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A Spirituality for Our Times

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Abstract:

The author articulates a spirituality relevant for our contemporary times and Indian context. To be spiritual is to be open and responsive to reality both in its negative and positive dimensions. Openness to reality consists in awareness of their presence and of their corrosive and brutalizing effects on the human heart and on social life. Relevant and adequate response to such negative realities would mean letting their awareness warn and shame us, and urge us to find and eliminate their causes and occasions, and challenge us to be different by cultivating their opposites, what would make one more reasonable, free, honest, generous and gentle. The Spirit is ever beckoning to us to be open to realities in us and around us; to let reality stir us, disturb us, challenge us, and move us to joy, to sorrow, to anger, to action. The Spirit is urging us to hear the song and the cry of reality, human and cosmic, personal and social. She is signalling to us to respond relevantly and adequately, to respond in the way She Herself does: that is, eliminating the negative, wiping away the tears, binding up the wounds, lifting up the lowly; ending greed, hatred and violence, and fostering the gentle, the beautiful and the loving — all for the common good, the welfare of all humankind, and for the greater praise and glory of God, the glory of God being the Human fully alive, whole and happy, flowering and fruitful.

Keywords

Spirituality, poor, spirit, contextual spirituality, prophetic spirituality, sharing wealth, man of God

1. Spirituality

1.1. To be spiritual is to be open and responsive to reality. Reality could be negative or positive. By negative reality is meant dispositions, desires, situations, traditions, structures, policies,

relationships, events, and decisions, actions which are dehumanising, oppressive, enslaving, divisive, conflictual, unsocial and self-worshiping. They are wont to make one depraved, reactionary, destructive, violent and sad. Openness to those consists in awareness of their presence and of their corrosive and brutalizing effects on the human heart and on social life. Relevant and adequate response to such negative realities would mean letting their awareness warn and shame us, and urge us to find and eliminate their causes and occasions, and challenge us to be different by cultivating their opposites, what would make one more reasonable, free, honest, generous and gentle.

When reality is positive, when one's experiences and situations are liberating and integrating, promotive of creativity, solidarity and hope, response to it will consist in welcoming it with its challenges, promises and possibilities, in letting it enrich one ever more and render one's heart and life increasingly sensitive to what is beautiful or pathetic, and courageous to pursue what contributes to freedom, solidarity and the common good.

1.2. Reality could be personal, familial, socio-political, cosmic and Transcendent — Divine. Personal reality may include one's own self: one's abilities and limitations, tendencies and gifts, achievements and failings, endeavours, hopes, joys, and sorrows as well as the depths of one's heart and conscience. Social reality consists of the web of relationships and interactions between persons and groups which weave the community in which we live. Included in social reality are the values, ideals, artistic creations, knowledge, traditions, achievements, myths, legends, and prejudices, challenges and opportunities as well as socio-political and economic events, policies, movements and crises, with all their promises, threats and demands.

By cosmic reality is meant what we call nature, the environment with its physical grandeur and evolutionary mystery, its rich variety and fascinating beauty, its endless surprises and wonders, its occasional angry outbursts, and its unceasing gifts with which it

lovingly supports and nurtures our life, healing, restoring, reproducing and renewing it.

The Transcendent is the unique reality we call God, the ultimate Ground and Source, Horizon and Goal of the cosmos and of our human history. It is that from which everything comes and on which everything radically depends, and to which everything points and tends, and which is the intimate meaning of all else. Ethics with its injunctions and prohibitions, and religions with their belief systems, institutions, devotions and rituals belong primarily to the sphere of the Transcendent; they have therefore to do with all the other ranges of life, relationships, decisions and activities.

Spirituality consists in being open and responsive to reality at all these levels, in all these dimensions. It is obvious that the attitude of openness and responsiveness to what is negative, oppressive, and dehumanising will differ from response to what is positive, life-affirming and liberating. The tint and throb, the depth and expanse of spirituality too will differ accordingly.

2. The Spirit

2.1. It is obvious that ‘Spirituality’ has to do with ‘spirit’. But what is the spirit in question? Many tend, spontaneously or philosophically, to identify the spirit with the human psyche or soul, the immaterial component of the human person. But we know that the soul can be selfish, cruel, deceitful and jealous,. Such a reality, according to Paul, is flesh, not spirit, though it is immaterial; and the flesh is hostile to God, does not submit to God’s law, and cannot please God (Rom 7:14-24; 8:5-8; 1 Cor 3:1-4; Gal 5:17-21). But God liberates and saves us from carnal servitude and from decline and disintegration by giving us His Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus Christ. With the Spirit of God dwelling in us, we are no longer in the flesh but in the Spirit. And with that, the power of Jesus’ Resurrection becomes active in us, defeating and destroying the power of sin and death. Thus vivified and led by the Spirit, we become God’s children, and heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ (Rom 8: 9-17). “If (then) we live in the Spirit, we also follow the

Spirit". Living in the Spirit, we reject the works of the flesh such as impurity, idolatry, hatred, dissensions. And as God's children we bear the fruits of the Spirit which are "love, joy, peace, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Gal 5:13-26). To be spiritual, then, is to be carried by the Spirit and be profoundly transformed by her. The human heart, a humane community and gentle relationships are Her chosen abode and temple (I Cor 6:19).

2.2. It is from the Holy Spirit that all spirituality derives and is named. All creation comes from God through the Eternal Word in the Holy Spirit, and is, therefore, radically holy and spiritual. Spiritual is all that the Spirit fashions, gives, guides, inspires, approves, vivifies, pervades and transforms. Paying attention to nature and respectfully watching its fascinating shapes and movements, and listening to its songs and silences could be an encounter with the Spirit and a heart-warming, uplifting spiritual experience. All creation is numinous, is a divine beckoning, a signalling to approach, to listen, to dialogue and receive a blessing.

A hymn, echoing this truth, exhorts us to listen to the Spirit, to

*"listen to His constant speaking,..
to His inspiration, .. . to His invitation."*

*For, "He's in the thunder, in the whisper of the breeze...
In the might of the whirlwind...
in the laughter of children...
In the cries of the suffering,
in their moaning and their pain
He speaks thru your companions,
thru the friend and the foe.
Therefore give ear to the Spirit
Wherever He may blow."*

(With Joyful Lips, St Paul's, 1989).

Such communion with the Spirit in the medium of natural phenomena is an aspect of Eco-Spirituality. But today Eco-Spirituality must get beyond this contemplative stage, and take to organized criticism of, and struggle against, environmental abuses

like polluting and poisoning of the earth, the air and water with chemical effluents, dangerous gases and deadly radiations, as well as against consumerist over-use of earth's resources, which is a deadly crime against the poor and a fatal betrayal of future generations.

2.3. One could have the Spirit and follow Her lead without being formally aware of Her presence and influence. One could be genuinely spiritual without expressing it in religious language. In fact, spirituality is not to be identified with religious rituals and pious practices. In one of Jesus' short stories there is a Samaritan who is a deeply spiritual person, a saintly man, whom Jesus proposes to us as a model. "Go and do likewise" is how Jesus concludes the story. The man's exemplary spirituality consists in his spontaneous openness and concerned response to an unexpected reality: a man stricken, wounded and abandoned half-dead on the roadside. His spirituality is his compassion and self-sacrificing service to a fellow human being in distress. No specifically religious creeds, pieties or rituals are apparent. But there are two 'religious' figures in the story: a priest and a Levite. These see the stricken man and pass by on the opposite side. Maybe, they are in a hurry to get to the temple on time for prayer and sacrifice. But Jesus does not propose them as models for his followers. They are models neither of religion nor of spirituality. Devoid of love, their religion is dead. The story makes clear who one's neighbour is, and how to become a neighbour, and what genuine spirituality consists in (Lk 10:25-37).

2.4. The same perspective and an identical message is conveyed in another parable:

The one about the final evaluation of human history. The Son of Man welcomes into the Kingdom a great mass of people because they have been compassionate and kind to the hungry, the thirsty, the naked and the homeless, to the sick and the imprisoned. Another mass of people is excluded from the blessed life because they have been self-centred and never cared for the needy, never loved their suffering sisters and brothers. Whatever

the people did or neglected to do to the least and the lowliest of their sisters or brothers, was in truth done or refused to Jesus Himself. Note that in this judgement scene too no questions are raised about creeds, rituals and pieties. The decisive factor is love outgoing in compassionate service. What matters is being open and responsive to suffering people (Mt 25:31 -46).

2.5. The position Jesus takes here is consistent with the rest of His teaching and His saving praxis. It is also consonant with the tradition of Hebrew prophets. More than once, in fact, Jesus approvingly cites Hosea's prophetic word declaring that what God wants and expects is mercy, not sacrifice (Hos. 6:6; Mt 9:13; 12:7).

3. The Prophetic Outlook

3.1. Hosea is not the only one, nor the first in Israel's history to take such a radical view of human relations to God, and to displace sacrifice from the central place it has traditionally been occupying. Samuel, the last of the Judges and a prophet, is perhaps the first to tell Israel and King Saul that "obedience is better than sacrifice", and that God delights in our submission to his commands rather than in the fat of rams (1 Sam 13:21-22). The rebuke was occasioned by Saul and his soldiers keeping alive the best sheep and oxen of defeated Amalek in order to sacrifice them to God while God had ordered the conquest of Amalek to be followed by the killing of everyone and everything. Had Saul spared some of the people of Amalek instead of a. great part of their animal wealth, would the prophetic reaction be different?

3.2. However that might be, Biblical tradition continued to place justice and love above sacrifice. The Lord says through Isaiah:

*What care I for the number of your sacrifices?
I have had enough of whole-burnt rams and fat of fatlings.
In the blood of calves, rams and goats I find no pleasure...
Put away your misdeeds from before my eyes;
Cease doing evil, learn to do good.
Make justice your aim: redress the wronged.
Hear the orphan's plea, defend the widow (Isa 1:11-17).*

This view gains popularity and becomes a proverb:

*To do what is right and just
is more acceptable to God than sacrifice (Prov 21:3).*

To those who complain that God does not take note of their fasts and self inflicted pain, the Lord's answer is:

*Lo, on your fast day you drive all your labourers
Yes, your fast ends in quarrelling and fighting,
Striking with wicked claw.
Is this the manner of fasting I wish... that a man bows his
head*

*Like a reed, and lie in sackcloth and ashes?
This rather is the fasting I wish;
Releasing those bound unjustly...
Setting free the oppressed, breaking every yoke;
Sharing your bread with the hungry,
Sheltering the oppressed and the homeless,
Clothing the naked when you see them
And not turning your back on your own...
Then your light shall break forth like the sun
And your wound shall quickly be healed...(Isa 58:3-8).*

Israel's God-sent guides are tracing for them the spiritual path they ought to walk. Now it is Jeremiah's turn to speak. Through him too God expresses His loathing for sacrifices detached from heeding His words and keeping His laws:

*Of what use to me is incense that comes from Sheba
or sweet cane from far-off lands?
Your holocausts find no favour with me.
Your sacrifices please me not (Jer. 6.20).*

Through Amos too, and in powerful words, the Lord reveals the heart of spiritual life. What is said moreover is relevant to all times:

*I hate, I spurn your feasts,
I take no pleasure in your solemnities;*

*Your cereal offerings I will not accept,
Nor consider your stall-fed peace offerings
But if you would offer me holocausts
Then let justice surge like water,
And goodness like an unfailing stream (Am. 5.21-24).*

3.3. Here we have a consistent vision and an insistent voice. Prophet after prophet defines spirituality in terms of obedience, justice and love rather than of legal provisions or ritual observances. The Holy Spirit is the Centre and the Horizon of our life and openness and response to Her in terms of justice mercy and solidarity constitute spirituality.

4. The Man of the Spirit

4.1. Jesus makes this spirituality his own. After forbidding anger, insult and violence, He instructs us to give to love and reconciliation priority, over sacrifice and ritual

Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift (Mt. 5.23-24).

Twice, as we have seen, does Jesus quote Hosea 6.6 as an adequate expression of His own stand? Both occasions are significant. One is when the Pharisees object to his befriending of, and eating with tax collectors and others whom upper classes despised as sinners. Jesus reminds the Pharisees that they need to go and learn the basis of authenticity in life and religion. They must go and learn the mercy of which Hosea 6.6.and Mt. 12.1-8 speaks.

4.2. Jesus praxis is in complete accord with this teaching. Or, rather, His teaching is but a translation into word of the reality of His life. For Him openness and obedience to the Father's will comes first and is decisive. And the Father's will is humankind's wholeness and happiness. God's will is mercy, love, compassion, solidarity and sharing of goods and of the knowledge of God among

God's beloved children, God's dear family on earth. Jesus therefore can never be cold or indifferent in the face of human suffering. Numerous healings and exorcisms bear witness to His concern and compassion. He served afflicted people, even over-ruling Sabbath laws and risking the murderous wrath of authorities (Mk 1:14-3:6: hi 5; 9). The blind, the deaf, the dumb, the lame, the maimed, the leperous, the fever-stricken, the deformed, the paralysed and victims of haemorrhage were restored to health and happiness throughout the land. On seeing a widow in tears, accompanying the bier of her only son, Jesus "was moved with pity for her, and said to her: "Do not weep" Then he touched the coffin and commanded the young man to arise. The youth sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother (1k 7:11-17). Jesus raises up Jairus' dead daughter from her "sleep" and, as the child walked around after days or weeks of illness, He directed her mother to give the child something to eat. Such is Jesus' tenderness, surpassing a mother's (Mk 5: 21-43). At the tomb of Lazarus of Bethany, 'When Jesus saw (Mary) weeping and the Jews who had come with her weeping, he became perturbed and deeply troubled... and Jesus wept" (Jn 11:33-34).

5.3. Limitless is the compassion of the Lord Jesus. When the apostles rejoin Him after a mission to the villages, the Master's first thought is about the quiet and rest they need. "Come away by yourselves," He suggests, "to a deserted place and rest awhile." But a crowd gathers frustrating this plan. When Jesus "saw the vast crowd, His heart was moved with pity for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd." So He taught them many things. When it was already late, His disciples intervened, suggesting that the crowd be dismissed so that they could go to the villages nearby and buy food for themselves. Jesus' reply, quite characteristic of Him, was that His disciples should not shirk hospitality but should themselves feed the crowd. But as the little food the disciples had with them would not suffice, Jesus multiplies the food they had till the last person in the crowd was satisfied (Mk 6:30-44). On another occasion, "when there again was a great crowd without anything to eat Jesus summoned His disciples

and said, My heart is moved with pity for the crowd because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them away hungry to their homes, they might collapse on the way, and some of them have come a long distance.” Once again, therefore, Jesus multiplies the few loaves they had at hand (Mk 8:1-c9; Mt 14:13-21; 15:32-39; Lk 9: 10-17; Jn 6: 1-13).

Jesus’ is a spirituality of shore-less compassion. It is not only our physical ills and needs that move His Heart to intervene creatively, but the wounds and filth of our mangled hearts too prompt Him to act on our behalf. Once, He was the guest of a Pharisee. As they ate at table, a woman comes in, falls at Jesus’ feet weeping, washing them with her tears, wiping them with her hair, kissing them reverently and anointing them with fragrant ointment. The host was disappointed that Jesus accepted the woman’s services instead of ordering her out for she was a harlot. Jesus read the man’s thoughts and challenged him by contrasting his meager hospitality with the woman’s abundant respect and love. What the woman did pointed to the greater pardon she had experienced and her deep conversion. The repentance and return of a sinner is worth celebrating. For, people matter (Lk 7:36-50; cf. Lk 15; Mt 9:10-13; 18:12-14).

5. The Spiritual Man

5.1. The whole being of Jesus with his entire life is deeply rooted in, and permeated by, the Holy Spirit. His very conception was effected by the Spirit’s overshadowing of Mary, His Mother (Lk 1:35-38). At His presentation in the temple, Spirit-led people like Simeon and Anna joined in, bearing witness to His Messianic identity (Lk 2:25-38). The wisdom in which the boy Jesus grew as He advanced in years is probably a reference to the influence on Him of the Holy Spirit (Lk. 2.40-50). But it was at His baptism in the Jordan that He experienced a soul-shaking on-coming of the Spirit (Lk 3:21), From that moment on, Jesus’ heart and life were governed, guided and shaped by God’s Holy Spirit. “At once the Spirit drove Him out into the desert and He remained in the

desert for forty days” (Mk 1:12-13), Jesus took time to reflect on His Jordan experience, to pray over the mission given Him, to discern the path He should follow and the friends He should choose. But finally, “Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit... He came to Nazareth... and went... into the synagogue on the Sabbath day. He stood up to read” (Lk 4:14-17), and this is what He read from the Isaiah scroll:

*“‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.
because He has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the
poor.*

*He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives,
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year
acceptable to the Lord” (Lk 4:18-19; Isa 61:1-2;
58:6; cf., Lev 25:10-12)*

Such is Jesus’ manifesto, His mission programme, and His spirituality. He is open to, touched by and concerned with the life and experience of the impoverished, the imprisoned, the blindfolded, and the downtrodden. He is here sent by God and equipped by the Spirit to end people’s victimisation, to defend their rights, and to lead a struggle for a more humane social order and for “economics as if people mattered” (cf., Mt 5-7; 11. 25-30; Mk 10:17-31; Lk 1:51-53; 6:20-42; Jn 13).

5.2. All His life, Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit, listened to Her voice, and followed Her Guidance. So He always did God’s will, did what was pleasing to God, and cared deeply for the welfare, the wholeness and the happiness of all God’s children. He urged all to be born from above, to be reborn of the Spirit, to be taught by Her and led by Her into all truth (Lk 10:21; Jn 3:2-8; 14:15-17, 21 15:26-27; 16:7-15).

Jesus himself is a great reservoir of the Spirit. From His Heart the Spirit flows like rivers of living water, of which all may drink who thirst for eternal life. “...whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (Jn 4:7-15). “On the

last day...of the feast (of Tabernacles), Jesus stood up and exclaimed, "Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture says: 'Rivers of living water will flow from within him. He said this with reference to the Spirit that those who came to believe in him were to receive'" (Jn 7:37-39). This precisely is what happened on Calvary soon after Jesus died on the cross. "... a soldier thrust his lance into (Jesus') side, and immediately blood and water flowed out. An eye witness has testified and his testimony is true" (hi 19: 34-35). After His resurrection Jesus shares His Spirit under a different symbol. On the evening of the first Easter Sunday, Jesus appeared to His disciples, wished them peace, made them heirs to His own God-given mission, and then, "he breathed on them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit!" (Jn. 20:19-22). Finally, just before His ascension, Jesus directs his followers not to leave Jerusalem, "but to wait for the promise of the Father," which is their "baptism with the Holy Spirit" (Ac 1:4-5). The promise was fulfilled on Pentecost Day when the Holy Spirit filled Jesus' followers, coming suddenly "with a noise like a strong driving wind" and appearing to them like "tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each of them," and enabling them to speak in different tongues (Ac 2:14).

The community of Jesus, therefore, starts its pilgrimage through history as a spiritual reality: Spirit-filled, Spirit-led, responsive to the Spirit's inspirations and to Her interest in human well-being, growth, solidarity, creativity, and mutual love and service. The church has experience of the Spirit in Her gifts of tongues and other charisms, as well as the new life style the believers devised and realized, of economic community and sharing in an egalitarian fraternity (Ac 2~1-21, 42-47; 4:32-37). The Spirit guides Philip to evangelize an Ethiopian (Ac 8:26-39). Once, as Peter was introducing Jesus to a gentile family "the Holy Spirit fell upon all who were listening to the word," to the astonishment of 'the circumcised believers' (Ac 10:44-48). Once, when prophets and teachers were together in the church at Antioch, the Holy Spirit

asked that two of them, namely Saul and Barnabas, be set apart for the work to which I (the Spirit) have called them... So, sent forth by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia..." (Ac 13:1-4). In all such cases we gain some insight into the spirituality of the early church as it let itself be taught and led by the Spirit, as it remained sensitive to the Spirit's concerns and collaborated with Her for the liberation and wholeness of peoples.

5.3. Jesus, then, was a deeply spiritual man, entirely open to the Holy Spirit, joyfully co-operating with Her purposes; sharing Her compassion and continuing Her loving care for the afflicted in particular, giving hope to the desperate, and recognition and honour to the despised; gifting health and wholeness to the sick and the deformed; restoring freedom and dignity to the enslaved and the oppressed; siding with the poor and the powerless in their struggles to regain their rights and to put an end to inhumanity and injustice of every sort; exposing savagery and violence camouflaged as patriotism; and naming exploitation that comes disguised as advancement. Jesus directed people's gaze to the Reign of God that was breaking in with His presence and services and to the beauty of life in the peace, love and solidarity of the Reign.

6. Today

6.1. Spirituality for today consists in openness and commitment to the Reign/Kingdom of God which Jesus embodied in His Person, served all His life, and announced in His ministry. He directed us to pray for it to break in: "Father, your Kingdom come!" God's Reign means a new life and a new world, different from the one shaped by Caesars and Presidents ancient and modern; different from this broken and blood-stained world of ours. To be spiritual is to dream of a new world of justice and peace, love and life, equality and solidarity. To be spiritual today is to stand with the millions of women and men in the World Social Forum, and affirm that another world is possible, and to strive together for its realization.

6.2. The new world will be envisaged, designed and built around people: with children, women and men as its centre and meaning. The securing and fostering of human welfare, dignity, freedom, creativity and solidarity will be the goal and purpose of the new social relations we weave, of all new political processes, all economic dealings and cultural developments. In so doing we are but following the path God has himself traced for us. For “God so loved the world that He gave His only son” for its salvation (Jn2: 16-17; Ps 8). For us humans and for our salvation God’s Son descended from heaven and became human, like us in everything except sinning (Jn 1:14; Heb 2:14-IS; 4:15; Phil 2:5-11). “The Sabbath was made for human well-being, and not humans for the Sabbath” (Mk 2:23-27). Religion too is for people, as are also social structures and economic organization and practice. The only valid and worthwhile economics is “economics as if people mattered” (E.F. Schumacher, 1973). A spirituality that follows God, places the Human at the centre of concern. The Human is the decisive value, governing all else.

6.3. An essential factor in today’s spirituality will be the weaving and cherishing of a vision of world solidarity, recognizing the equality, dignity and rights of all persons, groups and nations, irrespective of geography, race, colour, culture, gender, age, or status. Recover the world-view and spirituality underlying India’s ancient insight which holds that the wide world ‘is a dear little family’ (*vasudhaiva kutumbakam*). The same truth and spirituality is affirmed in the Gospel prayer, the ‘Our Father,’ a programme of openness and obedience to God; of love for neighbours and sharing of resources; and of mutual forgiveness and acceptance. Humankind indeed is one family, in the presence of the one Father of us all, living in one home and sharing a common table, namely the earth and its resources; each one breathing in what the others breathe out; and walking the same pilgrim way together towards our common destiny. Ours to strive to realize and live the global solidarity and love throbbing within the Our Father.

6.4. The sharing just mentioned of the earth and its resources calls for fresh emphasis. For we have tended quietly to overlook the repeated insistence of God's Word on wealth-sharing as befits God's beloved family. In the opening chapters of Genesis, God gifts the earth with all its wealth and wonder to the first humans, representatives of the whole of humanity, and not to Sir so and so. The title of their descendants to an equitable share of the gift stands, and must be honoured always and everywhere (Gen 1; 26-30; 2: 8-9,15-17). Through Moses, God ordered Israel to have a relaxation of debts every seven-year period: "Every creditor shall relax his claim on what he has loaned his neighbour, he must not press his neighbour."... Nay more!... "there should be no one of you in need," (Dt.15:1-4), that is, see to it that there are no poor among you, that no member of the family is denied his/her share at the earth-table the Lord has so richly laid. That is why Yahweh who does justice is always on the side of the oppressed (PS 103:6). That is why Jesus tells the rich to distribute their wealth to the poor (Mk.10:17-30), and congratulates a rich person, Zacchaeus, who took Jesus seriously and became free and whole (Lk 19:1.10). Paul appreciates and praises the generous wealth-sharing by the churches of Macedonia, and exhorts the church at Corinth (and elsewhere) to become joyful givers (1 Cor 8 and 9), "so that there may be equality" (1Cor 8:13-15) and that thanksgiving may abound (1Cor 9:7-12). Luke bears witness to the early church's adoption of a communitarian life-style with economic equality and balance which Paul as we have seen commends. This manner of common life was realized and lived in the context and in the spirit of the Eucharist. (Acts.2:42-47; 4:32-37; 1Cor.1:17-22). Scholars tell us that this beautiful social experiment lasted in the Christian communities around the Mediterranean for some three centuries and that it began to weaken and get submerged only when the Cross was force-married to the sword and the church succumbed to imperial mores and power-structures and to the feudal lord-serf traditions. It is time now for us to wake up, listen afresh to God's Word and to respond to God's radical challenges, and to work together to build a human world of equality, equity, justice,

and love; and evolve a spirituality of global family hood and table-fellowship, overcoming the rich-poor divide which is an insult to both reason and faith.

6.5. The gaps and the gulfs between the rich and the poor in every nation and among the nations of the world are becoming wider and deeper. An intricate system of exploitation, perfected through a few centuries of imperialist-colonial domination and deceit, has been set up on a global scale to entrap the many and benefit a few: a system which places profit and power above people and their life, and which has a history of accumulating capital through slave trade, slave labour and armed conquests. To be spiritual today is to hear the cry of the poor as God does, take their side in analyzing and denouncing the subhuman system, and work with all sensitive people to replace the system with one that honors people's rights, and accords with the social character of human existence, a distant but telling reflection of the Triune Divine Community.

6.6. The Human is bound up with the cosmic. Our life, growth and endeavours are interwoven with nature and its processes. An important and inspiring aspect of spirituality consists, therefore, in being open to the beauty and wonder around us. To the spiritual eye, nature is God's love-gift, a sacrament of God's presence and self-giving. To the spiritual person, nature is numinous, a divine beckoning and signalling to us, something God is saying to us which we can understand if we listen with our hearts. There is a whole tradition of Eco-spirituality in world-religions and world-poetry. "Silence, my soul, these trees are prayers," sang Tagore. (Stray Birds) "The heavens declare the glory of God" sang the psalmist (Ps 19; 29; 93; 96; 148). Trees, flowers, birds, harvests, rivers, floods, foxes, are present in Jesus' teaching as conveyors of his message (cf. Mt 7:9-11, 18-19,22; 8:20; 13:18-34; 18:10-13; 21:18-22; Jn 4:7-15; 6: 32-35; 7:37-39). Some aspects of His personal Mystery are represented by nature's phenomena: Jesus is seed that falls and dies only to sprout and rise (Jn 12:24). He is a Vine with us for branches; and He is the world's Light dispelling

darkness (Jn. 15; 12: 24; 8.14). Today, however, we have to get beyond this contemplative and poetic eco-spirituality. For, an irresponsible, selfish and greedy lifestyle is fast polluting, poisoning, over-using and destroying the eco-system. Eco-spirituality, therefore, today, takes a stand to combat this crime, and organises people to reject consumerism and its lying propaganda, to adopt simple lifestyles, to use things with mental maturity and responsibility to the community, to the earth, to future generations and to the Creator, ensuring that no plant or animal species is lost for ever, and that nobody tomorrow is deprived of the blessing we know and enjoy.

6.7. We live in an era of incredible violence, massacres, bloodshed and destruction. The last century witnessed two world wars; two major revolutions; the anti-Semitic holocaust which consumed some six million innocent victims, the unprovoked systematic destruction of Vietnam, land and people, with bombs, orange yellow defoliants, and generous bullets; the criminal dropping of nuclear bombs on two Japanese cities, killing two hundred thousand or more in a second, and mortally infecting many more for life; the regimes of military dictators and expert assassins and torturers of Latin America, trained and upheld by powerful governments in return for economic privileges; and the sufferings inflicted by apartheid regimes on native populations, especially in Africa. And this century, though so young, has its own history of bloody conflicts and lies as in Iraq, Afghanistan, Chechniya and the Congo. We are also aware of the large resources, billions of dollars, spent each week on manufacturing and stock-piling weapons of mass destruction while millions of people suffer for lack of resources to meet basic needs of food, shelter, medicine and elementary education. Spirituality in such a situation will consist in rejecting and resisting every form of violence and war, and in recognizing these as disastrous vestiges of ancient savagery surreptitiously feeding on advanced human science and technology. Violent conflicts are signs and exhibitions of mental under-development, the inability of disagreeing parties to sit down and

talk things over, to reason together, to listen to each other, to argue points as honest and mature men and women, and move towards solutions acceptable and honorable to all concerned. To be spiritual today is to go on striving to replace, in our hearts and in the community of peoples, the jungle-culture of instinctive fury and bloody claws and teeth with the culture of humane reasonableness, gentleness and sincere co-operation for the common good.

7. Conclusion

Spirituality is named after the Spirit of God, The Spirit is ever beckoning to us to be open to realities in us and around us; to let reality stir us, disturb us, challenge us, and move us to joy, to sorrow, to anger, to action. The Spirit is urging us to hear the song and the cry of reality, human and cosmic, personal and social. She is signalling to us to respond relevantly and adequately, to respond in the way She Herself does: that is, eliminating the negative, wiping away the tears, binding up the wounds, lifting up the lowly; ending greed, hatred and violence, and fostering the gentle, the beautiful and the loving — all for the common good, the welfare of all humankind, and for the greater praise and glory of God, the glory of God being the Human, fully alive, whole and happy, flowering and fruitful.

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