

CHAPTER 7

Providence Spirituality

We have spoken traditionally of a variety of spiritualities, e.g. Benedictine, Franciscan, Carmelite, to name a few. What they have in common is a deep faith in the mystery of the Trinity. What differentiates them is the special charism that distinguishes each from the other. Such charism is a gift, a given, usually attributed to the action of the Spirit. It enables a person or group to be influential for the benefit of others. Underlying a religious charism is a basic Christian faith with its particular vision of God, of the world, and of humanity.

A charism gives rise to a way of life commonly referred to as a spirituality, i.e. a personalized way of living our faith, of activating our God-given gifts. Providence spirituality resonates to that particular perfection in God which the gospels emphasize as a special concern for persons whose basic needs are not met. Persons endowed with the Providence charism seek out those who are marginalized for reasons of material or spiritual poverty. Their mission is to live by the Word and respond to the light of the Spirit as they reach out to others. Providence Spirituality is authentically trinitarian.

“The Spirit blows where it wills” is more than a cliché. Those who are drawn to a spirituality fed by the Providence charism, experience a particular exercise of discipleship, where God is seen as the creative artist who holds the universe in his hands. The ultimate response is one of praise, resembling but far surpassing the praise we offer our human artists.

One example of the gospel view of Providence is found in the parable of the talents, where we are challenged to make productive the gifts entrusted to us. It is said that Mozart offered praise to God through his piano orchestrations blended with pure

sounds of nature. Flowing brooks, songbird voices, and other natural sounds from the forest enhance his compositions. His symphony number 40 is a burst of praise for the Providence of God. Beethoven's "*Pastorale*", the symphony number 6 in F, "smells of April and May" says a critic! It is Providence spirituality set to music to proclaim the work of the divine artist reflected in the beauties of nature.

Inspired by Sacred Scripture, Providence spirituality places special emphasis on sharing with others, especially the less fortunate members of the human race, dispensing freely what gifts we ourselves have received from God. We are challenged to reach out, as Jesus did, to neighbours and to foreigners, be they rich or poor, healthy or ill, young or old, man or woman. We aim to see the image of God in them, blurred though it may be, knowing we are all on common ground as issuing from the one Creator. We need to search no further than the gospels for models of moral behaviour, of social justice, of outreach to the needy. These are the sources from which we draw creatively to discover or invent ways of being the human face of Providence in our respective milieus.

Providence spirituality makes us into ecologists, lovers and protectors of God's creation. We become actively concerned with promoting due respect for what the Creator has so artfully placed on our planet. Jesus' pedagogy is replete with examples taken from nature: "the kingdom of God is like the mustard seed...like a pearl of great price...look at the birds of the air...the flowers...Solomon in all his glory was not clothed as one of these".

The mission of the Spirit is to kindle in us a love that overcomes egotism and makes us into co-workers with God as we carry out our various ministries. Providence spirituality makes us aware that no event, place or person lies outside the "field of vision" of our Provident God. We may in moments of spiritual blindness attribute certain happenings to fate, luck, or chance, but the faith-name is Providence. This realization has at times invaded the minds and hearts of some persons to such a degree that they could only

fall on their knees in humble adoration. We can only pray for the grace to remain open to God's ways with us in whatever paths this might take us.

Perhaps there was a time when spirituality was thought to be the domain of cloistered religious, removed from the activity and distractions of society, and distinct from the vocation of the laity. Vatican II has broadened the meaning of spirituality as a reality that is open to all and attuned to the needs of our day. For all of us who have inherited the rich tradition of Christian spirituality; this is a precious legacy. We need to name our experience of God, receive it as pure gift, one that has to be treasured, but not kept hidden or undeveloped. Just as we cultivate the soil in our vegetable and flower gardens we can help others cultivate their faith-life, come to terms with who they are in God's eyes and accompany them on their faith journey. We may not always see the immediate or long-range effects of our efforts but we trust that Divine Providence will continue to inspire others who will bring to fruition what has been sown.

