

Spirituality: Ways of Walking with Christ and of Coming to Christ

Klaus Vellguth

One of the most famous Coptic icons is “Christ and Saint Menas”. It originally came from the Monastery of Apollo at Bawit near Antioch in central Egypt, a monastic establishment which was founded in the fourth century and continued until the 12th century. The icon was discovered around 1900 during excavation works among the ruins of this ancient and traditional monastery. The original is kept at the Louvre, but the icon became known in the last quarter of the 20th century when a copy was put on display in a church by the Ecumenical Community of Taizé, where it appealed to a large number of people, especially the younger generation.²²⁶ The icon, which originally comes from the African continent, clearly expresses a truth that has been held about the relationship between spirituality and Christ since the Early Church.

“Apa Menas” – visible in faint shiny lettering in the top left-hand corner – tells us who is depicted on the icon. Menas, a third-century soldier during the reign of the Emperor Diocletian (284-305) was beheaded for his faith and later venerated as a martyr. What is so striking about this icon from the Monastery of Apollo is the way in which the martyr is depicted. Whereas most iconographers show him either as a soldier on horseback or praying between two camels, this icon shows him standing next to Christ. The word “Apa” means “father”, and Menas is also described as a “principal” on the icon, as he was the first abbot of the Monastery of Apollo. Others, meanwhile, saw him as a spiritual father who had greatly inspired them. Christ is shown standing next to Menas and in slightly stronger colours, wearing an imperial purple robe and bearing a Gospel richly adorned

²²⁶ Cf. Sauter, H., *Bilder des Lebens – Ikonen als Antworten auf heutige Glaubensfragen*, Vienna 2012, 206f. Cf. also Wegner, J., *Bibel Intensiv Kolleg Neues Testament*, Kassel 2012, 150f.

with precious stones. One important key to understanding this icon is the position of the two characters' hands. Menas is pointing to Christ with his right hand, while Christ's right hand rests on the abbot's shoulder in a gesture of friendship. It is very much because of these postures that the icon became known under the title "Christ et son ami". Hanns Sauter says: "Friendship here means more than a deep relationship between two individuals or an honourable title – "Friend of the Emperor" – bestowed by Roman emperors on commendable men or on favourites. In the New Testament, Abraham is described as a 'friend of God' (James 2:23) because of his faith and unwavering trust in the Lord. 'Friend of God' is, therefore, a statement about a person's faith. It describes someone who, in all situations, unswervingly maintains the conviction that God is with him and will save him even when he – like Abraham – reaches his limits."²²⁷ The icon picks up this Old Testament account of profound trust in God so strikingly exemplified by Abraham. However, it relates the account not (merely) to a remote and otherworldly God but to a God in the here-and-now who desires to be close to people and who, through Jesus Christ, has a human face. The iconographer wrote the words "Jesus, Saviour" in the top right-hand corner, indicating that Menas had found his friend and Saviour in Christ. The position of Christ's hand, however, indicates very clearly what the painter meant by spiritual companionship: it is Christ who comes alongside a spiritually hungry person. He Himself is a spiritual companion for Christians (see Luke 24:15).²²⁸ What the icon conveys to us is precisely this experience of Christ as a reliable companion and Saviour. As a medium, the icon thus acquires a specific meaning and has lost none of its relevance right up to the present day. This is especially true in our media age with its significant transformation resulting from a focus on iconic imagery. Given that a large part of our information is now conveyed through images²²⁹, depictions of Christ can serve "as imagery in mission-focused outreach and as a way to engage more intensively, more creatively, more pur-

²²⁷ Sauter, H., *Bilder des Lebens – Ikonen als Antworten auf heutige Glaubensfragen*, Vienna 2012, 208.

²²⁸ Cf. Kiessling, K., *Geistliche Begleitung*, Göttingen 2010, 237.

²²⁹ Cf. Huber, H. D., Lockemann, B. and Scheibel, M. (eds.), *Bild Medien Wissen – Visuelle Kompetenz im Medienzeitalter*, Munich 2002. Clausberg, C., Bisanz, E./Weiller, C., eds., *Ausdruck – Ausstrahlung – Aura – Synästhesien der Beseelung im Medienzeitalter*, Bad Honnef 2006.

posefully and more broadly with people and with representatives of our culture".²³⁰ In the third millennium such imagery can help us bear witness to the Christian faith through the specific analogue qualities that characterise all images.

In this paper an exploration of the distinctive features of a Christ-focused spirituality will be preceded by an examination of whether – at the onset of the third millennium, at a time of diminishing denominational loyalties – there is any spiritual hunger at all in Germany and, indeed, in Western European societies in general.

Spiritual longing

In 2008, the Bertelsmann Foundation published what it called a Religious Monitor, a worldwide project in which it evaluated religiousness in the context of globalisation.²³¹ Probably the most extensive study of its kind on religiousness in different countries, it was intended as an interdisciplinary analysis tool, looking at religious dimensions within society. The analysis covered not only sociological aspects but also cultural and theological dimensions. To gauge the religiousness of populations in different countries, the study identified six core dimensions of religiousness: intellect, faith/ideology, public practice, private practice, religious experience and consequences. One central conclusion of the Religious Monitor was that the Christian faith continues to leave its stamp on Europe. About three-quarters of Europeans (74 per cent) in the countries surveyed were religious and a quarter (25 per cent) even described as highly religious. Only 23 per cent of Europeans saw themselves as non-religious. Moreover, the various Christian denominations turned out to be so dominant that the researchers decided not to draw any representative conclusions about other religions, as there were not enough cases. The study showed very clearly that religiousness is particularly prevalent in areas of intellectual discourse, in studies on faith and in reflections upon one's own religiousness. Furthermore, it was found that reli-

²³⁰ Oetterer, P., "Seht, da ist der Mensch" (John 19:5), in: *Pastoralblatt* 64 (2010) 6, 163-169, 164.

²³¹ Bertelsmann-Stiftung (ed.), *Religionsmonitor 2008 – Überblick zu religiösen Einstellungen und Praktiken*, Gütersloh 2008. On this section see also Vellguth, K., "Wie religiös ist Europa? Reflexionen zur religiösen Situation in Europa", in: Borras, A. / Bressau, L, eds., *Pourquoi proposer la foi? Séduit par Dieu, fascinés par l'Évangile. Actes du 25ème colloque Européen des Paroisses. Mons, du 5 au 10 juillet 2009, Cahiers internationaux de Théologie Pratique, série Actes n° 3*, Louvain-la-Nueve 2012, 15-23.

giousness is marked by individual religious practices such as prayer and other patterns of theist spirituality. As a result, people in Europe see themselves as being both religious and spiritual, i.e. they have a religious or spiritual self-image. The conclusions of the Religious Monitor were not the random results of isolated studies, but largely matched those of other studies conducted in parallel. Two studies, in particular, should be mentioned in this context: "Kehrt die Religion wieder?" (Is Religion Coming Back?)²³² and "Church and Religion in an Enlarged Europe".²³³ These studies on different levels of religiousness in society show, however, that people in Europe are less interested in religious faith as an intellectual starting point. Rather, they seek forms of religiousness that will give them existential foundations for their lives. The experiential dimension of religion is rated more highly than the doctrinal dimension; what people are longing for is not "orthodoxy" but "orthotherapy" – an experience of faith that touches their own lives and brings healing. This prioritisation should not come as a surprise. The primacy of an experience of faith over an abstract knowledge of faith was pointed out some time ago by Karl Rahner: "Although experience as such and the conceptually objectifying reflection of such an experience are never completely separate, neither are these two dimensions – experience and objectifying reflection – ever identical. Reflection can never catch up completely with authentic experience."²³⁴

People yearning for faith long for a religious experience that gives them orientation in their daily lives in the face of increasingly confusing complexity. This new yearning for a spiritual anchor at the beginning of the third millennium can be seen as a reaction to the changes brought about by post-modernism, in which the individual experiences an environment without fixtures and where everything is in a state of flux: "When everything ends up in the whirlwind of coincidence and randomness, there is a growing desire for ultimate certainties and authoritative truths. At a time when there is much talk about the 'dictatorship of relativism' there is a renewed quest for the

²³² Zulehner, P. M./Hager I. /Polak, R., *Kehrt die Religion wieder? Religion im Leben der Menschen 1970-2000*, Ostfildern 2001.

²³³ *Church and Religion in an Enlarged Europe* 2006. The project is funded by the Volkswagen Foundation and is being conducted by the Chair of Comparative Cultural Sociology at the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt an der Oder.

²³⁴ Rahner, K., "Vortrag an der Katholischen Akademie Koblenz vom 22.10.1969", published in: *Schriften zur Theologie*, vol. IX, Einsiedeln 1970, 161-176.

absolute.”²³⁵ It is this yearning which can lead to a Christ-centred spirituality. In view of social developments in Europe, however, it may be unrealistic to expect such spiritual searches to take place primarily or, indeed, exclusively within the churches. At the beginning of the third millennium it is a sign of the times that spiritual searches in Europe occur outside the established churches. Incidentally, this is also a challenge to the self-image of a church as it seeks to define what forms part of it and what does not (not to mention the question of how “church” itself should actually be defined). Nevertheless, when we look at the question of the relationship between spirituality and Christology, this situation may even represent an opportunity. On the one hand, people within the Church can embark on a journey involving the development of a Christ-focused spirituality. On the other hand, they can also – apparently independently of the Church – seek to get close to Christ without being obstructed by the Church’s structures, teachings and failures or, indeed, by its sheer existence.²³⁶

Orthodoxy: images of Christ and spirituality

Before enquiring into a given Christ-focused spirituality we need to ask what image a person has of Jesus Christ. Or, to put it biblically: How does a person respond to Jesus’ question: “Who do people say I am?” (Mark 8:27). There are numerous different answers to this question in the Christian tradition, each of them with its own nuance. Christ is the “Son of God” (Mark 1:1), the “God” (Philippians 2:11), “the high priest” (Hebrews 4:14-16), the “Son of man” (Matthew 19:28), the “crucified Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:2.1f.), the “Messiah” (John 1:41), the “Saviour” (John 4:42), etc. All these – analogous – images are attempts to express something in anthropomorphic speech that really goes beyond the limitations of language, while at the same time meeting our human need to put it into words so that we can communicate it.²³⁷

²³⁵ Fuchs, G., “Zwischen Wellness und Weisheit – Neue Begeisterung für die Mystik”, in: *HK spezial, Renaissance der Religion – Mode oder Megathema?*, November 2006, 32-36, 34.

²³⁶ It does remain questionable, however, whether it is really possible for someone to come to Christ independently of the Church. Ultimately, any concepts of Christ and any religious ideas that currently exist in any of the various cultures have been substantially influenced by the Church or its representatives. If such concepts are taken over on the understanding that they are independent of the Church, then a given process of inculturation only has the appearance of happening outside the Church. In reality those concepts actually originate from and were moulded by the Church.

²³⁷ The reason why this is linguistically impossible is that when we talk about Christ, we establish semantic references which are semantically plausible but ultimately cannot be verified.

The images of Christ that people have used have always differed from age to age, from one context to another and from person to person. On the one hand, this shows that Christ is clearly the one who is so strikingly at the centre of the Gospels; on the other hand – and this is an epistemological challenge – he is also the one whom we seek to discover in the Gospels. We tend to be rather quick in using an image of Christ that reinforces our own position or which confirms our own self-image. In our Christological reflections, therefore, it is all the more important not to resort to our own pre-fabricated imagery and prejudices and to refrain from turning our faith into an ideology. Instead, we should consciously accept the challenge of unfamiliar images of Christ, as such images may broaden our own – necessarily limited – view and understanding of Christ. “Otherness” thus becomes a learning experience and an opportunity to widen our understanding and our own relationship with Christ. After all, it is precisely through the “category of otherness or the recognition of otherness, together with a quest for dialogue, that we give equal dignity to all those involved. This must include matters of faith, which belong to the most sacred spheres of human existence. Such an attitude is an essential mark of the new missionary principles of cultural and religious empathy and thus of peaceful coexistence, acceptance and cooperation.”²³⁸

What may be helpful here is a conscious look at different theological contexts in which Christians view Christ from different perspectives. Asian Christians let themselves be inspired by their own religious context and, based on their understanding of Christ, ask questions that are influenced by their own cultural and religious context. This leads them towards answers that would be unthinkable in any other contexts. It does not mean that they absorb the faith tenets or beliefs of other religions into the Christian faith. They do, in fact, make a distinction between transferable and non-transferable facets of faith. The Indian theologian Michael Amaladoss, for instance, clearly distinguishes between two sets of symbols and characters: on the one hand, there are the familiar symbols and characters from Hinduism – e.g. Krishna, Rama and Shiva – characters who are inextricably linked with that context. On the other hand, however, Amaladoss also

²³⁸ Susin, L. C., “Jesus: ein ‘Ort’ um zu leben”, in: Bünker, A./ Mundaohn, E./Weckel, L. / Suermann, T., eds., *Gerechtigkeit und Pfingsten – Viele Christentümer und die Aufgabe einer Missionswissenschaft*, Ostfildern 2010, 113-132, 130.

emphasises that it would be inappropriate to apply those names and symbols to Jesus.²³⁹ Yet he also points out that the cultural context of Hinduism contains symbols which are equally open to followers of other religions, and – speaking from an Asian perspective – he therefore describes Jesus as the teacher of ethics, the *avatar*, the *satyagrahi*, the *advaitin*, the *bodhisattva*, the wise man, the *guru*, the servant, the fellow-sufferer and the dancer.²⁴⁰ Indian theology, in particular, can teach us openness and help us to derive inspiration from other religions in our image of Christ so that we can discover ever new facets of Jesus as the unique incarnation of God.²⁴¹ For instance, a group of Indian theologians once commented on the broadening of their own Christology as follows: “We acknowledge with gratitude that our experience of the incarnate Jesus leads us to discover the cosmic dimension of the presence and efficacy of the Word. We are aware that we must ‘neither mix nor separate’ these different manifestations of the Word in history or in different cultures or religions. On the one hand, we joyfully confess our own experience of the Word in Jesus; on the other, we endeavour to relate openly and positively to other manifestations of the Word, as they, too, are part of a divine mystery.”²⁴²

Separate Christologies also developed in Africa where they have their own “dignity of otherness”. After the missionary Placide Tempel had published his Bantu philosophy in the mid-20th century, African theologians such as Engelbert Mveng and Vincent Mulago outspokenly opposed forms of Christianity that were one-sidedly limited to Western perspectives. Instead, they insisted that it was both possible and necessary to use African cultural and religious ‘points of contact’ to convey Christian truths”.²⁴³ This is why African Christologies describe Christ, for instance, as the chief²⁴⁴, the

²³⁹ Cf. Amaladoss, M., *Jesus neu sehen – Indische Denkanstöße*, Freiburg 2010, 16f.

²⁴⁰ Cf. Amaladoss, M., *The Asian Jesus*, Maryknoll 2006.

²⁴¹ Amaladoss, M., *Das indische Verständnis Jesu*, in: Augustin, G./Krämer, K./Schulze, M. eds., *Mein Herr und mein Gott – Christus bekennen und verkünden*, FS Walter Kasper, Freiburg 2013, 523-539.

²⁴² D’Lima, E./Gonsalves, M., eds., Bangalore 1999.

²⁴³ Moerschbacher, M., *Christologien in Afrika*, in: Augustin, G./Krämer, K./Schulze, M. eds., *Mein Herr und mein Gott – Christus bekennen und verkünden*, FS Walter Kasper, Freiburg 2013, 572-586, 573f.

²⁴⁴ Cf. Kabasélé, F., *Christus als Häuptling*, in: *Der schwarze Christus – Wege afrikanischer Christologie*, Freiburg 1989, 57-72.

ancestor, the elder²⁴⁵, the master of initiation²⁴⁶, the healer²⁴⁷, the liberator²⁴⁸ etc. In the future there will be other Christologies that have been impacted by African cultures, helping Christians towards a richer understanding of God's incarnation in Christ. In respect of African theologies Marco Moerschbacher predicts that "What we are seeing now is merely the beginning of a period in which major directions are being set in Christological terms."²⁴⁹

At the founding event of the Association des Théologiens Africains in 2007 Anselme Titianma Sanon from Burkina Faso advocated a bottom-up Christology in which the hermeneutical approach is based on the people of Africa and conveys to them the aspect of liberation. In calling for a liberation Christology he showed that contextually different cultures can bring forth similar Christologies. This may happen either in parallel or at different times, and one would need to ask in each case whether such a Christology has developed independently or whether there has been some mutual impact. During the second half of the 20th century²⁵⁰ a liberation theology developed in Latin America whereby Christ was primarily seen as the liberator. It was a period which can be described as a revival of contextual Christologies throughout the southern hemisphere. Commenting on the hermeneutical rationale of this contextual Christology, Leonardo Boff says: "Jesus Christ can only be referred to as the liberator under one specific condition. Liberation is inversely proportional to

²⁴⁵ Cf. Nyamiti, C., *Theologe aus Tansania*, in: *Forum Weltkirche* (2007) 1, 29-32; Nyamiti, C., "Jesus Christ, the ancestor of humankind: methodological and trinitarian foundation", in: *Studies in African Theology I*, Nairobi 2005.

²⁴⁶ Cf. Sanon, A. T., *Jesus, Master of the Initiation*, in: *Der schwarze Christus – Wege afrikanischer Christologie*, Freiburg 1989, 87-107.

²⁴⁷ Cf. Kolié, C., *Jesus – Heiler*, in: *Der schwarze Christus – Wege afrikanischer Christologie*, Freiburg 1989, 108-137.

²⁴⁸ Cf. Ela, J.-M., *Mein Glaube als Afrikaner – Das Evangelium in schwarzafrikanischer Lebenswirklichkeit* (Theologie der Dritten Welt 19), Freiburg 1987; Ela, J.-M., *Gott befreit* (Theologie der Dritten Welt 30), Freiburg 2003.

²⁴⁹ Moerschbacher, M., *Christologien in Afrika*, in: Augustin, G./ Krämer, K./ Schulze, M., eds., *Mein Herr und mein Gott – Christus bekennen und verkünden*, FS Walter Kasper, Freiburg 2013, 572-586, 586.

²⁵⁰ One major milestone was the so-called Catacomb Pact (cf. Fornet-Ponse, T., "Für eine arme Kirche! Der Katakombenpakt von 1965 als Beispiel der Entweltlichung", in: *Stimmen der Zeit* 108 (2012), 651-661) and the Latin American Bishops' Conferences of Medellín and Puebla (cf. Eckolt, M., *Jesus Christus, der Befreier*, in: Augustin, G./ Krämer, K./ Schulze, M. eds., *Mein Herr und mein Gott – Christus bekennen und verkünden* FS Walter Kasper, Freiburg 2013, 540-571, 544.

oppression. Anyone who worships and proclaims Jesus Christ as the liberator thinks and lives out their Christological faith within a socio-historical context of oppression and domination. In other words, their focus is on a faith that seeks to cover all the various issues of structural change within the existing socio-historical situation. Faith applies an analytical procedure in creating this relevance and produces a Christology with the main focus on 'Jesus Christ the liberator'. In turn, such a Christology implies a specific political and social form of engagement that seeks to put an end to a situation of oppression."²⁵¹ Boff shows that a different perspective from another culture becomes a hermeneutically complementary place of discovery and that the perspective of the oppressed enables us to gain a direct Christological insight. Outside such a hermeneutical place this can only be achieved indirectly and in purely intellectual terms.

Orthopraxis: Christian action as a place of spiritual experience

Liberation theologians, in particular, have concluded that theology cannot be produced in an ivory tower but only through reflection upon specific situations. They see theological reflection as "faith-based reflection on the reality and historical activities of God's people who follow the works of Jesus by proclaiming and realising the Kingdom of God."²⁵² This awareness leads to a wider understanding of theology that must cover not only orthodoxy but also orthopraxis:²⁵³ Orthopraxis and orthodoxy challenge one another; neither of them would be anything without the other."²⁵⁴

In fact, the significance of orthopraxis goes beyond the development of one's own Christological understanding in that it becomes a place for an encounter with Christ. After all, it was one of the constant parameters of Christ's works that he primarily cared for the poor,

²⁵¹ Cf. Boff, L., *Jesus Christus der Befreier*, Freiburg 1986, 21.

²⁵² Ellacuría, I., "Die Kirche der Armen, geschichtliches Befreiungssakrament", in: Ellacuría, I. and Sobrino, J., *Mysterium Liberationis – Grundbegriffe der Theologie der Befreiung II*, Lucerne 1996, 761.

²⁵³ The term orthopraxis can be traced back to the Ecumenical Movement in the first third of the 20th century, indicating that theological reflection must centre upon questions of the right doctrine and as well as issues of the right action.

²⁵⁴ Gutiérrez, G., *Theologie der Befreiung – With a new introduction by the author and a new foreword by Johann Baptist Metz*, Mainz 1992, 41.

the sick and the needy.²⁵⁵ Whenever he brought healing, this had a sigmatic function, pointing towards an eschatological expectation of salvation which became visible in His own works.²⁵⁶ He then commissioned His followers to do likewise by caring for the poorest and the lowest. Christian social outreach (also described as “charitable work”) was, therefore, an essential factor in the missionary attractiveness of Christianity in late antiquity.²⁵⁷ Mission means proclaiming the message of God’s Kingdom not only in words but also in deeds. “A church can only be salt of the earth and bring about improvements to reality if it ceases to split its Great Commission into so-called ‘spiritual or religious’ spheres of action, on the one hand, and ‘socio-political’ ones, on the other. Where faith and love grow, social outreach and identification with the poor will also grow on a worldwide scale. This makes mission a ‘matrix’ for the Church’s Great Commission and thus also the most sustainable motivation for all other ministries performed on behalf of the Church.”²⁵⁸

At this point, however, we must be aware of a potential misconception. Social outreach is not primarily a particularly successful missionary method or even a soteriological condition for one’s own salvation, as one might falsely conclude from biblical tradition. Theologically, it is a specific feature of Christianity that caring for the poor and suffering – orthopraxis – should become a place of an encounter with Christ and an experience of God.²⁵⁹ This is strikingly illustrated in the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30b-35) which has its own tradition in redaction history and which Luke, the Gospel author, combined in his narrative with the dual command to love God and to love one’s neighbour. Luke shows that love of God manifests itself in active love of one’s neighbour and that this is not primarily an act of rational premeditation or of any ethical internation-

²⁵⁵ Cf. Krämer, K., *Den Logos zur Sprache bringen. Untersuchungen zu einem dialogischen Verständnis von Mission*, Ostfildern 2012, 128f.

²⁵⁶ Cf. Wilckens, U., *Theologie des Neuen Testaments, volume I: Geschichte der urchristlichen Theologie, sub-volume 1: Geschichte des Wirkens Jesu in Galiläa*, Neunkirchen-Vluyn 2002, 187.

²⁵⁷ Cf. Harnack, A. von, *Die Mission und die Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrtausenden*, Wiesbaden 1924, 170-220.

²⁵⁸ Schalück, H., *Mission: ganzheitlich*, in: Brosse, R. and Heidemanns, K., *Für ein Leben in Fülle – Visionen einer missionarischen Kirche*, Freiburg 2008, 136.

²⁵⁹ Cf. Vellguth, K., *Tracing the Footsteps of Jesus: the origins of religiously motivated charity and an experience of encountering Christ*, in: Krämer, K./Vellguth, K., eds., *Theology and Diakonia*, OWT 3, 48-67.

alisation of pro-social action. Rather, it has its most profound origin in a moment when a person is touched deeply and existentially in their emotions and when they experience God.²⁶⁰ This aspect of Christian social outreach was emphasised by Benedict XVI in his first encyclical letter, *Deus Caritas Est*, in which he specified the essential theological difference between Christian pro-social action and the orthopraxis of other cultures and religions²⁶¹: “Jesus identifies with those in need, with the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and those in the prison. ‘As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me’ (Matthew 25:40). Love of God and love of neighbour have become one. In the least of the brethren we find Jesus himself, and in Jesus we find God.”²⁶²

Orthotherapy: spirituality accompanied by both word and deed

Etymologically, the 19th-century neologism “spirituality” comes from the Latin verb *spirare* and refers to human breathing. Christian spirituality derives its inspiration from orthodoxy and orthopraxis which both have their spiritual roots in it. Faith shows itself in both word and deed and is therefore, breathed in and out, as it were. Bernhard Fraling defines spirituality as a living reality that precedes theological reflection: “It is characterised by devotional practices as manifestations of faith, by an emphasis on specific tenets of faith and by a corresponding lifestyle.”²⁶³ It would be a misunderstanding of Christian spirituality to reduce it to personal devotional practices, contemplation and mystical exercises. The concept of spirituality goes beyond such narrow confines and encourages the believer to understand his own faith as an inextricable combination of his experience of faith, on the one hand, and faith-based action, on the other. Spirituality also means an ongoing succession of reflection about one’s faith and of sharing it with others. Breathing in and breathing out are good metaphors for a Christian spirituality. It is different from “photographic spirituality” which only lasts for a short while and is about absorbing or storing an emotion, keeping it for a later numinous moment. In Christianity,

²⁶⁰ Cf. also Grün, A., “Heiliger Ort, heilige Zeit”, in: Christ in der Gegenwart (2012) 30, 1.

²⁶¹ Cf. Gutierrez, G., *Nachfolge Jesu und Option für die Armen – Beiträge zur Theologie der Befreiung im Zeitalter der Globalisierung*, Fribourg/Stuttgart 2009, 33.

²⁶² Benedict XVI’s encyclical letter *Deus Caritas Est* to the bishops, priests and deacons, men and women religious and all the lay faithful on Christian love. Statement of the Apostolic See No. 171, Bonn 2005, No. 15.

²⁶³ Fraling, B., Stichwort ‘Spiritualität’, in: LThK volume 9, Freiburg 2000, 856.

by contrast, spirituality means “abiding”, allowing breath to flow in and out.²⁶⁴ This abiding spirituality thrives on continually reviewing one’s own image of Christ, widening it (breathing in), sharing Christ (breathing out), savouring and tasting the moment of an encounter with Christ (breathing in), accepting Christ, enjoying moments of closeness with Him, letting oneself be healed through His presence and (breathing out) bringing healing to others.

Christian spirituality does not centre around orthodoxy, orthopraxis, Christian doctrine or ethical standards in isolation, as if any of those elements were a monolithic block. Where orthodoxy is concerned, Christian spirituality primarily means allowing oneself to be enriched by different Christologies and thus to keep meeting Christ in a new way. The same process of meeting Christ occurs in orthopraxis and in encountering and caring for the poor and the needy. It is one of the hallmarks of Christian spirituality that a person widens his own image of Christ and, in particular, sees Christ in his neighbour. This is because, ultimately, Christian spirituality is about a personal event, an encounter with Christ. “Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.”²⁶⁵

This does not mean that Christian spirituality might not also include specific devotional practices. Such practices have been developed by believers throughout history – practices to help people savour the presence of Christ. Silent prayer, for instance, was discovered by the priest, monk and author John Cassian (360–435) as a way to help the praying person grow in his relationship with Christ.²⁶⁶ During scholasticism the Carthusian monk Guigo developed instructions for a *lectio divina*, based on the monastic tradition of prayer.²⁶⁷ The 20th century saw the development of a spiritual form of prayer called “sharing the Bible”, in which Christians dwell on a specific Bible passage and

²⁶⁴ Cf. Schuhmann, L., Spiritualität beleben. Zurück zu den Wurzeln?, in: Geist und Leben 86 (2013) 2, 148–158, 152.

²⁶⁵ Benedict XVI’s encyclical letter *Deus Caritas Est* to the bishops, priests and deacons, men and women religious and all the lay faithful on Christian love. Statement of the Apostolic See No. 171, Bonn 2005, No. 1.

²⁶⁶ Cf. Oetterer, P., ‘Hingabe schafft Rettung’ – Das Ruhegebet nach Johannes Cassian (360–435 n.Chr.), in: Pastoralblatt (2013) 6, 188–190.

²⁶⁷ Cf. Hoffmann, C., Kontemplation als Lebensgrund und Lebenshaltung, in: AnzSS 122 (2013) 6, 5–9, 8.

savour it through *ruminatio*, so that they can develop a “taste for Jesus”.²⁶⁸ Primarily, however, Christian spirituality has nothing to do with specific devotional practices. Such practices have a subordinate, subservient function. The main focus in all these practices is always on an encounter with Jesus Christ and not on the actual practice itself.

Orthotherapy means inviting oneself and others to abide with Christ, to widen one’s own narrow understanding of Christ, to get to know Christ better and better, to act like Christ and to meet Christ through the healing that we ourselves can bring. Orthotherapy is a learning process which brings healing and comprises our cognitive view of the world, based on the person of Jesus Christ (the material dimension). But orthotherapy also means openly accepting an encounter with Christ through one’s neighbour, especially the poor and suffering (the relational dimension). Finally, orthotherapy includes abiding in the presence of Christ (the modal dimension). This understanding of Christian spirituality is formulated very aptly in the Old Testament prayer: “One thing I ask of Yahweh, one thing I seek: to dwell in Yahweh’s house all the days of my life, to enjoy the sweetness of Yahweh, to seek out his temple. For he hides me away under his roof on the day of evil, he folds me in the recesses of his tent (...) In his tent I will offer sacrifices of acclaim. I will sing, I will make music for Yahweh. (...) Though my father and mother forsake me, Yahweh will gather me up.” (Psalms 27:4-10)

Christ and Saint Menas

Christian spirituality is not one-dimensional but combines orthopraxis, orthodoxy and orthotherapy. It invites the believer to re-learn to live, to use a Christian breathing technique and to accept multi-dimensional transformations. It means allowing our image of Christ to be modified, allowing ourselves to be changed by Christ, changing the distressing situations of others and changing our own lack of breath. Christian spirituality includes the experience that the breath of Christ becomes part of our own breath. It means standing next to Christ and looking in the same direction. Such spirituality brings healing. Perhaps this is what the painter of the icon in Egypt wished to express: Menas

²⁶⁸ Cf. Vellguth, K., *Eine Neue Art, Kirche zu sein – Die Entstehung der Kleinen Christlichen Gemeinschaften in Afrika und Asien*, Freiburg 2005.

knew and understood Christ (breathing in), he experienced Him and shared with others his experience of Christ (breathing out). Menas saw Christ in his neighbour (breathing in) and cared for the suffering (breathing out). Menas had found Christ as his existential centre and Saviour.