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FROM ST IGNATIUS TO OBI-WAN KENOBI: AN EVALUATIVE PERSPECTIVE ON SPIRITUALITY FOR SCHOOL EDUCATION

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. This distinction is also pertinent to the ways in which spirituality is used in discourses that relate in some way to education. This article considers different understandings of spirituality in relation to influential cultural and historical factors. From these considerations an evaluative perspective on spirituality is derived for educational purposes – in other words, a scheme for appraising the appropriateness of any particular offering labelled as spirituality.

If you used the word spirituality in 1960, most likely you would be understood as talking about traditional Christian religious practice; also, for example, if you were talking about Catholic spirituality, it would be linked in some way with the spiritual life of religious orders. But now the word has been appropriated by diverse groups as illustrated above. 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.

Clarifying the role of school education, and especially religious education, in promoting spirituality in young people necessarily requires a coherent view of what spirituality is as well as an awareness of its ambiguities; a central educational task for students is to explore the questions: "What is spiritual?" and "What is religious?"

One might try to define spirituality comprehensively. However, if the definition seeks to accommodate the wide scope of interest, it can include so much of life that everything ends up being part of spirituality – and this is no more helpful to educational planning than a narrow definition.

Another approach begins with the question "what *sort* of spirituality" do we want to promote in a

particular educational context? This is an evaluative process that analyses issues relating to spirituality and takes a value stance on the particular aspects that are considered to be most important; these aspects of spirituality can then be used as criteria for informing decisions about curriculum content, resources and pedagogy, and about implications for the organisational and community life of the school.

The school context, whether it is a religiously sponsored, independent or government school, will alter the terms of reference for this process. Nevertheless, these different qualifying conditions can be taken into account when planning an education in spirituality. As we use the term here, an education in spirituality is not a new subject, but a *perspective* that helps with the examination of all of the different ways in which spirituality enters into school education.

In what follows, a limited selection of issues will be considered to generate a set of key evaluative principles, with the intention of informing educational theory and practice. This relatively brief account of the 'geography' of spirituality will not try to cover the extensive range of writings on the topic, but it will help make sense of the developments and trends that have contributed to the current complex situation. For some educators, some of the issues addressed are still 'over their horizon' and not yet matters of concern. The argument here is that all educators, especially religious educators, need to pay attention to these issues. The first step, and indeed a prerequisite for any substantial education in spirituality, is that the educators themselves be well enough informed about the issues to be able to explore them constructively with their students.

An evaluative approach to studying spirituality is not only important for the professional development of educators, it needs to enter into educational planning of the curriculum, and it needs to be followed through into the pedagogy of classroom practice, especially in religious education. For example, in the religious school, it is not enough to give students access to the religious spirituality of their faith tradition. They also need to learn how to look critically and wisely at the cultural conditioning of people's beliefs, values and behaviour. Many of the same issues noted below need to be part of young people's study agenda in spirituality.

Firstly, a particular example of religious spirituality will be sketched; this will help establish the characteristics of a religious spirituality (which can be neglected in some 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 will help identify further issues relevant to an evaluation of spirituality. At the same time, this discussion illustrates what can be called 'non-religious spiritualities'. An exploration of both religious and non-religious spiritualities is presumed to be a valuable part of any education in spirituality in both religious and public schools, especially where this education is evaluative. Many, including youth, are eclectic in drawing on a wide range of sources, both religious and non-religious for their spirituality. Also, attention to questions about non-religious spirituality is important in relation to values in public education, to values education and to a spiritual/moral dimension to education generally; these considerations can be a starting point for appraising writings about spirituality in education, particularly in the United Kingdom, where there has been an extensive debate on this question over the last twenty years. Finally, with educational purposes in mind, an initial proposal is made about the qualities of a healthy spirituality; these can also be used as evaluative criteria for educational planning and classroom pedagogy.

Historical Notes on Religious Spirituality in the Australian Catholic Christian Tradition since the 1960s

Rather than looking at religious spirituality in a generic way, this section will examine a particular example: Catholic spirituality as it has appeared in Australia since the 1960s. While this summary will not cover all of the varieties within Catholic spirituality, it will nevertheless highlight a number of 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 Christian circles, 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 in people's thinking and religious practices, especially prayer, both personal and communal.

Liturgy and sacraments were an integral part of traditional Catholic spirituality that had for its models the spiritual life in religious orders (for example, Benedictine, Ignatian, Franciscan, Dominican, etc.).

Depending on the level of individuals' theological education, Catholic lay spirituality was a mixture of popular piety and religious order spirituality. 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. However, since the Second Vatican Council, this has changed, principally through the idea that a theological education was the right of all Catholics.

At the same time, as more lay Catholics were being educated theologically, there were significant changes occurring in studies of 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 that were involved in Catholic schooling.

Another driving force in Catholic spirituality at the time, that 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 a vigorous interest in exploring 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, together with other literature and practice related to personal and organisational change was influential.

What was happening at the local level can be typified in one example: In the late 1960s, in Sydney, the Catholic Institute of Counselling was established; it mediated Christian psychological spirituality for many lay people and religious; it had a profound spiritual influence on its participants – it is still functioning effectively in 2004. 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 that expanded dramatically from the late 1960s and into the 1970s.

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* (1969) and *Why Am I Afraid To Love?* (1972) and his audio taped lectures (*My Vision and My Values*, 1975) were classics. His book *A Reason To Live, A Reason To Die: A New Look at Faith in God*, (1972) 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 (e.g., *The Friendship Game*, 1970) and particularly by Eugene Kennedy (e.g., *Fashion Me a People: Man, Woman, and the Church*, 1967; *A Time for Being Human*, 1977; *The Pain of Being Human*, 1972; *If You Really Knew Me Would You Still Like Me?* 1975), and by a number of others like Henri Nouwen (e.g., *Intimacy: Pastoral Psychological Essays*, 1969; *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life*, 1975), and Adrian Van Kaam (e.g., *On Being Yourself: Reflections on Spirituality and Originality*, 1972; *In search of Spiritual Identity*, 1975), 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. 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 of the 1960s and 1970s. Brief reference is made here to just a few of the prominent scholars and writers who were influential, for example, Karl Rahner, Bernard Lonergan, Edward Schillebeeckx, Hans Kung, David Tracy, Richard McBrien, Gustavo Guiterrez. 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 quantum leap from the Catholic spirituality of the 1950s.

This spirituality emphasised personal freedom, individuality and responsibility; 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, wisdom and so forth 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 reinforce narcissism and 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 religious spirituality had five distinctive qualities:

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

Yet 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; but it was not taken on board by 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 etc.; also, it was worried by the increasing sense of freedom, autonomy and individuality in the new spirituality. There was a complete spectrum from 'conservative' through to 'liberal' spirituality amongst Catholics. This has perhaps always been the case, and always will be, but at that time, the distinctions seemed to be very prominent.

The question of 'languaging' the spiritual and the religious became an issue of fundamental importance. 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 (e.g., of kindness) and the words (e.g., 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 (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. Rather it was more likely to be the first stage of secularisation into which 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 as obvious as they were in traditional societies, making them more difficult to identify and interpret.

Initially, through the religious congregations where many members pursued the new spirituality vigorously, and then through lay people, this spirituality became well established in Catholic schools and religious education. This spirituality took a strong hold among those who undertook some form of adult education in spirituality, theology and scripture (both those in religious orders and lay people). It had less impact on those who, for various reasons, did not have such 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 (e.g., liturgy in English and so forth), even though their basic theological understandings remained unchanged. In the main, there was relief amongst the majority of Australian Catholics that spiritual life was becoming less authoritarian and more easy going. However, even today, there still 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 have 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'. Few of the latter group now remain in Catholic education.

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

It is beyond the scope of this article to trace the history of Australian Catholic spirituality in more detail, looking at other significant variants. The picture is painted with broad strokes and has not attempted to look at the full complexity – for example areas such as: continuity of 1950s Catholic spirituality; the spiritualities of different cultural

groups in Catholicism; charismatic/pentecostal Catholic spirituality; the changes in religious order spiritualities; links between spirituality and theological/cultural changes.

In keeping with this brevity, the 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/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 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.

Key Aspects of a Religious Spirituality

From the consideration 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. Constructing a list of the characteristics of religious spirituality is a useful educational exercise for both educators and students.

The list (see Table 1 page 8) 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 Christian denominations and world religions. It could be used as a guide to clarifying the sort of spirituality that a religious group or church school would want to foster as its ideal; 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 would need qualification as regards a spirituality that the school would try to promote in pupils.

Another principal use of this list is to provide criteria for the educational identification and evaluation of spiritualities. It is a set of categories that could be used to interpret, profile and judge any particular offering of spirituality. If internalised, something like the list of evaluative categories or values could help individuals in their own spiritual quest.

For many religious people, spirituality is the *active style* of their religious practices – prayer, spiritual reading, reflection, response to homilies, social commitments and so forth. One of the distinctive features of Christian spirituality, and to some extent spiritualities in other world religions, is that the spirituality 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 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 concerns for the marginalised and for social justice.

It is evident that a particular value stance, even a particular theological stance, informs the listing. These need to be articulated and acknowledged if the criteria are to be debated and used for evaluative purposes in an open inquiring way. 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. As a result, this psychological dimension will become even more prominent later in the article when consideration is given to what might constitute a healthy spirituality in a generic sense.

Distinctions between the 'Religious' and the 'Spiritual': Issues for What Constitutes Spirituality

Traditionally the words religious and spiritual were synonymous. Therefore, spirituality was naturally

considered to be religious. However, this is no longer the case; 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. Any education in spirituality, whether it be in a religious context or not, needs to understand how and why this development occurred; it needs to be able to explore both religious and non-religious spirituality, their differences and their

interrelationships, and to take into account the issues that have shaped thinking about current use of the word spirituality. This is also a fundamentally important question for religions because one of the major problems they face today is their contemporary spiritual relevance – is religion satisfying people's spiritual needs? In addition, this thinking can help facilitate dialogue about spirituality between religious groups and those who are not religious.

Table 1

Key Aspects of a Religious Spirituality

Key aspects of a religious spirituality (initial listing)	Explanatory notes
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 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 and so forth. 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/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 acknowledgement of different spiritualities in others; an openness to ecumenical, interreligious dialogue as well as openness to those who have a non-religious spirituality.

The following looks briefly at what affected this distinction between the spiritual and the religious, with consequences for what is understood as spirituality – in particular, showing how the notion of spirituality can be dissociated from religion. Some of the influences will be explored in more detail later. Each of the issues identified is also pertinent to an evaluative perspective on spirituality. The analysis is organised under the following headings:

1. Secularisation and distinctions between religious and spiritual language
2. Privatisation of religion
3. Public rituals and private devotion (external observance and the personal)
4. Contemporary emphasis on experience (implications for personal autonomy and religious authority)
5. Meeting spiritual needs; spirituality as a consumer commodity
6. Scientific rationalism and modern religious studies
7. Postmodern views of religion

1. Secularisation and Distinctions between Religious and Spiritual Language: Increasing secularisation in Western societies is evident in the decreased prominence of formal religion in political, social and everyday life. Participation in formal 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 formal and conscious attention to their religion.

Secularisation implied that religions did not have a monopoly on spirituality, and this supported the notion of non-religious spirituality – the spiritual/moral domain was not restricted to religion; indeed, for some people, their spiritual/moral concerns had little, if any, link with formal religion. For others, religion permeated their spiritual concerns; while there were others who retained an affiliation with religion, 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 was a variety of religions and non-religious worldviews represented. Words like beliefs, values and commitments were used more frequently, acknowledging the presence of different religions and religious spiritualities in the same way that the use of inclusive language was developed to acknowledge gender differences that non-inclusive language tended to ignore. This situation called for the development of a language of spirituality that was not dependent on Christianity or any other religion, while it should be able to accommodate religion comfortably. This supported a distinction between 'religious' and 'spiritual' but not an exclusive distinction.

2. Privatisation of Religion: A consequence of secularisation was the tendency to regard religious beliefs as a private and personal matter that did not need to be acknowledged in public. In turn, this could make people think that religious beliefs were a matter of 'opinion' – and one person's opinion was "as good as another's". 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 formal religion from the private or personal religion of the individual.

For some, the gradual disappearance of formal religious practice and religious imagery from their everyday lives made them wonder whether they were religious any more; or wonder in what sense they were religious. 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 life. For some, spirituality referred to their ultimate beliefs about the purpose of life, while it had little relevance to their everyday living; for others, their notion of spirituality was very much concerned with daily life as it included values, commitments, intuitions, wisdom, attitudes and creativity.

3. Public rituals and private devotion: (external observance and the personal): Following in the wake of the above-mentioned developments, there was a tendency to associate 'religious' with formal, communal rituals in the faith community, while 'spiritual' was associated with the realm of personal, private devotion. The distinction was used mostly by those who wanted to distance themselves from religious rituals. Unfortunately, the usage can easily create a false dichotomy, as if formal communal religious activity would be empty of personal devotion – an idea that has been foreign to the religious faith traditions.

4. Contemporary Emphasis on Experience: (implications for personal autonomy and religious authority): Confluent with the above developments 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 individualism

can tend to measure the relevance of religious authority and religious traditions in terms of how they enhance or inhibit their own personal lifestyle and sense of autonomy. They can feel that they have direct personal access to spirituality and God, without being dependent on formal 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 existential emphasis affects the notion of the spiritual; it has to have here-and-now relevance; it must be linked to current feelings of well-being.

5. Meeting Spiritual Needs: (spirituality as a consumer commodity): There is nothing wrong with expecting spirituality to meet contemporary spiritual needs. However, caution is needed, because it is only a short step from here to a consumerist approach to spirituality. Consumerist spirituality needs scrutiny. If spirituality is regarded as just another aspect of human nature that needs 'development' and 'satisfaction', then spirituality 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 that air on Sunday morning television.

Caution is recommended with respect to consumerist spirituality for much the same reason that caution is important for consumerist views of education (medicine, law and so forth) – they have the potential to lose sight of the sanctity of the human person and deal with people as object consumers for commercial gain. It is unlikely that we will ever be without some forms of commercial spirituality and religion. However, an education in spirituality may help alert people to potential problems.

6. Scientific Rationalism and Modern Religious Studies: Somewhat different from the above influences on distinctions between the religious and the spiritual have been the effects of scientific rationalism and modern religious studies. These are not necessarily linked, but each has 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 bring 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 by them. 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, in 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 different 'avenues' to the spiritual.

7. Postmodern Views of Religion: Cultural postmodernity questions the validity of metanarratives, while acknowledging their socially constructed, contextual meanings and cultural functions. This highlighting of uncertainty in personal knowledge creates doubts about religious truth claims; somewhat inevitably, this thinking 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' – a relatively complete existentialist and pragmatic focus. Such a focus limits the breadth of human purposes and often goes hand in hand with present consumerism as the meaning and purpose to life – as if "I consume, therefore I am." (Bridger, 2001, p. 10)

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While for many people the spiritual and the religious are so closely related as to be indistinguishable, the questions considered above show that distinctions/polarities have emerged between the two with consequent implications for the understanding of spirituality. They also raise issues for the evaluation of spirituality – estimating the quality of what is offered as spirituality against specified criteria.

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 words religious and spiritual. Yet these beliefs are not always present in some contemporary spiritualities.

In his book *The Varieties of Religious Experience* published in 1902, the psychologist, William James, proposed the following view of transcendence. He considered that the core transcendent experience in religions was acknowledgement 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 (James, 1985, p. 38).

Christianity and Judaism (the world religions with which I am most familiar) give an extensive account of their personal God. Both the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Scriptures deal with 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.

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" and so forth. The idea of "the greater cosmic scheme of things" has also been used as an equivalent for God (Fuller, 2001, p. 4). Other images used were "greater, deeper sense of order" and "new vibration" (Levin, 2000, p. 34). 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 believe 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 construction; 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 beliefs 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 well-being. As noted earlier, we do not want to enter the debate about the nature of spirituality, but 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 evaluation of spiritualities in educational contexts.

Belief in God and transcendence enlarge the domain of spirituality beyond just personal well-being – a religious spirituality is not focused relatively 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.

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/moral dimensions to life tended to be in Christian theological language. However, given the relatively universal acceptance of pluralism in these countries, and the distinctions being made between the religious and the spiritual (as noted earlier under headings like secularisation and the like), a new non-religious language was needed for public discussion of spiritual/moral issues. In areas like public education, social work, social science, business, and health sciences words like spiritual, beliefs, values, commitments, ethics, justice, equity etc. became more appropriate for discourse; 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 from a range of religious and non-religious positions.

For religious people in such public dialogue, their use of a language of spirituality relatively

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 religious believers see how their religion was pertinent to their personal lives – it was like religion trying to find a new religious/spiritual language to address the secularised situation.

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: "The rapid rate of changes in the western world over the past three centuries has 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." (Zohar & Marshall, 2000, p. 8).

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."(Zohar & Marshall, 2000, p. 9). The suggestion that religion is needed only by those who are 'spiritually immature' is commonly associated with this view.

Levin (2000), also writing about spiritual intelligence, considered that this new spirituality enabled people to 'cut out the middle man' – bypassing 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 (Levin, 2000, pp. 38 - 39).

This argument has appeal for those interested in spirituality, but who want little or nothing to do with organised religion. It does 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.

Major types of non-religious spiritualities are formal groups that consciously espouse a spiritual nature for humans and propose practices to enhance spiritual well-being. Fuller (2001) in his book, *Spiritual but Not Religious*, gave an account of a wide range of such groups; some examples of metaphysical philosophies from the nineteenth century were: the Universalisers, Free Masonry, Swedenborgianism, Transcendentalism, Shakerism, Mesmerism, Spiritualism, Mind Cure, and Theosophy. There is an even greater range in the twentieth century.

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 practice.

Then there are a considerable number of psychological/spiritual movements and practices 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 and so forth. 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, yoga and so forth catering for people's interest in furthering their own psychological development and wellbeing; they often 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 spiritual orientation for example, Christians will incorporate spiritual insights from various psychological movements; they may borrow from Eastern religions and spiritualities.

From the perspective of an education in spirituality (in different contexts) the evaluative purpose outlined earlier becomes important. Such an education would seek to inform about the origins and history of spiritualities, about the social developments that have affected spirituality, as well as looking at criteria for evaluating spiritualities.

The following sections will work further towards a set of evaluative criteria, firstly by considering some issues for spirituality, including more detailed comment on some questions noted earlier.

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. Caution is recommended not to jump to this conclusion too readily (Bridger, 2001).

Cultural changes in the landscape of spirituality are very complex. It is difficult to make sense of many developments, let alone predict where they may lead. We would commend religious attempts to try to identify and address people's spiritual needs, especially in educational contexts but also acknowledging value in trying to make religious spiritualities relevant to contemporary social contexts. However, we suggest that this be done unconditionally, and not with the intention of getting youth back into church. It may well be that religious organisations like schools can enhance the spirituality of young people, but this will not necessarily show up in increased measures of church attendance.

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 the scope of this article to consider secularisation extensively. However, it is important to show that, while secularisation has diminished the place of formal 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', and not very religious (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 (1977) wrote about the process of secularisation in a chapter entitled, "The Eclipse of God". He began with the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, writing from his Nazi prison camp in 1944.

> ... the 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 (Bonhoeffer, 1966, pp. 194-195).

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 thirty 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 twentieth 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 as 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 of 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 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 21st century spirituality is the movement away from an external authority figure and a movement toward an empowerment of each seeker. 21st 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 (Lesser, 2000, p. 48).

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 be rash to make judgements 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.

Spirituality and Postmodernity

There are ambiguities with 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 (Jackson, 2004, p. 10). The concern here is not with their thinking as such, but rather with more general cultural ideas and ideological assumptions that are labelled as postmodern; these help interpret the socio-cultural 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 so-called 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 metanarratives. 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 (Bauman, 1995, 1997). Postmodernity seems to have applied Huisenberg's uncertainty principle for the momentum of the electron to human knowledge. This view not only stresses the uncertainty in personal knowledge, it can lead to a depressing view that truth is unknowable.

If the knowledge and understanding of truth is 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 spirituality that is existentialist and primarily focused on individuals' present needs.

It is understandable that religions feel under attack from postmodern thought. However, we consider that some of the agenda in cultural postmodernity 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 statement 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 (1939-1962) 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 (Catholic Church, 1939, p. 8).

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'" (Catholic Church, 1994, pp. 269, 270). 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; in addition, it 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 backs on it and 'sticking to the traditional formulae they were brought up on.' 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 espoused here favours the complex interpretation over the simple, because the latter is too limited a slice 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 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 (e.g., God) although they have different understandings of what he/she is really like. Similarly, some practical level of objectivity can be achieved despite the postmodern emphasis on subjectivity and relativism. Education, (especially religious education), should be committed to helping students 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 contemporary cultural situation. What this means in teaching and learning at different age levels at school needs considerable clarification, because the substance of what is being addressed here is most pertinent to adult education.

An excessive emphasis on postmodernity can lead to a spirituality that is exclusively existentialist, 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, meaning systems are unique for each individual. But at the same time, the similarity and commonality in human experience results in individual meaning systems with a lot in common, particularly for people with similar beliefs and outlook on life. The 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 levels of ambiguity and uncertainty that reside 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 to give some perspective to current concerns. This is where religious spirituality has something valuable to contribute.

Consumer Spirituality

Spirituality should help meet personal needs. But if this is its exclusive focus, three developments become more likely. Firstly, individuals lose a sense of community and traditional meanings; secondly, commitments to others, and to particular communities are weakened or abandoned; and thirdly, 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 contemporary Christian minister Rick Warren calls himself a "Stealth Evangelist". He sees 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 (Baird, 2004, p. 29). 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 cannot 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." (Baird, 2004, p. 29).

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?" (Bridger, 2001, p. 10).

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 as it becomes a relatively 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." (Bridger, 2001, p. 10).

Traditionally, religion provided a systematic *worldview* in which the Divine provided overall meaning and purpose to life. With postmodern cultural trends, the importance of worldview recedes into the background; instead, what becomes important for individuals is *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 life style and immediate sense of well-being.

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." (Bridger, 2001, p. 11). This pattern is evident in some who search for meaning and satisfaction in religion, or in esoteric religious practice, alternative spiritualities, 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 well-being 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." (Bridger, 2001, p. 12).

- **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/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." (Bridger, 2001, p. 12). 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.

Dimensions of Emotion, Imagination and the Aesthetics in Spirituality

While there is not space here to discuss this topic in any detail, it is important to signal that a comprehensive treatment of spirituality needs to consider these three dimensions: emotions, imagination and the aesthetic.

Emotions (or feelings) are fundamental visceral energies that are an integral part of normal human functioning; they are a key component of spiritual responses. Emotions can emerge from within, in an endogenous way, without any apparent external stimulus (e.g., depression, exhaustion.); they are often strong, and even overwhelming, psychosomatic parts of the overall human response to situations and events (e.g., 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 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.

The *imagination* is the individual's capacity to mentally picture future possibilities. 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 it 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. Any education in spirituality needs to attend to the spiritual dimension in the creative arts.

A Style Spectrum of Spiritualities: From Organisational/Structural Religious to DIY (Do It Yourself) On-the-run Psychological

In the diverse developments within both religious and non-religious spiritualities, it is possible to discern a prominent polarity formed from the confluence of the cultural influences and issues 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, including 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 they also help in '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, it is evident in some non-religious spiritual groups.

Towards the other end of an extensive spectrum is what can be called *DIY On-the-run psychological spirituality*.

This spirituality is more personally constructed according to need and less dependent on a religious institution with a comprehensive beliefs package. There is more personal freedom, but this puts more onus on the individual for constructing and living out a 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 (e.g., 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 above. 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. They resonate with what was said earlier in the article about trends and issues in spirituality: 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 world-view set of teachings and organisational religious practice will not be satisfying, or the individual will not take much notice of the beliefs that 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/factual, pointing in a valuable spiritual direction, but not *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.

The psychological emphasis implies that this spirituality seeks to be relevant to people's lives and moral decision-making. It emphasises individuality; but this is not necessarily anti-communitarian. Nevertheless, communities of this type, whether they be religious or non-religious groups, have a different style of social and spiritual functioning from one of the organisational/structural type. However, 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. As a result 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, distribution of power and so forth. 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.

This 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 afterlife. It does not need to rely on the traditional package of beliefs, selecting wisdom from a variety of sources that makes sense of their experience and can guide their moral life. They 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 on-the-run is important for interpreting the diversity of spiritualities in youth. It also signals the to-be-expected problems with an education in spirituality that is sponsored by the official religion or church. Official formal religious education, especially in religious schools, tends to have a curriculum that naturally leans towards the organisational/structural because it is institutionally sponsored. As a result there are difficulties to be negotiated for both teachers and students whose spiritual orientation is towards the other end of the spectrum.

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. While it is beyond the scope to pursue this in this article, it is important from the perspective of education in spirituality to signal these crucial relationships.

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 be used pedagogically for identifying, analysing and judging the

strengths/weaknesses of what is being offered as spirituality. The list is generic and could be applied to religious and non-religious spiritualities; it needs to be contextualised with the articulated

beliefs/values of the particular group engaged in evaluation; it will also be useful for individuals in the personal appraisal of their own spirituality.

Table 2

Evaluative Criteria for the Identification and Appraisal of Spirituality

Initial list of evaluative criteria for the identification and evaluation of spirituality	Evaluative questions and issues
Transcendence	The particular understanding of transcendence: Is it a human transcendence or does it include a notion of god or higher power? Is this higher power a personal or a non-personal creative life force? In what ways does the spirituality relate to religion?
Frame of reference: the individual, as well as something larger than the individual	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. To what extent does the frame of reference for this spirituality take into account community at both local and wider levels? (human/social environment). What historical traditions in spirituality give perspective to contemporary concerns, and a balanced interpretation of existential needs? Is there a custodial concern for the physical and animal environments?
Personal reflection	Cultivation of a habit of reflection on life experience and contemporary issues. Includes critical interpretation of culture. Development of a constructive, resilient personal meaning for life.
Confidence in human knowing	A healthy spirituality needs to come to terms with uncertainties about meaning and value that go with postmodernist dimensions to contemporary Western society. 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.
Inputs that inform and challenge spiritual understandings.	A healthy spirituality is presumed to be not static. It includes openness to activities (reading, education, new experience and so forth) that prompt reflection and continued development of spirituality. Openness to learning from other spiritualities. 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'.
Spiritually motivated values and commitments.	Spirituality that informs and inspires values and commitments, and a sense of social justice. Spirituality, values and commitments affect personal action and action on behalf of others.

Criteria such as these (with amendments and additions) can be used in teaching/learning where the topic spirituality is being explored in the classroom. Also, engaging students in the task of considering what might constitute a 'healthy' spirituality has considerable educational potential.

This list of evaluative criteria implies a value position about what constitutes spiritual health. In turn, this is based on a particular view of the human person. Three of the principal concerns in this list are as follows:

Firstly, 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 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.

Secondly, these criteria propose that a healthy spirituality should not be static and not just 'implied' in the way people live their lives; 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 proposed as one that motivates behaviour and leads to personal/social action. Healthy spirituality continually challenges the individual to practice, extend and deepen spiritual insights. Healthy spirituality is 'cultivated'.

Thirdly a healthy spirituality needs confidence in the personal knowing process. The postmodern strand in contemporary Western culture calls absolutes and metanarratives 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 knowledge of absolute truth, it is both realistic and pragmatic to believe that one can know part of the truth with confidence, and act on this with integrity. Given that the uncertainties in knowing (especially in the personal domain) 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, for example, it needs to critically evaluate postmodern thought.

Other views of spiritual health, not unlike what has been proposed here, have been discussed in the literature. Fisher (2000, 2001) noted the emergence of the term in writings about health; he considered that it was a pervasive dimension of overall health and well-being, and that it involved harmonious relationships in four domains – the personal, communal, environmental and transcendent. 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' spirituality (Hay & Nye, 1998). Others have considered the importance of spirituality for overall personal health (Goodloe & Arreola, 1992. Hjelm & Johnson, 1996), and its contribution to personal 'resilience' (Witham, 2001; Pargament, 1997) — inner resources that help people cope with life, particularly when there are difficulties to be overcome.

No doubt there will be debate about the evaluative criteria proposed here; the list needs to be debated and modified, and informed by the beliefs and values of particular groups seeking to educate the young in spirituality. The very process of debating these criteria and the beliefs and values that underpin them is a particularly valuable part of an education in spirituality for both adults and school students. Pedagogically, a scheme like this is useful when teaching spirituality, because teachers and students are drawn into considering 'what sort of spirituality' is being explored. This article, and the issues and evaluative criteria it has explored, can help in this process.

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