

Spirituality: History and contemporary developments – An evaluation

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Spirituality is increasingly becoming a popular concept both in the media and in academic literature. However, there is a vast difference between the original concepts of spirituality, which were largely based on a Biblical view, and many contemporary perceptions thereof. Spirituality is generally seen as being divorced from any specific religion and specific truth claims. Nevertheless, it can be stated that spirituality is now seen as a universal human phenomenon. An evaluation of these trends is attempted by studying the concept in its original Biblical context, and by understanding the development of the dichotomy between religion and spirituality.

Spiritualiteit: Geskiedenis en hedendaagse ontwikkelinge: 'n Evaluering. Spiritualiteit word 'n toenemend populêre konsep, beide in die media en in akademiese literatuur. Dit is belangrik om op te merk dat daar 'n groot verskil is tussen die oorspronklike konsep van spiritualiteit, wat op 'n Bybelse siening gegrond was, en baie van die hedendaagse persepsies daarvan. In die meeste gevalle word spiritualiteit tans beskou as iets wat van enige spesifieke godsdiens asook spesifieke aanspraak op waarheid geskei is. Daar kan wel gestel word dat spiritualiteit vandag as 'n universele menslike eienskap beskou kan word. Hierdie tendense word geëvalueer deur die konsep in die oorspronklike Bybelse konteks te bestudeer en deur die ontwikkeling van die skeiding tussen godsdiens en spiritualiteit te verstaan.

Introduction

Orientation

In contrast to modernism which denied the supernatural and valued reason to the point of declaring that 'God was dead', aspects of postmodernism are leading to an increased fascination with the supernatural and the realm of the spiritual. (Jankowski 2002:69)

This quotation illustrates an important aspect of postmodernism. The construct 'spirituality' is currently accepted in individual, personal and community contexts where people look for fulfilment (Kourie 2006:75; cf. Valenkamp 2008). It is no longer regarded as unscientific as was the case when positivism was the reigning paradigm (Richards & Bergin 1998). This concept is now back in mainstream academic discussions, scientific debate and educational circles. Though this can be seen as a positive development, the current academic discussions and debates around spirituality are new and lack clear criteria against which spirituality can be investigated and evaluated (Botha 2006:95).

There are many sources, both in popular literature and in scientific research, which explore the concept and uses of spirituality, and its relation to various aspects in life including psychology, education, leadership and health (Veith 1994; Richards & Bergin 1998:37f). Some guidelines do exist, yet the concept is difficult to define and no generally accepted definition exists (Maher & Hunt 1993:21; McSherry & Cash 2004:154). There is a lacuna in the academic literature on the origins of the concept and its practical expression in communities. It is, however, frequently used and discussed within the contemporary media and popular literature (Kourie 2006:75f; Estanek 2006) and the debate too often reflects uncritical mindsets and assumptions concerning the concept. Any type of spirituality is seen as valid and positive without qualification (Groothuis 2000:165; Re'em 2004:213).

Purpose of article

It is surprising that most academic research articles overlook the origins of the concept and its original applications within the Judeo-Christian religious context, sometimes intentionally. In the West, the origins of the concept *spirituality* within the Judeo-Christian domain are however well attested (McMinn & Hall 2000). The first purpose of this article therefore is to create an increasing awareness of the roots of spirituality within the Western context, which can then lead to more

meaningful discussions of spirituality. This does not deny the fact that there might be pre-Christian roots of spirituality; however, this is not the focus of the article.

Not only has spirituality become prominent in academic debate, but it has to a large extent become divorced from the concept of (Judeo-Christian) religion. Until recently spirituality was seen as an integral part of religion. This separation between the two concepts has mostly been done quietly without ever properly consulting historical sources. The second purpose of this article is therefore to explore the reasons for this dichotomy between spirituality and religion.

The assumption is that it is necessary to gain a holistic picture of the development and current perceptions of spirituality in the Western context before meaningful engagement with spirituality in any kind of academic debate can be possible.

Origins of the concept of spirituality

McSherry and Cash (2004) underscore the importance of considering the roots of spirituality. Without a clear understanding of its grounding in believing communities as well as its historical development, the debate around the use of the concept and the investigation of the phenomenon can become meaningless. This is particularly the case with pre-Christian and Christian spirituality, which existed long before postmodern conceptions of the term developed (McMinn & Hall 2000:252). A number of authors concur that in the West, the term has its origin within the Judeo-Christian cultural heritage (Downey 1997:60; Haldane 2003:12; Miller 2005:16). It therefore becomes inevitable to consider the Biblical origins of the concept.

A Biblical perspective on spirituality

Grudem (1994) describes God's spirituality as follows:

God's spirituality means that God exists as a being that is not made of any matter, has no parts or dimensions, is unable to be perceived by our bodily senses, and is more excellent than any other kind of existence. (p. 188)

Waaajman (2002:316) posits that amongst the Israelites the area of the spiritual was described in a number of ways, such as the fear of God, holiness, mercy and perfection. However, to understand this spirituality better we need to consider the term which is most frequently translated as *spirit* or *spiritual* in the Old Testament, which is the Hebrew word *rû(a)h*. This term originally referred to *breath in motion*, designating God's breath that entered and became part of the human person (Wright 2000:7; cf. Moreland 2001:3). However *rû(a)h* also refers to an element of personality (including the emotional and volitional life) as well as to an element of energy and power and even temper, passion, anger, jealousy and depression (Waaajman 2002:361). What is important here is that this term also designates the person in relation to God (Moreland 2001:3). The word *rû(a)h* features very frequently in the book of Isaiah, where it often also designates God's Spirit, often in connection with the Spirit coming upon a person (Sanford La Sor, Hubbard & Bush 1987:387ff). In

contrast to this, the term *nepshesh* (which literally refers to the neck or throat) indicates human psychological existence – the 'heart' of our being – and refers to the person amongst other persons. It is mostly translated as *soul*, *living being*, *life* or *person* which includes feelings, will, passions and mentality (Ladd 1993:500f; cf. Brueggemann 1997:452).

Concerning the New Testament usage of the concept some qualifying remarks about Greek thought are required. At the time when the New Testament was written and edited, within the 1st century AD (Geisler 1999:528ff), Plato's philosophy was still one of the most influential philosophies in the Greco-Roman world of the time. Plato held to a dualism of body and soul as he explains in his dialogue *Phaedo* (Plato 1931:137ff). The body was seen as a hindrance (Radford 2006:387; Russell 2005:134f; Wright 2000:8) and the soul and the spirit were considered to be on a higher level (Clark 1994:27). It is essential to stress that the Biblical view contrasted sharply with this conception, also because Paul advocated a holistic moral sense (Ridderbos 1992:66; cf. Bruce 1997:25; cf. Sheldrake 2000:23). The New Testament view of human beings was usually that of a unity and not a dualistic combination of body and soul (Ziesler 1991:10f; cf. Grudem 1994:483; cf. Wright 1996:146). When different terms are applied it only means that the writer emphasised one aspect of the whole (Moreland 2001:2). There are however theologies that hold to a dualism (body and soul or spirit), or even to a trichotomy (body, soul and spirit) (Grudem 1994:472ff), following the tradition of Plato. Especially in early Christianity, many writers were strongly influenced by Platonism (O'Keefe 2011:54).

The words soul (*psyche*) and spirit (*pneuma*) are used interchangeably in the New Testament (Grudem 1994:473ff); both will be explained later. The words *body*, *soul* and *spirit* are used in a dualistic sense in the New Testament only when death of the body is mentioned, that is when the body passes away, whereas the soul and/or spirit are still alive (Grudem 1994:483). In the kerygma (the original, oral gospel as preached by the apostles) this dualism is however viewed as a temporary condition, anticipating the reception of a *spiritual* body (Dunn 1975:312). In the New Testament, human existence is generally bodily existence. It is believed that Christians will receive a spiritual body in the next life (Ziesler 1991:97ff). A contemporary conception, namely that spirituality is a quality inherent in all human beings (Ingersoll 1994:105; cf. Chater 2001:64) can be seen as summarising the Biblical viewpoint (Grudem 1994:472). The Biblical documents define and confine spirituality within a particularistic Judeo-Christian worldview. This, however, does not deny the possibility that other and older traditions held a similar view of spirituality as a human characteristic.

The New Testament term for soul (*psyche*) generally denotes primarily the breath of life, then the soul in its various meanings (Vine 1966:54). New Testament psychology is especially rich and articulated in the writings of the apostle Paul. *Psyche* in the Pauline writings usually refers to the human being as a thinking, working and feeling person and

denotes the person as a whole, including the 'heart' and the personality (Ladd 1993:502). *Psyche* refers to the natural and earthly life (Ridderbos 1992:120). The term *pneuma* can be translated as wind or breath with the attributes of invisibility, immateriality and power (Vine 1966:62). Sometimes the terms *psyche* and *pneuma* are used interchangeably (Ridderbos 1992:120f). The terms can be differentiated in the following way: *Psyche* refers to the human being as being alive, striving, willing, purposeful, whereas *pneuma* refers to the immaterial self, the relationship with God and people (Ladd 1993:502), and the *experiencing I* (Dunn 1975:201). It also refers to the Holy Spirit which moves people toward love, joy and peace (Waaijman 2002:362). In the Pauline usage all people have a spiritual capacity as shown in 2 Corinthians 2:11 or 1 Thessalonians 5:23 (Ziesler 1991:100). This means that people have the capacity to enjoy fellowship with God. The reception of the promised divine *pneuma* is an integral part of the renewal of the human *pneuma* within the kerygma of the early church (Sheldrake 2000:23).

The term *pneuma* is also used with reference to the Holy Spirit, who comes from God (Vine 1966:63; Schneiders 1986:258; Wright 1996:146) and is part of God. In Paul's writings particularly, a Christian should yield to the presence and leading of the Holy Spirit, who acts through the spiritual component of the human personality (Ridderbos 1992:67; cf. Downey 1997:60; cf. Ziesler 1991:100) and transforms the whole life of the believer. The spirit is what makes belief and faith in God as well as the worship of God existentially real (Dunn 1975:201). This exemplifies that the Biblical idea of spirituality is intrinsic (relating to internal thought processes, feelings and desires) and never extrinsic (relating to outward actions such as rituals and deeds). God the Holy Spirit is also always seen as sharing many of the attributes of Jesus Christ, his son. In particular, he is the spirit of *truth*, that is, in the New Testament the questions of truth and falsehood are inextricable tied to the realm of the spirit (Guthrie 1997:111).

Other concepts in Pauline thought are the *heart*, the *mind* and the *conscience*. It is important to note that these are not separate entities, but rather that each of these designates a part of a whole that overlaps with other parts of the whole. The meaning of *heart*, as a person in his or her religious-moral quality (Ridderbos 1992:119), and *conscience* overlap, for example, as do *spirit* and *soul*.

In concluding it can be said that the English word *spirituality* is a translation of the Latin word *spiritualis*. *Spirit* is a translation of *spiritus* or *spiritualitas* (Waaijman 2002:361; cf. Howard 2008:15f). The Latin terms can be traced back to the Hebrew and Greek usage of the Bible as explained above. Spirituality within the context of the Bible thus refers to an intrinsic part of the human being, which is in relationship with God and other people and which refers to an element of personality as well as energy and power. Spirituality derives its meaning at least partly from its association with the phenomenon of monotheism and specifically belief in a personal God (McSherry & Cash 2004:153), and the appropriation of the Spirit of Jesus in the life of a believer (Howard 2008:16). This

does not deny that there may be other associations; however, these will not be explored here. In the following discussion, further developments concerning the meaning of this term will be considered and explained.

Spirituality within the context of the church

In early Christianity spirituality was often understood as life according to the Holy Spirit (Howard 2008:16), which could have different emphases. This spiritual living was especially accentuated within a context of asceticism and monasticism (Waaijman 2002:339f), which at that point in history acquired some extrinsic elements. Often some form of mystical connotation was also evident (Schneiders 1986:258; cf. Sheldrake 2000:21ff). An area of communal existence which was greatly influenced by Christian spirituality or religion at this time was that of social care. Christians in general attempted to apply the teachings of the Bible practically through an asceticism that avoided material possessions in order to focus on the development of the inner life. This was not entirely world denying, and emphasised caring for the needy and sick, as well as loving your enemies, to practically demonstrate love and compassion in the communities that supported the monastic orders. The early Christians thus attempted to provide a concrete embodiment of the spiritual within a harsh and superstitious age, providing spiritual meaning or a spiritual dimension for life (Narayananasamy 1999:390f).

During the 13th century a new development in Christian thought was evident (Holt 2005:87). Whereas previously spirituality was seen as the whole of Christian living, it came to be more narrowly defined as pertaining to the more rational aspects of life. This happened during the movement called scholasticism, which was an attempt to reunite Christian and Greek thought following the academic eclipse of the dark ages (Collins 2003; cf. Holt 2005:87). In this process a Platonic dualism, creating the two poles of spirit and matter, was absorbed into Christian thought. In this way the Pauline holistic moral sense was frequently lost from view. A contrast between the spiritual, rational and the material 'non-rational' in the Platonic sense was evident, that is, a dualism between soul or spirit and body emerged (Schneiders 1986:258; cf. Downey 1997:61f).

In general it can be said that Christianity experienced a period of academic decline during the Middle Ages. There was a huge difference between the clergy (those educated in the scholastic tradition of the time and therefore the 'spiritual') and the other (lay) people. During the Reformation that followed the scholastic period, Luther especially viewed this as an inaccurate interpretation of Scripture, proclaiming a spirituality for all believers in all areas of life (Pannenberg 1983:17; cf. Holt 2005:102). He also put a stronger focus on intrinsic spirituality, as found in the Bible. He rejected the asceticism of Catholic monasticism completely (Pearcey & Thaxton 1994:23).

From the 17th century to the 19th century there were continued developments concerning spirituality in the Western world, also because Christianity once again (the first time being

the period when Christianity came to Europe through the preaching of Paul) became a transcontinental religion as it moved to North and South America (Holt 2005:116). The term spirituality itself was, however, seldom used (Sheldrake 2000:24). The Protestant church was still in its infancy and had to develop its own institutional form. The Puritans and Methodists in England, the Quakers, Methodists and Evangelicals in America and the Pietists in Germany are examples of the continued development of the concept of spirituality (Holt 2005:118ff). In Roman Catholic France the interest in the interior life exemplified by devotion and a relationship with God was highlighted by Jeanne-Marie Bouvier de la Motte-Guyon and François de Salignac de la Mothe-Fénelon (commonly known as Madame Guyon and Fénelon), two 17th century and 18th century mystics, who has frequently found themselves at odds with the institutionalised church (Holt 2005:127f; cf. Downey 1997:61; cf. Waaijman 2002:393). Both basically emphasised a type of religion which placed much more focus on the inherent internal spirituality of people than on the more outward focus of religion of the Catholic Church. In general these movements emphasised that everybody could be spiritual and live 'according to the Holy Spirit' (Downey 1997:61). Spirituality came to be used synonymously with devotion, piety and true religion (Howard 2008:16), which had both intrinsic and extrinsic elements. In many cases there was an orientation towards the 'inner life', often in a mystical, experiential encounter with God, which often was a reaction against the Enlightenment emphasis on reason, and often became anti-intellectual (Noll 1994:83ff). There also was an increasing focus on the practical side of spirituality – the term acquiring a practical, external dimension (Waaijman 2002:326) in the 19th century. Florence Nightingale, for example, transformed nursing as a holistic dimension with the emphasis on treating the whole person within the context of Christian spirituality (Narayananamy 1999:392).

Up to the 1980s, the term was still mainly used in Roman Catholic contexts. Protestant scholars and clergy were often hesitant to use the term as the Roman Catholic usage often implied an element of works righteousness and sainthood (Collins 2003).

The term spirituality only became well-known in the English speaking world in the 20th century (Van der Walt, Wolhuter & Potgieter 2008:7) after a translation of the French (Catholic) term *spirituel* or *spiritualité*, which referred to the whole of the Christian's progress in perfection (Howard 2008:20). From the beginning of the 20th century numerous writings were published which made the spiritual traditions available to people (Waaijman 2002:403).

This overview has attempted to show that the origins and development of the concept of spirituality in the West has been strongly influenced by the Judeo-Christian tradition. There clearly are Biblical origins and in its historical development the concept was often informed by New Testament usage, either as a practical ministry or a mystical experience of the

divine presence, often both. It was nevertheless a constant part of theological reflection throughout the centuries (Schneiders 1986:261), regardless of the wide diversity in theological and devotional writings on spirituality in the West. In every age new emphasis was placed on a fresh experience of the spiritual life. What is important, is that throughout the history of the New Testament church the primary source for defining spirituality has mostly been the Bible even though interpretations often varied (Holt 2005:32). The focus, however, was always practical: either theological inquiry or the living of life according to the Holy Spirit (Downey 1997:68ff).

In the above discussion the term *religion* has not been used, even though it was often implied. In the next section the meaning of *religion* and *spirituality* within contemporary understanding will be explored. It is evident from the literature (as explained below), that the two are no longer seen as being identical, and in some cases they are even seen as conflicting views which cannot be reconciled.

The current distinction between religion and spirituality

In the West the concept spirituality originated and developed within the Judeo-Christian tradition as explained above. This implies a strong historical tradition (Downey 1997:60; Haldane 2003:12). It has mostly been an integral part of Jewish and Christian religion, and was hardly ever dissociated from the religious context of the community. Increasingly, however, particularly within the contemporary postmodern climate, the two concepts have been divorced in many contexts (Re'em 2004:212ff). Most authors concur that the concepts of religion and spirituality overlap, but are nevertheless distinct (Smith & Shortt 2000:3f; cf. Erricker 2000:37; cf. Benson, Roehlkepartain & Rude 2003:209).

Within the past few decades a concept of spirituality has developed outside an explicitly religious context (Drazenovich 2004; cf. Radford 2006:386; cf. Hodder 2007:186; cf. Erricker 2007:51ff). Spirituality is now often described as something that broke free from the restricting confines of association with formal religion. It is concerned with the 'higher' side of life in the sense of a search for meaning, unity, connectedness and transcendence (Tacey 2001:90ff; cf. Re'em 2004:213ff; cf. Tacey 2005:176f). *Spirituality* is also often defined as essentially an individual quest for fulfilment whereas *religion* is considered to be based more on societal beliefs and common behaviours and rituals, and thus more extrinsic and institutionalised (Chater 2001:64; cf. Hodder 2007:187). However, universal agreement has not been reached yet. Heelas and Woodhead (2005) argue that a spiritual revolution is taking place, where religion is giving way to spirituality. Benner traces this separation of spirituality from religion back to Carl Jung (Benner 1988:54ff), the first modern psychologist who acknowledged the spiritual side of human beings, but divorced it from the context of religion, especially Christian religion. He viewed spirituality as necessary for mental health (Legere 1984:380; cf. Benner 1988:54ff). In addition to

divorcing spirituality from the Christian religion, he also advocated a return to the pagan concept of religion (Wolin 2004:71), thus advocating religious relativism. As religions were typified as non-rational during the secularisation of the modern period (Wright 2000:47; cf. Alexander & Ben-Peretz 2001:35), a rupture took place between spirituality and religion. Some authors see spirituality as superior, wider and all-encompassing, whilst others view religion as a subclass of spirituality (Tacey 2005:176f). Some perceive spirituality as referring to no religion at all (Chater 2001:64), and religion has even been conceived to be at enmity with spirituality (Erricker 2007:52ff). However, there are also voices which claim that spirituality devoid of religious tradition tends to be naïve, simplistic and intellectually impoverished (Tacey 2005:182).

In the following discussion the development which led to the dichotomy between religion and spirituality will be investigated. Even though the majority of opinions support a separation between the two, it still needs to be established whether or not the distinction as well as the contemporary conception of spirituality can be considered valid on epistemological grounds.

Development of the dichotomy between spirituality and religion

In order to elucidate which factors led to the separation between *religion* and *spirituality* some remarks have to be made concerning the development of Western thought in the past few centuries, with special reference to the perception and treatment of Christianity and Christian thought.

As has been alluded to above, the concept of spirituality in the West is firmly rooted within the historical context of the Judeo-Christian religion and was an integral part thereof. Over the past few centuries, especially from the Enlightenment onwards, *religion* and the idea of theism have often been criticised and even ridiculed by Western scholars. This will be explained in the following paragraphs.

The detailed history of a new concept of spirituality, and the critique of religion and theism within modern positivistic philosophy is far too complex and extensive to be covered comprehensively here. Only a broad overview will therefore be attempted in order to show a coherent development.

The Middle Ages

In the Middle Ages (AD 400 – AD 1400), the Roman Catholic tradition was dominant and pervasive. There were nevertheless movements which are interpreted by some authors as paving the way for a development away from Christianity (Schaeffer 2005:56). Scholasticism was one of the movements in medieval thought, which had as its aim to use human reason – especially the philosophy of Aristotle – in order to interpret the Biblical revelation better and in general to penetrate truths revealed and inherited in the Christian tradition. To these scholars it was important to integrate the knowledge acquired by the Greeks into the knowledge as

revealed in the Bible (Microsoft Encarta 2002). In this context it is essential to include the contribution of Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas (1225–1274) is credited with introducing much of Aristotelian thought into Western thinking (Scott-Kakures, Castagnetto, Benson, Taschek & Hurley 1993:87; cf. Delaney & DiClemente 2005:36).

Compared with mainstream thought in the Middle Ages, Aquinas was different in that he wanted to show that the senses, as well as reason, are reliable means of finding knowledge. Aquinas developed his natural theology not to separate nature and grace but rather to show that nature can be used to defend belief in God. Reason and the senses can be used by human beings and by doing so, human beings can discover truth (Pearcey & Thaxton 1994:100; cf. Sproul 2003:78ff). In his *Summa Theologica* Aquinas (2006) attempted to show that the existence of God can be rationally demonstrated to be true (Aquinas 2006; cf. Scott-Kakures *et al.* 1993:91ff). He also tried to disprove the theory of two (conflicting) truths which spread through the Western world under the influence of the writings of the Arabic scholar Averroës, who was a pantheist (Sproul 2003:79; Delaney & DiClemente 2005:37). Interestingly, this view of double truths is similar to postmodernism, which also allows for the validity of conflicting truths.

Under the influence of Aquinas, the scholasticism of this time had as its aim the integration of Greek thought into the interpretation of the Biblical revelation without discrediting the Biblical revelation. In the following Renaissance era (roughly from the 14th century to the 17th century), there was a similar trend, that is, to go back to the original Greek and Hebrew sources of the New and Old Testament, which also meant going back to the Greek text of the New Testament instead of working from the Latin version (Goerlitz & Immisch 1984:88). As a consequence of these developments it has been argued that an option was created that nature and grace could be separated, even though at this stage nature was only given a more realistic place in the whole of reality, as nature was regarded as something profane in the Middle Ages (Sproul 2003:78ff). In the Renaissance, as will be shown in the following section, this took a different turn.

The Renaissance

Whereas the Middle Ages had a very strong religious orientation, the course of Western thought changed during the Renaissance into a much more secular direction (Pearcey 2004:101). Whilst the Middle Ages are often described as a period of academic eclipse and intellectual poverty, with a focus on mysticism, the Renaissance was characterised as a move towards belief in reason and the senses, ultimately leading to the emergence of scientific inquiry and the modern era. The perception is often created that science displaced religion in the West at this time. This is, however, not accurate, and the crucial role Christianity played in the development of the scientific method is well documented. Ironically, within the postmodern climate, the *religious* nature of scientific positivism has been exposed (Pearcey & Thaxton 1994).

The Renaissance started in Italy (Russell 2005:257) and initially provided the possibility for scientific thought by breaking down the rigid scholastic system (Schaeffer 2005:57ff). It revived the study of Plato and other ancient authors (Veith 1994:31; Russell 2005:461ff). At the same time, the study of nature acquired a more prominent role, a movement which had started in the Middle Ages (Schaeffer 2005:30ff). Nature (the material world) was now seen as autonomous, thus free from the interposition of divine acts of grace (divine intervention) or the need of special revelation to understand it rightly. This created room for Renaissance humanism, where nature (man), instead of God, became the measure of all things (Schaeffer 2005:57ff). The effects of this development were ethical relativism (there is no absolute moral truth), psychological romanticism (humans are basically good), epistemological scepticism and spiritual naivety (there is no personal nor demonic evil). As the old moral codes of the 'Ancient regime' were dismissed during the age of revolution, they gave room to increased immorality, treachery, corruption and cruelty (Russell 2005:463), which reached shocking proportions in the 20th century.

This discussion shows that the Renaissance represented another step in the separation between spirituality and religion. Secular humanism, and the differentiation between nature and grace, exalted human reason and experience (natural revelation) as the measure of all things instead of God and special revelation. Human beings and, more specifically, human reason as well as nature were now seen as functioning apart from religion. They became entities of their own and therefore spirituality could become much more of a human construct, free from religion with its specifics and its focus on the sinful nature of man. God became less of an omnipotent, omnipresent entity and spirituality was practised more from a human starting point. To an extent, this paved the way for the spirituality of the Reformation, which is explained below.

It must nevertheless also be acknowledged that considerable positive achievements took place during the Renaissance. The new open-mindedness in many areas of life, as well as an increased interest in nature as a whole, led to remarkable inventions and discoveries, of which the printing press is one prominent example.

Christianity was nevertheless still influential. The vast majority of discoveries, inventions and philosophical inquiries were still made within a Christian context and worldview. Copernicus, for example, saw his own theory of the earth revolving around the sun as just a specification of the created order (Pearcey & Thaxton 1994:33).

The Reformation itself was another fruit of the Renaissance, which provided other alternatives to the rigid scholastic division between nature and grace, opened up a new theological inquiry and access to the original texts, and paved the way for the confrontation and break with the religious authority of the time. It has been said that the Renaissance rediscovered the Greeks, whereas the Reformation rediscovered the Bible (Veith 1994:31). The Reformation was in the first place a reaction against the abuse of authority by the Pope in all

aspects of religious life and not a rejection of the authority of the Bible or the truth of special revelation, nor of authority per se (Goerlitz & Immisch 1984:112; cf. Russell 2005:481). It emphasised a more personal, devotional and therefore more spiritual approach to religion. As many Renaissance scholars put the notion of God (theism) aside, or at least removed God as an interpretative principle and personal presence from the natural order, they had to look for other universals, which would provide a meaningful holistic explanation of reality. The Reformation scholars presented a solution to this problem by returning to the belief in the absolute authority of the Bible [*sola scriptura*]. This meant that reason was also subject to the Biblical revelation. This should not be taken to mean that the reformers promoted anti-intellectualism. It rather subjected the intellect to God, but within that context promoted the use of the intellect. The numerous Bible translations of this period are a monument to the use of the intellect. This understanding of the intellect as being subject to God resulted in the reformers having an answer to the dilemma of the Renaissance scholars. They reunited nature and grace and seemed to experienced no problems between universals and particulars, as they had one unifying universal, namely God.

The Reformation provided a tremendous amount of freedom for people and society in general as it retained the Biblical absolutes, providing the religious context for the spiritual (elect) man – hard work, honesty, thrift, vocation – which catalysed the economic revolutions of the time without enslaving people to a system, as was the case under the pre-Reformation Roman Catholic church (Schaeffer 2005:105, 110). Spirituality could thus be practised outside the strict confines of institutionalised religion, acquiring a much more personal note.

This indicates that the Reformation and the Renaissance provided different answers to the same problem. It can therefore be argued that, in contrast to the Renaissance scholars, the leading scholars of the Reformation attempted to show that spirituality is part of true religion.

Even though there certainly were further philosophical developments between the periods of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, only some brief remarks about the period will be made. The 17th century was a time of sharp contrasts in the sense that it further promoted Renaissance humanism and at the same time supported Christianity. The mechanistic worldview also emerged at this time, which stated that the world is like a machine which does not need an immanent God in order to function.

The Enlightenment

The period of the Enlightenment in the 18th century gained much momentum through French scholars such as Voltaire and Rousseau. These men wanted to promote freedom and equality for all people, based on the idea that a person is actually good and only needs to learn to use reason rightly, which she or he is able to do with proper education (Rousseau

1921:5ff). Education played an important role for creating a better, more humane society (Goerlitz & Immisch 1984:178f, cf. Rousseau 1921). The focus was on rationality and science performed from an anti-spiritual stance, trusting in human reason. The Christian religion was often seen very negatively, which becomes obvious in, for example, Voltaire's *Candide* (Voltaire 2006).

This type of thinking had started in the Renaissance and developed further now. Human beings were the centre point of all moral reasoning and questions of truth, not special revelation (truth as revealed in the Bible). It was not necessary to invoke theism or a personal God to describe and understand a mechanistic natural order. Reason became the highest good (Yates 2001:211; cf. Dixon 2001:58). Many of the Enlightenment philosophers still believed in a god (Jeeves & Berry 2000:24); but they were deists, meaning that most of them believed that a rational being created the world. She or he was not at all involved in her or his creation and she or he is not personal (Veith 1994:33; cf. Glynn 1997:33). A Christian understanding of spirituality was thus increasingly marginalised and many scholars began to refer back to the pagan religions and practices of the past (Schaeffer 2005:122) or to the newly discovered religions and spiritualities of the colonies. Scientific positivism also became more and more prominent.

One of Kant's major works was his *Critique of pure reason*, which was published in 1781. In this work he tried to show that neither reason (rationalism) nor the experience of the senses (empiricism), as described above, can alone constitute true knowledge. He thus tried to synthesise the two approaches and underlying philosophies (Kant 2004; cf. Sproul 2003:89). However, in his quest he did not establish any clear standard of true knowledge. He rather made the epistemology of knowledge more uncertain than it had been before (Pearcey & Thaxton 1994:139f). He questioned the ontological basis for the knowability of God, as he simply could not agree that there was sufficient proof of the existence of God. In his other important work, *Critique of practical reason* ([1788] 1898), Kant argued that we have to live as if there was a God; he claimed that without God there cannot be absolute standards and an epistemological basis for right and wrong. His view of knowledge in this area is therefore purely pragmatic. However, he developed a moral argument for the existence of God, which became popular in Western thought (Russell 1957:11f). It is interesting to note that Kant postulated that a civilisation without the concept of God (theism) cannot function. In effect, however, and as a result of Kant's influence, virtue-based ethics were replaced by rational rule-based ethics (Worthington & Berry 2005:147). This development, which was to a great extent initiated by Kant, of course has implications for the concept of spirituality. If God is just a construct to help people live good lives, spirituality becomes devoid of the concept of a personal god and a person becomes even more important in defining his or her own spirituality.

Another important work of Kant is his essay 'What is Enlightenment?' (*Was ist Aufklärung*), which he wrote in 1784. In this essay, he emphasised the role of reason in

existence (Goerlitz & Immisch 1984:178; cf. Buckley & Erricker 2004:178; cf. Kant 1784). He says that people need to mature and use their reason to get rid of what he viewed as old superstitions and prejudices. In this essay he portrays reason as the answer to human problems in the form of a mature society. His prediction was that reason would ultimately lead to a utopian society (Kant 1784).

In this context it becomes necessary to return to the dichotomy between nature and grace, as Kant changed this tension fundamentally by redefining it. He defined the problem as a tension between freedom and nature. By eliminating enabling grace and the need for divine revelation he secularised the problem (Pearcey 2004:104), only keeping God in the argument for pragmatic purposes and not as a necessary consequence of the use of reason.

Even though there was a growing movement towards secular thinking, there were still strong beliefs in the existence of God. Descartes as well as Locke, for example, still believed that a god must exist (Delaney & DiClemente 2005:38f), even though much of this thinking can be classified under deism. It is, however, apparent that, ironically, the seeds for the postmodern view of science and existence were sown in the Enlightenment period.

The effect the Enlightenment had on spirituality within or without the context of religion was that the supernatural, which is usually part of spirituality, was largely discredited. This was also the case because reason, which in some cases stands opposite to the experience of spirituality, became all-important.

Romanticism

Romanticism started in the mid-18th century and lasted until about the mid-19th century. It first gained momentum in Germany and was characterised by an emphasis upon feelings and experience, a focus on the self, a return to nature, a new nationalism, and a nostalgic return to old practices, religions, pantheism as well as mythologies (Wright 1996:141; cf. Jeeves & Berry 2000:24). Quinton (1994:338) describes this as a reaction against the Newtonian mechanistic picture of the world, in contrast to which the Romantics preferred to view the world in an organismic way. The movement was similar to the Renaissance in that it emphasised the importance of art and music (Schaeffer 1990:27ff; cf. Wright 2000:19). Whereas the Classicists in the Enlightenment had as their aim to be more objective in their approach to art and music, the Romantics tended to see the world in terms of their own subjective experience and in the transcendental spiritual depth of the individual self (Wright 1996:142). This was also the time when a strong historicism developed. A new historical consciousness became widespread amongst intellectuals. Within this mindset, the particular (seen in a historical context) became more important than the view of the universal of the Enlightenment. The result was an emphasis on the subjective (Wolters 1989:18; cf. Wright 2000:20).

In this context, the idea of pantheism grew in importance. God was to be perceived as immanent in everything, and especially in nature. God was not seen as personal but as being everywhere. Many of the romantics believed in a kind of 'life force', which is close to the concept of deism, also rejecting a personally knowable God (Veith 1994:36). People thus tried to create a new universal life force to give an epistemological basis to nature or the particulars in nature apart from divine intervention. Goethe, for example, equated nature with truth (Schaeffer 2005:156ff). This movement was therefore important in providing an underpinning for the relativism of the postmodern era (Wright 2000:20).

The implications of the Romantic movement on spirituality were manifold. In an era where the subjective was seen as very important, personal spiritualities in their subjective expression could develop. The supernatural (in many different forms, such as pantheism and different folk religions), which is usually part of spirituality, became important again. Spirituality became more and more divorced from institutionalised religion.

The Romantic movement was very much focused on feeling and experience, whereas the next period was more focused on reason, as will be explained.

Modernism and onwards

Hegel, who was influenced by Romanticism, developed his idea of dialectical reasoning (synthesis). Previously people had thought in terms of either/or, thesis or antithesis. Hegel claimed that eternal truths do not exist and that different ideas are equally valid (Schaeffer 1990:232f; cf. Scott-Kakures *et al.* 1993:329f). With regard to the concept of spirituality, this would mean that different kinds of spiritualities can co-exist.

Glynn (1997:46) states that Charles Darwin, who introduced the theory of evolution, made an important contribution in this context. As much as the theory of evolution was perceived as a challenge to Christianity, it was also a reaction against the Romantics, in that Darwin showed that nature was not as idealised as the Romantics wanted it to be (Veith 1994:37). God, according to Darwin, had no existence in nature. Basically, this theory attempted to prove that the origin of species took place entirely through natural processes without any need for the intervention of a supernatural power (Pearcey & Thaxton 1994:114f). God was thus not seen to be a necessary component of a rational worldview. This naturalism together with determinism, reductionism, materialism and positivism, basically claimed that ultimately science would be able to resolve all problems and provide answers to all questions. This resulted in a very optimistic, future-oriented worldview. People believed a better world was within the reach of modern man and lay in the not so distant future (Richards & Bergin 1998:24ff; cf. Higgs & Smith 2003:139f). Terms such as progress, modernisation and development were frequently used, and reason was considered to be the highest good of mankind (Buckley & Erricker 2004:178).

In the area of psychology, there was a similar movement, in which Freud was the driving force (Glynn 1997:57ff). Freud attempted to explain human behaviour entirely on a naturalistic and deterministic basis, without invoking a higher cause, that is, soul or spirit (Schaeffer 1990:232). Freud criticised religion as 'the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity' (Freud 1927:30) and thus had a very negative view of religion (Wright 2000:29). In general, the interest in religion and the practice thereof was declined (Kourie 2006:77). It was within this positivist context, where mechanistic science reduced nature to inert matter, that values were separated from what is objectively real (Dixon 2001:58).

In summary, this period and its antecedents in the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, can be interpreted as a search for an alternative underlying and unifying truth and certainty. Differently stated, the scholars of this period tried to construct a purely naturalistic metanarrative, which was binding in all areas (Buckley & Erricker 2004:179).

This resulted in a movement away from the viability and rationality of religion, towards a much more naturalistic, evolutionary view. Life became secular (Wright 2000:47). Nevertheless, although religion was considered passé, spirituality began to play an increasingly important role in the development of psychological thought (Miller 2005:14). Somewhat ironically, Jung, a student of Freud, played an important role. He emphasised the role of spirituality but sharply separated it from religion (Benner 1988:54ff). This was a novel movement, as the concepts of spirituality and religion were still used almost interchangeably at the beginning of the 20th century (Miller 2005:12). It is also noteworthy that important psychologists such as William James and G. Stanley Hall were actively involved in establishing a psychology of religion by reducing religion to psychology (Nye 1996:109). Adler and Maslow followed in Jung's footsteps, also believing spirituality does not need to be Christian and that any religion can produce a variety of positive effects (Karstens 2006:26). Another example of a contemporary and influential psychologist who embraced the concept of spirituality is Viktor Frankl (Frankl 1963). He claimed that it is hardly possible to survive a holocaust if one is not able to assign meaning to life in a supernatural way. In other words, Frankl viewed a person's search for meaning as inextricably linked to spirituality, which to him was an extremely important facet of human life (Frankl 1963).

Another philosophical movement which took place in reaction to the Enlightenment was existentialism. This was a move towards non-rationalism (Schaeffer 2005:167ff). This movement combines a wide variety of theories. However, they all have as their point of departure the notion of human existence. The existentialists believed that there is no inherent meaning in life, and no intrinsic essential human nature. They claimed that a uniquely defining characteristic of human existence was that existence comes before essence. Meaning has to be constructed by the individual. The individual has to make choices and define him- or herself (Sartre 1974:28; cf. Scott-Kakures *et al.* 1993:359; cf. Stevenson & Haberman

2004:176ff). The individual is free to create meaning. She or he is not only free, but also responsible for actualising her of his existence and creating meaning, as no innate or fundamental access to objective knowledge of universal truth exists for the individual (Veith 1994:37f). Therefore, in the view of some existentialists, the act of choosing becomes more important and value laden than the content or action which is chosen (Sartre 1974; cf. Schaeffer 1990:18). This would then mean that one's spirituality is also a chosen and personally constructed entity, which is not necessarily linked to something supernatural.

Even though there were Christian movements within existentialism, of which Kierkegaard is one of the best-known (Stevenson & Haberman 2004:176ff), other more mainstream forms of existentialism with their focus on self-created meaning were another step in the move away from a Christian understanding of spirituality. It was no longer necessary to invoke God as meaning could be created individually.

Another movement towards non-rationalism was the pragmatism of William James (1988). This movement claimed that everything should be evaluated in the light of its practicality or usefulness (James 1988). It implied that belief in God is good as long as it is useful. The idea of truth is thus reduced to usefulness (Scott-Kakures *et al.* 1993:362). This inevitably undermines any epistemological foundation for truth.

Postmodernism

The different movements within modernism eventually led to the contemporary dominant Western worldview, which has been termed postmodernism. The development of postmodernism can be explained by mainly two factors. The first is that it is a logical conclusion of the philosophical development which started during the Enlightenment. The above mentioned developments of Romanticism, Darwinism, and Existentialism helped to bring the Enlightenment to its logical conclusion, namely relativism (Veith 1994; cf. Chater 2001). It follows that there is no entity that is the final cause and thus no ultimate right and wrong. Postmodern philosophers essentially applied what Kant and other Enlightenment scholars said, only more rigorously and to all of life. The phenomenologists were important here as they claimed that all seeing is 'seeing as'. The phenomenologists emphasised the subjectivity of theories (Brockelman 1980:27ff).

Another explanation which can be given for the development of postmodernism is the fact that people became dissatisfied with modernism, with its rationalism and scientific positivism (Higgs & Smith 2003:140; cf. Pearcey 2004:114). The promised utopia was never realised. Widespread genocide and warfare, including the two World Wars, as well as numerous other atrocities committed during the socialist revolutions of the 20th century (which, according to Enlightenment thought, would have long ceased to happen), were and are still rampant and have caused a profound mistrust in modernist rationalism (Wright 2000:13). People became

disillusioned with the tenets of modernism and started looking for alternatives. A reaction against the modern idea that God is not necessary anymore, is for example seen in the growing interest nowadays in supernatural phenomena, and a new openness to and interest in spiritual matters can be observed pervading all aspects of Western society (Jankowski 2002:69; cf. Alexander 2004:x). In summary, the postmodern movement as a reaction against modernism can be referred to as being similar to Romanticism in many of its basic tenets, as Romanticism was to a large extent a reaction against Enlightenment rationalism (Wright 1996:142).

One of the most basic tenets of postmodernism is the assumption that there is no absolute truth; it puts an end to all truth claims (Chater 2001:65; cf. Du Toit 2006:60). The French philosopher Lyotard described postmodernism as 'incredulity to meta-narratives' (Lyotard 1997:26). This ultimately also means that the hope of science or reason leading towards correspondence with reality (truth) needs to be given up (McDowell 1999:613ff; cf. Rorty 2004:53f). Furthermore, it means that postmodern philosophers relinquish the idea of foundations and metaphysics (Santos 2003:433; cf. Rorty 2004:53). One primary self-proclaimed task of postmodernism is thus to deconstruct meta-narratives (Wright 2000:21). Relativism, which is characteristic of postmodernism, does not attempt to engage in epistemological inquiry at all. A foundation for truth is not sought, or believed to exist. This then paves the way for the development of individualised spiritualities, not connected to for example any specific religion or belief in a god. These spiritualities thus do not need to have any epistemological foundation and can be very shallow.

A well-known postmodern philosopher, Michel Foucault (1984), took up Kant's search for freedom. Foucault's freedom, however, is not determined by absolutes (he considers the idea of absolutes to be catastrophic for society) but rather requires constant engagement in the process of creating freedom and opposing oppression. He has coined the term *biopower*, which designates the kind of power or knowledge which should be used to engage in working towards a more humane society. In his view people have to accept an ironic stance towards life: 'Don't take yourself too seriously, but engage in the affairs of the present' (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1986:117). The human subject is also not seen as something static, but it is rather perceived as constantly changing and increasingly hybrid (Foucault 1984; Yates 2001:210). Human beings can therefore choose their own meanings and ways of living (Buckely & Erricker 2004:181). This is often done opportunistically and arbitrarily. Lawton (2003:282) states that the heart of postmodernism is that nothing connects and nothing follows. Unsurprisingly, Foucault espoused an ethic where he pondered the question of whether or not acts such as rape actually should be considered a criminal offence, as he believed that sexuality should not be subject to any legislation (Foucault 1988:200f). Foucault also wanted to do away with the conventional idea of truth. He claimed that 'truth' is merely a disguise of 'power'.

Another important development of postmodernism, in which Jacques Derrida played the key role, was the change in the way language was perceived. Language is no longer seen as representing reality and conveying meaning and truth, but rather as being detached from the object. Absolute meaning is thus not possible (Yates 2001:212; cf. Wolin 2004:221f).

The only values that are deemed important in postmodernism are thus 'tolerance' and 'freedom', a guarding against imposing any (particularly religious) values on others (Wright 2000:22), which is in itself a contradiction, as it absolutises these two values. The focus of a postmodern spirituality is much more on personal subjective experience (Heelas & Woodhead 2005:4).

All this seems to indicate that postmodernism often rejects a logical rational basis, not by default, but by conscious design. However, by stating that no absolutes exist, the movement appears to undermine its own foundation, as it uses an absolute statement (McDowell 1999:621) and therefore also often sees spirituality as a subjective entity, which can be interpreted and used according to personal likes and dislikes. In other words, this means that any form of spirituality is valid and that anybody is free to devise his or her own spirituality, which cannot be imposed on another. In most cases these spiritualities can be termed secular and have a high tolerance for ambiguity (Kourie 2006:80). Heelas and Woodhead (2005:12) claim that a *subjective-life* spirituality is growing and will probably surpass religion. There are different kinds of spiritualities, such as mystical spirituality, gay and lesbian spirituality and ecological spirituality (Kourie 2006:82ff).

Conclusion

A short historical overview of the development of spirituality within the Western context has been given. The roots within Judeo-Christian religion should not be ignored as they can add value to research done about spirituality. Religion, interpreted largely as external behaviour, has been widely discredited as mainly harmful to societies, and religion and spirituality have become largely separated. This discussion, however, has attempted to show that this might be a premature conclusion and that Judeo-Christian religion (not necessarily defined as external behaviour) possibly does have a role to play in the discussion surrounding spirituality, specifically as it is a tradition which is historically verifiable.

The philosophical background to the developing dichotomy between religion and spirituality has clearly shown that both concepts and specifically religion have always been interpreted in terms of the predominant philosophical paradigm. It is therefore not surprising that spirituality is nowadays seen as higher as and better than religion (defined as external behaviour), that it is deemed to be an inherent human characteristic and that it can be interpreted according to any personal liking. This could possibly cause the concept to become less powerful as it can be simultaneously anything and nothing. It is therefore advisable that the existing

dichotomy between religion and spirituality be interpreted as premature, which in turn should motivate researchers to consider whether the Judeo-Christian tradition could not possibly play a much more crucial role in the discussions around spirituality.

This article has focused on a specific research gap. In the progression of knowledge others can now take up other aspects to investigate in greater depth, for example, how other religions relate to spirituality, which is an important discussion within this context. It is also important to consider exactly what forms of spirituality are advocated in academic debate as well as everyday life in order to engage more meaningfully in the current debate around spirituality.

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