacity of the planet for conscious awareness and reflexive thought. That is, the human enables the Earth to reflect on itself and on the divine Mystery out of which it has come and in which it exists.”*

This understanding of the earth as a living organism is known as the “Gaia theory.”

We are becoming more and more conscious about the fragile nature of our world. We are called to take care of the earth, to preserve it from greed and thoughtlessness. We are becoming more aware of the depletion of the ozone layer, global warming, the poisoning of the oceans..

The church has continually taught that God dwells within the created world. Each created sign is a sign of God’s presence and activity, with worth, dignity and mystery. Not only the human being, but everything that exists has its own meaning, beauty and value, its own indispensable part to play in the unfolding universe.

The renewed interest in Eco-spirituality is often seen as “the greening of Catholic spirituality.” Firstly, this challenges us to rediscover the indwelling of God in the midst of our world and remember that Christianity is incarnational and sacramental. Seeing the earth as a vessel for the divine can make the difference between reverence and destruction..

Secondly, another strand in this greening is the widespread attention that modern science is telling us about how the universe works, how it came to be and produces us. Thirdly, there is a growing respect for and willingness to learn from others – from the poor, from women, from other traditions and spiritualities, together with an effort to rediscover the creation-centered spirituality within our own Catholic tradition. Finally, this new approach

emphasizes the urgent need to make connections, to bridge gaps in our understanding, to search out the underlying dynamic that causes the ongoing destruction of the earth.

Pope John Paul II states: *“In many parts of the world society is given to instant gratification and consumerism while remaining indifferent to the damage which these cause. The seriousness of the ecological issue lays bare the depth of the human moral crisis. If an appreciation of the value of the human person and of human life is lacking, we will also lose interest in others and in the earth itself. Simplicity, moderation and discipline, as well as a spirit of sacrifice, must become part of everyday life, lest all suffer the negative consequences of the careless habits of a few.”*

7. Black Catholic Spirituality:

Black spirituality has its roots in West Africa’s tradition of extended family, filtered through the harsh, U.S. environment of slavery which West African’s descendants experienced.

Traditionally, community comes first, and within that context, respect for one another and for religion are understood. Within this context, sin is what hurts the community. The virtue of the community can be summarized as a sense of God’s providence. The idea that “God takes care of you. You’ve gotta trust the Lord” characterized “nomadic” spirituality, not rooted in places but in people and it lives today in the U.S. Black community’s old folks. They insist things happen for a reason. God’s grace is sufficient. The question is, what do you think the Lord wants you to do?

One’s personal relationship with God may mean one talks with God, even gets angry with God. A second characteristic of black spirituality is that you celebrate life. Because of this, black folks talk with one another, catch up on one another’s lives at church. For them, church is extended family. Burn the building down, and you’ve still got church. Move it somewhere else, you’ve still got church. That is why territorial parish mean little, the community celebrating means much. Thirdly, black spirituality pervades all life. You’re a person. God created you in God’s image and likeness and gave you free will. All life is good. You don’t divine it up into what is secular and what is secular. Life is life.

Black spirituality has certain values. First of all, one’s personal relationship with God is paramount. God is the God of our fathers and mothers. Secondly, there is the idea of personal call, a personal discovery of his or her personal connection with the Lord; a rootedness, a foundation in order to maintain balance. Thirdly, there is the idea of “leaning on the Lord.”

This involves trust in God’s providence. It also involves sharing important things with your extended family. You have got to tell people because the burden it too great to carry alone.

J. What is Spirituality? – Comments from the Experts!

“Spirituality can be described as the whole of our deepest religious beliefs, convictions, and patterns of thought, emotion, and behavior in respect to what is ultimate, to God.”

- Anne Carr, theology professor, University of Chicago.

“We’re like sponges; we soak up God’s grace. If we are vulnerable to God and open-hearted, and we soak up God’s grace that is offered freely to us, we become transformed people with a sensitivity to wherever there is a lack of love or a lack of caring or a lack of God’s presence. We become prayer, we embody prayer through being open to God’s

- Edwina Gateley, Volunteer Missionary Movement, Chicago.

“Spirituality is one of those slippery terms. We are trying to name the very rich, complex thick reality of Christian spiritual life as experience. The reality of being named is itself unwieldy. It is unwieldy because it is life and it is experience. Therefore it is hard to pin down. But this is one of the most exciting things about studying and teaching spirituality.”

- Michael Downey, professor of theology, Kentucky

“We are spirit, through and through. Humans are shot through with a yearning for something more than, a dynamic openness to the divine. Spirituality is living acknowledgement of who we most deeply are. Spirituality is about the reality of that nature of ours, which is more than animal life, indeed more than the sum of its parts.”

- Susan Muto, Director & Founder of Spirituality Center, Pittsburgh.

“Spirituality refers to our deepest values and desires, the very core of our being.”

- Psychiatrist Gerald May

“When we expand our awareness, strengthen our center, clarify our purpose, transform our inner demons, develop our will and make conscious choices, we are moving toward deeper connection with our spiritual self.”

- Psychologist Molly Brown

“Spirituality is our lived relationship with Mystery.” Fr. Steven Sundborg

K: Eating the Right Food – Traits of a Healthy Spirituality

According to Melannie Svoboda, the following traits reflect a healthy spirituality:

1. Self-Knowledge:

“Know thyself,” says Socrates. Jesus challenged us to “love your neighbor as yourself.” How we think of ourselves determines how we interpret the many happenings in our lives. How we react to a compliment speaks volumes about us.

2. Sense of Wonder:

“One who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe is as good as dead,” says Albert Einstein. When we wonder at things, we are acknowledging that there are some things that are beyond our understanding. Moses recognized that he was on sacred ground when he encountered God in the burning bush. Zacchaeus was curious about Jesus and so invited him to his house for dinner. Someone once said, “attention makes the genius; all learning, fancy, science, and skill depend upon it.”

3. Friendship:

Remember the old proverb, “tell me who your friends are, and I will tell you who you are.” According to C.S. Lewis, all friendships arise from a “You, too” experience. There are five different ways friends can help us grow:

- a. **Self knowledge** - we discover things, not only about our friends, but also about ourselves.
- b. **Expand our horizon** - friends convince us to read and do things we never considered doing.
- c. **Encourage us** - Living in a stressful world, friends are supportive.
- d. **Express love** - they help us express love in concrete ways, eg: pat on back,
- e. **Trust** – We begin to share more intimately with friends.

4. Courage:

Life is difficult. Life is complicated. Life presents us with major and minor adversities from death of a spouse to marital problems; from personal injury to ill health; from loss of a job to major financial difficulties. A healthy spirituality helps us to see the connection between these adversities and the presence of God in our lives. Someone once said, “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience but shouts in our pain.”

5. Teachable moments:

You might have come across H. Jackson Brown’s book, “Live and Learn and Pass It On,” where he wrote about finishing the sentence, “I’ve learned that...” if we have a healthy spirituality, we will have a healthy attitude to the falls we take along the way. Someone once said, “those who makes mistakes make everything else as well.”

- 6. Tolerance:**
Jesus often spoke about the ambiguities of life; of the weeds among the wheat (Matt. 13:29f). Ambiguity is part of life. Fr. Anthony De Mello once said, “Certainty is the sin of bigots, terrorists and Pharisees.” We must be open to and tolerate the diversity in life and in the lives of people. even Jesus chose a diverse group of people to be his apostles.
- 7. Sense of Humor:**
People often claim that Christianity is often about “doom and gloom,” that we’ve always got to be serious. Someone once defined humor as “the kindly contemplation of the incongruities of life.” Jesuit John Powell used to say, “If you are happy, let your face know it.” A teacher was preparing some kids of First Confession and asked them, “What is the first thing we have to do before we are forgiven?” One kid
- 8. Interdependence:**
Novelist Annie Dillard said, “All life is an interconnected membrane, weft of linkages like chain mail.” Because we are all interconnected, we must begin to listen to each other, realize that we live in community and become compassionate persons.
- 9. Perseverance:**
What is perseverance, except the ability to persist in an undertaking over a long period of time despite periodic setbacks, discouragements and disillusionment. There is the old adage that reminds us to remember that the great oak tree was once a little nut on the ground. Perseverance takes discipline and vision.
- 10. Freedom:**
The reason we are disciplined is so that we can become free, free to love. Someone once said, “freedom doesn’t mean being free for nothing. It means bring free to love.” It is important to remember that the primary idea in the Bible is freedom or liberation.
- 11. Love:**
‘Two things a man cannot hide: that he is drunk & that he’s in love” - Greek proverb. Love, in a healthy spirituality context, reminds us that God loves us; that God loves me; that He loves me no matter what; that everyone needs love and that the purpose of life is to learn to love.
- 12. Generativity:**
Dag Hammarskjold, former UN Secretary General, in his book, Markings, wrote “I don’t know Who – or What – put the question. I don’t know when it was put. I don’t even remember answering. But at some moment I did answer Yes to Someone – or Something – and from that hour, I was certain that existence is meaningful and that, therefore, my life in self-surrender, had a goal.” There is the old saying that life begets life.

- 13. Balance:**

We have to balance work and play in our lives. How do we try to integrate leisure into our Catholic way of thinking? How do we come up with a spirituality of work and a spirituality of leisure? What is my attitude toward work, toward leisure? Can I see God at work in both?
- 14. Prayer:**

How do we define prayer? Why pray? Maybe, we pray to find out what is in our hearts because God already knows what is there! Maybe we pray also to learn what God thinks and feels!
- 15. Forgiveness:**

“If God were not willing to forgive sin, heaven would be empty.” German proverb. The gospels are filled with the challenge to forgive (Matthew 6:14f). Forgiveness is both a challenge and a gift. It is a challenge in that it doesn’t come naturally. It is a gift in that it frees us. C.S. Lewis, said, “If God forgives us we must forgive ourselves. Otherwise it is almost like setting up ourselves as a higher tribunal than God.”
- 16. Gratitude:**

Astronomer Carl Sagan said, “If you want to make an apple pie from scratch, you first have to invent the universe.” In other words, we must never take the gifts we’ve been given for granted. The gospels remind us of this challenge in the story of the Ten Lepers (Luke 17:11-19).
- 17. Playfulness**

We must let God be God. Larry Eisenberg said, “For peace of mind, resign as general manager of the universe.” We must let go and entrust instead.
- 18. Commitment:**

Commitment means the recognition that there is sin in our world and inside us but this should not paralyze or overwhelm us but should challenge us to align ourselves on the side of goodness. Irish orator, Edmund Burke said, “all that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good people do nothing.” In the gospels, Jesus kept taking a stand and inviting us to do the same. He took stands against the Pharisees. We must also remember that our religion is counter-cultural and so we are faced with more of an uphill battle in our commitment.
- 19. Hope:**

Why do we need to hope? The first reason is to ask what is the alternative to hope? Dante saw hell as a place of misery first of all, because it is a place of hopelessness. Hope is difficult because there are so many bad things going on in our world: violence, poverty, war, depression, disease, etc. Hope is also difficult because we don’t always get what we hope for. Sometimes we seem to get far more than we hoped for.

20. Restlessness:

Malcolm Muggeridge once said, “the only ultimate disaster that can befall us is to feel ourselves to be at home here on earth.” The old saying says, “life is a journey, not a destination.” So as long as we are on the journey, we will be incomplete and restless.

L. Summary Thoughts

We have spent some time reflecting on some of our deepest desires, hopes and hungers. We have discussed various spiritualities and their implications. We have discovered that our spirituality is not about an after-life, devoid from this world, nor beyond it; it is primarily about engaging co-creatively with our evolving universe and the evolution of our home, the planet, earth.

We are invited to embrace the chaos in our lives as an experience that can teach us important things about the meaning of life.

Jesus came to establish the reign of God which would be a kingdom of love, compassion, service, justice, right relationships and suffering for the cause of right. This is the essence of the Beatitudes also.

What kind of spirituality is evolving for today? What key elements should it contain? Diarmuid O’Murchu suggests the following:

1. Take to heart the reality of what it means to be human.
2. Be human, not in competitive way of “divide and conquer” but inclusively.
3. Live in harmony with the mystery within and without, with the divine.
4. Integrate the shadow side so we can march toward the light.
5. Be interdependent rather than independent.
6. Transcend religious system to become co-creators with God, creating new heavens, new earth.

In order to accomplish these key elements, we need to do:

1. Instead of controlling and manipulating the world, we must engage it more holistically.
2. We must learn new ways to befriend the earth.
3. We need less of the head – the masculine, and more of the feminine – the heart.
4. We need partnership rather than national separations.
5. We need more cooperation and less competition.

T.S. Eliot puts it this way:

*Home is where one starts from. As we grow older
The world becomes stranger, the pattern more complicated.
We must be still and still moving,
Into another intensity;
For a future union, a deeper communion.*

How do we marry head and heart? In his book, Care of the Soul, Thomas Moore says, *“The intellect wants to know; the soul likes to be surprised. Intellect, looking outward, wants enlightenment and the pleasure of a burning enthusiasm. The soul, always drawn inward, seeks contemplation and the more shadowy, mysterious experience of the underworld.... The intellect wants a summary meaning all well and good for the purposeful nature of the mind. But the soul craves depth of reflection, many layers of meaning, nuances without end, references and allusions and prefigurations. All these enrich the texture of an image or story and please the soul by giving it much food for rumination.”*

What can we learn from our spirituality?

Benjamin Barber said, *“I don’t divide the world into the weak and the strong, or the successes and the failures, those who make it or those who don’t. I divide the world into learners and non-learners.”* What distinguishes a learner from a non-learner?

1. Seeing much:

All learning begins with seeing, that is, it begins with noticing things, with paying attention to what is happening around us.

2. Studying much:

To be a learner, however, it is not enough simply to see very much. We must reflect on what we see. We can say that all learning involves a long and careful look beneath and beyond the surface of things. Someone once said, “it is not experience, but thinking about experience, that gives wisdom.”

3. Suffering much:

If we want to learn, we must open ourselves to the possibility of pain. Although learning sometimes can be a pleasure and a joy, more often than not the greatest lessons in life entail some form of suffering. On the road to knowledge and wisdom, we are apt to fall many times.

Make Me More Teachable

Loving God, make me more teachable.

Help me to pay closer attention to the world around and inside me.

Help me to look beneath surfaces and beyond appearances.

Lead me to reflect on my experiences.

May I heed Jesus’ words every day: look, listen, take care, remember, watch, pray.

Coax me to be more open to life despite the possibility of pain,

Knowing that life’s greatest lessons often entail some form of suffering.

And finally, God,

Give me a positive attitude toward all the mistakes I make,

Help me to see them not as roadblocks to perfection

But as stepping stones to greater humility and compassion.

Every time I trip or stumble, tumble or fall,

May I pick myself up (with your help) and continue on my journey toward you. Amen.

- Melannie Svoboda, Traits of a Healthy Spirituality.

In order to see much, study much and suffer much, we must take the time to be at home with ourselves. We must love, live and laugh. In his book, And Grace Will Lead Me Home, John Powers offers:

“Tips for a Laughable Life.”

Listen to people who live on the edge, they know more about the center than do the higher-ups.

Challenge all those who pretend to be perfect.

Become fearlessly familiar with your inner family.

Learn how to do subtraction. It will bring more happiness to your life than addiction.

Include the excluded.

Reverence the imagination but not always the content of fantasy.

Challenge all those who try to justify aggression to protect the name of the institution in the name of God.

Repeat jokes even if you don't find them that funny anymore. Others might.

Don't let the anxious set your pace.

Cry as much as you like watching commercials.

Listen as much to what others are not saying as to what they are.

Remember that all religions are at best understatements about God and can never quiet capture in dogma the perpetual mystery that leaves human beings trembling with fear.

Before offering up anything to God, deal with it.

Listen to the music of nature.

Remain suspicious of bureaucracies. They store ideas well but don't create them. People do.

Never walk by a playground without trying a swing, slide or seesaw.

Don't beg God to change anything just for you.

Optimism is learned. Choose it.

Be concerned more about the separation of Church and God than the separation of Church and State.

Have breakfast with someone dangerous or different just to scramble your ideas.

Work just as hard in old age to make new friends as you do remembering the friends you've made.

Give something away every day. That way you won't have to worry about taking it with you.

M. Spirituality > Ritual > Religion

How are the concepts of “spirituality,” “ritual,” and “religion” related? Robert Fulghum, in his book, From Beginning to End speaks about rituals in our lives. He makes the following points:

1. To be human is to be religious:

Every human asks the basic questions such as: who am I? What am I doing here? Where did I come from? Where am I going? What is right, what is wrong? What is the meaning of life? These questions arise from the inner recesses of the person.

2. To be religious is to be mindful:

As we ask the above questions, we find answers and hold to these answers with faith and devotion thereby making them sacred to us. The asking and answering process itself sanctifies existence. Ritual is one name we give this process.

3. Our lives are endless rituals:

Our days are filled with patterns. There are common patterns. They are habits that are sacred because they help structure our lives. These patterns or rituals are present in all stages of our lives. These ritual mark the changes that take place in our lives from moment to moment, day to day, year to year. In acknowledging these changes, we name them as rites of passage. Sometimes, we celebrate these rites of passage publicly or privately. Public include weddings, funerals, baptisms, etc. Private include events celebrate with family and friends. These include birthdays, anniversaries, accomplishments, engagements, moving, promotions, etc. Some of these rituals can be spontaneous or arranged.

4. Rituals create sacred time:

Rituals put us in touch with a deeper reality. It puts us in touch with the divine, the Eternal. Consequently, we cannot hurry such moments.

As seekers of meaning in our lives, we need meaningful rituals to celebrate it. The Catholic Church is regarded as being filled with ritual. Is such ritual meaningful to today’s seeker of do we have to find other rituals that will express it? There is a need for some form of symbolic expression in our lives. There are key moments in our lives that need to be celebrated ritually. Have some of the rituals associated with such key moments lost their significance and power? We may have rituals to help us celebrate such events as birthdays, weddings, funerals, parades, carnivals, and national days of celebration but do we have rituals that help us work through and engage conflicts and struggles?

The ongoing awareness and recognition of the contribution of the feminine may help us revitalize rituals, bring more creativity and imagination as well as sensitivity into our ritual celebrations.

We must critically look at the “old” rituals and discover why some of them are no longer nourishing people today. We need new ways to befriend and support each other. We need new rituals to acknowledge, negotiate and celebrate the developing spiritualities of our day.

N. Conclusion

Someone once defined Americans as "people who are born in the country, where they work with great energy so they can live in the city, where they work with greater energy so that someday they can live in the country again." This definition tells us a great deal about who we are, what we do, and why we do it. It is a poignant comment on the culture that largely forms our spirituality. Culture and spirituality are not separate entities but parts of the same fabric. The function of spirituality is not to protect us from our culture but to enable us to leaven it, stretch it, bless it, and break it open to the present designs of God.

We have made quantum leaps in space and in science. Science has changed many aspects of life, death, sex, birth, and war. We have made ourselves militarily powerful but personally broken. Feminism has challenged our stereotypes, the supremacy of men, our myths, and our dreams, and presented us with the possibility of discovering a new identity.

Individualism has permeated every aspect and institution of our society. Yet we are social beings, and we experience a tension between individualism and community. We are fractured, not only because of our individualism, but also because we have lost the power to link the personal with the public dimension of life. We have forgotten how to make private spirituality the stuff of public policy in a world that is dangerously private and individualistic.

Because of this dichotomy, many commentators call for a "spirituality of engagement" or a "spirituality of contemplative co-creation." The challenge is to connect the private with the public, the individual with the communal, and the contemplative with the action. It is much easier to state the question than to attempt the answer. Perhaps we have to digest the question before we can find the answer.

To discover the answer, we must discover the roots of our journey and take from them what supports us on our individual journeys. From St. Anthony of the Desert, the first Christian monk, we learn the need for discipline. From St. Patrick, we learn the importance of listening to our dreams. From St. Teresa, we learn about the interior rooms of our souls. And from Thomas Merton and Dorothy Day, we learn that prayer and social justice are two sides of the same coin.

Catholic spirituality has always had a tension between prayer and action. This is a healthy tension, providing checks and balances to keep the sojourner on journey. That tension serves as a prism through which Christian spirituality is a distinct inner-to-outer movement. It is a movement from solitary interiority to societal action in the service of others.

All are called to holiness. That call is expressed differently, depending on a person's life situation. It is an openness to the sacred in the human heart and this openness demands a discerning spirit. In this essay, I have briefly addressed the multifaceted dimensions of lay spirituality. I have stated some of the contributing factors that become the road maps toward a more authentic, integrated, and wholesome spirituality. These contributing factors are not

isolated trends or incidents. Rather, they are expressions of the presence of the Holy Spirit at work. Their diversity reflects their unity of purpose, the universal call to holiness.

Lay spirituality, whether it be from a psychological or theological, a male or female, a contemplative or active point of view, whether it be liberation, journey, story, Eco-spirituality, black spirituality or creation-centered spirituality, and whether it be experienced individually or in a group setting. Is a lived experience.

The Sufis say that there are two ways to study honey. One way is to do it intellectually, by examining all its properties. The other way is to simply taste it. Both are important, but no amount of study will enable us to know the sweetness of honey without tasting it. And no amount of intellectualizing will enable us to know God apart from being open to know and serve Him in others.

Contemporary Catholic spirituality is a multifaceted, never-ending process of letting go of old ideas and old ways of seeing things that may stand as obstacles to a more intimate experience of God. No matter what our present stage of the journey, no matter how satisfied we may feel about our journey's images, direction, and content, God is always beyond them and God beckons us to continue the journey.

An old hassidic story reflects the nature of our ever-developing spiritual path. A pious Jew approached a noted rabbi for some advice on the spiritual journey.

"Teach me," he implored the rabbi, "the way to God."

"There is no one way to God," replied the learned rabbi. "Each person has a way to God that is best for him or her. You must find out what that way is for you and then commit yourself to it with all your love, strength, and will."

Spirituality Course Resources

Below are some of the books, mentioned in or used in the 6-week spirituality course.

Book Title	Author	Publisher	Cost
Search	James Kavanaugh	Steven J. Nash	7.95
Care of the Soul	Thomas Moore	Harper	22.50 (HB)
Joshua	Joseph Girzone	Collier Books	7.95
Let This Mind Be in You	Sabastian Moore	Harper & Row	8.95
King, Warrior, Magician, Lover	Robert Moore	Harper	9.95
Storytelling:Imagination & Faith	William J. Bausch	Twenty Third	7.95
Every Earthly Blessing	Esther de Waal	Servant Publications	7.99
The Spirituality of Imperfection	Ernest Kurtz et al	Bantam Books	12.95
Virgin Time	Patricia Hampl	Ballentine	10.00
God Lives	James Kavanaugh	Steven J. Nash	13.95
Traits of a Healthy Spirituality	Melannie Svoboda	Twenty Third	9.95
Anam Cara: Book of Celtic Wisdom	John Donohue	Harper Collins	24.00 (HB)
WomenStrength: Modern Church...	Joan Chittister	Sheet & Ward	7.95
Women's Spirituality	Joanne W. Conn ed.	Paulist Press	9.95
Toward a Male Spirituality	John Carmody	Twenty Third	7.95
An Introduction to Liberation Theol.	Robert M. Brown	Orbis	15.00
At a Journal Workshop	Ira Progoff	Dialogue House	10.00
Stories of God	John Shea	Thomas More Press	7.95
Hope for the Flowers	Trina Paulus	Paulist Press	4.95
The Catholic Myth	Andrew Greeley	Scribner	21.95 (HB)
How to Save the Catholic Church	Andrew Greeley	Scribner	16.95 (HB)
Models of the Church	Avery Dulles	Crossroads	5.95
A Church to Believe in	Avery Dulles	Crossroads	8.95
Take Nothing for the Journey	Donagh O'Shea	Twenty Third	7.95
And Grace will Lead me Home	John Powers	McCracken Press	9.95
From Beginning to End	Robert Fulghum	Villard Books	20.00 (HB)
Traits of A Healthy Spirituality	Melannie Svoboda	Paulist Press	9.95
Spiritual Quest	Thomas Hart	Paulist Press	11.95