

SPIRITUALITY IN THE ACADEMY

SANDRA M. SCHNEIDERS, I.H.M.

Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley

SPIRITUALITY, DESPITE the fluidity of the term's usage and the general confusion about its meaning, is a subject which can no longer be politely ignored either in a church which would prefer a less "emotional" approach to faith or in an academy which would guard its intellectual precincts from "subjectivism." Since Vatican II, both the Catholic and the Protestant Churches have had to contend with an increasing interest in spirituality on the part of their membership; programs designed to foster the lived experience of the spiritual life have multiplied; and the academy is witnessing (not without apprehension) the birth of a new discipline in its midst.

The contemporary interest in spirituality on the part of the laity, seminary students, and ministers has been documented and analyzed repeatedly in the recent past by scholars, publishers, and cultural commentators.¹ The World Council of Churches, increasingly aware of the thirst for spirituality among its membership as well as the importance of spirituality in the dialogue with non-Christian religions, convened consultations on spirituality in 1984, 1986, and 1987.² Academic consulta-

¹ A Protestant, Bradley Hanson, "Christian Spirituality and Spiritual Theology," *Dialog* 21 (1982) 207-12, attributes the upsurge of interest in spirituality to the crisis of meaning generated by the events of the 1960s. Anglican Tilden H. Edwards, "Spiritual Formation in Theological Schools: Ferment and Challenge. A Report of the ATS-Shalem Institute on Spirituality," *Theological Education* 17 (1980) 7-52, reports on the factors accounting for the increased interest in spirituality in seminaries. Among Catholic authors Joann Conn, "Books on Spirituality," *Theology Today* 39 (1982) 65-68, attributes the increased interest in spirituality to the spiritual maturation of Catholics since Vatican II. John Heagle, "A New Public Piety: Reflections on Spirituality," *Church* 1 (1985) 52-55, singles out the increased desire to integrate faith and life, especially the justice agenda. Eugene Megyer, "Theological Trends: Spiritual Theology Today," *The Way* 21 (1981) 55-67, focuses on the factors, especially the biblical and liturgical renewals, on the eve of the council which favored the development of the interest in spirituality. Ewert Cousins, "Spirituality: A Resource for Theology," *Catholic Theological Society of America Proceedings* 35 (1980) 124-37, chronicles the development of interest in spirituality and lists its salient characteristics, while Joseph A. Tetlow, "Spirituality: An American Sampler," *America* 153 (1985) 261-67, notes that 37 million Americans bought books in spirituality during 1985, publishers of spiritual books prospered, and outlets handling publications in spirituality multiplied.

² Ans J. van der Bent, "The Concern for Spirituality: An Analytical and Bibliographical Survey of the Discussion within the WCC Constituency," *Ecumenical Review* 38 (1986) 101-14, describes the process, beginning in 1948, of the gradual integration of the concern for spirituality into the WCC agenda.

tions on spirituality, resulting in published proceedings, have been held at Oxford,³ Louvain,⁴ Villanova,⁵ and elsewhere. The American Academy of Religion, the Catholic Theological Society of America, and the College Theology Society now have ongoing seminars on spirituality.⁶

The increasingly serious attitude toward spirituality in the academy⁷ is due in no small measure to the fact that the major theologians of the conciliar era have made explicit the roots of their constructive work in their own faith experience and their conscious intention that their work should bear fruit in the lived faith of the Church as well as in its speculation and teaching. Karl Rahner's conviction that "the Christian of the future will be a mystic or he or she will not exist at all"⁸ has its academic parallel in the evident conviction of such theologians as Mary Collins, Charles Curran, Margaret Farley, Gustavo Gutiérrez, Monika Hellwig, Hans Küng, Bernard Lonergan, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Edward Schillebeeckx, and Dorothee Soelle that only a theology that is rooted in the spiritual commitment of the theologian and oriented toward praxis will be meaningful in the Church of the future.⁹

³ Andrew Louth, *Discerning the Mystery: An Essay on the Nature of Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), is the volume on the relation of spirituality to theology which resulted from the Oxford program.

⁴ H. Limit and J. Ries, eds., *L'Expérience de la prière dans les grandes religions* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Centre d'Histoire des Religions, 1980), is the acts of a colloquium studying prayer across historical periods and religious traditions, both pagan and Christian.

⁵ Francis Eigo, ed., *Dimensions of Contemporary Spirituality* (Villanova: Villanova University, 1982), and *Contemporary Spirituality: Responding to the Divine Initiative* (Villanova: Villanova University, 1983).

⁶ The AAR Seminar on Spirituality meeting at the 1988 national convention was centered on the question, "What Is Spirituality?" and discussed unpublished papers on this topic by Ewert Cousins of Fordham University, Carlos Eire of the University of Virginia, Bradley Hanson of Luther College, Sandra Schneiders of the Graduate Theological Union, and F. Ellen Weaver of the University of Notre Dame. The participants were not in agreement about the nature of either the subject matter or the discipline which studies that subject matter; but as the discussions proceed, it is becoming clearer what questions must be answered.

⁷ Vernon Gregson, at the 1982 CTSA convention, remarked that "the theological use of spirituality is an obvious and significant change in recent Roman Catholic tradition." See "Seminar on Spirituality: Revisiting an Experiential Approach to Salvation," *Catholic Theological Society of America Proceedings* 37 (1982) 175.

⁸ Karl Rahner, "The Spirituality of the Future," in *The Practice of the Faith: A Handbook of Contemporary Spirituality*, ed. K. Lehmann and A. Raffelt (New York: Crossroad, 1986) 22. This collection of writings by Rahner on topics related to spirituality includes (313-14) the references to the original location and publication data of each essay.

⁹ See the excellent article by Regina Bechtle, "Convergences in Theology and Spirituality," *The Way* 23 (1985) 305-14. She discusses the work of Rahner, Lonergan, Pannenberg, Soelle, and the liberation theologians and concludes that their work makes clear that unless theology is grounded in the taste of mystery and in search of God through conversion, it is

The recognition *that* there exists a vital relationship between faith and spirituality on the one hand and theology and spirituality on the other by no means clarifies either what is meant by the term "spirituality" or what the relationship among faith, theology, and spirituality is. Before addressing these questions, however, two preliminary observations are necessary.

First, the term "spirituality," like the term "psychology," is unavoidably ambiguous, referring to (1) a fundamental dimension of the human being, (2) the lived experience which actualizes that dimension, and (3) the academic discipline which studies that experience. Some writers have tried to resolve this ambiguity by reserving the term "spirituality" for the lived experience while referring to the discipline as "spiritual theology."¹⁰ For reasons that will be given below, I think this solution creates more problems than it solves and I opt for retaining the term "spirituality" for both the experience and the discipline, even though this requires specification whenever the context is not sufficiently clarifying.

Secondly, the term "spirituality" (referring to lived experience) has undergone an astounding expansion in the last few decades. Before Vatican II it was an almost exclusively Roman Catholic term. The term is being gradually adopted by Protestantism, Judaism, non-Christian religions, and even such secular movements as feminism and Marxism, to refer to something that, while difficult to define, is experienced as analogous in all of these movements.¹¹ A singular indication of how universal the term has become is the title of the 25-volume Crossroad series, only three volumes of which are devoted to Christianity: *World*

empty and sterile. But unless spiritual experience is involved in the search for understanding and thus in the movement of reflection, it remains inarticulate for itself and for others.

¹⁰ Among the authors who take this position are Hanson, "Christian Spirituality" 212; Cousins, "Spirituality" 126; Megyer, "Theological Trends" 56.

¹¹ Rachel Hosmer, "Current Literature in Christian Spirituality," *Anglican Theological Review* 66 (1984) 425, captures the vagueness of the modern sense of the word: "Spirituality in the broadest sense defies definition. It refers to whatever in human experience is alive and intentional, conscious of itself and responsive to others. It is capable of creative growth and liable to decay." The descriptive definition chosen by the editors of the World Spirituality series is the following: "that inner dimension of the person called by certain traditions 'the spirit.' This spiritual core is the deepest center of the person. It is here that the person is open to the transcendent dimension; it is here that the person experiences ultimate reality. The series explores the discovery of this core, the dynamics of its development, and its journey to the ultimate goal. It deals with prayer, spiritual direction, the various maps of the spiritual journey, and the methods of advancement in the spiritual ascent." Cf. Ewert Cousins, "Preface to the Series," in Bernard McGinn and John Meyendorff, eds., *Christian Spirituality 1: Origins to the Twelfth Century* (World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest 16 [New York: Crossroad, 1985] xiii).

*Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest.*¹²

Furthermore, the term no longer refers exclusively or even primarily to prayer and spiritual exercises, much less to an elite state or superior practice of Christianity. Rather, from its original reference to the "interior life" of the person, usually a cleric or religious, who was "striving for perfection," i.e. for a life of prayer and virtue that exceeded in scope and intensity that of the "ordinary" believer, the term has broadened to connote the whole of the life of faith and even the life of the person as a whole, including its bodily, psychological, social, and political dimensions.¹³

The academic discipline which studies the lived experience of spirituality has developed rapidly in the past 30 years. Although I will examine this development in a subsequent section, I note here two indications of its power and direction. The first is the proliferation in the academy of courses and programs in spirituality. While programs of spiritual renewal continue to draw heavy enrolment, practical masters-degree programs designed to prepare religious, clerical, and lay personnel for spiritual ministries are multiplying in both seminaries and institutions of higher learning. Even more significant is the development of research doctoral programs in spirituality.¹⁴ The graduates of these programs are increasingly being invited to teach in their area of expertise, a sign that interest in the field at the undergraduate level is also increasing.

The second indication of the development of the discipline is the extraordinary burgeoning of publications, especially of research tools, in the field of spirituality. The renowned *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique*¹⁵ has arrived at the letter S and is now joined by the aforementioned *World Spirituality* encyclopedia and a number of single-volume encyclopedic dictionaries.¹⁶ Introductory volumes such as *The*

¹² *World Spirituality* (n. 11 above), 25 vols., ed. Ewert Cousins (New York: Crossroad, 1985-).

¹³ Heagle, "A New Public Piety" 53, succinctly summarizes the major differences between preconciliar and postconciliar spirituality. The former was theoretical, elitist, otherworldly, ahistorical, antiseccular, individualistic, concentrated on the "interior life" and "perfection." By contrast, "[t]he emerging spirituality of our age is intensely personal without being private. It is visionary without being theoretical. It is prophetic without being partisan, and it is incarnational without becoming worldly. It emphasizes personal response and interior commitment but it radically changes the context within which this response takes place."

¹⁴ E.g., there are doctoral programs in spirituality at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Fordham University in New York, and at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome.

¹⁵ M. Viller, F. Cavallera, and J. de Guibert, eds. (Paris: Beauchesne, 1932-).

¹⁶ E.g., the *Dictionnaire de la vie spirituelle*, adaptation française par François Vial (Paris: Cerf, 1983).

*Study of Spirituality*¹⁷ and the *Compendio de teologia spirituale*,¹⁸ extensive bibliographical tools such as the *Bibliographia internationalis spiritualitatis*,¹⁹ which annually indexes approximately 500 publications under eight major headings, introductions to classical texts,²⁰ as well as a number of series of both critical texts and translations of spiritual classics²¹ facilitate work in the field.

Given this extraordinarily broad and deep interest in spirituality on the part of laity, ministerial professionals, and theologians, as well as the rapid development of the academic discipline, it is not surprising that there is also an increasing concern about such basic questions as what the term "spirituality" means, how the discipline of spirituality is related to lived experience of the faith, how the discipline is related to theology on the one hand and other fields of inquiry (such as psychology, anthropology, the arts, and history) on the other, and what role, if any, praxis plays in the study of spirituality. These are the types of questions which any emerging discipline must face early in its development. The purpose of this article is to chart the progress of the discipline in coming to grips with these basic questions, to indicate the areas of continuing confusion, and to suggest directions for further clarification.

THE TERM "SPIRITUALITY" REFERRING TO EXPERIENCE

Preconciliar Development

Several recent studies have explored the development of the term "spirituality" from its origin in the Pauline neologism "spiritual" (*pneumatikos*), the adjectival form derived from the Greek word for the Holy

¹⁷ Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Edward Yarnold, eds. (New York: Oxford University, 1986).

¹⁸ Charles-André Bernard (Rome: Gregorian University, 1976).

¹⁹ Juan L. Astigarrago, dir. (Rome: Pont. Inst. Spiritualitatis, 1966-). *The Way, Studies in Formative Spirituality*, and *Nouvelle revue théologique* regularly publish bibliographies and review articles in the field of spirituality. *New Review of Books and Religion* devoted the entire issue 4, April 1980, to books in the field.

²⁰ E.g., Michael Glazier's 12-volume series *The Way of the Christian Mystics*; Crossroad's *Spiritual Classics* series; Frank N. Macgill and Ian P. McGreal, eds., *Christian Spirituality: The Essential Guide to the Most Influential Spiritual Writings of the Christian Tradition* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988).

²¹ E.g., Paulist Press's 60-volume series *Classics of Western Spirituality* and its new series *Sources of American Spirituality*.

Spirit of God (*pneuma*), to its modern use in pre-Vatican II Catholicism.²² Briefly, the adjective "spiritual" was coined by Paul to describe any reality (charisms, blessings, hymns, etc.) that was under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Most importantly, he used it in 1 Cor 2:14–15 to distinguish the "spiritual person" (*pneumatikos*) from the "natural person" (*psychikos anthrōpos*). Paul was not contrasting spiritual with material, living with dead, or good with evil, but the person under the influence of the Spirit of God with the merely natural human being.

This theological distinction continued to govern the term "spiritual" and the derivative substantive "spirituality" throughout the patristic period until the 12th century, when a philosophical meaning developed opposing spirituality to materiality or corporeality. In the 13th century a juridical meaning emerged in which spirituality was opposed to temporality to designate ecclesiastical goods and jurisdiction in contrast to secular property or power. It was in the 17th century, the so-called "golden age of spirituality," that the term came to be applied to the interior life of the Christian. Because of the primary emphasis of the term on the affective dimension of that life, the term often carried pejorative connotations. Thus "spirituality" came to be associated with questionable enthusiasm or even heretical forms of spiritual practice (such as quietism) in contrast to "devotion," which placed a proper emphasis on sobriety and human effort even in the life of the mystic. In the 18th century the elitist emphasis which has been the object of contemporary controversy attached to the word. Spirituality was used to refer to the life of perfection as distinguished from the "ordinary" life of faith, and the role of the spiritual director as the one who possessed the requisite theological expertise to guide the mystic (actual or potential) assumed great importance. By the 19th and early 20th centuries the meaning common just prior to the council, i.e. spirituality as the practice of the interior life by those oriented to the life of perfection, was firmly established.

Contemporary Meaning and Use

As noted above, the term "spirituality" referring to lived experience, i.e. to the reality which the academic discipline studies rather than to the discipline itself, is being used today to denote some experiential

²² The full-length monograph of Lucy Tinsely, *The French Expression for Spirituality and Devotion: A Semantic Study* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1953), was augmented by Jean Leclercq in his article " 'Spiritualitas,' " *Studi medievali* 3 (1963) 279–96, which he wrote in response to the study by Italian historian Gustavo Vinay, " 'Spiritualità': Invito a una discussione," *Studi medievali* 2 (1961) 705–9. Leclercq's study, in turn, has been summarized and augmented by Walter H. Principe, "Toward Defining Spirituality," *Studies in Religion/Sciences religieuses* 12 (1983) 127–41.

reality which characterizes not only Christianity but other religions as well and which, in some analogous fashion, can be predicated of nonreligious or even antireligious phenomena such as secular feminism or Marxism. Arriving at a definition of a term used so broadly has proven extremely difficult. It is possible, however, to discern among authors discussing this issue two basic approaches: a dogmatic position supplying a "definition from above" and an anthropological position providing a "definition from below."

The former is typified by C.-A. Bernard,²³ who equates spirituality in the full sense of the term with the life of the Christian communicated by the Holy Spirit and governed by divine revelation. (This entails, of course, the dependence of the discipline of spirituality on dogmatic theology,²⁴ a position against which I will argue in my second main section.) The latter is typified by J.-C. Breton²⁵ who argues, persuasively in my opinion, that spirituality, i.e. the spiritual life, "could be described as a way of engaging anthropological questions and preoccupations in order to arrive at an ever richer and more authentically human life."²⁶

For the dogmatic approach spirituality is the life derived from grace and therefore any experience which is not explicitly Christian can be called spirituality only by way of extension or comparison. Humanity, i.e. the anthropological givens of human being, merely supplies the conditions for the reception of grace. For the anthropological approach the structure and dynamics of the human person as such are the locus of the emergence of the spiritual life. Spirituality is an activity of human life as such.²⁷ This activity is open to engagement with the Absolute (in which case the spirituality would be religious) in the person of Jesus Christ through the gift of the Holy Spirit (in which case the spirituality would be Christian) but is not limited to such engagement. In principle it is equally available to every human being who is seeking to live an authentically human life.²⁸

In a recent article Jon Alexander surveyed the definitions of spirituality

²³ Charles-André Bernard, *Traité de théologie spirituelle* (Paris: Cerf, 1986).

²⁴ E.g., Megyer, "Theological Trends" 611-62, says that spirituality is a theological discipline because it derives its principles from revelation; that it is subordinate to dogmatic and moral theology, but is not merely the practical application of these disciplines because it pays particular attention to the personal, historical, and experiential aspects of faith and action. He says that, in a sense, spiritual theology could be called "supernatural anthropology" because its material object is the human being as he or she lives spiritually.

²⁵ Jean-Claude Breton, "Retrouver les assises anthropologiques de la vie spirituelle," *Studies in Religion/Sciences religieuses* 17 (1988) 97-105.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 101.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 100.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 103.

given by a number of contemporary scholars in the field²⁹ and concluded that the term is being used by most in an experiential and generic sense,³⁰ i.e. in a sense consonant with the anthropological rather than the dogmatic approach. In other words, there is a growing consensus in recognizing that Christian spirituality is a subset of a broader category that is neither confined to nor defined by Christianity or even by religion.

The obvious disadvantage of this approach is that it gives the term "spirituality" such a wide application that it is very difficult to achieve the clarity and distinction requisite for a useful definition. Raymundo Panikkar, for example, defines spirituality as "one typical way of handling the human condition."³¹ One is tempted to say, "So is alcoholism." The advantages of the anthropological approach, however, outweigh its disadvantages. First, the term is being used this way by increasing numbers of people, both by lay people interested in spirituality as personal experience and by scholars who regard this experience as a subject of study, and there is no way to control the development of language. However vague it may seem, the term is apparently sufficiently connotative to enable people to communicate about the subject matter, and the scholar who insists on a definition which rules out of consideration most of what ordinary people are talking about will find his or her scholarly work largely irrelevant. Second, in our rapidly shrinking world the importance of cross-denominational and interreligious dialogue is rapidly increasing. Scholars like Thomas Merton and Panikkar are not the only thinkers who have insisted that it is not primarily in the area of theology that such dialogue becomes possible and fruitful but in the area of spirituality.³²

It would seem that the most practical way to arrive at a usable definition of spirituality as experience is to extract from the plethora of current definitions³³ the notes which characterize the contemporary un-

²⁹ "What Do Recent Writers Mean by Spirituality?" *Spirituality Today* 32 (1980) 247-56.

³⁰ See Sandra M. Schneiders, "Theology and Spirituality: Strangers, Rivals, or Partners?" *Horizons* 13 (1986) 265-67, for a summary of Alexander's position and my criticism of it.

³¹ Raymundo Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man: Icon-Person-Mystery* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1973) 9.

³² See discussion of this point by Cousins, "Spirituality" 124-25, who calls the interaction between Western and Eastern traditions one of the salient features of contemporary spirituality; William Johnston, *The Inner Eye of Love: Mysticism and Religion* (London: Collins, 1978) 60, who says the mystical experience of the Trinity is the meeting ground for the dialogue between Christianity and the great religions of the East.

³³ Besides the definitions given in Alexander's article (see n. 29 above), descriptions and/or definitions can be found in the following: Antonio Queral, "La 'espiritualidad' como disciplina teológica," *Gregorianum* 60 (1979) 334; Hanson, "Christian Spirituality" 207;

derstanding and to construct a definition which includes them. I have attempted this by defining spirituality as "the experience of consciously striving to integrate one's life in terms not of isolation and self-absorption but of self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives."³⁴ The generally-agreed-upon characteristics included in this definition are the notions of progressive, consciously pursued, personal integration through self-transcendence within and toward the horizon of ultimate concern. If the ultimate concern is God revealed in Jesus Christ and experienced through the gift of the Holy Spirit within the life of the Church, one is dealing with Christian spirituality. But this definition, while excluding the organizing and orienting of one's life in dysfunctional or narcissistic ways (e.g., alcoholism or self-centered eroticism), includes potentially any spirituality, Christian or non-Christian, religious or secular.

At this point, however, it must be realized that while it is possible and, for the reasons given, desirable to define spirituality in such an inclusive way, there is no such thing as "generic spirituality." Spirituality as lived experience is, by definition, determined by the particular ultimate value within the horizon of which the life project is pursued. Consequently, it involves intrinsically some relatively coherent and articulate understanding of both the human being and the horizon of ultimate value (i.e., in Christian terms, theology), some historical tradition, some symbol system, and so on. In order that the discussion may not remain completely formal, throughout the remainder of this article, unless I specify otherwise, I will be speaking of Christian spirituality. Thus, while theology may not be intrinsic to spirituality as such, it is intrinsic to Christian spirituality and therefore to the academic discipline which studies that experience.

CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY AS AN ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE³⁵

Preconciliar Development

The use of the term "spirituality" to denote an academic discipline which studies Christian spirituality as lived experience is a fairly recent development, and the use is not yet established beyond competition from other terms such as "spiritual theology" or "mystical theology." However,

Principe, "Toward Defining Spirituality" 136; Hosmer, "Current Literature in Christian Spirituality" 425; McGinn, "Introduction," *Christian Spirituality* 1, xiv-xvi.

³⁴ Schneiders, "Theology and Spirituality" 266.

³⁵ What is said in this section about Christian spirituality as an academic discipline is applicable, in general and with appropriate modifications, to other spiritualities. While nonreligious spiritualities obviously do not have theologies, they do have ideological structures which function analogously.

as Walter Principe correctly observes,³⁶ and as the titles of research tools in the field increasingly demonstrate, this usage is rapidly gaining ground against its competitors.

Although the term and the discipline are new, they are not without forebears in the history of Christian theology. Recent studies, in the attempt to diagnose and suggest remedies for the "dissociation of sensibility"³⁷ in theology as well as the "spirituality gap"³⁸ in Christian experience, have recalled the premedieval unity of the theological endeavor as an intellectual-spiritual pursuit. Patristic theology would today be called biblical theology or more likely biblical spirituality.³⁹ It consisted principally in an exegetically based interpretation of Scripture for the purpose of understanding and living the faith and/or a biblically elaborated theological exploration of spiritual experience.⁴⁰

The roots of the separation of theology from its spiritual matrix were sown in the Middle Ages as philosophy began to rival Scripture in supplying the categories for systematic theology. At the same time the subject matter of spirituality as Christian experience was placed by Thomas Aquinas in Part 2 of the *Summa theologiae*, thereby making it a subdivision of moral theology, which drew its principles from dogmatic theology. In other words, from being a dimension of all theology spirituality began to appear as a subordinate branch of theology. This situation remained essentially unchanged, despite the elaboration of the

³⁶ "Toward Defining Spirituality" 135-36.

³⁷ This expression of T. S. Eliot is used by Bechtle, "Convergences" 305, for what she calls the post-Enlightenment lobotomizing of Western culture, i.e. the separation of thought from feeling, mind from heart, which was reflected in theology as a separation of theology from spirituality or of Christian thought from Christian living. There came to be two paths to God: the way of knowledge/thought/theory and that of love/prayer/action, the first a journey of the mind and the other a journey of the heart. The same phenomenon is discussed by Louth in *Discerning the Mystery* 1-3. Harvey Egan, "The Devout Christian of the Future Will . . . Be a 'Mystic': Mysticism and Karl Rahner's Theology," in *Theology and Discovery: Essays in Honor of Karl Rahner*, ed. W. J. Kelly (Milwaukee: Marquette University, 1980) 156, remarks that the deeply experiential character of Rahner's theology is "all the more remarkable when one considers the tradition out of which he comes. He had to overcome the radical divorce between spirituality and theology."

³⁸ Richard Lovelace, "The Sanctification Gap," *Theology Today* 29 (1973) 365-66, coined this term to refer to the rationalistic process within the evangelical tradition which so overloaded the conversion process that it left no room for the lifelong process of spiritual growth and resulted in a separation of spirituality from both theological discourse and personal witness.

³⁹ Megyer, "Theological Trends" 56, describes it well as reflection on Christian experience, which led to intensified spiritual life, in contrast to scholastic theology, which was "scientific, theoretical and dry speculation."

⁴⁰ For a fuller historical treatment of this topic, see Sandra M. Schneiders, "Scripture and Spirituality," *Christian Spirituality* 1, 1-20.

discipline of spiritual theology itself, until the 1960s.⁴¹

In the 17th century we meet the first use of the term "ascetical theology" to denote a branch of dogma dealing with the principles of the spiritual life. In the 18th and 19th centuries, following the development during the 17th century of an intense interest in Christian perfection and especially in the mystical life, the spiritual life became the object of study and teaching in its own right. This field of study was called "spiritual theology" and its object was defined as "the science of perfection." It had two branches or subdivisions: "ascetical theology," which studied the life of perfection (i.e., the spiritual life that had developed beyond the keeping of the commandments and the fulfilment of the ordinary duties of Christian life) in its active or premystical phase, and "mystical theology," which studied the life of perfection subsequent to the onset of passive mystical experience.⁴²

The early 20th century saw the publication of the standard textbooks in spiritual theology,⁴³ which concurred in specifying the proper object of the discipline as the perfection of the Christian life and in situating it as a subdivision of moral theology which draws its principles from dogmatic theology but is superior to both because of its finality in lived holiness. It consisted in a speculative part which explored the doctrinal principles of the Christian life, a practical part which described and prescribed the means by which to develop this life, and the art of applying these principles and means to the individual.

Until the conciliar era most scholars in the field were in basic agreement about the general outline, basic content, and method of the field of spiritual theology. The only real controversy centered on the question, still being discussed today,⁴⁴ of the continuity or discontinuity of the mystical life with the life of Christian holiness to which all the baptized are called. In other words, the question is whether mysticism is the normal development of the life of faith or an extraordinary state to which only some, in virtue of a wholly gratuitous vocation, are invited.

⁴¹ Megyer, "Theological Trends" 58-61, surveys the situation of spirituality under moral theology by such scholars as Congar, Maritain, Vandenbroucke, and Mouroux.

⁴² G. B. Scaramelli (1867-1952) was the first, apparently, to establish "ascetical and mystical theology" as one of the sacred disciplines, with the distinction between the two in terms of whether the activity of the spiritual life was acquired or infused.

⁴³ E.g., Adolphe Tanquerey, *The Spiritual Life: A Treatise on Ascetical and Mystical Theology* (2nd ed.; Tournai: Desclée, 1930); Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life* (2 vols.; New York: Herder, 1948).

⁴⁴ Karl Rahner takes up this issue in "Everyday Mysticism," in *The Practice of Faith: A Handbook of Contemporary Spirituality*, ed. K. Lehmann and L. Raffelt (New York: Crossroad, 1986) 69-70, and decides in favor of the continuity position. Rahner's position is elaborated by Egan in "Mysticism and Karl Rahner's Theology" 149.

The modern discussion, especially since Vatican II's stress on the universal call to holiness, has tended more and more to the former position, and this probably has favored the growing preference for the inclusive term "spirituality" as a designation for the field which studies Christian religious experience over the term "spiritual theology" with its division into ascetical and mystical theology.⁴⁵

Contemporary Discipline of Spirituality

Vocabulary

Dense terminological confusion surrounds the developing academic discipline which studies what we have defined as spirituality. As already noted, the development of language cannot be controlled by fiat. Consequently, all that can be attempted here is to sort out the confusion, pin down the various uses of terms, and suggest a coherent vocabulary. Whether the latter will prevail depends on factors beyond the control of the written word.

There is a historical connection on the one hand between what was called in the 19th century "the life of Christian perfection" and what is today called "Christian spirituality," and on the other hand between the 19th-century discipline of "spiritual theology" and the contemporary academic discipline of "Christian spirituality." However, there are obvious and important discontinuities as well.

The expansion of the term "spirituality" to include non-Christian and even nonreligious spiritual experience entails an understanding of the discipline which is not necessarily theological. Thus, since the relation, if any, of theology to a particular spirituality is not determined by the nature of the discipline as such, the question of how the discipline of Christian spirituality is related to theology must be addressed. I have elsewhere proposed that Christian spirituality can be called a theological discipline only if theology is understood as an umbrella term for all of the sacred sciences, i.e. for all religious studies carried out in the context of explicit reference to revelation and explicitly affirmed confessional commitment. But if theology is strictly understood, i.e. as systematic and moral theology, then spirituality is not a theological discipline for the same reasons that church history or biblical exegesis would not be called theological disciplines. Although spirituality and theology in the strict sense are mutually related in that theology is a moment in the study of spirituality and vice versa, theology does not contain or control spirituality. In other words, I have proposed that spirituality is not a subdivision of either dogmatic or moral theology.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Megyer, "Theological Trends" 58.

⁴⁶ Schneiders, "Theology and Spirituality" 271-73.

Those scholars who defend the opposite thesis, i.e. that spirituality is a subdivision of theology in the strict sense, do so for one of three reasons. A few continue to think that spirituality derives its principles from the systematic elaboration of revelation,⁴⁷ i.e. from dogmatic and/or moral theology, of which it is therefore a subdivision. Others consider spirituality a theological discipline in the strict sense because, after describing the data of spiritual experience, the scholar of Christian spirituality judges that experience against a normative faith position.⁴⁸ The majority of those who see spirituality as a strictly theological discipline take this position because they are convinced that good theology is rooted in religious experience, reflects upon that experience, and nourishes the religious experience of the theologian and the church community.⁴⁹

Some of the scholars who prefer the term "spiritual theology," especially those in the last-named category, also tend to use the terms "spiritual theology" and "mystical theology" interchangeably. For two reasons this seems to me an unfortunate terminological move. First, both mystical theology and spiritual theology are terms which have specific historical meanings, and using them for something other than what they historically designated introduces unnecessary confusion into the contemporary discussion. Mystical theology, as it was used in the premedieval period, referred not to systematic theological reflection *on* mystical experience, i.e. to what Rahner correctly calls the "theology of mysticism,"⁵⁰ but to the obscure knowledge of God experienced *in and through* mystical experience precisely in contradistinction to the knowledge of God arrived at through systematic theology. As the medieval theologian Jean Gerson said, "[m]ystical theology is experimental knowledge of God through the embrace of unitive love."⁵¹ Merton makes the distinction between mystical and systematic theology well when he says:

Beyond the labor of argument it [contemplation] finds rest in faith and beneath the noise of discourse it apprehends the Truth, not in distinct and clear-cut definitions but in the limpid obscurity of a single intuition that unites all dogmas in one simple Light, shining into the soul directly from God's eternity, without the medium of created concept, without the intervention of symbols or of language or the likenesses of material things.⁵²

⁴⁷ This is Megyer's position in "Theological Trends" 61-62.

⁴⁸ Principe, "Toward Defining Spirituality" 139-40.

⁴⁹ Some who take this position are Bechtel, "Convergences" 305-14; Egan, "Mysticism and Karl Rahner's Theology" 140 and elsewhere; Johnston, *The Inner Eye of Love* 53, 56, and elsewhere; Alan Jones, "Spirituality and Theology," *Review for Religious* 39 (1980) 161-76; M. Basil Pennington, "Spiritual Theology," *America* 155 (1986) 87.

⁵⁰ Karl Rahner, "The Theology of Mysticism," in *The Practice of Faith* 70-77.

⁵¹ Cited by Jones, "Spirituality and Theology" 170.

⁵² Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1962) 148.

The difference between mystical theology and systematic theology, in other words, is not in *what* is apprehended (the divine Mystery) but in *how* it is apprehended. Systematic theology remains discursive and categorical even when it reflects on mystical experience, including the experience of the theologian himself or herself. And, as Merton says, even mystical theologians usually have recourse to the categories of systematic theology when they want to explain the knowledge received in contemplation.⁵³

Spiritual theology, as has been explained, was the technical term used from the 17th century to our own time to denote that branch of theology, subordinate to dogmatics, which studied the Christian life of perfection in its ascetical and mystical realizations. Since we are still very much in the process of trying to liberate the contemporary discipline of spirituality from its tutelage to dogmatics and to broaden its scope to include the whole of the human search for self-transcendent integration and authenticity, it is not helpful to use this historically freighted term to speak of the contemporary discipline.

The second and more serious disadvantage of referring to experientially rooted systematic theology as spiritual (or mystical) theology is that it pre-empts the discussion of the proper relationship between spirituality and theology in favor of subordination of the former to the latter. Obviously, when the spirituality under discussion is religious, Christian or otherwise, theology is integrally involved. But the question of how it is involved is one which must not be decided by a premature subsuming of spirituality under theology.

I find most convincing and clarifying the position that regards spirituality as an autonomous discipline which functions in partnership and mutuality with theology. It is a relationship analogous to that between biblical studies and theology. Theology is a moment within the study of spirituality insofar as it is essential to the full interpretation of Christian spiritual experience.⁵⁴ Spirituality, as Keith Egan has explained⁵⁵ and William Thompson demonstrated,⁵⁶ is a moment integral to theology,

⁵³ Ibid. 149: "And yet when the contemplative returns from the depths of his simple experience of God and attempts to communicate it to men, he necessarily comes once again under the control of the theologian and his language is bound to strive after the clarity and distinctness and accuracy that canalize Catholic tradition."

⁵⁴ Cf. Harold Hatt, "Christian Experience, Systematic Theology, and the Seminary Curriculum," *Encounter* 36 (1975) 195.

⁵⁵ Egan's contribution is recorded by Vernon Gregson, "Seminar on Spirituality: Spirituality as a Source for Theology," *Catholic Theological Society of America Proceedings* 38 (1983) 124.

⁵⁶ In his *Fire and Light: The Saints and Theology: On Consulting the Saints, Mystics, and Martyrs in Theology* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist, 1987), Thompson uses specific problems

both because it raises questions which theology must consider and because it supplies data for theological reflection. Rahner has made this point concretely in relation to the theological study of mysticism. He insists that the empirical mystic supplies data for the theologian which is not available from the traditional sources⁵⁷ and that this data is not only useful but necessary for a theological study of the experience.

Naming the Discipline

Throughout the preceding sections I have indicated my conviction that, despite its inherent polyvalence, the term "spirituality" is the most useful name for the emerging discipline. I now offer four reasons for this position.

First, if the emerging contemporary discipline which studies what we have defined as spirituality (in the anthropological sense) is to develop freely in terms of its proper subject matter and the appropriate scholarly approaches, especially in the context of Christian theological scholarship, it is crucial that it distance itself from its 19th-century forebears. Spirituality is related to 19th-century spiritual theology in much the same way that experimental psychology since Freud is related to scholastic rational psychology. The discontinuity, at the moment, is at least as important as the historical link, and new terminology is needed to underscore this point.

Second, by eliminating the term "theology" from the name of the new discipline we can avoid a premature resolution of the question of how spirituality (especially religious spirituality) is related to theology. Even more importantly, we can avoid the subordination of spirituality to theology which would foreclose the very contributions which an autonomous discipline of spirituality is capable of making to the theological enterprise itself.

Third, the term "spirituality," precisely because it has little history in the academy and is not necessarily a theological term, has great potential for facilitating comparative and cross-traditional inquiry and dialogue. It is truly remarkable that a term which only 20 years ago connoted suspect enthusiasm or mindless piety in Protestant circles and was virtually unknown to Judaism, Eastern traditions, Native American religion, the new religious movements, or secular systems of life integra-

in theology and in spirituality to demonstrate the mutual relationship between the two disciplines.

⁵⁷ Rahner, "The Theology of Mysticism" 74, says that nothing in his position implies that the "theology of mysticism can only be constituted from the same sources and via the same methods as those employed by traditional dogmatic theology (Scripture, the magisterium, Church tradition, and so on)."

tion is now used freely within all of these circles. Even those who know that the term is historically Catholic do not seem to feel that it belongs to Catholicism or that to discuss spirituality is to appear on Catholic turf or to accept Catholic ground rules. It is very interesting that the Crossroad series includes a volume on ancient Greek, Roman, and Egyptian spirituality.⁵⁸ Although from a strictly historical perspective this use of the term is clearly anachronistic, it functions well for discussion of a particular dimension of the experience of classical antiquity. In short, by using the term "spirituality" for the discipline, we can identify the subject matter without freighting the discussion with disciplinary, denominational, or ideological presuppositions.

Fourth, spirituality better denotes the subject matter of the discipline than other narrower terms. This is true even when Christian spirituality is the specific area of inquiry. A striking illustration of this occurs in Rahner's essay on the theology of mysticism.⁵⁹ He engages the often-discussed question of whether mysticism is a higher state of Christian life to which only some are called, i.e. a nonconstitutive experience in relation to the Christian vocation. He answers that theologically there is no essential difference between ordinary faith experience and mystical experience, but then goes on to recognize that empirically there is a marked difference. He concludes (p. 73):

When and to whatever extent such experiences [mystical phenomena of a psychological kind such as altered states of consciousness, paranormal experiences, etc.] occur (to the point of enjoying "essential" differences of a psychological kind), it is the mystic and the experimental psychologist within whose competency an investigation of these phenomena falls, not that of the dogmatic theologian.

In other words, mysticism is the type of subject which, if it is to be studied "in the round" as religious experience, must be explored in an interdisciplinary way. One of the relevant disciplines is theology, but constitutive elements of the phenomenon are outside the competence of theology. A scholar in the field of spirituality would agree with Rahner that one other relevant discipline is psychology, but would recognize that comparative religion, anthropology, theory of myth and symbolism, history, literary interpretation, and other disciplines are also relevant. Spirituality better denotes the subject matter of this interdisciplinary field than narrower terms such as "spiritual theology."

⁵⁸ A. H. Armstrong, ed., *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality: Egyptian, Greek, Roman* (New York: Crossroad, 1986).

⁵⁹ Rahner, "The Theology of Mysticism."

Defining the Discipline

We can now attempt to describe the contemporary discipline which studies "the experience of consciously striving to integrate one's life in terms of self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives." *Spirituality is the field of study which attempts to investigate in an interdisciplinary way spiritual experience as such*, i.e. as spiritual and as experience. I use the expression "spiritual experience" to indicate that the subject matter is not only religious experience in the technical sense but those analogous experiences of ultimate meaning and value which have transcendent and life-integrating power for individuals and groups.

Several characteristics of this emerging discipline should be highlighted, because in combination they help to distinguish it from related fields of study. First, spirituality is essentially an interdisciplinary discipline, or what Van Harvey felicitously called "a field-encompassing field."⁶⁰ Although theology is an important moment within the investigation of religious experience (as we saw in the case of mysticism), it is precisely because spirituality is interested in the experience *as* experience, i.e. in its phenomenological wholeness, that it must utilize whatever approaches are relevant to the reality being studied. In the case of Christian spirituality, usually at least biblical studies, history, theology, psychology, and comparative religion must be involved in the investigation of any significant subject in the field.⁶¹

Second, spirituality is a descriptive-critical rather than prescriptive-normative discipline. Unlike spiritual theology, which aimed to apply unquestioned principles derived from revelation and tradition to the life of the Christian, spirituality wishes to understand religious experience as it occurs. As in any field, the scholar in the field of spirituality will make critical judgments about the adequacy of such experience using norms derived from various disciplines including theology.⁶² And spirit-

⁶⁰ Van A. Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer: The Morality of Historical Knowledge and Christian Belief* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966) 54-59.

⁶¹ Principe, if I understand him correctly, takes a different view of the pluralistic approach to spirituality. Rather than conceive of the discipline of spirituality as itself interdisciplinary, he takes spirituality as the unitary subject matter, which is then studied historically (history of spirituality), theologically (spiritual theology), in terms of its cultural setting (sociology of spirituality), etc. See "Toward Defining Spirituality" 139-40.

⁶² Principe (see n. 61 above) distinguishes a history-of-religions approach to spirituality from a theological approach at precisely this point. He says that after describing the spirituality in question, the theologian goes on to evaluate the data against a normative faith position. At this point one is involved in spiritual theology. I believe that the theologically critical moment is integral to the study of the experience under investigation, just as a psychologically critical moment is, without either one translating the study into another field, e.g. theology or psychology.

uality as a discipline has, as one of its ends, to facilitate healthy religious experience in much the same way that the study of psychology is directed toward therapy. But spirituality is not the "practical application" of theoretical principles, theological or other, to concrete life experience. It is the critical study of such experience.

Third, spirituality is ecumenical, interreligious, and cross-cultural. This does not mean that every investigation in the field is comparative in nature but rather that the context within which spiritual experience is studied is anthropologically inclusive. Even the study of Christian spirituality as such does not proceed on the assumption that Christianity exhausts or includes the whole of religious reality or that only Christian data is relevant for an understanding of Christian spiritual experience. A study of Christian mysticism, for example, must be carried on within and in terms of the ongoing cross-cultural and interreligious discussion of mysticism, religious and nonreligious, as a human experience.

Fourth, spirituality is a holistic discipline in that its inquiry into human spiritual experience is not limited to explorations of the explicitly religious, i.e. the so-called "interior life." The psychological, bodily, historical, social, political, aesthetic, intellectual, and other dimensions of the human subject of spiritual experience are integral to that experience insofar as it is the subject matter of the discipline of spirituality.

It is not amiss to remark that the emphasis in spirituality on inclusivity, wholeness, integration, and the validation of experience creates a particular affinity between spirituality and feminism, which embraces as values in both life and scholarship these very characteristics. The volume of writing in feminist spirituality testifies to this affinity.⁶³ Some authors have even identified feminist sensibility as a characteristic of the contemporary discipline of spirituality.⁶⁴

Aside from these characteristics, the practice of the discipline involves the conjunction of a particular *type of object* (the individual as opposed to the general), a particular *methodological style* (participation), a general "ideal" *procedure* (description-critical analysis-constructive appropriation), and a particular kind of *objective* (plural rather than singular) which further qualifies and distinguishes it.

Paul Ricoeur referred to the study of texts as a "science of the

⁶³ For a brief but excellent introduction to feminist spirituality, see Anne Carr, "On Feminist Spirituality," in *Women's Spirituality: Resources for Christian Development*, ed. Joann W. Conn (New York/Mahwah: Paulist, 1986) 49-58.

⁶⁴ Keith Egan suggested this in the context of the seminar discussion at the 1983 CTSA convention as recorded by Gregson, "Seminar on Spirituality" 124. See also Hosmer, "Current Literature in Christian Spirituality" 426.

individual,"⁶⁵ by which he meant to insist that the logic of probability consisting in the convergence of mutually supportive indices arrived at through a dialectic of explanation and understanding can provide the appropriately scientific knowledge of a reality which is studied and known not as a member of a class or a verification of a principle but precisely as an individual. Spirituality is characteristically involved in the study of individuals: texts, persons, particular spiritual traditions such as Benedictinism, elements of spiritual experience such as discernment, interrelations of factors in particular situations such as the mutual relation of prayer and social commitment, concrete processes such as spiritual direction, etc. While making use of a plurality of specific methods, the discipline itself has no one method of its own.⁶⁶ Rather, methods function in the explanatory moment of the hermeneutical dialectic between explanation and understanding.

The methodological style of spirituality as a discipline must be described as participative. It is certainly the case that most, if not all, students in the field come to the discipline out of and because of their personal involvement with its subject matter. And virtually all intend not only to do research and teach in the field when they graduate but to "practice" in the field in some pastoral sense of the word.⁶⁷ But the question of the relation of praxis to the discipline is most complicated in regard to the actual "doing" of spirituality.

Like psychology, spirituality deals with material that often cannot be understood except through analogy with personal experience. Spirituality deals with spiritual experience as such, not merely with ideas about or principles governing such experience (although these certainly have a role in the research). Just as one cannot understand anxiety unless one has experienced it, or the therapeutic process unless one has participated in it, it is difficult to imagine that one could understand mysticism, discernment, or spiritual direction without some personal participation in a spiritual life in which these phenomena or their analogues were

⁶⁵ Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University, 1976) 79.

⁶⁶ Edward Kinerk, "Toward a Method for the Study of Spirituality," *Review for Religious* 40 (1981) 3-19, proposes that Lonergan's method can be adapted for the study of spirituality. The problem with his proposal is that he seems to reduce the subject matter of spirituality to historical studies of spiritualities (in the sense of schools or traditions), whereas the studies in the field are of extremely diverse subjects, e.g. discernment, social-justice involvement, spirituality movements, bodily ramifications of spiritual experience, prayer, mysticism, etc.

⁶⁷ I say this on the basis of personal experience with doctoral students and am indebted to the students in the doctoral program in Christian spirituality at the Graduate Theological Union for their help in reflecting on this aspect of the issue.

experienced. Furthermore, as students readily testify, research in the area of spirituality is self-implicating, often at a very deep level, and the transformation experienced through study reverberates in the ongoing research.

All of this raises serious questions about the appropriate objectivity of the discipline, and where there is a mistrust of spirituality in the academy it tends to center on this issue. Some scholars fear that personal spiritual practice will be substituted for research in arriving at conclusions; others that critical judgment will be clouded by religious commitment; others that programs in spirituality will function as clandestine formation programs or evangelization agencies. While these fears are belied by the quality of research and publication of both doctoral students and mature scholars in the field, there is no question that this issue of the participant nature of the discipline requires further investigation and clarification.

Third, studies in spirituality tend to involve a three-dimensional approach which, while not a "method" in the strict sense, does give a recognizable and distinguishing shape to many studies in the field and might eventually permit the type of cumulation of research results that has so far not been possible. The first phase is essentially descriptive and intends to surface the data concerning the experience being investigated. In this phase historical, textual, and comparative studies are of primary importance. The second phase is essentially analytical and critical, leading to an explanation and evaluation of the subject. Here the theological, human, and social sciences are of particular importance. The third phase is synthetic and/or constructive, and leads to appropriation.⁶⁸ Hermeneutical theory governs this final phase. Not every study in the field of spirituality will involve all three dimensions nor will they always occur in this order. But experience suggests that this type of approach distinguishes serious studies in the field.

Fourth, spirituality as a discipline seems to have an irreducibly triple finality. While research in the field is aimed first of all at the production of cumulative knowledge, there is no denying that it is also intended by most students to assist them in their own spiritual lives and to enable them to foster the spiritual lives of others. While this triple finality contrasts with the traditional understanding of an academic discipline, it is actually not much different from the objective of the study of psychology or art. And increasingly even speculative theologians are realizing that good theology is not an exercise in abstract thought but reflection on the lived experience of the church community which should affect that life.

⁶⁸ I am using the term "appropriation" as Ricoeur does in *Interpretation Theory* 91-95, to refer to the transformational actualization of meaning.

CONCLUSION

No attentive observer of the contemporary cultural scene can fail to recognize the breadth and power of the "spirituality phenomenon" in virtually every part of the world. In the West various theories have been adduced to explain it. Some see it as the natural and even necessary culmination of the psychoanalytic movement inaugurated by Freud. Others attribute it to the final disillusionment with the Enlightenment ideal of progress generated by the wars of the 20th century. Others think it is a response to the meaninglessness of existence in mass society. And some believe it is the proper name for the wholesome breeze that entered through the windows opened by Vatican II. But whatever its cause(s), there is no denying its grip on the contemporary imagination.

Although the interest in spirituality sometimes produces superficial, unhealthy, bizarre, and even evil manifestations, it represents, on the whole, a profound and authentic desire of 20th-century humanity for wholeness in the midst of fragmentation, for community in the face of isolation and loneliness, for liberating transcendence, for meaning in life, for values that endure. Human beings are spirit in the world, and spirituality is the effort to understand and realize the potential of that extraordinary and paradoxical condition.⁶⁹

It is not surprising that scholars have been drawn to study this phenomenon. But what is more than surprising is the speed with which the original interest in charting and even measuring the phenomenon and then in facilitating the spiritual development of laity and ministers has become a serious, critical engagement with the subject matter within the academy. In the space of a couple of decades a new discipline has emerged. Spirituality is by no means a full-grown participant in the academy. Neither its self-definition nor its relationship with other disciplines is clearly established. It has not arrived at a commonly accepted vocabulary nor developed a sufficiently articulated approach to its subject matter to allow for the steady cumulation of research results that marks a mature field of inquiry.

Nevertheless, a steadily increasing number of graduate students are choosing spirituality as an area of specialization. Courses in the discipline are multiplying at the undergraduate and graduate levels. The tools of research and the organs for the communication of research are being developed. Serious and ongoing discussion is being pursued in academic societies and institutions. And some scholars from the traditional main-

⁶⁹ This is the very point which cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker made in his Pulitzer Prize-winning study of the human condition, *The Denial of Death* (New York: Macmillan, 1973). He says toward the end of the book: "The distinctive human problem from time immemorial has been the need to spiritualize human life. . ." (231).

line disciplines are discovering that their deepest interests can be discussed more freely in the precincts of spirituality and are bringing the expertise of their developed scholarship to the new discussion. Spirituality stands at the junction where the deepest concerns of humanity and the contemporary concern with interdisciplinarity, cross-cultural exchange, interreligious dialogue, feminist scholarship, the integration of theory and praxis, and the hermeneutical turn come together. If the present of spirituality as an academic discipline is somewhat confused, it is also very exciting.