

# MAPPING THE TERRAIN: WHAT IS “SPIRITUALITY”?

## DESIRE FOR THIS SESSION:

Since participants will bring a wide variety of experiences, training, study, understandings, biases, and practices in their own spiritual journey & formation work, it is critical to share some of this “story” and begin moving to some common ground regarding “spirituality”.

Begin to establish a common language regarding Key Marks of Christian Spirituality. First step for creating the framework [Provocative Proposal] to come...

# SPIRITUALITY...

- "Spirituality" = derived from Hebrew *ruach*, which had a range of meanings:
  - spirit
  - breath
  - wind
  - that which gives *life* and *animation* to something
- Spirituality:
  - that which *animates* a person's life
  - that which *moves* a person's life to greater depth and abundance

And they discussed two by  
two...

Qualities and Characteristics of “Spirituality”  
as you see it, understand it, live it, profess it,  
teach it, practice it, help others grow in it...

# CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY...

- Involves a person's...
  - **WAY OF EXPERIENCING GOD/RELATING TO GOD**
  - **WAY OF SHAPING ONE'S LIFE IN RESPONSE** to that experience of God
- Way of relating to God that is a **RESPONSE** to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ
- Response to God's initiative in revealing God to us and in loving us
- **WAY OF LIFE** that is lived out in **DISCIPLESHIP** with Jesus
  - In community
  - Encountering God through Word, Sacrament and One Another

# MANY SPIRITUAL PATHS...

- Church history is replete with numerous “spiritual imaginations” (traditions, schools, movements...)
- Share same ultimate goals:
  - Union with God
  - Glory of God
  - Spread of God’s reign in hearts/lives of all people
- Focus on different aspects of Christian life & means to reach the goals of the Christian life
- Highlight different motives for Christian living & different mysteries of faith



**SOME ATTEMPTS AT  
DEFINITION...**

# William Stringfellow

**... spiritual maturity or spiritual fulfillment necessarily involves the *whole* person – body, mind and soul, place, relationships – in connection with the whole of creation throughout the era of time. ...spirituality encompasses the whole person in the totality of existence in the world, not some fragment or scrap or incident of a person**

*(Politics of Spirituality, p. 22)*

# George Ganss

**Spirituality is a lived experience, the effort to apply relevant elements in the deposit of Christian faith to the guidance of men and women towards their spiritual growth, the progressive development of their persons which flowers into a proportionately increased insight and joy.**

("Introduction" to *Ignatius of Loyola*, p. 61)

# McBrien & McGrath

**Spirituality has to do with our experiencing of God and with the transformation of our consciousness and our lives as outcomes of that experience**

(Richard McBrien, *Catholicism*, p. 1058)

**Spirituality ... arises from a creative and dynamic synthesis of faith and life, forged in the crucible of the desire to live out the Christian faith authentically, responsibly, effectively, and fully**

(Alister McGrath, *Christian Spirituality*, p. 9)



# FIVE TENSIONS-POLARITIES OF CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

# OBJECTIVE ↔ SUBJECT-CENTERED

## OBJECTIVE

- Measures progress in terms of “things achieved”
- Clear expectations
- Structured/measurable ways of living out a committed Christian life
- Discipline, Obedience, Conformity, Self-Sacrifice

## SUBJECT-CENTERED

- Focus=Human person as free and uniquely developing subject in the spiritual life
- Measure progress in terms of person’s inner growth; quality of prayer & personal affective development
- Discernment & Dialogue

# PERFECTION ↔ PROCESS

## PERFECTION

- Striving for an **IDEAL-STATE OF PERFECTION** (though never achieved)
- Focus=Failure to “measure up” to the ideal
- Emphasis on what we fail to do rather than our level of desire, hope, love, moments of fidelity
- Focuses on goal, not path

## PROCESS

- Journey measured not only in terms of how far we have to go but especially how far we have come
- **GRATITUDE** in addition to sorrow for failures
- Focus-**CONVERSION** as on-going process of discovery, purification, commitment
- Finding God more in where we are and not where we would like to be

# PRIVATE ↔ COMMUNAL

## PRIVATE

- Emphasis on each person standing before God as an individual—solitude of one's heart
- Private prayer & devotion

## COMMUNAL

- Respects personal/individual BUT sees our relationship with God in the **CONTEXT OF COMMUNITY** (Communities) of **FAITH**
- Shared prayer & discernment
- Sacramental life as communal moments of celebration that tie us together and deepen our **CORPORATE** identity as people of God

# DUALISM ↔ WHOLENESS

## DUALISM

- Gnosticism, Manicheanism, Jansenism...
- Physical=Evil & source of temptation
- Flight from the body & emotions
- Only **REASON & VOLITION** are reliable
- Spiritual life- “higher realm”

## WHOLENESS

- Respects & encourages growth of **WHOLE PERSON**
- Role of **AFFECTIVITY** and appreciation of our **PHYSICALITY**
- Two core truths:
  - Pursuit of holiness is no way inimical to healthy human growth
  - Those who strive for holiness are not exempt from the human condition

# OTHER-WORDLY ↔ THIS-WORDLY

## OTHER-WORLDLY

- More about “going there” than “living here”
- “Escapist” tendency
- Valuable truth=Relationship with God always demands detachment, renunciation because of sin & distorted values/perceptions

## THIS-WORDLY

- World as creation of God’s love; the place of God’s redemptive presence; a sacred place for encountering God
- *Gaudium et Spes* proposes a world-affirming vision
- Rejoices in world as GIFT from hands of loving God
- Response-stewardship

# HUGH OF ST. VICTOR

**“For the whole sensible world is like a kind of book written by the finger of God. . . and each particular creature is somewhat like a figure, not invented by human decision, but instituted by the divine will to manifest the invisible things of the wisdom of God”**

Hugh of St Victor (d. 1142)

“There is within us a fundamental dis-ease, an unquenchable fire that renders us incapable, in this life, of ever coming to full peace. This desire lies at the center of our lives, in the marrow of our bones, and in the deep recesses of the soul . . . Spirituality is, ultimately, about what we do with that desire. What we do with our longings, both in terms of handling the pain and the hope they bring us, that is our spirituality . . . Augustine says: ‘You have made us for yourself, Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.’ Spirituality is about what we do with our unrest.”

*Ronald Rolheiser, OMI*