THE "TURN" TO SPIRITUALITY

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ABSTRACT

The term "spirituality" is difficult to define, given the equivocal meanings attributed to it, and the tendency to equate this phenomenon with "piety" or "otherworldliness". Such an approach is far too narrow, and does not take into account that "spirituality" needs to be seen in a much wider context. Spirituality refers to the *raison-d'être* of one's existence, the meaning and values to which one ascribes. Thus everyone embodies a spirituality, be it nihilistic, materialistic, humanistic, or religious. There are diverse spiritualities, each one culture-specific, expressing its own historical, sociological, theological, linguistic and philosophical orientation. Post-patriarchal and telluric, contemporary spirituality affects all areas of society, including the business world, education, health care, the arts, ecology, politics, religion and particularly the academy, where new programmes in spirituality are attracting a large number of students. The new surge of interest in spirituality is a force for personal and societal transformation.

The present era is witnessing an ever-increasing interest in the phenomenon of spirituality, not only among religious persons, but from all quarters of society. In fact, the term "*spirituality*" has become something of a "buzz" word, used, *inter alia*, by medical doctors, psychologists, psychiatrists, political scientists, business women and men, ecologists, sociologists, human rights activists, anthropologists, literature scholars, artists, as well as religionists and theologians.[2]

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2   In the business world, see Dollard, Marret-Crosby & Wright (2002) which offers insights from Benedictine spirituality for business; Lowney (2003) which offers Jesuit principles for business. In addition, conferences such as the one organised in 2001 by the Chancellor of the University of Massachusetts, David Scott, entitled, *Going public with spirituality in the workplace, Higher Education and business*, and the 2005 second annual *South African soul of business* conference, which includes in its agenda *Spirituality at work*; *lessons from African leadership*; *social entrepreneurship* and *leadership with soul*, are an indication of the growing importance of spirituality in the work place. In the field of medicine, a multi-disciplinary conference on spirituality and healthcare was hosted by the University of Aberdeen in January

Investigations into both the near death experience (NDE) and empathic death experience (EDE)[3] continue to be a cause of fascination and debate (Moody 2005:x). Neuroscientific research into the biology of religious belief raises important questions regarding the brain and religious experience (D'Aquili & Newberg 1999; Newberg & D'Aquili 2001). The idea of a "spiritual intelligence quotient" (SQ) which complements the cognitive intelligent quotient (IQ) and emotional intelligence quotient (EQ) (Zohar & Marshall 2000), and recent studies in genetics which posit a "God gene" (Hamer 2004) bring the debate regarding the nature of spirituality into a wider medical field.

The growing interest in the phenomenon of spirituality is evidenced in the vast array of literature, both popular and scientific that is now available. General bookshops stock large numbers of issues dealing with spirituality in an easily accessible manner. Ancient spiritual classics are being published in critical editions and experts from the major religious traditions are producing work of the highest quality from within

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2004, entitled *Integrating spirituality into Healthcare practices: remembering the "forgotten dimension"*. In education, a project sponsored by the John Templeton Foundation in 1997, *Looking inwards, looking outwards: exploring life's possibilities*, integrates world spirituality into the curricula of state schools. In the area of psychology, Hall & Edwards (2002), both psychologists at the Rosemund School of Psychology, Biola University, La Mirada, California, utilise the Spiritual Assessment Inventory (SAI) to analyse two primary dimensions, viz., "Quality of relationship with God" and "Awareness of God." It

> draws on the theoretical insights of object relations theory, which is very congruent with attachment theory and consistent with a sizable literature on God image/representation, indicating that one's relational/emotional development is mirrored in one's relationship with the Divine (Hall & Edwards 2002:341).

With respect to art, see Wuthnow (2001:2, 258) who speaks of art as a "spiritual practice" and as an experience of the sacred, which leads artists to profess optimism in the face of difficulties:

> I believe that you and I and everybody else are like a sparkle, like a flash of light, a sparkle of the uniqueness of whatever Being we are a part of … [which] wants to come forth and shine.

3   Moody (2005:x-xi) speaks of the phenomenon of Empathic-death experiences, which are closely related to NDE's, and which reflect the experience of those gathered at the bedsides of the dying, who have their own visions of a world beyond.

their particular spirituality.[4] Universities in various countries are now offering academic programmes in spirituality that are proving to be of great interest among students; societies for the study of spirituality have arisen; academic journals in the field are on the increase.[5]

Prayer and meditation groups are burgeoning; retreat centres now cater for an increasing number of lay women and men in addition to professional religious workers who are seeking a deeper spiritual life; radio and television documentaries, seminars and conferences, centres for the study of spirituality — all these have come to the fore in the last few decades. In short, spirituality is clearly on the agenda and will no doubt remain so in this new millennium.

The "turn" to spirituality is graphically expressed by Ashley (1995:13):

> What? Another "turn" in theology? Have we not already had more than enough? In the last few decades … theologians have been advised that we need to make the critical turn (the turn to praxis), the linguistic turn, the interpretative (or hermeneutical) turn, the turn to the subject and the turn to experience … [the] return to Scripture, [even] the turn to turning itself. I admit that I am thoroughly turned around. How much more complex does the situation become if the study of spiritualities past and present, is added to the list….

What exactly is meant by spirituality? What is the relationship between spirituality and religion? Why this explosion of interest in spirituality? What does the academic study of spirituality entail? What relevance has spirituality for society? These basic questions are addressed in this study in the hope that this highly fascinating area of study will lead to a greater enrichment of life in all its aspects, both at a personal and a societal level. Within the confines of the present endeavour it will not be possible to address specific spiritualities. Rather, the aim

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4   In particular, the 25-volume *World Spirituality*, covering the indigenous spiritualities of Asia, Europe, Africa, Oceania, and South, Central and North America; Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Zoroastrianism, Sumerian, Assyro-Babylonian, Hittite, Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Jewish, Christian, and Islamic spiritualities; esoteric and secular spirituality; the inter-religious dialogue concerning spirituality; and a dictionary of world spirituality. See also, *The New SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, edited by Philip Sheldrake, and published by SCM press, 2005.

5   See section 4 below.

is to discuss spirituality in general terms, and thus provide a basis for further specifications of spirituality at a later stage.

2. WHAT IS SPIRITUALITY?

The persistent interest in the phenomenon of spirituality is all the more remarkable given the fact that there is no clear, unequivocal definition of the concept that is acceptable to all interested in the field. In fact, in many circles there is widespread confusion regarding the very meaning of spirituality, and its use has become "fluid." In certain quarters, spirituality denotes escapism, inactivity, and irrelevance while in other quarters it refers to full human maturation. It is an umbrella term which covers a myriad of activities ranging from the deeply creative to the distinctively bizarre. Its popular usage covers all sorts of beliefs and values, and its usage is often imprecise. The amorphous nature of the term thus contributes to the fact that it is resistant to a concise definition. It has been described as an "applause-word" namely, it is "... the kind of word that is no sooner uttered than everyone breaks out in applause" (Carson 1994:381). For this reason it will be helpful to have a working definition that will encapsulate the essence of spirituality, eliminate misconceptions surrounding the term and facilitate discussion.

Unfortunately in many circles spirituality is identified with "piety" or "otherworldliness." Such a misapprehension cuts across all sectors, namely the idea that only monks, nuns, or ministers (belonging to diverse religious traditions) have an authentic spirituality. The phenomenon of spirituality therefore is anything but clear, and the plethora of scholarly and popular writings attempting to delineate the term is an indication that this is an on-going task in contemporary society. Spirituality has such a firm grip on the imagination today, that a degree of clarity with respect to its usage is imperative.

To sharpen the notion of spirituality and in an attempt to delineate its relevance for humanity today, it should be seen in a wider context to refer to the deepest dimension of the human person. It refers therefore to the "ultimate values" that give meaning to our lives, whether or not they are religious or non-religious. In this sense,

> Everyone embodies a spirituality, even if it be a nihilistic or materialistic spirituality .... Spirituality refers to a person's ultimate values and commitments, regardless of their content (Griffin 1988:1).

The referents of spirituality can just as much be power, success, money, sex, pleasure, or a way of life oriented around an ultimate reality which transcends ego-orientation. Kappen (1994:33) states succinctly that spirituality should not be seen in opposition to materiality and carnality, but rather refers to

> ... the manner in which humans transcend themselves and reach out to the ultimate possibilities of their existence. As such spirituality entails both an understanding of the deepest meaning of human existence and a commitment to realizing the same.

Spirituality is the concern of all who feel drawn toward the "fullness of humanity" and

> ... is the capacity of persons to transcend themselves through knowledge and love … and become more than self-enclosed material monads (Schneiders 1986:265; 2003:165).

Among the plethora of descriptions of spirituality to be found today, that found in the Crossroad series on World Spirituality is worthy of inclusion at this juncture:

> The series focuses on that inner dimension of the person called by certain traditions "the spirit." This spiritual core is the deepest center of the person. It is here that the person is open to the transcendent dimension; it is here that the person experiences ultimate reality. The series explores the discovery of this core, the dynamics of its development, and its journey to the ultimate goal. It deals with prayer, spiritual direction, the various maps of the spiritual journey, and the methods of advancement in the spiritual ascent (McGinn & Meyendorff 1985:xiii).

This description leads to a more formal view of the attitudes and beliefs and conduct appropriate to a given religious tradition. It presupposes internal and external congruence — maturation and integration — not escape and indifference. It presupposes a view of life that is not isolationist and self-absorbed, but rather characterised by "self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives" (Schneiders 1986:266). Such an approach is anthropological, focussing as it does on the human dimension of spirit, and on the aspects of human life which are seen to be intentionally linked to that which is of unre-

stricted value. The concept of *self-transcendence* is of vital importance in all forms of spirituality and its implementation in daily life. As Woods (1996:9) points out, spirituality

> ... is the self-transcending character of all human persons, and everything that pertains to it, including, most importantly, the ways in which that perhaps infinitely malleable character is realized in everyday life situations.

Waaijman (2002:1) speaks of spirituality as that which touches the core of human existence, namely "our relation to the Absolute," however the latter may be defined.

2.1 Spirituality and Religion

Spirituality is not necessarily linked to religion. It is possible to practise a deep spirituality without necessarily being religious in the accepted understanding of the word. In fact, certain adherents of spirituality consider religion as antagonistic to spirituality and consider the two to be mutually exclusive. Some students of spirituality maintain that its main characteristics comprise relationships with things, nature, other people and the Ultimate (in whatever term this is understood) as well as true morality and integration, rather than being linked to religious practices. In an age of secularism and agnosticism, true spirituality may be the way forward for those who cannot align themselves with traditional religion. An understanding of spirituality which effects aesthetic appreciation, and a deep interior conviction of the connectedness of all things, will perhaps bring women and men back to the realities of a life lived for others, and away from enslavement to material things and self-centredness. Clearly, given the fact that many people claim to be spiritual, but not religious, one cannot deny the validity of their particular path.

Jinpa (2001:81) bring this point to the fore, quoting the Dalai Lama:

> I believe there is an important distinction to be made between religion and spirituality. Religion, I take to be concerned with faith in the claims of salvation of one faith tradition or another, an aspect of which is acceptance of some form of metaphysical or supernatural reality, including perhaps an idea of heaven or nirvana. Connected with this are religious teachings or dogma, ritual, prayer and so on. Spirituality I take to be concerned with those qualities of the human spirit — such as love and compassion, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, contentment,

> a sense of responsibility, a sense of harmony — which bring happiness both to self and others. While ritual and prayer, along with questions of nirvana and salvation, are directly connected to religious faith, these inner qualities need not be, however.

In other words, such principles as compassion, tolerance, forgiveness and the sense of universal brotherhood and sisterhood are not to be seen as "special purviews of established religions." Such an approach detracts from the universal nature of spirituality. As a result of this more open approach, spirituality is seen to be more relevant to today's secular society (Jinpa 2001:82, 83).

> Being spiritual is an attribute of the way one experiences the world and lives one's life… it… signifies what one attends to and acts upon in daily experience (Van Ness 1996:2).

Waaijman (2002:55, 59) in his discussion of the spiritual dimension in education, also illustrates the point that "secular" or "humanistic" spirituality is one that is characterised by "consciousness, …. wonder, gratitude, hope, courage, energy, …. love, friendliness." Spirituality in this wider understanding, comprises both outer and inner dimensions:

> Facing outward, human existence is spiritual insofar as one engages reality as a maximally inclusive whole and makes the cosmos an intentional object of thought and feeling. Facing inward, life has a spiritual dimension to the extent that it is apprehended as a project of people's most enduring and vital selves and is structured by experiences of sudden self-transformation and subsequent gradual development (Van Ness 1996:5).

Whether or not one agrees with Van Ness in his description of self-transformation, as indeed there are a variety of ways in which the latter takes place, nevertheless, he is correct in identifying the two-fold character of everyday spirituality, a spirituality not tied to religion, but open to the realities of the so-called "secular world." Thus, a

> secular spirituality is neither validated nor invalidated by religious varieties of spirituality … this separation is more easily made if what is spiritual is conceived in phenomenological rather than metaphysical or institutional terms (Van Ness 1996:1).

However, this is not to say that spirituality and religion are necessarily diametrically opposed in all instances. Whilst religion can certainly become fossilised, nevertheless the dynamic of spirituality can

effect revitalisation and rebirth, so that the two are once again ineluctably intertwined and the former is constantly open to "new form" (Boyd 1994:94). It can also be argued that spirituality and religion should be partners:

> I would suggest that religion is the optimal context for spirituality. The great religious traditions of the world are much more adequate matrices for spiritual development and practice than personally constructed amalgams of beliefs and practices (Schneiders 2003:176).

Disaffiliated spirituality lacks a past and a future, and is not linked to an organic tradition, with all that the latter entails (Schneiders 2003:177). Of course, linkage to a religious tradition does not preclude critical evaluation of the latter. On the contrary, often a committed spiritual adherent is all the more able to criticise aspects of religious practice, given her or his greater sensitivity to the underlying reality that transcends any given structure. Viewing spirituality and religion as partners and not as rivals enables the former to vitalise the latter; at the same time religion provides a locus which prevents spirituality from becoming rootless and isolated. Schneiders (2003:181) puts it well:

> What we may be learning … is how to sit lightly to the institution even as we drink deeply of our own tradition.

By way of summary, therefore, spirituality in general refers to the values to which we subscribe which give meaning and orientation to our lives. Spirituality entails the ongoing harmonious integration of the whole human person. Whereas "religion" has connotations of institution, ritual, articulation of doctrine, etc., spirituality refers to something which is deeply personal, inward, experiential and authentic in the lives of its practitioners. Spirituality can also be linked to art and music, to the aesthetic sense, and thus offers access for those who locate themselves in the secular, or find themselves resistant to religious discourse. It is thus possible to be religious without being spiritual, and to be spiritual without being religious. However, this is not to posit an irrevocable gulf between spirituality and religion. On the contrary, in many instances the former gives life to the latter.

3. WHY THE "TURN" TO SPIRITUALITY?

One of the major reasons for the "turn" to spirituality is the transition from a primarily monocultural, Eurocentric Church, to a multicultural, polycentric global Church. This major paradigm shift allows Christianity to free itself from the fetters of Western thought — particularly Greco-Roman philosophical constructs — and absorb the richness of other cultural expressions of spirituality. This applies, not only to the situation within Christianity, but is also clearly seen with relation to other religious traditions. There is now a "global consciousness" coupled with a shift from divergence to convergence, enabling "a remarkable richness of spiritual wisdom, of spiritual energies, and of religious cultural forms" to come to the fore (Cousins 1985:15). Former attitudes of isolation, hostility, domination and colonialism are giving way to respect and spiritual sharing — leading to "dialogic dialogue." The latter is a phrase coined by Raimon Panikkar to distinguish the creative encounter between religious traditions from *dialectic* dialogue, in which there is an attempt by the one party to refute the claims of the other (1979:241-245). In contrast, dialogic dialogue comprises mutual understanding and appreciation together with a willingness to change misconceptions regarding the other. Respect for the autonomy of the diverse traditions leads to mutual enrichment. This is particularly important now that diverse spiritualities are becoming increasingly appreciated among diverse traditions. Former attitudes of isolation, domination and colonialism are giving way to respect and a wholesome appreciation of ecumenical and inter-religious exchange (Kourie 2000:10).

A second reason for the burgeoning interest in spirituality is the fact that many values and accepted beliefs of orthodox religious thought are being seriously questioned. Within *Christianity*, for example, there are elements that are highly critical of authority. The legitimacy of monolithic religious structures is no longer self-evident. In particular, at the beginning of this new millennium there is a growing spiritual hunger that often is not met by ecclesiastical institutions. The dissatisfaction with the mainline churches has in certain cases resulted in a move to more conservative communities. This is due to a desire for deeper spiritual meaning, together with the belief that churches are too involved with internal organisational issues and not sufficiently concerned with spiritual matters. In addition, decades of social gospel activism and po-

litical Christianity have not produced the global utopia that was expected. Communism and socialism do not answer the deep-felt yearnings of the human person. Consequently, in certain quarters, there is an increase of evangelistic crusades and an appeal to more emotional forms of Christianity.

The dogmatic or practical intransigence of the church can actually preclude access to spiritual experience. This is precisely the opposite of the original intention of theological systems. The latter are in fact meant to be *expressions* of a particular spirituality, not self-enclosed doctrines intent on rational and logical coherency. As the well-known philosopher Henri Bergson ([1935]/1980:369) succinctly states,

> ... a doctrine which is but a doctrine has a poor chance indeed of giving birth to the glowing enthusiasm, the illumination, the faith that moves mountains. But grant this fierce glow, and the molten matter will easily run into the mould of a doctrine, or even become that doctrine as it solidifies.

King (1997:39) also makes the point that all too often theology is devoid of spiritual nourishment, and is not easily a source of life and energy,

> ... theologians follow long-established, disciplined intellectual practices but all too often these are constrained by provincialism, by a parochialism of vision and by an excessive logocentricism.

Given the aforementioned, it should be stated however, that such criticisms do not provide the full picture. Indeed, one of the advantages of the "turn" to spirituality is the fact that there is a renewed understanding of the relationship between spirituality and theology. Ashley (1995:15) states this cogently in his analysis of certain classics of spirituality:

> As these examples show, such daring articulations of the experience of God arising from within the history of Christian spirituality can breathe new life into theological systems that have become too closed in on themselves and too obsessed with the drive to logical consistency and technical articulation. Furthermore, they can serve as correctives to narrowly conceived theological constructs, when, for instance, they emphasise only the distance and kingship of God, and not also God's nearness and tenderness.

Theology is therefore a "second step" resulting from the original spiritual experience. Therefore,

> ... it does not generate results out of its own resources and cannot authorize them simply on the basis of logical coherence and argumentative precision (Ashley 1995:15).

A third major consideration when considering the new wave of spirituality is undoubtedly *postmodernism*. Although the term "postmodernism" is much used today, nevertheless it resists easy classification and definition.

> Postmodernism has a fluid, uncontainable, changing quality. Nothing here is immutable. No truths are certain and eternal; truth is continually capsized in postmodernism (Globus 1995:121).

Postmodernism is therefore a *Gestalt* shift, or epistemological transformation, manifested, *inter alia*, in political, social, economic, philosophical and religious spheres. It is a decisive break with *modernity*, which had its origins in the 17th century, characterised *inter alia*, by excessive rationalism, linear thinking and the belief that universal truths, independent of context, may be found. Modernity exhibits, *inter alia*, individualism, dualism, futurism, secularism, scientism, materialism and nihilism (Griffin 1988:5-6). Without denying the very real benefits of modernity, in terms of scientific and technological endeavour, resulting in progress in all fields, nevertheless, the horror of two world wars and other atrocities of the twentieth and twenty-first century have caused disillusionment and a real questioning of modernity's values. Modernity and its promises of freedom and unlimited progress are silenced, *inter alia*, by the terror of Auschwitz, the oppression caused by communism, the injustice of apartheid, the genocide in Rwanda, and the horror of terrorism.[6] There is a loss of faith in secularisation with its marginalisation of religion. There is also a sense of horror at the daily misery of millions of people, who live in a world of hunger, violence and ethnic hatred. Clearly, the values and ideals bequeathed to us by the Enlightenment are deficient. Modernity can no longer be seen as the panacea for the future. It effects a general loss of spirituality due to its one-dimensionalism; political self-interest spawns oppression

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6   Witness, *inter alia*, New York: 9/11/01; Madrid: 3/11/04; and London: 7/7/05.

and racism; economic life concentrates on profits rather than on the real needs of the consumer; education policies lead to a general atrophy of the spiritual faculties; the very real factor of "might determines right" infiltrates apparently open and "democratic" structures; and what started as a legitimate revolutionary impulse all to soon becomes its opposite, namely tyranny. Furthermore, the transition from community to impersonal society has had disastrous effects, as aptly described by Berger (1967:61):

> Community was real and all-embracing, for better or for worse. The individual was thus rarely, if ever, thrown back upon himself (*sic*).... Modernity, by contrast, is marked by homelessness. The forces of modernization have descended like a gigantic steel hammer upon all the old communal institutions — clan, village, tribe, regions.... It is hardly surprising that this transformation caused severe discontents.

The recognition that traditional views of order and progress are no longer possible in the light of the aberrations of history, and that "modernity's idealist self-subsistent self" fails to satisfy the longing of the human heart, manifests the fragility of human endeavour (Downey 1993:748). However, apprehension of God is not gauged by Enlightenment canons of certitude, but by humility and a realisation of the interconnectedness of all living beings.

Postmodernism can be described as *deconstructive*, *eliminative* or *constructive* and *revisionary*. The former could also be characterised by the term *ultramodernism*: its "eliminations result from carrying modern premises to their logical conclusions" (Griffin 1988:x). Rejecting master narratives and repudiating "claims to normativity or non-negotiable ultimacy by any institution or agency" postmodernism can lead to

> thoroughgoing relativism with regard to religion as well as other institutions and authorities, and a despair of genuine relationships with those whose reality is really "other" than our own (Schneiders 2003:173).

The approach of *deconstructive* postmodernism is one of overcoming the modern worldview by an "anti-worldview," deconstructing or eliminating such concepts as God, self, purpose, meaning, etc. Such an approach can result in relativism and nihilism (Griffin 1988:x).

Constructive postmodernism, on the other hand, has immense significance for present-day spirituality, and indeed is one of the factors

contributing to the upsurge of interest in the subject. There is no attempt to eliminate, but rather to revise modern premises and traditional concepts. It aims for a "new unity of scientific, ethical, aesthetic, and religious intuitions, transcending individualism ... patriarchy, mechanization ... militarism;" postmodernism "provides support for the ecology, peace, feminist, and other emancipatory movements of our time ..." (Griffin 1988:xi). One of the most significant characteristics of constructive postmodernism is its emphasis on the inter-connectedness of all of life, human and non-human. Rejecting dualistic supernaturalism and atheistic nihilism, postmodernist spirituality affirms the notion of *panentheism* in which God is seen to be in all things and all things are in God (not pantheism). In short, as Griffin (1990:3) says, postmodern spirituality encompasses

> a nondualistic relation of humans to nature and of the divine reality to the world; the immanence of both the past and future (albeit in different ways) in the present; the universality and centrality of creativity; postpatriarchy; communitarianism (versus individualism and nationalism); the "deprivatization" of religion, meaning the rejection of the autonomy of morality, politics, and economics from religious values; and (specifically) the rejection of materialism ....

Constructive postmodernism has helped counteract the flattening of thought that is indicative of a rationalist era. There is a greater spiritual and aesthetic sensitivity, and a wider cosmic and mystical ambience, together with a revalorisation of the feminine and ecological awareness. Such a spirituality will surely help effect both personal and societal transformation.

By way of summary, the foregoing reasons are but an indication as to why spirituality is currently enjoying such interest. Society needs spirituality, and humanity's quest for something greater than itself is particularly pertinent in the age in which we live, characterised as it is by fear and a lack of peace. In addition to the interest in spirituality in general, the academic study of the subject is gaining momentum.

4. SPIRITUALITY AS AN ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE

The study of spirituality as an academic discipline has come increasingly to the fore, with a number of courses and programmes in spirituality at tertiary level, particularly at universities, being offered over

the last few decades, and with academic societies, new journals, conferences and discussion groups arising to meet this need.[7]

Schneiders' seminal work in this regard has contributed greatly to this endeavour (1986; 1989; 1993; 1994). In an insightful manner, Schneiders (1989:31) defines the discipline of spirituality:

> *Spirituality is the field of study which attempts to investigate in an inter-disciplinary way spiritual experience as such*, i.e., as spiritual and as experience. I use the expression "spiritual experience" to indicate that the subject matter is not only religious experience in the technical sense but those analogous experiences of ultimate meaning and value which have transcendent and life-integrating power for individuals and groups.

The academic study of spirituality is interdisciplinary, descriptive-critical rather than prescriptive-normative, ecumenical, inter-religious, cross-cultural and holistic (Schneiders 1989:32-33). In addition, a "three-dimensional approach" is advocated:

> The first phase is essentially descriptive … historical, textual and comparative studies are of primary importance. The second phase is essentially analytical and critical, leading to an explanation and evaluation of the subject. Here the theological, human and social sciences are of particular importance. The third phase is synthetic and/or constructive, and leads to appropriation. Hermeneutical theory governs this final phase (Schneiders 1989:35).

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7   *Inter alia*, Heythrop College, London University; University of Wales, Lampeter; University of California, Berkeley; Radbound University, Nijmegen; Instituut Catholique, Paris; St. Augustine College of SA, Johannesburg; University of South Africa (Unisa), Pretoria; and Gregorian University, Rome, where degrees in Spirituality are being offered. New Societies include the *Society for the Study of Christian Spirituality*, (SSCS), founded at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion, 1992; the *Spirituality Association of South Africa* (Spirasa) founded 2004. Journals include *Studies in Spirituality*, *Spiritus*, *The Way: Review of Contemporary Spirituality*, and *Acta Theologia* Supplement 8: *The Spirit that moves*. A recent conference held at Milltown Institute, Dublin, June 2004, entitled *With wisdom seeking God: the academic study of spirituality in Europe*, brought scholars together, not only from Europe, but also from Africa, China and Australia. The British Society for the Sociology of Religion also hosted a conference entitled, *The sociology of spirituality*, in April 2004 in Bristol, UK.

Another seminal work in the area of academic spirituality is the foundational study by Waaijman (2002). This impressive work is concerned with the phenomenon of lived spirituality; the definition of spirituality; and methods best suited to the study of spirituality (2002: 2-3). Waaijman considers a "dialogical-phenomenological" approach to be the best scientific method for analysing spirituality, since,

> Phenomenology is … a method of working … that is focused on experience and the internal examination of experience" and a dialogical approach is important because it "posits the principle of alterity: that which is other, the other and the Other" … (Waaijman 2002: 535).

Utilising form-descriptive, hermeneutic, systematic and mystagogic tools of research, Waaijman (2002:599) aims at integrating the phenomenological approach with that of dialogical thought and *vice versa*. A major element of the phenomenological method is that it is expository, analytic and synthetic as opposed to polemical and argumentative (Kruger 1982:ix). A further point to be borne in mind regarding methodological postulates, is the fact that these are but tools, not the final destination for the scholar of spirituality. Particularly with respect to the subject under investigation, namely the phenomenon of spirituality, intellectual interpretation is secondary to intuitive understanding, although of course both are essential. A phenomenological, rather than a confessional approach to the academic study of spirituality effects an open mind, whereby different spiritualities may be examined non-judgementally. Such an approach, from within a religious studies perspective, rather than a theological perspective, is conducive to inter-religious dialogue (Endean 1995:91-92).

The primary focus in the academic study of spirituality is *cognitive* — it is an intellectual reflection rather than an exercise aimed at promoting spiritual and moral growth (Endean 1995:90). Of course, the academic study of spirituality does not preclude the latter, but this is not its primary aim. In fact, there is a clear distinction between *formative* programmes in spirituality, more often conducted in retreat-centres, seminaries, or perhaps linked to departments of Practical or Pastoral Theology at educational institutions, and *academic* programmes in spirituality. The former aim at fostering spiritual growth, and the latter are research oriented. Schneiders (1993:12) maintains that such research aims

to understand, theoretically and practically, the lived experience of God and try to clarify this phenomenon in all its multiplicity and uniqueness and power. They are concerned with the conditions of possibility of such experience, its actual occurrence, the variety of religious experience, the structure and dynamics of such experience, the criteria of adequacy of such experiences, the effect of social context and theological milieu on religious experience in literature, art, and social construction, and so on.

Schneiders (1993:12) goes on to state that the only difference between such scholarship and that of other human sciences or even natural science is the fact that scholars of spirituality investigate the

actual human experience of God rather than a purely "natural" phenomenon, such as a social movement, or a chemical reaction.[8]

Closely allied to the foregoing, and due to advances in the field of information and communication technology (ICT) a new web community is currently underway, under the auspices of the Titus Brandsma Institute, Nijmegen, Holland. *Spirituality International* (SPIRIN) is an "academic forum, multidisciplinary in structure and multicultural in approach" in which

scientists, lecturers, students and professionals in the field of spirituality are given an opportunity to exchange information and engage in discussion (Huls & Waaijman 2004:355).

Comprising six inter-connected areas: *Who's Who*; *Bibliography*; *Forum*; *Encyclopedia*; *Education*; *Bulletin Board & Links*, this academic web community will offer information on spirituality freely to everybody (Huls & Waaijman 2004:357). Of particular importance is the *SPIRIN Education Network* (SPINE) designed for digital learning, by means of which students all over the world can register for modules in spirituality. Although there may well be some classroom tuition for these modules, the major teaching would be conducted via the digital learning environment (Huls & Waaijman 2004:368). SPIRIN and SPINE are indications that the academic discipline of spirituality is a world-wide phenomenon and is here to stay!

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8   See Dreyer & Burrows (2005) for a collection of twenty-five essays, originally published in either the *Christian Spirituality Bulletin* or *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* which deals with critical issues in the academic study of spirituality.

By way of summary, one cannot deny the problems that still exist in the academy, with respect to the new discipline of Spirituality. This is mainly due to inbred Enlightenment suspicions regarding the notion of "experience" and the dangers of "subjectivity" (Sheldrake 1999:58). Nevertheless, the academic study of spirituality continues to gain ground and to attract large numbers of quality students with a wide variety of research interests. Serious and critical engagement with the subject matter of this new discipline continues to grow, and exciting new areas of discourse are opening up to scholarly analysis. Its vocabulary is developing, primary resources and research tools are now more readily available, academic societies are providing a forum for exchange of ideas, and scientific journals in the field are of a high standard. The study of spirituality is increasingly facilitating productive interchange between global spiritual traditions, an interchange which is of benefit to all parties concerned.

5. CONCLUSION

We are witnessing a renewal of interest in perhaps what is one of the oldest traditions in human history, namely, the transmission of spiritual wisdom. With the passing into history of the Enlightenment, together with the dismantling of oppressive systems of government, as well as the intense realisation of the need to preserve the planet, humanity is witnessing a deeper longing for unity and understanding at all levels. Interest in spirituality is an indication of a deep-felt desire within the hearts of women and men to find unity and wholeness, both individually and in society. Particularly, in South Africa, as the legacy of the past is replaced by a new dispensation, spirituality can help effect justice and peace at all levels. *Orthopraxis* and *orthokardia* — "right-heartedness" — are both essential, so that human existence, whatever the texture of its surface, may acquire greater depth and meaning. Therefore, a true understanding of the nature of spirituality will effect personal and societal transformation, and help bring about a more united, peaceful world community. In contrast to former views of spirituality, which considered that it was deracinated from earthly concerns, contemporary spirituality fully embraces the phenomenal world and enters passionately into its affairs. It is my contention that the "turn" to spirituality, both general and academic, will help bring about an ecumenical transformation of consciousness, which will elucidate the many-faceted splendour and diverse ways in which to discover Ultimate Reality.

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