

**CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY: ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR  
AUTHENTIC MINISTRY**

**by**

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## **DEDICATION**

**I dedicate this work to my dear wife, Ann, and to my two sons, Paul and Wesley.**

**Your love, patience and support have meant everything to me.**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the significance of contemporary Christian spirituality for authentic Christian ministry. To this end an extensive survey of contemporary academic literature is conducted. The research bears in mind the almost unprecedented contemporary interest in ‘spirituality,’ both for academics and laypersons alike, and presupposes the need to redefine and understand spirituality for our times. The study yields the finding that contemporary academic spirituality contributes a newfound authenticity to Christian ministry. Spirituality achieves such authenticity for ministry through highlighting and realising a number of outstanding features. These features include: a new global awareness, and an appreciation of spiritual diversity; a ‘this-worldly’ embodiment or ‘materialism’ as integral to spirituality; a rediscovery of the experiential dimension of ministry; a re-awakening of the contemplative spirit as permeative of every dimension of life and activity, and a new inter-disciplinary appreciation of the metaphors, means and stages for spiritual formation and maturation. The hermeneutically sound and convincing contribution of spirituality is ascribed to its growing academic credibility, its utilisation of its own historical tradition and documented experience, and its discriminative deployment of postmodernism’s amenability to Christian spirituality. Finally, the thesis is not concerned with distilling practical ministerial activities from spirituality. It strives, rather, for an understanding of ministry at the ontological level, where self-understanding, vocational awareness and a desire for God realise the essence and dynamic of ministry.

**Keywords:** authenticity, contemplative spirituality, contemporary spirituality, embodiment, experience, formation, Methodist, ministry, postmodernism, spirituality, universal spirituality.

## PREFACE

I undertook this thesis out of a growing awareness that serious theological thought and organisation could be fruitfully applied to the developing academic field of Christian spirituality. This awareness, in turn, raised exciting possibilities for me as it spoke to some of my unmet academic and spiritual needs. First, here was finally the possibility of utilising my background in both systematic *and* practical theology. It seemed to me that Christian spirituality might be well served by both these fields. Second, and more to the point, I was frankly pleased to be able to pursue hard theological thinking again, and in a field to which I now had academic access. Such theological conceptualising, and the need to organise and sharpen my thinking, has always held appeal for me. In this regard, I would not be easily understood by many of my Methodist colleagues, who, for the most part, identify more with Methodism's well-known pragmatism. 'What is the *relevance* of your study?' 'What are you going to *do* with your doctorate?' These are anticipated responses, and I have fielded some of them already. To such pragmatic incredulity I have no answer, except to say that this is who I am. Moreover, I am not persuaded that 'spirituality' *is* so deeply committed to *relevance*, or its utilitarian connections. In fact, it includes within itself a characteristic critique of these assumptions. Third, and in partial answer to mystified ministerial pragmatists, I have always needed to understand the 'theory' of what I am doing as a minister, and whether I should be doing it at all. In this regard, I am conceivably no different from anyone else. I *am* different, however, in being less easily pleased by the makeshift, conventional, and often-unconscious theories that serve to justify so much ministerial activity. This is where my 'theory' *does* meet practice and where the *relevance* of my study comes in. Finally, I am not convinced that Christian ordained ministry is my primary vocation. Preceding even this high calling is my own spiritual journey of discovery, and its inner wrestling with angels and demons. This thesis is part of that journey that all persons must make for themselves – and without which they are never authentic.

I am greatly indebted to my wife, Ann, for her support and patience in enabling me to complete this thesis. She has always believed in me and has been an understanding and loving partner in ministry and in making significant sacrifices in the cause of this doctorate. My gratitude is also expressed to my sons, Paul and Wesley, who have tolerated my ignorance of computers and given me much help along the way, together with some good-humoured teasing. My sister, Glynis Ruthenberg, has most generously sponsored much of my study and has been a great encouragement along the way, as have my parents, Ken and Dorothy Ruthenberg, all of whom

have regularly asked me ‘how things are going’ with my studies. My father has an appetite for theological reflection and has sometimes kept a layman’s company with me in my discoveries and ‘thinking-out-loud.’ As far as the *word* ‘spirituality’ goes, with him a possible exception, everyone of the family has doubtless had a bellyful.

My promoter, Prof Celia Kourie, has been a great help and guide, showing herself a consummate scholar throughout. Her words and encouragement have helped me more than she can know and I have felt privileged walking with her through this learning experience. She has always had a ready ear and a full measure of patience.

Inevitably, the Parow Wesley Methodist Church, of which I am the resident minister, has served as the contextual background and provided the firsthand experience for much of my writing. I thank this loving congregation for what they have meant to me through all these years.

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 RESEARCH PROBLEM

The title of this thesis is *Contemporary Christian Spirituality: Its significance for authentic ministry*. At the risk of being over-propositional or stilted, the research problem might be logically developed in a threefold movement. The first aspect of the problem is not the *main* focus, but must be taken into account as preliminarily problematic. First, is contemporary Christian ministry sufficiently and manifestly *authentic* as it stands, or is there a dimension and ontology that is essentially missing? Indeed, is there not a vocational erosion and spiritual vacuum that is evident in the pleas, ‘burn out’ and resignations of disillusioned contemporary ministers? (Others note a statistical ‘fall-out’ of persons offering for the priesthood). Some reflective contemporary literature is just beginning to show a concern to redress these ministerial crises. Second, what *is* contemporary Christian spirituality, its features and insights, merits or demerits? Third, how might these *features* of contemporary Christian spirituality authenticate or ‘de-authenticate’ an ostensibly Christian ministry? What has contemporary Christian spirituality to offer in the context of ministry, whether in crisis or not? I now enlarge on these three problems.

First, the intrinsic research problem implicitly addressed in the title relates, in part, to ascertaining the authenticity of contemporary Christian ministry. Presupposed in the research undertaking is the possibility that so-called Christian ministry temporarily practised compromises itself for lack of ontological insight and substance. Such ministry, in drifting from its moorings in sound Christian ontology or ‘spirituality,’ may be increasingly subject to the prescriptions of a society that has itself lost its spiritual identity and sensibility. Motivating the research undertaken, in other words, is the concern that contemporary ministry is often unreflective and largely devoid of self-understanding and spiritual acumen, especially as it emerges from the modernistic era. Furthermore, ministry’s long-time lack of access to spirituality and its rich heritage, not least because of Protestant suspicion, might have occasioned an over-dependence on biblical exegesis or a rational systematic theology to fuel the soul and energy of an essentially vocational and spiritual undertaking. These discursive or exegetical theological disciplines do not automatically, or intentionally, sustain the spirit and ‘source experience’ of a vocational-spiritual ministry. Moreover, practical theology, from which ministerial practitioners understandably expect much, scarcely addresses that which lies *behind* the scope of its study field. It encompasses (only) the communicative *actions* employed by ministers, through which God comes to people in God’s Word. Such study is invaluable. But nothing is said here of a fundamental generative energy or

spirituality that realises the potential of such actions, or even re-conceives them. Furthermore, has not modernistic literature been singularly unhelpful in failing to identify the prerequisite for ministry itself, namely the *practitioner's own* assumptions, motives and healthful spiritual disposition? At the same time, a slowly escalating and concerned turn out of spiritual literature takes up the ministerial cause, testifying therein to a starving clerical appetite for nourishment. Nonetheless, a further problem presented to research is the *nature* of contemporary Christian spirituality itself, to which I now turn.

What *is* 'spirituality,' or *Christian* spirituality in particular? This question identifies the second part of the research problem. The easy and universal employment of the word 'spirituality' might suggest a clearly defined understanding of the term. Nothing, though, could be further from the truth. In some ways it is an 'applause word' that unjustly credits its flaunters with intellect, relevance and a deeply intuitive perspective. Nevertheless, few users thereof would presumably welcome a request to explain themselves. 'It appears that spirituality is one of those subjects whose meaning everyone claims to know until they have to define it' (Sheldrake 1991b:32). Further, the word now has stature in the academic world and can certainly be expected (and required) to offer clarity. To be sure, it is now by no means a word peculiar only to Christians. Still, theologians and ministers of the Christian Church freely use (and doubtless lay a special claim to) it. And it scarcely bears mentioning that 'spirituality' reputedly brings a freshness, promise and insight to Christian thought and ministry that breaks new ground. Indeed, 'spirituality' so employed often seems to indicate or imply a different spiritual and conceptual dispensation altogether. It is thus not a synonym for the old 'devotions,' or Christian piety, but brings with it a resurgent energy and excitement that has long been missing.<sup>1</sup> But the problem is that more has been said about 'spirituality' in vague and general terms than in terms of specificity, description and evaluation. I try to give substance to what often seems a vacuous and over-utilised word or concept. The problem, however, cannot be tackled in the purely definitional sense, imperative as that is. Rather, I am describing or indicating the content – the thought forms, intuitions, 'mystery' and substance of spirituality contemporarily understood. The research also involves the preparatory problem of distinguishing between broader 'secular' understandings of the word and a specifically Christian approach. Moreover, there is a distinction between academic

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<sup>1</sup> 'For the most part, Protestants have preferred 'piety,' a term acceptable in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when Protestants suspected that beneath 'spirituality' lurked monks, nuns, Jesuits, and the enormous doctrine of works righteousness' (Raitt 1987:454).

spirituality and spirituality understood as lived-life. Now I look at the third problem, which comprises the focus of this thesis.

The major research problem, thus arrived at, relates to the engagement between spirituality and ministry. The problem is that not much has been said about their impact upon each other, and what resultant changes are appropriate. I venture that relatively little has been written about contemporary Christian spirituality with ministry *conspicuously* in mind. (Understandably, much reflective contemporary spirituality is under no compunction to elucidate its implications for Christian ministry.)<sup>2</sup> The research problem might thus be posed as follows: *Can contemporary spirituality offer fresh insight, energy and integrity to Christian ministry, both to how ministry is done and, more primarily, to how it is understood?* Other theological disciplines, such as ethics, systematic theology, missiology, practical theology, Church history and biblical exegesis, have traditionally shown how their unique discipline might impact on ministry. Little, however, is heard of contemporary spirituality's critique of 'Christian ministry' as commonly understood, or for that matter of how ministry resists some of 'spirituality's' insights, for good or ill. In a postmodern era, which calls for a different perspective and sensibility, the previously mentioned theological disciplines are, surely self-avowedly, without the tools to ascertain what can only be *assumed* in their fields. This assumption is that the prerequisite and continuum of spirituality has been duly 'taken care of.' Therefore, while these various theological disciplines are vital, one must not look to them for more than they can possibly deliver. In any case, can ministry be authenticated solely through theological disciplines that champion orthodoxy, orthopraxis or satisfactory empirical verification? What must one make, then, of Jesus' rejection of similar credentials, and his powerful implication that these things in themselves do not secure ministerial authenticity (Matt 7:21-23)? Thus, the *void* that waits to be filled through the engagement of spirituality with ministry also sets the matrix or domain of the research problem. How the engagement affects these two interlocutors, 'spirituality' and 'ministry,' will serve to fill this void. Still, an even finer point - related to Christian ministry - must be reiterated at this stage. It is integral to the research problem.

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<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, very little has been done to set out the features, intuitions and motif of contemporary spirituality, which is part of the problem that needs to be addressed here. People have no 'handle' on the *substance* of contemporary spirituality, especially as it is often presented so disparately. Just as the word 'spirituality' has come to thrive on variable definitions, so the substance of 'spirituality' is (not surprisingly) often equally vague, especially in relation to ministry.

Authentic ministry will be determined also in large part by the outlook and disposition of the *minister*. Such is the nature of spirituality that its primary locus is persons. Thus spirituality engages primarily the minister as the key to the authenticity of ministry. In this sense, spirituality, at least in part, also gets *behind* empirically investigable ministry itself, as a kind of *meta*-discipline, validating or invalidating it. Given the frenetic and competitive tenor of much ministry, further aggravated by a seductive societal consumerism, this point should not sound as ethereal or nondescript as it might have sounded to modernism. One's own interiority, sense of purpose and vocation, must surely colour everything one does, or determine whether it should be done at all. Such evaluation of ministry might be pleasing to latter-day Donatists. But it enjoys greater insight than the more moralistic Donatists of old, - and of recent 'moderns' - as it draws on the growing insights of psychology and self-understanding.<sup>3</sup> In summation then, spirituality's engagement with ministry is understood here as affecting and including both the *actions of ministry*, but also crucially and pre-determinatively *the minister* her/himself.

## 1.2 AIM OF THE RESEARCH

*The aim of the research is to elucidate those outstanding features and intuitions of contemporary Christian spirituality that might best contribute to a perspective and praxis for ministry that can realise authenticity.* This elucidation will need to bring some order, summation and insight to a mass of contemporary Christian literature. The outstanding features of spirituality, and their subsidiary features, will need to be delineated in the research. Simultaneously, research and reflection will be utilised with a view to translating insights and intuitions of spirituality into a philosophy and authentic stimulus for ministry.

The thesis posits, or at least implicitly assumes, a theory that contemporary Christian spirituality can be of enormous *benefit* to Christian ministry. This theoretical stance by no means precludes the possibility of *detrimental* influences on ministry. Such negative influence, though, was not the inspiration of the research. Neither is it the primary ministerial perspective with which the literature has been researched and reflectively read. The aim of the research is to show how spirituality has much to offer as a *positive* critique of ministry, bringing to it a greater authenticity

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<sup>3</sup> Donatism's argument viewed in retrospect is not without some merit, especially if one bears in mind the psychologically subliminal (and contagious) nature of defection. Donatism, *inter alia*, disputed 'the validity (maintained by the Catholics) of sacraments celebrated even by unworthy ministers' (Richardson 1969:98). More precisely, the initial objection had to do with the bishop of Carthage, whose consecration was an alleged irregularity (Kelly 1968:410).

and spiritual motivation. For this informed distillation to be possible, a precondition needs to be articulated.

A necessary precondition for scientific research of spirituality is to let contemporary spirituality speak for itself. This precondition means that premature interference by a ministerial pragmatism, so that spirituality serves merely as a conduit for utilitarian ministerial interests, must be avoided at all costs. Mindless manipulation and crystallisation of ‘spirituality’ merely for the purpose of ministerial *practices*, is not my interest. (On the contrary, I am looking at something akin to a *spiritual philosophy* of ministry.) Neither is it scientifically defensible. Part of the aim here is that ministry, academically or popularly understood, should not be permitted to ‘manage’ spirituality. The latter must have opportunity to declare its own (sometimes uncomfortable) uniqueness, and therein with respect to Christian ministry.

### **1.3 AREA OF RESEARCH**

#### **1.3.1 Spirituality Defined**

‘Spirituality’ is often used in the broadest and most nebulous terms. There is little sense of the increasingly freighted gravity it holds in reflective (Christian) academies. In spoken language, but probably less so in literature, its usage is indiscriminately casual and careless – and ‘up-for-grabs.’ It is variously understood as a synonym for ‘faith,’ ‘theology,’ ‘meditation,’ ‘healthy philosophical outlook,’ or any number of other supposedly life-enhancing dispositions, or even superstitions. For the record, ‘spirituality’ is just as plausibly malignant, though it seldom carries this connotation. To distinguish ‘spirituality’ from the broader, unqualified, whimsical usage constitutes an initial demarcation of my research. Indeed, something more concise and distinctive is implied in the word’s etymological evolution and its contemporary significance in the context of our times. A brief elaboration is thus necessary.

I wish to utilise the more reflective, academic coinage of this word, using ‘spirituality’ with deliberation and care. This much needs to be understood by ‘contemporary spirituality’ in the title. In other words, I do not use ‘spirituality’ as a variable synonym for ‘faith,’ ‘theology’ or ‘prayer life,’ but recognise that it has come to have a nuanced world of meaning. Identifying this meaning or wrestling therewith, must be understood as implicit in the thesis. (Of course, suggesting a more helpful and concise understanding of ‘spirituality’ is not the *only* task of the thesis, nor always explicitly in the foreground.) A host of academic writers, who cannot possibly be enumerated here, attempt some demarcation in understanding ‘spirituality.’ By no means least

is the pioneering, insightful and provocative work of Schneiders (1986, 1989, 1993). While the genius of ‘spirituality’ resides excitingly in its undefined nature as an unencumbered word, considerable academic interest in its definition provides subject matter for my proposed demarcation.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, a further demarcation must narrow the focus even more.

I intensify the focus to *Christian* spirituality. For example, to focus on the vast world of *global* spirituality in its all-encompassing sense is obviously out of the question. That such a global field is a plausible consideration is amply borne out by the (now) encyclopaedic universality of the subject (Cousins 1985). Further, studying the global field *per se* assumes that ‘spirituality’ is compositely generic and uniform. No account is taken of the field’s extraordinary contextual diversity. On the other hand, a *neat distinction* between Christian spirituality and spirituality in general might be more semantic than real. My thesis will, at least in part, reflect the artificiality of this assumption. There is something too slick, naïve, and even smug about isolating *Christian* spirituality, according it an immunised realm far-removed from its worldly *sitz im leben*. It is still but a child of its times, notwithstanding its own sometimes-idealistic Christian exponents. It is not untouched by spirituality more widely understood. Indeed, a major contribution of ‘spirituality in general’ to *Christian* spirituality is the way it assists Christian spirituality in its own self-understanding. To take one outstanding example: If one considers postmodernism as a spirituality of sorts, or generative thereof, then surely it has *helped* Christian spirituality to ‘reinvent itself,’ crassly put. Furthermore, Christian spirituality has internal problems of its own, as it also accommodates a non-generic Christian familial diversity within itself. This intra-diversity makes the delineation of a *Christian* spirituality sound altogether too ambitious and presumptuous. One thus needs to bear in mind the danger of simplistic categorisation. But these objections duly noted, *Christian* spirituality has enough internal cohesion and integrity to bear sustained scrutiny. Moreover, its place in the context of spirituality in general would seem to call for elucidation of its supposed distinctiveness. But clearer focus shall be brought to demarcation of ‘spirituality’ when I come to ‘methodology,’ notwithstanding spirituality’s relevance to the present heading.

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<sup>4</sup> ‘A contributing factor in the enormous expansion of the word outside of the study of spirituality is probably that “spirituality” is an unencumbered word. “Spirituality” stands for something undefined, like “religiosity,” “the experience of faith,” and “religious experiences,” terms which keep open an area that has not yet been occupied by institutional frameworks’ (Waaijman 2002:364).

### 1.3.2 Ministry: Lay or Ordained

Do I refer, in this thesis, to lay or ordained ministry? Is it specifically a vocational ministry to word and sacrament, or might I be referring also to lay Christian ministry? *Some* demarcation and narrowing of the research field takes place here. I am uncomfortable treating *ministry* in an entirely exclusivist and clericalised way. Certainly, ministry pertains to ordained *and* lay ministry. That is how *ministry* is treated, for example, in the discipline of Practical Theology. This is as opposed to a classical pastoral theology, which deals one by one with each aspect of an *ordained* minister's work (Hiltner 1958). But *ministry*, of whatever Christian description, is not the exclusive province of those ordained to ministry. While bearing the latter sentences in mind, however, I would like to subscribe to the words of a Catholic priest and prolific writer in ministry and spirituality. In the introduction to a book on creative Christian ministry, he says that every Christian is a minister, but that the ordained ministry can be considered as a *focus* because this ministry gives the most visible shape to the different forms of Christian service. Thus, what is true for ministers and priests in the formal sense is also true for every man and woman who wants to live their life in the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Nouwen 1978:xxiv).<sup>5</sup> Another writer says: 'Nothing a pastor does is different in kind from what all Christians do, but sometimes it is more focused, more visible' (Peterson 1989:42). Moreover, the priest or minister has tended to be (excessively and unrealistically?) entrusted with a multiplicity of functions and activities, which make the ordained person a more obviously representative figure for Christians in general. For instance, it is noted that 'the priesthood has adopted and adapted to itself some of the most prominent New Testament roles and, consequently, enfolded *a tremendous idealistic wealth* ... In short, the priesthood aspires to what was regarded as a model of Christian behaviour by various stages of New Testament thought [*italics mine*]' (Brown 1970:44).

Notwithstanding some introductory deference to *lay* ministry, however, this thesis is primarily focusing on *ordained* full-time ministry to word and sacrament. I understand this ministry to comprise the traditional ordained roles of liturgical service, didache, homiletics, pastoral care, church administration and leader of a congregation and its sub-groupings. Indeed, 'there is always the danger that by diversifying ministry throughout the whole membership of the church we end up devaluing the gift God has given in ordination' (Rowe 1992:40). Further, 'within Methodism's *Deed of Union* it is stated: "Christ's Ministers in the Church are Stewards in the household of

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<sup>5</sup> For the scrupulous practical theologian there might be some vestige of over-clericalisation here. Nevertheless, the minister or priest is usually the most visible and traditionally representative custodian of the faith, expressing Christian actions conspicuously, if not always authentically.

God and Shepherds of His flock. *Some are called and ordained to this sole occupation and have a principal and directing part in these great duties ... [italics mine]*” (ibid:40). One does not need, then, to be inordinately apologetic in giving a primary focus (even in enlightened, practical theological parlance) to *full-time ordained* ministry.

### **1.3.3 Spirituality as Regulator**

By way of further demarcation I establish now that the study of Christian spirituality shall enjoy prior attention, research and description to that of Christian ministry. The thesis is primarily a study in the field of contemporary spirituality, which is treated as the *regulating*, organising and deciphering principle with respect to ministry, and not the other way around. Far less justice will be done here to ‘ministry’ as, say, to a subject of research in practical theology. Thus ‘ministry,’ in this thesis might well be spoken of too loosely from the perspective of the practical theologian. I concede to practical theology the difficulties of describing (ordained) ministry in a way that is universally acknowledged or always academically satisfying.<sup>6</sup> But my references to ministry are more tangential, arbitrary and predicative, as the determinative initiative has been given to ‘spirituality,’ which is the focus of the thesis. No doubt practical theology will raise more finely tuned questions of its own with regard to ‘ministry,’ as is appropriate to its own unique theory and perspective.

## **1.4 METHODOLOGY**

### **1.4.1 Literature Research**

This thesis falls within the framework and inter-disciplinary perspective of literary science. It works with an extensive range of contemporary reflective literature on Christian spirituality. This literature is often itself a hermeneutical reflection on older classical and historical deliberations. The thesis thus, as literary examination, assumes that ‘spirituality is accessible in language forms which bear the imprint of the inner reality of the spiritual process’ (Waaajman 2002:413).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> I have tried to draw on sound sources for the understanding of ministry, together with my own twenty-one years’ experience as an ordained Methodist minister, six of these in the superintendency of a circuit of Methodist churches.

<sup>7</sup> Scarcely enough can be said of Waaajman’s (2002) extraordinary scholarly contribution to the academic field of Christian spirituality, and even spirituality more widely defined. His comprehensive and detailed perspective is immensely stimulating and encouraging for a subject still in its academic infancy. He has found ‘a place for everything, and everything in its place,’ and his field of research is enormous. Much of what I write in this section leans heavily on his encyclopaedic work.

Through a literary and reflective investigation of these contemporary texts, I seek to arrive at the outstanding features, intuitions and experiences of contemporary Christian thought in spirituality. As I shall explain, this investigation requires the employment of a certain amount of intuition and discernment, given the demands of the subject. For mystical, or spiritual, discourse is often a reaction to language by means of language, a battle with words, where, ironically, the writers attempt both to conquer language and free themselves from it. Spirituality is a struggle between speech and the inexpressible (ibid:412-413). Literary research in this area is therefore *a certain kind* of literary science. It is distinct from what is often commonly understood by literary appreciation, editing or interpretation. What is intended in this thesis is not the description of the character of texts, or portions thereof. Rather, I aim at the extrapolation and highlighting of the thinking, intuitions and insights of contemporary Christian spirituality in the experiential or academic sense. Indeed, the thesis is at once research, discernment, deliberation and organisation. It is therefore a literature study organised around a theme or key construct, as indicated in the thesis title. My aim is not to test a theory or to review theories, but rather to find conceptual classifications for the key features in the literature, as prevalent in exploratory studies (Mouton 2001:93). Thus my literary research is by *themes* and *constructs*, all beholden to the over-all thesis title.

## **1.4.2 Theoretical Framework**

### **1.4.2.1 Theological**

The theoretical framework of the thesis is largely theological, applying a Christian theological perspective to the substance of contemporary literary spirituality. To be sure, the word ‘theological’ is nebulous and elusive. Some elaboration is required. First, by ‘theological’ is meant a perspective forged in the more rational, doctrinal discipline of systematic theology. Second, the practical theological understanding of ‘praxis’ as a kind of reflective action - a sort of theory in itself - rather than mere ‘practices’ has been a helpful concept to me in bridging the theory-practice gap of ‘spirituality’ and ‘ministry,’ if one might justifiably speak in such bi-polar terms. Nevertheless, the application of a *blend* of systematic-practical theological insight as a possible way of ‘doing theology’ seems most appropriate to the experiential study material and the title of this thesis. Third, the discipline of Christian spirituality, contemporarily understood, also contributes its own *theological-theoretical* perspective to the study in question. It is a theological perspective that I have utilised, to some extent. The perspective is still controversial and, for some, scientifically questionable from a university point of view. But it is in many ways

of the very essence of spirituality itself. This perspective might be referred to as ‘discernment’, or ‘diakrisis.’ It deserves a closer look.

#### **1.4.2.2 Discernment, Practical Wisdom**

While ‘diakrisis’ might seem to offer sanction for all kinds of subjective, unverifiable conclusions, in my view it is gaining recognition as a method appropriate and indigenous to spirituality in general and mysticism in particular. For the means and methods of theoretical analysis must surely always be contingent upon, and determined by, the nature of the subject matter under investigation, whatever the science. Waaijman (2002:484-515) makes for compelling and convincing reading in his sophisticated treatment of the traditional place of ‘diakrisis’ in the history and praxis of spiritual methodology. In terms of university-academic criteria, certainly in the field of the historical sciences, his presentation of this methodology of discernment is impressive. He refers to the extracanonical exhortation and metaphor handed down from the second century, namely that we be ‘approved moneychangers’ (ibid:485). Insight, in other words, is required in ascertaining whether the particular spirituality under scrutiny is a counterfeit *coinage*. I try to harness this particular aspect of the moneychanger metaphor insofar as I scan contemporary spirituality selectively, discerning where Christian spirituality now has insights to offer Christian ministry. The concept of discernment, however, may be further elaborated through an exploration of ‘practical wisdom.’

Helpfully, discernment, or ‘diakrisis’ has intelligible affinities with the Aristotelian concept of ‘practical wisdom’ (Waaijman 2002:523-534).<sup>8</sup> I seriously hope that I have enlisted practical wisdom, technically understood, in this thesis - especially as acquired over twenty-one years of reflective, practical ministry. But longevity is not the sole guarantor of practical wisdom. One requires a more descriptive definition that can be utilised as a methodological scrutiny of spirituality – a methodology that is most appropriate to the subject matter.<sup>9</sup> Practical wisdom, far from being a mere subjective indulgence, gains a methodological respectability, and critical posture when articulated by Waaijman (2002:528-529): ‘Practical wisdom is a hermeneutic praxis

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<sup>8</sup> Waaijman (2002:523-534), from my point of view, demonstrates a wonderfully sensitive, elaborated and variegated tool for foundational research in spirituality. He does this by drawing on the insights of Aristotle’s concept of ‘practical wisdom,’ and then sees it as a kind of philosophical counterpart to ‘discernment’ or ‘diakrisis.’ Evident here is this contemporary writer’s inter-disciplinary versatility and acumen, and the way he therein seems to further succeed in legitimising spirituality as worthy of serious academic contention.

<sup>9</sup> The methodology of practical wisdom is appropriate because it meets the spiritual-practical nature of the thesis. Furthermore, this method follows the object. Such twofold unity of method and object is constitutive for all truth finding, determining also the nature and degree of precision (Waaijman 2002:521).

in which perception and insight work together to discern, in a liberating way, the potential for happiness in the irreducibly concrete situation.’ This understanding and definition of ‘practical wisdom’ traces its precedents back to Aristotelian philosophy and an historical Church tradition that gives gravity, in my view, to the argument that ‘practical wisdom’ be acceptable as (bona fide) critical, methodological analysis within the academy. It is a methodology that sees practical wisdom as the determining ‘mean’ of the pastorally particular, on the one side, and those ‘universals’ of goodness, purpose, virtue and fulfilment (or happiness) on the other, all of which comprise the inner logic of praxis (Waaajman 2002:524). But now some attention needs to be given to the inter-disciplinary nature of the theoretical framework.

### **1.4.2.3 Inter-Disciplinary Approach**

The theoretical framework employs an *inter-disciplinary* approach in its methodology. This inter-disciplinary application may be understood in two ways: first, as drawing on the insights of *fundamentally different* academic fields, such as philosophy, science of religion, history, literary science, psychology and sociology, spirituality (in its own right) and the field of systematic theology. My interest in the latter discipline can virtually be presupposed throughout this thesis. It is probably dominant as the most influential cross-disciplinary norm and referential field, duly informed by the discipline of practical theology. In addition, I utilise a number of the other above-mentioned fields in seeking a clearer understanding of contemporary spirituality, though I admittedly have no consummate grasp of non-theological subjects. Still, more than a little interest is given to the field of psychology, particularly in the chapter on spiritual formation. The reason should be clear. Psychology has a vital pertinence to ministry’s prior concern with persons, pastoral care, and both personal and communal growth. The influence of sociological works and insights, however, should also be apparent, especially as necessitated by the crucial influence of postmodernism on contemporary spirituality. Second, the inter-disciplinary phenomenon might also be understood as *internal* to contemporary spirituality itself.

The inter-disciplinary framework also necessarily involves what might be called the ‘inside’ or internal perspective of the *intra* disciplinary (Waaajman 2002:367). Here one refers to different viewpoints from which the phenomenon of spirituality has been perceived. They may be enumerated as follows: treatises on perfection, mystical theologies, ascetic and spiritual theologies, and the perspective of experience (ibid:367). As a non-Catholic, and thus not really schooled in the previously mentioned categories, I have needed to become increasingly aware of these distinctions. This is as opposed to seeing Christian spirituality as an untouched, unpioneered

land of indiscriminate fields, which is more or less how I started out on the thesis. It has meant familiarising myself with the classic distinctions between ascetic and mystical theology, together with the belated realisation that these fields were accorded their appointed places in classic theological prolegomena. Moreover, emerging from the ascetic and mystical theologies has been the more organised and arguably prescriptive ‘spiritual theology,’ which also has its own history, and with which the academic needs to be acquainted. A perpetual though often implicit motif in this thesis is the relation of ‘spirituality’ to ‘spiritual theology,’ both academically understood. The clarification of their relationship, and some of the questions it raises (together with the contemporary plausibility of ‘spiritual theology’s’ continuing existence) seems to be intrinsic to understanding spirituality’s nature and subject matter. In its own way, the relationship, which might seem exclusively ‘academic,’ has interesting implications for contemporary authentic Christian ministry. Just as decisive in terms of spirituality’s academic status and over-all nature is its relation to mystical theology, ascetic theology and various ‘devotional writings,’ so termed. As this thesis engages these intra-disciplinary perspectives, sometimes not as self-consciously as perhaps warranted, it therein demonstrates a growing awareness of, and concern for, contemporary spirituality’s academic stature. This intra-disciplinary consciousness creates a context that reflects a prior sensitivity towards the freightedness of the word ‘spirituality,’ a primarily academic issue.

### **1.4.3 Spirituality as Academic Discipline**

‘Discipline’ and ‘experience’ as related to spirituality are two related and inter-penetrative words in my view, a *perichoresis* phenomenon. Thus I am not convinced that I can secure an entirely individuated grasp on them. Still, *integral to an outline of methodology is the question of whether one is speaking, in this thesis, of spirituality as academic discipline or lived experience.* Notwithstanding their distinction, I sometimes use ‘spirituality’ to refer to both simultaneously, as this *is* possible on occasion. Moreover, speaking of ‘lived experience’ and ‘academic discipline’ as two well-circumscribed, discrete entities is problematic. That is, I suspect that ‘spirituality’ identified as ‘lived experience’ pure and simple, unreflected upon or undocumented, is less common than ordinarily supposed. For instance, something more is inferred by the word ‘praxis’ than merely ‘practices.’<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Thus when Waaijman (2002:312) enumerates various words forged by lived spirituality, whether scriptural words or Hellenistic, is he not already engaging in an organised, deliberative and selective approach to lived spirituality that, in my view, is patently academic and systematic?

Even ‘lived experience,’ for the most part, comes with some systematised organisation and compilation, usually with a wider, subliminal (sometimes-unconscious) theory. On the other hand, ‘academic discipline’ itself has ‘experience’ as its subject matter. Slick categorisations are therefore best avoided. My methodology, however, is strongly suggestive of a major interest in spirituality as *academic discipline*, or at least as a *self-consciously reflective, critical exercise*. In any case, surely the latter italicised phrase describes the substance of a *university discipline*. A number of features in this thesis, therefore, point to the prior interest in contemporary spirituality as academic discipline. I shall enumerate these now, especially as they have a bearing on the overall methodology.

#### **1.4.3.1 Appropriate Tools**

First, let it be clear that utilisation of ‘diakrisis’ and ‘practical wisdom’ is not in any way suggestive of a sub-academic methodology, as I have tried to show. They are both appropriate tools-methods that are historically substantiated and *essentially* consistent with the subject matter of spirituality. Thus the effort to harness these particular methodological facilities in this thesis is itself testimony to the taking of ‘spirituality’ in an academically serious way. While it cannot be said with any certainty how far these methods *are* employed in this thesis, if at all, or whether they are appropriate to *all* studies in spirituality, there is still an uncomfortable awareness that a methodological vacuum ‘exists’ if ‘spirituality’ is simply to be equated in kind with other (theological) disciplines. Certainly, I would have found myself at times in uncharted territory if ‘diakrisis’ and ‘practical wisdom’ could not have been invoked as legitimate methodological tools.

#### **1.4.3.2 The Logic of the Thesis**

Second, the *logic* of this thesis is expressly indicative of, and operative within, a concern for spirituality as academic discipline. The thesis employs an academic logic of ‘descriptive findings’ relating to interesting and significant patterns in existing theoretical data, after the manner suggested by a major resource guide for master’s and doctoral work (Mouton 2001:113). More particularly and centrally, and emerging from ‘descriptive findings’, is the logic of ‘interpretive findings’. Here I advance an interpretation of extensive existing literature, typical of hermeneutic, historical or text-based studies, being one of the perspectival approaches, I believe, open to academic spirituality (ibid:113). The mode of logic, more clearly defined, is that of deductive reasoning through conceptual explication – that is to say, identifying, clarifying and exploring concepts, explicit or implicit, in contemporary literature. Such deductive reasoning is not to say,

however, that other forms of reasoning are entirely excluded. Some real ‘inductive and informed generalisation’ was invoked in applying inferences from my specific observations of pastoral Christian ministry and contemporary deliberations thereon by, for example, the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. Furthermore, some ‘retroductive reasoning’ must be assumed as well. This kind of reasoning ‘involves using inferences from observations or data in order to construct or “infer” an explanation of such observations. It is also referred to as “inference to the best explanation”’ (Mouton 2001:117-118). Again, this latter form of reasoning relates more particularly to my assessment of contemporary Christian ministry through fulltime engagement therein than it does to my treatment of contemporary Christian literature.<sup>11</sup> In keeping with the blueprint of discernment and practical wisdom already endorsed in this introductory chapter is the approach employed herein of systematic research, which reflects on the thematics of spirituality, though not in the predetermined way of a spiritual theology (Waaajman 2002:516). Furthermore, the approach is more dialogical and discursive than phenomenological, which is another option for spirituality (ibid:516). But there is another factor pointing to an interest, in this thesis, in spirituality’s aspirations for academic status. It has to do with a methodological design for spirituality.

#### **1.4.3.3 Systematic Research in Overall Context**

Third, adding to the fundamental veracity of this thesis as oriented towards the *discipline* of spirituality is its adherence, to a lesser or greater degree, to an overall methodological design and research procedure for spirituality *as* academic discipline. While aspects of this design have already been touched on in a somewhat arbitrary way in this introduction, a selective and tidier map of the framework is alluded to here, after Waaajman’s (2002:516) comprehensive and insightful design.

The design begins with establishing the appropriate epistemology for spirituality. Thus, consistent with an Aristotelian precedent, one needs to choose between two ways of knowing or finding truth. In spirituality, but ‘unlike *scientific knowledge* [italics mine], the highest principle is not discovered by abstraction from concrete things; rather, concrete experience is transformed in the direction of the end (the good, virtue, happiness) that is the transformative principle of this

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<sup>11</sup> One might wish to express some concern about a perceived irreconcilability between these three forms of reasoning (that is, deductive, inductive and retroductive) and the ‘practical wisdom’ and ‘diakrisis’ mentioned earlier. They do not seem to me to be mutually exclusive, however, since spirituality has a reasoning peculiar to itself. Furthermore, the present thesis must necessarily accommodate a more philosophical and theological reasoning as well.

transformation (Waaijman 2002:520-521). *Spiritual insight*, in spirituality's case, ascertains the formative possibilities of the principles under scrutiny. Next, following on this preparatory epistemological consideration, a scientific approach then needs to be defined (ibid:516). As indicated earlier, the scientific approach adopted herein follows the path of deductive theological thought rather than an exercise in phenomenology. Finally, the manner of methodological research as such can be more pointedly discussed.

The said methodological design exhaustively accommodates the following avenues or forms of research: form descriptive, hermeneutic, systematic or mystagogic. To some extent, the present thesis utilises a number of these main avenues, yet admittedly without too much self-awareness thereof, or conspicuously punctuated methodology. Hermeneutic research is conducted, but only in a secondary sense, by insightfully interpreting those contemporary writers who deal more directly with the original materials and the subsequent traditional interpretations thereof. Mystagogic research is conducted in a qualified way insofar as the spiritual journey is focused upon and analysed, to some real extent, in relation to developmental psychology and how the latter might throw fresh light on spiritual formation. Spiritual formation, however, is seen to possess its own native insight, and epistemology – one that is furthermore essentially self-contained and self-subsistent. Some of the literature *re-presented* by contemporary writers was originally presented in journal or semi-autobiographical form and thus seems to fall under the purview of mystagogic research. Less utilised, however, is the form-descriptive research avenue, which seems primarily phenomenological in procedure. The tool that is thus of priority, given the present schema, is that of *systematic research*, which I now elaborate.

While it is necessary to be cautious in claiming my own research procedure as consistent with Waaijman's (2002:774-868), especially as he goes right back to the inceptual and rudimentary stages of a systematic genre, I hope that without too much presumption, my research may be seen to fall reasonably within his domain of *systematic research*. The factors that qualify the thesis as systematic research, therefore, conform to Waaijman's (2002:774) general schema pertaining thereto. There is, for example, the presupposition that the whole cluster of characteristics discussed in the thesis have materialised as a consequence of what he terms, 'spiritual conference.' The spirituality under review, in other words, has been through the forge and consolidation of Christian community and its intra-communal dialogue and reflection. Defining the focus still more, the relevant Christian communities have explored in depth and, to some

measure at least, realised deeper insight into the truth through their dynamic collation of the experiences.<sup>12</sup>

Systematic research locates its object of interest in a number of areas. One is the ‘scientific forum,’ another is the ‘spiritual categories,’ a third is ‘argumentation,’ and the fourth the ‘self-disclosure of truth’ (Waaajman 2002:774). Within the ‘scientific forum,’ after the pattern just designated, this thesis gives attention to scholars, both past and contemporary, and to ‘working and study groups,’ which make collective and informed insights and research results available. Also within this forum are the abstract journals, book discussions and citation indexes utilised by this thesis, therein identifying the work as a systematic research. ‘Spiritual categories’ include reference works, journals and the invaluable minefield of good bibliographies, which often open up new vistas of perspective. ‘Argumentation’ is said to utilise inspiration, experience, imagination and reasoning, all of which are employed in varying degrees in the present thesis. Further elaborated, ‘inspiration is what animates and orientates human thought. Experience is the concrete reality on which we humans reflect. Imagination attempts to design the horizon within which that reality manifests itself. Reasoning consists ... in conceiving graphic examples and the proper use of categories’ (Waaajman 2002:843-844). Now, if these faculties comprise a plausible infrastructure for philosophic argumentation, then, for the most part, this thesis fits such research, namely systematic.

## **1.5 DELINEATION OF CHAPTERS**

The introduction serves as chapter one. It attempts a clear formulation of the research problem and follows this formulation by indicating the aim of the research. There are naturally demarcations to the said area of research and these are accordingly delineated above. The methodology is shown to fall within the framework and delineation of literature research. The theoretical framework is primarily theological, but also beholden to practical discernment and, in some real measure, the utilisation of a cross-disciplinary approach. An epistemology appropriate to spirituality is recognised as important. The theoretical approach is not phenomenological, notwithstanding the latter’s suitability to the field of spirituality. The mode of reasoning is largely deductive, through conceptual explication of a wide range of literary works.

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<sup>12</sup> Insofar as the thesis has enlisted the insights and interests of Methodist spirituality, at least to some degree, one needs to indicate the Methodist counterpart to ‘spiritual conference.’ At first it may be the Methodist Annual Conference that comes to mind, where all matters of the said church are discussed, and where proposals may be finally sanctioned – *and* which is significantly referred to as a *Conference*. More insightfully, however, the primitive Methodist class meetings, and more fundamentally Wesley’s own original formative ‘Holy Club,’ were particularly instrumental in fashioning Methodist spirituality.

The literature review constitutes the second chapter. The analysed literature is not the only kind of its nature but is generally original and groundbreaking in its suggestive impact for an academic spirituality. Particularly prominent are the works of Schneiders (1986, 1989, 1993), Sheldrake (1992) and Waaijman (2002) – all in the field of the scientific methodological contribution to academic spirituality. These writers form the theoretical foundation and academic, reflective intelligibility of all that is to follow. For me, Peterson's (1992, 1993) works begin to spark the flame for an implementation of such academic respectability in the practical and theological world of actual pastoral ministry. Ascetical contributions for understanding contemporary spirituality are appropriated from the works of Foster (1978), Miles (1981) and Willard (1988). Leech's (1986) work on spirituality and pastoral care is insightful and dynamic. Griffin's (1988) essay is highly significant, admittedly among many other postmodern writers, for its insights into the pervasive influence of postmodern thinking on contemporary spirituality.

Chapter three reveals the universal and accommodative perspective of contemporary spirituality, and shows how this perspective resonates with authentic ministry and actuates a greater authentic credibility for ministerial work. Contemporary Christian spirituality utilises both the best in historical Christian mysticism and in global postmodernism to secure a universal embrace for ministry. Such a universal spirit, the chapter shows, also relates to the in-house, ecumenical universality within contemporary Christianity itself. Moreover, Christian spirituality's locality within the wider field of academic spirituality furthers its understanding of, and capacity for, universal relatedness and responsibility.

Chapter four looks at contemporary spirituality's concern to secure a spirituality that overcomes old dualisms, or the denigration of rooted 'embodiedness' and the material reality of our world. An incorporeal and dematerialised spirituality is ably addressed by spirituality's insights, and its reflective analysis of the best in Christian tradition. Old dualistic, pejorative connotations that cling to 'spirituality' find a welcome corrective in a spirituality that draws on 'feminist,' 'liberation' and 'creation' spiritualities, together with fresh insights into Christian asceticism. The human body, in particular, is here regarded as integral to spirituality, thereby authenticating the incarnational nature of ministry and the corporeal Christian faith that generates it.

The daunting task of looking at 'experience' is undertaken in chapter five. 'Experience' is a slippery and indeterminate word. Still, if contemporary Christian spirituality achieves anything, it *does* reinvest in *experience* of God as primary. The importance of religious experience and the

possibility of immediate encounter with God are reappraised in this chapter. The absolutising of rationality and dogmatic prescription is called to account by that Christian experience without which there could be no Church or Scripture. The second part of the chapter offers an array of various Christian spiritualities or ‘lifestyle experiences,’ recognising, however, that no one emphasis is complete in itself.

The sixth chapter suggests that the newly conceived ‘spirituality’ gives to ministry a contemplative depth and insight that incisively challenges popular ministerial anomalies. While contemplation is traditionally seen (only) as a way of prayer, the chapter advocates that contemplation becomes a way of *being* a minister - of evaluating one’s priorities, exercising pastoral and devotional attention, and becoming more aware of what *God* is doing. Contemplative pastoral work will constitute a new way of doing ministry and a simultaneous critique of how ministry is contemporarily understood.

The final chapter deals with Christian formation and the numerous possibilities that spirituality’s variegated approach offers to Christian growth. Prominent in this present offering is spirituality’s redeployment of Christian metaphor and imagery. This utilisation of imagery often leads, in turn, to derivative spiritual maps of growth, and identification of the various ‘moments’ in Christian illumination and transformation. Inter-disciplinary engagement with psychology helps to broaden the understanding of spiritual maturation.

## **1.6 SUMMATION**

It seems pretentious and scarcely realisable to claim Waaijman’s (2002) systematic methodology as yardstick, guideline and organising principle for the chapters that follow. Furthermore, the various methodological approaches enumerated herein are arbitrarily employed in the thesis – that is, the analytic and intuitive perspectives are not applied with the detailed conspicuous precision of Waaijman (2002). But where I have not self-evidently located myself within his admirable design I have, notwithstanding, aspired to the spirit thereof. It is vital to identify and engage as far as possible with the best practical and philosophical schema available. Such schema, I venture, is what this Dutch contemporary scholar offers. It should be clear though (given the nature of theology and contemporary spirituality, and their relation to Christian ministry), that this thesis entertains a peculiar and dynamic ‘mix’ of methodological analyses, yet all in some way appropriate to the subject matter.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

The subject of contemporary Christian spirituality already has an appreciable literary library to draw on. Even literature that does not deal *conspicuously* with the academic problem and definition of spirituality can often reasonably fall within the purview of analysis. A case in point is contemporary hermeneutic of classic writings - which, incidentally, also characterises contemporary literary approaches in spirituality. Thus the shelves of serious theologising in spirituality are expanding with a burgeoning and excited interest - quite apart, that is, from the popular ego-directed, consumer-market literature on many bookshelves. More and more, people are writing seriously, systematically and in an inter-disciplinary way about spirituality. Serious theological and philosophical works begin with a definition of 'spirituality' as requisite for what is to follow. Writers are clearly intrigued by the possibilities that 'spirituality' brings to theology, lived life, and the contemporary intellectual milieu. My thesis is motivated and informed by key literary works – monographs, compendiums, academic essays and other reflective literature. A fair cross-section hereof is now reviewed for the purposes of discerning the contribution that this body of literature makes to the background of my research area. For the most part, I follow a thematic arrangement rather than one that is strictly chronological.

#### **2.2 SPIRITUALITY FOR MINISTRY: TWO FOUNDATIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS**

Peterson's (1993) book, *The Contemplative Pastor*, demonstrates many of the classic insights gleaned afresh by contemporary spirituality, especially as touching on a credible, satisfying and authentic ministry. The author reveals an insightful grasp of Christian spirituality, yet without systematising his work or seeking to create a textbook on the subject. One senses that creativity, imagination and poetry are more akin to spirituality for him than the too-often prosaic and discursive intellect that seemingly kills the spirit it seeks to serve. Particularly commendable in this writer is the way he puts to work these very instincts of creativity, imagination, prayer and patience in the writing of the book. He moves with the insights and intuitions of spiritual life rather than employing those philosophical and theological tools that might be essentially alien to it. It is a refreshing book of openness and receptivity, in the tradition of the contemplative spirit. The value lies very much precisely here, in communicating to the pastoral practitioner and reflective academic that one does not engage in spirituality through theoretically detaching oneself from it. Spirituality would seem to be repelled and extinguished through the use of

inappropriate operational methodology, or a supposed distanced ‘objectivity.’ Again, while the author does not employ such vocabulary, a contemplative sense is created through the manner and style of the book’s presentation. He does not define spirituality, nor reflect a concern for its academic future and credentials. Rather, he ‘takes in’ the substance of the subject, and is clearly revived by it, breathing its native air. Still, the book is informed by a professional, theological and biblically exegetical mind. Peterson (1993) has read and evaluated the classical spiritual writers and related them to systematic theology and his own biblical scholarship. He is well schooled and richly informed, holding a professorship in spiritual theology. It would thus be a gross misrepresentation of his book to suggest that Peterson (1993) offers us little more than poetic musings and idealistic pastoral visions. Having made these generalised observations, a spare outline of the book may now be in order.

As the title suggests, the contemplative instinct runs throughout the book. Peterson (1993:15-52) sets the tone by trying to rescue the word ‘pastor’ from some of its contemporary anomalous understandings. There was a day when ‘pastor’ could stand on its own as a noun, but now it needs some contemplative adjectives to rescue it from further corruption. Peterson (1993) leads the charge to salvage this bastardised word. Having set the fundamental ground principles through a redefinition of ‘pastor’, the writer then has the foundation for looking at the pastor’s work ‘between Sundays’ (ibid:53-154). The primacy of the forgotten art of ‘curing souls’ over merely ‘running a church’ is championed. The ‘mechanics’ of both these necessities, curing souls and administering a church, are helpfully contrasted. But ‘cure of souls’ needs to be reinstated as the uncontested priority. Next, the writer speaks of the kataphatic way of prayer, where creation is the legitimate theatre of God’s glory. The chapter is creatively entitled, *praying with eyes open*. Another chapter encourages the discovery of one’s ‘first language’ of infancy, communion and relationship, which is essentially the primordial prayer language. This language is not informational and motivational. Rather, the latter style constitutes the second and third ‘language,’ respectively (ibid:88-94). A more participatory and less one-sided understanding of ‘freedom of the will’ is illustrated by the author’s own life experiences, and the sinfulness peculiar to contemporary society is insightfully described in a chapter entitled, *unwell in a new way* (ibid:117-128). Ordinary (non-theological) ‘small talk’ with parishioners is also seen as amenable to the contemplative style of ministry. Chapters beginning with a poem by the author set the imaginative and receptive feel of the book, as does a closing chapter of the writer’s poems, *the word made fresh*.

Peterson (1993) raises the tantalising prospect, scarcely realised in his book, of treating ‘spirituality’ in a more reflective and systematising way. From my perspective, the writer opens the door to the possibility of ‘doing’ an academic, theoretical spirituality. While such a possibility is scarcely new for the Catholic tradition, it comes as an exciting discovery to those who never entertained this possibility.<sup>1</sup> Of course, this Presbyterian writer never *intends* a more definitional, academic work. Much of it sounds like rich, well-researched homily, albeit for ministers. But his book contains a higher level of reflection and academic sophistication than is customarily given to the ‘devotional life,’ and to other (inadequate) synonyms for ‘spirituality.’ His works in general are definitive for many ministers schooled in non-Catholic traditions. Particularly pertinent is the way Peterson’s (1987, 1992a, 1992b 1993) spirituality is deftly and insightfully related to, and permeative of, pastoral work. In my opinion, few contemporary writers have brought spirituality and Christian ministry together as significantly and inspirationally.

Equally rewarding of reflection is another book by the same author, *Under the Unpredictable Plant: An exploration in vocational holiness* (Peterson 1992b). The book of *Jonah* is skilfully and insightfully explored insofar as it throws light on *vocational* holiness for ministers. A new and often unexplored dimension is here more conspicuously opened up for reflection and responsible critique. Fundamental to understanding the book is the appreciation of the distinction between the minister’s *personal* spirituality and that of ministerial *vocational* spirituality. A *vocational* spirituality is no less subject to the possibility of corruption, and perhaps more insidiously so. Moreover, personal spirituality does not guarantee vocational integrity. ‘I was a *pastor* vocationally; I was a *Christian* personally. I had always assumed that the two, “pastor” and “Christian”, were essentially the same thing and naturally congruent. Now I was finding that they were not’ (ibid:2). Here then the author opens up the virtually unexplored world of contemporary *vocational* spirituality – a world hitherto entirely unidentified, or at most, assumed as sanctified by the pastor’s spiritual credentials.<sup>2</sup> The author is to be congratulated for identifying (what he would certainly regard as) contemporary ministerial defection to a glamourised ‘Tarshish ministry’ as opposed to the vocational obedience of ministering in Nineveh. The book thus raises

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<sup>1</sup> Peterson’s (1993) book undoubtedly precipitated an exciting departure for me, as he appeared to assign greater academic respectability to spirituality, or ‘spiritual theology’ as he might call it. Too often spirituality, at least in Protestant circles, is left to take care of itself; scarcely earning the academic credibility accorded its heavier-weighted theological relatives. Because of what I now see as Peterson’s preparatory influence on my thinking, I have begun this review by looking at two of his key books.

<sup>2</sup> Is this too bold? Given the way that seminary ‘pastoral studies’ has leant on the infiltrative insights of business management and corporational growth, not to mention the occasional dubious practice of viewing the congregation as a political electorate, one might say that there has been no theory of vocational spirituality whatsoever.

the question of how a contemporary spirituality might address vocational spirituality for ministers. Further still, the book is *itself* an example of contemporary spirituality's capacity to inject authenticity into the ministerial vocation. It is thus of almost unique pertinence to my thesis.

The way back to an authentic, satisfying and credible vocational spirituality is, for the author, the way of contemplation (Peterson 1992b:112). Only the distinctiveness of a contemplative-style of ministry can rescue the Jonah-minister from the corrupted vision of a Tarshish-style ministry, or for that matter the resentful sham of ministering 'obediently' in Nineveh. There is much that goes into making a specifically contemplative minister, and the writer ingeniously expounds the way as he works through the story of Jonah. In short, the reader is awakened to the kind of corrupted vocational spirituality that many ministers are subscribing to. According to the author these ministers are certainly in the majority. The way back to contemplative ministry, therefore, is through convicted recognition of one's stormy situation and then inevitably through the *askesis* of the whale's belly (Peterson 1992b:73-116). The 'belly experience' necessarily involves a sceptical look at the real limitations of one's own church institution, congregation – and oneself. Certainly the latter two, more likely than not, have tainted views of how ministry should be understood, and consequently a critical perspective on these fashioners of ministerial philosophy is imperative. For one, the institution will not - and perhaps cannot be expected to - take care of the minister's vocational spirituality. Second, the congregation's concept and expectation of ministers cannot be left to form the minister's understanding of vocational faithfulness and integrity. Such forfeiture of ministerial definition leads to an Aaronic golden calf reductionism, under the veneer of religion. A third threat to sound vocational spirituality is the minister's own ego, not infrequently fed by the congregation's flattery. It will take the *askesis* of prayer, a rule of life and new contemplative perspectives to rescue vocational spirituality from mirror-imaging its ego-fuelled societal context. 'If we do not develop a contemplative life adequate to our vocation, the very work we do and our very best intentions, insidiously pride-fueled as they inevitably become, destroy us and all with whom and for whom we work' (ibid:114).

Vocational spirituality is authenticated, for this writer, by the minister's geographical rootedness; that is, long-term commitment to the specific locale of a parish and its people. Short tenures are not encouraged. Linked hereto, and providing the perfect foil, the pastor is also 'apocalyptic' in the sense of having a ministry evaluated and defined by apocalyptic perspectives. 'It is the *imagination* that must shift, the huge interior of our lives that determines the angle and scope of

our vocation' (Peterson 1992b:177). This constitutes a radical paradigm shift for vocational holiness or spirituality, essentially from programme director to spiritual director (ibid:177).

In many ways Peterson's (1992b) work is masterful. It is creative, experimental and widely informed, yet also not academic in the strict, ordered sense. It seems to call for, and inspire, an extensive look at contemporary spirituality in a more manageable and self-conscious form – perhaps a manageability that this writer views as destructive of the contemplative spirit. Therein he has a point, as the work itself (almost unconsciously) exhibits how the scholar in spirituality requires a spiritual, contemplative 'feel' for the subject. Yet the book is still only an aesthetic 'riot' of diverse insights, tantalising the mind to ask further questions through the reader's 'blessed rage for order'. Still, there is more than a passing feeling, for the attentive reader, that Peterson's (1992b) mind is more ordered and academic in spiritual theology/spirituality than we meet in the book – taking nothing from the over-all quality of his work in its present form.

### **2.3 SOME DEFINITIVE ACADEMIC WORKS**

A definitive and pivotal work for academic spirituality is the groundbreaking article, *Spirituality in the Academy* (Schneiders 1989:676-697). In the writer's own words, 'the purpose of this article is to chart the progress of the discipline' [and] 'indicate the areas of continuing confusion, and to suggest directions for further clarification' (ibid:680). What *is* spirituality? How is the academic discipline of spirituality related to spirituality as 'lived experience'? What is 'spirituality' as opposed to historical 'spiritual (and/or) mystical theology'? Serious theological writers frequently quote this article - and one or two other articles by the same author - thereby evidencing the pioneering gravity of the work. A few key positions in the present debate are collated and summarised against the conceptional historical background of the terminology, in the course of which the essayist's own reasoned position is presented. A review and opinion of the article is, I think, almost inconsequential since many writers clearly gauge their thoughts and directions from and within the guidelines and parameters set by the article, irrespective of the position they ultimately take. Such universal response tells its own story. The article thus seems to draw the lines of distinction (or battle?), inviting urgent response. The essay brings intellectual satisfaction, in my view, to a subject that in Protestant circles has wanted for lack of theoretical foundation and academic plausibility - and in Catholic circles, I humbly venture, for catholicity, dynamism and revision in general. The article provides the intellectual environment and matrix for those thinking people who would be greatly helped by seeing spirituality in broad context. At the same time, an *approach* to the study is suggested for pursuing the subject in a more substantiated and

respected manner (ibid:695). The approach is tentative and incomplete to be sure, but presents exciting possibilities. The article as a whole, however, might prove a pivotal contemporary classic in academic spirituality.

Summarily dealt with, the article illustrates the growing interest in spirituality, and not least of all in the academy, where ‘major theologians of the conciliar era have made explicit the roots of their constructive work in their own faith experience ... ’ (Schneiders 1989:676-677). The word ‘spirituality’ is shown to have different shades of meaning. Nonetheless, the writer opts ‘for retaining the term “spirituality” for both the experience and the discipline ... ’ (ibid: 678). Indeed, she is clearly an exponent of ‘spirituality’ over and against the older ‘spiritual theology’. The article essentially champions this concept. Furthermore, spirituality may refer to both the ‘lived experience’ *and* the academic discipline that studies it. Of course preparatory qualification will sometimes be necessary. The reasons for opting roundly for ‘spirituality’ are partly historical. It is an attempt to avoid confusion by establishing a new point of departure. The latter is crucial for the writer inasmuch as it distinguishes spirituality from, say, ‘spiritual theology’ or a latter day, misconceived, ‘mystical theology’. Furthermore, the word ‘spirituality,’ it is suggested, has gained such universal acceptance that it ill behoves the wise scholar to swim against the stream. But supremely, ‘spirituality’ needs to avoid a *premature dogmatic resolution* of its academic inquiries. This easy resolution would be the effect of ‘spiritual theology’. Here we surely have the author’s key and characteristic argument. It appears to her that a subordination of spirituality to theology ‘would foreclose the very contributions which an autonomous discipline of spirituality is capable of making to the theological enterprise itself’ (Schneiders 1989:690). But more will be drawn from this vital cornerstone article in the course of the thesis. Suffice it to say that much is also made by contemporary writers of the author’s summary definition of spirituality, which satisfyingly reflects the principle features referred to in contemporary discussion and experience. Curiously, one hears far less (from her admirers) of her probably more significant distinction between ‘spiritual theology’ and ‘spirituality’ than one does of the summary definition.

Schneiders (1989:676-697) opens up new vistas for those who wish to see spirituality in academic context and at the same time give to the subject a credibility that does justice to the contemporary postmodern milieu. When read in tandem with Peterson (1987, 1992a, 1992b 1993), I see the emerging possibility of relating contemporary Christian spirituality to ministry, yet with far greater depth and perspicuity, mindful of the groundwork and underlying contemporary debate.

Too much discussion on spirituality is ‘piece-meal’ and ‘inspirational.’ That is good as far as it goes – in short, not very far.

A senior sibling of the above work is Schneiders’ (1986) *Theology and Spirituality: Strangers, rivals, or partners?* The latter work bears some similar features, but is a longer article with important extra material. In common with the previous article, and also with Sheldrake’s (1992) essay, which I shall presently review, this article ably traces the historical development of ‘spirituality’ to the present time. To give credit where it is due, Schneiders’ (1986) historical delineation is probably the *prototype*, at once inspirational and formative for Sheldrake (1991b) and not a few subsequent and largely repetitive treatments. Still, I shall restrict my attention largely to other aspects of her definitive essay.

After placing spirituality in historical context and indicating what is peculiar to contemporary ‘spirituality’ as opposed to its historical permutations, and to ‘spiritual theology’ in particular, the writer proceeds to realise her intent - to address the relation of theology and spirituality (Schneiders 1986:270-274). Two understandings of spirituality, both crucial, are seen in sequential relation to theology: first, spirituality as actually *lived*, in terms of *experience*, and second, spirituality as *academic discipline*. First, for spirituality as lived and experiential, the sobering point is made that ‘theology is a servant of Christian experience, not its master’ (ibid:271). It is spirituality that generates theology and not, as held nineteenth-century theology, the other way around (ibid:270). This observation, of religious experience as prior to theology, brings vitality, I believe, to an often over-cerebral, intellectually derivative ministry. Second, academic spirituality is presented as an independent discipline, theological only in the broadest sense, but in no way a handmaid to systematic theology’s directives. While intimately related to systematic and moral theology, spirituality is already generating dissertational topics that quite clearly are not at home in spiritual theology. It reflects different needs and a reconceived understanding of the dimensions and complexities of spiritual life (ibid:272). To elaborate on this new understanding one needs to refer to the earlier part of the essay, where the expanding notions of spirituality are identified. At one point, it simply referred to prayer, then an intensified faith life, broadening out to holistic and socially incorporative dimensions. It now reflects ecumenical, inter-religious and even non-religious orientations. For this it seems that spiritual theology, for instance, has no facility. The fact that something significant has been happening in the faculty, moving beyond the older spiritual theology is, I think, a telling argument against ‘spirituality’s’ detractors.

Two other significant observations are important. One is the writer's juxtaposition of the historically philosophic understanding of 'spirituality' with the religious understanding as a possible pointer to the relation between 'secularised' spirituality and a more particularised *Christian* understanding. Presumably, just as these two once lived happily side-by-side so might there be room for a broadly understood interiorly juxtapositioned 'spirituality' in the academy. The other observation, and related hereto, is the writer's all-important definition of spirituality - a definition that might academically accommodate both concepts of spirituality as highlighted above. It is insightfully observed that 'everyone talking about spirituality today is talking about self-transcendence which gives integrity and meaning to the whole of life and to life in its wholeness by situating and *orienting the person within the horizon of ultimacy in some ongoing and transforming way*' [italics mine] (ibid:266). The italicised words in particular seem to me to circumscribe the envisaged academic field. All told the essay still enjoys a landmark status.

As already pointed out, a number of writers interested in defining 'spirituality' (and *again* Schneiders does a good job here) necessarily begin by tracing the development of the word. In the interests of authorial diversity I now follow Sheldrake's (2000:21-42) excellent article, *What is Spirituality?* As with Schneiders' (1986) essay, it exemplifies an incisiveness and academic soundness that has earned its place among the more widely recognised contributions to this field of investigation. His essay, (because it is shorter and more focused on the historical?) finds itself in Collins's (2000) ecumenical compendium of outstanding articles on spirituality, particularly on account of its historical considerations. The article cautions at the outset that 'every generation has to redefine what precisely spirituality is meant to encompass' (Sheldrake 1991b:32). The word in its present form and significance has had a fairly short and variable history, its meaning changing according to historical context. 'Spirituality,' in other words, does not bring with it an historical constancy and stability of meaning, and something less naïve than tracing the *word* is required of an historical study. Thus the article proposes the kind of *denotation* one is looking for through history, given the inconstancy, versatility or youthfulness of 'spirituality.' This is itself an insightful and necessary innovation on the part of the author. He therefore coins an all-purpose definition, and decides 'that what the word "spirituality" seeks to express is the conscious human response to God that is both personal and ecclesial. In short, "life in the Spirit"' (ibid:25). That is, he recognises the anachronism of imposing 'spirituality' *carte blanche* on past history. A ('history-friendly') definition is a necessary precursor. With this definition we are able to turn our eyes to ecclesial history. And thus the author proceeds.

The general trends and perceptions of 'spirituality' during three major eras are noted. The first era embraces the initial Pauline understanding and neologism *together with its* (on the whole) stable transition into and through the patristic period, notwithstanding diverse readings of 'patristic time-span.' The Pauline vocabulary speaks of *pneuma* (spirit) and *pneumatikos* (spiritual). The Latin, *spiritualitas*, attempts to translate *pneuma* and *pneumatikos* and therein provides the Latin noun from whence comes 'spirituality.' The Apostle Paul understands the spiritual as 'what is under the influence of, or is a manifestation of, the Spirit of God' (Sheldrake 1992:23). The latter, and numerous other writers in fact, is at pains to point out that 'spiritual' is *not* contrasted with 'flesh' (Greek, *sarx*) literally understood as physical or material, but with that which does not fall under the Holy Spirit's influence. The writer then ably shows how the patristic period, whether terminating in the fifth century or some hundreds of years later, by and large retained the Pauline concept of 'spiritual'. Notably interesting for contemporary readers is the sustained synthesis of biblical exegesis, speculative reasoning and mystical contemplation in this theological dispensation (ibid:26). It contrasts sharply with enlightenment-and-modernistic-era fragmentation, the effects of which are still very much in evidence.

The High Middle Ages are seen to precipitate the beginnings of fragmentation, away from the monastic theology of the seventh to the twelfth century, broadly speaking. The fragmentation is accounted for by the availability of (the more precise and systematic) Greek philosophy, which was resurfacing in this time and became formative for scholastic theology. The spiritual life gradually separated from the rest of theology. 'So the twelfth century, and even more strikingly the thirteenth, witnessed the birth of a more "scientific" understanding of the theological enterprise' (ibid:29). Other factors contributed further to the fragmentation so evidenced, effecting the emergence of mystic *experiences*. This development contrasts with the older patristic mysticism of 'participation in the objective mystery of Christ ...' (ibid:30). If I understand correctly, the mystical became more extraordinary and 'elitist', dimming the older insight and perpetual experience that the whole Church was part of the mystery through baptism.

This historical critique takes us finally to the third era, whose characterisation was probably first evident in the wake of Vatican II. The Church had till then inherited a somewhat artificial distinction in the form of ascetical and mystical theology, which a later 'spiritual theology' could not completely dispel (Sheldrake 1992:34). The advent of 'spirituality', however, has done more to address the historical fragmentations than heretofore. The advantages of 'spirituality' over the more artificially customised spiritual theology are enumerated. They are: that spirituality is not

exclusive, subject to theological prescriptiveness, nor limited to a concern with interiority. It further takes into account the dynamic of human growth (ibid:37).

Tracing spirituality in this way is most illuminating, and indispensable for understanding contemporary spirituality in its exciting expansiveness and dynamism. The writer would seem to be a supporter of 'spirituality' over 'spiritual theology,' gauging from his description of what is happening in this field. Contemporary spirituality, at least as defined by Sheldrake (1992:25), might be imagined as dialectically co-inherent with doctrine and ethics, recovering a kind of patristic synthesis, though far more complex and better informed. Interestingly, it is advised that 'in most types of research (with the possible exception of historical studies) you should start with the most recent sources and work your way *backward* [italics mine]' (Mouton 2001:90). The latter suggests the possible exception of history. This thesis is surely a case in point. The historical study thus undertaken is a necessary *precursor*. It is also invigorating, and can only stimulate contemporary research.

Some writers prefer the term 'spiritual theology' to 'spirituality.' The choice of designations is significant. While Bernard (2000:229-241) does not suggest any alternative, the implications of his 'choice' become clear in his essay, titled *The Nature of Spiritual Theology*. He is generally regarded as an exponent of the designation in the title, although he makes no mention of another possibility. The essayist favours Aumann's (1987:22) definition of spiritual theology. Perhaps predating the more intentional adversaries of spiritual theology, the definition does seem to realise the fears of a less prescriptive 'spirituality.' Spiritual theology proceeds 'from the truths of divine revelation and the religious experiences of individual persons, defines the nature of the supernatural life, formulates directives for its growth and development, and explains the process by which souls advance from the beginning of the spiritual life to its full perfection.' The definition portrays a 'one-way-traffic' prescriptive movement from a chauvinistic systematic theology *down to* spiritual experience. The latter cannot consequently make its own subjective or theoretical contribution to the wider theological picture. 'As is said today, the indicative of revealed doctrine is the norm for the imperative of moral theology *and the basis of spiritual experience*' [italics mine] (Bernard 2000:231). To be sure, some justice is attempted for spiritual experience. The experience itself must be studied before a systematic elaboration can be attempted (Bernard 2000:235). Sociological influences on experience must be taken into account, together with inter-disciplinary activity with regard to personal growth and development. Yet, as the exponents of 'spirituality' fear, there is arguably a premature resolution of the study at the

expense of the more mystical, experiential ‘side.’ Spiritual theology apparently ‘calls for interdisciplinary studies that can integrate the data of Revelation (sic) and theology with the scientific data from psychology, sociology, philosophy and linguistics’ (Bernard 2000:235). Yet one still senses the imperiousness of theology, dogmatically understood, in the latter quotation. When all is said and done, systematic theology makes the final call.

The essay is not without merit. At the very least it serves as a sounding board or example of classic spiritual theology, in itself edifying and (till recently) undisturbed by a ‘pre-globalised,’ compartmentalised world. It must still be credited to spiritual theology that it gives academic frames of reference and clues to the road ahead. Moreover, can spiritual theology’s desire for order and answerability, especially for a *Christian* spirituality, be rebuffed in good conscience without clarifying how Christian ‘spirituality’ will be distinctively *Christian*? Does Schneiders (1989) really answer this question? Does she *care* enough? On the other hand the essay, while doing a sound excursus of historical spirituality, is scarcely conducive to a postmodern world, where the sedentary awkwardness of a somewhat imperious spiritual theology breathes an alien air. Yet notwithstanding this criticism, ‘spiritual theology’ must still be taken seriously as a conservative aspect of contemporary Christian spirituality in its more accommodative and non-technical sense. This essay, then, typifies the other polarity of the intra-spirituality debate.

If Bernard (2000) is not overly explicit in his espousal of spiritual theology, the same cannot be said for Hanson (2000:242-248) in his article, *Spirituality as Spiritual Theology*. ‘What I propose is that the study of spirituality is best understood as *spiritual theology* [italics mine] or something analogous to it’ (Hanson 2000:242). The contemporary definitions of spirituality are explicitly engaged and the case for spiritual theology is advocated, notwithstanding the fact that the name spiritual theology ‘may have old, unsatisfactory associations,’ even to the writer (ibid:247). Proponents of ‘spirituality’ such as Wolski Conn (1986), Cousins (1985), Schneiders (1986) and McGinn (1985) are quoted, being those who obviously see promise for the academic future of the subject. Their definitions of ‘spirituality’ do not, in the mind of the author, warrant the advent of a new discipline by this name. A new, academically defensible discipline would need to satisfy two criteria: First, can it be distinguished on the basis of its *subject matter*, and second, can it *approach* the subject matter in an academically legitimate manner? On these unilaterally recognised criteria for university status the application of spirituality as such would need to be declined. On the first count, the definitions reflect a subject matter that is too diffuse and lacking in distinction. (This also holds for the subject’s *intra*-theological relations.) What distinction the

subject matter *does* have leans towards an unwieldy inclusiveness. Consequently, '[i]t does not appear that spirituality can qualify as a discipline just on the basis of its subject matter' (Hanson 2000:245). The second criterion for academic legitimacy is also unrealised by 'spirituality,' at least according to this author. Its *approach*, in other words, disqualifies it, though not because it wants for Schneiders' (1986) distinctiveness as such, but rather that the *nature* of that distinctiveness is inadmissible. The approach, which combines *rigorous reflection* and an *existential relation* and *involvement*, is doubtless admirable and distinctive. But on those very terms it is apparently too participatory or practically-ambitious for scientific neutrality (ibid:246-247).

One may have questions to ask of the essayist, yet the issues raised here are the very ones that dog the promoters of academic spirituality. Neither is it clear that answers are altogether satisfactory or promptly forthcoming, though optimism prevails for 'spirituality' as a foregone conclusion. But even for its ardent supporters, '[s]pirituality is, in a sense, a phenomenon which has not yet been defined, analysed, or categorised to anyone's satisfaction' (Schneiders 1986:253). Thus, at least for the time being, Hanson's (2000) position stands its ground as a well established, if somewhat pedestrian and blinkered, counter.

A monumentally encyclopaedic and contemporary work on spirituality, *Spirituality: Forms, foundations, methods*, appears to underscore 'spirituality's' potential for academic status (Waaajman 2002). The length of the book virtually defies an exhaustive review so that a cursory approach does the author some real injustice. But anything less than an exhaustive, painstaking reviewer can only speak in generalities - no more than can be offered here. Suffice it to say, this extensively researched work is highly suggestive of an emerging discipline in the making. The book would seem to pay little deference to 'spiritual theology' and takes an inter- *and* intra-disciplinary approach that seems self-evidently indicative of the essential uniqueness of spirituality as such. Particularly outstanding is the detailed framework and 'satellite' perspective that the writer gives to the terrain. Specific chapters are preceded by a detailed sub-sectioned breakdown of the field, inspiring unprecedented confidence in spirituality's ability to 'hold its own' academically. Ironically, the author evidences the advantages of a clinical, systematic mind rather than that of the experiential contemplative. But that such a contribution is necessary is beyond question, and, after all, it is more the organised bird's eye view that is presently so imperative for the subject, taking nothing from the obvious depth of the book.

In broad outline, the subject terrain relates first to *forms of spirituality*: lay spirituality, spiritual schools and counter movements. Next, *foundational research* examines spirituality in the light of its praxis and science, while appropriately undertaking a well-researched treatment of discernment as particularly pertinent to the nature of the subject matter. Finally, *methods of spirituality research* look at form-descriptive, hermeneutic, systematic and mystagogic research. Encouraging for the proponent of academic spirituality is the way that Waaijman's (2002) spirituality, so coined, accesses its subject material independently, drawing on its own praxis and science while honouring its inter- and intra-disciplinary contingencies. The book takes an unprecedented look at the possibilities for spirituality. Rather than debating the pros and cons of legitimacy, however, it takes for granted spirituality's self-substantiating credentials and plunges into the substance of the study. The book is imperative reading for theoreticians. For ministers, I think it encouragingly validates the academic promise and earnestness of the discipline, indicating how it has its own unique subject matter and how it might go to work methodologically.

Furthering the methodological and epistemological approach of contemporary spirituality is an essay by Springsted (1998): *Theology and Spirituality: Why theology is not critical reflection on experience*. While not covering the subject of spirituality as an independent theological discipline the author does, to my mind, show the epistemological credibility and theological integrity of an aspect of faith that is all too often missing from the (systematic) theological enterprise. Indeed, if spirituality as an academic pursuit seeks to sever itself from a submissive stance towards a dogmatic and prescriptive systematic theology, it should not be imagined that there is an absence of concern within systematic theology itself as to its methodology. This concern, certainly for Springsted, is related to theology's almost exclusive adherence to critical reflection - of the intellectual and philosophic kind. But there is now a kind of ferment of spirituality taking place within theology in general, and systematic theology in particular. Even within traditional systematic theology there is a move to revive something integral to the theological pursuit, surely something we may safely call 'spirituality.' Springsted (1998:49-62) shows that theology, doubtless both systematic and in general, 'is *not*, as is plitudinously claimed in contemporary circles, "critical reflection upon religious experience"' (ibid:49). That is, with regard to theology in particular, as opposed to other scientific disciplines, there is a most important connection between the thought *and* the actual *improvement* of the thinker. Indeed, 'because...God is at the very center (sic) of our being, creating whatever being we might have, *there is no standing apart from God and surveying the possibilities* [italics mine]' (ibid:52).

The synonym for spirituality, in this writer's thinking, seems to be 'faith,' or rather that *aspect* of 'faith' that is something *other* than mere critical reflection. Faith, so understood, is also necessary to systematic theology. Perhaps the hitherto disappearance of this dimension of faith in deliberative systematic theology, I suggest, necessitates the vocation of contemporary spirituality. This vocation would be one of reclaiming that lost aspect of faith that is not essentially notional and intellectual. While theology *is* a notional and an intellectual discipline, and while some aspects of faith, insofar as faith seeks the multiplication of the good, is intellectual as well, this does not cover the entirety of a definition of faith. And it is this area that contemporary spirituality indicates. Drawing on the writings of Farrar (1964a, 1964b), the essayist shows that there is an 'initial faith,' a religious interest, that is more important than initial certitude, and that precedes *belief* (Springsted 1998:54). Such initial faith or religious interest is entirely appropriate and requisite, God being who God is - that is, inextricably one with the Good. Indeed, 'faith *is* a good, made by the Good' (ibid:58). Here the writer quotes Weil (1962:291) when the latter says that 'faith creates the truth to which it adheres.' Faith is, in other words, part and parcel of that divine Good that is subscribed to. In truth, access to God requires a disposition of the heart - a participation in truth, of which Weil (1962) is not the only exponent. If we entertain the thought of faith as only notional, then we need to come to terms with some notable philosophical and theological cases. 'In each of these cases, the sense that faith is also an order of the heart that reason does not know (Pascal), or an inner word, the shape of our minds and knowledge (Augustine), or the ordering of our lives in light of the God we desire (Weil) is ignored' (Springsted 1998:60). Together with the sentiments of this quotation the essayist again utilises the insight of Farrar (1965:22) that real knowledge is only acquired through an actual interaction with the object of thought. That is, there is 'no thought about reality about which we can do nothing but think' (ibid:22).

Springsted's (1998) article is typical of what is elsewhere tackled in various ways in contemporary academic spirituality, namely an engagement with a hitherto forgotten or sidelined epistemology.<sup>3</sup> The essay is a ray of light for ministers or students who have come to identify

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<sup>3</sup> Contemporary literature on spirituality necessarily contends with an absolutist, rationalistic epistemology. Numerous writers, in effect, challenge the older modernistic, rationalistic epistemology that gave no place to another kind of knowing. Pennington (1987:216), in a significant contribution to a major encyclopaedic work, noted how a more and more conceptual stance to spirituality developed out of the proliferation of the printed word, where the power of thought, sometimes totally divorced from the heart, became prevalent. He noted, however, the start of a reversal through the crucible of the postmodern global village. Merton (1971:113) lamented 'the overemphasis on rationalizing and logic to the exclusion of everything intuitive' [and] 'the repudiation of the aesthetic from the contemplative life...' This left behind a kind of arid

theology exclusively with a cerebral and philosophical exercise. Theology breathes with new life and first-hand experience for those who wrestle with Springsted's thought. On the other hand, can the development of faith and spirituality be left to systematic theology? What provision is made in this writer's essay, or in contemporary systematic theology, for the furthering of the faith-faculty? The indicators are not good. How is the development and conscious treatment of faith integrated into theological disciplines - for example, systematic theology? One is left with the feeling that spirituality/faith is not quintessentially the academic province of systematic theology and that the author can do little more than point out theology's present deficiency in this regard. Needless to say, here is where contemporary academic and experiential spirituality might step in.

#### **2.4 A UNIVERSAL SPIRITUALITY**

There is enough literature to caution against the foregoing subheading, 'a universal spirituality,' notwithstanding widespread general convergences involved in 'globalisation.' Yet part of this thesis points to the unilateral and pervasive dimensions of contemporary spirituality, both in its general *and* specifically *Christian* connotations - *and* whether employed in the academic or lived, experienced sense. The advantages thereof for ministry are delineated in this thesis. Such appreciation of spirituality's universality is observed in a number of writers.

A significant essay, *Postmodern Spirituality and Society*, shows how a distinctively postmodern spirituality might (or perhaps already does) have a pervasive and universally intelligible character (Griffin 1988:1-31). Of course, everyone embodies *some* variety of spirituality, as it is 'not an optional quality which we might elect not to have' (Griffin 1988:1). Admittedly a stricter spirituality might condemn other materialistic, nihilistic spiritualities as inauthentic, or 'pseudo.' Still, even the committed pursuit of power, pleasure and possession constitutes spirituality, whether or not a traditional religion ascribes thereto. Many contemporary indicators, perceptions

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rationalism. Argument was further made for a greater reflection on human experience, where even the general approach to revelation in theological studies had become captive to a discursive, deductive epistemology, as one writer surely infers (Sheldrake 1991:33) One astute writer proclaims that 'what we learn and teach as theology today is therefore pre-eminently a cultural product, a systematic and rational reflection on God within the framework of the assumptions of the dominant culture which dictate the epistemological parameters and methodological-linguistic tools of our theology' (George: 1994:11). The affirmation of more than one epistemological avenue is appealed to again and again. Indeed, says another writer, an epistemological claim can be made for the mystical that contradicts ordinary views of how knowledge is acquired, for the mystical event is seen as an immediate, illuminative experience that (also) provides knowledge, in this case not provided elsewhere (Hvolbek 1998:35). With mystic contemplation (for one writer expounding on the sixth century Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite) comes 'a pure, immaterial vision from which sense and intelligence are radically excluded' (Beggiani 1991:63). Such an epistemology, furthermore, is a negation of 'negative' theology, where the latter 'negative' approach can only limit the affirmative tradition and does not occupy the same epistemological tier.

and convergences, however, point to the emergence of a widely sanctioned postmodern spirituality. For the essayist, this emergence has enormous potential for reversing the destructive impact of much that is negative about modernism.

The author proceeds to describe the features, first, of modern society and modern spirituality, following thereon with descriptions of society and spirituality as expressive of a postmodern vision. I shall look expressly at the descriptions of the two said *spiritualities*. But first it must be said that the writer does not intend a definitive statement of *the* position of postmodern spirituality on any issue, as if *formal* agreement exists. He intends rather to stimulate thinking, conversation and action (Griffin 1988:23). Preliminary thereto, though, is his conviction that '[m]odern spirituality began as a dualistic, supernaturalistic spirituality, and ended as a pseudo- or antispirituality; postmodernity involves a return to a genuine spirituality that incorporates elements from premodern spiritualities' (ibid:2). An outstanding feature of modern spirituality is its commitment to individualism. Modernism reflects the intrinsic denial that the human self is constituted through relations to other people, institutions or nature. Such individualism, while precipitated by a number of factors, is certainly also Cartesian in substance (ibid:3). Somewhat akin to individualism is a modernistic *dualism* related to 'self' and 'nature', where the human soul is conceived as different from the rest of creation (ibid:3). In attendance thereon is a mechanistic scientific view of the natural world. It invited the exploitation and unlimited domination of nature. Perhaps, understandably, there emerged an exaggerated swing to divine *transcendence* over *immanence*, and a later resultant change from theism to deism, where 'God does not intervene after the initial creation ...' (Griffin 1988:4).

The destructiveness of much modernistic spirituality is put into conspicuous reverse by the features of postmodern spirituality. Relations to people, or things, are no longer external and derivative but constitutive, essential and internal (Griffin 1988:14). Similarly, postmoderns feel at home in the world, manifesting, to coin a word, an *organicism*, which transcends dualism and materialism. Postmodern spirituality demonstrates a joy in communion as opposed to the 'modern desire to master and possess ...' (ibid:15). Whereas modern spirituality was also largely absorbed in the future, the postmodern position expresses at once a living-in-the-present, but always a present constituted by its past and anticipative of, and influenced by, its future. Thus the place of tradition and respect for the past is reinstated. Modernistic spirituality developed a more narcissistic propensity in its later expression where the future was increasingly sacrificed to the self-indulgence of the present. Postmodern spirituality has thus done greater justice to *time* in the

fullness of *past, present* and *future*. From a theistic point of view, furthermore, this contemporary spirituality perhaps understandably evidences a non-dualistic '*naturalistic panentheism*, according to which the world is present in deity and deity is present in the world' (ibid:17). The former modernistic, and indeed Protestant, imbalance of 'transcendence over immanence' is herein brought to 'equilibrium' again, if not favoured to immanence. A significant blow has also herein been dealt to derivative authoritarianisms and hierarchies.

In summation, as contemporary Christian spirituality seeks fresh intelligibility in the postmodern period, it discovers that its own (for example, mystical) tradition thrives on certain postmodern insights. Because of postmodernism's almost universal 'voice' I shall contend later that *Christian* spirituality, in some measure, now also enjoys this universalism. Griffin's (1988) article, to say the least, is stimulating and insightful and resounds with possibilities for Christian spirituality. It is an indispensable 'read' for any grasp of contemporary spirituality, whether *Christian* or not. It therein paves the way for intelligible ministry in the context of contemporary spiritual self-understanding.

A further contribution among many to a global perspective for spirituality is a short essay on contemporary ecumenical proclivities. The essay, *Ecumenical Spirituality*, draws expressly on the enduring influences of Steere and Merton (1915-1968), a Quaker and Benedictine (Cistercian) monk, respectively (Hinson 1993:1-14). It is clear that to thus designate their religious allegiances is somewhat misleading. Both men were known for their universal spirit, and a seeming ability to find God in all people, as the writer implies. Their accommodative spiritual story is presumably offered as symbolically expressive of our time. But both, notwithstanding any criticism to the contrary, had firm roots in sound historical tradition.<sup>4</sup> Thus, 'the impact of the Benedictine tradition on Merton was not superficial. Quite the contrary, the best of that tradition is what he sought to communicate to an ever-widening range of readers' (ibid:2). Steere himself showed great interest in his own experience of the Benedictine tradition, notwithstanding a Quaker background. He finally established the Ecumenical Institute of Spirituality, which included one or more Benedictine monks in its number (ibid:2-3). But even prior to his Benedictine connection, Steere exhibits a noteworthy catholicity of spirit (ibid:12). For all that diversity, however, the Quaker builds on sound Christian contemplative tradition.

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<sup>4</sup> Hinson (1993:1), perhaps of conservative (certainly Baptist) stock, seems to relish Merton's distinction between 'convention' and 'tradition,' therein showing how 'tradition' still holds fears for the often uncomprehending, fastidious Protestant. Doubtless the children of radical reformation have *some* historical grounds for their nervousness, though the fussiness often smacks of pious condescension.

Steere and Merton, then, set the trend for some of the outstanding features of what is surely a contemporary ecumenical spirituality (Hinson 1993:3-10). Three features are delineated. Each feature typifies both thinkers in no small part. First, they both see the need for mutual appreciation of one's own tradition and those of others, inside and outside the Christian family. In fact, there needs to be, to quote a book title, a 'mutual irradiation' (Steere 1971:8). Such mutual irradiation calls for the most congenial setting possible for all concerned to release their own deepest, distinctive witness (Hinson 1993:5). Second, there is in ecumenical spirituality a kind of cosmic Christology or pneumatology. The ubiquity of Christ leads to the discovery of Christ in unexpected places, both for Merton (1953:275) and the Quaker conviction of 'the light within,' which sees Christ present everywhere to every person (Hinson 1993:6-7). This is the slumbering Christ within us, waiting to be stirred (ibid:7). Third, contemporary spirituality has manifested a person-centred approach to unity, finding a kinship and solidarity with all people on the basis of a common humanity. There is, to use but one example, a common disposition of 'fear and trembling' before the Ultimate - and Christians will not be the only people with some light to radiate to others (ibid:9-10).

In summation of the afore-mentioned essay, then, both Steere (1971) and Merton (1953) show how two people from essentially different backgrounds, while staying rooted to those backgrounds, find a deep commonality in the contemplative tradition. The latter tradition is, I contend, a marked feature of contemporary spirituality. It unmistakably contributes to the 'universal spirituality' that is the fruition of contemporary spirituality, whether in spirituality's general or specifically Christian connotation. (Indeed, something more is claimed for 'ecumenical' in this essay than a simple 'in-house' Christian convergence.) The story of these two men, I suggest, serves as a kind of paradigm of contemporary theological reflection, rooted as it is in a universalising contemplative spirit. It is *not*, of course, being asserted by Hinson (1993) that these two contemplatives realised an era of 'ecumenical spirituality' single-handedly.

An ostensible caution against 'a universal spirituality' comes from, among others, a distinguished Oxford professor, in an essay titled, *Convergent Spirituality* (Ward 2000:47-71). The essayist's caution is *ostensible*, in my view, since there is enough in the essay to show how spirituality, collectively and in its religious pluriformity, is ultimately the custodian of all that is most precious and indispensable about any one distinctive religion. Where religions are often inflexible, dogmatic, culturally embedded and even mutually hostile 'it is vital that they should be led by those whose primary concern is with *spirituality* [italics mine]' (ibid:71). For this writer,

‘[w]hat has become possible in modern (sic) times is a recognition of the convergent spirituality underlying the religious diversity of the world’ (ibid:70). Indeed, religion ultimately has to do with spirituality, not doctrine. And it is distinctively spirituality that champions convergence to unity, as opposed to religion’s often divisive and uninformed confidence in its own opinions (ibid:70). If spirituality cannot exist without organised religion - and it cannot for this essayist - it is still true that spirituality offers the possibilities of convergence, ‘while specific religious traditions can properly remain diverse’ (ibid:71). So the writer infers an intrinsic universality to spirituality that operates with a certain freedom not enjoyed by ‘religion’ or, we might say, dogmatic theology – or for that matter ‘spiritual theology.’

The author does well. He is not succumbing to a fanciful New Age, convergent spiritualism. Such esoteric, simplistic grandiosity is nowhere found in his article, nor, hopefully, in my thesis. Globalisation, for example, has *not* led, as one might suppose, to a simple universal ironing out of differences in religions and spiritualities. On the contrary, elements in primal and mainline religions, and often their distinctive spiritualities as well, have closed ranks against a globalising science that requires more than stubborn scriptural literalism and propositional hand-me-down revelations, and even in the face of rampant globalisation. Ironically, there is much in common between certain forms of intolerant, ‘fundamentalist science’ and the posture assumed by fundamentalist expressions in religion. To be sure, ‘[t]he reason for religious fundamentalism lies in the fact that it is, paradoxically, too much influenced by the model of modernity. It sees religious truths as being of the same sort as scientific truths’ (Ward 2000:55). But that dimension of each religion that is spirituality has the specific vocation of bringing the religion it serves back to its own intense and vivid experiences of spiritual reality - for example, as seen in its founder (ibid:62). Such spirituality, certainly in the *Christian* academic context, is latterly encouraged by historical and literary criticism of sacred texts, which highlights the fallibilities of *all* religions and paves the way for integration into wider understandings of spirituality and the Ultimate. Moreover, contemporary endorsement of the authority and reality of religious experience itself gives further impetus to such convergence. The essayist ably points to spirituality’s capacity, on an almost inter-religious scale, to serve the deeper and most fundamental interests of religions across the board. It is clear, though, that such spirituality is no simple, generic phenomenon, or formal collusion, although there is surely a certain *kinship* among spiritualities in this essayist’s view. Still, each spiritual ‘school’ would need to strive for all that is best in itself to potentialise the religion it serves. It is in that truth-finding experiential quest that, as I understand the article,

spirituality holds the greatest *potential* for convergence, *and* has actualised whatever convergence is already realised.

## 5. EMBODIED SPIRITUALITY

An encouraging strain in contemporary spirituality is its dimension of social and physical embodiment, thus breaking sharply from pejorative, disembodied, ethereal notions. A number of articles give sophisticated treatments of this ‘embodied accent,’ collected together in an arguably landmark compilation, *Spirituality and Social Embodiment* (Jones & Buckley 1997). One essay herein defends spirituality’s embodied commitment against a consumer spirituality that ‘systematically avoids the disciplined practices necessary for engagement with God’ (Jones 1997:4). Bernard of Clairvaux’s (Casey 1988) work is herein compared to Moore’s (1992) *Care of the Soul*. The latter allegedly takes traditional Christian insights out of their specific God-centred context, putting them to the service of his readers’ own eclectic preferences and self-referential interests and desires. ‘I explore Bernard’s writing to show how a Christian appropriation of what has recently been identified as “spirituality” involves the *transformation* [italics mine] of our desires ... ’(Jones 1997:5). This transformation and employment of embodied spiritual practices is in stark contrast to the comfortable (disembodied?) selectivity of contemporary consumer spirituality, of which Moore (1992) is an example. Such spirituality has no built-in critique that takes account of inevitable self-deception. The whole question of ‘sin’ is not seriously treated. One encounters in Moore (1992) a revival of well-documented Gnosticism - in short, an orphaned spirituality of one’s own choice that panders to the esoteric/Gnostic shopper.

Another contribution to the vital embodied-dimension of spirituality is *Interiority and Epiphany* (Williams R D 1997:29-51). It is part of the same compilation. The essay does not make for easy reading, yet one needs to grapple with it. Some hopefully accurate observations must be attempted. The notion of an inner, settled circumscribed ‘self’ is questioned, a so-called “‘true self”, hidden, buried, to be excavated by one or another kind of therapy ... ’ (ibid:29). One’s self, as far as there *is* one, is best seen as the developing fruit of inter-personal engagement - a dynamic modification and adjustment that evidences a *social embodiment* and accommodation. In my view, this concept at once disinvests a possessive, pejorative spirituality of its self-absorption-agenda and its questionable theoretical construct of the ‘self’. For this writer then, spirituality is always related to, by inference, embodied Christian ethics. Still, while the self is developed through inter-action and ethical engagement, there needs also be a kind of dispossession of self-

justifying *acts* - as of self-justifying interiority - in exchange for a (can one say 'hidden'?) revelation of epiphanic depth. Suffice to say, one is always talking here about an embodied wholeness of action (epiphany) and selfhood (interiority) – the epiphanic *depth* undermining any meritorious possessiveness or self-evident goodness.

Another writer by the same name, and in the same edited book, shows the holistic nature of Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* in her article, *Mystical theology Redux* (Williams A N 1997:53-74). Here, to some extent, we have embodiment of a different sort. 'In Thomas' work the word "contemplation" functions on the basis of a productive ambiguity, so that individual usages might almost always refer either to theological reflection or to prayer' (ibid:58). So 'Thomas suggests...that theology is a form of reflection deriving from a kind of active participation in God's self-knowledge...' (ibid:58). There is supposedly little hint here of a dualistic animosity between intellect and contemplation. 'Thus even in its most practical moments, the *Summa* is to be read as an act of contemplation whereby we are united to the mind of God' (ibid:59). More so the very 'inner connections of the *Summa* point to and make manifest the unity of God and humanity and the unity of all human existence before God' (ibid:71). Thus the essayist offers an example of contemporary apologetics in spirituality, rescuing Aquinas from the widely held impression that he was 'a hair-splitting philosopher' and an exhibit of the 'spirituality-theology' divide (ibid:57). The matter is perhaps arguable, but the motif is again evident in this essay - that contemporary spirituality's hermeneutic has an eye for *embodiment*, and not without some historical justification.

An embodied spirituality leads naturally to the subject of ascetic theology - a subject revisited perhaps most notably by Miles (1981,1988), setting her contemporary deliberations ably against the backdrop of ascetic history. Part of her purpose is to deliver historical asceticism from its popularly perceived image of body-hatred and seeming denigration of the *flesh*, literally understood. Incredulous for some, Augustine and Origen are more body-affirming than often supposed. For them there is the possibility of *incarnational* incorporation into the higher interests of the spirit, and ultimate participation in the resurrection. Indeed, '[i]n its cosmic setting, human being occupies a place between – and connected with – the "one original principle" and the material world' (Miles 1981:80). The human being occupies a kind of hierarchical midpoint between 'the bodily' on the one hand and the ultimate 'one original principle' on the other. This midpoint represents a far more positive view of the human body than interpreters have often portrayed (ibid:106). It is admitted, however, that some historical Christian (so called) asceticism

is deeply problematic (Miles 1988:177). There is a need for reconstituting ‘the traditional idea of self-transcendence that has contributed to disdain for the material conditions of life’ (ibid:180). That said, the writer offers a convincing argument from Christian antiquity for a greater appreciation of the essential embodied nature of spiritual asceticism.

A significant awakening to asceticism (and perhaps to ‘embodiment’) in the Protestant world, took shape in Foster’s (1978) much-heralded work, *Celebration of Discipline*, for which he received a ‘writer of the year’ award. This Quaker writer organised twelve traditional ascetical practices into inward, outward and corporate disciplines - four disciplines assigned to each, albeit with the notable exception of the Eucharist. While progeny of the Reformation had characteristically treated ascetical disciplines with suspicion, here was a writer of that tradition prepared to take another look, predictably with some sacramental omissions. Thus, ‘[t]he Spiritual Disciplines are intended for our *good*. They are meant to bring the abundance of God into our lives. *It is possible, however, to turn them into another set of soul-killing laws. Law-bound Disciplines breathe death*’ [italics mine] (Foster 1978:8). The book speaks with celebrative, belated discovery, and was received in the same spirit. While celebration might not immediately accompany discipline, the celebration ‘is the result of a consciously chosen way of thinking and living. As we choose that way, the healing and redemption in Christ will break into the inner recesses of our lives and relationships, and the inevitable result will be joy’ (Foster 1978:167-168). Willard (1988), one-time mentor to Foster (1978) and discussed hereafter, would have endorsed his directee’s conviction that while grace is unearned and unearnable, ‘if we expect to grow, we must take up a consciously chosen course of action involving both individual and group life’ (Foster 1978:7). Here we have a less than cautious Protestant excursion, then, into ascetic practices, as long as there is no thought of meritorious ‘works righteousness’. Thus there is always danger; we are warned of turning a discipline into a law (ibid:8). Still, although not explicitly pointed out, as Willard (1988) would do later, there is here an implicit recognition of spirituality as essentially embodied. Foster’s (1978) book, however, predates a more self-conscious embodiment to spirituality, which came later.

Foster (1978) helpfully introduced both ordained and laypersons to ‘the disciplines’. His treatment of these practices is stimulating. Nevertheless, they lack the later contemplative catalyst that effects a sense of divine, transcendent mystery. This was an era, one might say, that stopped short at asceticism – whether Protestant or Catholic. Foster’s (1978) disciplines, in my view, remain somehow impotent and stolid. *Celebration of Discipline*, and this author’s succeeding

works, define and encompass various types of Christian discipline, prayer and lifestyles in a popular, readable and even encyclopedic way. One gets a panoramic view of what is available (Foster 1985,1990,1992). Given that ascetic theology and reflective, intentional lifestyle traditionally precede the mystical, and that few Protestants have grounding in either, these works were timely. Yet the absence of a mystical dimension meant that the books did not, in my judgement, realise the life they were meant to generate.

Years later a ‘popular theology’ (one might say) of the disciplines was attempted - *The spirit of the Disciplines* - by a Southern Baptist minister of some philosophic scholarship (Willard 1988). The work received a significant response from laypersons and clergy alike, perhaps primarily of Protestant ancestry. The key and locus of human transformation is the human body, which ‘is the focal point of human existence’ (ibid:29). ‘It is with our *bodies* we receive the new life that comes as we enter his Kingdom ... *To withhold our bodies from religion is to exclude religion from our lives*’ (ibid:31). Moreover, too often salvation is understood as ‘mere forgiveness’, for example through the atonement (ibid:41). But salvation is a *life*, and our salvation is through Christ’s *life* and *resurrection*, not just an isolated death. This life includes the spiritual, *embodied* disciplines or *practices* of Christ, something the writer never tires of telling us. How is it that these practices are presently alien to many Christian lives? This exclusion of Christ’s (and the Apostle Paul’s) own formational *practices* surely accounts for the glaring absence of transformed, empowered Christian living. A closer look at the Bible, then, reveals the ‘psychological realism’ of, for instance, the Apostle Paul’s approach to Christian living (ibid:115). Willard’s (1988) stance has much to commend it, and it is presented with sincere conviction and obvious concern. It probably predates some of the powerful contemporary insights into contemplative and mystical spirituality, so that his book, by comparison, seems truncated in doing less justice to a wider picture. Is his almost exclusive vision for the disciplines too blinkered? Does he perhaps hold too much hope for the disciplines, at least from a twenty-first century, postmodern perspective? The book does not bear the dynamism and possibility of divine encounter that seems reserved for later or more insightful works in the twentieth and twenty-first century. For example, it is not always clear, if ever, just how the *spirit* part of his title catches fire. In this regard the book is pedestrian and does not breathe enough life - at least anachronistically assessed. The ‘disciplines’ *seem* to be the first and last word. Willard (1988) sees small chance of lasting transformation if not through ‘the disciplines’. Forgiveness, love of God, ritual, liturgy, infusion of the Spirit, communion of the saints – *none* of them, individually or corporately, ‘reliably produce large numbers of people who really are like Christ ... That is statistically verifiable *fact*’ (Willard 1988:x). Might I not

suggest, then, that it is as much as one can expect from this author, that he at least manifests a Protestant kindling of the ascetical flame? But the mystical part of the journey cannot yet be assimilated and intuited.

## **2.6 DEVELOPMENT OF 'IMMEDIACY': PSYCHOLOGICAL AND CHARISMATIC**

Perhaps Willard's (1988) stance is somehow true to the ascetical tradition, as far as it goes. Yet other writers who essentially predated a contemporary contemplative spirituality (at least in the Protestant arena) seemed to have developed a lost 'spiritual' or mystical dimension, though not necessarily disputing the ascetical way (Kelsey 1972, 1981a, 1981b; Smail 1975, 1980, 1988). These writers are characterised, I suggest, by the possibility of encounter with God of an *immediate* kind. Kelsey (1972) drew on *psychological* resources, and Smail (1975, 1980, 1988) tried to legitimate the *charismatic* experience theologically. While Willard (1988, 1993, 1998) might not dispute the possibility of *immediacy*, he is hardly of this school. He could be expected to question what is surely the inference of these writers, namely that marked and lasting change *is* to be found down this road of direct encounter. These writers were ostensibly 'mystical,' yet the word is seldom part of their vocabulary. I turn now to one of these writers, who championed the possibility of experiential *immediacy* in the divine-human encounter.

Kelsey (1972), in *Encounter with God*, finds enormous possibilities in the works of Jung (1963, 1964) and how the latter's treatment of 'the unconscious,' I venture, broke the 'space-time-box' worldview of (modernistic?) science - *and* theology. In Jungian psychological terms, through the indeterminate dimension of the 'unconscious,' one seems in dynamic and continuing interaction with God. Control goes back to God, who is not exclusively tied to the media of the five senses and human reason. Such psychology from a renowned, religiously sympathetic psychiatrist finds further stimulus for Kelsey (1972, 1981) in the (then) charismatic renewal movement and its Jung-like accommodation of dreams, healings, tongues and inspired Platonic 'madness.' As background, Kelsey (1972:26-121) presents an analysis of philosophic and Christian history that illustrates the neglect of a spiritual realm or dimension in Christian theology, and even, at times, a virtual negation thereof. For instance, while the Church employed Aristotelian insights with enthusiasm, Plato's theory of knowledge was not dealt with fully, notwithstanding the original basically Platonic terms used by the church fathers (*ibid*:59). Even Plato's treatment of this dimension was somehow 'blanked out' by contemporary twentieth century students, who could not countenance such a worldview (*ibid*:52). Kelsey (1972:56) enumerates that for Plato there were three basic ways of knowing: First, through sense experience; second, through reason; and

third, through divine inspiration, possession, or madness. Here one is given direct access to the realm of the non-physical, that is, through prophecy, healing, artistic inspiration and, above all, love. Indeed, '[t]he history of the New Testament church and the church that followed is one of God the Spirit breaking into men's lives in healing, visions, prophecy ... ' (Kelsey 1972:88). Ultimately for this writer, Jung gives a scientific and sophisticated validation to a vast psychic world that is more than mere personal subjectivity, but objective, meaningful and real (ibid:110). Of course the author saw the charismatic movement of the time as further validating this objective reality through the experience of being filled with the Spirit - in itself, he thought, a kind of mysticism (ibid:165).

Kelsey (1972,1976,1981b) is a vital part of the historical development and maturation of ministerial spirituality, even though his thinking predates a conceptual (postmodern) world, which is more comfortable with a contemplative mind frame. He had to do battle with the modernistic 'space-time-box', but even by contemporary standards his historical delineations are refreshing and convincing. In essence, he offers a religious epistemology, inspired as he was by Von Hugel (1927) and Taylor (1930). The lack of a conspicuous postmodern outlook, together with a still-undeveloped contemplative awareness threw Kelsey (1972) back on Jung (1963,1964). The latter psychologist was almost a 'voice crying in the wilderness', proclaiming the philosophical and scientific implications of religious experience and laying a foundational substitute for modernism. Many ministers, however, found an encouraging theoretical base in Kelsey's (1972) research, and are therein also indebted to the Swiss psychiatrist who opened a door for him. Kelsey's (1972) partly derivative theologising, that is with respect to Jung, realised a new rationale for ministry. Priests could now, among other things, take a serious look at the ministry of healing. Further, the expectation of encounter with a spiritual realm and the reclaiming of the forgotten faculties of imagination, dreams and spiritual interiority meant that the spiritual quest could be reaffirmed and once again undertaken with serious purpose. Kelsey's (1972,1976,1981b) work, I maintain, narrowly predated the insights that were to break loose with the postmodern appreciation of contemplative and mystical 'immediacy.' The subject of 'immediacy' or 'direct encounter,' however, was also tackled from another perspective. I turn to this approach now.

Smail's (1975,1980,1988) books gave greater theological substance to the *charismatic* experience of *immediacy* and encounter. Here was a greater sense of spiritual reality, facilitative of expectancy in spiritually malnourished, thinking ministers, (suffering from the great theology-

spirituality divide), together with the rare theological backdrop that was lacking in unreflective 'charismatic' experience as a whole. The writer's books also predate the later Protestant leaning to contemplative spirituality, but they are significant as attempts to integrate serious Christological and pneumatological thought and 'spirituality'. Smail's (1975) book, *Reflected Glory: The spirit in Christ and Christians*, is particularly pertinent here. The author himself speaks from *inside* the then Charismatic Movement, thus exemplifying a contemporary principle in academic spirituality that one cannot write of spiritual experience in a completely detached way. In retrospect, I contend that Smail's (1975) book evidenced a systematic theologian's struggle with a spiritual malnourishment that was not fed by the systematic theology of the time. In short, systematic theology's divorce from spirituality was in evidence here. In strict systematic theological terms the writer tries to dig for spiritual life and allow (*inter alia*, his own) charismatic experience some 'say' in constructing reflective, systematic theology. But it is evident here that the time had not yet arrived, at least for Protestants, to excavate for this life other than in the field of strict systematic theology itself. The writer has thus no recourse to a self-respecting domain of, for instance, Christian spirituality to legitimate his own experience. He exemplifies the dilemma, I maintain, of that particular nineteen-seventies stage of Protestant spirituality. Nevertheless, as far as he goes within the constraints of his own theological field of expertise he does well. Some summative pointers may now be noted with regard to the book itself.

While the author is an initiate to the charismatic experience he is less than comfortable with the theology that accompanies it. Too often the new movement subscribes to a 'second blessing' theology, or, as the writer puts it more technically, a 'theology of subsequence.' The problem is not with a deepening *experience* subsequent to conversion, to which a 'second blessing' or 'baptism in the Spirit' alludes. The problem lies with the *theological description* or rationale that comes with it (Smail 1975:37-51). This charismatic theology drives a wedge between the work of Christ and the work of the Spirit. At its most banal, conversion is seen as the work of Christ, while the subsequent deepening or 'baptism in the Spirit' is seen as the work of the Spirit. In other words, God 'is offering us two distinct gifts, first salvation and justification in Christ, and then a receiving of the Holy Spirit which adds what was lacking in the first' (ibid:44). This distinction is most unfortunate for a number of reasons. First, only part of our experience is then related to Christ, whereas the second part is related to the Spirit. Second, Jesus seems somehow insufficient. At a decisive point he hands over to the Spirit. Furthermore, there is here presented a division between the Son and the Spirit - that is, a complete independence of the Spirit. Two

emerging aggravations of this theology are, first, the inference – and often more than that – that certain meritorious conditions must first be fulfilled, and second, an elitism that presupposes two classes of Christians. For the writer, such theology can obviously not be entertained (Smail 1975:44-49). The latter develops a remedial pneumatological Christology that obviates such division of the second and third ‘persons’. He furthermore places the ‘baptism in the Spirit’ experience within the whole process of Christian *initiation*. Thus the term ‘baptism in the Spirit’ is not inappropriate for him and there can now be no thought of ‘subsequence to our initiation into Christ, upon the fulfilment of special conditions ... ’ (ibid:142). Rather the word ‘baptised’ might far more fittingly be described as referring to both ‘initiated into’ *and* ‘overwhelmed by’ (ibid:142).

Of what value are these theological niceties to the contemporary debate on spirituality? I think that, for one, here is a theologian trying to come to terms with that which contemporary Christian experience was saying to him, and *within* him. Although he maintains that he is bringing faulty theologising into line against normative theological thought, he is perhaps less conscious of the formative influence of ‘charismatic’ experience on what he has to say. In short, is he not already operating in some way within the yet unavailable contours of what is now contemporary academic spirituality? Second, through some deft theologising Smail (1975) makes available in theological terms that which *already* prevailed experientially. Moreover, to some real extent the writer had *already* integrated this prevailing experience into his systematic theology. His theologising thus constitutes an interesting exhibit of theology working from the perspective of spiritual experience *per se*. At the same time, while he could not appeal to the postmodern mind frame to assist his spirituality, he waged a strong attack against, in his terms, the unbelieving *dispensationalism* of his time.

The conceptual world of the psychiatrist Jung (1875-1961), on the one hand, and the Charismatic retrieval and renewal on the other, to some extent broke the theology-spirituality-divide, at least through the works of the afore-mentioned two theologians. Yet Vatican II and its aftermath could, for the most part, do without an exclusively psychological and Charismatic validation. Vatican II, I suggest, had the legacy wherewith to draw on a perhaps older ‘language’, the rich and ancient *mystical* paradigm. Further, this mystical tradition now finds some real amenability to *aspects* of postmodernistic thought. But it is surely incontestable that Vatican II also gives back to *everyone* the resources of the mystical tradition, together with that tradition’s compelling and ancient historical precedent. Many contemporary writers draw attention hereto, and those that operate

unconsciously herein nevertheless thrive on the opportunity that the retrieved mystical tradition affords them and their readers.

## **2.7 THE EXPERIENTIAL DIMENSION OF SPIRITUALITY**

The word, 'experience', is integral to any discussion of contemporary spirituality. Considerable ambiguity, however, comes with the word and one has to initially establish mutual understanding and agreement. The word, though, cannot simply be dismissed as confusing. 'Experience' of one kind or another is integral to contemporary Christian spirituality. Expressive of the word's ambiguity for spirituality and ministry is an article entitled, *Appealing to 'Experience': What does it mean?* The author is a Methodist local preacher and theologian (Marsh 2004:118-130). Still, the writer's struggle for clarity is not unique to Methodism. His article, while not speaking directly of spirituality, covers the same definitional terrain. It is clear for Marsh (2004:118) that 'experience' has always been of the utmost importance in Methodism, as opposed to a confessional in some other denominations. A significant quote from a former Methodist textbook precedes his essay: 'Experience ... is the governing principle with Methodism all the way through, not only with respect to the actualities of personal religion, but with regard to religious rites, and ecclesiastical regulations, and evangelistic methods, and indeed everything else' (Bett 1937:125-126).

Marsh (2004) is of course aware (notwithstanding his quote) that it is less easy to speak of experience today than it was then. With the development of 'experiential learning' in education, for instance, a different understanding of experience is introduced into the picture (Marsh 2004:119). There is 'life experience', namely experience of life in broad terms, and there is 'religious experience,' or faith's inner aspects. Methodists often find themselves talking at cross-purposes in this respect. The problem is, both these types of experience have been critical in Methodist conviction and ethos. Methodism has touched ordinary people for God 'in the ordinary and everyday life and occupation'. Methodists have always seen themselves as pragmatic, practical, ordinary people. But Methodists have also spoken distinctively of *Christian* experience: 'the experience of being redeemed, or knowing oneself to be forgiven ... '(ibid:119). Naturally, this is not simply synonymous with sensory experiences or emotion. In brief, though, there is the experience of God 'in the everyday' and there is the *Christian* experience of redemption. Methodists are passionately concerned with *both*. But all the more reason then that they should clarify themselves more clearly. Thus, 'theological teasing out of the primary theological ideas at work in Methodism's understanding of "experience" (accepting its primary "religious" character) has to take place' (ibid:121). Furthermore, one should not fear or down play the *religious* aspect

of the experience when locating it in the 'secular realm'. Indeed, it is only when the ordinary, 'everyday' is taken into account that theological discourse is worthy of its name (ibid:121-122). In any event, both these concepts of experience need to be looked at seriously, that is, owned and clarified by reflective Methodists.

Marsh's (2004:118-130) article demands attentive reading and implicitly cautions against unqualified use of the word 'experience'. Such clarification, I believe, is vital for contemporary definitions of spirituality, where the definitional parameters of spirituality vary greatly from one theologian to the next. A reading of contemporary academic spirituality will show how this article strikes at the heart of much contemporary debate and clarification, therein comprising a kind of microcosm of theological reflection. Finally, the essayist shows how Methodist experiential conviction, regarding *both* these types of 'experience,' must lead to a theological conception of 'participation in Christ' and 'radical self-acceptance,' the latter concept based on God's grace. 'God loves us in spite of what we are known to be' (Marsh 2004:126).

While the Charismatic movement of the later twentieth century dealt much with 'experience' as emotionally significant and often overpowering, the effects of mysticism on contemporary spirituality brought another perspective, if not totally without conspicuous 'experiences.' Turner's (1995:5) landmark work interpreted traditional mysticism as rescuing contemporary interpretations *from* an experientialist misreading. Indeed, for him the mediaeval mystic might ironically be seen to offer contemporary spirituality an 'anti-mysticism,' given mysticism's contemporary (mis)interpretation. Matthews' (2000:75) findings are identical, and indeed beholden to the former scholar, and he gives a good critical summation of some sound contemporary 'mystical scholarship.' His contemporary analysis deserves review, and to this I now turn.

For Matthews (2000:75) '[i]t is by no means certain that the mystical experiences of which people speak are really "experiences" *at all* [italics mine]'. To be sure, the title of his book, *Both Alike to Thee*, is a reference to God being equally at home in experiential darkness or light and, I might say, not essentially attached to either (Psalm 139:12b). The purpose of mediaeval mysticism must be seen as a kind of *antidote* to the misconception that God and *experience* always go together, if at all. 'God is essentially beyond experience' (Matthews 2000:83). Further, 'much of what we moderns call mysticism is something we have invented' (ibid:82). The writer lays much of the blame at the door of the influential classic, *The Varieties of Religious*

*Experience* (James [1902] 1925). James reduced religion to inhabiting the realm of private experience, which in the end served as a form of scientific positivism (Matthews 2000:78). Moreover, even intelligent Christians thenceforth saw mysticism as synonymous with *personal experience* of union with the divine. This malady has prevailed through the contemporary explosion of experiential spirituality literature and its distinctive offshoots. What is now needed, therefore, is an *accurate* retrieval of the mediaeval tradition of apophatic or ‘negative’ mysticism. Such ‘negative’ mysticism effects the realisation that God is not a separate reality at all and therein, I assume, that no experience can be attached to that ‘Reality’. ‘God is simply beyond human knowing’ (Matthews 2000:83). Indeed, for the latter - and this is often missed - even the kataphatic tradition serves to sabotage a God that can be knowable, ‘secured’ or objectified through some ‘separatist’ *experience*. The kataphatic approach, that is, becomes lost in its wordiness and super-abundance of God-images, even as the apophatic approach realises the same lostness in its dumbfounded silence. The *experiential* God is undermined in both these traditions, *both* of which are sources of mysticism (ibid:85).

Matthews’ (2000) mystical retrieval is applicable as to how ministry is conducted. In short, there is a contemplative or mystical way of conceiving and engaging *in* Christian ministry. ‘What I believe we need is a strategy for the recovery of the contemplative pastor’ (Matthews 2000:62). The latter’s views resonate with Peterson’s (1993) *Contemplative Pastor*, whose book is here quoted (Matthews 2000:64). Mystical retrieval gives new meaning to ministerial action – indeed, a *re-enchantment* of action, to use now contemporary parlance (ibid:61-74). A mystical retrieval might permeate ministry in the following ways: first, in a reticence to over-define ‘ministry,’ springing from the contemplative-mystical insight ‘that we are not entirely in control ... ’ (ibid:63). Second, ministry is thus permeated through the almost mystical or contemplative *acceptance*, to venture my own interpretation, of the spirit of place. It is an acceptance of God’s place for you being where you *are*. This acceptance draws on the Rule of St. Benedict and its vow of stability (ibid:65). Third, there is a recovery of wonder and delight where the contemplative access to God is primarily through wonder, desire, and the magnetism of divine beauty - what one writer referred to, I might add, as the attractiveness of God (Hanson 1973:1-9). Fourth, the mystical retrieval for which the author fights, would introduce a (famous poet’s) ‘negative capability’ to ministry, where one does not balk at mysteries, doubts and uncertainties. Further, prayer takes on a mystical manner. Prayer is not something we do but rather something done within us (Matthews 2000:63-70). In summation, I think it is easy to see how Matthews’ (2000) appreciation of mysticism lends itself to such interpretations of ministerial action.

As inferred already, the book's value also lies in its assessment and appreciation of contemporary Christian literature, so it is scarcely one book that is here under review. Peterson (1993), Maitland (1995), Turner (1995), Cupitt (1998), McIntosh (1998) and Milbank (1999) are a few of the significant contributors to the writer's thought and critique. More expansively, the world context of postmodernism is seen as integral to the new credibility of mysticism, as other writers have not been slow to observe. Yet Matthews (2000:96-102) happily does not succumb to everything 'postmodern', offering a penetrating critique of a kind of 'postmodernism' that veils a still modern and even nihilistic outlook. Cupitt (1998) in particular is held to account in this regard.

Another perspective on 'experience,' I suggest, presents the word as indicating experience of a certain *kind* of spirituality, for example, within Christianity. For its succinctness and simplicity the Catholic writer, McBrien (1987), presents a helpful little handbook, *Ministry*, wherein he outlines the various (or different) perspectives on experienced spirituality within the Christian family as a whole. His concern is, in part, that ministers evaluate their spirituality against sound criteria - the kind of criteria that demonstrate 'a genuinely catholic style of Christian life...' (McBrien 1987:88). The different criteria that he presents are, in my view, too often the hallmarks of *separated*, virtually circumscribed spiritualities within the wider Christian tradition. The author commendably intends, however, that these wrongly alienated properties be part and parcel of *every* Christian spirituality worthy of the name. The thought is noble and well intentioned, notwithstanding the traditional tensions that seem to exist between various schools of 'Christian' spirituality, and not infrequently aggravated by the remnants of dualistic thinking. Ten criteria for sound spirituality are delineated by the writer: spirituality is holistic, other-oriented, pluralistic, humane, Trinitarian, sacramental, Kingdom-oriented, sacrificial, ecclesial, and for *all* Christians (ibid:89). To be sure, this delineation offers nothing new to recent appreciation of the diversity and richness of Christian spirituality. Even Leech's (1985) still earlier work, for one, presents an impressive exploration in spiritual theology, showing how distinctively Christian concepts of God yield, I think, virtually self-contained Christian spiritualities. Furthermore, each feature enumerated by McBrien (1987:88) is contemporarily explored and appreciated in greater depth by a widening expanse of contemporary scholarly literature - both from theoretical and, increasingly, phenomenological perspectives. Thus this small handbook might seem scarcely worthy of consideration in such a burgeoning and sophisticated academic climate. To the book's credit, however, it offers a rare and refreshing delineation of possibilities outside the routine and well-trodden road of Christian *denominational* or *parochial* spiritualities, so called. The ten descriptive

criteria invite the possibility of evaluating ministry through perspectives other than distinctively Catholic, Orthodox or Methodist - among others. That is, McBrien's (1987) spiritual features are refreshingly identified with Christian *doctrines* or contextual needs, as opposed to well-fortified, home-grown Christian traditions. The book also invites the thought of how each feature (holistic, Trinitarian, sacramental) almost bespeaks a distinctive Christian spirituality (given that diverse reality within Christian spirituality) in itself and has its own distinctive emphasis and motif. This, as I have said, is not McBrien's intention. Still, I shall try later in this thesis to evaluate ministry more in terms of this approach than have recourse to the diverse theological convictions of the various Christian spiritual 'schools'. For now, one or two additional observations on this small book must suffice.

The author makes a seldom-heard observation, especially in an era of 'hard-sell' business and executive efficiency, where even Christian ministers are encouraged to take their lead from the competitive and robust business executive. He says: 'It is never enough to be a competent, efficient minister. The minister must embody and live by the spiritual values that she or he represents, proclaims, and tries to persuade others to embrace' (McBrien 1987:77). Further to this timely observation it is pointed out that 'the minister is not only an instrument of God's grace; the minister is also a *sign* of God's grace. The invisible reality of grace must be made visible in the sign' (ibid:77). Thus a distinction is made, I suggest, between the functional and ontological reality of what it means to be a minister. The minister has to live by the experience and first-hand witness of what is proclaimed and taught. Of course, such an argument lies at the root of authenticity and integrity for ministry. The rest of this handbook outlines the theological and moral virtues that are always imperative for ministry. My comments above, however, have focused almost exclusively on the particular pertinence of the chapter dealing with ministerial spirituality (McBrien 1987:77-103). While the book is scant, and its thoughts undeveloped, it provides a good skeleton that can be 'fleshed out' by others.

It should be clear that various perspectives on the word 'experience' are operating when this word is used, so clarification is essential, and no *one meaning* can be entertained. Nevertheless, the word, albeit versatile, is essential to contemporary Christian spirituality. Obviously, much more could be said about 'experience' than is attempted here, and there are doubtless many more authors worthy of our attention with regard hereto.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> There is enough to be said in the writings of Schneiders (1976,1986,1989,1993), Kourie (1992,1996,1998), Kourie & Kretschmar (2000), Johnson (1998), and Turner (1995) himself to show that

## 2.8 SPIRITUALITY'S ENGAGEMENT WITH ORDAINED MINISTRY

Naturally, everything in this thesis impacts in *some way* upon ministry. But a number of writers are more focused in showing how contemporary spirituality might be formative for traditional ministry. Peterson (1989), I believe, is particularly influential in furthering ministerial spirituality, and is arguably the sharpest crystallisation of such thought. Nevertheless, I shall not give express attention to him again for the present. The following three writers, Nouwen (1978), Leech (1986), and Johnson (1990), however, show some facility for particularising and extrapolating a sound contemporary spirituality for ordained ministry. In each case there is a depth and comprehensiveness to their apprehension of spirituality. Thus the tone is set for an authentic ministry.

An early awakening to ministerial 'spirituality', contemporarily understood, came in an insightful and prophetic work entitled, *Creative Ministry* (Nouwen 1978). This Catholic writer reaches out tentatively, by contemporary standards, for a lost spirituality - a path of experiential transcendence, and a sense of immortality as known by the mystics of old. 'It is painful to realize that very few ministers are able to offer the rich mystical tradition of Christianity as a source of

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contemporary spirituality might offer to ministry a new lease on life with respect to religious experience - albeit with qualification in Turner's (1995) case - in the sense of *conscious union* rather than 'sensational' union with God. Not a few writers, then, have a concern to recover the experiential dimensions of the faith - and even 'to put experience of the God of Jesus rather than propositions at the centre of religious education' (Carozzo 1994:24). Concern for 'experience' or the 'mystical' has also been the propensity of New Testament scholars, who obviously feel that the New Testament writings are amenable to an oft-neglected 'mystical hermeneutic.' Thus, a new 'post-critical' era may accommodate the insights of modern biblical scholarship within a *contemplative* or *mystical* reading of scripture (Kourie 1998:434). Even where not explicitly mystical, another New Testament scholar uncovers the fundamental experiential roots of the scriptures in a phenomenological approach - a way of seeing that assumes 'that religious language and religious experience are actually about something and deserving of attention in their own right' (Johnson 1998:182). On the basis of such experiential recovery, and with the help of comparative religion, Johnson (1996) is able to expose, in my view, the reductionist regression of a contemporary quest for the historical Jesus, which seems to see New Testament faith-experience as somehow extraneous to the extant kernel of the faith. But 'Christianity came to birth because certain people were *convinced that they had experienced God's transforming power* [italics mine] through the resurrection of Jesus' (Johnson 1998:185). Doubtless the postmodern milieu, together with the tangential influence of academic spirituality, has further facilitated the insights of these polymath scholars. Naturally, the etymology of 'experience' can be exceedingly slippery or indeterminate. Still, spirituality gives back to ministry the rationale and possibility of taking religious experience more seriously than the sometimes-cynical modernistic era. Mysticism in particular speaks of a '*consciousness* [italics mine] of union with the Divine, or Ultimate Reality ...' (Kourie 1992:99). In a number of significant essays Kourie (1992, 1996, 1998) essentially underscores, in my opinion, how mysticism again becomes a contemporary rationale and resource for taking religious experience seriously. Her essays are examples of how mysticism can be approached with academic acumen. Kourie (1996:4-5) keeps a generally accommodative view of 'experience' as such - that is, in so far as experience(s) are particularly demonstrative or not - as does Keller (1978:97), who speaks of those who live 'on the level of deep psychological or spiritual experience, on the level of their innermost being.'

rebirth for the generation searching for new life in the midst of the debris of a faltering civilization' (ibid:117). The writer laments that, as ministers or priests, we have perhaps lost contact with these powers (ibid:117). The book is one of the very few of the period - and sometimes prescribed for ministerial studies - that sought to recover a spirituality for ordained ministry. The pervasive refrain in the book is the phrase 'beyond professionalism', which virtually serves as a sub-title. The book stands in the foreground of the then emerging social sciences and helping professions, together with the new popularity of clinical pastoral education. The writer wants to recover that spiritual dimension without which an exclusively ministerial professionalism is always a kind of anomaly and adulteration of authentic ministry. Professional skills for ministry, however, are not discounted but given preliminary attention to the spirituality that necessarily takes one beyond mere professionalism. (Perhaps a Catholic persuasion of grace building on nature?) But the often-scant attention to this spiritual dimension suggests that 'many ministers and priests are extremely concerned to be *in* with the competent people and to have a clear-cut identity' (ibid:49).

Hankering after the clear-cut professional identity, and the ego-affirmation that so often presupposes it, may need to be challenged by the very ethos and spirit of ministerial spirituality. In truth, there are two forms of consciousness for this writer. The one form is readily identified with the Western-world perspective - one that says that you must be *yourself* so you can be creative. It stresses individuality. The other perspective, of the Eastern-world, speaks of *losing* oneself so that God can be creative in you (Nouwen 1978:51). Much of this Catholic writer's book hints at how a preoccupation with 'self,' professionalism and 'the pastor's ego prevents his (sic) mystical union with God ... '(ibid:51). Still, self-affirmation and self-emptying are not thereby opposites, for no person can give what they do not have. The ministerial calling must bear the tension of self-affirmation *and* self-denial, self-fulfilment and self-emptying. Curiously though, Nouwen (1978) does not conceive how self-affirmation itself might draw on Christian spirituality. Self-affirmation seems to be generated by the professional sciences. Does this evidence a kind of dualism? Perhaps for this writer a self-affirmation is somehow automatically secured through kenosis.

Nouwen's (1978) application of spirituality, as he experienced it in the late sixties and early seventies, reveals an admirable contemplative strain. It is *admirable* because it is insightfully premature. There is a contemplative 'attention,' self-emptying (*kenosis*) and openness to his approach to ministry that runs through the five traditional ministerial functions that he

enumerates. These five functions are: teaching, preaching, pastoral care, organising and celebrating. For example, corresponding to teaching is a requisite bilateral openness between teacher and student that is mutually evocative of inherent potential. Similarly, with preaching there is a corresponding openness and availability of the preacher that goes beyond mere professionalism. The preacher is authentically in touch themselves and therein with the human condition and dilemma. The contemplative disposition is again apparent in the writer's treatment of pastoral care where attention is drawn to the fact that 'we will find the God we want to give in the lives of the people to whom we want to give Him (sic)' (Nouwen 1978:63). Indeed, in all these ministerial functions there is highlighted a notable self-surrender, which typifies the one who moves 'beyond professionalism.' Typifying the self-surrender and contemplative vulnerability of the minister is a significant Johannine opening quote that precedes the introduction to the book, where Simon Peter is told that 'you will stretch your hands and somebody else will put a belt round you and take you where you would rather not go' (John 21:18). While the book might invite some serious cross-questioning of the author's stances, which Nouwen (1978:121-123) himself gracefully admits, there is much to commend this early and rare effort at a ministerial spirituality. The leaning towards a contemplative ministry is almost ahead of its time.

Leech (1986) applies an arguably well-balanced and searching spirituality to pastoral care-ministry in his book, *Spirituality and Pastoral Care*. A hallmark of the book is the way in which this writer's brand of Christian spirituality challenges and even subverts much of what stands for contemporary ministry - and (Christian) spirituality. Clearly, an authentic spirituality is no passport to a peaceful, self-satisfied ministry, whether for clergy or laity. For 'there is a false peace which comes not from rootedness in God but from a kind of analgesic spirituality which seeks to remove the pains and conflicts both of the world and of the heart by dulling consciousness' (Leech 1986:33). Spiritual maturity will occur as a result of our exposure to, and confrontation with, realities that at once disturb and transform us (ibid:31). Thus we are formed through *struggle*. Consequently, pastoral care cannot simply be characterised as 'ambulance work, or the dissemination of peace and inner satisfaction' (ibid:32). Doubtless the integration of *struggle* into this spirituality, apart from its traditional contemplative precedent, is also due to the writer's deep social concerns and convictions. This social sensitivity 'fills out' his spirituality healthily into one that embraces the social context. But now we might look at three foundational principles from which emerge, for this theologian, some of the (I think mostly uncomfortable) correctives to a misguided ministerial spirituality.

One foundational principle for spirituality is the 'Word of God' (Leech 1986:5-16). In contrast to a ministerial perspective that focuses on self-cultivation, personal enlightenment and heightened awareness, the Word of God calls forth very different preparatory dispositions, albeit often uncomfortable. 'If we are to be formed by the Word (sic), we need to cultivate the *opposite* [italics mine] qualities: insight, contemplative listening, and the willingness to allow our culture not to distort the Word but to be confronted and challenged by it (ibid:8). The use of Scripture will call for wrestling, brooding and weeding. Suffice to say, this is in stark contrast to the fundamentalist's transplanting of ready-made biblical applications to life, lifted *whole* from the text. Moreover, the scripture poses a troubling challenge to a comfortable status quo religion, or a culturally sanitised Bible. A biblically formed people, therefore, are 'a people of contradiction and of authentic nonconformity' (ibid:16).

Another foundational principle for spirituality is the conscious practise of 'silence.' Here again, the silence brings with it, for this theologian, a subversion of status quo religion, and therefore of a ministry akin thereto. Such status quo ministry is inauthentic. Silence challenges the busy, superficial minister caught up in illusory self-images of efficiency and competence, but nonetheless inwardly adrift and undernourished (Leech 1986:30). Of course, the silence also carries within itself the genetic social protest of those who first withdrew into the desert, taking a stand against ecclesiastical deference to the culture. Finally, *struggle*, as already highlighted, is the writer's third foundation of authentic spirituality for the minister (ibid:31-44). Such struggle is occasioned by the Church's proclamation of the *kingdom* as opposed to (an evangelical?) preference for spiritual individualism and private religion. Furthermore, an authentic Christology, it is argued, will always be powerfully incarnational and prophetic, and therefore scarcely placid and meekly accommodative.

More could justifiably be said about Leech's (1986) book. Ironically, in spite of the author's seemingly adversarial and robust spirituality - that is, perhaps indicative of conflict - there is also much that is conciliatory and integrative about the book. While spiritual direction is distinguished from counselling and psychotherapy, there is room for mutually informative and enriching interaction. More fascinatingly, the writer demonstrates the common ground between the socially prophetic dimension and spiritual direction. In fact, Leech (1986) is one of the very few spiritual theorists, to my mind, who combines a sophisticated contemplative tradition with a passionate, socially aware spirituality. He is well schooled in both these dimensions. The combination is

uncommon enough to be commended and assimilated. In this respect, he takes ministerial spirituality wider than Nouwen (1971), though perhaps without the latter's pastoral specificity and finesse. It is important, however, to appreciate the contrasting dimensions of 'spirituality' evidenced by these two writers.

It is clear that a contemporary Christian spirituality or ministry cannot promote a dichotomy between 'contemplation' and 'action', or a blatantly naïve 'spiritual-physical' dualism. While ministers often lean towards one or other of this reductionism, there are writers especially alert to such pitfalls. Johnson (1990), in *Faith's Freedom: A classic spirituality for contemporary Christians*, strives to develop a contemplative approach that bypasses these reified and uncompromising alternatives. He finds particular inspiration and impetus in the words of the Apostle Paul: 'For freedom Christ has set us free' (Galatians 5:1). But for the author this freedom frees us from more than the conventional list of sins and transgressions. Indeed, our own invested religious persuasions can become just as idolatrous, skewed and self-righteous as more obvious deviations. We no less need to be set free from *these* entrenched and erroneous fixations, not least of all ministers and priests. The 'Christian' extremes of *Gnosticism* (or more euphemistically, *contemplation*) and *liberationism* (perhaps rationalised as *Christian activism*) are the subject of much of this writer's concern. Neither the Gnostic nor the liberationist is free. More so, '[t]he Gnostic and liberation models of spiritualities offer a kind of simplicity, but it is accomplished by the elimination of complexity and tension through ideology and program' (Johnson 1990:181). The author sees the stances of contemporary 'Gnostic' and 'liberationist' as essentially compulsions, or *idolatries*, to use one of his key words. 'The simplicity that is given by compulsion is artificial and rigid; it can endure only by constant attention to its own protection, and the elimination of any other that threatens it' (ibid:181). (Of course, such compulsion and addictive exclusivism is, in truth, *idolatry*.) This compulsion or idolatry is also described as being caught up in one's own *project* - that is, a kind of compulsivity, albeit a *religious* and self-justifying one. But how is this bondage overcome?

True freedom is described as 'openness to' (be influenced by) 'the Other' - that is, the Otherness of God, of other people and of the otherness, generally, of the world and nature. Such otherness may also include the experience of our own body - for example, in our body's resistance to our plans, or in the body's weakness and disease. But it is the gift of Otherness that constitutes grace. 'In the broadest sense, I define grace as the gift of otherness made available to us by God in the world. It is the fact that there always *is* an "other" that enables me to break the pattern of idolatry'

(Johnson 1990:68). Idolatry, so to speak, always wants to swallow up that 'other' in an unmitigated pattern of compulsion. My idolatry can only be relativised and neutralised, then, by an 'Other' that escapes my *project* or *compulsion* (ibid:68). This gift of otherness is offered every moment in what is a grace-drenched world. The gift is a constant corollary of God's continuing creation (ibid:72). God is experienced as Other, but in *every* 'other' that is encountered there is an implicit offer of God's knowledge and love - that is, God's grace (ibid:72). Furthermore, the experience of human love is no mere *metaphor* or *analogy* for God's grace. Rather, '[it] is a *means* of God's grace, indeed one of the most direct and powerful ways in which God touches the human spirit' (ibid:72). Thus real Christian maturity for Johnson (1990) is intrinsically the freedom of accessibility, where the other is received not as threat but as gift. For the truly mature person, or saint, is accessible. She does not seek identity, and is free of protective defences (Johnson 1990:182). 'The saint is open to what is new and different, because he (sic) expects from the new a gift from God, and from the different an opportunity to grow into a world as expansive as God's' (ibid:182).

In summation then, the writer presents a foil to the extremes of contemporary Gnosticism and liberationism by recovering a tradition that is strictly contemplative. This philosophy of ministerial spirituality offers a searching critique of an unworldly, dematerialised spirituality on the one hand, and a social activism that has lost touch with its contemplative and mystical heritage. Too often the spirituality of ministers and priests has been tragically reduced to one or other of these diminutions of authentic spirituality. While neither Nouwen (1971) nor Leech (1986) fall prey to these excesses, they might both be well served by the dynamically conciliatory stance of Johnson (1990), who I think is logically introduced as the last of this contemplative threesome. However, a question for Johnson (1990) may raise the concern of whether his approach of accessibility is just *too* open. Does he have sufficient normative substance to regulate his reception of otherness? Such is the classic recurring concern that mystics attract.

## **2.9 PARTICIPATIVE TRINITARIAN SPIRITUALITY**

If any *one* Christian spirituality might be accorded the comprehensive and accommodative foundation for nearly all contemporary demands and insights then a sound Trinitarian spirituality would seem to deserve this confidence. New treatments of the Trinity in Christian thinking, by all accounts long overdue, have facilitated a convergence of theology and spirituality, thereby revealing an exciting integration that holds much possibility for 'over-intellectualised,'

theologically trained ministers.<sup>6</sup> La Cugna (2000:273-282) writes a seminal essay, *The Practical Trinity*. She shows how ‘both Catholic and Protestant theologians who are working to revitalize the doctrine of the Trinity have shifted away from constructing theories about God’s “inner life”’ (La Cugna 2000:274). Medieval theology had become hardened into God’s *self-relatedness*, born of the earlier concern to distinguish intricately between Christ’s divine and human nature. In other words, debates about the equality of the ‘persons’ of the Trinity had finally calcified into an all-embracing preoccupation with the *immanent* Trinity, which became the conceptual operational field of the theological intellectuals. The Trinity was now just an abstract theory, and ordinary Christian living even seemed to get on without it. The unintentional effect of the Cappadocians and Augustine was a virtually exclusive focus on the *inner* life of God (ibid:278). Yet, as we are reminded by this author, ‘[t]he doctrine of the Trinity is in fact the most practical of all doctrines’ (ibid:275). The Trinity, or more particularly the ‘economic’ Trinity, relates to God’s dynamic life of giving and receiving *in which human beings have been included* [italics mine] (ibid:278). Such an understanding increasingly emerges out of contemporary retrieval of largely forgotten ideas - ideas that belong to classical teaching on the Trinity. In fact, ‘[t]he Bible, liturgy and early Christian creeds do not show any predilection to settle question of God’s “inner” life; they speak only of God’s presence in the world through the Son and Spirit’ (ibid:278). These contemporarily retrieved experiences and insights, for this author, increasingly bring a confessional, relational dynamic to Trinitarian reflection so that ‘we live out our personhood in a manner that conforms to who God is’ (ibid:280-281). Indeed, while the doctrine of the Trinity *is* a doctrine about God, it is also a doctrine about *salvation*, from which comes the only material, I might say, for constructing the conceptual Trinity. In other terms, what is contemporarily recovered is ‘the connection between Trinitarian (sic) doctrine and Trinitarian faith’ (ibid:279). La Cugna (2000) therefore sets the groundwork for a Trinitarian spirituality - probably the most fundamental Christian spirituality of all. The Trinity presupposes and actualises, then, a relational and participative spirituality for those who are devotionally and imaginatively engaged therein. Thus La Cugna (2000) is really presupposing more than a mere *practical Trinity*, which is still a somewhat static description. Rather, at a deeper level, might one not say that here is a Trinity that even subsumes the worshipper and devotee into ‘its’ very participative life? This means that sound Christian spirituality is inseparable from the Trinity so understood - that is, as ‘economic,’ dispensational

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<sup>6</sup> The ‘over-intellectualised minister’ may be a hypothetical construct. Who *are* these ministers? (Perhaps we need *more* of them, as opposed to those who are always dispensing the next experiential novelty.) Still, many clergy were not trained in a theological climate that admitted any real *existential* response to what was exclusively an *intellectual* exercise. New insights into the ‘practical, economic Trinity’ bring, for many systematic theologians and Christian ethicists, a whole new lease on spiritual life.

and ‘dispersive.’ In such spirituality the minister finds complete integration of Christian experience and sound doctrine - in other words, ministerial authenticity. Other works are increasingly drawing on these dynamic insights for spirituality as they emerge out of an ‘economic Trinity.’

Different *kinds* of Trinitarian spirituality extend the possibilities for imagining one’s communion with God and with others, as in the absorbing essay, *Three Trinitarian Spiritualities* (Gresham 2000:283-293). The latter essayist outlines three ways of conceiving Trinitarian spirituality.<sup>7</sup> First, one might understand the Trinity in a way that furthers a *contemplative* spirituality, where the Trinity dwells in the soul, after the psychological analogy of Augustine, in his *De Trinitate*. The soul is here a unity of remembering, knowing and willing. ‘Basic to this spirituality is the psychological analogy of the Trinity, in which Son and Spirit are encountered as the Word and Love of God...’ (Gresham 2000:285). Son (Word) and Spirit (Divine Love) are respectively productive of contemplation and the human being’s passionate reciprocating love. Second, there is a Trinitarian spirituality of a social dimension, incorporating into itself more than the limiting possibilities of the human soul analogy. ‘The Son becomes a member of the human *community* in order to bring *humans* into the divine community of the holy Trinity’ [italics mine] (ibid:287). Here there is a communal incorporation into the Trinitarian life, although with a (probably worthwhile) risk of sliding into tritheism, as one is presumably dealing more pointedly in this instance with the *inter-action* of the divine ‘persons’ (ibid:288). Thirdly, Trinitarian spirituality at once illumines and roots baptism and confirmation as liturgical symbols of the distinct but united missions of Son and Spirit (ibid:289). Utilising this particularised spirituality is also the Charismatic theological persuasion, which relates ‘new birth’ and ‘baptism in the Spirit’ to the distinct missions of Son and Spirit. Of course, the exaggeration of these distinctions is frequently observed. Summarily however, Trinitarian spirituality has rendered the abstract Trinity formula (once again) a servant of that God who is experienced contemplatively, mystically, and incarnationally as *practical* Trinity. In brief, the influence of insightful Trinitarian spiritualities dare not be under-estimated in contemporary reflective spirituality.

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<sup>7</sup> I think it is important to identify these concepts at work, sometimes unconsciously utilised, in many ‘spirituality theorists’ and practitioners. Retrieval of Trinitarian depths is productive of much excellent contemporary Christian spirituality, and thus the importance that this be given recognition in a literature review.

## 2.10 FORMATIVE SPIRITUALITY

Is there something too categorical and circumscribed in speaking of *spiritual formation* as related to contemporary Christian spirituality - or any Christian spirituality for that matter? Is formation not of the essence of spirituality? In other words, integral to spirituality so qualified are transformative influences and potentialities. These influences are at work even when not consciously described or deliberated. Nonetheless, the degree of sound *maturiation* actually taking place is not always beyond dispute. To be sure, not a few historical and contemporary ascetics and well-intentioned acolytes have been guilty of excesses and crude misreading of scriptural intent. Wolski Conn (1989), in *Spirituality and Personal Maturity*, exemplifies a contemporary concern for spiritual maturity and a topical propensity for critically dovetailing developmental psychology and spiritual formation. The helpfulness of these insights to pastoral ministry is almost self-evident to any astute pastoral counsellor and spiritual director. While investing her thinking in the developmental work of Kegan (1982), Wolski Conn (1989) employs her own sophisticated understanding of historical and contemporary spirituality. Analysing historical spirituality up to the present time the author concludes that the Christian tradition sees maturity as loving *relationship* to God and others. Such was the nature, for example, of biblical spirituality. 'In biblical vision, spiritual maturity is deep and inclusive love. It is the loving relationship to God and others born of the struggle to discern where and how God is present in the community, in ministry, in suffering, in religious and political dissension, and in one's own sinfulness' (Wolski Conn 1989:16). In early post-New Testament times spiritual maturity was still envisioned as relational union with God and love of one's neighbour. Later on, Protestant and Catholic reformers saw maturity as surrender to God's free love in Christ, albeit with the need for fidelity to one's own conscience and interior call. Merton (1971) was 'a paradigm of spirituality in the life of the Church of Vatican II' (ibid:29). His perspective broadened dramatically into relational, inter-religious human friendship and mutually undertaken political action. Thus the author delineates, throughout Christian history, the *relational* motifs of spiritual maturity and spirituality. Yet one might ask: What of the contemporary 'secular' concern for self-direction and autonomy? These are not seen as inimical to spiritual development. Some kind of well-established self-identity and self-direction is implicit and necessary for genuine love as self-offering. Both Kegan (1982) and Wolski Conn (1989) outline human development as perpetually related to the resolution or balance of the autonomy/relational tension. Maturity, then, is the outcome of a process of balancing the lifelong tension between yearnings for inclusion and distinction' (Wolski Conn 1989:57). Self-direction and autonomy need not be discounted. Such self-direction, however, must come into its own through the life of complex and mutual

relationships with God and others. Significant in this writer's work, however, is the way she finds a psychological framework, in her case from Kegan (1982), for integrating spiritual and psychological development. This inter-disciplinary, mutual resourcing is an important feature of some contemporary formative spirituality, helpfully blending the minister's psychological and spiritual-theological training. Admittedly, it represents more a *description* of the journey of maturation, and its desired *goals*, than it does a practical resource on *how* to get there - perhaps a reminder that the Spirit still blows where the Spirit wills (John 3:8).

## **2.11 CONCLUSION**

Any survey of literature dealing with contemporary Christian spirituality must seem incomplete on conclusion, as does this one. Yet the enumerated writers for the most part provide voice for many similar positions and mutually borrowed insights. No claim is made here that every writer herein is the best exponent in their particular field, though many of them probably are. Finally, while the literature on most contemporary spirituality is not expressly related to ministry *per se*, many of the implications for ministry - though by no means all - are fairly obvious. A book that makes little or no mention of ministry, in other words, might still be a most fruitful source for authentic ministerial spirituality.

## CHAPTER THREE

### CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY: GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE FOR MINISTRY

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

A feature of contemporary spirituality is its universal embrace, and particularly the global and inclusive perspective it gives to ministry. Although one must distinguish clearly between contemporary spirituality in *general* and Christian spirituality in *particular*, much can be said for the generous inclusiveness of contemporary *Christian* spirituality as well. I further elucidate how this has implications for authentic Christian ministry. Moreover, whether one speaks of spirituality in the sense of ‘lived experience’ or as a ‘contemporary academic discipline,’ that inclusiveness is largely common in both understandings. Furthermore, the references to ‘contemporary Christian spirituality’ in this chapter might generally be taken to refer to both the ‘lived experience’ and the ‘academic’ understanding of spirituality, unless otherwise specified. For the most part, these two categories are interdependent and mutually enhancing.

Inviting the view of greater inclusivity is a contemporary and much-quoted definition of spirituality, namely ‘the experience of consciously striving to *integrate* [italics mine] one’s life in terms *not of isolation and self-absorption* [italics mine] but of self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives’ (Schneiders 1989:684). The latter’s definition of spirituality quoted above is discussed right through the contemporary world of Christian spirituality, although it must be admitted, not always uncritically. How might this definition further authenticate Christian ministry? Can it more effectively express the spirit of the Christian faith in practical Christian service? Previous Christian generations might have felt some discomfort at the heralding of this expansiveness. They might well have hastened to assert ‘the scandal of particularity’. Contemporary Christian spirituality, however, draws on sound traditions that speak to the globalisation of our communities and times. Notwithstanding the still popular sentiments of the *ecclesiam nulla salus* (‘outside the church no salvation’), contemporary Christian spirituality is arguably doing justice to those Church Fathers who countenanced greater accommodation of that ‘Christian’ living that predated the Christian era itself. Although Tertullian, for example, may have been more concerned than most that the distinctiveness of the faith might be compromised, there were other Fathers who affirmed God’s saving activity prior to Christ’s advent. Such were Irenaeus (c. 130-c.200), Clement of Alexandria (died c. 215), and Origen (c.185- c.254) (Pittman, Habito & Muck 1996:45). When contemporary Christian spirituality manifests distinctive motifs of greater inclusiveness it is therefore not without real patristic support. Again, Christians have

traditionally maintained the celebrated Vincentian canon, affirming that which has been believed everywhere, always, and by all (*quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est*) (Oden 1983:10). This familiar standard of universality and breadth of perspective may, with the advent of ‘spirituality’, take on a fresh and even more inclusive possibility.

### **3.2 FACTORS FURTHERING INCLUSIVITY**

A number of factors have spawned the inclusive feature of today’s Christian spirituality. They are a combination of social phenomena and of features integral to Christian spirituality. The factors mentioned below are not exhaustive, but each is critical, leading to enhanced understanding of contemporary Christian writing in the context of this study.

#### **3.2.1 Human Experience**

Contemporary Christian spirituality has been part of a significant move in western theology towards more serious reflection on human experience (Collins 2000:37). This move facilitated a break from a static approach that is more characteristic of the older ‘spiritual theology’ of the pre-conciliar period. Spirituality speaks a world language of human experience *per se* - as opposed to prescribed dogmatic experience. ‘Spirituality’, as opposed to ‘spiritual theology’, has herein understandably proved a far more *inclusive* concept. It has gained much ecumenical acceptance and has a largely eclectic approach, utilising the riches of a shared Christian heritage. It is a break away from a more sectarian perspective on ‘life in the Spirit’ and expresses catholicity far better than previous ‘spiritual theologies’ (Collins 2000:37). Of course, Schneider’s (1989:684) expansive definition of spirituality is once more pertinent here.

#### **3.2.2 Christian Origins**

Much contemporary spirituality draws appreciably from Christian spirituality and even retains some of its residue. Etymologically the word ‘spiritual’ is a neologism from the writings of the Apostle Paul. The fact that ‘spirituality’ has its origins in the specificity of the Christian faith surely gives contemporary Christian spirituality some residual (and even proselytising?) foothold in this worldwide phenomenon. Pennington (1987:216), referring to Christians, can speak of ‘those who are experiencing with some liveliness the currents of global spirituality, an ecumenism beyond ecumenism ...’ Conversely, while many benefactors of spirituality may know little about the traditions of Christian spirituality, still a residual Christian undercurrent arguably remains, introducing some preliminary or tenuous grasp of Christian thought and practice to those unacquainted with the Christian religion.

### 3.2.3 Globalisation

An enormous contributor to current Christian spirituality's inclusiveness has surely been the globalisation of the planet and a greater and easier access to other insights, cultures and religions. A 'global consciousness' emerged on the eve of the twenty-first century. This consciousness, it has been pointed out, has identified with a more primitive cosmic, collective consciousness that was lost with the emergence of the great religions of the world in the 'axial period' of 800-200 B.C.E (Cousins 2000:88). The latter writer bears testimony to what is more than self-evident by now. Indeed, global consciousness is one reason for increased interest in spirituality, '... with a welcome ecumenical, cross-cultural and inter-religious exchange ...' (Kourie & Kretzschmar 2000:9). In combination with a residual Christian spirituality, globalisation conceivably looks to become a facilitator of widening Christian acceptability.

### 3.2.4 Postmodernism

Hard upon the heels of the globalisation phenomenon, and scarcely distinguishable from it, is *postmodernism*, which has its own contribution to make to 'at-one-ness'. The postmodern person does not feel like an alien in the world, as might a 'modern' have done. They feel at home, and enjoy a sense of kinship with all species. In their sense of at-homeness 'the modern desire to master and possess is replaced in post-modern spirituality with a joy in *communion*...[italics mine]' (Griffin 1988:14-15). Postmodernism fosters a greater sense of at-oneness where 'the foundation of all social energies - economic, political and cultural - is spiritual. Spiritual energies are the deepest source of the legitimation or transformation of society' (Holland 1988:49). In this thinking 'the relations one has with one's body, one's larger natural environment, one's family, and one's culture are instead *constitutive* of one's very identity.' (Griffin 1988:14). There is thus a holistic tenor to the era of postmodernism that, it is argued here, facilitates a wider, universal embrace for current Christian spirituality. Indeed, postmodern spirituality has more than one methodology and strategy. It is multivocal and pluralistic and, in the main, does not proclaim one authoritative truth, but explores 'a coherent, meaningful expression of relative principles as a viable spiritual path' (Irwin 1999:6).

Postmodernism has also effected a fragmentation and relativising of truth. Such is admittedly not good news from a Christian perspective. Still, truth is now experienced in a more diverse and contextual way, no longer the monolithic and all-purpose imperative of previous ages, or of the modern era. The general interest in Eastern thought in the sixties and seventies was further enlisted and exploited by postmodernism. Some helpful assimilation of Eastern insights was

credibly employed in the writings of Merton (1967). Zen thought and practice found a certain kinship with Christian 'schools' of mysticism and contemplation. Religious and cultural barriers were often bridged. Formerly foreign and perhaps feared insights now facilitated deeper understandings and assimilations of one's own faith as a living and cognitive experience. Postmodernism, and its co-determinant, globalisation, lends further weight to the expansiveness of Christian spirituality, together with the burgeoning interest in spirituality right across the secular sphere. Atheistic and non-religious spiritualities are not uncommon. One writer has said, in fact, that 'the spiritual and the salvific are clearly distinguishable. Secular spiritual practices are not necessarily competitors with traditional religions that promise salvation' (Van Ness 1996:6). Nevertheless, the postmodern climate can relate to a hankering after an 'ultimate concern.'

While some interests in spirituality might be bizarre or even evil, interest in spirituality 'represents on the whole, a profound and authentic desire of 20<sup>th</sup>-century humanity for wholeness in the midst of fragmentation, for community in the face of isolation and loneliness, for liberating transcendence, for meaning in life, for values that endure' (Schneiders 1989:696). There is clearly, then, a search and hunger for that which transcends the merely material and mundane, to that which renders one's life authentic and integrated. In answer to this, a new presentation of the Christian faith is being harnessed by today's Christian spirituality, in the form of retreats, spiritual programmes and 'rules of life'. Contemporary Christian spirituality has found itself advantageously placed to lay aside exclusively ecclesiastic and dogmatic approaches of former years. Furthermore, the proliferation of non-Christian spiritualities seems to enhance Christian spirituality's less dogmatic foothold in this postmodern hunger. The advent of revived Christian spirituality in this era corresponds to a universal recognition of deeper need, and speaks to secularism's acknowledgement of that need. Contemporary spirituality demonstrates versatility in being able to speak the language of the times. In short, it rides the wave of postmodernism, albeit not uncritical of some of its manifestations. Spirituality sidesteps the prejudice inducing 'language of Canaan,' or 'dogmatics' rigidly understood, to raise curiosity or feelings of affinity in the unchurched.

### **3.2.5 Academic Eclecticism**

The work of Schneiders (1989) has had a profound effect in the halls of theological training and preparation for ministry. She has championed a place for (Christian) spirituality as a discipline in the university academy. For reasons that will become obvious, this has brought expansiveness to the perspectives of spiritual practitioners in general, and ministers of religion in particular. She

achieves this effect by making academic spirituality, *inter alia*, an anthropological exercise. Christian spirituality is thereby loosened from the apron strings of systematic or moral theology. 'Although spirituality and theology in the strict sense are mutually related it is a moment in the study of spirituality and vice versa, theology does not contain or control spirituality. In other words, I have proposed that spirituality is not a subdivision of either dogmatic or moral theology' (Schneiders 1989:687). The latter therefore achieves for contemporary Christian spirituality a universal background in the academy. Her approach also reflects a preference for inclusivity. Understandably, she does not favour the classical designation, 'spiritual theology', as this does not give freedom to the academic examination of Christian religious experience. She herein makes the break from the classic divisions of ascetical and mystical theology. The groundwork is thus done for a more informed, sympathetic and rational legitimation for ministerial mission in the contemporary world.

In summation, and at the at the risk of making too generalised a statement, we may note that spirituality is not so much a static content or pile of information. It is essentially a process, for true spirituality has a universal character and contributes a capacity for experiencing the whole breadth and depth of Christ (Ebert & Kustenmacher 1995:8).

### **3.3 AUTHENTIC MINISTRY**

John Wesley, the father of Methodism, uttered the oft-quoted words: 'The world is my parish.' Elsewhere he said, '[i]f your heart be as my heart, then give me your hand.' If he were a bit wary of some of the expansiveness sounded above, his heart would nevertheless have been most sympathetic.

One measure of ministerial authenticity, certainly for Methodists, would be the possession of an explicit and operational global perspective and a desire to embrace all humanity. If 'God so loved the *world...*' [italics mine] and God's purpose is 'to bring all creation together...' (Eph. 1: 10) and '...God was making *all* [italics mine] mankind (sic) his friends through Christ,' (2 Cor. 5: 19) (Good News Bible) then the prominence of a merely localised and exclusive enterprise could scarcely be a credible or faithful disposition in the Christian minister, ordained or lay. Protestantism can be much enriched by the biblical and more distinctively Catholic stress on a universal Christian perspective. Fox (1999:17) points out persuasively that for the Apostle Paul, even justification must be seen in a wider context as part of God's total plan for creation. Paul's thought was triggered by the divisions in a pluralistic world, and less by the inner struggles of

individual persons. Bearing in mind the sentiments and injunctions of these biblical insights, the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, for example, enjoins its ministers to hold before their eyes the stated vision of this Church: 'A Christ-healed Africa for the healing of the Nations.' Even the more immediate objective of calling 'the Methodist people to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ for healing and transformation' is meant as a step to this wider realisation of reaching 'the Nations'. (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2003:2). Wesley's evangelicalism demonstrated a strong social and universal dimension and his clarion call was 'to spread Scriptural holiness throughout the land.' His still controversial opposition to Calvinist predestinationism was consistent with his other firm dictum that 'all men (sic) can be saved.' Quite apart from the biblical injunctions and insights, therefore, the Methodist minister's work can only be fully authenticated by a vision that, while not excluding the local setting, goes far beyond it. Wesley's (quoted in Williams 1984:15) sermon, *the Catholic Spirit*, reads:

I do not mean, 'Be of my opinion.' You need not: I do not expect or desire it...Keep you your opinion; I mine; and that as steadily as ever. You need not even endeavour to come over to me, or bring me over to you. I do not desire you to dispute those points, or to hear or speak one word concerning them. Let all opinions alone on one side and the other: only 'give me thine hand'

Of course, one can hardly annex this ecumenical or catholic perspective as exclusively Methodist or Wesleyan. It is a heritage that all Christians share and has implications for all Christian ministries. Indeed, in our multi-cultural South African setting we constantly meet the 'universal' and the 'other' indigenously, on our own ground and in the person of our compatriots. Regardless of denomination, Christian ministry recognises, that 'mission is the church's participation in the work of the Spirit to renew the face of the earth ... the church is called to exercise this ministry with total commitment' (Bosch 1996:378). The authentic minister must own this vision and be owned by it. In addition, the Christian minister needs a spiritual and theological rationale that can speak to the globalising perspective of our times - one that transcends a previous century's parochialism and condemnation of everything foreign or non-European. The contention in this chapter is that current Christian spirituality is amenable to these global and ecumenical challenges. As a Methodist, I will show that John Wesley's universalistic propensities are done adequate justice by the more inclusive leanings of contemporary Christian spirituality, which also give to Christian ministry a greater injection of biblical authenticity. For Methodist ministers in particular, this makes for greater ministerial authenticity.

### 3.4 SPIRITUALITY'S PRESENT CONTRIBUTION

#### 3.4.1 Confluence with Global Perspectives

Contemporary Christian spirituality makes a contribution to ministry through rediscovering its own normative heritage. But, at the risk of some repetition, I now show how spirituality uses the contemporary reality of globalisation to render its own contribution. Authenticity for ministry is not only related to being faithful to the Christian spiritual traditions, it also means answering to the universal perspectives and worldview of our times. Naturally, one has to be able to offer a critique of the *zeitgeist*, or spirit of the age. But there needs to be a certain congruency between the needs and opportunities that the *zeitgeist* presents and the contemporary presentation of the faith into that context. It is here that contemporary spirituality enables the minister to speak to the global understandings of the contemporary world. The world context is particularly amenable to the agility and versatility evident in much present-day Christian spirituality. There appears to be a confluence in understanding and concerns between the global perspective and some of the universal propensities of spirituality. Postmodernism's concerns and expressions have proved fertile soil for central convictions of today's Christian spirituality and have anticipated (or precipitated) much needed correctives and normative retrievals for spirituality in these times. In short, postmodernism has 'assisted' spirituality and ministry in discovering a new credibility and integrity.<sup>1</sup>

Specifically, postmodernism has responded critically to the 'individuality' of modernism. The latter period reflected an 'adulation of the self-determined, autonomous, self-subsistent self' (Downey 1994:94). By contrast, postmodernism has brought us into a much wider world. It has given us an 'appreciative awareness of the indispensability of relationality, interdependence, community, and traditions' (ibid:94). Modernism's proud assertion of the self-sufficient, subsistent rational self is now exposed. In response to this mood, or by providential fiat, theology and academic spirituality has been rethinking and reconceiving itself. For instance, Downey (1994) among others, outlines the doctrine of the Trinity, discovering again the Trinity's

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<sup>1</sup> We should, however, be uneasy with superficial equations between postmodernism and aspects of current Christian spirituality. Matthews (2000:97) issues a warning that medieval mystical insights, for example, are not always understood in their original radical form. He cites Don Cupitt (1998) in this respect. Matthews says of Cupitt: 'Does even he, who readily relates the mysticism of Meister Eckhart to the postmodern phenomenon, really grasp the difference that there is between Eckhart and our own ways of thinking'?

communal, relational and incorporative character. He says: 'Taken as the point of entry and destination of Christian life, the Trinity gives rise to an understanding of a spirituality whose keynotes are participation in communion of persons both human and divine, and the perfection of these relationships in self-donation, mutuality, and reciprocity' (Downey 1994:96). Reflection on the Trinity predictably gives rise to a sense of the unity and mutuality of God and of all things in God. It then becomes easier to see how all things hold together, and how there is a givenness about the basic unity of life in all its diversity. Indeed, there seems to be a divine legitimation of this essential oneness by the very Trinitarian nature of God her/himself. A new appreciation of this mutuality and oneness can perhaps be better attributed to the field of spirituality than systematic theology. LaCugna (2000), for example, develops a contemporary spirituality informed by the doctrine of the Trinity. She notes that while the Trinity has often been assumed to be the loftiest, most abstract, and ethereal expression of the doctrine of God, the Trinitarian doctrine, is after all the most practical. It is the unique province of Christian spirituality to explore the practical implications of teaching the Trinity, enabling people to appreciate their essential oneness in God.

Contemporary Christian spirituality presents Christian ministry with an intelligible and relevant way of meeting the perspectives and opportunities of our times. In this respect it has an inclusive, transcultural and inter-religious flavour to it. Contemporary Christian experience and thought is able to answer to our times by responding to the fresh challenges and insights of globalisation and postmodernism. Christian spirituality today reflects 'the recognition that the task of Christian spirituality is to be carried out in the midst of a global community ...' (Tyson 1999:377).

On the other hand, there is recognition that there is no generic Christian spirituality - that is, an all-purpose, mutually agreed-upon orthodoxy for all purposes and all places. Here our present-day spirituality ties in with the fragmentation characteristic of postmodernism. There is an adaptability and transcultural quality to Christian thought and experience. Distinctive Christian spiritualities, growing out of indigenous contexts, are being accepted and recognised as authentic.<sup>2</sup> Schneiders (1986:267) says that 'there is no such thing as generic spirituality or spirituality in general'. Ministry then becomes more authentic and credible because it recognises

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<sup>2</sup> Christian spirituality shows great versatility as it arises out of the 'base communities' of South America, where the distinctive circumstances of social and economic injustice are being addressed by the spirituality of these communities. Comparable expressions of indigenous Christian spirituality are increasingly evident in Africa as well. Further, feminist spirituality is transcultural and pervasive and is indicative of how praxis informs and rewrites theory.

the role and place of context and does not so easily impose its own (generic) blueprint on others. South African Christian workers will not be strangers to this generic imposition, which was so characteristic of many colonialising missionaries to this country. Christian spirituality's non-generic, contextual appreciation, to which Schneiders' (1986) well-known article has been no small contributor, is more able than previous generations to appreciate a spirituality that can be fashioned for different contexts, yet without succumbing to the *zeitgeist*. Few honest spiritual theorists could still subscribe to a transcultural or classical theology.<sup>3</sup> Replacing this monolithic approach has been a diversity of Christian spiritualities, conscientised and sensitised by the diversity of their contexts. Christian spirituality, and theological reflection in general, is not scandalised by this diversity and fragmentation as it once might have been. It is better able to see how an authentic Christian spirituality might emerge in this form. Christian spirituality's sense of wholeness, connectedness and universality, then, is not only established by those hungers, aspirations and values that are common to all of humanity. Its wholeness and connectedness is also established by its *accommodation of spiritual pluralism*, even outside the Christian family. What King (1995:72) says of theology is just as easily said of spirituality:

It is emerging with a renewed sense of wholeness, connectedness and universality and yet it is also intensely aware of the importance of context and rootedness for any meaningful conversation about the divine. It is emerging with a renewed sense of vocation to help all who seek to discover and discern the presence of God in our interconnected world.

Christian spirituality today has become more universal precisely *because* it appreciates the diversity of forms that these spiritualities might take, while still being legitimately Christian. King (1995:71) says that 'an example of this is the way in which many theologians of our time identify themselves and locate their place in the Christian community – not just incidentally, but as a fundamental preparation for their theological enterprise'.

Contemporary Christian spirituality offers a priceless gift to present-day Christian ministry. It speaks to the fragmented dispersion of postmodern perspectives, since its all-encompassing approach helps congregants find integration and wholeness in a world of deconstruction and diversity. Uncomfortably for some congregants, they can no longer feed on fundamentalist diets,

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<sup>3</sup> Don Saliers explains that a culturally homogeneous central tradition of spiritual literature as being normative for all is no longer in existence. There are now multiple themes of feminist, black, creation, liberationist, and even ecumenical 'spirituality'. (Dupré & Saliers: 1989:540.)

which set their Church or religion against the rest of the world. Today's Christian spirituality becomes a tool for ministers to liberate their people from the confining insecurities and compulsions of literalism and fundamentalism. It introduces them to a mature and serving faith that is not hamstrung by its own defensiveness and fears. It liberates the mission perspective of the Christian minister to engage in a teachable and humble ministry of mission, freed from the pious patronising, to put it strongly, that so often counted as mission in the past. It employs the perspectives of the times, which appreciate diversity and the circumscribed nature of local contexts. Indeed, contemporary Christian spirituality that sees itself as part of an even wider and diverse family enables ministry to identify the parameters of its own cultural understanding and mythologies. It also invites an appreciation of other insights and limitations precipitated by their contextual embeddedness.

Sheldrake (1991b:50) describes a universal perspective and appreciation as one of the outstanding features of contemporary Christian spirituality: 'Firstly it is not exclusive - certainly not associated with any one Christian tradition, nor even necessarily with Christianity as a whole'. For him this is one of the features of spirituality to have emerged in the last twenty years within Western Christianity. In the same vein Cousins (1990:44) makes it clear that '... from now on and into the future, Christian spirituality can not be true to its own identity unless it understands itself in relation to the other spiritual traditions of the world'.

Christian ministry, if it is to be authentic and credible, must surely welcome the wider perspective evident in these contemporary theorists. Many congregants today, as children of postmodernism, feel instinctively that Christianity cannot write off the validity of other religions. Christian spirituality arguably does for our ministry what dogmatic theology has seemed unable to do. It has a more inclusive and appreciative spirit. There is a greater sense of universal kinship within contemporary Christian experience, which often presupposes and indeed articulates the deep oneness of all humanity, as Merton (1967,1971) increasingly saw. King (1982:163-164) writes: 'A basic thread runs through all Merton's writings, whether on prayer or on nuclear arms. The human person is called to oneness with God in Christ, in truth and in love, at the centre of his [sic] being. At this core he discovers a solidarity with all men [sic] ... '

It is clear then, that contemporary (Christian) spirituality's universal character is congruent with postmodernism and the global perspective of our times. In this identification with the worldview of our age it also succeeds in making Christian ministry more authentic and credible. It does this

in a number of ways. For one, it reawakens ministry to cast its net wider and see the local church in global and missionary perspective. Second, it gives to ministry a new appreciation of the legitimacy of contextual shaping of diverse spiritualities, while embracing this diversity in a wider unity. Ministry is sensitised to the spiritual insights of different contexts. In the process, ministry reflects greater humility, and a teachable spirit. It abandons religious imperialism. Moreover, it comes to recognise the place that 'context' has in shaping Christian vocation. 'Ministers' see that they are dependent on the wider community to verify their calling's authenticity. Christian spirituality is a contextual activity. It is prayerful and critically reflective. It 'presupposes experience within Christian community and a willingness to test constantly the authenticity, credibility, and relevance of any Christian expression both within that faith community and within the larger community' (Pittman, Habito & Muck 1996:33). Spirituality is more respectful of context and more versatile than those spiritualities that were exclusively dominated by systematic theology. Third, ministry becomes appreciative again of the communal nature of the world, and the Church in the world. Postmodernism's implicit 'warning' about any form of world-abandoning disposition in this climate is ably complemented by today's spirituality. But it is also the mystical re-emergence within spirituality that gives ministry the tools and rationale to address the universal challenge of the global village. The following section will seek to elucidate how a mystical approach is particularly adept at achieving this.

#### **4.2 The Retrieval of Mysticism**

The above section (2.1) has spoken generally of the universal indicators in contemporary spirituality. It has also shown how contemporary spirituality has worked in tandem with postmodernism in this respect. Yet under this present heading it will be apparent how the retrieval of the mystical dimension within today's Christian spirituality utilises the thinking of contemporary global perspectives. It does this through rediscovering its own rich mystical heritage.

It is a unique contribution of mysticism that it removes our blinkered vision, enabling us to 'see' the world with new eyes. The retrieved *mystical* tradition within present spirituality allows us to leave our over-aculturated perspectives and find a transcendent overview on the pluralities of the contemporary world. That this *retrieval* is in operation is manifest all over. 'At present it seems a new form of spirituality is developing. It is characterized by a return to the sources ...' (Busser

1987:301). Indeed, the word 'retrieval' occurs quite significantly in present-day Christian spirituality.<sup>4</sup>

In the classic mystical triad of *purgation, illumination* and *union*, one is able to discern again the heart of one's faith, and not oversubscribe to its more peripheral issues. Particularly the aspects of 'illumination' and 'union' have a universal identification that crosses religious boundaries. They find echoes in Buddhism and in other Eastern spiritual traditions. The re-affirmed mystical element in contemporary Christian spirituality evidences a multi-religious accommodation that fits well with the postmodern climate. It initiates a more eclectic perspective, embracing the cosmic and the human, the natural and the divine. Everything is seen as striving towards unity. Jager (1987:88) writes as follows: 'Mystical experience is a becoming conscious of the essential oneness of created things with the primordial metaphysical reality of the divine, from which all differentiation flows. This primordial metaphysical reality is described as emptiness and nothingness, as one, and as the originating ground of all things'.

Focusing on the mystical dimension of various religious traditions has undoubtedly led to a resonance of commonality in interreligious dialogue. As a result, Christian ministry has been given a global rationale and a rediscovered link with its own traditions, making it more conscious of the diversity and insights of world religions. The great mystical traditions of yesteryear are being accessed anew today through the thought, literature and practice of contemporary Christian spirituality. Tracy (1996:422) observes:

I remain convinced that one signal opportunity for Christian theology as a result of serious religious dialogue is the retrieval of the great Christian mystical traditions: the image tradition of Gregory of Nyssa and Origen and their development of a cosmic Christianity; the Trinitarian mysticism of the Cappadocians and Augustine and, above all, Ruysbroeck; and the great love mysticism tradition of the classic Cistercians and Bernard of Clairvaux to the great Spanish Carmelites, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross.

No doubt, as Tracy indicates, the retrieval of the mystical traditions is precipitated by serious religious dialogue. Yet that same retrieval also precedes these dialogues as contribution and offers them a predated mystical dimension from the annals of Christianity. Today's Christian

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<sup>4</sup> The use of the word 'retrieval' gives credence to the argument, fully endorsed in this thesis, that part of the genius of contemporary spirituality is its reworking and 'retrieval' of the classic writings. David Tracy and Melvyn Matthews both use the word 'retrieval' in relation to *mysticism's* present-day recovery.

spirituality, as lived experience and academic discipline, is building bridges for interreligious contact and appreciation. The dialogue, in turn, is allowing Christians to appreciate a residual *Christian* point of identity in other peoples and, sometimes, other faiths. Such discoveries and serendipities often prove most insightful and astonishing:

Jesus was *astonished* by what he found – mature faith *outside* the church. We, by contrast, are increasingly likely to find faith only in its recognisable forms, in Christian groups, in the routine and the expected. In our captivity we are increasingly blind and deaf to astonishing instances of faith and vocation outside Israel... I long for a church that will again discover faith and hear God's call from within the public life of the secular world (Pitt 1995:37).

The writer here envisages an integrity that comes to Christian ministry, when, like Christ, we see faith outside of our own predictable environment of ecclesiastic enclosures.

Adding impetus to the contribution of Christian mysticism is the fact that 'the postmodern identity is constituted by a deep feeling of unity with others (what Erik Eriksen regards as species identity ...' (Griffin 1988:89). It is not surprising then that contemporary Christian spirituality is drawing on all that resonates with that in its own traditions. The Christian mystical tradition of seeking union and assimilation in, for example, the Trinity, is rich and instructive in this regard.

Contemporary Christian spirituality in general, and specifically our retrieved mystical tradition, is placing ministry in its requisite universal context. It is rendering Christian ministry more inclusive in its affirmation of the human race and its manifest diversity. In consequence, other religions are given greater legitimacy and people are accorded their God-given status as made in God's image. Merton (1971:211) captures this universal spirit in his description of the Christian who has reached 'final integration':

Final integration is a state of transcultural maturity far beyond social adjustment, which always implies partiality and compromise. The man who is 'fully born' has an entirely 'inner experience of life.' He apprehends his life fully and wholly from an inner ground that is at once more universal than the empirical ego and yet entirely his own. He is in a certain sense 'cosmic' and 'universal man'. He has attained a deeper, fuller identity than that of his limited ego-self which is only a fragment of his being. He is in a certain sense identified with everybody: or in the familiar language of the New Testament ... he is 'all things to all men'.

There are fundamentalist elements within Christian ministry that might mourn the more fluid postmodern climate of today as threatening the modernistic stabilities of the past. Yet

postmodernism and its amenability to mysticism ‘presents the Christian community with the opportunity to restate its faith with an integrity it has not been able to possess for several hundred years’ (Matthews 2000:93). Thus with regard to modernism we should perhaps not mourn its loss too much, for postmodernism brings a different view of personhood – one that is co-creative, social and integrative. This perspective of personhood should help us to make more sense of the incarnation and resurrection, and assist us to understand what it means, according to the Apostle Paul, to be incorporated into Christ (ibid:93-94). But more importantly, for the present purpose, here is a view of personhood that characterises postmodernism, yet also rings true for mysticism. For it is a mark of mysticism that it is self-negating and finds its life in participation with the *other*. Can contemporary mysticism, then, not utilise the postmodern contribution to our understanding of personhood and become a way of drawing diverse peoples together? Is there not a common ingredient in both the mystical understanding of personhood and that of postmodernism? Ministry, then, may surely use the convergence of the mystical and postmodern ways to facilitate a new acceptance and appreciation of what personhood is. But more to the point, ministry has here the exciting rationale wherewith to develop an authentic spirituality of participation and of exposure to the *other*. Here we have a timely corrective to a common isolationist spirituality, which is still alive and well in many a sincere churchgoer.

Contemporary mysticism, I submit, offers Christian ministry a rationale for a communal spirituality, as opposed to privatised, parochial pietism. Such conservative, evangelical pietism was much in evidence in the apartheid era. It was further enhanced by the standard Christian national education of the day, which presented a dualistic and compartmentalised worldview. Kretzschmar (1996:69-70) speaks meaningfully of this kind of spirituality. She says: ‘A privatised Gospel is...individualistic. Rather than stressing both the value of the individual person and the group or community, an overemphasis on the individual results in the ignoring of the community or social aspects of our faith’. To be sure, there is clearly a re-education that needs to take place here. Contemporary retrieval of mysticism, together with congruent understandings of personhood, gives the Christian minister the tools and precedent to strike a significant blow against pseudo- and neo-Gnostic spiritualities.

The concept of ‘incorporation into Christ’ is deserving of no less attention than new insights into personhood. ‘Incorporation’ is suggestive of a more relational and embracing spirit in contemporary Christian spirituality. And, of course, it is *distinctively mystical*. It follows the mysticism of the Apostle Paul, to be precise. The postmodern view of relationality finds

confluence with the New Testament understanding of the Christian who is 'in Christ'. To be 'in Christ', for Paul, is an intensely participatory and relational concept. One can see how being 'in Christ' is synonymous with corporate relationship and delivers us from the more individualistic flavour of modernism. Indeed, 'the preposition "in" from the "in-Christ" formula has therefore both mystical and *sociative* [italics mine] connotations, notwithstanding the fact that each member of the body is a distinct person' (Kourie 1998: 447-448). The latter believes that we need to rediscover the true Apostle Paul, who too often has been understood only in a juridical way and not in the mystical and participatory manner of 'union with God in Christ' (ibid:447). Zizioulas (1985:28) further confirms this integrative and corporate understanding, which one would describe as being 'in Christ': 'The idea of new birth or birth in the Spirit was associated in the early church with baptism. The deeper meaning of baptism for Christian existence involved ... a birth, that is, *the emergence of an identity through a new set of relationships, those provided by the church as the communion of the Spirit* [italics mine]'.

The participatory and incorporation concept of the Apostle Paul has a reawakening in the mystical anthropology that Weil (1963:28) and Stein (1992:12) established in the first part of the twentieth century. They understood that we are not 'selves' alone, but selves-in-solidarity. In this respect, their thinking merges in part with the postmodern interest in relationality (McIntosh 1998: 231). The argument presented here is therefore that the onus is on the Christian minister to utilise this insight from postmodernism in general, and 'retrieved mysticism' in particular. Ministerial practitioners also need to make the most of contemporary writers who are *re-*presenting mystical traditions in timely and reflective ways. One could cite numerous authors who are both true to the medieval mystics and who have a sensitive and well-informed approach to contemporary global perspectives and worldviews. These writers are neglected at the peril of those who desire to express an authentic ministry in today's world. For the criteria for authenticity in ministry is, on the one hand, faithfulness to our Christian sources. But on the other it is surely an accurate assessment of what is intelligible to congregations in the contemporary world. The latter is also implied in any thoroughgoing hermeneutic.

A major argument in this section, however, is that there is a universal and all-embracing propensity in contemporary Christian thought. It may be seen to apply only at the ecumenical level, but it is suggestive of something even wider than the embrace of Christendom, or so it is being argued. As hinted at earlier in this chapter, the understanding of the Trinitarian life in contemporary spirituality (or more particularly the mystical dimension thereof) is predisposed to

a more universal incorporation. As with Eckhart, Weil (1963) understood God's outpouring in creation as grounded within the eternal divine outpouring. They both seemed to believe that the whole universe existed *within* this opening up of the divine being as acted out in the First and Second Persons of the Trinity (McIntosh 1998: 234).

Mysticism as a present-day contribution to ministry has also opened a door to lay ministry and enhancement of the layperson's spiritual journey. Yoder (1987:20) mourns the loss of the universality of ministry. But can the mystical element of Christian spirituality not achieve this, where theological constructs have failed? Systematic theology does not have a happy track record of achieving these experiential breakthroughs. Mysticism and Christian experience are no longer the exclusive province of the clergy or theologian. No doubt this fits in with the non-authoritarian tenor of the postmodern era. The postmodern era is, in this instance anyway, all to the good, for can ministry still be credible without a levelling of the ministerial 'playing fields'? There is much for clergy to discover in the contribution of retrieved mysticism, not least of all in the monopolising of authority and religious experience by the religious professional. The insights of mysticism do much to universalise the concept of Christian ministry and make it congruent with the New Testament picture.

Where mystical experience was inaccessible to most people in centuries gone by, that access to the mystical is now acknowledged as the inheritance of many, if not all, Christians. Vatican II has had much to do with this new accessibility to the mystical. Mysticism has shed some of its spiritual elitism in the sight of the Catholic Church in particular. Vatican II's emphases on spirituality have been less associated with the pursuit of perfection by the *elite* than with a growth of Christian experience in *all* Catholics. The Dogmatic constitution on the Church issued a universal call to holiness that all the faithful of whatever rank were called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity (Carson 1994: 384).

Mysticism, and not just ascetical practice, might now be the spiritual experience of many. Here, once again, we witness a greater accommodation and inclusivity of present day thinking in spirituality. For authentic Christian ministry it means that the spiritual hunger of congregants might be further stimulated by the promise of a spiritual life beyond the rote prayers of the past, or the discursiveness of meditation. Ministers may give their people access to a profound mystical heritage. There is clearly a capacity for new dimensions in spirituality in our postmodern world, not least of all in the mystical way. We recognise that mystical experience today, throughout

Church congregants, is not only ecclesiastically acceptable, but vital for the continuation of the faith as such. Rahner (1984:22) notes in his now familiar words, ‘ ... that the Christian of the future will be a mystic or he or she will not exist at all’. Christian ministers need no longer turn a deaf or doubtful ear to those parishioners who reflect a facility for the contemplative life.

The mystic dimension of contemporary Christian spirituality has, in another sense, a way of rendering today’s spirituality more all embracing. It has found, one can argue, a contemporarily intelligible way of appealing to the Christian Church right across the ecumenical spectrum. In this regard, it blends well with charismatic approaches to prayer ‘in that profound, though often fleeting or obscure, sense of entering in prayer into a “conversation” *already in play*, a reciprocal divine conversation between Father and Spirit which can finally be reduced neither to divine monologue nor to human self-transcendence’ (Gillett 1993:184). At the same time, it reflects characteristics that resist the shortcomings that were identified by theologians of the mid-twentieth century. In response, for example, to Protestant concern about religion being a symptom of human pride and an alternative to genuine faith, mysticism’s apophaticism has a built-in antidote thereto. Further, in its self-resignation and intense realism, contemporary mystical spirituality is an answer to legitimate concerns about Christianity’s obsession with people’s needs and feelings. Mysticism reflects a built-in critique of obsolete, or modernist, views of the universe. It transcends old dualisms and cosmologies. It has, in addition, an inherent way of dealing with manipulations of God, as in paganism, and in some pseudo-Christian spirituality. It has an intense concern about ‘allowing’ God to be God. Mysticism holds prospects for breaking down walls between clergy and laity, which none of the above theological enterprises seemed able to do.<sup>5</sup>

### **3.4.3 The Concept of *Kenosis***

With regard to the concept of *kenosis*, or ‘emptying’ (Phil. 2:7), one might argue that the all-embracing nature of Christian spirituality today is further enhanced by the retrieval and reworking of mystical insights. A contribution is here made to a decentering of the ‘self’, which, in turn, meets with conceptual sympathies in postmodern thought. In fact, ‘it should be reasonably clear by now that postmodernism involves a “decentering” of the self, an awareness that the self is not a distinguishable reality which interprets and validates all other realities’ (Matthews 2000:91).

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<sup>5</sup> Yoder (1987: 43-44) outlines how well known theologies of twentieth century theologians presupposed a concept of ‘agency ministry’ and the professional religionist. Yet one can understand how a mystical approach might have the capacity to dismantle this. Interestingly, mysticism also combines within itself the antidote for the threats perceived by these twentieth century theologians.

This decentring or way of 'deconstruction' restores a proper humility to the place of the self and 'might well be able to set us free to see more clearly the true nature of the mysticism of the past' (ibid:91). In short, the partnership of postmodernism and revisited-mysticism leads to a less circumscribed concept of 'self' and one that better sees the individual as one with humankind. In this view, it has been suggested that spirituality be conceived as 'encounter' rather than self-actualisation, as a form of life engendered and initiated by the other - the human other of the neighbour and the divine other whom I meet through my love for the neighbour (McIntosh 1998: 22). Ministry is thus given the conceptual and experiential tools in mystic thought to become less self-serving and more *kenotic* - that is, to enable congregants to conceive themselves as part of a wider whole. Here there is a decided contrast to modernistic views, which constructed a self-sufficient individuality of independent outlook. Contemporary Christian ministry can now rescue spirituality from its not infrequent self-interest and inward monitoring of personal spiritual progress. These were some of the unfortunate characteristics that earned 'spiritual' and 'spirituality' these pejorative images in the sixties and seventies, and later. In this understanding, spirituality had little or nothing to do with the societal or political domain. In its extreme form it simply became a religious self-indulgence, a pastime of individual self-enhancement. Sometimes it became captivated by psychological and spiritual experiences, which were displayed as indicators of spiritual advancement and maturity. There was a diminution of the self's intrinsic social nature. Contemporary mystical insights, however, offer the Christian minister a happy corrective to this serious distortion. The concept of *kenosis* introduces us to a self-relinquishment that is consonant with our understanding of God's revelation in Christ. 'For the Christian mystic the kenosis of God and the kenosis of humanity coincide in Jesus ... For the mystic, the kenotic love of God results in his or her own self-effacement. There is a process of *dispossession*, and a vigorous out-pouring of self' (Kourie 1998:447). The latter quote, in other words, lends strength to the argument put forward here, that contemporary mystical retrieval rescues ministry from placing personhood in an impoverished modernistic framework. Rahner (1963:14) in referring to the life of mysticism, writes that any form of apophatic journey:

... must also conceive itself as participation in Christ's 'kenosis,' for he alone experiences the true mystical 'emptying' through the cross, death and the tomb ... Finally it must realize that in earthly man this emptying of self will not be accomplished by practising pure inwardness, but by the real activity which is called humility, service, love of our neighbour, the cross and death.

Even as Jesus is so often portrayed as a corporate figure in identification with others, so the present-day Christian might think of themselves in similar fashion.<sup>6</sup> Authentic ministry, as it seeks to honour the second great commandment about the neighbour, would do well to instil this self-understanding in contemporary Christians.

#### **3.4.4 Theocentricism**

A further broadening of consciousness within contemporary spirituality might be attributed to the theocentric nature of Christian mysticism. The mystical allows for greater appreciation of the universality of the divine, without foreclosing the nature of God in a particular acculturated view of Jesus. It offers a balance to the intense Christocentric theology of Karl Barth, for example, and introduces a healthy apophatic dimension. The mystical becomes a point of identification with non-Christian approaches. We are reminded that God is 'bigger' than our comfortable concepts of Godself. Christian spirituality is allowing congregants to move beyond being frightened and defensive guardians of revealed truth. A greater freedom can thus be given to exploring the 'human-divine project' (King 1995:71). One wants to suggest here that the retrieval of mysticism as characteristic of contemporary spirituality enables congregants to come to terms with the existence of other religious traditions. King (1995:71) puts it as follows: 'For the Christian explorer, Jesus is not so much our destination as our companion on the common human journey towards God'. For congregants over-fed with a diet of folksy 'Jesus religion,' and the intense parochialism that often goes with it, contemporary spirituality, through its mystical expression, can introduce a more Trinitarian approach. The mystical element of spirituality can help realise an appreciation for the authentic threads that hold the faith together, but also appreciate those threads we have in common with other main religions (Graham 1974). There is a need to rediscover the religion *of* Jesus, and not a religion *about* Jesus. Can we not say, then, that present Christian spirituality has the potential to reveal Christ to us through the unorthodox? Does it not embrace those so-called unconscious Christians (cf. Matt.25) of other religions, who reflect the concerns of Christ? Retrieved mysticism, it might be argued, gives ministry and Christian education an authentic and inclusive breadth of vision. It can help parishioners to see how true Christian genuineness 'is not in any feelings or emotions or private visions, but in how

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<sup>6</sup> Suggit (1997:116) indicates the corporate and representative significance of Jesus so enlighteningly in the words: 'Pilate exclaims "there is the man", Adam (Greek *anthropos* Gen. 1: 26), clothed in the glory of his original creation'. If Jesus took on this representative vocation we can scarcely entertain a merely individualistic self-concept.

realistically we recognise the people we meet with day by day, not as individuals separated off from us, but as one with ourselves' (Graham 1974:115).

Ministry becomes authentic, then, through a mysticism that helps Christian educators and workers realign themselves with the contemplation of the Logos of God. This means a return to the essential and all-embracing truth, that all things have been created in the Logos or Word of God.

Contemplating each created thing in God's Logos is to discover the place it properly enjoys within the hierarchy of all things uniquely different and yet all inwardly related into a whole, the Body of Christ. Such a Logos mysticism has much to tell us in the modern world; it helps us discover our unique personhood in Jesus Christ and, in that identity, to serve lovingly the uniqueness in each creature that we encounter in our work (Maloney 1983:233).

### **3.5 AN ECUMENICAL INCLUSIVENESS**

The expansiveness that learns from other religions is also evident in contemporary spirituality's (arguably) unprecedented strides in the field of ecumenical appreciation. The spirit of the times has seen a new and impartial quarrying of the mines of historic spiritualities by a wide range of different Christian traditions. Although these experiences and Christian traditions have always been available to all, their availability and pertinence have now become infinitely more apparent. The Christian heritage as a whole is freed to speak in exciting and contemporised ways. Ministry has benefited from insights and practices right across the denominational divide. Many contemporary books on spirituality are mining the riches of this great spiritual heritage.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, contemporary Christian spirituality has evidenced a capacity to embrace diverse Christian traditions while at the same time becoming a new meeting point for their patrons. Indeed, contemporary Christian faith, as lived experience or academic discipline, offers itself as a source rich in multi-denominational spiritualities and insights. Taize, Vatican II, the Lambeth Conference of 1968, the Charismatic Renewal and Thomas Merton's profound spirituality, have all had their influence in creating a greater openness and flexibility and an expression of Christian spirituality that transcends traditional boundaries. There has been a realisation of Vatican II's call

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<sup>7</sup> A few book titles are indicative thereof. *Faith's Freedom: A classic spirituality for contemporary Christians* (L. T. Johnson: 1990) is one of many. Diogenes Allen's (1997) book, *Spiritual Theology*, bears the subtitle, *The theology of yesterday for spiritual help today*. Muto's book, *John of the Cross for Today* (1991), contemporises a leading spiritual exponent of the past. The examples hereof are profuse.

for ‘a continuous return to the sources *of all Christian life* [italics mine] and to the original inspiration behind a given community, and an adjustment of the community to the changed conditions of the times’ (Jones, Wainwright & Yarnold 1986:574). Together with this, there is mutual appreciation of Christian traditions other than one’s own. Thus:

... There can be little doubt that mutual enrichment across traditions of spiritual life so long divided is taking place in the consciousness and the actual lived practice in a remarkable range of communions. We can speak, therefore, of a genuinely ‘ecumenical spirituality’ which creates new lines of identity and loyalty as well as struggle within and across traditions. (Dupre & Saliers 1989:528.)

One would have to add, of course, that this is without necessarily blurring denominational boundaries. Still, a *culturally* homogeneous central tradition of spiritual literature as being normative for all is no longer in existence (Dupré & Saliers 1989:540). This is clearly so. Still, there is evidence of more versatile and inclusive spirituality available today, which is incorporative and unparochial. While it may not have been formally publicised, it exists in informal ways, drawing comprehensively on a wide range of Christian traditions. One would be well advised not to give a generic plausibility to contemporary Christian spirituality. Nevertheless, there is more than a suggestion of old suspicions laid aside, and of excited ecumenical discovery. There is a desire ‘to listen single-mindedly for the voice of that deeper, *ecumenical consensus* [italics mine] that has been gratefully celebrated as received teaching by believers of vastly different cultural settings - whether African or European, Eastern or Western, sixth or sixteenth century’ (Tyson 1999:37-38).<sup>8</sup> The search for ‘ecumenical consensus,’ and new possibilities of finding it, is part of the picture of today’s spirituality. This broader and experimental spirituality holds significant implications for authentic ministry. I outline six such implications below, showing how they invest ministry with its own true nature.

### **3.5.1 Ministerial Solidarity**

Through deeper appreciation of each other’s traditions, ministers are drawn into fellowship and solidarity across the denominational divide. Ministerial (and denominational) division is always a scandal. It flies in the face of Jesus’ high priestly prayer that we may be one and renders a conspicuous inauthenticity to ministerial leadership and credibility (Jn. 17:21). Neither is this lost on laity, who find these ministerial divisions untenable. In the case of the Methodist Church of

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<sup>8</sup> One is merely indicating here that Christian spirituality is now able to find acceptance for, and sustain, this consensual approach. This is indicative of how a new ecumenicity has been conceived within the matrix of present Christian spirituality.

Southern Africa, there is within the stated vision and reworked call of the Church a specific commitment 'to be one so that the world may believe'. (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2003:2 = MCSA 2003) While much of this concern for oneness arises out of division *within* Methodism itself, it clearly extends to the Methodist Church's relationship with other traditions as well. There is, however, a well attested conviction within South African Methodism that an intentional focus on spirituality within our Church will do much to transcend old divisions and suspicions, particularly those that emerge from the apartheid era. The long fight against apartheid and social injustice, it is believed, has left the Methodist Church impoverished in its spirituality and sense of purpose in a new South Africa. The fact that a virtual referendum among South African Methodists identified a need for a deepened spirituality as a priority, lends credence to the people's faith that *spirituality* can best heal divisions, in and outside our own denomination (MCSA 2003:2). It is clearly a denominational instinct, if not a corporate spiritual discernment. Ministry, in the light of Jesus' high priestly prayer, is most conspicuously discredited where spiritual leaders and ministers are not able to reflect their solidarity in Christ. The argument is made here that present spirituality has the potential to attract ministers, refreshingly, to traditions other than their own and therein create visible ecumenical solidarity.

### **3.5.2 Ministry Claims Full Heritage**

Second, ministry understandably becomes more authentic as it claims and draws on the *full* spectrum of the universal Church's insights and traditions. There is an impoverishment in parochial exclusivism. It is not only out of keeping with a postmodern perspective, but also closes its eyes to doctrinal correctives from across the East-West, or denominational divide. Happily, Christian spirituality evidences a contemporary ecumenical 'licence' to move between the great Christian traditions. Recent ecumenical anthologies on spirituality bear testimony to this phenomenon. Consequently, the Christian minister is afforded the opportunity of exposing themselves to a great treasury of spiritual insights. One such recent ecumenical anthology indicates the complementarity of different spiritual practices, in this case within Protestantism (Tyson 1999). Tyson contrasts the approaches of Geoffrey Wainwright (a Methodist) and Richard Foster (1978) of the Society of Friends. Wainwright (1980) faithfully demonstrates his Wesleyan spirituality by according 'the means of grace' a significant place in one's spiritual development. This tradition uses both Word (scripture, liturgy, creed, hymn) and Sacrament, together with other practices (fasting and holding conference, among others) for the formation of Christian living. Foster (1981) on the other hand, looks exclusively at an examination of the disciplines, inward, outward and corporate. Most Christians will gravitate toward either the sacraments or the

personal disciplines. Yet Tyson (1999:47) makes it clear that ‘significant growth ... is to be found in a fruitful synthesis of the liturgical and personal elements of spiritual life’. Here, then, is where so much of the richness of present-day spirituality is found for the Christian worker. A balance of traditional insights can prove significantly authenticating for ministry. Furthermore, it is uniquely within the area of spirituality, and not primarily within the field of theology that such ecumenicity is being realised. ‘Scholars like Thomas Merton and Pannikar are not the only thinkers who have insisted that it is not primarily in the area of theology that such dialogue becomes possible and fruitful but in the area of spirituality’ (Hanson 1990:23).

As someone schooled in the evangelical tradition, I appreciate the expansiveness and depth that Catholic spirituality brings to Protestantism. Does not the evangelical tradition too often create a picture of God’s grace as strongly contingent on the individual’s decision? The more ‘Catholic’ approach rescues evangelical spirituality from its propensity to individualism and its fascination with ‘personal decision for God.’ Catholic spirituality, loosely termed, ‘envisages a broad process of the work of God into which the individual is incorporated through birth and baptism and in which the process of growth continues through faith ... ’ (Gillett 1993:25). Indeed, the Western Catholic spiritualities focus on wider horizons than traditional evangelicalism. An even broader dimension is introduced by contemporary ecumenical spirituality’s encounter with Eastern spiritualities, taking us back before the creation of the world to the cosmic Christ at the centre of all things, as in the first chapter of John’s gospel. Here we have an all-embracing perspective for ministry that grounds its self-understanding in cosmic realities, while answering to the greater global and cosmic consciousness. Greater ministerial authenticity is possible when the minister can acknowledge, in theory and practice, their full Christian heritage. Raitt (1987:301) says that ‘at present it seems a new form of spirituality is developing. It is characterized by a return to the sources and by a growing openness for the tasks of the world from a deepened sensitivity’. With this widening perspective comes a mutual appreciation of our own ministerial and denominational insularity. The cross-pollination of Christian ideas and practices further guards the minister from repeating the mistakes of history. Christian spirituality today, in its ecumenical mood, can rediscover and preserve ‘the memory of the past history of piety ... *and ...* [italics mine] will regard as stupid, inhuman and unchristian, the view that man’s piety is continually making a fresh start ... ’ (Rahner 1984: 19). One is rooted firmly in authentic ministry through the memory of the Church; a memory that safeguards against old heresies in new forms. Pittman (1996:33) shows that: ‘*Authenticity* as a criterion for truth requires that all Christian expressions be responsibly

evaluated in light of the biblical witness to God's disclosure in and through Jesus and in light of the traditions and experiences of discernment of the *worldwide Christian Church* [italics mine].'

Ministry is consequently able to draw on a vast expanse of multi-traditional Christian material today, re-presented in countless works on spirituality. As the above quote indicates, it is this identification with the comprehensive witness of the worldwide Christian church that renders Christian service authentic. The ecumenical spirit of the age is in this regard a profound contribution to ministry in that it enables the minister to utilise formerly untapped traditions, yet remain firmly within the Christian family. Lest one sound too triumphalist about this, let it also be conceded that there is much room for improvement. This is no realised eschatology. But a reading of Scripture and an understanding of the Church, which could be called 'post-critical,' could particularly assist the further realisation of this trend in spirituality.<sup>9</sup>

### **3.5.3 Ministry Beyond Maintenance**

Ecumenical spirituality today makes a significant contribution to an understanding of the true nature of the Church. Thus it can only help to reinvest ministerial work, especially of the ordained variety, with its true purpose. Maintenance work and structural preoccupation has often become the priority for ministers. In the Methodist Church of Southern Africa for example, maintenance of properties and financial preoccupation has often been substituted for mission. The suggestion is being made here that ecumenical spirituality takes the Church out of its self-preservation mode and out of a merely structural mentality. It helps inward-looking ministers to join hands with others and work at redefining one's purposes. It puts one in touch with those mothers and fathers of the Church who lived unselfishly for others. The present-day Church is concentrating less on difference in ecclesial structures and giving much more prominence and effort to delineating the *essence* of the Church. There is a greater concentration on the mystery of the Church (Kourie 1998:433). In this view there is a dynamic at work that has all the potential to herald in a new era (ibid:434). A mystical, contemplative and ecclesial reading of scripture is achieving a cross-traditional identity and taking the focus off static and structural preoccupations. One would, of course, want to recognise that the societal prompters of these new initiatives are many and

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<sup>9</sup> Celia Kourie refers to a 'post-critical' approach to an understanding of the Church. She says, 'Such a hermeneutic integrates the gains of modern biblical scholarship within a contemplative and ecclesial reading of scripture. This would incorporate insights of the church fathers and mothers, and the spiritual mistresses and masters of ancient and modern church history' (Kourie 1998: 434). A reading of Scripture and an understanding of the Church, which could be called 'post-critical,' could particularly assist the further realisation of this trend in spirituality.

various. Yet spiritualities of ecumenicity have surely had a hand in a more global understanding of mission and a redefinition and authentication of the role of the clergy in particular, and Christian workers in general. Ecumenical spirituality gives to all denominations a perspective that transcends denominationalism, enabling it to rediscover its reason for being. Its contribution to authentic ministry is thus considerable.

### **3.5.4 Ministry and Personality Type**

Further elaborated, a fourth validation that contemporary ecumenical spirituality realises for ministry is that it presents ministers with alternatives. It enables ministers to find a home for their own particular preference in spiritual formation. They are now able to fit a particular spiritual expression to their own personality type. It is now possible, and acceptable, to make an unbiased yet discriminating use of the spiritual classics. An ecumenically intentional spirituality offers a greater possibility for the adaptation of a historic spirituality for one's own spiritual formation. 'There are many dangers in the way, and notably dilettantism and hybrid spiritualities. But many people have been helped to find their own genuine way, as the years go by, through discovering one particular author always congenial and nourishing' (Jones, Wainwright & Yarnold 1986: 577). One writer feels comfortable to encourage ministers to find the spiritual tradition that most suits their personality. He draws out the strengths and weaknesses of seven types of traditional spirituality<sup>10</sup> (Johnson 1988:68-73). His compendium of spiritualities constitutes a willingness to reach for consensus and offers ministers a treasury of historical traditions. Directly related hereto is the spiritual guide's/minister's responsibility to 'access' various spiritual paths for the benefit of their parishioners' diverse needs and personalities. Gibbard (1986b:576) offers the reminder that in every age the guide's task is not to teach their own way but to help students, through the Spirit, to discern the way proper for them. The spiritual guide should always have a wide and perceptive knowledge of spiritual paths - particularly today - of other traditions.

The psychological climate for matching spiritualities with personality types will not go away. Neither should it. One only has to note the scientific acknowledgement of, and groundwork in, the field of personality types to see that choices of prayer styles and spiritualities are justifiably a major consideration. Kelsey (1981a) gives comprehensive treatment of personality types in at

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<sup>10</sup> The traditional spiritualities (or pieties, as he terms them) listed by Johnson (1988:68-73) are: the evangelical, charismatic, sacramental, activist, academic, ascetic, and the 'Eastern.' He gives the strengths and weaknesses of each, and suggests what type of personality would find each one appropriate.

least one of his books and clearly recognises its significance for spirituality and Christian service. The approach has scientific legitimation through the work done by Carl G Jung (1963, 1964). It is further popularised through the Myers-Briggs personality indicator assessments. Moreover, spirituality has been coupled with nine distinctive personality types, popularly known as the *enneagram*, where workshops facilitate this understanding. People are hereby given options for spiritual formation (Ebert & Kustenmacher 1995). Different schools of spirituality in Church history are an implicit acknowledgement that there is no 'one size fits all' in the culture of the spirit. The Ignatian Spiritual Exercises, with its imagery and employment of the imagination, is well complemented by St John of the Cross's Carmelite school of apophaticism. Both are contemporarily used with enthusiasm.

### **3.5.5 Rediscovering the Saints**

Spirituality's present-day display of different historical traditions is acquainting all traditions with 'the communion of the saints,' past and present. Ignatian retreats are growing in popularity among Protestants. Many have drawn spiritual enrichment from St John of the Cross or felt deep appreciation for Thomas Merton's example. One can scarcely offer a ministry of faithfulness where many of the saints and spiritual mothers and fathers of the church have been marginalised. Such a ministry expels that article of the creed that speaks of the communion of saints, thus undermining its traditional confession. It is particularly interesting to note how the veneration of the ancestors in African thinking has a counterpart in the 'communion of the saints.' Ministry does not need to necessarily outlaw this integral part of African belief and culture. Rather, this aspect of the creed is enhanced by the African contribution. The times and contexts call for the contributions of those saints and spiritual ancestors, past and present, who speak to the unique challenges of our broadening consciousness and sense of universality. Here again there is an apparent synchronisation with the deconstructionist leanings of postmodernism and its appreciation of the interdependence of all humanity. It is here that Matthews' (2002) insight is suggestive. The latter is an Anglican, given particularly to reflective writing on contemporary Christian spirituality. He makes contributions in reworked mysticism and in reconceiving concepts of God. It is therefore from the school of contemporary Christian spirituality that he speaks. His work breathes ecumenical life into previously circumscribed traditions. Where there has been a decline in the popular understanding of the 'communion of saints,' its recovery by this author does much for faithful ministry in that part of the creed. Also to be admired is his credible, mystical approach to Pauline thought. We need to appreciate how even the person of Christ, in his historical particularity, cannot bear the *full* burden of being a solitary role model (Matthews

2002:123). Such appreciation of the spiritual fathers and mothers of the Church is surely commendable. His treatment of Christian spirituality in this respect serves ministry well in that it enables ministers to give their congregants access to the lives of those who so reflected God's glory. The Apostle Paul himself took this communion with the utmost seriousness:

For St Paul Christ is the first of a body of people, the body being made up of all those who follow in his way and so are incorporated into his life, death and resurrection. *He is the first of a body of examples.* For most of Christian history Christ carried within himself a universal humanity, and drew all men and women into the divinity of God. Once you drop that universal humanity of Christ in favour of *a* historical particularity, then you make the communion of saints an impossibility [italics mine] (Matthews 2002: 123).

### **3.5.6 Encountering Own Tradition Afresh**

An ecumenically intentional spirituality today helps Christian ministers encounter their own tradition afresh. It is as we look at the 'other' tradition that we discover who *we* are. Indeed, the present ecumenicity of Christian spirituality 'forces us to look at our inherited traditions in a new and questioning way' (Sheldrake 1987:8). For example, the Methodist Christian worker may find, through ecumenical approaches today, that John Wesley borrowed from a wide range of Christian traditions and then interpreted them through his own eclectic selectivity. Forster (2001:12) says of Wesley: 'The influences on his spirituality were eclectic to say the least, ranging from the Puritan emphasis on works and discipline to the mystical influence on introspection and unity with God, all of which were tempered by the sound teachings of the early Church fathers.'

Authentic ministry must always acknowledge its grounding in the wider foundation of the Christian family. It must see how that upon which it was built fed its own cherished tradition. Wesley encouraged his people never to forget the 'rock from which you were hewn'. It would be a most appropriate demonstration of faithfulness for any serving Methodist to re-examine her/his own tradition in the light of those saints whom Wesley himself drew upon. The World Methodist Council states in its most recent 'Wesleyan essentials of Christian faith' that 'we claim and cherish our true place in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church' (MCSA 2003:175). It is surely incumbent upon Methodist ministry then to rediscover those traditions upon which Wesley himself drew, and appreciate how Wesley struggled to find himself in them. A ministry of integrity can do no less. It cannot simply adopt an unthinking, parochial, Wesleyan stance. It is precisely in the to-and-fro of eclectic Christian spirituality that we discover again what is most endearing and enduring about our own spiritual background. And in the company of the wider

Christian family, we are able to test the authenticity of our own position. Again, this would be incumbent upon any Christian ministry. Certainly a Methodist minister, ordained or lay, would not be able to avoid this in good conscience. Clapper (1997:13), expounding Wesley, says: ‘We need each other to discern God’s truth, and we cannot rely solely on introspective self-exploration that can easily turn narcissistic. Wesley’s heart religion is, by its very nature, open to the correction of the scriptures, the Christian tradition, and the present Christian community’.

In contemporary Christian spirituality we find ourselves in the exciting place of reassessing our own traditions in a new perspective of lived Christian experience, or ‘spirituality’. As we assess the *Methodist* tradition with this perspective, we make an intriguing discovery. Wesley was more of a spiritual pragmatist than a theologian, seeking to preach ‘the “how” of religion rather than the “what,” which should culminate in the end or goal of all religion, which is Christian perfection as found in scripture and attained by perfect love’ (Forster 2001:6). We suggest here that Wesley’s writings, often best expressed in the hymn-writing lyrics of his brother, Charles, were more accurately a spirituality than a finely worked systematic theology. If the Methodist minister, then, is to be credible in her Methodist tradition, she would do well to make this discovery – quite possibly with insights from the rich spirituality on hand in these times.

What makes Wesley’s spirituality particularly contemporary is his eclectic approach, drawing on the Church Fathers, the Puritans, the mystics, and even (somewhat remote for an English clergyman?) Macarius the Egyptian. Further, he drew on other spiritualities in order to arrive at his position. Herein, he would seem to create a precedent for Methodist ministers to do the same. Thus the eclecticism of the current nature of spirituality contributes to a Methodist minister’s appreciation of their own background and the implications it has for ministry.

### **3.6 ACADEMIC CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY**

Together with the interest in spirituality as lived experience, there is also ‘the emergence of a revised *academic* discipline that studies spirituality’ (McIntosh 1998:19). Contemporary academic Christian spirituality has contributed an inclusive and universal nature to this field. It will be suggested that this, in turn, has implications for Christian service, lay or ordained. The debate surrounding the discipline is considerable and views are diverse as to its object of study and the terminology that might best be used. We are still in the formative period of this discipline, but these are exciting times. A major and groundbreaking contributor to the subject is

Schneiders.<sup>11</sup> The following factors related to academic spirituality are pertinent to the inclusiveness of the subject:

### **3.6.1 A New Accessibility**

First, academic spirituality is enjoying a new accessibility to students (and vice versa) since it has incorporated into itself the mystical or passive aspect and does not deal exclusively with ascetical theology. There has been, in other words, the formation of a less elitist subject, known as spirituality, which is accessible and widely owned. The same could not be said for the (differentiated) ascetical and mystical theology of old. In short, the older spiritual theology, which fell under moral theology, has been subsumed by ‘spirituality’ (Schneiders 1989:687). Both Protestant and Catholic have been able to identify with this terminology as it has an ecumenical (and even interreligious and cross-cultural) appeal (Schneiders 1989:693). One can draw different implications from this for ministry. These implications are admittedly more inferential than empirical, but not without real significance. For one, the legacy of Christian mothers and fathers of prayer are more readily available and the very nature of a *unitary* subject like ‘spirituality’ simplifies the scenario for less sophisticated ministers and teachers. ‘Spirituality’ as academic discipline legitimates an indiscriminating approach for clergy *and* lay persons and admits everyone to its spiritual precincts. It is suggested that Vatican II’s stress on the universal call to holiness played a part in the inclusivity reflected in academic spirituality (Schneiders 1989:687).

### **3.6.2 An Anthropological Approach**

Schneiders (1989) favours an anthropological approach to academic spirituality, providing a ‘definition from below’. This approach, ‘from below’, gives spirituality, as academic discipline, a universal scope and therein places ministry within a scientifically approved field. It sets ministry within a universally acknowledged theoretical perspective and gives assent to the assertion that ‘human beings are spirit in the world ... ’ (Schneiders 1989:696). For her, ‘the structure and dynamics of the human person as such are the locus of the spiritual life’ (Schneiders 1989:682). She is not alone. Indeed, the spiritual life could be seen as a way of tackling anthropological questions and preoccupations in order to achieve a richer and more authentically human life

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<sup>11</sup> Schneiders is indisputably a leading scholar in defining academic spirituality. Particularly pertinent are her two definitive essays (1986:253-274) & (1989:676-697). We use these essays as a yardstick, particularly with regard to her understanding of spirituality as an academic discipline.

(Hanson 1990:21). Could one then suggest that the anthropological approach has the potential of authenticating ministry in the eyes of secularity?

Schneiders' anthropological view of spirituality is consistent with her position that spirituality should not be subject to revelation or systematic theology as normative. Ministry, in this view, might enjoy more validation from the academy as a whole. The academy would then examine lived spiritual experience or 'spirituality' as phenomena, which may not be unlike psychology (and even art) as scientifically verifiable. Christian spirituality might further escape a premature validation or rejection by systematic theology. Ministry then becomes less speculative, doctrinaire and protective of its own parochial interests, some of which cannot stand the test of academic scrutiny. Would this anthropological validation lend ministry greater credibility, especially in a scientific age? Ministry, at least in its deference to academic spirituality, would enjoy scientific approval.<sup>12</sup> Yet exponents of academic Christian spirituality are as divided on these issues as pastors so often are in their own field. Rather than assess the above academic debate, however, I am only pointing out that the anthropological approach and the break from spiritual theology invests contemporary spirituality with an inter-cultural, inter-religious scope, which speaks of universality and inclusivity.

### **3.6.3 Spirituality as 'Linear Concept'**

Spirituality in the academy is seen to have a wider context than academic spiritualities of previous centuries. While not all academics in the field would subscribe to the advisability of this, there is an appreciation of spirituality as a 'linear concept' in the sense of being unilateral. It is, in other words, operative in, and intrinsic to the full spectrum of life: politics, social development and personal integration and formation. No longer can spirituality be exclusive, or even a simple 'revival' (still a popular, 'evangelical' word in some circles) of past spiritualities:

*The old agendas of spirituality were too prescriptive, too much embedded in an ascetic and mystical flight from the world, too much centered on self-denial, which could be self-destructive rather than a path to real growth and fuller being. They were also too much tied to particular institutional settings and prescriptive, normative teachings, too much wedded to particular theological doctrines (King 1997:10).*

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<sup>12</sup> The inferences being drawn for *ministry* are my own and not Schneiders.' One is merely trying to follow the progression of how education in 'anthropological spirituality' would inevitably rub off on Christian workers trained in the academy.

Spirituality today, even in the context of *Christian* spirituality, is a spirituality-of-being-in-the-world. It is no longer understood 'as a solid, reassuring fortress, clearly demarcated by the boundaries of tradition, narrowly defined and unchanging' (King 1997:11). Spirituality as a discipline has a holistic characteristic, related to the psychological, historical, social and political. It is a discipline of inclusivity, wholeness and integration (Schneiders 1989:693). While these are, in part, aspirational notions and await further realisation, the times in which we live will scarcely be satisfied with less. The benefit for the priest, minister or religious worker is that spirituality becomes part of the real world. It is taken out of its overly religious, pious or puritanical (in the worst sense) worldview. Spirituality is then brought into that domain which is in any case its native habitat. Nothing could be healthier for ministry. No longer can spirituality get by as a privatised religion of exalted feelings, individualism and 'spiritual highs.' A more inclusive academic spirituality sanctifies all of life. It dispenses with old dualisms. The world is reclaimed for ministry so that 'heaven *and* earth are full of your glory'. In short, 'Christian spirituality emerges as an interdisciplinary subject par excellence - what some scholars have called "a field encompassing field"' (Collins 2000:15). This explains pictorially how spirituality is now dispersed through all disciplines. Its pervasiveness enables ministry to transcend formerly dualistic theories and concepts of 'secularisation' and reclaim the spiritual nature of life in general.

The 'peripheral' nature of contemporary spirituality is further enhanced by the development of local contextualised spiritualities. This is no small subject, but we append it here. There are spiritualities that have often arisen out of the marginalised peoples of the world. One refers here to spiritualities of *liberation* and to *feminist* spirituality, together with *ecological* spirituality, which often draws on Johannine Christology, seeing Christ as intrinsic to the cosmos and instrumental in its creation and perpetuation. Colossian Christology characteristically offers enhancement to Christ's identification with the universe (Col. 1: 15-20). these three spiritualities are 'peripheral' in the sense of relating cross culturally on a worldwide basis. They have the effect of de-localising spirituality or redressing universal problems or injustices, while further reconciling formerly marginalised peoples to the mainstream of the Christian faith. Ursula King (1997) and Sally McFague (1987) are among those who have been particularly enlightening in their elaboration of how Christian spirituality is answering to this universal consciousness. They have a deep affinity with the feminine and ecological aspects, if less so with *liberation* expressions. Certainly, 'contemporary Christian feminists invite the Church to a larger vision that is truly universal and that breaks out of the provincialism of patriarchy' (Collins 2000:16).

### **3.6.4 Academic Endorsement of Spirituality**

A noteworthy effect of Christian academic spirituality is its implicit endorsement of the indispensability of spirituality. An academic legitimising of spirituality has been given that addresses all churches right across the board. Its universality is secured by its place in the *university*. Schools of abstract theology have had to take note. Training ministers now begins to acknowledge that systematic theology, theological ethics and practical theology do not come with built-in guarantees of furthering the student's spiritual insight, formation and Christian lifestyle. On the contrary, for some ministers there are questions as to which of the aforementioned disciplines was meant to take responsibility for this glaring omission in their academic training. Weighty theological training has not produced spiritual maturity. The academy's emphasis too often fell exclusively on reasoning, philosophical pursuits, creeds and councils. Remote and abstruse reasonings were not uncommon and the health and effectiveness of the minister was, for the most part, entrusted to psychology and the insights of business executives. That is the only background that some can recall.<sup>13</sup>

The shamefaced acknowledgement might even be that before current academic Christian spirituality there has been no academic intentionality or educative structuring in spirituality for the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. Can this be said for Protestantism in general? Possibly there is anachronistic unfairness, some may say, in judging a past modernist era through the lenses of a different age. Yet the sobering truth remains that present initiatives in academic spirituality fall into an empty space, since for much of recent Protestantism it seems to have no predecessor.

## **3.7 ADDRESSING OBJECTIONS**

### **3.7.1 Question of Validation**

It is easy to sound triumphalist and premature when heralding the universal and inclusive nature of contemporary Christian spirituality. Are we not speaking in generalisations and half-truths? Certainly the present subject is one of critical differences between usages of terminology. One needs to indicate one's own understanding of popular words, such as 'spirituality', or 'theology'

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<sup>13</sup> It was apparently assumed that the philosophical and doctrinal subjects would carry with them the ingredients for transformation and the spiritually cultured life. Intellect was God's sole tool. No doubt this intellectual climate was itself a child of modernism. Practical theology became 'pastoral work', for utilitarian purposes, but was aimed at *communication* in the classic clerical functions and never at the *condition* of the actual *communicator*. Admittedly, Anglican students in South Africa received supplementary education at St Paul's College in Grahamstown, which picked up on the often-maligned 'spiritual dimension'.

or easy usage of ‘postmodernism’. It has been noted that ‘spirituality is a person-variable synthetic theological construct: One must always inquire as to what components enter into the particular construct advocated or assumed by a particular writer and what components are being left out. Only rarely are such matters made explicit’ (Carson 1994:387).

Interestingly, the latter quote also makes certain assumptions, but one would want to bear the spirit of the quote in mind and verify acknowledgement of these caveats. They have been borne in mind in the above deliberations. The present section seeks to verify my awareness of these distinctions.

### **3.7.2 Spirituality: General and Specific**

First, there is clearly a difference between spirituality in *general* and *Christian* spirituality. And it is easy to see how spirituality in *general* has a universal phenomenology today. It is a word, experience, discipline whose time has come, and is used either with great carefulness or, more often, with a free abandon quite unconscious of its freighted nature. Spirituality in this generalised understanding transcends religious, cultural and national boundaries. One would contend that this phenomenon holds certain advantages for the promotion of faithful ministry in the twenty-first century. Serious drawbacks, however, might also present themselves for the *normative distinctiveness* of Christian spirituality in this worldwide trend. Notwithstanding the generalised nature of spirituality it has been specifically the *Christian* phenomenon that has received attention above, although the phenomenon of generalised spirituality as worldwide phenomenon is acknowledged. Further, one would want to be careful of speaking too easily of a universal Christian spirituality today. It could be argued that this was too often the fault of systematic theology. It assumed too often a unitary position. As we must speak of theologies, in the plural, so we would be well advised to speak of spiritualities, as opposed to unqualified *spirituality*. Perhaps Christian spirituality, when authentic, could be understood as a critique of all false universalisations in theology. Lonergan’s (1971:123-124) approach is a further endorsement of the plurality factor. He indicates a more contemporary appreciation of different cultures. He says that:

... while a classicist would maintain that one should never depart from an accepted terminology, I must contend that classicism is no more than the mistaken view of conceiving culture normatively and of concluding that there is just one human culture. The modern fact is that culture has to be conceived empirically, that there are many cultures, and that new distinctions are legitimate when the reasons for them are explained and older truths are retained.

These quotations might seem to undermine the universalising motif claimed for spirituality here, whether of the academic or ‘lived experience’ variety. But the present chapter has tried to show that in its very embrace of pluralities the spirit of contemporary Christian spirituality evidences a kind of newfound universality in diversity.

### **3.7.3 Christian Spirituality in a Vacuum**

Christian spirituality does not operate in a cloistered vacuum. We cannot be over-zealous about distinctions, notwithstanding the Christian ‘scandal of particularity’. That would make dynamic realities the servant of propositional thinking. Christian spirituality does not remain untouched by the universal (albeit plural) nature of contemporary spiritualities, religious or otherwise. Does Christian spirituality ever operate in a vacuum? Might not the widespread nature of spirituality, even in the general sense, render Christian spirituality more embracing? Has it not forced theology to look with more appreciation at what God is doing in the uninitiated ‘Gentiles’ of today? Are contemporary Protestant theologians as Barthian in their undermining of ‘natural theology’ as once was the case? Whatever Sandra Schneiders means by spirituality, her inclusive anthropological approach includes Christian spirituality and inevitably renders it more universal and world endorsing than former prescriptive spiritualities.<sup>14</sup> And it *is* Schneiders who seems to have most captured the imagination in her daring yet, I would contend, academically substantiated position.

The categorical distinctions of spirituality in general and *Christian* spirituality in *particular* are in any case less cast in stone in current spirituality than might have once been so. McIntosh (1998:97) says of Karl Rahner: ‘There is a hint of that quintessential modern longing for a universal human religious sensibility, uniting peoples in such a way as to liberate them from the peculiarities of their own histories, languages and customs’ (1998:97). Yet it seems to be specifically the perspective and vocation of spirituality to recognise how fixed entities and concrete distinctions are more the language of certain philosophical schools than of ontological

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<sup>14</sup> Schneiders’ spirituality sets Christian spirituality in universal context, in the inter-religious give-and-take of the academy. We are not suggesting, of course, that her view is uncontested. Neither is it, in this writer’s view, entirely without ambiguity in the sense of bearing the strain of the general and the particular. Diogenes Allen’s highlighting of Simone Weil’s spirituality is instructive and contemporary. He takes up Weil’s concept of ‘gravity’ where he says, ‘Gravity understood as the force which led to the crucifixion of Jesus on a wooden cross therefore means that something of the reality of Jesus’ cross is present *universally*. [italics mine] Weil claims that many people who lived before Jesus or who did not know Jesus, knew the cross under the form of gravity’ (Allen 1989:193). We simply note here how the groundwork for a more inclusive spirituality is apparent in Diogenes Allen’s appeal to Weil’s thinking. Similar potential for this inclusivity is apparent in the spirituality of John MacQuarrie’s existential-ontological theology (MacQuarrie: 1977).

realities. Old dualisms and over simplified distinctions often meet their limitations in spirituality, particularly in its mystical expressions. Even one's talk of 'secularisation' can often be shown to build on untenable hypotheses of the nature of reality, fed largely by dualistic thinking.

### **3.8 CONCLUSION**

The contribution of spirituality to contemporary ministry is in some ways paradoxical. But either way it contributes a more embracing approach to Christian rationale and practice. In the one sense, spirituality today, as academic discipline or 'lived experience,' gives ministry access to the broadest ecumenical treasures and insights of lived *Christian* experience. Christian spirituality currently combines within itself formerly antagonistic Christian perspectives and offers to ministry a diverse blend of Christian traditions, together with their distinctive insights and self-understanding. It makes ministry more authentic in as much as it renders a greater ecumenical legitimacy to ministry. In this context, spirituality comes characteristically in the form of '*Christian* spirituality' or perhaps 'spiritual theology', which certain contemporary proponents would more happily call it.

Paradoxically, it is *also* true of another perspective on (Christian) spirituality, for example in Schneiders' anthropological orientation, that it challenges prescriptive spiritualities to find their place in a more *global* and *inclusive* context. While enhancing the specificity of Christian ministry on the one hand, this concept of spirituality can also encourage ministry to meet God in God's 'general revelation' on the cosmic scale. These two approaches can be strange bedfellows and even antagonistic in the thinking of some. Can they ever live easily together? Their outstanding commonality, in spite of this tension, is a rare demonstration of unity and inclusivity in each case: ecumenical on the one hand, and even more expansive on the other, though in the latter case not without difficulties for the normative function of theology. Ministry, through the more universal appeal of spirituality in general or Christian spirituality in particular, can find greater transcultural recognition in our world today. It could facilitate the deconstruction of worldviews based narrowly on genetic group, closed societal exclusivism, naturalistic worldviews and even unreflective identification with one's own nation's claims to divine sanction. The Church has censured all these worldviews at different times.

Especially in multi-religious and multi-cultural South African society, not to mention a society of esoteric or new age spiritualities, a ministry schooled in current Christian spirituality finds itself with a more credible voice. Together with the broader perspectives of (Christian) spirituality,

ministry speaks into what Schneiders (1989:696) calls ‘a profound and authentic desire of 20<sup>th</sup> century humanity for wholeness in the midst of fragmentation, for community in the face of isolation and loneliness, for liberating transcendence, for meaning in life, for values that endure’. If our times are not particularly hungry for ‘religion’, they certainly have an appetite for less prescriptive adventures of the spirit. Whether one should attribute this to postmodernism, or to the unrestrained wind of present trends in spirituality, is neither here nor there. If spirituality speaks a language that is credible to postmodernism it is not necessarily any less Christian spirituality that is being described, certainly in broad terms.

Taking the above a step further, authentic ministry is not only verified by the criteria of faithfulness to its roots in the whole family of God. Surely it is further verified by its simultaneous ability to minister intelligibly to the world’s current insights and self-understanding?<sup>15</sup> Nouwen (1996:116) possibly sums it up best when he writes: ‘The extraordinary flow of post-modern cultural influences asks a growing flexibility, a willingness to remain open and live with the small fragments which at the moment seem to offer the best response to a given situation’ (1996:116). This is indeed a valid observation. But it is also a part of the argument of this chapter that current spirituality has been able to contain this fragmentation within a growing universal embrace, arguably more than ever before. There *is* a ‘sense of discontinuity and disintegration, cultural and religious, current among many of us in the West’ (Sheldrake 1987:12). Yet Christian spirituality’s inevitable identification with the linear, unilateral nature of current spirituality in general, gives it a universal dimension. And herein lies a *kairos* moment for ministry.

Quite apart, however, from the expeditious secular appeal of spirituality for the effectiveness of ministry, are the new developments in the nature of Christian spirituality itself. Spirituality is being understood as more incorporative of lived life, both religious and non-religious. In the

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<sup>15</sup> One might suggest that an authentic ministry follows not only the criteria of faithfulness to its own memory and distinctive norms, but faithfulness also to the language and opportunities (or *kairos*) it finds in contemporary thought. With respect to postmodernism, the latter offers its own unique *kairos* for contemporary spirituality, though not without some caveats. Ministry, however, must surely share with biblical hermeneutics some of the same hermeneutical principles. As Leander Keck says, ‘To preach biblically is to take full account of the concrete issues to which the text was addressed in the first place; it is to reckon with the fact that what the biblical writers found necessary to say was determined not by truth in general but by needs in particular.’ Keck further speaks of the ‘hermeneutics of the content,’ but also ‘the hermeneutics of the recipients, then and now’ (Keck 1983:115). To minister in a Christian way that is intelligibly incarnate will mean to permeate one’s ministry with an appreciative ‘hermeneutics of the recipients.’ Ministry can never be authentic by offering normative Christian spirituality from a previous, for example modernistic, milieu.

preconciliar age it was antiseccular, individualistic *and* interior. Yet while it now emphasises personal response and interior commitment it also ‘radically changes the context within which this response takes place’ (Schneiders 1989:679). The quote suggests that Christian spirituality is now making inroads to transform and universalise Christian experience beyond the practice of prayer and ‘devotional life’. Spirituality now incorporates all of life into itself. More shall be said about the implications of this for ministry later in the thesis.

Schneiders’ now-familiar definition of spirituality shows the move towards a broadening inclusivity: ‘the experience of consciously striving to *integrate* one’s life in terms *not of isolation and self-absorption* [italics mine] but of self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives’ (1989: 684). Her definition is being felt right through the world of current Christian spirituality. Perhaps the universal and ecumenical breeze is no less than one should expect of spirituality. After all, it takes its name from the Holy Spirit, whose primary function is to create that unity that the immanent Trinity enjoys.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY: EMBODIED ROOTEDNESS FOR MINISTRY

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

One would scarce expect of a Christian spirituality that it be less than incarnational and rooted in the real world. Any *Christian* spirituality, one might suppose, would meet this criterion or be an anomaly. Yet Christian spirituality has, at times, been the servant of dualisms that have rendered it unfit to speak for an incarnational and fully earthed faith. Indeed, clearing the word 'spirituality' of pejorative baggage has been a process of retrieval, begun in the early part of the twentieth century. 'Spirituality' had too long been associated with otherworldly interests. Adding to the suspicion was spirituality's seeming independence from sound theological parameters and answerability. The evidence, however, of current Christian spirituality's commitment to embodiment and incarnation is overwhelming. Schneiders (1989:693) says that: '... spirituality is a holistic discipline in that its inquiry into human spiritual experience is not limited to explorations of the explicitly religious, i.e. the so-called "interior life"'. As a holistic discipline 'the psychological, *bodily* [italics mine], historical, social, political, aesthetic, intellectual, and other dimensions of the human subject of spiritual experience are integral to that experience insofar as it is the subject matter of the discipline of spirituality' (1989: 693).

Contemporary spirituality's future shows every sign of maintaining and even intensifying this perspective in its desire to speak to the distinctive contextual needs of the twenty-first century. The need for a more pronounced spirituality of embodiment was accurately seen some decades ago. Allchin (1978:51) noted that if the way of spirituality was to be pursued in times of changing consciousness it would 'involve a new discovery of the place of the body and the life of the senses in our whole approach to God, our fellow men, (sic) and the world around us'. His words are just as apt now as they were then.

I shall show that current Christian spirituality is characterised by a new affirmation of embodied and material reality. The implications of such a spirituality for Christian ministry will be indicated. It will affect the minister not only in her/himself, but also realise a new breadth in ministerial perspective. Ministry will thus be afforded new opportunities of redeeming the world

from the exclusive and heretical designation of ‘secularism’.<sup>1</sup> It has been suggested that ‘(T)he primary vocation of ministers with regard to their sense of self is to be earthed, to be as humanly human as they know how’ (Jones 1992:40). If this is so, then contemporary Christian spirituality contributes an enhancement of ministerial authenticity. It would do this through growth in ministerial integrity and acceptance of the embodied world as the arena of God’s activity and the object of God’s love.

The title of the present chapter employs the words ‘embodied’ and ‘rootedness.’ The word, ‘embodied’ presently enjoys wide currency in theological parlance. It includes the understanding of our personal, individual physicality, but embraces our collective, societal embodiment as well. It further embraces the intellectual dimension, which saves spirituality from the dangers of subjectivity and affectivity. It is in this broad sense then, that ‘embodiment’ should here be understood. As an attribute of contemporary spirituality it hints at the new distinction between spirituality contemporarily perceived and the ethereal and pejorative reputation of a formally alienated spirituality. Akin to ‘embodiment’ is the word, ‘rootedness.’ It serves to expand the compass of the chapter to include all visible and material reality, giving to ministry an ecological, cosmological perspective. There *is* a sense in which the two words might be used interchangeably.

I show, then, that Christian spirituality now reflects a strong and intentional affirmation of embodiment. ‘Embodiment’ will be employed loosely, initially signifying only the human body. It will, however, be expanded to include all the earth and the cosmos in their rootedness. First, however, it is necessary to show how Christian ministry requires a spirituality of this kind if it is to be authentic.

#### **4.2 AUTHENTIC MINISTRY**

We presuppose for a moment that contemporary Christian spirituality reflects a greater affirmation of the material and incarnational world. Would an incarnational and embodied spirituality render a greater authenticity to current Christian ministry? Would a rooted contemporary Christian spirituality give a greater integrity to Christian service, whether in

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Secularism’ is a common and acceptable word. It is exclusive and heretical only in the theological sense of inviting a dualism that divorces God from God's own world, and from all things earthly. To my mind, it always retains a measure of dualistic presupposition.

ministry's traditional clerical roles, or in wider Christian service? The contention presented here is that ministry can only benefit from such developments and attributes in current Christian spirituality. The reason for saying this is at least two-fold:

#### **4.2.1 Ministry's Inherited Tradition**

The whole tradition in which ministry stands is one of embodiment and incarnation. This is true not only for ministry's New Testament heritage, but also for its oft-forgotten Old Testament beginnings. The neglect of Old Testament background by Christians has led to serious distortions of the gospel. The spiritualising of a social and political Christian faith might often be attributed to 'the neglect of the Old Testament and of the essential "Jewishness" of Christian theology and spirituality ...' (Leech 1985: 66).

The contempt for the material world and relapse into pagan approaches to matter, nature and history; the 'privatizing' of God and the false interiority which reduces spiritual life to an inner experience of the individual; the loss of the link which joins social justice to spiritual insight: these and many other evils are connected with the neglect of the Old Testament roots of Christian faith. The Christian God is first of all a Jewish God (ibid:66).

An over-spiritualising of the New Testament might indeed indicate a neglect of our earlier Christian heritage in the older Testament.

Yet the New Testament tradition is no less adamant in rooting itself in the material. The Word of God is supremely an incarnate Word (Jn 1: 14). Those entrusted with the dissemination of this Word are themselves embodied and vulnerable (Jn. 15: 18-21). They are committed to fulfilling their ministry in a material-world reality. As spiritual people they nevertheless know that 'the "spiritual person" (e.g. 1 Cor. 2: 14-15) is *not* someone who turns away from material reality but rather someone in whom the Spirit of God dwells' (Sheldrake 1991b:35). This seemingly subtle distinction is often tragically overlooked, resulting in pseudo-Christian spiritualities. Contemporary Christian spirituality, I contend, offers the orthodox corrective to a detached and disembodied ministry.<sup>2</sup> It is in tune with the tradition that Christian ministry is founded upon, namely a spirituality rooted in the Word made flesh.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> One may well wonder what form a 'disembodied ministry' might take. Again, one refers to a ministry that operates out of dualistic body/spirit assumptions and consequently communicates those assumptions to parishioners, consciously or unconsciously.

<sup>3</sup> Leech (1985), in securing the essential elements of a renewed and authentic Christian spirituality, makes embodiment indispensable. He says of his envisaged spirituality that 'it will be a spirituality rooted in the

In speaking of pastoral work, Peterson (1992a:33) might just as effectively be referring to Christian ministry as a whole when he says, 'Pastoral work is a commitment to the everyday: it is an act of faith that the great truths of salvation are workable in the "ordinary universe."' Christian ministry needs the 'earthedness' that Peterson describes here. Is not current Christian spirituality better equipped to provide such rootedness than spiritualities permeated with residual body/spirit dualisms?

#### **4.2.2 Ministry as a Practical Science**

Ministry benefits from embodied Christian spirituality since ministry itself finds expression in the real, embodied world. For the most part, ministry is empirically verifiable and belongs to the world of practical science. It is thus analysable, as in the discipline of Practical Theology. Indeed, the classic roles of ministry largely have their operational and empirical equivalents in the studies of the social sciences. Thus, preaching has to do with communication, teaching with instruction, pastoral work with care, and ministry with social service (Theron 1984:4-5).<sup>4</sup> Practical Theology, as academic discipline, is taken seriously not only as a theoretical discipline, but as a science engaged in empirical research. It therein expresses the conviction that ministry does not exist in a nebulous vacuum, somehow removed from the material world, or from the burgeoning social and communication sciences, or the operational fields referred to by Theron (1984). A spirituality, then, that is grounded in the material world would be of great authenticating value to Christian ministry, which must always be rooted and embodied.

### **4.3 SPIRITUALITY AND HUMAN EMBODIMENT**

#### **4.3.1 Some Contemporary Perspectives**

Many current writers would agree with Saliers (1984:94) that 'a Christian spirituality that remains unembodied and focused only within the interior life and "religious" experience of the individual believer is both unbiblical and a dangerous deception'. Christian spirituality may often have identified with an unembodied or radical world-denying, ascetic philosophy of life, yet

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Word made flesh. It will hold to the truth of God incarnate, and will seek to find and serve God in the flesh and blood of God's children' (1985: 422).

<sup>4</sup> The study of Practical Theology at the University of South Africa engages with the communication and social sciences. The traditional classification of Practical Theology as being exclusively beholden to Systematic Theology, or the work of the pastor, has had its day. Practical Theology's new inter-disciplinary approach recognises other empirically investigable acts in terms of which the operational fields of Practical Theology may be examined (Theron 1984: 2-5).

contemporary spirituality has a decidedly holistic perspective and ‘impacts on the totality of life.’<sup>5</sup> Kim (1996:59) maintains that ‘spiritual life in the West necessitated that people experience alienation from their own bodily experiences ... ’ He says that this is further borne out by the West’s Lenten season of bodily denial and its celebration of Easter Sunday as quintessentially a victory over the human *bodily* experience of death. Griffin (1988) has insightful things to say of postmodern spirituality, which is, in his view, unquestionably embodied, and contrasts with the old classical aspirations for disembodied transcendence. He says:

We first know God’s creative presence in the reality of our own bodies – flesh, blood, breath, nerves, bones, muscles, posture, digestion, sexuality, psyche, etc ... Our own body is our first religious encounter with the Mystery expressed in creation. Hence, a religious or even an anti-religious drive based on rejection, abuse, trivialization, or forgetfulness of our own body would be a denial of our first and abiding encounter with the Creator Spirit (Griffin 1988:51).

Our bodies are not to be understood as somehow extraneous to an indwelling Spirit. Such is sometimes the assumption behind popular description of the body as ‘temple of the Spirit,’ as if the body were an external box. Rather these temples or bodies are dwellings created by the Spirit itself (Griffin 1988:51). Body and soul must not be seen as separate entities. ‘A human person does not *possess* a body; rather, from the moment of conception, each is *expressed* bodily, so that no one can be distinguished from his/her body’ (Prokes 1996: 36). So there is recognition today that we cannot ‘misread the spirit-flesh opposition in Paul to favour spiritualities that depreciate the body ...’ (McBrien 1987:89). We are body-spirits and not ‘spirits imprisoned in our bodies, waiting always to be released from this “vale of tears”’ (McBrien 1987:89). Again, for Griffin (1988: 50) ‘our vision of spiritual energies needs to be rerooted in matter: first in the matter of our bodies ... ’ Even more fundamentally, there is a feeling today that the Bible needs to be interpreted through the eyes of a more body-centered spirituality and that in this regard there are many parts of the mystery of Christ that we still need to discover (Rohr 1991:68). ‘Whatever else may be affirmed about a spirituality which has a biblical precedent and style, spiritual maturity or spiritual fulfilment necessarily involves the whole person - body, mind and soul, place, relationships ... ’ (Stringfellow 1984:22). Such a holistic understanding of the spiritual life was undermined in the Gnostic heresy that so challenged the early Christian church. Yet the same unembodied sense of ‘spirituality’ would emerge again in later church history. The word

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<sup>5</sup> In this connection, see Kourie’s helpful descriptions of current spirituality in her article, *What is Christian Spirituality?* (Kourie & Kretschmar 2000: 12-13).

'spiritual' came to have different shades of meaning and connotations, such as a life contrasted to the corporeal or material. Principe (2000:45) records that a new sense of the word altered the Pauline moral sense to one that was entitative and psychological: 'In this shift one can foresee the confusion of spirituality with disdain for the body and matter that was to mark many later movements dealing with spiritual life'. Happily, a heightened concern for embodied spirituality is in evidence again. It helps secure for Christian ministry an authenticity in its service of the embodied Word of God.

Much of contemporary embodied spirituality is a recovery of the authentic Christian tradition, occasionally in the face of obdurate Gnostic trends. That embodied spirituality is widely recovered in contemporary Christian writers, and with such emphasis, renders it an attribute of contemporary Christian spirituality. A feature of that embodied spirituality is its commitment to critical analysis of unembodied leanings through the centuries and up to the present day. It further shows a determination to feed such leanings through the canon of Christian tradition, East and West, always mindful too that an unembodied spirituality cannot meet the needs of our times. Out of this particular analysis has come a new sense of discovery and liberation about the spiritual stature of the human body. Willard (1988:53) writes: 'The human body itself then is part of the *imago Dei*, for it is the vehicle through which we can effectively acquire the limited self-subsistent power we must have to be truly in the image and likeness of God'. Leech (1985:242) exemplifies characteristics of current spirituality when he says:

It is the whole person who shares the image of God. This truth is emphasized in the works of a whole range of Eastern spiritual writers, including Irenaeus, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory Palamas. According to the last: 'The word Man is not applied to either soul or body separately, but to both together, since together they have been created in the image of God'.

#### **4.3.2 Body: Vehicle of Revelation**

Feminist spirituality has done much to elevate the place of the human body in 'revelation', theologically understood. Body Theology is a phenomenon in current feminist spirituality, and more than tentative advances are evident in the field.<sup>6</sup> Its potential for enhancing Christian ministry is considerable. It fosters ministerial understanding of what one might call 'body-revelation' for the pastoral context. Of course, *Body Theology* is not the only contributor to the

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<sup>6</sup> Prokes (1996) Isherwood & Stuart (1998) and McFague (1987) offer stimulating insights. A meaningful contribution is made to both genders and the thinking is, in my view, creative and based on sound theology.

concept of the body as vehicle of revelation. Spirituality as a whole has been recovering an appreciation of the human body. Indeed, more attention has been given in recent times to the human person, or the person's own body, as initial or primary recipient of revelation. The discipline of spirituality has broken some of the restraints of 'spiritual theology' so that '... the realisation has emerged that specific traditions are initially embodied in *people* [italics mine] rather than doctrine and grow out of life rather than from abstract ideas' (Sheldrake 1991b:33). I suggest that one might look at a theology or spirituality of the body, or *Body Theology* so designated, from at least two points of departure when it comes to ministry: First, revelation to others, and second, revelation to oneself.

First, *Body Theology* shows how the human body of the minister might be a vehicle of (sacramental) revelation to congregants. That revelation may be self-revelation, or revelation of God. Prokes' words are illustrative in this respect. She writes that 'the lived body is revelatory and effective in ways that exceed our capacity to contain or manipulate' (1996: 88). Prokes (1996: 79-82) draws on Rahner (1966:221-252) to show how the human body '... is revelatory of the whole person, a Real Symbol. Each human person is a visible, meaningful word spoken bodily into the world ...' (1996: 90). Prokes (1996: 80) further shows how Van Roo (1981) delineates various categories of symbol: conventional, natural and 'mixed'. Prokes then utilises Rahner's thinking to indicate the most exalted category of symbol in its primordial sense as image of God, or 'Real Symbol.'<sup>7</sup> Summarising Rahner, Prokes (1996:80-81) says that 'all being is constitutively symbolic, from within its own existence. There is an intrinsic plurality in every being: to "realize" or *be* itself, each being is *expressed* (what Rahner terms its "otherness")'. She continues: 'This is not something added on, but is rather constitutive of any existent being ... For the human person, the *body* is the "Real Symbol" through which the whole person is self-realized and makes itself known' (1996:81).

Body as 'Real Symbol' has exciting and broadening implications for ministry as incorporative of the minister's physical being and presence. The body thus becomes, or *can* become, a symbolic

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<sup>7</sup> To what extent, one may ask, is 'Body Theology' an expression of Christian spirituality rather than systematic theology? Is there justification in my quoting it as an expression of *spirituality*? It should be clear, however, that these two theological disciplines are not mutually impenetrable. They are not circumscribed fields. Furthermore, Prokes (1996) is not only a systematic theologian but also a revisionary scholar in spirituality. It seems to me she occupies that indeterminate give-and-take area between these two fields. In any case, the separatist language accorded these disciplines is a symptom of conceiving 'spirituality' and 'theology' in entitative ways.

and sacramental vehicle of revelation to others, or constitutive of that revelation itself. If one then includes bodily and liturgical gestures as an integral part of that self-revelation, as Prokes (1996: 83-90) does, then the concept of minister or ordained functionary as 'Real symbol' opens new dimensions for the understanding of ministerial presence and efficacy. Can we not say then that the minister as sacramental presence and instrument of revelation is given even greater substance in current 'body theology'?<sup>7</sup> Is there not a valuable contribution made here to the understanding of minister/pastoral worker as incarnate symbol? The insights of 'Body Theology' help us understand that the human person is a composite whole, and further, that when the minister's (or anyone's) '... outward expression and inner intent are in accord, the more perfectly is the body-person realized as Real Symbol' (Prokes 1996:90). For whether one enjoyed a sacramental church background or not, 'the pastor, [sic] by virtue of the pastoral office itself, *is* [italics mine] a major symbol of the church system. The pastor must provide a continuing affirmation of the group identity, its purposes, its values, and its goals' (Pattison 1977:63). Any Christian worker by virtue of their embodied state, inevitably engages to a lesser or greater extent in the revelatory capacity of their physical embodiedness. The human body, then, may be of great benefit in its 'outward revelation,' that is to congregants in particular. The body may clearly be a vehicle, not only of the revelation of the self, but also of the God in whose image that *body* is made.

Body Theology also shows how the minister's own body might become a vehicle of divine revelation to them, and so contribute to the minister's personal growth and self-knowledge in ministry. (One might coin such revelation 'self-directed' or 'immanent.')

Body Theology in particular and current holistic spirituality in general, I contend, affirms that the minister may themselves become the recipient of revelation through the instrumentality of their own body. Christian heritage lends support thereto. The demonstrative bodily experiences of church Fathers and Mothers arguably enjoy renewed attention today.<sup>8</sup> As the writings of Julian of Norwich or John of the Cross are explored, the physical and mystical experiences of the saints are brought into the spotlight again. Access to such literature unearths the Christian's heritage of revelation through bodily experience. Current spirituality is able to appreciate how the human body was a means of self-directed revelation in the illness of Julian of Norwich, the stigmata of St Francis, or the apostle Paul's 'thorn in the flesh'(2 Cor 12: 7). Williams (1997a) strongly asserts the

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<sup>8</sup> Writers can scarce speak of Julian's *Showings* without being drawn into the way she accommodated her bodily experience of illness within her sense of God relating to her. Did not even John of the Cross, admittedly no proponent of bodily manifestations or consolations, experienced bodily desolation as part of the revelation of God's essential hiddenness? Ignatius of Loyola adds another voice to the great tradition of revelation through the agency of the senses.

anthropological foundation of a Christian understanding of faith. He explores the theology of Thomas Aquinas with benefit to contemporary spirituality's convictions. 'If we are led to God by our senses as well as by our minds and our hearts, it is because we are embodied ... We are drawn into participation in God's life through body, mind and soul' (1997:64). Williams' appreciation of his Catholic heritage is typical of current spirituality's use of the historical mothers and fathers of the Church. Drawing on Aquinas' Summa, Williams (1997:64) says that 'neither our physicality nor our intellect bars us from union with the divine; rather our senses and our minds lead us to God, the finite knowing the Infinite, the created contemplating the Uncreated, that the two be joined in love'.

#### 4.3.3 Summation

Can the concept of human body as vehicle of self-directed revelation alert the minister to listen more seriously to their own body, and the signals God gives through it? May we not say that current holistic spirituality gives the minister a theological directive to do so? Compulsive Christian service, without due rest, might then be seen as spiritual failure through neglect of the body as revelatory. Perhaps 'burnout' and bodily exhaustion among clergy may then be regarded, among other things, as ministerial obduracy to God's word through the body.<sup>9</sup> Physical self-abuse and neglect by a minister, however, may well be indicative of their conscious or unconscious adherence to a false body/spirit dualism. Ministers will increasingly need to ensure that their spirituality takes account of their physical bodies in an affirmative way. Anything less may be a contemporary regression to Gnosticism.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The reality of ministerial burnout and physical collapse need scarcely be defended here. The term 'burnout' was apparently first applied to public health care workers and has been in circulation for more than two decades (Hall 1997:245). Rasseur (1982) wrote a supportive and insightful book where he gave 'practical help for clergy who deny themselves the care they give to others'. Hall (1997:245-247) gives empirical attention to burnout and finds that the number of hours per day spent in church-related activities, together with inter-personal crises and conflicts, make the minister a natural target for this disability. A responsible counter to impairment and breakdown would be, *inter alia*, 'an annual family vacation, utilizing a social-professional support system, having a flexible schedule, and giving and receiving family support ...' (1997:247). Contemporary Christian spirituality could do much to help ministers accommodate these provisions in a holistic, embodied spirituality.

<sup>10</sup> Gnosticism is characterised by divorce of the 'material' (or bodily) and the 'spiritual' or incorporeal. It is perpetuated to some degree by what has been coined 'consumer spirituality', which cuts the 'private' off from the 'public' and indulges itself in personal spiritual experiences. In a perceptive critique of Moore (1992), Jones (1997:16) writes: 'For Moore, the "sacred" is to be cultivated in personal, indeed private, experiences that may or may not have any connection either to the social and political around the self or to more specific beliefs about "God" ...' Jones says of Moore that he '... has imbibed more ancient theory and practice than he perhaps suspects, but unfortunately it is an updated version of one form of *Gnosticism*, [*italics mine*] the ancient Christian heresy' (1997:15).

## **4.4 SPIRITUALITY AND SEXUALITY**

### **4.4.1 An Introduction**

*Spirituality and Sexuality* logically belongs under the previous heading. I have, however, given greater specificity to sexuality in spirituality and ministry, as it is deserving thereof and touches so powerfully and painfully the lives of persons in Christian work. Furthermore, sexuality enjoys much attention in contemporary Christian spirituality.

Sexuality profoundly affects ministry and is an inevitable part of it - a 'given.' Current Christian spirituality embraces sexuality as integral to our spiritual lives. A spirituality that is without erotic passion, for example, becomes 'lifeless and cold' (Ellison 1996:222). 'I am searching for a Christian spirituality that acknowledges that the human calling is to make passionate love in this world, in our beds and in our institutions' (Ellison 1996:222). The latter shows Christian ministry is a power-sharing, where we align ourselves with God's awesome power that flows through us, bringing wholeness, integrity, and at-one-ness of human life in relation to others and the created order'. He continues:

Sexuality and spirituality are intimately and unavoidably connected because they deal with that kind of power-in-relation we believe to be genuinely sacred and life-giving. Sexuality, our embodied sensuous connectedness to all reality, is our human capacity and longing for intimacy and communion with others, and helps us gain strength in our vulnerability to receive as well as give affirmation and care (ibid:222).

The embodied nature of much contemporary theology is a break from otherworldly Christian spirituality. The latter was often characterised by a noticeable fear of, as well as a fixation with, the power of sex. Again, 'the pervasive discomfort with the body and dis-ease about sex show the ongoing power of a spirit/body dualism and the related male/female dualism that are so characteristic of Western Christianity' (Ellison 1996:222). Body alienation, however, means self-alienation. We are to overcome this dualistic influence and legacy. 'Erotic passion is positive spiritual energy. Therefore, to trust that eroticism is essential to our human well-being and to our God-relation requires courage' (ibid:222). McFague (1987:74) speaks of 'the long antibody, antiphysical, anti-matter tradition within Christianity. This tradition has repressed healthy sexuality ... [T]o say that God loves bodies is to redress the balance toward a more holistic understanding of fulfilment'. McFague (ibid:74) says that 'bodies are worth loving, sexually and otherwise, that passionate love as well as attention to the needs of bodily existence is a part of fulfilment'.

It should be clear that a minister's (often unconscious) alienating of her/his own sexuality, or an uneasiness therewith, can invite a truncated and emotionally unstable ministry. The minister will at least be offering a less than whole self to their ministry. While no one admittedly comes to ministry entirely whole, and all are 'wounded healers' (Nouwen 1996), still emotional and sexual woundedness can have much bearing on ministry. Christian workers, and particularly clergy, are often exposed to factors that characteristically precipitate sexual temptation and misconduct. Included herein are, *inter alia*, a suspicious spouse, high stress related to marriage, family isolation and sexual issues (Hall 1997:249). A number of surveys clearly show that sexual misconduct is a significant problem among pastors. Somers (1986) found that twenty-five per cent of the ministers that he surveyed from the Free Methodist Church admitted to having engaged in inappropriate sexual behaviour. The point is that while some sexual problems are brought *to* the ministry, a spirituality that is at enmity with one's God-given sexuality is an extreme aggravation, often leading to clandestine and spiritually destructive behaviour. Where celibacy, on the other hand, is requisite for ordination one needs at least to be aware of some possible motivations for the celibate life. Could celibacy be a way of avoiding sexuality, marriage and children because of childhood trauma or fear and anger directed toward the opposite sex? In the light of the foregoing, is not present spirituality's affirmation of the human body a healing embrace and redeeming of the biological and psychological desire that is sexuality? Contemporary thinking is a departure from the kind of spirituality, not uncommon in parts of Christian history and pietism, which effected unhealthy denial and repression, together with their consequent psychological and physical problems.

#### **4.4.2 Feminist Spirituality and Sexuality**

It may seem superfluous here to mention the contribution of feminine or feminist spirituality as a new affirmation of sexuality. After all, much that has already been quoted under *Spirituality and Sexuality* is indicative of the wide contribution of women in the fields of feminine spirituality and theology. While one would not want to characterise feminine spirituality as related exclusively to the sexual, women by virtue of affirming their sexuality in a discriminative world have, in my view, contributed a fuller and healing perspective to concept of God and relationship with God. Women have rendered to both genders a healthy and timely corrective to male-dominated spirituality and theology. Herein they have shown how an alienating dualism has kept females from claiming their assertiveness and males their vulnerability (Thatcher & Stuart 1996:216). Women have undoubtedly offered a new perspective to theology and spirituality. It has been noted that: 'There has been a shift from theologies of sexuality to sexual theologies' (ibid:216). It

is clear, however, that this phenomenon is not only in the exclusive area of systematic theology. The interest is also related to spirituality. The questions being asked are: ‘What does our *experience* of human sexuality say about our perception of faith – *our experience of God*, our interpretations of Scripture and tradition, our *ways of living out the gospel*’ [italics mine] (Thatcher & Stuart 1996: 214)?

Of course, the qualities and distinctiveness of a feminine/or feminist spirituality are not the sole possession of the female sex, but they are derived from a uniquely female experience of everyday life, according to Nancy Ring (1983:149). Exponents of Feminine Spirituality, both female and male, are able to recover receptivity, affective response, waiting, attentiveness and intimacy to the experience of God. The insights are largely derived from a woman’s sense and experience of her own unique sexual embodiment and connectedness (ibid:149). The enhancement and wholeness that feminine spiritualities bring to theologies and spiritualities propounded exclusively by men is by all accounts transforming and immensely enriching. Much can naturally be said, too, about God as Mother, or the motherly attributes of God. While female writers see God as transcending genders, they nevertheless powerfully reinstate our concept and experience of God in *all* Godself’s glory and biblical fullness. Hosmer (1986:107) says that Julian of Norwich’s ‘understanding of the motherhood of God makes possible a needed corrective to the anthropology of Augustine and Aquinas, neither of whom granted that women, autonomously and equally with men, are created in the image of God’.

The Methodist Church of Southern Africa has for some time now followed the practice of ordaining women for the ‘ministry’ (priesthood) and the diaconate. For much of the church’s history women were indeed excluded from ordination. ‘Today, the appropriateness and value of women to the ordained ministry is affirmed and celebrated by many denominations around the world. Within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, our first woman minister was ordained in 1957, and our first woman bishop was inducted in 1999’ (Doctrine, Ethics & Worship Committee 2003:19). It should be self-evident that women have a perspective and embodied experience to offer to ministry that is indispensable, and whose benefits are incalculable. A woman’s experience of embodiment and ‘femaleness’ is able to identify uniquely with more than half of the human race. Present insights, together with creativity and sound scholarship in feminine spirituality, offer much to affirm the sexuality of ordained women in ministry. Encouragement and affirmation for women in ministry and what they can offer is being found in the great spiritual Mothers of the Church. Both have been marginalised for too long.

#### 4.4.3 Prayer and Sexuality: A Common Thread

At the risk of making too fine a point, sexuality (embodiment) and the prayer life ('spirituality', loosely termed) are sometimes seen as held together by a common thread. Both deal in finest detail with the common thread of intimacy. Peterson (1992:23-71) subscribes hereto in his treatment of the biblical book, *Song of Songs*. Peterson (1987,1989,1992) employs an invaluable breadth of perspective for ministers, since he writes from a pastoral perspective, but always within his creative matrix of reflective spirituality, theology and hermeneutics. His utilisation of this combination, and the soundness of his scholarship, makes him, in my opinion, a rarity. He is a significant exponent of current spirituality in the hands of a pastoral and ministerial practitioner. Spirituality's inter-disciplinary character, as described by Schneiders (1989:692), is also in evidence here. Peterson (1992:24) says that sexuality and prayer 'are both aspects of a single, created thing: a capacity for intimacy'.

In some ways it matters little where you start: with the physical relationship as an analogy of the spiritual or with the spiritual as a model for the personal. Regardless of where you start, it is only a step or two to get from one to the other. Because of the common origin of our creation and redemption, an examination of our sex life leads to an examination of our prayer life and vice versa (Peterson 1992:25).

Peterson (1992:25-26) refers to a survey that shows 'strongly religious women reporting more sexual satisfaction than those who are moderately religious. Responding to some astonishment expressed at these findings, Peterson explains that no astonishment is necessary. There is a correlation between religion and successful lovemaking. The teaching is integral to the biblical revelation and has been taken for granted by Christians and Jews for millennia (1997:25-26). I record this here only to show how some recent thinking binds sexual intimacy and lovemaking with our prayer and religious life, making the one almost a commentary on the state of the other. The current need for ministry is therefore to utilise this insight and to take seriously the sensual spirituality of writers like Peterson in general, and the *Song of Songs* in particular. Peterson's writings are conducive to a ministerial spirituality that takes marital/sexual intimacy every bit as seriously as prayer, or intimacy with God. Some timely questions might thus be: is Christian ministry not desperately in need of such wholeness and congruency? Does this thinking not take us a step further in embodied spirituality, leading our sexuality into the precincts of prayer and spiritual formation? Does such wholeness not inevitably impact upon the quality and transparent sincerity of one's ministry through effecting a new wholeness? Marriage enrichment and healthy sexual conduct for ministers is then an authenticating of ministry, as it enhances the God-

relationship. Indeed, such sexual intimacy is in no entitative or categorical way distinct from one's relationship with God.

McFague (1987) takes the concept further when she uses the metaphor of 'lover' for the Second Person of the Trinity. She shows that with the model of divine lover, that salvation is not something that is *received* by us, as much as it is something *performed*. She says that salvation 'is not something that happens to us so much as that which we participate in. The lover loves the beloved, and wants and expects a response' (1987:145-146). Here, too, the physical imagery argues for an embodied and virtually visceral relationship with God, which calls forth the totality of one's being. There is a continuity of one's embodied sexuality into the relationship with God. Such a spirituality can do much to heal those couples who try to minister through a dualistic spirituality of otherworldliness and denial.

It is indicative of current theological interest in embodiment that Julian of Norwich has become a focus of spirituality. Julian uses bridal imagery to permeate and constitute understanding of relation with the Holy Trinity (Hosmer 1986:107).<sup>11</sup> Julian of Norwich says: 'And so I saw that God rejoices that he is our Father and God rejoices that he is our Mother and God rejoices that he is our true spouse, and that our soul is his beloved wife' (quoted in Hosmer 1986:107). Julian shows that in both our sexuality and sensuality we are able to have union with God, and indeed reflect God. Hosmer (1986:107), in the same context, relates Julian's insight to that of Dante, who sees in the child Beatrice wisdom, beauty and fleshliness that becomes the inspiration of his life. His experience, too, is sensual. The sight of the child in all her holy and sensual beauty opened for Dante a spirituality of the flesh and passions, one that 'arose from a vision of Eros, and led up to a vision of God in highest heaven' (1986: 86). Dante is ultimately able to say of Beatrice: 'If Christ is holy Wisdom, then Christ is the woman I love, in whom holy Wisdom is manifest to me' (quoted in Hosmer 1986:86-87). Such, then, is the way that contemporary writers in spirituality are marshalling the insights of the Christian spiritual tradition.

One might ask: how can Julian and Dante lead us to a spirituality that affirms the sexual and sensual and takes us in our human totality into relationship with God? Might ministers of both sexes be rescued from a passionless and body-negating spirituality, which leaves one divorced from part of one's created self? An engagement with these aspects of Christian spirituality might

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<sup>11</sup> The bridal imagery of Jeremiah 31, and the imagery of the Church as the Bride of Christ in the book of Revelation further validate this approach

help effect a change. It would realise a welcoming of one's often-marginalised sexuality into the mainstream of ministry, self-acceptance and personal integration.

#### 4.4.4 Gay and Lesbian Ministry and Spirituality

Gay and Lesbian ministry is particularly topical, and indeed controversial, at this time. For many it has become a divisive issue. It is appropriate that something be said on this often difficult issue, aware that so many minds are already made up, one way or the other. Can we not, however, see homosexuality, ministry and spirituality in continuity with what has been said already about the heterosexual and spirituality? Is homosexuality not best considered in the context of contemporary Christian spirituality (Doctrine, Ethics & Worship Committee = DEWCOM 2003:26)? As spirituality takes one of its major foundational criteria as *experience* itself, must we not say that 'there are substantial numbers of people of homosexual orientation within the Christian Church already whose gifts and graces reveal the work of the Holy Spirit among us (DEWCOM 2003:26)?<sup>12</sup> One might hazard the prediction that as with the *bodily experiences* of women increasingly playing a formative role in Christian spirituality, that much the same will prevail in the spirituality of lesbian and gay people, *and* become unilaterally acceptable. Contemporary Christian spirituality is showing how the context of each person's unique embodiment and sexuality is becoming more determinative of the nature and potential of their distinctive Christian spiritualities.<sup>13</sup>

People are discovering the importance of listening to their bodies and their sexual orientation. For many of a homosexual orientation that are engaged in ministry, this listening will result in a greater authenticity. For, 'one key commonality that has emerged again and again from the stories of gay and lesbian people is that their homosexual orientation was not *chosen* but *discovered*' [*italics mine*] (DEWCOM 2003:21).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Schneiders (1986:264) emphasises that lived *experience* must play a major role in current spirituality. Spirituality is neither dogmatic nor prescriptive, the mere application of pre-determined theological principles. It is an experiential response of individuals to the call of integrity and transcendence.

<sup>13</sup> It is, of course, appreciated here that many would object to the adjectival 'Christian' as attributive of a spirituality that affirms gay, lesbian or bisexual *practice*, or even, incredibly, the *experience* of being homosexual.

<sup>14</sup> Naturally, one cannot generalise here for the whole range of homosexual experience, but for those seriously engaged in ministry and its preparatory self-examination, one most often hears of a homosexuality that was *discovered* - not *chosen*.

Isherwood and Stuart (1998:98) speak of the possibility of relating to one's 'body not simply as a symbol or as a mass of matter on which social constructions are written but as an active knower, which is in a constant process of change and which is finite'. Indeed, the body becomes, for many gay and lesbian people, the very source of resistance against tyrannies that the rest of society often subject them to. Knowledge of their bodies becomes the ground for a 'trespass,' a body knowledge that trespasses over conventional boundaries, including the boundaries of a traditional academic theology (ibid:99). In encompassing the human body, present spirituality thus gives the tools to those of gay or lesbian orientation to utilise their embodied experience in their ministry.

'Homospiritality' is a form of spirituality that has developed during the past few decades. It could help create a sense of solidarity for gay/lesbian people in ministry and build a stronger self-esteem. The alienating views of society may well be changing. In the meantime, it seems that gay people need to make the heroic move to give up their attachment to rejection, and the need for people to affirm their wholeness and loveableness (Waaajman 2002:219). Contemporary Christian spirituality, however, gives the possibility of greater freedom and insight in the way that the Bible is approached. More place is being given to inclusivity and the criterion of human experience.<sup>15</sup> Spirituality helps show that it is without adequate foundation to assume that the Bible unequivocally condemns every expression of the modern-day experience of homosexuality (DEWCOM 2003:8).

## **5. EXPLORATION OF HISTORIC ASCETICISM**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Current spirituality's appreciation of human embodiment finds a strong ally when it revisits historical spirituality. This is inevitable, as asceticism (with its embodied practices) and spirituality have historically gone hand in hand. Aquinas himself had spirituality fall in the same over-all category as moral theology and ascetics.<sup>16</sup> O'Keefe (1994a:70) says that 'contemporary spirituality cannot lose touch with the insights discussed in the traditional treatises on ascetical theology.' He speaks of the requirement 'that contemporary spirituality recover notions of

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<sup>15</sup> Are there possible tensions here between that which is referred to academically as 'spiritual theology' on the one hand, and 'spirituality' on the other? Their academic points of departure are different. Might 'spirituality' not be happier to go with the *experience* of homosexual people as fundamental, yet do less to listen to that *tradition* so normative for 'spiritual theology'?

<sup>16</sup> There was a continuum for Aquinas from moral theology and ascetics through to the ultimacy of the contemplative life. 'In St. Thomas's *Summa Theologiae*, we see the unity of the theological enterprise at its height, before its division into the specializations of dogmatic and moral theology (the latter including spiritual theology within its scope)' (O' Keefe 1994:62-63).

purgation and asceticism that are authentically and appropriately world-affirming and creation-serving and that guide Christian women and men in the integration of all of their desires into their striving after God' (1994a: 70). A major work on world asceticism presupposes that spirituality take account of asceticism and not perpetuate the body/spirit dichotomy by assuming to know the place within the human where 'spirit' and 'body' cohere (Wimbush & Valantasis 1995:xxx). It is suggested that spirituality not express itself in a manner contingent upon body/spirit 'but with language and constructions expressive of the practices, relationships, and symbolic constructions of the full human' (1995:xxx). It is finally asserted that 'asceticism opens the study of spirituality to the unitive function it seeks' (ibid:xxx). Willard (1988) and Foster (1978) in their respective works assume the indispensable part that ascetical, bodily disciplines play in the path to spiritual growth.

## **4.5.2 Mining Historical Resources**

### **4.5.2.1 Pitfalls for Contemporary Ascetic Spirituality**

It would be naïve to imagine that current academic spirituality might simply transplant the ascetic practices of Christian antiquity into the present milieu. Account would need to be taken of different views of the body than we would want to entertain today. Some of the ascetic practices would doubtless be considered degrading and undesirable, not to mention an embarrassment to current Christian insights. Yet academic spirituality also helps us appreciate the place that the spiritual fathers and mothers had for the human body. Miles (1981) has a concern for the recovery of a new asceticism. She notes that it was always Augustine's purpose, for example, to move us from contempt of one's body as victim of the soul's habitual concupiscence, to love for it as the body of the resurrection (1981:76). Yet Miles seems to concede that the inappropriateness of some historical spirituality needs reforming. She is concerned about the tendency in past writers to disembody the spiritual life (1988). Part of the problem for her manifests itself in the descriptive old-world imagery given to spiritual formation, such as 'pilgrimage' and 'ascent'. 'Ascent, for example, is indicative of transcending the world, and, I would suggest, of the need to regard the body as of dispensable and secondary value. Miles (1988:13) laments how the body-affirming doctrines of creation, incarnation and resurrection of the body have not seemed as characteristic of Christianity as body-denying, body-damaging ascetic practices. She says that 'perhaps the greatest difficulty for us in a two-thousand-year tradition of instructions in the practice of Christianity is the continuity of agreement on the importance of "transcending" the physical conditions of human life' (ibid:176-177). Miles, predictably, is uneasy with antiquated understandings of 'transcendence.' 'Instead of interpreting human transcendence in the direction

of its potential for body-denying, world-rejecting escapism, we must reinterpret transcendence, not only as individual self-awareness but also as recognition of the interdependence of all living beings' (1988:180). Miles herein seeks to rescue 'transcendence' from unhelpful connotations of disembodiment, which has too often been evident in Church history. While the human body has often been done a disservice in past Christian thought however, and carried that influence over to some current trends, its exponents at least had the insight to recognise the indispensability of the body to any spiritual growth. Academic spirituality is now beginning to bring this to light.

#### **4.5.2.2 Affirming Positive Historical Precedents**

Academic spirituality is doing much to recover all that is best about the Christian tradition's incorporation of the human body into Christian life in general, and ascetic formation in particular. It is affirming the historical strengths of Christian history's engagement with the body. Gutierrez (1983:65-67) in a contextual spirituality, while not dealing explicitly with asceticism, wrestles with the meanings of New Testament words such as 'body,' 'flesh' and 'spirit,' and gives a corrective to disembodied interpretations of the Apostle Paul's writings. I understand Gutierrez to say that one cannot, for example, use the term 'the flesh' as an all-purpose way of invalidating the physical aspect of human life, as has often been done or implied by some spiritualities in Christian history. 'To reject the power of the flesh does not mean to have contempt for the body. On the contrary, Christian spirituality consists in *embracing the liberated body ...*' (1983:70). While Gutierrez is a systematic theologian, the manner of his grappling with issues of spirituality and embodiment is seldom evident in traditional dogmatic and doctrinal theology. Do we not have here a theologising that might more easily be described as academic spirituality? His style of theology, certainly in the work quoted, is an applied science, straddling disciplines to affirm a new discovery of Christian living and experience. Willard (1988:90-91) seemingly arrives at a more exalted view of 'flesh' than Gutierrez. He explains that 'the flesh,' in Pauline language, is *not* synonymous with 'fallen' human nature. Willard (ibid:90) argues that: 'Unfortunately very few throughout the ages of the church have seen the fallacies in treating the flesh as identical with *fallen* human nature.'<sup>17</sup> He continues: 'Fallen human nature is a certain manner in which the good powers deposited at creation in our human flesh are twisted and organised against God' (1988: 91). It is thus no the flesh *per se* that is corrupt. Indeed, Willard (1988) shall argue that the human body is God's instrument for transformation of the human person.

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<sup>17</sup> Willard (1988:90) cites George Fox, the founder of the Friends or Quaker movement, as one who got it right. Willard says that Fox's 'insight frequently brought him into bitter conflict with his contemporaries.'

Miles (1981) gives a fascinating panoramic overview of Patristic thinking in her apologetic for a new, historically based asceticism. She shows how Augustine was truly interested in the place of the human body. He was concerned that Christian authors had not affirmed their own bodies as the logical extension of their faith in the incarnation (1981:78). We are introduced to two early views of the human being in relation to the cosmos. The earlier one is the hierarchical view. Body, soul and spirit are arranged hierarchically. They reflect and share in the cosmic hierarchy, where matter is lowest and the spiritual originating principle is highest. Each part, however, has a strong connection to the one above and the one below. In this view:

If the energy of the soul's attention and affection flows towards the body, physical pleasures and material comforts, then the connection to the life of the spirit and to God is neglected. If, on the other hand, the soul's longing moves upward to strengthen the connection to God, the body is ultimately carried with the soul's momentum toward the immortality that Augustine describes as 'perfect health of body' (Miles 1981:80).

The view that was introduced later is described as the 'incarnational view' and was difficult for the current cosmological worldview to assimilate. It required a 'breaking in' to the hierarchical order so that human and divine could occupy an equal position at the top of the cosmic hierarchy. In exhuming both these views, Miles (1981) shows the historical connection and continuity between body and spirit orders. Her insightful hermeneutic of the hierarchical model in particular shows how thinkers are now reclaiming the past for the present, in this case 'embodiment' as an indispensable part of current Christian spirituality.

## **4.6 ASCETIC SPIRITUALITY FOR TODAY**

### **4.6.1 Introduction**

There is a recovery of Christian asceticism in spirituality today. The underlying motivation is to advance oneself in spiritual growth and, in the classical tradition, to overcome 'the obstacles to the fulfilment of the gospel imperative to love God and love one's neighbor' (Rader 1983:28). Assisting this development has been the interest in modern psychology, anthropology and sociology, which has set aside old body/soul dualisms with a stress on integration of the 'whole' person. Mistrust or contempt of the body seems to be replaced by a 'common-sense' form of discipline: exercise, vegetarianism, or meditation posture (Rader 1983: 27-28). These trends have unquestionably enhanced current spirituality's own contribution to asceticism's place in Christian life and ministry.

On the Church front, formerly guarded Protestants and ‘Free Church’ writers are beginning to taste the once forbidden fruits of asceticism.<sup>18</sup> Foster (1978), a Quaker, presented an enthusiastically received book on celebrating ‘the disciplines’. (Yet, of course, he made no reference to the sacraments.) Willard (1988), a Baptist, presented an inspired effort to revive the ascetic disciplines in over-reactive Protestants. Peterson (1992), a Presbyterian, in a more creative and less prosaic way, in my view, did the same thing but within the wider context of vocational holiness for ministry. For the purposes of this thesis it is significant that they each wrote from the background experience of pastoral work and ministry, seeing the applicability of embodied ascetic spirituality for a wide range of Christian ministries. As academics they blend their practical work with academic training in spirituality and interacting with ministerial students. They know from personal experience the unique stresses and challenges of authentic ministerial example and leadership.

#### **4.6.2 New Testament Grounding**

Important for Protestant ministers in particular, is the way these exponents of current spirituality now find precedent for ascetic spirituality in the Bible. Willard (1988) begins with examples set by John the Baptist, Jesus and the Apostle Paul. He asks how we could ever have been happy with their teachings yet inexplicably missed the embodied spiritual disciplines that their lives exemplified. Jesus was strengthened by solitude, prayer and fasting, as was Paul. For the Apostle it is in his ‘*practice*, the way he lived, that we must interpret the statements he makes about his experience and behavior and about what *we* are to do’ (Willard 1988:105-106). When Paul (Rom 6:13; Col 3:5) directs elsewhere that we are to ‘mortify’ the actions of our bodies through the spirit or mortify our members upon the earth, it is clear that we must interpret his words in the light of how Paul lived ascetically (ibid:105). Protestant over-reactions to ‘works righteousness’ and a fixation on ‘justification by faith’ have equated salvation with ‘forgiveness of sins,’ as opposed to ‘a new order of life’ (ibid:32-33). Bodily self-denial in the New Testament is thus conveniently ignored (ibid:133). Foster (1978:3) says that the Bible called people to such disciplines as fasting, meditation and worship. These ‘were so frequently practised and such a part of the general culture that the “how to” was common knowledge.’ In a belated passion of protestant recognition Willard (1988:100) says that ‘these early Christians really did arrange their lives *very* differently from their non-Christian neighbors, as well as from the vast majority of

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<sup>18</sup> When Willard (1988:19) began teaching ‘the disciplines’ in various Protestant churches, he says that he did so with the awareness that ‘all of them had in common a firmly entrenched tradition of scorn for “ascetic” practices such as solitude, silence and fasting.’

those of us called Christians today' (1988:100). Another writer insightfully sees Jonah's sojourn in the belly of the whale as the place where *askesis* is achieved. 'The belly of the fish is a place of confinement, of severe and inescapable limits' (Peterson 1992:88-89).

Ministers of the Protestant persuasion, and others besides, will find in these writers a new scriptural precedent for practising and teaching the embodied disciplines in a contemporarily intelligible way.

#### **4.6.3 Body as Instrument of Transformation**

The human body as instrument of transformation features strongly in the well received work of Willard (1988), and, more implicitly, in Foster's (1978) groundbreaking book. Peterson's (1992) asceticism is more philosophical and insightful, yet sets an all-encompassing contemporary groundwork for affirmation of ministerial embodiment. Foster (1978) presents the embodied disciplines as God's way of 'putting us in the ground', where the natural forces of God's Spirit take over (Gal 6:8). God, as a means of receiving divine grace, gives the bodily disciplines to us. The exercising of these disciplines is not a contradiction of grace, but rather 'the way of disciplined grace'. Foster is concerned to offer a short apologetic in this regard, doubtless for a readership traditionally suspicious of 'works righteousness'. A stronger sense of embodied spirituality features in Foster's (1985) later work on the traditional monastic vows of 'poverty, chastity and obedience,' helpfully contemporised by Foster into 'money, sex and power', He wishes to affirm our bodily instincts and needs, yet sees the urgency for meaningful contemporary 'vows,' which address the inter-related issues of money, sex and power in today's society (1985:5-10). For Foster, these issues have become ones of destructive compulsivity in our age. They can again be the means of grace through the embodied responses and 'vows' of simplicity, fidelity and service as disciplined correlatives. Foster's work is applicable and relevant for authenticity in celibate or married ministers. His ascetic spirituality is an educative and informative tool in the hands of ministers, since Foster (1985:248) makes it clear that 'the vows of simplicity, fidelity, and service are for all Christians at all times.' He believes the Church could lead a drive to include the monastic vows as the minimum requirement for Church membership, and then provide the setting for living out these transformative disciplines.

Willard (1988:121-126), however, makes explicit what is implicit in Foster. He sees 'the body as storehouse and transmitter of power.' Such is Willard's insistence on the intensely embodied nature of our spirituality. If salvation involves power over evil, then for him 'this power is, in the

New Testament conception, *literally* [italics Willard's] located in the body of the redeemed or spiritually enlivened person' (1988:122). Redemption is presented in the New Testament as comprehensible only in relation to *embodied* human nature (1988:91). For Willard (1988:84), because the human personality is inseparable in consciousness from their own body, we need to express the *identity* of a person *as* their body. Therefore our bodies must be the primary focus in our part in the redemption process.

Peterson's (1992b:88-99) contribution to spiritual asceticism is less propositional and traditional than Foster's or Willard's. He is, among other things, a poet at heart. He brings an affirmation of sensuality and creativity to theology that breathes through his works, not least of all in his poetic literary style.<sup>19</sup> His ascetic spirituality reflects a recovery of the body and senses as instrument of transformation, but not in the self-evident way so typical of his two contemporaries. Yet it is Peterson, in my view, who achieves the more refreshing, contextualised and dynamic asceticism. He speaks initially of an 'involuntary *askesis*,' those experiences of bodily limitation occasioned by unforeseen circumstances such as 'heart attack,' or, as in the case of many persecuted Christians, 'imprisonment.' The body becomes God's vehicle of grace and formation in these undesirable circumstances. He artistically describes voluntary asceticism as 'voluntary disaster,' a fine antidote in Peterson's view to a spirituality of self-advancement and ego pandering, which he passionately rejects as a contemporary ministerial illness. He warns of 'spiritual disciplines' hawked as consumer items by religious marketeers. These insights are absent in Willard and Foster. Much of Peterson's ascetic spirituality might be summarised as follows:

...[C]onsumer mentality is distressingly common, and we must do everything possible to combat it. We begin by insisting that *askesis* is not a spiritual technology at our beck and call but is rather immersion in an environment in which our capacities are reduced to nothing or nearly nothing and we are at the mercy of God to shape his will in us (Peterson 1992: 90).

Ultimately, Peterson's (1992b:97-99) *askesis* is an immersion in one's parish, or what Peterson significantly calls the minister's 'monastery without walls,' a lifestyle and vocation that is Peterson's synonym for asceticism. While this might sound too abstract and disembodied for the ascetic purist, it is, of course, nothing of the kind. For 'what is critical is an imagination large enough to contain all of life, all worship and work as prayer, set in a structure (*askesis*) adequate

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<sup>19</sup> Here, one thinks particularly of Peterson's (1992: 23-71) treatment of the *Song of Songs*. Among other things, we feel his appreciation of dance as a way of putting the body to worship and prayer, and the immersion of his senses in the sacramental passion of these love songs.

to the actual conditions in which it is lived out' (1992:99). Might we not regard Peterson's 'asceticism' as a perceptive, though unintentional, critique of Willard (1988)?

#### **4.6.4 Implications for Authentic Ministry**

##### **4.6.4.1 Incorporation of the body**

Ministers are able, with the assistance of historical reclamations, to incorporate their bodies into the journey of spiritual formation. With the lively and fruitful interest in historic spiritualities, the Christian minister encounters sound traditional resources that point to the indispensable place of the human body in spiritual growth. Christian ministry is thus afforded the opportunity of establishing ministry on a holistic foundation, which includes physicality as part of God's plan of redemption. Protestant ministers in particular are introduced to a rich world of asceticism.<sup>20</sup>

Incorporating the body into devotional life on the strength of reclamation of historical spirituality is exciting and long overdue. Anticipating contemporary trends as early as the 1960s, it was noted that:

The body as well as the spirit now yearns to tread the way of redemption that leads to Calvary. It too wants to expose itself to the searching sun of God's holiness. Formerly spiritualization was the goal, now it is rather the moulding of the whole human life. The meaning of Christ's incarnation for the Christian life on earth is being understood in a new light (Goldbrunner 1964:7).

An over-cerebral approach to preparation for ministry is less than ideal. The church institution is often at fault here, but not without assistance from ministers in post-ordination training, who are tempted to succumb to intellectual *hubris*. Methodist ministers are debatably recipients of an education that gives prominence to intellectual acumen, with approved academic analysis of every pastoral situation. Such equipping for ministry is indeed of inestimable value. Yet it is critical to remember that Christian formation for ministry is not simply a *conceptual orientation*, or a *mental attitude* (Miles 1988:33). It is the human person as a whole that is employed in equipment for ministry. 'The self does not become a unity by imagining itself so, but by *acting in a unified way in hundreds of large and small ways every day*' [italics mine] (ibid:33). Foucault (1986:50-51) wrote as follows of ascetical self-application and cultivation:

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<sup>20</sup> It should, however, be said of some Protestant ministers that while not traditionally enjoying an ascetic background they have nevertheless sensed the importance of physical exercise. Such exercise has often been pursued with a purpose and enthusiasm not unattached to spiritual devotion, and with an awareness of the holistic constitution of the human being.

It is important to understand that this application to oneself does not require simply a general attitude, an unfocused attention. The term *epimeleia* (cultivation) designates not just a preoccupation but a whole set of occupations ... The time is not empty; it is filled with exercises, practical tasks, various activities. Taking care of oneself is not a rest cure.

It is to be hoped that the new incorporation of ascetic insights into current spirituality will release a new dynamic in ministry. It could characteristically take the form of sending ministers back to their own traditions to investigate the place of the human body in spiritual growth. Methodists, for instance, have already been directed to look again at Wesley's 'General Rules,' which comprise the 'works of mercy' and the 'works of piety' (Clapper 1997:86-97). While not all of these 'Rules' are distinctively ascetic, they do include Wesley's forgotten injunction to pursue the various forms of fasting.

#### **4.6.4.2 Education beyond Abstractions**

The contemporary affirmation of embodiment in holistic Christian spirituality gives to ministers the opportunity to teach Christian growth through classic bodily disciplines. Spiritual progress does not take place automatically by virtue of the Christian holding firmly to certain beliefs and convictions. New life in Christ is a life of the whole embodied person. Willard (1988:111) makes it clear that it was what Jesus *lived through* that transformed his life (Heb 5:8-9). Ministers are afforded the opportunity of introducing congregants to those bodily disciplines that necessarily give flesh and blood to an otherwise incorporeal abstraction. Disciplines of fasting, frugality, solitude and silence can again become the vehicles of new life in an incarnate faith that must always utilise the physical actions of abstinence and engagement if it is to grow. Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant would do well to commend to their parishioners those physical disciplines that, rightly used, have constituted and transmitted an intentionality and integrity in countless Christians through history. There will, of course, also be occasion to learn from past extremes and abuses. Yet it *is* a distinctive and intentional *lifestyle* that might be most needed in climates of nominal Christianity. A teaching ministry in the insights of spiritual disciplines can revitalise all that is most positive in asceticism.

#### **4.6.4.3 Ministry and Monastic Vows**

Ministry is never immune to the infections of avarice, infidelity and abuse of power. They correspond to the classic monastic injunctions of poverty, chastity and obedience. If a spirituality of embodiment, further inspired by the monastic vows, can afford contemporary ministry another look at the dark (and light) side of money, sex and power, it might save many an otherwise

constructive and promising ministry from mediocrity at best, or disaster for priest and parish at worst. There is place for a more imaginative and current treatment of the monastic vows. It would answer a need in lay and ordained Christian workers alike.<sup>21</sup> Unhappiness over stipend or remuneration could result in a newly discovered contentment and victory over materiality and fear, serving as an endorsement of a sacrificial ministry. In the Methodist Church of Southern Africa the ‘stipend’, as it is significantly called, could again be distinguished from a ‘salary’, in the secular sense.<sup>22</sup> Marital failure and infidelity are also the subjects of many disciplinary church hearings. Might current spirituality not help ministers redeem their sexuality from either repression or lack of discipline? Can the positive and celebratory drives of one’s sexuality be put to the service of ministerial enhancement and creativity? Furthermore, while Protestants have been prejudiced toward a celibate ministry, is there not much more for them to learn from the vow of celibacy as such, or the exercise of sexual restraint?<sup>23</sup> The vow of obedience and submission also strikes at the heart of much ministerial pain and power struggles. A revisiting of this vow could reinstate authentic servant ministries.

## **4.7 SOCIAL EMBODIMENT AND MINISTRY**

### **4.7.1 Introduction**

If one speaks of an embodied spirituality for the individual, it is always part of the wider social embodiment, which helps constitute who one is. Relations are no longer portrayed as self-subsistent and hypostatic. Rather, ‘... postmodern authors portray relations as internal, essential and constitutive. An individual does not first exist as a self-contained entity with various qualities on the basis of which he or she then has superficial interactions with other beings which do not affect his or her essence’ (Griffin 1988:14). Of course Christian spirituality, apart from its incarnational heritage, has drunk at the well of this postmodern wisdom, which has surely assisted it in discovering and propagating a rich embodiment for a new global and environmental consciousness. Griffin (1988:14) shows that ‘the relations one has with one’s body, one’s larger

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<sup>21</sup> Foster (1985:19-51)), for example, refers to the ‘dark’ and ‘light’ side of money. He is further able to contemporise the classic vows, and shows how integral they are to any spiritual formation. While the words poverty, chastity and obedience might have an antiquated sound, current spirituality should be charged with pursuing them in terms of, say, ‘simplicity’, ‘sexual integrity’ and ‘community consensuality,’ or ‘servanthood.’ Foster (1985) takes us some way down this road in his timely book.

<sup>22</sup> Methodist ministers are not so much employees as ‘servants’ or even *douloi* – that is, ‘slaves’. While the Revenue Service will not be of this persuasion, such an understanding gives back to ministry its true character. It is also becoming the denominational yardstick for ruling against Methodist ministers who litigate against their Church on the grounds of an ‘employer-employee’ basis.

<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, both Willard and Foster remain silent on celibacy. For Willard this is particularly conspicuous as he pointedly argues that we take the bodily practices of Jesus and Paul seriously.

natural environment, one's family, and one's culture are instead *constitutive* of one's very identity'. Spiritual energies need to be rerooted in matter, and perhaps logically in a gradation, 'in the matter of our bodies, then in our social context, and finally in our natural matrix'.<sup>24</sup> The advantage of such a spirituality for today's world, and thus for ministry, is that it speaks to a contemporary awareness of embodiment. It recovers the interdependence of all life as cosmologically of-a-piece, finding its source in planetary earthiness (Gen 2:7). In this regard, it resonates comfortably with the materiality of Scripture and with the cosmic divine plan (Rm 8:21-22; Eph 1:10).

#### **4.7.2 Embodiment: The Church**

In his manifesto for a renewed spirituality, Leech (1985:421) envisages spirituality characterised by adherence to the faith of the Apostolic Church. It will look to a God who nourishes and builds up the Body of Christ. 'Christian spirituality ... is materially embodied in a visible community which shares and expresses the life of the resurrection. Apart from this community there is no gospel and no Christianity' (Leech 1992: 219). Indeed, Jervell (1972:15) says: 'No "naked" *kerygma* ever existed.'

One might be excused for asking, though, how Leech can say this in a time of such disparate and eclectic spiritualities, even *within* the Christian family itself? Has not the very emergence of a new freedom evidenced in the inception of 'spirituality', popularly termed, been symptomatic of a move away from some of the restraints imposed by ecclesiastic prescription? Does not the very heart of 'spirituality' express in some way a desire to break free from strict church affiliation, or a prescribed Church dogmatics?

One might argue, however, that Christian spirituality now commands an ability to renew the Church through engaging in an insightful analysis of Church spirituality. The critique offered by spirituality need not signal its severance from the Church family. To be sure, the representations of the spiritualities of Meister Eckhart, Julian of Norwich and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, to name but a few, effect a critique of the Church.<sup>25</sup> Yet that critique, whether self-conscious or not, is made

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<sup>24</sup> We begin to sense this wider affinity through the experience of our own bodies, which leads us inevitably to wider embodiments. 'Our own body is our first religious encounter with the Mystery expressed in creation' (Griffin 1988:51). I have followed this logical unfolding pattern in the present chapter, beginning with the human body as fundamental.

<sup>25</sup> None of these mystics, if Bonhoeffer also be so called, followed the traditional line of status quo Church thought in their day. (One of them offended by being a *woman*.) Yet Meister Eckhart's 'creation

from their awareness of being *part* of the Body, even though the Church made some real effort to alienate or ignore them. The academic and experiential analysis offered by contemporary Christian thought then, as it draws on such mystics, offers a priceless contribution to the enrichment of ecclesiastical spirituality. It further shows how such mystics should not now be emulated as self-styled religious loners, so beloved of some forms of privatised, self-seeking spirituality. We learn that ‘perhaps at least in part Julian’s modern appeal is *not* the perennial appeal of an *unincorporated* mysticism, but the appeal of Christ’s invitation to discipleship through *incorporation into his body*’ [italics mine] (Bauerschmidt 1997:97). Here, Julian is admittedly interpreted as arguing for an embodiment even wider than the Church offers, indeed a universalism. Yet this embodiment includes the Church as primary and fundamental. ‘Because her revelation is of a body in which the divide between interior and exterior is overcome, she offers us an image of sociality in which boundaries of exclusion and denial can only be seen as penultimate’ (Bauerschmidt 1997:96). There are still those today who do not want to succumb to a spirituality of self-absorption and who will find in Julian of Norwich an alternative spirituality that embraces the Church, but goes even further in its expression of embodiment. Julian’s sociality is depicted as realised in the Godhead’s mutual indwelling, or *perichoresis*, of which the Church becomes the embodied custodian through its exemplary sacrificial way of life. This way of life comprises an embodied incorporation into Christ, defined by practices or re-enactments that *perform* the corporate Christ-life today (ibid:97). Thus Bauerschmidt (1997:97) concludes his essay on Julian’s incorporative spirituality by saying: ‘A pilgrim city whose boundaries are always frontiers and never walls the Body of Christ treads the path of his compassion through suffering to glory. It is this Body that Christ offers us in Julian’s revelation, and that we are invited to *perform* [italics mine].’

A helpful and refreshing affirmation of ecclesiastic embodiment comes from a *Lutheran* tradition in an essay by Yeago (1997:101-120). His apologetic of Luther’s thought makes the assertion that, for Luther, incorporation into the Church by the Holy Spirit is synonymous with receiving salvation. Justification, Yeago submits, is not a private and individual relationship with God, but constitutes incorporation into the communal priesthood of the Church, ‘into the unity of the Body of Christ with its Head’ (1997:116).

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spirituality,’ Julian’s powerful and affective Trinitarian thinking, and Bonhoeffer’s radical ‘religionless’ stand, all reflect an orthodox critique of the Church, in their day *and* ours.

Ministry does well to understand its own spiritual growth and the growth of parishioners as sustained by, and inextricably linked to, the embodied life of Church community. If ministers, who *should* know better, look for God only in ‘interior movements’, they are furthermore receiving an incomplete and distorted image of God (Hug 1986:340). Such a distorted image is inevitably passed on to parishioners who are already fed on a staple diet of private individualism and its exaggerated merits. Does not authentic ministry see itself as *part* of the wider embodied priesthood of all believers, involving the ministry and mission of the Church as a whole?<sup>26</sup> Ministry needs always to work at setting the parishioner in their embodied environment. Indeed, ‘ministry communicates and reveals God by creating an *environment* [italics mine] in which significant religious revelation and discourse may take place in public’ (Valantasis 1993:339-340). Central to ministry is that it works at creating a religious culture. Geertz (1973:144) says that culture is ‘an ordered system of meaning and of symbols in terms of which social interaction takes place’. Is that not also a good practical description of the Church?

Peterson (1989:8) is uncomfortable with the American tendency, not uncommon with many South Africans, to focus on *private* as opposed to *common* prayer, or prayer in corporate worship. He underscores the socially embodied nature of the Church. The paradigmatic prayer is not the one that takes place in solitude but in community, for the fundamental biblical context for prayer is the worshipping community. ‘In the long history of Christian spirituality, community prayer is *most* important, *then* individual prayer’ [italics mine] (1989:8).

Contemporary spirituality, then, finds itself countering the ‘individualistic bent’ of some spiritualities, past and present. ‘The spiritual journey has often been presented as a cultivation of individualistic values, as a way to personal perfection ... ’ (Tyson 1999: 116). Both Protestant and Catholic spirituality show signs of recovering a concept of congregational embodiment, even through unexpected sources such as the mysticism of Julian of Norwich or that of Martin Luther (Bauerschmidt 1997 & Yeago 1997).

Notwithstanding anything said thus far, the lived experience of spirituality, and especially the mystical expression thereof, should not be imagined as offering a routine endorsement of

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<sup>26</sup> Willard (1988:124) fights shy of a wider understanding of ‘body,’ as applied to the *Church*. He questions John A T Robinson’s (1952) ‘assumption’ that denominational communion is adequate to effect immersion into Christ’s body. Willard says that this is the assumption from denomination to denomination. Yet surely ‘the body’ as Christ’s Church is never far from the Apostle’s mind? In spite of Willard’s view, have not the non-Catholic Churches been notorious for under-developed ecclesiologies? This has meant that parishioners have lost the vital sense of *communal* embodiment in Christ.

contemporary Church spirituality. It is part of the revelatory nature of mysticism in particular that it sits uneasily with a prescribed ecclesiastic status quo. 'There is a sense that the institution quenches the spirit; there is an element of protest in all religious insight and a desire to break free of the tyranny of ecclesiastical systems, and storm the heights of holiness from which established churches and hierarchies pull one back' (Wakefield 1983:122). Consequently, one takes Wakefield's point that 'the relation of spiritual pioneers, men and women of religious genius, those whom we may loosely call mystics, to the institutional church is ambivalent' (ibid:122). Might a contribution of contemporary mysticism, dare one say, be that of a 'voice in the wilderness,' cautioning that the pervasive and universal stress on 'embodiment' reflects a prejudice against other dimensions of spirituality? Is it not also a reflection of our times, of disillusionment with the non-material, and an absolutising of materiality? Spirituality must secure the independence and academic credibility to ask these questions. Yet, having said that, it is hoped that ministers may take the Church seriously for the incarnate reality that she is. If I regard the Church as 'the mystical Body,' it still cannot be designated 'the *invisible* Church,' as disillusioned and embarrassed ministers have sometimes chosen to call it.<sup>27</sup>

#### **4.7.3 Embodiment: Liberation Spirituality for Ministry**

'Liberation spirituality' gives to ministry an authenticity by embracing God's patent concern for the political needs of peoples. Such breadth of spirituality honours the biblical dimensions of salvation, finding perhaps its greatest paradigm in Israel's deliverance out of Egypt. Gutierrez's (1973) definitive theological work shows how conversion means a commitment of oneself to a process of liberating the oppressed and the poor, reflected in a down-to-earth, concrete way. His work heralds a social consciousness and action that is energised and nourished by a newfound spirituality. More comprehensively perhaps, Leech (1992:31-32) writes of a number of Latin American theologians who have sought 'the coming together of the *contemplative* and the *militant* in a quest for "integral liberation" [italics mine].'<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> While I cannot attribute this expression directly to anyone, it has known some popularity with those who have become disillusioned with the 'visible Church', to the point of opting for an invisible spiritualisation of the Church. Taking refuge, however, in an invisible elect, or a disembodied and Platonic interiority, is a sad and heretical refuge for the Church as incarnate 'Body of Christ'. Williams (1997b:50) says: 'The kind of interiority that seems to be evoked in the Sermon on the Mount points not to an undervaluing but to a revaluing of the *bodily* agent in our ethical thinking ...' For Williams, the secret is not to move away from *mere* outward action to the inner sphere of good intent, but rather to move entirely out of the 'performance - oriented' mind-set.

<sup>28</sup> Leech (1992:32) says: 'The fact that liberation theologians are so concerned to hold together the *spiritual* and the *social* [italics mine] dimensions of the Christian tradition is confirmation of their insistence that, far from being fashionable innovators, they are "shameless conservatives ... looking for the literal gospel."'

King (1997:126) shows that contemporary spirituality is not one that directs us to another world, or to afterlife, but to justice here and now. Spirituality is not a call *away* from life but the life force that moves us to do justice and to resist evil. Contemporary spirituality recognises that what Christ brings about is *not* the possibility of individual redemption, but rather of restored community and communion, with God and with each other. Salvation is thus *social*, through incorporation into that way of life defined by Christ's incarnation (Bauerschmidt 1997:82).

Williams (1997 R D:29-53) is helpful in showing how an authentic spirituality must find its ethic in social *interaction* and not in the defensiveness of a home-grown 'interiority.' For him, '... the self is free to grow ethically only when it is not under obligation to defend itself above all else – or to *create* itself in a potentially hostile environment' (ibid: 38). Can one say that Williams, then, secures a new ontology for ministers by enabling them to understand their own spirituality in terms of interaction with others? The minister is then freed from a spirituality of detached self-absorption. In a liberation spirituality, then, one recognises that moral evaluation or justification for the minister cannot come via a neutral interlocutor. (Indeed, must this not be true for all *Christian* spirituality?) For Williams, Christianity is in this sense always political.

A liberation theology for ministry, with contemporary spirituality as catalyst, transforms into a systematised and circumscribed spirituality in its own right. Johnson (1988) presents it as an 'activist piety', recommending it to a certain calling and personality type. This spirituality encounters God not primarily in the Church or in religious rituals and practices, but in social service and political action (1988:71-72). It is vulnerable, however, to 'burnout' for ministers, especially as it is idealistic, ever looking for the social transformation that is realised by the kingdom of God. Disillusionment can easily set in.

For Methodists, who stand in a tradition of social consciousness and conscience, a spirituality of liberation might be an appropriate vocation to follow within one's ministry. It lives with the ideal and hope of the transformation of the world, and follows a perspective typified by H. Richard Niebuhr (1951) as, 'Christ the transformation of culture' (Jones, Wainwright & Yarnold 1986: 603).<sup>29</sup> Christian spirituality is taking on the nature of embodiment, therefore, in its current

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The final words of his observation are a quote from J. P. Miranda (1981:4). We observe here a greater concern for spirituality among liberationist thinkers than one sometimes credits them.

<sup>29</sup> Wainwright says that Niebuhr's transformational perspective corresponds to a certain kind ('type') of spirituality. It is likely to be sacramental (1986:603). It is a spirituality that rests on an affirmation of embodiment, accompanied by positive doctrines of creation and incarnation.

liberation expression. It is an embodied spirituality because it is rooted in concern for embodied individuals, and also because it is experiencing an embodied identity with the poor and dispossessed. 'The Christian imagination has become increasingly sensitised to God's preferential love for the poor. It is developing the habit of seeing "God" wherever it finds human beings impoverished and oppressed, terrorized and homeless' (Reiser 1994:53). Spirituality of this kind is a step forward from the grim and aggressive disposition of the sometimes-disillusioned liberation theologian. Too often ministers involved in 'the struggle' have become cynical, angry and inwardly depleted. What one finds distinctively refreshing about recent exponents of liberation spirituality is their surge of energy and expansion of perspective. Typical of this developing transition is Reiser's position, which sees prayer as a posture of standing together in God's presence with the entire human family, particularly the oppressed. 'When my eyes pass over the biblical texts, I am aware of the presence of untold believers and of a wordless belonging to the entire human family. *It is like receiving communion*' [italics mine] (Reiser 1994:18). Liberation spirituality helps one heed Archbishop Ramsey's (1972:37) words to his priests: 'It is possible to preach the gospel of conversion without any sight of its social context ... Be it your wisdom to preach the gospel of conversion, making it clear that *it is the whole man* (sic) *with all his relationships who is converted to Jesus* [italics mine] as the Lord of all he is and does.'

#### **4.7.4 Ministry and Spirituality for Creation**

Contemporary spirituality expresses its most expansive endorsement of embodiment in 'creation spirituality.' It is a spirituality that champions an embodiment of cosmic proportions. The major current exponent of this spirituality is Matthew Fox (1983b, 1991,1999). Fox's (1983:21) contention is that 'all theological studies have to return to a whole and let go of their Newtonian, specialized parts-mentalities ... the term "spirituality" is not even found in solid theological thinkers of the Middle Ages ... (T)he whole theological enterprise was one of *finding one's place in the universe*' [italics mine]. There needs to be a letting go of forms of religion based on the narrower fall/redemption theologies, spiritualities and systems. For him the exclusively historical spiritualities and theologies too often betray dualistic presuppositions. He looks for a spirituality that is 'transformed into that tradition which is more ancient, more celebrative, more justice oriented, and more like the tradition Jesus himself lived and preached' (1983:305). Spirituality must begin with the creation and the cosmos. 'Only later does it get to the human story, which then attracts us like a jewel set in the larger drama of creation itself. There can be no anthropology without cosmology' (Fox 1991:13).

McFague (1987) seeks to establish a material rootedness, and affirmation of all of life, by employing the metaphor of the world as God's body. She does not mean that the world *is* God's body, but that it is the most effective metaphor for interpreting God's salvific love for our times (1987:62). It is daring and exciting language and, significantly for Christian ministry, could become the basis for a revived sacramentalism, one that is aware of the world's vulnerability (1987:77). She argues that we need to take a further step than liberation spiritualities enable us to do. The liberation of certain individuals, so admirably the concern of liberation theology, must be further deprivatised to include the well being of *all* life (1987:7).

A distinctive value for this world-engaging spirituality is 'compassion.' 'Compassion is a spirituality as if creation mattered. It is treating all creation as holy and as divine ... which is what it is' (Fox 1999:30). Compassion makes the breakthrough that overcomes dualistic and separatist thinking. It heals the wound of dualism and embraces all of life. St. Luke 6:36 (New English Bible) is appealed to, where it is said: 'Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate'. 'It does not mean some kind of static state of moral purity and perfection,' as is sometimes suggested by translations of its counterpart in Matthew 5:48 (Fox 1999:32).<sup>30</sup>

Creation spirituality's significance for authentic ministry is largely self-evident. There is also evidence within the Methodist Church that ministerial staff are allying themselves with this spirituality of cosmic consciousness, and are even drawing up statements of intent in this regard. Such spirituality underscores the sacramental dimension of ministry and gives an embodied rootedness to ministry. It offers equilibrium to a one-sided stress on the 'ministry of the Word.' It affirms the Genesis stewardship of creation and enables all Christian work to express a biblical ecological ethic. It addresses remnants of unworldly spiritualities, which invite indifference to unprecedented global and ecological crises. In creation spirituality it is not possible to drive a wedge between God and Godself's material universe. As the universe and its life is the primary context in creation spirituality, ministry achieves liberation of the senses and Psalmic enjoyment

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<sup>30</sup> That is, for Fox, the word *teleios* in Matthew 5:48 may more satisfactorily be fleshed out as 'compassion'. It seems - if I understand Fox correctly - that 'compassion' is a word and concept that at once captures spiritual openness to God *and* feelingful down-to earth acts of care for creatures and creation. In this sense, it serves nicely to dissolve 'spirit-world' dualism. Methodist ministers might find some help in Fox's more dynamic understanding of *teleios*, as it appears in Matthew 5:48. Wesley's use of the word 'perfect,' and then 'Christian perfection,' to translate *teleios* in Matthew 5:48 is, in my view, most unfortunate. He can never break free from the word's stultifying connotations and must ever qualify himself. Williams (1960:176-186), while an apologist for Wesley, betrays some of the problems that Wesley created for himself. Fox (1999: 32) shows that the word translated 'perfect' does not have the later Greek meaning, but has more to do with 'truth and sincerity and being a "true" person.'

of the world. The pastor shares in the divine creativity imparted by the stamp of God's image upon their life. Furthermore, as they become more in touch with the rhythms and seasons of their own body, the priest is able to transcend the static encumbrances of moralistic and perfectionistic mindsets. Spontaneity and joy become the hallmarks of such Christian service. Freed from a narrower 'Fall/Redemption' dispensationalism, ministry can do justice to those rites of passage that reflect the processes of nature, such as baptism, confirmation, marriage, death and the seasons of the earth's calendar. Are not ministers here rendered more human, not merely operating out of an encapsulated dispensationalism within the covers of the Bible, but sharing the processes of life with their congregation? On the other hand, is not the strength of creation spirituality also its weakness in that it has no eschatology? Surely something more is implied by the Christian faith than the absolutising of the cosmos, where our earth-boundedness becomes an ultimacy in itself? Fox may have dealt a blow to otherworldly transcendence, but something significant has been lost.

#### **4.8 CONCLUSION**

While one cannot speak today of a generic Christian spirituality, the diversity of contemporary Christian spirituality secures a common motif of material rootedness and physical embodiment. This motif extends from the embodiment of the human being as primary, through the body as sacrament and sign, and even as, in some sense, word of God. Contemporary thinking takes in the feminist theologies of gender affirmation and celebration of one's sexuality, and even the growing edge of gay and lesbian orientations. The characteristic of embodiment in Christian spirituality gives a positive appraisal of historical asceticism in some of its current thought, and a new appreciation of how the body must be taken seriously as an inevitable transmitter of the divine life. Spirituality's endorsement of *social* embodiment has also become more sophisticated and perceptive (Jones & Buckley:1997). Such embodiment is applied to any number of social realities - whether the universe, planet earth, society or Church. Spiritualities of liberation and creation show how affirmation of the individual human body ultimately takes in all of life: political, social and ecological. Spirituality has thus kept pace with secular insights into societal and cosmological structures of embodiment. Current academic spirituality recognises the givenness of the individual's incorporation into community. It understands the impossibility of conceiving the individual outside of their embodied ecclesial, social or cosmological context. 'Christian spirituality at its best is materialistic, a spirituality of the whole person in communion' (Leech 1992:66). Leech correctly foresaw the development of contemporary spirituality as

‘directed by a genuine materialism, rooted in the truths of incarnation, resurrection and sacrament’ (ibid:66).

A spirituality of embodiment realises authentic ministry in untold ways. It affirms the incarnational embodiment of Christ, the Christian faith, the minister, congregation and society in general. It creates opportunities for overcoming old hostile body/spirit dualisms. It recovers and releases the human body for ministry and recognises the inter-dependence of all of life. It is congruent with the current global consciousness and offers ministers the opportunity to communicate sound theology in the thought forms of the times. It offers inner regeneration for Christian workers and gives them the rationale and impetus to promote social and ecological justice. It affirms the minister who abandons the unacceptable entitative thinking that divorces the individual or personal (and private) from the social and political.

Paradoxically, contemporary spirituality also holds within itself and its inherited tradition the capacity to critique any ‘embodiment thinking’ that absolutises our physicality. Might this not also become necessary? There is, after all, something more to humanity than physical embodiment and reification. We do not live by bread alone.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### RECLAIMING AND EVALUATING RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The present chapter will show how contemporary Christian spirituality reclaims and evaluates religious experience for Christian ministry. The chapter is divided into two main sections: The first section shows how contemporary spirituality, more especially in its academic form, both recovers and legitimates religious experience for ministry. Contemporary thought in spirituality expresses or implies concern at the marginalising of Christian experience in theological faculties and its subordination to speculative and systematic theology, or to an absolutised ‘rationality’ or ‘reason’. The first section serves in part as a critical apologia for the place of religious experience in ministry, indicating how Christian spirituality recovers this vital dimension of authentic ministry. Spirituality helps show what part ‘experience of God’ might legitimately play as a prerequisite for, or authentication of, ministry and vocation. Christian spirituality has an ear to the history of religious experience. Its academic grasp of the ascetical and mystical tradition can be invaluable as a stimulus and corrective for those in ministry. The new discipline is well informed on the contemporary hunger for ‘spirituality’ in general, and how Christian experience is construed on the religious consumer market. It is the genius of Christian spirituality, through the vistas it opens, that it is able to bring ministry back to its native experiential atmosphere. As such, it offers an authentic and motivated unity to any multi-functional Christian ministry.

Brown (1998:115) says, perhaps too sparsely, that ‘spirituality is our experience of God.’ Nevertheless, for Christian spirituality, that must surely be the fundamental consideration. Most definitions of (Christian) spirituality now explicitly refer to ‘experience’ or presuppose some internal motivation or ‘transcendent-pull’ that is either religiously experiential or cannot be accounted for in merely rationalistic or discursive terms. The word ‘experience’, however, is slippery, elusive, and notoriously problematic. Its elusiveness needs to be acknowledged at the outset.<sup>1</sup> Aggravating the situation are various denominational presuppositions and aberrations with regard to ‘experience’. For example, one might be understood as speaking of a *once-off* religious experience at some point in time, as, for example, in John Wesley’s ‘warming of the heart’ experience (Curnock 1967:51).<sup>2</sup> Indeed, for Wesley the place of Christian experience is

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<sup>1</sup> Turner (1995:2) tackles the word in his much-quoted work on negativity in mysticism. He asks: ‘What is “experience”? The latter question seemed to me to be too difficult ...’

<sup>2</sup> As Methodists well know, John Wesley found the assurance of salvation he was looking for in his experience at Aldersgate Street on the 24<sup>th</sup> May, 1738. The experience appeared to be a sustaining

cardinal, though not contemporarily without difficulty. Marsh (2004:118-130) has shown how one's understanding of 'experience' has had to deal with contemporary shifts in meaning. As a Methodist theologian he tries to come to terms with 'religious experience' as opposed to 'experience of life', and what this might mean for contemporary Methodism, given the centrality of experience for Wesley. Again, one might refer to a *sustained* religious experience, continuously resourcing or energising one's life. For others, 'religious experience' could have the connotation of a (to them) normative post-conversion *deepening* of one's spirituality, variously described as a 'baptism in the Spirit', 'filling with the Spirit', or 'second blessing'. For all this breadth of understanding and association, the present chapter does not expressly exclude any of the above experiential chronologies. But 'experience' here will have everything to do with the conscious dimension of relating to, and knowing, *God*.

It may be suggested that there are preferable synonyms for 'experience'. Are not 'consciousness', 'awareness', 'mystic' or 'religious sensibility' less freighted and ambiguous words? By 'experience' in the first section, however, I try to refer to that basic perpetual awareness or contemplative vision of God effected through God's Spirit joining Godself to our spirits to declare that we are God's children (Rom 8:16). Such 'experience' might even be quite *devoid* of the word's preferred secular meaning, that is, its socially-induced predilection for religious sensations and spiritual novelty. Ironically, this might be one good reason for using 'experience' here. It is able to get to the heart of twenty-first century perceptions as no other word is able to do, inviting pertinent discussion. It can show what *kind* of experience might best fit an authentic spirituality.<sup>3</sup> For all the semantics, however, it is clear that spirituality recovers a lost and energising dynamic for ministry.

The second section uses the word 'experience' in a somewhat different way, although the distinction cannot be rigidly enforced. Here attention is given to ministerial '*lived* experience', referring to the everyday *arrangement and outworking* of one's spirituality - for example, in its devotional, structural, political, functional and conceptual operations. The thesis is that contemporary spirituality is able to analyse and evaluate the everyday, habitual 'lived experience' of ministry. The evaluation takes place in a way that is consistent with the distinctive contribution

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influence for him throughout the evangelical revival. He writes of it that 'about a quarter before nine ... I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ ... and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins ...' (quoted in Williams 1960:105).

<sup>3</sup> It could, for example, raise questions about the oft-heard, usually unreflective expression, 'Christian experience', and whether these two words are self-evident, inseparable partners.

of what is carefully termed, 'Christian spirituality'. In truth, it is the kind of 'Christian spirituality' that I understand Schneiders (1986) to be proposing, and if not, then one that draws on her appreciation of Christian spirituality doing justice to its place in a wider faculty of 'spirituality in general'.<sup>4</sup>

In summation, the first section looks at the more fundamental religious experience that underlies and generates spirituality as 'lived experience'. The second looks at that 'secondary fruition' (for ministry) of the fundamental experience dealt with in section one. It will be described as 'lived experience'.

## **5.2 RECLAIMING 'EXPERIENCE' FOR MINISTRY**

### **5.2.1 A New Focus on Experience**

Christian spirituality's unequivocal contribution to ministry is the focus it brings to bear on *experience* of God. As such, Christian spirituality operates according to a give and take of two-way traffic. On the one hand, it employs the insights and sometimes marginalised experiences of Christian thinkers and writers throughout *history*, bringing them into the dialectic with theological norms and from there into the bloodstream of ministry. On the other hand, it is only completely true to its newfound designation as it learns from the firsthand experiences of ministers, Christians in general and religious experiences in currency among all contemporary religions and spiritualities. These current experiences are also allowed to engage with the normative, Christian theological tradition.

Christian spirituality, whether as lived experience or as an academic discipline, is in part a reaction to the secondary status given by religion to experience, whether the lived religion of the local church or the sometimes lifeless cerebral religion of academic theology. It is clear that a 'dissociation' of sensibility *has* been the fruit of Christian history over at least the past few centuries.<sup>5</sup> The emergence of academic Christian spirituality, as opposed to an analytical and

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<sup>4</sup> Schneiders (1986:254) identifies various understandings of spirituality in its recent developing history. Some have understood spirituality as relating distinctively to the prayer life, or spiritual renewal. The latter sense may be closest to the primary or fundamental significance that is aimed at in section one. For others, Schneiders explains that spirituality embraces body and emotions, and further still, social and political life. The second sense is spirituality in its lived out manifestation or, in the case of this thesis, its ministerial expression. It is the *second* sense of 'spirituality' employed in the latter part of the chapter.

<sup>5</sup> 'TS Eliot spoke of a "dissociation of sensibility" that set in in the seventeenth century and from which we have never recovered: a dissociation manifested in the way in which the refinement of language in the eighteenth century is not matched by any corresponding refinement of feeling ... It is a dissociation between thought and feeling, between the mind and the heart' (Louth 1983b:1).

abstract 'spiritual theology', gives to actual Christian experience of God a new and much-neglected focus. As such, it is a move away from a static approach to the Christian life, embodied in prescriptive conceptual structures. To be sure, even within the context of systematic theology itself, there is recognition of the lost dimension of personal involvement and 'becoming' that always characterises primitive, patristic theology. For example, Springsted (1998:49-62) tries to show that theology is never merely a *detached* intellectual exercise. His observation is symptomatic, I suggest, of a growing awareness in a rational and intellectual systematic theology that a spiritual dimension has gone missing. This has proved an inestimable loss to theology, if not a disastrous contradiction of the essence of theology itself. Christian spirituality appears in part as a reaction thereto. Christian spirituality, as academic enterprise, constitutes 'a major shift in Western theology towards a more serious reflection on human experience ...' (Sheldrake 1991b:49). It gives greater attention to experiential context, moving away from the deductive propensities of traditional 'spiritual theology'.<sup>6</sup> It therefore achieves a self-respecting legitimacy for religious experience in the life and witness of a sometimes over-rationalised Christian ministry. It offers a field of study that feeds a growing hunger for interiority and personal authenticity in Christian service. Indeed, 'lived experience is the center of spirituality' (Thayer 1985:57). Furthermore, contemporary spirituality gives much needed credence to the way 'disciplines of prayer, worship and engagement with the world are vehicles for the awareness of God present in, permeating, emerging from our lived experience' (ibid:57). However, it is also true to say that spirituality as discipline will not treat prayer and worship as a preconceived, petrified ritual. Such disciplines will not be seen as mere formal conduits of grace. Rather, spirituality will look to the nature of that which is *experienced* in prayer, acknowledging prayer and worship as dynamic engagements in the wider experiential context. A focus of this kind has *not* been the interest or perspective of systematic theology, nor other speculative theological disciplines.<sup>7</sup> Even Practical Theology, as a burgeoning discipline, gives primary attention to the communication aspect of the faith, accordingly utilising the communication sciences. Here, too, there is no focus on religious experience as such. It has not fed the hunger that spirituality is satisfying. Indeed, spirituality as lived experience, and as an academic discipline in particular, has

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<sup>6</sup> 'Spirituality' is really 'the child' of the formerly hierarchical 'ascetical' and 'mystical' theology, merging the characteristics of both within itself and delivering it from the designation of 'spiritual theology'. The latter discipline is suggestive of experiential subservience to systematic theology. Schneiders (1986,1989) has been concerned to show that spirituality is not subservient to dogmatic theology, or to any other theological discipline for that matter. It cannot apply unquestioned theological principles to lived experience, but rather tries 'to understand religious experience as it occurs' (ibid:32).

<sup>7</sup> The view that Science of Religion or Comparative Religious Studies covers this field is, in my opinion, unconvincing. These subjects do not engage in the same way with the dynamic phenomenological nature of experience.

clearly exploited a lost dimension in the current theological disciplines. At the same time, spirituality as an academic exercise reflects an awareness that it cannot fall prey to the ‘dissociation’ effected by an imperialistic and condescending theological discipline that takes away its own independence. Spirituality, by nature, is pluralistic, ecumenical and interdisciplinary. Furthermore, it has been wisely observed that ‘spirituality operates on the frontier between religious experience and inherited tradition’ (Sheldrake 1998:35). While offering a pioneering focus on experience, therefore, spirituality as discipline also takes within its ambit an interaction with the other theological disciplines.

In summation, for an ordained ministry sometimes over-identified with rational and speculative pursuits, ministry need no longer have a self-understanding that is ‘limited to a practical outworking of doctrines’ (Sheldrake 1998:84). A heavily delineated theological approach, especially as sustained by the philosophic and systematic disciplines, tends ‘to exclude proper study of those aspects of contemporary Christian spiritualities that move beyond normal theological boundaries’ (ibid:84). In the practitioner-world of everyday Christian experience, through encounter with parishioners, dogmatic norms cannot be the exclusive criteria of judgement for ministerial authenticity. The ministerial practitioner can benefit from academic focus on the primacy of (Christian) experience, and indeed become a ‘field-worker contributor’ to contemporary Christian spirituality as academic discipline. For there can be no doubt that notwithstanding its profound theological contingency, ‘Christian spirituality proceeds through an *experience* [italics mine] of Christ, the Trinity, and grace ... ’ (Cousins 1990:43).<sup>8</sup>

#### **5.4.2.2 Primacy of Experience**

When ministry becomes subject to relationship difficulties, fatigue or disappointments it can easily lose the experiential sense of God and of vocation that constituted its initial impulse. Part of the popularity and timeliness of spirituality, whether as lived experience or academic discipline, is the promise it seems to hold for an inner experience or consciousness of the Ultimate or the Divine. Christian spirituality’s popularity bears some testimony to the demand for inner renewal and vitality and the indispensability of what might best be termed ‘religious

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<sup>8</sup> Of course, such intense involvement with ‘experience’ can raise serious questions for Christian spirituality as academic discipline. Hanson (1990:50) is of the opinion that such involvement of necessity involves a ‘strong existential concern to grow in faith’, which must eventuate in spirituality failing in its qualification for a place in the religious faculty. Hanson’s observation is well taken. I share some of his concerns. On the other hand, he conceivably betrays precisely the presupposition that is under scrutiny in this chapter - namely an apparent outlawing of experience and spiritual intent as *a priori* subservient to an exclusively rational, dogmatic theology.

experience'. It endorses the primacy of experience for the Christian life of service and witness (1 Jn 1: 1-3). Johnson (1990, 1996, 1998), who displays a rich inter-disciplinary approach as New Testament scholar and as author in contemporary Christian spirituality, shows how the foundation of one's faith always goes back to that credibility that can only be found in Christian *experience*. In Johnson's (1996) engagement with a latter day 'quest for the historical Jesus', he argues how the bedrock of our faith can be misplaced. While doubtless recognising the Christian faith's rootedness in history, he suggests that the new quest for the historical Jesus is misguided. Current formal or 'lived life' Christian spirituality permeates his New Testament scholarship. 'Christianity has never been able to "prove" its claims except by appeal to the *experience* and *convictions* [italics mine] of those already convinced' (Johnson 1996:168). 'The claims of the gospel cannot be demonstrated logically. They cannot be proved historically. They can be validated only existentially by the witness of authentic Christian discipleship' (ibid:168). For ministers, sometimes over-exposed to the rationality and philosophic pursuits of the academy, (and this is admittedly not *all* ministers), 'it is time for a return from the academic captivity of the church' [where] 'we recognize that not every intellectual tendency or shift of mood is one that enhances the church's fundamental responsibility for handing on a tradition of life from one generation to another' (ibid:169).<sup>9</sup>

Ward (2000:66) says that 'religions do have authoritative texts and interpretative communities. But the authority of the text may be seen to lie in its witness to *a liberating experience of the divine* [italics mine]'. He strives for an interpretation of the text that is based on experience, 'that gives religious language the function of evoking such experience' (ibid:66). Countering a certain kind of literalistic interpretation of Scripture he says that 'what is paramount and *primary* [italics mine] is not that one accepts certain predictions as true but that one's present life is transformed by the presence and power of God' [and] 'one follows a teacher who is believed to have been so transformed'. One needs 'a reorientation of religious faith around the focal notion of *transformative experience* [italics mine], based on an exemplary experient, instead of around theoretical propositions about supernatural and future facts, based on supposedly infallible teaching dictated by God' (ibid:66). Ward (2000:69) indicates how the Scriptures employ

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<sup>9</sup> Johnson (1998) reflects the influence of the newly fledged 'spirituality' in a refreshing approach to New Testament study. Somewhat uncharacteristically of a New Testament scholar, in my observations, Johnson seeks to draw closer to the nature of religious experience amongst the first Christians. Reading like a work in religion or spirituality, he gives primacy to the place of religious experience, defining it as 'a response to that which is perceived as ultimate, involving the whole person, characterized by a peculiar intensity, and issuing in action' (1998:62). His book is a serious work of scholarship, as borne out by Johnson's concern to challenge the views of some of his academic theological peers.

metaphorical and symbolic systems that encode ‘paradigmatic forms of spiritual experience, experience leading to liberation’.

Mysticism, too, raises questions regarding the primacy of experience, which, in the recent theological world, was often surrendered to the priority of reason. An obvious source of humanity’s strength as an evolved species has been the establishing of *mental*, over *ontic*, experience. Mental experience thus acts as a rational filter for unfiltered ontic immediacy (Hvolbek 1998:40). An evident weakness of *homo sapiens*, however, is their imbalance. For ‘in a world of inner and outer ontic activity, we abstract and lose touch with the *immediate experience* [italics mine] of the body. We live our lives from within the constructed concept of the self’ (ibid:40-41). We need to salute the emergence of abstraction as the means for fighting off chaos and perhaps extinction. But there is a price to pay for ‘rational imperialism’. ‘The abstract is now ready-made. We are raised in an abstract world and away from the immediate concrete experience of things. In moving away from immediate experience, we have gained control of the world but clouded our sense of the universal and the spiritual’ (ibid:41). Pragmatism takes the place of the sense of God (ibid:41). But something else happens in mystical experience. The rational filter seems to be by-passed. ‘The environmentally adaptive behavior that a functioning individual uses to maintain and advance itself in the world ceases and the individual stands in a more or less somatosensory way before things’ (ibid 42). The primary mystical experience bypasses the mental screening. This mental screen or filter usually constitutes ‘the theoretically controlled and manipulated views that determined prior experiences’ (ibid:43).

It is pertinent to note that even asceticism, or devotional practice, needs to recognise the independence and primacy that belongs to experience or non-cognitive ‘immediacy’. Schneiders’ (1989:684) celebrated definition of spirituality as ‘the experience of *consciously striving* [italics mine] to integrate one’s life in terms of ... self-transcendence ... ’ hints at spirituality being primarily ascetic and active. No doubt Schneiders is compelled by her academic aspirations for ‘spirituality’ to couch her definition in more anthropological terms. Von Hugel (1961:369), however, gives primacy to the *mystical*, the *passive*, or the *experiential* when he says that ‘the further the soul advances the more it sees and realizes the profound truth, that all it does and is, is somehow *given* [italics mine] to it; and hence that, inasmuch as it is permanent at all, it is grounded upon, environed, supported, penetrated and nourished by Him (sic) who is its origin and its end’. The ascetical category has its place and it is probably unfair to ascribe to Schneiders (1989:684) a preference for the ‘active’ and the ascetical. However, does her anthropological

approach miss the ‘infused’ or ‘passive’ notion of the mystical strain? Is her ‘experience’ more of the active than the passive kind? Contemporary spirituality offers to ministry a new appreciation of ascetical spirituality. Yet more fundamentally, it also releases ministry from understanding spirituality as completely accounted for by asceticism.

Spirituality, then, makes a plea for recognition of the primacy of experience in the history, tradition, and lived experience of the Christian. Its position is not without some real psychological and anthropological substantiation, as I have fleetingly tried to show. While there is a necessary on-going dialectic in the give-and-take of dogma and experience, it is refreshing and sobering to hear an appeal to religious experience as a fundamental point of departure for spiritual authenticity. Indeed, ‘it is difficult to avoid the evidence of history that concrete spiritual traditions arise from Christian experiences or from the concrete realities of human existence rather than being derived from ideas and doctrines’ (Sheldrake 1998:86). While not restricting himself to *mystical* experience here, Sheldrake wants to show how recent works on spirituality seek to engage questions arising from the everyday experience of Christians. Of course, more is implied in this undertaking than an affirmation of traditional treatments of prayer, penance and the theological virtues (ibid:1987:1-2). Writers note that something has been lost in the undue primacy given to the top-down deductive approach. Sheldrake’s (1987:3) conviction that ‘spirituality finds its starting point in experience rather than in abstract ideas’ calls for a re-appraisal of a ministry whose appeal is often exclusively to Scripture, Tradition and Reason. Methodists in particular might be expected to recognise the balance that ‘experience’ has always brought to their heritage, whether exploited by current Methodism or not.<sup>10</sup>

### **5.2.3 Spirituality and ‘Pure Rationality’**

#### **5.2.3.1 A Rediscovered Epistemology<sup>11</sup>**

There are perhaps two common presuppositions related to ‘pure rationality’. One is the presupposition or prejudice that ‘pure rationality’ is the *only* epistemology. There can be no

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<sup>10</sup> With the Reformers, Wesley adhered to the principle of *sola scriptura*, where Scripture is the final authority in matters of faith and practice. Yet Wesley placed much stress on experience. He was concerned how easily the acceptance of the authority of Scripture and Tradition might lead to a merely formal religion that undermined a vital and living relationship with God (Williams 1960:32). Wesley (quoted in Williams 1960:32-33) writes: ‘I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist, either in Europe or America. But I am afraid, lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power.’

<sup>11</sup> This subheading is not necessarily meant to raise formal philosophical questions in epistemology for contemporary spirituality. I use ‘epistemology’ in a layman’s capacity to refer to a growing awareness of other ways of knowing as opposed to the way of ‘pure reason’.

philosophically or scientifically justified ground for any other. The second assumption is that 'rationality,' so proposed, is *pure*, untainted by the cloudiness of an impure 'subjectivity'. An integral part of academic spirituality is manifestly its engagement with absolutist claims for 'reason' and 'pure rationality'. Christian spirituality now forms a critique, though not always consciously, of the self-satisfaction of an imperialistic rationality and the ascendancy it has held in the past. Ministry has consequently become more than an eroding island subject to the advancing waves of rationality, so called. Spirituality is a corrective to 'the development of the more rationalistic attitude toward the basic truths of life ... ' (Pennington 1987:216). Such rationalism was 'a tendency later universalised by the proliferation of the printed word ... ' (ibid:216). This has meant that 'a more and more conceptual stance has dominated the Western approach to life and spirituality. The power of thought - sometimes totally divorced from the heart - has prevailed' (ibid:216). Spirituality presently understood, notwithstanding its rich denominational diversity, has an appeal for those ministers who sense that the merely rational epistemology of a philosophical word-based dimension cannot exhaust the meaning and nature of ministry and theology.

Merton (1971:113) implicitly speaks of another kind of 'knowing' when he says that 'the overemphasis on rationalizing and logic to the exclusion of everything intuitive ... has perverted the idea of monastic discipline with a kind of arid rationalism'. It appears to him that Descartes' allegedly arid rationalism has also influenced the Catholic life of prayer. What has to be rediscovered in Merton's (ibid:113) view is an inner discipline of the 'heart', or the 'whole person', that opens one up to the invisible, intangible, yet sensible reality of God's presence and love. At the very least, 'rational approaches to understanding the Christian faith have been complemented with renewed interest in experiential means of Christian formation' (McMinn & Hall 2000:251).<sup>12</sup> Studies in spirituality that relate to the Holy Trinity have arguably underscored the experiential by making a significant move in theology from 'substance ontology' to an ontology of relationality. Has this shift not also encouraged a new or rediscovered epistemology of 'experience,' as opposed to a substantial, discursive and propositional dogmatic? And what might this 'reinstated epistemology' mean for ministers, priests and Christian workers? For some, it will feed a hunger in an over-dogmatized and prescriptive theological education. For others, it will give infinitely more substance and intellectual satisfaction than the paltry diet offered by

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<sup>12</sup> McMinn & Hall (2000:251) point out how the task has always been to integrate psychology and theology. But now one is faced with the task of integrating psychology, theology and *spirituality*. To this end we must now grapple with the experiential content of life.

some unreflective (for example, 'Charismatic') spiritualities. One recognises sadly that the minister and the Church has too easily adopted the rational vistas offered by the modern world, vistas which plainly know *the truth* about what used to be called 'the *mysteries* [italics mine] of the faith' (Matthews 2000:22). Ministry becomes inauthentic, since God becomes manageable and predictable, controlled by 'those in the know', usually academics or religious professionals.

A number of writers wrestle, ostensibly within their own theological disciplines, to contest the absolutism of discursive or 'pure' rationality. Their contributions, however, either belong in the academic field of spirituality, or have served to promote spirituality's cause as academic enterprise. They have not been ignored by the new discipline, and significantly occupy an interdisciplinary terrain. Allen (1989:145) does more than hint at another epistemology in his forthright words that 'Christian faith is not a leap *within* the order of the intellect, a leap which violates the very essence of that order. The leap of faith is a leap *from* the order of the intellect to the order of the heart. We leap because we recognize the reality of the domain of the heart ... ' Allen's theological 'mix' is again at work as he contests the common view that there is no 'difference between natural religion and Christianity' (ibid:35). He argues that one needs to distinguish between natural religion and revealed religion. Christianity cannot be dismissed on the basis that it is exclusively accounted for by 'natural religion'.

Lonergan (1971:238) reaches for outlawed experiential dimensions of the Christian faith and questions a common understanding of 'objectivity'. He wishes to eliminate 'an exceedingly stubborn and misleading myth concerning reality, objectivity, and human knowledge. The myth is that knowing is like looking, that objectivity is seeing what is there to be seen and not seeing what is not there, and that the real is what is out there now to be looked at' (1971:238). Does he anticipate later spirituality's consistent reference to 'experience' and 'self-transcendence'? He speaks of the critical realist's need to 'acknowledge the facts of human knowing and pronounce the world mediated by *meaning* to be the real world; and he (sic) can do so only inasmuch as he shows that the process of *experiencing, understanding, and judging is a process of self-transcendence*' [italics mine] (ibid:239).

Concern at experiential loss has been expressed more recently as well. Have scholastic and intellectualist ideas of theology prevailed over the experience of God? Obsession with information, and encapsulating the truth in *words*, strengthened by the modern media culture, has devalued the place of silence and other means of the experience of God (George 1994:11).

Theology has followed the framework of such a culture and embraced the trend of rational discourse. Consequently, one has witnessed the violation of that harmony of experience evident in the tradition of religious experience. *Written and spoken words* have disrupted the equilibrium of the whole. Furthermore, a false distinction between ‘mystical theology’ and other forms of academic theology has clouded theology’s experiential core (George 1994:11).

Striking something of a compromise for the reason-experience debate is the awareness that too often there are certain operative presuppositions that are not verbalised by the interlocutors or antagonists. What does it mean to describe someone as rational? Rahner’s work provides real possibilities, according to Schiavone (1994:2), for a retrieval of the contemplative dimension of rationality. Does such contemplation come close to what is here referred to as ‘experience’? I would so contend. The contemplative component of rationality might be described, one may argue, as a certain integrative intuition, though admittedly fed by a degree of asceticism. The contemplative strain *in* rationality might be identified in a person who ‘comes to recognize the utter poverty of all that is ordinarily included under the title of knowledge and the limits of every good that he (sic) can achieve or acquire ...’ (ibid:8). Such person ‘opens himself up to infinite possibility’ (ibid:8). Could one not suggest that the latter disposition is in itself a constituent of religious experience? Could one say that Schiavone’s (1994) work exhibits a current trend in spirituality, reconciling the ‘dissociation of sensibility’ and giving theological credence back to experience?

Spirituality’s rediscovered ‘experiential epistemology’ enables ministers to take their people beyond the fundamentalist understanding of Scripture. Ministers might now inject back into the Scriptures the indigenous experiential dimension of the text, without which one does a disservice to the nature of Scripture itself. Armstrong (2000:19) speaks of recovering the *mythos* in religion, where fundamentalism only understands the modernistic dimension of *logos*. She shows that the concept of the one God is not accessible to *logos* but must be apprehended ‘intuitively and imaginatively as a *mythos*’ (ibid:20). Her essay is an exhibit of emerging academic spirituality. Furthermore, her *mythos* perhaps serves as a virtual synonym for *experience*, or more accurately, its derivation. Is Armstrong not trying, in her own intellectual context, to recover an epistemology of experience? Can ministry reflect authenticity without this experiential dimension? Surely authentic Christianity cannot interpret the truths of religion in an exclusively rational way.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> It must reflect some ministerial complicity that ‘in our modern Western culture, we have lost a sense of the mythological (where) many find it hard not to interpret the truths of religion rationally’ (Armstrong

### 5.2.3.2 Apophaticism

It is in recent spirituality's retrieval of the apophatic tradition, both as experience and academic affirmation, that it reaches the apex of its challenge to the tradition of rationality. The apophatic tradition, if any, sounds the death knell for the absolutising of rationality. The apophatic tradition, when competently explained, is revealed as two logical moves away from the kataphatic approach. The kataphatic explores the innumerable images that one might use for God and necessarily gets lost in the multiplicity and seeming contradictoriness of the analogies and metaphors. Apophaticism, however, comes into its own supremely in its negation of the negation. For an appreciation of its significance, one needs to grasp the complete breakdown it expresses.<sup>14</sup> There is at this point a sharp break with pure reason.

In apophatic mood, Clare (1981:45) says that contemplation is a stage of prayer that transcends all mental activity. She further cautions that 'it is necessary to be aware of the danger of too much thinking *about* [italics mine] God, rather than relaxing in his presence and waiting upon him in emptiness' (ibid:64). Spirituality may include cognitive activity, but it 'transcends the intellect...' (ibid:14). Indeed, apophatic prayer has always known 'the imperfection of our will and intellect, our penchant for self-deception, the reliance on social reinforcement of our identity and ideology' (ibid:94). It even seems that contemporary spirituality influences psychology in pointing out that reality may be known through many modalities of lived experience. Psychology has only latterly been able to accommodate spirituality's insight into other ways of knowing, as in the psychological coinage, 'altered states of consciousness' (ibid:59-60).

Valid questions at this point might be: But how does apophaticism's subversion of pure rationality now become synonymous with 'reclamation of *experience*'? To what extent can apophaticism, correctly understood, be in any sense *experiential*? Is the alternative to intellect and rationality unquestionably (religious) *experience*? Such might seem the implication of the present argument. To such questions the only answer can be that the understanding of 'experience', as

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2000:19). Too often the minister has not taken their people beyond a rationalistic epistemology, and must own some responsibility in this regard. For 'when reason tries to address religious truth, it is attempting a task that it is not equipped for. When it endeavors to explain or prove a *mythos*, it can only be a caricature of itself ...' (ibid:20). On the same point it is noted that 'a factual and rational interpretation of theism is increasingly distressing to large numbers of people' (and that) 'in Britain, it has become so distasteful that the bulk of the population wants nothing more to do with Christianity' (ibid:19).

<sup>14</sup> This is in any event how I would understand it. As such, it occupies the most radical subversion of a 'pure rationality', yet ironically employs quite a sophisticated philosophical procedure to get there. Apophaticism, however, is commonly misunderstood. Current exponents empty it of its dialectic (Turner 1995:5).

admitted before, has a certain amount of ‘drift’ to it. Allowing for such etymological mobility, ‘the experience of *non-experience*’ might even become a legitimate way of speaking, especially if it is able to throw further light on the subject.

The present heading might be incomplete without a reference to postmodernism. Ministry could be most pertinent to our postmodern climate because of its utilising of the apophatic tradition. For there *is* a sense, can we say, in which both postmodernism and apophaticism evidence some congruency? They both have a deconstructionist dimension that might appreciate how ‘all structures of the knowledge of reality are rooted ultimately in unprovability and sustained by the consensus of the social group affirming them’ (Clare 1981:94).

### **5.2.3.3 Images**

An additional contribution by spirituality, especially in its ‘lived’ format, is its rediscovery of images and icons. The rediscovery facilitates religious experience while also constituting a critique of an over-conceptualised and philosophised ministry. In short, spirituality presently precipitates a non-discursive utilisation of images that facilitates religious experience. Spirituality now brings an image-filled language (and historical source, one must add) for feeding a communicatively multi-dimensional congregation.

On the other hand, Messer (1989:21) shows how even in the Christian ministry, images have become too conceptual. ‘Part of the problem with some of the more popular contemporary images of Christian ministry is that they are far too conceptual and lack the poetic imagination of envisioning and challenging’. Images used to describe the minister, like *facilitator* or even *professional* are sterile terms according to him. They are still bound in the conceptualism and chauvinism of, might one say, an over-investment in a propositional style. Glasse (1968) is well known for a work on the Christian ministry as a *profession*, arguing that ministry needed the mantle (or academic gown perhaps?) of *profession* in order to obviate its identity crisis. The book was a ‘setwork’ for probationer Methodist ministers doing their training in the seventies. Messer (1989) is surely correct in his insight about such use of imagery, and the nature of the imagery itself. Newly conceptualised ‘spirituality’ can surely contribute a corrective imagery that is indigenous to ministerial self-understanding and practice.

Related to imagery, and intrinsic to it, is George’s (1994:22-23) conviction that an *aesthetic* appreciation must find its place in spirituality. Such spirituality, incidentally, also constitutes a

subversion of the 'pure rationality' ideal, or pure speculative theology for that matter. 'If we attempt to weave the strands of a new spirituality around formal theological concepts, we may not advance much, because that spirituality might turn out to be another discourse falling into the same trap as any academic theology' (ibid:23). An emerging spirituality would have to turn from a monological theology and draw its resources and energy through the medium of beauty. The key to the aesthetic medium will be the experience of material reality as beautiful and good (ibid:23).

#### **5.2.4 Independent Discovery and Validation**

In the climate of postmodernism, religious institutions look vulnerable and even undermined. For some observers, the Church looks stifling and obscurantist. The words of a recent philosopher come to mind, and express the current spirit pertinently: 'Theology ... induces a dogmatic belief that we have knowledge where in fact we have ignorance, and by doing so generates a kind of impertinent insolence towards the universe. Uncertainty ... must be endured if we wish to live without the support of comforting fairy tales' (Russell 1961:14). Expressive of the latter sentiment is the new-world move to discovering for oneself the ultimate significance of life. A serious contemporary research project says: 'It can safely be concluded that the subjective turn, from life as 'expected', and "laid down" to the interior experiences of subjective-life, is of considerable significance' (Heelas & Woodhead 2005:81). It does seem, in other words, that the subjective turn of contemporary culture, 'favours and reinforces those (subjective life) forms of spirituality which resource unique subjectivities and treat them as a primary source of significance, and undermines those (life-as) forms of religion which did not' (ibid:78). 'Hand-me-down' traditions do not inspire the confidence they once did. Inevitably, that reflective scepticism rubs off on ministers as well, except perhaps for the most recalcitrant fundamentalists. More and more, people have become savourers of different spiritualities, religions, and expressions of what one might broadly term 'the New Age Movement'. There is now a manifest desire for independent search, discovery and validation in the religious and spiritual sphere. Into such a climate, current spirituality, whether as lived experience or academic stimulus, realises reclamation of personal experience and independent validation for profession of the Christian faith. It is inherent to spirituality, as no other discipline, that it invites spiritual search and discovery that bypasses a prior and regulatory validation by doctrinal studies. I contend that such must be true of *Christian* spirituality, and *not just spirituality in general*, if it is to fulfil the fresh insight and promise that it brings to an older 'spiritual theology'. 'Spirituality' reclaims something of the first-hand order of salvation through emphasizing the legitimacy of experiential

search, savouring, and discovery, and the integrity that inevitably goes with it. Has not much authenticity been lost to ministry where ministers have not been prepared or secure enough to rediscover and reclaim the faith *for themselves*? The result has been ‘an institutionalisation of the experience of God at the propositional level’, reflecting an inability or lack of personal appropriation to reclaim the truth of the faith experientially for oneself (Holmes 1981:160).<sup>15</sup>

The newly conceived spirituality, in accommodating historical investigation of spiritual case studies, shows the need to, (and largely the legitimacy of) claim our spiritual experience for ourselves. Indeed, Holmes’s (1981:150-156) pen pictures seem to show that such personal appropriation and validation were the hallmarks of (perhaps not always orthodox) authentic people such as, *inter alia*: Dag Hammarskjöld, Thomas Merton, Simone Weil and Martin Luther King. While Julian of Norwich tested orthodoxy to the limit and was successfully ignored by the Church of her day, even her ‘heretical experiences’ of universalism and a God devoid of wrath, speak tantalisingly to a world that does not want to be prescribed to.<sup>16</sup>

Academic spirituality, in the license given to it by an exponent such as Schneiders (1986, 1989, 1993) for example, can help retrieve the indispensable place of independent discovery and validation for both minister and parishioner. It can give ministers more tolerance towards the sometimes-frightening private revelations reported by congregants, and those outside the regular life of the church community. Indeed, ‘the secular world is still fascinated by a spirituality of mystery and is unable to accept the apparently clear truths of the message the Church wishes to impart’ (Matthews 2000:22). While many parishioners seem more than happy with the ‘pre-packed “truths” of a certain type of Christian exposition’, the more adventurous and secure seeker is ‘willing to linger with the different dimension to religious awareness afforded by things like icons, silence, Gregorian chant ...’ (ibid:22). Is Matthews also trying to say that congregants and secular seekers need more space to discover a faith for themselves? Have the traditional schools of systematic and moral theology encroached too much on the area of the seekers’ personal

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<sup>15</sup> Literalism is often the bulwark and last resort for the faith that cannot grow up. Current Christian spirituality can give ministers, and indeed congregants as well, a license and security to risk reclaiming the faith for themselves, rather than seeking safety in propositional dogmas, creeds and personal denominational entrenchments. It does this by reinstating the high value, integrity and legitimacy of lived experience for an authentic Christianity.

<sup>16</sup> Hick (1999:129-143) raises fascinating questions of how personal mystical experiences, as for example in Julian of Norwich, might speak to orthodoxy and test its theory. A further question might be raised as to how ministerial spiritual experience presents more dogmatic, normative Christian studies with pertinent questions. One that springs to mind is the traditional outlawing of same-sex marriages. Will personal spiritual experience, or the faculty that studies it, continue to share the orthodox verdict of culpability and non-acceptance thereof?

freedom and investigation? Insofar as it does this, it robs both minister and congregant of true spiritual and ministerial authenticity. A greater focus on experience in both academy and lived life restores to ministry an integrity and self-esteem that comes by personal validation of the faith. Indeed, the earliest desert monastics evidenced:

a refusal to be content with arguments, concepts, and technical verbiage. They sought a way to God that was unchartered and freely chosen, *not inherited from others* [italics mine] who had mapped it out beforehand. They sought a God whom they alone could find, not one who was given in a set, stereotyped form by somebody else (Merton 1960:6).

Having made the point, however, for independent validation and religious experience, one would also do well to hear a sobering critique thereof. How does one answer the criticism of Pitt (1995: 36), who says that the supreme yardstick for faith and vocation has now become ‘the subjective religious experience’? ‘God, these days, is less likely to be heard in the call of the church, its liturgical life and its doctrine, more in the call of the “inner voice”’ (ibid:37). There is a ‘cultural shift towards the exaltation of subjectivity, spontaneity and the affective side of personal identity’ (ibid:36). Doctrine, Church order, liturgy and critical study are no longer seen as things that mediate faith and are more or less regarded as irrelevant. The shift away from Church life has meant that people have turned exclusively to subjectivity and the individuality of personal experience. The Church has also succumbed to the idea that religious experience is the prime source of faith and ministerial vocation. Consequently, people are now tyrannised ‘by a requirement that the Churches in the past did not make, namely that public worship and Christian ministry must be validated by purely personal conviction’ (Pitt 1995:37). Such subjectivity, it is claimed, raises great difficulty in the search for fresh understandings of ministry (ibid:37).

One has to appreciate Pitt’s concerns. There is real validity in what he says. Yet once again he may be speaking only of a certain *kind* of experience that is not necessarily endorsed here; namely, a particularly fitful and dislocated kind that has lost its roots in the religious community. In answer to Pitt, one might need to say that we have to *risk* succumbing, in certain instances, to the unfortunate and unChristian trend of individualism and subjectivity. It may be the price to pay for underscoring how, for too long, a validation of Christian faith has been sought in *external* verification and dogma only. Neither must it be forgotten that personal and communal experience ‘creates’ dogma and even essentially *predates* it. Ministry and any sound academic spirituality will hold to this understanding as one that cannot be surrendered. Spirituality enables us to get in touch with that which the dogma originally expressed.

Given Pitt's salutary word, it is still difficult to know how to dislocate *religious experience* from (the minister's sense of) *vocation*, which etymologically relates to hearing 'a call' of one kind or another. Significantly, Emmet (1958:253-254) has said that one needs to talk of ministerial vocation not in organic or politically purposive language, but in religious language. Emmet maintains that the *discovery* of vocation may be one of the main things that religious language expresses. Carroll (1991:200-202) says that 'it is exceedingly difficult to symbolize God's trustworthiness in the midst of life if one is not also a participant in that reality', namely the reality of personal vocation. It is a lively sense of calling that gives foundation and unity to reflective leadership and sacramental presence. With such integration comes a renewal of the clergy's authenticity and authority.

In the light of what Emmet (1958) has to say, one needs surely to understand vocation as presuming 'the experiential'. And as vocation is fundamental for ministry so, surely, is some form of experience.

### **5.3 EVALUATING 'LIVED EXPERIENCE' FOR MINISTRY**

#### **5.3.1 An Explanatory Preamble**

I began by evaluating the place of religious experience and how contemporary spirituality can make a significant contribution in the recovery of experience for ministry. The argument was made that religious experience is integral to ministry. Contemporary spirituality is uniquely placed to offer a more single-minded attention to the subject of religious experience than any other theological discipline. In a sense, the more dynamic 'spirituality' now offers an apologia for 'spiritual experience', which has often, in the past, been relegated or surrendered to pejorative categories. The present section looks at the evaluative criteria that the present discipline or experience of Christian spirituality might bring to bear on various ministerial, religious experiences as 'lived life'. (Thus one might say that a more *normative* principle is now inevitably introduced.) The focus is on the lived experience of ministers. The boundary lines in contemporary spirituality are not firmly drawn in this area it must be said. The subject of criteria for the study of lived Christian experience is in flux. However, it would blight the potential of Christian spirituality, so designated, to regress and simply prescribe for ministerial experience a kind of hand-me-down dogmatic outline as criteria for lived Christian experience in the ministry. The intention here is rather to indicate some of the unique potential of 'Christian spirituality' in particular, to analyse, delineate and evaluate lived Christian (ministerial) experience. Thus a 'wider evaluation' is also made of the ministerial 'lived experience' and not simply the

normative evaluation that one might expect, say, of a 'spiritual theology'. In the give-and-take of inter-disciplinary theological dialectic, what insightful criteria might 'contemporary Christian spirituality' - distinctively - *prescribe* for experiential evaluation? Indeed, here one reaches the heart of the matter. Does contemporary Christian spirituality offer a simply normative evaluation of the religious experience of Christians? As the academic discipline of Christian spirituality seeks to find a possible home in a *wider* faculty of religious experience known as 'spirituality', does it offer any criteria for experiential regulation? Is it rigorously prescriptive of what may be experienced and what must be relinquished? There is the implication in Schneiders' (1989) vision for Christian spirituality that, in a larger faculty, the Christian discipline might gain wider access to the world of religious experience, right across the board. 'I find most convincing and clarifying the position that regards spirituality as an *autonomous discipline* [italics mine]...' (Schneiders 1989:689). 'Spirituality ... is a moment integral to theology, both because it raises questions which theology must consider and because it *supplies data for theological reflection* [italics mine]' (1989:689-690). Rahner (1984) maintained that the theology of mysticism, for example, was by no means exclusively gleaned from the same sources and via the same methods as those used by a traditional dogmatic theology. Consequently, for Schneiders (1989) it is crucial that religious experience, as such, retain its voice. (Might one say 'vocation'?) Spirituality must not be simply subordinate to theology and thereby forfeit the kind of contribution that its academic autonomy can make to a more discursive theological enterprise (Schneiders 1989: 690).

### **5.3.2 Normative Criteria for Evaluation**

A normative evaluation of lived experience in ministry would need to be simultaneously open to modification by experience itself. While speaking of *normative* criteria, therefore, one needs to do justice to the way in which the normative is also the fruit of a phenomenology of experience at the anthropological level. However, it is still *Christian* spirituality that is the yardstick applied here. A number of widely acknowledged and accumulated criteria present themselves as evaluative for a supposed or prospective Christian spirituality. Of course, such criteria can only assess religious experience in 'its *effects* [italics mine] on the lives of men and women' (Hick 1999:165). The way one would test for the authenticity of religious experience and the likelihood that it proceeds from God, Absolute Reality, or Transcendence, is the way in which its impact is embodied in the receiver (Hick 1999:165). The advantage that Christian spirituality has over 'spiritual theology' is in its inter-disciplinary approach, inside and outside the theological faculty. It can offer universally agreed-upon norms for evaluating lived religious experience, even

(perhaps controversially) while retaining its distinctive Christian character. A few of these norms, derived from the subject of 'spirituality in general', will be employed here to weigh the authenticity of any experience and its possible contribution to ministry.<sup>17</sup>

A further major criterion for evaluating Christian spirituality for ministry will be an analysis of the kind of 'God-concept' the lived experience of the minister portrays. An evaluation of the minister's spirituality by contemporary understandings would work on the assumption that the kind of 'God-concept' experienced would inevitably be illustrated in 'lived life'. 'God-concept', or how God is assimilated in actuality, would thus be determinative of the recipient's lifestyle. Spirituality would make a phenomenological assessment. 'God-concept', it is argued here, is revealed in the devotee's behaviour, thinking, social proclivities and world-view. Such holistic understanding of spirituality would do justice to a wide range of 'spirituality definitions' over the last two decades.

I now propose the evaluation of ministerial spirituality through utilising the multi-faceted and distinctive Christian concept of God as Trinity. Each concept, it is maintained, has its own implications for lived life. These spiritualities are all Christian, being complementary rather than mutually exclusive. (Furthermore, their distinctiveness and clarity is owed or indebted to the insights and ferment of contemporary spirituality.) Such complementarity and differentiation, I submit, is always the challenge of Trinitarian thinking. I begin with a Trinitarian spirituality, and then look at distinctive Christian spiritualities (or 'experiences' in the title of this chapter) best attributed to each of the 'persons' of the Trinity. In each case, the spirituality is not denominational, but reflects a genus or family of spiritualities most readily associated with that divine 'Person'.

### **5.3.3 Trinitarian Spirituality: Community and Self-Giving**

#### **5.3.3.1 Normative Evaluation**

Christian spirituality has been at the forefront of eliciting practical insights for lived life from the doctrine of the Trinity, as a number of scholars show. For instance, LaCugna's (2000) work evidences concern for the *practical* implications of Trinitarian faith. She sets the groundwork for a Trinitarian spirituality. The latter spirituality invites the concept of communal integration into

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<sup>17</sup> By 'spirituality in general' one refers to Schneiders' (1989) proposed all-inclusive subject of spirituality as including non-Christian and even non-theological constructs.

the Trinitarian life itself, with all the practical implications for unity, ecumenicity and the insightful understanding of selfhood that this implies.

Taking normative evaluation further is the enlightening work of Downey (2000). He shows how Trinitarian spirituality is a sharing in the divine life. To *speak* of the Trinity is to employ a *grammar* that merely outlines the safety boundaries for holding on to faith as belief.<sup>18</sup> Yet much more is implied for spirituality in the Trinity than a plain, cognitive orthodoxy. As with La Cugna (2000), Downey (2000:63-78) shows how spirituality brings practical ministerial clues and directives for lived experience out of the doctrine of the Trinity. The Trinity is determinative for the understanding of selfhood. ‘We are from others, by others, toward others, just as it is in God to exist in the relations of interpersonal love’ (ibid:63). But a warning is given herein. It is noted that ‘at times Christian understandings of human personhood as well as of the spiritual life have been heavily influenced by an understanding of the Trinity that emphasizes the three in one Love mirrored in the *inner life* [italics mine] of the individual person’ (ibid:63-64). Such spirituality, however, is not reflecting an accurate Trinitarian understanding, and if it is not checked, leads to a ministerial life characterised by self-preoccupation and self-absorption. It will see God as love, as incarnate in Christ and communicated in the Holy Spirit (ibid:64).<sup>19</sup> It will be vital for ministry, as it ‘provides a critical challenge to any understanding that sees either the human being or God as self-contained individuals. God is self-giving Love. And human destiny rests in receiving and living from that gift in self-giving love’ (Downey 2000:64). A spirituality of Father, Son and Spirit safeguards ministry from introversion. It avoids communicating an individualistic understanding of Christian faith among congregants. As such it secures ministerial and pastoral authenticity.

As there is a Trinitarian grammar for doctrinal theology, so the Trinitarian grammar can express itself in the spiritual life of minister and people. Ministerial lifestyle therefore finds evaluative correctives with the application of the norms of Trinitarian spirituality. Ministry as exclusively insular or even monastic, expressed in the solitary life, or for ‘religious’ only, is undermined by

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<sup>18</sup> ‘Grammar has to do with a way of speaking correctly. Rules of grammar set the limits within which creative discourse can take place. *Rules of grammar do not guarantee that we will speak the truth* [italics mine], but if we are to speak in a meaningful and coherent way, we must work within the rules of grammar’ (Downey 2000:47). Here Downey seems to hint at the limitations of Trinitarian doctrine when adhered to exclusively as a *grammar*, and not as a practical doctrine for the outworking of spiritual life.

<sup>19</sup> Indeed, ‘the roots of Christian spirituality lie in seeking to answer the question: “What kind of God do we have?”’ (Sheldrake 1987:11). It is in the working out of the Trinitarian implications for lived experience in ministry that Christian spirituality fills a conspicuous academic void today.

the evaluation of Trinitarian spirituality, which gives the mark of Christian authenticity to living in communion. Holiness will not be a private possession, but rather the out-pouring of love and service. Christian vocation will not pertain exclusively to certain circumscribed ministries, suggestive of a non-communal, un-Trinitarian lifestyle. Vocation might be lived in various walks of life, not monopolised by religious office, but pervaded by 'a way of presencing Christ and the Spirit, rendering present the mystery of the three in one Love in a particular and irreplicable manner' (ibid:108).

At the risk of over-utilising Downey (2000), one might reflect even further appreciation for the way his Trinitarian spirituality enjoys congruency with a wide array of classical Christian disciplines. He gives new meaning to *asceticism*, again breaking a sometimes-rigid perspective of the past. Asceticism has often been understood, narrowly, as mortification of the flesh, but the wider embrace of a Trinitarian spirituality encompasses the sacrifice of marital life, rearing children and the basic daily struggle for survival - indeed the very substance of everyday living. *Spiritual discernment and direction* is seen as a resource available for all Christians. It is the gift and task of all those who live in the Trinitarian life, which means every Christian (ibid:110-116).

Similarly, ministry needs to take account of Trinitarian spirituality's implications for *healing and wholeness* - a most pertinent concern and topic in contemporary (particularly South African) ministry. Contemporary approaches to healing and wholeness, when evaluated by a Trinitarian spirituality in ministry, will consider the human person as a unity of some real complexity. Various dimensions of personhood are uncovered. The relationship to one's own body, one's spouse, family and community are all embraced within the ambit of God's activity and healing purposes. An approach of such a dimension sounds the death-knell of dualistic anthropologies sadly perpetuated by some well-meant healing ministries (ibid:116-117).

Trinitarian spirituality is evaluative for the lived experience of the Christian in that it analyses whether ministry is truly incorporated into the giving and receiving of Trinitarian life. In short, 'the various disciplines of the Christian spiritual life are simply the means by which we seek to participate ... in the mystery of the three in one Love' (Downey 2000:129).

### **5.3.3.2 A Wider Evaluation**

It cannot be supposed that Christian insights into Trinitarian spirituality are all exclusively derived from indigenous Christian terrain. Christian spirituality in particular, certainly by virtue

of Schneiders' (1989) anthropological perspective, draws on dialogue with science of religion, philosophy, psychology and various social sciences. It is also ideally engaged in inter-religious dialogue and does well to acknowledge its sister faiths in Islam and Judaism, not to mention insights from Buddhism, Hinduism and other religious traditions.

Dialogue with philosophy and psychology has enriched spirituality's understanding of personhood and encounter. Notably here is the conception and experience of the 'I-Thou' (Buber 1958) construct, and its obvious implications for a *Trinitarian spirituality* - if not exclusively for the latter, then not without particular pertinence. Buber's (1958) insight with regard to mutual personal encounter and communion in the 'I-Thou' relationship has been beneficial, if not always acknowledged by Christian spirituality. His thought has taken root in wide strands of ecclesiastical, Trinitarian thinking. 'The most profound *I-Thou* relation is with God, the Eternal Thou who can never become an *It*. God cannot be grasped in descriptive concepts and definitions, but only addressed in encounter. This obviously bears on prayer, worship and the spiritual life and has influenced modern Christianity ...' (Clements 1983:59).

The influence of postmodern spirituality on Christianity, but also upon Trinitarian spirituality, is significant. In the face of modernity's stress on the centrality of individualism, 'it is not surprising that no feature of postmodern spirituality is emphasized more than the reality of internal relations...' (Griffin 1988:14). As opposed to modernity, postmodern spirituality does not see relations with others and with things as somehow external, 'accidental' and derivative. Relations are seen as intrinsic, essential and constitutive (ibid:14). The way that postmodernism facilitates new insights into Trinitarian spirituality and Christian spirituality in general should be evident to the reflective Christian pastor and congregational leader. One might express some appreciation for postmodernism's facilitative insights. Still, if academic spirituality is to be true to its faculty, it cannot afford unconscious adoption of postmodernism, regardless of the latter's undoubted advantages for much Christian thought. It is part of Christian spirituality's inter-disciplinary approach that it exercises conscious scientific acumen with regard to its present societal context. It cannot afford to be deductive only, as in the case of a (perhaps caricatured) 'spiritual theology'. It has to draw inductively (in the sense of directly from contextual experience) and thus non-prescriptively from the lived experience of Christian and non-Christian alike. As such, Christian spirituality has the potential to offer a greater contextual hermeneutic for current spirituality than a sometimes antiquated, derivative approach.

A wider evaluation than the normative might also be understood as one that embraces the lesser-known contributions of the wider Christian family. For Western theology this has meant a new appreciation of the Eastern Orthodox tradition, and a new ecumenicity as characteristic of Christian spirituality. Ecumenicity, then, further reflects the non-prescriptive tenor of spirituality, certainly as academic exercise. For it is certainly evident that an ecumenical accommodation and interaction is facilitated by the new discipline. More precisely, the strongly Trinitarian influence of an Orthodox faith has been integrated into the Christian mainstream. For the Orthodox position, 'God has revealed himself to man (sic) as Trinity, as a Unity of Godhead in a Trinity of persons, and *this self-disclosure of God is at the heart of Christian prayer*' [italics mine] (Lash 1983:283-284). Eastern Orthodoxy facilitates the incorporation of lived life into the Trinity, together with the advantages that ministry enjoys thereby. Evagrius (345-399), the celebrated exponent of Orthodoxy, has said that 'if you are a theologian, you will pray truly. And if you pray truly, you are a theologian' (ibid:283). Eastern Orthodoxy, now used as part of a wider evaluation of ministry, translates cerebral Trinitarianism into the dynamic of lived experience. Pastoral practitioners are still to embrace the full insightful dimension that Trinitarian spirituality brings to ministerial self-understanding.

### **5.3.4 'First Person' Spirituality: Mystery and Contemplation**

#### **5.3.4.1 Normative Evaluation**

What kind of spirituality is generated by a renewed appreciation of the 'First Person' of the Trinity?<sup>20</sup> What corrective will such spirituality make to various distortions and imbalances in ministerial practice? As a Presbyterian 'Charismatic', Smail (1980) titles his book, *The Forgotten Father*. He believes that 'the Father' has been 'forgotten' in Charismatic spirituality and he assesses the consequent damage to the Movement. Smail argues that 'Christian maturity and holiness are not to be found in a narrow pursuit of charismatic experiences and manifestations in and for themselves, but in the existential rediscovery of Abba Father (sic)' (Smail 1980:45). Seeking to redress various distortions in lived experience of ministers and congregants, Smail maintains that the gospel is basically a Father (sic) movement.<sup>21</sup> It is not first a Jesuology or a pneumatology but it is rather a *theology* (1980:20).

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<sup>20</sup> Here one hesitates to use too freely the designation of God as 'Father' or 'Mother', since one has the possibility now of looking at God in an apophatic way as 'mystery'. But certainly, in a kataphatic sense, it is God as 'Mother' or 'Father' who is referred to here.

<sup>21</sup> Of course Smail is not defending the use of 'Father' as sole designation of God, though he could conceivably have been more sensitive in that regard. He does, however, say that 'the *patria* which in Eph 3:15 takes its name from God includes mother love as much as father love in itself' (1980:59).

While Smail's work anticipates some contemporary thinking, it is, in my view, not as informed or ecumenically rich in its bibliography or text. Significant, however, is the way he addresses the fixation with religious/charismatic experiences of one kind or another. Herein he possibly finds an unlikely counterpart in Turner (1995). The latter reveals how much late twentieth century understanding of mysticism and its classic metaphors is very different from that of Christian mystics in the ancient and mediaeval context of Christianity in the West (Turner 1995:1). In writing what must surely be a groundbreaking book on the negative way in mysticism, Turner (ibid:2) expresses doubt whether there was ever any such thing as mystical *experience*. He says this because there seems 'to be a common, informal view around that the "mystical" had something to do with the having of very uncommon, privileged "experiences" ...' (ibid:2). In contradistinction thereto, Turner finds that Eckhart, John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila or the Author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* did not think of experiences as definitive of mysticism. Particularly evident in *both* Smail and Turner's work is how a return to God as 'Father', or more particularly, as essentially *mystery* in Turner's case, begins to address the inappropriate fixation with mystical or charismatic 'experiences'.

Turner's work raises significant questions for a ministry that has over-invested in feelings and (sometimes mandatory) Christian experiences. Stereotypical rites of experiential passage to spiritual promotion are often in evidence in the churches. It further highlights some of the ambiguity in spirituality today in terms of religious experiences as opposed to everyday lived experience of the Christian faith, of the more general and 'natural' kind. It is an ambiguity that can doubtless even be detected in the arguments of the present chapter. Too much ministry has arguably been invested in experiences themselves. Much spirituality has been psychologised. The apophatic spirit, most appropriate one might argue to the mystery of God as 'first person', speaks of 'a "divinity" which is "hidden" precisely *from* experience' (Turner 1995:4).

Contemporary Christian spirituality thus reintroduces ministry to the ('first person') God of cloud, mystery and darkness, whose purpose transcends congregational needs for 'experiences' or 'God-management'. It draws on the insights of Neo-Platonic thought, which timeously elicits a contemporary critique of religious experiences and concepts, delivering ministry from a 'positivism of religious experience' (Turner 1995:5). Smail (1980:28) writes that seeing 'the place of the Father (sic) in the life of Jesus helps us to see that our own greatest need is *conversion from an obsession with our needs* [italics mine] to an obedience-centred Christianity... ' The first-person spirituality of contemplation and mystery brings ministry and

pastoral work back to the ungraspable God, one who cannot be managed. 'But these attempts to control and manage cost us dearly. Our sense of wonder is exiled, our faith begins suffocating from thick layers of dull familiarity and easy answers, and our lives are emptied of surprise' (Hudson 1995:22-23).

It is, then, in our concept of 'the Father,' here used as a synonym for God the first person, that spirituality does a new service for Christian faith and pastoral care. The mystery characteristic of God the Mother/Father invites the spirituality of apophaticism. 'The apophatic tradition radically relativizes all language about God and thereby undermines the basis of our neurotic manipulations of God. Regular apophatic prayer keeps us deeply mindful of this, and in so doing, frees us to recover the symbolic language of our tradition as symbolic' (Thayer 1985:43). Of course, such manipulation also involves the soliciting of 'God' for religious experiences of various kinds. But Thayer's reference to neurotic manipulation is indicative of how psychological growth is stunted through a less than comprehensive Christian spirituality.

### **5.3.4.2 A Wider Evaluation**

Contemporary spirituality evidences a new readiness to appreciate the mystery and unknowability of God. Its unapologetic use of Neo-Platonic thought might leave some non-Catholics feeling uneasy. Protestant suspicion of philosophic traditions and employment is fairly well documented, though often unconsciously utilised by Protestants themselves.<sup>22</sup> Christian spirituality, thus designated, draws on *philosophy* and *philosophical* theology. Its use of Pseudo-Dionysius is productive and illuminative and enhances one's ability to scan the lived-experience of ministers. Such would not be true to the same extent were Christian spirituality to declare an inter-disciplinary approach to be somehow sub-Christian and unworthy of the faith.

Thayer (1985:43) is representative of a psychological awareness in contemporary Christian spirituality. 'God' may be easily manipulated by the psychologically immature personality. The apophatic tradition in particular has its own intrinsic anti-body to such a psychological impediment to pastoral healing and wholeness.

Merton's inter-religious, cross-cultural engagements have left a rich heritage for 'first person' spirituality, so that old dualisms and flawed concepts can be satisfactorily relinquished. His

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<sup>22</sup> Indeed, 'there are many Christians who regard an interest in philosophy as a dubious and dangerous flirtation' (Brown 1968:7).

contemplative spirituality, still much in evidence, has an inviting appeal to atheists and agnostics. Indeed, ‘for those who do not share this (Christian) faith or who have been alienated from it because its proclaimers have seemed to “know” too much, the starker journey into the divine darkness ... may well offer a more compelling invitation to take a closer look at the Christian way’ (Wiseman 1998:184). ‘Merton was able to feel keenly what he once called “the attitude of those who are no longer satisfied by a mystery whose presentation is reduced to the level of *things*”’ (ibid:184).

Kruger (1989) shows the benefit of Christian spirituality engaging with Buddhist thought. He points out that Christianity is not fully accounted for by traditional theism. Using the Quakers as an example, Kruger (ibid:122) notes how George Fox, the founder of the Quaker movement, broke away from the orthodox religious framework of his day. He found it too notional, fixed in dogma and, might one say, objectified? ‘Quakerism did not work out the implications of its intuition with anything like the philosophical rigour and radicalism of Buddhism ... yet the resemblances with the Buddhist approach discussed in this chapter are so marked that Quakerism might loosely perhaps be called Christian Buddhism’ (ibid:122). Expanding on Kruger, can one say that Christian spirituality ideally has less scruples than a ‘spiritual theology’ in drawing on insights from Buddhism that help the Christian to a new depth in experience of the divine? Here one might refer particularly to the Buddhist reservation about the status of concepts. Kruger (ibid: 121) believes that ‘instead of anti-theistic “atheism”, or just “non-theism” the Buddhist point of view could be more aptly termed “meta-theism” or “supra-theism”’. Such meta-theism could be productive for a Christian faith too inclined to conceptual thinking and prone to dualism. Christian spirituality, in its academic possibilities, enables ministry to get in touch with its own apophatic and non-dualistic traditions. Academic spirituality is thus resourced to assess lived ministerial experience with an evaluation that is arguably wider than the strictly normative, yet not necessarily subversive thereof.

### **5.3.5 Incarnational Holistic Spirituality**

#### **5.3.5.1 Normative Evaluation**

A strong feature of prevailing contemporary spirituality is its ‘holistic’ motif. By virtue of the Trinitarian framework employed here, holistic spirituality is largely derivative from an incarnational precedent, pertaining to the ‘second person’ of the Trinity, Word made flesh. Contemporary holistic spirituality asks of ministry whether it realises a pervasive holistic dimension to its Christian service. Christian practice has not always secured the holistic

dimension for itself, but is increasingly conscientised by its absence. The ‘second person’ of the Trinity thus constitutes a holistic revelation, which negates the ‘spirit-flesh’ opposition so commonly misinterpreted in the Apostle Paul’s theology.<sup>23</sup>

Leech (1986:38) points out that a major weakness of modern Christianity lies in the area of Christology, the doctrine of the Incarnation. ‘The truth of the Incarnation, of the taking of humanity into God, is the basis both of a materialistic, earthy and fleshy spirituality, and of a spiritually-based commitment to action in the world.’ Leech (ibid:38) maintains that incarnation thus stresses the ‘carnality of grace’, the physical foundation of spiritual reality, which provides the impetus for reaching out to the poor, the despised and the broken. With regard to the spiritual and contemplative leader, therefore, ‘a test of our spirituality must be whether it makes us more aware of the realities of the world, and therefore more ready to respond to them or not’ (ibid:35). A holistic, incarnationally induced, spirituality will thus be a corrective to any mysticism that becomes too susceptible to what Hebblethwaite (1983:211) calls ‘an imageless void’, which loses contact with incarnation. Holistic spirituality for ministry constitutes a routine and automatic critique of ‘other-worldly ministry’ that seeks ‘to press beyond the mediation of Christ’s humanity ...’ (Hebblethwaite 1983:211). Ministry must embrace ‘not only the spark in which God’s creative act *touches* the creature ... but also the ungodly imperfection and the fragile vulnerability which result from that creative act’ (Dupré 1985:338). Furthermore, ‘through the incarnation Christ includes *all* creation within himself (also in its finitude) and reunites it with its divine Source’ (ibid:338).

As with ‘holism,’ ministry must be ‘concerned with the whole of reality, rather than only with a selected aspect ...’ (Kretzschmar 1996:65). Too often the Christian Church has divided the fifth century Chalcedonian imperatives (that hold together the human and divine personages of Christ) with disastrous consequences for ministry and the normative lived-experience of Christians. In short, ‘whereas the ministry of Jesus Christ is a perfect example of the unity of mysticism and social involvement, the Church has all too often divided the two’ (ibid:66). It is a concession to gross contemporary misunderstanding to speak of ‘holistic Christian spirituality’ at all. Kretzschmar (ibid:64) suggests that it is a tautology, ‘since the vast majority of definitions of

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<sup>23</sup> The opposition of which Paul speaks ‘is an opposition between our *whole* [italics mine] person as oriented, on the one hand, toward the Kingdom of God, and our whole person as oriented, on the other hand, away from God in the pursuit of selfish interests. Christians who misread the spirit-flesh opposition in Paul tend to favor spiritualities that depreciate the body, human emotions, human passions, social relationships, our material environment, and the like’ (McBrien 1987:89).

spirituality stress that true spirituality does not espouse the dualisms that separate the material from the spiritual nor the personal from the social'. The contemporary concern to express incarnational, holistic spirituality, therefore, corrects those Christian leaders who see in the Christian faith an unworldly denial of materiality and incarnation. Ministry will thus be able to 'rejoice in the divine gifts of matter and of sexuality, seeing in the human the gateway to the divine' (Leech 1985:422) It will be a materialistic spirituality, with all that this must mean for ministry (ibid:422). Such holistic and materialistic spirituality stresses community and social concern in ministry and creates a ministerial spirituality that is humane, embracing the totality of what it means to be human.

Hughes (2003:14-15) sounds a normative Christian caution to *holistic* spirituality. In an admittedly 'popular' work, perhaps meant for a wider audience than the academic, he notes that 'being holistic is not the same as being holy'. Hughes (ibid:14-15) no doubt is making more of a critique of common secular thought than of a comprehensive holistic spirituality presented, say, by Kretzschmar (1996). To be sure, the latter gives a credible definition of holistic Christian spirituality. Nevertheless, normative Christian spirituality in the academy might need to develop a more discriminative critique of unrefined, secular holism and its perfunctory adoption by the Christian Church. For 'while genuine holiness will always strive to be holistic, the fact of being "holistic" does not necessarily imply holiness' (Hughes 2003:41-42). Methodist ministry can rediscover in its spiritual history of the eighteenth century the emphasis on 'Christian perfection' and 'holiness'. Present studies in the *history* of academic Christian spirituality would be helpful in this regard. Methodist ministry fully endorses the *social* nature of religion and holiness, and would countenance no other. But it might well rue the contemporary loss of 'private' holiness and integrity that undermines society in the form of corruption, self-enrichment, self-aggrandizement and infidelity. Ministerial duplicity and infidelity must not be allowed to find its vindication in 'activist' credentials or functionalism. Unfortunately *holistic* spirituality is less clear on these imperatives, and is less incarnational for being so. 'Holiness' now has the pejorative status that once belonged to 'spirituality'. Cutting edge contemporary spirituality is flawed in this respect. 'Holism', loosely defined, is sacrosanct. Yet the most recent resolution for 'codes of conduct' in the Methodist Church and the Church Unity Commission, bear tell-tale evidence of the erosion of the less socially explicit values, such as impartiality, integrity, accountability and incorruptibility. The 'codes' are suggested for 'lay persons' and 'clerics' alike (Resolutions Referred to Circuit Quarterly Meetings/District Synods 2004:A10-A16). On the other hand, academic historical

spirituality puts each denomination in touch with its distinctive heritage and with the now discarded (and quaint?) holiness tradition.

### **5.3.5.2 A Wider Evaluation of Ministry**

Christian spirituality's kinship with a wider faculty's examination of religious experience will doubtless render further insights into one's spirituality and consequent style of ministry. None but the most conservative would say that Christian spirituality, and ministry, could not benefit from 'outside enhancement' of that which lies dormant in one's own tradition. I argue here with Schneiders (1986,1989,1993) that Christian spirituality would need to be open to interdisciplinary and inter-religious influence and critique. Leech (1985:13) shows that 'today both Marxists and Christians are undergoing necessary processes of self-criticism, mutual criticism and purification ... Certainly Christian faith in the true and living God must emerge purified and strengthened by the Marxist critique of false religion.' It is particularly Christian spirituality's potential openness to the Marxist critique that might help evaluate Christian ministry, whether it be truly incarnational or merely offering an 'analgesic spirituality' - an opiate to the people. Is Christian ministry one of rooted embodiment, thereby negating the Marxist claim of exclusive 'other-worldliness'? Again, it is the task and contribution of Christian *spirituality*, as opposed to a merely deductive 'spiritual theology' to allow itself to be challenged by the material stances of the Marxist position. Such a challenge is particularly appropriate as it tests Christian spirituality and ministry's claim to incarnationality.

In the disinterested examination of religious experience, Christian spirituality as academic discipline can enhance an exclusively normative evaluation of faith and ministry. 'The acceptance of experience means that spirituality has moved away from a deductive process ... towards a realization that spiritualities arise within particular and therefore different contexts' (Sheldrake 1991:189). Christian spirituality, may one say, needs to engage other spiritualities, whether Marxism or postmodernism, as spiritualities that might inform incarnational spirituality. It can draw insights, for example, from a postmodernism that understands selfhood as relational, interactive and contrary to the spirituality of modernism and its philosophy of self-subsistent independence. Christian spirituality might further advance an authentic holistic spirituality by guardedly utilising the naturalistic pantheism of postmodernism, 'according to which the world

is present in deity and deity is present in the world' (Griffin 1988:17).<sup>24</sup> A further contribution to Christian spirituality is the contextual experience of 'base communities' in South America. Holistic Christian spirituality is enhanced through Christian spirituality's wider perspective on spirituality in context.

### **5.3.6 God as Spirit: Spirituality of Immediacy**

#### **5.3.6.1 Normative Evaluation**

Spirituality associated more explicitly with the Holy Spirit characteristically has its own questions to ask of ministry as lived experience. Such questions most appropriately relate to the evidences of *unity* across boundaries of race, gender, or economic station. It is perhaps the major feature of the Spirit that she/he effects *unity and integration* in the face of diversity. Such activity and normative evaluation of ministry is especially pertinent in the climate of contemporary postmodern fragmentation.

For present purposes, however, I focus elsewhere, yet still showing how perceptions of God as 'Spirit' evaluate and enhance the lived experience of ministry. In so doing, greater Christian authenticity for ministry is realised. Leech's (1985:199-235) images of water and fire as biblically descriptive of the Spirit already contribute certain associations and evocations for ministry, relating to baptism, cleansing and fiery energy and inspiration. Yet it is debatably the concept of Spirit as *all present and permeative* that best facilitates new insights and energy for Christian service. Leech (1985:422) characterises a spirituality drawing on Spirit as 'God-concept' as a spirituality of 'cleansing and purifying, of renewal and spiritual warmth. In the symbols of the water of baptism and the fire of the Spirit, it will see the call to continual rebirth and the daily challenge of the God whose nature is consuming fire. It will be a charismatic spirituality.' Spirituality of this kind will also address the domain of *orthokardia* in ministry, as complementing the equally crucial though perhaps not as neglected categories of *orthodoxy* and *orthopraxis* (Cole 1993:52-56). 'In sum, orthodoxy and orthopraxis without a sense of the worthiness of Jesus Christ may degenerate into mere cognitivism (that is to say, a mere matter of the mind)...' (ibid:55-56). Might one not say, then, that contemporary emergence of charismatic spirituality recovers a much-needed *orthokardia* for ministry, meaning 'right heartedness towards

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<sup>24</sup> Research outside the field of Christian spirituality in this regard might lead to new appreciation of the full Christian heritage. Postmodernism seems to endorse the insights of an Ignatius Loyola. In Ignatius 'there is a new and more biblical emphasis on God's immanent activity in the world. He (sic) continually works the creation of the world ...' (Lane 1984:46). 'The God of Ignatius is not deistic or remote. He dwells in creatures and "works and labours for me in all of them"' (ibid:46).

God'? Ministry 'cannot be reduced to simply obedience in belief and conduct' (Ibid:54). It is a matter of love, of the heart, of 'fire' – 'the orientation of the affections or attitudes of the self towards God' (ibid:54). Borg (1997:128) says that 'spirituality is for the hatching (sic) of the heart'. So stated it is an over-simplification and scarcely addresses the far more comprehensive understanding of human experience entertained by contemporary spirituality. Nevertheless, both Borg (1997) and Leech (1985), as expressive of recent spirituality, raise questions for ministry. Is ministry energised by a source that transcends itself? Certainly for Methodist Christian workers there always needs to be the stimulus from Wesley that 'true religion consists in the living relationship to God ...' (Williams 1960:37).<sup>25</sup>

Borg's (1997) God-concept reflects a preference for conceiving God as *Spirit*. From this mental construct he is able to crystallise valuable enrichment for ministry. He suggests 'Spirit' as a root image for a versatile and contemporary model of God. 'It leads to an image of the Christian life that stresses relationship, intimacy, and belonging' (ibid:71). The spirituality elicited from the Spirit-concept evokes images of Divine Mother, Lover and Wisdom. It ignites a dimension of immediacy. These images derivative from God as Spirit 'do not simply lead to a set of intellectual conclusions about God's nearness and concern but also affect the feeling level of the psyche' (ibid:77). God as Spirit, rather than being distant, presents Godself right here, as immediacy. For "spirit images God as a nonmaterial reality pervading the universe as well as being more than the universe' (ibid:72). Such a permeative and intrinsic God-concept gives to ministerial experience a depth of devotion for Christ. It offers a special appeal 'to the intuitive, feeling type' of minister, where extraversion of personality is dominant. The strength of such spirituality is found in its immediate experience of God. It evokes a supernatural worldview and knows no boundaries, whether economic, educational, social or racial (Johnson 1988:70).

### **5.3.6.2 An Inductive Evaluation**

It might be plausibly argued that contemporary Christian spirituality has also been able to evaluate ministry through arguing *inductively, back* through ministerial experience, and also through human experience more universally. As such, it does justice to Schneiders' (1989:682)

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<sup>25</sup> A contemporary proponent of Wesleyan spirituality says that 'when the authors of scripture – and John Wesley – used the term *heart*, they typically were not referring to the muscle that pumps blood throughout the body. They instead used the term to refer to the center of a human being, that core of who we are. The heart is the source of our strongest desires and the guide for our deepest choices, the home of our inmost yearnings and of our greatest hopes, fears, loves, and dreams' (Clapper 1997:17).

anthropological position, as opposed to a departure from a theologically dogmatic stance. Is Kelsey (1972) in some real way an exponent of an anthropological, experientially inductive approach? Whether proceeding from outside the Christian experiential world, inwards, or operating inductively within spiritual theology itself, surely it would seem so. Kelsey (1972) utilises Jungian insights, garnered through Jung's scientific work with patients, to develop an affirmation of the spiritual world. He further establishes these insights through his own pastoral work with parishioners. The operations of the inner self, and particularly the unconscious, become the common ground, in Kelsey's thinking, for the immediate encounter with God. As with Jung, Kelsey works with dreams, images, archetypes and stories to legitimate direct encounter with God. 'Through ... unconscious contents and meanings, Jung believed, men (sic) are presented with a vast psychic world, as objective, as real, as meaningful and experienceable as the material and physical world' (Kelsey 1972:110). Kelsey's use of Jungian insights help him to pave a way out of the 'naturalistic box' that much theology has unquestionably endorsed, and thus strangled any possibility of an immediate encounter with God.<sup>26</sup> Kelsey even seems to make an experiential test case of Thomas Aquinas. He points out how the intellectual Aquinas became a disciple of the circumscribed Aristotelian worldview, where direct knowledge can *only* come through sense, experience and reason. Yet Aquinas himself had a latter-day, direct experience of God, which led him to declare that all his writing 'had become as straw compared with what had been revealed to him' (1972:64-67).

Kelsey (1981b) exemplifies Christian spirituality in action just as explicitly in his deductive and inductive treatment of 'tongue speaking'. One might imagine Schneiders (1989) complimenting him on his groundbreaking methodology as theologian, psychologist and philosophical anthropologist. Together with his other works, Kelsey (1972,1981a) asks significant and probing questions of conventional theological orthodoxy.

The Charismatic theologian, Smail (1975, 1980) one could argue, does similar inductive work. He appears to argue back from an inductive consideration of charismatic experience of 'baptism in the Spirit', justifying its theological description as a *deepening* work of the Holy Spirit. While he works as a systematic theologian, it is clear that he has taken the actual *experience* seriously and allows it to engage with theology. It is a noteworthy argument in the face of not a few

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<sup>26</sup> It should perhaps be said that the naturalistic, boxed-in worldview so lamented by Kelsey is probably, in hindsight, more an attribute of a modernistic, mechanical worldview than it is of postmodernism.

detractors, such as Dunne (1970), Culpepper (1977) and Leech (1985). For the purposes of a heightened experiential ministry of integrity and vitality, spirituality of a Charismatic persuasion offers a rediscovery of fellowship. It effects a sense of expectancy and spontaneity, with accommodation of emotional expression. Charismatic spirituality asks of a nominal Christianity whether it reflects a new simplicity of expression, revitalised ecumenical appeal and a general renewal of spiritual life and witness. According to Culpepper (1977:159-162), all these features might be characteristic evidences of such spirituality, notwithstanding some of its excesses and unreflectiveness.

#### **5.4 CONCLUSION**

The loss or marginalising of Christian experience is surely to a great extent the result of various historical circumstances, notably Scholasticism, the Enlightenment and a more recent 'modernistic', scientific worldview.<sup>27</sup> A further aggravation has been, perhaps inevitably, the severance of the initial apostolic experience from the study of the extant material bearing testimony thereto. There has consequently been a unilateral and 'peripheral' loss of the experiential dimension in theological faculties.

Postmodernism, on the other hand, has helpfully undermined experiential captivity to prescriptive institutions and rationalities of one kind or another, and given to contextual and personal experience a self-subsistent validity of its own. Contemporary Christian spirituality, no doubt itself a child of its (postmodernistic) times, reclaims and legitimates a lost dimension intrinsic to theology and ministry. Such dimension has been referred to, perhaps somewhat loosely in this chapter, as 'experience'. The difficulty and etymological 'drift' of the word 'experience' however, has been acknowledged. Part of the universal proliferation of books, retreats and seminars on spirituality bear testimony to some such loss of (experiential) reciprocity to what has been studied in the theological faculties. Contemporary Christian spirituality, whether as lived experience or academic discipline, has plunged into the yawning gap left by this deficiency.

Whatever synonym one might use for 'experience', it must bear the qualifying characteristics that the word tries to capture, namely that which is non-rational, non-discursive and epistemologically

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<sup>27</sup> One notes, for instance, that 'the High Middle Ages in the west were characterized by growing divisions within theology and the gradual separation of spirituality from theology ... It was, at heart, a division between the affective side of faith (or participation) and conceptual knowledge' (Sheldrake 1998:43).

unique to its own *modus operandi*. Various Christian traditions might be more comfortable with words as diverse as ‘filled with the Spirit’, assurance, mystical, contemplative, consciousness, awareness, participation and immediacy. While for some ‘experience’ might be routinely *affective* in their traditional understanding, this is not necessarily presupposed in my use of the word. Indeed, I contend that Christian spirituality in its mystical expression offers a fascinating critique of (ministerial) ‘experience’ as commonly understood. The relation of the experiential to mysticism is critical, and currently subject to some misunderstanding.

Contemporary spirituality draws attention and credence to the *primacy* of experience. In its manifestation, as lived experience or academic enterprise, it thus reclaims for ministry a dimension that is fundamental and indispensable to ministerial life and vocation. Might we say that it gives back to ministry the authenticity of that encounter and immediacy that *even predates* the Church and the Scriptures? It recovers *self-validation* of the faith for ministry, claiming that such first-hand mystical experience or discovery is the only Christian spirituality that can survive the future.

‘Experience’ might be understood in a different way, however, as the ‘lived experience’ of everyday life in the ministry. Such *wider* understanding of experience is a particular feature of contemporary Christian spirituality. Spirituality cannot be understood primarily in an esoteric or subjective sense anymore. The second section of the chapter, then, has shown how contemporary spirituality, perhaps in its more normative, Christian manifestation, is able to evaluate ministry in terms of *lived life*, attitudes, actions, and self-understanding in ministry. Here the word ‘experience’ is obviously being used in a more expansive way, though not unrelated to the aforementioned fundamental, determinative experience of the divine. Contemporary Christian spirituality transforms the nebulous, pejorative concept of ‘spirituality’ and shows how it is determinative for ‘lived life’ in the ministry. Spirituality is thus shown as an embodied way of life for ministry, and not simply an esoteric impetus.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **CONTEMPLATIVE MINISTRY**

#### **ALTERNATIVE TO CONTEMPORARY MINISTERIAL ANOMALIES**

##### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

The present chapter maintains that part of the contribution of contemporary spirituality is the way it makes possible a different style and mood for ministry - one best designated as *contemplative*. It is a viable and authentic alternative to less credible, arguably insidious trends in contemporary ministerial practice. Some definition of 'contemplation' is attempted, showing how a narrower understanding of 'contemplation' as a form of prayer may not do the word full justice. Might not *all* ministry become in some way contemplative? Contemplation may be more widely appropriated than the private prayer experience, traditionally enjoyed by a select or elite few.

I assume that ministry depends on its own contemporary intelligibility and relevance for part of its claim to authenticity. I thus show how a contemplative ministry has a peculiar, timely pertinence to contemporary circumstance, ministerial crisis and postmodern possibility. (The latter argument is indeed partially borne out by popular contemporary gravitation towards mysticism in general and towards contemplative forms of ministry in particular.)

Some effort is made to show how contemplative ministry might take form in practice. Thus one addresses the subject of 'ministry in contemplative *mood*'. The word *mood* is suggestive. To be over-explicit about ministerial forms, it is felt, might undo the very critique that contemplation brings to pre-determined concepts of ministerial roles, or to how ministry is performed. Here, everything is presented against the almost adversarial background of different forms of ministry that are, in my opinion, often wanting in credibility.

##### **6.2 THE EMERGENCE OF CONTEMPLATIVE MINISTRY**

###### **6.2.1 Derivative of Contemporary Spirituality**

Contemplative ministry is in large part derived from contemporary Christian spirituality. The latter brings to Christian ministry a revival and retrieval of contemplative prayer and perspective. To say so is not to claim that contemporary Christian spirituality is *itself* the original source of the contemplative life. It is rather the case that the contemplative tradition is being *re-presented* through the medium of Christian spirituality, and organised in an intelligible way for the current world context and self-understanding. Through the contributions of lived Christian experience

and organised academic spirituality, the contemplative tradition has been made accessible to Christian ministry, and to the interested Christian in general.

While the contemplative tradition is a feature of so much contemporary thought and practice in *Christian* spirituality, it is also a feature of spirituality *in general*. Contemplation is thus not the sole property of the Christian faith. It is, however, Christian spirituality, as contemporarily defined, that has a licence to draw on a wide range of disciplines and inter-religious insights. It is herein able to be particularly insightful for the development of the contemplative dimension within Christian ministry. The anthropological nature of contemporary spirituality reminds Christians that their heritage is not the only one that lays claim to contemplative tradition. Schneiders' (1989) appeal for an anthropological departure point for spirituality as academic discipline makes a definitive contribution in this regard. By way of exposure to philosophical insight and inter-religious dialogue, Christian spirituality is now able to appreciate the advantage of anthropological points of departure. It has drawn on perspectives that extend beyond the conspicuously Christian, albeit offering an enhancement and further depth to the Christian tradition. Recent ecumenical Christian thinkers have looked beyond their own traditions without surrendering them. 'One thinks immediately of Thomas Merton's threshold discoveries in relation to Buddhism in his late *Asian Journals ...*' (Saliers 1989:526). Other mystical and contemplative inter-religious explorations have been observed with avid interest (ibid:526). Contemporary Christian spirituality has become a crucible, harbinger and interpreter for a new appreciation of the contemplative life. Included in its normative commitment to *Christian* spirituality, it is also increasingly mindful of philosophical and psychological insights.<sup>1</sup> Certainly contemporary Christian spirituality, as academic discipline or lived experience, has played a decisive role in ministry's renewed interest in the contemplative life. Yet contemporary Christian spirituality has itself been part of a still wider contemplative phenomenon.

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<sup>1</sup> Kenny (1992:86-102) is economically helpful in giving some insight into Aristotle's views on contemplation and service of God, and therein showing how Christian spirituality owes much to Aristotle. Some psychologists are also happy to speak of a 'contemplative psychology', yet having the propriety to acknowledge contemplation's primitive roots (De Wit 1991). Contemporary Christian spirituality, however, has needed no encouragement to explore the philosophical and theological history of contemplation, whether in Aristotle, Pseudo-Dionysius, Meister Eckhart or Thomas Merton. Psychological contributions are also within its compass, where spirituality's interest in 'alpha brainwaves' and 'heightened states of consciousness' are not uncommon.

### 6.2.2 A Definition of Contemplation

To arrive at an understanding of what contemplative *ministry* might mean requires a prior definition of ‘contemplation’ itself. Such definition, however, is in some ways inappropriate, as contemplative prayer is precisely a ‘way of praying’ that breaks with formulated expectations and easy definitions. Contemplation is in reality an affective knowledge, hidden away in the depths of the heart. It ‘has a loathing for external manifestation’ (Philippe 1981:35). Further, it is characterised by a refusal of ‘simplistic theological certainties offered by many others in the church, preferring instead to live with paradox, mystery, and unknowing. It has emphasized a living encounter with the Holy One when others have stressed beliefs, moral obedience and external forms’ (Taylor 2002:110). Contemplative prayer does not adopt a routinely discursive style, is not mentally structured or dominated, and stands outside the more regulatory styles of asceticism, meditation, or of a traditional prayer book. The contemplative dimension has even been seen as inaccessible to the ‘ordinary’ Christian, whose domain has supposedly been restricted to the more rudimentary stage of asceticism and meditation. Contemporary Christian spirituality, as Schneiders (1989:686) appreciates, bears the mark of Vatican II’s stress on the *universal* call to holiness, a standpoint that surely spearheaded the convergence of ascetical and mystical theology, or ‘spiritual theology’, into ‘spirituality’ as academic discipline. It is now almost a commonplace observation that contemplative prayer is the heritage of many Christians if not in fact all. A journey to contemplative prayer, according to contemporary observations by Christian spirituality, might even seem a natural progression for the Christian. So a common experience is described of how it ‘becomes progressively more difficult ... to use many of the traditional methods of “saying prayers”’, [and] ‘*many people* [italics mine] mistake the change for a total collapse of their prayer life. In fact, what is happening is that the attention to God is moving from the mind to the will. The best way to pray at this time is by way of short one-word prayers ... ’ (Leech 1980:46).

‘Contemplation is *receptivity and availability in love* [italics mine] to whatever life has to offer’ (Jones 1985:183). It is to look at someone else with love, and to experience them looking at us in the same way (Hinson 1993:119-120). One might argue that it is distinguished from the ascetical prayer life in that its basic disposition is less facilitative of the *acquisition* of grace than the *infusion* thereof. There is a shift from *effort* and ascetical discipline to a stance that evidences *receptivity*, openness and an intentional passivity, where the operations and distractions of the mind are laid aside. In contemplative prayer, ‘purity of intention is the primary focus of the

practice. It is a matter of love ... The Spirit now has taken over our activity and prays in us' (Keating 1995:124).

### **6.2.3 A Contemplative Ministry**

It might sound premature or presumptuous to speak of a 'contemplative *ministry*'. Has the particular mood and attributes of contemplative prayer given form, content and revised values to (a perhaps rediscovered) Christian *ministry*? An increasing number of writers draw on the insights and disposition of the contemplative lifestyle in order to bring depth, perspective and authenticity back to ministerial life and practice (Leech 1986; Peterson 1989; Groff 2000; Taylor 2002). Those that do not make specific mention of ministry are nevertheless clear that nearly every Christian might have access to the contemplative life (Keating 1991; Louth 1991; Shannon 1992; Simpson 1997). Thus 'contemplative prayer is the *ordinary outcome* [italics mine] of a life of fidelity to basic Christian imperatives; it operates even when the person is unaware of the gift received ... There is nothing exclusive about it ... ' (Casey 1995:170). A great catalyst, therefore, in translating the contemplative dimension into ministry is the accessibility that the 'ordinary' Christian, or congregant in this case, now has to the experience of contemplation. It is not the exclusive property of a mystical elite. Consequently, the 'ordinary' minister now finds that they, too, might harness the resources of the contemplative dimension, enjoying the accommodative sanction of a new dispensation - one in no small part indebted to the Second Vatican Council. Such indiscriminating accessibility has been of undoubted benefit to ministers, opening the Christian mystical world and tradition to those already beginning to intuit its reality through personal ministerial experience.

Widening the door further to contemplative accessibility for ministers is contemporary spirituality's re-explication of the nature of contemplation, and that which led to its marginalisation or seeming extinction. Simpson (1997:106-114), I contend, exemplifies something of contemporary spirituality's elucidation. Simply and summarily, he shows the classic distinction between *infused* and *acquired* contemplation. In short, the idea of *infused* or passively received contemplative prayer (or the prayer of 'stillness') ultimately had the effect of precipitating a caste system among believers. Infused 'contemplative prayer became the bailiwick of specialists, something typically found among monks and nuns but rarely among the general population. The result was a net loss in the numbers of people having (or admitting to) contemplative experiences' (ibid:112). Protestant reformers aggravated the loss of contemplative prayer to Christians by dismantling convents and monasteries. Roman Catholics closed ranks for

fear of fresh outbursts of private experience and duly supervised their contemplatives closely (ibid:112). A different contemporary climate and mood is able, however, to grasp how historical contemplation came to be sidelined, and is now beginning to reclaim the contemplative tradition. Contemporary Christian experience also resonates with, and recognises, a contemplative experience that is 'given' from outside and identifiable therefore with the historical 'infused' experience. Contemporary ministers have found their experiences thus identified and endorsed.<sup>2</sup>

Particularly facilitative of an indiscriminating access to a contemplative mood for ministry is the contemporary appreciation of the *acquired* notion of contemplative prayer. Those who intentionally dispose themselves to it, seeking to acquire the 'prayer of stillness', as contemplation is sometimes called, may well come to experience it. Such is not to negate the essential 'givenness' of contemplation, as incongruous as this may sound. Keating (1991, 1992), however, introduces the now-popular concept of 'centering prayer' as a precursor to contemplative prayer, and in some senses seemingly indistinguishable from it. His method is suggestive of an 'acquired approach'. Indeed, do contemporary books on contemplative prayer display the over-all *raison d' être* that contemplation is now a universal possibility, not least of all for ministers? Such is the assumption behind a proliferation of books on contemplation. It furthermore surely accounts for the wide ministerial and lay identification with the substance of Merton's (1961,1975) works, still highly influential, resonant and compelling. Assisting the interest in an *acquired* contemplative prayer has been the revisiting of the 'acquired tradition' as exemplified in Eastern Orthodoxy. 'One of the most significant events in the intellectual life of the modern Western world has been without doubt the discovery of the whole contemplative tradition of the orthodox church that goes by the name of hesychasm' (Sherrard 1989:417). Indeed, writers of contemporary Christian spirituality show a new interest in *hesychasm*, (a Greek word for 'stillness' or 'fixedness') and often refer to the evergreen popularity of its small eighteenth century introduction, *The Way of a Pilgrim* (Franch 1972).

Some works focus exclusively and helpfully on contemplative benefits to ministry. Peterson (1989) utilises contemplative insights to sharpen and correct contemporary perceptions of Christian ministry. His call for a ministerial vocation of spiritual direction, discernment and

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<sup>2</sup> 'Quite frequently, I have contemplative experiences when I am off alone in the mountains ... Underlying the natural beauty, I sensed the profound stillness of God's sustaining presence. I prayed by enjoying the stillness, because many words would ruin something that was, in itself, lovely and complete. It was best to let it be and to let myself be caught up in it ... Some people are fortunate enough to find themselves from time to time caught up in a lovely quiet deeper than words and mental images no matter where they are' (Simpson 1997:107-108).

discriminating focus all speak of contemplative influence.<sup>3</sup> Adding to Peterson's (1989:17-52) undoubted popularity for ministers is his creative ability in translating the mood and disposition of contemplative prayer into practical insights for Christian ministry. The contemplative pastor will be one who understands 'busyness' and its connotations as antithetical to ordained Christian ministry. It is destructive of authentic ministry because it is 'inwardly rushed, distracted, or dispersed' (ibid:20). 'The adjective *busy* set as a modifier to *pastor* should sound to our ears like *adulterous* to characterize a wife or *embezzling* to describe a banker. It is an outrageous scandal, a blasphemous affront' (ibid:17). I am 'busy' because of vanity or laziness. The contemplative pastor, however, has a spirit conducive to the essentially contemplative nature and work of the minister, which has to do with praying, preaching and listening. These functions are, for Peterson (ibid:21), inimical to 'busyness' of any sort. On the contrary, authentic ministry will require a kind of contemplative leisure - waiting, listening, observing - and creativity. This disposition is far more easily named than achieved in ministry presently construed. Some might envisage it as unattainable. Nevertheless the point needs to be well taken and one must begin somewhere.

Peterson's work reflects insight into the attributes of contemplative prayer. He writes with a timeliness and insight for those Christian ministers who have lost touch with their contemplative heritage, or more likely never knew they had one. These are ministers dancing to the piped music of the demands and obsessions of contemporary (Western?) culture - a 'music' that all too often infiltrates the Church. Peterson's words break with freshness on primarily Protestant ears, which will still be for the most part ignorant of a Catholic heritage that Peterson scarcely mentions. But that the latter *is* thus influenced can scarcely be denied. His translation of the contemplative mood into contemporary ministry may be unparalleled. But what Peterson fails to do in not disclosing the heritage itself, is being taken up by contemporary spirituality in its reflective and guided disclosure of contemplative history. Herein ministry can find an anchor, secure greater authenticity, and exercise insightful critique of secularly induced ministerial anomalies.

While 'contemplative prayer' and 'contemplative ministry' might not be synonymous, the spirit, mood and attributes of contemplative prayer as presented in contemporary spirituality are realising a transformation of ministry as generally practised. Prayer may be the heart and

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<sup>3</sup> A Presbyterian, Eugene Peterson (1987, 1989, 1992b), evidences the receptivity and intentional vigilance of the contemplative. His discerning eye and a concern at North American ministerial corruptions have spoken a timely word to (Protestant?) ministers, almost of prophetic proportions. Still, one has to look hard in his works to find much reference to those who are surely his historical, contemplative, and primarily Catholic benefactors. In this regard, he may be charged, in my view, with a certain Protestant chariness.

substance of contemplation, but *something more than a discursive or circumscribed understanding of prayer-practice is implied by 'contemplation'*, not least in the context of ministry. In essence, contemplation ultimately refers to an ontological disposition or possibility that is permeative of every part of life. In *this* sense it offers to ministry an alternative to various ministerial distortions, perversions and reductionist anomalies. In regard hereto it needs to be admitted that ministry has benefited from a more malleable understanding of the meaning of 'contemplation'. 'Contemplation' has been crafted, or has evolved, in such a way that it naturally becomes conducive to transforming all of ministry. Indeed, a popular reference dictionary on spirituality observes that 'a more flexible and less doctrinaire understanding of contemplation than that which characterizes traditional ascetic theology is probably more congenial to our time' (Ward 1983:95). Clearly, the dictionary identifies the development of a more general or accommodative significance to the word.

### **6.3 TIMELY PERTINENCE OF CONTEMPLATIVE MINISTRY**

#### **6.3.1 Preamble: Pertinence and Authenticity**

Contemporary Christian spirituality's invaluable contribution to authentic ministry may be partly accounted for by its essential and resourceful pertinence to contemporary needs and questions. To elaborate, such pertinence, in my view, satisfies two major criteria for authenticity: First, contemporary spirituality's faithfulness to, and accurate utilisation of, its own contemplative heritage; and second, spirituality's intelligible synchronicity with, and appeal to, contemporary worldviews and problems. But can one really argue that it is also the second phenomenon of synchronicity and pertinence that secures authenticity for ministry? One would surely need to say so. Authenticity comprises faithfulness to Christian tradition, but also the discovery of that contemporary truth that finds synchronicity with the tradition itself. Such is the focus and contention here.

Contemporary spirituality, and in particular as expressive of 'contemplation' and 'contemplative lifestyle', answers a contemporary cry of need. For one, it is a cry of need from frustrated and unfulfilled ministers, not least those on the point of resigning, either formally, or psychologically, while staying 'on the job'. They are the ministers who may well find in contemplative ministry an accommodation of their original vocational prompting - one that does justice to the holistic nature of Christian ministry.

On the other hand, the contemporary climate of postmodernism and its disenchantment with the absolutes of the modern era and the failed modernistic prospect of human betterment and progression, finds itself in a global climate of profound vulnerability and relativising of the 'scientific world-view'. Contemplative ministry speaks intelligibly to minister, congregant and the discerning unchurched, or 'secular person' in an age that is amenable to contemplative mystery and disposition. Christian ecumenism has also facilitated a much wider exposure to mysticism in general, and the contemplative disposition in particular. In short it is presupposed here that, whether speaking pertinently to the Christian-initiated or to a wider 'secular' audience, contemplative ministry fulfils a new authenticity and credibility for the Christian faith.

### **6.3.2 Contemporary Ministerial Disenchantment**

The revival of interest in contemplative prayer and lifestyle, as expressive of contemporary Christian spirituality, is increasingly evident in astute and reflective Christian ministry. Partly facilitative thereof is disenchantment with ministry as practiced towards the end of the twentieth century and still perpetuated in the new millennium. Business management techniques and insights, a fascination with numerical Church growth and conspicuous success, together with a pervasive psychological emphasis, have not been without merit. Yet they have often had the effect of making the Christian ministry a stranger to its own heritage. With such assimilation has inevitably come an over-identification with the values, whims and faddism of contemporary pre-occupations, themselves needing to be challenged by the Christian faith. Certainly the resources offering contemporary business panaceas and 'mega-church' prescriptions have been in ready supply for some time.<sup>4</sup>

Admittedly not all disenchantment leads to the contemplative option for ministry. The dissatisfaction expressed with ministerial anomalies as recently conceived, however, makes contemplative ministry an enticingly antidotal and traditionally sound alternative. It is small surprise that Christian practitioners and writers are showing an interest. Oden (1983:7) declares

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<sup>4</sup> One suspects that many popular works have assumed similar values and 'success driven' methods for the Church as have proved workable in political canvassing, big business, and other major institutions. Schaller (1972), McGavran & Hunter (1980), and Warren's (1995) much read, *The Purpose Driven Church*, I contend, all bear the stamp of the numerical growth anxieties and obsessions of contemporary bureaucracy and politics. Covey's (1989) popular work, while meritorious in many respects, still appeals to the 'how-to' contemporary compulsion regarding mastery, control and 'effectiveness'. Evangelising by some evangelicals suggests a similar interest in numbers and 'head-hunting'. Mittelberg's (2000) work, for instance, arguably needs to be more perceptive and sophisticated for the present century and its human diversity and needs. In short, such works, as enumerated above, have left insightful spiritual practitioners with a deep dissatisfaction and a sense that the Church has substituted the panaceas and neuroses of the twenty-first century for its own contemplative tradition.

disenchantment. He anticipates criticism of his preference for premodern sources in his standard work on Christian ministry. He explains, though, that he wishes to be radical in the sense of ‘root-oriented’, ‘for I am trying to *catch up* [italics mine] with the fourth century’ (ibid:7). ‘After having been enamored as a theologian with a long parade of novelties that promised the moon and delivered green cheese, I now avoid the pretences of creativity. So I have deliberately sought out earlier pastoral writers, especially when they speak more sensibly than modern ones’ (ibid:7).

Taylor (2002:133-134), an Anglican rector, is perhaps not as strong in his dissatisfaction. Yet he cautions that ‘our contemporary way of speaking about faith is just as influenced by cultural assumptions and values’. There is contemporary ‘emphasis upon psychological insight, emotional support and affirmation, community, social justice, prosperity, and positive thinking, healthy human relationships, personal fulfillment, cultural diversity, and so on’ (ibid:133-134). Many cardinal values, though, are conspicuous by their absence. There is a depletion in our day of ‘such values as the transcendent power and mystery of the divine, a holy fear of God, confession of sin, self-forgetfulness, humility, sacrifice, and obedience to the church’s traditional disciplines. In every period of history, religious writers wear cultural blinders’ (ibid: 133-134). Indeed, the missing values outlined here are often, most distinctively, the fruit of a contemplative life and ministry.

Writers such as Taylor (2002) and Peterson (1989) have tried to recover a contemplative motif and mood for ministry. Peterson’s (1980, 1987, 1989,1992) works have explicitly challenged careerism in ministry, and a defection to the interests of ecclesiastical consumerism and other ministerial anomalies. He calls for a return to the art of spiritual direction. His definitive work in this regard is significantly titled *The Contemplative Pastor* (1987). While not leaving their jobs, he sees (American) pastors as nevertheless abandoning authentic ministry and vocation. Peterson (1987) is not shy in his admonition of, and disenchantment with, their alleged defection. ‘They are not leaving their churches and getting other jobs ... But they are abandoning their posts, their *calling*. They have gone whoring after other gods. What they do with their time under the guise of pastoral ministry hasn’t the remotest connection with what the Church’s pastors have done for most of twenty centuries’ (1987:1). Peterson (ibid:3) urges pastors to get back to the contemplative priorities of praying, reading Scripture, and giving spiritual direction. But ‘the pastors of America have metamorphosed into a company of shopkeepers, and the shops they keep are Churches. They are preoccupied with shopkeeper’s concerns - how to keep the customers happy, how to lure customers away from competitors down the street, how to package the goods

so that the customers will lay out more money' (ibid:2). In the face of such anomalies he sees a 'contemplative ministry' recapturing ministerial and vocational authenticity. It will be a ministry where 'the pastor's responsibility is to keep the community attentive to God. It is this responsibility that is being abandoned in spades' (ibid:3).

Messer (1989:119) reveals disenchantment with the 'sterile' and 'reductionist' model of the minister as 'professional'. Messer shows a partiality to a mystical and contemplative dimension, advocating it as inherently constitutive of ministry. 'The reductionist tendency ... is to portray ministry as little more than the sum total of one's roles, function, knowledge, or skills' (ibid:119). 'The Christian minister is a spiritual person ... The mystery of God's ministry is that an individual can be a channel for God's grace in this world' (Messer 1989:119). Ministry is not merely, if ever, a matter of "paying the rent" - that is, appropriately discharging the congregation's expectations and then doing what one pleases' (ibid:119).

Such, then, are some contemporary voices on the deficiencies of ministry, so-called. Can one say that disillusionment with standard concepts and perceptions of ministry are synchronous with the advent of latter twentieth century, and twenty first century Christian spirituality? The question, I think, need not be too tentative. Old images and identities of the minister as 'professional', 'chief executive officer', or an all-purpose philanthropic functionary are now being challenged, and rejected outright. That they *are* being challenged is not as noteworthy as the growing evidence that the challengers already have *something to take its place*. The substitute is a *prayerful* ministry of heightened awareness, discernment and observation that might be fittingly called 'contemplative'.

### **6.3.3 Postmodern Pertinence**

The postmodern climate and world-view cannot be imagined to have left the Church untouched. Are congregants, even where unconsciously, using the intellectual persuasions and convictions of postmodernistic thinking to look for intelligibility in their Christian faith? As people of their time it can scarcely be doubted. In this regard it must be said that contemporary Christian spirituality, and perhaps particularly its *contemplative* expression, enjoys an advantageous resonance to postmodernistic thought. A postmodernistic philosophy thus gives ministry an opportunity for greater authenticity through Christian ministry's utilisation of, specifically, the Christian contemplative dimension. Such an observation is more than plausible and can evoke extensive

discussion and substantiation as to stand as a subject on its own. I shall not pursue that in length here. Nevertheless, some pointers are in order.

Certainly, the advantageous synchronicity of postmodern propensities and the re-emerging contemplative tradition have been frequently noted. One example is the postmodern intellectual realisation of 'decentering', referring to 'an awareness that the self is not a distinguishable reality which interprets and validates all other realities' (Matthews 2000:91). Such an insight is conducive to the development of a peculiarly contemplative climate. For example, it is noted that 'the acceptance of postmodernism might well be able to set us free to see more clearly the true nature of the mysticism of the past' (ibid:91). It is a mysticism that seems itself to have relied upon the 'decentering' of the self so that God might be available specifically to *faith*. Thus, 'a contemporary philosophical understanding which relies upon a similar decentering should provide the opportunity for that earlier mysticism to take on its true colours and become available to contemporary men and women in a way which it has not before' (ibid:91). An opportunity that should not be missed is herein offered to Christian ministry. Contemplative ministry does not recognise the old, modernistic, subject-object relationship of creature and creator. Similarly, in postmodernism, there is the recognition and intelligibility of an all-pervasive spiritual energy. Society is seen as the human expansion of nature's spirituality (Holland 1988:53). Thus, in the postmodern understanding, it becomes 'important to remind ourselves over and over again that we do not meet the Spirit simply as created meeting Creator. Rather - and here is the marvel - we are cocreators of our bodies, of nature, and of society' (Holland 1988:56). In some way, such decentering helpfully deconstructs the assumptions of an unbiblical 'secularization hypothesis'. The idolatry that objectifies 'God' does not find sympathies with a contemplative ministry; neither does it fit the thought forms of postmodernism. In postmodernism *and* Christian contemplation, community, interaction and spiritual pervasiveness are substituted for individualism, centralisation and dichotomisation (Griffin 1988:9). For both contemplative ministry and postmodernism the community or relational dimension has become the basic form of organisation (ibid:50).

Consonant with the Christian contemplative tradition then, is postmodernism's preference for a God of mystery - one who needs to be (re) discovered rather than replicated and petrified. 'Postmodernism ... seriously questions the glorification of the measurable and replicable ... It questions the premise that reality can be committed to ideational formulation ... ' (Kourie 1996:3). Typically for postmodernism, 'views of reality are not "given" but constructed' (and)

‘there is suspicion of all universal and normative claims, even and especially about God’ (Downey 1994:95). The climate of postmodernism seems to call for ‘the cultivation of deep reserves of hope in *a hidden God of unfathomable mystery* [italics mine]...’ (ibid:92). Postmodern spirituality ‘is willing to surrender to the unfathomable gracious mystery in the darkness that is in itself a disclosure’ (ibid:99). The opportunity is thus created for ministry to find appeal and pertinence in contemporary thinking while enjoying and securing authenticity through its roots in the Christian contemplative tradition. Such opportunity, of course, will not mean an uncritical assimilation of all postmodern spirituality. It will, however, mean a utilisation of the peculiar advantage afforded to contemplative ministry through the tenor of contemporary societal thinking. Particularly conducive then to ministerial integrity is the way that postmodernism’s contemplative nature and philosophic preferences tap into the spirit of a contemplative ministry. Postmodernism is itself a spirituality and, perhaps debatably, a contemplative one. But it prepares the way for contemplative ministry to address the peculiar needs and thought forms of the times. Herein it offers ministry the opportunity to re-acquaint itself with its own considerable and characteristic contemplative history.

More explicitly, contemplative Christian spirituality must surely be, by nature, in sympathy with postmodernism’s preference for a pantheistic stance, ‘according to which the world is present in deity and deity is present in the world’ (Griffin 1988:17). The Christian contemplative has outgrown a *deus ex machina* view of God, related to supernaturalism or spasmodic and episodic divine interventions. Such views are more often than not built on dualistic presuppositions, or the outlawing of all that is ‘material’ as somehow debased. Together with postmodernism it is surely the intuition of contemplative lifestyle and ministry that objectified and modernistic concepts of God will not suffice in the contemporary world. With an ‘objectified’ God comes the presupposition that God is quite easily known, usually as a straightforward projection of our own humanity. But contemplative ministry can say, with much postmodern spirituality, that meaning and personal regeneration come through *discovery* and ontological *relationship* rather than pre-packaged ‘take-it-or-leave-it’ dogmas. Here lies the weakness of modernity, for ‘modernity as a cultural configuration cannot affirm that meaning is *discovered* [italics mine] ...’ (Moore 1988: viii). Conversely, postmodernism has a greater affinity with ‘discovery’, receptivity, and the non-coercive appreciation of myth, ritual and religious symbolism.<sup>5</sup> In such non-authoritarian, non-

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<sup>5</sup> Moore (1988: viii-ix) sees postmodernism as amenable to these more non-discursive elements of the Christian faith. On the other hand, ‘culturally modern approaches are usually reductionistic and do not emphasize the value of symbol, myth, and ritual for contemporary life’.

coerciveness, therefore, it holds much more in common with a contemplative stance. Postmodernism's non-rationalistic, non-discursive character and the intuitive and receptive tenor of Christian contemplation thus enjoy a marked kinship.

Related hereto is postmodern spirituality's relinquishment of the desire to possess, master and control. These grasping features are more recognisably the properties of modernism. Postmodernist spirituality, however, takes on the form and spirit of 'a joy in communion and a desire for letting-be' (Griffin 1988:15). Such features are transparently true to the spirit of Christian contemplation, responding as it does to the 'letting be' or 'passive' disposition of the one seeking union.<sup>6</sup> For example, McDargh (1991:87) speaks of the capacity for contemplation as 'the ability to respond to the world in its "isness" without a need to distort it for defensive purposes'. As opposed to controlling one's life through some form of possessiveness or hoarding, contemplation is more akin to finding freedom in the playful relinquishment of open communion. One 'becomes a contemplative in the acceptance of "isness", as opposed to a hoarder' (ibid. 87). 'Contemplative ministry', then, utilises an arguable *convergence* of postmodern and Christian spirituality to critique the not infrequent ministerial desire to control and manipulate. Such contemplative ministry fosters a spirit of attentiveness and 'letting-be'. It is at once authentic for ministry and foreign to some contemporary ministerial anomalies.

A serious flaw of postmodernism for an authentic contemplative ministry could be its seeming annexation of a historically dislocated intellectual and spiritual pragmatism - albeit a contemporary one. Postmodernism arguably manifests a loss of history to a universal relativisation. More succinctly, one must ask whether postmodern spirituality displaces the treasures and hard-won insights of the past with that which is only *contemporary* and *novel*. Christian contemplative spirituality, of course, cannot surrender its anchor in theological history as a basic norm, notwithstanding its need to be a self-respecting discipline, independent of an over-prescriptive dogmatic theology and history. The evidence of such dislocation in postmodernism, however, is more apparent than real. More accurately, such description fits the nature of 'modern' thought. For, 'postmodern spirituality recovers the concern and respect for the *past* [italics mine] ... The present moment of experience is seen to enfold within itself, in some

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<sup>6</sup> A synonym for 'letting-be' is Fiand's (1987) word, 'releasement.' 'Releasement' constitutes a receptive-responsive openness for ministry, without the need to control or manipulate. 'Unless we thoughtfully and reverently hold ourselves within the diversity of everything that is, *as it is*, our actions will unquestionably succumb to the Will to Power and, in one way or other, we will do violence both to ourselves and to others' (Fiand 1987: 88). We need to make 'the courageous choice to wait and to let-be' (ibid: 88).

respect and to some degree, the entire past' (Griffin 1988:15). Postmodernism recognises that the past has been compressed into the crucible of the present. While such recognition seemingly has more to do with postmodernism's acknowledgement of humanity's cosmic and biological contingency, it does not preclude the picture of humanity as the fruit of its religious and mythological historical formation. In fact, postmodernism's vision could well realise a new conservatism, 'because it instills a new respect for ways of being and relating that have worked in the past' (making us) 'wary of assuming that we can adopt radically new forms of being human without suffering severe, perhaps terminal, psychic distress' (ibid: 16).

Griffin (1988:14-18), to my mind, offers further clues as to how postmodern spirituality might facilitate receptivity to a contemplative style of Christian ministry. For example, postmodernism understands the *future* as in some way constitutive of the present. For Christian contemplation, one must say, there is also a future eschatological awareness that impacts upon the present and even contributes to Christian identity. Indeed, for both postmodernism and a contemplative ministry there is an awareness of *timelessness*, where humanity is shown to be part of a much wider whole. It is a timelessness characteristic of a mystic-contemplative tradition, which, although sensitive to the earth, enjoys a certain transcendence over space and time while nevertheless remaining subject to it. There remains a danger, of course, for an uncritical Christian contemplative ministry, particularly when it comes to the possibility of a postmodern infatuation with *novelty*. There is surely, however, enough responsible and accountable thinking to informed postmodernism that seems to rule out a whimsical and arbitrary use of novelty. At the same time, 'postmodern spirituality regards some forms of possible novelty as calls forward from the divine reality, so that a pure conservatism would be a rejection of divine promptings. A central challenge for postmodern spirituality is to learn better to differentiate creative from destructive novelty' (Griffin 1988:16). Such openness to 'novelty' might be a secular counterpart to securing the unknowability of God, and allowing what is new about God to come to awareness and discovery. Naturally such 'novelty' must sit uncomfortably with spiritual theology, technically understood. Yet the over-prescriptiveness of such spirituality too often strangles the life out of spiritual freedom and discovery. After all, Jesus implies some kind of room for 'novelty' in the Johannine assertion that the Spirit will lead the disciples into all the truth.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> A contemplative ministry will characteristically make more of Jesus' Johannine words regarding the Spirit leading the disciples into all the truth than would a more dogmatic spiritual theology (Jn 16: 13).

In summation, contemplative ministry finds a timely pastoral and theological pertinence through utilising contemporary postmodern thought forms.<sup>8</sup> It sustains authenticity for ministry even though it may share with postmodernism a contesting of some traditional theological images and models of God. Such authenticity is secured through drawing on erstwhile forgotten understandings of God better evidenced in the Christian mystic-contemplative tradition. Contemplative ministry need not be embarrassed by postmodernism's rejection of 'the entrenched beliefs and myopic values of dualistic as well as atheistic nihilism ...' (Kourie 1996:3). Indeed, contemplative ministry must stand unique in its ability to address the shortcomings of a modernistic understanding of 'God'. Contemplative ministry has the resources and openness to challenge comfortable, sometimes patriarchal or hierarchy-inducing images of God. As such it is able to help postmodern congregants reevaluate their 'God concept' in helpful and maturing ways and allow God to *be* God - the God of faith.

#### **6.3.4 A Contemplative Ecumenism**<sup>9</sup>

Contemporary spirituality brings authenticity to ministry through its renascent contemplative dimension. Yet there is timely pertinence to a Christian spirituality that enjoys synchronicity with a Protestant readiness for the 'contemplative way'. It is such readiness that secures a greater authenticity for ministry precisely within the Protestant tradition.<sup>10</sup> Protestantism has all but exhausted its own resources in securing a spiritual revival within its own self-understanding. For instance, Wakefield (1986:532) maintains that all Protestantism's scholarship and Church leadership 'has not resulted in a revival of classic Protestant spirituality commensurate with the renewed interest in mysticism instanced in the discovery of Julian of Norwich'. While 'books interpreting and applying Catholic mystical theology have poured from the presses',

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<sup>8</sup> Still, an *unqualified* contemplative affirmation of postmodernism is not recommended. The spiritual denudation of contemporary society cannot be attributed *solely* to the ills of modernity, but also to 'deconstructive postmodern thought, *both of which* [italics mine] rely on socially produced discourse comprising self-referential concepts' [where] 'there is no ground of meaning outside our language inventions' (Kourie 1998:438). Postmodernism can thus be deleterious to a Christian contemplative ministry when utilised in an uncritical way.

<sup>9</sup> 'Contemplative ecumenism' is not advocated as a formal coinage. Further, that such an established or formal designation prevails, or is even desirable, is not necessarily defended here. Contemporary spirituality, however, gives the non-Catholic Christian family a new access to the 'once-forbidden-fruits' of mysticism and the contemplative life. It is, in such sense, that one might speak informally of contemplative ecumenism.

<sup>10</sup> As a Methodist minister I particularly value a seeming providential synchronicity, which finds 'Protestant ministry' ripe for the formerly marginalised mystical tradition. Has Protestantism run into a spiritual *cul de sac* where its only resource for renewal lies outside its parochial boundaries? It is hard to see how Protestantism might have revitalised its own spirituality from within.

[nevertheless] ‘such teachers of prayer as have had much influence have adopted a fundamentally Catholic approach’ (ibid:532).

Protestantism’s two contrasted schools of spirituality have often devolved into the mutually antagonistic political activist approach on the one side, and a fundamentalist evangelicalism on the other. The one sees the *road to holiness*, when thought of at all, through the world of political action. The latter, for all its worthiness, has left in its wake a dearth and bankruptcy of spiritual energy, and a one-sided utilisation of the Christian tradition. Tvard (1981:561) shows the inadequacies of such a theology, where liberation instead of reconciliation can become the dominant hermeneutic principle, somehow ignoring mystical Christology, not least of all in the Apostle Paul. On the other hand, Evangelicalism has also tended to discredit itself, although perhaps less so for the uncritical and unthinking faithful. It has largely ignored the benefits of historical criticism, using ‘translations of the Bible which in places are paraphrases in the interests of a certain school of theology. The extreme radicals do not disdain to anathematize the extreme manifestation of this as “Christo-Fascism”’ (Wakefield 1986:536). Have these ‘schools’, as entrenched and contrasting theological expressions, had the effect of emasculating authentic ministry in the Protestant context? Has their mutual exclusivity not been a fine example of a dualism that can no longer be countenanced in a new world order? Further, have they not reflected a peculiarly mechanical and external way of thinking, somehow devoid of ontology and holistic incorporation into the God-life? Protestantism’s commitment to the sometimes-overplayed juridical, penal substitutionist theories of the atonement has aggravatingly had a way of externalising and ‘de-ontologising’ the spiritual depth of lived Christian experience. It is in the face of such palpable deficiencies, where ministry is set against itself and becomes essentially schizophrenic, that the contemplative expression of spirituality can now serve to authenticate Christian ministry.<sup>11</sup> Contemplative ministry avoids the anomalous reductionism of a pseudo-evangelicalism, which characteristically offers an individualistic, privatised, disembodied spirituality.<sup>12</sup> It offers not so much a way in which ‘God’ can become ‘*part of one’s life*’ (in

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<sup>11</sup> The untenable activist/spiritual (or ‘evangelical’) divide was surely not entirely unknown in the Catholic world. In apartheid South Africa Christians were seemingly able to distort expressions of the faith to fit in with their own political and cultural proclivities. One need not have been expressly Protestant to do this. There would be enough in the Catholic tradition to at least *hint* at a disembodied, ‘mystical’ faith, however misguidedly construed by devotees.

<sup>12</sup> Kretzschmar (1996: 69-70) is not the first to point out that much South African Christian spirituality has been of the narrow, privatised variety. One might add that it has often found embodiment in the pietistic, ‘conservative evangelical’ mindset, among others. It stresses individualism and is *a-contextual*, managing to disengage itself from the critical social issues of the day. In such an understanding, then, Christian ministry speaks to one’s private life only, and becomes the guardian of private and ‘innocuous’ morals.

evangelicalism's popularised terms) as it does a mystical incorporation into that which is larger than oneself. At the same time, in a non-dualistic way, contemplative ministry can overcome the less apparent, 'activistic' self-righteousness of those who have seen through the self-delusion of much evangelical pietism, yet are similarly blind to their reductionistic stance.

The timely ecumenical pertinence of contemplative ministry is evident in an edited Protestant compilation on 'five views of sanctification' (Alexander 1988). The Lutheran view on sanctification is presented first, as 'the art of getting used to justification' (Forde 1988:13). The article is offered as an invitation to ecumenical dialogue and response. Particularly noteworthy is the inclusion of a *contemplative* contribution and a helpful inter-denominational dialogue between Lutheran, Reformed, Wesleyan, Pentecostal and *Contemplative* traditions. It is indicative of the ecumenical ripeness for engagement with, and accommodation of, contemplative insights and disposition that these onetime-exclusive traditions are able to share differences - yet also common ground. As a Methodist minister I am particularly able to appreciate the contemplative influence of the mystics upon John Wesley. Methodist ministers might be drawn back to Wesley's 'synthesis of the mystical ideal of holiness (loving God with all the heart) with the Reformed doctrine of evangelical grace ... One is justified by faith as the Reformers preached, but one can also experience mystical union with God through the means of grace by faith alone' (Wood 1988:199). Methodist ministry must again feel Wesley's (qualified) appreciation for the contribution of the mystics. Such contribution showed Wesley that Christian life is 'not so much assent to certain beliefs; rather, as for the mystics, it becomes a *participation in the divine* [italics mine]' (Forster 2001:10). But Wesley's qualification, says Forster (ibid:10), understands 'participation as far more active than mere spiritual and mystical introspection'. In answer to Forster, might one not well say that contemporary contemplative understanding is somewhat caricatured when described as 'mere spiritual and mystical introspection'? Clearly, more is implied by contemporary contemplation than that which belongs only to introspection, so called. Such an interpretation may say more about Wesley's fears and projections, and a residual contemporary dualism, than it does about traditional contemplation, whether historical or contemporary. Nevertheless, 'much in Wesley's view of sanctification is in harmony with the contemplative tradition, probably by design' (Hinson 1988:130).<sup>13</sup>

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'Whereas the ministry of Jesus Christ is a perfect example of the *uniting* [italics mine] of mysticism and social involvement, the Church has all too often divided the two' (Kretzschmar 1996:66).

<sup>13</sup> According to Hinson (1988:130), however, the contemplative tradition may well part with Wesley on the latter's espousal of 'perfection in love' as attainable in this life. Yet one wonders whether Wesley's this-worldly 'perfect love' is so different from contemplation's unitive experience, or the Orthodox

Protestantism will need to ring the changes in order to find spiritual depth for authentic ministry. It needs to look to the depth that the contemplative tradition has to offer. It is the contention here, however, that it has already begun to do so. The Protestant family is no longer stranger to the contemplative tradition, and even manifests some commendable insight into its own pathology. As such it is particularly (and happily, I believe) susceptible to the contemplative dimension that comes with contemporary Christian spirituality. The insight that Protestant ‘justification’ is often an anachronism in the present world climate is not lost on some theologians from that tradition. Thus for Pannenberg (1983:29-30) the problem is that Protestant spirituality as it touches on Christian freedom has become couched in the language of a *penitential piety*. It is largely an anachronistic piety appropriate to the Reformation era and psychological self-understanding. ‘In late medieval penitential piety this doctrine effectively expressed Christian freedom from the law of sin and death, as well as from all authority, through acceptance of the divine promise’ (ibid:29). It now creates a kind of self-crucifying split between the extrinsic and intrinsic aspects of the self. The pathology is not new, in Pannenberg’s thinking. It set in when the Reformers took ‘justifying faith’ out of Luther’s alleged vision of it as *mystical participation in Jesus Christ*. The result of penitential piety was to be a spawning of self-aggression and the loss of a genuine self-identity (ibid:29-30). ‘The consequences of this development is that the fundamental idea of the Reformation, the freedom of the believer through participation in Christ, can be rescued only by separating it from penitential piety’ (ibid:29-30). So ‘if there is to be a new manifestation of the spirit of liberation and the joy of being redeemed from an inauthentic life ... a break with the traditional penitential mentality is as inevitable as a quest for new forms of Christian piety and life’ (Pannenberg 1983:29-30). In these observations from a significant Protestant theological mind one sees how Protestantism is trying to find itself, and how it is ripe to further authentic its ministry through an assimilation of the contemplative insights of contemporary ecumenical spirituality.

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understanding of deification, or *theosis*. Wesley would surely have agreed with the Orthodox position, as described by Kourie (1998:450), that Christianity ‘is not mere adherence to dogma ... but much more, namely a direct *union* with the living God, the total transformation of the human person by divine grace and glory. Thus, the sublime hope is held out to *all Christians* [italics mine] that they are called not only to become good, but to become sharers in the divine!’

As a Methodist I am uncomfortable in identifying my Wesleyan tradition solely with ‘Protestantism’, in an unqualified sense. I do not see myself as a champion of Protestantism as such. Such might be the case for a Lutheran or Reformed theologian. But ‘what made Wesley’s writing so contentious, and indeed still today, is that Wesley wrote in a time when his desire to hold together the best of the traditions which had informed him, was rejected by those who claimed that it was a matter of “all or nothing”. If he saw any good in anything Catholic, he was a papist. If he saw any good in anything Puritan, he was trying to revive Puritanism’ (Forster 2001:12). In this regard I would contend that Methodist ministry has a history of ecumenism that makes it more amenable than most ‘purist Protestantism’ to contemplative spirituality.

## **6.4 MINISTRY IN CONTEMPLATIVE MOOD**

### **6.4.1 A Preliminary Explanation**

Having noted the fecundity of much contemporary thought for contemplative ministry it now remains, more pointedly, to garner those contemplative insights that enhance an authentic ministry - or authenticate a ministry that has lost its soul. In short, where does contemplation and ministry meet? The purpose here, however, is not to offer pragmatic-utility suggestions for the pastoral practitioner. Rather, one wishes to show how the contemplative mood offers a new feel and perspective to ministry that inevitably takes shape in *what* is done, and *how*. The agenda of the ministry is not somehow predetermined, then, but generated creatively out of the fundamental contemplative disposition. Such is the strength of the contemplative 'mood'. It recognises that integrity and authenticity in ministry do not inhere primarily in fulfilling certain time-honoured traditional duties, however indispensable to pastoral work. It presumes that spiritual depth, insight, and a sense of spiritual vocation are fundamental. In contrast to some contemporary ministerial models, then, it addresses and feeds ministry in its depths, rescuing it from an unreflective application of ministerial functions.

### **6.4.2 Contemplative Prayer for Ministers**

#### **6.4.2.1 A New Ministerial Instinct for Prayer**

Prayer is surely fundamental to Christian ministry. Peterson (1993:19-20), as author of *The Contemplative Pastor*, sounds the imperative of *prayer* for the pastor - especially for the one who has surrendered to the contemporary idolatry of 'busyness'. Peterson evidences a new instinct for prayer inasmuch as he writes out of a self-evident contemplative discovery and self-awareness. Judging by the popularity of his books he speaks for many ministers when he writes: 'I want to be a person in this community to whom others can come without hesitation, without wondering if it is appropriate, to get direction in prayer and praying. I want to do the original work of being in deepening conversation with God ... I don't want to dispense mimeographed hand-outs that describe God's business; I want to witness out of my own experience'. He articulates the discontent of a pastor who finds himself resisting market-oriented expectations for ministry - but also the genuine discontent that is often the herald of 'progress' in prayer life (Casey 1995:12). Peterson (1993) rightly gives ministerial priority to prayer, and his writing is suggestive of a

different approach to prayer. On the other hand, as author of *The Contemplative Pastor*, he has little, if anything, to say about the distinctiveness and practice of *contemplative* prayer as such.<sup>14</sup>

The most ingenuous and obvious engagement of contemplation and ministry is in the area of the minister's own prayer life. For contemplative ministerial initiates, previously unschooled in the contemplative prayer tradition, such 'contemplative prayer' has not simply substituted for traditional discursive prayer, say in some kind of entitative way. Such has been the case for too long. The problem with 'prayer' literature for ministers, perhaps more particularly in the Protestant tradition, is debatably that it more often than not has to do with a fascination for prayer *techniques*, or experimenting with different *kinds* of prayer. Might one cite in this regard the popular works of the Quaker, Richard Foster (1978, 1992)? For all the undoubted popularity and informative value of these comprehensive publications, they scarcely get to the *spirit* of prayer. As such, Protestant books on prayer seem more discursive in nature and sadly lacking in the intuitive and prayerful style of, say, a Thomas Merton (1961). It never seems to occur to Protestant writers that authors on 'prayer' might appropriately aim at writing in a *prayerful* and *contemplative way*. The style and genre of writing is then invested with the very nature of prayer instead of being unhelpfully *about* it. Has the spirit of contemplative prayer, then, largely eluded the over-organised or discursive Protestant writer? Frankly, yes. For contemplative prayer, it is now becoming apparent that contemporary spirituality is more akin to an alternative prayer life and mood largely foreign to the discursive style or to that of a traditional book on prayer, or a Protestant 'quiet time'. Thankfully, contemporary Christian spirituality can authenticate Christian ministry through exposing it again to the thinking and practices of the contemplative mothers and fathers of the historical Church, in a way that Peterson does not. Contemporary contemplative spirituality is furthermore finding an ally in a new instinct for contemplative prayer. As Christian spirituality comes in an experiential, and not only academic, format one must reasonably suppose that it has great potential to evoke the *spirit* of prayer for contemporary ministers.

The value of contemplative prayer's contribution to authentic ministry is that it now gives a name and legitimacy to that which many ministers have been feeling and experiencing for some time - namely a wordless and imageless prayer. Such prayer has been born of silence and solitude. It involves:

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<sup>14</sup> Perhaps to be fair to Peterson, he is more concerned to show how a contemplative spirit might pervade *all* of ministry than he is to describe what contemplative *prayer* might mean. He therein arguably assumes too much, and might even be construed as using 'contemplative' as a synonym for prayer in general.

... allowing the Holy Spirit to enter into and pray deeply within us ... Moving beyond words and concepts, we wait upon God in the emptiness and nothingness of what the mystics call 'unknowing'. Prayer becomes very simple, almost wordless, loving attention. In this way the Holy Spirit can take over our prayer so that it becomes more and more the Spirit praying within us (Leech 1986:20).

It is, of course, ill advised to assume a uniform understanding of such words as 'contemplation' and 'meditation'. In the Middle Ages the word 'contemplation' had an extremely wide reference.<sup>15</sup> Typically, however, contemplative prayer constitutes a break from the more mental prayer of 'meditation'. 'The word meditation has always been used in Christianity for defining an activity of the mind, stemming from two closely-related traditions: the Bible and graeco-Latin antiquity' (Leclercq 1983:261-262). Meditation is roughly constituted by the three activities based on the scriptures, namely, *lectio*, *meditatio* and *oratio*. Fundamental thereto, however, has been the prayerful mental activity, and often memorising, leading to vocal prayer.

Contemplative prayer, as highlighted again by ecumenical Christian spirituality, speaks to the not infrequent ministerial experience of acquired disenchantment with meditational prayer, where the latter practice becomes virtually dysfunctional. Spirituality saves the disillusioned minister, so afflicted, through its utilisation of the insights of, among others, John of the Cross.<sup>16</sup> Spirituality now reveals that John speaks to a common (ministerial) experience, heretofore attributed to failure, where the Christian minister finds that his/her facility for meditation, or desire therefor, simply evaporates. In John of the Cross' thinking it is shown to be less a pathology than part of the normal prayer process - or often maturation in prayer. For John of the Cross, such readiness for contemplative prayer needs to be validated in certain ways. Such validation will come out of the crucible of one's own wrestling-in-prayer, even one's despondency. In brief, validation of the beginning of contemplative prayer will be: first, a recognition of the prayer that imagination no longer serves their prayer life as it did in the past; second, that the desire or inspiration to fix

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<sup>15</sup> Sometimes 'contemplation' is used as a term to cover the whole life of prayer. It is necessary in reading the various [historical] 'writings therefore to be clear in what sense a word is being used, or there can be great confusion' (Leech 1986:158-159). Even today 'contemplation' and meditation' are sometimes used interchangeably. Western Christendom's 'contemplation' is often referred to as 'meditation' in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, and in Eastern spirituality in general. In fact, 'meditation' may be the most popular secular synonym for the Western Church's 'contemplation'.

<sup>16</sup> Leech's (1977:160-167) delineation of John of the Cross' thinking is particularly commendable. In what can be confusing and easily misunderstood writing, and too readily turned into a Christian contemplative syncretism, Leech brings clarity and incisiveness in his summation of John's 'Dark Night' thinking. It is just a small part of Leech's (1977,1980,1981,1985) almost encyclopedic contribution to the history of Christian spirituality. I have had recourse to turn to him often. His voluminous work in this regard, I would suggest, is almost unsurpassed.

one's mind on objects of meditation has dissipated; and, third, that there has developed a pleasure and facility for simply waiting on God in loving attention, without any formal mental activity whatsoever. Contemporary literature thus draws insightfully on the Christian contemplative heritage, and the prayer life preliminary to it, and is therein able to assist ministers who have experienced a crisis of dislocation in their prayer life. For example, it will be encouraging for many such ministers to hear that:

... the beginning of contemplative prayer will mean that it becomes progressively more difficult and perhaps impossible to think about God or to use many of the traditional methods of "saying prayers". The mind wanders constantly to such an extent that many people mistake the change for a total collapse of their prayer life. In fact, what is happening is that the attention to God is moving from the mind to the will (Leech 1980:46).

Further, in an era of 'feel good' religion, often exacerbated by the excesses of some 'Charismatic' spirituality, a revisiting of John of the Cross's 'dark night' spirituality puts prayer-experience, or lack of it, back into perspective again. For ministers and congregants over-invested in prayers of ecstasy and spiritual manifestations, there is a sobering perspective emerging from contemporary contemplative literature, perhaps especially where John of the Cross is the concerned.<sup>17</sup> Where a commonly held ministerial view prevails that prayer life relates to spiritual 'highs', with some lows, John's insights can be instructive, and often liberating. Leech's (1977:160) words are helpful: 'The dark night of John of the Cross is not a *phase* [italics mine], still less is it a pathological feature of the Christian life: it is a symbol of the entire process of movement towards God. Those who enter the night never leave it, though the night changes'. There is thus a contemplative trusting and 'unknowing' darkness about mature prayer. At the same time St John's darkness corresponds to a whole new instinct for the 'darkness reality' in contemporary Christian experience. Happily, for the minister to find themselves thus identified is at once an affirmation and an encouragement. It shows the experience of the 'absence of God' to be well

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<sup>17</sup> John of the Cross's three-staged dark night of the senses, the spirit, and the preliminary experience of the dark night of unitive encounter with God, form a particularly helpful frame of reference for the praying minister who is struggling in devotional darkness (cf. Leech 1977:160-164). For the Protestant minister, St John evidences a refreshing ontological approach to prayer, as opposed to the more predictable Protestant publications on prayer-technique. When the three stages of St. John's 'dark night' are blended with the contribution of Pseudo-Dionysius' 'three ways', the minister is given a spiritual map and process that locates them in an historical contemplative schema. Pseudo-Dionysius gives ministers the 'three stages of movement toward ecstatic union with the One that would provide St Bonaventure and others in the West with the three steps in the way of Christian perfection: the purgative, the illuminative, and the unitive' (Maloney 1983:29). The three ways, in other words, correspond most helpfully with John's 'stages of the night'.

chronicled, and part of the normal Christian (prayer) life. Integrity is achieved in the minister who is comfortable to own their dark night experience of prayer as inevitable and vital. Authentic ministry is then able to resist pandering to popular congregational demand for something more sensational. A market-oriented ministry that has formerly catered for prayer *experiences* is now brought back into line. A rediscovery of the contemplative experience and the 'dark night' now accommodates the minister's own experience of prayer, realising a powerful integration of personal experience and the contemplative prayer tradition. A new credibility is consequently brought to ministry through this synthesis of theory and praxis.

#### **6.4.2.2 Prayer as 'Being with God'**

Contemplative prayer authenticates Christian ministry in that it recovers for prayer a rightful sense of 'being with God' as opposed to a *utilitarian*, often *self-serving* activity that has nothing to offer precisely *those* characteristic pathologies in contemporary society. Contemplative prayer is in a sense, then, an end in itself and not primarily 'outcomes based'. Its purpose is 'being with God'. A preoccupation with 'ends', or with short-term 'results' ends in disenchantment, and rightfully so. Contemplative spirituality, especially in its contemporary literary or academic format, has succeeded in resisting the more popular and superficial claims for prayer. These claims were possibly more characteristic of a modernistic, dualistic or mechanical understanding. Indeed, the effects of contemplative 'prayer become apparent only after a time. What one feels at the end of a particular session need not reflect the cumulative value of what has been done over months' (Casey 1995:120). Contemplative prayer, thus, may not meet the utilitarian supply-demand, quick-fix mentality of a consumer religion, or ministerial aspirations for 'success'. It does, however, recover for ministry the primary ontology of simply *being with God*, for 'contemplation *is* [italics mine] an ontological phenomenon' (Pannikar 1995:27). Neither is there a pandering to hyper-activity and achievement, or the often self-satisfied delights of intellectualising. It thus enables ministers to gain fresh insight into the misguided nature of much contemporary spirituality and the anomalous Christian ministry that feeds it. Contemplative prayer, and its resultant ministry, therefore constitutes an important corrective. The corrective is applied to what Keating (1995:120) calls:

... a predominant enculturation in the two things that are most inimical to proceeding from discursive meditation to interior silence. The first is hyperactivity - thinking that we have to *do* something in prayer to please God. The second is overconceptualization, a special hazard for those who are highly educated', [not infrequently the minister] 'and even more so for those who are highly trained

theologically. They have gradually absorbed the idea that thinking about God is praying. It isn't (Keating 1995:120).

'Being with God', then, undermines the popular concept of praying as 'doing something'. 'The accent is entirely on God doing the revealing, giving the gift of Himself and no longer is the emphasis on humanity and personal human activity' (ibid:26). The death knell is also sounded for intellectualising, or discursive thought, as contemplative of prayer is at least apophatic, or more accurately even a negation thereof.

A central motif for contemplative prayer, as essentially 'being with God', has been the concept of *participation*. Methodist ministers would do well to revisit this concept as, 'Wesley undertook a regular program of such wide-ranging reading that ... he knew quite a number of patristic authors (and, indeed, was especially sensitive to certain major themes from orthodoxy, perhaps the most important of which was the idea of "participation") ...' (Trickett 1989:355). 'Prayer, then, is a matter of participating in the life of Jesus Christ' (Casey 1995:62). *Participation* has challenged and exposed the more structured, entitative and prepositional way of thinking about prayer, recovering its essentially ontological character. Prayer thus becomes more a way of life and ontological inter-change than a one-sided striving for God. A further advantage is the severance of 'prayer' from the exclusive and restrictive understanding of 'quiet time', so beloved of the Evangelical tradition. Of course, set times for prayer can never be faulted and must always be part of any Christian regimen. But the exclusive identification of prayer with the place of 'quiet time' reflects a petrified and literalistic thinking that, I suggest, misses the spirit of prayer. Pannikar's (1995:27) contribution in this regard is graphic and evocative. Contemplation 'is actual participation in the reality one contemplates, real sharing in the things one "sees", dynamic identification with the truth one realizes'. To be sure, it 'is not merely an act of mind, but is "touch", real existential contact ...' Such language leads to a particularly accommodative disposition towards the Eucharist. 'Contemplation, to further trace this line of thought, implies an "eating" of the object and also a "being eaten"; it discloses the absolute mutual transparency of subject and object' (Pannikar 1995:27). *Participation*, thus understood, resonates with the Eucharist, where mutual indwelling and participation constitute the communal exchange inherent to the significance of the sacred meal. The participatory understanding of prayer, always quintessentially contemplative, suggests a ministry of divine-human participation, and thus the possibility of contemplative or prayerful ministry as a whole. The concept of *participation* has a dispersive and perpetual quality that has the capacity to make all ministry contemplative. Ministry thus becomes intrinsically and diffusely prayerful. It accomplishes the groundwork that enables,

for example, Peterson (1989) and Groff (2000) to speak intelligibly of a ‘contemplative ministry’. One can thus render ministry in a prayerful way, in the sense that prayer or contemplation is an on-going participation in Christ. The strictly formalised concept of prayer is here transcended. Nouwen (1978:63) writes significantly that: ‘Ministry *is* [italics mine] contemplation. It is the ongoing unveiling of reality and the revelation of God’s light ...’ So Groff (2000), too, spells out a matching of ministerial functions and contemplative perspectives. He weaves a ministerial model for unilateral contemplative application in ministry. Of course, it must be said here that contemporary spirituality has harnessed the powerful insights of the Eastern Orthodox tradition. Irenaeus spoke of a *participation* in God, and Gregory of Nyssa made clear that God has not made us simply spectators of Godself’s power, but also participants in the divine nature (Leech 1977:143).

I suggest that the lines between ‘prayer’ and ‘ministry’ become (appropriately) blurred in the accommodative and non-dualistic insights of contemplation and participation. ‘The spiritual life’ [as with contemplative prayer] ‘is the life that is lived in the light of the movement between relationship with God in Jesus Christ and ministry’ (Purves 1989:110). It is ‘as we live ever more fully into our objective life in Christ, we become ever more faithfully God’s persons in ministry to the world’ (ibid:110). The participatory or contemplative understanding of prayer breaks the stranglehold of an exclusively extraneous prayer life that divorces prayer from ministry, and emasculates it. But *participation* and its logical fulfillment in *deification* is fittingly realised and authenticated in the Apostle Paul’s pervasive use of the expression, ‘in Christ’.<sup>18</sup> It is the indispensable understanding of being ‘in Christ’ that has often been marginal in Reformation thinking, whether originally intended or not. It has been noted, by no less than a Reformed theologian, ‘That so central is the idea of justification to Lutheran thought that it ... at times even seems to threaten to displace the person of Christ from center stage. Justification is *in Christ*, and is to be sought in him, not in itself’ (Ferguson 1988:34). The participatory strain in contemplative prayer thus dissolves the spirit of prayer into *all* of ministry so that ministry acquires another taste and internal stimulus. It further recovers for ministry the Pauline ontology and imperative of life ‘in Christ’.

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<sup>18</sup> Kourie (1998:447) says candidly: ‘It is time to rediscover the true Paul - he has been buried far too long under the Talmud of Paulinism, and has been interpreted in a juridical rather than mystical and *participatory* [italics mine] manner. It is my contention that the heart of Paul’s gospel is *union with God in Christ*, both at an individual and collective level.’

### **6.4.2.3 Summation**

Contemporary Christian literature of the ‘spirituality genre’ has much to offer to the peculiarly postmodern ministerial needs of the contemporary priest, especially to the one who is discovering a new hunger and facility for a prayer life that goes beyond the stereotypical. Admittedly, many insights relating to ‘meditation’ and ‘contemplation’ are not new and cannot be credited exclusively, if at all, to *contemporary* Christian spirituality. Only a serious Christian historical amnesia could sound such a heraldic note for the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Yet historical spirituality does not interpret or organise *itself*, nor can it identify the contemporary echoes in ministerial and Christian prayer life. The contributions of, for example, Green (1977,1979), Leech (1980), Casey (1995) and Keating (1991,1992,1996), together with contemporary interpreters of Thomas Merton and essayists on the best in Western and Eastern contemplative thinking, have so crafted and organised the rich historical prayer heritage as to make it accessible to contemporary spiritual need and experience. Writers here enumerated are but a small, albeit significant, part of a wider proliferation of works on contemplative prayer, not all of which are as deeply rooted in the Christian tradition.

### **6.4.3 Contemplative Ministry and Spiritual Direction**

#### **6.4.3.1 Return to Roots**

The instinct and intuition of contemplation in general, and contemplative prayer in particular, reclaims for ministry a new feel and facility for spiritual direction. It is here that the significance for a more authentic ministry falls into sharp relief. It is increasingly claimed for spiritual direction that it returns pastoral activity to its roots of ‘the cure of souls’, or more specifically spiritual direction, and the minister to the work of spiritual director:

I am not the only pastor who has discovered this old identity. More and more pastors are embracing this way of pastoral work and are finding themselves authenticated by it. There are not a lot of us. We are by no means a majority, not even a high-profile minority. But one by one, pastors are rejecting the job description that has been handed to them and are taking on this new one or, as it turns out, the old one that has been in use for most of the Christian centuries (Peterson 1993:56).

Peterson (ibid:57) explains that the term, ‘cure of souls’ has to do with ‘care’, as in the Latin sense of *cura*, which also has some undertones of ‘cure’. He understands the soul as the essence of the human personality. Cure of souls is directed by Scripture, and is a care that is shaped by prayer and is extended to persons individually or in groups, in ‘sacred’ or ‘profane’ setting. Cure of souls constitutes ‘a determination to work at the center, to concentrate on the essential’

(ibid:57). As with Peterson (1993), some reflective and now disenchanted ministerial practitioners are beginning to balk at the anomalous designation of ministry as, 'running a church', with all the busy, fussy and misdirected 'priorities' that inevitably go with it. Of course, there *are* duties to be done by the minister/priest, and no minister can be limited to the role of consultant for spiritual direction. One need not be contemptuous of 'running a church'. Nevertheless, 'it is reducing pastoral work to institutional duties that I object to, not the duties themselves, which I gladly share with others in the church' (Peterson 1993:59).

One would have to say again of Peterson that while his return to contemplative ministry and spiritual direction is admirable, his specific utilising and pointed acknowledgement of these sources is less helpful. Might Schneider's (1984:101-102) words not find justification in this instance? She writes that 'some authors seem to be either unknowledgeable of, or unimpressed with the importance for the practice of spiritual direction of an operative acquaintance with the long and rich tradition of Christian spirituality and the variety of spiritual schools and traditions'. It is clear to Peterson that his 'cure of souls' is validated by a long-standing tradition, but very few pointed references are made to the tradition itself.<sup>19</sup> Yet, notwithstanding these omissions by some contemporary authors, ministry is validated by the recovery of spiritual direction. Personal spiritual direction *does* go back to at least the Desert Fathers, through Augustine Baker and St John of the Cross. Indeed, 'the reality of personal spiritual guidance was known to such writers as Bucer and Richard Baxter ...' (Leech 1986:47-48). Authentic ministry, then, needs to acquire more than an 'anecdotal attention to concrete spiritual experience', but still 'the first-hand accounts by people involved in the experiential rediscovery of this important means of spiritual growth are ... extremely valuable' (Schneiders 1984:101).

#### **6.4.3.2 The Distinctiveness of Spiritual Direction**

Spiritual direction, as re-presented by contemporary Christian spirituality, is infused with a distinctively contemplative spirit. Indeed, 'spiritual direction is inseparable from contemplative prayer' (Leech 1986:71). Spiritual direction given by the Eastern Orthodox monks was related to interior, perpetual prayerfulness, and St John of the Cross relates spiritual direction to the journey

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<sup>19</sup> Schneiders (1984:101-102), however, might well commend Peterson on his experiential approach. She notes how contemporary writers on spirituality also evidence, perhaps somewhat like Peterson, a capacity for developing a spiritual direction that emerges from present experience. In this regard, 'the reliance on real life experience also results in a distinctly twentieth century approach to the topic that is not only more palatable but also much more useful for the person seeking some assistance in the practice of this ministry'. Contemporary spirituality has taken spiritual direction beyond its often-exclusive 19<sup>th</sup> century identification with the confessional variety. Further, its not infrequent unhappiness with the term 'director' is at least evidence of a lively interaction with the historical tradition.

of the soul towards deeper contemplation (ibid:71). While some training in psychology and psychoanalysis is mandatory for current ministerial preparation, spiritual direction's legitimation comes primarily from contemplative prayer, spiritual experience, insight and, probably, charism. It may come simultaneously, in some measure, with a growing sense of religious vocation. It is not taught, and does not hold psychological presuppositions about the desired outcome of its ministry. 'In this perspective', as with pastoral care in general, it 'can never be limited to the application of any skill or technique ...' (Nouwen 1978:63). As such it assuages the sometimes-disillusioned sense within ministers that there is nothing distinctive, or for that matter 'self-transcendent', about the guidance and direction that the Christian minister has to offer. The effect thereof is for ministers to be experienced by congregants as demonstrating a new confidence and integrity as they again utilise that which is distinctive to *Christian* ministry.

Distinctive also to spiritual direction as familial to contemplation is its characteristic openness to what may best be termed 'the other'. Contemplation is distinctively and 'passively' open to the otherness of God, and to the otherness of people. Thus it draws on the contemplative attributes of intentional attentiveness as directed to God, others and one's self. It involves 'the development of the capacity to pay attention to one's own experience in its particularity and richness. This is not a call to mere subjectivity' [but] 'a disciplined commitment of observation and attention, and is not an indulgence in mere feelings' (Thayer 1985:25).<sup>20</sup> Spiritual direction will similarly seek to facilitate such Godward and selfward openness in the directee.

Spiritual direction assumes the hue of contemplation through the director's (sic) acquired vulnerability, and through acceptance and assimilation of the gift of 'otherness', by way of divine immediacy and also through the 'other' as counselee. God and people, such is the contemplative insight, are gifts to the minister precisely because of their 'otherness'. It is ministerial openness and malleability that become distinctive for spiritual direction in the contemplative mood. Spiritual direction thus presupposes a human consciousness where 'there is in *every* other that is encountered the implicit offer of God's knowledge and love - that is, grace' (Johnson 1990:72).<sup>21</sup> Thus the Christian minister avoids the temptation of becoming 'a manipulator of people. Only

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<sup>20</sup> More accurately Thayer is here speaking of what he terms 'interiority', though one might safely say that such interiority is the fruit of contemplative experience, even partly constituting it, and thus opening the practitioner to a new and wider dimension of inner awareness. It is out of such contemplative attention, and intention, that spiritual direction becomes a possibility for the one offering guidance, and indeed for the recipient themselves.

<sup>21</sup> Johnson here speaks of 'grace', yet his thought and instinct is most instructive for the contemplative spiritual director. 'If God creates at every moment ... then the gift of otherness is offered every person at every moment. God is the "giver of every good gift" always and everywhere' (1990:72).

when he (sic) learns to see his pastoral relationship as a vital source of theological contemplation can he himself also be ministered to by those whom he cares for' (Nouwen 1978:63). For 'the paradox of the ministry indeed is that we will find the God we want to give in the lives of the people to whom we want to give Him (sic)' (ibid. 63). Such theological insight supplies the foundation for the gift of spiritual direction to the Church. Does it not, then, give rise to the question in each minister/priest: 'What is *God doing in the lives of my people*, and am I sufficiently perceptive and discerning thereof?' Certainly Peterson (1993:60) would be of this persuasion. He speaks of 'prevenience', which 'is the conviction that God has been working diligently, redemptively, and strategically *before* [italics mine] I appeared on the scene, before I was aware there was something here for me to do'. In this regard, the spiritual director, as beneficiary of contemporary reclamations, appreciates how each congregant has a spiritual history and journey uniquely her or his own. There is no 'one-kind-fits-all' prescription, thus saving ministry from a sometimes crass and often unfeeling application of religious disciplines or predetermined behavioural advice.<sup>22</sup>

#### **6.4.3.3 Spiritual Direction and Psychology**

Ministers have sometimes experienced a sense of alienation from ministerial work as a result of the seminary's/university's wholesale accommodation and endorsement of psychological counselling practice for ministry. Notwithstanding the undoubted benefits of psychological insights for the pastor, a pastoral instinct suggests that something has been lost to the secular psychologising and annexation of 'counselling' and direction. Consequently, the re-emergence of spiritual direction and contemplative insights in ministerial practice, together with a ministerial diet of contemporary writing on spirituality in contemplative mood, has done much to give ministry a deeper confidence in its own authenticity and distinctiveness. Spiritual direction, as opposed to the more indeterminate 'pastoral counselling', with all its clinical connotations, has recovered distinctive ministerial and theological concerns inherent to Christian ministry.

A comparative treatment of spiritual direction, as juxtaposed with counselling and psychotherapy, is far more than can be attempted here. Yet such comparison is at once fruitful and affirming for

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<sup>22</sup> At the risk of sounding prejudicial, I make mention of Adams' (1970) *nouthetic* counselling method. It was well received by those who felt that the warning, admonishing and confrontative style of various Scripture passages could serve as a suitable resource for doing spiritual direction. In this view, the Bible is seen as a kind of manual for doing one-to-one counselling by virtue of its being the 'Word of God'. There is also a great psychological naiveté for much of the time in Adams in his assumptions about biblical meanings and language. To quote Schneiders (1984:107) in her criticism of *another* writer: 'He does not seem to take adequate account of the subterfuge (conscious or otherwise) that such language can constitute...'

the minister, and critical for a thorough evaluation of contemporary spirituality's contribution to ministry. What, however, needs to be observed at the outset is that pastoral counselling, with its often psychological insights and goals, is not *per se* inimitable to spiritual direction. Nevertheless, spiritual direction brings a perhaps unexpected insightfulness and energy back to ministry, reinstating a lost art and new vocational fulfilment for the Christian worker.

Leech's (1977,1986) work on comparative definition - for its sheer research, breadth, and readable historic scrupulosity - must again stand unsurpassed. For him, the specificity of spiritual direction lies in its reinstatement of the *vision of God* and in its intricate concern with theology and belief. The same unqualified statement, it is clear, cannot be made for 'pastoral counselling'. Spiritual direction is thus replanted in its own native soil, in a tradition that goes back to the monastic movement of the fourth century. It has an integral incorporation in the life of the sacramental community and is not office-based, as is so often true for pastoral counselling. Spiritual direction, on another point of distinctiveness, is more given to long-term guidance in Christian spiritual maturation and does not focus primarily on crises, states of emotional distress and problem-solving (Leech 1986:57-58). 'The ministry of spiritual direction indeed is more important when there are no particular crises' (Leech 1977:100). Spiritual direction is a continuous ministry. Here the priest is concerned with spirituality as the pre-requisite for *any* health, whereas the therapist or counsellor is characteristically more concerned with sickness (ibid:101). Thus James-Abra (1991:19) says also that 'spiritual direction differs from both psychotherapy and pastoral counseling which tends to be illness or problem-centered'. Notably refreshing is the way Leech (1986:51) secures for spiritual direction a distinctiveness that challenges a pathological 'revival of self-cultivation where all the emphasis is on *personal growth* [*italics mine*], a spirituality which is self-centred rather than God-centred'.

Distinctive also for spiritual direction is the outcome it has in mind. Psychological pastoral counselling has not infrequently striven for the goal of personal adjustment to society, or the adjustment and tempering of an over-harsh 'super-ego', which imposes impossible expectations together with inappropriate guilt. The disturbed and over-conscientised have been led into a liberating experience of 'okayness' that has done much to bring healing and inner freedom.<sup>23</sup> Such insights have been invaluable for ministerial workers. I would contend, however, that spiritual direction locates again the challenge to move toward what Schneiders (1989:684) refers

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<sup>23</sup> Here the reference is to Harris's (1973) book, *I'm OK, You're OK*, which found much popularity in its helpful and easily accessible utilisation of transactional analysis.

to as *self-transcendence*, and makes available the means to move *beyond* a psychological concept of mere 'adjustment'. It does not put an absolute value on inner feelings of well being and serenity. It locates again a long-lost Christian value-orientation that has, allegedly, been surrendered by a Christian counselling coloured by the clinical pastoral education era. It authenticates ministry in the eyes of those who formerly came to the Church for Christian counselling. What they found instead was the psychologically inspired therapeutic and psychoanalytic *modus operandi* - one they had purposely avoided in the hope that their faith would be affirmed, harnessed and made intelligible for them by a distinctively *Christian* priest in the context of a well-informed Christian community and tradition.

The reintroduction of spiritual direction, together with an informed utilisation of sound historical resources, offers to 'counselees' once more the possibility of Christian holiness, with a sense of becoming participators in God's will and purpose. Spiritual direction can unashamedly recognise that no psychological counseling is in any case value-free, whether identifiable as naturalist, humanist, socialist or existentialist in orientation (Lowe 1976). Rather, of paramount importance is the self-awareness of counsellor or priest that the Church again has an alternative to offer, in spiritual direction, to the mere personal adjustment demanded of contemporary societal and psychological values. Psychology has sometimes said, not without a real strain of self-satisfaction, that spiritual direction starts 'with an *ideal* towards which an individual must aim; therapy starts with the individual *where he or she is* [*italics mine*]' (Leech 1986:61). More incisive is the criticism that spiritual counselling or direction has been woefully ignorant of the operation of the unconscious. Sadly, spiritual direction or Christian spirituality *has* often been abysmally superficial, and sometimes seen the way of holiness and self-transcendence as a rejection of 'human nature' (Leech 1986: 61). Such ministerial anomalies do exist. But so do the complacent secular caricatures of spiritual direction. Yet has not pastoral counselling too often been content with a tragic trivialising and reductionism of its heritage? There may, of course, be exceptions, but these are few and far between.<sup>24</sup> For fear of being too directive, insensitive or authoritarian (and these attributes are unquestionably not being advocated here), would-be spiritual direction has lost the opportunity to introduce the congregant to a contemplative encounter with the divine Other. Surely the distinctiveness of spiritual direction becomes more pronounced at this point? Is it concerned with a mere intrapersonal stability, and self-contained

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<sup>24</sup> Thus it is admirably pointed out that 'the task of psychological and moral development is to move steadily toward a greater understanding of one who is in relation to self and others, identified as a movement from self-absorption to self-transcendence' (Billy & Orsuto 1996:103; cf Kourie 1998:445). Popular psychology too often serves the interests of self-infatuation.

equilibrium? Such is certainly good as far as it goes. The contemplative tradition, however, has a distinct potential for encounter, confrontation and struggle. Can one say, then, that it introduces the possibility of a divine encounter - something that is other than exclusively self-referential? The latter must undoubtedly be claimed for spiritual direction as being of its very essence. Thus understood, the divine encounter, ultimately leading to contemplative union, inevitably introduces real turbulence and cannot be equated with the generating of a pseudo ('Christian') peace. Spiritual direction conforms essentially to Leech's description of spirituality in general. It offers 'not a process of self-cultivation by which we are helped to adjust, to *conform* to the values of the dominant social order. It is a process of "Christ-ening" [that involves] confrontation, exploration and struggle ...' There is an encounter with darkness and inner turmoil that runs counter to 'analgesic spirituality' and its prolific feel-good, 'pop-psychological' counterparts.

With the undoubted contribution of psychology in general, many checks and balances have been put in place to assess the health, and determine the veracity, of contemporary spiritual direction. Certainly spiritual direction, in my view, is being vindicated from a formerly pejorative categorisation. Here spirituality, it must be admitted, does have much in psychology and the social sciences to thank for its growing credibility in the area of spiritual direction. Similarly, the deconstructive spirit of postmodernism surely contributes to the credibility of a contemplative disposition and worldview in the eyes of psychological purists, realising a renascent practice of spiritual direction. The effects of (among others, Jungian) psychology, postmodern deconstruction, and even a qualifying of the understanding of 'secularisation' means that spiritual direction no longer defers exclusively to pastoral counselling, psychotherapy and self-referential clinical perspectives. The concomitant benefit for ministry is that it at once reclaims its heritage of spiritual direction *and* a public and congregational perception of newfound veracity for minister and Church.

#### **6.4.3.4 Reinstatement of Discernment**

Giving further distinctiveness to contemplative ministry, and to spiritual direction in particular, is the recovered element of discernment in the work of the pastor.<sup>25</sup> Here, the minister again has something distinctive to offer to congregants. Discernment has notable precedents in prophetic ministry, and thus a rootedness in Judeo-Christian tradition. The Old Testament prophet, for

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<sup>25</sup> Indeed, this present subheading is not unrelated to the previous one, for the discerning and prophetic element of spiritual direction again distinguishes spiritual direction, I would suggest, from the general spirit of pastoral counselling as offspring of mainstream psychology.

example, was a visionary - a person of insight and vision. Moreover, closely linked with vision is contemplation itself, which presupposes an intensity of prayer and, not infrequently, a possession of psychic powers. Indeed, for the biblical writers there is no distinction between prophetic and mystical life. They constitute an integrated whole (Leech 1986:69). Ministry is authenticated here, for the ontological, prayerful nature of counselling is not dualistically divorced from a psychological counselling expertise. In other words, spiritual direction is not the application of a technique or expertise so much as a contemplative exercise from beginning to end. Ministry is again secured as a profound and indistinguishable integration of ontology and action.

Once discernment is restored to ministry it becomes clear that spiritual direction has profound implications for the rest of the minister's life and use of time, as direction is not learnt from a book, but emerges largely from the lifestyle of the minister. Ministry then becomes an entrustment to the minister to employ their time in such a way as to facilitate insight, openness and, in short, a contemplative spirit. The congregants thus invest the minister with custodianship of the contemplative and discerning life. Indeed, 'what the Church needs is for contemplatives to share with others their privilege of silence, worship and meditation, their ability to listen more deeply and more penetratingly to the Word of God, their understanding of sacrifice, their inner vision' (Merton 1971:137-138).

Leech (1986:51) makes a compelling argument for a careful discernment of spirits in contemporary ministry. It is particularly necessitated now due to: a resurgence of the cults, a new surge of Christian fundamentalism and anti-materialistic Gnosticism, together with a psychologised revival of (supposedly Christian) self-cultivation. Could one suggest moreover that spiritual directors ought also to give attention to less-esoteric sounding 'spirits', such as the ones feeding contemporary secularity? Here one might identify the spirit of run-away consumerism, the spirit of power politics, structural injustice and a value-system that has made the person an expendable toy in a throw-away society (Schneiders 1976:119-120).

By way of brief summation, clinical pastoral counselling has failed to address a void in the experience and existential pathology of the postmodern person and congregant. A more interpretive and intuitive guidance is sought in contemporary society. Must it not be one that addresses the totality of the question of human existence, relating to an *eccentric*, divine transcendence that is hitherto unmet by a self-betterment, self-actualising and self-referential

psychology? As such, spiritual direction is more accommodative and holistic than the limiting parameters of clinical counselling have been able to address.

#### **6.4.4 Towards Contemplative Models**

Some clues are offered here towards describing contemplative models for ministry. I shall look at three contemporary exponents of contemplative models for ministry. While it is not the nature of contemplation to be reduced to, or confined within, certain ministerial functions, some endeavour needs to be made to describe how a contemplative ministerial approach may shape ministry.<sup>26</sup> It will be assumed in that, in the main, one is speaking of traditional, ordained ministry. The word ‘model’ refers to that intermediate and dialectical state between contemplative perspective and prayerfulness on the one hand, and actual empirical actions or pastoral functions on the other. Resources and literature evidencing application (or more appropriately, translation?) of contemplative outlook and prayerfulness to and into ministry are still, I submit, in short supply. Even when the literature shows promise, more often than not one has to take some liberty with the material and the writer’s precise meaning to show how the contemplative minister might ‘go to work’. Some literary thinking and creativity, however, lends itself to the subject more readily than others do.

Determinative for contemplative ministry, it is suggested by one contemporary exponent, is the ‘unbusyness’ of the pastor, rendering preaching, for example, to be an act that requires and evidences preparatory quietness, solitude, concentration and intensity (Peterson 1993:17-49). Homiletic language itself, it might be inferred here from, becomes less routinised and conventional and realises new depth, with consequent congregational self-recognition. The means for such authentic depth in preaching and pastoral work is the acquisition of contemplative *‘leisure [italics mine] for praying, preaching and listening’* (ibid: 22).

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<sup>26</sup> It is the genius of the contemplative tradition and experience that it effects a thoroughgoing critique of ministry. It quickly identifies a ministry that is exclusively functional, or programme orientated. Ministries driven by pre-determined pastoral chores, church promotion and unreflective busyness have much to answer for from a contemplative’s perspective. Of course, it is also easy to be critical, in the worst sense. Therefore, some (albeit often tenuous) effort must be made to translate the contemplative minister’s insights into rooted, flesh-and-blood ministry. On the other hand, with regard to Peterson in particular, a distillation of his suggestive and provocative writing into a work-a-day model for ministry might be a foreign imposition on something that was never meant for that purpose, namely a turning of the ontological into the old obsession with ‘busyness as usual’. Such a comment could conceivably be made for the contemplative way as a whole.

Another indispensable acquisition for a valid contemplative model is, according to Peterson (1993:27-37), the pastor's awareness of the subversive nature of their ministry. Translated into everyday ministry it is noted that '*prayer and parable* [italics mine] are the stock-in-trade of the subversive pastor' (ibid:36). The minister's self-image of a 'subversive' gives them a broader perspective than simply identifying the Church *per se* with the kingdom of God. Ministers are interested in world-conquest. Is it not true, furthermore, that ministers often settle for the congregation's trivialised and marginalised pastor-image, forgetting through exposure to the congregation their own subversive contribution? The contemplative's ministry has a certain parabolic and even, one might say, elusive and indefinable tenor that bespeaks the careful subtlety of the subversive.

Determinative for a contemplative model of ministry is also the insightful concept of minister as 'apocalyptic pastor' (Peterson 1993:39-49). It shows refreshing innovation, I contend, to re-enlist a sense of the apocalyptic in relation to pastoral work. The apocalyptic contribution to pastoral work achieves a scripturally charged authenticity for ministry. It evokes a not altogether novel question: Has pastoral work of the expressly clinical tradition not clearly driven a wedge between scriptural language and theological thought forms on the one hand, and the rationale of the contemporary Christian minister on the other? Certainly 'apocalyptic' and 'pastor' are seldom accommodated together in the language of practical theology. The value of the distinctively apocalyptic attribute for ministers, however, may be delineated as threefold: first, the apocalyptic dimension bears the sense of prayerfulness, where it holds the conviction that prayer is pivotal for the minister's work. It is the apocalyptic stance that most effectively counters a ministry of 'messianic ally pretentious energy' (ibid:49). The latter approach takes upon itself the practice of messiah, where 'we will do the work of God for God, fix (sic) people up, tell them what to do, conspire in finding the shortcuts by which the long journey to the Cross can be bypassed since we all have such crowded schedules right now' (ibid:43). Second, 'apocalyptic pastor' gives rise to a pastoral preference for poetry and imagery as opposed to the (not infrequently Protestant?) embarrassingly banal prose that is so often the hallmark of ministry. For the pastoral use of words must be primarily for *communion* and not *communication*. Finally, an overview of Peterson's (1993:46-49) 'clues' for contemplative ministry suggests that the attribute of 'apocalyptic' for the minister secures a vital corrective to an 'impatiently hustling ambition' that cannot claim place in ministerial work. The reason for this is that an apocalyptic attribute is productive of *patience*. Peterson (1993:49) contends that for contemporary ministerial anomalies 'we need the most

powerful of prophylactics - something like the apocalyptic prayer and poetry and patience of St John of the revelation'.<sup>27</sup>

The work of Nouwen ([1971] 1978) and Peterson ([1980] 1992, [1989] 1993) enjoy a certain complementarity. Both are acutely aware of the dangerous reduction of ministry to a professionalism devoid of real spirituality. Nouwen (ibid:xxi) asks: 'What is there beyond professionalism - is ministry just another speciality in the many helping professions?' While Peterson's works seek to evoke the contemplative spirit in a scholarly, suggestive and less prosaic treatment, Nouwen (ibid: xiii-xiv) makes more *explicit* the contemplative implications for ministry. He deals in this regard with the classical ministerial functions of teaching, preaching, pastoral care, organising and celebrating. Throughout his approach there is evidence of a call for mutuality, openness and a teachable vulnerability that bespeak a contemplative stance. 'So, ministry and spirituality never can be separated. Ministry is not an eight-to-five job but primarily a way of life, which is for others to see and understand so that liberation can become a possibility' (ibid: xxiii). There is a contemplative recognition that 'a Christian minister will never be able to be a minister if it is not his own most personal faith and insight into life that forms the core of his (sic) pastoral work' (ibid: xxiii).

Nouwen (1978:20) advocates a *teaching* ministry that is redemptive and diametrically opposed to the violent and intrusive education that so often operates out of a spirit of condescension and the horror of self-encounter. There is evidence in the teacher of teachability and mutuality. *Preaching* evidences similar contemplative attributes. It is dialogical and reflects the preacher's willingness to make their 'own faith and doubt, anxiety and hope, fear and joy available as a source of recognition for others ... ' (ibid:37). As with teaching, preaching is incarnational, utilising the minister's sincere involvement and vulnerability. *Pastoral care*, as indicative of Christian spirituality or contemplation, is juxtaposed with the old professional identity. The professional identity was essentially concerned with *self-affirmation* as opposed to a contemplative *self-denial*, with professional *contract* as opposed to *covenant*, and a more static fixation with *role-definition* as opposed to *contemplation* (ibid:64). Is not much Christian ministry, so called, still stuck,

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<sup>27</sup> Peterson's work can scarcely be done justice here, yet he is undoubtedly a pacesetter in moving towards models for contemplative ministry. His work is a sobering contribution to ministry, outspoken in its critique of pastoral obsessions with up-to-date training and new techniques that invariably stem from the behavioural sciences. He is able to adapt much scriptural tradition to contemporary pastoral practice, while forging an impressive link between pastoral work, corporate worship and contemplative spirituality. These comments are particularly appropriate with regard to Peterson's (1992) *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work*.

however, in an identity bestowed by non-theological sciences and interests, as Nouwen would here seem to imply? 'It is painful to realize that very few ministers are able to offer the rich mystical tradition of Christianity as a source of rebirth for the generation searching for a new life in the midst of the debris of a faltering civilization' (ibid:117).

Groff (2000) is a third exponent of translating the contemplative persuasion into ministry. He is placed third to indicate the increasingly practical progression, beginning with Peterson (1992a, 1992b, 1993) and then through Nouwen (1978) and ultimately to Groff's (2000) own specific suggestions, which might be even more explicit than a model. Contemplative threads may be woven into what amounts to the classic ministerial roles, although there is a concern that these roles will not be perceived as exclusively clerical. An appropriation of various contemplative stances or dispositions is made to distinctive ministerial roles: thus, worship is partnered with prayer, administration with discernment and vision, education with the less prosaic faith stories, soul care (sic) with silence-presence, and outreach with the more contemplatively passive hospitality (Groff 2000:39). These 'partners' are, of course, not exclusively 'married' to each other and have an appropriate and dynamic inter-changeability. One may speak of 'weaving the spiritual with the structural'. The imagery is 'weaving' and 'tapestry'. 'The aim is to make space for contemplative practices in the active life of community, while at the same time cultivating them in solitude. As the Christ-life takes form in us, so this tapestry's public dimensions (the front side) and private dimensions (the back side) are interfaced' (ibid.41). In this way, Church growth and spiritual growth are able to engage each other.

#### **6.4.5 Contemplative Ministry versus Anomalies**

Contemplative ministry is able to address various anomalous ministerial philosophies contemporarily influential in pastoral practice. Peterson (1993) is often scathing in his attack on pastoral and academic satisfaction with *professionalism*. Nouwen (1978) is at pains to point out the imperative of moving beyond it. Indeed, the contemplative influence on ministry does not accord well with Glasse's (1968) influential appeal of not so long ago. There the concern was to secure a professional niche for ministers, supposedly to save them from an identity crisis and a corresponding crisis of credibility in the eyes of a professional society. Glasse (1968) maintained that the risk needed to be taken of losing one's dedication in order to secure a competent professionalism for ministry. He also wanted to make it clear that 'the concept of profession is not antithetical to the concept of calling' (1968:25). Yet did the cumulative substance of the book, for all its possible merits, have the effect of a reductionistic classification for ministry in a

secularised category of ‘profession’, with the subliminal message of eroded confidence in spirituality and other attributes integral to Christian ministry?<sup>28</sup> Contemplative spirituality would certainly view the book in that light now. To be fair to Glasse though, his book was written in a spiritually dry era, in the first flush of exciting social sciences but still feeling the drought of ‘death of God’ theology.

Contemplative ministry addresses more than just the question of professionalism, however. Formally undetected contemporary ministerial corruptions, it might be argued, become more apparent and insidious when viewed through the sensitive and perceptive lens of the contemplative life. It is a lens that surely serves as the necessary gauge of ministerial integrity, exposing among other things the ‘self-help’ phenomenon of the ‘heroic ego’. It reveals the accompanying deception that ‘meaning’ for ministry is attained and constructed and not essentially the fruit of contemplative openness, feeding through symbol, myth and ritual (Moore 1988: ix). The search for ministerial inspiration and effectiveness in the novel and esoteric is challenged by contemplation’s conviction that ‘spirituality emanates from the *ordinariness* [italics mine] of this human life made transparent by lifelong tending to its nature and fate’ (Moore 1992:262). One might further ask: Does not contemplative prayer also rid the socially-conforming minister, ever with an eye on satisfying a congregational *deus ex machina* concept of God, of tailoring prayer as self-centred and utilitarian? Is not such ministry a necessary antidote to popular religious consumerism and faddish opinion? Here one has the rationale and possibility of moving ontologically, or participatively, into the life of God rather than exercising the occasional dualistic invocation of the divine to intervene.

Spirituality, rightly applied, gives the necessary insight and self-recollection for discerning false ministerial spirits. Ministry is often so invested with the particular *zeitgeist* of its context that it does little more than parody its social environment. The contemplative priest is vital, for ‘we live in a troubled culture that is awash with defenders of market values, proponents of patriarchal religion, and evangelists for manifest destiny’ (Wallace 1996:98).<sup>29</sup> Above all, it is the individual

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<sup>28</sup> Particularly jarring on contemporary ministerial perspectives must be Glasse’s (1968:35) now largely anachronistic appreciation of characteristic *professional* attributes for ministry, such as intellectual training and working for a fixed remuneration, or where ‘the distinguishing and overruling characteristic is the *possession of a technique*’ (Carr-Saunders & Wilson 1933:285).

<sup>29</sup> Efforts at harnessing spirituality for self-serving ends are not unknown among ministers. ‘Claiming’ answers from God that are presumably ours by divine right find expression in the phrase, ‘what you say is what you get’. Such practice finds a counterpart in the secular spirituality of ‘manifesting’, or actualising one’s wants and desires in the material world (Dyer 1998; Gray 1999). These secular works are not without merit, but need to be read discriminatively. The line between contemplative insights and regression into

who is placed at the helm of his or her own destiny. 'Unlike the disciplines of traditional spiritual life (prayer, fasting, and so on), the promise inherent in the self-help game is that you, yourself, take charge of the whole process' (Bregman 1996:272). The essential self-emptying, or *kenosis*, that typifies the heart of the contemplative spirit is notably absent in this ministerial philosophy. Recent trends in spirituality show how there is '*a revival of self-cultivation* where all the emphasis is on personal growth, a spirituality which is self-centred rather than God-centred' (Leech 1986:51). It is easy to see how some ministries have capitulated to a 'self-help, self-cultivation' spirituality. In the guise of holiness and 'growth', ministry gives endorsement to a religion of self-absorption.

Can ministry still exercise a self-criticism that is able to lay bare a residual capitulation to secular spiritualities and values? By way of answer - a contemplative dimension restores to ministry its subversive and socially critical dynamic. It acts as a sounding board for anomalous ministerial practices and shows that 'the pursuit of a prayerful life of simple love and discipleship sets us in isolation from and opposition to the mainstream, mammon-directed culture in which we live' (Leech 1980:81). Ministers themselves need to recover their identity before God through the exercise of a contemplative ministry. In doing so, they will take the stance of the early desert monastic who challenged the Church of their time. 'What they all shared was a desire to find God by finding themselves. To do this, they asked for the grace to let go of the illusions and delusions upon which their identity had previously been based' (Wicks 1992:31-32). Ministers can do no less. For ministry must find its identity in God, thereby resisting the identities of salesmanship, professionalism, and religious problem-solver.

#### **6.4.6 Contemplative Ministry: More than Idealism?**

Is contemplative ministry feasible, or mere idealism? As there is something mysterious and indefinable about the contemplative life, is a thorough translation of ministry into contemplative mood not too nebulous?<sup>30</sup> Does an advocacy of 'contemplative ministry' take into account the many-sidedness of ministry in its various roles? What embodied difficulties might pastoral practitioners encounter in its implementation? These are serious questions, and the argument thus far has been short on explicit description of the contemplative priest/minister in action. Honesty

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capitalistic self-interest is not always clear. Furthermore, the God of self-control is still firmly in place, albeit in the guise of alleged ego-transcendence.

<sup>30</sup> I have spoken of ministry in contemplative *mood* precisely because I have had a loss of nerve in wondering whether the realisation of contemplative ministry *per se* might be too ambitious, or too presumptuous a way of speaking. We can surely, however, go a long way in improving our ministry while still falling short of the ideal.

would require the admission that a merely academic and abstract construction of ‘contemplative ministry’ would fair less well in the turbulence and demands of everyday ministry. It might even seem somewhat quaint - perhaps at worst an intellectual, ivory-towered titillation and pipe dream. Academics of spirituality are thus left with a feeling of theoretical self-congratulation, while the streetwise practitioner continues with ‘business as usual’. The scenario is all too familiar.

The problem might be highlighted with yet another reference to Leech (1986:127-136). He distinguishes between the role of a ‘clergyperson’ and a ‘priest’. While the clergyperson’s calling seems more utilitarian - in this thinking a kind of religious jack-of-all-trades - the priest is ordained to life, symbolising permanent in-touchness with God, ever the watchman, messenger and ascetic.<sup>31</sup> The situation crystallises into a greater accommodation for contemplative ministry in the image of priesthood than may be found in the clergyperson concept. Protestant ministry (sic) would traditionally thus feel the intrusiveness of contemplative insights more markedly than the Catholic or Anglican tradition. On the other hand, the Protestant tradition might well take another look at the attributes of priesthood and ask whether its own ministry has not too often degenerated into pragmatism and functionalism - and an extraordinary vulnerability to opportunistic agendas.

What is argued for here is the possibility of ministry taking, even tentatively rather than not at all, a contemplative evaluation of its own authenticity. Ministry needs to be essentially ontological. Out of a reclamation of the ‘contemplative way’, ministry will again be able to ask critical questions of what it is doing, and why. Ministry, in the Methodist tradition for example, must see the contemplative spirit as constitutive of its work. It is not merely *preparation*, nor to be left to the private responsibility and (hoped for) integrity of the minister, usually after all other training has been accounted for. ‘Spirituality is not simply a preparation for good pastoral care and good priesthood, a technique for doing some job better. It is the inner reality of priesthood and pastorate, it is the integrated and lived theology of holiness and liberation ... All pastoral work and action must be rooted in, and take its meaning and life from, the inner life of the spirit’ (Leech 1986:136).

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<sup>31</sup> ‘My assumption is that the clerical role is concerned with a range of skills and functions which a person may assume for a time and may abandon. One becomes a cleric; one may cease to be one. Priesthood, on the other hand, is not a job but an identity, a condition, a sacramental state’ (Leech 1986:127). Here the problem is arguably highlighted for *Protestantism*, which will surely struggle more with a proposed contemplative ministry than the more amenable priesthood. Protestantism, for the most part, knows of no such distinction. Perhaps much of ministerial discomfort with contemporary (Protestant?) ministry is related to unexamined assumptions about the nature of ministry as a whole.

#### 6.4.7 Contemplation's Global Awareness

Ministry is never merely localised. Methodists, in particular, live with their 'founder's' conviction that 'the world is my parish'. In this view, which is clearly scriptural, a global concern and vision can only serve to further authenticate ministry. It may seem extraneous to show how the contemplative lifestyle has become particularly amenable to global concerns and political involvement. That was surely a logical inference of the foregoing arguments. Yet spirituality is now a major beneficiary, as is ministry, of how the contemplative way leads to a heightened global and social awareness. Contemplation and action are not awkwardly contradictory entities. Indeed, one may speak of a *contemplative action*, insightfully far removed from a modernistic dualism of fairly recent persuasion. Contemporary appreciation of the contemplative life exposes the preposterous, entitative thinking that prevailed for much of the last century. Contemplation and political action had to be strung together in an artificially unconvincing way, thinly disguising a modernistic assumption that the two were incongruous and hardly precipitative of each other. There is now, in contemporary spirituality, a rationale for a natural progression from contemplation to a global awareness that bodes well for a ministry at one stage subservient to a politicised, South African pseudo-spirituality. The latter often assumed the nature of a 'conservative-evangelical' piety that saw social awareness as an (alien?) appendage to prayer life rather than emergent therefrom.

Contemplative life will not permit the old dichotomous assumptions. A mysticism, and thus contemplation, devoid of global concern and awareness will now be diagnosed as misguided, or even pathological. 'No mystic can avoid becoming a social critic, since in self-reflection one will discover the roots of a sick society' (Nouwen 1996:121). Similarly, it is in the discovery of one's inner fears and questionable ambitions, furthermore, that one is drawn inexorably back to the universal condition and the vision of a new world (ibid:121). The contemplative life and the one of global concern and action are co-inherent. Does Sheldrake (1987:27), however, understate the case and speak, *still*, from a dualistic assumption? He says: 'While it is clear that the search for experience and contemplation as an end in itself may be self-regarding, the same may be true of shallow activism that has lost touch with its spiritual roots'. One appreciates his diagnosis of an authentic and 'balanced' contemplative expression, and one cannot doubt his exhilarating contribution to contemporary spirituality. Yet the twentieth century somehow takes us beyond the old entitative diagnoses. In this regard, at the risk of being opportunistically pedantic, I suggest that Nouwen's (1996) thinking is more dynamic, and closer to the spirit of recent contemplative experience. Such contemplative experience of (prayer-action) co-inherence clearly stems from a

number of sources. One is doubtless the contribution of postmodernism's deconstructionism and the breakdown of a modernistic worldview, where social action was only positionally predicative of the life of prayer. The other is Merton's (cf. 1971, 1973) notable work, which is almost a phenomenological exhibit of contemplation's inevitable journey into global awareness and political action. He assumes that contemplation and political perception and involvement are all-of-a-piece, where 'action and contemplation are focused into one entity by the love of God and of our brother (sic) in Christ' (Merton 1973:143). Without contemplation and real prayerful interiority the Church is unable to fulfil her mandate to transform and save humankind. It is expressly the contemplative dimension that rescues the Church from assimilation into servanthood of cynical worldly powers (ibid:144). Can one say, moreover, that it is the contemplative disposition that ultimately authenticates political involvement for the minister? Might it be *contemplative* ministry that distinguishes authentic action from often frustrated and angry activism? These questions do not imply that 'no action' is somehow Christian. But contemplation enables 'action to be performed in awareness and freedom. This implies that ministers befriend their actions, be reflective, make choices, be aware of their motives for acting, live more transparent lives where they are open to input from others...' (Clarke 1990:163). These aforesaid attributes are clearly properties of contemplation. But similarly 'no man who ignores the rights and needs of others can hope to walk in the light of contemplation because his way has turned aside from truth, from compassion and therefore from God' (Merton 1962:18-19).<sup>32</sup>

## 6.5 CONCLUSION

The roots of contemplation, and thus contemplative ministry, cannot be located exclusively within contemporary spirituality, to say the least. Yet contemporary spirituality explicates and recrafts the contemplative life for the twenty-first century. Thus *contemplative* ministry is a significant part of recent spirituality's contribution to Christian ministry. Given the *bona fides* of the contemplative ethos in the Christian tradition, contemplation, broadly understood, further authenticates and adds a much-needed spiritual depth to ministry.

'Contemplative ministry' necessarily implies more than an understanding of 'contemplation' as a synonym for standard prayer, or for the exercise of private devotion. The contemplative spirit, discipline or outlook, I contend, is transferable to, and definitive of, *all* of ministry. The

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<sup>32</sup> If Merton's work is claimed as too dated for inclusion in *contemporary* spirituality the argument has to be countered by pointing to the popularity that Merton still enjoys amongst more recent writers (Adams 1979, Shannon 1987). Furthermore there are popular reprints of Merton's works and untold recent treatments of Merton's thought in anthologies, dictionaries and critical studies.

possibility, however, of a contemplative ministry that takes root easily or without problems in contemporary concepts of ministry must not be over-estimated. Much ministry as presently practised is not conducive thereto.

The 'ministry' alluded to here has routinely adjusted itself to contemporary religious consumerism. Contemplation is shown as a largely passive, open, perceptive and unprescriptive spiritual disposition. It sees God operative in people and in the world. It dispenses for the most part with the God of dualistic intervention. At the same time, contemplation to some degree defies description and cannot be isolated and petrified within certain time-honoured ministerial roles, nor be made to emerge predictably from them. It is consequently not always easy or safe, I submit, to describe what form a contemplative ministry might take. The danger prevails that over-confidence in managed 'contemplative forms' might divest ministry of the very mystical element that is the life breath of contemplation. Nevertheless, contemplative ministry has its pioneers. They offer stimulating insights into the possibility of a new dawn in Christian ministry. Some of these writers are concerned at trends in contemporary ministry and believe that it is losing its soul and identity to images and expectations that are essentially foreign to its vocation and normative tradition. Most notably, contemplative spirituality, through its fruit of spiritual direction, prayerfulness and observant contemplation is enabling ministers to find God in the midst of their work. It has introduced an intuitive depth to ministry once more. Ministers are led to revisit prayer and quietness, to challenge tired and clichéd concepts, and discover formerly unimagined vistas of interiority and self-transcendence. Contemplative spirituality has made credible a natural progression from contemplative prayer into an active contemplative life on the global stage. It has given the minister a faith that the contemplative way has substance and credibility, putting ministry in touch again with a considerable contemplative heritage. As such, contemplative ministry may not be merely an enticing alternative. More accurately, can one not speak of an overdue return to the only kind of ministry worthy of the name?

**CHAPTER SEVEN**  
**CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENTAL SPIRITUALITY**  
**METAPHORS, MEANS AND MOMENTS IN FORMATION**

**7.1 INTRODUCTION**

Christian spirituality is again enjoying the depths and riches of its formational heritage, though the Church has not yet fully realised their full possibilities. Similarly, the global context and worldview seem conducive to a re-presentation and reception of this invaluable tradition. Contemporary spirituality is shown, in section 2, to revive and utilise classic metaphors of spiritual formation in such a way that new insights are gained and changes are effected. Some of these diverse classic metaphors are identified, including some contemporary ones. It is indicated how these metaphors might be understood as facilitative of spiritual change, and suggested how each unique metaphor evokes some change and understanding of formation that corresponds to its own suggestive imagery and iconic depth. It is further shown, notably in section 3, that the renascent mystical tradition lends a different hue to asceticism and traditional spiritual disciplines. In section 4 some means of formation are elucidated, such as prayer, fellowship, and ‘fasting’, the latter seen as primarily indicative of abstinence and self-discipline in general. These devotional acts of formation are seen against the ‘control’ framework of John Wesley’s traditional disciplines, or ‘means of grace’, as Wesley called them. In this manner, one is able to gauge how contemporary spirituality may authenticate the work of a (Methodist) minister. In section 5 I look at the relation of spirituality and psychology. Of course, psychology is not the only discipline with which spirituality has to interact. But in both disciplines a considerable reciprocity is taking place between insights of formation. However, while the discipline of spirituality needs to reflect openness to this discipline and not be a science unto itself, it also needs to exercise some discriminatory vigilance. New perspective and profile is given to the various stages of spiritual growth, with discriminative inter-disciplinary enhancement taking place. This exchange results in a critical look at the goals of formation in section 6, in a way that serves the entirety of incarnate personhood.

**7.2 FORMATION METAPHORS**

**7.2.1 Reviving Metaphors of Formation**

A singular contribution of contemporary spirituality to ministerial self-understanding and growth is its use of ‘formation metaphors’, ancient and modern. A few effects of this contribution may be

enumerated. They include a revived ministerial awareness and anticipation of spiritual growth. Indeed, pertinent hereto is whether ministerial social activism has too often left the minister to wander an endless plateau of self-effacing, supposedly unselfconscious 'good deeds'. The theoretical substantiation for such Protestant modesty was, *inter alia*, a Bonhoefferian, religionless Christianity as the preferred understanding of Christian holiness.<sup>1</sup> Contestably, Bonhoeffer's (1959:139-153) treatment of Matthew 6:1-18 and the *hidden* character of the Christian life came into it as well, so that any thought of spiritual formation became a Protestant embarrassment. Justice was not served to Christianity's undisputed tradition of formation. The recovery of metaphor, however, especially as it relates to spiritual *journey* and *growth*, gives the minister a new perspective on spiritual formation - assuming, of course, that the said minister ever had one. This recovery ought to be welcomed by the Methodist minister in particular, as they stand in a holiness tradition. Besides, it is a tradition that was given conscious attention by Methodists as a striving for 'Christian perfection', a term that makes no secret of its aspirations or creed. One might debate, in my opinion, whether 'perfection' does not lead to misunderstanding, or is the wisest choice of word, although that is another matter). Protestant scruples aside, the frame of reference offered by 'formation metaphors' becomes a valuable and encouraging source of self-evaluation for ministerial recollection.<sup>2</sup> This frame of reference also harnesses ministerial imagination through stimulating more than self-achieving cognitive hubris. An evocation of unconscious, psychologically 'archetypal' dimensions realises new possibilities for the minister. A contemplative immersion in those metaphors, which have stood the test of time, invites participation within the imaginative depth of the metaphor itself. The metaphorical capacity to regenerate true *affective* religion in the Christian practitioner, as the participative and relational potential of metaphors are hereby utilised, realises a new ontological depth for the minister. As imagination is brought into play, the full interiority of the metaphor is explored at deeper levels than the merely cognitive.

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<sup>1</sup> While such a contention might seem speculative, the influence of Bonhoeffer's thought surely cannot be underestimated here. Particularly compelling are Bonhoeffer's words: 'To be a Christian does not mean to be religious in a particular way, to make something of oneself (a sinner, a penitent, or a saint) on the basis of some method or other, but to be a man - not a type of man, but the man that Christ creates in us' (Bethge 1971:361). The words are insightful, meritorious, and still compelling. But with time the consequence of such thinking - notwithstanding its original contextual power - realised an arid and impotent spirituality.

<sup>2</sup> The Protestant scruples referred to are particularly evident in some Lutheran thought. An exponent of the Lutheran view of 'sanctification' suggests that sanctification comprises getting used to 'justification', thus subverting the (supposed) perniciousness of schemes of progress. Thus, 'instead of viewing ourselves on some kind of journey upward toward heaven, virtue and morality, our sanctification would be viewed more in terms of our journey back down to earth, the business of becoming human, the kind of creature God made' (Forde 1988:29-30). In his critique of the Lutheran view so expressed, Wood (1988:36-41), a Methodist, says that 'believers in the Methodist tradition do not put justification and sanctification in competition with each other'. He has the feeling that Forde (ibid:29-30) 'could have spoken more positively about what sanctification means to believers in their walk with Christ ...' (Wood 1988:41). Together with Wood (ibid:41), I would lament the blurring of sanctification in much over-reactive Protestantism.

Humble and awe-filled passivity, receptivity and (significantly) *participation* now become liberating correctives for the ministerial over-achiever. Gone is the dualistic engagement with petrified propositional ethics, so typical of much conservative-evangelical religion, which served to externalise the ethical life. For indeed, the prerequisite of authentic mystic experience, with its intuition that human effort is worthless unless given by God, is that there *has been*, and still must be, such immersion in the metaphorical/formation-symbols of the Christian journey.<sup>3</sup> For this reason I contend that spirituality's reclamation of formation metaphors, together with the potential of such metaphors for growth, is deserving of more investigation by spirituality in its capacity as a contemporary discipline and as lived experience. Religious professionals are the custodians of the symbolic spiritual terrain. They are the propagators of the symbolic language of spirituality (Holland 1988:49). Making such metaphorical, symbolic language explicit must be the ministerial contribution to, for example, a social activism that has often lost all spiritual aspiration. In the light of desperate social need, as in *apartheid* South Africa, 'spiritual formation' was easily relegated to the category of pietism of the very worst kind - in short, not germane to the problems at hand. Contemporary spiritual bankruptcy in ministry, however, can ill-afford such a characterisation of developmental spirituality. Recovery and emphasis of tested spiritual metaphors, those invariably evocative of Christian growth and progress, stimulate the religious imagination. Access must herein be given, through a nascent contemporary spirituality, to 'the various maps of the spiritual journey, and the methods of advancement in the spiritual ascent' (McGinn, Meyendorff & Leclercq 1985:xiii).<sup>4</sup>

## **7.2.2 Some Metaphors Identified**

### **7.2.2.1 Metaphors of Location and Geography**

A classic locational metaphor of spiritual journey, formation and abundant scriptural attestation is that of the *desert*, or wilderness. That it constitutes a motif throughout Christian history is not surprising. More surprising, however, is the belatedness of its twentieth-century re-exploration,

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<sup>3</sup> Johnston (1995:20), an Irish Jesuit, gives consideration to the metaphors intrinsic to mystical theology and experience. In spite of any Protestant suspicion of precisely such metaphorical schemas on account of 'works righteousness', Johnston clearly has no doubt that grace is still supreme in the mystical way thus metaphorically described. For, 'the call is a gift. Progress is a gift. One must always wait on God'. To make the point in a radical way, 'one must not awaken love before its time' (ibid. 20). (Actually Protestantism has not been without its formational metaphors. Yet the metaphorical paucity within Protestantism, and some dis-ease related thereto, is easily discerned.)

<sup>4</sup> These quoted words constitute part of an authoritative, encyclopedic work on Christian spirituality, together with the authors' assessment of what the human spirit might feasibly attain in the realm of self-transcendence (McGinn, Meyendorff & Leclercq 1985:xiii). Noteworthy for the present purpose is the quotation's endorsement and inclusion of maps for spiritual *growth*, or, in different words, its inclusion of the possibility of spiritual advancement.

happily through a new interest in spiritual theology, or more accurately, *spirituality*. A ministry often over-invested in activity and church programmes has found the appeal of desert and retreat at once a healing balm and a source of direction, self-evaluation and personal and social integration. Moreover, some authors have written persuasively of how first-world ministers in particular have a need for 'desert spirituality'. Such ministers might hereby avoid capitulation to the temptations of popularity, success and the permeative self-help culture paraded by popular bookstores and 'motivational speakers' (Lane 1984:78). The desert stands therefore 'in sharp contrast to the secularity of modern life with its emphasis upon self-expression and self-fulfilment. The desert affords no hiding place, no refuge. It is a place of desolation and liberation' (Williams 2003:227). The renewed interest in mysticism and mystical theology owes a great debt to images of the desert, whether interior or exterior, not to mention indebtedness to 'the holy cenobites and hermits who, in the third and fourth centuries, retired to the Egyptian desert to pray...' (Johnston 1995:17). Such images of interior and exterior deserts and its accompanying solitude, gave rise to 'the monastic movement which was to nourish prayer, mystical prayer, for almost two millennia throughout the Christian world' (ibid:17). Through reclaiming the desert imagery, and all that goes with it, Christian spirituality, contemporarily understood, opens ministry up to all the benefits of the monastic movement. Such monasticism is the inspiration of a spirituality eroded down to bare essentials by the inner and outer desert that facilitates the recent popularity of 'centring prayer'; as for example the work of Pennington (1980) seems to show. Less apparent beneficiaries of the grand desert tradition, with some qualifications, are contemporary spiritual phenomena such as the Taizé Community, the Focolare movement, and the on-going influence of De Foucauld's work (Brother Roger 1983:368-369; Robertson 1983:153-154; Gibbard 1986a:419-423). Their style of prayer communities, in a sense set apart from the institutional Church, has brought inspiration and challenge to contemporary ministers, not least to young ministerial candidates. Modified contemporary eremitic retreats have also been in evidence, usually practising a periodic report-back to a central communal rallying point. Indeed, is not the word 'retreat' itself a child of the older desert image, tailored to a different era? Ministerial practitioners are challenged to a new maturity in the desert/monastic prayer life that gave rise to the great monastic progression through *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio* and *contemplatio*.

An unlikely twenty-first century synonym for the *desert* might just become the *city*, which in the book of Revelation serves as a final consummatory image of the heavenly city, but surely not without this-worldly implications. For First World ministers the picture of the secular rundown city

and the ministry it demands might more comfortably be avoided. It increasingly presents itself as today's desert, even though 'from the beginning there has been a tendency to place "desert" and "city" in opposition as symbols of two polarized lifestyles' (Burton 1992:124-125). Sometimes ministry seems exclusive to suburbia and largely unintelligible outside of the suburban context. Cities are thus surrendered to social workers, businessmen and contemporary hermits. But insightful contextual spirituality is beginning to show that 'for those who wish to be at the "kingdom" frontier of history, it is the steaming ghetto of my (sic) big city, not the countryside that is the place of the radical overcoming of this world, the place where one renews creation' (Tardiff 1995:20). Again, the city may not only be a prime context for Christian service, but also an incomparably valuable school for ministerial and lay spiritual growth. Thus it is now commonplace to speak of a reverse movement, a spiritual return from the desert to the cities, as indicative of a truly authentic spirituality. The city is seen to offer those robust means of spiritual growth that could once be found only in the wilderness.

What our forefathers and mothers went to the desert to do, today may be done in the city, for today the desert is in the city too. What about solitude? The city is one vast solitude, isolation, anonymity, lack of family bonds. What about virile lifestyle? There is the bruising nature of urban life - its pace, noise, stimuli. The demons are there too: Prestige, eroticism, money, power. Urban monasticism calls for fighters (Burton 1992:126).

The foregoing quotation, by no means an isolated example of contemporary thinking, proves an encouragement and opportunity for those ministers whose environments have seen the change to downtown situations. Here the encroachment of urbanisation has all but totally changed the manner and focus of ministry. In this changed context a contemplative spirituality reveals how the city may be an unexpectedly conducive formative environment for realising robust, mature, unselfish servants of humanity. Rather than bewailing their dislocation and seeking leafier settings, ministers are finding in contemporary spirituality an endorsement of their place and role in the 'urban-desert' context. Might such urbanised ministers not justifiably wonder whether the solitary suburban or country retreat centre, so popularised today, has less to do with the Desert Fathers and contemporary Christianity than the downtown desolation of city life, stripped of everything but faith in God?<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> 'Desert', 'city' or 'retreat' centre may seem oddly inappropriate and sedentary as pictures of *progress* and *movement*. They are common nouns in essence, but in spirituality they acquire a nominal or adjectival abstraction. Intrinsic to the picture of the desert in biblical imagery is the idea of *journeying* nomadic life, or

Other imagery of geography and specific location also enjoy revival in contemporary thought. Fostering the archetypes of spiritual journey, or ‘ascent’ in this case, is the still-prevalent image of Mount Athos, and with it the undoubted imagery that holy biblical mountains conjure up, such as those of Mount Sinai, or the mount of transfiguration, to name a few. But, ‘in the Eastern Churches, the wind of renewal has also been blowing powerfully, most notably on Mount Athos itself. The monastic revival that is taking place all over Greece is centered here with the old monasteries being repopulated and new monasteries beginning’ (Priddis 1986:575). And if *monastery* may be an inaccessible image for some, then at least one Protestant theologian has made of it what he can. Speaking against the ministerial wanderlust of over-itinerant American Protestant ‘pastors’, his favourite designation, he writes:

In taking ‘monastery’ as a metaphor for ‘parish’, I found a way to detach myself from the careerism mind-set that has been so ruinous to pastoral vocations and began to understand my congregation as a location for a spiritually maturing life and ministry .... I do insist ... that the congregation is not a job site to be abandoned when a better offer comes along. The congregation is the pastor’s place for developing vocational holiness (Peterson 1992:21).

Peterson (1992:21) maintains that ‘without the humiliating and wholly “unspiritual” experiences of parish life - the limited routine of trivial tasks, the sheer tedium and loneliness - there would be no way of confronting much of human nature ... The pastor has come to the parish to escape the illusory Christian identity proposed by the world ...’ Accordingly, this contemporary writer is not in favour of short pastoral tenures in a parish. The influence of St Benedict (Chadwick 1958:291-337) is clearly admitted and in evidence here. The possibilities of sacred place (or ‘parish’) and identification with that place for the spiritual development of the minister is thus not to be underestimated.

Reclamation of ‘place’ metaphors for developmental spirituality is given further impetus by the revived contemporary interest in Celtic Christian spirituality. The values of ‘place’ and ‘journey’

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*purgative progress*, whether of the Old Testament Hebrew people in the Sinai desert or of Jesus in the spiritual formation acquired through his eremitic struggle. It may seem less easy to make ‘city’ or ‘retreat’ serve the interests of mobility. On the other hand, contemporary spirituality also shows that ‘movement’ may not always be the best picture for some experiences of spiritual formation. Other images of ‘night’ or ‘cloud’ (of unknowing) are in some ways equally sedentary, yet in keeping with a less conscious progress, though significant nonetheless - and perhaps more so.

are paradoxically connected in Celtic spirituality, thus giving to developmental spirituality the sense of movement. Sheldrake (1995:8) explains how ‘places’, in Celtic thought, are transit points - a passageway between worlds. To the Celtic mind, places themselves are not static realities. Indeed, both the pilgrimage journey and the sacred place spoke of a *transitus*, or ‘passing over’ from one world to the other. The journeying connotation in both ‘place’ and ‘journey’ for the Celtic, and much earlier ascetics, is seen in Sheldrake’s words: ‘... an engagement with “place” ... may enable a spiritual, inner journey ... Equally, the journey of the wandering ascetics was actually a search for the ultimate *place*, a place of harmony and the unity of all things in the Absolute - what the Celtic ascetics called “the place of the resurrection”’ (Sheldrake 1995:8). Of interest here is also the way that the image of *desert*, for instance, serves much the same paradoxical function as a symbol at once of ‘place’ and ‘journey’.

#### **7.2.2.2 Metaphors of Deprivation and Alienation**

A formational metaphor enjoying revival is that of the *dark night*, as virtually immortalised by John of the Cross (1542-1591) and further underscored by the Christian mystical tradition (Johnston 1995:156-173). The progression or spiritual development in the night metaphor moves from ‘the night of the senses’ to the second ‘night of the spirit’. Both nights describe a necessary purgation that is effected by a deprivation of sensory or spiritual affirmation. An initial experience of alienation is increasingly shown to be one of spiritual progress. In the night of sense, God feeds us from within rather than through the external senses, such as memory, imagination and reason. In this sensory night ‘these faculties are at rest so that our intuitive faculties, the passive intellect, and the will-to-God, may access the “still point”, the place where our personal identity is rooted in God as an abiding presence’ (Keating 1992:90). Johnston (1995:160) explains that God is now communicating Godself in a new way and weaning the soul from the food of infants and giving it the coarse bread of the more mature Christian. But in the second night, that of the spirit, there is an extinguishing of ‘the last traces of our subjection to the emotional programs for happiness in the spiritual part of our nature’ (Keating 1992:98). Something of a developmental pattern seems to be evident here. Indeed, contemporary writers seemingly give a far greater systematisation and progression to the understanding of the dark night than possibly even John of the Cross intended. One must be cautioned, therefore, that the nights ‘are not conceived as straightforwardly successive states. They overlap and interact a good deal, and both “nights” have active and passive aspects (struggle and receptivity together)’ (Williams 1983:104). Ministers, though, can be grateful for thoroughly modern books on formation, written in accessible English, and out of a modern mindset. In addition, the contemporary leaning to systematisation of the ‘nights’ is not without advantages

and ultimately offers more clarification than obfuscation. Perhaps the real difficulty of reading the classical texts is that they are mostly written out of a pre-modern conceptual world. For example, John of the Cross' commentaries are largely steeped in medieval scholasticism (Collier 2004:10-11). But contemporary writers have done much to enable ministers to identify their own ministerial experiences in more accessible presentations of the classical works, not least of all in Johnston (1995) and Keating (1992). A fresh perspective is hereby given on spiritual development, enabling one to locate oneself on the spiritual map. Ministers might be surprised to find that this 'night', as contemporarily elucidated, becomes a herald of profound enlightenment, and 'that the creative people who find themselves located in impenetrable darkness are the truly privileged ones who share in the redemption of the world. O night more lovely than the dawn' (Johnston 1995:173). Surely there is good news here, and some measure of consolation for those devout ministers and congregants who have moved beyond the sensationalist 'bright lights' of popular religion.

The *dry well* metaphor as illustrative of a new departure in prayer life is also powerful in its affirmation of well-documented Christian experience. Interestingly, the metaphor of the dry well seems to dovetail with the experience of the dark night. Most notable about contemporary Christian spirituality is that it is placing various experiences of the masters and mistresses of prayer into a wider, yet consistent and comprehensible framework. In the image of the *dry well*, contemporary spirituality has Teresa of Avila (Peers 1960) to thank.<sup>6</sup> Yet again, it is the understanding and elucidation of *recent writers* that give to Teresa's classical writing a fresh confirmation and accessibility. She is often 'enamoured of the exaggeratedly flowery and emotional language of the Spanish royal court' (Collier 2004:10-11). But with contemporary writers the dynamic authenticity of her experiences and writing takes on new life. Thus Green (1979), for example, simplifies and systematises Teresa's autobiographical work for contemporary spirituality. He takes one through Teresa's experience of the stages of interior growth in prayer. Using Teresa's picture of drawing water from a well, where the water stands for prayer or 'consolation', Green (1979:37-55) outlines the natural progression of prayer where the 'water' is at first more easily available, but ultimately dries up. Of course, the minister or congregant who is well versed in prayer will recognise the earlier stages of consolatory prayer, when the 'water of affirmation' tends to flow more freely. One labours at first in prayer as with a bucket, then with a pump, then with rivulets flowing into the

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<sup>6</sup> Perhaps Teresa would be better known for her metaphor of 'water' than that of the *dry well*. 'The water image she uses has become perhaps the most famous metaphor in the history of Christian spirituality' (Green 1979:29-30). Nevertheless, it is in the picture of the dry well, I submit, that Teresa takes us seriously into 'prayer beyond the beginnings', which is also the sub-title of Green's (1979) book.

garden, and finally with cloudbursts. Yet something more than these initial stages is demanded of one who is to guide others beyond the beginnings. Such is surely the minister or priest. Thus of particular interest to the pastoral worker will be the dry well syndrome. For 'all the great masters [sic] of prayer recognize that the time will come when our intellects, our imaginations, our feelings dry up and cease to be of help. It seems then that we have lost God; but the purpose of the whole experience is rather to reveal to us that God, the Lord we love, is not to be identified with any of these created means ...' (Green 1979:21). Of groundbreaking significance for ministry, then, is that the experience of darkness or dryness has more to do with the perpetual nature of prayer than the exception - sadly, an insight expediently avoided by stockists of religious consumer goods. However, whether using the image of 'night', 'dryness' or the classic 'cloud of unknowing' image, such experiences are normal, good and healthy signs of interior growth, albeit not without mystery.

The *cloud of unknowing*, from the name given to one of the outstanding treatises of fourteenth century England, is not immediately evident as a metaphor for spiritual growth. Nonetheless, it is not out of place with the metaphors of the dark night and the dry well and bears mentioning here. The progressive, or developmental, inference of this metaphor is catered for in the distinction made between the 'cloud of forgetting' as one stage of the contemplative journey, and the subsequent 'cloud of unknowing' itself. The 'cloud of *forgetting*' is preliminary, referring to the separation of oneself from the world and its creatures. It is thus a kind of night of the senses, or the first experience of the dry well. The second stage, at the risk of over-entitative organisation, is the 'cloud of *unknowing*' - that cloud between God and the seeker that can only, in classic language, be pierced by 'naked intent' and the 'longing of love.'

### **7.2.2.3 Miscellaneous Developmental Metaphors**

A metaphor not touched on thus far, and one that finds new impetus and appeal in contemporary Christian thinking, is that of *human growth and development*. The reason for this newfound impetus is in no small part due to the enhancement of spirituality by the science of physical and psychological growth, and developmental psychology as a whole. There is a kinship here with 'Paul's metaphors of growth in the grace of Christ as the passage and development from being a child to becoming an adult. At other places we also find the idea of leaving an old life to embrace a new life or to shed old clothes in order to assume new ones' (Cunningham & Egan 1996:49). A concomitant human growth metaphor enjoying new circulation, and thus not out of place here, is the traditional *bride-bridegroom* picture. The peculiar relational dimension of the metaphor gives it uniqueness in developmental spirituality and affords the minister simultaneous access to two

outstanding priorities of pastoral concern - commitment to God-relationship *and* to marriage relationship, and the analogous ways that these two relationships inform each other. The new freedom of expression relating to sexual intimacy in marriage, and the proliferation of marriage enrichment courses (together with the rediscovery of the long-neglected biblical book, *Song of Songs*, and its unashamed praise of sexuality and intimacy) bring long-unexplored dimensions back to contemporary spirituality.

Because some of the above metaphors have particularly arduous, heroic or desolate connotations to them, (for example, *desert*, *dark night*, seasons of indefinite *dryness*) they might well seem impracticable or idiosyncratic to the everyday Christian. Can one identify so easily with these fantastic, albeit traditionally sound, metaphors? The everyday experience of Christian discipleship in city or suburb, and other commonplace life, may seem ‘too bound to ordinary experience, or too uncertain to attempt the desert journey (even though in our worst moments we can understand the desert!) or the ascent of the mountain’ (Cunningham & Egan 1996:59). Another suggestion, therefore, is the model of *the widening circle*. It could be most helpful, in other words, to envisage our Christian life as an on-going endeavour to *widen* our *circle* of human concern so that we break the narrowness of our understanding of Christianity, bringing ourselves into a much larger reality (ibid:59). This expansion of horizons, in my view, is without question a distinctive contribution of contemporary Christian spirituality. Moreover, there is a need for alternative models of Christian growth, complementing the ones we find in classic Christian literature (ibid:59). A metaphor that facilitates expanding vision and a more holistic and comprehensive spirituality must surely be welcomed. *The widening circle* is timeously in step with postmodern intelligibility and the global village phenomenon. Further, the metaphor accords well with the now almost proverbial definition of spirituality by Schneiders (1986:266-267), that ‘spirituality refers to the experience of consciously striving to integrate one’s life in terms *not of isolation and self-absorption* [italics mine] but of self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives’.

Contemporary spirituality, most helpfully for any ministerial liturgist, has highlighted again the *metaphorical and symbolic content of the liturgical year*. The interest in liturgy on the part of contemporary spirituality has doubtless also been spurred on by the twentieth century’s renewed attention to the large, deep and universal metaphors and symbols of the liturgy. Older studies had seemingly only given verbal attention to the liturgy. The function of the Church year, though, is to provide shape and order for the living out of one’s life, the goal being that of participation in

Christ's life (Pfatteicher 1997:108). If that is so, then spirituality might reasonably be supposed to have annexed a hitherto unclaimed area of academic study, namely the way a metaphorical liturgy, biblical metaphors and the symbolism of the Christian seasons feed developmental spirituality.<sup>7</sup> Work has already been done on liturgical spirituality, so called, so that the biblical-narrative symbols and metaphors realise once more their capacity to incorporate the faithful congregant into a participative life in the historical and timeless story of Christ (ibid:108). Some attention surely *had* to be given to the dimension of spirituality in the seasonal liturgy and lectionary, other than the exclusively expository publications on the three-year cycle of lectionary readings (Soards, Dozeman & McCabe 1992-1994; Craddock, Hayes, Holladay & Tucker 1985-1987). After all, 'the minister serves as the director of the drama of worship, a structure of the week. The minister serves as a guide through the seasons of the Christian year, a structure of the year' (Johnson 1988:93). A rediscovery of the metaphorical power of lectionary, liturgy and Church year by liturgical spirituality enables the minister and their people to function more self-consciously with regard to the given metaphors in the drama of worship and the narrative of the scriptures (Johnson 1988:93). Saliers (1984:101-102) says 'the loss of the church year as a continuing living of the narrative of God's history with us and the story of Jesus' life, ministry and death/resurrection, and the loss of vital sacramental faith and biblical preaching - all these have conspired to diminish our sense of the way in which the Christian life remembers and becomes something more than it already is'.

A liturgical spirituality, in my view, is able to surpass the drier and more detached approach of the older study of liturgics. Contrary to the latter approach we are now seeing 'a worthy liturgical spirituality' [that] 'involves the *integration* [italics mine] of objective and subjective piety, a balance between the communal and the personal in such a way that each enriches the other' (Saliers 1984:x). Indeed, it is mostly through such liturgically induced experience, and not through doctrine and discipline, that the church - and particularly the Eastern Church - has developed and formed the faith of its people (ibid:x). Outstandingly pertinent is the way that liturgical spirituality has the potential of producing a resonance of the spiritual year in the faithful worshipper and communicant. This experiential resonance enables minister and congregant to transcend a mere chronological review of the historical life of Christ, substituting it for the timeless, participative celebration

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<sup>7</sup> This area of study is surely not done justice by the normal practical theological approach, which gives attention to a more or less disinterested study of liturgics, with minimal or non-existent attention to the liturgical or seasonal impact on the spiritual life, its sustenance and formation. Pertinent to the contemporary debate on spirituality is also the place of subjectivity and personal experience as it pertains to the scholar or student of spirituality. Certainly, there is something profoundly untheological about a discipline that renders liturgics a supposedly detached, 'scientific', non-existential discipline.

engaged in by the ‘angels and archangels and all the company of heaven’ (ibid:108). But intrinsic to the whole understanding of liturgy and Christian calendar is the formative capacities of the symbols and metaphors embedded therein. Christian spirituality, or that expression dealing pointedly with liturgy, may show how ‘symbols rise to consciousness that may not be understood for centuries. But the wholeness of the liturgy preserves them for us so that they are available when we need them’ (ibid:109). Yet their availability in this case is only accessed by a spirituality that offers more to ‘liturgies’ than the usual wooden and undynamic approach.<sup>8</sup>

### 7.2.3 Apologia and Summation

The categorisation of the above metaphors is obviously neither watertight nor completely satisfactory. For one, the *desert* is also a place of deprivation and alienation and would just as easily qualify for the second group so named. Its inclusion under geography or location seems somewhat contrived. Yet its separation from the ‘dark night’ and the ‘dry well’ is not entirely unjustified. For one, the desert is more obviously a *place*, and while it can refer to an interior desert - an interior place within ourselves that we withdraw to - the importance of withdrawing physically to a *physical* place is uniquely preserved by this metaphor, as also by the pictures of ‘city’ and ‘retreat’. ‘Dark night’, ‘dry well’ and ‘cloud of unknowing’ do not etymologically secure the well-attested Christian component of physical location as prescriptive for the maturation of embodied spirituality. In this sense, they are abstract. More persuasive for such categorisation, however, is the argument that the entry into *desert*, whether of the physical or exclusively interior kind, is an act of premeditation - a self-chosen withdrawal.<sup>9</sup> This premeditative attribute is probably sufficient to distinguish it from the *dry well*, *dark night*, and *cloud of unknowing*, which, for the most part, are

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<sup>8</sup> The seeming prejudice reflected here towards traditional practical theology might be too heavy-handed. Still, practical theology has tended to focus on the *means* by which God comes to humankind in Godself’s Word. Using scientific approaches borrowed from the social (operational) sciences and its research methods, practical theology has examined those mediatory operations in terms of their suitability and efficaciousness for theology. The clinical approach thus adopted has often had the effect of concentrating on the *means* rather than the *content*, while also inevitably demystifying the unknowable and mystical. Though there is no doubt place for this, little is made of the inter- and *intra-communicative and existential dynamic of this divine communication* - nor *can* it be made, given the parameters of its study; thus there emerges the sense of a vacuum in theological study, which invites the discipline of spirituality. As a result, spirituality, or even the older spiritual theology, offers a complementary dimension to the overall education of the minister, realising an authenticity for ministry that would otherwise be less than comprehensive. The older Pastoral Theology had predetermined the academic fields for consideration *and* predetermined the academic recipients of the subject - all ministers - and effectively divorced interior ontology from its deliberations, probably because it had no tools to engage the subject convincingly.

<sup>9</sup> Of course one could argue the stark exception of the strong word used in Mark 1:12, where Jesus is probably *driven* or *thrown out* (ἐκβάλλει) into the wilderness by the Spirit, although the word does not necessarily involve force (Louw & Nida 1988-1989:188). Nevertheless, *desert* is often explicitly *chosen* in Christian tradition. Presumably even Jesus himself was not mesmerised or robotic in entering the wilderness, but went of his own volition. Certainly the entrance into a *retreat* is palpably volitional.

visited upon the contemplative in a personally non-volitional and undeliberative way; so to speak ‘from the outside’.<sup>10</sup> Instructive for ministers in this categorisation is the contemporary documenting of both *chosen* wildernesses and those wildernesses that are an *inevitable*, passive part of one’s growth in the contemplative and formative life. The preservation of this distinction is part of the intention here. Will not authentic ministry involve both kinds?

Customary metaphors of spiritual maturation are particularly those of the *journey*, the *ascent*, (for example, of ‘Mount Carmel’, or ‘Jacob’s ladder’), and the *symbols that invite participation* in the Christian seasons or narratives, together with pictures of *human growth and development*. The intrinsic developmental and progressive facility of these metaphors lends itself naturally and self-evidently to the movement of Christian maturation. And even the idea and practice of *pilgrimage*, as treated by Hughes (2003) for example, is not relegated to the annals of history. It is still proving appropriate to the requisite idea of *movement* in the journey of some twenty-first century Christians. The more sedentary metaphors utilised in this section (for developmental spirituality) might thus seem peculiarly inappropriate to journeying and movement. Such are arguably, *dark night*, *cloud of unknowing*, and *dry well*. What has been attempted here, however, is more evocative of the terrain of the journey, its moods and undulations rather than speaking generally with ‘journey-metaphors’, which are all well and good but often have no descriptive substance and interiority to them. It is the challenge and cutting-edge of spirituality that it now presents new windows into the landscape of the developmental journey. Contemporary Christian spirituality has herein offered imaginative depth and intricacy to the vague generalities of the not-so-distant past. For the minister, it has put into more graphic relief the realities and pitfalls of the journey and located the minister on the map rather than assuming that spiritual maturation is inevitable, or takes care of itself.

### **7.3 A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON FORMATIVE SPIRITUALITY**

Preliminary to discussion on the *means* of formation are some developments that need to be appreciated. Contemporary spirituality, as far as it addresses ‘the *means* of spiritual formation’, or what Wesley (1944:134-151) called ‘the means of grace’, takes a step behind an older or more mechanical treatment of the spiritual disciplines. Such is argued here. One might now welcome a kind of meta-ascetics, or new perspective on formative spirituality that is less absorbed in the

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<sup>10</sup> The relativity in this sentence, ‘for the most part’, is an acknowledgement that the ‘dark night of the senses’ is not entirely passive and involves engagement with, and mastery of, the senses. It is thus not an ethereal experience, or merely a ‘spiritual’ one in the pejorative sense of the word.

outward actions themselves, and more facilitative of spiritual formation and perception. Asceticism, or the practice of spiritual disciplines, is now seen in a new contemplative perspective. Ascetical practices have not changed so much as has the spiritual disposition for realising their potency. Moreover, spirituality, with the help of postmodern thinking, has seemingly subsumed a pedestrian ascetical theology into the more indeterminative and dynamic experience of 'spirituality' as a whole. Thus it is now easier to appreciate, both intuitively and academically, that the ascetical actions or 'means of grace' are not automatic conduits of spiritual growth, albeit indispensable for serving an embodied, incarnate spirituality. Another way of positing this distinction between the older devotional piety and the contemporary spirituality of asceticism is to draw attention to the distinction between *practising* the disciplines and *participating* in that spirit that initially gave them life. Contemporary spirituality has been able to effect a participative engagement through the various classical means of formation, rather than stagnate in a preoccupation with the external observances alone. This is the distinction between merely *practising* the disciplines of formation and actually being assimilated into, or *participating in*, that triune relationship intended by the disciplines themselves. It is seen in the contrast between a disinterested science of religion, or science of comparative religion, and the newly coined 'field encompassing field' of spirituality. The distinction is commonly indicated in contemporary lay parlance by those who claim little or no interest in 'religion' but speak of a rich spiritual life - even Christian. The experience is not without validity, though the vocabulary is often clichéd and unreflective. Academically, the corresponding distinction was, until fairly recently, evidenced in an ascetical theology divorced from the more sublime and exclusive mystical theology.

But more, however, is being argued here, since I submit that the very real mystical awakening has also spilled over into how one approaches asceticism or 'means of grace'. A 'mystical resurrection' has in some part emerged again because of the historical alienation of mysticism from those supposedly lesser mortals who could only experience the lower reaches of asceticism. This mystical resurrection has lent to asceticism a different hue - one that appreciates far more than the outward actions of the ascetical tradition. Furthermore, it is being appreciated again that 'mystical theology, as it was used in the premedieval period, referred not to systematic theological reflection *on* mystical experience ... but to the obscure knowledge of God experienced *in and through* mystical experience precisely in contradistinction to the knowledge of God arrived at through systematic theology' (Schneiders 1989:688). There is arguably now a kind of blurring of the classic distinction between ethical and mystical categories and a merging of these categories into more versatile and less entitative 'spirituality'. This convergence or consolidation, I maintain, has now

brought lustre and vibrancy back to asceticism, offering to the seeking minister a new perception of - and insight into - the spiritual disciplines. There has indeed even been a recognition that one might come to the contemplative dimension of one's spirituality far sooner than was thought possible, and that over-rigid organisation of a certain sequence cannot always bear out the testimony of experience. Thus, 'it is possible that some people are naturally disposed to contemplate at the *beginning* [italics mine] of their Christian life. The teaching of prayer at local church level could well make room for this and be released from the obsession with petition and intercession, unimaginatively interpreted, that has unfortunately dominated it for too long' (Ward 1983:95-96). For instance, need one still maintain that the mystical or contemplative experience is but the reward of long years in ascetical devotion? Might one increasingly be able to reverse the order and actually bring *to* asceticism a contemplative dynamic that re-orders one's understanding of spiritual disciplines altogether? Further, does not the postmodern 'mindset' make this earlier contemporary appearance of the mystical dimension a greater possibility than heretofore, liberated as it is from the less versatile modernistic spirit? Such reorganising of sequential expectations is often precipitated by contemporary insights and experiences in Christian spirituality, and must be identified as peculiarly postmodern, but also brought about by the new fluidity of contemporary 'spirituality'. A pedestrian journey through various spiritual disciplines, then, and their supposedly inevitable capacity to yield spiritual formation is a less certain practice in the world of contemporary spirituality than it used to be. In this regard, would it be unfair to suggest that Foster's (1978,1992) popular works were distinctively part of the *pre*-spirituality era, contemporarily understood, as they tended to assume too much inherent potency for the disciplines themselves, or failed to elucidate their contemplative dimensions? Certainly Foster's (1978) earlier work, it would seem to me, lacked a contemplative dynamic and consequently robbed asceticism's full capacity to effect formation. Similarly, Willard's (1988) comprehensive ascetical study, while making a contribution to embodied spirituality, yields less fruit for the minister than promised. It still conveys a debatably modernistic atmosphere that appeals exclusively to renewed efforts from the minister or ascetic to achieve those spiritual heights that are, frankly, inaccessible without a new spiritual vision. For 'ultimately, spiritual disciplines are not something we choose for ourselves. This is another problem we have in our individualized, privatized form of religion in our culture. We think spiritual disciplines are something *we take on*' (Mulholland 1985:77). Thus something more is now presupposed in contemporary asceticism than was evidenced in the often stolid and unproductive approach to spiritual disciplines of the recent past.

## 7.4 'MEANS' OF FORMATION

### 7.4.1 A Frame of Reference

Methodist ministers may refer to the various 'means of grace' prescribed by Wesley (1944:134-151), which for Wesley and the people called 'Methodist' constituted those practices most conducive, and indeed indispensable, for effecting spiritual formation. These 'means' can therefore serve as a kind of 'control' for the present consideration. Wesley (ibid:136) says: 'By "means of grace", I understand outward signs, words, or actions, ordained of God, and appointed for this end, to be the ordinary channels whereby He [sic] might convey to men [sic], preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace.' In gauging authenticity for ministry, particularly of Methodists - both ministers and lay - it would seem appropriate, then, to look at 'means of formation' through this traditional Wesleyan frame of reference. (One can then examine their adequacy or current hermeneutic in the light of contemporary understanding in the field of spirituality.) Together, these 'means' formed, and still do, the Methodist rule of life. In essence the rules were of two kinds: the first and primary group comprised 'all the ordinances of God'. These were the (supposedly) instituted channels of God's grace; that is, those in no way negotiable. They were: *prayer*, which had to represent one's life in various contexts; as individuals, thus commonly referred to as 'private prayer'; then, prayer practised by participants in the primary family social group; and finally, prayer engaged in as members of the great congregation. Prayer required in all instances an intimate connection with the reading of Scripture. Distinguishable in some way from the latter was the *searching of the Scriptures*, and the immediate practising of what one learnt there. Another means of grace was the *Lord's Supper*, which one was enjoined to attend at every opportunity. *Fasting* was another instituted means, with its purpose of weaning the soul from its habitual attachment to earthly things. Finally, *Christian conference* was understood in two ways: as sharing in small groups for fellowship and nurture, which for Wesley was of inestimable value and priority and typified that emphasis in the early Church; and as using one's conversation as a divine trust for the purpose of witnessing to one's faith (Williams 1960: 132-133). The second group, comprising part of the Methodist rule of life, was referred to as the '*prudential* means of grace', since these means were tailored to the specific context of the small group and could thus be subject to changing needs. All the same, the prudential means have a timelessness about them, even though intended for eighteenth-century England. They include that of 'doing no harm, avoiding evil of every kind, especially that which is more generally practised' and, second, that of 'doing good by being merciful after one's own power, doing good of every possible sort to the bodies of people as well as to their souls and, as far as possible, to all' (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2000:15-16).

While the previously mentioned ‘means of grace’ might introduce nothing *new* for Methodist ministers, its importance and significance is given new life by a contemporary spirituality. It is important that one appreciate the part of contemporary spirituality, first, in *re-presenting* each Christian tradition with its own distinctive spirituality. Any number of contemporary works might be cited to substantiate this contribution of spirituality to the diverse Christian family (Alexander 1988; Gillet 1993; Hinson 1993; Dupré & Saliers 1989; Collins 2000). Contemporary spirituality might therefore be conceived as an ecumenical terminus and dispensary, forwarding sometimes forgotten inheritances to each specific part of the collective Christian corpus. But more than that, these spiritual traditions can now be viewed in their own light, and in a sense isolated from other theological preoccupations, such as systematic theology and biblical studies, while in creative and dynamic interaction with other Christian traditions. Contemporary spirituality, in other words, does not merely re-deliver the Methodist rule of life in the package of a previous era, or even the recent past. Rather, it gives to each discipline and ‘rule’ a self-subsisting dynamic that it never had before. Even my reference, then, to the Methodist ‘means of grace’ is in some way beholden to a contemporary spirituality that gives a new profile to one’s own inherited spirituality. More so, it invites an engagement with that inherited spirituality in a wider self-respecting subject that operates out of its own theory and praxis.

## **7.4.2 The Means of ‘Prayer’**

### **7.4.2.1 A Richer Landscape**

An enduring impression left by contemporary Christian spirituality is the richer landscape it brings to a previously uniform and petrified experience of ‘prayer’. In other terms, it is as if prayer has now been further elaborated and given a fresh vocabulary. One might well ask: ‘Does this impression bear the burden of proof in contemporary literature and experience? Has anything changed in prayer?’ Certainly the earlier twentieth century often had a more pedestrian grasp of prayer than the momentum generated through accessibility to the contemplative and mystical tradition - such a possibility being in no small part accountable to Vatican II (1962-1965). It could plausibly be argued that prayer of the nineteenth and, in some instances, the twentieth century was taken for granted as self-explanatory and conventional.<sup>11</sup> Such simplicity and uniformity stands in

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<sup>11</sup> Methodists would be familiar with ‘ACTS’, a popular acronym standing for ‘adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication.’ This acronym lent a predictable and manageable concept to prayer that had little to do with the discovery and mystery characteristic of contemporary mystical and contemplative insights. The latter presents prayer in a more continuous way - a perspective or awareness, as opposed to creating a punctiliar effect. While not referring to ‘ACTS’ itself, a number of Methodist publications presented prayer in precisely this stolid, technical and unimaginative fashion (Morrow 1956:20-22; Stacey 1971:94-98; Abba 1977:87-96). Understandably, these writers were also products of their time. But such ‘safe’ structures of prayer, usually emphasising human endeavour, suffered for want of the breath of life.

stark contrast to contemporary appreciation of prayer. Thus 'prayer' in more recent dictionaries on spirituality can seldom appear under one heading as assuming a common universal understanding in Christendom. One only has to look at a popular dictionary such as Wakefield's (1983).

A richer and more diverse landscape, therefore, now comes into view. A Methodist minister and author expresses something of this new departure from the merely punctiliar understanding of 'prayer' as he shares his insights, experience and reflection on contemporary spirituality. "Practising the presence of God" is a phrase that has become increasingly instructive for my own pilgrimage. Constantly it enters my mind reminding me that it is within everyday life ... that my union with the resurrected Christ must be lived out ... I failed to grasp this truth in the early years of my walk with Christ' (Hudson 1995:121). Moreover, the full dimension of 'prayer' is given a new vocabulary in the writing of innovative contemporary writers. One reads of 'turning the mind regularly in a Christward direction', 'keeping constantly thankful', and 'doing everything we do for God' (ibid:125-129). Prayer is now revealed as a fascinatingly detailed landscape that, in essence, defies description and manageability. This revelation may be more of a 'paradigm shift' for the Protestant minister than the Catholic priest, who presumably enjoyed greater exposure to the monastic prayer tradition and its access to contemplative prayer. On the other hand, when Vatican II shed some of the exclusivity traditionally associated with mysticism, one imagines that prayer in the Catholic tradition almost certainly took a significant step forward. The sharp distinction that had for centuries been drawn between the ascetical life and the mystical life was now assimilated into the more comprehensive term 'spirituality'. With Vatican II it would seem that this discontinuity between the life of ordinary prayer and the mystical life was absorbed into a comprehensive discipline (Schneiders 1986:259). Mysticism could then be more easily embraced as an authentic part of ministerial and congregational life, simultaneously extending the vista on prayer life in general.

#### **7.4.2.2 A Contribution to Methodism**

Fresh treatments on prayer bring a wider perspective to Methodist ministers, at once meeting deeper personal hunger in ministers themselves, and answering a public and congregational impatience with second-hand religion, or new 'techniques' for prayer. (Sadly, this impatience is less evident in the faithful churchgoer than in the more adventurous postmodern thinker and New

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These books were specifically prescribed for trainee ministers and lay preachers in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. Rare exceptions came from those of the Anglo-Catholic tradition. Archbishop Ramsay's (1972:12-18) welcome little book offered a short chapter on prayer of a different kind, and was also prescribed for Methodists, yet his treatment was too fleeting to be of significance or impact.

Age citizen, who evidence a critical stance on conventional 'religion'). If Wesley (1944:134-151) had a profound grasp of the essence of prayer, and backed it up by his own inexorable prayer regimen, there is still considerable evidence to suggest that the vast hinterland of *contemporary* prayer brings even more authenticity to the twenty-first century minister than earliest Wesleyanism was ever able to offer. While Wesley saw prayer as 'the most basic "work" of the Christian life, the most fundamental way that we should spend our energy in order to grow in grace' (Clapper 1997:89), his furiously busy evangelical agenda did not, one might imagine, make him the most patient and sensitive explorer of silence and solitude. Neither did Wesley's writings spell out the versatility and diversity of prayer. Such a contribution, to be frank, was neither his chief legacy to the wider Church of God, nor do Methodists pretend that it was. Wesley's breathless rule of life, his admirable zeal for 'saving as many souls as possible' and 'spreading scriptural holiness throughout the land', cries out for a complementary diet of the mystical tradition. It is here that contemporary spirituality helps the (Methodist) minister in self-understanding. In spirituality's helpful profiling of monastic spirituality in particular, the minister can see that, as with the monk, there might also be some extent to which the minister 'is not defined by his task, his usefulness. In a certain sense he (sic) is supposed to be "useless" because his mission is not to *do* this or that job but to *be* a man of God. He does not live in order to exercise a specific function: his business is life itself' (Merton 1971:7). Again, while acknowledging some irreconcilable differences between monasticism and 'ministry', the latter might *learn* from monasticism's aim 'at the cultivation of a certain *quality* of life, a level of awareness, a depth of consciousness, an area of transcendence and of adoration which are not usually possible in an active secular existence' (Merton 1971:7). Such insights into prayer would help ministers drink of the wells of quietness and plummet new depths of self-knowledge and personal integration. It would achieve an insight into societal needs and ills that goes beyond the self-evident and perfunctory. Of course, as far as monasticism is mystical in its nature, Wesley *was* influenced by 'a group of mystic writers, which included De Moines, De Sales, Mme Guyon, Pascal, Fenelon, De Renty, Lopez, Brother Lawrence, and Tualer [sic]' (Forster 2001:9). He read widely in the writings of the seventeenth century mystics and was impressed with their "noble descriptions of union with God and internal religion" that "made everything else appear mean, flat, and insipid" (Whaling 1981:102). It must be further remembered that a few hours before Wesley's life-changing experience at Aldersgate Street he had read that Christians should be 'partakers of the divine nature', from 2 Peter 1:4, perhaps a classic mystical text of the Eastern Church (Fanning 2001:186). Methodists cannot underestimate the influence of mysticism, then, on Wesley's life. It is also clear, though, that he had an uneasy relationship with the mystics. They did not seem to give a clear, steady or uniform light, and were

sometimes injudicious (Forster 2001:9). For an ardent evangelical pragmatist, as Wesley surely was, Madame Guyon might be a good woman and a fine writer, but her writings allegedly ended in unscriptural Quietism (ibid:9). Yet contemporary spirituality gives back to Methodist ministers a sense of their authentic eclectic heritage in Wesley.

### **7.4.2.3 Detailing the Prayer Landscape**

Features of the prayer landscape are numerous, and contemporary literary attention to each specific feature is, for the most part, prolific. The features are, *inter alia*: ‘meditation’, ‘spiritual reading of scripture’, ‘oral prayer’, ‘contemplation’, ‘Christian service’, ‘retreat,’ and prayer as expressed in ‘simplicity of life’. While the various features of prayer may have a familiar appearance, it has not always been grasped that each feature is, crucially, a way of praying and is never to be understood mechanically as ‘something to do, or try’, as in the happily outdated (modernistic) fixation on technique. In this regard, Merton (1971:139-140) anticipates the postmodern need that such stilted, piecemeal approaches can never meet, namely that ‘what people seek today is not so much the organized, *predigested routine of conferences and exercises* [italics mine] but an opportunity to be quiet, to reflect ... ’ and, one might add, to bring forth spontaneously that God-given contemplative instinct that resides within. It is such a concept of prayer that breaks the petrified categories of the not-so-distant past and brings greater fluidity to the subject. Here follows a brief treatment of some specific aspects of the landscape of prayer, especially as revitalised by the perspective of contemporary spirituality.

#### **7.4.2.3 (a) Meditation and Spiritual Reading**

Both *meditation and spiritual reading* may be considered, with some qualification, within the matrix or context of prayer. They are for the most part foundational and preliminary to any further growth in prayer, especially growth that realises a contemplative dimension. Furthermore, meditation and spiritual reading (the latter also known as *lectio divina*) are conceptually inseparable, though *lectio divina* usually refers to scriptural reading. As with meditation, spiritual reading ‘is unfailingly effective in rendering specific doctrine real to the heart, as to the mind’ (Byrom 1983:331). (It is, of course, *Scripture* that is classically the food and focus for meditation.) In this respect, spiritual reading approximates very closely to meditation (ibid:331). For ‘the final goal of *lectio divina* is to initiate and deepen the conversion process in the one who reads ... It is reading mingled with prayer and contact with God’ (Shannon 1992:41). On the other hand, ‘for the ancients “to meditate” is to “put into the heart” a text that has been read. “Heart” in this context is

to be given the fullest possible meaning ... It means the eyes that see the text, the mouth that pronounces it, the ears that hear it, the memory that fixes it within itself, the intelligence that grasps its meaning and the will that desires to respond to the text ... ' (Ibid:50).

Both the 'means' of meditation and spiritual reading utilise the *mind* in their distinctive operation. Instructive for the minister, however, are the great insights of Christian antiquity as they re-emerge in contemporary spiritual thinking. Familiar words, and 'meditation' is one of them, are routinely misunderstood. For example, meditation and spiritual reading *do* utilise the mind, but *not* in the manner most comfortable or natural to ministers trained in dogmatic and philosophical theology. While classic meditation is *mental* insofar as it is a reflection on Scripture, it demands a change of mental *approach* - a susceptible disposition - for the contemporary minister. Such is the change of existential posture, one might say, from the 'informational' or 'functional' to the 'relational,' that meditation and *lectio divina* can be paradoxically described as learning 'how to "read" without "reading"' (Mulholland 1985:21). If this quote is less apt for describing 'meditation' than *lectio divina*, it still vitally indicates a use of the mind seldom described in popular books on prayer, which favour a voracious appetite for effectiveness, technique, and even information. Popularised prayer has for too long fed the spiritual hubris and 'outcomes-based' intellect (that is so symptomatic of a certain kind of education) instead of operating as a means of spiritual formation? Has not much scripturally centred 'meditation', whether in private or with small groups, been little more than a 'Bible study', inspiring innocuous curiosities and diversionary questions or 'problems', while lived life remains untouched? (Is it not often the case that with some ministers, no alternative to 'Bible *study* groups' even comes to mind?) Too often the depths of scriptural, meditational prayer have not been intuited, and thus not realised. Spiritual insights in contemporary spiritual literature call for an education of congregants, and a re-alignment of the mental 'take' on prayer. Mulholland (1985:21-22) might just as well be speaking of a misguided approach to meditation as he is of spiritual reading when he writes: '*We control our approach to the text; we control our interaction with the text; we control the impact of the text upon our lives.*' The same dynamic is operative in much 'prayer' as contemporarily understood and taught in popular religion. While Wesley (1979:43) is still too entitative and artificially sequential in his thought to capture the true genius of meditation, one senses that he feels it intuitively. He invites the best in meditation when he writes: 'Serious and earnest prayer should be constantly used before we consult the oracles of God; seeing "Scripture can only be understood through the same Spirit whereby it was given".' Indeed, 'it is less what one reads than *how* one reads that counts. It is an attitude of mind that is at

issue' (Squire 1976:124). Such an attitudinal shift is again made possible through the instrumentality of contemporary spirituality. More fundamentally, an appreciation of the iconographic nature of scripture, drawing us into its multi-dimensional 'world-within-a-world', may well hold the key to new possibilities for meditation. In any event, whether focused exclusively on Scripture or not, the meditational 'journey (inward to God) involves the exploration of images, mythologies, ideas, pictures, in the hope that one or two may become an icon, a window into reality' (Jones 1977:13). The specific 'means' of grace and formation in this form of prayer, then, is the *kataphatic* method. It takes the shape of 'a systematic free association upon biblical and other traditional images' (Holmes 1982:147). Herein lies an answer, I believe, to a commonly recognised problem for contemporary meditation - how to honour one's training in the insights of modern, scientifically critical exegesis without losing that necessary participative engagement with Scripture that is at once simple and submissive. This meditational and receptive stance may be maintained by a participation in the metaphorical depth of Scripture, affording one the possibility of merging with the original experience that inspired the choice of textual imagery. It is really the science of experiential Christian spirituality and its rootedness in a long historical tradition that makes this variant 'non-exegetical' approach to Scripture plausible. It may thus be said that meditation and *lectio divina*, as a way of praying and engaging the Scriptures, recover for many contemporary Christians a form of prayer that has become obsolete or completely monopolised by an unfruitful 'bible study' and its evasive 'problems'. A Church recently in the grip of modernistic influences and an age of reason might not be surprised at this still-visible manifestation of intellectualism in its midst. Nevertheless, *meditatio* and *lectio divina* are recovering their ancient potency and significance, while simultaneously diversifying the prayer landscape.

It would be a mistake to imagine that the word 'meditation' enjoys a consistent currency of interpretation.<sup>12</sup> 'Secular' global understandings aside, even the varied traditions *within* Christianity cannot assume too much of each other. Here, 'meditation' is often used interchangeably with 'contemplation', and it is not always clear which understanding is being adopted. The Western *kataphatic* understanding, however, cannot be surrendered to a contemplative exercise devoid of historical substance and Christian heritage. Meditation, as described in the present chapter, is a way of prayer that utilises historical images, myths and traditions. Hudson (1995:33-45) illustrates this

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<sup>12</sup> In common secular (and 'new age') parlance, 'meditation' is consistently used as referring to what would more commonly be *contemplation*, or image-less attention. Even Christian writers use 'meditation' loosely, sometimes clearly referring to *contemplation* rather than the image-filled dwelling on Scripture that is more accurately *meditation*. The Eastern Orthodox Church tradition has also used 'meditation' for 'contemplation'. The confusion, one might say, often prevails within Christianity itself.

by speaking of ‘developing a Christian memory’, a phrase which to some extent, I submit, serves as a synonym for ‘meditation’. In this regard, Hudson is creative in giving a fresh insight into the spirit of meditation, namely its characteristic exercise of memory (ibid:33-45). He portrays the activity of meditation as ‘remembering Jesus in the gospels,’ ‘remembering our personal stories’ and ‘remembering the present day’, the latter in the sense of recollection or an ‘examen of consciousness’. The injunction to ‘remember’ is of course well founded in Scripture, whether in the older or newer testament, but perhaps supremely in the celebrating of the Eucharist. Might it be argued that *Christian* spirituality, in particular, has a vocation to cherish this Western concept of meditation?<sup>13</sup> Is such custodianship not particularly necessary in the light of a generalised ‘secular’ understanding of ‘meditation’, which leans towards undefined eclecticism, unrootedness and historical reductionism? There is already a concern that ‘Christian spirituality has lost its roots. We have forgotten that the Christian faith, grounded in Jesus, is in continuity with the people of Israel - with the whole redemptive history of God’s remembering’ (Saliers 1984:25). ‘Meditation’ in the rediscovered classical sense offers an imperative counterbalance to the equally vital mystical tradition. Doubtless, the seeming tension between ‘spiritual theology’ and ‘spirituality’ might also in some way be tempered by a new attention to Christian meditation, as traditionally understood. The fear expressed by exponents of ‘spiritual theology’ is that of losing one’s Christian moorings in an independent ‘spirituality’ that operates largely as an ahistorical anthropological discipline.<sup>14</sup> Meditation, however, can find its roots and nourishment in the Bible and Christian symbols once more, thus alleviating some of the fears of ‘spiritual theology’.

#### **7.4.2.3 (b) The Contemplative Dimension**

The contemplative dimension in prayer adds a new expansive landscape and detail to prayer as previously understood. The subject of contemplation and contemplative ministry has already been treated in the previous chapter. It was shown there how an understanding of contemplative prayer transcends old stultified and manageable approaches, and even opens the minister to an experience of prayer as a continuum or way of seeing rather than isolated punctiliar acts of devotion. There is perhaps something inappropriate about describing contemplative prayer as a ‘means’ to anything. Such prayer might more readily constitute the very substance of what other kinds of prayer aim at,

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<sup>13</sup> The Western Church’s inclination has been towards the *kataphatic* tradition, which has the potential, I contend, of securing historical rootedness and Christian symbolism. Of course, this is not to downplay the Eastern *apophatic* tradition, which is no less priceless.

<sup>14</sup> Schneiders (1989:682) does not share the position of ‘spiritual theology’ but shows how, among others, it is ‘typified by CA Bernard, who equates spirituality in the full sense of the term with the life of the Christian communicated by the Holy Spirit and governed by divine revelation’. (This entails, of course, the dependence of the discipline of spirituality on dogmatic theology.)

namely a union of love. Indeed, *any* kind of ‘prayer is not to be used but to be lived. Either the experience of God in prayer is its own justification or no justification is possible’ (Green 1977:38). Still, contemplative prayer *does* contribute in a unique way to ministerial formation in that it addresses the minister’s innate drive to control and manipulate, reconstructing the congregation and even God to one’s preferred perceptions and agendas. Insofar as contemplative prayer effects, and *is*, a loving attention to God, it is most reasonable to expect that it will also work the same attentive disposition towards congregants. It is the prayer of contemplation, too, that condemns the intrinsic ministerial problem of excessive reliance on one’s own efforts. It contributes in shifting the definition of prayer from the idea of actively *raising* our minds and hearts to God, with the seeming emphasis of a semi-Pelagian effort, to a different view altogether. Green (1977:31) suggests that a better definition ‘would be to define prayer as an *opening* of the mind and heart to God. This seems better because the idea of opening stresses receptivity, responsiveness to another. To open to another is to act, but it is to act in such a way that the other remains the dominant partner’. It is expressly contemplative prayer that rescues prayer in general from an exercise in human ingenuity. The acquisition of such spiritual maturation as contemplative prayer gives cannot be underemphasised.

If the re-emergence of ‘praying in tongues’ in the twentieth century anticipated and hinted at such a new possibility of prayer, thereby introducing a contemplative strain, contemporary spirituality, subsequent to Vatican II, gives to ministers much greater substance and sobriety to the subject. It utilises a long-standing though often neglected, non-discursive contemplative tradition, taking spiritually elitist connotations out of mysticism. Contemplative prayer harnesses the ancient and respected *apophatic* tradition. ‘Associated with figures such as Evagrius Ponticus and Gregory Palamas, it consists of a systematic effort to empty the mind and heart by the constant repetition of a simple prayer ... This is known as apophatic prayer’ (Holmes 1982:147). Contemplative prayer comes as a liberation to ministers trapped in discursiveness and wordiness and ‘immerses us into the silence of God’ (Foster 1992:163). It moves the minister from the intellectual kind of epistemology to the God who can only be known by love. Contemplation takes the minister beyond ‘an obsession with questions and answers, with problems and solutions, with momentous decisions, and even with “identity” raised to a kind of absolute’ (Merton 1971:47-48). As such, contemplative prayer may be a kind of antidote to the Protestant stress on the ‘proclaiming of the word’, the *understanding* thereof, and the perpetual call for a *response* of faith. Such response inevitably

appeals to a certain degree of analysis and intellectual engagement.<sup>15</sup> Contemplative prayer, however, has brought with it a Catholic dimension of *participation* and worship that moves beyond the medium of the *ear* for revelation (Faber 1988:18-19). It takes the Christian to a different level of maturity - 'a surrender to the inexplicable mercy which comes to us from God entirely on His (sic) own terms, in the context of our personal and social history' (Merton 1971:135). It is only these self-surrendered ministers of contemplative prayer who can communicate 'their privilege of silence, worship and meditation, their ability to listen more deeply and more penetratingly to the Word of God, their understanding of sacrifice, their inner vision' (ibid:137-138). This poise of inner ministerial silence and recollectedness cannot be credibly substituted for something less. It will always be the unmistakable fruit of authentic contemplation.

Contemporary spirituality will enhance for Methodist ministers those distinctively contemplative and mystical lyrics that occur every now and again in the Wesleyan hymns- for example, 'till we cast our crowns before Thee, *lost in wonder, love and praise* [*italics mine*]' (British Methodist Conference 1983:267). While such mystical delight is reserved in this hymn for the final beatific vision, might one not know at least some anticipatory ecstasy here and now? Contemporary spirituality in the post-Vatican II era might seem to raise these possibilities. Moreover, Wesley's (1952) high expectation of *this*-worldly sanctification, or 'perfection', would seem to be conducive to an experience of prayer that goes well beyond the beginnings.

#### **7.4.2.3 (c) Formative Prayer**

Some prayer regimens are expressly constructed for the purposes of *formation* - thus, *formative prayer*. While including the familiar practices of meditation, spiritual reading, contemplation and oral prayer, the prayer regimen, or formative prayer so called, is aimed at a *conversatio morum*, meaning a death to the status quo and a facilitation of constant change, conversion and openness to God's Spirit (Foster 1992:59-60). Typical of formative prayer are the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), which are often critically re-presented through new editions (Sheldrake 1991a). Such a prayer regimen employs a use of all the senses and may be categorised as meditative prayer. 'Since the purpose is to bring about conformity to Christlikeness, there is throughout the Exercises an uninterrupted asking for special charisms or graces of the Spirit'

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<sup>15</sup> Faber (1988:18-19) offers an interesting insight into the distinctiveness of Protestant and Catholic spiritualities. His description of the Protestant 'cult' sounds accurate: 'There is a type of cult in which the word is central, in which stories are told, the scriptures are expounded, the Torah is meditated upon, a type which lives on down to the present day in the synagogue and in Protestant worship. This is a type of worship in which the participants are above all asked for the reaction of their faith.'

(Foster 1992:62). It is precisely such a weekly rhythm of prayer as the *Exercises* fulfil that addresses a serious vacuum in Methodist ministry and, it may be suggested, in Protestantism in general. Uniquely characteristic of the Ignatian *Exercises*, and significantly for ministry and this-worldly engagement, is the way that Ignatian contemplation touches everyday life. Wickham (1991:146), a contemporary exponent of Ignatian spirituality, is concerned to preserve 'this pouring of the divine life into the lived life of the one praying. In the Ignatian regimen the one praying should carry an awareness of the whole life-world into the mystery' (Wickham 1991:146). More precisely, 'Ignatius could take it for granted that what a person felt inwardly would at once reverberate through social relations' (ibid:148). As Methodism has always recognised 'no holiness but social holiness', one can understand the attractiveness that the *Spiritual Exercises* hold for this movement within the Christian Church. Further, one is scarcely surprised that the *Spiritual Exercises* are enjoying unprecedented interest and utilisation through the advent and hermeneutics of contemporary theoreticians of spirituality. Of course, such re-explications of prayer regimens are just as aptly illustrated in the writings of De Waal (1984, 1997) and her interest in Benedictine spirituality. Other reworkings and translations of classical works put one in touch with the prayer regimens of Christians throughout history. Even contemporary regimens of prayer that serve to pray the Psalms, or 'pray the Gospels,' are making their appearance (St. Romain 1984). In short, the timeless genius of various regimens of prayer is creating an excitement and an echo of recognition in a spiritually hungry, and perhaps more receptive, generation. Even Wesley's standard movements in the order of salvation, *repentance*, *faith* and *holiness*, are being seen as more expressive of a wider, continuous becoming in prayer. For him, 'as well as for the rest of the mainstream of Christian orthodoxy, repentance and trust in Christ are to be daily features of the Christian life ... (Clapper 1997:87)'.

The formative prayer rhythms mentioned here are detailed to the point of daily directions. One also needs to appreciate, however, that contemporary revisionists of classic spirituality have drawn attention again to the wider formative movements in which these focused exercises find their place. Thus there has been the re-emergence of interest in Guigo II's (Shannon 1992) steps of monastic ascent as related to *reading*, *meditation*, *prayer* and *contemplation*. Madigan (1994), again, examines what might just as easily be termed an outline of developmental prayer when he identifies *penance*, *contemplation* and *response*, or *service*, as illustrative of prayerful dispositions in the wider continuum of spiritual maturation. Similarly, while the 'spiritual ladder' so beloved of classic spirituality might not be as pertinent and cosmologically credible as it once was, still some of its

benefits are recoverable. 'The theme of the ladder has had its limitations; yet, it is a rich, symbolic theme that imparts the developmental and progressive qualities of the mystery of God's way to humanity and the human journey to God' (Egan 1983:243).

#### **7.4.3 The Means of 'Fellowship'**

Using John Wesley's various 'means of grace' as a control one can scarcely avoid his concern for fellowship and communion or, to use his phrase, 'Christian conference' (Clapper 1997:93-94). What Wesley 'meant by this term is simply getting together with other Christians regularly in order to encourage one another and, even more important, to hold each other accountable for the commitments that the Christian life calls for' (ibid:93). Such small 'class meetings' proved the genius of Methodism. They are in some way enjoying a revival in the proliferation of Christian cell groups within congregations, meeting during the week and thus complementing the bigger celebrative gathering on a Sunday. These small 'class' groups obviously meet a need for mutual accountability. But in communicating a *Christian* spirituality in particular, they might facilitate the historical and distinctively Christian rootedness that is so often missing in a postmodern era of historical dislocation. The Wesleyan cell group, or 'class meeting' (perhaps unfortunately so called) had a particularity about it, inasmuch as it fostered Christian understanding, and a distinctively Christian lifestyle, placing people in touch with their Christian heritage. By contrast, there is an intrinsic postmodern break from those vital and nourishing symbols of one's distinctive cultural tradition. It might be described as a lack of a sense of continuity, where only the here-and-now is available (Nouwen 1996:114). To be sure, 'when we wonder why the language of traditional Christianity has lost its liberating power, we have to realise that most Christian preaching is still based on the presupposition that people see themselves as meaningfully integrated *with a history ...* [italics mine]' (ibid:116). The benefits of contemporary Christian spirituality and its appeal to an awakening postmodern spirituality are, among other things, that it holds out new possibilities for rediscovering one's distinctive Christian history, community and heritage. While it has the capacity and depth to present interior maps and clues to the spiritual journey for such groups, the minister might hope that it would also liberate congregants from 'the non-historical' spiritual syndrome, where 'we live by the hour and create our lives on the spot' (ibid:116). But will contemporary *academic* Christian spirituality necessarily help to secure such Christian distinctiveness for small groups of Christian congregants? Such might have been the concern of 'spiritual theology' and its more traditional *deductive* approach, but it may be left to Christian spirituality as 'communal experience' to be the custodian, in the small group, of the distinctive Christian heritage. It is still to be clarified what internal shape a general academic Christian 'spirituality' might assume. Will it be

more concerned to identify with spirituality as more widely understood, in its anthropological or philosophical sense? If spirituality's departure point is anthropological, can it be entrusted with the nurture of a distinctively Christian culture and the fostering of Christian community? In any case, could that feasibly be its task as a self-respecting university discipline? These are some of the questions that go to the heart of the contemporary 'spirituality' debate.

While the literature of contemporary Christian spirituality comprises the contributions of many Christian traditions, there are nevertheless characteristic themes that emerge in this vast expanse of spiritual literature. By far the major contribution, I contend, appears to come from the admittedly priceless Catholic and Eastern traditions. An abiding impression, however, is that the latter traditions as the substance of much contemporary spirituality have less to offer a Wesleyan concept of lay fellowship groups than one might have expected. Is this because they have been more invested in the community of 'religious' monastics, or the priesthood, than of the layperson? Lay fellowship home groups and their enormous potential as a 'means of grace' for Christian development, may be the distinctive Methodist contribution to an academic 'ecumenical spirituality'. Insofar, however, that Catholic and Eastern spirituality contribute to fellowship through the concept of Christian 'retreats', (and such contribution is surely considerable and virtually uncontested) they must be credited with facilitating enormous contemporary growth in the Christian Church, perhaps particularly of an inter-denominational nature.

Notwithstanding the above qualifications, Christian spirituality of the twenty-first century is sufficiently expressive of the best Christian traditions to secure the substantial communal imperatives of the Christian faith. Thus we are reminded, in a contemporary encyclopedic work on spirituality, of the radical nature of New Testament community: 'The church was a set of relationships, which provided one with a new identity, different from the identity given by natural birth or society' (Zizioulas 1985:28). This observation reveals the sharpness of contemporary spirituality's perception and scholarship in the face of an invitingly individualistic society, where even popular spirituality places high value on privacy and an exclusive self-cultivation. But 'spirituality is an ecclesial and not an individual experience' (ibid:30). Thus while fellowship may be understood as a means of grace, it is perhaps more nearly the very substance of that grace itself, where Christ meets with those gathered in his name. For while the journey must in a sense be one's own, 'we mature into our true selves only by actually living *with* others' [and] 'only "with all the

faithful” can we comprehend “what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge (Eph 3:18-19)” (Gibbard 1986a:577).

#### 7.4.4 The Means of ‘Fasting’

Wesley’s (1944: 134-151) commitment to fasting as a means of grace, and by extension Christian formation, is good as far as it goes. Perhaps an over narrow interpretation and application might have contributed to its almost total demise in Methodist ministerial practice, if not in other Christian traditions as well. The substance of much contemporary spirituality, however, shows how ‘fasting’ can have a far broader connotation if seen as a synonym for a widely applied lifestyle of temperance and sobriety in general. Of course Wesley’s own ordered, temperate and frugal lifestyle would concur with this understanding of ‘fasting’s’ wider application. Yet, contestably, Wesley does not introduce in any depth a variegated treatment of what this might look like. Nor, and perhaps more importantly, does he really develop a thoroughgoing theoretical substantiation for the choice of such moderation and asceticism. On the other hand, what Wesley *does* do is plant and nurture the sense of a ‘methodical’ (thus the parody, ‘methodist’) rule or way of life where one is ever encouraged to ‘redeem the time’ and to ‘spend and be spent’ for God.<sup>16</sup>

Spirituality, in the sense of the characteristic subject matter of much serious contemporary literature, is able to profile, particularise and create theological theories for a more detailed and comprehensive look at the means of grace, or spiritual disciplines. Furthermore, the academic expression of spirituality should be able to harness the service of other academic disciplines to look more deeply at acts of asceticism, especially as related to the effect of bodily discipline and sobriety on the psychology of the person as a whole. Contemporary spirituality has literary insights into ascetic responses to a materialistic, sensually intemperate and still authoritarian and patriarchal society. (Even Church governance often only thinly disguises the assimilated prejudices of its age.) Foster’s (1985) book, *Money, Sex and Power*, is a popular and easy-to-read example of such contemporary literature, though one would also want to look to weightier works. Rahner (1984:19) certainly visualised the (presumably experiential *and* academic) advent of such spiritual discernment for the future contextual challenges of the times: ‘The spirituality of the future will be

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<sup>16</sup> The quoted words are favourites of Wesley’s. Further, his journal bears ample testimony to an inexorable ordered-ness and discipline of life, where he is always ‘stirring up God’s gift’ in himself and urging the same in others. Thus Wesley’s (British Methodist Conference 1983:745) renowned lyrics in the *Hymns and Psalms*: ‘Still let me guard the holy fire, and still stir up thy gift in me.’ In this sense Wesley’s devotional framework or rule of life, together with his exemplary and uncompromising lifestyle, is transparently in evidence. Yet Wesley arguably has neither the time nor vocation to fulfil a more sedate, particularised and reflective treatment of the lifestyle of self-denial. But that he knew it himself is surely beyond question.

a spirituality of the Sermon on the Mount and of the evangelical counsels, continually involved in *renewing its protest against the idols of wealth, pleasure and power.*' Such visionary writing feels the promising influence of the contemplative tradition in contemporary literature. Also reflecting such influence are the words of Casey (1995:165): 'To become free we have to allow all binding attachments to be loosed. Freedom is nakedness, according to the ancient maxim, "naked to follow the naked Christ". For much of our life the rigor of this precept is waived. At a certain point, however, we are suddenly confronted with its exigency.' Spiritual formation must help bring to consciousness one's mortal contingency, which is often encountered for the first time only in some dire circumstance of life, forcing itself upon a totally unsuspecting and unexercised minister. The authentic priest or pastor must come to grips with these existential struggles as lying uniquely within the province of spiritual ministry.

I suggest that spirituality, as contemporary research of traditional asceticism, might recover the broader word 'detachment' as a possibility for 'fleshing out' Wesley's thinking on fasting as more narrowly understood. Casey's (1995:165) understanding of 'freedom' hints at some such word as 'detachment', speaking of relinquishment instead. In short, 'detachment' surely applies peripherally or unilaterally to ministry as a whole, constituting a prerequisite for any thought or possibility of ministry whatsoever. For Casey (ibid:165), contemplation might plausibly be an encompassing of relinquishment and detachment, so-called, or synonymous with them in some real sense. Contemplation bears the fruit of relativising one's daily attachments, particularly those of the addictive kind. One cannot underestimate the importance of such grace for ministry. 'The insight behind the injunctions to detachment for spiritual leaders ... is that of the impossibility of committed love and service to God if one is enslaved - emotionally or by habitual dependence - to objects or relationships' (Miles 1983:111). Detachment is often the fruit of that kind of 'fasting' that one might refer to as 'solitude'. In solitude one is able to die to others in the sense of being truly independent of them, and thus *available* for the first time. Nouwen (1981:35) therefore speaks of detachment (without using the word, admittedly) when he writes: 'If you would ask the Desert Fathers why solitude gives birth to compassion, they would say, "Because it makes us die to our neighbour".' Such death is a detachment, so that one is free to stop judging one's neighbours, 'to stop evaluating them, and thus to become free to be compassionate' (Nouwen 1981:35).

### **7.4.5 Summation**

The ‘means of grace’ for spiritual development and formation towards Christian maturity are experiencing resurgence in contemporary literature. This resurgence may be attributed to the phenomenon of postmodernism on the one hand, and a burgeoning re-presentation of Christianity’s extensive prayer and ascetic tradition on the other. Moreover, with a new proliferation of scientific disciplines, especially in the fields of psychology, sociology, anthropology, philosophy of religion and even medicine, spirituality as academically understood finds itself in possession of an unprecedented field of scientific resources to develop its understanding of the impact of the ‘means of grace’ on spiritual and psychological maturation. Such inter-disciplinary activity liberates spirituality from its sometimes-subsidary role of subservience to systematic theology. ‘Spirituality’ is thus given a credible academic voice of its own. The minister will benefit, then, from the depth of Christian spirituality as contemporarily *experienced*. Moreover, the legitimating *academic* support of these channels of grace will effect, at least in the more reflective minister, a readiness to take such ‘means’ with far greater seriousness. More radically, the status quo credibility of some ‘means’ might find their traditional veneration placed under an uncomfortably critical light. For the recalcitrant fundamentalist this could be disconcerting. But for those ministers who believe that the Spirit still leads to the truth, the way ahead is exciting and dynamic (John 16:13).

## **7.5 MOMENTS IN DEVELOPMENT: PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SPIRITUAL**

### **7.5.1 Dialogue and Integration**

A most promising growing edge for inter-disciplinary activity is evident in the mutual theory-forming exchanges and integrative possibilities of formative spirituality and developmental psychology. Such interactive, mutual enrichment must surely be of great benefit to the pastoral worker. Too often the trainee minister has sensed the tension between clinical pastoral education (CPE) in developmental psychology and his own more native terrain of spiritual growth. This tension is subliminally suggestive of a less than scientific legitimacy for the developmental formation experienced and recorded by the great spiritual Mothers and Fathers of Christian history. The academic substantiation for a consistency and natural progression between the fields of developmental psychology and Christian formation promises to give a wider and more integrated perspective to the priest. This scientific legitimation might appear to take something of the natural mystery and enchantment out of that which is naturally unfathomable – perhaps not a totally unworthy concern. I would still contend, however, that psychology might well come to legitimately accommodate these mysteries without being expected to ever tame the untameable, or ‘routinise’

the mystical.<sup>17</sup> If not, the discipline of spirituality should offer some experiential, empirical and historical incentives for psychology to take a closer look.

Academic spirituality needs to operate an inter-disciplinary dialogue if it is to fulfil its aspirations of scientific credibility and the securing of permanent status in a university academy. Spirituality, and indeed developmental spirituality so called, is not an academic field unto itself. Extremely diverse phenomena fall within its almost multifarious domain, not least of all those phenomena belonging to psychology, sociology and anthropology (Schneiders 1986:268). Naturally, each of these distinctive disciplines has its own unique integrity to preserve in terms of its scientific vocation. Doubtless, psychology cannot afford to be too assimilative in terms of its scientific answerability. At the same time, spirituality has a wealth of spiritually formative experience to offer, which predates the newborn science of developmental psychology. Marion (2000:xiv) feels that contemporary psychology has not yet incorporated into its progressions of human inner growth the full spirituality that the Western Christian tradition has to offer. After all, he notes that for two thousand years this latter tradition has had *inner* spiritual growth as its top priority. Moreover, he feels that the spiritual teachings of Jesus and of the Christian saints and mystics have not, for the most part, been appreciated or incorporated into developmental psychology. The spiritual teachings of Jesus and of the saints have not been understood. The depth and insight of formative spirituality, it is argued, take one beyond the borders of the psychologically well-adjusted adult. Here is an opportunity, then, for psychology to move beyond the limits of psychology's 'vision-logic' level (ibid:xiv).

Wolski Conn (1989) helps to establish a convincing theoretical substantiation for an integrative approach to formative 'spirituality' and the growth in 'personal maturity' as mapped by developmental psychology. As such, I suggest, she shows herself to be a credible theoretician of the new academic school of spirituality. Giving weight to this assertion is her introductory treatment of the nature of spirituality as understood through the developing centuries of Christian thought and life (1989:13-35). This introduction is indicative of her seriousness to apply spirituality to the psychological understanding of personal maturity, and to go about it in a reflective and

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<sup>17</sup> Indeed, this would be a sad reversion to a more modernistic treatment, where everything is predictable and safely categorised. One should heed Matthews' (2000:83) caution that '[t]he starting point for a real understanding of the nature of mysticism is not an analysis of the so-called experiences themselves, but a realization that God is not a separate reality, not even a "spiritual" reality.' With respect to 'God,' in other words, we are not dealing with modernistic predictability and categorisation.

comprehensively researched way. She is convinced that spiritual maturity is not a contradiction or compromise of human maturity, even though spiritual theology has often been guilty of breeding immaturity in the past (ibid:9). ‘To cut ourselves off from the maturing process, to shirk personal growth under cover of the cliché “God alone,” is, in fact, to escape from God because God is not glorified in half-persons’ (ibid:8). The gist of her theoretical model reflects a sharp criticism, and indeed abandonment, of theological or psychological imperialism.<sup>18</sup> Kegan’s (1982) work on developmental psychology, and his model of an evolving self, here finds approval as a psychological framework. It is gender-inclusive and sufficiently comprehensive for integration with a theory of developmental spirituality. Further, it attends to relationship rather than autonomy as the goal of maturity. Wolski Conn (1989) naturally operates from a perspective of *theological* interpretation and understanding. But through hypothetical case studies of both spiritual direction and ‘psychological’ counselling, she shows how a supremacist (or conversely, ‘subordinationist’) view of either psychological or theological positions is ultimately detrimental to maturation and, she might also have said, reductionist with regard to both disciplines. She respects both theological and psychological points of departure and prefers ‘to explore the theology of “grace working through nature” in terms of the possibility of integrating Christian spirituality and human maturity. The search for a model of integration means a desire to demonstrate my conviction that they are inseparable, parallel, even identical in basic ways’ (ibid:7). Inspiring Wolski Conn’s (ibid:6) integrative approach is primarily her feminist criteria for theology. Such reworked theology must be rooted in mutual relationships of sisterhood, together with the necessary rejection of any thought of domination, subordination or control, as evidenced in so much male-centred theology.<sup>19</sup>

The potential of Christian spirituality for a more integrative ministry, where pastoral counselling is infused with sensitivity towards spiritual growth and not modernistically antithetical to it, is in the interests of authentic, incarnational ministry. For ministry needs to own the maturity that is secured in psychology’s concern with the achievement of *autonomy*, or standing outside of one’s own cultural and psychological ‘embeddedness,’ thus making one’s person one’s own. But ministry *also*

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<sup>18</sup> Wolski Conn does not, admittedly, speak as much about the relationship of spirituality and *psychology* as she does of ‘spirituality and *personal maturity*’, the latter four words also being the title of her book. Perhaps she therein saves herself from necessarily endorsing *all* psychology’s conclusions. Nevertheless, her use of *personal maturity* is clearly seen as a synonym for psychology as a developmental discipline, whose interest is, after all, the pursuit of personal maturity.

<sup>19</sup> Here, as elsewhere, Christian spirituality is generously enriched by the contribution of feminist theology, which offers alternative possibilities for doing theology and for finding more integrative approaches to theological methodology. Indeed, spirituality finds increasing theological intelligibility through the critique that feminist theological acumen and experience bring to formally ‘status quo,’ or male-gender presuppositions.

needs to secure its own greater theological priority of *interdependence*, or mature relationship. Indeed, even *autonomy* might (and often *does*) itself become a form of all-consuming subjectivity, or 'embeddedness'. An integrative approach secures both the spiritual and psychological yearnings. Thus, developmental psychology stands in danger of seeing growth only in terms of autonomy, differentiation and individuation, while missing the theological truth that maturity is also about union with God and free adult surrender, thus achieving a comprehensive maturation (Wolski Conn 1989:88-89). There is thus much to be said for contemporary efforts at a more comprehensive understanding of persons as psychological and spiritual beings. Spirituality, I submit, is greatly enhanced by psychological insights, but the spiritual theoretician will also express some concern about this new science's limitations. For example, it is perhaps the province of spiritual direction to give back to counselees something of their essential God-given mystery, as opposed to 'pigeon-holing' them. Jones (1992:45) writes: 'Psychology is a valuable tool to help us understand ourselves and each other, but it is often used to reduce people to manageable categories'. His reference here is to the labeling of people as, say, 'alcoholic', 'overweight' or 'sexually compulsive'. Yet he believes that psychology might best be a servant to help uncover these essentially spiritual longings (ibid:45).

One might speak prematurely, superficially or misguidedly of the convergence of spiritual and psychological maps of maturation. Such triumphalism should not be paraded here. There are pitfalls, and the relationship is always dynamic. Nevertheless, inter-disciplinary suspicion and some inherently antithetical elements aside, much has been done in the generalised field of reflective spirituality to arrive at a mutually informative understanding of human beings in their totality. Can we say that this mutual give-and-take between academic disciplines moves 'spirituality' further along the road to academic status, distinguishing it increasingly from the older but arguably less dynamic discipline of 'spiritual theology'? One must surely answer in the affirmative. Ministers trained in developmental psychology will take spirituality's guarded overtures to psychology as a welcome affirmation of their own faith's radical incarnational position. The implicit uneasiness and tension between clinical pastoral education and the insights of formative spirituality and spiritual direction is primarily a modernistic one. These two disciplines can surely afford to bury the inter-disciplinary hatchet and begin an enriching and mutually informative relationship. Having studied pastoral psychology in relation to chronological growth in personality, together with the psychology of moral behaviour, many ministers are beginning to feel a greater completeness to

their counselling through spirituality's acknowledgement and enhancement of this social science.<sup>20</sup> These inter-disciplinary developments rescue spirituality from the older pejorative understanding of a vaporous disembodiment that failed to minister to persons in their full humanity.

There are more than a few lone theorists in contemporary spirituality who are giving attention to psychology in general, and to developmental psychology more particularly. In an implicit affirmation of psychology, Adams (1979:159) draws on Merton's (1963) work in pointing out that sanctity, for example, is not a matter of being *less* human, but more human than others. Gone is the imperial or subordinationist view, where spirituality usurps psychology, or gives to counselees a route supposedly immune and transcendent to psychological assessment and insight. One must say of Merton (1961) that he, too, anticipates and presupposes the reality and value of psychology's insights into ego development, but would want to take it further than the fledgling science's parameters. Thus he sees a cardinal error of our times being a superficial personalism that identifies 'person' with an external self, or empirical 'ego', and which, through psychology, devotes much of its time to the cultivation of 'ego' as somehow sacrosanct (Merton 1961:219). Yet he also therein necessarily assumes developmental psychology's veracity and opens the door to further inter-disciplinary engagement. Matthews (2000:9) makes similar implicit acknowledgement by calling for a journey *beyond* one's self-generated images of oneself, through which 'we feed our ego-selves', or self-created identities. Marion (2000:xv), perhaps the newest contributor to a comprehensive developmental view, says in his introduction that 'it is the purpose of this book to show how the Christian spiritual tradition both complements and completes the works of the psychologists'. He appreciates how there has been in more recent years a burgeoning academic contribution to mapping the stages of growth in human consciousness.<sup>21</sup> Another writer describes that 'recent work in developmental psychology and its counterpart in faith development has shown how both social psychology and faith progress from conventional stages, through crises and individual spiritual experiences, to committed creative action' (Lane 1984:79). Moreover, he

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<sup>20</sup> Methodist ministers trained in pastoral work at Rhodes University in the 1970s were given a good grounding in the growth of personality, using Lowe's (1972) utilisation of contributors to the field, such as Freud (1965), Erikson (1950) and Piaget (1952). The University of South Africa, in its honours course for Practical Theology, made use of Wright's (1971) psychological work on moral behaviour, among others, to develop one's understanding of psychotherapy's relationship to ethics. Academic spirituality can now draw on the resources and findings of this scientific work and effect a more holistic or complete understanding of human need, and in a real sense redeem these studies more persuasively and effectively in the eyes of ministerial theorists.

<sup>21</sup> Psychology herein also moves closer to spirituality, particularly in the fields of 'transpersonal and other "higher level" psychologies' (Marion 2000:xiv). In this regard, one might refer to, among others, Van Kaam's (1995) work on 'transcendent formation' as related to formative spirituality.

rightly points out that traditional spirituality has always implied development, as for instance in the mystical traditions of Teresa of Avila (1986) and her 'seven mansions', or Ignatius of Loyola's (1964) four 'weeks' of the Spiritual Exercises. Such development is intrinsic to spirituality, as spirituality has to do with a vision of God's on-going work of creativity (Lane 1984:79). Other writers who appreciate and utilise the insights of psychology, also in its developmental expression to a lesser or greater extent, are Moore (1985) and his understanding of 'desirability' or healthy self-esteem, Kelsey's (1972) reflective spirituality in his theological exploration of Carl Jung, and Keating's (1992) endorsement of a spiritual journey through unconscious motivation into liberating awareness. Should there then perhaps be no marked dichotomy between spirituality and psychological development? Is not Christ essentially at the centre of both? Are we not able to assume Christ's presence in all things? Thus a contemporary writer, in one of his books on holiness and Christian development, feels that his readers can assume Christ's centrality without specific mention being made thereof. 'You may have already been wandering, if you have followed this book closely, what has happened to *Jesus*. He has only been mentioned once or twice ... That is because he is at the centre ... of all things and in *our* centre' [italics mine]'(Matthews 1996:116). Some such position would be expected of 'spirituality' as opposed to a 'spiritual theology' that has, for the most part, given pride of place to systematic theology. Such qualified convergence of developmental approaches in psychology and 'spirituality' can only bring further authentication to a pastoral spirituality.

### **7.5.2 Confluent Moments of Formation**

Specific stages or moments of formation in spirituality and psychology have been brought into sharper focus in literature of the later twentieth century and that of the new millennium. A synchronicity and tentative confluence has offered mutually informative correctives and wider perspectives to various disciplines. The fields of developmental psychology and spirituality are a fine example. The latter two disciplines both recognise earlier fundamental 'conventional' stages of personal growth, where adherence to authority expresses the limits of one's awareness. (Significantly, formative psychology is also beginning to push back its frontiers, echoing the new freedom and 'unmanageability' of its approximating counterparts in mystical spirituality.) As in psychology, spirituality is also seen to 'boast' an individuating stage, based on personal experience. This stage rises up in prophetic challenge to one's tradition, as seen in the life and ministry of Jesus (Lane 1984:79). It is this exciting and growing edge as characterised by spirituality that brings a new dynamic to a sometimes-petrified theology. As it resonates in some way with psychological growth in personality, it also gives the minister a pastorally integrated horizon, but one that intuits the grace and freedom inherent to the Gospel. In short, a contemporary developmental spirituality

can bring the minister into her native territory of spirituality, and its less prescriptive (and less limited?) horizons, while still keeping her psychologically informed and credible.

Contemporary spirituality brings to psychology its tried and tested praxis of, for example, the *scala perfectionis*, or ladder of perfection. It is divided into the three stages of the purgative, illuminative and unitive life, and for the most part experienced in that order. It is the developmental order, or famous three ways, of the mystical tradition found first in this form in Dionysius the Areopagite (Louth 1983a:108), though strongly influential in its conception were surely Plato's allegory of the cave, together with the *Ascent of Mount Sinai*, and the writing of Bonaventure (Waaijman 2002:130-131). These three ways, honed by the experience and reflection of successive thinkers, formed the basis for further elaboration (Kavanaugh 1987) later on, notably in the work of John of the Cross, the sixteenth century Carmelite monk, who tried to accommodate the thought and experience of the earlier schema. Of course, other formational stages were introduced by the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* (Wolters 1986:332-334) and by Teresa of Avila's (1515-1582) masterpiece, *The Interior Castle* (Kavanaugh 1980). Much later, the English Anglican Evelyn Underhill (1990) followed John of the Cross' (Kavanaugh 1987) elaboration, but seemed to begin at an earlier point. Marion (2000) charts some of these maps, ancient and modern, in an impressive way. He wants to show the reader how to emulate the developmental stages of the Christ. He draws initially on the work of renowned developmental psychologists, seeing their insights largely as preliminary to the levels of 'higher consciousness' mapped out by that mystical tradition and only latterly appended to the new science of developmental psychology (Marion 2000:33-61). The various works of Wilber (1986), who also writes the foreword to Marion's book, are credited with an unprecedented contribution to the convergence of hitherto scattered insights into the pattern of spiritual growth. It is into Wilbur's developmental philosophy and psychology that generous portions of the ('dark night') experiences of John of the Cross, all ostensibly shared by Marion (2000), are mixed.<sup>22</sup> In spite of the unquestioning incorporation of inter-religious material and some 'New Age' assumptions, the book is worthy of note and is recommended reading for the present subject.

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<sup>22</sup> There is a fair amount of autobiographical information in Marion's (2000) book, describing the author's own victories and defeats in his spiritual journey. (This is sufficiently uncommon in a work of this kind to warrant mentioning.) He includes, *inter alia*, an account of growing accommodation and acceptance of his own homosexuality, and the liberation that this self-acceptance brings him. The book is thus an interesting example of what the theoreticians of spirituality would call an inevitable and vital component, namely that the academic in spirituality be initiates themselves. I have *some* un-ease with Marion's spirituality, however, as he leaves the reader with the impression that he, the writer, has 'been there and done it all'. Moreover, I miss a Christian community, or *any* community, to vouch for him – a not infrequent critique of the mystic.

Marion (2000) outlines nine stages in the development of 'consciousness', freely acknowledging his indebtedness, largely to Wilber (1986), in this syncretistic compilation. The preliminary stages should be familiar enough to many, identified in chronological order as 'archaic', 'magical', 'mythic' and 'rational-consciousness' stages. Needless to say, important writers such as Lonergan (1971) Kohlberg (1981), Kegan (1982), Fowler (1984), and now O' Keefe (1995) in the area of spirituality's continuity with Christian ethics, all predate and contribute to the wider picture, as of course do the renowned founding fathers and mothers of modern psychology. Naturally, Marion's (2000:33-62) endorsement of the afore-mentioned psychological stages has less interest in early child psychology than in the tenacious presence or re-emergence of these stages in later Christian experience. 'Rational consciousness' is seen as 'the dominant consciousness of the present age and is the level more or less attained by the average adult in contemporary society' (ibid:49). Thus it will be vital for further growth, certainly into the mystical, that one gets beyond the 'mythic-literal' stage and into the second of the 'mental stages', namely 'rational consciousness'. Beyond rational consciousness there is arguably the most sublime stage attainable outside the strictly spiritual realm. This is the stage of a global, rational consciousness. It moves above the perspective of sectarianism, parochial interests and religious xenophobia, and is able to acquire the 'bigger picture'. It would be, for example, a level of awareness beyond the capacity of fundamentalism, or exclusivism of any kind. It is often apparent in 'secular' world leaders and negotiators on the global platform and might be referred to as 'vision-logic consciousness' (Marion 2000:63). Ironically, could one not say that it is a stage that many *ministers* do not seem to reach, or not without some implausible rationalisation on their part, leaving them unable to fulfil God's seemingly *wider* purpose of uniting all things in Christ (Eph. 1:9-10)?

One might, of course, observe that the elucidation of these stages cannot be accredited to contemporary spirituality and that they have been established by *psychology* - and for some time, notwithstanding psychology's fairly recent emergence. What needs to be said is that developmental spirituality is increasingly baptising these stages into its own understanding of spiritual formation, with the reservation that one explore the further dimension that the mystical Christian tradition has to offer. There is a reaffirmation of the idea of grace working through nature, and not circumventing or negating ordinary human development. On the other side, psychology has further defined, and enlarged on, its understanding of human development, coinciding with spirituality's reclamation of long neglected Christian maps of the spiritual journey. But more interesting than these preliminary stages is the way that spirituality is now able to append a progression beyond the

frontiers of psychology, possibly with some exception in the case of the psychology of 'transcendent formation', which in any case seems to bear the influence of an inter-religious 'spirituality'.<sup>23</sup>

Moving beyond the (global) 'vision-logic' stage of spiritual awareness is a number of other stages. They are born of the experience of mysticism, which traditionally takes the devotee beyond the 'self'. Again, Marion (2000:69-214) offers the most comprehensive map, but one that should be complemented and elaborated upon by other developmentalists. His further critical stage is that of 'psychic consciousness', which, while supposedly describing the immediate post-conversion sense of awareness would seem to be even more spiritually acute than that. Of course, while various mystics describe approximately the same thing, their stages are not always identical and automatically inter-changeable with each other's, and one therefore needs to assimilate more of their context and background to spot these variations and nuances. Underhill (1990:176) is a case in point. She seems to infer a greater spiritual maturity in her understanding of the awakening of 'transcendental consciousness' than is generally effected by 'conversion' pure and simple. John of the Cross, to my mind, also begins his account of the spiritual journey at a contemplative place beyond the spiritual awareness of most new Christians.

Following upon the 'psychic' level is the level of 'subtle consciousness'. The latter has much in common with the contemplative stage of greater passivity, and is distinguished from the 'psychic' in a way comparable to the distinction between the contemplative and the meditative. The 'dark night of the senses', in this developmental arrangement, precedes 'subtle consciousness' (Marion 2000:87-114). In keeping with John of the Cross, this dark night deals a fatal blow to any identification of our religion with the consolation of the senses, specifically that consolation one experiences in outward acts of devotion, which up and till then had borne all the fruit one needed. Now those structures start crumbling, and not without consternation aptly described as a dark night. Finally, preceding the final two stages of full spiritual realisation, is the 'dark night of the soul', which comes as a kind of crucifixion in the form of a disintegrative inner contradiction. Marion

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<sup>23</sup>Thus Van Kaam (1995:xvii), apparently an inter-disciplinary psychologist, speaks of his 'dream of bringing people of various faith and formation traditions together spiritually'. Might not such utilisation of psychology, anthropology and 'experimental theology', if there be such a thing, fall in large part within the generalised field of 'spirituality', if not the subdivision of Christian spirituality in particular? Or is psychology itself looking to embrace this generalised field? It is this kind of fragmentation and continual adjustment of various scientific parameters that seem typical of contemporary academic methodology and the postmodern generation.

(2000:141) imagines that ‘the Gospel crucifixion narratives were deliberately constructed by Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John to symbolise the inner spiritual events that take place during this Night’. It is through this ‘night’ or ‘death’ that the minister comes into a new kind of knowing. A new conversion is experienced, realising a radical recentering on God. This dying to the old and rising to the new typifies much of developmental spirituality, and results in the all-determinative *gift* of a new convictional knowing. ‘Those who courageously face the void of loss, abandonment, and death open themselves to this gift ... The stages of development bring people time and time again to a breakdown of a secure world of their own and society’s making’ (Studzinski 1985:64). Thus, the minister will derive the insight that conversion is not a once-and-for-all experience, but a series of deaths and rebirths.

The understanding of conversion as process is an important one for the minister. It is a long cry from the stereotypical, conservative-evangelical developmental plan, of the (most times highly emotional) once-and-for-all conversion so beloved of this particular hybrid. Even the ‘second-blessing’ of the Keswick holiness movement,<sup>24</sup> and the analogous ‘baptism of the Holy Spirit’ popularised by Pentecostals and then the later Charismatic Movement are, in this far more elaborate map described herein, shown to be threadbare and inadequate maps of what is a much more detailed country. Notably, the Christian journey will not be simply equated with inner peace and quiet. For ‘the journey of conversion is a frightening one, despite the numerous testimonies to favourable outcomes’ (Studzinski 1985:71). Spiritual maturity for the minister is no longer an expectation of power and super-human abilities, which too often foster one’s own need for recognition and power of some kind or other. In the understanding of the greatest mystics this is just another form of an egoism that still needs to be tamed, or even obliterated. Especially for the minister in midlife, spirituality now throws new light on Christian formation in the challenges of midlife. The dark nights coincide with some of the ‘deaths’ that accompany midlife, where prayer must become ‘purified of cloying self-interest and more authentically Other-directed. Self-projects of all sorts are surrendered so that one’s determining task in life becomes the upbuilding of the community which the person serves’ (ibid:15).

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<sup>24</sup> The Keswick Holiness movement is a Protestant inter-denominational persuasion given to the teaching and expectation of a distinctive ‘*second* blessing’, or deepening Christian experience subsequent to conversion. Renowned preachers are periodically invited to preach at a ‘Keswick convention’, where the powerful challenge is offered to open oneself to this deeper life. John Wesley is often credited, rightly or wrongly, with the conception of this ‘second-blessing’ (holiness) ideal. It is doubtful in my view, however, that Wesley was as prescriptive or stereotypical in his thinking. ‘Keswick (pronounced without the *w*) is the name of a resort town in England’s Lake District where annual conventions “for the promotion of practical holiness” have been held since 1875’ (McQuilkin 1987:152-153).

The final two most sublime reaches of the inner work of spirituality might be described as the ‘Christ-consciousness’ level, followed ultimately by ‘non-dual consciousness’. The person experiencing ‘Christ Consciousness’ is purportedly able to say, together with the Apostle Paul, ‘... it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me’ (Gal 2:20 RSV). At this level the person ‘is free from neurotic projections and emotional addictions, and is able to live solely in the present, curiously detached from everyday struggles and anxieties’ (Marion 2000:183). The non-dual level, on the other hand, is mirrored mythologically by the ascension of Christ and is referred to by the Christian mystics as the ‘beatific vision’. ‘Nondual consciousness marks the end of all division between “creature” and “creator”. It was the level from which Jesus spoke when he said that “the Father and I are one”’ (Marion 2000:197). In a more secular language perhaps, it is the end of the spiritual path, the realisation of the evolution of human consciousness in this world (ibid:197).<sup>25</sup>

## 7.6 GOALS OF FORMATION

It may seem ill advised in the present chapter to introduce the envisaged *goals* of formative or developmental spirituality at this late stage. An earlier treatment of various goals might have shown that this, in turn, will be determinative of how one conceives the nature of the stages themselves.<sup>26</sup> For example, the previous section on the stages of formation seems to sketch a uniform understanding of these stages, based on the presupposition that formation has to do with growth in *awareness* or *consciousness*. Are there not various ‘families’ of stages, depending on the goal one is after? In defence of the present methodology, however, perhaps a prior look at the traditional means and stages will help to evaluate whether they take one to a desirable Christian ‘outcome’. In any case, the stages described in the previous section *do* seem almost universal in the historical tradition of the Christian faith, with a few significant exceptions. (That is, they invariably take one into the supposed ultimacy of mysticism). These ‘universal stages’, moreover, find echoes in psychology, as I have tried to show. Finally, an over-fascination with utilitarian ‘outcomes’, albeit topical, is not always the main concern of a faith that is essentially relational in its nature *and* resource.

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<sup>25</sup> While an inordinate amount of space may have been given here to Marion (2000), his work is sufficiently representative of contemporary ‘secular’ and mystical thought to be credited with a contribution that far outstrips his own. Some of his more fanciful musings aside, the spiritual detachment described in the penultimate stage, together with contemporary spirituality’s almost universal challenge to dualism of every description, gives Marion’s reading of developmental spirituality a representative interpretation of twenty-first century spirituality. His book is also a more contemporary publication than most.

<sup>26</sup> For instance, one could possibly show how various Christian traditions lay greater emphasis on goals closer to their own convictions, and consequently how their formative disciplines aim to realise that desired outcome.

Some developmental spirituality reflects the presupposition that the goal of Christian development is an ultimate ‘awareness’, ‘consciousness’, or even ‘Gnostic’ knowledge. Formation’s purpose is ‘to *accelerate* growth in consciousness, to speed up our normal snail’s pace growth in spiritual awareness. All the “technologies” of the Christian religion ... have only one purpose: to accelerate people’s growth in consciousness upwards and eventually into the non-dual vision of Jesus’ Kingdom’ (Marion 2000:23). The latter writer anticipates charges of Gnosticism, and sees some Gnosticism as inevitable for Christians, but dissociates himself from those aspects that fell under the Church’s judgment (ibid:22). His point is well taken.<sup>27</sup> Still, can ministerial theorists and practitioners afford to be entirely indiscriminating? Clearly one’s consciousness *is* determinative for the authenticity of much, if not all, ministry. Awareness and self-knowledge, for example, is surely required to realise the depths of Jesus’ definitive teaching. But it is to be doubted that the Methodist tradition, with its strong emphasis on ‘social holiness’ as the only holiness worthy of the name, would feel entirely comfortable with this primarily mystical or ontological perspective. Similarly, an Ignatian perspective would presumably be far more practical in its perspective. Its goal is that of finding God’s specific (this-worldly) will. An Ignatian exponent, for example, asks the following practical questions: ‘What leads to greater faith, hope and love in our hearts? What seems more likely to enhance real communion and community among those with whom we live and work?’ (Barry 1990:82).

The nature of the *goal* of Christian formation goes to the heart of one’s understanding of ‘spirituality’, contemporarily understood. Is formation to be conceived after the pattern of Marion’s (2000) exclusive attachment to the mystical growth in awareness, if indeed he interprets this tradition correctly?<sup>28</sup> Is his mystical goal of enhanced awareness and ‘knowing’ sufficiently incarnational to be *Christian*? Or is development in *holiness* also ‘spiritual’, or for that matter ‘mystical’? It surely must be. If the work of sanctification is at the heart of Christian formation, and there can be no formation without transformation, as Steele (1990:24) insists, then Marion’s (2000)

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<sup>27</sup> ‘The Church, too, professed to offer men (sic) saving knowledge, and set Christ before them as the revelation of the Father. There was a powerful strain in early Christianity, which was in sympathy with Gnostic tendencies. We can see it at work in the Fourth Gospel ...’ (Kelly 1968:27).

<sup>28</sup> For example, in the light of Merton’s (1971) contemplative writing and experience, which led him increasingly into global and political concerns, is Marion’s (2000) interpretation of Christian formation and its ultimate realisation not too disembodied and ‘spiritual’ in the old pejorative sense? Is it not too grandiose (and even exegetically extrapolative with regard to Luke 17:21) to say that the single most important thing that Jesus taught about the Kingdom of Heaven was that “The Kingdom of God is within” (Luke 17:21)? So says Marion. Further, ‘the Kingdom of God or Heaven that Jesus preached up and down the land of Israel, day in and day out, throughout his entire ministry, is a Kingdom that you and I can find and see *only* by going deep *within* ourselves. There is *no other way* ...’ (Marion 2000:3).

progression, I think, ought surely to have reflected more of this. It should have made more clear that ‘the ultimate aim of mysticism ... is the complete transformation of ordinary life. The material world is the arena in which mystic awakening purification and illumination occur, and *the arena to which ultimate transformation is directed ...* [italics mine]’ (Kourie 1996:9). This fuller understanding of spiritual development is more easily translatable into ministry than a (spurious?) mysticism related *exclusively* to transformation of consciousness. Thus Kourie’s (1996:5-10) treatment of both mystical consciousness *and* mystical *transformation* does greater justice to authentic ministry and to the deepest (if not always immediately apparent) insights of the mystical tradition. Indeed, a matter that needs further examination is conceivably the place of holiness, or transformation, within the understanding of spiritual development. The absence thereof would certainly be troubling, for example, to the Methodist family. What the ecumenical thinking on developmental spirituality *does* show, in my opinion, are the different traditional conceptions of holiness, and how they each make an outstanding contribution to an understanding of the goal of maturation. Contemporary spirituality shows how one might speak of monastic, biblical, mystical and social evangelical holiness (Matthews 1996:116). The latter writer is particularly concerned to define mystical holiness in terms of inclusivity. ‘If there is a mystical holiness for modern men and women then it must be that inclusive mysticism of which Merton and others speak so strongly’ (ibid:76). Given the Apostle Paul’s mystical propensities, and some measure of mystical capacity can safely be attributed to him, then he was also, and without contradiction, patently clear on the practical fruits and communal outworking of this distinctive life ‘in Christ’.<sup>29</sup> It was a life that brought liberation, practical ‘fruit of the Spirit’, and a visible non-conformity to popular perspective and ideology (Gal.3:28, 5:1,22-23, Rom. 12:1). This more comprehensive goal of formation is in keeping with a holistic and inclusive contemporary spirituality, which avoids ‘spiritual’ estrangement from the material world, the human body, and social concern (Schneiders 1986:268).

Representative of the strain and conflict in the understanding of the goal of spiritual formation are the reflective scholarly works of Groome (1980) and Holley (1978). It may well be that Christian spirituality, as academic discipline, will continue to theorise about the contrasting perspectives represented by these two Christian educationalists. They hold the classic diametrically opposite positions, and their understanding presupposes a spirituality that, if not specifically alluded to, is, in

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<sup>29</sup> Kourie (1998:442) clearly believes so, and shows how it is specifically Paul the *mystic*, not organiser or moralist (or *dare* we even say, activist?) who reveals the secret wisdom of God. We are thus able to experience Scripture as a dynamic medium, and not a calcified semantic object.

my view, integrally influential in their distinctive approaches. The one approach has its goal as enabling people to live as Christians in the world, and is set against the background of the 'kingdom of God'. It favours a way of knowing that arises from 'doing', rather than the other way round. It is clearly the way more favoured by, for example, a 'liberation theology', deducing theory from 'shared story' and context (Groome 1980). It is fairly comprehensive and has much to commend it. The second writer, though, concludes that religious education gives attention to the *religious dimension of personal life*, which is, of course, somewhat different from the first writer's position (Holley 1978). For the latter, the general aims of religious education relate to the stimulation and evocation of *spiritual insights* [italics mine] (ibid:19). Here we find the much more explicit reference to a transcendent religious dimension of life, not functioning primarily according to intellectual posits and categories, but 'illuminating all endeavours by insisting on the spiritual depth and ultimacy of life' (ibid:53). This work is also commendable, and perfectly complements the incompleteness of Groome (1980). It gives attention to a different subject matter, trying to secure that which is unique to the *religious dimension*. One must say that unprecedented phenomenological and literary substance has been added to this field since the publication of these two definitive works. But these two contrasting positions will still vie for the subject matter of an academic spirituality. They both hold great possibilities for informing and enriching ministry, but not as exclusive alternatives. Indeed, Groome's (1980) position no longer holds the perpetual moral high ground of a modernistic generation so much more sure of itself than postmodernism. Certainly, the time where the mystical dimension took an apologetic 'backseat' has come and gone. Silenced and victimised by often self-righteous critics of a reductionist theological school, their silence meant the impoverishment and even negation of Christian spirituality. Such subjugation of 'spirituality' is increasingly untenable in a postmodern world where the painful disillusionment with modernism's promises, its two world wars, and much more besides, still lives on as recent history. Spirituality's genius is the offering of a depth, perception and wholeness that is not offered in psychology, intellectualism, political ideology and rampant consumerism. Neither is it offered, for that matter, in the sometimes-innocuous hand-me-downs of much Church dogmatics. The deconstruction of old worldviews asks of Christian spirituality that it take its experiential and academic place without deference and delay. Its mandate is to offer and investigate relational immediacy with and in a Trinitarian divinity that is incorporative of humanity as well. It is a new way of knowing and living, and neither just one or the other. For want of this contribution the present order finds itself directionless, whimsical and shallow.

## 7.8 CONCLUSION

Metaphors, means and ‘moments’ (or the less alliterative ‘stages’) in spiritual formation have come increasingly into the picture in reflective spirituality. Contemporary society finds some real existential resonance with the experiences of classic writers in these categories. The differentiated landscape of prayer, both of the ascetic and mystical tradition, and particularly the latter, has stimulated an age that seems more amenable than most to a ‘rehearing’ of the classic devotional exponents of experiential faith. Moreover, an opportune synchronicity in spiritual and psychological insights regarding human development has meant that a comprehensive and authentic map can be drawn of spiritual development. There has thus been some convergence in spiritual and psychological studies, though not without interdisciplinary analysis, discretion and distancing.

The benefits for authentic ministry in the field of contemporary formational spirituality are enormous. Primarily, ministers are given revised and well-informed frameworks of spiritual growth for both themselves and congregants. These stages have a spiritual specificity about them that must be of paramount importance to spirituality. Nevertheless, the subliminal tension between spiritual and psychological development has been eased, making possible a ministry that can integrate the two so as to realise pastoral *and* spiritual goals - something that can only be celebrated by any pastoral congregation leader. (This integration does justice, I think, to the proposed anthropological tenor of ‘spirituality’ as academic discipline.) A reconsideration of the goals of formation has also become necessary, for the most part resulting in a widening and deepening of comprehension in this regard. Helpful and exciting for ministers is the way that a resurgent sense of mystery and infusive grace has again emerged for the spirituality of ministry, not without some endorsement from the ‘growing edge’ in psychology.

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION

#### 8.1 Preamble

It is implied in chapter one, with reference to the ‘research problem’ for this thesis, that contemporary Christian ministry might well be impoverished, and wanting in authenticity. Is there enough evidence to suggest that the integral dimension of spirituality has suffered erosion from the ravages of consumerist expectations and the respectability that is earned through ministerial busyness and business-executive values? The fall-out in the ministry and priesthood, through resignation or shortage of candidates, arguably tells a story of disillusionment, and possible subversion of authentic ministerial roles in the face of secular demand and redefinition of ministry - or even through entrenched obscurantism from the Church’s side. *It can now be observed that much contemporary reflective spirituality in the contemplative and mystical realm addresses itself to just such (inter alia ministerial) deficiencies, and finds the extensive readership to suggest that it is pertinent to the problem.* In other words, the nature, conviction and proliferation of contemporary reflective literature analysed in this thesis seems to vindicate the accuracy of my ‘research problem.’ Furthermore, reflective theological literature is showing a concern to redress these spiritually bankrupt ministerial crises. Where Christian ministry is not always addressed *per se* in such sound literature, the insights gained from Christian tradition ring uncomfortably true in exposing the parlous state of some contemporary parish work. Ministry, at least contemplatively speaking, and in terms of spiritual direction and soul care, has largely lost its way. The research of this thesis has thus been worth the effort. The distinctive and largely corrective features of a contemporary Christian spirituality can indeed do much to restore ministry to Christian credibility and authenticity. Ministry thus renewed will be recognised by Christians. It will also be compelling to seekers and ‘new age’ adventurers grown weary with stultified, hand-me-down ‘churchiness’.

A second aspect of the research problem is described as an attendant vacuity that often accompanies the word, ‘spirituality’. It is claimed that there is a need for further light to be thrown on the word, and not just in terms of definition. That the word ‘spirituality’ suffers for lack of clarity is conspicuous through the way it is so loosely employed. More importantly, it is quite clear that (also) in the academic world the substance of this word and its designations are still in their infancy. A wealth of exciting literature on spirituality suffers in certain instances for lack of definition, and for description of its contemporary substance. My literature research seems

to bear out that it is ‘open house’ in the utilisation of the word ‘spirituality’ at the moment. Thus the importance of this thesis, in my view, is more than vindicated.

Finally, my assumption maintains that ministry needs the contribution of a contemporary spirituality that could be made available to ministry’s fairly well documented plight. Indeed, not much has been pointedly done for ministry in this regard, as my literary research seems to underscore. I have been more intentional in this regard.

The aim of the research in this thesis, and now restated in this section, has been first *to elucidate the outstanding features of contemporary Christian spirituality* and, second, *to assess what contribution spirituality could make to authentic Christian ministry*. I indicated that the thesis would concentrate on the *positive* contribution that spirituality might allegedly make, without necessarily wanting to imply an all-positive influence. In other words, could spirituality offer the kind of critique of Christian (in the main, ordained) ministry that would bring to such ministry a greater authenticity and spiritual motivation? As phrased in chapter one: *Can contemporary spirituality offer fresh insight, energy and integrity to Christian ministry, both to how ministry is done, but primarily to how it is understood?* I further indicated that the thesis is concerned with a spiritual philosophy of ministry and not in procuring utilitarian distillations from spirituality for practical implementation in ministry. Furthermore, contemporary spirituality would need to speak for itself rather than first be fed through the filter of normative theological prescriptions.

The thesis arrives at five major conclusions, or pervasive features, of the nature of contemporary Christian spirituality and its significance for authentic Christian ministry.

## **8.2 CONTEMPORARY SPIRITUALITY AND MINISTRY**

### **8.2.1 Authenticating Ministry’s Global Outlook**

Academic spirituality has *a breadth of universality* about it. It might be commented that this breadth pertains only to spirituality in its general, ‘secular’ designation. In contradistinction, however, this thesis maintains that such universality and breadth of intelligibility and credibility is also ‘carried over’ into *Christian* spirituality and has an inevitable effect on it. ‘Contemporary spirituality’, insofar as its outstanding features are hereby alluded to, gives to ministry a universal language, and therein an opportunity to engage the postmodern world convincingly, *and* with Christian integrity. By ‘universal language’ is not meant, necessarily, the quite literal linguistic kind. ‘Universal language’ as metaphor represents the contemporary sense of self-understanding

and existential longing in the context of globalisation, postmodernism and the new ecological, inter-dependent world order in general. The appeal and concerns of spirituality's terms of reference, both generally understood *and* with its more specific Christian designation, achieve for Christian ministry a responsive recognition from the global community. In 'spirituality', in other words, one employs a language that unilaterally opens doors of recognition right across the global neighbourhood. That there *is* recognition for spirituality, and a depth-identification therewith, is increasingly more than one can say for theological dogmatics. In a postmodern climate, whether deservedly so or not, dogmatic presentation of the authenticity and validity of ministry, is often heard as a self-pronounced *a priori* declaration of infallibility. If traditional Christian apologetics is still persuasive for many, it is less convincing for millions more. Moreover, such mass 'secular' incredulity is not easy to assuage in a postmodern era. Thus, Christian spirituality finds a new at-homeness in a world of competing worldviews and religions. Indeed, it also bears witness *within* itself (in its *intra* operations, or inter-traditional engagements) to a new universality of perspective and appreciation. Ironically, what contributes to Christian spirituality's universality is also its contemporary endorsement of a non-generic understanding of spirituality. Here each community or context inevitably filters its 'religious' understanding through its own culture and symbolic self-understanding. I would still submit, however, that such non-generic appreciation seems to do more for 'universalisation' than fragmentation.

What insights does contemporary Christian spirituality utilise in creating a new universality of perspective? First, with respect to *human experience*, it admits and ascribes to the commonality of universal spiritual experience, or at least more conspicuously than some Christian thinkers would countenance. An embracing 'anthropological approach' emerges as desirable for academic spirituality. Second, in its redeployment of *mysticism and kenosis* contemporary spirituality turns away from premature dogmatism. Seekers are freed to open themselves to the nature of ultimate reality, and therein to find 'God' for themselves. There is a universal endorsement of each person's God-given right to explore a spiritual 'immediacy' - a right to personal and direct experience of 'the Divine'. Similarly, 'kenosis', an important New Testament Christological word, refers to a non-prescriptive 'self-emptying' that arguably enjoys parallels with the postmodern notion of 'decentring'. Out of mysticism and 'kenosis' emerges a less prescriptive approach to the divine, which is something that various mystical traditions seem now to have in common.<sup>1</sup> Third, contemporary spirituality, in its *convergent* dimension, translates into a fresh

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<sup>1</sup> A safeguard against easy eclecticism, however, is ironically (also) part of contemporary spirituality's contribution to ministry. That is, notwithstanding spirituality's global accommodation, it also draws

look at theocentricism. Where a Christological approach must never be gainsaid, and is necessarily definitive for Christianity, there is frequently a deprivation of ‘mystery’ in over-prescribed spiritualities. Here the conservative fears and premature resolutions of (often ‘evangelical’) Christianity predisclose a revelation that was, after all, originally experiential and unforced, where the Spirit progressively led (and leads) disciples into the truth, presumably as an on-going, explorative discovery (Jn 16:13). Fourth, spirituality without doubt complements and enhances its own normative Christian insights with the more globalising, universe-affirming mood of postmodern spirituality.

With respect to ministerial application, contemporary spirituality gives wider dimension and global awareness to a ministry whose aspirations and concern must always be universal if it is to live by its ministerial and missional imperatives. Moreover, the universal embrace of contemporary spirituality resonates with the growing insight in scripture that there *is* also ‘faith outside of Israel’ - or even *greater* faith, as Jesus once observed.<sup>2</sup> Contemporary spirituality authenticates and expedites Christian ministry’s normative global outlook. It was shown in chapter three, though not in identical expression, that authentic ministry must necessarily exhibit a global investment, consciousness and concern. The substantiation for this global concern is found in the normative component of Christian ministry, that is, *inter alia*, in the missional and evangelising substance of Christian ministry and biblical theology. Christian ministry, in the spirit of its founder, is a ministry normatively related to the unifying presence and coming of the kingdom of God. Neither can it be argued that this is an entirely other-worldly concept, but rather one reflected in this-worldly terms, where it is prayed that God’s will may be realised on *earth* as in heaven (Matt 6:10). But significantly, it is furthermore a kingdom of *universal aspirations*, where God seeks to unite all things in Christ (Eph. 1:10). On the other hand, but integral to the normative tenor of Christian ministry, such ministry is only hermeneutically vindicated when it *locates* its reciprocal, contextual *sitz im leben* in the contemporary world. One might say, in naïve and unsatisfactory terms, that it has to be presently *relevant* to be God’s word, or God’s ministry. It is the labour of every biblical prophet and writer to speak God’s word observantly into their

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attention to the essential generic diversity of spirituality. *Indeed, it is the global diversity in unity that contemporary Christian spirituality seems to secure for ministry.* Contemporary Christian spirituality is able, without embarrassment and irrationality, to accommodate a rich, treasured diversity of, among other things, mystical insight.

<sup>2</sup> This universal embrace, as I have indicated, is achieved through academic spirituality’s positioning of Christian spirituality within the wider context of academic spirituality in general. Of course, a more conservative strain within Christianity might ask how Christianity is to preserve its normative theological identity in this context. I still maintain, however, that the merits of this embrace far outweigh the alleged merits of an over-prescriptive ‘spiritual theology’.

context if it is to be God's word at all. Therein lies the conception, effectiveness and event-stature of God's word, which does not return unto God void. Consonant with ministry's global imperatives it so happens, of course, that the world *is* contemporarily facing global, transcultural, ecological and mutually critical issues of unprecedented proportions. The concern of the times is how to exercise global values and responsibilities on a planet where each nation's actions become determinative for another's, and for our common home, 'spaceship earth'. How can ministry be authenticated, then, given its normative universal concerns on the one hand, and the extraordinary, unprecedented challenges of globalisation on the other? And can older models of mission still work? Patently not. The claim is made here that through the insights and 'implementation' of contemporary Christian spirituality, ministry is able to be true to its normative moorings, and at the same time achieve a sound spiritual resonance with the 'global village', and with the peculiar challenges and facilitative thought-forms of the times. *Contemporary Christian spirituality enables ministry, I claim, to fulfil both its normative and contextual imperatives, rendering ministry hermeneutically authentic.* Put differently, spirituality has 'a foot in the camp' of both contemporary globalisation on the one side, and erstwhile forgotten (universalising) parts of the Christian tradition on the other. Therefore, *I contend that Christian spirituality, in contemporary thinking, affords ministry an authenticating global perspective.* I have indicated how contemporary spirituality achieves a global amenability and perspective. This cosmic perspective *is* authenticating because ministry always has a *normative, theological* investment in 'global-dimensioned' salvation and reconciliation. Further, for ministry to be authentic I have shown that it needs to address the peculiar challenges and thought-forms of globalisation. This it *does*, through finding within its *own traditions* those universalising insights that achieve hermeneutic accord with postmodern globalisation and self-understanding. It is, of course, not an uncritical accord, theologically speaking. Neither does Christian spirituality somehow avoid the well-documented fragmentation and diversification of truth claims that are intrinsically accommodated by both postmodernism and contemporary Christian reflection. Nonetheless, *'spirituality', even with its 'Christian' attribution, enjoys a thus-far unencumbered universality, while evoking a recognition and hunger of universal proportions.*

### **8.2.2 Concentric 'Embodiments' for Ministry**

Contemporary Christian reflection indicates different dimensions of 'embodiment', starting from the individual but becoming more encompassing as the embodiment takes in wider social spheres. The smallest 'circle', in this understanding, would be the individual. Wider circles, however, are represented in this image by the widening concentric circles. It should be clear, what's more, that

spirituality's endorsement of these 'embodiments' validates Christian ministry. For one, the Christian faith is essentially incarnational by virtue of the 'word made flesh' (Jn 1:14). Furthermore, God pronounced Godself's material creation as 'good', therein giving the lie to a material/spiritual dualism (Gen 1:31). Thus the embodied features of turn-of-the century spirituality are consistent with Christian ministry's normative, inherited tradition. In short, contemporary spirituality, as described in chapter four, is a *corporeal spirituality*. It stands in contrast to any pejorative spirituality that offers itself as a dualistic alternative to physical or institutional embodiment. Present Christian spirituality, that is, dissolves the dualistic divide between the 'physical' and the 'spiritual'. It offers a sound Christian spirituality to the work of a Christian ministry that is always embodied, and rooted in the material world. It preserves the Christological 'non-negotiables' of Jesus as human and divine, yet more effectively and naturally than the older, somewhat wooden and antiquated Chalcedonian formula (Kelly 1968:338-343). Such embodied spirituality, I have shown, has considerable support in contemporary literature, and few writers want to be seen as advocating anything less, even though one-sided other-worldly spiritualities are still occasionally in evidence. Contemporary spirituality is a rooted, incarnational expression of one's faith in God. What, however, are some of the concentric embodiments that contemporary spirituality endorses as vehicles for the Divine? I now summarise these concentric embodiments, starting logically with the most fundamental 'embodiment' - the human body.

First, the *human body* is contemporarily shown as a much-neglected conduit and expression of God's action, whether in the writings of feminists or those taking another look at traditional asceticism. Feminist spirituality, so designated, is particularly enriching and dynamic in this regard. Many studies, however, now give new profile to the human body as integral to spirituality, ministry and divine-human communication. Thus it is increasingly clear that the human body is no 'also-ran' in factors that make for integrated spirituality. The body is essentially the recipient, transmitter and even housing of God's presence in Godself's world. The soul in this understanding far less *has* a body than *is* one. Ministers therefore need to take their physical bodies more seriously as conduits of divine communication. Second, *spirituality and sexuality*, I maintain, give a wider concentric 'circle' to sexuality (as 'additional' to the human body) because contemporary embodied spirituality breaks new ground by incorporating *sexuality* (at least more conspicuously and positively) into spirituality. For too long sexuality has been construed as an enemy of Christian maturation rather than an integral and inevitable part of it. Now, however, the minister's engagement with their sexuality might be seen as taking place *within* the compass of spirituality and prayer itself, rather than being a vexation to the kind of

spirituality that is comprehended as divorced from an anathematised sensuality. Where sexual temptation, failure and fruitless alienation of one's sexuality are fairly well documented among ministers and priests, positive redemption of sexuality is vital. A look at contemporary embodied spirituality can help significantly in this regard. Third, a wider concentric circle of contemporary spirituality encompasses, or constitutes, the *Christian Church*. While there are self-styled spiritualities that promote a privatisation of the spiritual life (and even some imbalanced *Christian* spiritualities lean this way) contemporary Christian spirituality incorporates the embodiment of spirituality in concrete Church life. This incorporation of the visible Church is, of course, an authentication of a Christian ministry that must always serve a visible, incarnational Church family - a community that witnesses to the world by the visible, incarnational way they love one another. Fourth, a wider concentric circle of embodiment in contemporary reflection represents a spirituality of political and social liberation. Contemporary spirituality reveals that a perception of liberation theology as presently devoid of real spiritual and contemplative insight is an unexamined and anachronistic impression. Ministers are able to find deeper satisfaction in a spirituality of broader proportions. Welcomingly illuminative, the wider dimension takes ministers out of a privatised, pietistic insularity. With globalisation of the world and the patent inter-connectedness of its problems, ministry can have scant credibility as an insular, 'closed neighbourhood' practice. It is imperative that clergy avail themselves of spirituality's broader political perspectives. Embodied spirituality, in its conscientised feeling for the poor and alienated of the earth, gives credibility to ministry in the well-informed global village, where suffering is relayed every day through the media. Lastly, I suggest that *creation spirituality* is expressive of the widest circle of materiality and embodiment. The subject here, of course, is not only organic or intelligent life, but also the whole material, cosmic order. This departure point claims to place the Christian historical 'dispensationalism' of salvation into the wider picture and terrain of creation. Creation spirituality has much to commend it. It is a salutary reminder for the minister of the materiality of the Christian faith. The sacramental, liturgical, celebrative rhythms of the faith find cosmic endorsement in the dying and rising patterns of creation. The rites of passage in everyday congregational life find cosmic resonance within the wider cosmic picture. Furthermore, the ruinous damage done to the earth through humanity's plunder and abuse is conspicuously laid bare in the thought, concerns and convictions of 'creation spirituality'. Ministers need to take up the Christian-stewardship challenge of creation spirituality in conscientising their people in this regard.

In summation, a rooted and embodied spirituality is an affirmation of Christ's incarnation, as it is of the flesh-and-blood minister who labours in that world of materiality that Christ came to redeem. God loved this cosmos so much (Jn 3:16). Can the minister do less? Nevertheless, the earthy spirituality here described is happily no longer a mere corrective and reaction to a disembodied spirituality that has lost its Christian heritage. This would be a perpetuation of an outdated dualism. Rather, the spirituality I have described is beginning to have the contemplative vision and receptive openness that has been missing from the often angry, prayerless activist, who found that their Church had betrayed the incarnation. Moreover, embodied spirituality endorses the physical nature of Christian ministry as endorsed by Practical Theology, in dialogue with communication and social sciences. In addition, the new world order of globalisation and postmodernism demonstrates an intrinsic concern for materiality and physicality and the essential holistic nature of reality. Thus, embodied spirituality realises authentic ministry in fulfilling adherence to two major hermeneutical requirements: the normative and the contextual. In this comprehensive sense embodied spirituality shows a facility for thinking theologically - that is, it is both faithful to the tradition and responsive to the challenges of our time.

### **8.2.3 Legitimizing Ministerial Religious Experience**

Christian spirituality of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century (*re*) *legitimizes religious experience*. The scientific spirit of modernism had done much to marginalise the *bona fides* of religious experience. It is my submission that spirituality's latter day reinstatement of religious experience, however, is one of the outstanding features of contemporary Christian spirituality. Ministry, and more particularly its requisite experiential sustenance, has long been held captive to systematic theology, and related philosophical-theological disciplines. Theology, so described, has become prescriptive and determinative for what is legitimate and acceptable in the field of religious experience. Therefore *because spirituality, as contemporarily conceived, gives credibility and legitimacy back to spiritual experience (and because ministry is impotent without such vocational and sustaining experience) it is indispensable for any Christian ministry worthy of the name*. In fact, contemporary spirituality as a theological discipline almost single-handedly takes on the challenge of salvaging the once priceless, experiential component of early theology. It does this recovery in a reflective and scientifically credible way. Christian religious experience is persuasively reintroduced and reinstated as indispensably authoritative - and therein for ministry as well. In a word, religious experience is now *relegitimised*.

How does contemporary academic spirituality validate or legitimise religious experience? What sources are contemporarily utilised by the fledgling academic discipline of spirituality for re-legitimising religious experience as such? I have shown that academic spirituality utilises the contemporary faith in first-hand *human (religious) experience*, which is generally enjoying newfound validity.<sup>3</sup> In other words, human religious experience (and human experience in general, it must be said) has now become a legitimate ‘object’ of examinable religious experience. Of course ‘religious experience’ is not in all cases equally valid, and sometimes not at all. The possibility of self-deception, to name but *one* obstacle, is always real. Still, religious experience *per se* has come into an era of far greater respectability or self-legitimation than before. The validity of experience *per se* provides a substantial part of the foundation for spirituality’s - at least envisaged - academic status. With regard to Christian ministry, spirituality reinstates the place of those inner ‘human’ motivations and sometimes-indefinable illuminations that have consistently changed the hearts and minds of people throughout the Christian centuries. Second, *spirituality as an academic study* validates human religious experience insofar as it formally profiles religious experience for serious scrutiny and reflection, giving it a theological and theoretical dimension. Thus the forum of academic spirituality is itself reflectively endorsing spiritual experience and drawing greater attention and sensitivity towards valid experiential manifestations. For ministers schooled in theological academies this is a great legitimation of religious experience *per se*, so often the poor relation of supposedly more respectable theological pursuits. Nonetheless, spirituality’s prior attention as *Christian* spirituality is to its own traditions. It is here, thirdly, that spirituality gives to ministry the greatest authenticity for its Christian work, namely *an informed rediscovery and analysis of its own contemplative and mystical roots*. Spirituality validates religious experience through a *sophisticated re-examination of its classical experiential heritage*. Turn-of-the-century academic spirituality looks in greater depth at the classical, and sometimes-forgotten or marginalised, writings of the Christian mystics and contemplatives. The insights of, and modern parallels to, *apophaticism* and *kataphaticism* are particularly convincing. Particularly exciting and validating, to my mind, are the analytical tools and theological perspectives peculiar to spirituality that this proposed academic field now brings to the ‘devotional’ and mystical ‘genre’. What was originally simply inviting of a subjective response from the reader has now called forth an analysis and appreciation that belongs uniquely

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<sup>3</sup> There are several reasons why religious experience, or new ways of knowing, has contemporarily come into its own. The reasons are, *inter alia*: disillusionment with the promises of rational, supposedly progressive and ‘scientific’ methods, which was greatly aggravated by the world wars of the twentieth century, *et al*; the rise of postmodern perspectives and the undermining of ‘pure rationality’ and ‘objectivity’; the questioning of previously uncontested epistemologies and the frequent absolutising of rationality.

to a 'spirituality discipline'. Waaijman's (2002) extensive work, for example, shows the potential and scholarly sophistication of such a discipline. Spirituality is no longer the object of condescension and patronage from the more 'respectable theological disciplines'. It has found itself within an epistemological framework that gains increasing contemporary credence. Fourthly, prior to classical and historic Christian literature is spirituality's endorsement and validation of the *place of experience in the scriptures and the earliest Church*. New, dynamic thinking in spirituality rightly identifies earliest Christian experience of Christ, in and through the Church, as self-evidently predating formalised creeds, and even the Scriptures themselves. Further, it is increasingly noted that such experience carries more weight than a supposed ready-packaged circumscribed truth, which often comes in the form of petrified words of Scripture. These, then, are some of the sources that spirituality utilises for reinstating the crucial nature of religious and salvific experience.

Arising out of academic spirituality's recovery of 'experience' comes more than just a suggestion, I submit, of *'doing' theology differently*. This insight invites the realisation of a new integration for the various branches of theology as a whole. Short of such comprehensive integration, the effect would remain of consolidating the respectability of contemporary academic spirituality. It must be admitted, however, that a way of doing theology differently is less easily described than tentatively mooted and explored. Perhaps one would expect some such professional reservation of an academic in the field of an experiential epistemology. The appeal of such an experiential theological approach, though, would be appealing to Wesleyan theologians, yet not exclusively to them. Such an approach might answer the cry of spiritually famished ministers and pastors who can no longer be sustained merely by intellectual theological systems. Such monolithic systems have long evidenced vulnerability as they come under fire from postmodern spirituality. Moreover, scholars have long held that the faith does not inhere in printed words, or in theological systems that timelessly prevail above all contradiction. Spirituality thus offers academic foundation for doing theology in a way that is appropriate to the *bona fides* of religious experience *per se*.

Academic *Christian* spirituality in particular could *evaluate various expressions of Christian spirituality* in, and for, ministry. In this respect, Christian spirituality owns some normative responsibility in evaluating the 'Christianness' of any aspiring *Christian* spirituality. The inestimable value for ministry of this more normative evaluative function in contemporary spirituality is self-evident. It authenticates ministry by giving it a wider, more appreciative

perspective of Christianity's many traditions. It also invites an inter-disciplinary assessment of the nature and, for example, psychological or political outcome of pursuing a certain kind or tradition of lived spirituality. Contemporary Christian spirituality is extremely versatile in exploring the rich heritage of Christian spiritualities, and has a great capacity for putting one in touch with hitherto unexplored depths in one's own Christian roots. It furthermore assists ministry to construct a comprehensive and formative spirituality as opposed to one that is ultimately inadequate or too one-sided.

Therefore, attention has been drawn to the outstanding feature of *recovered spiritual experience* in contemporary spirituality. The rediscovery of mysticism, and the door that Vatican II (1962-1965) opened to the mystical and contemplative tradition, meant the possibility of an almost unprecedented first-hand experience of the immediacy of God. This invigorating new dispensation has now become a time of discovery and personal verification of the faith for oneself. Notwithstanding the slippery nature of the word 'experience', there is now the possibility of a profound first hand involvement in one's faith. For many parishioners and ministers this was sadly lacking in the past. Largely through academic spirituality's re-evaluation of the Christian experiential tradition, and not least of all the works of the mystics, the fathers and mothers of the Church, spirituality has enabled devotees to *own* their faith with fresh conviction and serendipitous illumination. Christian spirituality puts 'experience' back into ministry. Indeed, the supreme and validating principle for any ministry has to be one's own experience of the divine. A qualification of 'experience' is required, as the word is difficult to define. But a mere mental assent to a 'confession', or a lifeless concern for philanthropic endeavours, however noble and spiritual, will scarcely authenticate Christian ministry. There is no substitute for the power and immediacy of the primordial Spirit who creates and sustains the Church, and empowered those from within that Church to verbalise the oral tradition and the resultant scriptures. If Christian ordained ministry presupposes a divine 'call', then ministry stands or falls on such experience of the divine, even where such 'experience' must disappoint the expectations of a misinformed contemporary 'mysticism'.

#### **8.2.4 A Contemplative Mood for Ministry**

An outstanding feature of contemporary Christian spirituality, of the 'lived experience' or academic persuasion, is its re-presentation of contemplative prayer, and the insights that emerge therefrom. In this respect, contemporary spirituality is distinctive inasmuch as it moves beyond prayer techniques and ascetical prayer disciplines. It does not discard the latter. Nevertheless, its

genius and hallmark is essentially that it incorporates, into the greater whole, that dimension of spirituality that has traditionally belonged only to the 'religious' or, if one might say, the spiritual elite. The two, of course, are not necessarily synonymous. Still, in more formal and technical language, the older 'spiritual theology', with its traditional categories of ascetic and mystical theology has been subsumed and 'collapsed' into Christian 'spirituality', where access to the mystical dimensions of the faith is now the inheritance of all.

The distinctive contemplative dimension of spirituality addresses ministry in a number of significant ways. That is, Christian spirituality renders ministry an invaluable service as it speaks with timely pertinence or synchronicity to a number of contemporary factors, all of which touch unmistakably upon ministry. *One such factor is the expeditious effect of postmodernism on contemplative spirituality.* The dualistic and optimistic tones of modernism have been found wanting, and the credibility of contemplative ways of thinking and perceiving are favourably received by postmodern spirituality. Contemporary spirituality authenticates ministry, in other words, through convincing utilisation of postmodern spirituality. In no small part, postmodernism represents a perspective that questions the infallibility of our perceptions. It underscores the determinative nature of our context for understanding reality. With this introduction of humility, openness and 'decentring' to the human enterprise, postmodernism resonates with what is best in the contemplative life. Second, a timely pertinence of contemporary spirituality for ministers, especially in spirituality's contemplative expression, is the way it offers ministry *a welcome alternative to present anomalous ways of going about ministerial work.* It is so often a corrupted understanding of ministry that eats at the spirit of priests, who know instinctively that something has gone awry with their ministry, and that a consumer-dictated mood has taken over. There needs to be a corrective to the business, market-oriented approach to ministry. Such ministry operates out of a keen observation for the consumerist appetite of its Church clientele, flagrantly following the examples of big business or unscrupulous marketers. In contrast to 'success' oriented approaches to ministry, and the breathless styles of programme-driven ministers, is the contemplative style of openness and receptivity - to God and to the world. The contemplative mood gives to ministry a composure and a salient witness to a consumer society that has now infiltrated the Church and its ministry. Such frenetic ministry often tolls the death knell for a discerning and reflective pastoral work - the vital ministry that sees beyond the ego-driven needs of ministers and their congregants, offering an alternative to the misguided vacuity of so much church activity. If the Church surrenders this contemplative witness to the 'drivenness' and

obsessive compulsivity of the *zeitgeist* then it abandons its most treasured ‘better part’ of sitting at the feet of Christ (Luke 10:42).<sup>4</sup> Thirdly, a contemplative disposition and prayerfulness, on the contrary, has added a dynamic and indispensable dimension to political action and social consciousness. There is now a newfound integration of once disparate theological disciplines, and not least of all the integration of a spiritual awareness into systematic theology and ethics. This integration has added an almost universally endorsed contemplative dimension to political action. Such political action was once unduly frustrated and reactionary towards what it rightly saw as an impoverished or pejorative understanding of the spiritual and mystical life. Most notably, contemplative spirituality, while not dismissive of the undeniable benefits of psychology and the social sciences for ministry, has recovered the credibility of soul care and spiritual direction for Christian ministry. The study of the practice of, and prerequisites for, spiritual direction as inspired by contemporary ecclesiastical spirituality will do much to facilitate, I believe, an intuitive grasp of the nature of contemplative ministry in general. Such reflective study might reveal how the minister’s overall approach to ministry either facilitates their capacity for (administering) spiritual direction or makes it contemplatively impossible.

The *contemplative dimension* of spirituality is thus another pervasive feature of contemporary Christian spirituality. Even writers with no Church tradition background in the contemplative life unconsciously show the effects of contemplation’s influence, an influence largely precipitated by Vatican II, enhanced no doubt by contemporary possibilities in postmodern thinking and other factors relating to the Christian tradition’s own resonance therewith. Moreover, while contemplation has, for the most part, been ascribed to the prayer life, it is clear that a wider contemplative *outlook* and *receptive disposition* can also be unmistakably contemplative. The latter contention underpins much of this thesis. I have shown, in other words, how the contemplative spirit is of the very soul of the Christian life, and therefore of Christian ministry as well. Only mistaken views of ministry, fuelled by busy consumerism and the need for (often religious) self-gratification, could lead one to believe otherwise. Such is the public demand, however, for highly frenetic, ‘successful’ displays of ministry that the contemplative *mood* is

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<sup>4</sup> The reading strongly implies that in sitting at the feet of Jesus, Mary had chosen the *better* portion, (την ἀγαθὴν μερίδα – by implication, the better ‘plate, or portion of food’) as opposed to Martha, who was supposedly preoccupied with food portions of another kind, in the ‘kitchen.’ It is true, as many homilies monotonously point out, that the Church needs *both* ‘Mary’s’ and ‘Martha’s.’ But is this good exegesis of Luke 10:42? The text makes a contemplative point that ministers do well to ponder. The immediately *preceding* passage to this one commissions us to ‘go and do likewise’ (Luke 10:17). In Luke 10:42, however, ‘Jesus affirms *not going and doing* [italics mine] but sitting still and listening’ (Craddock, Hayes, Holladay & Tucker 1986:95).

likely to be met with some stiff resistance. ‘Ministers’ and ‘pastors,’ as opposed to ‘priests,’ whose roles seem to be traditionally more mediatorial and contemplative, are likely to bear the brunt of this functionalist and ‘pragmatic’ onslaught. But the stand is worth taking.

### **8.2.5 Spiritual Maturation: Metaphors, Means and Moments**

Contemporary Christian spirituality brings formative *metaphors* and *means* of growth to the Christian life. It does this together with a description of the significant *moments* in Christian spiritual development. In doing so, it also serves as a corrective to self-serving, misguided spiritualities, of which there are evidently several on the religious consumer market. Christian spirituality recovers those metaphors that have served the Church faithfully throughout her history. In its capacity for academic scrutiny and experiential insight, turn-of-the-century spirituality has re-evaluated the dynamic contributions of such metaphors. It has also pointed to helpful, latter day images that can be entrusted with evoking the kind of Christian imagination that is conducive to the work of formation. Christian spirituality recovers *the praying imagination*, not merely as optionally available or psychologically prescribed, but virtually as an imaginative sacrament that brings new dimension and insight to the prayer life, and to Christian formation in general. The lost imaginative dimension - a facility surely intrinsic to ‘God-stamped’ humanity - offers again a dimension of interiority, a spiritual map and even a hint of the Christian’s purpose and destination. This contribution throws open expansive vistas to those ministers schooled exclusively in blinkered rationality, or who utilise only the facilities of philosophic theology and critical exegesis. As indicated in my thesis, here, too, is the resolution to the seeming incongruency between contemporary biblical criticism and the apparently naïve meditational use thereof by bygone devotees, who knew less than we do. Notwithstanding the questions raised over historicity, and other questions rising out of contemporary exegetical science, the employment of imaginative participation in biblical imagery becomes a respectable utilisation of Scripture. In other words, it is not really breaking the rules of biblical criticism. Essentially, as spirituality might remind us, the bedrock-spiritual-depth of Scripture does not lie in sound exegesis. Radically speaking, it lies rather in the Christian devotee who enters into those inspired imaginative depths of the New Testament writers themselves. Indeed, when the careful literary arrangement and insight of the Gospel writers is studied on its own terms, it reveals a greater appreciation of imagery and poetic innovation than one can expect to find in some

scholarly exegesis.<sup>5</sup> Together with such enlightening affirmations of spiritual metaphor, then, spirituality recovers the praying imagination for ministers and their congregants. The recovery thereof is not for the purpose of prayer technique, but for the existential participation of the devotee in those metaphors and images so well documented in scripture and Church history.

I have suggested that metaphors be helpfully spoken of in various categories, though the distinctions are neither watertight nor comprehensive. They include, from Church history, categories of location and geography, journey, deprivation and alienation *and* miscellaneous contemporary images that also serve Christian formation. The overall benefit of tried and tested imagery for ministry and congregational education is surely incontestable. The suspicious iconoclastic abstractions of much Protestant devotional literature would do well to reinvest in the rich metaphorical imagery of Holy Scripture and Christian tradition. In fact, even the anticipated qualification that such metaphors have no inherent power of their *own* already hints at a traditional Protestant propensity for distrust of images, even if only of the conceptual kind. Still, the rich interiority opened up by the praying imagination is affirmed and utilised by spirituality's re-adaptation of formative metaphors. All members of the wider Christian family might profit from such formative imagery. I now turn to 'means of grace.'

I have used John Wesley's (1703-1791) concept of 'means of grace,' and his specific designation of those various disciplines as a 'control' reference for examining contemporary means of growth. In this way, I indirectly show how contemporary spirituality is enhanced by Wesley's unique contribution. Perhaps more importantly is the implication in this approach of how contemporary spirituality can lead to a new and informed *appreciation* of one's own tradition and *enhance* that tradition more comprehensively - and more comprehensively than the other way around. Contemporary developmental spirituality offers to each specific Christian tradition a treasury of insight from the wider Christian family, appropriately correcting or endorsing each tradition according to the wider witness and wisdom. To my mind, this contribution of formative spirituality to each tradition constitutes an authentication of ministry, which often suffers from a tunnel vision peculiar to its own parochial preferences.

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<sup>5</sup> A retired New Testament professor, with whom I have occasional contact, wrote an article describing the Gospel literature as, *poetry's next-door neighbour* (Suggit 1978:3-17). That is, the Gospel writers' use of imagery and their overall technique has more in common with poetry than is often appreciated.

An abiding impression of formative spirituality is its enormous diversification of the means of growth. The world of prayer, with its numerous vistas, is explored in detail, yielding a rich landscape. Gone are the days of a few suggested ways of praying. Further, prayer technologies and techniques as somehow self-sufficient also seem to have had their day. Were such mechanical approaches to prayer a distinct feature of a Protestantism that had no access to the mystical tradition? Thus, of supreme importance, and already alluded to in the thesis, is the way in which potentially formative means of grace are invested with a contemplative spirit. Perhaps this meta-contemplative spirit is the real means that at once permeates all the well-known formative disciplines. These disciplines, in other words, are energised by an illumination and perception that breathes life into once-dead prescriptions for spiritual growth. In this regard there is a new perspective on formative spirituality - a quiet knowingness and intuition that necessarily predates and generates those very exercises which, until recently, were charged with more responsibility than they could hope to own. With such contemplative rejuvenation has come a deeper, and sometimes inexpressible, grasp of such words as prayer, meditation, spiritual reading, contemplation, fasting, fellowship, and the renowned exercises, for example, of Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556). Most pertinently for many ministers will be the reflective quietness and openness to God that these means of grace bring, especially when animated by mystical spirituality's contribution to once-stolid ascetical practices. Such exchange between the ascetical and mystical strains is, as I have shown, a notable feature of what we now call 'spirituality'. Priests are thereby enabled to utilise ascetical practices in a way that feeds the spirit and realises the original intention of those disciplines.

Spirituality has harnessed the developmental maps and insights of psychology in further enhancing its own understanding of spiritual growth. Contemporary developmental psychology has 'filled out' the picture even further. It is a tribute to academic spirituality's holistic self-understanding that it takes seriously those insights that come from outside its own field of immediate expertise. Here again, there is a continuum between nature and grace, or psychology and spirituality- if indeed one might speak in these categories at all. The essential point for authentic Christian ministry, however, is that spirituality realises wholeness for pastoral workers, as it takes both pastoral psychology's insights and the depths of spiritual maturation seriously and not somehow antithetical to each other. It should be clear that, of all people, pastors need this kind of 'psychology-friendly' spirituality, for pastors are *not* simply spiritual directors. By the same token, psychology has too often defined the values and goals of Christian ministry.

It has been shown that spirituality has enormous potential for offering *metaphorical and 'cartographic' means of spiritual maturation*. Speaking out of, I believe, an intuitive and informed reading of spiritual formation I sought to show the fresh and dynamic world that metaphorical imagery might bring to Christian growth, though only when approached with contemplative insight. Moreover, contemporary spirituality, through reclaiming its own formative traditions, and exploring the interiority of its own rich, formative imagery, is able to facilitate a new excitement and possibility for spiritual growth in ministers and congregants. Methodist ministers, for example, should feel an authentication of their Wesleyan tradition in the purposeful energy and resources of contemporary developmental spirituality. Spiritual formation brings holiness, and Wesley believed that holiness was a real, *imparted* possibility for each human being - not just *imputed*, as in the thinking of Luther and Calvin. Formative spirituality holds great promise for Wesleyan Methodists, who traditionally take holiness (sometimes referred to as 'perfect love' or 'Christian perfection') seriously. Formative spirituality, out of its informed interdisciplinary engagement with psychology, is giving visibility to maps of spiritual growth. Together with these maps comes spirituality's enrichment of the praying imagination and the erstwhile-mislaid antidote to spiritual stagnation.

### **8.3 Realisation and Outcome of Research**

If the five features of contemporary spirituality, so elucidated, are now placed side by side one might tentatively describe contemporary Christian spirituality as: *a relationship with God that is globally conscious and universally aligned, embodied and of the earth, yet valuing and reclaiming the dimension of religious experience through a contemplative openness to the mystery of divine transcendence, and committed to formation and the realisation of distinctively Christian goals*. The definition doubtless errs for lack of *Christian* or *Christological* identity. Nevertheless, it has the honest scientific advantage of letting the best of contemporary Christian spirituality speak for itself without being prematurely censured with regard to normative constraints.

Deliberatively applied to Christian ministry I contend that: *contemporary Christian spirituality gives to ministry a global, missional awareness and imperative; an affirmation of the incarnational embodiment of the faith and its ministers; a reinstatement of vocational and sustaining Christian experience, together with the validation of personal spiritual discovery; an authentic contemplative perspective for any Christian ministry worthy of the name; and the metaphorical and formative tools to realise personal and communal formation*. The aim of my

research is thus realised, as I have now attended to both the *features* of contemporary Christian spirituality and its *significance* for authentic Christian ministry.

The parameters (or demarcation) of my research, as outlined in chapter one, have been observed. I conceived these parameters as relating to a careful and critical understanding of ‘spirituality,’ the question of whether ministry be understood as ‘lay’ or ‘ordained,’ and whether the weight of research leans more towards ‘spirituality’ or more to ‘ministry.’ With respect to ‘spirituality’ I undertook *not* to read into that word an anachronistic understanding, or an unexamined synonym for ‘faith,’ ‘prayer,’ or ‘meditation.’ My thesis, I submit, shows no such superficiality. The understanding of ‘spirituality’ is in contention. Furthermore, I also undertook to employ the attribute ‘Christian’ to spirituality, though not prematurely, thus giving academic spirituality some room to speak for itself. My thesis is, moreover, mindful of a distinction between academic spirituality and spirituality as lived experience. Second, I conceded in chapter one that Christian ministry is ‘ordained’ *and* ‘lay’. Much of the thesis may well apply, then, to lay persons as well. Still, I wish to be understood as speaking largely for ordained ministers, and in that regard I also stay within my parameters. My last-mentioned parameter expressed my concern (and perhaps apology) to attend more to the research of *spirituality* than a sophisticated treatment of *ministry*, as might do justice, for example, to the requirements of a practical theologian. I feel sure that this is more than evident in my thesis. All told, I have observed these three demarcations as set out in my introduction.

Contemporary Christian spirituality is a fascinating, if complex, field – not least with respect to its aspirations for a place within the academy. Yet there is more than enough to suggest that this discipline is maturing in its self-understanding and in its credibility in the eyes of a postmodern world. Older assumptions, which gave primacy to other branches of theology over the ‘spiritual’ or mystical, are far less convincing in the twenty-first century. Academic spirituality (now beginning to emerge with a self-respecting theory, epistemology and empiricism) becomes increasingly difficult to refute. Still, reflective work needs to be done in clarifying the parameters and particular academic expertise that belongs this field. It is presently ‘open season’ for all branches of theology to speak on ‘spirituality’ with little seeming awareness of what is happening academically in this domain. Work needs to be responsibly done in this field to bring structure, intelligibility and legitimacy to what is too often disorderly and even faddish. Ministry can only benefit from a spirituality that is self-consciously reflective, that explores the infinite riches of the Christian spiritual tradition, and becomes less arbitrary and utilitarian, as it often *does* in the

hands in the hands of those essentially outside the discipline. Further, ministers need to see Christian spirituality credited with the academic stature that the field increasingly demands. Too often ministerial-university training gives the impression that spirituality must take care of itself.

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