

study of the various sciences since Aristotle—one, unlike Aristotle's, that specifically addressed the integration of all forms of knowledge in the service of divine *sapientia* leading to mystical experience."⁴⁰

Summary of Relationship Spirituality and Theology: Twelfth to Fourteenth Centuries

When theology was first systematized it had similarities to patristic *theologia*. That is, both the early scholastics and the monastic theologians continued to value the knowledge of God and the journey of transformation as a basis for their tasks as theologians. These scholars expected even their most speculative and abstract works about revelation and tradition to contribute to the understanding of faith so that it might be more deeply lived. The connection between spirituality and theology was not just theoretical but, as in patristic times, how people lived their lives in terms of Christian beliefs was viewed as important to competence in the study of both theology and the living of the Christian life. In other words, theology was intended to nurture spirituality and spirituality nurtured theologians. FROM

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MYSTICAL THEOLOGY

Mystical theology emerged as a theological specialty in the seventeenth century, an offshoot of moral theology; these divisions were part of the systematization of scholastic theology.⁴¹ Franciscan and Carmelite centers of theological study were the first to establish chairs in the new discipline.⁴² Its object of study was the perfection of the Christian life, studied according to classifications from the patristic period and topics and questions first formulated by Thomas Aquinas.⁴³ Dionysius (sixth century), the patristic author who most influenced mystical theology taught that the goal of the spiritual journey was union with God, which was achieved progressively through participation in the liturgy and through contemplation of God's word. Dionysius classified this progression into three stages, purification, illumination and union, which became the foundational categories of mystical theology.⁴⁴ Aquinas asserted that the goal of the spiritual journey was perfection achieved through advancement in the practice of virtue and progression in forms of prayer. Aquinas described different paths of progression in virtue for different states in life. (*Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 184, q. 183.4)

Seventeenth century mystical theology focused on categorization of levels of progression into union with God and on determining which forms and experiences of prayer constituted different levels of perfection.⁴⁵ Thus, treatises on mystical theology were mostly organized according to the three stages of progression, namely, purification, illumina-

tion and union. Each level of progression corresponded to a set of ascetical practices and approaches to prayer that would result in growth in virtue. In the more advanced stages, prayer followed a hierarchical order, from mental prayer, to infused contemplation, to mystical graces and spiritual marriage.⁴⁶ Mental prayer essentially involved spiritual exercises such as the classical structured meditations in the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius. Infused contemplation referred to the experience of God's presence interpreted as occurring through God's grace as opposed to through the intentional practice of some form of spiritual exercise. Mystical graces included exceptional experiences of God as reported by the mystics. When mystics experienced a total union with God this was considered the exceptional grace of mystical marriage.⁴⁷

Ascetical and Mystical Theology

In the course of the seventeenth century and into the eighteenth century, important scholars of mystical theology became concerned with the question of how the contemplation deemed necessary to perfection came about. Did this contemplation come about primarily through ascetical practices aided by grace? Or, was the contemplation most indicative of union with God the fruit of infused graces? Some authors argued that the spiritual journey consisted most importantly in progressive growth in virtue, achieved certainly through grace, but made possible through the detailed practice of various forms of virtue and mental prayer. The gift of infused contemplation was not essential to perfection. Other authors stressed that union, the most advanced stage of perfection, was only possible through infused contemplation and included extraordinary mystical gifts. These differences in perspective led to a subdivision of mystical theology into two branches. Mystical theology focused on the study of the path to perfection through infused contemplation and the mystical experiences and graces associated with such contemplation, whereas ascetical theology studied the so called ordinary path to perfection through the heroic practice of virtue.⁴⁸ Thus, in the eighteenth century, mystical theology as theological specialty became ascetical and mystical theology.

Spiritual Theology

The end of the nineteenth century saw the beginning of a new focus in the theological study of the journey to perfection with a controversy that lasted into the middle of the twentieth century, and resulted in another shift in the name of the discipline. Scholars questioned the distinction between ascetical and mystical theology, and preferred to call the specialty "spiritual" theology. The debate centered upon questions related to the distinction between acquired contemplation (the experience of union with God based on intentional spiritual exercises and/or ascetical prac-

tices) and infused contemplation (the experience of union with God due to special graces rather than spiritual exercises). Questions such as the following were at the heart of this debate. Is there such a thing as acquired contemplation? Does acquired contemplation represent the dividing line between an ordinary way to perfection and a most perfect, extraordinary way to perfection? Is infused contemplation necessary for perfection?⁴⁹ A full picture of spiritual theology in the first half of the twentieth century would include discussion of the theoretical debates just described and of the various approaches to the writing of systematic manuals;⁵⁰ such a discussion is beyond the scope of this work.

Discussion

As we have seen, through the beginning of the twentieth century mystical, ascetical and spiritual theology had become very narrow, concerned with details about levels of perfection, categories of spiritual exercises and the relationship between perfection and practices. These theological specialties influenced by the philosophical categorizations of scholasticism became arcane speculative disciplines mostly unrelated to the life of ordinary Christians; they developed in parallel rather than in dialogue with more practical works on the spiritual journey such as the influential treatises of Frances de Sales (seventeenth century).⁵¹ Until the second half of the twentieth century when spiritual theology began to change, the methodology and object of study of these theological disciplines had little in common with the contemporary discipline of spirituality. Indeed the narrow object of study contrasts with the broad understanding of spirituality today. As spiritual theology changed in the twentieth century, one can begin to see a connection between some works in this discipline and the contemporary discipline of Christian spirituality. Below I offer a detailed description of two manuals that show the developments in spiritual theology, describing the questions addressed, the theoretical issues treated and the methodology employed. Since spiritual theology has influenced contemporary discussions of method in spirituality, such an account can illuminate the current discussion regarding the relationship between theology and spirituality.

Joseph de Guibert

First, I will discuss the work of Joseph de Guibert, professor of spiritual theology in the second quarter of the twentieth century at the Gregorian University in Rome. He was considered a moderate in the aforementioned theoretical debates,⁵² and one who argued in favor of spiritual theology as the name of the discipline. In his systematic treatise, *The Theology of the Spiritual Life*, de Guibert describes the object of the discipline as the perfection of the Christian life and problems related to this.⁵³ Having argued that spiritual theology is the best description for the disci-

37. On the Song of Songs, Sermon 74.1.1–2. In Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs*, 4 vols. (Kalamazoo: Cistercian, 1979–1983), 4.85–86.
38. Monastic theology has continued to affect Western spirituality into our own day. For example, Thomas Merton who has had a significant influence on contemporary spirituality is deeply influenced by the medieval monastic masters. Contemporary movements such as Contemplative Outreach which seeks to teach centering prayer and an adapted monastic spirituality to ordinary Christians is rooted in monastic theology (see <http://www.centeringprayer.com>).
39. See Leclercq, Vandenbroucke, and Bouyer, *The Spirituality of the Middle Ages*, 229–34.
40. McGinn, *Growth*, 370. For a detailed discussion of Hugh's contribution to theological reflection on mysticism, see *ibid.*, 370–95.
41. Seventeenth century mystical theology dealt with mysticism, a word with broad meaning over the 2,000 years of Christianity; see Wiseman, *Spirituality and Mysticism*, 7–10. Mysticism has also been studied over the centuries in contexts other than Catholic seventeenth century mystical theology. Bernard McGinn gives an overview of the theological study of mysticism in McGinn, *Foundations*, 366–91. "Mystical theology" today can be used to mean theological study based on the spiritual experience of mystics. See for instance, Mark A. McIntosh, *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology*, Challenges in Contemporary Theology (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998).
42. Solignac, "Spiritualité," 1156–57.
43. For a summary of the development of mystical theology from the seventeenth into the twentieth century, see Aimé Solignac et al., "Mystique," *ibid.* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1980).
44. For a summary of Dionysius's spirituality see, McGinn, *Foundations*, 157–82.
45. Solignac et al., "Mystique," 1925–26.
46. See Waaijman, "Toward a Phenomenological Definition of Spirituality," 31–32 for another description in English seventeenth century mystical theologies.
47. This brief summary of terms used is intended for those not familiar with this literature.
48. For a discussion of the term ascetical theology and a summary description of shifts from mystical theology to ascetical and mystical theology, see Solignac et al., "Mystique," 1931–35.
49. The Dominican R. Garrigou-Lagrange exemplified this new perspective. See especially, *Christian Perfection and Contemplation* (St. Louis: Herder, 1947) and *The Three Ages of the Interior Life* (St. Louis: Herder, 1947).
50. For a summary of these debates see, Auguste Soudreau and Charles Baumgartner, "Contemplation," in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1953), 2171–83.
51. See a summary of his teaching in Michael J. Buckley, "Seventeenth-Century French Spirituality," in *Christian Spirituality: Post-Reformation and Modern*, ed. Louis Dupré and Don E. Saliers (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 32–41.
52. Solignac et al., "Mystique," 1937.
53. Joseph de Guibert, *The Theology of the Spiritual Life*, trans. Paul Barrett (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1953), 3.
54. *Ibid.*, 11.
55. *Ibid.*, 42.
56. *Ibid.*, 78–82.
57. *Ibid.*, 82.