



THE LETTER AND THE SPIRIT: SPIRITUALITY AS AN ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE

Bernard McGinn

The late Justice Potter Stewart was the source of the noted remark, "I don't know how to define obscenity, but I sure know it when I see it." Much the same can be said for spirituality. Obscenity, despite endless debates and not a few court decisions, still lies mostly in the eye of the beholder. Spirituality, which cannot profit from legal decisions about community standards for its possible identity, usually has to rely on the fickleness of academics to try to speak its name, though this fact has never prevented people from just doing it and not bothering about defining it. Academics, unfortunately, do need to be attentive to issues of description and definition.

Both spirituality and obscenity are also linked by a common semantic explosion—everybody seems to be talking about them, though often at cross-purposes. The debate over obscenity, of course, gets into the news more frequently, but the documentation on the prolific growth of the term "spirituality" in recent American culture is

substantial, and it involves not only those interested in religion. I await the moment (perhaps not far off), when a product will be advertised on national television because of the contribution it makes to some form of spirituality.

In 1961 the Italian medievalist Gustavo Vinay referred to spirituality as "a necessary pseudoconcept we don't know how to replace" (706). It is certainly the kind of pseudoconcept which seems to have a life of its own, whether academics oppose it or attempt to profit from its ubiquity. Given the relative novelty of "spirituality" to many, as well as the ambiguity that allows it to be used so variously (often in contradictory fashion) a case could certainly be made that the term should be dropped from the contemporary study of religion. But I am convinced that despite the ambiguities of the word, there are important issues at stake in spirituality's recent popularity, as well as considerable contributions that the study of spirituality can bring to religion in the decades ahead. Trying to present this case is not easy, because it requires a survey of the history of the term followed by reflections on definition and methodology in religious studies—issues that make all but the most academic eyes glaze over.

Spirituality is not a new word in English. As used in the fifteenth century, it generally meant either an episcopal gathering (i.e., a spirituality of bishops, the equivalent of a pride of lions), or ecclesiastical possessions or revenues. These are not the meanings most of us have in mind when we talk of spirituality today, however much we hope bishops may be spiritual men. But as early as the fourteenth century "spirituality, (or spirituality)" was to be found in the more ancient sense of the quality or condition of being spiritual, as can be seen in *Piers Plowman* (Passus 5

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of the B text) where Wrath relates how he delights in setting friars against parish priests:

I, Wrath, walke with hem and wisse hem of my bokes,
Thus they speken of spiritualte, that either despitheth
oother

Til they be bothe beggars and by my spiritualte libben,
Or ellis al riche and ridden aboute (lines 146-48).

It is noteworthy that Langland's view of spirituality is already particularized into special forms, and is also capable of being twisted to the devil's purpose by Wrath. The problems of spirituality and its perversions seem to go back to its earliest English appearances.

Where then did the term originate and what is its history? The role of the spirit (*ruah*) of God in the Old Testament was the foundation for the New Testament emphasis on the importance of the "spirit" (*pneuma*) and the qualifier "spiritual" (*pneumatikos*) in the foundational Christian documents. In Luke-Acts the Spirit is in Jesus in the act of establishing the community (e.g., Lk. 4:14, Ac. 2:32-33). Paul identifies the Risen Lord with the *pneuma* (e.g., 2 Cor. 3:17, 1 Cor. 6:17), and John emphasizes the rebirth in the Spirit and in truth (e.g., Jn. 3:3-8, 4:23, and the Last Discourses). As is well known, the Christian opposition between "flesh" (*sarx*) and "spirit" originally had nothing to do with a dualistic anthropology contrasting body and soul, but rather addressed the concrete human choices between life lived according to egoistic satisfaction and that conducted according to God's purpose. Despite popular accounts to the contrary, few patristic and medieval theologians missed this point, though they often had difficulties harmonizing it with the dualistic Platonic anthropology they adopted from Hellenistic sources. (For more information regarding the term's history, see Leclercq; Alexander; or Principe. For New Testament study, see Schweizer.)

Spiritualis, the Latin translation of *pneumatikos*, appears 22 times in the Vulgate of St. Jerome, but it was not until the fifth century that we find the noun *spiritualitas*, appearing in a letter anciently ascribed to St. Jerome: "Age ut in spiritualitate proficias," that is, "Act in order to grow in spirituality." (This fifth-century text, found in PL 30:115A, has been doubtfully ascribed to both Pelagius and to Faustus of Riez.) It is clear that in this text, the term still bears the meaning that *pneumatikos* had from the origins of Christianity—increase your hold on the Spirit of Jesus, the source of the Christian life. This is the way in which the substantive was used in its rare appearances in the early Middle Ages. (See Leclercq 281-84) In the twelfth century, however, *spiritualitas* was employed more frequently and more diversely. Not only was it used in the traditional sense of the power animating Christian life, but

it began to be used by Scholastic theologians, Gilbert of Poitiers for example, in a naturalistic and philosophical way, as what pertains to the soul as contrasted with the body. The perhaps unavoidable mingling of these two meanings in later Christian history has been one of the less happy consequences of Scholasticism—the root of those conceptions of spirituality which willy-nilly used it as the reason for giving the physical world and especially the human body a largely negative role in what they conceived of as authentic Christian life. Thomas Aquinas forms an interesting example of a bridge figure. According to the *Index Thomisticus*, the term appears about seventy times, and Thomas seems usually to think of *spiritualitas* in the traditional sense of integral Christian perfection, as when he says that "Sanctificatio gratiae pertinet ad spiritualitatem," or "Sanctification by grace belongs to spirituality." But he is not above using the newer philosophical mode in which spirituality means what belongs to the soul as soul. It was also in the thirteenth century that *spiritualitas* found a juridical use, being applied to ecclesiastical offices and goods.

The later Middle Ages was the era of the great migration of Latin terminology into the vernaculars of Europe whose descendents we still use in our theological constructions. According to Lucy Tinsely's study, the first emigre of *spiritualitas* appears in the Old French *espiritualite* of the mid-thirteenth century, though this word was most often employed in the jurisdictional sense. The fourteenth and fifteenth-century Middle English examples cited above are indicative of the spread of the term throughout the late medieval vernaculars. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, in Johannes Altenstaig's *Vocabulary of Theology*, the Latin adjective *spirituale* still kept its biblical meaning as referring to the whole person's way of acting (Raitt, 454-56), but during the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there seems to have been a gradual shift of "spirituality," both in Latin and in the vernaculars, toward signifying only the inner dispositions, the interior states of the soul. This is the way we find it used in John of the Cross, for example, in the words "And if, now that the spirit has achieved spirituality [*espiritualidad*] in this way..." In seventeenth century France "spirituality" was widely used in the sense of "Everything connected with the interior exercises of the soul free of the senses which seeks only to be perfected in the eyes of God," as one dictionary puts it (Leclercq 293-94). But the crisis of mysticism caused by the condemnation of Quietism at the end of the seventeenth century had its effect on the popularity of "spirituality," as we can see in Voltaire's ironic references to "*la nouvelle spiritualité*" of Madame Guyon and Francois Fenelon (Principe 132). In the eighteenth and nineteenth

centuries the terms "devotion" and "piety" became far more popular among both Catholics and Protestants. Jon Alexander, for example, points out that "spirituality" was used in the nineteenth century mostly by free religious groups, the same groups who kept alive interest in such suspect figures as Madame Guyon (248). On the academic side, the dogmatic categories of ascetical and mystical theology favored by the Italian Jesuit Giovanni Battista Scaramelli (1687-1752) won the day. Up to the middle of the present century, among Roman Catholics at least, ascetical and mystical theology was still the preferred term for what is now almost universally referred to as either spiritual theology or spirituality.

The reasons for the revival of the term "spirituality" in France around the beginning of this century remain something of a mystery. Auguste Soudreau, who was using the term in 1900, issued his *Manuel de spiritualité* in 1916, and Pierre Pourrat's very successful four-volume *La spiritualité catholique* was published between 1918 and 1928. The Jesuit Joseph de Guibert also began employing the term extensively, and in 1932 the first fascicule of the great *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* appeared. By 1943 when Etienne Gilson gave the inaugural lecture for the establishment of the chair of the history of spirituality at the Institut Catholique in Paris, spirituality had definitely arrived.

Spirituality became popular more gradually in English, being first introduced among Catholics in dependence on the French, and, according to Principe, appears first in 20th century English in the 1922 translation of Pourrat (134). Alexander's survey of the *Catholic Periodical Index* turned up only 11 uses in titles of articles between 1930 and 1964 and no less than 146 uses between 1965 and 1976 (149). By the 1970s the all-powerful gravitational pull of spirituality was as evident in America as it was in France. One sign was the capitulation of the journals. The French Jesuit periodical which had started out "Scaramellianly" as the *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique* in 1920 changed its name to the *Revue d'histoire de la spiritualité* in 1972, and in 1977 the American journal *Cross and Crown* became *Spirituality Today*.

God alone probably knows how many appearances of "spirituality" can be found in journal articles of the past fifteen years. On the American scene, these same fifteen years have witnessed the publication of the Classics of Western Spirituality series (seventy-seven volumes since 1978), and the commencement of *World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest*, of which eleven volumes have appeared since 1985. A number of single-volume dictionaries of spirituality have also become available, as well as countless books, academic and popular, with "spirituality" in the title. It is now possible to take a Ph.D. degree in spirituality in at least four American

universities (Fordham, Catholic University, Duquesne and the Berkeley GTU). Perhaps most surprising has been the willingness not only of non-Catholic Christians but even non-Christians to embrace the term spirituality, as has been demonstrated by the *World Spirituality* project (though, to be sure, this was not without its conflicts and difficulties). One may think of the growth of the term "spirituality" in the past generation as either a good or a bad thing, but it is certainly a major new factor on the map of American religion.

In the second and longer part of this paper, I wish to consider the role of spirituality, whatever it may be, primarily in terms of religious academia, that is, the teaching of religion in all its aspects. I will do so under three headings. First, what is spirituality and how are we to relate it to other disciplines that concern the study of religion? Second, should it be taught? And third, how should it be taught?

Without by any means making an exhaustive search, I recently turned up some thirty-five different definitions of spirituality, both "first-order" definitions, that is, ones concerned with the phenomenon itself, and "second-order" definitions treating of the study of spirituality. Most of the second-order definitions are of the theological variety. (Second-order definitions of an anthropological and historical-contextual type usually add nothing to the first-order definition except the qualification of "the study of." It would be, of course, possible to add qualifications about the perspective used in such study, though in the case of defining mysticism this appears to have been rarely done, at least in the sense of entering into the definition itself. Walter Principe, on pp. 135-36, makes an interesting distinction between three levels of spirituality: (a) the real or existential level; (b) the level of a formulation of a teaching about the lived reality, as in Ignatian spirituality; and (c) the study by scholars of the first and especially the second levels.)

At first glance, this might seem to indicate total semantic chaos, but things are not quite that dismal. These descriptions and definitions tend to fall into broad groups exhibiting common features, however much they differ in details. At this stage in the evolution of the discipline (if such it be), semantic confusion and vigorous debate is probably not a bad thing, especially insofar as it tends to clarify the current state of the question. I also think that it is possible for scholars to disagree about what is primary in the notion of spirituality and still work together in productive fashion because they are convinced that there is something primary about spirituality itself, however conceived.

Sandra Schneiders in her important 1989 article

"Spirituality in the Academy" suggests two kinds of approaches to spirituality—"a dogmatic position supplying a 'definition from above' and an anthropological position supplying a 'definition from below'" (Schneiders, 682). I think that the picture is actually more complicated than that, because there is a third option, an historical-contextual one. I would like to suggest that rather than the model of above-and-below (which is not a very nuanced view of how much contemporary theology deals with the problem of relating God and world), it would be better to think of recent views of spirituality as trying to relate various theological, anthropological and historical-contextual ways of conceiving the connection between limited and unlimited value systems. It is also important to note that a number of investigators provide both general definitions of spirituality, as well as scientific definitions of Christian spirituality, a process that often enables them to combine two or all three approaches.

Be not afraid. I do not intend to discuss thirty-five different definitions of spirituality, anymore than I would as many legal definitions of obscenity. But I do need to provide some key examples of important definitions and to reflect on what camps they fall into in order to frame my own understanding of the state of the field. I apologize for the way in which often subtle and extensive presentations will be summarized here—few of the authors cited will probably be happy with my brief characterizations of their position in the paragraphs that follow.

Older examples of definitions of spirituality, largely Catholic in provenance, were often second-order definitions emphasizing the theological character of the discipline to the exclusion, at least by implication, of anthropology, history and the human sciences as having any constitutive role. Pierre Pourret was more resolute than most of his followers when he affirmed early in this century that "Spirituality is that part of theology which deals with Christian perfection and the ways that lead to it," but this view has not been absent from recent Catholic thought either. For example, one can cite C. A. Bernard, who sees spirituality as "a theological discipline studying Christian existence by describing its progressive development and elucidating its structures and laws" (37), as well as Eugene Megyer. Those who take this approach often prefer the term "spiritual theology" to spirituality itself, James A. Wiseman, for example, who describes spiritual theology in Lonerganian terms (143-59). Non-Catholic scholars, such as Bradley C. Hanson, take a similar line, arguing that spiritual theology involves not only "a rigor of reflection" but also "a strongly existential relation to the subject matter" (49). The Anglican writer Kenneth Leech is another example of someone who understands spirituality primarily as spiritual theology.

Leech's preface to *Experiencing God: theology as spirituality* describes his book as "An exploration in spiritual theology, that is, in the search for a transforming knowledge of God."

However, many recent discussions of spirituality, even by Catholics, have hesitated over the term "spiritual theology," perhaps because of their fear that this may involve the reduction of spirituality to a mere appendage of dogmatic or moral theology. For example, more than thirty years ago, Louis Bouyer, although he spoke of spirituality as based on dogmatic theology, insisted that "Christian spirituality (or any other spirituality) is distinguished from dogma by the fact that, instead of studying or describing the objects of belief as it were in the abstract, it studies the reactions which these objects arouse in the religious consciousness." Thus he saw the discipline, which he, however, also spoke of as "spiritual theology," as being intimately connected to both human psychology and history (viii-ix). I find something of the same in Josef Sudbrack's article on "Spirituality" in *Sacramentum Mundi*, though he avoids any definition. The problem is this: Is spirituality a theological discipline or a separate field of the study of religion? And, if it is a theological discipline or specialization, how does it relate to the other aspects of the study of theology, whether conceived in traditional or in non-traditional ways?

A significant option, argued by some of the most weighty twentieth-century Catholic theological voices, is built upon a distinction between a generic notion of spirituality based upon human hunger for transcendence and specifically Christian spirituality which is to be measured by the norm of revelation (which does not necessarily have to mean that Christian spirituality is just a specialization of dogmatics). Perhaps the most interesting spokesman of this view has been the Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar, who, in three typically dense and powerful papers distinguished between spirituality as a "basic practical or existential attitude which is the expression of how one understands ethically committed existence," and the properly Christian spirituality which is nothing other than "the subjective aspect of dogmatic theology." (For the former notion, see "The Gospel as Norm..." in *Spirituality*, 7; for the latter quotation, "Spirituality" in *Explorations*, 211. In "Spirituality," 212, von Balthasar defines *theologia spiritualis* as "the Church's objective teaching on how revelation is to be realized in practice.") Another example can be found in the Dominican Jordan Aumann who says that "...spirituality refers to any religious or ethical value that is concretized as an attitude or spirit from which one's actions flow." For Aumann, spirituality is not restricted to any particular religion; it pertains to the field of religious psychology. It becomes the basis for spiritual theology when the spirit in

question is understood as the Holy Spirit, so that properly Christian spirituality is "a participation in the mystery of Christ through the interior life of grace" (17 and 18). Principe also appears to follow this line, explicitly appealing to von Balthasar, but creating his own definitions of general spirituality and specifically Christian spirituality. General spirituality is "the way in which a person understands and lives within his or her historical context that aspect of his or her religion, philosophy or ethic that is viewed as the loftiest, the noblest, the most calculated to lead to the fullness of the ideal or perfection being sought" (136). Note the important anthropological and historical elements here. The definition of Christian spirituality is "life in the Spirit as brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ and daughters and sons of the Father" (135). Finally, although Karl Rahner was not at pains to give a definition of spirituality, on the basis of his distinction between transcendental experience and supernatural experience (and how he applied this to mysticism), one can think that a position along these lines would not be foreign to him (See McGinn 286-89).

Despite these nuanced theological options, the majority of definitions today can be described as variants of "anthropological" understandings (taken in both a philosophical and social scientific sense), that is, ones that put the greatest stress on spirituality as an element in human nature and experience. Many scholars see spirituality primarily as a "depth-dimension" of human existence. These definitions involve, implicitly or explicitly, a notion of human authenticity, and often also of transcendence, or at least of self-transcendence. Let me cite some examples to give you the flavor. Spirituality involves "the inner dimension of the person...[where] ultimate reality is experienced" (Ewart Cousins, xiii) or it concerns "the constituent of human nature which seeks relations with the ground or purpose of existence" (G. Wakefield, v), or it is seen as "a capacity for self-transcendence" (Joann Wolski Conn, 3). Shifting from attempts to characterize the inner ground itself to characterizations of our experience of it, we find an even larger number of definitions/descriptions. Spirituality has to do "with becoming a person in the fullest sense" (John Macquarrie 40 and 47), or is "one typical way of handling the human condition" (Raymundo Panikkar, 9). For J.C. Breton, it is a way of engaging anthropological questions in order to arrive at a richer and more authentically human life, something which does not seem much different from Jon Alexander's view that it concerns those aspects of human life which are seen by their subjects as intentionally related to what holds unrestricted value (Breton, 97-105). Sandra Schneiders praises the basic line taken by Breton,

but tries to be more precise 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" ("Theology and Spirituality" 684). This position leaves open the possibility for forms of non-religious, or secular spirituality, as does Edward Kinerk who thinks of spirituality as the expression of a dialectical personal growth from the inauthentic to the authentic (Edward Kinerk 6). Michael Downey, on the other hand, would seem to exclude this because, in his preface, he sees spirituality as concerned with the relational and personal dimensions of the human person's relation to the divine. Perhaps the vaguest expression of the anthropological approach known to me occurs in an article of Rachel Hosmer, who begins her piece with the observation: "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" (425). However, like the theological positions cited above, Hosmer goes on to talk about specifically Christian spirituality, which she describes as "focused in Christ and his Body the Church as the community of believers and the *locus* of the encounter between the human and the divine."

The advantages of the anthropological approach are many, as Sandra Schneiders among others, has pointed out ("Spirituality in the Academy" 683). First, this option seems to be that adopted by the majority of recent investigators (though the argument from numbers should not be decisive). Second, this approach allows for ecumenical Christian and wider interreligious use of the term, and even, in most cases, for the possibility of a secular spirituality (which many today argue is an important option.) A third advantage, at least from the academic point of view, is that it encourages the study of spirituality from the viewpoint of the human sciences and thus gives it entry into academia on as broad a base as possible. The disadvantages, however, are equally evident. Many of the definitions or descriptions cited above are so vague that they make any definition of spirituality as a field of study impossible—if spirituality is everything that is good and positive about what is human then all it needs is a round of applause rather than cultivation and study. Even those definitions, like that of Sandra Schneiders, which clarify more precisely exactly what aspect of human behavior is the subject matter of spirituality, as well as the perspective from which it is to be studied, run into the difficulty of distinguishing that subject matter and perspective from what it is that religion is supposed to study, or from the object of ethics broadly conceived (Cf. Hanson 48-49). In trying to determine what spirituality is

by taking anthropological route alone, it may well be that all we have come up with is another name for religion. More careful distinctions between religion, ethics and spirituality are certainly in order at the present time—their creation would seem to be important to the academic future of the discipline.

There is a third approach to defining spirituality, one less often found in a pure form perhaps, but still worthy of note. I refer to this as the historical-contextual approach because it emphasizes spirituality as an experience rooted in a particular community's history rather than as a dimension of human existence as such (not that it excludes this). I myself had something like this view in mind in the "Introduction" to *Christian Spirituality I*, when I spoke of Christian spirituality as "the lived experience of Christian belief in both its general and more specialized forms," and later termed it "the effort to appropriate Christ's saving work in our lives" (xv; cf. 254). This quasi-definition has been criticized with some justice, in particular by Carlos M. N. Eire, for being vague and difficult to distinguish from moral theology, though I did try to make such a distinction by restricting spirituality to "those acts in which the relation to God is immediate and explicit" (*ibid.*, xvi). However, I have no interest in unyielding defense of this particular formulation in a paper whose point is that there is no fully adequate definition.

Several other recent students of spirituality have emphasized the contextual element in helpful ways. In his *Christian Spirituality*, Rowan Williams says, "And if spirituality can be given any coherent meaning, perhaps it is to be understood in terms of this task: each believer making his or her own that engagement with the

questioning at the heart of faith which is so evident in the classical documents of Christian belief" (1). Urban T. Holmes also adopted a historical-contextual approach, defining his task as answering the question "How has Christian humanity throughout its history understood what it is to seek God and to know him?" (3). A good example of a description of spirituality that emphasizes the historical dimension while being able to include the other two elements can be found in the French historian Andre Vauchez who speaks of spirituality as "the dynamic unity of the content of faith and the way in which it is viewed by historically determined human beings" (7). Recently, Philip Sheldrake's *Spirituality and History* has also emphasized the importance of history in the study of spirituality.

The emphasis on the historical rootedness of spirituality in a particular community, of course, would seem to cast doubt on the possibility of a secular spirituality, unless we think of certain secular traditions (e.g., Marxism) as taking on the aspects of a quasi-religious community. It is also clear that a historical-contextual approach alone, since it rests primarily on the witness of adherents who say they have a spirituality, cannot, of itself, address normative questions. (In the discussion of the oral version of this paper, the interesting question of the possibility of a "Satanic spirituality," or a "Nazi spirituality" was raised. I would argue against seeing these as authentic spiritualities, but it would be difficult to do so on a historical-contextual approach alone, since significant communities would assert that these represented their "authentic," and even "transcendent" values). Therefore, the historical-contextual approach, of its very nature, has the advantage of implying the other two, that is, it must

We teachers usually expect our students to be changed in some (often, we hope, fundamental) way by our teaching. Under Itard's influence the undomesticated boy is changed—socialized. In the same way that he learns to wear clothing, he learns that objects have names, that pleasing people has rewards, that even caring people may be unjust.

Strikingly, the highly socialized Itard is as much changed in the process of teaching as the boy, Victor, is transformed. The teacher moves from eager, detached intellectual curiosity to more sympathetic—even empathic—involvement with his pupil. *He* discovers the nature of the boy as he goes, and adjusts his pedagogy as best he can to meet what he perceives to be the needs of the learner. At some point he begins to see his pupil as a human being, not as an animal. Not quite an equal, but more than just a creature to be tamed.

It is significant that Truffaut, the director, takes the role of *the teacher* in this film. The film thus raises other questions. Does Truffaut's film theory—that a film's director may be its single dominant creator or *auteur*, surpassing writers, actors, and cinematographers in control of a film's style, form, theme, and content—apply to teaching? To what extent is the teacher an *auteur* in the learning process? Does art seek principally to educate or to change? Is the viewer changed by the film?

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have a relation to the beliefs of the community, the theology that formalizes these, and eventually, if not in every instance, to the truth claims of those beliefs. And it also must take into account what the study of the practice of beliefs within historical human communities has to say about human nature as such, that is, it must be open to anthropology, conceived of from both philosophical and social-scientific perspectives. The mutual implication of all three approaches to understanding the meaning of spirituality hinted at here provides, I believe, an important insight into the current situation regarding the status of the term.

What may seem like helpless confusion, or open warfare between different approaches, may, if we turn it on its head, actually be an advantage. I do not believe that we have any really adequate definition of spirituality at the present time—and we may never have (just as we will probably never have a fully adequate definition of religion). Theologically speaking at least, Hans Urs von Balthasar provides us with a reason for this when he reminds us: “No mission, no spirituality, is capable of being defined in its living center. They all come from the infinite variety of the divine life, which always exceeds the compass of the human mind” (“Spirituality” 226). If it is indeed the case that spirituality is one of those terms where exploration will never yield clear and universally acceptable definition, then it is primarily in the ongoing discussion among the three approaches outlined above that we will, if only in some asymptotic fashion, approach a more adequate understanding of what spirituality is in itself, as well as possibly work out better ways to study it. What I would insist upon at the present is that all three options remain in conversation, though this conversation will doubtless take different forms depending on the context, that is, whether it takes place as a part of the humanistic study of religion or in specifically religious educational institutions.

This brings me to the second question, this is, should spirituality be taught? There are those who think that spirituality cannot be taught, at least in the way in which other subjects can be. To these we may respond that it has always been taught. As Ewart Cousins has reminded us, “The transmission of spiritual wisdom may be the oldest discipline in human history” (xiii). The question is rather the relation of this ancient tradition of handing on spiritual wisdom to the highly developed ways in which modern society trains the next generation, especially through its formalized academic institutions.

To my mind, the transmission of spirituality in the first-order definition will, and should, take place primarily outside academia within the traditions of spiritual training which academics need to study but which they too often

imitate at their own peril. I am frankly hesitant about how much of a “practical” element can and should be incorporated into the academic study of spirituality, both within religious schools and in secular academic settings, though I am convinced that for committed Christian academics teaching itself is a spiritual discipline. A number of the current projects concerning the study of spirituality seem to involve confusions about the relation between intellectual appropriation and personal commitment that would be impossible to implement in non-religious institutions and possibly unwise even in religiously-affiliated institutions of higher learning. Something of this seems to me present in Schneiders’ insistence on the “participative” dimension of the study of spirituality (“Spirituality,” 693-95).

These dangers kept in mind, however, it seems clear that there is considerable consensus today among those involved in the study of religion concerning the necessity of incorporating spirituality, in some way, into the curriculum. This is particularly evident among those who view spirituality as spiritual theology. Numerous modern theologians have reflected on the sad history of the separation of theology and spirituality, that “diastase” that Hans Urs von Balthasar traced back to the incipient distinction of polemical and inner-churchly theologies in the patristic period and which grew immeasurably worse in the late Middle Ages due to the separation between the rational theology of the Scholastics and the affective theology of some mystics (See “Theologie und Spiritualität,” 577-84). For the Swiss theologian, the very structure of the covenant between God and humanity witnessed to in the Hebrew Bible requires the reintegration of spirituality and theology. Reflection on Scripture, especially the unity of dogmatic and parnetic teaching in the Pauline letters, leads him to conclude: “On this basis one can already ask oneself the question whether it makes sense in the future to distinguish any longer between theology and spirituality” (*ibid.* 586). We need not accept the whole of von Balthasar’s program for overcoming the disjunction between spirituality and theology to use him as a spokesman for agreement among contemporary theologians concerning the need to bring theology and spirituality back together (Cf. Bechtle 305-14). If theology finds its ultimate purpose in the conversion of the subject, as my teacher Bernard Lonergan argued, it seems impossible to exclude spirituality from the task of religious self-appropriation which Lonergan saw as theology’s goal. As Regina Bechtle noted, for Lonergan “knowing oneself in relation to God and giving oneself over to the discipline of transformation emerge as prerequisites and not just frills for one who would do theology” (*ibid.* 308).

Even those who do not wish to take a primarily theological route into the study of religion, both in religiously-affiliated and non-affiliated schools, have begun to argue that spirituality should take a place in the curriculum. Every religious tradition needs to understand its past, and there is something that answers to the broad description of spirituality in all religions, at least in the sense that beliefs have always been practiced and were always intended to be appropriated on a deep personal level. This history of appropriation has often been neglected in narrowly rational models of the study of religious traditions that concentrated only on doctrines and institutions. Spirituality may not be the only way to correct this myopia, but it is certainly one way that should not be neglected. From the perspective of the study of religion in non-religious higher education, this historical-context approach to spirituality makes a particularly strong case for the need to include spirituality in some way in the curriculum.

To be sure, there are those, even among believers, who doubt the wisdom of this. Bradley Hanson, for example, questions whether spirituality can be taught within a religiously-neutral academic environment because of the degree of existential involvement spirituality always entails (49-50). Precisely this issue of subjective interest, as well as the admitted vagueness of the term, would lead many non-religious educators to rule spirituality out as a fit subject of study. But I want to argue against these positions, claiming, as Walter Principe and others have done, that spirituality can and should be an integral part of the curriculum both within theological education and in the humanistic study of religion.

To those who say that the "existential orientation" entailed in spirituality is incompatible with the objectivity that is at least the ideal of the humanistic education, I reply that we need more adequate distinctions among various kinds of existential orientations. In the religiously-related school, existential orientation will mean one thing; it will mean something rather different in a department of religious studies or a non-church related Divinity School like the one where I teach. Here the existential orientation entailed in the study of spirituality need not be directed either immediately or mediately to the student's own religious life, but should at least include the student's willingness to investigate a particular spirituality as one way of expressing the central concerns of living the human condition, however foreign that may be to him or her on a personal level. Put more existentially, the study of spirituality requires a desire to try to appreciate how religious people actually live their beliefs.

In some ways I think the final question I wish to

address, that is, how spirituality is to be taught, is the most difficult and the one on which there may well be the most disagreement. There have been a number of recent articles that have set out programs for the incorporation of spirituality into academic curricula. In 1981, Edward Kinerk, using insights from Bernard Lonergan, suggested that a curriculum for the study of spirituality could be constructed by the application of questions for analysis that would allow one to find the form of a spirituality, followed by questions for comparison and contrast among spiritualities that would eventually lead to questions for evaluation (7-19). In 1989, James A. Wiseman advanced another Lonerganian plan. Treating spiritual theology as a "subject specialization" in the terms of Lonergan's *Method of Theology*, he tried to show how the subject matter can be specified by the use of the five categories of symbolic expression that P. Joseph Cahill in his book *Mended Speech*, identifies as the core of any religious tradition. The five symbolic expressions are: (1) a body of normative literature, such as the Bible; (2) theological formulations, broadly taken; (3) visual art forms; (4) aural art forms; and (5) popular devotions and the like. This subject matter would then be approached through the mediation of Lonergan's eight functional specializations (research, interpretation, history, dialectic, foundations, doctrines, systematics, communications. (Wiseman, 147-57). Walter Principe's article also contains brief reflections on the teaching of spirituality both from the theological perspective and the history of religions point of view. More recently, Sandra Schneiders has provided a rather detailed picture, basically Ricouerian in inspiration, which treats spirituality as an interdisciplinary "field-encompassing field" which should be descriptive-critical, ecumenical, holistic and participative. Each of these four programs has merits. Read individually, each seems convincing, at least in part; taken together, their considerable differences demonstrate the problems of curricular development in an area still so unsure of itself.

This is not the occasion for a detailed evaluation of these plans and exactly why I would not want to implement any one of them myself. This is not to deny the important contribution they represent, nor to put a stop to the discussion of exactly how to implement the teaching of spirituality into the curriculum. However, I do want to go on record with what may seem a rather anomalous statement after my insistence on the importance of spirituality for the teaching of religion; that is, I am not at all sure that spirituality needs a separate niche in the curriculum in order to be adequately assimilated. The creation of programs of spirituality is an important part of the process of giving spirituality the voice it deserves, but need not be taken as the only way to achieve the goal.

Speaking as a Christian theologian, I believe that it is quite possible to teach spirituality effectively in and through traditional disciplines such as theology, both historical and constructive, ethics, and also the history of Christianity. In saying this I do not mean to exclude other disciplines, or the necessity of being open to non-Christian forms of spirituality, especially because so much good theology today is theology that is being done in dialogue with other traditions. The reason for this has been well put by von Balthasar when he says, "Nothing in the Church is mere abstract principle: everything that is valid for all rests on concrete persons, or better, on concrete talks entrusted to concrete persons..." ("The Gospel as Norm," 20). This attention to the concrete person and the concrete task in the study of religion—not just to institutional structures and intellectual systems—necessarily implies what I understand as spirituality. As long as we do not treat this hunger for the concrete in an elitist fashion that would narrow the scope of spirituality to the thought of a few great masters, the incorporation of this perspective in our teaching will help us be attentive to what we seem unable not to call spirituality.

We may ask in closing how the efforts of believing teachers and educators relate to first-order spirituality, that is, to the personal appropriation of Christian faith. Each teacher must have her or his answer to this question. Generalization is particularly difficult here, perhaps impossible. So let me instead tell two stories. The first involves a vision of sorts, but contemporary vision that might have been given to anyone concerned with the teaching and dissemination of spirituality.

A Long Island commuter stands on a platform watching trains speeding past each other east and west in their rush towards what seem to be opposite goals. This particular commuter happens to be a religious editor who suddenly grasps this as an image of the mutual ignorance and lack of connection between Eastern and Western spiritual traditions. If only something could be done to get the trains to slow down, he thinks, to stop, to converse window-to-window, might they not realize that their opposition is not as great as it seems? This sudden illumination, a kind of modern analogy to Augustine's third kind of vision (the intellectual vision discussed in the twelfth book of the *Literal Commentary on Genesis*), was the actual beginning of the Classics of Western Spirituality Series, which was originally designed to be one-half (60 volumes) of a joint enterprise called the Classics of Eastern and Western Spirituality.

I doubt if the recipient of this commuter-vision would want to describe himself as a mystic, despite his interest in spiritual traditions. The astute among you will have

noticed that the moment of illumination he was given did not refer directly to God, but to the contemporary audience of spiritual seekers. However, this moment of enlightenment and the work that has gone into making it at least partly real surely is not without relation to the personal appropriation of belief on the part of the hundreds of thousands who have profited from better access to classical spiritual teaching, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim. To hand on what we have been given, even imperfectly, is to play a role.

Reflecting on this role reminds me of the story that some of you may remember from the end of Gershom Scholem's great book, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*. Scholem says he heard it from the Hebrew novelist S. J. Agnon. I conclude by quoting it in full:

When the Baal Shem had a difficult task before him, he would go to a certain place in the woods, light a fire and meditate in prayer—and what he had set out to perform was done. When a generation later the 'Maggid' of Meseritz was faced with the same task he would go to the same place in the woods and say: We can no longer light the fire, but we can still speak the prayers—and what he wanted done became reality. Again a generation later Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sassov had to perform this task. And he too went into the woods and said: We can no longer light the fire, nor do we know the secret meditations belonging to the prayer, but we do know the place in the woods to which it all belongs—and that must be sufficient; and sufficient it was. But when another generation had passed and Rabbi Israel of Rashin was called upon to perform the task, he sat down on his golden chair in his castle [obviously, he was an academic] and said: We cannot light the fire, we cannot speak the prayers, we do not know the place, but we can tell the story of how it was done. And, the story-teller adds, the story which he told had the same effect as the actions of the other three. □

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As I watched *Wild Child* for what must have been the fourth or fifth time, I found myself longing for the periodic appearances of Madame Guerin. Itard's "teaching" seemed so brittle and severe compared to Mme. Guerin's more sensible and sensitive ministrations. To long for Guerin is, I think, to renew one's commitment to the affective dimension of teaching and learning. But we still lack an adequate vocabulary for speaking about this matter without making it seem as though we are seeking simply to "make people feel good about themselves." The wild child certainly felt better in the wild. But was he better off there?

Mark Schwehn