

Denominations

My thoughts on current English denominations and their key aspects of Spirituality.

Pentecostal – like to feel God, hear from God (prophecy), speak in tongues (want to see stuff)! Prophecy and the hope of revival very important. Looking for perfection. Faith based. Often anti-intellectual.

Church of England – Middle class. Not too serious, but not too lax. Quality of devotion greatly varies from church to church. More recently wanting to connect more emotionally with God. Some going to the high-side for this – taize and candles. Others to the HTB praying in tongues and jumping up and down side!

Salvation Army – Want to be busy for God – achieve things for God. Tradition. Veneration of William Booth. Music very important. Very good hymns – one of the main ways people can remind themselves of doctrine. Collecting money – lots!

Baptist – a bit wet!

Quaker – very quiet! Lost their way a lot – shame. Very interested in what God is doing now but don't seem to realise that God does not change and so God's word gives us the principles for how God works and gives us a good idea of what God wants now. Want to hear from God.

Luther

Luther had some positive and negative influences on Christian Spirituality.

His positive influences included his promotion of meditation on God's word. For example his work *A Simple Way to Pray*, 1535. This was popular and gave a four fold framework to meditation.

This included *Instruction*, *Thanksgiving*, *Confession* and *Prayer*. In *instruction* the seeker looks to God for instruction and all his needs. In *thanksgiving* the seeker remembers all that God has done for him – especially God's great act of redemption. The seeker then goes on to *confess* his sins and acknowledge his weaknesses. Finally the seeker prays for God to renew his faith and keep him strong in obedience.

Another great contribution of Luther was his insistence that believers do not need an intermediate between themselves and God. This meant that ordinary believers could be confident of a closer relationship to God unrestrained from an 'official mediator'. The notion of the 'priesthood of believers' also meant that ordinary Christians had a stronger identity.

Luther brought out some lovely mystical insights, in particular of the mystical union between God and the believer, which is like a man and wife in marriage. Luther explains how the believer is united to God and receives all of God's riches; at the same time Christ takes away all of the believers sin so that the believer is holy in the sight of God.

Luther also promoted the singing of hymns and wrote some brilliant hymns – the most famous of which, based on Psalm 46, is "[A Mighty Fortress is Our God](#)".

Luther's more negative influence on Christian Spirituality is linked to his, and his predecessor's, rejection of all things Catholic. Any work that had strong mystical tones in it was considered Catholic and thus in error. Another, not so deliberate, influence on Christian Spirituality was the way that Luther used terms like **mystic** in quite different ways to refer to quite different topics. Thus almost removing the more classical idea of mysticism.

Silence

The Desert Fathers went to great lengths to find silence. How can modern Christians incorporate more silence into their lives?

First I would like to say that often when people talk about practices that are acknowledged to be very good, yet poorly practised it is common to think that bigger is better, or more is better. Silence is good but God has called us to works prepared for us. It is unhealthy to spend a long time in silence – you will just end up daydreaming and no good will come of that!

One cannot just jump into silence. The mind, and the spirit, need to be prepared. One of the best ways to prepare is to refrain from excessive talking, also doing manual work – I find this particularly helpful. It takes time to slow down and a time of silent communion with God should be prepared for.

Ways to spend time in quiet for 10 minutes:

Watch a candle flicker in the dark (the darkness helps remove distractions!)

Be aware of your breathing

Look at a religious picture (Calvinists might not like this)
After reading a parable or short gospel section picture the scene.

The main benefit of silence is closer communion with God: a greater sensitivity to his guidance and deeper communion.

My experience with silence.

Good

Sometimes I have sought and found an answer from God on a particular subject through waiting in God in quiet. I would spend 10-30 minutes a day in quiet for about a week, each time just quietly waiting in faith that God will speak in his own time. After about a week some new truth often opened up to me.

Bad

Sometimes I went a bit over the top with silence. There were several things in my life that I needed help with and so I sought silence to hear guidance from God. For several years I spent nearly all my spare time in quiet in my room (often 3 hours a day) to keep my mind quiet. I was so desperate that I would get annoyed when people talked to me and ended up being quite rude and abrupt – not exactly what God intended!

The Desert Fathers

Of great importance to the idea of The Desert is the wanderings of Israel in the wilderness. Here we get the two images of “journey” and “desert” together. The Desert Fathers sought solitude so that they may experience a fuller vision of God undistracted from business and temptations. Often people who were not ready for solitude found that they did not make progress but fell deeper into sin.

Cassian said that it was necessary to be prepared – to be perfect in fact – before going into the desert.

Two major players were Anthony (c.291–396 AD) described as the Father of Monks and Pachomius (ca. 290–346), a former soldier. The latter was a gifted administrator and organizer, and it was he who devised the structure which became the foundation for Monasticism.

An important event on the history of Desert Spirituality was the marriage of the Church to Rome, a consequence of the conversion of Constantine. Things became a bit too rosy for the church – obviously there were no longer any martyrdoms; Withdrawing from all that made life easy was seen as a type of martyrdom.

The main features of Desert Spirituality were withdrawal, silence and continuous prayer. Those that withdrew from the world did not abandon it, but sought to hold it up in their prayers.

Christian Poverty



I don't think modern Christians are particularly against poverty, but I think that the idea is strange to many of them. Jesus did say, "if you want to be perfect..." sell all your possessions. For many in the middle ages, poverty was thought of as being a necessary step on the journey to Christian perfection. They would renounce their possessions and get the minimum requirements by begging.

I don't like the idea of begging. I think it is wrong to beg from anyone especially unbelievers. Personally, I don't like the idea of charity status or getting government grants. It is dangerous to be in the pocket of anyone, especially unbelievers. A recent example is St Paul's, London [cialis rezeptfrei legal](#). Their doorstep became the camp ground of Occupy London – a protest mainly against bankers and their gambling practices. However, St Paul's received a lot of money from the Banks. This made things – complicated!__

In matters of money people like C.T. Studd and George Muller are influential today, especially for charismatics. They think of having faith for whatever you need each day. This however can lead to people being very wasteful. They get say £10,000 and blow it all in one go expecting new reserves to come tomorrow.

