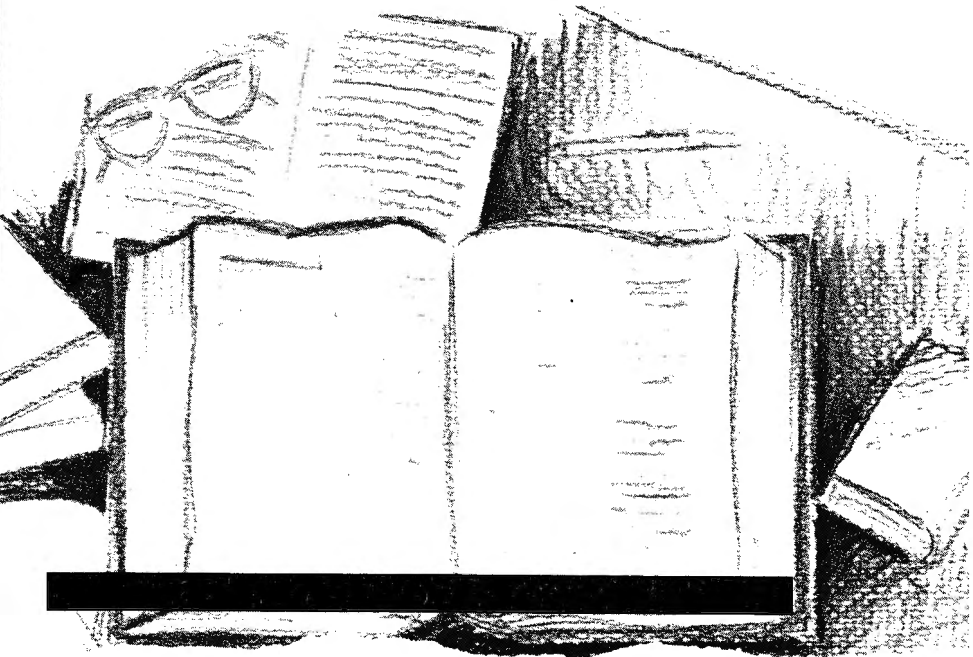


SPIRITUALITY:
CONTEMPORARY
& BIBLICAL

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P Seddon & I H Marshall

SPIRITUALITY: CONTEMPORARY AND BIBLICAL

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Publishers Preface

The papers in this booklet were originally delivered as lectures to an RTSF Day Conference in St Andrews in March 1993. They are published here with only minor revisions, and the addition of full footnotes to Dr Seddon's paper. He was asked to provide this additional material, as many of the items referred to would not be so well known. The notes will provide material for further reading, thought and research.

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SECTION 1

CONTEMPORARY SPIRITUALITIES

(Philip Seddon)

I want to divide my topic into three subject areas: secular, religious and Christian. Each area is full of overlaps and ambiguities, ebbs and flows, offering stimulation and recoil in equal measure. But in all the turmoil there is an extraordinary longing - we could say: 'for the unknown God'. And, all through, the critical issue is (to borrow a phrase): will we condemn? or will we try to understand? More theologically, will we try to be inclusive and open in our apologetics? Or will we be exclusive and retire into our fox-hole to wait for the end? I suggest that we will not be heard unless we listen. I have been very impressed by the ministry of Brian Austin,¹ who said in conversation, 'Unless we learn to shut up and listen and admit the faults of the church in the past, we have no right to address the New Age in love.'

'Secular spirituality' I use as a deliberate oxymoron. A general working definition of *spirituality* is 'the life of the spirit - including the Holy Spirit - in human life'. God is at work in many areas where he is denied or unacknowledged, brooding over the chaos to bring order. The Wisdom literature of the Old Testament and the Intertestamental period gives the clues: 'Wisdom' is God's universal activity in creation. In this context, *secular spirituality* includes contexts of constructive relationship, the quest for inner significance - 'the body within the clothes', longing for transcendence, and the ability to discern spiritual themes.

I am amazed at the many different contexts in which 'non-religious' people speak of spirituality, almost using a code word to point to the Ineffable, the Numinous, the Beyond, the Within in modern society. I see this as part of God's and creation's nourishment of and gift to humanity, and as a hunger with which all are fed at birth. Today it is thrusting up through the concrete of a materialistic, secular, nihilistic society, while, by and large, people assume that the churches are not interested.

I. Quest and Denial

I want to look at today's secular spirituality under the title of 'Quest and Denial'.

Let us look at a variety of arts. What speech is there in today's silent universe? Where do the arts hear the echo of the voice of 'God'? Consider three recent films. First, Alain Corneau's beautiful *Tous les matins du monde*, a poetic exploration of word and music, sound and silence; the creativity that flows from bereavement, the silence from which words are born, and the music which begins where words leave off - a kind of mysticism of music, more eloquent than life itself. Secondly, take what I read is a violent film: *Bad Lieutenant*, which is nonetheless concerned with the question of the forgiveness of a rapist, and of which Mark Kermode, in *Sight and Sound*, said, 'The story itself is almost biblical, an unashamed tale of the redemption, via divine intervention, of one who has fallen from grace... Its narrative heart is palpably spiritual'.² Thirdly, consider Michael Eaton's rapturous review of the film *The Rapture*,³ a film which explores conversion, the Rapture, the Horseman of the Apocalypse, God, rationality, disillusion and the Last Days in American society today. Michael Tolkien, the director, wonders: 'Was I trying to make a spiritual film, or a film about spirituality? And I heard the word all the time, but what do we really mean by "spiritual"?'.⁴

Take Andrei Tarkovsky's marvellous *oeuvre*, from his *Andrei Rublev* to *The Sacrifice* (1986). His *Times* obituary described his favourite theme as 'the spiritual versus the material'. Derek Malcolm, in *The Guardian*, said: 'Few poets would dare address us in the way he did, constantly chiding us for putting temporal things first and forgetting our spirituality...He demanded a great deal from his viewers and from those who made his films with him. In return, he gave absolutely all of himself'. Mark LeFanu, author of one of the critical studies of Tarkovsky,⁵ said, 'Tarkovsky is undoubtedly one of the great spiritual presences'. His was a contemplative choreography, with a fearless visionary thrust. 'Sin', Tarkovsky said, 'is that which is superfluous; and that being so, our whole civilisation consists from beginning to end of sin'.

Even if I were to pause briefly at Jean-Luc Godard's *Passion* (1982), a kind of 'Zen of film', with what Tom Milne in *The Observer*⁶ described as its 'pinnacles of agony and ecstasy, those moments of grace which are preserved in

perpetuity by the paintings of the great masters, but which in life tend to pass unnoticed, frittered away in the toilsome business of simply living', time would fail me to tell of Ingmar Bergman's relentless treatment of the themes of spiritual anguish and the absence of God, and 'the harrowing separateness of people, even when in love',⁷ from *The Seventh Seal* (1956) to *Through a Glass Darkly* (1961) to *The Silence* (1963) to *Winter Light. The Communicants* (1967) and *The Shame* (1968).

George Steiner has given this theme of 'Quest' astonishing form, in his *Real Presences*.⁸ 'This essay... proposes', he writes, 'that any coherent... account of the capacity of human speech to communicate meaning and feeling is, in the final analysis, underwritten by the assumption of God's presence. I will put forward the argument that the experience of aesthetic meaning in particular, that of literature, of the arts, of musical form, infers the necessary possibility of this "real presence"' (p 3). Like Pascal, he puts a wager on God - on the basis of the richest modes of human communication. 'To ask "What is music?" may well be one way of asking "What is man?"' (p 6). "'Mystery" is a term crucial to the argument' (p 17). 'The final stakes are theological' (p 87). Spirituality is presence in absence (p 121f).

In a different but important field, because of his friendship with Prince Charles, Laurens van der Post has been calling continually for a return to 'spiritual values'. 'One of the great confusions of our time is that people equate rationality and consciousness. Our task, first, last and most immediate, is to make those values, the imaginative and spiritual values, contemporary. We must become whole again.'⁹

But there is also the 'Denial'. If from a Christian perspective we have Steve Turner's sympathetic study *Hungry for Heaven*, subtitled *Rock and Roll and the Search for Redemption*,¹⁰ from a Jewish viewpoint we have Michael Medved's recent *Hollywood vs America*,¹¹ a highly critical study of that cynical sadism, satanism, sex and seduction which destroys what it feeds. A society buys and sells what it approves and values. Michael Jackson and Madonna both flaunt and sell a flagrant flirting with and flouting of religious and sexual mores. From the Bacchanalian Rolling Stones to the thunderous noise of Guns N' Roses heavy metal and the orgiastic music of acid house parties, primitive chthonic forces, as in ancient Greece, ransack rationality and invoke the irrationality which is so fundamental to and at the same time destructive of

modern society. This might represent an ounce of humane sanity in the face of a mindless urbanisation, were it not for the monumental financial orchestration and exploitation of such violence.

Perversely, music that purports to energise, enthuse and dynamise (to use Paul's verbs in Colossians and Ephesians!) can also be repetitive, boring and vacuous. 'Unique, gentle and harmonious music to relax, inspire and uplift you' is the soporific banality of mindless New Age music. Naturally, such music interleaves into the patterns of the unconscious, and indeed is intended to put the unconscious into overdrive. This is not a million miles away from the current resurgence of Sufism and the whirling Dervishes, featured most recently in Michael Palin's *Pole to Pole*.¹² Of what he describes as a 'serene, transfiguring sequence of piano pieces by Satie' Paul Driver in the *Sunday Times* said, 'It came straight after [Taverner's] *Mary of Egypt* and was the more spiritual experience'...¹³

For music can also be the bearer of truth. A friend tells me of a not particularly religious member of his choir singing in the *St Matthew Passion*. Of the phrase 'Truly this was the Son of God' he said, 'That's the most wonderful phrase in all music'. A choirboy from a real working class family sang in Bach's *Magnificat* and said 'Cor, sir, that's real!' We are back to the 'Quest'.

Here we can get a clear sense of what 'spirituality' means in today's secular world. It speaks of 'a something': a something beyond words, which has the power to move; the elusive and indefinable which touches us deeply; it reminds people of 'the something' non-material, non-physical, permanent and real which is of deepest and greatest importance; that 'something' which people hanker after, beyond the nit-picking of creeds and the contortions of religious language - viz *reality*. 'Spirituality', in today's culture, I believe, refers to a sense of the objective, nameless (and probably unknowable) Other which is the sole remaining vestige and clue to the transcendent in a culture which has, for all practical purposes, disposed of 'God'. It is today's equivalent of 'the unknown God', which Paul explored - in a very unLutheran manner, according to Luke! - with the Athenians. That is why I believe we should listen to today's secular culture.

Let me take two more final illustrations: sport and the environment. Torville and Dean's ice dancing, for some, breathed an air of pure spirituality.¹⁴ The

body became a lyric, transformed into liquid music and speech, transcending gravity and physical limitations, displaying 'sheer grace', and that rare spiritual harmony where two are one. Remember the Barcelona image of the body of a diver floating out over the city landscape, suspended in time and space. Recall Linford Christie's eyes seeing and reaching the prize, the body a vehicle of the spirit. Think of the mountaineer conquering the peaks, scaling the heights, daring the impossible, overcoming limits; reflect on the the azure blue of the sky and the virgin white of the snow, those two fundamental elements of life, all but evacuated from modern life. Are mountaineers society's spiritual alibis, climbing the peaks we should all be, inwardly? Is sport now the only area where people talk of discipline?

Once Paul kept his body under, for the sake of the Gospel; now a certain sportswear manufacturer's advert, on a background of women exercising, preaches a New Age gospel: 'YOU are your ancestors and your history your heritage and your home you are all the women who came before you and yet this is your body you move and no one else's this is your heart that is beating so loud and so strong just do it'. Discipline *then* for spiritual salvation; discipline *now* for health and wholeness (plus the expensive shoes).

Secondly, the environment. Here is one of the main movements of the time, millenarian, apocalyptic, utopian, 'well advanced towards replacing' Judeo-Christianity,¹⁵ raising *fin-de-siecle* and even *fin-de-tout* fears of a literal end to all things. Along with a philosophical rejection of utilitarianism, it also includes a 'Green spirituality' of participation in, rather than lordship over creation, a primitive 'basic respect for all life', a space for 'The Green Man' (a male equivalent of the Goddess and complement to Gaia),¹⁶ and a great deal of highly contested 'religious mumbo-jumbo', which virtually split the Green Party. But the soft sell of 'naturalness' and 'purity' has made a headway into food, advertising and women's magazines: natural health, medicines and foods; no colourings or additives; raw, unrefined, pure cane sugar; natural wood. Alongside the mass-marketing of junk and pre-packed foods, preaching that they are 'the real thing', there is a quest for authenticity and simple living, a longing for genuineness and reality, a rejection of substitutes and everything *ersatz*, a hankering after Eden.

II. Voices from Beyond: Myths of Redemption

Let us turn to the second main division, of spirituality in the religious context. Contradictions and nonsense abound here, but there is also (in my judgment) a remarkable sniff of the spiritual world-context of Jesus and the early church. This section I have entitled: 'Voices from Beyond: Myths of Redemption'.

One of the ironies of the scientific 'conquest' of outer space (apart from the fact that it is not matched by an equal conquest of inner space) is that increasing knowledge of the size of the universe gives rise to proportionately increasing fears of meaninglessness. Science then promises to answer all the questions, and Stephen Hawking is installed *nolens volens* as Chief High Priest, as Bryan Appleyard has recently shown (and been attacked for, for questioning the authority of science).¹⁷ Science answers all and none of the questions. Human beings are strangers and aliens in their own planet, let alone their own universe.¹⁸ Astrology and nihilism are two of the possible opposite responses. The New Age (which can happily embrace both), also comes in to claim the throne, as the world-view most in line with 'recent scientific discoveries', priding itself on being an age of spirituality - which is precisely the mark of the new age, small or capital letters.

Let me try and spell this out, by way of elucidation, with reference to Jung's essay 'Flying Saucers. A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Skies' (1958),¹⁹ which is touched on in an interesting volume of 1974 by Christopher Evans, entitled *Cults of Unreason*.²⁰

Jung begins from an article he wrote in 1954 concerning UFOs, which four years later was picked up by the media and taken to mean he believed in them. In order to correct this misapprehension, he wrote a rebuttal, which was never taken up. The conclusion is: 'Scepticism seems to be undesirable. To believe that UFOs are real suits the general opinion, whereas disbelief is to be discouraged... Why should it be more desirable for saucers to exist than not?' (pp 309-310). Jung's investigation I find fascinating. He sees the phenomena as a cultural psychic projection at a time of widespread anxiety, indicating a 'profound psychic need' (p 414). They represent a 'living myth' (p 322-3) in the process of formation, an 'archetype of order, deliverance, salvation and wholeness' bearing the 'expectation of a redeeming, supernatural event' (p 328), 'signs in the heaven' (p 323) symbolising an 'epiphany' (pp 327, 406) of the 'gods' (p 327).

In terms of the history of thought, this represents a visible form of the Gnostic myth of the Redeemer from the skies.²¹ It also clearly constitutes a form of secular apocalyptic, presaging the - or an - end. It represents a wish-fulfilment for contact with the gods, and for revelation from above. This was the attraction in the now (on the whole) discredited corn circles: 'someone is trying to say something to us'. I do not think it would be blasphemous to view the appearances of the Virgin Mary at Fatima, Garabandal and now at Medjugorje in such terms of Christian longing for revelation;²² or even to see some speaking in tongues as similarly originated. There is, further, an extraordinary hagiographical illustration of the messianic aspect in Leni Riefentahl's film *Triumph of the Will* (1936), in which, at the start, an aeroplane is first seen far above the clouds, and then from below, descending through the clouds, to bring the beloved Führer to his waiting faithful, as he arrives for the Nüremberg rally. *He is the Saviour from heaven, coming on the clouds.*

From that overall insight, let me now proceed to offer a short list of some ten different aspects of religious spiritualities today.

1. Of the legion contemporary *cults of irrationality* I never forget Käsemann's passing remark that such proliferations resemble the 'seven other devils' that the first devil expelled has brought along with him after the house has been cleansed and left empty.²³ This profusion of myriad hosts of bizarre new religious movements has spawned its own network of research agencies, including INFORM, CESNUR, the DIALOG Centre International, and ISAR.²⁴

The European delights in reporting on many of these groups. These include the Raélians, who lie naked on the ground in order to receive messages from outer space; the Damanhur community led by Oberto Airaudi, with their huge underground temple in the Northern Italian Alps; the synthetic movement of Aumism in its holy city of Mandar Om, near Lake Castellon in the French Midi, with its 22m high statue of the Buddha, 20m high statue of Christ and 33m high statue of its founder, the Cosmic Messiah.²⁵ You will also remember David Icke's brief epiphany in March 1991, perhaps have heard of the Brahma Kumaris, a highly organised philosophical support-group for the movement Global Cooperation for a Better World; maybe recall Benjamin Creme with his prophecies over the past 15 years or so concerning the coming of Lord

Maitreya; and, perhaps most famously of all, remember Bhagwan Sri Rajneesh - he of the violent naked group therapies in Pune, India, he of the 97 Rolls-Royces in Oregon, California, and he who on his grave-stone had incised: 'Osho: never born - never died.'

2. **Magic (Magick)** in all its branches has enjoyed an unparalleled revival since the early 1950's when the Witchcraft laws were repealed. It may be the cult of Aleister Crowley, who is certainly more honoured now than ever during his lifetime; it may be one or other of the more or less official branches of Wicca (ritual magic); or it may be one of the many offshoots of the darker forms of magic. 'The Occult' now occupies at least as much space in major bookshops as 'Religion'. Most public statements by practitioners of magic regularly distance themselves from extreme and destructive forms - which seems suspiciously like a media massaging campaign to present the 'acceptable face of witchcraft'. The research and writing of Dianne Core offers a rather different picture...²⁶ There seems little doubt that there is a whole range of 'anti-spiritualities' of darkness, of death and of Satan.
3. Another estuary which flows into the New Age is *folk-religion*. Positively viewed, this is the practical 'natural' wisdom of the past, including the healing properties of plants and herbs; negatively viewed, it marks a return to superstition, ritual and magic based on patterns, plants, planets. On its own, it marks a return to tradition; as often, it is part of the alternative Tradition of esoteric religion.
4. We should distinguish between *individualistic- and community-based* movements. It is clear that all cults depend upon individualism, if not also a self-seeking individualism, but a genuine spiritual search, when combined with 'gullible cynicism',²⁷ makes some people ready to buy and surrender anything, as the current case of the Branch Davidian literal siege-mentality illustrates. This cocktail frequently has a prosperity gospel element added, sometimes Christian, sometimes not. Roy Clements points out in a Jubilee Centre tape that 'the only sort of religions that can proliferate in our present social climate on a mass scale are cults which foster materialism and individualism - the world-views of our culture'.²⁸
5. A return to *astrology* is an obvious major shift. The front covers of large numbers of women's magazines have advertised astrological guides in

recent New Year issues. Of course, there is selling power in such advertising, but that precisely illustrates the symbiosis between a trend and the technology (literature in this case) which fosters it. It would be naïve not to see the connection between the extraordinary astronomical discoveries of the time, and the subsequent astrological 'hijacking'. Nancy Reagan and Princess Diana's links with astrology first lent disbelief and then credence to the trend. Note the remark of Diana's astrologer in December: 'If ever she needed spiritual and therapeutic guidance, it's now.' Astrology, the quest for a sense of place, pattern and purpose, offers a liturgy for the emptied space of a silent universe, a litany of the Zodiac - the speech of destiny.

6. The reclaiming of *ancient mythologies and religions* is one of the most extraordinary facets of this era. Twenty years ago Horus, Seth, Isis, Hermes Trismegistus, Valentinus and Quetzalcoatl were mere footnotes in scholarly works. Today they are in every Dillons and Waterstones. In one sense this is another aspect of the rejection of rationality; but it is more consciously an embracing of the lost wisdom which enabled humans to live (it is assumed) in relationship with the world around, instead of regarding themselves as separate from it. The return to mythology is therefore also a return to the pre-Industrial, pre-Cartesian indivisibility of a spiritual and material world. (This goes hand in hand with the New Age assault on any and all forms of dualism.²⁹) The gods may be "divinities", powers, energies, projections of the unconscious, to be assimilated into the conscious; or they may be fertility powers symbolising natural cycles and rhythms. Mythologies now therefore resume their function of providing some necessary assistance for language and reality in an age where the relationship between the two has broken down.³⁰ 'The Tradition' - whether occult, hermetic or alchemical, but always esoteric - now again finds its place in the wider post-modern human consciousness.

Julian Cope's *Jehovahkill* tape illustrates the return to an often aggressively evangelistic (dys-angelistic?) paganism: 'Jesus Christ is not on the cross', with tracks such as 'Jesus Christ is not the cross', 'The cross is a representation of Man a-standing arms Outstretched', 'Accepting the Creation', 'the Cross is Mankind stretching up and Out of His Waking Dream'.

7. *The Great Goddess*, in one sense, is the focus and culmination of this whole recovery of ancient civilisations. But it is more than that. She is taken to be the underlying reality of all things - everything is the Goddess. This can be seen as true pantheism, except that the *theos* is *thea*.³¹ In this sense, the heart of the New Age is the rediscovery - if not the dominance - of the feminine as the fundamental underlying reality. It is certainly a rejection of what is seen as the Male God of Judaism and Christianity and the whole history of patriarchalism. This may be expressed in varying degrees of mythology, but as a force in spirituality it is extremely potent. At a more generalised level, this is translated, almost *ad nauseam*, inside and outside the churches, as the concern for 'wholeness'; more technically, and more properly, it is expressed by the concern for interconnectedness.³²

At the same time, a fresh debate is just beginning to take place, with an increasing number of notable women arguing that it is the feminine that is needed, not feminism.³³

8. Next, it is worth noting *the military aspect* of various religious movements. We have the Jesus Army loud and strong in Birmingham; we have Frank Peretti's 'spiritual Star Wars',³⁴ offering the irony (as Paul Hiebert has pointed out) that a conviction posing as thoroughly orthodox has in fact assumed the language of pre-Christian (probably Zoroastrian) dualism; we have the Marches for Jesus, and Crusades at intervals; and we have the Islamic League's 'We are marching to God's call',³⁵ and the whole resistance of the Muslim Brotherhood to godless Western materialism and profanity, including the Ayatollah's *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie. All these approaches, Christian and Muslim alike, are (with some reservations) fundamentalist in stance, being usually psychologically aggressive, theologically literalist (or radical in the sense of 'back to the roots'), and above all politically stressed. The political convictions of liberation theology, from a more liberal stance, are not unrelated to such militancy.
9. In an altogether different style comes the Alister Hardy Research Centre in Oxford,³⁶ inaugurated by Sir Alister Hardy himself,³⁷ and run successively by Edward Robinson (brother of J A T), David Hay and Gordon Wakefield. This has been (I think) sober research, simply cataloguing experiences people have identified as religious, without being able to

categorise them absolutely, though with some attempts to describe whether they have been beneficial or not. I took part myself in some of the early questionnaires, now nearly some 20 years ago. What is interesting is the sheer volume of experiences that people have had, which they have never shared with anyone else, because of the prevailing negative climate of opinion.

10. Finally, *inter-faith dialogue*, and the spirituality of living inter-faith (neologisms and the re-creation of grammar are also a mark of a New Age mentality) are, in many quarters, rapidly replacing evangelism as the Christian task. Historically, this is a post-colonial, post-missionary-movement mood; structurally, a marginalisation of doctrine; theologically, a querying of the uniqueness of Christ; culturally, the relativism which confounds choice; and Christologically, a preference for Theology in place of Christology.³⁸

On the whole, this is a professional and scholarly business, but at street level the presence of many creeds and colours in British society has raised the question of what the English church has to offer other faiths. In addition, it can be illustrated at the level of fashion and jewellery; cf. *ELLE's* offering of 'religious knick-knacks from all over the world: crucifixes from Peru, skeletons from Mexico, voodoo dolls from Haiti, icons from Greece, medicine masks from Africa...decorative crosses based on Celtic, Coptic and pagan regalia...it was Madonna who first brandished the cross as decoration.'³⁹

In contrast, the work of Interserve and the growth of Black and Asian Christian groups⁴⁰ is performing the very important service of distinguishing cultural religion (here, Christianity) (*cuius regio eius religio!*) from the essentially international and multi-cultural nature of Christian faith, which is only now beginning to be realised and addressed in the West, at precisely the same time that (in other quarters) the theological basis of evangelism is being challenged.

The picture, then, in this sphere, is chaotic and amorphous, even with - or, perhaps, especially because of - a messianic reading. These are the areas where one becomes painfully aware that religion is such an ambiguous force, so full of perversion, abuse of power, ignorance and stupidity. Fortunately, in a

paradoxical way, ordinary common sense protects most people from being duped. I have to say by way of a conclusion in this section, which might seem to go against the kind of links I have been trying to explore, that most people (?) never get anywhere near some of these extreme movements, and that Western culture is still, by and large, suspicious of, and antipathetical towards, anything to do with personal religion, except where it can be safely privatised, doctored and controlled.

III. Renewal and Loss

Finally, let us turn to the Christian arena. I want to address this under the title 'Renewal and Loss'.

Let me begin with music again, and pick out four areas. *Mission Praise* and *Songs of Fellowship* are probably the regular diet for many, but, if you will pardon me, that says everything. There is good music, notably Graham Kendrick, the quality merchant by a mile, and there are a fair number of very moving, musically interesting compositions.

But what are the general themes? Victory, praise, spiritual warfare, being bold, smiting the enemy, in one corner of aggressive military language; counterbalanced in the other by a soupy romantic Christian equivalent of smoochy muzak, laced with gallons of subjectivity (on which more below). The (?) spiritual hall-marks are happiness and triumph, without much concession to the cross. This may be a reaction against a certain kind of pessimistic swooning over masochistic or erotic images of the cross, but a 180° swing of the pendulum to the polar opposite is hardly the solution.

For many, secondly, Taizé spirituality is 'the bee's knees', or perhaps more appropriately, the bee's nest, judging by the way that thousands return to the hive year after year. Young people in particular find a challenging mixture of catholic liturgical music and worship, a sense of mystery and of history, a palpable ecumenical spirit and a genuine commitment to justice and social issues in the name of Christ. It represents *the church engaged*: an integration of parts often split elsewhere.⁴¹

That same quality of integrity comes through, thirdly, in the area of more popular music, for instance in Sheila Walsh and her honest account of her own marriage difficulties, and in the plaintive songs of the blind singer Marilyn

Baker; gutsiness in one and yearning in the other. Mahalia Jackson and the many black Pentecostal choirs remind us here, too, of the enormous black contribution to spiritual life today. 'God is building me daily to the image of his Son Jesus Christ', she is quoted as saying. Note also that Bob Dylan's 1989 *Oh Mercy* marked his rehabilitation in the secular musical world, having been blasted by critics since becoming a Christian.

Integrity, incidentally, is a key word. I have long liked this quotation from William Feather: 'We British tend to be wary of the spiritual in art, partly at least because what passes for spirituality is often nothing but striptease of the soul. Spiritual qualities are found, not in subject-matter alone, nor in method...but in a capacity to work towards a complete integrity. Worthiness... isn't integrity'.⁴²

Finally, in the classical area, there has been a true renaissance. First, there is Olivier Messiaen's mystical, committedly theological and 'ecstatic contemplation of God'⁴³ in his huge musical *opus*, including *La Nativité du Seigneur*, *Les Sept Sacraments* and the recent *St Francis of Assisi*. Second, we have John Tavener's *Akathist of Thanksgiving*, his *The Protecting Veil*, and most recently his magnificent *We shall see him as he is (Ikona of the Beloved)*, featured in last year's Proms. Third, I note the Estonian exile living in Berlin, Arvo Pärt, composer of the stunning *Passio* and magnetic *Miserere*, summed up in the title of a *Guardian* article as a composer of 'austere, hypnotic and exultant sounds... a music as intense and spiritual as it is simple..extraordinary other-worldliness, [whose] monastic frugality... expresses itself in sounds of pristine melody and spine-tingling harmonic dissonance'.⁴⁴ Fourth, Henryck Gorecki's *Third Symphony* has been in the hit parades, because, according to Warner's UK manager, 'it fulfils a spiritual need many feel in modern life'.⁴⁵ Here are four (what the media call) 'deeply religious' composers reaching back into orthodox Christian faith and far out into the so-called secular world. This is the Christian music that is hitting the market and touching the human spirit.

Art? As in the religious supermarket, so in the church, who would have guessed that Rublev's icon of *The Holy Trinity* of 1411 / 1425 would come to be so hugely disseminated in the late 20th century? This, too, is part of the resurgence of Christian tradition in the form of Catholicism and Orthodoxy; and its availability represents one of the greatest contributions of modern technology. But more importantly, it represents the invasion - perhaps the re-

invasion - of the *visual* in a highly sight- and image-oriented world (in every sense),⁴⁶ about which Ellul characteristically expresses severe reservations.⁴⁷ For just as the task of the media is to create images, so it has become the task of the Christian media to create Christian images. But who are the alternatives to the secular - and (NB) female - icons of Princess Di, Madonna, Linda Evangelista or Michelle Pfeiffer? (quite apart from the fact that in a few years' time - apart from Princess Diana (as Camille Paglia has pointed out!⁴⁸) - these names will all be quite unknown). Mother Teresa? Jackie Pullinger? Martyrs such as Janani Luwum or Oscar Romero? These are the icons, at best, that come and go. What is required is the true Icon that 'abides'...

In literature the darkly mysterious volumes of the new Susan Howatch and the elegant Cadfael series of Ellis Peters (both self-confessed believers) explore themes of 20th century Anglican and 14th century Benedictine spirituality. Both are extremely popular and sell well, though the fascination seems to me to be ambiguously linked with things ecclesiastical, clerical and psychic as much as spiritual. But then, as we noted earlier, for most people today, the psychic is precisely the spiritual. The poetry of R S Thomas,⁴⁹ in contrast, though far less accessible, works much more with the absence than with the presence of God, with the *via negativa*, but exhibits a humanity and earthedness which Christian faith badly needs at the moment. All this said, I suspect that contact with and outreach into wider society is still relatively marginal.

In terms of Christian art and film, the least said the better (or perhaps I am just as ignorant as anyone else in this area). I note that two of the areas of greatest secular spirituality are two in which Christian contributions are negligible.

Underlying all these topics seem to be three issues on which I would like to base the rest of this study. They are 1) the relationship of the present to the past; 2) the priority of Word or Spirit; and 3) the interrelationship of creation and the supernatural.

First, the relationship of the present to the past. Here we are considering the place of tradition in contemporary spirituality. The issue of women's ordination hangs on this point, and on a traditional reading of Scripture. As to *recovery*, women's studies have brought back from the dead a whole army of forgotten female saints: from Julia in Romans 16 to Priscilla, Hilda, Hildegard, Mechtilde,

Julian and Margery Kempe, to name only some of the most famous. We have also witnessed a resurgence of Christian Celtic spirituality, and sense the power of that tradition to speak today. The discovery of kindred spirits from the past has made many more humble and receptive to the wisdom of the whole church, and at the same time opened many to the reality of the church in England before the 'triumph' of Catholicism.

At the same time, precisely that same strand of recovery of the past has encouraged dismissal of '2000 years of patriarchy' within the Christian tradition, and the obligation to combat it in varying degrees. The recovery of one vision produces rejection of another; the recovery of creation is taken to negate the whole history of the church's attitude towards animal life; an abandonment of liturgy goes along side by side with a rediscovery of it. One group finds the future held in the appropriation of the past; another does so only on the basis of a high degree of selectivity. Some have already ceased praying to the Father or to the Lord because these are terms of male domination; others see such a move as a craven capitulation to the spirit of the age, especially in view of the anti-patriarchal interpretation of 'Father' and 'Lord' specifically offered, in the light of Jesus' life and death, throughout the whole of the New Testament. There is a real polarising here which is not promising, all the more so because it is grounded, supposedly, on a vision of restoring wholeness to the church's spiritual life. 'Renewal' is becoming a code word for destruction, as in 'urban renewal' (!), and as in some New Age rites which involve rites of rejection of one's Christian past.

Matthew Fox's *Original Blessing*⁵⁰ is almost a litmus test of one's commitment to orthodoxy or otherwise. Advocates for Matthew Fox see him as a prophet, yes and more than a prophet; his being silenced by the Vatican as proof that he is a man for our times; any opposition as blind refusal to see God's hand in the 'new thing' that He- or more likely She - is doing. To reject Fox is to prove that you are a spiritual dinosaur, confined to the old age; to be converted to him is to welcome the New Age and to enter the marvellous freedom of those who know no sin. Already by p.9 he is speaking of a 'new religious paradigm'. All the more enticing is Fox's rehabilitation of the church's suppressed traditions. However, I take comfort from the judgment of Simon Tugwell (a genuine scholar) in personal conversation: Fox on Eckhart is 'crooked'; the introduction is 'sheer fantasy'; the translation is 'dishonest'. I also take heart

from Jeremiah, who knew all about the temptations of making religion suit the customer, making God amenable, and internalising him out of existence. 'Am I a God near at hand, and not also a God far off?'⁵¹

Let me take the second issue: that of the priority of Word or Spirit. In one sense, this is another version of the first issue. But here particularly arises the question of one's approach to Scripture. Ironically, two totally different areas of church life seem to have switched allegiance to giving the Spirit priority over Scripture. Naturally, this is a very 'spiritual' thing to do! One area where this seems to operate in practice, if not always in theory, is the World Council of Churches. The allied mechanism of distancing Scripture is played down: 'Of course, we acknowledge the importance of Scripture ... But nowadays... we can no longer believe that... We must listen to what the world is saying'. The Word is important, the argument goes, but the world must be set alongside, for that is where the Spirit is speaking to the churches today. We cannot separate the cry of the world from the cry of the Spirit.

In complete contrast, the charismatic movement has also sometimes contributed to a reduced emphasis on Scripture. 'Life in the Spirit' courses have emphasised the connection between experience of the Spirit and daily experience; well taught, it has not only rested and been grounded on Scripture, it has also opened up the eloquence and power of Scripture to speak, far beyond the limitations of historical scholasticism. Poorly taught, Scripture has become an illustrative text book to support beliefs or practices already approved of. Excessive highlighting of particular texts has over-emphasised, in turn, since the '60's, speaking in tongues, anointing, physical healing, and now inner healing. In many evangelical churches, the level of actual exposition of Scripture is poor, with bizarre dramatic illustrations, or material appropriate for six-year olds. The whole sense of a Christian mind, as Harry Blamires pointed out some years ago, has vanished, by and large. Scripture has lost any sense of regulatory authority. Such a development cannot but have serious consequences for Christian spirituality.

I sense that there has been a crisis for charismatic spirituality of late. Despite all the appreciation for and experience of the Spirit, despite all the liberating and renewing doors opened and chains broken, all the claims for more or less universal healings made in the 70's, and all the claims made for the Kansas City prophets and for large-scale renewal in the 80's have been left unfulfilled

- and indeed unfulfillable, if Roy Clements is correct in saying that, paradoxically (and against the drift of this whole lecture!), all those natural and human contexts which make for receptivity to the Gospel are lacking in the Western world ⁵² - namely a sense of community relationships and an openness to spiritual realities. At least a degree of discredit must now attach to the Christian church's own part in raising millennial expectations in a prophetic spirituality at some points alarmingly similar to New Age spiritualities and mind-sets.

Thank God, there has been also a revival of evangelical scholarship, as you hardly need to be reminded at St. Andrew's. Serious work has been, and is being done on its evocative and provocative message. There is tremendous encouragement here, but I must not slip into the area of biblical theology. I simply want to point out the serious consequences for spirituality of a loss of the sense of the objective. Simon Tugwell and Tom Torrance are at one on this point.⁵³ Abandonment of the objective leads inexorably to the rule of the subjective; 'and many there be that go that way'.

The third point concerns the interrelationship between creation and the supernatural (I use the term despite all its dubiousness). Again, this is not unrelated to the two previous ones. It is the relationship between creation and redemption, between natural and spiritual.

In terms of context, the renewed emphasis on creation is a reaction to the rather exclusive emphasis on Jesus and the Spirit in the '70's (not to say much of church history!), that is, to an over-spiritualising and perhaps sentimentalising of Christian faith, which itself was a reaction and renewal out of the over-comfortable liberalism and formalism of the '40's and '50's. It was also, secondly, a response to the growing environmental crisis, which was being highlighted both by the scientific fraternity and by the burgeoning and increasingly confident voice of the New Age. Thirdly, it was a reaction to the consequences of Western individualism. Fourthly, the consequences for such ways of thinking were seen as increasingly disastrous, when combined with a false master- or domination-theory of humanity *over* nature on the basis of Genesis 1:28. Those spiritualities which are in the ascendant at the moment are those which engage with creation - pagan or Christian Celtic, Orthodox, Wicca and all forms of magic, and Fox's creation spirituality. However, as Jesus says: 'Be on your guard'. One witch writes: 'What is being

called "creation theology" in some Christian circles is what we and Native Americans have been living for thousands of years'.⁵⁴

I must draw to a close. Any study of contemporary spiritualities must survey and analyse the scene. Any Christian survey must sensitively welcome signs of spiritual quest and even denials of it; amidst a multitude of religious aberrations it must note and discern between the God-given longings and the human-based delusions; but in all these areas, as well as within the Christian area itself, it must call for a sharp critique and a deeper and wider commitment to Jesus Christ. A church abandoning its first love and choosing apostasy⁵⁵ is no figment of the imagination. Not even every spirit that confesses *Jesus* is of God. For many today, Jesus is *a* Christ, but not *the* Christ. In some 'Christian' circles, I sense a clear embarrassment with Jesus. Especially in some educational and inter-faith circles, 'uniting' language about God displaces 'divisive' language about Jesus.

Let us note Jesus' own words. 'Many will come *in my name*, saying, "I am he!" and will lead many astray... If anyone says to you, "Look, here is the Christ!" or "Look, there he is!", do not believe it. False Christs and false prophets will arise and show signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But take heed; I have told you all things beforehand'.⁵⁶

I wish to express my thanks to Dr Roger Pooley, Lecturer in English at Keele University, for his astute help in the early stages of this paper.

Notes

1. Brian Austin, The Mustard Seed, 21, Kentish Town Road, Camden Town, London NW1 8NH. Interestingly, a recent request for apologetic literature suitable for offering to New Agers considering Christian faith, even after considerable research, revealed very little from recent years, apart from C S Lewis and Francis Schaeffer; but see now the relevant chapter in Alister McGrath, *Bridge-Building. Creative Christian Apologetics* (IVP, 1992).
2. *Sight and Sound*, February 1993, p 40.
3. *Sight and Sound*, July 1992, pp 21-22.
4. *Ibid.*, p 23. cf. also Terry Gilliam's *The Fisher King*, a jokey modern 'Quest of

- the Holy Grail' film; and Mark Lawson's article in a colour supplement of *The Independent Weekend* (date mislaid), pointing out a whole range of films treating 'religious' themes by and large abandoned by the church.
5. Mark LeFanu, *The Cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky*, British Film Institute, 1987; cf. also *idem.*, *Sight and Sound*, Autumn 1986, pp 284-5, and Peter Green, *Sight and Sound*, Spring 1987, pp 108-9 (obituary) and pp 111-118.
 6. *The Observer*, 15 May, 1983.
 7. Chris Peachment in *The Independent on Sunday*, 28 June, 1992; see also S. Bjorkman et al., *Bergman on Bergman. Interviews with Ingmar Bergman* (Simon and Schuster, 1973), for repeated theological discussions; and Peter Cowie, *Ingmar Bergman. A Critical Biography* (Secker and Warburg, 1982), for a definitive study.
 8. George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Faber and Faber, 1989).
 9. Laurens van der Post, *The Independent on Sunday*, date mislaid.
 10. Steve Turner, *Hungry for Heaven* (Virgin/Kingsway, 1988).
 11. Michael Medved, *Hollywood vs America* (HarperCollins, 1993).
 12. Michael Palin, *Pole to Pole*, BBC 1992.
 13. *The Sunday Times*, 28 June, 1992.
 14. Cf. Clive James in *The Observer Review*, 18 April, 1984: 'On the ice they are transfigured from within.'
 15. The complete sentence is: 'Environmentalism, from being for 2,000 years the downtrodden partner of Judaeo-Christianity, is now well advanced towards replacing it.' David Nicholson-Lord, 'Cities and Spirituality', *Resurgence* 145, March/April 1991, p 26.
 16. See William Anderson and Clive Hicks, *The Green Man. The Archetype of our Oneness with the Earth* (HarperCollins, 1990).
 17. Bryan Appleyard, *Understanding the Present. Science and the Soul of Modern Man* (Pan, 1992).
 18. Stanley Jaki, *Cosmos and Creator* (Scottish Academic Press, 1982), pp 112-126; *The Origin of Science and the Science of its Origin* (Scottish Academic Press, 1978), pp 87-110.
 19. In C G Jung, *The Collected Works, Volume Ten: Civilization in Transition* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964 and 1970), pp 307-433.
 20. Christopher Evans, *Cults of Unreason* (Panther Books, 1974).
 21. Evans, *op.cit.*, p 170. This analysis does not preclude the possibility of demonic influence or of the involvement of 'principalities and powers'; but their 'interference' is possible, literally, *anywhere*.

22. Cf. the recent psychoanalytical study of Ignatius of Loyola: W W Meissner, *Ignatius of Loyola. The Psychology of a Saint* (Yale University Press, 1993).
23. Luke 11:24-26.
24. INFORM: Information Network Focus on Religious Movements, Houghton St., London WC2A 2AE; CESNUR: Center for Studies on New Religions, Turin; ISAR: Institute for the Study of American Religions, University of California, Santa Barbara, etc.
25. *The European*: Damanhur, 5-8 November 1992; Aumism, 15-18 October, 1992; and cf. Eileen Barker, *New Religious Movements. A Practical Introduction* (HMSO, 1989), Appendix IV, including pp 200-201 (the Raëlians) and pp 201-205 (Rajneesh), noting especially the footnote reference to Bob Mullan, *Life as Laughter. Following Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh* (Routledge Kegan Paul, 1983).
26. See Dianne Core (with Fred Harrison), *Chasing Satan. An Investigation into Satanic crimes against Children* (Gunter Books, 1991) distributed by Vine Books; also Tim Tate, *Children for the Devil* (Methuen, 1991).
27. A phrase (somewhere) of Philip Walters, of Keston College, Oxford.
28. Roy Clements, 'Planes to catch and bills to pay', Jubilee Centre, 26 October 1992. cf. Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism* (Abacus, 1980); and most recently Vishal Mangalwadi, *In Search of Self. Beyond the New Age* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1992).
29. The New Age's assault on all forms of dualism, clearly exemplified in Matthew Fox's *Original Blessing* and other works, feeds into this stream. For a recent serious analysis of duality, if brief, see the ten(!) types outlined in NT Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (SPCK, 1992), pp 252-9.
30. This is the issue which George Steiner confronts.
31. Cf. Marija Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess* (Thames and Hudson, 1989); Gloria F Orenstein, *The Reflowering of the Goddess* (Pergamon, 1990), and Lawrence Durdin-Robertson, *The Year of the Goddess* (The Aquarian Press, 1990).
32. See Philip Seddon, *The New Age - An Assessment* (Grove Books, 1990/1992), pp 10-11; and *idem.* in David Gillett and Michael Scott-Joynt (eds), *Treasure in the Field. The Archbishops' Book for the Decade of Evangelism* (HarperCollins, 1993). The extent to which the church has allowed itself to be deceived into accepting, or consciously or unconsciously welcomed, the false equation of wholeness and holiness is little short of incredible. To extend the point briefly: the misleading verbal similarity does not derive from Hebrew or Greek; holiness is predicated primarily of God, secondarily of human beings, wholeness of creation primarily, of God only with difficulty; holiness is a defining element of God's burning righteousness, wholeness a structuring category of human (self)development; holiness is unthinkable, wholeness entirely thinkable,

without God. In short, whatever the overlaps, the points of reference are in principle distinct.

33. Most recently, Kathleen Raine, *The Guardian* 2, 23 March, 1993.
 34. Frank Peretti, *This Present Darkness* (Minstrel [Monarch], 1989), and *Piercing the Darkness* (Minstrel, 1990).
 35. 'Ahmed', *Assignment*, BBC 2, 9th February, 1993.
 36. Formerly the Religious Experience Research Unit.
 37. Author of *The Spiritual Nature of Man. A Study of Contemporary Experience* (Clarendon, 1979). See esp Ch 1: 'Spiritual feeling in a scientific age' (my italics), and Ch 9: 'What is spirituality?' (Hardy's italics).
 38. Cf. Konrad Raiser, *Ecumenism in Transition. A Paradigm Shift in the Ecumenical Movement* (WCC Publications, Geneva, 1991), and a review by Lesslie Newbigin (forthcoming).
 39. *ELLE Magazine*, December 1989, p 119.
 40. Interserve, and Ministry Among Asians in Britain, 325, Kennington Road, London SE11 4QH; Patrick Sookhdeo's 'In Contact' programme; Ram Gidoomal [of South Asian Concern] (with Mike Fearon), *Sari'N'Chips* (Monarch, 1993); and The Centre for Black and White Christian Partnership, Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham.
- N B The fewer notes on this final section reflect my assumption that this area will be more familiar to theologically literate readers.
41. Note the forthcoming Grove booklet on *The Spirituality of Taizé* by Tim Haggis.
 42. *The Observer*, 30 March, 1980.
 43. David Cairns in *The Sunday Times*, 18 December, 1988.
 44. Hugh Canning, 'A Passion for Purity', *The Guardian*, 21 March, 1989.
 45. *The European*, 18-21 February, 1993.
 46. See Michel Quenot, *The Icon. Window on the Kingdom* (Mowbray, 1992), pp 7-9, 11-12, 145 ('The icon: an image which purifies'), pp161-165; and the volume of essays edited by Gennadios Limouris, *Icons. Windows on Eternity. Theology and Spirituality in Colour* (WCC Publications, Geneva, 1990).
 47. Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word* (Eerdmans, 1985). As if to illustrate his critique, see Paul Avis on 'Icons of the Sacred', ch 11 in *Eros and the Sacred* (SPCK, 1989), pp 81-94.
 48. Cf. Camille Paglia, astutely, on Princess Diana, *The Review Guardian*, 30 July, 1992, and the *Daily Mail*, 12 March, 1993 ('...THE icon figure of our times'); and, somewhat optimistically, on Madonna in 'Madonna II. Venus of the Radio Waves', in *Sex, Art and American Culture* (Viking, 1992), pp 6-13.

49. See now R S Thomas, *Collected Poems 1945 - 1990* (Dent, 1993).
50. Bear and Co. 1983; see also Margaret Brearley's searing article, 'Matthew Fox: Creation Spirituality for the Aquarian Age' in *Jewish Christian Relations*, Vol 22, No 2, Summer 1989, pp 37-49.
51. Jeremiah 23:23, and see Walter Brueggemann, *To Pluck Up, To Tear Down. A Commentary on the Book of Jeremiah 1-25* (International Theological Commentary) (Eerdmans and Handsel, 1988), pp 205-207.
52. Roy Clements tape, 'Planes to catch and bills to pay', as above, n.28.
53. Simon Tugwell, *Thomas and Bonaventure* (Classics of Western Spirituality) (SPCK); Thomas F Torrance, *Theological Science* (OUP, 1969).
54. Laurie Cabot, *Power of the Witch* (Michael Joseph, 1990), p 277.
55. Revelation 2:4 and Hebrews 6:6.
56. Mark 13:6, with 21-23 forming the *inclusio*.

SECTION 2

SPIRITUALITY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

(I Howard Marshall)

According to G S Wakefield (in the introduction to *A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, London: SCM Press, 1983), the term 'spirituality' has come over to us from the French Catholic tradition. It belongs with a number of other recently-coined concepts in Catholicism, such as 'the liturgical movement' or 'liturgical renewal', terms which tend to refer to efforts to put the eucharist at the centre of Christian worship and to make it more of a celebration in which all the church participates, and 'ministerial formation' which means the preparation of people for ministry as opposed to simple theological training. Within the contemporary Protestant world we have the important work of James Gordon who has attempted to describe what he calls *Evangelical Spirituality* (London: SPCK, 1992). He quotes a definition of spirituality as 'those attitudes, beliefs [and] practices which animate people's lives and help them to reach out towards super-sensible realities'. In his handling it has become a description of the characteristic features of both the faith and the practice of a number of well-known evangelical figures from the eighteenth century onwards, their understanding of conversion and the Christian life, and the ways in which they have expressed their faith in prayer, worship, hymnology and so on, in short how they have sustained their relationship with God and what effects this has had on their daily life in the world. This gives us a broad idea of the area. The word is broad enough to mean 'what a Christian believes and does'.

There is obviously a need for something like this concept and its terminology. Recently I have moved into some fresh types of detective fiction. I have made the acquaintance of Brother Cadfael, and it has given me a sympathetic insight into what medieval Catholicism at its best, or perhaps somewhat idealised, could do. And I have rediscovered Rabbi David Small, who seems to be largely unknown this side of the Atlantic. Rabbi Small has a middle-class Jewish congregation in the USA, and it is entertaining to read the stories of his

relationship with a synagogue council which behaves remarkably like a Presbyterian kirk session. Some of its members are canny businessmen who are happy to serve the synagogue in a way which is more concerned with counting their bawbees than because of any great concern for the development of true religion and piety. Yes, we would say, they are unspiritual in their attitudes, and we can contrast them with their Rabbi who is more 'spiritual' than they are. We can recognize that there is a 'spirituality' (or lack of it) characteristic of medieval Catholicism or North American synagogues which shows some similarities to evangelical spirituality and yet has significant differences.

But the testing ground for any kind of *Christian* spirituality is manifestly its place of origin in the New Testament, and my remit in this paper is (I presume) to look for something in the NT that might then be regarded as a norm and stimulus for us and which may need some translation for modern application.

The Slipperiness of 'Spirituality'

What I am going to do is to plead for some circumspection in our use of the term 'spirituality' and then suggest that we make a fresh start by going back to the New Testament to consider what it means to be 'spiritual'.

Reason No 1 for my plea lies in what I call the slipperiness of the term. Some years ago *The Expository Times* ran a series of articles on so-called 'Slippery Terms', which are often used in theology but have decidedly vague meanings or are downright ambiguous. The one that I was assigned to write on was 'eschatology'. A rapid survey of a number of theological writings elicited at least half a dozen different but related senses in which the word was used. It seemed that each writer filled it with their own meaning, and this led to constant confusion because one tended to assume that the meaning in one writer would also be the meaning in another, whereas in fact the force could be significantly different. Further, there were some writers who used the word almost meaninglessly and developed a king of jargon that really said nothing. And consequently there arose the danger of false and illogical arguments caused by silently switching from one use of the term to another.

In this kind of situation it is essential either to define your terms with care and

to stick to your definition, or else to abandon the use of the terms altogether. The same could be said of the word 'apocalyptic' which is notoriously hard to define, and equally of 'Gnosticism'. Both of these examples, however, strengthen the view that the terms have come into use to describe some sort of entity or collection of entities, and the problem is to define what are the common characteristics and what items are then to be included in the collection. That is to say, in some cases the solution may well lie in careful definition, because language is groping to describe some entity that is really there, whereas in other cases it may be that the solution is to drop the use of a misleading expression.

There are, however, also cases where the use of an imprecise term is helpful and necessary because precision can force decisions that one does not want to take. I think of the indeterminate state of affairs where a male and female are developing a relationship and the problem is to describe whether they are going out together, going out seriously, or whatever. Are they friends, or just friends? An 'open-textured' term that does not distinguish between these stages is essential if embarrassment is to be avoided!

Reason No 2 lies in the fact that we are using a non-biblical term in a discussion of biblical concepts. Theology cannot develop without developments in terminology, and words like Trinity, Omniscience, Person, the Fall, are indispensable. But we know that they bring with them the danger of reading back concepts anachronistically into the NT and attributing an awareness to the writers that they did not yet have - for example an awareness of philosophical categories that did not come into Christian use until later. Now this fact shows that there are some terms that we cannot do without even though they are not biblical. Trinity is the obvious example. Others are better abandoned, such as perhaps some of the legal terminology associated with the atonement. The problem is whether 'spirituality' is helpful and necessary or more likely to lead to misconceptions.

With these two general points in mind we can now look at another specific example. I had the same problem as I am now facing about 25 years ago with the word 'revival' which had become the buzz-word of a group called the Methodist Revival Fellowship. They were aware that the spiritual life of the church and its evangelistic zeal and activity were at a low point, and they believed that the church needed new life. The word 'revival' was an obvious

choice for what they longed to see, although others like 'renewal' could have been used. But historically there had been periods in evangelical history which were termed revivals or awakenings, and people looked back nostalgically to these and longed for a return of the kind of thing that happened in the past. Hence the question arose: what should we expect when revival 'comes'? What, if any, conditions need to be fulfilled to make it possible? And since they were biblically-minded Christians, they naturally asked the question, 'What has the Bible to say about revival?' and on a number of occasions I found myself invited to supply the answer to the question.

I had problems. The first was the virtual absence of the terminology in the Bible, so that I couldn't do what we so often do, conduct a word-study (like giving a talk on 'faith' or 'pride' or 'deacons'). The linguistic base was negligible. The second problem was that the NT church was a new church in process of being born rather than a mature church which had fallen asleep or declined, and therefore there weren't any examples of a church like our contemporary one. The best I could do was to identify various problems that arose in growing churches that weren't growing properly and their solutions. And in fact I managed to redefine the situation of the church at Corinth to be sufficiently like that of a church needing revival - within no more than five years of its birth! I suspect that I did not satisfy my audiences. They really wanted to know what the NT had to say about what they must do in order to bring about a repeat performance of the phenomena experienced in 1859, when people were almost spontaneously converted in remarkable numbers and the churches were filled. They wanted confirmation that revival comes when people pray long and hard enough, although they recognized that it lay in the sovereign control of God to send it when he pleased. They wanted to know how to be sure that certain specific events were or were not revivals; for example, they seemed fairly sure that the phenomenon of conversions on a vast scale at a Billy Graham campaign was not necessarily a revival. (I could never understand why they seemed so grudging in acknowledging what God had wrought through his servant!)

It seems to me that the problems which arose with the term revival were similar to those which arise with our present, and obviously related, concern. I should say, before turning more directly to it, that in the Methodist Revival Fellowship we had to agree that we were not in a state of clarity or agreement

about what we meant by revival and that we had to admit that we could have different visions of it; but we were all agreed that the state of the church was not what it should be, that spiritual life shown in both the growing holiness of the members and in fruitful evangelism was lacking, and that we all needed to engage in prayer and works through which revival would come. Further, we saw these kind of activities as being our central concern; we were not primarily concerned with the social witness of the church in society, which we regarded as being of secondary importance (but still very important!) and as often having replaced the task of evangelism; nor were we much concerned with the structures of the church, except, firstly, when there was a threat of union between the Methodists and Anglicans on a basis which would have effectively denied cardinal doctrines of the gospel, and, secondly, when we felt that something needed to be done about the liberal teaching and training which was being given to ministers and preachers. Holiness, prayer and evangelism were our primary concerns - and the growth of each of these in the church was what we really understood by revival. To that extent we had agreement, but I think that you can see that we had some unnecessary problems caused by the desire of some people to create a category called 'revival' and then try to define it in biblical terms.

We may say, then, that it can be useful to have the open-textured term 'spirituality' to refer to a number of related attitudes and characteristics found in different forms of religion, but that such a loose usage may be dangerous when we are trying to think about specifically Christian behaviour, and that the existence of the term may also lead us to create a corresponding entity which may or may not be appropriate in the development of our Christian theology and practice.

A Survey of the Biblical Usage

So we come to spirituality in the New Testament. The word 'spirituality' is not biblical, but we do have a biblical basis for examining the concept in the NT usage of the word *pneumatikos* which is quite literally 'spiritual' in the general sense of 'having to do with the spirit'. A study of it is mandatory for us. It occurs surprisingly often (26 times plus the corresponding adverb 2 times; note also the use of *logikos*, 2 times).

1. In **Eph 6:12** we have a contrast between flesh and blood and that which is spiritual, where the spiritual entities are evil forces, literally 'the spiritual entities of evil'; this brings out the fact that the word can be used in an ethically neutral way to refer to *what is non-material*.
2. In one or two places the word conveys the sense of 'metaphorical' in contrast to 'literal'. When believers are told that they are being built together as a 'spiritual house' to offer 'spiritual sacrifices' (**1 Pet 2:5 a, b**) the sense is 'metaphorical' in that both are on the level of the spiritual as opposed to the physical. Thus there is a spiritual level and sphere of activity alongside the physical, and Christians are to be involved in it. In 1 Pet 2:2 we have a reference to the way in which Christians should thirst for milk, like newborn children who are ardent to be fed, but this milk is *logikos* (as in Rom 12:1) - ie not material. The apparently weak translation 'metaphorical' gets the sense.
3. In **1 Cor 10:3 a, b, 4** there is an interesting usage where Paul talks about the experience of the Israelites in the desert as they drank a spiritual drink from a spiritual rock that followed them and ate spiritual food. Here 'spiritual' could mean much the same as 'metaphorical', but more likely it means 'non-material' and refers to the *spiritual sustenance* which the people received. The specific reference is probably to the manna and to the miraculous supplies of water in the desert which were given by God, and they are probably to be seen as prefiguring the bread and cup at the Lord's Supper. Whether this means that the food and drink conveyed the gift of the Spirit is another matter, and whether Paul is suggesting that the Lord's Supper conveys the gift of the Spirit is equally a problem that we cannot discuss here. The point is that divinely supplied sustenance is no magic prophylactic against falling into sin.
4. A somewhat different kind of significance attaches to the word in **1 Cor 15:44 a, b** which refers to the *spiritual body* given to believers at the resurrection in contrast to the *psychikos* body which is buried (44a and 44b). Here the reference is to that which is not made of flesh and blood but is spirit in its substance.
5. *Pneumatikos* is used to describe 'spiritual (things)' in **1 Cor 12:1; 14:1**; here it must refer to certain abilities/activities which are produced by the

work of the Spirit. The same entities are also referred to as '*charismata*' (1 Cor 12:4, 9, 28, 30, 31). They were abilities that various individuals manifested in the setting of the Christian congregation. They are regarded as activities that people were not naturally endowed with - speech that revealed a supernaturally imparted wisdom or knowledge, faith that probably resulted in miraculous events, the ability to heal and do other mighty works, to prophesy, speak in tongues and explain speech in tongues. From a later listing it would appear that apostles, prophets and teachers were regarded as having such spiritual endowments for their functions. The question of the presence or absence of natural endowments is not raised, although our tidy minds want to see how these are related.

6. The word is also used to describe a form of *knowledge* which is called 'spiritual things' (1 Cor 2:13), conveyed in words taught by the Spirit and so probably called 'spiritual (words)'. It is significant that this knowledge is said to be 'charismatic' (*charisthenta*). Paul also refers to a 'spiritual gift' (*charisma pneumatikon*) in Rom 1:11 which he wants to impart to the Roman church. It is clear from the context that this is not just a piece of knowledge, but rather a mutual sharing of Christian experience in a wider sense (but including his knowledge of the gospel) that will help to make believers stronger in their faith.

Similarly, in 1 Cor 9:11 Paul refers to sowing spiritual things in the lives of his converts, for which it is appropriate that he receives in return 'fleshly things' ('material benefits', NRSV). Again it is the communication of his Christian experience which is in mind.

7. The word is also used to describe certain *people* (1 Cor 2:15; 3:1; 14:37; Gal 6:1). In 1 Cor 14:37 Paul talks about people in the church who are prophets or spiritual people, and here the word seems to refer to anybody who has any other spiritual gift comparable with being a prophet. In 1 Cor 3:1, however, Paul laments that he could not speak to the members of the church on the basis that they were spiritual people. There is no identification that the word here means 'possessing the sort of gifts of the Spirit described above'. Rather it is defined by contrast with being 'fleshly', 'babes', able to appreciate only elementary teaching rather than advanced. The presence of strife and envy rules out any possibility that they

are spiritual people; they behave according to human values and form cliques in the church. This description opens up the way to Paul's general teaching about living according to the Spirit or according to the flesh. This should be familiar territory to us. It leads us away from the gifts of the Spirit to the more ethical 'fruit' of the Spirit which consists in unselfishness and love for others, peacableness, patience, humility and the like. These are the qualities which are associated with the Spirit of Christ, and they are shown in personal relationships - especially in the church but also more generally. Paul appears to suggest that these qualities develop with maturity, that one who lets the Spirit rule in his or her life shows the appropriate qualities of character - specifically in this case the absence of envy and strife.

8. We need at this point to go backwards into the previous chapter of 1 Corinthians (1 Cor 2) which is where the issue of being spiritual really arises. This time it is not a question of the ability to convey spiritual truths but to *receive* them. Things have been conveyed by the Spirit to 'us' Christians which the world does not receive and regards as folly - the supreme example is Christ crucified in 1 Cor 1. There is a wisdom which comes from God which is identified with Christ. The implication appears to be that the Christian message in general strikes ordinary people as foolish, offensive, and weak. The weakness lies in the crucifixion; equally this is offensive as a means of salvation; and it is folly. To see it otherwise is to see things from God's point of view as wise, to have a new scale of values. Here Paul suggests that the word can be used in two ways. On the one hand, since the ordinary person cannot understand spiritual things, it seems that there is a group of people who are chosen and called (despite their lack of worldly wisdom) by God to receive his message. The message is preached in words taught by the Spirit and therefore accompanied by power and it is accepted by those who believe. The Spirit appears to work in and through the preaching. Thus all who accept the gospel are 'spiritual' in that they possess the Spirit (*cf.* Rom 8:9). On the other hand, once conversion has taken place, people who have become believers may remain 'fleshly' and babes who are nevertheless 'in Christ', rather than not yet born. And Paul can appeal to them to change their attitudes and to walk by the Spirit and even speak of disciplining them. Thus there are two levels of being spiritual.

So we may say that as well as the Spirit-given ability to convey a word of knowledge, there is also the Spirit-given ability to receive and accept such knowledge. People who can receive such instruction are 'spiritual' (1 Cor 2:15), because the instruction which they are capable of receiving is 'spiritually discerned' (1 Cor 2:14). Later, in Col 1:9 Paul will refer to this sort of discernment as 'spiritual understanding'.

Thus to appreciate the truth and wisdom of the Christian message requires that a person have the Spirit. A spiritual person understands and accepts the message in an ever deeper way. (But what truths are 'deeper' than others?)

9. The term is also applied to people in Gal 6:1 where certain members of a congregation who are spiritual are to restore those who fall into transgression. These people are presumably those who are *led by the Spirit*, live by the Spirit and walk by the Spirit in Gal 5:16,17,25. It is they who might act in judgement on people who transgress and do not live by the Spirit but under the dominion of the flesh, but they are called to exercise a therapeutic function. Here spiritual people are people who are living by the Spirit and showing the fruit of the Spirit in their lives. Note that again we have the paradox of a type of character which appears to be due to the presence of the Spirit and which yet requires to be put into practice by appeal and exhortation to the people concerned; is the function of the Spirit to guide people into ethical behaviour, say, patience, which they otherwise would not know to be God's requirement, and/or is it to enable them to be patient? How is what Paul says different from simply telling people to be patient? And why should he need to tell them if the Spirit told them in some other way? There is a clutch of problems here. Christians have been tempted to tend to one pole or the other.

Thus there is a type of Christianity which would rely very much on the guidance of the Spirit and the power of the Spirit as the means of spiritual maturity. This is the attitude sometimes labelled Quietist. It depends upon individual guidance ('The Lord told me to...'). Problems arise if the guidance appears to be contrary to scriptural teaching or if there are contrary messages purporting to be from the Spirit. The other extreme would be to insist on discovering God's will more through reasoned deduction from Scripture and in the light of circumstances. In this case

it would also be necessary to have some kind of inner conviction which would confirm which particular scriptural teaching was God's will in a particular situation. Moreover, on this view there is still the problem of the source of the power to overcome temptation and to make the effort to do what is good. Thus to move to either end of the spectrum is to take up an impracticable position, and nobody could consistently do so. Our experience involves a practical balance between the two poles, even if a theoretical reconciliation of them proves to be impossible. (It may be because of this that we can accept the tension involved in the initial preaching and acceptance of the gospel, where the relationship between the Spirit and faith and between divine choice and human response is equally opaque to reason.)

10. The word 'spiritual' is also used in **Rom 12:1** (= *logikos*) in the NIV where some translations have 'reasonable'. It refers to the kind of service which Christians are to give to God in presenting their bodies to him. The force of the term is to suggest that this is a service which takes place on the level of reason rather than that it is 'the logical thing for Christians to do', so that 'spiritual' refers to the *mental* dedication to God. This is confirmed by the next verse which talks about the renewal of the mind and discernment of the will of God. This brings out the important point that God's service does involve *the transformation of our mental attitudes*. Our faculty of judgement must be affected. We may compare the change in Paul's outlook reported in Phil 3 where he speaks of gaining a new sense of values which affected the direction of his ambitions and his efforts. (Note that this seems to affect both choosing good rather than evil, Col 3, and also becoming indifferent to good things that other people may value.) So, although the term 'spiritual' is not actually there in the original text, we have a valid aspect of the concept.
11. Later in the same chapter, in **Rom 12:11**, the NIV translates a phrase involving the noun 'spirit' with 'keep your spiritual fervour' (cf. NRSV 'be ardent in spirit'; contrast RSV 'be aglow with the Spirit'). The problem with interpretation here is whether the reference is to be the human spirit or to the Holy Spirit. Either way the phrase refers to *being zealous in Christian service* and the context points towards *action involving other people*. This is an important point because our use of the term

'spiritual' may be misleading if it gives the impression of what one might call devotional fervour rather than practical zeal.

12. In **Eph 5:19** believers are encouraged to speak to one another (*heautois*) by using psalms and hymns and *spiritual songs*. The phrase might mean to speak to themselves, since the next phrase refers to singing in their hearts to the Lord. This verse is paralleled in **Col 3:16**, and here again it is not clear whether the reference is to speaking aloud to one another or to inward meditation. On the whole, overt behaviour would seem to be indicated. It seems unlikely that a whole string of phrases which would normally refer to overt behaviour here are to be taken in an inward manner. Then 'heart' will characterise the behaviour as coming from the heart. The force of 'spiritual' could be simply to differentiate religious songs from secular, but it might mean 'inspired/taught by the Spirit' and suggest something akin to the gift of tongues but this time expressed in normal language.
13. Finally, in **Eph 1:3** we are told that God has blessed us with every *spiritual blessing* in the heavenly (places) in Christ. This must refer to blessings conveyed and mediated by the Spirit, since no distinction between these blessings and other kinds of blessings can be intended (the word 'blessing' in itself means a divine favour). This is supported by the fact that in **Eph 1:13f** believers are said to be sealed with the Spirit which is the first instalment of their inheritance. So this passage confirms that believers receive the gifts of God by virtue of being sealed with the Spirit. Spiritual people, in the sense of people who have the Spirit, receive God's blessings in this way.

This completes our survey of the NT usage, and it may be helpful to attempt to draw together the relevant conclusions from it.

Drawing Conclusions Together

1. We have seen that the word 'spiritual' (*pneumatikos*) can be used to draw a series of contrasts.
 - a. There is the contrast between what is *physical* and what is *mental* - the familiar distinction between the world of tangible things like bodies and intangible things like thoughts.

- b. Similarly, there is the contrast between the *material* and the *spiritual*. It is important that there are two spheres of reality, so that there can be, for example, material and spiritual bodies, or entities composed of flesh and blood and entities like angels and demons. Everybody would accept distinction a) as a fact of experience, however they may understand it philosophically. However, distinction b) is not universally accepted and it is the mark of those who believe that reality is not just material and that there is the possibility or the actuality of God or other spiritual beings.

Could we then say that at the lowest level the spiritual person is the one who accepts the existence of this sphere of the spirit, and whose life is related to it and shares in it? Then such a person would i) participate in the spiritual sphere, and ii) allow his/her experiences and participation in the physical/material sphere to be influenced by it. A person, for example, who thinks that there is more to existence than the purely material will adopt a different attitude to it from the person with a circumscribed horizon. The attitude of 'let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die' will be replaced by a different attitude, which sees the physical world in its proper context. It is also true, of course, that to accept the spiritual sphere does not mean the denial or even the denigration of the physical, but to admit that reality has these two aspects. What may need some care is how we deal with the implications of the fact that the physical world is apparently to become spiritual in the end of the day. Paul speaks clearly of the transformation of the physical body into a spiritual body, and of the redemption of the created order. Both of these expressions indicate that the physical is imperfect and corruptible and is to give way to something different. But the key point is that the thought is not one of replacement but of renewal, transformation, change into what is perfect and everlasting. Our knowledge of the natural world confirms that left to itself it decays and perishes; therefore it cannot continue for ever without a decisive change in structure and substance. However, we cannot conceive what such a change would be like; we cannot comprehend what a spiritual body would be like.

- c. There is a distinction between the *flesh* and the *spirit*. Here the words are being used in a sense that is close to the preceding distinctions. The nature of human beings is such that there is the physical body and also something that can be called spirit, or such words as soul and mind may be employed in similar ways.
 - d. But this same distinction is also used in an *ethical way*, where flesh signifies a power that tempts and overcomes the person, and where we are now thinking of the divine Holy Spirit which is characterised by goodness and which can also exercise control over a person. A person who is thus dominated by the Spirit is said to be 'spiritual' by contrast with somebody who is 'fleshly' (*sarkinos, sarkikos*) or 'soulish' (*psychikos*). This is the specifically Christian understanding of the term.
2. The *marks* of the person who is spiritual are:
 - a. the ability to understand and accept divine revelation and guidance, recognising and accepting it as true and good.
 - b. the possession of gifts of the Spirit, distributed variously according to God's will.
 - c. the manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit in various aspects of Christian character.
 3. Paul is quite clear that all believers do possess the Spirit, and that this is in fact the distinguishing characteristic of believers. To that extent the term 'spiritual' is applicable to all Christians. Nevertheless, the term is *not used in an absolute sense*. It is evident that people who show any of the marks of the Spirit may show them to varying degrees and that possession of some of them may go along with various sins and signs of imperfection. There is a clear implication that people who are spiritual can cease to be spiritual, that there is no sense of reaching a level from which one cannot slip back. All Christians are expected to be spiritual. Words like 'immature' are used of those who are not spiritual, but it doesn't seem to be the case that there is necessarily a lengthy process of development from conversion through immaturity to maturity; rather the immature are those who haven't developed as they should; there is

no timetable or programme for Christian growth. While Christians are told that they should be spiritual, there is no precise process or programme to be followed in order to become so, other than putting aside the works of the flesh, ceasing to be dominated by it and submitting to the guidance and control of the Spirit.

The picture, which is admittedly a metaphor that can easily break down, may be of a situation like that of the captain of a ship, endeavouring to control the crew and the vessel and to bring it safely to its destination; there is also a pilot on board, and the captain may choose either to follow his own ideas or to take the pilot's instruction. Can the captain get into a mood of submission to the pilot so that it becomes his settled way of life? Can the pilot overrule and influence the captain so that even when the captain wants to do it his way he is constrained to do the will of the pilot?

4. We can *widen the concept* to include the working of the Spirit more generally in the life of the believer, since whatever is said about this without the use of the actual terms 'spiritual' will apply to spiritual people. For example, the spiritual person will be one in whom the love of God is shed through the Spirit who has been given to believers, Rom 5:5.
5. We can also state that the concept is being used in a specific - possibly narrow - way, and that *it does not necessarily have various connotations which may be popularly and loosely attached to it*. Thus itself it says nothing about the spiritual person being one who has turned from the life of the world to spend time in prayer and meditation. On the contrary, we saw that among the marks of the spiritual person was an out-going attitude towards other people.

'Spirituality' and 'Spiritual'

What about the term 'spirituality' in the light of all this? We might go down the route of saying that spirituality is very broadly a name for that characteristic of people's whole lifestyle when they are living in the consciousness of the realm of spirit, with all that this implies for their relationships both to the spiritual and to the physical realms. Since there are other religions which also accept the existence of a spiritual sphere, we shall then manifestly need to

speaking more particularly of a *Christian* spirituality which is defined by and expressed in terms of the Christian revelation of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and humankind as a being who participates in flesh and spirit, and the world as destined for a new creation.

But the biblical material which we have considered indicates that Christian spirituality is rather more than being conscious of God as Spirit; the spiritual person is one who has the Spirit with all that this implies in terms of spiritual knowledge, gifts and character.

Side by side with this we may need to place and consider other definitions of Christian existence, such as that it is life which is conditioned by the fact of Christ crucified and risen, ie a life 'in Christ'. Or again that it is a life of faith. We would then need to ask how these definitions compare with one another, and whether they are each saying much the same thing from different points of view. What are the values of using this particular definition of Christian existence alongside others, and what points are uniquely or even just significantly and emphatically brought to our notice by using it? It may be that the term is potentially so broad in its scope that virtually any aspect of the Christian revelation can be subsumed under it.

It is for this kind of reason that I suggest that we need some caution with the indiscriminate use of the term 'spirituality'. It is a useful term for comparing various types of attitude to the spiritual dimension of life, but it may endanger the uniqueness of our Christian experience of the Holy Spirit. At the same time, we should be highly enthusiastic for the term 'spiritual' and all that it says about the nature of genuine Christian living in the Spirit. Therefore my instinct is to suggest that we concentrate our attention first of all on the biblical term 'spiritual' in the sense of 'Spirit-directed, Spirit-controlled, Spirit-empowered, Spirit-gifted' as a defining characteristic of what a Christian should be. The value of the term is that it continually reminds us that this is what we ought to be rather than dominated by the flesh and its selfish attitudes. Once we have gained some clarity about what it is to be 'spiritual', we can then proceed to part two of our task, which is to ask about the ways in which we can become more and more spiritual, both as regards our closer relationship to God who gives us his Spirit and as regards the world around us in which we are to live as spiritual people. But that is a separate task which I have not attempted to take up here.

