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MAPPING THE TERRAIN: DESCRIBING DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES ON SPIRITUALITY

Abstract

In a guest editorial for this journal it was suggested that one thing religious educators may need in exploring the relationship between spirituality and religious education was some perspective on the 'geography' of contemporary spirituality (Crawford & Rossiter, 2005). By way of response to this articulated need, this paper attempts to draw together some key insights offered by a number of different perspectives in relation to spirituality, both traditional and contemporary. As the result of such an undertaking, three descriptions of spirituality are offered which may provide a way forward in inform religious educators as to how spirituality might be understood in the contemporary milieu.

Introduction

In acknowledging the problematic nature of attempting to limit an understanding of spirituality to any one fixed definition (e.g. Eaude, 2003; Erricker & Erricker, 2000; Hay & Nye, 1998; Keating, 2000; Pridmore & Pridmore, 2004; Priestly, 2002), this paper reviews the literature on spirituality to describe what may be understood by this term from three broad perspectives – the relationship between spirituality and institutional Christianity, spirituality as a natural human predisposition, and the Divine at the core of Self. It is thus argued that rather than being the exclusive property of any one religious tradition, spirituality is an essential human trait, that it concerns a movement towards Ultimate Unity (de Souza, 2004), and that it is given expression in terms of how one might act in relation to the human and non-human world.

The relationship between spirituality and institutional Christianity

In previous times, the word spirituality was used principally with religious connotations. For instance, Rossiter (2005) has noted that spirituality was once to be understood in relation to Christian religious practice, and that if one were to speak about Catholic spirituality, it was in relation to the spiritual life of religious orders, or lay members of the Church striving to emulate aspects of the life of religious orders. So connected with religion was spirituality that O'Murchu (1997) and Tacey (2000) have posited that institutional Christianity has, to a large extent, claimed ownership of spirituality, seeking to control it, and arguing it to be impossible that spiritual feelings or values could arise apart from the context of formal beliefs.

However, some contemporary perspectives maintain that it is possible for spirituality to exist and to be given expression outside of any religious tradition. For instance, Tacey (2000) while not undermining the value of religion has argued that in spite of its efforts to control spirituality, institutional Christianity is no longer able to contain it, and that today, many people are searching for and giving expression to their spirituality outside of formal systems of values and beliefs. In light of such an argument, different academic disciplines have argued it to be erroneous to describe spirituality as being the exclusive property of any one particular religious tradition, and that there is, in fact, a clear distinction between spirituality and institutional religion (e.g. Erricker, 2001; Priestly, 2002; Scott, 2001; Tacey, 2003).

It was William James who, in *The varieties of religious experience*, distinguished between institutional religion and the "primordial religious experience", today more commonly known as spiritual experience. In describing religious experience, James' (1977, original work published 1902) interest was not so much in institutional religion as in "the original experiences that were the pattern-setters for the mass of suggested feeling and intimated conduct" (p. 29) that has subsequently resulted in formal religion. His concern with religion was in essence, the psychological experience of the individual(s) "for whom religion exists not as a dull habit, but as an acute fever rather" (p. 29). That is to say, James considered spirituality, or spiritual experience to be the primordial religious experience of the individual. Institutional religion becomes, then, a secondary phenomenon – a response to the original spiritual experience of the individual or community. Other more recent scholars, including Maslow (1970), Tacey (2000, 2003) and Zohar and Marshall (2000) have also understood spirituality to be the primary religious experience of the

individual, and institutional religion to be the secondary phenomenon, "the codification and communication of [the] original mystic experience or revelation…to the mass of human beings in general" (Maslow, 1970, p. 19).

Importantly, Tacey (2003) has noted that although formal religion is a secondary phenomenon, a response to the original spiritual experience, this does not render it less meaning or value. That which comes first – the spiritual – does not necessarily imply that it is better than what later ensues. Tacey has maintained that the initial spiritual experience can be unrefined, and is often lacking in wisdom. Also, the primary experience tends to be removed from the communal context, whereas the secondary development enables the primordial to be experienced within such a milieu. It ought to be possible, Tacey then has argued, to "state that spirituality is primary, without implying that religion is therefore 'merely' secondary" (p. 140).

Although religion and spirituality are not synonymous, some scholars have argued that a person's spirituality may be given expression through an organised religious belief system. For instance, Ranson (2002) has suggested that a religious tradition, such as Catholicism may provide the context and shared value system needed to depth and give voice to an individual's spiritual experience. Ranson has maintained that spirituality comprises an arrangement of interrelated activities within two foundational moments – the "spiritual", whereby one attends and inquires into the spiritual experience which has

Spiritual experience and institutional religion
Supporting the notion that spirituality can exist outside of a mainstream religious tradition such as Christianity, the literature suggests that there have been numerous individuals who have apperceived spiritual experience. Such individuals would include those connected with formal traditions, such as Buddhist monks who have experienced the state of *anatta*, where the self ceases to exist as a distinct and separate entity. Also, Christian mystics including Francis of Assisi, Teresa of Avila and Hildegard of Bingen have claimed to have experienced the presence of God as the ground of their own being. However, such spiritual experiences are not confined to the mystics and practitioners of various religious traditions. The literature indicates that all people, whether or not they belong to or practice any particular religious code, are capable of apperceiving spiritual experience.

James (1902/1977) proposed that personal religion, or spirituality as it is more commonly known today,

been apperceived, and the "religious", whereby one interprets and acts upon spiritual experience, placing it into the social and communal reality, that is, into a system of shared beliefs and values (institutional religion).

However, Ranson's (2002) construct could be considered problematic as it seems to suggest that an individual's spiritual development is incomplete unless it proceeds to the activities of interpreting and acting within an organised system of values and beliefs. Such an understanding has been advanced by some scholars including Wright (2004), and Carr (1995), who have rejected approaches to spirituality that do not begin with the religious because "they are not focused on transcendent or spiritual experiences in any relevant sense (p. 91). Thatcher (1996, 1999) has maintained that to speak of spirituality outside of a mainstream religious tradition is meaningless, arguing that any articulation of spirituality requires first and for mostly, a theology. He has remained suspicious of so called secular and modernist treatments of spirituality that have broken "the conceptual connection between spirituality and belief in God" (Thatcher, 1996, p. 122).

Meehan (2002), however, has pointed out that Thatcher's position is essentially exclusivist. He has contended that it fails to recognise that there are many people who are not associated with any religious tradition, yet would describe themselves as spiritual. One cannot dismiss their spirituality on the grounds that they are not religious, or that they may not possess a theology to articulate it.

is experienced by numerous people in a wide variety of ways, and may be used by the individual as a means to find solutions to problems of value and meaning in life. James regarded a person's spirituality then as "an absolute addition to the Subject's range of life. It gives him [sic] a new sphere of power" (James, 1902/1977, p. 64).

According to James (1902/1977), this new sphere of power enabled individual's to draw upon her or his spiritual experiences as a mechanism for confronting and finding solutions to the difficulties and problems of life. Those who experience such mystical states apperceive them as states of absolute knowledge. They are "states of insight into the depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect. They are illuminations, revelations, full of significance and importance…and as a rule they carry with them a curious sense of authority for aftertime" (p. 367).

Priestly (2001) has noted that those who undergo such experiences frequently claim that while

emanating from feelings, they have resulted in an absolute intellectual certainty. An individual would claim that she or he was never more certain of anything in their life, and that from that moment on, their life was changed in some way. Importantly, Priestly has noted, "the things about which we are most sure are those upon which we try to act. They become part of our being" (p. 190).

Maslow (1970) also recognised the validity of an individual's religious (spiritual) experience, arguing that it was a rightful subject for scientific investigation. Maslow coined the phrase "peak experiences" to describe these revelations, or mystical illuminations. While he maintained that they are common to all, or almost all people, Maslow recognized that many people repress or suppress such experiences, and so do not use them as a source of "personal therapy, personal growth, or personal fulfilment" (p. 29).

Further to this, Robinson's (1977) study at the Religious Experience Research unit in Oxford discovered and reported that spiritual experiences are common to a significant number of people. An extensive body of correspondence had been built up in relation to particular experiences of people, in which they felt that their lives had been affected by some power beyond themselves. Robinson noticed that a substantial number of them, which were written by adults, described profound experiences from childhood. These had remained vivid memories of the correspondents for their whole life, and held great significance for them when contemplating questions relating to identity and meaning. While these accounts may have become embellished over time, Robinson argued that it was difficult to ignore the impact of these experiences, which in some way generated reflection in the individual.

Zohar and Marshall (2000) have maintained that experiences like these, whether explicitly religious in content or otherwise, are quite common. They have claimed that in western culture, between 30% and 40% of the population are recorded as having undergone such experiences on at least one occasion. Such experiences were described as being accompanied by feelings of great euphoria and well-being, and resulted in "deep insight that brings new perspective to life" (p. 99). Similarly, Hart (2003) reported in his research that up to 80% of participants (all young adults) indicated that they had had a spiritual experience, and that between 60% and 90% of those indicated that experiences of this nature occurred during childhood. This is significant because it may suggest that children have particular spiritual capacities and experiences which are uncommon to many adults. Hart has maintained that this may be due to the openness of

children to such capacities and experiences as opposed to many adults, who tend to approach the spiritual from rational thinking. Hart has maintained that "spirituality lives beyond the rational" (p. 5), and that it lies rather in people's "inner wisdom and sense of wonder, with (their sense of) compassion and deep meaning" (p.14). All people have these spiritual capacities, although it seems that perhaps children may be more open to them.

While individuals may draw upon a religious tradition, such as Catholicism, to give expression to their spirituality, the literature explored here indicates that people who may not practice any particular religion have apperceived spiritual experience. This would suggest that there is a case to be argued that spirituality is accessible to all people irrespective of their membership of any particular religious tradition. That is, spirituality may be considered to be a natural human predisposition, or an innate human trait.

Spirituality as a natural human predisposition

The scholarly literature indicates that spirituality is an ontological reality for human beings. O'Murchu (1997) has maintained that spirituality is a natural human predisposition. It is something that people are born with, "something essentially dynamic that forever seeks articulation and expression in human living" (p. 37). Groome (1998) has argued spirituality to be a human universal, and is therefore ontological in nature. Spirituality "belongs to every humankind's 'being'. It is more accurate to call ourselves spiritual beings who have a human life than human beings who have a spiritual life" (p. 332). Similarly, Hart (2003) has stated that "rather than thinking of ourselves as human beings occasionally having spiritual experiences, I find it more helpful to think of ourselves as spiritual beings having human experiences" (p. 7). In writing from a Christian perspective, Rolheiser (1998) has asserted that spirituality is "something that issues forth from the bread and butter of ordinary life…something vital and non-negotiable lying at the heart of our lives" (p. 6). Similarly, Champagne (2001) has argued that the human cannot be separated from the spiritual. Spirituality then can be understood to be rooted in the reality that human beings are incarnated. That is to say, people embody their spirituality. It cannot be "dissociated either from the human or from what is beyond the human, in transcendence and in immanence" (p. 83).

A biological and evolutional reality

Perspectives presented as the result of recent studies in the fields of biology, neurological science and evolution support the case that spirituality is a natural human predisposition,

arguing that spirituality is present in all people as an attribute that has been selected in the evolution of the human species. Hardy (1966) proposed that what he called "religious experience" (more commonly termed today as the spiritual or spiritual experience) has evolved through the process of natural selection because it has survival value for the individual. In other words, the capacity for spirituality is potentially present in all human beings because it has a positive function in enabling human beings to survive in their natural environments, and therefore is an attribute that has been favoured by the process of natural selection.

Neurobiological perspectives

Recent neurobiological studies have sought to identify those aspects of the human brain that might be involved in religious or spiritual ideas and perspectives. Persinger (1996) and Ramachandran and Blakeslee (1998) have reported on their research linking heightened activity in the temporal lobes of individuals who have apperceived spiritual experience. They concluded that the temporal lobes might contain neural machinery specifically concerned with religion, or the spiritual. This area of the temporal lobes has been coined by Zohar and Marshall (2000) as the "God spot" or "God module". While the "God module" may play an essential biological role in spiritual experience, it neither proves nor disproves the existence of God or whether human beings can communicate with a Divine source. Also, the research described above is controversial. Fontana (2003) has argued that this type of study would require extensive replication by other before it could be concluded that temporal lobe activity is involved in the experiences reported across cultures and through the centuries that have been labelled as spiritual. Nonetheless, the research of Persinger and of Ramachandran and Blakeslee does suggest that, from a biological perspective, aspects of the human brain may have evolved which render all human beings the capacity to be spiritual.

More recently, and as the result of extensive research, a slightly different perspective has been offered by Newberg, d'Aquili and Rause (2001), who have maintained that the temporal lobes and limbic structures within it are not solely responsible for the complexity and diversity of such spiritual experiences. These researchers have argued that there are potentially many other structures involved in such experiences. They have identified four association areas of the human brain – the visual, the orientation, the attention, and the verbal conceptual – which interact to produce the mind's spiritual potential. All four of these association areas – the most complex neurological compositions in the brain – are required in order to explain the vast array of spiritual experiences

apperceived by people. For instance, these researchers have described how such structures combine and interact during the state of passive meditation to shield the mind from the intrusion of superfluous sensory input, a process known as 'deafferentation' (p. 118). In this state, the orientation area lacks the information needed to create the spatial context in which the self can be oriented. Since there would be no line of distinction between the self and the rest of the universe, the mind then perceives a neurological reality consistent with many mystical descriptions of ultimate spiritual union. In such a state, the mind exists without ego in a state of pure undifferentiated awareness.

In discussing the architecture of the brain, Newberg, d'Aquili and Rause (2001) have maintained that the human brain has evolved over millions of years to address issues of survival and adaptation to environment. These scholars have maintained that although the particular structures involved in spiritual experience developed initially from simpler neurological processes that evolved to address more basic survival needs, their potential for spiritual experience always existed. As evolution proceeded, the potential for the spiritual and its usefulness in addressing issues of meaning and value was realised and favoured by the process of natural selection.

Ultimate Unity

As the result of their research into structures of the brain that become active when an individual apperceives spiritual experience, Newberg, d'Aquili and Rause (2001) have described the neurobiology of transcendence as a movement towards Absolute Unitary Being, that is, when Self blends into Other and mind and matter become one and the same. This refers to the states of unity experienced by many of the mystics from various religious traditions of both eastern and western cultures. As the result of their exploration of different association areas of the human brain which may become active in producing the mind's spiritual potential, Newberg and his colleagues have proposed the notion of a "unitary continuum" (p. 145), where at one pole, a person may interact with the world and with others, but may experience this interaction as something from which he or she is apart. As that person progresses along the unitary continuum, the sense of separateness becomes less distinct, and could lead to individual experiences of sacredness, and experiences of unity with Other, In the state of Absolute Unitary Being, "the self blends into the other; mind and matter are one and the same" (p. 156). Such a notion is consistent with, and describes in neurological terms, the Buddhist state of *anatta* (no-self), or the Christian

mystical state of experiencing the presence of God as the ground of one's own being.

Similarly, Austin (2000) has explored the possibility of the waking consciousness loosing its sense of superficial self, rendering a state of no-self, or complete unity with Other. Austin's contention has been that consciousness evolves when the superficial self dissolves. When the "I-Me-Mine" (p. 209) egocentric triad dissolves, novel states of consciousness are said to emerge. Austin has referred to two such states – insight-wisdom, or *kensho-satori*, and internal absorption. In such states, all self-centred subjectivities dissolve, leaving the apperception of the world of Other. Released from subjective attachments, the world revealed is one in the form of unburdened clarity. The world as it really is, without self-referent attachments is apperceived, and one can glimpse the reality "of things as they 'really' are" (p. 228).

In drawing on the above research, and in exploring the spirituality of young people in a rural setting, de Souza (2004) has described spirituality as a movement towards Ultimate Unity. Such a movement can be understood to spiral through different layers of connectedness with self, others, the world and possibly with the Transcendent, which generally move forwards towards wider levels, or inwards to deeper levels, but which could recede depending upon the particular contexts of an individual's experiences and responses. de Souza has argued that such forward movement, for some individuals, has the potential to lead to the widest or deepest level of connectedness, where the individual experiences becoming one with Other, that is, Ultimate Unity. These conclusions support particularly the contentions of Newberg, d'Aquili and Rause (2001) that the neurobiology of transcendence is a movement towards Absolute Unitary Being, when Self blends into Other, and mind and matter become one and the same.

Social evolution (co-evolution)

The biological nature of spirituality and its favoured selection in the process of the evolution of the human species alone may not adequately explain its continual emergence in humankind. There is a need to examine and take account of additional factors, and perspectives, such as the social and cultural component in the evolution of spiritualityOne such perspective can be drawn from the work of Durham (1991) who offered a systematic account of the relationship between biological and social evolution, a process known as *co-evolution*. Social evolution occurs in a way similar to biological evolution through the process of natural selection. In the case of the former, the units of cultural meaning are known as *memes*. Memes can vary from the most basic units of connotation, through to the more complex ideas,

beliefs and value systems. The particular variations of memes within a human group or community – "allomemes" – provide the different possibilities from which selections can be made in the process of social evolution.

As with genetic variation, not all variations of memes have equal fitness for survival. Durham (1991) has asserted that whilst natural selection occurs as a type of selection by consequences – organisms that are unfit for survival fail to survive – cultural selection operates as selection according to consequences. Particular patterns of social behaviour are deemed as either helpful or detrimental to survival on the basis of personal experience, history or rational reflection. Social evolution then acts as guided mechanism of change "that tends to promote human survival and reproduction, and does so with considerably greater efficiency than natural selection" (p. 363).

This process of co-evolution may explain in part the continual emergence of spirituality in humankind. A meme such as 'altruism' for example, may have been selected via the process of social evolution because it has survival value for the human community, and because it has concordance with the underlying biological predisposition to spirituality. However, as Hay and Nye (1998) have noted, in some cases social evolution can have a damaging effect on the survival of a community. Negative social processes can be imposed from influences outside of a community. For example, powerful groups or individuals can coerce others to behave in ways contrary to the mechanism of change promoted by social evolution. There can be occasions on which, in relation to external pressure, there is a voluntary acceptance of memes that are unhelpful to survival. This may create an obstruction, where existing social values that normally promote survival are impeded by factors such as propaganda, advertising, brainwashing, or drug addiction.

It has been the contention of Hay and Nye (1998) that spirituality, naturally (biologically) selected for in humankind, can be repressed by the socially constructed processes that contradict it in the manner described above. By way of example, they have identified modern individualist philosophy as a meme that has emerged in opposition to biological evolution because of the destructive nature of the societies it has generated. Hay and Nye have suggested that the traditional meme that has been constantly been selected for in the history of the human species is universalist religion. However, the processes described above have in many instances operated so as to create value blockage, and eventually, in many instances, to displace this meme.

Not only can the spirituality of all people be explained, at least in part, by the processes of biological and social evolution, but it some instances, those aspects of the human brain, favoured and selected through the evolutionary processes, may enable individuals to experience Ultimate Unity (de Souza, 2004), in which they may experience becoming one with Other. Throughout history, there have been individuals who have reported and attempted to describe such spiritual experiences. Prominent among such people are the adherents of the contemplative and mystical traditions of Christianity, who understood all people to be capable of becoming one with the Divine, and who understood the Divine to be within each person. Also prominent among those who have experienced becoming one with Other are those from eastern philosophies who have understood that at the highest levels of unity, one's Self becomes unified with the Absolute, the Brahman. This notion of the Divine as being at the core of the Self forms the basis of the next section.

The Divine at the core of the Self

While much of the contemporary literature has described spirituality in terms of relationality and connectedness (e.g., Elton-Chalcraft, 2002; Fisher, 1997; Hay & Nye, 1998; Kendell, 1999; O'Murchu. 1997, 2000; Reimer & Furrow, 2001; Scott, 2001; Tacey, 2000, 2003), many of the world's mystical and contemplative traditions, both eastern and western, have understood spirituality as an involving a journey towards Ultimate Unity (de Souza, 2004), by which, at the deepest and widest levels of connectedness, an individual might experience becoming unified with Other. While an in depth discussion of these traditions is beyond the scope of this paper, a few pertinent factors are highlighted below.

Christian mystical traditions

The Christian mystical tradition has understood the unity said to exist between Self and the Divine. For example, in *The Interior Castle*, Teresa of Avila (1577) wrote of the soul, the core of Self, as being the place where God dwells, and of prayer as being the means by which the soul is united to God. Similarly, in *Stanzas between the Soul and the Bridegroom (The whole Canticle)* St. John of the Cross (1542 - 1591) wrote of the soul who has glimpsed the high state of perfection, of union with God. In *The Soul's Journey into God*, St. Bonaventure wrote of Jesus Christ as being not only the way of the mystical path, but the one who stands at the ultimate point of the mystical path (Mommaers, 2003). Christian mystic Meister Eckhart in his statement succinctly phrased this unity between the Self and God, "The eye with

which I see God is the same eye with which God sees me" (Shannon, 2003, p. 217).

Among the more contemporary mystics of the Christian tradition who have expressed this understanding of Self as being one with the Divine is Thomas Merton. In exploring the quest for self-identity, Merton wrote of the discovery of the true Self as an experience of finding God (Malits, 1980). Such a search entailed transcending the superficial self – going beyond the "I" that represents the ego with its own opinions and ideas, to discover, or recover the "I" at the depth of one's own being, achieved in Merton's own language as passing through the centre of the soul to find God:

Self-realisation … is an awareness of the God to whom we are drawn in the depths of our own being. We become real, and experience our actuality, not when we pause to reflect upon our own self as an isolated individual entity, but rather when transcending ourselves and passing beyond reflection, we centre our whole soul upon the God Who is our life. That is to say, we fully 'realise' ourselves when we cease to be conscious of ourselves in separateness and know nothing but the one God Who is above all knowledge (Merton, 1978, p. 122).

Of significance in the above idea of Merton (1978) is the concept of ceasing to be conscious of the separateness between Self and God – Other. In seeking to discover, or to rediscover one's true Self, Merton has effactually argued that Self becomes unified with the Transcendent Other. In writing of Merton's place of nowhere, Finley (2003) has summed up Merton's concept: "The true self is rather our whole self before God" (p. 23). The more an individual searches for her or his true Self, the more she or he may come to discover that Self and Other are one.

Following the essence of the above discussion, it can be argued that at the centre of each individual's Self is the Divine presence, and therefore, the relationship between Self and others is also pertinent, and renders a significance not just for the Transcendent Other, but also for Other as encountered in both the human and non-human world. The writings of Merton express the importance of the relationship between Self and Other. The "I" that searches to discover God by transcending the superficial self and delving into the deeper core of one's being also discovers the image of the Divine in every other person and in the whole of creation (Malits, 1980). By journeying into the depths of one's being to discover God, humankind may come to discover who others really are.

Eastern traditions

Eastern philosophy has long understood the spiritual path to involve Self and its true nature. In Buddhism, significant emphasis is placed upon the individual being able to see through the illusory, conditioned self so as to realise one's true nature (Billington, 1997). Once a person recognises the illusory nature of her or his socially constructed self, there comes an awareness that in its place exists an expansive state of being (Shannon, 2003). This state is understood to be an integral part of the unified whole which is ultimate reality (Fontana, 2003). One is said to arrive at this state through intensive meditative practices. The Buddhist term for this state is *anatta*, meaning no-self (Billington, 1997; Fontana, 2003). This means that the self ceases to exist as a distinct and separate entity. Self blends into the other, and mind and matter become one and the same. This state is understood to be one's true nature, and in becoming aware of it, a person might become aware of the true nature of everything.

Hindus traditionally refer to the "self" in lower case letters, signifying the conditioned and socially constructed self that results from a person's learned experiences and reactions to those experiences. It is the "self" that a person mistakenly takes to be who he or she really is. It refers to the ego which seeks to make itself "master of the world" (Griffith, 2002, p. 16). In speaking of "Self" with an initial capital, Hindus refers to a person's own true nature which is understood to be identified with the Absolute, the Brahman (Billington, 1997; Fontana, 2003). It is the indwelling Self, the Divine light, mysteriously present and shining in each person (Zohar & Marshall, 2000). Self is understood to be one with the Brahman. Hart (2003) has drawn attention to the Hindu tenant, Atman and Brahman are one, meaning that the individual human and the Godhead are one and the same. From this, Hart has concluded that the spiritual path "involves realising more of this innate divinity as we uncoil the multidimensional nature of ourselves and the universe" (p. 114). Griffith (2002) has maintained that the unity of the Atman and the Brahman is a key feature of Indian thought. Self – the Atman – the Ground of personal being is one with the Brahman, the Ground of universal being. In further exploring the concept of the Divine as being one with Self, de Souza (2005) has maintained that the above understanding is reflected in the Indian greeting, *Namaste*, which in translation may be rendered as " The Divine Presence in me meets the Divine Presence in you. I bow to the Divine Presence in you" (p. 42).

The above literature alludes to the individual being able to expand awareness so as to transcend the superficial self – the ego – in order to realise the true Self, or in Merton's language, to pass through the centre of the soul in order to find God. Literature from the biological perspectives has explained in neurological terms those parts of the human brain that might become active when this occurs. Such an activity involves the notion of consciousness, and the possibility of attaining higher levels of consciousness in order to realise the true Self. While acknowledging the complexity and uncertainty associated in a discussion of the nature of consciousness and the Self, the following perspectives drawn from eastern philosophy, integrated in some instances with western science, contribute to this discussion.

Eastern philosophical perspectives on consciousness

Several writers have indicated the eastern notion of different, and sometimes interconnected, levels of consciousness that might be attained by the individual in order to realise the true Self. In commentaries on the work of Eastern philosopher Sri Aurobindo, Maitra (1962), Cornelissen (1999), and Marshak and Litfin (2002) have drawn attention to Aurobindo's notion of the ascending planes of consciousness from *matter* to *satchitananda*. These planes include the material plane, the vital plane, the mental plane, the transitional planes of higher mind, the illuminated mind, the intuitive mind and Overmind, the Supramental plane, and the divine consciousness. According to Aurobindo, each human being is a self-developing soul, evolving towards greater divinity (Marshak & Litfin, 2002). It is when a person reaches the level of divine consciousness that he or she might be said to have arrived at the highest status of his or her real, or true Self.

Wilber's integral theory of consciousness

In discussing the different waves, lines and states that might comprise an integral theory of consciousness, Wilber (2000) has made an authentic attempt to link the notion of developmental levels of consciousness that are recognised in the east with western science. Rather than envisaging these as hierarchical, Wilber described these developmental levels as a holarchy from matter to life to mind to soul to spirit, arranged along the "great rainbow or spectrum" (p. 148) of consciousness. Along this spectrum, Wilber incorporated key aspects of many of the major psychological and wisdom traditions – eastern and western, as well as ancient and modern. Across this spectrum, the higher levels of consciousness are understood to enfold the preceding levels. Wilber maintained that this type of thinking reflects the work of Aurobindo, who argued that spiritual evolution conformed to a logic of successive unfolding. The higher, transpersonal levels of consciousness do not sit on top of lower levels, but

rather, as these higher levels of consciousness unfold, they envelop the lower levels. These levels, or "waves" as Wilber has described them, have been termed developmental because they are fluid, and overlap as waves appear to do. They appear to be like "concentric spheres of increasing embrace, inclusion, and holistic capacity" (p. 147).

Central to this notion of developmental waves of consciousness is Wilber's (2000) notion of Self, or self-system, which acts as a means by which to integrate, or balance these waves of consciousness. Wilber maintained that waves of consciousness, as well as other aspects of awareness, appear to be devoid of an intrinsic self-sense. According to Wilber, one of the primary characteristics of Self is its capacity to identify with the basic levels of consciousness. This drive to integrate the various components of the psyche is a fundamental feature of the self system. Wilber envisaged Self as a centre of gravity, with the various levels, lines and states of consciousness orbiting around the integrating tendency of Self.

Such an understanding of an integral theory of consciousness enhances the credibility of the existence of different levels, or waves of consciousness. It serves to broaden the perspective and include levels other than the three that have been widely referred to in western psychological literature: conscious, subconscious, and unconscious. Wilber (2000) further suggested that this integral theory of consciousness has the potential to assist in explaining how Self, through integrating higher waves of consciousness with lower levels, might achieve unity with the Absolute, the true Self. That is to say, Self becomes one with Other, where in the Buddhist tradition, one attains the state of *anatta*, or no self, or where in the Hindu understanding, Atman and Brahman become one, or where in Christian mystical terms, one passes through the centre of soul in order to find God:

> …the time is now ripe to…move towards a more integrated theory, not only of consciousness, but of the Kosmos at large; a theory that would begin to show us the how and why of *intrinsic* [italics in original] connections between all things in existence. This would truly be a 'theory of everything'…even if all of the details remain beyond our grasp (p. 167).

Summary and conclusion
By way of summary Table 1 presents a précis of the insights gained from these perspectives on

spirituality. This paper, therefore, argues for three particular descriptions which may provide a perspective on the geography of contemporary spirituality for religious educators in exploring the relationship between spirituality and religious education:

1. Spirituality is an essential human trait
This paper has shown spirituality to be an ontological and biological reality. It is a natural human predisposition involving a path towards the realisation of one's true Self, in which ultimately, Self is unified with Other. It involves the successive unfolding of higher levels of consciousness which, at the highest levels, may enable the individual to transcend the ego in order to apperceive the deepest and widest levels of connectedness in which Self and Other are unified. The continual emergence of spirituality in humankind may in part also be explained by the process of co-evolution, in which behaviours and attributes which have concordance with the underlying biological predisposition to spirituality have continued to be selected as they have a positive value in enabling individuals to survive in their environments.

2. Spirituality concerns the movement towards Ultimate Unity
Spirituality is understood to involve more than connectedness and relationality. Spirituality is concerned with that movement towards Ultimate Unity (de Souza, 2004), whereby at the deepest and widest levels of connectedness, an individual may experience unity with Other. The notion of connectedness, or relationality, implies two objects being in relationship to each other. Ultimate Unity, however, implies not two objects, but one. It entails the individual becoming one with Other. The means by which Ultimate Unity may be attained involves the successive unfolding of higher levels of consciousness, which may enable the individual to transcend the ego in order to realise the true Self which is unified with Other.

3. Spirituality is given expression
Spirituality is the outward expression of this sense of unity, possibly, although not necessarily, through a formal system of values and beliefs, that is, institutional religion. Spirituality is the outward expression of the fire within the soul (Rolheiser, 1998) in terms of how one might act in relation to the human and non-human world, and towards a Transcendent dimension. Typically, such expression might be characterised by altruism and acts of selflessness.

Table 1: A précis of the insights gained from three broad perspectives on spirituality

Description	Perspective		
	The relationship between spirituality and Institutional Christianity	**Spirituality as a natural human predisposition**	**The Divine at the core of the Self**
Spirituality is an essential human trait...	- It can be experienced by all people irrespective of whether or not they practice any religious tradition. - Spirituality is the primordial experience of the human being out of which religious traditions may emerge	- It is ontological. It belongs to each person's being. - Is an attribute that has been selected in the process of evolution of the human species. - Can be explained in part by the process of co-evolution.	- Concerns the unity that exists between Self and the Divine (God). - Involves a path towards the realization of one's true nature (the true Self) -Involves the successive unfolding of higher levels of consciousness, which enable the individual to transcend the ego in order to realise the true Self which is unified with Other.
Spirituality concerns the movement towards Absolute Unity...	- Ultimate Unity may be achieved by practitioners of particular religious traditions... ...**BUT**... belonging to a religious tradition is not a prerequisite for achieving Ultimate Unity.	- Involves a movement towards Ultimate Unity in which Self blends into Other. - Can spiral through different layers of connectedness, having the potential to lead to the deepest and widest levels of connectedness where the individual becomes one with Other. - Underlies the altruistic impulse, the desire to act selflessly towards Other.	- Entails the unity that exists between Self and Other as encountered in all elements of creation. - Involves awareness of the connectedness with Self, others, the world, and possibly with the Transcendent. - Is the motivating force for action towards Other. - Leads to greater integration or disintegration in the way people relate to God and others in the physical and cosmic worlds.
Spirituality is given expression...	- Possibly through a religious tradition... ...**BUT**...may also find expression outside of institutional religion.	- So as to function to lead people to act upon their spiritual experience in seeking solutions to problems of meaning and value in life. - Through altruistic behaviour. **BUT**...can be repressed or overlaid by socially constructed processes.	- Through different layers of connectedness with Self and everything Other than Self. - Outwardly in terms of the way one acts towards the Other in both the human and non-human worlds.

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