

A HISTORY OF THE WESTERN TRADITIONS OF CATHOLIC PRAYER

I. Schools of spirituality are different ways of approaching God through Christ. They have similar elements, but combine them in different ways.

A. The different traditions are all authentically Catholic, but focus on different methods and emphasize different aspects of the faith. Most of the traditions are associated with specific religious orders (e.g., Benedictine, Franciscan, Dominican, Jesuit), but the desert fathers and St. Francis de Sales developed their spiritualities before there was an order to live them.

B. Despite their different approaches, there are many common elements to the traditions.

1. Keeping the moral law is always crucial to any spiritual progress, for the moral law is God's light and guidance that we may advance toward Him. See, e.g., Matt. 7:24-27.
2. All of the traditions recognize that humility, in such ways as openness to God's will, appreciation of the goodness of others, and the recognition of a need for improvement, is the baseline, and that charity in prayer must be put into action.
3. There is a complementarity of knowledge and mystery. We are called to advance in the spiritual life through understanding, but also recognize that there is a mystery beyond our understanding.
4. All of the traditions have a complementarity of order and freedom. There are both principles that discipline the human spirit, but also a liberation to soar in the spirit. As Jesus says, "You will have the truth, and the truth will set you free." John 8:22.
5. All of these traditions, being Catholic, are based upon the Bible and Church teachings.
6. All of these traditions deal with the question of human suffering, and all of them recognize that sacrifice is needed for progress.

7. Above all, the Catholic spiritual traditions are all Christocentric, and recognize the fact that God's grace and salvation won by Christ is primary, a calling that we participate in.

II. Desert spirituality emphasizes a strong recognition of the reality of human nature and the need for grace, a reality that one comes to in quiet prayer, away from the distractions and pleasures of the world.

A. Monasticism was developed in the desert, both at first to escape persecution, but then also to get away the corruptions and distractions in society. People started coming to the desert monks for advice, and would come to call them abbas, or fathers.

B. Building on St. Paul's analogy, the monks would sometimes be called "athletes of God" because of their self discipline and training, this time for the goal of strengthening the spirit. See 1 Cor. 9:25; 2 Tim. 2:5, 4:7-8; Heb. 12:1-2.

C. St. Anthony of the desert (251-356) was considered to be the founder of western monasticism. There were monks before him, but St. Athanasius' Life of Anthony caused monasticism to take off. St. Anthony's own writings and writings about him very much emphasized seeing this life as a battle against evil, and salvation as akin to winning a war.

D. Evagrius Ponticus, St. John Cassian (d. 435), and St. John Climacus (St. John of the Stair) wrote the most famous desert works. St. Augustine (354-430), who would emphasize the centrality of God's grace and conversion from sin, was also a monk for a time. St. Basil the Great (329-379) wrote the first great rule for monks in the east.

E. Desert spirituality was very much focused on reality. Away from the distractions and false joys of the world, the desert would force one to focus on real needs and real sources of joy.

1. Thus, for example, the need for water would remind the fathers of our need for grace.

2. There was a radical notion of dependence on God; one lived day by day.

3. There was also a strong notion of disciplining desires and the senses to be their master rather than their servants. This discipline does not mean that desires and the senses are evil, but rather, because of sin, one needs constant training to

keep them under control.

F. Evagrius Pontius wrote Pratikos and Chapters on Prayer, focusing on controlling thoughts. He traced sin and slavery to desire to eight basic evil thoughts (the basis for our idea of the capital vices.) All of these sins involve living in a fictional world.

1. There are thoughts of: (1) gluttony in believing one needs more of food, drink, possessions, knowledge etc., than one does; (2) fornication in reducing another to an object and believing that pleasure will be the key to happiness; (3) avarice in desiring more and more of the false security money and power promise; (4) sadness in clinging onto an unreal happiness, based upon the past, the future or an unattained good; (5) anger in focusing on a real or imagined injury that blinds one to charity; (6) acedia in refusing the joy of the spirit in favor of some more visible, but less real, joy; (7) vainglory in imagining oneself doing great things and being applauded; and (8) pride in ignoring the need for grace and the help of others.

2. The solution involves knowing one's thoughts and gaining control of them to focus on God and service of neighbor. The goal is not focusing on nothing, as Buddhist practices would, but rather in seeing all things in the light of Christ. Thus, deep prayer is needed for moral advancement.

3. One needs the grace of God to begin and to continue this progress, for we need prayer and vision to overcome sin, but sin prevents us from attaining this prayer and vision. Thus, there must be an openness to Christ, who alone frees us from this prison to sin; but there must also be a willingness to cooperate with the grace of Christ.

III. Augustinian spirituality focuses on conversion and overcoming the barriers that sin puts in our way of achieving what really is the deepest desire of the human heart, love, sanctity and union with God.

A. St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430) gradually grew, with the help and prayers of his mother Monica and St. Ambrose, from a secular youth through errors and bonds to sin, into the saint and theologian whose thought dominates Catholic thought to this day.

1. He was born of a Christian mother Monica and a pagan father Patricius in Tagaste, a small town of northern Africa. He

was raised with a good education and a general knowledge of the faith, but not baptism, nor clear instruction in devotion. An extraordinarily intelligent youth, he sought to advance in the world through rhetoric and learning. He rejected Christianity as too simple for him and at first adopted Manicheism, an otherworldly religion that considered the spirit to be all good and this material world evil.

2. In order to learn rhetoric, he made his way to Carthage, the most prominent city in central northern Africa, for studies and teaching. Reading the great classical philosophers and writers, especially Cicero, he gradually sought more wisdom in itself. Rejecting Manicheism and the idea of decadence by the age of 20, he was determined to developing virtue and the pursuit of wisdom. But he was held back by his earthly desires, and especially by his concubine.
3. At about the age of 29, he came to Rome and became attracted to Christianity, especially under the influence of St. Ambrose and the prayers of his mother. At one point, in a dramatic conversion, he was filled with a longing for holiness and a child (possibly an angel) told him to open the Bible and read. The passage he turned to, Romans 13:13-14 filled him with a divine light and joy and convinced him to stop putting off conversion and enter the Christian faith. And so, he began preparation and was baptized in 387.
4. At first, he tries to be a monk, but his talents were too great for people to leave him alone. And so he was soon ordained a priest at 36, and then, at the age of 41, as bishop of Hippo in Africa. There, he would preside until his death 35 years later.

B. As priest and then bishop, he was central to the great theological debates of the day.

1, Opposing the Donatists, he defended the importance and effectiveness of the sacraments even if the minister was unworthy. Opposing the Pelagians, he emphasized the importance of grace and the sacraments and coined the term

"original sin." His explanation of the Trinity and work On Christian Doctrine were immediately classics, and have been central to this day. And his work The City of God set forth a Christian theology of history.

2. His autobiographical Confessions, perhaps the world's first spiritual autobiography and certainly the inspiration for this genre, have been the classic conversion story for the ages.
3. His rule for monks and nuns would come to be adopted by what is now called the Augustinian order, and by later orders such as the Norbitines, who strongly emphasize conversion in one's life. Great Augustinians include the likes of: (1) St. Hugh of Victor (1097–1041), whose spirituality emphasizes the advancement through reading, meditation, deeper prayer, growth in love, and finally contemplation, always becoming more rid of the impurities that hold us back; and (2) Thomas a Kempis, whose book The Imitation of Christ, which focuses on self-renunciation to find one's true calling, is probably the most read Christian classic other than the Bible.

C. St. Augustine and the spirituality he inspired strongly focuses on liberating the call to holiness and true love from the sins that hold us back in a false self.

1. He emphasized that the deepest longing of the human heart is for unity with God, for that love that will make us who we truly are. However, because of sin, both original and personal, this longing is buried under a mountain of other desires that distract us to lesser goods.
2. Furthermore, because of sin, we have lost even the knowledge of what we really desire; we do not know God or even ourselves. And so we are easily deceived by false selves, created by carnal desire, or by excessive attraction to the beautiful things of the world (e.g. physical beauty, fine rhetoric, friendship), or even by advancements that make us prideful. Even a desire for good things, such as friendships or virtues, can become a source of temptation if they draw us from our final goal in God.

3. God reaches through this slavery to sin and darkness by giving us a vision of the light of a greater kingdom. In his book *Surprised by Joy*, C.S. Lewis calls this vision joy, but a joy that strangely brings us sadness for it reflects a realm that we are excluded from because of sin.

4. Human efforts at wisdom or virtue, like the law given to the Jews, are themselves good because they represent a striving for this greater realms. But, because of our sin, they cannot bring us to God. Rather, we must open ourselves to this grace, this light from heaven, to be freed from sin and liberated to become our true selves. We must be radically open to this will of God. The half-hearted efforts to be basically good, but not fully so, will not do. A complete turning to God is needed; and if we turn to Him, He will fill our souls with a sense of this divine beauty, a glory that is a reminder of the divine friendship lost with original sin, that alone will conquer our desire for sin.

D. However, this conversion is a life-long process. We have never, on this earth, "made it."

1. St. Augustine himself spoke later in life, when he returned to Carthage, about his "second conversion." He was experiencing all over again, temptations that he thought were long gone; and he wondered why God allowed these temptations. He realized that he was becoming lax in prayer, to self-confident and looking down on others. And so God allowed these temptations again to remind him of the continual need for conversion and prayer.

2. In our continuing conversion, we do experience a greater joy than the world could ever know. But it is a joy that requires effort. We are so used to the limited and easily accessible beauty of this world that we tend to be satisfied with it. God makes us work for a deeper beauty, found in Scriptures, in prayer, in union with the saints. We must work for this deeper beauty because it is only in making sacrifices that we truly learn to love. We must not be distracted by even good things, such as intelligence or rhetoric, if they lead us away from God.

3. Thus, the Church, the sacraments, and the help of others, are always needed and will always join us together in this City of God on this earth as we journey to His city in heaven.

IV. Benedictine spirituality focuses on growing through order and stability and the resulting divine peace.

A. St. Benedict, who lived from about 480 to about 540, and his twin sister St. Scolastica who died a few years before him, incorporated the great Roman traditions into the Benedictine traditions and especially into his great work, which came to be known as The Rule of St. Benedict.

1. They were born into a noble family in Norcia, Italy amidst collapse of Roman Empire. St. Benedict was academically gifted, but wanted to be a hermit and work on his spiritual perfection away from the world. However, other people who wished for perfection found him, and he again became popular as a monk and spiritual guide. After an unsuccessful attempt to lead a group of monks, St. Benedict wrote his Rule and launched the Benedictine order. His sister St. Scholastica, whom St. Benedict said was much holier than he was, likewise led the women's side of the Benedictine order.

2. From the time of Charlemagne in the eighth century until the eleventh century, the Benedictines were the main Western order. Other orders, such as Trappists, Cistercians, and Carthusians were formed from the Benedictine tradition.

C. Benedictine spirituality very much emphasizes orderly, patient progression in prayer and work. There is a focus on setting a time for all things and keeping a schedule. One is neither neglectful nor impatient in work and prayer, but simply puts forth one's best efforts and accepts the results.

- In a Benedictine monastery, life is very regulated, with a time for everything, such as prayer, work, sleep and even recreation and one's own projects. There is a great freedom from worrying about what to do. One may be doing the same things each day, week and even year, but one does them more and more carefully.

D. Central in Benedictine spirituality is lectio divina, a slow, prayerful way of reading Scripture.

1. This type of prayer varies in detail among people who use it, but it involves common elements. First, one reads a Biblical or other spiritual passage once as usual. Then one prays over it, trying to gain insights and applications. One then reads the passage again slowly in context of that prayer and then prays over it again, concentrating attention even further. One may read it a third or fourth time, always deepening thought and prayer.

2. One progresses through a book of the Bible or other spiritual work carefully in this fashion. There is no rush; the desire is for deep wisdom.

E. Benedictine spirituality emphasizes order by the careful use of time. There is, consistent with the schedule and the faith, a certain liberty of thought about such things as what to pray about or what work to book to pray over. But there is an emphasis on finishing what one starts with consistent effort.

F. Benedictine spirituality focuses heavily on praying, working and learning carefully and attentively. This tradition avoids multi-tasking, instead concentrating on the work or prayer (or lawful pleasure) of the moment. The Benedictines sing much of their prayer, and emphasize the Mass and the Divine Office, the common prayer of the whole church.

G. In one sense, Benedictine life is very hierarchical, insofar as there is a great deal of willingness to accept governing rules and authority. But it is recognized that this hierarchy is for order and the conquest of selfish pride, not for the sake of emphasizing power. St. Benedict emphasized that a higher rank does not make one holier and that the Holy Spirit can speak through anyone.

V. Franciscan spirituality strongly emphasizes a desire for freedom through simplicity of life, detachment from worldly goods, and a radical dedication to God's calling in any fashion.

A. St. Francis (1181-1225) was born to a wealthy family of merchants, but sensed a calling to leave that human wealth in favor of his greater vocation, to serve God through a radical witness of noble simplicity.

1. He was at first a generous, but often vain, young man and a soldier who desired to be a knight. He was not particularly successful in battles, but was still honored for his chivalry.

2. After a couple of military adventures, he received God's call in Assisi, "Rebuild my church" and saw a vision of Lady Poverty, whom he found to be supernaturally beautiful.

3. Attracted to this call, and believing that it was to be fulfilled in his home town, he left everything to rebuild a church in Assisi called San Damiano. He endured public ridicule for a time, but soon his joyfulness of life attracted others to him.

Eventually, his followers wanted some organization in the form of a religious order. And so he quickly wrote a rule and went to Rome to gain approval for the new order, which he had not thought he was going to found. His good friend St. Clare of Assisi, also of a wealthy family, defied their desire for her to "marry up" and founded the women's side of the order. She was, through great penance and austerity of life, able to show forth the power of God to the world.

4. The Franciscans were a new type of order. They were mendicants, who begged for their sustenance, rather than having stable properties like the Benedictines. There was an emphasis on fraternal union and a notion of each being brothers and sisters, in an early sort of democracy.

B. The order soon flourished and the Franciscans formed numerous smaller groups. St. Bonaventure was elected Master General 1257 and organized the order into more of what we see today.

C. Franciscan spirituality emphasizes humility, poverty, and seeing God everywhere. There is a notion of rising above dependence upon earthly things (e.g., possessions, positions, prestige, pleasure) to soar to the heavens.

- Through powerful penances, depriving oneself of earthly things, one liberates the spirit and senses a radical openness to God.

D. This radical openness to God allows one to see and sense His presence in nature, in those in need and above all in the Eucharist, and to feel His power working inside of one's soul.

- St. Francis very much promoted creche scenes, especially living creche scenes, to give us a strong sense that Jesus is with us here on earth, in the humblest guises.

E. There is a strong notion of sensing the nobility of God in those in need and glory in ministering to the least. The triumph of bringing the love of God to places where it seems so absent is seen as a striking victory, more so than any of an earthly triumph.

- There is a desire to be as open to evangelization as the Apostles were of old, and as contemptuous of the standards of the world as they were.

F. Joyfulness is central to Franciscan thought. One does not seek joy for its own sake, but rather seeks the adventure of a radical openness to serving God. But this radical, and in fact mystical, openness to God allows one to take joy at all goodness. This joy is no longer dependant upon getting things in the way one wants them, for earthly desires are controlled and the focus is on Jesus. Joyfulness of spirit becomes the reward and sign of the actions of grace in one's life.

G. The Franciscan spirit thus tries to promote a paradoxically humble revolution. There is a great humility of spirit in disciplining one's desires, for power, pleasure, prestige, and the like. All glory is directed to God and away from self; if any human is to receive glory, it is the least in the world. This great humility acts as a revolt against the world's worship of false gods.

VI. Dominican emphasizes growth through connecting together study, prayer, teaching, service and a sense of the mystery of God.

A. Saint Dominic de Guzman (1170-1221) was a canon of a cathedral in Osma, Spain at about the same time as St. Francis' life. In 1204, while traveling with his bishop Diego to help arrange a royal wedding, he was passing through southern France, where Albigensians (a sort of Gnostic sect) held sway. By prayer, argumentation, patience and an exemplary life, they were able to reconvert most of the heretics. From this experience, St. Dominic realized his mission to form a preaching order, which was confirmed by Pope Innocent III and, when he died, Pope Honorius III in 1216.

- They would live very simple lives as a mendicant order; that is, they would keep very little property and ask for alms. There was a strong focus on learning and prayer, but a learning and prayer that would make them more able to teach and serve.

- In the thirteenth century, the great universities were expanding and knowledge of philosophy and science was growing rapidly. The Dominicans tried to sanctify this growing knowledge by combining it with faith and prayer, so that both the secular and theological realms could benefit each other.

- St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) would systematize theology in his masterpiece the Summa Theologica, which, along with his other writings, have been central to Catholic theology every since. He and St. Augustine are usually considered the two greatest Catholic theologians since Scriptural times.

B. Dominican spirituality is thus very much based very much on contemplation and action, the two complementing each other.

There is a very strong sense that nature and grace, faith and reason support each other.

- Dominicans understand that we can begin with the experience of the world and rise to God. When we see His goodness in creatures, we form concepts to understand Him better, and gradually rise even above those concepts towards greater and greater understanding of God.

- But there is also a strong notion that we can get nowhere unless we put things into practice, especially in teaching. As St. Catherine of Siena, a third order Dominican of the fourteenth century said "There is no virtue nor any faith, which is not manifested by means of one's neighbor."

C. There is a great focus on patiently understanding all points of view, and trying to arrive at the truth. The idea is that even erroneous views have some truth to them, and even accurate views should be developed further. St. Thomas Aquinas once said, "Rarely affirm completely, never deny completely, always distinguish."

- In the thirteenth century, a form of writing and argumentation called Scholasticism was very popular; it involved describing the views opposed to one's own conclusion and trying to adapt as much as possible of it to one's own through careful distinctions and subtle reasoning. The Dominicans, and especially St. Thomas, mastered this approach.

D. The Dominican approach does not rely heavily on authority for own sake, except that of Scripture and the Church. There is an attempt to find truth wherever it may lie, but always to remain true to the faith.

E. The approach to the moral life is one of practicing each of the virtues, the Beatitudes, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, as perfections of human nature. See Matthew 5:2-9; Isaiah 11.

- As one always seeks to develop skills in any field (e.g., scholarly, professional, artistic, athletic) one should continually attempt to develop the skill of being a **Aprofessional@** at holiness, a goal that is attainable for anyone. See 1 Tim. 2:4-6.

- Dominicans thus describes sins are contrary to the virtues. The moral law is thus designed, not primarily as a restriction, although on earth it must operate as such. Rather the goal of the moral life is to become most perfectly human. See Matthew 5:48.

F. There is also in Dominican spirituality a strong sense of unifying all aspects of life: physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual. One should ask how our actions, friendships, tastes, environment, and so forth affect our prayer, and how prayer affects them.

G. There is also a great interrelationship between prayer and study. Dominicans commonly pray between classes and studies. Some Dominicans do writing in the chapel. Prayer is meant to be intelligent, and theological research is not simply an academic exercise, but should draw us closer to God.

H. But Dominican spirituality also recognizes very strongly that there is a mystery of God beyond our understanding that we must simply kneel before. St. Thomas Aquinas, near the end of his life, saw a vision of heaven and said, "I have seen things, and things have been revealed to me, that make everything I have written look like straw." Some fourteenth century theologians, including the Rhineland mystics (Meister Eckhardt, Johannes Tauler, and Blessed Henry Suso) would emphasize the idea of going above concepts, simply being with God and finding God in all work.

I. St. Catherine of Siena (1347-1380) was a devout young woman and the youngest daughter of a wealthy family during a century that was experiencing disasters, such as the Hundred Years' War, the papacy away from Rome, and the Black Death. Opposing her family's desire for a noble marriage, she became a third order Dominican, i.e., one that would join in the spirituality of the Dominicans but live in the world.

1. She emphasized very much a constant desire of prayer, describing that connection with God as being as the inner circle of a wheel; all other desires are meant to be distributed proportionally around it.

2. She very strongly emphasized knowing oneself in the light of Jesus, focusing on His presence and asking what He thinks of one's life.

3. She also said that the progress of prayer is not in feeling, but in charity.

I. Both St. Catherine and St. Thomas very much emphasized the need to avoid sin and excessive attachments to have the mind free to sense things from the standpoint of heaven.

VII. The Carmelite tradition emphasizes growth in the spiritual life through struggle, through darkness, and through charity even and especially in the seemingly smallest matters.

A. The three most influential saints of this tradition are St. Theresa of Avila (1515-1582), St. John of the Cross (1542-1591), and St. Therese of Lisieux (1873-1897).

B. St. Theresa of Avila led a reform of the Carmelite order in the sixteenth century after experiences great reform in her own life.

1. She entered religious life at age 20 and, as a Carmelite nun, was very sociable and popular, but not particularly prayerful. She was allowed a relaxation of the rule to see guests because she was well liked and enhanced convent's reputation and fundraising ability. But at age of 39, she realized the mediocrity of her life and really started living her calling more deeply. The result was that she received more criticism because she strove for perfection but had not attained it. She eventually formed new convent that was more strict in its observance. There was great opposition, but her efforts, along with those of St. John of the Cross, led to a renewal of the Carmelite life, first in Spain and then throughout the world.

2. Her main works are: The Interior Castle, which uses an extended allegory of the spiritual life to advancing through a castle; The Story of Her Life, the autobiography in which she, among other things, uses an extended analogy of the spiritual life as allowing grace to work like water to a field; and The Way of Perfection, with its great commentary on the Our Father.

- Although she received great spiritual consolations, including visions of Jesus and of angels, she warns against placing primary value on such consolations. In chapter 18 of The Way of Perfection, she says, "Perfection and its reward do not consist in spiritual delights, but in great love and deeds done with love and truth." Spiritual consolations are the first promise of what will be the final reward in heaven. She maintains that there should always be an openness to a sense of God's presence, but that sense is a special gift that cannot be demanded.

- She says that one should not insist on quick results. God works when, and perhaps especially when, one does not see how it is being done. She compares a soul at prayer to a noble in the court of a king. The king may address the noble directly only at times, but his performance of duties is always noticed.

3. Her favorite image was that of water as representing the effects of prayer and grace in our lives. (Sin, by contrast, is

sometimes symbolized by poison in the water.) In the most extensive analogy, she compares the workings of prayer like four ways of watering a garden: (1) carrying water from a well with a bucket; (2) using wheels and an aqueduct to convey water from nearby source of water to the garden; (3) having the garden near a stream so that it is watered continually; (4) or having a consistent rainfall. In all cases, God's action (represented by the water) is primary to making the soul fruitful, but the abundance varies as He become more naturally a part of one's life.

4. In The Interior Castle, she also compares the advancement of a soul to proceeding on to greater mansions within the castle of God. Souls not even trying are like those outside in the darkness. At first, souls are in poorer circumstances, but still in the presence of God, while still struggling against the vermin and filth of sin. Gradually, they advance to come closer and closer to the king. It should be noted that advancement, especially to the higher levels, is not simply a matter of leaving one mansion behind and moving on. One must gradually often go back to more basic matters to improve them.

C. St. John of the Cross, a Spanish priest of the sixteenth century, was a friend of St. Theresa and with her led the Carmelite reform. He suffered greatly in his life and emphasized the need for suffering as we advance to overcome sin and allow God to work in our lives.

1. He was ordained at the age of 25 and offered a position as a university professor. But he felt called to a contemplative life. Along with St. Theresa of Avila, he tried to promote a more strict observance of the Carmelite rule. For a while, he enjoyed the support of the papal nuncio (ambassador) of Spain. But when the nuncio died, some of his opponents within the order condemned him for alleged insubordination and imprisoned him for two years. In 1580 he escaped and received the support of Pope Gregory XIII as he became abbot of one of the more prominent monasteries. But he continued to face opposition for the remaining 11 years of his life.

2. His most famous works are The Dark Night of the Soul, The Living Flame of Love, The Ascent of Mount Carmel, and The Spiritual Canticle of the Soul.

3. Like St. Theresa, he very much describes the primacy of keeping moral laws and of accepting sufferings as central to advancement in the spiritual life. He begins The Dark Night of the Soul by warning about how the seven capital vices can infect prayer and how to purify oneself of them.

4. But he emphasizes more than St. Theresa the intense moments in spiritual advancement as one struggles to go higher levels of prayer. He especially describes what he calls the active and passive dark nights of the senses and of the spirit, the latter two being fairly rare even among the devout.

5. The idea in all cases is to recognize that struggling through sufferings is necessary and to allow God to develop deeper levels of prayer, even if those deeper levels are not at first attractive.

D. St. Therese of Lisieux was a virtually unknown Carmelite nun in her life, but her autobiography became a classic after her death.

1. She was born in Bordeaux, but when her mother died young, the family moved to Lisieux. The family was very strongly Catholic and St. Therese received much support from her five older sisters. After considering various vocations, she became very determined to enter religious life, as two of her sisters had already done (and the other three would soon do), so that she could pray for all vocations. In 1888, at the age of 15, she received special permission to enter the nearby Carmelite convent where her sister, Agnes, was also a sister. Agnes soon became prioress, and, recognizing Therese's deep prayer life, which attracted little notice, she asked Therese to write a spiritual autobiography. As she wrote this autobiography, St. Therese became very ill and died at the age of 24. At the time of her death, she was known in the convent as a very joyful, but not particularly important person. However, soon after her death, the autobiography, The Story of Her Soul, would become a central text in popular devotion.

2. She described what she called her Little Way, the attempt to combine love with every action, even and especially the least ones. For she deeply understood that any action done with a love for God and neighbor brings God's love to earth and, therefore, has an infinite value. Because all true callings are meant to be carried out in the context of the love of God, acting with this love taps into them all.

- The idea is that all things are guided by the love of God, and the crucial thing is to make that love a continual part of one's life. And doing so is in many ways easier when one has less important tasks, for then one does not have as many worries and can focus more on acting with love.

- One should also recognize that God uses our own imperfections and inability to carry out our desires to

overcome our self-centeredness and make us focus on His much greater plan of salvation. Overall, whatever we can do with the greatest love, not what seems most important, is our calling.

- Pope Benedict XVI recently emphasized this point in his encyclical Caritas in Veritate, where he says that one should practice charity should be "the overriding principle" in all aspects of life, without exception.

VIII. The Ignatian tradition was inspired by St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), who wrote The Spiritual Exercises and other works based upon his own conversion.

A. St. Ignatius was from a family of warriors and explorers and trained for military services. His spirituality would draw from his military experience.

1. Ignatius was injured after a heroic performance fighting at Pamplona in 1521 for the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. While recovering at a religious hospital, he read The Life of Christ and The Lives of the Saints and experienced a profound conversion that led him to desire to be a knight of Christ. He realized that the saints showed all of the courage, dedication, loyalty, and generosity of knights. The difference is that they served, not an earthly king, but instead the King of Glory.

2. After a time of discernment, he began studies for the priesthood in 1524. After 13 years of studies at Barcelona, Alcalá and Paris, he was ordained in 1537. Meanwhile, he had gathered a group of brothers who eventually went to the reformist Pope Paul III and asked for his approval for them to become a religious order. After working for the poor of Rome for a time, this order, the Society of Jesus (or Jesuits), eventually went out to catechize and convert Europeans in the ways of the faith. Soon the order would become central to the Church's missionary activities in the Far East and the New World.

B. Ignatian spirituality is based very heavily upon a very powerful notion of serving Jesus as the great King and Lord of heaven and earth. There is a strong emphasis on discerning the will of God and being courageous and dedicated in carrying out His will.

- The centerpiece of St. Ignatius work is the Spiritual Exercises, which were written as a guide for a 30-day retreat, although the work is common used for shorter retreats as well.

C. St. Ignatius very much focuses on developing a felt knowledge of Jesus" and on using the imagination, feelings, reason, and all aspects of the human person to develop this knowledge. In meditating on Scripture and especially on the gospels, he advises deeply imagining oneself in the scenes described in the Bible, including focusing on very specific details (e.g., the individual people present, the time of day, the tension in the air.)

D. St. Ignatius also discusses at length the "discernment of spirits," i.e., the ability to discern whether an inspiration is good or ill. One of his principle rules is that a good inspiration will be challenging but will leave one with a lasting sense of peace in God's presence, while an ill inspiration will be immediately pleasing, but leave one with a sense of unease.

E. Ignatian spirituality involves the ability to sense consolations and desolations and grow through them. Consolations are strong senses of God's presence, which include both joy at His triumph and sorrow at sins. Developing consolations by focused prayer and detachment from desires are very helpful in discernment, as are consolations with no apparent cause. Desolations are sense of anxiety and turmoil that are not based upon difficulties in the world. They can be a result of laxity in prayer, or can be a trial sent by God to strengthen the person. In both cases, one's response should be continued prayer (or revived prayer in the former case) and not making changes in plans during these times.

F. Blessed Mother Theresa of Calcutta formed the Missionaries of Charity largely along the lines of Ignatian spirituality.

IX. Salesian spirituality emphasizes growth in the spiritual life through integrated one=s whole day, and all of one's duties and activities with one's prayer. There is a notion of living holiness in the world.

A. This form of spirituality was developed by St. Francis de Sales (1567-1622), especially in the context of his help with St. Jane de Chantal (1573-1641) in forming the Sisters of the Visitation.

1. St. Francis de Sales was the eldest of 13 children of a noble family in Savoy, France. He was a brilliant student and went to study law at University of Padua. But, under the influence of his Jesuit spiritual director, he was gradually drawn more to theology and living a consecrated life. He gradually overcame the opposition of his family, who did not want him to give up his worldly prospects, and was ordained a priest at the age of 26.

2. At about that time, Duke Charles Emmanuel of Savoy recaptured Chablais, one of its states that had been controlled by Protestants who forbade Catholicism; to restart the Church there, he asked for some priests, one of whom was Francis de

Sales.

3. To persuade people to return to the faith, Francis started printing leaflets that described the faith. This writing, the holiness of his life and his ability to explain the faith in preaching and debates won more and more converts, over 72,000 in four years.

4. In 1602, after many consultations with the Duke, he became Bishop of Geneva. As such, he worked very personally on training of seminarians, catechetics, visitations of all of the parishes, and formations of religious societies.

5. One of his spiritual directees was St. Jane de Chantal, a widow whose husband had been killed in a hunting accident. She grew steadily in prayer and, with St. Francis, started the Visitation sisters in 1610. Based upon the model of Mary's visit to Elizabeth, the order focused on humility, piety and charity. This order was the first attempt to combine cloistered life with a vocation in the world, in particular in teaching.

6. St. Francis' most famous work is the Introduction to the Devout Life, which he finished in 1609 and based largely upon his spiritual direction of St. Jane and others. He wrote the more complex Treatise on the Love of God in 1616.

B. Salesian spirituality emphasizes that all people are called to the devout life, but in different ways.

1. St. Francis argued that devotion makes one's rightful calling better. In a famous analogy, he said that, as a bee draws pollen from a plant, not only without damaging it but making it better, so true devotion includes all aspects of like but not only does not damage legitimate callings but makes them more delightful and more dedicated.

- God may draw one away from one calling to a better one, but never from a productive calling to mere vagueness or abstract thought.

- St. Francis cautioned against any apparent devotion that leads one to neglect duties, saying, "We are sometimes so occupied with being good angels that we neglect to be good men and women."

2. In The Introduction to the Devout Life, he reiterates that purification from sin (especially mortal sin) is both a necessary preparation and effect of a truly devout life.

- This progress against sin is a continual process. He said, among other things, "We must be prepared to see weeds growing in our garden and also have the courage to pull them out." and "There is no better means of progressing the spiritual life than to be continually beginning afresh, and never to think we have done enough."

3. St. Francis emphasized taking on penances and austerities, but with prudence. One should practice self-discipline, but also humility also involves recognizing our limits. We should pray for crosses in proportion to the measure we have borne those already given.

4. St. Francis said one should try to see God's will in all things and practice "a divine indifference" to success, as long as one knows one is following God's will.

5. He said that one should distinguish carefully between good and bad influences in the world. To the degree that one's friends, co-workers, and other acquaintances have good standards, trying to please them is a good thing, although of course second to God. But, one should be careful of society when it promotes decadence, greed, mediocrity, etc. and avoid any unnecessary things that promote such values. He particularly focused on being careful about who to have as friends, what entertainment to enjoy, and what circles to travel in.

C. Anticipating the Vatican II Council three and a half centuries later, he was very much was willing to take the advancements of human sciences as good, while insisting that all things must be submitted to God's grace. He said, "I am as human as anyone could possibly be."

D. In The Introduction to the Devout Life, St. Francis describes a way of daily meditation that involves six steps and includes a prayerful environment, intellect, emotions, will, petition, thanksgiving, and inspiration for continual prayer.

1. The first step is preparation. One tries to find a favorable environment (e.g., the

church or a place in one's home set aside for prayer.) One places oneself in the presence of God by reading a passage from Scripture or another spiritual reading.

2. The second step is consideration. One allows the Holy Spirit to guide one from one aspect of the topic of one's reading

to another in an unhurried fashion.

3. The third step he calls affection. One draws on emotions based upon the considerations, especially with a desire to imitate Jesus.
4. The fourth step is a resolution. One forms a definite resolution (e.g., getting to a task one has been putting off, being kind to a neglected co-worker) to carry during the next day.
5. The fifth step is thanking God for guidance and asking for the grace to carry out the resolution.
6. The sixth step is taking from prayer a "spiritual bouquet," i.e., a thought, image or phrase to recall throughout the day.