

2006

# The Discipline of Christian Spirituality and Catholic Theology

Sandra Marie Schneiders

*Jesuit School of Theology/Graduate Theological Union, [sschneiders@scu.edu](mailto:sschneiders@scu.edu)*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.scu.edu/jst>

 Part of the [Religion Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Schneiders, Sandra Marie "The Discipline of Christian Spirituality and Catholic Theology." In *Exploring Christian Spirituality: Essays in Honor of Sandra M. Schneiders, IHM*. Edited by Bruce H. Lescher and Elizabeth Liebert, 196-212. New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2006.

Copyright © 2006 Paulist Press. Reprinted with permission.

This Book Chapter is brought to you for free and open access by Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Jesuit School of Theology by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact [rscroggin@scu.edu](mailto:rscroggin@scu.edu).

# THE DISCIPLINE OF CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY AND CATHOLIC THEOLOGY

*Sandra M. Schneiders, IHM*

## INTRODUCTION

This essay originated in a request from the spirituality seminar of the Catholic Theological Society of America (CTSA) for a paper to focus its 2006 session on the relationship between theology, as it has traditionally been understood in the academy, and Christian spirituality, as it is the specialized interest of some of its members. The request offered me the stimulus to rethink a subject I have addressed more than once in the past thirty years of trying to help this new field of study articulate its identity and clarify its relationship with other disciplines. Responses to my previous attempts by scholars in the field—who have raised questions about my position, amplified it with considerations from other disciplines and diverse classroom experience, or strenuously disagreed with me—have enlightened me and modified my thinking. So this opportunity to “try again” was welcome, as was the request of the editors of this volume to publish the essay, which would bring it to a wider audience than the CTSA participants. Although I am now writing for an audience that includes non-Catholics and perhaps non-academics, traces of the original concern with Catholic theologians and of the oral form of the original presentation will be discernible. I trust my readers can make the necessary adjustments.

I was asked to provide a starting point for the discussion by addressing the questions, What role does theology as a discipline play in studying spirituality from the perspective of a particular religious tradition? Does theology have a unique role or is it only one discipline among many? I want to begin by raising some questions about this implied dichotomy: “unique” or “only one among many.” It is somewhat like asking whether the account of creation in Genesis is “historical” or “only a myth,” implying that these are the only two choices, that they are necessarily mutually exclusive, and that they involve a choice between hierarchical alternatives. Let us begin by deleting the “only,” which implies that being one among many is something negative. I will contend that theology does indeed play a unique role in the discipline of spirituality if by *unique* we mean not hegemonic or superior but *a role that nothing else plays*. The same, however, could be said of some other disciplines that also play a unique but not hegemonic role in the discipline of Christian spirituality: for example, church history, biblical studies, and the human sciences. So, my short answer to the question would be that theology plays a unique role in the discipline of spirituality as one discipline among others within this interdisciplinary field.<sup>1</sup> However, I would prefer to abandon that question altogether, since it does not get us very far in understanding the identity of spirituality as a field of study or the relationship between spirituality and theology, which is the real question with which we are struggling.

Before offering some suggestions on a reformulated question—namely, How are the two disciplines distinct and how are they related?—I need to make some rather extended preliminary observations.

It is crucial to keep in mind that the term *theology* is used today in the academy in two very different ways, both of which have implications for our understanding of spirituality as an academic discipline. One meaning, which might be called “restrictive” or “exclusive,” refers only to what has come to be called systematic theology, under which cluster a number of subdisciplines such as trinitarian theology, christology, pneumatology, ecclesiology, moral theology, and so on.<sup>2</sup> Spirituality, as it is understood today among many of its practitioners, myself included, is not among

these subdisciplines. In other words, it is not the systematic theology of the spiritual life in the way that trinitarian theology is the systematic theology of the triune God.

The other meaning of the term *theology*, much broader and more inclusive, refers to all confessionally committed religious studies within the Christian tradition. So a theology department at a Catholic or Lutheran university might include not only systematic theology but also biblical studies, church history, pastoral ministry studies, practical theology, world religions, comparative theology, ecumenical theology, theology and aesthetics, and a number of other areas of inquiry. I would suggest that Christian spirituality as an academic discipline, while not a subdiscipline of systematic theology, is a legitimate member of the inclusive household of theology broadly understood as confessionally committed study of reality within a Christian perspective.

A second preliminary remark concerns some hidden or not-so-clandestine misconceptions about the relationship between the disciplines of spirituality and theology, which I hope are disappearing from the horizon but that, for reasons of intellectual hygiene, need to be named and, at least in my view, rejected. It has been suggested, for example, that spirituality is really just “theology done right”; that is, theology done with heart as well as head engaged. Closely related is the suggestion that spirituality is a temporarily useful corrective to a rationalistic and desiccated abstract theology. According to this theory, once theology has relearned to take human experience seriously and has recommitted itself to the ultimately transformative rather than purely academic purpose of theological scholarship, spirituality—like the Communist state—will wither away since it will have done its job. In my opinion these understandings of spirituality as “theology on steroids” or, worse yet, “bad theology in therapy” are neither accurate nor very flattering either to genuine theology (which is neither anemic nor abstractly rationalistic) or to contemporary spirituality. Another theory, equally unflattering, is that spirituality is theology for the intellectually underendowed. A quick perusal of the roster of scholars who today list spirituality as their primary academic location should definitively lay to rest this theory.

While rejecting these hypotheses, which I consider misconceived, we can profit by acknowledging the historical situation to which they indirectly point. Until the High Middle Ages, theology was not equated with dogmatics (the forerunner of systematic theology) and was not divided into subdisciplines such as christology and ecclesiology, nor was it separated from biblical studies or spirituality. All theology was faith seeking understanding; it was also understanding seeking transformation, the transformation of self and world in God through Christ in the power of the Spirit. In other words, theology referred primarily to the global and integrated enterprise of living the spiritual life, and that enterprise was nourished by meditating on the Bible as scripture, thinking clearly and faithfully within and about the tradition, practicing personal prayer, celebrating liturgically within the believing community, and living the life of the Beatitudes that Jesus preached. The theologian was defined as one who prayed truly. Some people, especially bishops and monastics, devoted themselves professionally to this shared Christian enterprise for the sake of their fellow Christians and so were also called, in a more technical sense, theologians. In other words, theology *was* spirituality understood not as an academic discipline but as living faith seeking understanding for the purpose of transformation in Christ. Origen, Antony, Augustine, Gertrude the Great, Hildegard of Bingen, Meister Eckhart, Thomas Aquinas, and Julian of Norwich were theologians in this sense of the word, giants of the spiritual life who were original and articulate teachers and guides of their fellow believers.

There are scholars in both spirituality and theology today who long for the reconstitution in the modern context of this pre-modern integral approach to theology as theoretically reflective and articulate “lived spirituality.” I share their nostalgia for but not their confidence in such a revival. The Enlightenment has happened. Humpty Dumpty, mortarboard and all, has tumbled from the wall and cannot, I am afraid, be put back together again. The multiplication of disciplines defined by distinct material and formal objects and methods of study is a fact of the academy born of, and expressive of, our Western intellectual *Weltanschauung*. I suspect that multi-disciplinarity and inter-disciplinarity are our

characteristic and probably only ways of dealing with the excessive fragmentation that is the downside of the critical revolution. A return to an intellectual and academic unity that characterized an earlier time, however desirable, is probably not really possible.

Finally, as my last introductory remark, I would like to say that, just as the term *theology* has both an exclusive meaning and an inclusive meaning, *spirituality* is also a term used in two quite different ways. The first and inclusive referent of the term *spirituality* is the *lived experience* of the faith.<sup>3</sup> But the referent we are discussing here is spirituality as the *academic discipline* which studies that lived experience. In the description just given of the patristic-medieval unity of theology and spirituality, it was the first meaning of spirituality, the lived experience of the faith, which was functioning. Spirituality as an academic discipline did not arise until some centuries after the breakup of the medieval synthesis, and the emergence of dogmatic theology as an academic discipline with subdivisions. When spirituality did begin to be considered a domain of academic discourse, it was understood as a subdiscipline of dogmatic theology, which, I have already suggested, is not the case today.

It is too cumbersome to keep repeating these distinctions explicitly, but conceptual slippage between the two meanings of each term, *theology* and *spirituality*, subverts the attempt at clear discourse on this topic. In other words, it is simply misleading to talk about the relation between theology and spirituality because the real question is, What is the relationship of *systematic* theology to spirituality *as an academic discipline*? Is spirituality, on the one hand, a subdiscipline of systematic theology or even one way of viewing or approaching systematic theology or, on the other hand, is spirituality a relatively autonomous discipline in the large household of confessionally committed study of reality from a Christian perspective?<sup>4</sup> And if it is the latter, which I think is the case, what role does systematic theology play in the work of this relatively new discipline and, conversely, what role does the discipline of spirituality play in the work of systematic theology?

## DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY AND SPIRITUALITY AS ACADEMIC DISCIPLINES

As philosophy has long known, genuine relationship requires distinction in the service not of separation or alienation but of a union that is neither absorption nor subordination. Appropriate boundaries, including intellectual ones, are both defining limits and points of fruitful contact. So our first order of business is to distinguish between theology in the strict sense and spirituality as an academic discipline. I would like to concentrate on two areas in which the differences between the two are especially important but in different ways: the *object of study of each discipline*, which first distinguishes and then relates them to each other, and the *approach to the study of each object*, which first relates and then distinguishes them.

### The Object of Study: Distinctions Which Relate

Theology as a discipline seeks to mediate the faith as it has been formulated in the classical loci—that is, scripture; the creedal, dogmatic, and liturgical traditions; and the history of the Church<sup>5</sup>—into the contemporary religio-cultural situation, which is ever-changing.<sup>6</sup> For example, as post-Newtonian science has revolutionized cosmology, theologians are striving to rethink the traditional understandings of creation, christology, and soteriology. As feminism has challenged the patriarchal construction of intellectual and social reality, theologians are challenged to rethink traditional trinitarian theology, the christological and ministerial implications of the maleness of Jesus, theological anthropology, moral theology, and ecclesiology. Psychology and psychoanalysis have raised similar issues for moral theology. And so on. A privileged tool of theology in its elaboration of the understanding of the faith has, traditionally, been philosophy.<sup>7</sup> As modern and postmodern philosophies have multiplied, and as linguistic-literary modes of reflection have gained a certain ascendancy in the academy, the ways in which theologians interrogate and interpret the faith tradition have also diversified. But the object of the-

ology—faith as the thematically formulated response to revelation that has been transmitted in the Church, in relation to faith as it is currently being lived in particular contexts—remains constant.

Spirituality as an academic discipline has a different, though related, object. Spirituality's primary object is not the *formulated tradition* as it illuminates and is illuminated by the lived experience of the faith, but the *lived experience* of the faith itself. I and others in the field have sometimes expressed this as a concern with religious experience *as* experience, a formulation which has sometimes given rise to the misunderstanding of the discipline of spirituality as the attempt to discern what constitutes religious experience; to analyze the nature, structure, and dynamics of religious experience as such; and/or to develop criteria of validity for religious experience. Perhaps it would help to clarify the object if, instead of speaking of studying experience, we use Paul Ricoeur's expression and call spirituality the study of the religious particular or of "the individual."<sup>8</sup> By individual or quasi-individual, Ricoeur goes beyond a particular human subject, like Teresa of Avila. His usage would include distinct religious movements such as the sixteenth-century Carmelite reform in Spain, or events such as Teresa's conversion,<sup>9</sup> or the experience of a particular group such as the life in the Convent of the Incarnation in Avila at the time of Teresa's conversion, or practices such as Teresa's own mode of prayer.<sup>10</sup>

Obviously, no one has direct access to any experience except perhaps one's own and many would maintain we do not even have direct, but only mediated, access to our own subjectivity. But in any case, we could all agree that we do not, because we cannot, study "raw" or immediate experience, that is, experience prior to interpretation and expression, if indeed such a thing exists (which I doubt). We access experience through its expression in "texts" broadly understood. Such texts may be written documents such as biographies, autobiographies, poetry, journals, and histories; literary, plastic, and musical artistic creations; conversations and other oral presentations; accounts of dreams and visions and prayers; works, movements, and whatever else serves to make personal experience inter-subjectively available: that is,



to exteriorize it into the public forum. But the texts of interest to scholars of spirituality are texts that mediate the particular as particular rather than the texts that thematize and formulate, however tentatively, the tradition.

An extended example might help to clarify the difference I am suggesting between a research project in theology and one in spirituality. Both the scholar of spirituality and the theologian might be studying *conversion* and both might be focusing on the actual conversion of a particular person, say Teresa of Avila. The theologian's primary interest is in the phenomenon of conversion itself, of which Teresa's experience is a particularly interesting instance. What are the conditions of possibility of conversion? What precipitates it? What are its nature, structure, dynamics? Are there different kinds of conversion? What are its effects? Are there criteria of validity that distinguish genuine from ersatz conversion? The theologian may be drawing on biblical material, such as Paul's conversion recounted by Luke in Acts 9:1–19 in comparison with Paul's own account in Galatians 1:1–17; or on psychological analysis, such as William James supplies in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*;<sup>11</sup> or on theological analysis, such as Bernard Lonergan's theory of conversion.<sup>12</sup> Theological anthropology, the theology of grace, and other theoretical material will undoubtedly play a part. But even if the theologian is focusing on the conversion of Teresa of Avila, the theologian is seeing that particular personal event as an instance of a theological category, namely, religious conversion. The theological tradition will be used to analyze and judge Teresa's experience as it is recounted in her autobiography, while Teresa's experience of conversion may raise new questions to the theological tradition's understanding of this reality, helping to refine the tradition or enrich it. The theologian will be asking such questions as, Was this really a conversion? In what sense? Or was it simply an experience of profound repentance? And what is the distinction between conversion and repentance? Is a fundamental restructuring of consciousness à la Lonergan and as verified in Paul essential to conversion in the strict sense of the term? Was Teresa's conversion primarily intellectual or affective? And so on. What the theologian is seeking is a deeper and more adequate under-

standing of conversion itself by relating the theological data on the subject to a particularly striking instance of conversion from the history of spirituality.

The spirituality scholar is going to approach the same subject matter, Teresa's conversion experience recounted in her autobiography, differently and for different purposes. The object is not to understand conversion but to understand Teresa's conversion experience specifically. The focus is precisely on the "individual": that is, the particular experience of conversion as it occurred in the life of Teresa. This event in Teresa's experience is being interrogated not as a particular instance of a general category—that is, conversion—but precisely as an ingress into Teresa's particular and personal lived experience of faith—that is, her spirituality—in which her conversion is a particularly significant moment. It is not primarily conversion, but the religious experience of Teresa, that is the object of inquiry. Consequently, primary importance will be given to her historical, cultural, and religious context; her biography up to and after the experience; her autobiographical description and analysis of it; the theological, religious, and literary resources she had (or did not have) for interpreting her experience; the contribution that depth, developmental, or archetypal psychology can bring to an understanding of the dynamics of Teresa's experience; her aesthetic formation, which made the precipitating encounter with the statue so powerful for her; the effects on her consciousness of contemporary attitudes toward women as well as her own originality in regard to the feminine in relation to God; and so on. Theological and philosophical material on conversion may well figure in the interrogation of Teresa's conversion experience, especially if the study raises questions about her God-image, her theology of suffering, and her understanding of Church and ecclesial authority. But theology may or may not be the primary tool of analysis, and it is not the purpose of the study to understand better the theology of conversion or to directly contribute to the theology of conversion (although both of these might occur). The point of the study is to understand Teresa of Avila's experience of God, her spirituality, as it gave rise to, shaped, and was shaped by this experience.

So, is theology integral to this project in spirituality? Yes. Is the study primarily theological? Not necessarily. Theology is integral to any research project in Christian spirituality, as is biblical material and church history, not because the project is a study in spirituality but because it is a study in *Christian* spirituality and all Christian faith experience is suffused with and embedded in the theological tradition of the Church. Teresa's conversion, in other words, was not Buddhist enlightenment or psychological healing but a personally revolutionizing *prise de conscience* in Christ. So theology is relevant and integral to the research. But because it was a profound psychological experience, psychological theory is also integral to the project. Because her experience of conversion is mediated to us in a historically conditioned literary text, the history of sixteenth-century Spain and of the literary genre of autobiography are also relevant and integral. Because Teresa was a woman in a patriarchal Church and culture, feminist analysis is crucial. Because her experience of conversion precipitated a major religious movement, namely, the reform of the Carmelite Order, the history of religious life in the period of the Reformation is important. And so on. Which of these many disciplines, and perhaps others not mentioned, will more or less govern the research project depends on the purposes of the researcher. Someone primarily interested in the way gender affects religious experience will shape her study of Teresa's conversion one way. Someone interested in how literary genre and rhetorical agenda shape religious experience will construct his study differently. Someone defending the authenticity of Teresa's experience against theological skeptics might rely more on theology than someone interested in the role of aesthetic sensibility in religious experience.

In summary of this point, the object of study in theology may be either some topic or category of Christian tradition itself, for example, Christ's humanity or religious conversion, or some problem like the possibility of a just war or the meaning of salvation; and it may then be focused by some particular event like the emergence of the new cosmology, or Teresa's conversion, or the war in Iraq, or the recognition of the fact of religious pluralism. But the point is, finally, to understand the tradition itself better in

order to integrate our experience and the tradition in a coherent and developing way.

The point of the study of spirituality, however, is to understand the religious experience as and in the “individual” or particular, whether that is an individual person, like Teresa; an individual movement, like Benedictinism; an individual commitment, like Martin Luther King’s nonviolence; an individual charism, like Francis of Assisi’s stigmata; an individual devotion, like that of Edward Taylor to the Lord’s Supper; or an individual aspect of Christian life, like work. The purpose is finally to understand the particular as well as we can in order to expand and enrich our grasp of the relationship of humans with God, which is always an interpersonal and social encounter and, as relationship, is never “general.” One might say, by way of analogy, that there are two ways to study humanity: one way is by studying what anthropology, psychology, sociology, and history teach us about human nature in order to relate this knowledge to actual humans; another is by studying concrete human beings in person and through literature and the other arts in order to understand more fully what humanity means. These approaches are not exclusive of one another nor unrelated to each other. Indeed they should be mutually enlightening. But in the first case, the object is to expand our *theoretical knowledge* of humanity so that we might understand actual humans better and be more adequate in our treatment of them. In the second case the object is to expand our knowledge of the *concrete experience* of being human so that, among other things, our theoretical formulations are more adequate to their subject matter.

In short, one might say that the “knowing” aimed at by theology is primarily conceptual, arrived at through the study of formulated expressions of the tradition in the classical and contemporary loci, and eventually expressed in second-order language that has applicability beyond the individual case. The “knowing” aimed at by spirituality is primarily personal and arrived at through the multidisciplinary analysis of thick description of the individual that remains concrete and specific even as it gives rise to constructive results that have, ideally, broad implications. Theology probably has more in common with philosophy,

while spirituality has more in common with psychology or art criticism. In any case, it is probably as futile to try to eliminate all overlap between the two disciplines as it is to try to distinguish absolutely between systematic theology and historical theology, or between biblical criticism and biblical theology. A research project in spirituality is recognized not only by what it studies but by the way it is conceptualized, constructed, and prosecuted, and by the kinds of knowledge in which it results.

### Approach to Study: Relationship Which Distinguishes

Let me turn more briefly to a second point of relationship and distinction between the two disciplines, namely, approach. Increasingly systematic theology understands itself as a hermeneutical and constructive enterprise rather than a deductive or even inductive science. Theology attempts to interpret the texts and traditions of Christianity in critical dialogue with the culture in which it is lived today, realizing that theological discourse is itself part of culture and therefore not fully separable from it. It seeks what Gadamer calls a fusion of horizons between the Christian faith tradition as thematized in theological loci and the cultural situation in which that tradition is lived and of which it is a part. The academic discipline of spirituality in its contemporary incarnation is also a hermeneutical enterprise. It seeks to interpret concrete and individual instances of the living of Christian faith as these are mediated to us in particular texts, practices, art objects, and so on. It seeks a fusion of horizons between the world of the scholar and the individual phenomenon being studied.

I would suggest, by way of hypothesis, that though both theology and spirituality are concerned with the *fusion of horizons* that Gadamer described, Ricoeur's notion of *appropriation* is realized differently in the two fields precisely because the object of study in one case is accessed through a body of thematized knowledge, and aims at ever-more-adequate second-order discourse, and in the other case is accessed through expressions of the particular, and aims at knowledge of the individual. The fully engaged theo-

logian does not simply interpret the tradition objectively for the benefit of readers or listeners, but also appropriates what he or she illuminates as personal, existential—that is, spiritual—augmentation. In other words, appropriation for the theologian is, ideally and ultimately, not only increased knowledge but deepened personal spirituality or engagement with God. The fully engaged scholar of spirituality does not simply interpret concrete examples of human encounter with God but also understands this encounter as a particular participation in a living tradition that these individuals incarnate and mediate. In other words, appropriation for the scholar of spirituality means not only increased knowledge of the divine-human relationship but also enriched and deepened existential participation in the tradition in its contemporary realization.

## CONCLUSION

By way of conclusion, I have my doubts about how much time and energy we should spend on trying to establish absolute, clear-cut differences between theology done well in the service of the faith life of the Church, and spirituality done well as theologically responsible study of the actual experience of living faith in the Church. Distinctions are indeed necessary, especially until it becomes clearer to all concerned that the contemporary discipline of spirituality is not an attempt to resuscitate the corpse of what was once called spiritual theology.<sup>13</sup> That version of theology of the spiritual life, exemplified by such works as Adophe Tanquerey's treatise on ascetical and mystical theology, was an effort to abstract from concrete religious experience a generalized "scientific" theory of the spiritual life generated by and expressed in the categories of dogmatic theology.<sup>14</sup> From this dogmatic theory could be deduced what the spiritual life should consist in and how, ideally, it should function. It was understood as a subdivision of moral theology, itself subordinate to dogmatics, and assumed to be applicable to all believers with allowances made for minor idiosyncrasies. It had a (non)relationship to real spirituality analogous to the relationship of what was once called

rational psychology (which was really philosophical anthropology) to the psychic experience of real people as studied today by psychologists. I would suggest that systematic theology today does not play this defining and normative role in the contemporary discipline of spirituality, but that does not imply that theology is dispensable or unimportant to the new discipline.

Conversation on the relation of systematic theology to spirituality as an academic discipline would probably be facilitated if the theological participants could lay to rest any suspicion that spirituality as a discipline is either poaching on their territory or denigrating their work as intellectually abstract or spiritually vacuous. By the same token, scholars of spirituality need to renounce the suspicion that theology is trying to subjugate, supplant, or appropriate their field. Spirituality belongs in the theological household not as a dependent or minor but as a mature member of the family, distinct from but closely related to systematic theology as well as to other theological disciplines.

We may be witnessing yet another chapter in the story that began when biblical studies decided it did not need a theological "tutor," the natural sciences decided they did not want a "queen," and philosophy decided it was no longer interested in being a "handmaid." Mutuality among equals is a better model for productive conversation than rivalry, hegemony, or absorption. The more the members of the theological household talk to each other rather than at or past or down to each other, the richer the intellectual (and spiritual) fare the academy will be able to offer to contemporary seekers. Systematic theology is a critical participant in the work of spirituality studies, and spirituality as a discipline has much to offer to systematic theology. Both have much to offer to and much to learn from ethics, church history, practical theology, non-Christian religions, and their other colleagues in the theological academy. Furthermore, as in any healthy family, each member will also have partners and friends from outside the household that may or may not be equally interesting or attractive to other members of the family. I lament the fate of theological Humpty Dumpty, but his demise has bequeathed us a vastly expanded and diversified field of inquiry and challenged us to live in a wider interdisciplinary world. In my view, whatever the dan-

gers of fragmentation or the frustrations of difficult communication, the contemporary adventure—intellectual and spiritual as well as social and religious—is more interesting and rewarding than life in the ghetto or even in a theoretically better ordered academy.

## Notes

1. When I speak of “spirituality” or “theology” in this essay, unless otherwise specified, I mean Christian spirituality and Christian theology.

2. In some circles, notably more conservative settings, this branch of theology is still called *dogmatic theology*, emphasizing the prescriptive, positive, and normative understanding of theology. In more liberal settings, including most major Catholic academic settings today, the preferred term is *systematic theology*, emphasizing the hermeneutical, critical, and constructive character of the enterprise.

3. I have attempted in other places to define this primary meaning of spirituality in a more nuanced way: namely, as I have said in other articles and presentations, “the experience of conscious involvement in the project of life-integration through self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives.” This more descriptive definition rules out certain misunderstandings of spirituality (for example, social organizations like Nazism) while, by not specifying it religiously (for example, as Christian), allowing for interreligious discussion of spirituality as well as consideration of nonreligious spiritualities such as ecospirituality or some forms of feminist spirituality. However, for the purposes of this essay, the briefer and more general definition will do.

4. We should recognize that all disciplines are only relatively autonomous. The increasingly interdisciplinary character of most research today constitutes a questioning in practice of the Enlightenment model of nonoverlapping, radically distinct disciplines.

5. The history of the Church is an ever-expanding category. Scholars today would want to include in their understanding of history the artistic traditions (music, painting, architecture, etc.), as well as established spiritual traditions (for



example, Benedictinism), as well as the Church's ongoing self-definition through the relationships it has established by treaties, concordats, and so on with various and changing political and cultural contexts. And historians are increasingly challenged to incorporate the previously excluded data of "heterodox" material and the experience of marginalized or oppressed groups in their discourse.

6. I am avoiding the term *critical correlation*, although I continue to find it one helpful way of conceptualizing the work of theology because there are other valid ways of understanding theology today and I do not want to get into that discussion here.

7. For Catholic theology, the Platonic-Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophical tradition was considered virtually normative (although it was never exclusive, for example, among Franciscan theologians) until the first half of the twentieth century. Protestant theology was never as dependent on a single system but philosophy, since the Middle Ages, has played a role in theological exposition.

8. See Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University, 1976), 78–79.

9. Teresa of Avila recounts her experience of conversion when she was confronted with a statue of the "Ecce Homo" in *The Book of Her Life* in *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, vol. 1, translated by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1976), ch. 9, pp. 100–101, with considerable detail about her spiritual condition prior to the event and subsequent to it.

10. For example, Teresa gives extensive teaching on the subject of prayer, its stages, the phenomena that characterize the stages, and so on, in both the *Life* and *The Interior Castle* in *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, vol. 2, translated by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1980), 263–451, notes pp. 480–99. But she also describes in detail her own individual experiences in prayer. The two are, of course, related. She says explicitly that in speaking about mental prayer, for example, "I can speak of what I have experience of" (*Life*, chap. 8, p. 96). But in the case of her teach-

ing about prayer, she is dealing with material applicable to different people in different ways, whereas in speaking of her own experience with all its particularities and idiosyncrasies, she is describing “the individual” or her “experience as experience” rather than as an instance of the general, even though she knows it is such.

11. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, introd. by Eugene Kennedy (New York: Triumph, 1991). [Originally the Gifford Lectures delivered at Edinburgh in 1901–02 and published by Longmans, Green.]

12. A brief presentation of Lonergan’s theory of self-transcendence or progressive conversion is available in “Self-transcendence: Intellectual, Moral, Religious” in *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan: Philosophical and Theological Papers 1965–1980*, edited by Robert C. Croken and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 313–30.

13. It should be recognized that some contemporary scholars who name their area of specialization “spiritual theology” are not using the term the way it was used from the late-eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century, especially in Catholic circles.

14. Adophe Tanquerey, *The Spiritual Life: A Treatise on Ascetical and Mystical Theology*, 2nd and rev. ed., trans. by Herman Branderis (Tournai: Desclée, [Society of St. John the Evangelist], 1932).