

## THE PERSON AS A SPIRITUAL BEING

**Purpose:** To describe the spiritual dimension of personhood

**Objectives:** After reading this chapter and completing the exercises, you should be able to:

1. Identify three critical attributes of spirituality found in nursing literature
2. Compare mysticism in Christian and monistic traditions
3. Articulate an understanding of biblical spirituality
4. Describe the relationship between spirituality and health care

**Keywords:** spiritual, spirituality, religion, belief, prayer, mysticism, monism, *rûah*, occult, energy-based therapies

Anna moaned in pain. She was three days post-op from removal of abdominal adhesions, and everything indicated that she was healing well, but the pain continued. Nothing seemed to help. I (Judy) had given her all the PRN analgesics she could have and called her physician to have the dosage increased. He refused. I tried rubbing her back, bringing her a cup of tea and turning her radio to some soothing music. Still her muscles tightened in agony. "Why does God allow me to suffer so?" She moaned, "He must hate me!"

From her clenched fist dangled a crucifix on a rosary. A brainstorm struck me. "Do you think God hated *him*?" I asked, pointing to the crucifix.

"Of course not—he *was* God!" Anna replied.

We continued to talk about God's love for us being demonstrated in the cross of Christ. Then I offered to pray for her. Afterward Anna's muscles slowly relaxed and the pain eased. She slept through the night.

While most nurses would quickly acknowledge that Anna's pain stemmed from more than physical causes at this point, they would probably attribute it to psychological factors. However, Anna's problem was spiritual. Further discus-

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sions with her revealed a complicated web of broken family relationships and a painful estrangement from her church. Anna harbored a deep anger toward her former husband, her son, the church and God. She figured that God must hate her as well.

My friend Martha would have a different approach, although her assessment of the problem would be similar. I met Martha at a nursing convention and liked her immediately. A devout Roman Catholic, Martha taught a course on therapeutic touch and other alternative therapies in her church-related college nursing program. She enthusiastically described how these energy-based therapies brought marked relief almost every time she used them.

After listening for several minutes, I finally asked her about the source of the energy she believed she was channeling. "Oh, it's the Holy Spirit!" she said happily.

As I probed further, it became apparent that she was working from an eclectic worldview. In typical Western fashion she had put her Christian beliefs into the category of "religion" but somehow reserved a pragmatic area for what she called "spirituality," which could be related to her nursing practice. For Martha, spirituality dwelt in the worldview of monistic energy fields, which she envisioned as the Holy Spirit.

"It makes me kind of nervous to think of trying to manipulate God," I replied, trying to gently move her toward thinking about the implications of what she was doing.

"But we are *supposed* to be channels of the Holy Spirit," she continued, "It's just the laying on of hands with another name."

It soon became apparent that our conversation might quickly degenerate into a fruitless argument, so we changed the subject. However, Martha kept coming back to talk more. By the end of the week we were friends. Although we respected each other, neither of us changed the other's mind.

What differentiates the spiritual from the physical or psychological? We have already established that these aspects are not separate parts of a person, but that they can be distinguished. Our dualistic Western culture would like to see the spiritual as either nonexistent or irrelevant. It would say that Anna's pain should be controlled with the proper medical or surgical intervention, or at least a psychiatric consultation if all else failed. In this worldview, reality is essentially physical or material. However, in the face of Anna's very real pain, the spiritual dimension had to be addressed in order to bring relief.

On the other hand, Martha and other proponents of new spiritualities would argue that the heart of *all* Anna's problems was spiritual, and that they could be corrected by techniques to balance her universal energy flow. Although most advocates of the new spiritualities also use Western allopathic remedies, they do

so with reluctance. In this worldview, reality is essentially spiritual.

In the Christian worldview, spirituality is essentially relationship—a relationship of the whole person to a personal God and to other people (or other spirits). The spiritual is always personal. It is not an impersonal energy force. The personal nature of spirituality imbues it with deep moral and ethical implications. Dallas Willard explains, "Spirituality is simply the holistic quality of human life as it was meant to be, at the center of which is our relation to God."<sup>1</sup> He further elaborates, "The spiritual is a homogeneous aspect, part and parcel of the biological (and therefore social) nature of human beings."<sup>2</sup>

### *Spirituality in Nursing*

The nursing literature reflects our culture's changing understanding of spirituality. Although earlier definitions attempted to differentiate spirituality from religion, most saw spirituality as involving a person's relationship with God, while later references began to view it as a life principle.

Joan Haase et al. attempted to synthesize the definitions of spirituality in the nursing literature. They came to the conclusion that while spirituality was consistently seen as a basic or inherent quality of all human beings, what differed was spiritual perspective, which they defined as "a highly individualized awareness of one's spirituality and its qualities." They found three critical attributes of spiritual perspective: (1) connectedness (with others, nature, the universe or God), (2) belief (in something greater than the self) and (3) creative energy "that is in constant, yet dynamic, evolutionary flux."<sup>3</sup>

Based on these attributes, they defined spiritual perspective as "an integrating and creative energy based on a belief in, and a feeling of interconnectedness with, a power greater than self." Their literature review also found three apparent outcomes of spirituality: (1) purpose and meaning, (2) guidance of human values and (3) self-transcendence.<sup>4</sup> However, the worldviews inherent in the articles they surveyed were not differentiated, so that they merely combined and summarized incompatible spiritual perspectives.

Using concept analysis, Emblen investigated the terms *spiritual* and *spirituality* in the nursing literature, comparing them with the concept of *religion*. In

<sup>1</sup>Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), p. 77.  
<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 78.  
<sup>3</sup>Joan E. Haase, Teri Britz, Doris D. Coward, Nancy Kline Leidy and Patricia E. Penn, "Simultaneous Concept Analysis of Spiritual Perspective, Hope, Acceptance and Self-Transcendence," *Image*, summer 1992, p. 143.  
<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

definitions of *religion*, six terms appeared most frequently: *system, beliefs, organized, person, worship* and *practices*. On the other hand, *spirituality* was associated with the terms *personal, life, principle, animator, being, God (god), quality, relationship* and *transcendent*. By using these terms to form consensus definitions, Emblen concluded that *spirituality* is a broader term that may include some aspects of religion. However, she also notes that "the term *spiritual* is rapidly acquiring new and varied definitions."<sup>5</sup>

An earlier study by Burkhardt summarized definitions of terms related to spirituality, showing a wide variation but concluding that "spirituality goes beyond a focus on religiosity" and "spiritual care needs to be based on a more universal concept of inspiring rather than religion or religiosity."<sup>6</sup> She further concludes, quoting from Viktor Frankl,

The concept of spiriting has no antecedents. Spiriting is "a thing in itself. It cannot be explained by something not spiritual; it is irreducible. It may be conditioned by something without being caused by it."<sup>7</sup>

If such is the case, the idea of a generic, broadly defined spirituality raises serious concerns for the Christian nurse. The spiritual world is not neutral, as most nursing authors seem to imply. The Bible makes it quite clear that when we seek a spirituality apart from the Spirit of God, we invite evil spirits to dwell in us (Mt 12:43-45; Col 2:8; Eph 5:6-17; 1 Tim 4:1).

Willard explains that there are two directions that spirituality can take in today's culture, Christian or "general human interest." He further clarifies,

Much of modern thinking views spirituality as simply a kind of "interiority"—the idea that there is an inside to the human being, and that is the place where contact is made with the transcendental. In this view, spirituality is essentially a human dimension.

Christian spirituality is centered in the idea of a transcendent life—"being born from above," as the New Testament puts it. This idea of the spiritual life carries with it the notions like accountability, judgment, the need for justice, and so on. These concepts are less popular, and they are certainly more difficult, than a conception of spirituality that simply focuses on one's inner life.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Julia D. Emblen, "Religion and Spirituality Defined According to Current Use in Nursing Literature," *Journal of Professional Nursing*, January-February 1992, p. 41.

<sup>6</sup>Margaret A. Burkhardt, "Spirituality: An Analysis of the Concept," *Holistic Nursing Practice*, April 1989, p. 71.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 73-74.

<sup>8</sup>Dallas Willard, "What Makes Spirituality Christian?" *Christianity Today*, March 6, 1995, p. 16.

In other words, secular spirituality is an aspect of human nature to be nurtured. It may include human relationships, but it is usually an inner experience. According to Steve Turner, "As used in secular discourse, *spiritual* can refer to anything that cannot be tested in a laboratory or bolted to the floor."<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, the Bible presents spirituality as an encounter with a spiritual being separate from ourselves—either God or an evil spirit. Christian spirituality is essentially a personal relationship with God. Turner explains,

Christian conversion is not a case of fanning that little spiritual spark in the human soul into a flame. It is a case of invading a dark and doomed soul with spiritual light from above.

Christian spirituality does not originate in a small area of the human brain. It is a transference of God's personality into the human life, and it can only happen on the basis of repentance, faith, and discipleship. It cannot be coaxed, kick-started, or chanted into being. The original temptation is that we can become divine through a mechanical act.<sup>10</sup>

Martin Luther reacted strongly against the mystics of his day, believing that "enthusiasm" (in its technical sense of being inspired or possessed by a god) was the essence of original sin.<sup>11</sup> Salvation must come from without.

### *The Christian Spiritual Tradition*

The Christian church does have a rich mystical tradition, which became suppressed during the Enlightenment and the rise of empiricism. Mysticism refers to "the immediate experience of a divine-human relationship, and in particular to the experiences of oneness with a divine . . . being or state."<sup>12</sup> We affirm that there is much in this tradition that should be restored and enjoyed. Mysticism unchecked, however, frequently leads to serious heresy and corruption in the church and blurs the uniqueness of the Christian gospel. Psychologist Elizabeth Hillstrom points out that mystical writers from Maharishi Mahesh Yogi to Christian mystics like St. John of the Cross all warn about the dangers of "madness, demonic deception or possession for those who venture into the mystical path."<sup>13</sup> Richard Foster describes the goal of true Christian mysticism:

<sup>9</sup> Steve Turner, "Lean, Green & Meaningless," *Christianity Today*, September 24, 1990, pp. 26-27.  
<sup>10</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>11</sup> Gerhard O. Forde, "A Lutheran Response," in Donald L. Alexander, ed., *Christian Spirituality*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1988), p. 192.  
<sup>12</sup> Irving Hexham, *Concise Dictionary of Religion* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 153.  
<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth L. Hillstrom, *Testing the Spirits* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995), p. 132.

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In meditative prayer there is no loss of identity, no merging with the cosmic consciousness, no fanciful astral travel. Rather, we are called to life-transforming obedience because we have encountered the living God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Christ is truly present among us to heal us, to forgive us, to change us, to empower us.<sup>14</sup>

The Bible is the central reference point in Christian mysticism. The mystical experience must always be tested by the Scriptures, not the other way around. When mysticism moves beyond biblical limits, it ceases to be Christian, even when Christian terminology is retained.

In reviewing the history of Christian spirituality, George Lane defines spirituality as "man's possession by God in Christ through the Holy Spirit."<sup>15</sup> We first see this understanding of spirituality demonstrated by Jesus as he prays in John 17:

*The mystical experience must always be tested by the Scriptures, not the other way around.*

And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth. I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. (vv. 19-21)

In this context Jesus is not referring to "oneness" as a monistic merging with God but as a dynamic personal relationship that results in a oneness of purpose and a reflection of Christ's character in his followers. This understanding of "union" or "oneness" with God is what separates Christian spirituality from all others.

Monism, the belief that "all is one," has challenged Christian faith from the very beginning. The early church faced attacks and subtle corruption by Gnosticism (teaching that salvation was obtained through a secret knowledge) and Platonic philosophy (which sought salvation through ascetic practices and mystical experiences). Both of those influences taught a spiritual monism—that each person had a "divine spark," or a pure soul, that was imprisoned by a corrupt body. The goal of each divine spark was to shed the confines of the evil body to be rejoined with God. Both the Gnosticism of New Testament times and the later Neo-Platonism (third through sixth centuries) incorporated magic and sorcery. The early church fathers were unanimous in pointing to Simon the Magi-

<sup>14</sup>Richard J. Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), p. 149.

<sup>15</sup>George A. Lane, *Christian Spirituality—An Historical Sketch* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1984), p. 2.

cian in Acts 8 as the first Gnostic.<sup>16</sup> We see further evidence of these influences in many of the concerns that New Testament writers express to first-century churches in the Epistles.

Monism is an assumption that there is one eternal principle in the cosmos. It therefore denies a Creator above and separate from creation. It began around the sixth century B.C. in India and China, gradually spreading to Persia and later to Europe.<sup>17</sup> It appeared in various forms, such as Hinduism, Taoism, Buddhism, Gnosticism and Neo-Platonism. Today we see it reappearing in New Age religions. The appeal of monism comes from its assumption that all is One, and therefore all is God. This makes everyone God, removing all external ethical constraints. It is also highly experiential, seeking mystical union with God through meditation, dreams and visions. This experience then becomes the source of truth for the monist.

Historically, when Christians practiced mysticism, monism often followed; church leaders from Paul to Luther made strong efforts to control it. Prophecy, in the sense of delivering an inspired message from God, is a form of mysticism. The New Testament and early Christian writings, such as the *Didache* (second century) set firm limits on the authority of anyone claiming to have gained knowledge through mystical means (Mt 7:15; 24:24; 1 Cor 14:37-40; 2 Pet 2:1-3; 1 Jn 4:1-6).

Several significant periods in church history produced outbreaks of mysticism—what many would call *spirituality* today. The first evidence came in the book of Acts and continued through the second and early third centuries. It was a time of intense persecution, and God seems to have provided powerful experiences to give the young church the encouragement and sense of mission to survive and grow in a hostile environment. Outstanding mystics from this period included Origen (185-254), an influential teacher in the early church, and Montanus, founder of a prophetic movement that began about 170. Origen was a brilliant scholar who struggled to reconcile his Christian faith with Greek philosophy. He was strongly influenced by Neo-Platonism but tried to use it in the service of Christian doctrine. The flamboyant cult leader Montanus, along with his female disciples Prisca and Maximilla, claimed to speak for the Holy Spirit while in ecstatic states.<sup>18</sup> Both met with strong criticism from the church, yet both also contributed to the rich history of the church's mystical tradition.

<sup>16</sup>E. M. Yamanchi, "Gnosticism," in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright and J. I. Packer (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1988), p. 272.  
<sup>17</sup>Robert Brow, *Origins and Ideas* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1960), pp. 33-36.  
<sup>18</sup>Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1967), p. 52.

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<sup>19</sup>Linda E. Sabin, "Hildegard of Bingen," in *The Christian Mystical Tradition*, ed. Thomas M. Murnighan and Thomas M. Murnighan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 8-9.  
<sup>20</sup>Lane, *Christian Spirituality* (New York: Crossroad, 1997), pp. 8-9.

In the fourth century, the state religion became corrupt, politicized and thony the Hermit, sought to escape the distractions of often exhibiting bizarre the top of tall pillars), but guidance, healing or deliverance away from orthodox Christianity. As life in the desert grew cluster in monasteries. By the influence of Benedict, became concerned about community evangelism. One shining Bingen, came from the who was also an expert on healing.<sup>19</sup> By the third century) set firm limits on the authority of anyone claiming to have gained knowledge through mystical means (Mt 7:15; 24:24; 1 Cor 14:37-40; 2 Pet 2:1-3; 1 Jn 4:1-6).

In the fourth century a new type of spirituality developed. Christianity had become the state religion with the conversion of Constantine. The church was corrupt, politicized and spiritually weak. The "desert fathers," including Anthony the Hermit, sought union with God by fleeing to the Egyptian desert to escape the distractions of the world. These monks lived alone in the desert, often exhibiting bizarre behavior (extreme fasting, refusing to bathe, living at the top of tall pillars), but they were often visited by Christians seeking divine guidance, healing or deliverance from evil spirits. Some of these monks moved away from orthodox Christian teachings and into monism as they became consumed with mystical experiences and the contemplative life.

As life in the desert grew increasingly difficult, many of the monks began to cluster in monasteries. By the sixth century these monastic orders, under the influence of Benedict, became less focused on personal sanctification and more concerned about community life and reaching out to the world in charity and evangelism. One shining light for nursing in the twelfth century, Hildegard of Bingen, came from the Benedictine community. A spiritual leader and visionary who was also an expert in the use of herbs and midwifery, she wrote two books on healing.<sup>19</sup> By the thirteenth century the mendicant orders, led by the Dominicans and Franciscans, lived a common life with the explicit purpose of going out into the world to serve and to preach the gospel. They attempted to balance spirituality and service.

Overshadowed by the horrors of the Black Death, the Hundred Years War and scandalous corruption in the church, the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries produced a new round of mystical spirituality. The most famous Rhineland mystic of this period, Meister Eckhart, taught a mystical union with God in the Neo-Platonic tradition and was condemned by the church for "pantheism."<sup>20</sup> A bright light in this period was Julian of Norwich, an English mystic with a vibrant relationship with God. Her deep faith led her to reach out in compassion to others. Although Julian, as an anchoress, was not allowed to leave her "anchorhold" (a few rooms by a church), she would counsel local people through her window from behind a curtain.<sup>21</sup>

The sixteenth century was a time of tremendous turmoil in the church. It produced activist reformers like Martin Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, John Knox, Thomas Müntzer and Conrad Grebel. This period also produced some of

<sup>19</sup>Linda E. Sabin, "Hildegard of Bingen: A Woman of Vision," *Journal of Christian Nursing*, spring 1997, pp. 8-9.

<sup>20</sup>Lane, *Christian Spirituality*, p. 34.

<sup>21</sup>Monica Furlong, *The Wisdom of Julian of Norwich* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 7.

the most influential mystics, such as Ignatius of Loyola, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross. The activists and the contemplatives did not understand each other. While Luther ranted against enthusiasm, Teresa of Avila prayed for him, asking God to "give light to the Lutherans."<sup>22</sup>

This rift between the Reformers and the mystics resulted in a long suspicion of the contemplative tradition in most Protestant churches. Their reasons for concern were not without cause. Many of the mystics, such as the Spanish Illuminati, believed that once they had reached mystical union with God they no longer had to heed any other authority. Ignatius countered that the union one should seek with God was not a matter of cosmic merging that rendered a person ethically autonomous, but a correspondence to the divine will. His spiritual disciplines and the writings of Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross provide great inspiration to Christians today who are seeking a deeper spirituality.

### *Spirituality in the Bible*

Postmodern people today are reacting against the emptiness of modern religion. Too often liberal Christianity has taught that true religion is doing the right things.<sup>23</sup> Evangelicals have tended to focus on believing the right doctrines.<sup>24</sup> Neither has fed the deep hunger most people feel for intimacy with God, leaving seekers disillusioned and often angry. The postmodern alternative to organized religion is a contentless, experiential spirituality—what we are calling *generic spirituality*. Interestingly, the term *spirituality* does not appear anywhere in the Bible, nor does the abstract concept of spirituality. However, several Hebrew and Greek terms are translated as *spirit* or *spiritual* in the Bible. If we consider spirituality to be that which pertains to the spiritual realm, then a brief study of these words should inform our definition of Christian spirituality.

The first appearance of the word *spirit* in the Old Testament comes in Genesis 1. It is the Hebrew term *ruah*, which the NRSV translates in this case as "a wind from God." The same term is used in Genesis 2:7: "then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being." According to Old Testament scholar Hans Walter Wolff, *ruah* is used in six different ways in the Old Testa-

<sup>22</sup>Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle*, ed. and trans. E. Allison Peers (New York: Doubleday, 1989), p. 235. The original version of this book was written in 1588.  
<sup>23</sup>Liberal Christianity taught this with good biblical reasons! See, for example, Luke 10:25-37; Ephesians 2:10; James 1:26-27; 2:14-26.  
<sup>24</sup>Believing the right doctrines, while important, has less biblical precedent. See, for example, Matthew 23:2-3; James 2:19.

<sup>25</sup>Hans Walter Wolff, *Interior Castle*, ed. and trans. E. Allison Peers (New York: Doubleday, 1989), p. 235. The original version of this book was written in 1588.

ment: wind, breath, vital powers, spirit(s), feelings and will.<sup>25</sup> When used in relation to humans, *rûah* refers to the person as empowered by God. It is always under God's control, not something humans possess. However, it is the *rûah* of God that communicates with the human *rûah* in dynamic relationship. Wolff explains, "A man as *rûah* is living, desires the good and acts as authorized being—none of this proceeds from man himself."<sup>26</sup>

The equivalent term for *rûah* in the New Testament is the Greek word *pneuma*. It can mean wind, breath or "that dimension of the human personality whereby relationship with God is possible."<sup>27</sup> It may also refer to disembodied created beings, as well as to God himself. In two cases Paul refers to those who are *spiritual* as Christians who are mature in Christ (1 Cor 3:1; Gal 6:1), but nowhere do we see him urging his followers to develop their *spirituality*. Instead the New Testament focuses on seeking God through Christ and doing his will. Jesus taught his disciples the importance of prayer, and the spiritual gifts certainly play an important role throughout the New Testament; however, their purpose is centered in restoring humanity's broken relationship with God. They are evidence of God's in-breaking kingdom (Lk 4:18), preparing his people to move out into the world proclaiming good news to the poor, liberty to the captives, sight to the blind and freedom for the oppressed.

The Bible takes for granted that an unseen spiritual world exists. Throughout the Old Testament, God warned his people to avoid any dealings with spirits other than himself (Ex 20:1-6; Lev 19:31; Deut 18:9-14; 1 Sam 28:3-19; 1 Chron 10:13-14). The entire history of Israel provides graphic stories of the personal disintegration and national corruption that resulted when God's people violated this command. In the New Testament, Jesus began his ministry by going into the wilderness, where he was tempted by Satan and attended by angels (Mt 4:1-11; Mk 1:12-13; Lk 4:1-13). Throughout his ministry he confronted evil spirits; furthermore, he commissioned his followers to teach, preach and cast out demons (Mk 16:17). In his letters to the churches, the apostle Paul gave clear guidelines for dealing with the principalities and powers of this unseen world (Rom 1:18-23; 8:37; 1 Cor 10:20-22; Eph 1:20-23; 6:10-20; Col 1—2; 1 Tim 4:1-5; Jas 2:19).

Most people today—even many Christians—are biblically illiterate. With the

<sup>25</sup>Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), pp. 32-39.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>27</sup>J. D. G. Dunn, "Spirit, Holy Spirit," in *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. I. Howard Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer and D. J. Wiseman, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), p. 1125.

loss of biblical knowledge in our culture, people do not know God or the spirit world as the Bible portrays them. Rationalist thinking taught us that we could know and conquer the natural world, using it for our purposes. Such thinking extended even to the social world, where we attempted to learn the laws that govern society, and to the inner world, where we mapped the psyche. Many of the social and psychological scientists early in the twentieth century had great hopes for remaking both human beings and society.

That quest for utopia clearly failed, with a resulting loss of faith in science. At the same time, Christianity has long been viewed as having been tried and found wanting; in fact, many modern problems are attributed to it by its critics. God, if he exists at all, is considered too far off to care about our problems; thus the return to pre-Christian religions (or new religions) with their rituals and occult practices.

### *Living in a Spiritual World*

Even the church in the Western world has contributed to the problem of functional skepticism by not teaching and practicing the reality of God's daily involvement in our lives or the reality of eternal life. While people in difficult circumstances will talk of heaven, for many middle-class American Christians life here is good, and we want to keep it that way. We often think we don't need God to help us. After all, water comes out of the spigot when we turn it on. In more primitive cultures they pray for rain. If we are sick we take medicine or have surgery, and we pray as a last resort. However, even prayer is now being investigated scientifically. Christians, as well as skeptics and neopagans, are conducting research to see if prayer and other spiritual techniques work. Despite the postmodern disenchantment with science, we can't help thinking like modernists. We want to know how things work—and we want to control them. Few Christians would overtly contradict the reality of the biblically informed worldview. But most of us function as if angels and demons were merely a vestige of primitive superstition. Many would go so far as to say that the Bible uses spiritual terminology to describe what we can now explain scientifically. For instance, in Matthew 17:14-20 a man came to Jesus with his son who apparently was convulsing and falling into fires. In other records of this story (Mk 9:14-29; Lk 9:37-43) the father attributes the problem to a demon, but in this account he says the boy is "moonstruck" (from the Greek *sehnazein*) or, as the KJV translates it, "a lunatic." Interestingly, newer translations struggle with this. The NIV is merely descriptive—the boy "has seizures"—but the NRSV and CEV come right out and diagnose the condition as "epilepsy." However, in all cases Jesus deals with the problem by rebuking "the demon," and the boy is cured.

While many in our culture today talk freely about angels and other supposedly benign spiritual forces, even many Christians do not acknowledge the reality of demons. Others see them behind every bush and live in fear. However, as nurses begin to flirt with the occult in therapeutic touch and other energy-based therapies, we believe that demonic activity will become much more evident. Both of us have seen evidence of this happening, in the United States as well as in other countries.

### ***Arlene's Story***

I (Arlene) lived in Zambia among people who were not only aware of spirits but sought to use and placate them. They attributed sickness and accidents to spirit activity. People who knew how to deal with spirits prescribed the rituals and formulas necessary to remove their evil influence. Unlike many Americans, who naively view spirits as helpful, these people feared them. Observing those under the influence of evil spirits was a terrifying experience. Two examples have stayed etched in my memory for many years.

One afternoon a woman was admitted to the hospital glassy-eyed and hyper-ventilating. She was brought from a local healer who dealt with spirits. Every woman in the forty-bed ward sat up as she was put in one of the beds. I sensed what they knew: this woman was under powerful spirit influence. Being an outsider to the culture, I wanted to confirm my impression with the hospital chaplain. After a bit of probing on my part, he agreed with my assessment, though indirectly. The word about this poor woman spread among patients, staff and nursing students.

The next morning I asked the students during our morning prayers if they wanted to pray for this woman. We had been reading in the Gospel of Mark about how Jesus delivered people from the power of evil spirits. I was a novice in such matters, but the issue seemed to be clearly before us. Many gathered at my home that evening and we prayed that Jesus would drive the evil spirit away. During the night the woman died! The next morning both I and the students were subdued. It seemed as if the Evil One had warned us to stay out of his territory. I decided that I would never try this again, at least not with such apparently difficult cases.

There were several times, however, when things went better. Once a young student complained for months of pain in one side of her body. Finally, after aspirin proved useless, I asked her what she thought the problem was. As I suspected, she thought that spirits were bothering her. She agreed to bring a friend with her to my office, and feeling somewhat foolish, I prayed she would be freed in Jesus' name. The pain went away! A short time later she was called

home to attend a funeral. Because funerals involved rituals to drive spirits away, I feared that she might return to school with the old problem. But she did not, and never again did she come to the morning clinic complaining of pain in one side of her body.

Another story concerns a schoolteacher admitted to our hospital because she could not walk and refused to eat, a rather strange combination of symptoms. She had consulted but received no help from the local healer. Once again I sensed that spirit activity was part of the problem, but after the obvious failure with the woman who died, I resolved to stay uninvolved.

But one day, while supervising students in the unit, I watched this woman through the window in her room. She looked directly at me with eyes that I can only describe as burning. Surely there was help for this young woman. Since she was not eating, I wondered if she could be tempted with special foods.

She was! For some time I carried out a daily ritual of bringing her tasty food and trying to talk with her. She would not talk but slowly she began to walk. Finally I gained sufficient courage to ask others to pray with me for her healing. We gathered around her, asking Jesus to drive out the spirit. She began to sing in a loud voice. Her mother, who had joined us, said that the spirit was singing. When she stopped singing we finished our prayer. She was not noticeably improved but continued to eat. After several weeks we transported her to the nearest psychiatric hospital, 180 miles away.

Undoubtedly this woman was psychotic, but spirits also were involved. I have thought that the combination of loving care, prayer for deliverance and psychiatric care were all part of her recovery.

### *Judy's Story*

Early in my experience as a Nurses Christian Fellowship campus staff member, I (Judy) met with a new group of students. Ben, the group leader, told me beforehand that he was having difficulty leading Bible discussions and wanted help. As the meeting started, a strange phenomenon occurred. Whenever Ben would ask the group a question after reading a Bible passage, his face would contort. One side would be smiling and calm, the other side would scowl and twitch. The students on either side of him also responded in opposite ways. Those on the scowling side would sit in utter silence. Those on the smiling side would all talk at once.

After the meeting, Ben and I went for a walk to discuss what had happened. Ben was a good student and proud of his scientific objectivity, but finally he told me, "I think it's demons." As he spoke, his face contorted again, and his voice became uncharacteristically gruff. Surprised, I asked him what made him

think so. He was grandmotherly re a child. Before marijuna and know I'm a Chr I knew nothing see a psychiatrist I talked with a other colleague I could tell he on he began to from his strange More recently at a secular un postmodern th was almost en three classes. I where he will early stages of so frightening the later stages to him as knig My classmate were also pra assortment of class and beg prayer support would call me the prayer sup came much m creasingly in One week been horrible came into the seemed stran told us that a dream. He received only ries of anti-

think so. He went on to tell me of a long family history of spiritualism. His grandmother regularly presided over séances in their dining room when he was a child. Before becoming a Christian he had consulted Ouija boards, smoked marijuana and often binged on alcohol. "I think I let evil spirits into my life. I know I'm a Christian, but there is still something that's not right," he confessed.

I knew nothing about demons then. My first inclination was to suggest he see a psychiatrist, but he replied that he had been in therapy for years. Finally I talked with a colleague who had some experience with exorcism. He and another colleague met with Ben and cast out the demons. I was not present, but I could tell he was different. Ben experienced a radical change. From that point on he began to mature into a strong Christian leader. He never again suffered from his strange malady.

More recently I encountered the bizarre demonic world in a graduate course at a secular university. Trying to investigate the concepts being taught by the postmodern theorists, I enrolled in a course on "The Body—East and West." It was almost entirely East, after the West had been soundly maligned in the first three classes. The professor spoke freely of his own experiences in meditation, where he willingly entered the "demonic realm." He explained that during the early stages of meditation the demons would appear as serpents and monsters so frightening that "you could go crazy" without a spiritual advisor. However, in the later stages they would become "your friends." These friends often appeared to him as knights in shining armor and told him what to teach in class.

My classmates were almost all seekers or adherents of Eastern religions. Most were also practicing various forms of Eastern meditation as well as an eclectic assortment of spiritual exercises. I became increasingly uncomfortable in that class and began to literally shake as I drove home, so I desperately sought prayer support. My Sunday school class and my husband prayed daily. Arlene would call me to pray over the phone before I left for class each week. With the prayer support I felt much more calm and confident, but the professor became much more aggressively anti-Christian. My classmates, however, grew increasingly interested in knowing more about Christianity.

One week we were to discuss the demonic realm in class. The readings had been horrible and vulgar. I enlisted more people to pray. When the professor came into the classroom that day, he walked over to me and bowed, which seemed strange to me and to several of my classmates sitting nearby. Then he told us that he couldn't teach what he had prepared for class because he "had a dream." He asked if anyone had any questions about the readings, but received only blank stares in return. Finally he just started rambling on with a series of anti-Christian stories. I decided that this was not the time to retort, and

so I sat calmly listening. Then he suddenly stopped and said, "I can't keep criticizing Christianity like this anymore, because Judy is going to get a gun and shoot me."

I laughed and said, "That wouldn't be very Christian!"

The woman to my left elbowed me and said, "That's his dream! He dreamed you shot him!"

But the ultimate test came when I turned in my final paper on the biblical view of the body (a topic he had approved). He gave it back to me and said, "You can't use this methodology. You've cited both the Old and New Testaments. You can't do that—those are two different gods. This is a B-paper unless you fix that." I did not "fix" it—but amazingly, I got an A—in the course.

### *Spirituality and Health Care*

Although our experiences with the spirit world may seem bizarre and uncon-

vincing, we can see strong parallels with the worldview expressed in the Scriptures. Western culture has been so strongly influenced by scientific "objectivity" that we have difficulty recognizing what people from the beginning of time have acknowledged and exploited.

People in almost every culture have developed various systems for relating to the spiritual realm, especially in regard to healing. Shamans—healers who gain their powers from the spirit world while in a trance-like state—have appeared indigenously on almost every continent. Attempts to appease malevolent spirits and attract familiar spirits through rituals and spiritual exercises are common around the world. Magicians try to compel gods, demons or spirits to do their bidding. They follow a pattern of occult practices to bend psychic forces to do their will. Even societies with atheistic philosophies, as well as those with strong monotheistic religions, including Christianity, have provided fertile soil for occult beliefs and practices. An undercurrent of paganism seems to lie dormant, even in Christianized cultures, only to resurface periodically. We

- Testing Mystical Experiences**
1. Are they initiated by human effort and techniques?
  2. Do they lead to pride?
  3. Do they lead to claims of secret knowledge that contradicts Scripture?
  4. Do they lead to mental and emotional disturbance?
  5. Do they lead to a more godly life?
  6. Is the person humble about them and hesitant to discuss them?
  7. Do they lead to greater love for God and others?

**CASE STUDY: I See G**  
Sally Jones, ninety-three woman with coarse w  
tightened against her  
chart indicated that she

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3. How does that differ nursing literature?
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### *Theological Reflect*

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### *For Further Think*

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are seeing just such resurgence in many of the New Paradigm theories and therapies today.

Our primary concern in discussing spirituality is to look specifically at its relationship to health and health care. Probably the New Paradigm's greatest contribution to nursing is its strong emphasis on viewing the person holistically with a focus on the spiritual. However, as we have seen, spirituality cannot be generic or neutral. Practicing energy-based therapies, praying to other gods, or encouraging a person toward any spiritual beliefs and practices contrary to Christ only courts disaster. Even evidence that a particular alternative therapy appears to work does not necessarily make it permissible for the Christian nurse.

If we view Christian spirituality as the whole person in dynamic relationship with God through Jesus, then our definition impels us to nurture that relationship in contemplation, community and compassion for others. Rather than seeking a vague inwardness or manipulation of the spirit world, spirituality leads us to a mature faith and a life of service.

### **For Further Thinking**

1. How would you define *spirituality*?
2. What does it mean to be a *spiritual being*?
3. In what ways have you experienced the spiritual realm?

### **Theological Reflection**

Read Psalm 16:9-11, Psalm 32:1-7, Romans 12:1 and 1 Corinthians 2:6-16.

1. According to these passages, how are the physical, spiritual and psychosocial aspects of our lives interrelated?
2. How do these passages describe what is spiritual?
3. How does that differ from the ways spirituality is commonly described in the nursing literature?
4. Based on these passages, what are spiritual needs?
5. Read Ephesians 6:10-20. According to this passage, how are we to deal with the spiritual realm?

### **CASE STUDY: I See Glory!**

Sally Jones, ninety-three, was admitted to the hospital after a stroke. A frail woman with coarse white hair, her knees moved toward her chest and her arms tightened against her body. She came to the hospital from a nursing home. Her chart indicated that she had one son who lived in Arizona, but she was alone.

In the days since she was admitted to the hospital, she never spoke a word. She didn't respond to painful stimuli or gentle touch. However, one night as her nurse, Sue, hummed *Amazing Grace*, she thought she saw the corners of Sally's mouth turn up.

Sue made sure that Sally received excellent physical care. She bathed her gently, rubbed lotion into her dry skin, attempted to maintain range of motion and turned her frequently. Whenever she had extra time, Sue would spend extra time with Sally so she would not be alone. However, Sally did not improve.

One evening, when Sue made her rounds, she found Sally diaphoresing. Her eyes were open and glassy, her pulse and respirations irregular.

Suddenly Sally straightened herself and sat up in bed. Her withered arms stretched toward the heavens. Her eyes seemed transfixed, but did not appear to see anything in the room. She spoke in a crackly voice just above a whisper,

"I see glory—it's so *beau-ti-ful!*" She fell back on the pillow as the monitor alarm blared. Her heart had stopped beating. She had entered the glory of heaven.

(Adapted from Sue Henley, "I See Glory!" *Journal of Christian Nursing*, spring 2004, pp. 31-32.)

### Discussion Questions

1. What indications did the author have that Miss Sally had spiritual needs?
2. How did she meet those needs?
3. In what ways did her physical care meet spiritual needs?
4. What spiritual perceptions did the author express?
5. What did she learn from Miss Sally?

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