

## Chapter 8

### From St Ignatius to Obi-Wan Kenobi: An evaluative perspective on spirituality

Traditionally, the word ‘spirituality’ referred to the spiritual life of Christians: prayer and spiritual exercises. It was primarily religious both in definition and practice and it was applied beyond Christianity to religions generally.

Gradually, spirituality acquired a cachet beyond its specific ‘religious’ meaning; it has become a catch phrase that sits comfortably as a term that encompasses a certain lifestyle, a personal philosophy or even a way of doing business. A distinction between the spiritual and the religious emerged – and in some cases, a divergence. Religion no longer had a monopoly on the spiritual. This is illustrated in the sample of quotations below:

[Some of the world’s leading psychologists] have all agreed that the ‘farther reaches’ of the unconscious connect humanity with a wider spiritual environment. This quest for higher states of consciousness has been an enduring theme in ... [the] pursuit of spiritual awakening.

Fuller 2001, *Spiritual, but not religious: Understanding unchurched America*<sup>1</sup>

Using our Spiritual Intelligence (SQ) means stretching the human imagination. It means transforming our consciousness. It means discovering deeper layers of ourselves than we are used to living. It requires us to find some grounding in the self for meaning that transcends the self.

Zohar & Marshall 2000, *SQ: Spiritual intelligence, the ultimate intelligence*<sup>2</sup>

Sport cannot equal the sacred traditions as a means of cultivating the inner life. But, as this book makes clear, sport does possess its own unique genius for revealing and opening to people the spirit’s ‘gem-like flame’.

Although sport is a most secular activity in a highly secularised world, in its ability to provoke wonder, to elicit deep feeling, to grace our lives with glimpses of timeless beauty and freedom – in these and other ways sport is, though not religion, something religious.

Murphy (cover comments) & Cooper 1998. *Playing in the zone: Exploring the spiritual dimensions of sports*<sup>3</sup>

Thought Field Therapy: The most powerful technique you will ever experience. Learn how to eliminate fear, anxiety, stress, trauma, guilt, anger, phobias, jealousy, procrastination, addictions, lose weight and increase confidence and energy in minutes!!

Piccinotti 2004, *Nova: Keeping body and soul together*. *Nova* is a Perth/Sydney-based magazine 'committed to exploring leading edge ideas, services, practices and products that help foster a more liveable world'.<sup>4</sup>

These excerpts show how 'spirituality' is being used like a new buzz word with reference to education, medicine, business, sports and travel, and by diverse groups from the religious to the New Age. The understandings and definitions of spirituality have been expanding to accommodate these developments. However, the broader and more generic the definition, the more that everything in life seems to become a part of spirituality – hence the problem in interpreting what is to count as spirituality.

This chapter sets out to give some perspective on the 'geography' of spirituality that will inform the work of those involved in the education and care of youth.<sup>5</sup> It will provide a framework for interpreting the development and diversification of spirituality and its relationships with religion; and in turn, this can inform judgments about the appropriateness or healthiness of different spiritualities on offer.

The questions to be explored revolve around the functions of spirituality, for example: What is the psychological role of spirituality? How does it relate to religion? Does it substitute for religion? When is spirituality healthy? Hence the chapter works towards a critical, evaluative perspective on spirituality. This may help stop the term sliding into the realm of clichés and hyperbole, as noted in some of the quotations above and in the comments of Christian minister and 'stealth evangelist' Rick Warren. 'I'm not a bureaucrat ... I'm a spiritual entrepreneur', he maintained. He promised to 'reduce your stress, focus your energy, simplify your decisions, give meaning to your life and ... prepare you for eternity'. As the article on Warren noted, he appealed to the notion of a 'comforting God who acts like a great therapist in the sky'.<sup>6</sup>

This exploration of the function of spirituality sets out to honour the religious heritage of spirituality while addressing the diverse manifestations of spirituality that have arisen from outside religion. After commenting further on the need for an evaluative perspective on spirituality, the chapter gives a detailed account of a particular religious spirituality to illustrate the strong traditional ties between spirituality and religion. It then considers the divergence between the 'spiritual' and the 'religious'. It concludes with proposals for what constitutes a healthy spirituality. The chapter serves as a prologue to the examination of youth spirituality in Chapter 9.

## **8.1 Developments in the meaning of the word 'spirituality': An evaluative perspective**

Earlier, the word 'spirituality' was used predominantly with a religious connotation. Now it has been appropriated by a wider range of interest groups and a distinction has emerged between the spiritual and the religious, to the extent that some people now describe their spirituality as non-religious or secular (8.5.5). This distinction is also pertinent to the ways in which spirituality is used in discourses that relate in some way to education.

If you talked about spirituality in 1960, most likely you would be understood as meaning traditional Christian religious practice; if you were talking about Catholic spirituality in particular, it would be linked in some way with the spiritual life of

religious orders. But now the word has been appropriated by diverse groups. In addition, there is an interest in spirituality in nursing, the social sciences and ecology; it crops up in areas like healing and the media; even in the new physics, there is some interest in a spiritual dimension to cosmology. Part of spirituality's popularity flows naturally from the view that a spiritual dimension is fundamental to human happiness and fulfilment, but it is vague enough in connotation to accommodate a wide range of interests and lifestyles, including those that are religious, non-religious and even anti-religious.

In working towards criteria for evaluating spirituality, we will not refer to the extensive writings on spirituality; rather we will try to make sense of the developments and trends that have contributed to the current ambiguity about spirituality. Initially, characteristics of a religious spirituality will be built up from a 'case study' of a particular example; this is often neglected in academic discussions of education and spirituality. Then, attention will be given to a range of influences that have affected understanding of the words 'religious' and 'spiritual' (and by implication, religion and spirituality). This helps broaden evaluative criteria by taking into account non-religious spiritualities.

## **8.2 Historical notes on religious spirituality in the Australian Catholic Christian tradition since the 1960s**

Rather than look at religious spirituality in a generic way, this section will examine a particular example: Catholic spirituality in Australia since the 1960s. While this summary will not cover all of the varieties within Catholic spirituality, it will highlight key developments and issues that show the roots of contemporary Catholic spirituality. While the picture will be different for other Christian denominations, there should be enough common ground and common issues to serve as a useful starting point for comparisons and contrasts.

The word spirituality, as traditionally understood in Christianity, has a long history. Spirituality meant spiritual thinking and religious practice; it drew on theology and scripture as well as on an extensive Christian religious tradition; it was evident especially in prayer, both personal and communal. Liturgy and sacraments were an integral part of traditional Catholic spirituality, which had for its models the spiritual life in religious orders (Benedictine, Ignatian, Franciscan, Dominican and so on).

Depending on the level of individuals' theological education, Catholic lay spirituality was a mixture of popular piety and spirituality as practised in religious orders. Formerly, theological education was the preserve of the clergy and religious orders, and only relatively few lay people had opportunities for a formal education in spirituality, apart from what they received at school and in the local church. Since the Second Vatican Council, however, this has changed; it was to be accessible to all Catholics.

At this same time, there were significant changes occurring in theology, scripture and spirituality. One of the driving forces was scripture scholarship. Better understanding of biblical authorship informed a more theological and less literal interpretation of the gospels. Interest in the quest for the 'historical Jesus' informed understandings of the 'Christ of faith'. The changes in emphasis in Christian theology and spirituality between the 1950s and the 1970s were extensive and dramatic. This was paralleled by, and related to, equally dramatic changes within the religious congregations, especially those involved in Catholic schooling.

Another driving force in Catholic spirituality at the time, which has left an indelible impression, came from the social sciences. What emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s in English-speaking countries was a Christian ‘psychological spirituality’. There was vigorous exploration of the experiential and relationship dimensions to spirituality, and there was a special interest in the personal ‘development’ and ‘fulfilment’ of individuals. Psychological insights from what was called the humanistic psychology movement melded with the rapidly evolving spirituality. The work of psychologists like Rogers, Erikson, Maslow, May, Allport and others was influential, along with other literature and practice related to personal and organisational change.

What was happening at the local level is typified by the Catholic Institute of Counselling, established in the late 1960s in Sydney. The Institute mediated Christian psychological spirituality for many lay people and religious and had a profound spiritual influence on its participants and it is still functioning effectively. Since the 1960s, many institutes, seminaries, conferences, retreats, lectures, adult religious education programs and study groups have provided the Australian Catholic community with access to an education in spirituality (and to theological-scriptural education that informed spirituality). These developments were supported by a growing literature of Christian psychological spirituality.

A good picture of emerging Catholic spirituality at this time can be drawn from the books that were popular. Jesuit John Powell’s books *Why am I afraid to tell you who I am?: Insights on self-awareness, personal growth and interpersonal communication* and *Why am I afraid to love*, and his audiotaped lectures (*My vision and my values*) were classics. His book *A reason to live, a reason to die: A new look at faith in God*, while not as popular as these, was well ahead of its times and still speaks to contemporary uncertainty about meaning and purpose in life. Many books by Andrew Greeley (*The friendship game*) and particularly by Eugene Kennedy (*Fashion me a people: Man, woman, and the church; A time for being human; The pain of being human; If you really knew me would you still like me?*), and by others like Henri Nouwen (*Intimacy: Pastoral psychological essays; Reaching out: The three movements of the spiritual life*), and Adrian Van Kaam (*On being yourself: Reflections on spirituality and originality; In search of spiritual identity*), provided substantial resources for psychological spirituality in those earlier years. This list is a sample of the literature that informed this new Catholic spirituality in the 1970s.<sup>7</sup> The titles of the books showed the human, psychological emphasis on personalism and relationships. These and other books of the time represented a significant development in Catholic spirituality in the English-speaking world after the Second Vatican Council. There are comparable literatures for other Christian denominations.

Expanding theological and scriptural understandings were at the heart of developments in the emerging Catholic spirituality. Reference is made here to just a few of the prominent scholars and writers: Karl Rahner, Bernard Lonergan, Edward Schillebeeckx, Hans Kung, David Tracy Richard McBrien, Gustavo Guterrez, and to scripture scholars John McKenzie, Bruce Vawter, Murphy O’Connor, Raymond Brown. This particular scriptural-theological influence meant that most contemporary Catholic spirituality was different from what can be described as ‘evangelical Christian’ spirituality.

For those who absorbed this new spirituality, especially members of religious communities who generally had more scope for studying spirituality than lay people, it represented a profound change from the Catholic spirituality of the 1950s.

This spirituality emphasised personal freedom, individuality and responsibility, and its adherents welcomed the personalism and sense of spiritual liberation that it brought them. Within religious congregations, this new wave of spirituality was at the heart of far-reaching changes (this is another complex story). Even though from an ecclesiastical perspective the Catholic Church has become more conservative since the 1970s, there would be no turning back the clock for those who were imbued with this personal spirituality.

Key words like relationships, fulfilment, personal development, individuality, originality, self-knowledge, self-esteem, self-revelation, personal sharing, being 'close' to people, intimacy, sensitivity and wisdom became prominent in the language of psychological spirituality; they gave a distinctive emphasis to *personalism*, *individualism* and the *experiential*. No doubt this agenda was prone to reinforcing self-centredness, but the better practitioners tempered such a tendency with concerns for prayer, community and social justice.

Some Catholics went wider afield in bringing other elements into their spirituality. Some of these sources are listed towards the end of this section, showing different emphases in Christian religious spirituality. Others went even further to include spiritual insights from sources such as Australian Aboriginal spiritual beliefs and Eastern religions.

To summarise, mainstream Catholic spirituality developed five distinctive qualities:

- 1 It was strongly theological and scriptural.
- 2 It was reflective and psychological (putting life into some overall purposeful perspective).
- 3 It was prayerful, emphasising personal mental prayer, communal prayer and liturgy.
- 4 It often involved spiritual input of some sort, whether this was from reading the scriptures or spiritual books, lectures, or even advice from a spiritual director.
- 5 Spirituality was initially modelled on the styles of religious life within religious communities (prayer, spiritual development opportunities and retreats), although this pattern has changed gradually.

But this new spirituality did not extend throughout the whole Australian Catholic community. It was more influential for those who actively sought out a theological/scriptural/spirituality education; and it was not acceptable to all. For perhaps the majority of Catholics who attended church, their access to this spirituality depended on the opportunities within their parishes, and this varied significantly. There was also some opposition, some seeing the development as an unwelcome move to liberalism – they saw no need to change the Church or their spirituality. This conflicting view tended to have a different selection of prominent words in its spiritual vocabulary, for example doctrine, authority, orthodoxy, 'true' faith, ten commandments, obedience, committed. It was also concerned about the increasing sense of freedom, autonomy and individuality in the new spirituality. Among Catholics there was a complete spectrum from 'conservative' through to 'liberal' spirituality. This has perhaps always been the case, and always will be, but at that time the distinctions seemed to be prominent.

The question of 'languaging' the spiritual and the religious became significant. Some opponents of psychological spirituality dismissed it as mere 'psychology',

drawing attention to the predominantly psychological emphasis in the key words listed earlier. However, such criticism missed the point that the religious quality in what is said or done is not determined merely by the use of words that traditionally have a religious connotation. The essential religious quality flows from the faith and religious motivation of the individual; when a religious person consciously acts or speaks from their faith, the actions (for example of kindness) and the words (for example about their spiritual life) are genuinely religious, even though in the external domain the words used might not be explicitly religious. Psychological spiritual language became a new authentic religious language for religious people (though this did not imply that psychological language as such was necessarily religious).

For many Catholics, their psychological spirituality put God in a more pivotal position in their consciousness and behaviour, and made them more prayerful; this seemed to be good evidence of its authenticity. Also, this spirituality, while steeped in religious traditions, because it was not restricted to traditional religious language, was able to flow more easily in everyday life; it thus seemed to have a more permeating effect on people's lives than the spirituality of the 1950s. Critics suggested that such a 'humanisation' of spirituality was not necessarily an infusion of ordinary life with religion, but more likely to be the first stage of secularisation in which the traditional religious impulses would be dissolved and forgotten. All of this remains part of the ongoing debate about what it means to be religious in contemporary Western society; religious actions and words are not so distinguishable as they were in traditional societies, making them more difficult to identify and interpret.

Initially, many members of religious congregations adopted the new spirituality enthusiastically; then it was taken up by lay people. Soon it became well established in Catholic schools and religious education. It had less impact on those who, for various reasons, did not have an adult religious education. The extent to which the new spirituality spread through the parishes depended on the efforts of local clergy and on the extent to which parishes provided access to adult religious education; changes in liturgy and community prayer were most noticeable, but this was not always complemented by theological development. How much the new spirituality entered into popular Catholic piety thus varied significantly from individual to individual.

Some who were initially opposed to the new spirituality eventually accepted much of its style and practice (for example liturgy in the vernacular), even though their basic theological understandings remained unchanged. In the main, there was relief among most Australian Catholics that spiritual life was becoming less authoritarian and more personally relevant. Even today, however, there remain levels of disquiet and conflict about the impact of this spirituality on Catholics in Australia.

These developments in religious spirituality can be judged as having made a significant long-term contribution to Catholicism and Catholic education in Australia. For those born and educated after the Second Vatican Council, who never experienced the Latin Mass, their perspective on this 'new' spirituality is somewhat different from that of those who experienced the rapid transition – for the former, it was not 'new', and the exhilaration of the years of change was not their experience.

There has been continuity in this religious spirituality since the 1970s; it can now rightly be called 'traditional' Catholic spirituality. But again, there are Catholics who have a different view of what traditional and authentic spirituality entails.

It is beyond our scope here to trace the history of Australian Catholic spirituality in more detail, looking at other significant variants. We have not attempted to look at the full complexity in areas such as continuity of 1950s Catholic spirituality; the spiritualities of different cultural groups in Catholicism; charismatic or pentecostal Catholic spirituality; the changes in religious order spiritualities; or links between spirituality and theological or cultural changes.

This section will be concluded with notes on other influential themes that have entered into the mix of contemporary Australian Catholic, Christian spirituality. These are:

- *Creation spirituality* – giving special attention to the theme of ongoing creation and ongoing revelation.
- *Feminist theology and spirituality* – acknowledging the patriarchal hegemony of Christian and especially Catholic spirituality, and the need for addressing the agenda coming from the perspective of women.
- *Ecological spirituality* – stressing the need for responsible environmental stewardship, ecologically sustainable commerce, respect for the physical and biological environment and all living species, critical awareness of problems of pollution and environmental mismanagement, and a global perspective on ecological relationships.
- *Charismatic spirituality* – Catholic Charismatic Renewal is a Catholic version of Pentecostal spirituality that emphasises emotional prayer, healing, community, and the overt spiritual influence of the Holy Spirit.
- *Ecumenical and multi-faith perspective* – acknowledging the need for a positive perspective on ecumenical relationships with other Christians as well as respectful dialogue with people from other religions. In particular, for some Catholics special attention has been given to indigenous Aboriginal spirituality.
- *Social justice and social analysis* – adding a critical evaluative perspective to spirituality that judges culture and prompts committed social action.

### 8.3 Key aspects of a religious spirituality

In the light of the above, an initial list of key aspects of a religious spirituality will be constructed. It is a starting point that needs extension and refinement in the light of a wider study of different religious spiritualities.

The list represents an ideal for a religious spirituality. Its bias is towards Christian traditions, but it could be developed further through reference to the spiritualities of other world religions. It can be used as a guide to clarifying the sort of spirituality that a religious group or church school would want to foster; and this could inform the sorts of school experiences and curriculum that have the potential to educate towards such a spirituality. In the curriculum of a public school, it would be just as useful in relation to the study of spirituality, but not as regards a spirituality that the school would try to promote in pupils.

The list can be helpful for differentiating between a religious and a non-religious spirituality; and in working towards criteria for the profiling, interpreting and evaluating of religious spiritualities. If internalised, a list of categories like this could help individuals in their own religious quest.

**Table 8.1 Key aspects of a religious spirituality**

| Key aspects of a | Explanatory notes |
|------------------|-------------------|
|------------------|-------------------|

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>religious spirituality (initial listing)</b>  |  |
| Belief in a personal God   | A keynote of religious faith. Belief in God provides personal meaning within a larger 'divine' framework; correspondingly, it provides individuals with the unique significance of being known personally and loved by the Creator.  |
| Balanced personal and community frame of reference   | The frame of reference for spirituality is larger than the immediate personal needs and interests of the individual; frame of reference includes a balance between personal/individual and community concerns. Community concerns are not just for a local community of faith, but for the wider human community. This spirituality is not always 'comfortable' for individuals – it can be challenging and personally demanding in its commitments. |
| Community of faith   | A local community reference point for beliefs; provides plausibility and support for faith; context for communal spiritual activities such as prayer and worship.  |
| Historical connection with religious tradition   | Knowledge of the continuing historical religious tradition; familiarity with theology and scripture.   |
| Inputs that inform and challenge spiritual understandings  | Openness to reading, study and personal development programs that prompt continual development of spirituality; may include religious and other studies such as psychological, sociological, historical, literature. Desire to develop constructive, resilient meaning to life.  |
| Personal reflection  | Cultivation of a reflectiveness on life experience and in response to any spiritual education.   |
| Religious experience and prayer  | An openness to religious or transcendent experience, and/or to experience that prompts emotional and reflective responses. Habits of prayer, especially personal prayer, with opportunities for communal prayer.   |
| Spiritually motivated values and commitments   | Informs and inspires values and commitments, and a sense of social justice.  |
| Critical interpretation of culture and evaluation of influences on people's spirituality and lifestyle choices | Skills in interpreting the potential shaping influence that cultural elements can have on thinking and behaviour; critical consideration of the cultural effects on people's spirituality and lifestyle choices.   |
| Motivation of community service and social action  | Spirituality that carries through into action where individuals make adjustments to their own lives; as well as motivating committed social action.  |
| Sense of responsible stewardship for both the physical and social environments                                 | A sense of sharing in a corporate responsibility for the health of physical, animal and social environments. This is to include local and global perspectives. Believing in more than just individual personal development can motivate concern for the wider human community and its environment.   |
| Openness to mutual exchange with the spiritualities of others  | Respectful acknowledgment of different spiritualities in others; an openness to ecumenical, interreligious dialogue as well as openness to those who have a non-   |

|                         |
|-------------------------|
| religious spirituality. |
|-------------------------|

For many churchgoing people, spirituality is the *active style* of their religious practices: prayer, spiritual reading, reflection, response to homilies, social commitments. One of the distinctive features of Christian spirituality, and to some extent of spiritualities in other world religions, is that it is challenging and demanding on the individual; it calls individuals to commitment to something more than just their own interests, needs and fulfilment. It challenges them to acknowledge the absoluteness of God who transcends human interests and needs while still intimately concerned with both. The challenge in Christian spirituality, for example, is the demand on Christians to be altruistic, and not to make their own needs and interests exclusive concerns. The measure of its authenticity is principally in terms of its action on behalf of the marginalised.

It is evident that a particular value stance, even a particular theological stance, informs the above listing. These need to be articulated and acknowledged if the criteria are to be debated and used for evaluative purposes. Also to be acknowledged here is a presumed stance about how religious spirituality can contribute to psychological maturity. It is admitted that in some instances religious views may contribute to psychological immaturity. Hence this psychological dimension will become even more prominent later in the chapter when consideration is given to what might constitute a healthy spirituality in a generic sense.

#### **8.4 Distinctions between the ‘religious’ and the ‘spiritual’: issues for what constitutes spirituality**

A distinction, and in some instances a divergence, has developed between ‘the spiritual’ and ‘the religious’. Consequently, there are spiritualities that are not based in, or dependent on, religion. This question is of great consequence for religions, because one of the major problems they face today is their contemporary spiritual relevance: is religion satisfying people’s spiritual needs? The same question is significant for dialogue about spirituality between religious groups and those who are not religious.

Distinctions between the spiritual and the religious will be explored under the following headings.

- |       |  |
|-------|--|
| 8.4.1 | Secularisation and distinctions between religious and spiritual language                         |
| 8.4.2 | Privatisation of religion  |
| 8.4.3 | Public rituals and private devotion (external observance and the personal)                       |
| 8.4.4 | Contemporary emphasis on experience (implications for personal autonomy and religious authority) |
| 8.4.5 | Meeting spiritual needs; spirituality as a consumer commodity                                    |
| 8.4.6 | Scientific rationalism and modern religious studies  |
| 8.4.7 | Postmodern views of religion   |

##### **8.4.1 Secularisation and distinctions between religious and spiritual language**

Increasing secularisation in Westernised societies is evident in the decreased prominence of formal religion in political and social life. Since the 1960s participation in religious practices decreased significantly; religious authority and distinctive religious culture declined as influences on people’s thinking and behaviour; people were getting by with less conscious attention given to their religion.

Secularisation implied that religions did not have a monopoly on spirituality, and this supported the notion of non-religious spirituality; indeed, for some people, their spiritual and moral concerns had little or no link with religion. For others, religion permeated their spiritual concerns. There were others who retained an affiliation with religion, but their spirituality included elements from beyond their own faith tradition, including both religious and non-religious components.

In public discourse, shared religious beliefs and shared religious language could no longer be presumed. Other 'spiritual' language had to be used for the discussion of spiritual, moral and religious issues in pluralist communities where there were a variety of religions and non-religious worldviews. Words like 'beliefs', 'values' and 'commitments' were used more frequently, acknowledging the presence of different religions and religious spiritualities in the same way that inclusive language was developed to acknowledge gender differences previously ignored. This situation called for the development of a language of spirituality that was not dependent on Christianity or any other religion, while it was to be able to accommodate religion comfortably. This supported a distinction between 'religious' and 'spiritual' that was not an exclusive one.

#### **8.4.2 Privatisation of religion**

One consequence of secularisation was the tendency to regard religious beliefs as private and personal; they did not need to be acknowledged in public. In turn, this led to thinking that religious beliefs were a matter of 'opinion' – and one person's opinion was as good as another's – an idea that was often regarded as problematical. It was easy to associate the word 'spiritual' (and 'spirituality') with this private domain, and to use 'religious' to describe the public, formal world of religion. In addition, the words 'organised religion' were used to differentiate religion from the private spirituality of the individual.

For some, the gradual disappearance of formal religious practice, and of religious emblems and imagery from their everyday lives, made them wonder whether they were religious any more. Spirituality was a good word for this situation: people retained religious beliefs about God, the afterlife, prayer and a moral code, and they acknowledged a likely influence of religion in the values they absorbed from their family. For some, spirituality referred to their ultimate beliefs about the purpose of life, while it had little relevance to their everyday living; for others, it was concerned with daily life as affected by values and commitments, and by other aspects like the aesthetic.

#### **8.4.3 Public rituals and private devotion (external observance and the personal)**

There was a tendency to associate 'religious' with formal, communal rituals in the faith community, while 'spiritual' was associated with personal, private devotion. This distinction was often used by those who wanted to distance themselves from religious rituals. But the usage can create a false dichotomy, as if communal religious activity was empty of a specifically personal connection to God or devotion— an idea that has long been foreign to the religious traditions.

#### **8.4.4 Contemporary emphasis on experience (implications for personal autonomy and religious authority)**

There has been an increasing reliance on people's own experience as their touchstone for truth, authenticity and lifestyle. This changes attitudes to religious authority and to religious traditions. People imbued with a strong sense of individuality can tend to measure the relevance of religious authority and religious traditions in terms of how they enhance or inhibit their own lifestyle and autonomy. They can feel that they have direct personal access to spirituality and God, without being dependent on religion and religious leaders. In turn, this affects the way they could associate 'spiritual' with the former and 'religious' with the latter.

Existential concerns have become so prominent that they can limit historical perspective and interest in future developments. This emphasis affects the notion of the spiritual; people want it to have 'here-and-now' relevance and to be linked with feelings of wellbeing.

#### **8.4.5 Meeting spiritual needs; spirituality as a consumer commodity**

There is nothing wrong with expecting spirituality to meet felt needs. But it is only a short step from here to a consumerist approach to spirituality. If spirituality is regarded as just another aspect of human nature that needs 'development' and 'satisfaction', then it can readily become commodified and marketed. Commercial gain can be part of the driving force in providing opportunities for spiritual development. The same can apply to religion, as evident in some of the religious programs aired on Sunday morning television.

Consumerist views of spirituality can become problematic, as have consumerist approaches to education, medicine, law and childcare: they have the potential to lose sight of the uniqueness and sacredness of the individual and deal with people as objects to be used for commercial gain. It is unlikely that we will ever be without some forms of commercial spirituality and religion, but naming the problem is a first step in addressing it.

#### **8.4.6 Scientific rationalism and modern religious studies**

Scientific rationalism and modern religious studies, although not necessarily related, have affected the cultural and intellectual climate in Western countries as far as perceptions of religion are concerned.

Scientific rationalism over the last two centuries (influenced by the Enlightenment) has tended to undermine simple views of religious truth, as well as bringing traditional religious authorities into question. If science and reason have provided such a successful explanatory account of human life and culture, this can give the impression that religion has been superseded. However, while this interpretation may be dismissive of religion, if it still recognises a spiritual-moral domain, then it will further the distinction between the religious and the spiritual, and will support a non-religious spirituality.

Perhaps more than any contemporary religious studies, biblical scholarship has had a profound influence in enhancing Christian theology, and in turn, enhancing Christian spirituality. Nevertheless, from outside Christian circles, systematic studies of religions can give some the impression that religions are generic (variations on a common theme), and that the idea of absolute religious truth is a myth that religions foster. This furthers the distinction between the religious and the spiritual; it sees religions as merely different 'avenues' to the spiritual.

### 8.4.7 Postmodern views of religion

Cultural postmodernity questions the validity of meta-narratives, while acknowledging their socially constructed, contextual meanings and cultural functions. This highlighting of uncertainty in personal knowledge creates doubts about religious truth claims, and somewhat inevitably, steers a course in favour of ‘spiritual’ rather than ‘religious’. The hyper-questioning stance of extreme postmodernism can incline people to dismiss tradition and history, while at the same time discouraging hope for the future. This approach readily reinforces a ‘here-and-nowism’, both existential and pragmatic. It limits the breadth of human purposes and often goes hand in hand with consumerism as the meaning and purpose to life – as if ‘I consume, therefore I am.’<sup>8</sup>

#### Summary: Distinctions between the spiritual and the religious

While for many people the spiritual and the religious are so closely related as to be indistinguishable, the comments above show that distinctions or polarities have emerged between the two, with consequent implications for the understanding of spirituality; this is summarised in Table 8.2. However, the tabular summary remains problematic because the generalisations do not apply to all. For some, differences between the two sides do not exist; the qualities ascribed to the spiritual are precisely those of their religious approach to life. For example, someone may commonly participate in formal religious practices, while these are accompanied by considerable internal reflection that show personal autonomy and creativity. Some people may be ‘either/or’ on some variables, and they may be ‘both/and’ on others. For other people, the differences are important. For yet others, the distinctions may reflect unjustified stereotypes about the spiritual and the religious. The distinctions do, however, tend to project negative stereotypes about the religious, while the connotation of spiritual appears more ‘human’ and ‘liberal’. So, while caution is needed not to read the distinctions or polarities too stringently, they do highlight important issues for both religion and spirituality.

**Table 8.2 Summary of stereotypical distinctions and polarities that may apply between the ‘spiritual’ and the ‘religious’**

| <b>Cultural influences affecting thinking about the ‘religious’ and the ‘spiritual’</b>                                    | <b>Tendency in public thinking and in stereotypes to view the ‘religious’ and ‘religion’ as</b> | <b>Tendency in public thinking and in stereotypes to view the ‘spiritual’ and ‘spirituality’ as</b> | <b>Notes</b>  |
|--|---|---|---|
| Secularisation<br>Privatisation of religion<br>Contemporary emphasis on experience<br>Valuing personal autonomy<br>Meeting | External, formal and public   | Internal, more informal, subjective and private   | While this table shows polarities between perceptions of the terms, the distinctions do not always apply to |
|  | Emphasis on formal religious practices and observances  | Emphasis on personal spiritual experience   |   |

|   |  |   |  |
|---|--|---|--|
| existential<br>spiritual needs<br>Consumerism<br>Commodification<br>of the<br>spiritual/religious<br>Scientific<br>rationalism and<br>modern religious<br>studies<br>Postmodern<br>interpretations of<br>religion | Regulated by requirements of religious authority   | Guided by the individual, emphasis on personal autonomy   | particular individuals.<br>They may have the qualities noted in both columns because the characteristics are not necessarily exclusive e.g.<br>1). Substantial participation in organised religion can enhance personal spirituality rather than inhibit it.<br>2.) A personal non-religious spirituality may be a substantial part of an individual's reflective life; in other instances it might be superficial and specious. |
|   | Normative teachings and doctrines  | More reliance on personal interpretation  |  |
|   | Can have an institutional emphasis   | Tends to be individualistic   |  |
|   | Organised and structured   | More informal, individualistic  |  |
|   | Absolute truth claims proposed authoritatively   | A more constructivist notion of personal truth; admits to more uncertainty and existential best-estimates |  |
|   | Importance of history and tradition; in Christianity, allied with theology and scripture | Less concerned with traditions and more existential in focus  |  |
|   | Does not always accommodate questioning  | Tends to accommodate questioning  |  |

The table helps with understanding secularisation and the problems religions have where they fail to meet the spiritual needs of their members. In addition, it may help in dialogue between religious groups and with those whose spirituality is not religious – this will be important in the public discourse about spirituality and education. Also, it can help avoid the relegation of religion in such discourse.

The differentiation between religion and spirituality has been taken up by David Tacey, particularly in his books *Reenchantment: The new Australian spirituality* (2000) and *The spirituality revolution: The emergence of contemporary spirituality* (2003). He illustrated many of the distinctions made in Table 8.2. For Tacey, a key to the development of a popular spirituality vis-à-vis religion is in the strength of the cultural themes of freedom and individuality within a context of plurality.

This revolution involves a democratisation of the spirit. It is about individuals taking authority into their own hands, and refusing to be told what to think or believe. It is about personal autonomy and

experimentation, with the use of direct experience of the world as a kind of laboratory of the spirit. There is a new desire to observe, create theories, and test these against the facts of our experience. We seem to be applying the scientific method to our spiritual lives. Not all this investigation is happy or profitable, and this is all the more reason why public institutions [including religion and the churches] must eventually take up a dialogue with popular spirituality.<sup>9</sup>

Tacey considered that the increasing prominence of spirituality represented a force for spiritual renewal within society which was distinct from, and to varying degrees in conflict with, traditional religion and fundamentalism. He stressed the mystical and experiential dimension to spirituality. The lack of dialogue between religion and spirituality he ascribed to the inability of the churches to move beyond 'conventional ideas of the sacred'.

Spirit is felt to be spontaneous, freely available and democratically structured, whereas religion is perceived to be doctrinal, regulated and authoritarian. Spirit is felt to be holistic and urging us towards wholeness and completion, whereas religion is perceived to be promoting perfection, one sided-ness and imbalance ...

The traditional sense of belonging to one specific interpretation of the world not only runs counter to the new experience of diversity and social plurality, but is also contrary to the modern experience of education ... It is hardly surprising if many of us are beginning to live out spiritual lives according to this same pattern, by looking at our own needs and the various world religions in terms of what makes sense to us and what can be concluded by our experimentation.<sup>10</sup>

Tacey's interpretation did not presume that religion and spirituality are incompatible; his ideal would be a healthy spirituality within a religious tradition. His views are therefore accommodated by religious people who want a spirituality that is not always forthcoming in the local church; and those who want a non-religious spirituality can also identify with his interpretation. Some religious people and mainline religious authorities find his views too liberal and unorthodox – as do fundamentalist Christians, who see him promoting relativism and a privatised spirituality. Tacey drew a distinction between the ideology of 'relativism' and a practical 'relativity' that acknowledged 'that all religious systems are to some extent productions of time, place and history, and that when we enter into any religious system we are necessarily participating in the historical and social influences of that system'.<sup>11</sup> He also pointed out that this is a natural consequence of contemporary culture where 'many of our modern assumptions and absolute conceptions had been transformed by post-modern fluidity and uncertainty, and by a new exposure to process and mystery'.<sup>12</sup>

While not all will agree with the solutions Tacey suggests, and while there is more complexity and diversity to the spirituality of religious people than Tacey was able to show in his books, there is no doubt that he has raised an agenda of great importance for all who would consider relationships between spirituality and religion. What requires further attention is the spirituality of those who are not religious and who are not attuned to the mystical-experiential themes that Tacey considers fundamental to spirituality.

## 8.5 Further consideration of issues related to the nature of spirituality

The following sections address in more detail some questions about what constitutes spirituality (some of the topics were signposted in earlier sections).

- 8.5.1 Spirituality, belief in God, and belief in a transcendent dimension to human life
- 8.5.2 The need for a new, non-religious language for addressing spiritual-moral issues in the public domain
- 8.5.3 Non-religious spiritualities
- 8.5.4 A new spiritual awakening? A resurgence of religion?
- 8.5.5 Secularisation and spirituality
- 8.5.6 Spirituality and cultural postmodernity
- 8.5.7 Consumer spirituality
- 8.5.8 Dimensions of emotion, imagination and the aesthetic in spirituality
- 8.5.9 A style spectrum of spiritualities
- 8.5.10 Values in education, values/moral education and the spiritual-moral dimension to education

### 8.5.1 Spirituality, belief in God, and belief in a transcendent dimension to human life

The existence of God, and particularly a personal God who is interested in people and intimately concerned with human affairs, are beliefs that are distinctive of religions. Such beliefs are central to the transcendent dimension to religion. Other aspects of religious transcendence include belief in an after-life. For many, it is this transcendent dimension that is the essence of both the religious and the spiritual. Yet these beliefs are not always present in some contemporary spiritualities.

In his book *The varieties of religious experience*, originally published in 1902, the psychologist William James proposed the following view of transcendence. He considered that the core transcendent experience in religions was acknowledgment that the physical world was part of a more spiritual universe that gave the world its principal meaning; and that trying to develop personal union with this spiritual power was the ultimate purpose and goal of human life. For James, spirituality would then be the collection of thinking, commitments and activity that guided a life based on these beliefs.

Christianity and Judaism (the world religions with which we are most familiar) give an extensive account of their personal God. Both the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Scriptures show people communicating personally with God. In addition, these religions see God as creator and sustainer of life. Other qualities including immanence (permeating life) and omnipresence or ubiquity (present everywhere) are ascribed to God. Such views are also prominent in other world religions, especially Islam.

In generic writings about religions, and particularly about spiritualities that are not explicitly based in religion, reference to God as central to transcendence is still evident, but expressed in more abstract terms. God may be referred to variously as the 'creative spirit', 'life force', 'higher power' and 'transcendent other'. The idea of 'the greater cosmic scheme of things' has also been used as an equivalent for God.<sup>13</sup> Other images used were 'greater, deeper sense of order' and 'new vibration'.<sup>14</sup> It is not difficult to see the connection with 'The Force' in the Star Wars films, and to see why

some educators tried to use the popularity of the phrase as evidence of a ‘resurgence’ in youth spirituality.

Process philosophy and theology emphasise the nature and role of God as remaining involved in the process of continuing creation and unfolding of the universe.

Belief in God implies a transcendence that fits comfortably within a notion of the spiritual and spirituality. However, there are people and spiritualities that do not have any belief in God but still use the words spiritual and transcendence. Here, the spiritual dimension is regarded as central to human nature, even if for individuals it does not endure beyond death. For such spirituality, transcendence is understood as a human construct. It may be the spiritual quality of humans; it may be experiences of value or beauty that inspire people; it may be mystical experiences; or it could be the notion of a non-personal, permeating life force in the universe.

Then there are spiritualities that exclude both belief in God and in spiritual transcendence. Some would argue that it is inappropriate to apply the word spirituality to such movements, and that they would be better described as psychologies concerned with personal wellbeing. As noted earlier, we do not want to enter the extensive debate about the nature of spirituality, but we need to point out that the way transcendence and belief in God appear in (or are absent from) a spirituality is an important issue when it comes to the analysis and evaluation of spiritualities.

Belief in God and transcendence enlarge the domain of spirituality beyond personal wellbeing – a religious spirituality is not focused exclusively on the immediate concerns and personal needs of the individual. A religious spirituality does not guarantee that people will not be self-centred or that they will be self-transcendent; but at its best, it provides a strong challenge to self-centredness.

### **8.5.2 The need for a new, non-religious language for addressing spiritual-moral issues in the public domain**

Previously in Western societies, when there was little distinction between the words religious and spiritual, any public discourse about spiritual and moral dimensions to life tended to be in Christian theological language. However, given the almost universal acceptance of pluralism in these societies, and the distinctions being made between the religious and the spiritual, a new non-religious language is needed for public discussion of spiritual and moral issues. In areas like public education, social work, social science, business, and health sciences, words like spiritual, beliefs, values, commitments, ethics, justice and equity became more appropriate for discourse because they avoided the evangelising agenda that was readily associated with religious words; also, many traditionally religious and theological words were no longer perceived as relevant. In this context, the word spirituality was used to cover a spiritual orientation to life that did not specify a particular religious affiliation. Inclusive spiritual language and a broader conception of issues were likely to be more appropriate for dialogue across religious and non-religious groups, and for gaining the consensus and moral support of people for common values.

For religious people in such public dialogue, their use of a language of somewhat independent of religion helped them explore how particular religious concerns could be translated into a pluralist social situation. There was another benefit for religion: this language would also help believers see how their religion was pertinent to their

personal lives – it was like religion trying to find a new spiritual language to address the secularised situation.

### 8.5.3 Non-religious spiritualities

For those who were consciously non-religious, the language of spirituality provided a suitable alternative to religion. In some instances, the alternative to religion was sought on the grounds that religion was failing to provide an appropriate and meaningful spirituality. As already noted, a confluence of pressures from the advent of science, rationalism (from the Enlightenment) and secularisation affected the cogency, plausibility and perceived relevance of religions; they had been the traditional sources of meaning. A recent example of the substitution of a relatively non-religious spirituality is evident in the book *SQ: Spiritual intelligence, the ultimate intelligence*, by Zohar and Marshall (2000). They concluded that '[t]he rapid of changes in the western world over the past three centuries have left conventional religions struggling to be meaningful'. Hence people need to use their own innate spiritual capacities 'to forge new paths to find some fresh expression of meaning, something that touches us and that can guide us from within'.<sup>15</sup>

This emphasis on personal experience, autonomy and relevance or meaningfulness was contrasted with 'conventional religion', which was stereotyped as 'an externally imposed set of rules and voice. It is top-down, inherited from priests and prophets and holy books or absorbed through the family and tradition'.<sup>16</sup> The suggestion that religion is only needed by those who are 'spiritually immature' is commonly associated with this view.

Levin, also writing about spiritual intelligence, considered that this new spirituality enabled people to 'cut out the middle man' – bypassing both organised religion and 'gurus':

In the old external order there is a hierarchy. 'God', or some ultimate authority figure, sits at the top, followed by his 'Church', the priest, the institution, men, women, children, animals – in that order. To relate to 'God' you must go through a priest, and a church. But that is no longer the case. We are all being urged to connect to spirit directly ...

Instead of relating through the old triangle, the old hierarchy, we are being asked to connect directly with God, or the force of spirituality, or the force of the creative – however you see it, the words often confuse the issue. It means that, as well as dramatic changes in your relation to spirituality, the role of the priest or the guru is also changing. Altogether. They are no longer your link to spirituality or God.<sup>17</sup>

This argument has appeal for those interested in spirituality, but who want little or nothing to do with organised religion. It does, however, propose something of a 'straw man' image of religious spirituality; there are many practitioners of a religious spirituality who would claim much personal autonomy and direct access to God. For example, there are many Christians who draw strongly on their denomination's religious traditions for their spirituality, while being relatively autonomous in relation to church authority; they will make up their own minds when it comes to disputed questions.

Nevertheless, there are a significant number of people, including many youth, who feel that religion is mainly irrelevant to their spiritual quest and this understanding motivates their search for a non-religious spirituality.

A major type of non-religious spirituality is evident in groups that consciously espouse a spiritual nature for humans and propose practices to enhance spiritual wellbeing. Fuller, in *Spiritual but not religious*, gave an account of a wide range of such groups; some examples of metaphysical philosophies from the 19th century were: the Universalisers, Freemasonry, Swedenborgianism, Transcendentalism, Shakerism, Mesmerism, Spiritualism, Mind Cure, and Theosophy. There is an even greater range in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Other non-religious spiritual groups focus on astrology and the occult, or they constitute some form of New Age spirituality. In addition, there are groups that draw to various extents on Eastern religious and Eastern non-religious thought and spiritual practice.

Then there is a considerable number of psychological/spiritual movements that have been used in association with both religious and non-religious spiritualities. These range from traditional Rogerian Encounter Groups, to the popular Myers Briggs personality inventory, the Enneagram and rebirthing etc. Useful psychological insights and wisdom are readily incorporated into spirituality. The word spirituality has also been appropriated by what has been called the 'self-help' personal development industry. This is a diverse group including various therapies, holistic movements, meditation and other activities, catering for people's interest in furthering their own psychological development and wellbeing; they purport to promote spirituality as a central aspect of human development.

In Western societies, there is now a large smorgasbord of spiritualities ranging from particular religious spiritualities to many different non-religious spiritualities. In addition, people may be eclectic in borrowing from different spiritual sources and practices without changing their basic religious orientation. For example, Christians will incorporate spiritual insights from various psychological movements, or they may borrow from Eastern religions and spiritualities.

#### **8.5.4 A new spiritual awakening? A resurgence of religion?**

While acknowledging that there has been a long, sharp decline in church attendance, some Christians have been heartened by the increasing interest they see being taken in spirituality. It has become something of a new buzz word. They talk about seeing a new 'spiritual hunger' in people, including youth, and they think that this may foreshadow a new religious awakening. Some Christian religious educators think that if they can tap into these spiritual needs they will be able to show young people the relevance of Christianity to their lives and perhaps even encourage them to come back to the Church. We recommend caution in jumping to this conclusion.<sup>18</sup>

Cultural changes in the landscape of spirituality are complex. It is difficult to make sense of some developments, let alone predict where they may lead to. Religious attempts to try to identify and address young people's spiritual needs, especially in education, need to be commended; also valuable have been efforts to make religious spiritualities relevant to contemporary social contexts. But we suggest that this be done unconditionally, and not dependent on the intention of getting youth back into church. It may well be that religious agencies like church schools can enhance the

spirituality of young people, but this will not necessarily be a successful formula for increasing Sunday church attendance.

### 8.5.5 Secularisation and spirituality

The adjective ‘secular’ is formally contrasted with ‘sacred’ and ‘religious’; it means ordinary life or experience without any religious connection or connotation. ‘Secularisation’ is a process in which the prominence of formal religion in social interaction decreases. Secularisation, therefore, is usually of concern for religions because it affects their standing and influence in culture and politics; and it weakens the bonds between believers and organised religion. Religious people worry about secularisation because they see it encouraging others to live their lives with little or no connection with religion, thus losing their religious identity and the spiritual resources that go with it. Critics of religion see secularisation as a positive development because it lessens the social control that religions exerted on believers, allowing for more autonomy and personal responsibility for beliefs.

‘Secularism’ is an ideology that actively promotes secularisation. Secularism is often overtly anti-religious; but secularisation itself is not necessarily anti-religious. It is beyond our scope here to consider secularisation extensively. However, it is significant to show that, while secularisation has diminished the place of religion in public life, it does not necessarily do the same for the spiritual and spirituality. A case can be made for describing some youth spirituality as ‘secular’ but not very religious, and the same applies to adults.

Increasing secularisation has been the pattern in Western societies for more than a century. In a text on modern European thought, Franklin Boumer wrote about the process of secularisation in a chapter entitled ‘The Eclipse of God’.<sup>19</sup> He began with the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, writing from his Nazi prison camp in 1944.

[T]he secular movement which I think had begun in the 13th century has in our time reached a certain completion. People have learnt to cope with all the questions of importance without recourse to God as a working hypothesis. In questions concerning science, art and even ethics this has become an understood thing which one scarcely dares to tilt at anymore.<sup>20</sup>

This draws attention to a process with a long history that now has a contemporary prominence and universality in Western countries. It has been accelerated by social change over the past forty years through communications, economic policies, technology, travel, education and the media – all of which foster a lifestyle characterised by a strong sense of freedom, individuality and relativism, even if there is a significant gap between what people hope for and what they actually experience.

Bonhoeffer’s comments are particularly pertinent to contemporary society where many people, especially the young, construct their spirituality without much reference to traditional religion or to the ‘God’ they see reflected in the teachings and practices of this sort of religion. While he probably did not imagine the extent to which secularisation would have developed by the end of the 20th century, Bonhoeffer thought that the changes in emphasis flowing from secularisation were not necessarily a bad sign for Christianity. He saw secularisation changing religion – moving it from cultural control of thought and behaviour to a more autonomous, personal Christian spirituality. Some labelled such a development dangerous, ushering in a type of ‘religion-less Christianity’ – a term that was used to encapsulate this trend in its

quintessential form. However, it is important to note that Bonhoeffer never proposed excessive individualism; for his view of authentic Christianity, the believing community was fundamental; and developing community in the wider society was central to the Christian mission. (Bonhoeffer's doctoral thesis was titled *Communio Sanctorum*. The big issue in secularisation, as far as religion was concerned, was that God and religion were no longer formally at the centre of everything. Religious doctrines, symbols and rituals are no longer the principal sources of meaning for individuals and societies.

One of the corollaries of secularisation is the *privatisation of beliefs*. As the social prominence of religions in pluralist societies decreases, so the tendency to regard religion as a matter of private belief increases. This helps shift the notion of religion from the historical and objective towards the existential and the personal. In turn, this tends to make spirituality a more personal and private affair, less linked to formal religion.

From one point of view, the privatisation of beliefs emphasises, and can enhance, the personal dimension to spirituality. This can go hand in hand with a community dimension, or it can diminish the latter, with individuals feeling that they have less need for organised religion. Religious people are concerned about this trend. Part of their concern is the diminished moral power of religion over individuals. Another concern is the way in which religion can be domesticated and its capacity for social action and justice limited. Religion can be treated as a matter of private, personal opinion, where it may offer personal meaning and motivation without getting in the way of business and life in general. So it is not surprising that many people in contemporary Western countries will favour the idea of spirituality in preference to religion; a decline in participation in organised religion is occurring at the same time as an increasing popular interest in the spiritual. For some, this may well be because they are disenchanted with organised religion. Some indeed see religion as an obstacle to their spirituality – they may see religion as more concerned with social control than with promoting personal spirituality and autonomy, and they may resent the idea of being ‘told’ what to believe; for others, it may just be more convenient and less demanding; for still others, they will retain certain links with religion and religious beliefs, while having a stronger personal say in determining their own spirituality.

One author summarised this trend as follows:

The big difference between the older forms of spirituality and 21<sup>st</sup> century spirituality is the movement away from an external authority figure and a movement toward an empowerment of each seeker. 21<sup>st</sup> century spirituality is not about being told what to do ... It's about becoming one's own authority, so that our moral behaviour and our cosmic awe stem from the inside out.<sup>21</sup>

Secularisation is not so much a decline in belief in God, but a ‘repositioning of religious belief in a manner that reflects a more general shift of emphasis within society from institutional to domestic life’.<sup>22</sup> Many people are religious but in a more private and general way, and not in the traditional institutional way. They may still draw on their religious tradition for beliefs and spirituality, but they will not ever be likely to become actively involved in a local community of faith.

Also related to secularisation and privatisation of beliefs is a tendency for people to consider spirituality as nominal and implied. While not having any clearly recognisable practices that might sustain and enhance spirituality, some people may

claim that spirituality is inherent in their lifestyle and that spiritual values give direction to their lives. This can go with a claim to be ‘spiritual but not religious’, and is given as a reason for not needing formal links with religion. It might be described as an ‘invisible’ spirituality or ‘invisible’ religion. This may well be the case for particular people. Spirituality may permeate their lives without being obvious or too explicit. How much individuals need explicitly spiritual activities and how much time needs to be spent in specifically educating or otherwise enhancing their spirituality are matters for discernment; it would rash to make judgments about what is or what is not appropriate for them on the basis of presuming they have little implied spirituality. However, we want to draw attention to the problem situation where a claim to an implied spirituality is little more than a cover for giving no conscious attention to spirituality. In such cases, a relatively ‘invisible’ spirituality may well tend towards the non-existent. This remains an issue for the evaluation of spirituality.

### **8.5.6 Spirituality and cultural postmodernity**

There are ambiguities in the use of the term ‘postmodernity’ because of the different meanings given to it. Philosophers of postmodernism (sometimes also referred to as post-structuralism) like Baudrillard, Lyotard, Rorty and others are noted for an epistemological stance opposed to ‘realism’ and for rejection of the assumptions and ideologies of modernism (2.10.9).<sup>23</sup> Our concern is not with their thinking as such, but rather with more general ideas and ideological assumptions that are labelled as cultural postmodernity; this helps interpret the sociocultural environment that affects people’s thinking and behaviour.

What is of particular concern for spirituality is a sense of ‘cultural agnosticism’ that is prominent in postmodern thought. It seems to engage in a cycle of never-ending questioning about the reliability of knowledge. A stock question is ‘How can you be sure you know that?’ It presumes a constructivist and contextualist view of knowledge; it questions the existence of absolutes and the validity of meta-narratives. It gives the impression that ‘because you can deconstruct it, therefore you can distrust it’.

Postmodernity represents a significant paradigm shift from the scientific rationalism and positivism that flowed from the Enlightenment. Now the emphasis is on uncertainty, subjectivism and existentialism; some critics would also add ‘irrationality’ as a characteristic.<sup>24</sup> Postmodernity seems to have applied Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle for the momentum of the electron to human knowledge. This view not only stresses the uncertainty in personal knowledge, but it can lead to a depressing view that truth is unknowable.

If the knowledge and understanding of truth are relative, depending on the particular context and local conditions, this spells trouble for religions that claim absolute truth. Authoritative religious teachings are relativised, and their truth tends to be evaluated in terms of useful functions for the individual and the community. Also, postmodernity leads to a primacy of the subjective over the objective. As a result, the individual’s own experience becomes the most important touchstone for truth and authenticity. Existential needs take centre stage and long-term human goals become less cogent. This favours a spirituality that is existential and primarily focused on individuals’ current needs.

It is understandable that religions feel under attack from cultural postmodernity. However, some of its agenda needs to be addressed constructively by religion and

spirituality rather than dismissed, for example conflicting claims by different religions to absolute truth.

One of the values of postmodern thinking for religion is that it reminds people that knowledge is socially constructed and its meanings are conditioned by historical and contextual factors. Sometimes religious discussion can give the impression of being arrogant, presuming that all will accept authoritative statements as somehow absolute. For example statements like ‘The Bible says this’ are challenged by a realisation that it is really a particular individual or group interpretation of what the Bible is thought to be teaching. Similarly a phrase like ‘Authentic Catholic theology’ has to be interpreted in terms of its history, development and authority base. Such challenges do not necessarily do away with religious authority, but they call for a more rigorous justification and clarification of what is said.

Sometimes interpretations said to be ‘postmodern’ are more appropriately labelled ‘the results of scholarship’ or ‘development in the interpretation of religious doctrines’. This is illustrated in the following example. For some, what the Catholic Church teaches about Hell is simple and straightforward. The Green Catechism (1939–62) said:

Hell is a place of eternal torments.  
 God made Hell to punish the devils or bad angels, and all who die in mortal sin.  
 No one can come out of Hell, for out of Hell there is no redemption.<sup>25</sup>

The relatively new official adult *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994) confirms traditional teaching about ‘the existence of hell and its eternity ... for the souls of those who die in a state of mortal sin ... [and] the punishments of hell, “eternal fire”.’ But it extends the interpretation as follows: ‘The chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God, in whom alone man can possess the life and happiness for which he was created and for which he longs’. And ‘This state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed is called “hell”’.<sup>26</sup> Critical studies in scripture, theology and history (as well as psychology) yield a more complex and less clear-cut interpretation of Catholic teaching on Hell. Those familiar with this complexity may not have heard the word postmodernity, let alone understood its meaning. But it is useful as a label (or state of mind) for the more questioning, complex interpretations of traditions. Some cannot bear to live with the complexities of meaning that critical scholarship uncovers – and it certainly makes the teaching of religion much more complex. Others cannot bear to live with what they perceive as simplistic interpretations. Some address the problem by turning their back on it and ‘sticking to the traditional formulae they were brought up with’. Others see the problem as just ‘reality’; and they feel more in tune with reality, and vitalised by living comfortably with the complexities.

The value position presumed here favours the complex interpretation over the simple, because the latter is too limited a representation of the truth. This proposes that we need to accommodate the natural levels of complexity and uncertainty in religious knowledge because we believe that such built-in limitations are part of the nature of such knowledge. This does not mean that it is untruthful but that it is unlikely to express *all* of the truth. The complexity of truth was always there, but it is in recent times in Western societies that people have been more widely challenged to acknowledge it. It is presumed that truthful meaning and personal integrity can be achieved within this knowledge framework. Different people can grasp the same

truth, God, for example, although they have different understandings of what God is like. Similarly, some practical level of objectivity can be achieved despite the postmodern emphasis on subjectivity and relativism.

Those involved in education and the care of youth can be committed to helping young people acquire better understandings and interpretations of the truth; hence, from this value stance, an unwillingness to help them explore the challenges in this greater complexity is a failure in professional commitment. This is a view that is contested, particularly with respect to the role of religious authority. But it is one authentic response to the postmodern cultural situation.

This discussion relates back to section 3.2.14 where we proposed that acceptance of a natural degree of uncertainty in personal knowing need not compromise its meaning and truthfulness. Also, some practical objectivity can be achieved despite the postmodern emphasis on subjectivity and relativism.

An excessive emphasis on postmodernity can lead to a spirituality that is exclusively existential, and to a large number of religions – each with only one member! Extreme postmodernism seems to have swung so far in the direction of individualism, subjectivity and relativism that people are left all alone to construct their own unique personal packages of meaning that give them some feeling of ‘ontological security’ about their value and purpose in life, with little or no connection with any community of meaning or historical traditions for meaning. That level of individualism seems inhuman and unhealthy.

Strictly speaking, personal meaning systems are unique for each individual. But at the same time, the similarity and commonality in human experience results in meaning systems with a lot in common, particularly for people with similar beliefs and outlook on life. Individualism can be over-emphasised at the expense of shared meaning and communities of meaning. After all, shared meanings are essential for the integrity of personal communication and human relationships; this is the case while acknowledging the natural degree of ambiguity and uncertainty in personal knowing and communication.

Hence the fundamental importance of communities of meaning and individuals’ contact with, reliance on and nourishment from such communities needs to be acknowledged. The uniqueness of the individual’s meaning system coexists with significant amounts of shared meaning.

It is proposed that a healthy spirituality needs a broader base within both community and historical traditions. This is where religious spirituality has something valuable to contribute.

### **8.5.7 Consumer spirituality**

Spirituality should help to meet felt personal needs. But if this is its exclusive focus, three developments become more likely. First, individuals lose a sense of community and traditional meanings; second, commitments to others and to particular communities are weakened or abandoned; and third, spirituality tends to become yet another commodity for a consumerist lifestyle – it can be marketed and exploited for its ‘feel-good’ potential. The noble aim to seek spirituality as part of personal development can be affected by a consumerist ethic.

This is evident where religion and religious spirituality become ‘business oriented’. For example, the Christian minister Rick Warren referred to at the start of this chapter calls himself a ‘Stealth Evangelist’. He saw himself capitalising on a ‘new great Awakening spiritually in America’. The newspaper article on Warren said that he ‘encouraged ministers to think of their churches as *businesses* and congregations as *customers*.’ It concluded that he was appealing to a notion of ‘a comforting God who acts like a great therapist in the sky’ – thus compromising religious concerns for social issues and social justice.<sup>27</sup> The author considered that ‘while the desire for personal change is admirable, an obsession with self-fulfilment distracts from the need to change the world’. She quoted favourably a more desirable alternative view from another pastor:

Is it enough to preach sermons that centre on individual struggles and offer guidance along the path to a more meaningful and fulfilling personal life? I can’t help thinking this is a time when we should be challenging our people to move beyond the personal to the public – indeed, the political – and commit themselves to transforming the world ... Jesus, our role model, not only cared for hurting individuals but also shattered the cultural conventions of his day and turned his society upside down.

The uncertainty and existentialism of postmodernity naturally incline people towards consumerism: ‘if life is fraught with ontological uncertainty, why not find meaning in consuming as much as possible while we can?’<sup>28</sup>

If this happens, spirituality can lose its transcendent perspective and its capacity to critically interpret the culture. In religious terminology, the ‘prophetic’ quality of spirituality is diminished because it becomes an indistinguishable part of the prevailing consumerist lifestyle. In considering this aspect of spirituality, one writer claimed that ‘postmodern consumerism is ... a worldview reaching into every aspect of Western culture, shaping our lives from cradle to grave. It constitutes *the* dominant metanarrative ... “Consumerism is ubiquitous and ephemeral. It is arguably *the* religion of the late twentieth century.”’<sup>29</sup>

Traditionally, religion provided a systematic *worldview* in which the Divine provided overall meaning and purpose to life. With cultural postmodernity, the importance of worldview recedes into the background; instead, what becomes important for individuals is the *life-world* and its components. The need to find some overarching meaning system for life can be supplanted by a concern to maximise the consumer products that enhance lifestyle and an immediate sense of wellbeing.

Attention needs to be drawn to a number of aspects of consumerist and commercial spirituality that are important for the critical evaluation of contemporary spirituality:

- *Consumerist lifestyle emphasis:* In relation to the popular contemporary quest for spiritual fulfilment, it is evident that a ‘plethora of spiritualities, each with its own claim to provide a final answer to existential angst, reflects exactly the pattern and dynamic of consumerism’.<sup>30</sup> This pattern is evident in some who search for meaning and satisfaction in religion, or in esoteric religious practice, alternative spiritualities, the New Age and even in alcohol or drugs.
- *Existential gratification:* There is an emphasis on the gratification of personal needs and interests here and now. How people *feel* about spirituality will be more influential than their thinking; feelings about comfort and wellbeing will sway choices about the spiritual. On this point Bridger considered that: ‘The “instant satisfaction” culture of the shopping mall is so deeply embedded in the Western psyche that, insofar as the

search after spirituality represents the consumerist ethic, it is to be expected that those engaged in the search will conform to this ethic.<sup>31</sup>

- *Consumer notion of freedom:* Personal freedom tends to be interpreted in terms of individual consumer choice from a variety of options.
- *Private and personal:* Spirituality tends to be regarded as more of a private and personal matter than something that is rooted in community and historical tradition. Spirituality can then be like ‘personal opinion’ and ‘one opinion is as good as another’s’ and is ‘entitled to equal respect’.
- *Individualistic frame of reference:* The emphasis is on the individual constructing his or her own version of spirituality. ‘Spirituality becomes a matter of subjective experience whose efficacy is judged by the extent to which it meets the subject’s self-perceived needs and desires. And since these are in a constant state of flux, consistent only in being driven by the impulse to gratification, the spiritual search consists of a never-ending stream of sensation-gathering as the individual moves from one attempt at fulfilment to the next.’<sup>32</sup> The individual’s own experience becomes the touchstone for authentic spirituality.

If spirituality embraces values and commitments that are not just self-centred, then at times it will conflict with personal feelings and individual interests. Fidelity to commitments will not always be emotionally comfortable; life motivated by a healthy spirituality will not always take the easiest ‘feel-good’ path. Commitment to other people and to long-term life goals can be aspects of spirituality that ‘transcend’ self-centredness, and thus transcend consumerism. This echoes a particular interpretation of Christian religious spirituality that it is precisely in a level of self-forgetfulness that goes with concern for others that individuals may find their ‘true’ selves.

### **8.5.8 Dimensions of emotion, imagination and the aesthetic in spirituality**

This section will do no more than signpost three dimensions to spirituality that warrant more detailed attention.

*Emotions* (or feelings) are fundamental visceral energies that are an integral part of normal human functioning; they are also a key component of spiritual responses. Emotions can emerge from within, in an endogenous way, without any apparent external stimulus (for example depression); they are often strong, and at times overwhelming, psychosomatic parts of the overall human response to situations and events (joy, zest, exhilaration, anger, fear, depression, guilt). Much consideration needs to be given to the expression of emotions, as well as to their moderation. Emotions can be ‘trained’ and controlled to variable extents. Particular expressions of emotion can be judged appropriate or inappropriate in a certain context. Emotions can be repressed, causing damaging repercussions within the personality; emotions can also ‘run riot’ and appear to be out of control; people can be ‘slaves’ of their emotions. A balanced, expressive emotional life is central to the notion of health, including spiritual health (2.9.6, 13.5).

The *imagination* is the individual’s capacity to mentally picture future possibilities (2.9.7, 13.8 and 15.7.10–12). New ideas, even new selves, can be imagined and rehearsed. In this way, imagination of possibilities and consequences is a precursor to human action and personal change. Imagination helps people identify with the feelings, understandings and situations of others and is thus important for empathy. It is a key to creativity and originality, and is an important aspect of spirituality.

The *aesthetic* dimension to spirituality has to do with the appreciation of beauty, creativity and originality – it is an integral part of human responses. Beauty is perceived and enjoyed both in nature and in human constructions like architecture and art. The aesthetic is also linked with symbolism and its role in human self-expression and communication with others. An understanding of spirituality needs to attend to the spiritual dimension in the creative arts.

### 8.5.9 A style spectrum of spiritualities

This section examines a spectrum of spiritualities ranging from organisational/structural religious to DIY (do-it-yourself)/on-the-run psychological. In the diverse developments within religious and non-religious spiritualities, it is possible to discern a polarity that results from the interplay between cultural influences such as those noted above.

Towards one end of the spectrum is what can be described as *organisational/structural religious spirituality*. This is where a religious spirituality is strongly located within a local faith community. It is defined and expressed through worship, liturgy and religious practices as well as through authoritative religious teachings. The faith is articulated in a systematic theology or worldview that includes a moral code. A comprehensive beliefs package is accepted, even if individuals do not understand some aspects, and even if some beliefs are puzzling.

Religious identification is tied up with firm, and often relatively unquestioning, acceptance of the orthodox teachings. Religious identity is regarded as important; it is defined over and against other religious and non-religious groups. What the individuals believe and their religious practices, in addition to nurturing their spirituality, also have a ‘boundary construction’ role – serving as boundary markers for the religious group, keeping them separate and distinctive. There is an emphasis on absolute truth and certainty in religious claims. Often there is a strong focus on preparation for eternity, on salvation and atonement for sins.

This sort of spirituality gives a strong sense of personal and spiritual security. It sees religious beliefs and practices as defining one’s integrity and as ‘coaxing’ God to intervene and make their lives more successful (not only spiritually). It braces itself against cultural postmodernity and any other influences that may be perceived as dangerous because of their eroding effects on faith.

This style of spirituality can be found in all traditional as well as relatively new religions, in both older and younger members. Also, versions are evident in some non-religious spiritual groups.

Towards the other end of an extensive spectrum is what can be called *do-it-yourself, on-the-run psychological spirituality*.

This spirituality is more personally constructed according to need and is less dependent on a religious institution with its comprehensive beliefs package. There is more personal freedom, but this puts more onus on the individual for constructing and living out a spirituality. In structural/organisational spirituality, individuals have a choice of religion; but once having chosen, there is often little more choice available because a required belief system is prescribed. DIY spirituality suits those who cannot abide such a restriction on their freedom and who want to be involved in selecting and choosing the components of their spirituality.

It is somewhat tailor-made to help negotiate life ‘on the run’, dealing with spiritual questions as they arise, with interpretations and constructions that are felt to be the best available wisdom. It may well draw substantially on the individual’s own traditional religious heritage (for example scripture and theology), but it will be a well-developed and usually complex interpretation. It is focused on present life (a psychological emphasis) and not much concerned with a hereafter, although this is not dismissed, especially when death looms closer with old age. It adverts to the spiritual and moral dimensions of ongoing life experience; it may seek transcendent and religious experience as well.

Some individuals have moved towards this style of spirituality in varying degrees because they were not functioning comfortably within the organisational/structural framework described earlier. Others may find themselves towards this end of the spectrum by default, by being too busy, or through lack of much conscious attention to spirituality. Some may be in this position being consciously spiritual but not religious. Others have this style of spirituality while remaining identified with their traditional religion, but their mode of participation in the church or religion is markedly different from the organisational/structural style.

Some of the characteristics of a DIY on-the-run spirituality are as follows (resonating with issues discussed earlier in the chapter).

Becoming more personally autonomous and responsible for one’s spirituality may result in wanting to select aspects that have a desired function or meet particular needs – hence the standard set of teachings in a worldview and organisational religious practice will not be satisfying; or the individual will not take much notice of beliefs they feel are marginal. Multiple comparisons of religions and non-religious views of life can incline individuals to de-absolutise religious truth claims, seeing them as more symbolic than historical or factual, pointing in a valuable spiritual direction perhaps but not expressing *all* of the truth. They can be eclectic in sourcing spirituality beyond their own religious tradition. They experience secularisation but do not see it as a spiritual problem for them; and being busy, they may not have the time for a lot of religious practice if it does not seem to meet any real need.

This style of spirituality seeks to be relevant to people’s lives and moral decision-making, and its emphasis is psychological. It values individuality, but it is not necessarily anti-communitarian. Nevertheless, communities of this type, whether religious or not, have a different mode of social and spiritual functioning from that of the organisational/structural type.

It is common for local religious faith communities to be far from homogeneous, having a great range of spiritualities represented from across the complete spectrum. Hence it is usual in communities of faith, perhaps even normal, for there to be give and take, and even some conflict arising from different spiritualities and different needs. Sometimes faith communities can work together and rise above such differences in spiritualities; sometimes they cannot. Much depends on the leadership, key personalities and distribution of power. It is not uncommon to find these same differences in spiritualities within a family group.

Some with a DIY style of spirituality remain very active and involved in their faith community; for others, it is their style of spirituality that draws them away from organised religion.

DIY on-the-run spirituality can get by comfortably with a measure of acknowledged natural uncertainty about the big spiritual issues of life – God, death and the afterlife. It does not need to rely on the traditional package of beliefs, selecting wisdom from a variety of sources that makes sense of people’s experience and can guide their moral life. Such people are more aware of the ‘real uncertainties’ both in life and religion than the ‘unreal certainties’ they sometimes perceive in the organisational/structural style of religious spirituality. For the DIY style of spirituality, there is less need for religious identity boundaries.

This spectrum ranging from structural/organisational to DIY spirituality is significant for interpreting the diversity of spiritualities in youth. It also signals the natural problems that can be expected with an education in spirituality that is sponsored by the Church (see Part IV ). Formal religious education in religious schools tends to have a curriculum that naturally leans towards the organisational/structural because it is institutionally sponsored. Hence there are difficulties to be negotiated for both teachers and students whose spiritual orientation is towards the other end of the spectrum.

#### **8.5.10 Values in education, values/moral education and the spiritual-moral dimension to education**

This discussion of spirituality needs to be related to debates about values in education, values education and the spiritual-moral dimension of education (see Part III). While we have chosen not to report on the extensive literature on values and values education, we consider that this volume makes a significant contribution to values education. In Part III we give special attention to a broader category, ‘the spiritual and moral dimension to the school curriculum’; a comprehensive perspective on spirituality is central to that conceptualisation.

### **8.6 Healthy spirituality: Criteria for the identification and evaluation of spirituality**

Judging what is a healthy and desirable spirituality always takes place within a specific context where there are presumed values and beliefs, whether these are religious or not. Here a starting list of evaluative criteria is proposed that can be further developed. The schema can also be used pedagogically for identifying, analysing and judging the strengths or weaknesses of what is being offered as spirituality. The list is generic and applicable to both religious and non-religious spiritualities; it needs to be contextualised with the articulated beliefs and values of the particular group engaged in evaluation; it may also be useful for individuals in the personal appraisal of their own spirituality.

**Table 8.3 Evaluative criteria for the identification and appraisal of spirituality**

| <b>Initial list of evaluative criteria for the identification and evaluation of spirituality</b> | <b>Evaluative questions and issues</b>  |
|--|---|
| Transcendence  | The particular understanding of transcendence:<br>Is it a human transcendence or does it include a notion of God or a higher power?<br>Is this higher power personal or a non-personal creative life force? |

|   |  |
|---|--|
|   | In what ways does this spirituality relate to religion?  |
| Frame of reference: the individual, as well as something larger than the individual | <p>The frame of reference for spirituality needs to respect the uniqueness of the individual; however, if the frame of reference is no larger than the immediate personal needs and interests of the individual, there is a danger of self-centredness and narcissism.</p> <p>To what extent does the frame of reference for this spirituality take into account community at both local and wider levels? (human or social environment).</p> <p>What historical traditions in spirituality give perspective to contemporary concerns, and a balanced interpretation of existential needs?</p> <p>Is there a custodial concern for the physical and animal environments?</p> |
| Personal reflection   | <p>Cultivation of a habit of reflection on life experience and contemporary issues.</p> <p>Includes critical interpretation of culture.</p> <p>Development of a constructive, resilient personal meaning for life.</p>   |
| Confidence in human knowing   | <p>A healthy spirituality needs to come to terms with uncertainties about meaning and value that go with postmodern characteristics of contemporary Western society.</p> <p>This includes confidence in personal knowing, while recognising the natural limitations to socially constructed knowledge. Personal knowing may be imperfect and in need of ongoing evaluation; however, it can provide an authentic basis for human meaning and can inform constructive decision-making and commitments.</p>  |
| Inputs that inform and challenge spiritual understandings                           | <p>A healthy spirituality is presumed to be not static. It includes openness to activities (reading, education, new experience) that prompt reflection and continued development of spirituality. It encourages openness to learning from other spiritualities.</p> <p>This view of spirituality presumes that it is not enough to claim to be spiritual in a nominal way: there needs to be some activity that challenges and enhances spirituality, or that shows spirituality in 'action'.</p>  |
| Spiritually motivated values and commitments  | <p>Spirituality that informs and inspires values and commitments, and a sense of social justice. Spirituality that affects personal action and action on behalf of others.</p>   |
| Gender equality   | <p>Authentic spirituality is available for both men and women without prejudice. It is not paternalistic and is accessible to all. From this perspective, questions can be raised about the role of women in religions.</p>  |

Criteria such as these (with amendments and additions) imply a value position about what constitutes spiritual health and a 'healthy' spirituality. The list is based on a particular view of the human person. Here are three of its principal concerns:

1. There is no doubt that a healthy spirituality should enhance the personal and social life of individuals. However, if the personal needs and interests of the individual are the exclusive frame of reference for spirituality, this can more easily move into self-centredness and narcissism. A balance is needed so that the personal meaning of the individual embraces something larger than the self. This is needed for both religious and non-religious spiritualities. Fundamental to this view is the belief that individuals are born human but they become persons through social interaction. In other words, being both a contributing and a receiving member of human community is central to human nature. When applied to spirituality, this means that authentic spirituality has to be community-related: you cannot be fully spiritual on your own. This thinking proposes that the frame of reference for spirituality needs to include family, local community and the wider human community. In addition, it considers that responsible stewardship for the environment should also be part of the value base of spirituality.

2. A healthy spirituality should not be static and not just 'implied' in the way people live a particular lifestyle; it needs to be sustained and developed by reflection, education (in the broadest sense) and habits of spiritual activity. For example, it is considered not enough to claim that 'I have beliefs and values', 'I believe in God' or 'Spirituality is implied in my lifestyle'. An authentic spirituality is one that motivates behaviour and leads to personal and social action. Healthy spirituality continually challenges the individual to practise, extend and deepen spiritual insights. Healthy spirituality is 'cultivated'.

3. A healthy spirituality needs confidence in the personal knowing process. The postmodern strand in contemporary Western culture calls absolutes and meta-narratives into question, and its emphasis on the uncertainties and ambiguities in socially constructed human knowledge have led to excessive subjectivism, contextualism, existentialism and relativism. While it may be unrealistic to claim full knowledge of absolute truth, it is both realistic and pragmatic to believe that one can know part of absolute truth with confidence, and act on this with integrity. Given that the uncertainties in personal knowing are natural to the human condition, and if this is accepted, it is both possible and reasonable to claim that one can construct a spirituality that is authentically human with respect to self and others. This spirituality will not be perfect; it will advert to spiritual traditions, but it will not be constrained by them; it will make mistakes; it should be open to revision and enhancement. But it can help people chart a meaningful and hopeful life in uncertain times – times that seem to have unprecedented opportunities for human life and wealth, while at the same time having pressures, gross inequities and threatening uncertainties that affect basic human meanings and quality of life. Such a spirituality can turn the contemporary emphasis on being 'critical' to advantage by engaging in the critical interpretation of culture to discern the influences on people's thinking and behaviour, and to evaluate their significance.

Other views of spiritual health, not unlike what has been proposed here, have been discussed in the literature. For example, a recent research report on youth proposed that 'Spiritual wellbeing reflects the deepest level of meaning for individuals, a sense of having a place in the world, being part of "the grand scheme of things"; its essence is mysterious and elusive, so hard for science to grasp and explain.'<sup>33</sup>

Fisher noted the emergence of the term in writings about health; he considered that it was a pervasive dimension to overall health and wellbeing, and that it involved

harmonious relationships in four domains: the personal, communal, environmental and transcendent.<sup>34</sup> This is consistent with writings about spirituality that understand it as self-awareness coupled with relationships with others and the environment – in other words, a ‘relational consciousness’.<sup>35</sup> Others have considered the importance of spirituality for overall personal health,<sup>36</sup> and its contribution to personal ‘resilience’,<sup>37</sup> as inner resources that help people cope with life, particularly when there are difficulties to be overcome.

The evaluative criteria proposed here need to be developed and further refined, and the process of discernment needs to be informed by the beliefs and values of the particular groups seeking to enhance the spirituality of youth.

## **Notes**

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- 1 RC Fuller 2001, *Spiritual, but not religious: Understanding unchurched America*, p. 58.
  - 2 D Zohar & I Marshall 2000, *SQ: Spiritual intelligence, the ultimate intelligence*, p. 35.
  - 3 Murphy, cover comments, A Cooper 1998, *Playing in the zone: Exploring the spiritual dimensions of sports*, p. 1.
  - 4 D Piccinotti 2004 in *Nova: Keeping body and soul together*, **10**, 12, 40.
  - 5 This chapter was developed from GM Rossiter 2005, From St Ignatius to Obi-Wan Kenobi: An evaluative perspective on spirituality for school education; ML Crawford & GM Rossiter 2005, Editorial: Spirituality and religious education, *Journal of Religious Education* 53(1): 1–2.
  - 6 J Baird 2004, A life lived for business purposes.
  - 7 For a list of books by John Powell, Eugene Kennedy, Adrian Van Kaam, Andrew Greeley and Henri Nouwen, see Bibliography under Catholic psychological spirituality of the 1970s.
  - 8 F Bridger 2001, Desperately seeking what? Engaging with the new spiritual quest, p. 10.
  9. D Tacey 2003, *The spirituality revolution: The emergence of contemporary spirituality*, p. 4.
  - 10 *ibid.*, pp. 31, 45.
  - 11 *ibid.*, p. 45.
  - 12 *ibid.*, p. 61.
  - 13 Fuller 2001, p. 4.
  - 14 M Levin 2000, *Spiritual intelligence: Awakening the power of your spirituality and intuition*, p. 34.
  - 15 D Zohar & I Marshall 2000, *SQ: Spiritual intelligence, the ultimate intelligence*, p. 8.
  - 16 *ibid.*, p. 9.
  - 17 Levin 2000, pp. 38, 39.
  - 18 A useful discussion of this question is provided by Bridger 2001.
  - 19 FL Boumer 1977, *Modern European thought: Continuity and change in ideas*, p. 439.
  - 20 D Bonhoeffer 1966, *Letters and papers from prison*, ed. Edehard Bethge, pp. 194–5. **[These page numbers are in the bibliography. Are they relevant? delete?NO THEY ARE THE CORRECT PAGES AND ARE NEEDED]**

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- 21 E Lesser 2000, Insider's guide to 21st century spirituality, quoted in Bridger 2001, p. 12.
  - 22 A Wright 2004, The justification of compulsory religious education: A response to Professor White, p. 166. Wright refers to the thesis about secularisation proposed in G Davie 1994, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without belonging*.
  - 23 See for example the discussion of modernity and postmodernity in R Jackson 2004, *Rethinking religious education and plurality*, p. 10.
  - 24 Z Bauman 1995, *Life in fragments: Essays in postmodern morality*; 1997, *Postmodernity and its discontents*.
  - 25 Catholic Church 1939, *Catechism of Christian doctrine*, Lesson 5, questions 11-13, p. 8.
  - 26 Catholic Church 1994, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1035, p. 270 and #1033, p. 269.
  - 27 Baird 2004, p. 29. While agreeing with the author's appraisal of Warren's spirituality, we disagree with her proposal that the implied spirituality in Mel Gibson's film *The Passion of the Christ* is a desirable alternative.
  - 28 Bridger 2001, p. 10.
  - 29 *ibid.*, p. 10.
  - 30 *ibid.*, p. 11.
  - 31 *ibid.*, p. 12.
  - 32 *ibid.*
  - 33 R Eckersley et al. 2006, *Flashpoints and signposts: Pathways to success and wellbeing for Australia's young people*, p. 41.
  - 34 J Fisher 2000, Understanding spiritual health and wellbeing: Becoming human, becoming whole; 2001, The nature of spiritual wellbeing and the curriculum: Some educators' views.
  - 35 D Hay & R Nye 1998, *The spirit of the child*.
  - 36 Two examples that illustrate the discussion of spiritual health are R Goodloe & P Arreola 1992, *Spiritual health: Out of the closet*; J Hjelm & R Johnson 1996, *Spiritual health: An annotated bibliography*.
  - 37 T Witham 2001, Nurturing spirituality in children and young people by developing resilience. This also relates to the discussion of religion as a 'coping' mechanism: see K Pargament 1997, *The psychology of religion and coping*.