

Christian Spirituality : Some Preliminary Observations

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In this paper an attempt is made to identify some of the possible features of Christian Spirituality. The first section tries to define spirituality. Effort is made to discern the spirituality of Jesus in the second section. The third section is on life-sustaining spirituality, while a spirituality that receives insights from other religious faith-experiences is the focus of the fourth section. Finally, we also make some concluding observations.

Spirituality Defined

Everywhere 'spirituality' puts people off but 'spirit' enthuses them. Spirit is life-force, energy, animation, courage, character, resolve, enterprise, grit, mettle.¹ Spirituality then need not be caricatured as a feeble, pallid thing; rather it is our recognition of the involvement of the Spirit in us and in the whole creation. Spirituality is our free acceptance of this relationship and our rediness to live it in our everyday life.² The spiritual is what the Spirit of God creates, originates, inspires, guides, indwells, blesses, approves, accepts. Thus the created world is a spiritual reality. Spirituality then implies being open to reality in all its dimensions. It means being ready to respond to reality and its truth.³ God is spirit, life and life-force. God's Spirit brooded over primal chaos till an ordered cosmos hatched, of beauty, light and life, and song and dance, to God's delight. In biblical and Christian tradition, the Spirit of God is not something anemic, glum or sad, She is God's creative Power, divine *shakti*, full of love and therefore rich in inventive capability to which the created world bears abundant witness. Her biblical symbols are water, wind, fire, dove and above all, Jesus of Nazareth.⁴ Whatever has to do with the Spirit of God is spiritual and spirituality is our recognition of the involvement of the Spirit.

The substantive from 'spirituality' is not used in the Bible, but the adjective 'spiritual' (*Pneumatikos*) is frequently employed to describe the character of the person who has entered the kingdom of God.⁵ Such a person has the Holy Spirit as the vital, determining principle of life. The state of spirituality is a natural outcome of the Christian life as it was intended by Christ. That spirituality was the chief feature of the life offered by Jesus is evident from his insistent demand - "you must be born again". Though this new life awakened in human beings is a quality of life infinitely more valuable than the ordinary concept of life, it is not dissociated from the mundane.⁶ We may say that in the New Testament *Pneumatikos* is used

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a technical term for Christian experience, i.e. life centered in Christ. Christian spirituality can therefore be described as that which is concerned with the conscious cultivation of a Christocentric life, which are both a gift and a task.⁷ Christian spirituality is the formation of life in response to the divine Spirit as that is known in Jesus Christ.⁸

Spirit represents the indwelling power of the ultimate pervading human life. Christian spirituality can be understood as the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers empowering them to do the will of God. It is the manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit in the life of believers to let the kingdom of God be fully restored on earth. Spirituality is human spirit living in the power of the Holy Spirit, human spirit in its capacity is to transcend himself/herself in response to the divine spirit. Spirituality is therefore, a dynamic process of becoming, of continuous movement toward fullness of life.⁹ Christian spirituality refers to communion with God in Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. One way of defining spirituality biblically is to relate it to the 'indwelling of the spirit'. "You are on the Spiritual level, if only God's spirit dwells within you" (Romans 8.9). Spirituality has to do about living by the power of the Spirit; it has to do about the resources of the Spirit to renew our 'mortal bodies' to the new life (Rom.8.11). The empowerment by the Spirit transforms persons to be children of God (Rom.8.14).¹⁰

Spirituality represents the total response of the self to the self-world-God trio.¹¹ Humans have a more or less developed awareness of a subjective selfhood. This awareness is accompanied by the awareness of the objective world of nature and other selves and also of God in some relation to self and the world. It is thus self-world-God relation which faiths seek to harmonise and understand. Theism or atheism, both have to take this trio seriously, affirming or denying but formulating a relation. A particular religion may deny the reality of the world in the name of God, atheism may deny the reality of God in the name of the self or the world. But the response of the self to the self-world-God trio is inevitable and spirituality denotes this response. "In all faiths, religious or secular, self and its fulfillment, the realisation of the purpose or destiny of the self, is a central issue. And the word *spirituality* is used to denote the manner in which humans, becoming aware of the transcendence of their selfhood over the world, seek to fulfil the self' meaning, purpose or destiny."¹² Spirituality represents human person's basic attitude vis his/her ultimate end.¹³

There have been attempts to identify a key-model that would be adequate and broad enough to illuminate as well as hold the diverse modes of Christian spirituality together. We may take the first and the second commandments of Jesus namely that of loving God and loving one's neighbour as the model for Christian spirituality.¹⁴ We may consider dying and rising in and with Christ as an alternative model for understanding Christian spirituality in its various modes. Dying and rising in and with Christ is a dominant theme of the New Testament and is derived from the very core of the Christian gospel namely the death and resurrection of Christ.¹⁵

Spirituality of Jesus

Jesus' was a life-sustaining spirituality¹⁶ which has to mould and lead us. The following were some of the characteristics of it: (a) It was a relevant spirituality, as may be seen in his furious cleansing of the temple, and his position that all creation is God's house. It should not be turned into a den of thieves through our greed. (b) Jesus let himself be led by the spirit

through whom he got in touch with himself, identified with his people and overcome temptation to wealth, greed and power. (c) Jesus was non-patriarchal. Women were as much his disciples as were the men. We find an atmosphere around him to which they could be by themselves. (d) Jesus' was a humanizing spirituality which sought to recreate us and our cosmos through a call to share our blessings and gift freedom to one another. (e) Jesus called for dispossession and renunciation, countering greed.¹⁷

Jesus lived a counter-cultural life. He did not equate himself with possessions, positions, achievements or with the group, race, religion, family, sex to which he belonged. This equation necessarily leads to competition which involves greed, ambition, hatred, opposition, fear and living for self alone (lust etc.). The spirituality of Jesus countered these evils.¹⁸ He could truly love every one. If we can help living about this new outlook in and around us, we are to become followers of Christ.

Jesus inspires us to retrieve the interconnectedness between the human, the Divine and the cosmos and foster an in-depth communion, recognizing the interconnectedness. He inspires us to radicalize our living and not to be lured into the consumeristic pattern of life by our deliberate daily choices.¹⁹

Jesus represents the creative power of the Spirit of God. To quote,

The Spirit is the Power God put forth in raising Jesus from the dead. Jesus of Nazareth in his compassion and his indignation, extending his hand to touch the sick to health, and breaking bread to hungry crowds, or agonising in Gethsemane, crying aloud on the cross and bursting his tomb open and rising in glory is the image of God's creative Spirit.²⁰

The central message of the New Testament is the Christ event, the Incarnation and Redemption through Christ. It is affirmed that salvation in Christ is an event in history, and that salvation is a cosmic event. Incarnation of God in Christ is the supreme evidence to show that there is no spirituality of an exclusively vertical dimension.²¹ Incarnation is not just becoming human, it is also the personal presence of God in the world. God in Christ has set himself on the earth. The Cross of Christ rooted in the world is symbolic of the redemption of the entire cosmos.²² Jesus' concern for the 'the multitude', 'the little ones', 'the poor' in their needs such as hunger, sickness, and the like, are evidences of a wholesome spirituality. Even the prayer that he taught his disciples emphasises the vertical and horizontal dimensions of human relationships.²³ Jesus' spirituality was one of withdrawal to lonely places to be alone with the Father as well as of deep involvement in the world to fight the forces which destroy or obstruct fullness of life.²⁴

Life-sustaining Spirituality

Today we have come to think about a "life-sustaining spirituality" in the context of Globalisation.²⁵ The strangle hold of globalization has wreaked untold misery among the poor in our countries. The agonizing cry of the poor resonates with the groaning of the spirit within us about which St. Paul talked. It is this same spirit that unlocks and unleashes a profound spiritual energy. This spiritual energy is what is identified as life-sustaining spiritualities.²⁶

The view expressed here is that real spirituality corresponds to God's will as manifest in

historical situations. It is an attitude which refuse to collapse in despair in the face of enormous evil and suffering like globalization. It confidently attempts the creative transformation of evil, sad and sub-human situation.²⁷ It will be a secular humanist spirituality which unleashes the explosive power of the spirit. In it people are at the centre. God is where people are. Spirituality for life undertakes a relentless search for God among the people.²⁸ Further, the explanation given is:

Spirituality is the dynamic aspect of personality or the capacity to go beyond one's generation and history. That capacity is to become concrete in terms of vision and passion, Vision is the future that draws and motivates: passion is the action that involves us. If the vision takes hold of a whole mass of people, it becomes a movement.²⁹

Life-sustaining spirituality means joining or having communion with God's humanity in the poor-to take sides with God's humanity in the poor-to take sides with the poor to place all of one's resources and power at the service of the vulnerable.³⁰ In the context of globalisation, for example spirituality for life would mean the following: (a) to sharpen our critical analysis of ambiguous situations; (b) to resist and reject what is perceived as contrary to God's loving purposes; (c) to dream alternatives and recover a vision of the future; (d) to take steps towards its realization and pursue it with passion; and (e) this will not be an individualistic endeavor but one that gives life to a movement.³¹

Here we are meaning a spirituality that provides a basis for meaningful involvement in society and the struggles of people; a spirituality which guides us and sustains us.³² The spirit of non-acquisitiveness, of sharing, of harmonious relationship between humans and nature—these which are the hallmarks of Asian spirituality, become the sources of strength for such a spirituality.³³

The concept of combat spirituality, a forerunner of life-sustaining spirituality was made popular since the Nairobi Assembly of the World Council of Churches.³⁴ M.M. Thomas in his moderator's address to the Assembly spoke on this theme. Christians are called to workout what might be called a spirituality for combat. Out very struggles should become part of worship. He was not pleasing for more social or political action as such but calling for a quiet confidence in God to struggle against all that dehumanises, to relate spirituality and struggle, righteousness and repentance, eucharistic celebration and committed engagement.³⁵ Later Thomas has pleaded for a plurality of spiritualities for common liberating social action in India.³⁶

Liberating social action in a pluralistic society has to be common secular action but sustained by a plurality of spiritualities. It may be the non-religious spirituality of the secular humanist, the spirituality of detachment from the fruits of action characteristic of Hinduism or the spirituality of justification by faith in the forgiving Grace or it may be other. It is a framework of dialogue among religions and between religions and secular ideologies at the anthropological level in depth that can create the cultural and spiritual support to liberating social action.³⁷

Indian women are doing their own explorations into a theology and spirituality that will empower them to break out of the patriarchal boundaries. Feminist spirituality may be defined as women's commitment to justice, to transform economic, political, social and religious institutions to give priority to the voice and concerns of those from human dignity is the most effectively withheld.³⁸

It endeavours to recapture the dimension of the resurrection for past sufferings and defeats and open up a new path into the future.³⁹

There is a growing understanding among women that they should not go to retreats, use meditation or celebrate the liturgy in order to mute their anger or close their wounds, but that they should attempt new patterns of theological and liturgical forms, discover new symbols in order to renew their vision and spiritual power to engage in struggle for justice.⁴⁰ What this new spirituality attempts to expose is the tendency of traditional piety to ignore the challenges of everyday life new and speak of a life hereafter and its tendency to speak of a matter/spirit and body/spirit dualism.⁴¹

But there are others who suggest that doing justice, loving persons and humbling before God are three marks of the Biblical spirituality. We have to do what is just, show constant love and live in humble fellowship with God.(Micah 6.6-8). A wholesome spirituality has three aspects namely passion for justice, compassion for people and communion with God. A wholesome spirituality calls for the integration of the combat spirituality, the compassionate spirituality and the contemplative spirituality.⁴²

On the other hand there is a suggestion that theology and spirituality in India today must distance itself not only from the academic theology of the West but also from traditional Indian forms which may blunt its liberative thrust.⁴³ By traditional Indian forms is meant the Christian ashrams where inmates live a contemplative life of spiritual striving for union with God in the spirit of classical Hindu spirituality.⁴⁴ The ashramites are busy practising oriental meditation to convince Hindus that Christians are spiritual. There is no reason whatever why Christians should conform to Hindu ideals of spirituality any more than why Indians should copy Western models of theologizing. It is often the slavish imitation of brahmanical rituals, brahmanical regulation of diet, Hindu techniques of prayer, that is seen in the Christians ashrams.⁴⁵ But it should be noted that for Christians to be spiritual means to live by the Spirit(Gal.5;25); to be animated by that dimension of divine life and power that enables us to love as God loves(Mt.5.43-48). Therefore there can be no Christian spirituality without an active concern for the poor and this is what is lacking in Christian ashrams that imitate classical Hindu spirituality.⁴⁶

The poor are not a conspicuous presence in ashram life. Ashram Spirituality, with its long hours of ritual and mediation, is a Brahmanical spirituality, the spirituality of an affluent, privileged class, able to afford the leisure for self-cultivation. The simplicity of life that is encouraged may be health medicine for the rich (it is only the sociologically rich who can become 'voluntarily poor'!), but it is a mockery for the five hundred millions of our people who subsist below, on, or just above the poverty line. This may be why Christian ashrams attract crowds of westerners (suffering from a surfeit of consumerism), or economically secure Westernized Indian religious (looking for a way out of their felt alienation), but Native Indians.⁴⁷

A Spirituality that receives insights from other Faith Experiences

But there are also people who do not feel their identity threatened by the Hindu environment. They are open to adopting Hindu spiritual disciplines. They make a distinction between spirituality and 'practices' and 'disciplines' that help one in one's spiritual life. Spirituality is life in or guided by the Spirit. Spiritual disciplines are practices that sustain and enhance

this life.⁴⁸ Christian spirituality is lived by one who has the Spirit of Christ. But in so doing one can adopt from the spiritual traditions of Hinduism, practices that are keeping with the Spirit of Christ.⁴⁹ Mataji Vandana for example tells us about the practices adopted in her ashram. She shows how the three ways (*margas or yogas*) to God namely knowledge, devotion and action can be integrated into one in the context of ashram life. Christian life and practice can be shaped by the spiritual disciplines of the threefold yoga.⁵⁰

For six years she moved to Sivananda Ashram in Rishikesh, to experience Hindu spirituality⁵¹ at a deeper level through silence as well as praying together. After this the experience of interfaith exchanges and Akhand Japa (chanting God's name) continued in her own Jeevan Dhara Ashram at Jaiharikhal for more than twelve years. It is Mataji's experience, as that of swami Abhishiktananda, that the ultimate meeting point of Hindu and Christian sannayasins is 'in the cave of the heart' where in silence the ultimate Reality can alone be found. Theologically reflecting on her experience of dialogue with Hindu friends Mataji Vandana does not think that syncretism is a real danger.⁵² The real 'danger' is in the fact that today many Christians are saddled with cold 'doctrinal' understanding of our faith and therefore miss out on the experience of God within. But at the same time it is not a syncretism that she has discovered in her dialogue with Hindus but a renewing, reviving and enlarging of her faith. Christians according to her can discover Christ hidden in all religions. Inculturation has to move from superficial externals to transformation at religious levels as there is an advaitic relationship between culture and religion. To bear witness to Christ, to make people his disciples and to establish God's kingdom does not mean the same thing as recruiting of people for church membership without inner transformation. While Christians cannot but call on the mystery they know as Christ, Christ is present in all authentic religions in ways proper to them. It is Mataji Vandana's conviction that our faith in God's love for us can rather increase in thinking that Christ could conceivably appear on earth more than once in various cultural forms.⁵³

The authentic way of relating Christian spirituality to other spiritualities involves the following three possible positive attitudes: (a) A person may be a practising Christian and receive inspiration in all openness from other spiritual traditions, through books, meetings, exposures etc., (b) One may sincerely and fully accept another spiritual tradition, without giving up one's own roots, (c) A Christian may reach a point in his or her experience where the externals of religion are transcended, and thus touch also upon the experience of other traditions. This means 'transcending religions' in deep spiritual experience, where the labels do not matter any longer.⁵⁴

Question can be raised how Christians can maintain that integrity which professes to live by the Gospel of Jesus Christ in a multi-faith world. In living the Christian life with all its multiple perplexities generated by the context of other religious experiences, Christians become sensitised to these and prepared to learn from what they encounter in the process of dialogue. This experience of living the life of the Christian community in the middle of the city, with all its complexities and contradictions has to be understood Christologically, i.e., in terms of Christ's own experience of submitting to the will of the Father and laying down his life for others. Religious pluralism here is not a problem to be solved, but more positively a relationship to be explored. The problem for inter-faith relations today is how loyalty to a particular community can be responsibly exercised in face of other and equally plausible

forms of loyalty. Christians have a duty to identify how the truth of Christian revelation, what is learned of God from God's own word spoken in and by God's Church, relates to what is to be learned of God from the words' spoken by the other, outside church.⁵⁵

Namajapa or prayer of the name is a meeting point of the spiritualities of Hindu and Christian traditions.⁵⁶ Namajapa means repetition of a name of God. The power of the Name brings freedom from fear, anger and selfish desires as well as preserves us in the presence of God. In Namajapa of the Hindu traditions and the practice of Jesus' prayer of the Eastern Christian tradition, the mind is brought down and fixed in the heart. (Maitri up. 6.24. Katha up. 2.12, 20; 4.12, 13; 6.17; 5.12, Chandogya up. 8.1; Mundaka up 2.2; Taittiriya up 1.6). A *mantra* is combination of sacred syllables, which, when articulated in the requisite manner create certain vibrations and have certain effect. Faithfully and lovingly repeated, it leads us to discover our true selves. Mantra diksa is the initiation of the disciple into the mantra most suited to his/her temperament. Through the *Mantra-diksa*, the guru and disciple are closely bound for life in the divine Power.

While relating Christian experience with Mahayana Buddhism one basic prayer form that we can come to through zen is pure attention or objectless, formless prayer. In Japanese zen it is called *shikan taza* ('nothing but applying oneself to sitting')⁵⁷ In this that which is attentive is the heart of the person. Heart is here conceived as the infinite dimension of the human being. It is the power by which we know God. Praying here is simply letting the heart take its natural course. Prayer is attention of the heart and the focus of this attention is the formless Infinite. Here meditation is without a focused object; and devotional thought and emotion are not essential to true prayer.⁵⁸ We meditate in order to come to enlightenment which in Christian terms can mean, to share in the self-identification of Christ Jesus or to experience the oneness of all in God or the Christ - consciousness or the discovery of the Christ-self. Enlightenment directs us to more rectitude, peace and especially to ministry for others.⁵⁹

Zazen (tso-ch' an in Chinese) is a happy marriage between Taoism and Buddhism. Zazen (meaning 'to sit in meditation') is a way of meditation which finally leads to formlessness, detachment, emptiness and receptivity. It starts out by concentrating on breathing on an object, but eventually it enters into a formless state of consciousness. It is a notable model of the Negative Way.⁶⁰ The method of zen involves no thinking, no relying on, no attachment. This creates a real 'emptying' of the 'heart'. The zen contemplative faces void means he/she faces his/her original nature through void and emptiness.⁶¹ The zen practice helps Christian spirituality in diverse ways. To quote a Christian devotee's experience:

From zen practice I learned not to search for a God on high, a transcendent God, but I turned towards my inner being, facing my human nature. Since my human nature is God's image, I simply wait for this God's image to manifest itself to me. I learned from Christ to be simply attentive to my inner mystery, knowing that I cannot see my as God's child, unless the Father enlightens me by his own spirit.

The practice of zen meditation taught me to stay in pure attentiveness before my inner mystery. No thinking could make me realize this inner mystery of mine. I could not rely on any thought, any desire, to reach this presence of God in me.....

In fact it is the practice of zen which helped me to understand that the final step is not to follow Christ or to imitate him, but to be animated by him, because he lives in us.....

I realized at the same time that the way of prayer of Jesus when He was alone was more of a zen type. He was simply aware that all his life was sharing the life of the Father. He was not meditating but simply aware that, at the depth of his human nature, he shared divine nature with his Father.⁶²

D.S. Amalorpavadass has tried to identify the following important elements out of which can emerge a synthesis of Indian Christian spirituality⁶³: (a) *Experience*: The people in the East spontaneously yearn for experience. Indian sages have always been more interested in experience than in ideas and concepts. Jnana is experiential consciousness, or knowledge experienced and lived. Religion is understood here above all a *marga* and a *sadhana* leading to realising salvation and liberation. Therefore experience should get priority in our spirituality.⁶⁴

(b) *Mystery of Being*: An experience of interior unity and contemplation makes us transcend the level of doing and come to the state of being. A person who has an experience of being in himself/herself can experience the same mystery of Being in others and in God. These three levels are not three experiences but one single experience of the Mystery of Being.⁶⁵ (c) *Presence*: Another characteristic of the Indian people is a sense of divine presence in all things. We are able to perceive the divine presence in all realities of life and find ourselves in His/Her presence (*sannidhi*). This is not pantheism. This attitude of seeing God in all things is present in all the three margas, karma, bhakti and Jnana. Ahimsa and Karuna two characteristic Indian virtues spring from this awareness of universal presence.⁶⁶ (d) *Interiority*: Indians envisage reaching God in the depth of oneself, and therefore interiority has been considered as an essential element of Indian spirituality. Through interiority we are able to arrive at transcendence. Interiority transcends dogmatism. Also interiority does not lead to individualism as it is not limited to self but incorporates the whole society and universe, social solidarity (*lokasamgraha*) and cosmic harmony (*rta*).⁶⁷ (e) *Pilgrimage (Yatra)*: For an Indian life or experience is a movement, involving a long process of growth from imperfections to perfection.⁶⁸ (f) *Renunciation and Non-attachment*: These are the counterpart of God-experience and interiority. To renounce everything (*sannyasa*) is the supreme form of God-experience. Yet *sannyasa* is not the only form of renunciation. The values and aspects of each of the four stages of life (*ashrams*), including those of *sannyasa* state should be integrated into our personal life. The minimum that one must aim at is non-attachment (*aparigraha*), not having one's grip on things and persons that pass away.⁶⁹ (g) *Sacrifice (Yajana)*: The sacrifices of diverse religions are always symbolic of one's own person, a denial of self, emptying of self and offering of oneself. One's own personal development is involved here by giving importance to personality development, growth and fulfillment of the human person, freedom and responsibility of each individual in decision -making and obedience.⁷⁰ (h) *Freedom*: Freedom is not only ability for self-determination but also an ability to respond to self, to others and to God, implying responsiveness and responsibility. The individual self becomes real self only when it is related to other selves and to God. One has to empty oneself and keep oneself open and sensitive in order to give oneself totally to God and others.⁷¹ (i) *Wholeness, integrity and totally*: Wholeness is realised at three levels: cosmic, communitarian (social) and personal. First of all one must unify oneself at the core of one's being. Transcending body-soul duality as well as subject-object distinction

one has to grow from a split-personality to an integral person. The second level of wholeness is our solidarity with others, with its communitarian dimension and social concern. The third dimension of wholeness is in terms of ecological balance or cosmic harmony. Cosmic harmony (*rta*) and social order (*dharma*) are indispensable factors for personal wholeness.⁷² (j) *Discernment (Viveka)*: The whole spiritual life depends upon discernment. We have to discern God's will. One also needs *viveka* to choose and practice the *sadhana* that is suitable for one's temperament and stage of life.⁷³ (k) *Dialectics*: Indian Christian spirituality implies a process of dialectics of death-resurrection, transcendence-impotence, involvement-withdrawal, possession-renunciation, emptiness and fullness. A balanced and integrated spirituality should hold on to both the realities, without getting polarised. In that sense spirituality is also a dialectical tension.⁷⁴ (l) *Silence (mauna)*: Silence is a meaningful way in spirituality because God is ineffable and unutterable, and also we are unable to express fully our spiritual experiences. A guru communicated through silence. Mauna could be a synthesis of the whole of Indian spirituality. A spiritual person is called a *munih*, one who has reached total silence, experiences God in silence and communicates it to others through silence.⁷⁵ (m) *Life-style*: The life-style of Indian Christian Spirituality can be expressed through what is called ashram. Ashram is a state or place of intense and sustained spiritual quest for the Absolute by a group of people around and under the guidance of a guru. The life-style here is necessarily simple.⁷⁶

Islam has immensely contributed to spirituality through Sufism from which Christianity can profit much. The Sufis laid stress on the interior spiritual life, on knowledge of God by experience (*kashf*) rather than by pure reasoning. *Kashf* is an inner illumination or immediate apprehension of divine things obtained *with* God.⁷⁷ Renunciation was stressed, renunciation made wholly for the love of God.⁷⁸ Sufis in the state of ecstasy felt that they have lost awareness of their own selfhood, and were conscious only of the existence of God. The word 'tauhid' which in orthodox theology was used to denote the unity of God was used by them to denote human persons union with God. Supreme mystical experience permits a temporary union with God.⁷⁹ Some of the Sufi saints upheld non-dualism as their experience,⁸⁰ though Sufi teachings and practices differ from order to order and from place to place, yet some common elements in them can be discerned. The Sufi who sets out in search of God calls himself/herself a traveller (*salik*). Under the guidance of a spiritual director (*Shaikh*) he/she progresses along the 'path' (*tariqat*) by slow 'stages' (*maqamat*) and different 'states' (*ahwal*) to the goal of union with Reality (*fana fil Haqq*).⁸¹ The earliest 'stages' of the 'traveller' are aimed at purification-repentance, abstinence, renunciation and poverty which lead to trust in God. In human person there is a principle of evil-the lower soul which they call *nafs*. It has to be mortified to extinguish its attributes, ignorance, pride, envy, uncharitableness etc. These are replaced by their opposites when the mind is concentrated on God the will surrendered to Him. Thus the Sufi reaches the stage of 'trust in God' (*tawakkul*).⁸² There are three stages in trust in God - to cease complaining is the stage of the penitent, to be satisfied with what God send is the stage of the ascetic, to love whatever God does is the stage of the friends of God.⁸³ During his/her travel the Sufi experiences certain God-send 'stages' or conditions of feeling such as mediation, nearness to God, love, fear, hope, longing intimacy, tranquility, contemplation, certainty.⁸⁴ In the course of his/her journey the Sufi performs certain acts of devotion which are known as *dhikr* or recollection and *muraqabat* or meditation. In recollection the Sufis repeat short phrases such as 'glory to God' or 'there is no God but

God' either loudly or silently for hours together. The mechanical intonation of the words is accompanied with intense concentration of the entire person on each word and a rhythmic movement of the body. When he/she is sufficiently 'worked up', he/she proceeds to meditate on a verse of the Quran.⁸⁵ The goal of the journey is union with God; jana i.e. the death of the individuality marks the attainment of baqa or union with the Divine where the real existence of the person continues in God.⁸⁶

5. Conclusion

We noted above that spirituality is our recognition of the involvement of the Spirit in us and in the whole creation. In Biblical and Christian tradition Spirit is God's creative power, divine *shakti*, full of love and rich in inventive capability. In the New Testament *pneumatikos* is a term used for Christian experience i.e. life centered in Christ upholding kingdom-values. Christian spirituality refers to communion with God in Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. It denotes loving God and our neighbours; dying and rising in and with Christ. Spirituality represents the total response of the self to the self-world-God trio. It denotes the manner in which humans, becoming aware of the transcendence of their selfhood, seek to fulfil the self's meaning, purpose or destiny.

Jesus' was a life-sustaining spirituality which has to mould and lead us. Some of the characteristics of it were the following: It was a relevant spirituality, as may be seen in his furious cleansing of the temple. Jesus overcome temptation to wealth, greed and power. He was non-patriarchal. His was a humanizing spirituality. He called for dispossession and renunciation. He lived a counter-cultural life going beyond possessions, positions, achievements or the group, race, religion, family, sex to which he belonged. Jesus is the image of God's creative Spirit. Incarnation of God in Christ is the supreme evidence to show that there is no spirituality of an exclusive vertical dimension.

Life-sustaining spirituality or spirituality for life undertakes restless search for God among the people. In the context of globalisation the agonizing cry of the poor resonates with the groaning of the spirit within us and the energy unleashed by this spirit is what is identified as life-sustaining spiritualities. Here we should note that the concept of combat spirituality, a fore runner of life-sustaining spirituality was made popular since the Nairobi Assembly of the world Council of Churches. Christians are called to workout a spirituality for combat, which calls for a quite confidence in God to struggle against all that dehumanises, to relate spirituality and struggle, righteousness and repentance, eucharistic celebration and committed engagement. Also suggested is a plurality of spiritualities for common liberating social action in India. Feminist spirituality is defined as women's commitment to justice, to transform economic, political, social and religious institutions to give priority to the voices and concerns of those from whom human dignity is the most effectively withheld. There are people who think that Christian spirituality in India must distance itself from classical Hindu spirituality as it may blunt its liberative thrust.

But there are also people who are open to adopting Hindu spiritual discipline that are in line with the Spirit of Christ. For example the three margas of knowledge, devotion and action can be integrated into Christian ashram life. The ultimate meeting point of Hindus and Christians is 'in the cave of the heart' where in silence the ultimate Reality can alone be found. Namajapa or prayer of the name again is a meeting point of the spiritualities of Hindu

and Christian. Christians have a duty to identify how the truth of Christian revelation relates to what is to be learned of God from other religious experiences. Zen meditation for example can help Christian experience for pure attention of the heart on the formless Infinite. It involves no thinking and a real 'emptying' of the 'heart'. The zen contemplative faces void means he/she faces his/her original nature through void and emptiness. It teaches a Christian to be attentive to his/her inner mystery, the presence of God in Christ in him/her. Islam again has immense contribution to spirituality through Sufism from which Christians can profit much to reach the goal of union with God where the real existence of the person continues in God (*baqa*) through the death of the individuality (*fana*). A synthesis of Indian Christian Spirituality can emerge from insights such as experience, mystery of Being, presence, interiority, pilgrimage, renunciation, non-attachment, sacrifice, freedom, wholeness, discernment, silence, and an appropriate life-style.

NOTES

1. Samuel Rayan, "Let the Rivers and the Trees Clap Their Hands : Spirituality and Ecological Concern - A Christian View" in *Spiritual Traditions. Essential Visions for Living*, ed. by David Emmanuel Singh, Bangalore/Delhi: UTC/ISPCK, 1998, pp.254-55.
2. *Ibid.*, p.256.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*, p.255.
5. M.V.Abraham, "Spirituality from the Biblical Perspective" in *Spirituality and Theological Education*, ed. by H.S. Wilson, Bangalore : BTESSC, 1986, pp. 2-3.
6. *Ibid.*, p.3.
7. O.V. Jathanna, "Models of Spirituality in the Christian Heritage" in *Ibid.*, p.12.
8. *Ibid.*, pp.12-15.
9. R. Lianhnuni, "Spirituality from a Feminine Perspective" in *Ibid.*, p.48.
10. Samuel Amirtham, "A New Spirituality for our Ecumenical Age" in *Ibid.*, p.62-63.
11. M.M. Thomas, "A Plurality of Spiritualities For Common Liberating Social Action in India" in *Breed and Breath*, ed. by T.K. John, Anand: Gujarath Sahitya Prakash, 1991, pp.223.
12. *Ibid.*, p.222.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Raymond Panikkar, *Trinity and World Religions*, Bangalore Madras : CISRS/CLS, 1970, p.9.
15. Henry Rack, *20th Century Spirituality*, London: Epworth press, 1969, pp.111-116, 172.
16. cf. Mt. 10.39; Mk.8.35; Lk.17.33; Jn.12.24-25; Rev.2.10; Rom.6.3-11; 1Cor 15.36; 2cor.4.10, Phil.3.10-11; Col.2.12; 2 Tim. 2.11. O.V. Jathanna, "Models of Spirituality in the Christian Heritage", *op.cit.*, pp. 15-16.
17. EATWOT India's "Statement of the Seminar 'Search for life-sustaining spiritualities in the context of globalization ' (held in Bangalore, June 25-28, 1998)" *Voices from the Third World*, Vol. XXI, No.2, Dec. 1998, pp.148-49.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*, p. 149.
20. *Ibid.*
21. Samuel Rayan, "Let the Rivers and the Trees Clap their Hands: Spirituality and ecological concern - A Christian View" in *Spiritual Traditions. Essential Visions for Living* ed. by David Emmanuel Singh, Bangalore/Delhi: UTC/ISPCK, 1998., p.255.
22. M. V. Abraham, "Spirituality from the Biblical Perspective", in *Spirituality and Theological Education*. ed. by H.S Wilson, Bangalore: BTESSC, 1986, p.10.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*
26. cf. EATWOT India's "Statement of the Seminar 'Search for Life Sustaining Spiritualities in the Context of Globalization' (held in Bangalore, June 25-28, 1998)", *Voices From the Third World*, vol. XXI, No.2, Dec. 1998, pp.134-151.
27. *Ibid.*, p.146.
28. *Ibid.*, p.147.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*, pp.147-48.
31. *Ibid.*, p.148.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 147. Here it should be noted that the Journal of EATWOT, *Voice From the Third World* has devoted many of its earlier Issues as well for discussing the topic of life-sustaining Spiritualities of the following general themes and their Issue specifications : "Spirituality and Human Liberation", Vol.X, No.3, Sept. 1987; "Towards a Liberating Spirituality", Vol.XIII, No.1, June 1990; "A Cry for Life - "Spirituality of the Third World", Vol.XIV, No.2, Dec. 1991; "Life Affirming Spirituality-Source of Justice and Righteousness", Vo.XV, No. 1, June 1992; "Spirituality for Life: Women Struggling Against Violence", Vol.XVII, No.1, June 1994.
33. K.C. Abraham, *Liberative Solidarity: Contemporary Perspectives on Mission*, Tiruvalla : CSS, 1996, p.93.
34. *Ibid.*, p.126.
35. Samuel Amirtham, "A New Spirituality for our Ecumenical Age" in *Spirituality and Theological Education*, ed. by H.S. Wilson, Bangalore : BTESSC, 1986, p.69.
36. *Ibid.*, p.70.
37. M.M. Thomas, "A Purity of Spiritualities for Common Liberating Social Action in India" *Bread and Breath. Essays in Honour of Samuel Rayan S.J.*, ed. by T.K. John. Anand : Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1991, pp.222-36.
38. *Ibid.*, p.236.
39. Aruna Gnanadason, "The Search for Humanhood : Women-Theological Education and Spirituality", in *Spirituality and Theological Education*, *op.cit.*, p.43.
40. *Ibid.*, p.42.
41. *Ibid.*, p.44.
42. *Ibid.*, p.35.
43. Samuel Amirtham, "A Wholesome Biblical Spirituality" in *Bible speaks Today. Essays in Honour of Gnana Robinson*, ed. by Daniel Jones Muthunayagom, Delhi/Bangalore : ISPCK/UTC, 2000, pp.345-49.
44. George M. Soares - Prabhu "From Alienation to Inclusion. Some Reflections on Doing Theology in India Today" in *Bread and Breath. Essays in Honour of Samuel Rayan S.J.*, *op.cit.*, p.95.
45. Vandana Mataji, *Social Justice and Ashrams*, Bangalore : ATC, 1982, p.4.
46. George M. Soares-Prabhu, *op.cit.*, pp.96-98.
47. *Ibid.*, p.97-98.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
49. Mataji Vandana, "In Search of Being One With the One", *Spirituality in Interfaith Dialogue*, ed.by Tosh Arai and Wesley Ariarajah, Geneva: WCC Publications, 1989, p.23.
50. *Ibid.*
51. *Ibid.*, pp. 23-30 cf.also Vandana, *Gurus, Ashrams and Christians*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1978.
52. cf. Vandana Mataji, *Living with Hindus. Hindu-Christian Dialogue. My Experience and Reflections*. Bangalore/Delhi : IJA/ISPCK, 1999.
53. *Ibid.*
54. *Ibid.*
55. Bettina Baumer, "A Journey With the unknown" in *Spirituality in Inter-faith Dialogue*, *op.cit.*, pp.40-41.
56. cf. Michael Barnes, *Walking the City. Christian Discipleship in a Pluralist World*, Delhi: ISPCK, 1999.
57. Vandana, *Nama Japa. Prayer of the Name in the Hindu and Christian Traditions*, Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1984.

58. Thomas G. Hand, "Englishtenment Through Zen" in *Spirituality in Interfaith Dialogue, op.cit.*, p.52.
59. *Ibid.*
60. *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.
61. Peter K.II. Lee, "A Search for Spiritual Roots" in *Spirituality in Inter-Faith Dialogue, op.cit.*, pp.55-56.
62. Yves Raguin, "Deepening our Understanding of Spirituality", in *Ibid.*, p.83.
63. *Ibid.*, pp.83-84, cf. Hakan Eilert, "Journey Through the Gateless Gate", in *Spirituality in Interfaith Dialogue, op.cit.*, pp.93-95.
64. D.S. Amalorpavadass, "A Synthesis of Basic and Constitutive Elements of Indian Christian Spirituality", in *Indian Christian spirituality*, ed.by D.S. Amalorpavadass, Bangalore:NBCLC, 1982, pp. 221-36.
65. *Ibid.*, pp. 221-22.
66. *Ibid.*, p. 222.
67. *Ibid.*, pp.222-24.
68. *Ibid.*, pp.224-25.
69. *Ibid.*, pp.225-26.
70. *Ibid.*, pp.226-28.
71. *Ibid.*, p.228.
72. *Ibid.*, pp.229-30.
73. *Ibid.*, pp.230-33.
74. *Ibid.*, P.233.
75. *Ibid.*, pp.233-34.
76. *Ibid.*, pp.234-35.
77. *Ibid.*, p. 235. cf.pp. 158-59.
78. Ternence Farias, "Sufism-Muslim Mysticism" in *Indian Christian Spirituality, op.cit.*, p. 201.
79. *Ibid.*, p. 202.
80. *Ibid.*, p 203.
81. *Ibid.*, p.204.
82. *Ibid.*, p. 205.
83. *Ibid.*
84. *Ibid.*, p. 206.
85. *Ibid.*
86. *Ibid.*