# Medieval Spirituality and the Revival of the Christian Religion

**Francis Thonippara**

Dharmram Vidya Kshetram, Bengaluru

### Abstract

The present paper attempts to bring to light the major spiritual movements of the Middle Ages. These spiritual movements, which took various forms, helped the Church to regain her inner strength and vitality. Whenever the Church faced spiritual crises, the Church could trace her true identity with the help of the Holy Spirit through these spiritual movements. The Cluny movement was an attempt to liberate the medieval Church from the feudal lords, and Cluny monks were behind the Gregorian Reformation. Mendicant Orders were reminders to the Church about her pristine simplicity. The Hermits, Carthusians, and Cistercians attempted to relive the original Benedictine Rule. The Canons Regular and the Norbertines focussed on the reform of the diocesan clergy. The mystics of the Middle Ages laid the foundation for the flowering of mysticism in the sixteenth century.

*Key Words*: Benedictine Rule, Carthusians, Cistercians, Mendicants, Mystics, Military Orders, Canons Regular, Norbertines.

## Introduction

The Church, founded by Christ, has had its ups and downs throughout its existence. The strong conviction that the Church is both divine and human, composed of saints and sinners, guided by the Holy Spirit, and the ideal Church is the Church in *eschaton*, gives hope and inner strength to the members of the Church to move forward in moments

of distress and disappointment. The story of the Church in the last part of the early medieval period (896 to 1046) is not very informative, and historians qualify this period as the 'Dark Age' or 'Iron Age,' a time when the papacy reached its lowest ebb of existence. Papacy was a plaything in the hands of the Roman nobles. The reasons for the decay include secularising interventions by rulers, squandering of property by lay abbots, and the lack of protection of the papacy by royal power. Here an attempt is made to review the various revival movements of the Christian religion, which gave her a qualitative life and inner strength.

## Cluny Movement[1]

The reform movement of Cluny deserves special attention, which was of decisive importance in the tenth and eleventh-century reform of the Church. The Cluny movement was a reform attempt to liberate the monasteries from the undue influence of the feudal system and the dominion of episcopal feudal lords. The association of individual monasteries in a congregation became a great movement of piety and renewal in which the idea of Europe took place. The reforming dynamism of Cluny subsequently paved the way for the Gregorian Reformation of the eleventh century. Cluny is 80 KMs north of Lyons, not very far from Luxueil and from the spots where later Citeaux and the Premontre were founded. Cluny was founded in 910 by Duke William of Aquitaine. According to the foundation charter, the monastery was subject to no secular or spiritual lord but only to the Holy See. Cluny was founded not as a proprietary monastery but as a wholly ecclesiastical institution. The emancipation of the medieval Church and the religious institutions from the clutches of the feudal system was one of the chief points of Cluny's program of action. Cluny maintained a disciplined and fruitful monastic life that constituted the most powerful reforming influence on the Church (Aumann, 1989). "Cluny stands in the tenth century for the restoration of Benedictine monastic life, largely as it had been understood by Benedict of Aniane a century earlier" (Lawrence, 1989).

The Church was passing through the Dark Ages in her history (896-1046). Pope was Sergius III (904-911), and the papacy became a plaything in the hands of the Roman nobles, Tusculans and Crescenzis. Here lies the importance of the Cluny movement. The first abbot of Cluny was Berno, and his followers were Odo (926-942), Odilo, and

---

[1] For a detailed study on Cluny, please refer Gert Melville, *Le Comunita religiose nel Medioevo*, Editrice Morcelliana, Brescia, Italy, 2020, pp. 61-95.

Hugh (1049-1109). Hugh codified the customs and rules of Cluny. During the time of Peter, the Venerable (1122-1156), Cluny's glory and external brilliance reached their zenith. New monasteries were founded in Cluny, and several existing monasteries were given to it. During the time of Odo, Cluny had more than 65 monasteries. The annexed monasteries depended on Cluny because they were governed by a Prior appointed by the Abbot of Cluny. At the same time, there were monasteries that, without entering into a real union with Cluny, accepted the Cluniac customs and introduced reform partly with the support of the monks of Cluny.

The reasons for the growth of Cluny and its tremendous influence over the entire Church by virtue of its reforms are to be found especially in the personality and the usually long reigns of the abbots. From its foundation to the death of Venerable Peter, 246 years (910-1156), Cluny had eight abbots, whereas there were 52 popes at the same time. Seven of these abbots were honored as saints. Through them, Cluny and its entire federation acquired continuity, solidarity, and a definite goal.

There was an extraordinary amount of praying at Cluny, almost too much, and no time was left for scholarly studies. The Cistercians later upbraided the Cluniacs by merely praying and not working. But they prayed, and people had confidence in their prayer. Prayer for the dead, which they especially fostered, and their generosity to the poor were the sources of their wealth. The faithful gave gladly and generously because they knew that Cluny forgot neither their dead nor the poor. In 998, Odilo introduced the commemoration of All Souls as a special feast, which in 1030 was fixed on November 2 by Pope John XIX (1024-1032) and is still observed in the Latin Church. "The Cluny congregation, with its independence of secular power and that of the bishops, was strong in the fight against the abuses of lay investiture and simony" (O'Mahony, 1986).

**The Hermits**

Another monastic movement based on the Benedictine Rule is called the Congregation of the hermits. It was the result of the desire of the people to lead a more rigorous life. Central Italy witnessed this type of monastic life. In 992, St Romuald founded his first monastery. In 1012 founded near Arezzo, a colony called Camaldoli, from which the entire Congregation later received the name of Camaldolese, fostering a strictly eremitical life under the Rule of St Benedict. After Romuald

died in 1027, other hermitages arose - Vallambrosa near Florence, which was a combination of the coenobitic and eremitic life based on the Benedictine Rule (Bihlmeyer, 1967). What the Camaldolese, as well as Cluniacs especially brought about was the example of deep religious eagerness. These orders rendered valuable service to the Church in the reform of morals and in supporting papacy. Earnestness and consciousness of responsibility were sadly lacking in many secular lords, who regarded their bishops, abbots, and priests almost as servants. The wild Rome of the tenth century lacked these, even in the Popes themselves.

## St. Peter Damian (1007-1072)

Peter Damian received a very good education from Ravenna. Aiming to reform the Church, he entered the eremitical life. He focussed on three areas of church reforms: reform of the diocesan clergy, renewal of monastic life, and adjustment of church-state relations. He employed very severe reform means to achieve his aim. He worked for the reform of the diocesan clergy and proposed community life for the diocesan clergy. According to him, ascetical practices were a means to attain the perfection of charity and divine wisdom. His concept of monastic life was that of separation from the world and concentration on the things of God: a life of penance and prayer. It is said that Peter Damian's example and influence led to the introduction of the use of the "discipline" or scourge in religious orders. "Peter gave the Italian hermit movement both a theological and a firmer organizational and economic basis, even though the congregation he constructed included not many more than ten settlements" (Jedin, 1980).

## General Trends of Hermits

According to the hermits, prayer was not in the community but continual mental prayer. Following are the occupations: prayer, reading, bodily flagellation, and prostrations, accompanied by recitation of specified prayers. Contemplative life: separation from the world and pure asceticism. Monks left monasteries and became ascetics. Bishops left dioceses and became hermits. Even among the lay people there was great enthusiasm to become monks. The reason for the widespread of hermits was the unchristian living of many Christians. Here one is reminded of the famous saying of St John Chrysostom: "Monasteries were necessary because the world was not Christian; let it be converted and the need for monastic separation will disappear."

### The Carthusians

Another renewal of the Benedictine Rule is the Carthusians, founded by St Bruno of Cologne (1030/1035 – 1101) in 1084. Carthusians took their name from the mother house of the order, 'La grande Chartreuse,' which stands high in the French Alps. It provided its members an eremitical life within the primitive Benedictine *coenobium* or community life. The monks are totally cut off from the world to maintain direct contact with God. The key and seal of all spiritual discipline is obedience, safeguarded by humility and patience and accompanied by chaste love of the Lord and true charity. Giugo I, between 1121 and 1128, prepared the Book of Customs. So Carthusians are not following the Rule of St Benedict, but their own *Consuetudines*. There are two types of Carthusians – monks and lay brothers. The residence is a hermitage charterhouse rather than a monastery. Traits of Carthusian spirituality include wise discretion, joy, simplicity, constant care not to lose sight of the lowly struggle of the purgative way even in the heights of the contemplative life, and tender love for Jesus and Mary. Because of its austere life, it was least affected by the monastic decline of the Middle Ages (Aumann, 1989, p. 91-92). The silent Carthusians always preserved a spirit of genuine religiosity and inner strength through prayer and introspection. The carthusian lifestyle is a western reinvention of Egyptian monasticism. "The order retained its vigour throughout the medieval period and exercised considerable influence upon the wider Church on account of its witness of prayer and dedicated lifestyle and the monks' various contacts with the wider world – through writing, spiritual direction and in other ways" (Tanner, 2011).

### The Cistercians

The Cistercians was the outcome of the restless search for a simpler and more secluded form of ascetical life. This spiritual movement was a reaction against the corporate wealth, worldly involvements and surfeited liturgical ritualism of Carolingian monastic tradition. The foundational aim was to restore the pristine observance of the Benedictine Rule to reform the monastic life (Lawrence, 1989, p. 174).

In the history of monasticism personality plays a key role, and the history of monasticism is a history of great founders and of the great reformers. In 1098 a new monastery was founded not very far from Dijon that of Cistertium or Citeaux in eastern France and the Cistercians named after the first monastery. In 1111 many monks lost their lives because of an epidemic asnd Abbot Stephen Harding, an Englishman, thought

of closing down the monastery. But in the following year, Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) entered the monastery as a novice along with thirty companions. It was a point of revival for the monasteries and several monasteries were founded. Bernard was the Abbot of Clairvaux. At the General chapter of 1119 Bernard and Stephen Harding drew up the statutes of the new order, which they called the "Constitutions of Love", *Carta caritatis*. Pope Eugene III (1145-1153) gave the final approval (Aumann, 1989, p. 93-100).

## Characteristics

The monasteries have landed properties and they engage themselves in manual labour. They were the leaders in medieval farming. The organisation of the Order is based, in the Benedictine fashion, on the permanently established autonomous abbey. However, the novel features included, that the abbot had to meet annually in General Chapter and the provision that the Abbot of Citeaux named annual visitators who then reported to the Chapter. The Lateran Council prescribed this for other orders too. In piety the Cistercians were especially distinguished for their devotion to Our Lady, to whom all their churches were dedicated.

Cistercians spread rapidly and in 1350 there were more than 600 abbeys. It was a boast of the Cistercians that they could journey through all of Germany without having to put up at a strange hospice. Two factors which facilitated the rapid spread of the Cistercians were: excellent Constitution and the personality of St Bernard. The dynamic leadership of St Bernard is a model for religious animation. He personified the middle ages and the French national spirit. "The austere lifestyle and simplified liturgy in community, as well as the emphasis upon manual labour, principally farming, appealed to many young men" (Tanner, 2011, p. 120).

## The Canons Regular

The Carthusians embodied the spiritual experience of the desert in permanent form. The religious fervour and ascetical spirit of the period were reflected in the secular clergy, and many began to live the *vita communis* or *canonica.* The Canons Regular were an attempt to go back to the ascetical practices of the Christian antiquity, the life of the Apostles or *vita apostolica* (Acts 4, 32). The Canons Regular were a hybrid order of clerical monks. "They represented an effort to give practical effect to the conviction of the Gregorian papacy that the Apostles were monks

and that the secular clergy, who had inherited their office, should model their lives upon them" (Lawrence, 1989, p. 163-164). The custom of some of the secular clergy living together under some kind of rule and chanting the Divine Office can be traced back to the 4th century. Sts Augustine of Hippo and Eusebius of Vercelli were especially associated with this practice. But later, on account of lack of proper leadership and barbarian invasions the custom seems to have died out. The man responsible for its revival in the middle ages is St Chrodegang (700-766), bishop of Metz. He adopted the Benedictine Rule to the diocesan clergy, prescribing a common life, table and dormitory. Chanting of the Divine Office was to take at fixed hours and intellectual and manual work filled in their free time. Chrodegang's influential position as Pepin's Chancellor enabled him to spread this form of life rather widely among the clergy. Charles the Great ordered clerics be either monks or canons. Later this form of life became obligatory throughout the empire. Canons were different from monks. They had no vows and they had private income. They contributed this income for the maintenance of the community. They declined mainly because of the predominance of wealth. The Lateran Synods of 1059 and of 1063 exhorted priests, deacons and subdeacons to share their income, dwelling and to live a common life. Eventually many of the cathedral and collegiate chapters adopted a monastic rule and thus *canonici saeculares* became *canonici regulares* (Bihlmeyer, 1967, p. 222).

## Norbertines or White Canons

The largest and most influential of these communities of Canons is that of the Premonstratensians, which was founded by Norbert of Xanten (1082-1134), a Canon from the lower Rhine. He gave up all the privileges of a nobleman and committed himself to the reform of the clergy. He became a wandering preacher and in 1120 he founded the monastery of Premontre near Lao which was to serve not as community of monks but as one of Canons who were to live according to the Augustinian Rule. As its special duties he assigned it the sanctification of clergy and ministerial work and preaching among the people. A thorough training was needed to prepare the ground for this endeavour. In 1126 Norbert became the Archbishop of Magdeburg, thus showed his interest in active life pastoral care. St Norbert made an attempt to combine the life of the cloister with the clerical ministry. Already in 1156, the new order of Premonstratensians counted over 100 communities (Aumann, 1989, p. 114-118).

## Medieval Spirituality

The medieval spirituality is characterised by the new interest shown by the laity in the study of Scripture. Bible was slowly made available in the local languages. There were groups who came together and held private discussions on Scripture. Later the laity was forbidden to possess and read Bible in the vernacular languages. Devotion to the sacred humanity of Christ was another feature of this period. More attention was given to the intensity of the sufferings of Christ. Artists using their imagination expressed this intensive suffering of Christ in art form. Name of Jesus was the object of great veneration. The poverty of Christ was stressed. The popular teaching was that by baptism a Christian is obliged to renounce the world and its pomp. Radical living of the evangelical poverty was the cry of the day.

There was an increase in the devotion to Blessed Sacrament and to improve the fervour of the faithful, discussions were held on Eucharist. Some questioned the real presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. "Transubstantiation" thus might have been introduced by bishop Hildebert of Tours (+1133). Elevation of the Host after the Consecration was introduced; later chalice also was elevated. Then authentic veneration of the real presence of Christ was mixed with practices that were almost superstitious. Communion was not very frequent. Therefore, Lateran Council IV(1215) ordered that Catholics must receive communion once a year, during the Easter season. Confession of devotion became more common (Tanner, 2011, p. 88-90, 111, 97). Keeping the Eucharist in the tabernacle was slowly introduced. In 1246 the first diocesan feast in honour of *Corpus Christi* was celebrated. It was declared a universal feast by Pope Urban IV (1261 -1264) (Tanner, 2011, p. 126).

Filial love for Blessed Virgin Mary, veneration of saints and angels were the other features of this period. Marian devotion was mainly in the monasteries. The titles used for Mary were Notre Dame, Madonna, etc. Marian prayers like Ave Maria, Salve Regina were introduced and Angelus was recited while ringing the bell in the evening. Rosary became popular later. However, reciting 50 Ave Maria or 150 Ave Maria was common. Various guilds under the protection of the saints were formed. Collection of relics and construction of shrines in honour of the saints were very popular. Lateran Council IV (1215) insisted that all relics must be authenticated by the Holy See. Pope John XV (985-996), in a Synod in 993 solemnly canonised Ulrich, bishop of

Augsburg, (923-973), which was the first ritual canonisation by a Pope. In 1234 Pope Gregory IX made canonisation a prerogative of the Holy See.

Other features of the late medieval Christian Europe were the autonomy of the individuals and the growth of individualism. Opening of the universities allowed free access to the learning process and acquiring knowledge. Scholasticism, crusades, maturity of the laity and the national consciousness among the Europeans, Renaissance and Humanism, Avignon papacy, Western Schism, conciliarism, rampant corruption from top to bottom in the hierarchy were the other prominent features of Europe which had their implications in the history of Christian spirituality.

### *Devotio Moderna*

Another spiritual movement, *Devotio Moderna,* gained momentum largely because of the annoyance and boredom of many sincere Christians with the speculative intricacies of the German and Flemish writers and the undue influence of scholastic philosophy in Christian spirituality. The new trend in medieval spiritualty offered an affective type of spirituality which answered the practical needs of earnest Christians, without excessive theorizing about union with God in the higher states of mystical life. (Imitation *of Christ*, I, chapters 1 -3) (Aumann, 1989, p. 162). There were errors and scandals as a result of the teachings of the exponents of this new school of spirituality. However, many followed them with great enthusiasm. Their constant cry was the reform of the Church and questioned the worldly and luxurious life of the Church leaders. This earnest cry for reform was facilitated by the ideas of Renaissance and Humanism and put into practice in a radical way by the fore-runners of Reformation and Protestant reformers. The Catholic Church responded to this reform cry in a slow phase with the Council of Trent in 1545 -1563.

### Gerard Groote (1340-1384).

He was the leader of the reform movement in the Netherlands, a deacon and a preacher. Two years after his death his followers formed a community of *Brethren of the Common Life* at Windesheim. Contemplation is perfection of charity and he stressed the importance of poverty, self-detachment and the practice of virtues. The basic rule for distinguishing the true disciple from the false is by the fruits they produce, namely, illumination of the intellect and an increase in charity.

## Thomas Hemerken a Kempis (1379-1471)

Author of *Imitation of Christ*, widely read and widely criticised book. *Imitation of Christ* was written in the context of the reactionary movement against speculative spirituality. It was written for those who are leading a monastic life. The ecclesial context of the writing of this book was the constant cry for reform and renewal in the Church. This accounts for its anti-intellectualism and insistence on separation from the world and its constant emphasis on repentance and conversion. The true spiritual life according to *Imitation of Christ* is the meditation on the humanity of Christ and Christians arrive at the contemplation of his divinity and a union with God which liberates the soul. Knowledge of oneself and death to one's self are needed. Resignation means renunciation of one's self and total abandonment to God (Aumann, 1989, p. 164-168).

## The Beguines

New forms of religious communities continued to multiply, especially in northern France, Belgium and the Rhineland during the 13th century. The Beguines along with their male counterparts, the Beghards, originated as a lay association as a result of the extraordinary spirit of religious fervour. They were not affiliated to any religious order, nor did they follow any recognised monastic rule. With no single founder or legislator, these spontaneous religious groups intended to recover the simplicity of the primitive Church in or out of enclosure. Beguines were urban women from various social classes whose lives were adapted to the particular conditions of the local area. While many maintained their own homes, they still lived a communal life of prayer, asceticism, almsgiving and service. Beguines took no vows and did not renounce the possibility of marriage, but they submitted to a grand mistress. The organisation of their daily life and religious practices resembled that of the monastery, and after six years of their formation, they could obtain permission to live as recluses. In a limited sense, the Beguines represented a movement of women's liberation. The Beghards, the masculine counterpart of the Beguines, devoted themselves to the care of the sick and burial of the dead (Bihlmeyer, 1967, pp. 226-227). Openly attacked for their use of the vernacular for Bible reading and interpretation of Scripture, they were officially condemned by the Council of Vienne in 1311. However, Beguine communities survive to this day in some part of Belgium and France. "Their simple piety based upon study of the vernacular Bible and their cultivation of mystical

experience, placed them alongside the friars as preachers of a new kind of religious experience, which was individualistic, intuitive, and lay in its inspiration" (Lawrence, 1989; Tanner, 2011).

**Medieval Mystics**

Yet another feature of the medieval spirituality was the presence of mystics and these mystics gave new life to the Church and the flowering of mysticism was in the sixteenth century with Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross. The central and later Middle Ages witnessed an impressive number of people in the Western who were described as mystics.

It is remarkable to note that there were number of women among them. It is not an easy task to narrate the various schools of mystical thought and therefore a few selected personalities are presented here.

**Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179)**. Hildegard of Bingen was the Abbess of the Benedictine convent on the Rupersburg near Bingen, in Germany She had visions and was very much involved in the reform of the clergy, religious and laity. She brought mystical experience to a new level with her writings which she sought second half of the thirteenth century to describe her visions of the divine. Her principal work, *Scivias,* is an account of twenty-six visions with an apocalyptic emphasis dealing with creation, redemption and the Church. Hildegard also was a great lover of nature and promoter of herbal medicine.

During the second half of the thirteenth century the Cistercian convent of Helfta attracted many young girls to lead holy life and produced many mystics. They also include, Mechtild of Magdeburg (+1285) and Mechtild of Hackeborn (+1299).

**St Gertrude the Great** (+1302). She joined the Helfta monastery school at the age of five and had visions. She became familiar with the writings of the Fathers of the Church, especially St Augustine, St Gregory the Great, St Bernard, etc. She had mystical experiences during the liturgical celebrations and she had great devotion to the Eucharist, passion of Christ, etc. In 1284 she received the stigmata in an invisible form. Her works include *The Herald of Divine Love* and *Spiritual Exercises*. St Gertrude was an ardent devotee of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

**St. Bridget of Sweden** (1303-1373). Her spirituality was based on Cistercian spirituality, concentrating on the passion of Christ and devotion to Mary. She used to advice great rulers and ecclesiastical

dignitaries. During the Avignon papacy she tried her level best to bring papacy back to Rome. However, she could not see papacy back in Rome. She spent six months in Hoy Land and she had a prophetic vocation. She received numerous revelations concerning the passion and death of Christ. She is the foundress of an order of contemplative nuns dedicated to the praise of God and reparation for sinners. Her preference was to Neo-Platonic than to closely reasoned Aristotelian approach of St Thomas. Her spirituality was a move towards contemplation and mystical experience. To achieve this mystical experience we have to follow the path of total renunciation of self, complete submission to the will of God and rejection of all sense images. Union with God which is divinisation, that for all practical purposes leaves the soul indistinguishable from God (Aumann, 1989, p. 147).

**Meister Eckhart** (260-1327). Meister Eckhart was the most important most daring representative of speculative German mysticism. He was a German Dominican who was condemned as heretic as it was accused that he promoted pantheism. He developed a highly speculative "mysticism of essence" and the spirituality of mystical marriage – *Brautmystik.* According to him, in God *esse* and *intelligere* are identical. Outside of God there is no true existence. Human beings are impelled by the necessity of their own nothingness, to return to God in whom they have their source. The point of contact or the radical capacity for union between human beings and God is found in the essence of the intellect which is designated variously as a power, a spark or the *Grund der Seele*. "There is something in the soul that is uncreated and uncreatable, namely, the intelligence; and if that were the whole soul, that too would be uncreated and uncreatable" (Aumann, 1989, p. 149).

**Johannes Tauler** (1300-1361). Johannes Tauler, a disciple of Meister Eckhart, emphasises the need for total renunciation of all externals to attain nudity of spirit and an interior recollection or withdraw into the *Grund* of the soul, where one attains mystical contemplation. Until the intelligence of human beings is completely emptied of all sensible and intellectual images, it cannot contemplate God. Only through the nudity of the spirit can the intelligence become sufficiently passive and receptive so that it can experience intimate union with God. Human beings live on three levels: sensible, rational and the superior level called *gemuet* – cart of mind, soul, heart, disposition temper. The union is achieved when the individual returns to the *Grund* centre of the soul where the Trinity dwells (Aumann, 1989, p. 151-152).

**Henry Suso** (1295 -1366). Henry Suso was a Dominican, who stresses the central role of Christ in the journey to perfection. Human beings in themselves are nothing and only God, the perfect being, is the All. In becoming more and more aware of his/her nothingness, human beings become increasingly humble. Hence, humility is the door to renunciation and self-abandonment which enable one to empty oneself of self and be filled with God. When that happens, God's *allness* replaces human beings' nothingness so that human beings are divinised.

**St Catherine of Siena** (1347-1380). Catherine of Siena was the best-known mystic, indeed the most famous saint, of her time. She was the first woman recorded as bearing the stigmata. Her main work is *Dialogue*, also known as *The Book of Divine Providence.* In the *Dialogue*, which is a colloquy between the eternal Father and Catherine, Catherine makes four petitions to God: for her own sanctification, for the sanctification of humankind and peace in the Church, for the reform of the clergy and that divine providence may direct all things for the salvation of the souls.

The spiritual direction of St Catherine is based on a knowledge of God and knowledge of self. The latter is the foundation of humility, which destroys self-love. We need to be aware of our own nothingness, since we have received our very being from God. Then we realise that God is all. Mystical union is the experience or awareness of the presence of God in the soul and is quite different from the simple union with God through sanctifying grace. In the state of perfection, the soul never loses its awareness of God's presence. There is such an intimate and continual union between the soul and God that every time and place is the place for prayer, for communication with God (Aumann, 1989, p. 173-174; Schaff, 1989).

**English Mystics**

England, in the fourteenth century, produced devotional writings which have been classed in the literature of mysticism. They are wanting in the transcendental flights of the German mystics, and are, for the most part, marked by a decided practical tendency (Schaff, 1989). Richard Rolle, (+1349), author of The Cloud of Unknowing, Walter Hilton (+1396), author of The Scale of Perfection and Julian of Norwich (+1442), author of Revelations of Divine Love, were the leading medieval mystics. "Julian's emphasis on the love of God, her description of the motherhood and feminine nature of God and her

optimistic tone, epitomized in the words revealed to her, 'All shall be well and all manner of things shall be well', which seems to offer the hope of salvation for all people, accord well with modern concerns" (Tanner, 2011, p. 140).

## Mendicant Orders

11th, 12th and 13th centuries were centuries of religious revival, recovery and church reform. There were number of popular movements and a group laity became more and more aware of the need of reform in the Church and in the religious communities. Papal centralization was at its climax pope centred Europe was the order and possessions and positions were well esteemed by the religious and ecclesiastical authorities. Pope became the feudal Lord of the known world of those days. However, the whole life was permeated with a religious spirit. The founders of the mendicant orders were the people who steered the new spirit of reform which had seized upon the people into healthy and thoroughly ecclesiastical paths. The founders wanted to go back to the poor Church of the early centuries and to glorify the beauty of the real spirit of Christian simplicity. The founding of the Mendicant Orders was a positive spiritual reaction against the luxurious life that crept I to the medieval Church from top to bottom.

**St Francis of Assisi**. Francis of Assisi was born in 1182 and in 1206 he renounced his wealth and began a sort of eremitical life. In 1208 he became a preacher of penance, though still a lay person. He had a few followers and was not anti-clerical. He visited Rome and Pope Innocent III encouraged him. At Pentecost 1219 there was held in Assisi a chapter which gave a kind of organisation to the nascent order and is known as Order of Friars Minor (OFM). Antony of Padua from Portugal came to Italy and joined the Franciscan order. Francis sent missionaries to foreign lands. The Rule was approved in 1223 and on October 3, 1226 Francis died. The soul and radicality of this spiritual movement is evident from the following: "The brethren shall appropriate nothing to themselves, neither a house nor a place nor anything. And as pilgrims and strangers in this world let them go confidently in quest of alms" (Hughes, 1985, p. 360).

**Dominicans**. Dominic was born in 1170 and founded the Order of Preachers (O.P.), a new concept for a religious order, whereby preaching was the primary charism (Tanner, 2011, p. 121). Definite approval of the order was given in 1216. Dominic died in 1221. Among theologians,

Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas are especially noteworthy. Dominicans were the first centralised order and the legislative power is with the General Chapter. The full executive power is with the Master General.

**Carmelites**. Originally founded by Berthold on Mount Carmel in Palestine about 1154 with ten of his companions. It once claimed to have descended from Elijah and the community of prophets who lived there. Approval of their first Rue was in 1226 by Pope Honorius III. A new period in the history of the order began with the fall of the crusader states and migration of the Carmelites to Europe. The sixth general, Simon Stock, obtained from Pope Innocent IV certain modifications of the Primitive Rule as laid down in 1209 by Albert de Vercelli, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem. It was less stringent and silence was restricted to specified times. In 1247 the order became a mendicant order. In 1452 an order of the Carmelite nuns was established (Jedin, 1982).

Trinitarians. "The Order of the Most Holy Trinity" was founded at Cerfroid, Meaux, in 1198 by John of Matha and Felix of Valois, with the approval from Pope Innocent III. Known also as "Mathurins", they followed an austere form of an Augustinian Rule, wearing a white habit. Devoting themselves to redeeming Christian captives, they take a fourth vow to sacrifice their own liberty if necessary, using one-third of their revenues as ransoms. By the fifteenth century there were 800 houses. A reform movement, "the Barefooted Trinitarians", founded by Juan Baptista of the Immaculate Conception in Spain in 1596, is the only surviving body, engaged in education, nursing and ransoming of slaves. There are also Trinitarian nuns (Bihlmeyer, 1967, p. 225).

Other Mendicant Orders include *The Order of Hermits of St Augustine* (1256) and *The Order of Servants of the Blessed Virgin Mary* or *Servites* (1233).

Mendicant orders follow austere poverty and the monastery is not to possess anything. They decisively stamped the ecclesiastical and religious life of the thirteenth century, certainly more powerful than did the reform orders of the twelfth century in their day (Jedin, 1982).

**Military Orders**

In the context of crusades and in the wake of the interests of the laity in the protection of the Church against Islamic attacks, a new form of spirituality is developed. Added to that, in the feudal Christianity there had always been a military concept of the members of the Kingdom of

God, the Church, where ruler was Christ the King and members were soldiers of Christ. St Bernard preached the crusade in the name of Pope Eugene III in 1145. He was also responsible for a religious institute – soldier –monk. For St Bernard there was a need for a "new kind of militia" which had come forth in the Holy Land and has as its object to expel Muslims from Holy Land.

## The Order of the Knights of Templars

The first military order was founded around 1118 in the premises of the temple of Jerusalem. It was affiliated with the canons of the Holy Sepulchre. Their mission was to defend the Christians in the city of Jerusalem. They observed the vows of obedience, poverty and chastity and considered themselves as religious. The Rule was based on that of the Canons Regular, Benedictine and Cistercian observances. They assisted at Divine Office, obliged to fast and abstinence, simple dress, etc. They were suppressed during the Council of Vienne (1311-1312)

## Knights of Malta

It was founded in Jerusalem and the mission was to care for the hospital of St John the Baptist. They followed the Rule of St Augustine. The members were from clergy and laity, observed the vows and led community life. Both groups spread rapidly in Europe and defeated the Moors in Spain.

Teutonic Knights had their origin from the hospital created by citizens of Bremen and Luebek during the siege of Acre in 1189-1190. In course of time military service got predominance over hospital apostolate (Jedin, 1982).

Another group of military order in Spain was Knights of Santiago de Compostela. The followers were not religious and they were not observing the religious vows.

For an ordinary Christian, the disturbing question is: How to reconcile military undertakings with vowed life? Monks engaged in wars could not be digested by traditional Christians. St Bernard, great champion of the Military Orders, argues that "they are fighting for the Lord". St Peter the Hermit says that "they are monks as regards their virtues, but soldiers in their action". The medieval concept of the Kingdom of God and Christ depicted as King of kings encouraged Christians to dedicate their lives as Christians to fight for Christ.

**Conclusion**

It is not an easy task to present a comprehensive picture of the medieval spirituality, especially that of the High Middle Ages. Europe was the arena of activities Christian religion was the unifying force of Europe. The spiritual movements should be understood in the context of Avignon Papacy, Western Schism, Conciliarism, Renaissance and Humanism, etc. The whole situation got deteriorated with the presence of fore-runners such as John Wyclif and John Hus. The constant cry of the Medieval Church reform of the Church from top to bottom. Many of the spiritual revival attempts narrated above helped the Church to face the challenges and to re-orientate the Church to her pristine purity and simplicity. However, one may wonder why the Protestant reform ideas spread so rapidly in Europe. One answer may be the religious reform movements were not very powerful on the eve of the Protestant Reformation and the religious practices were becoming more and more superficial and commercialized. Added to that, there was no concerted efforts from the part of the ecclesiastical authorities to undertake a thorough reform.

**References**

Aumann, J. (1989). *Christian Spirituality in the Catholic Tradition*. London: Sheed & Ward, p.86.

Bihlmeyer, K. (1967). *Church History* (Vol 2). Westminster: The Newman Press, p.133.

Hughes, P. (1985). *A History of the Church* (Vol 2). London: Sheed and Ward, p. 360.

Jedin, H. (Ed.) (1980). *History of the Church* (Vol III). New York: The Seabury Press, p. 329.

Jedin, H. (Ed.) (1982). *History of the Church* (Vol IV). New York: Crossroad, pp.181-182.

Lawrence, C. H. (1989). Medieval Monasticism (2nd ed.). London and New York: Longman, p. 86.

O'Mahony, C. (1986). *OCD, Church History* (Vol I). Alwaye, p.267.

Schaff, P. (1989). *History of the Christian Church* (Vol VI). Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, pp.194-205.

Tanner, N. (2011). *New Short History of the Catholic Church*. New York: Burns & Oates, p.120.