

Discovering God through Action and Reflection

A Spirituality of IYCS



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1. Introduction

In our world, in our Church, and in our movement, there is much talk about the need for a deeper spirituality. People are faced with many frightening realities: poverty, inequality and unemployment; violence, domination and abuse of power at all levels; exploitation and corruption; the growth of an individualist, consumerist and competitive culture; and the difficulty in forming deep and lasting relationships. These leave many tormented by a sense of insecurity, fear and hopelessness.

In response, the world is being flooded by many types of spirituality offering some form of consolation and hope. Unfortunately many of these spiritualities are either reinforcing these realities, or are inviting people to escape from them! It is increasingly difficult to talk of a gospel that calls for a radical commitment to engaging with, and transforming this world in a spirit of love, openness and dialogue.

IYCS, along with other like-minded groups and people, has always promoted a spirituality of critical reflection and action within the perspective of transforming the world. However, with the increasing academic pressure and rapid turnover of student leaders, and through the growing difficulty in finding available chaplains schooled in this spirituality, the understanding and practice of it has waned in many parts of the world.

To address this problem, over the past five years, the International and Regional Teams of IYCS have organised and facilitated many training sessions for chaplains, animators and students, with a strong focus on deepening reflection on this spirituality. Out of these sessions, a regular call has been made for their fruits to be produced into a publication that could be a resource for the training of chaplains, animators and students at all levels of the movement and beyond.

The current International Team of IYCS therefore commissioned this booklet as a response to that call. It is hoped that it will be an important resource in facilitating training and understanding of the movement's

spirituality for all members, leaders, animators and chaplains of IYCS, as well as all others concerned about developing an integral spirituality. In particular, through living it out more profoundly in our daily lives, it is hoped that more and more students (and young people in general) will be fired with a deeper faith, hope, love and joy to make a difference and bring hope and change to our troubled world.

I am deeply indebted to various chaplains of the YCS (Pierre Ménard from Quebec, Fr. Vincent Monteiro from India, Br. John D’Cruz from Malaysia, Fr. Jordi Mas Pastor from Spain, and Fr. Jean-Paul Sagadou from Burkina Faso), whose insights and useful critiques have greatly helped to enrich this text. I am also very grateful to Meenuka Amaratunga and Manoj Mathew for their tireless efforts in doing the layout and design.

How to use this Booklet

This booklet can be used simply as a source for personal reflection. In addition, it can be used in a one or two day training programme in Integral Spirituality. To this end, some suggested programmes making use of the contents of the booklet are offered in the appendices.

Mike Deeb OP
Paris, April, 2007



2. What do we mean by “Spirituality”?

The word “spirituality” can evoke a variety of meanings, which are at times even in conflict with one other. It is therefore necessary to begin this reflection on the spirituality of IYCS by clarifying the sense in which we will use it.

Basically, by *spirituality* we mean “the spirit with which we do things, because we believe that it is the way that most enables us to encounter God”. There are always two dimensions to defining a spirituality: by defining the *form* it takes, and by defining the *content* it contains.

The *form* that one’s spirituality takes is the context, structure or mediation that every person or every group has to organise or find which enables them to discover, encounter and feel closer to the ultimate reality of God, Jesus or the Truth. Some find that they encounter God more profoundly through silent meditation; others through praying the rosary; or through singing and praying or dancing in a group; or through being outside in nature; or through Eucharistic adoration; or through gazing at icons or statues; or through reading the Bible alone; or through working amongst the poor; or through an intimate sharing with someone; or through being part of a large gathering/rally; or through wearing particular garments or objects; or through living in community; or through listening to music; or through recalling a particular saint; or through playing with children; or through having a meal together with others; We can continue with innumerable examples! Of course, each person can discover God in a number of these mediations or contexts. However, we are normally attracted to a way or a group that focuses on just one or two or a few of these mediations in particular.

Each of these contexts or mediations constitutes a particular “spirituality” – a way of awakening and encountering God’s Spirit that is already within each one of us, so that it nourishes our faith and the way we live. These mediations help us to discover a sense of meaning, and to set our hearts on fire. Thus each person or movement or religious congregation has a particular charism or spirituality (identifiable by points of reference

such as particular actions, gestures, symbols, and priority focuses) which defines their particular way of trying to encounter God.

While a particular *form* may enable different people to have a similar “spiritual” experience (in the sense of an “emotional” or “motivating” experience), this does not necessarily inspire the same fruits (way of living). In this sense, the form of the spirituality can be neutral (although some forms can be more conducive to producing the desired fruit). Therefore, in order to complete the definition of the spirituality, we have to identify the *content* that it contains. This is the message or the way of living that we believe the Holy Spirit is calling us to pass on, which depends on how we interpret the Gospel. It is the criteria we adopt to evaluate whether we are living according to the true Spirit of Jesus. While many spiritualities complement each other in awakening the Holy Spirit that lies within us, there are often spiritualities which are in contradiction. Thus some might encourage deep involvement in the world, while others encourage escaping from the world; or some might promote community while others promote individualism; or some might promote a humble spirit of dialogue with those who are different while others promote an absolutising of their own truth; or God may be seen as a compassionate friend by some and as a stern moralistic judge by others. Each one of us is continually challenged to discern whether it is indeed the Holy Spirit that our own spirituality is awakening in us or whether it is some other spirit.

What, then, is the *form* (the particular points of reference, contexts or mediations) used in IYCS that enables us to encounter God? And what is the *content* (the criteria for living according to the Spirit) which the movement is promoting? We can now try to identify the spirituality of IYCS?

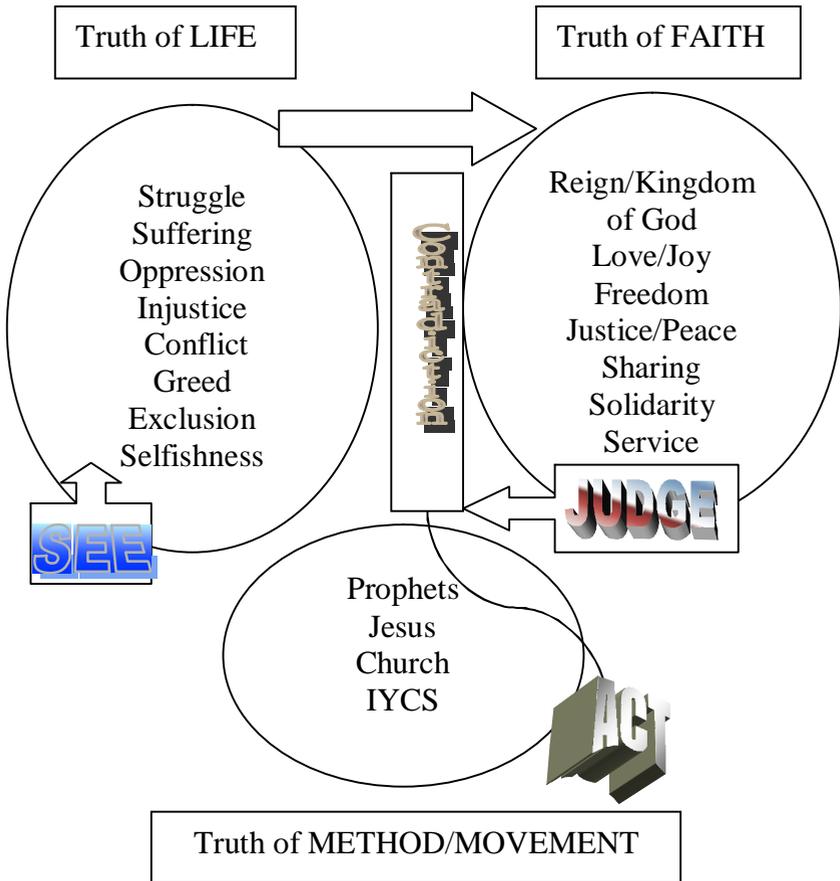
3. The Roots of IYCS Spirituality: Three Truths

The roots of the spirituality of IYCS lie in the “Three Truths in the lives of all Christians” articulated in the 1920’s by Joseph (later Cardinal) Cardijn, the founder of the Young Christian Workers (YCW). Cardijn identified three truths - of Life, Faith, and Method - as fundamental dimensions to be acknowledged if Christians are serious about communicating good news to any sector of the population. In the diagram below we show the interconnection between them.

The *truth of life* (of *reality* or of *experience*) reveals to us that life experience for most people, even while comprising many joys, is nevertheless largely a reality of struggle, suffering, oppression, injustice, conflict, greed, exclusion, and selfishness.

The *truth of faith*, on the other hand, assures us that we are all created in God's image. Hence, as children of God, we believe that all people are called to be co-creators in building a world that God intended: a world of love, joy, freedom, justice, peace, sharing, solidarity, and service – the Reign or Kingdom of God. It is a world that, in our deepest being, we all really desire. The truth of life is thus often experienced as a total contradiction of this truth of faith.

The *truth of method* (or of *movement* or *action*), therefore, highlights the necessity of finding a method and of building a movement to remove this contradiction - to change life experience from one of suffering and injustice to one of love and justice - and hence to bring faith and life together. Following the tradition of the prophets, Jesus began this movement, the Church (of which IYCS is an integral part), which needs to be continually reminded of its task to “denounce” evil and to “announce” Good News. And each Christian is personally called to be an active agent in enabling this movement to succeed in its mission



With these assumptions about the meaning (*content*) of the Gospel, Cardijn developed the *See Judge Act* method as his answer to the search for an effective method (*form*) of evangelization – of bringing Good News to the world by reducing the contradiction between life and faith. This process, he insisted, must always start from life - to *see* a concrete experience or issue, which is always an actual and true story, and to analyse it to understand its context and causes. The second step is then to *judge* the problem or issue by confronting it with the experience of faith, by searching for the feelings God would have in relation to it. The third step, finally, is to make concrete plans to *act*, in the light of the preceding reflection, in order to address the issue.

This process, with a continual focus on reality, the gospel, and action, is, in a nutshell, what constitutes the spirituality of IYCS, which we call the “Review of Life”. It is in taking each of these focuses seriously in an ongoing process of reflection and action that we believe we are most profoundly able to encounter God, discover the Truth, and thereby become God’s instruments in enabling the Reign of God to come. Or, in other words, the Holy Spirit is to be discovered in a deep understanding of real life experience, through a discerning reflection on the Gospel, and through our reflective action aimed at transforming that reality.

In the remainder of this booklet, we will be looking at each of these three truths in turn, in order to identify the specific *form* and *content* of the spirituality that they reveal. In the process we will be identifying criteria for evaluating whether we are really living an integral spirituality of action and reflection.

4. Truth of Life

4.1 A Spirituality of Integrating the Whole of Life

Starting from Life

We begin with the Truth of Life because “seeing” - really seeing - concrete life experience is always the starting point (the first major *form*) of our spirituality, which is why we call it the “*Review of Life*”. We believe that God’s Spirit, the Spirit of Life, is revealed as we reflect deeply on our own life experience with the eyes and the heart of faith, trust, and openness. This primary focus on life experience in our tradition is what has distinguished us from most other Christian youth organisations. From the beginning, we have wanted to allow the Spirit of Jesus (the Holy Spirit) to blow and to breathe through us, in order to change the world around us – to make it a place where joy, happiness, justice, and peace (the Reign or Kingdom of God) can prevail.

The different realities we face

So we generally agree that we need to start with our feet on the ground, by getting to know what is happening around us – by doing an analysis of our reality. However, we do not always agree on which reality we should focus.

Many of our groups focus on youth issues, such as drugs, alcohol and relationships, or on student or educational issues, such as student representation, academic stress and financial difficulties, or on social issues, such as poor or orphaned children and the loneliness of the sick. These are the classic focuses of our movement around which there is little disagreement, since we want to start where the students are at.

Then we find some groups which engage in a political analysis of their local, national and international situations, and others which do some cultural analysis, especially with a view to promoting inter-cultural dialogue. Not everyone does these, and some even feel that a political analysis should not be done, since ‘we are not a political movement’. In such cases politics is often associated with corruption or ideological

conflicts between parties, which are seen as irreconcilable with faith or spirituality. Also, in some countries, any political discussion is regarded as subversive, so our groups, through fear, often avoid any such discussion.

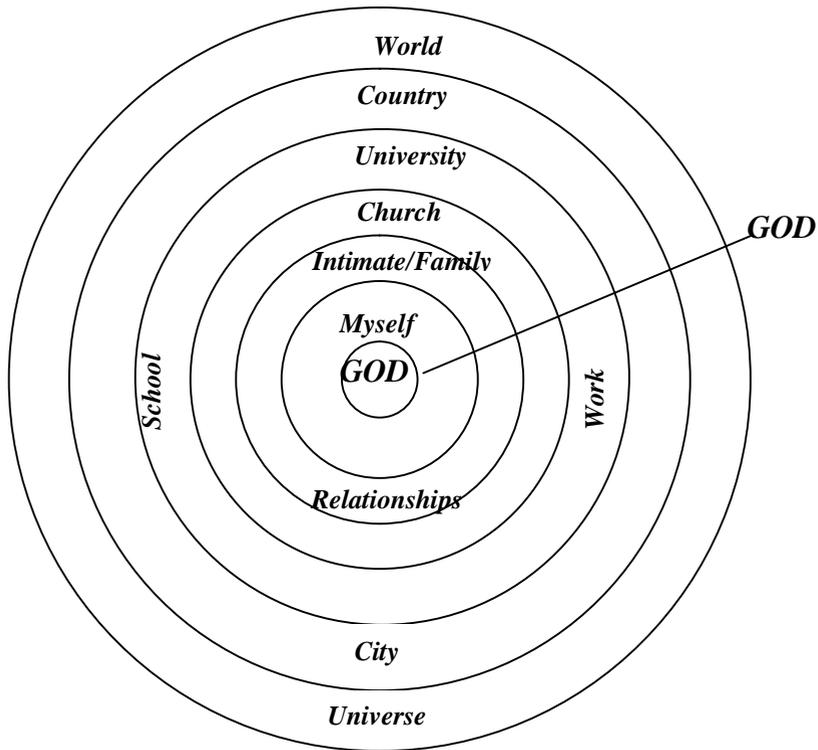
On the other hand, some groups engage in a reflection on their faith, and try to analyse and understand the source of what motivates or demotivates them. However, not very many do this, and some even resist it, seeing it as self-centred and individualistic, whereas they understand our movement to be focused on engaging with, and changing the world.

All these experiences raise the question: What is the reality we want to change, and therefore what do we need to analyse and act upon within our movement?

An Integrated Analysis

Our movement has always understood our mission in terms of the transformation of all reality, the whole of life, which is indivisible. So we have to focus on everything that affects (positively or negatively) our own lives and the lives of the people we are living and working with. To do this we need categories, and there are many different ways to categorise our lives. However, we would like to suggest one way to get a handle on the many dimensions of life that we all experience.

Consider the life of each person as an “onion” with many layers, with each of which the person has a relationship [See the diagram below]. These relationships range from being very intimate to being less personal to being very distant. Yet all of these layers (relationships) are interconnected, so that freedom and harmony or the lack of either in each layer affects the others, either directly or indirectly. Let us now look at the nature of the relationships we have in each layer and how each is related to the other layers:



1. Relationship with Myself

The first layer is myself, with whom I have the most intimate relationship. There are many things that I know about myself that no-one else knows. And I have strengths, but also weaknesses and many wounds that life and people have inflicted on me. Maybe I love the way I am, or maybe I hate the way I am, or maybe I fluctuate between the two. Maybe I look after myself well, or maybe I neglect myself. What is sure, though, is that the way I relate to, and feel about myself determines, to a large extent, my ability to respond to the needs of others unconditionally. If I don't like myself, I will either ignore other's needs, because I feel miserable myself, or I will respond to them so that they will like me in a way that I cannot like myself, and hence I hope that they will fill my own need. In such situations, I am often afraid to face myself and acknowledge who or what I am, which causes me to become alienated from myself. I end up acting out of drives (hungers) of which I am

unaware, or have lost control. If I like myself, I can be much freer and joyful in responding unconditionally to others' needs (Luke 10:27). For many people, the biggest struggle in life is discovering how to like themselves - how to feel good about themselves. It is therefore vital that we focus on this layer by giving time and space to getting to know our real selves, by identifying and acknowledging our feelings, and by trying to accept who we really are.

2. *Intimate Relationships*

The second layer consists of those people with whom I share my daily life and feelings – my family, my lover, my close friends – my intimate relationships. These can bring me the greatest joy, if there is mutual love and acceptance, or lead me to the deepest despair that comes from a sense of rejection, if mutuality or trust is absent. Most people spend the largest portion of their energy on seeking, developing and sustaining such relationships within which sexual preoccupations and confusions are normally an integral part. It is therefore often the area of greatest vulnerability which most people struggle to face, especially since, in most cultures, it is taboo to speak openly about sexual questions. It is also my family which largely determines my cultural values and behaviour, which, in turn, influence the attitudes and prejudices I grow up with. These affect my ability to be open to, and to relate to people of other cultures. Since this area of our interpersonal relationships is the one that preoccupies (and mostly worries) people most of the time, no analysis can be complete without taking it into account.

3. *Relationship with the Church*

The third layer consists of those people with whom I share my faith, the fundamental driving force in my life (even if the understanding of that faith has extreme variations). We are gathered together in that institution called Church, full of much love, in which many of us have found, and continue to find life and meaning. But the Church is also full of many contradictions, so that many students who have developed a critical consciousness struggle to feel at home in it. I might believe that Jesus Christ offers us the fullness of life, but the Church's practices and teachings often appear as obstacles to this realisation, giving rise to a

love-hate relationship. In the face of this, many students choose to leave the Church, and others choose to ignore it. However, in our movement, we choose to engage with it, since it has given birth to, and still nourishes our faith and culture in some way (even if indirectly). It also continues to have a profound impact on the lives of millions of people throughout the world, and we (who are the Church) desire that all of them discover the fullness of life that Jesus offers. An ongoing reflection on the Church is therefore indispensable.

4. Relationship with my Secular Community (School, Work, Neighbourhood, Village)

The next layer consists of those people with whom I share my daily activities. Although I am likely to have friends amongst them, my relationship with most of the people in these broad communities will be much more, if not totally, impersonal. Nevertheless, what happens or is decided there affects me intimately, whether it be the rules of the organisation, the culture of the community, the honesty of the people, or the virtue of the leaders. I cannot opt out of this world, and so, if I want a life of justice and peace for myself and others in this community, I have to focus on, analyse, and engage with it.

5. Relationship with my City or Country

The next layer consists of those people whom I may never see or know, but with whom I relate (in my city or my country) through us sharing a common piece of land, and a common government which makes laws that apply equally to all of us. Whether it be a law to drive on the right-hand side of the road, a decision to increase taxes, a rejection of an appeal by a community for a new school to be built, or a prohibition of a practice of a religion, all of us bear the consequences, even if they affect each of us differently. The biggest proportion of the suffering in the world is caused at this so-called 'political' level. Actually, when we talk about 'politics' we are referring to 'a way of organising power', which is applicable at every level of our "onion". Hence we can have a fair or a discriminatory way of organising power (political justice or injustice) even in a single relationship, in a family, in the Church, in a school or workplace, or wherever. Nevertheless, when most people speak of

'politics', they are usually referring to the governments of cities or countries.

Most of us feel very small when mention is made of this political level, and we are easily inclined to leave it to others who are 'interested in politics', especially if engagement at this level carries any danger. However, even if I do not do anything, I am still having an effect, since I am reinforcing the status quo. Thus, if I am concerned about relieving suffering in the world, and bringing about peace, I have to engage at this level. This does not necessarily mean involving oneself in party politics. There are numerous organisations (including the church) in civil society, which are engaged in the context of a political perspective.

6. Relationship with the World or the Universe

The next layer consists of those people about whom I may never know anything, who live as far away as the opposite side of the world. Nevertheless, decisions that are made far away from my country are affecting me on a day-to-day basis. A decision by one or two people in a large corporation in New York can cause the value of a currency in a far-away country to collapse within a split-second, thus impoverishing the entire population. Or the pollution allowed by people everywhere in the world is affecting the ecological balance, causing climates to change, and affecting agricultural production indiscriminately anywhere. And, with modern technology, instantaneous communication is possible anywhere, causing every culture to be diluted by the cultures being propagated through the internet and other forms of mass media. The world is now a small village. Therefore, if I am concerned about my future, the future of my loved ones, and of the whole world, I have no alternative but to grow in global awareness and to engage at this level. I even need to become more aware of how our vast mysterious universe (within which our own world is just a tiny speck) is evolving in ways that are beyond our control, and which may have effects on us at an ecological level.

7. *Relationship with God*

The final reality that we need to face in our lives (which we cannot limit to only one layer) is our relationship with God. Whether we can make sense of, and believe in God or not, all of us struggle, at some stage or another, with the source and meaning of our lives and its 'spiritual dimension' which is not visible or tangible. Because it is not scientifically tangible (and therefore not capable of being located in a particular layer), many people in the world exclude it from the realm of reflection. However, in our movement, it is also a vital area of focus as it is a preoccupation that concerns us and most people a lot, and that we cannot wish away!

We can say that, for us, God, who created all things in harmony, is at the heart of everything. God is within me, and is at the heart of each one of these layers, looking at them from the perspective of the poor, the marginalised, and those suffering, bursting for the Holy Spirit to be manifested at every level, and trying to show the *interconnectedness* of each level. For example, I can only address the problem of domestic violence in my community (layer 2), if I can see its connection to the unemployment (layer 5 & 6) and the resulting loss of self-worth of the men (layer 1) which provokes aggressive reactions; or if I can see its connection to the patriarchal values that all people (men and women) are schooled in (layer 2, 3 & 4) in most societies today. I am relating intimately with God when I can feel God's anguish and joy at each layer of my existence, from the deeply personal to the broadly global.

I cannot love God *per se*. I love God by accepting God's love for me, which means believing that I am acceptable or lovable (layer 1). This in turn fills me with a confidence and a compassion, which enables me to empathise with and love others less conditionally (1 John 4:10-12). I am thus relating intimately with God when I can experience God's compassion for those who are suffering at every level. I am relating intimately with God when I allow God's Spirit to use me to bring life, freedom and wholeness (Luke 4:18) to each layer of the humanity given to us. Thus a central dimension of the spirituality of IYCS is our consciousness of God, which pushes us to look at *all* aspects (layers) of reality (the whole of life), and to seek an integration and harmony

amongst them. But to achieve this integration, each of us has to regularly focus on our personal experiences and understandings of God, to see how these are relating to our relationships with all the other layers of our lives.

4.2 A Spirituality of “Seeing Concretely, Critically, and Deeply”

Having identified *in which* realities we discover God (the first *form* of the ‘Life’ part of our spirituality), we now turn to *how* we can discover God within them (the necessary quality or the second *form* of that search). Which approaches are central to our spirituality?

Firstly, our spirituality is a spirituality of seeing *concretely*. We always need to start with a concrete experience that I or that someone I know has encountered in any reality, and about which we can tell a story of what actually happened. This is essential if we really want to be open to what God is revealing in that reality. We do not begin by making general observations or statements about any reality, as these imply that we have already made an interpretation or judgement of that reality without identifying the facts. Since we all approach any situation with prior assumptions and prejudices, such an automatic interpretation can easily be far from the real truth. Each story has its own specificity, and only after knowing all the facts, is it possible to start seeing real connections to other past or present realities, and to making plausible judgements.

Jesus shows this well in his refusal to quickly judge or condemn the woman caught in the act of adultery before pondering on all the facts (John 8:3-11).

Secondly, our spirituality is a spirituality of seeing *critically*. This means that we should never accept or interpret things simply at face-value. We should always look behind what is being said, done or reported – whether by our friends or by our enemies - before making a judgement. We keep asking “Why?” in order to uncover the underlying root cause or issue. Without this we can put a lot of energy into action on the basis of faulty analyses, half-truths and even lies, which can only be obstacles to human progress. Jesus demonstrated well his grasp of root causes when he dared to violate the laws of the Sabbath (Mark 2:23-28), and when he drove the money-changers out of the Temple (Matt 21:12-13). Yet being critical is

very difficult in today's world, where more and more people are clinging on to "absolutes" which they do not want to be questioned at all! For many such people, being "critical" means being negative or pessimistic, and is therefore a quality to be avoided! Although, in our movement, being critical is a very positive value, we have to take care that our critical approach is not, in fact, negative or pessimistic, but rather positive and constructive. Only in this way will our critical approach avoid being destructive, and really contribute to building up the world.

Thirdly (and very closely tied to the previous point), our spirituality is a spirituality of seeing *deeply* - of encountering God in the depths of all of Creation. The deeper we see, the closer we come to God.

So, to understand our concrete daily experiences, we usually begin by analysing the immediate social context we find ourselves in (our family, our school, our parish, our neighbourhood). However, for us to see the roots of all we discover there, and hence to see Creation in its fullness, we need to understand its historical evolution (how it came about) and to engage in a broader social, political and economic analysis, to understand the forces that are driving and determining power and wealth in the world. But this too is not enough! We also need to engage in a cultural, ecological and psychological analysis, to understand the powerful forces that are motivating people, and breeding the values out of which we operate. Thus Jesus helped his apostles to understand the social pressures that provoked James and John to seek privileged treatment (Mark 10:35-45). When we are aware of our own cultural assumptions (the behaviours and values that we take for granted) and our own woundedness (which often leaves us feeling excessively needy or reacting inappropriately), we can then be in a stronger position to open ourselves up to the truth of others, and to respond unconditionally to the suffering experienced by the billions in the world. Thus, a more holistic analysis, which penetrates all the layers of our "onion", will enable God's Spirit to be revealed more fully in each one of us, and enable us to become truly life-givers.

We thus believe that God is to be discovered more profoundly as we approach our reality with the qualities of greater concreteness, a constructive critical attitude, and a deep, historical and holistic analysis.

5. Truth of Faith

5.1 A Spirituality of Judging Reality and our own Values with the eyes of Jesus Christ

Having identified and understood a real-life reality, the second major *form* of IYCS spirituality is then to take a step back and look at the issue with the eyes of faith, which, for us, are the eyes of Jesus Christ. Firstly we want to identify how Jesus can be made present (incarnated) in that situation, and therefore to judge how the situation corresponds to His way. Then secondly, we want to identify how that situation and Jesus' response to it challenge our own values and priorities.

Thus, this moment of *judging* is meant to be a moment of deep conversion in the *Review of Life* process. Unfortunately, though, many of our groups find it very difficult to “judge”! It is normally very clear what needs to be done to “see” and to “act”. We can describe an issue or problem, analyse it, and decide what we can do to respond to it or change it. Or we can describe an action, evaluate its effectiveness, and plan another action to improve the situation. However, once we have finished “seeing” the problem or the action, and reach the moment when we are supposed to “judge”, we sometimes read a biblical text and briefly discuss it, or more often than not we just brush over the question, and just go straight to planning an action. “Judging” is often seen as a dispensable element in the process – something it would be nice to do if we had time (which we never have, of course!). This challenges us to re-think what this moment in our lives or our meetings is really for. How can the moment of “judging” enable us to encounter God more deeply?

The difficulty to define criteria

The first point that we have to appreciate is that every decision to *act* presumes a conscious or unconscious *judgement* beforehand – about what needs to be done to make the situation better. “Judging” is essentially a moment to ensure that our decisions are not based on the *unconscious assumptions* that we have always had, but rather on a thorough *deep and critical reflection and evaluation* of the reality, issue or problem that we

have identified. And to do any evaluation we always need to choose *criteria*.

As a Christian movement, our chief criterion is the person of *Jesus* (his life, words, actions, and spirit), the knowledge of whom our Tradition, stemming from the apostles, has passed on to us through Scripture. We therefore normally use the lens of Scripture (the *Gospel*) to “judge”. But it is not enough *just* to look at Scripture for various reasons:

1. There are many different interpretations of the same text – even amongst learned theologians. This is because each person and each group always approaches a text with their own unconscious assumptions (life experiences, attitudes and prejudices), with their own ideology (system of ideas), and with their own theology (system of ideas about the nature of God), none of which are neutral. Thus, enemies often use the same Bible to justify their actions against each other.
2. The Gospel does not have something direct to say on every situation and context with which we are faced, since the world has changed enormously, and many new issues and situations have arisen that the people of Jesus’ time could not even have contemplated.
3. We can be tempted to seek biblical texts which use the same words as us in order to *justify* whatever judgement or action we have already decided is appropriate - which would add nothing new to our “judgement”. Or we can also be tempted to *apply* a text directly to our situation without taking into account its meaning in its particular context or time, which may be vastly different to our own. Both these applications would be using the Bible like a recipe book – a static document – which was written just for me today. For us in IYCS this fundamentalist approach diminishes the richness of the Bible as an historical living document which recounts the experiences of, and struggles with God that our ancestors in the faith had throughout the ages. It is therefore the source of our faith whose light we have to responsibly identify and re-read in our own time and context.

In the light of this reality, the Church, through the ages, in the teachings of its pastors, and in the works of scholars of the faith (theologians), has

continually sought to identify anew Jesus' spirit (the Holy Spirit) in the major issues facing people in their lives. This has resulted in a rich reservoir of authoritative texts from Church Councils, popes, and bishops (our "Tradition" or Church Teachings) which show how the Church is constantly evolving in its appreciation of the Gospel truth, and therefore always changing and renewing itself. We therefore also need to refer to and use this evolving *Tradition* as a vital lens (criterion) for judging situations.

At times, these Church authorities make definitive statements on controversial questions to give direction and prevent chaos. This obliges us to take such teachings very seriously and positively, and to try to relate the criteria they identify to our own life experience. We recognise, nevertheless, that there are always debates emerging from new experiences in our multiple, very diverse and evolving human contexts that challenge existing formulations of the truth, and call for fresh theological reflections. This is complicated by the fact that, almost from the beginning, *diverse understandings or images of the nature and function of the Church* have existed which have arisen in different historical times and conditions. Several of these diverse images are still evident and exist side by side today, each with a distinctive theology and spirituality which are frequently in conflict with those of other images.

So, for example, concerning *internal* Church relations, in some societies, the Church is accepted as a steep hierarchical structure, almost exclusively led by the clergy, with laity playing little or no role in decision-making. Whereas, in other societies, being Church requires a major focus on building communities and forms of ministry and leadership where lay people can participate fully and freely in sharing their faith and even in decision-making. In such contexts, the role of the Church authorities (hierarchy) is primarily a unifying and inspiring one – to be the leaven in the community and to facilitate collegial decision-making.

Or, also, concerning the Church's relationship to different *external* understandings of 'Truth', in some societies, particularly those which are culturally homogeneous, or where the Church feels itself under attack, otherness or difference is often seen as a threat to societal unity or Church

survival. ‘Tradition’ is then often understood as something unchangeable, and secularising forces are viewed as the enemy of the good. In such contexts, it is easy for the Church to see its role as the strict guardian of orthodoxy and discipline requiring a centralising authority to maintain uniformity and order.

On the other hand, in other societies, particularly those where diversity, pluralism, and secularisation have become acceptable realities, the Church authorities often affirm the pluralism and difference, and encourage inculturation and creativity in order to embrace these developments. Open dialogue with other churches and religions is also encouraged without fear, and rather than providing final answers to difficult moral questions, Church authorities help people to develop an informed conscience in facing them.

Thus, in the midst of these diverse and evolving human contexts and understandings of Church, when new experiences emerge that challenge existing formulations of the truth, it is the responsibility of Christians to share these with the Church authorities and to help them develop new formulations that take these realities into account. This helps to deepen and enrich the *criterion of Tradition* that we use to make our judgements.

The impossibility of absolutely “true” judgements

These diverse human contexts and images and understandings of Church reveal the difficulty we will always have to identify absolute criteria for making judgements from Scripture and Tradition, since interpreters of texts are always influenced by their subjective experience. We can therefore never be *absolutely* sure that our judgements are true, since there is no judgement that is ideologically neutral.

Unfortunately, in our fast-changing world today, which breeds so much insecurity, fear, and relativism (where one’s own personal experience becomes the only criterion of judgement), more and more people are looking for clear and absolute norms and principles to cling to, and therefore cannot accept such “uncertainty”. There is thus a great temptation for the faithful to seek, and for leaders to provide interpretations of texts with an absolute claim to truth (fundamentalist

certainty), even though most of these absolute claims are illusory. While such absolutes can have a very comforting effect in the short-term, in time they will either have oppressive effects on the members of the group, or aggressive effects on those outside the group. As Pope Benedict XVI warned at the World Youth Day Vigil in Cologne in 2005, “Absolutising what is not absolute but relative is called totalitarianism”. Thus, while I can have a conviction about the truth, I can never claim to have the Truth.

However, this difficulty in establishing whether we are on a “true” path or not is not a reason to despair. Once I can acknowledge this difficulty, the possibility of me becoming more open to others and to their opinions (even those of my enemies), and to the Absolute Truth (God) is immediately greater, and offers the hope of more dialogue, and maybe even greater unity among us all.

IYCS Criteria

Despite this “uncertainty”, each person and all groups, nevertheless, have to identify criteria for evaluating their lives and actions. Thus, the students and chaplains of IYCS have always sought to identify the points of unity in their faith - a theology (a system of ideas about the nature of God and its implications in our lives) that is faithful to the experience of the students, to the Gospel, and to the acceptable diversity offered by the Church’s Tradition.

Our international meetings over the decades have repeatedly reaffirmed the *content* of our spirituality: our belief that Jesus revealed to us a God who is present in the world, and whose priority is to bring about a kingdom or reign in continuity with this world (Mark 1:15; Luke 17:21; Matt 12:28; 25:31-46) where all people, especially the poor and marginalised, are freed (saved) from all forms of oppression (Luke 4:18; 6:20-25) and dependency (John 5:1-9), and each has equal dignity (Matt 23:1-12); a world of love and justice, with a spirit of sharing (Matt 19:16-22) and service (Mark 10:41-45), which enables unity, solidarity and harmony to exist for everyone. This faith motivates us to promote such a new world (to evangelise) through:

- building small close and accepting communities (of students, in our case). These are the Church amongst students, and are signs of this new world by offering people support in their search for a clear identity in our fast-changing world where everything has become relativised. We do this by giving everyone (including the youth) the space to take responsibility and participate fully (regardless of hierarchical status) in common reflection, transforming action and celebration (Matt 23:8-12; Mark 10:13-15);
- engaging (from the point of view of the poor and marginalised) with those who have power to promote or prevent this new world being realised (Matt 21:23-46; Mark 12:15-18; Luke 19:1-10);
- promoting a spirit of openness, broad global solidarity, ecumenism, and dialogue, which challenges us all to go beyond narrow, exclusive group loyalties (my ethnic, cultural or language group, or my church or movement), and to discover our true identity in a continual search for the truth (Matt 5:43-47; Mark 3:31-35; Luke 10:29-37);
- faithful and critical reflection on all the traditions we inherit, whether secular (cultural practices, gender relations, etc.) or religious (the Bible, sacraments, church structures and practices, etc.), with an informed conscience, in order to understand the truth and value they offered within the broad social and ecclesial contexts in which they arose. This enables them to be valued, experienced and inculturated in a rich renewed way in the world of today (Mark 2:23-28; John 4:5-9,27), so that the purpose of God's Law (service, compassion, love and mercy) can be obediently fulfilled (Matt 5:18; 9:13; 12:1-8).

Our movement brings people together who either share or are open to these views of faith, and are committed to forming people (and hence new members) in it. We recognise that not everyone in the Church fully shares this theology, even though we might all acknowledge the same creed (statement of faith) which unifies us. We respect such difference, and always remain open to engaging with others on our points of disagreement for the sake of the truth. This is what makes us Catholic: recognising that, within our diversity, maybe those with different (and even diametrically opposing) views to our own are pointing to a truth that we have not yet seen!

We can thus assert that the above theology – which is rooted in *critical reflection and action for a better world: the Reign of God* – corresponds most closely to the truth of our faith reflection and experience so far. It therefore defines our criteria for making our judgements of reality and of our own values with the eyes of Jesus Christ. It constitutes the *content* of our spirituality, which I have tried to capture in the following prayer:

Loving God,
Thank you for the many gifts you have given to me,
even though I have done nothing to deserve them.
Give me the wisdom to see myself, to see others, and to see the world
with your eyes,
the eyes of Jesus, your Son.
In all my encounters, give me the compassion to feel what those on all
sides are feeling,
especially those who are poor or suffering.
Give me the strength and courage of the Holy Spirit to change what is not
in your plan
of love, justice, mercy and peace.
And give me the faith to know that all my successes and failures come
from you,
and that they bring neither glory nor shame to me.
Amen.

5.2 A Spirituality of Permanent Search for the Truth

Having identified the theology underlying our spirituality (its *content* or *message*), we now need to ask: How can we foster an ongoing growth in, and faithfulness to this way of following Jesus? What contexts, structures or mediations (what *form*) do we need to provide to enable all our members to discover this message, encounter Jesus, and thus come closer to the ultimate reality of God? How can we strengthen them to persevere, in joy, in a permanent openness and search for the Truth? We can propose three broad areas to achieve this: through creating spaces (1) to do theology; (2) for facing our unconscious assumptions and prejudices; and (3) for celebration and prayer.

Creating spaces to “do” theology

Firstly, in the tradition of our movement, the basic structure is always the small group or team using the *see judge act* methodology. As mentioned above, it is normally clear what needs to be done to “see” or “act”, while it is often difficult to know how to “judge”! A lot more effort therefore needs to be made to help our members to understand how to use the “judge” moment in a group’s reflection more effectively.

Some of the questions usually asked in order to “judge” are:

- What would Jesus do in this situation? or
- How have the leaders in the Church seen this issue? or
- What does this issue or question have to do with our faith?

If given the space, these questions can inspire very powerful reflections, since they give the opportunity to stand back from the issue, and look at it from a different point of view – with the eyes of faith. Doing this is what is commonly called “*doing theology*”.

To “judge” is not simply to *apply* to our situation what others have said. Not even what Jesus has said (because the Gospel does not talk about every situation we are faced with today)! Not even what the Church teachings have said (because theology in the Church is always evolving)! We rather have to *engage* with the Gospel, with Church teachings, or with theological scholars, to understand and digest what they are saying about the issue in question, in order to develop our *own* reflection on *the meaning of our faith in our own lives* and its relationship to the issue. It is thus that, when we “judge”, we are *doing* theology. This is what can and does contribute to the development of theology in the Church as a whole – even if done by a simple student with no formal theological training!

But then (the question might arise), if we are not *applying* the Gospel to our situation, are we not in danger of creating our own gospel – maybe even our own heresy? To which the answer must be “Maybe!”. This is always a possibility. But this danger is equally a possibility even if we try to apply the Gospel strictly to our issues. How come? Because, as we have already mentioned, whenever we read the Gospel, our interpretation is based, to a large extent, on our own assumptions, our own life experiences, and our own attitudes and prejudices. How else is it possible

to have so many different interpretations of each biblical text by so many learned theologians? So we come back again to the question of our own unconscious assumptions, and how central they are to all the judgements we make! Is there any way we can make a “true” judgement, without our own subjective experience getting in the way? As we have already mentioned, we can avoid an individualistic interpretation by sharing any new reflections with Church authorities or theologians who hopefully can help us to locate our reflection within the broad Church tradition, and to identify whether our experience requires any new theological formulation to be developed.

Nevertheless, in order for a sound theological judgement to be made, it is vital to provide thorough formation for all the members of the group in Scripture, Church Teachings, and the theology of our movement. This could be done through Bible Study groups, theology discussion groups, day-, weekend-, or week-long formation events or courses, etc. Only with such formation is it possible for them to make their judgement with an *informed conscience*. If their knowledge (and internalisation) of the movement’s theology is weak, a profound judgement according to its objectives will not be possible, since that judgement could be based on criteria different from those of our movement. Our members are then less likely to have a thirst for changing the world for the better, resulting in our action having a diminished impact. Clearly, this formation is only possible if a group is accompanied by a chaplain or animator who is well-schooled in these areas.

Creating spaces for Facing our Unconscious Assumptions and Prejudices

A second necessary structure required to get closer to the Truth is a space to discover and acknowledge the unconscious assumptions (repeatedly referred to above) that lie behind all the judgements we make. It is very difficult to ever talk about making an “objective” judgement of a situation, since we all have feelings, prejudices and assumptions which we bring to the situation and which determine how we are able to look at it. While we can never fully remove the element of “subjectivity”, at least if we can acknowledge the presence of our own feelings, prejudices and assumptions, it can help us to discern how dominant they are in making

the judgement. Again, one of the most appropriate spaces to do this is in the context of a small close group where a spirit of trust and unity exists. Such a sharing can then be a powerful moment for facing one's own prejudices, and hence for enabling conversion to take place.

To achieve a more profound judgement, then, we should ensure that we have included the following questions at some point in our reflection:

- What are my feelings (assumptions/prejudices) about this issue?
- What are the different ways that other people evaluate the issue?
- Which of these is closest to Jesus' way? Why?

This highlights another dimension of the "judge/reflection" moment in our meetings and in our lives. We are not only reflecting in order to change the situation for the better, but also to enable me and us personally to come closer to the Truth (to God) through this process of reflection and action. What is the good of trying to change a bad or problematic situation, if I try to address it with attitudes and prejudices that could only make it worse? Unfortunately, often we are not aware of our own prejudices, and this is why we need our small group (which hopefully can grow in trust) to reveal them to us when we, on our own, are not able to do so. We should also seek spaces where we can open ourselves to dialoguing with others who are very different to us (people of other religions, other ideologies, other theologies, etc.). These can especially be very important in helping us to overcome our prejudices.

However, in order to be able to confront my own feelings, prejudices and assumptions, I have to have a prior *openness to conversion*, which presumes a spirit of humility. Although this is often difficult to presume, it is nevertheless important to acknowledge that, if we want our judgements to be more profound, and hence for our actions to have the desired impact, such an openness is indispensable.

This openness is always difficult for us to develop as we all are at least partially blind, and we all have many fears that cause us to close ourselves up and resist facing a truth that will require us to change. We therefore have to find spaces where we can be free to express and let go of these fears. Such spaces could be "spiritual retreats", where we can be accompanied through silence, spiritual talks, the sacrament of

reconciliation/confession, or a non-judgemental space to express ourselves; or simply regular meetings with a “spiritual companion/guide” with whom we have an open, trusting relationship.

Creating spaces for celebration and prayer

A third necessary structure to enable us to encounter God more deeply is a space to celebrate our faith and to pray. Many of us are often tempted to remain very “rational” in our approach to faith as we search for meaning in our lives. We take on all the burdens of the world in all seriousness as if it is only our responsibility! It is then easy to lose sight of the fact that our whole life is a pure “gift”, something we have received totally undeservedly. Or we forget that we are not in control. This is why we need spaces in which we can get ourselves into perspective – where we can just “be”, without having to “be for” something; spaces in which I can become naked and be my real self; spaces in which all my deepest hopes, fears and desires can be expressed; spaces of silence, solitude, and reflection.

While many of us are privileged to have relationships or people around us with whom we can just be ourselves, we normally always have an element of reserve – even with those we are closest to – since it is very difficult for any person to express *absolute* acceptance of, and unconditional love for another. It is impossible to *absolutely* suspend all our own needs, fears, and prejudices for the sake of the other (even if many “saints” achieve this to a high degree!). However, we all need to feel such absolute acceptance and love in order for us to have self-esteem (to think we are good enough) and hence to feel beyond ourselves and have the capacity to love others. And the only One who can offer this to us is God, who is Unconditional Love.

Prayer, then, is a moment when I open myself up to this Unconditional Love, to God; when I express my deepest hopes, fears and desires; and when I try to accept that I am loveable enough for God to accept and love me completely. It is a moment to put my doubts aside and allow God to love me (something we all resist to some degree or other because we don’t think we are worthy enough!). It is then also a moment to recall that God loves ALL people equally, which makes them all (even my enemies)

worthy of my love and solidarity. Prayer then becomes a moment to also think of, and express my solidarity with those who need to be reminded of God's love at that time – especially those who are suffering and tormented. All together, these enable me to be permanently open to conversion.

For our YCS groups, the primary space to create such moments of prayer is, again, our small group or team, where, hopefully, a spirit of trust and unity exists, and where an awareness of each other and of the world at large is always present. All the other spaces mentioned above (formation sessions, study groups, retreats, etc.) are also important spaces for prayer. Of course, one of the most important spaces is that which our Tradition has passed down to us – the Eucharist – in which we join regularly with the entire universal Church to remember Jesus, who reveals to us the source of that universal and absolute love and acceptance.

A vital element of all prayer is that it enables us to develop a spirit of *celebration*. When we have a continual focus on analysis and action, it is very easy to remain very serious, and to lose sight of the lighter and joyful side of life. Few people can sustain such seriousness for very long, and any group which remains so will not be very attractive to new people (especially young people)! A moment of prayer enables us to remember the giftedness of the life we have been given (even in the midst of all the suffering), to give thanks for it all, and thus to celebrate and feel the joy that comes from receiving a gift.

6. Truth of Method

6.1 A Spirituality of Transformation

Having judged a life reality with the eyes of faith, and having identified any contradiction that might exist between that reality and Jesus' vision of God's Reign, we are then faced with the task of identifying a way (a method) and an action that will remove that contradiction. This will reinforce the growth of the movement that is seeking to integrate life and faith. It is in the process of engaging in such Spirit-filled action – the final major *form* of IYCS spirituality - that we believe we encounter God most profoundly.

Everything we do in the movement is geared towards *action*. Why is this? Because we want to make a difference to our world. We want change – transformation – at the global level, and in the lives of each student! And we cannot do this only by talking or praying (even though these are also indispensable). We have to *do* things that will make that difference. In every group or organisation, people *do* many things, but within our movement, an action is not just *any* action. We have a particular way of understanding action that is reflective of our particular spirituality. What, then, is the *content* of an action for us?

Actions or Activities

It is important to begin by making a distinction between *actions* and *activities* since, for us, they are not necessarily the same thing.

Activities are events normally organised by the leaders of a group or a movement (a committee or an executive) to enable the full participation of its members or other target groups. Examples of these are liturgies, discussions, talks, debates, parties, fun days, pilgrimages, formation or training events, retreats, etc. These are all essential for the life of any of our groups (as with any other organisation). However, within our movement, our understanding of action is very different to this.

For us, an action is something planned and executed by a group or by individuals, as a response to a particular *experience*, which is reflected

upon, and which reveals a particular need demanding a response. Thus, the starting point for determining an action is always a *personal* experience of a member or members of the group. Such an experience is not a thought, or an idea, or a wish – but something that was *actually* encountered: a nasty thing said or done to me, a suffering experienced by a friend, something that happened in class at school, something we saw in an exposure programme.... The starting-point is therefore to tell the *story* of the experience. This is then followed by a deeper analysis and evaluation of what happened (the ‘See’ and ‘Judge’ part of our methodology described in the preceding sections), which identifies a need that requires a response. In the light of this reflection, a plan is then made to *do* something that will somehow begin to address the issue identified. That ‘something’, for us, is an ‘action’!

Thus, an action, in our movement, is:

- Something we do which *emerges out of our reflection on a concrete experience*, so that everyone ‘owns’ it, and feels passionately about implementing it. Hence it is not simply a habitual ‘activity’ of the organisation.
- Something *planned by all* the members (not only the leaders) - preferably in a small group.
- Something that has the *aim of transforming* the life experience encountered by the students – something that will make a difference.
- Not necessarily something big involving a lot of people (like a big conference, or a rally). It can even be just an attempt to talk to someone about the issue in question. The basic principle is that *there is no action that is too small!* The parable of the ‘mustard seed’ (Mark 4:30-32) is a good example of the meaning of action in our movement. The smallest of seeds can end up being the biggest shrub of them all. Even the smallest action can end up having an effect way beyond what we can imagine!
- Something we do that aims at *drawing others into our movement* – that aims at *evangelising*. We do not do action for our own glory (to promote ourselves or our own movement), but to help others to discover the “good news” offered by Jesus as well as to grow in commitment to realising it in our world. Thus, our small group always has a sense of mission towards the larger group of which

we are a part (the school, the class, the chaplaincy community, etc). It is a school of formation, empowering young lay people to be Christian leaders with the right and duty to evangelise. And we are concerned with spreading the movement especially where the gospel is not yet announced – beyond the frontiers of the Church.

Of course, many ‘activities’ too can be ‘actions’, but only if they emerge as a response to an experience that needs to be addressed, with the aim of transforming it. So, for example, a need for a particular and regular formation for individuals or a group may emerge. In one sense, one could say that all activities in some way are addressing some need, since, without such a felt need, no-one would participate in them. However, frequently, activities are organised simply because it is the tradition of the group, or because it is the job description of the leaders to do so, without any perspective of changing anything. Within this perspective, the activity can become simply an end in itself – maybe providing stimulation or fun for the participants, but doing little, if anything, to transform their lives. The challenge, therefore, is to regularly evaluate the activities our group is organising, to see whether they have become ends in themselves, or whether they are enabling the participants to change their lives.

6.2 A Spirituality of Action

With this perspective, some might see us as ‘activists’, who focus on *doing* rather than just *being*. Or we are at times labelled as ‘action movements’ which are distinguished from ‘spiritual movements’. Such labels often imply that we are not ‘spiritual’, and, hence, somehow marginal to the Church, whose primary task is a ‘spiritual’ one. If we are being seen in this light, it is either because those saying it are operating out of a narrow understanding of ‘spirituality’, which is limited to the spheres of prayer and liturgy, or because we are not being faithful to the tradition of our movement.

One of the particular contributions that our movement offers to the Church is the richness of a *spirituality of action*. We believe that Jesus calls us all to continual conversion to the way of God’s Kingdom. However, real conversion does not take place simply through talking or

praying. We need to discuss in order to gain a deeper understanding of our lives, and of what God wants of us, and we need to pray in order to draw energy and motivation from the source of our faith. However, it is especially when we put our bodies where our minds and hearts have pointed to, that we can come to a real understanding and knowledge of God. And ‘moving our bodies’ means ‘doing action’! Any expert on ‘Learning Processes’ will affirm that, by ‘doing’ we learn abundantly more than by ‘listening’ or ‘talking’. Thus, it is in ‘doing’ what God wants of us (transforming the world, to enable God’s Kingdom to come here), that we come to a much more profound *knowledge of God* (James 2:14-26).

Finding Hope

Furthermore, it is especially through doing action that we *find hope*. In many countries that I have visited over the years, students that I have encountered (within our movement) have frequently expressed a lack of hope that they can change their difficult situations. They imagine that only those with power or money (usually from outside) can help offer salvation. Often the more we talk and analyse difficult situations, the more hopeless we become, and we end up only complaining. I have often heard it said: “Over-analysis leads to action paralysis”! However, I have discovered that, when our members are doing something (even something very small) to address the problems identified, they complain much less (even if they are still suffering), and they have a great deal of hope. They come to believe that they can make a difference, no matter how small, and therefore that things can change!

One of the biggest killers of hope is the spirit or mentality of *dependency* that exists in many parts of our movement. Many groups began with substantial financial support from friendly benefactors or donors (usually within Church circles). However, after some time, such support has often diminished or even stopped completely. This has often rendered our groups powerless and hopeless! However, with our spirituality of action, we believe that, with some creativity and faith, we can find ways to overcome a dependence mentality, to become more autonomous – to discover the resources that are in our midst – and to cease seeing salvation as something that only comes from “outside”!

Indispensability of Reflection

In order for our action to be spiritually nourishing, there is also an absolute prerequisite for it to be *preceded and followed by reflection*, so that we can appreciate why we are doing it, and what effect it has had on us and on the world. If this is missing, we can easily lose the sense of the action, and either descend into simple ‘activism’, which can then easily become misdirected, or simply remain hopeless.

Consciousness of an action as an action

We can only appreciate the real value of an action if we are conscious of it as an action. In many of our movements, I have discovered (but only after probing very deeply) that many good actions are being done, but they are not recognised as actions, and hence their positive impact is lost. Let me illustrate this with an example.

When I was once visiting the YCS of Tyre in Lebanon, while being led to our meeting place I noticed signs painted on the walls (in Arabic, which I could not read) all along the way, signed by the emblem (which I could read) of the YCS. It was explained to me that it was an exhortation for the neighbourhood to be kept clean, while also giving the movement visibility as a Christian presence in a predominantly Muslim area where Christians often feel threatened and powerless. Soon afterwards, in our meeting, when I asked what issues and actions they were engaged in, I was told of discussions about unemployment, a cultural concert, and fundraising parties. When I asked about the signs on the walls, there was surprise, as it was something just taken for granted. Here was an excellent action, yet it was not recognised as such. Instead they referred only to the activities that involved crowds. Consequently much of the spiritual impact of the action probably got lost.

This is why we need to re-visit our movement’s understanding of action, so that we can all become *conscious agents* of the new world that God wants.

Thus reflective and conscious engagement in action enables us to encounter God more deeply in the discovery of hope, in making a positive difference in people's lives, and in building the movement that seeks to make God's kingdom of freedom, justice and peace present in our world.

7. Conclusion

The spirituality of IYCS, an integral spirituality of reflection and action, which we call the “Review of Life”, is thus a process with a continual focus on reality, the gospel, and action. It is in taking each of these focuses seriously in an ongoing process of deepening our understanding of real life experience, of discerning reflection on the Gospel, and of reflective action aimed at transforming our reality that we believe we are most profoundly able to encounter God, discover the Truth, and thereby become God’s instruments in enabling the Reign of God to come.

Implicit in each of these focuses are certain convictions about the meaning (*content*) of the Gospel, and of the methods (*form*) of evangelization necessary to reduce the contradiction between life and faith. We can thus summarise our spirituality in terms of the following elements that focus on *life*, *faith*, and *method* in a unified process, and which can serve as criteria for evaluating whether we are really living an integral spirituality of action and reflection:

Life A spirituality of *seeing* the whole of life - concretely, critically, and deeply

1. Are we taking all the dimensions of life into account, and seeking harmony amongst them? (Or only taking into account one or some in isolation?)
2. Are we ‘seeing’ concretely, deeply, and critically? (Or abstractly and superficially?)

Faith A spirituality of *judging reality* and our own values with the eyes of Jesus Christ

3. Are we personally getting to know people who are poor and marginalised, and trying to see things from their point of view (Or the point of view of the rich and powerful?)
4. Are we promoting life, and enabling people to be free, self-fulfilled, responsible, and autonomous? (Or promoting oppression and dependency and demanding fearful blind obedience to fabricated absolute laws?)

5. Are we enabling all those involved to participate fully? (Or maintaining power in the hands of only a few?)
6. Are we building community where everyone has equal dignity and a spirit of solidarity? (Or promoting individualism which regards some people as worthy of more privilege?)
7. Are we helping people to dialogue with groups and views different to their own, and to search for the truth with an open mind? (Or allowing people to cling to, or absolutise their own truth?)

Method A spirituality of *action* aimed at transforming our life experience

8. Is our action making a difference to the life situations we see? (Or running away from them?)
9. Is it enabling those involved to find freedom, fairness and hope? (Or leaving them as they are?)
10. Is it helping others to come closer to the movement through discovering commitment (Or leaving them on their own while we seek our own glory?)

The relevance of the Review of Life today

Ever since IYCS was founded, its spirituality has been described in most of the terms used above. However, while using the same language (especially *see judge act*), the actual understanding and practice of the *Review of Life* has varied enormously. Thus, while many local YCS groups are consciously trying to use the same *form* (method) of the spirituality (*see judge act*), this has not necessarily produced the desired fruit (*content*). This has frequently led members to experience this method as mechanistic, rigid, boring, and even oppressive – precisely the opposite of the world we are trying to build! And hence it has diminished our impact on the world!

Thus, while it is extremely valuable (and maybe even necessary) to use this method (*form*) to arrive at our goal, it is important to avoid seeing it in narrow terms. It is less a rigid, mechanistic formula than a reminder for us to continually keep in broad view the three dimensions of *focus on reality*, *focus on faith criteria*, and *focus on transforming action*. This

will enable us to maintain a priority focus on the *content* of our spirituality – the criteria we use for evaluating our practice – without getting bogged down in language about methodology. It will also enable us to consciously benefit from the variety of other *methodologies* that we tend to use anyway (Bible studies, exposures, silent meditation, etc.), and that can help us to deepen our grasp of each of these three dimensions.

Thus, through our integral spirituality of reflection and action, we are trying to empower each one of our members to gain a deep awareness of God in their own lives, their schools, our Church, and our world, by giving them the space (preferably in small groups) to reflect deeply on their personal experience, to evaluate it, and then to act to transform each of these domains. When we develop this capacity, we will truly become a movement which is building leaders who are full of hope, and which will have a major impact in inspiring the faith that will enable God's Kingdom to become a reality in our world.

Other Readings on IYCS Spirituality

1. Clancey, Jack m.m and Devos Jeanne i.c.m, *The Review*, IMCS Asia, Hong Kong, 1978.
2. Crespo, Luís Fernando, *Revisión de Vida y Seguimiento de Jesús*, UNEC/CEP, Lima, 1991.
3. García López, Miguel Angel, *Revision of Life*, European Coordination JECI-MIEC, Brussels, 1998.
4. JEC et MEC Québec, *La Révision de Vie – ma façon d’être au monde*, Montréal, 1996.
5. Naik, Gregory, SJ, *Introducing...YCS/YSM to Animators, Parents, Teachers, Well-wishers*, YCS/YSM National Office, Chennai, 1979.
6. Pelegri, Buenaventura, *JECI MIEC – su opción, su pedagogía*, Centro de Documentación del MIEC-JECI, Lima, 1978.
7. Pelegri, Buenaventura, *IYCS and IMCS: their option, their pedagogy*, IMCS Asia, Hong Kong, 1979.
8. Warenghem, Gérard, CSSp, *La Révision de Vie*, JEC Gabon, Chevilly Larue, 1995.

Programme for a 9-hour Training Session on Integral Spirituality

15 minutes – Introduction, input and clarifications: What do we mean by “Spirituality”? (Chapter 2)

30 minutes - Input and clarifications: The Roots of IYCS Spirituality: Three Truths (Chapter 3)

Explain by drawing up the diagram of the “Three Truths” on page 8, and keep referring back to it in subsequent inputs.

30 minutes – Input and clarifications: Truth of Life (Chapter 4)

Explain by drawing up the diagram of the “Onion of Relationships” on page 12.

90 minutes – Group Work on “SEE” questions (in Appendix 1b)

Objective: To have a practical experience of being focused, concrete, and critical in seeing reality in all dimensions of life.

Divide all participants into groups of at least 3 and no more than 5 people, and give each person a copy of the “Questions for Group Reflection” (Appendix 1b). Choose group leaders, and (before the session) meet with them to explain the objective of the group work, and to ensure that they all understand what is required of each question. Ask each group to answer the questions on “SEE” and to focus on only one layer of the “onion” of our relationships (page 12). If there are more than 6 groups, different groups may focus on the same layer. If there are less than 6 groups, layers 5 and 6 (city/country and world/universe) may be combined, and, if necessary, layers 1 and 2 (feelings/faith and intimate friends/family). Each group is to write up the key responses on a flipchart paper.

60 minutes – Plenary sharing of group responses.

The facilitator should comment on whether the issue chosen is sufficiently focused or concrete, and on whether the analysis done is sufficiently critical (bearing in mind questions 1 and 2 of the “Life” elements of our spirituality in Chapter 7, the Conclusion, on page 37).

60 minutes – Input and clarifications: Truth of Faith (Chapter 5)

75 minutes – Group work on “JUDGE” questions (in Appendix 1b)

Objective: To have a practical experience in doing a theological reflection on, and evaluation of the issue, as well as a self-evaluation in the light of this reflection.

The participants work in the same groups as before, and focus on the same issue.

45 minutes - Plenary sharing of group responses.

The facilitator, bearing in mind the criteria listed in questions 3-7 of the “Faith” elements of our spirituality (in Chapter 7, the Conclusion, on page 37/38), should comment on the responses, pointing out their coincidence with, or their divergence from these criteria, and provoking discussion on them.

30 minutes – Input and clarifications: Truth of Method (Chapter 6)

45 minutes – Group work on “ACT” questions (in Appendix 1b)

Objective: To have a practical experience in converting the previous judgement into a focused and concrete plan of action.

The participants work in the same groups as before, and focus on the same issue.

45 minutes - Plenary sharing of group responses.

The facilitator, bearing in mind the criteria listed in questions 8-10 of the “Method” elements of our spirituality (in Chapter 7, the Conclusion, on page 38), should comment on the responses, especially insisting on the concreteness of the plan (Who? What? When? How?), and on whether it can be realistically implemented.

15 minutes – Summary and Conclusion: (Chapter 7)

Appendix 1(b)

Questions for Group Reflection during Training Sessions

See:

1. Each one identify and write down **ONE** striking, concrete issue that I have experienced recently (or even in this session), concerning:
Group 1 – My feelings/faith
Group 2 – My intimate friends/family
Group 3 – My (our) Church
Group 4 – My (our) university/school/work
Group 5 – My (our) city/country
Group 6 – Our world/universe
2. Write each one's issue on the flipchart/sheet of paper.
3. Select ONE that seems the most urgent or most common.
4. Tell the full story of what happened.
5. Start asking WHY it happened. Why? Why? Why?
6. What is the root cause/issue?
7. What are the consequences if the situation is not addressed?

Judge:

1. What would be Jesus' response to the issue/situation?
Why?
Which biblical texts can help us?
2. Which of my own values/priorities are challenged:
2.1 – by the issue/situation?
2.2 – by Jesus' response?

Act:

1. What action:
 - Will make a difference to the situation described?
 - Will enable those involved to find freedom, fairness, and hope?
 - Will help others to come closer to the movement (discover commitment)?
2. Who will do what? When? How?

Appendix 2

Programme for a 5-hour Training Session on Integral Spirituality

15 minutes – Introduction, input and clarifications:

What do we mean by “Spirituality”? (Chapter 2)

20 minutes - Input and clarifications:

The Roots of IYCS Spirituality: Three Truths (Chapter 3)

Explain by drawing up the diagram of the “Three Truths” on page 8, and keep referring back to it in subsequent inputs.

30 minutes – Input and clarifications: Truth of Life (Chapter 4)

Explain by drawing up the diagram of the “Onion of Relationships” on page 12.

15 minutes – Buzz Groups (3-4 people sitting near each other huddle together for a quick sharing): What questions, challenges, agreements, or new contributions do you have?

30 minutes – Plenary discussion

60 minutes – Input and clarifications: Truth of Faith (Chapter 5)

15 minutes – Buzz Groups: What questions, challenges, agreements, or new contributions do you have?

30 minutes – Plenary discussion

30 minutes – Input and clarifications: Truth of Method (Chapter 6)

10 minutes – Buzz Groups: What questions, challenges, agreements, or new contributions do you have?

30 minutes – Plenary discussion

15 minutes – Summary and Conclusion: (Chapter 7)

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