Assessing the Construction of Spirituality: Conceptualizing spirituality in health care settings

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Spirituality has become a popular term in chaplaincy and health care settings, but is defined in such a myriad of ways and in such broad terms that, as a term, it threatens to become unfit for clinical practice. Several prominent conceptualizations of spirituality are analyzed in an attempt to recover the distinctiveness of spirituality. An adequate understanding of spirituality for clinical use should run close to the lived spirituality of persons in their unique individuality, differing contexts and various persuasions. In the second place a distinct discourse on spirituality needs to be sensitive to characteristic experiences of that which is other.

Why get upset?
Because the clock is broken?
The sun is setting.
The spirit collects impressions.
I search for moving images.

Srečko Kosovel (2004)

Introduction: Looking for a Vantage Point

Spirituality is receiving much current attention in contemporary health care settings . It receives a growing and very diverse international body of literature. The foci of this literature are expansive and include attention to the spiritual needs of patients and clients in health care, the contribution of religion and spirituality to health and well-being in general, the role of chaplains as spiritual care specialists, and the roles of other health care professionals in the provision of spiritual care. The contexts are similarly varied, from models for palliative care in hospice settings to empirical research on high tech hospital wards, from esoteric therapies to models of nursing assessment. Cultural contexts, too, play a role.

The term 'spirituality' carries different connotations in secularized portions of Europe than in the United States. The connotations among indigenous peoples in Alaska or New Zealand are different as well. To some, attentiveness to spirituality seems to be a natural part of health care. Others question its efficacy and empirical status. The lack of consensus and the diversity of contexts and connotations raise the question, can anything definitive be said about the term 'spirituality' other than the fact that its meaning is diffuse?

Recent interest in spirituality in health care reflects the current cultural interest in this arena. The number of shelves of book stores devoted to books on spirituality are but one of the most visible expressions of this global phenomenon. The state of the discussion on spirituality in health care settings reflects this cultural shift glaringly often due to the acuity of life, death, and health care decisions.

The plethora of spiritual assessment models reflects this focus (Topper, 2003; Fitchett, 1993, pp. 11-25). Consensus definitions have been proposed (Puchalski et al., 2009) and a vast number of books, articles and research reports on spirituality in health care as well as a great variety of definitions of spirituality proposed or operationalized. Much of this interest comes from non-theological and non-religious professions (O'Connor et al., 2002) contributing to fruitful multidisciplinary cooperation, reflection, and enhanced practice models.

The current global focus on spirituality has also generated critical attention (Egan, 2009; Breitbart, 2009; Buck, 2006; Tanyi, 2002; Puchalski, 2002). Many critics attempt to distil a comprehensive or consensus definition. Others critique those attempting to do so (Bregman, 2004; Tanyi, 2002). This dynamic, sometimes contentious context challenges attempts to evaluate the uses of the term spirituality, particularly within the realm of health care. The "extension" of understandings of spirituality has proven problematic with regard to the "comprehension" of spirituality (Kees Waaijman 2010; 2000[1]).

In light of this confusing and dynamic discourse, I offer this effort to evaluate the uses and conceptualizations of 'spirituality' in health care. Of course, any such attempt at distillation and clarification should necessarily be understood as a pilot venture stirring further challenge and supplementation. This proposal is offered as an attempt to develop a focused vantage point for evaluation.

The questions I bring to this subject include: what understandings of spirituality are being employed? How do they relate to each other? Where are they coming from? How can these questions be answered adequately remains an underlying struggle. One potentially comprehensive starting point could be to conduct a literature review on spirituality. However, it remains questionable whether doing so would be feasible and fruitful. I concluded that such an approach would not be adequate. Therefore, I choose a different approach that compares and comments on a number of fundamental conceptualizations of spirituality selected partly on the basis of what I regard as their pungency and publicity, partly in recognition of the authority and influence of the authors, and, as is unavoidable, partly on the basis of my just happening to encounter them.

I concluded that two distinct but related approaches were required for this project. The initial need is *analytical*. In the present article, the starting point focuses on specific ways in which spirituality is being conceptualized. I seek to develop an appreciation of the contexts and complexity of what is understood under the term 'spirituality'. From that appreciation several criteria and indications of content can be gleaned. I plan to offer a second article that employs the fruits of the present analysis in a *constructive* proposal for an understanding of lived spirituality. In that article, I plan to make some comments on chaplaincy care as itself a spiritual practice.

1. Construction of spirituality

Underlying all of my analysis is the awareness and assumption that ways of thinking about spirituality are constructions that vary in both time and place. This recognition implies that conceptions and perceptions of spirituality fluctuate and are constantly being reconstructed. George Fitchett's *Assessing Spiritual Needs* prompted this awareness. Fitchett formulates a number of criteria for evaluating methods of spiritual assessment, one of which considers the nature of the concept of spirituality itself, whether it is substantial or functional, static or dynamic, holistic and multi-dimensional (Fitchett, 1993, pp. 90-93). Such reflection implies that spirituality can be construed and constructed in various ways that defy simple definition. I treat these constructions as invitations to conversation and dialogue on the dimensions of human experience and life to which they refer.

1.1 Relating spirituality to the religious (Pargament and Zinnbauer)

The study of spirituality is no longer a specifically religious or theological discipline. The term has long suggested practices of particular piety or intensity among the religious, particularly catholic religious; now,it has a much broader reference. Waaijman (2010; 2007) lists twelve different scholarly disciplines that study spirituality. He points particularly to the field of psychology. One example of this expanded interest is represented in the *Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* (Paloutzian & Park, 2005). Interestingly, Kenneth Pargament and Brian Zinnbauer, both psychologists, describe ways in which spirituality is

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[1] That monumental work of Kees Waaijman has been translated into English by John Vriend (2002) *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods*. Leuven: Peeters

constructed. Pargament and Zinnbauer distinguish between the terms 'religion' and 'spirituality' in a polarized fashion. Although traditionally both concepts are multidimensional, and the terms were commonly used interchangeably, in contemporary usage, a formal, substantive understanding of religion is often opposed to a dynamic, functional view on spirituality. Religion is considered to be cognitive, institutional, formalistic and exclusive. Spirituality is now regarded as experiential, personal, authentic and universal. Such juxtaposition finds particularly expression in circles of New Age spirituality. In his analysis of new spirituality, Maarten Meester (2008, p. 184) suggests that for many people, the term spirituality would not be usable without stipulating the contrast between religion and spirituality. The contrast persons draw between religion and spirituality serves to support the idea that they have chosen their own, authentic spiritual path even when some of the new forms of spirituality also create new institutions and even dogmas.

Generally, Pargament and Zinnbauer regard substantive definitions of religion to be reductionist, and functional definitions of spirituality to lack a sacred core. They prefer to relate spirituality not to religion (as a more cognitive and empirical term), but to religiousness. Underlying that relationship seems to be an understanding of spirituality (and religiousness) primarily as a human activity for which the key attribution is 'search'.

Interestingly Pargament and Zinnbauer do not agree on the relationship between spirituality and religiousness. For Zinnbauer, *spirituality* is a personal or group *search for the sacred.* It is a broader construct than *religiousness* which he understands as a *search that unfolds within a traditional sacred context*. For Pargament, *spirituality* is, likewise, a *search for the sacred*, but he posits *religiousness* as a *search for significance in ways related to the sacred* within a broader field of human activity. Both understand spirituality as a search for the sacred. The real point of departure dividing the two appears to be not which is the broader construct but the difference in concepts of religiousness. Zinnbauer relates religiousness to traditional religions and Pargament relates it to a general human activity in search for significance. They agree that any scholarly definition runs the risk of contradicting an individual's self-definition. I will return to this insight later. Presently it is important to note that two terms, "significance" and "the sacred", function centrally in the understanding of spirituality.

These two terms serve as a core to Pargament's visualization of spirituality in his book *Spiritually Integrated Psychotherapy* (2007, p. 33, used here with permission):
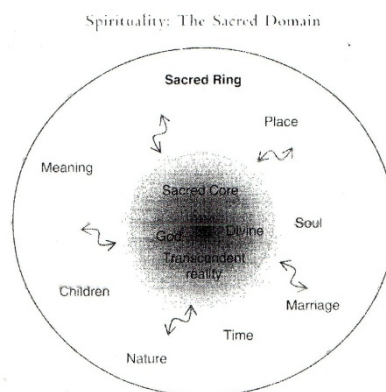

FIGURE 2.1. Picturing the sacred.

There are various searches for significance and/or experiences with meaning that play roles in spirituality (relationships, nature, soulfulness, special times and places), but their significance for spirituality is understood in terms of their relation (proximity) to a sacred core. The sacred core is further defined by Pargament in terms of transcendence, the divine, God. Pargament maintains that spirituality is a holy business with a specific religious reference.

Despite their insistence that the term spirituality is multidimensional, neither Pargament nor Zinnbauer suggest that the term 'spirituality' can function at different levels: as a type of human experience in terms of deepening, connection or authenticity; as an activity or group of activities as in spiritual practices; as a dimension of human existence arousing its own questions of meaning and purpose; as a reference to specific traditions or institutions; and as reference to a transcendent dimension or experience. The various references are or can be interrelated. Failing to distinguish between them may contribute to definitional variability such that in some instances, the term is interchangeable with religion whereas, in other instances, it is comparable to religiousness or becomes a functional equivalent of existentiality.

1.2 Relating spirituality to the non-religious (Swinton and Solomon)

The practical theologian John Swinton proposes a different visualization (2001, p. 38, used with permission) in his book *Spirituality and Mental Health Care*.
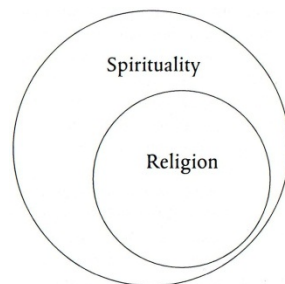
Swinton (2001, p. 11) describes "the migration of spirituality from the 'religious' to the 'secular'". By introducing the process of migration, Swinton suggests a constructive transition from religion as an encompassing concept to spirituality as an encompassing context:
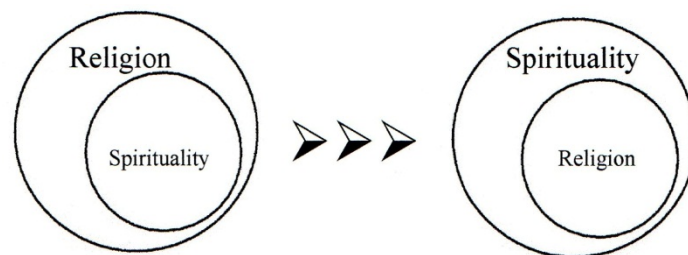
"Like religion, spirituality strives to answer deep existential questions pertaining to the meaning of life, suffering, illness and so forth, as well as recognizing the need for human interconnectivity and the desire to transcend the self in meaningful ways. However, unlike, religion, such a wider understanding of spirituality does not necessarily find its primary focus in any kind of transcendent being or force. Nor does it require affiliation with a specific community." (2001, p. 23) Swinton undergirds his position with a wider understanding of spirituality drawn from Larson et al. (1997). Similar to Pargament (2007), Swinton understands spirituality as a search for the sacred with all the feelings, thoughts, experiences, the means and methods (rituals and behaviours) relative to that search. Spirituality includes non-sacred goals that are brought into relationship with the sacred. More explicitly than Pargament, Swinton contends that the sacred is not specifically related to the divine exclusively; it can also be understood in terms of ultimate reality or truth, dependent on each individual. Even though Swinton cites various definitions of spirituality, he prefers a listing of central features of spirituality such as (ontological) meaning, (ultimate) values, transcendence, connectedness and becoming.

Swinton's conceptual framework has a strategic intent. Spirituality is something "seen to be of relevance to all people, and spiritual care is something that extends beyond the remit of the religious professional and into the working life of the whole multidisciplinary team. Within

the religious model of spirituality, spiritual care will have to do with the meeting of specifically religious needs such as nurturing the person's connection with God, prayer, confession, scripture reading and so forth. Spiritual care in its widest sense pertains to strategies designed to endow meaning, value, hope and purpose to people's lives. Interventions here would include the development of meaningful personal relationships, meditation, enabling access to sources of value and so forth." (2001, p. 38)

The formulation seems to suffer from overstatement as if prayer, confession and scripture reading are not also ways of endowing meaning, value, hope and purpose to life, or as if meaningful personal relationships and meditation could not be offered by a chaplain to non-religious persons if the conceptualization of spirituality is not right. That is, of course, not the point Swinton is trying to make. I point it out, however, because it reveals the way in which conceptualizations of spirituality are constructed, not just for reasons of adequacy but also for strategic purposes.[2]

Philosopher Robert Solomon (2002) provides a more rigorous consideration of the relationship between spirituality and religion in his book *Spirituality for the Skeptic*. Solomon offers a passionate portrayal of spirituality as "the thoughtful love of life" with an act of "transformation" or "expansion of the self". "Spirituality means to me the grand and thoughtful passions of life and a life lived in accordance with those grand thoughts and passions. Spirituality embraces love, trust, reverence, and wisdom, as well as the most terrifying aspects of life, tragedy, and death." (Solomon, 2002, pp.6-7) More than is the case with most religious perceptions of spirituality, Solomon includes the experiences ("reality") of meaninglessness and tragedy in his understanding of spirituality. He advocates a "naturalized spirituality" that is close to art of life traditions philosophically. Solomon advocates a naturalization of spirituality because in his view spirituality has been hijacked by organized religion, New Age eccentrics, divisive sectarians, and contaminated by sectarian religion, all of which can be categorized as uncritical and antiscientific thinking. Alternatively, he offers the notion of "a nonreligious, non-institutional, non-theological, non-scriptural, non-exclusive sense of spirituality, one which is not self-righteous, which is not based on Belief, which is not dogmatic, which is not anti-science, which is not other-worldly, which is not uncritical or cultist or kinky." (Solomon, 2011, p. xii)

Solomon's understanding of religion fits into the patterns discerned by both Pargament and Zinnbauer (2005), and concurs with the criticism of religion that Meester (2008) registered in the circles of new (age) spirituality. In Meester's analysis of new spiritualities, philosophical art of life approaches like Solomon's are classified alongside New Age and esoteric understandings. Solomon, who includes "New Age eccentrics" in his sweeping judgments on those who hijack spirituality, would not likely have been pleased with the comparison. However, both advocate liberating spirituality from religion, so that effectively a new paradigm might emerge in which 'religion', however understood, becomes more or less irrelevant to spirituality.


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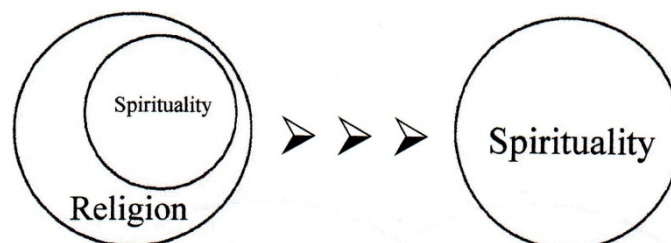
[2] Swinton's conceptualization seems to exemplify three tendencies that Paley has derogatorily criticized: reversing the traditional relation of religion and spirituality, universalizing spirituality and stretching spirituality's "denotation beyond anything directly associated with religion", thus saturate the terrain of human experience. (Paley 2008, p. 5)

Solomon illustrates that a substantial spiritual design without a sacred (or religious) core is conceivable and may be convincing in its own right. Such a stance has roots in its own (philosophical) tradition; it can be thoughtful and sensitive to human experience. His emphasis on transformation is instructive. Solomon's argument (consistent with advocates of new spirituality as depicted by Meester) about the nature of spirituality's rootedness in religious traditions remains unclear. He overstates his case by neglecting the specific content and character of religiously spiritual traditions. The critical and reforming role of spiritual movements *in* religions which to some extent coincides with the positions of external critics like Solomon remains juxtaposed to the question about where spirituality would have evolved without its religious – traditional and institutional – embededment. Solomon does acknowledge that that philosophy has neglected tending to this task. Although these historical issues go beyond the scope of the present analysis, they beg for more discernment and nuance than Solomon provides.[3]

Pargament and Zinnbauer (2005) (and indirectly Swinton, 2001 and Solomon, 2002), identify the dilemma about which concept, spirituality or religion/religiousness, is more encompassing or fundamental. Some scholars prefer to conceptualize spirituality in ways that at least some of spirituality is taken to be non-religious. Such a stance spurs additional questions. Is all of religion spiritual? Which definitions might support or reject this perception? Beyond scholarly debate, lay usage is likely to differ from scholarly application of terms. The absence of such an argument suggests that the relationship between religion and spirituality could be one of overlapping but not necessarily encompassing realms, whereby the degree and manner of overlap could vary according to definition and practice.
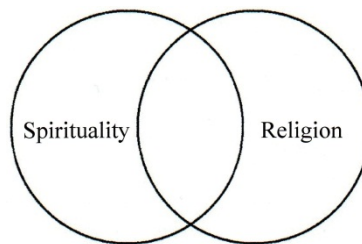
This representation may serve as a possible clarification of the relationship between the two. However, doing so may constitute an oversimplification for spiritual care giving, a domain to which I will return.

1.3 Fitting spirituality into assessment tools (Topper)
Charles Topper's *Spirituality in Pastoral Counseling and the Community Helping Professions* (2003) provides a clear depiction of the present *state of affairs* regarding spirituality, spiritual care, and spiritual assessment in health care. The book is addressed to both chaplains as spiritual care specialists and to other health care professionals as contributors to spiritual care as well as to those who might first signal spiritual need or distress. Topper presents a variety of spiritual assessment models from easy to manage four term tools to more detailed specialized methods of pastoral diagnostics. One envisions a great body of professionals all attentive to diverse spiritual needs and attending to spiritual care in a variety of ways. The wealth of information and the great variety of instruments that Topper identifies have great practical value and cumulative appeal. However, these instruments may contain some risk for unanticipated and undesired consequences not listed in the package leaflet. The reader is left with an overwhelming plurality of options that identify the present *state of development* in spiritual care: Five possible consequences include:

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[3] Solomon (2002) appeals to Plato with regard to his position that philosophy "is a spiritual practice" (p. 27), but he neglects the metaphysics of Plato which are more metaphysical and in some ways more exclusive than in many religious positions.

(1) *Overstretching the term.* Topper (2003, p.6) defines spirituality "as the universal yearning for meaning and connection beyond self that everyone naturally has." The terms 'meaning' and 'connection' combine well with the descriptive terms used by Swinton (2001). The 'search' about which Pargament and Zinnbauer (2005) wrote is rendered by Topper in terms of a 'yearning', emphasizing spirituality more as a fundamental anthropological need than describing it as a human activity. Where Pargament and Zinnbauer explicitly refer to transcendence or the sacred, Topper speaks more modestly of that which is "beyond self" in a way that is reminiscent of Solomon's (2002) expression "expansion of the self". The philosopher Harry Kunneman (2006) has employed the term 'horizontal transcendence' to refer to human experiences of meaning that go beyond the self, but need not assume the divine. To the claim of universality Topper adds the quality of 'naturalness' to spirituality. Unclear, however, is in which way "everyone naturally has" such a yearning. The concept of spirituality becomes broader and broader.

(2) *The risk of relativism.* Plurality and diversity are important components of the definition of spirituality, especially with a view to gender aspects and multicultural settings. However, Topper´s manner of presentation, one model after another, with no substantial critical comparison, may have a relativist effect: one might do it this way, but one could also do it another way. The field seems to be in need of clear criteria, other than personal preference, for sifting through the various options and models and methods of spiritual assessment. I point in this respect again to Fitchett's work (1993).

(3) *Inconclusiveness on key terms.* When comparing models I am struck by the great variation in key terms. Part of the variety can be accounted for by using Fitchett's distinction between substantial and functional terms. Some models seem to have a preference for the former; some for the latter; most employ both. But that is not all. Whereas each list or set of key terms has its own appeal and logic, it is not difficult to think of other terms that might be considered just as fundamental or that indicate other aspects of spirituality. The rationale for specific terms, for example, in Fitchett's 7x7 model or in the case of The Discipline (VandeCreek & Lucas, 2001), is generally a mix of pastoral literature (specifically pastoral diagnostics) and perceptions of a specific chaplaincy team.[4] That, too, is a reflection of the stage of development of spiritual assessment.

(4) *Terminological discrepancies.* Lists provide categories but elude simple definition. With regard to such a multidimensional concept as spirituality, any listing of central themes, any set of key terms, can only give an indication of what a spiritual caregiver might encounter. Any list can only be a reference to the whole by means of an enumeration of selected disparate parts as in merism, however significant each of the listed parts might be. On the other hand there seems to be a continuing need for a more rigorous use of terms, or at least a rigorous substantiation of the chosen terms. Often terms of quite different character are listed together. 'Courage and growth' to use an example from Fitchett (1993, p. 42) suggest a desired state of affairs, whereas the term *community* is more descriptive and *beliefs and meaning* more abstract, fundamental terms. My intention here is not so much to criticize that state of affairs, as to point it out. It is not easy to do better. The best attempts to find and define key terms remain to some extent arbitrary or culturally coloured and in all cases partial. What does that say to us about our models? And what does that say to us about spirituality and the ways we define spirituality?

(5) *Lack of consistency and clarity.* I have already pointed to various non-religious usages of the term spirituality. Such non-religious usage seems to imply hesitance or abstinence with regard to such terms as *sacred* or *divine*, as well as to any reference

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[4] The latter method has been excellently researched, translated and revised for the Belgium context by Anne VandenHoeck (2007)

to ultimacy.[5] The relativity encountered in the plurality of has its counterpart in the way in which transcendence is construed. In sum, it is important to note that presenting any number of constructions of spirituality alongside each other potentially undermines rather than substantiates the conceptual significance of spirituality. Although the term spirituality eschews a single definition, it provides an area for continual interdisciplinary conversation on spirituality requiring on-going, critical and creative evaluation if the term is to be sufficiently substantial to be of service.

1.4 Fitting spirituality into definitions (Puchalski et al.)

I now turn to a definition of spirituality arising from a major multidisciplinary consensus paper, "Improving the Quality of Spiritual Care as a Dimension of Palliative Care", co-authored by Betty Farrell and Christiana Puchalski (2009). "Spirituality is the aspect of humanity that refers to the way individuals seek and express meaning and purpose and the way they experience their connectedness to the moment, to self, to others, to nature, and to the significant or sacred." (p. 887) This definition seeks to be both comprehensive and communicative. However, the aspect of comprehension is problematic. The aspects of meaning and purpose were addressed earlier. If I point out that meaning and purpose can also be *experienced* and connectedness *sought* and *expressed*, I remain within the range and the intention of the definition. The way in which various objects of connectedness are iterated is reminiscent of the Pargament's configuration of the sacred core.

The effect Farrell and Puchalski's consensus definition is summative, cumulating a number of disparate though related elements, whereas Pargament offered a qualitative approach, moving towards the evolution of a sacred core. The consensus definition does not take the aspect of sacredness to be essential to spirituality. A reference to things that are significant is considered sufficient to employ the term spirituality.

I suggest that the most intriguing part of the cumulative definition is the twofold use of the phrase *the way* to refer to the manner in which individuals seek and express meaning and the manner in which connectedness is experienced. Although meaning, purpose, and connectedness can be experienced in many ways, the definition stops short at the critical point of pointing to particular ways which may be characteristic of what might be understood by spirituality. These ways include not only practical forms of spirituality like meditation or prayer, dance or pilgrimage, enjoying nature or culture, textual or non-verbal forms, but basic attitudes and dispositions as well. These inclusions are implied in common sense usage when a person is considered to be spiritual.

The consensus definition's strength is its practical sense and open formulation, what Fitchett (1993) describes as a functional definition. But is this definition also operational? Is it necessary for this term to be so all-encompassing? Why speak of spirituality in cases where a *search for meaning* or *existential questions* would suffice? In an editorial in *Palliative and Supportive Care,* William Breitbart (2009) responds to comments by Pär Salander (2006) that "(1) *Spirituality* as a 'concept' is poorly defined or operationalized, (2) the concept of *spirituality* is not linked to any theory and lacks systemic meaning, (3) the term *spiritual* is unnecessarily and inaccurately being used to describe what are essentially *existential* issues, and, finally, (4) the universality of the term *spiritual* is challenged…" (p. 139), as perhaps being acceptable and reasonable in an American context but not in that of a "non-English speaking secular European". Breitbart's responds that "the term *spirituality* … was necessary as a term or concept because it was a concept shared by both the religious and the secular to describe a dimension of human experience that was not captured immediately by the terms *existential* or *religious*. The term *spirituality* allowed for multiple options and permutations and interpretations of the religious or existential that still spoke to some basic human pursuit of understanding one place and purpose in the universe." (Breitbart, 2009, p. 139)

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[5] Swinton (2001, p. 23) "Ultimate Truth or Ultimate Reality" the terms being borrowed from Larson et al. (1997)

Spirituality's inherent reference to a dimension not captured by other terms bespeaks of its special quality. Generic use of the term spirituality dilutes its special characteristics and referents. Spirituality transcends the limits of a container concept and becomes a containership concept, that can carry various and sundry and perhaps contradictory cargos.[6]

The language remains cumbersome and unclear. Does spirituality encompass the experience of meaning or does the experience of meaning encompass spirituality? I propose that the exploration and expansion of meaning is the basic competence of chaplaincy care understood as the hermeneutics of human experience in times of crisis and illness, in the face of loss and handicap? How do people understand themselves, their situation, their spiritual ties, their existential questions, and how can they be helped to explore new interpretations, expand their understandings and their selves? Spirituality is a *significant* part of such circumstances, but there are existential, ethical, biographical, traditional, cultural, social and psychological aspects as well.

1.5 Fitting spirituality into research

Harold Koenig, psychiatrist and prominent researcher on mental health and spirituality, expressed his "Concerns about Measuring 'Spirituality' in Research" (2008, p. 353). Koenig accounts for the relationship of spirituality to religion and the secular as well its relationship to aspects of mental health. He criticizes research projects that define spirituality with the help of terms from mental health such as meaning, purpose, connectedness, peace, and hope. In so doing, he notes that when relationships between spirituality and mental health are measured, inevitably, the results must prove positive due to a lack of clear definitions. The overlap in the definitions makes the research essentially tautological. Koenig describes four versions of spirituality:

(1) A traditional-historical version in which spirituality is part of religion, both being distinct from the secular.
(2) A modern version that reverses the relation between spirituality and religion in a way in which spirituality includes religion but expands beyond it. It is still distinct from the secular.
(3) A tautological version that is like the modern version as far as spirituality, religion and the secular are concerned, but that differs from the modern version in that it includes aspects of mental health and human value.
(4) A modern clinical version of spirituality (not suitable for research purposes) in which spirituality encompasses not only religion and positive mental health, but also the secular.

Theoretically there is a fifth possibility, which Koening does not mention, in which spirituality includes religion and the secular but not mental health characteristics. Koenig points out that versions three and four above are not suited for research purposes on spirituality and mental health because they assume what the research is intended to investigate, namely, that spirituality has a (positive) relation to mental health. Even the relationship of spirituality to physical health becomes problematic for research, in as much as physical health also correlates to mental health. One interesting conclusion of Koenig's review is that the more traditional-historical the understanding of spirituality, the more precisely it can be defined and the more measurable its effects are in research (p. 354) Koenig also suggests that broader definitions of spirituality are ill-fitted to research, yet they may well serve clinical practice. Whereas research definitions need to be reductionistic and exclusive, the clinician in a public health care system needs to use terms that are inclusive, welcoming, supportive and non-discriminating. "For these reasons, a broad, nebulous and diffuse term such as spirituality is ideal. Here, spirituality is a sufficiently vague term that patients can define for themselves. For some patients it will mean connection with nature,

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[6] Paley speaks of "as sort of giant conceptual sponge, absorbing a lavish and apparently inexhaustible range of items…" (Paley 2008, p. 5)

relationships with loved ones, the high experienced from psychedelic drugs, or the fulfilment of human potential; for other patients, it will mean their religious beliefs and relationships within a faith community." (Koenig, 2008, p. 354)

It remains questionable whether an abstract, vague term is functional or even necessary for contacts with patients. Generally, when patients tell their stories, conceptual terms like spiritual or existential are not usually included in the recitation. When they are used, these terms usually have specific referents.

It also remains questionable whether distinguishing between research and clinical practice is preferable when considering the usage of the term spirituality. The trend in health care, and an expectation that increasingly extends to chaplaincy care, is that care be evidence based. The evidence emerges from research and clinical practice. If the clinical language does not correspond to the research language, the value of research on spiritual and/or chaplaincy care for clinical practice will be diffused or undermined. Both Koenig's critical comments on different versions of spirituality in research as his compliant position regarding clinical practice illustrates a success story for the term spirituality, particularly in English speaking settings. I fear questioning such success if it serves to improve attentiveness to spiritual and existential questions in health care settings. However, there may be a price for that success. For whom is the term encompassing? Is simplification or generalization the same as clarity? Is a discrepancy between research definitions and descriptions for clinical practice desirable? Putting the questions in this way substantiates Waaijman's observation (that the extension of the concept of spirituality is at the cost of its comprehension (2010).

2. Contexts of spirituality

Attempts to construct the concept of spirituality in inclusive and non-discriminatory terms routinely resort to the use of generalized terms and abstract relationships. However worthy and necessary doing so dilutes spirituality's distinctiveness. Consideration of contextual issues in the construction of spirituality may help to preserve its distinction.

### 2.1 The complex world of human spirit

I suggested earlier that representation of religion and spirituality in two circles may help to clarify the relationship of those two terms whether in an encompassing figure, or, preferably, in a partially overlapping configuration. However, the two circles may likely represent only a portion of what a chaplain actually encounters in working with human spirits. The term spirituality may be comprehended best by a systemic theory of human spirit. Such a theory could attest to the fundamental character of both spirit and spirituality. By example, Swinton (2001, p. 14) speaks of "Human Spirit" as "the essential life-force that undergirds, motivates and vitalizes human existence. *Spirituality* is the specific way in which individuals and communities respond to the experience of the spirit." Pargament and Zinnbauer speak of "spirit as an external transcendent or internal animating force" that "can be differentiated from spirituality, a sacred human activity" (2005, p.28).

These two examples suggest that attempts to define human spirit will encounter constructive complications similar to the problems of definitions of spirituality. These pursuits might show that the term spirit does not even fit into the broad definitions of spirituality currently available. It is still unclear whether spirit and spirituality refer to the same realm of phenomena in all cases.[7] For practical reasons, I prefer to focus on conceptualizations of spirituality, suggesting that things may be perceived less like the diagram of two overlapping circles of spirituality and religion and more like a figure of multiple intersecting circles. This configuration portrays overlapping dimensions of human experience: spirituality, religion,

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[7] Johan Bouwer (2003) examines for the Dutch language various alternatives such as spirit, soul, mind, psyche and comes to the conclusion that etymology will not resolve the questions on defining spirit, spirituality, etcetera.

morality, the aesthetical, emotions, para-normality, voices and visions. The overlaps are dynamic and different for each person.
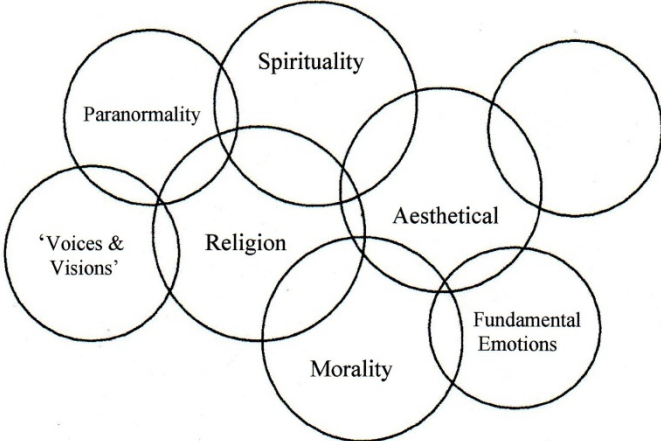
For some persons, religion and morality may be almost synonymous; for others, spirituality and the aesthetical may practically coincide. For some psychiatric patients spirituality may be closely related to the voices they hear or the visions they see, a relationship which might be experienced variously as positive or negative. Some take emotions to be the essence of spirituality and religion; others seek in spirituality or religion liberation from the constant stream of emotions. For some, spirituality and morality may be closely tied. Perhaps dimensions of the mystical as well as of the realm of the tragic might also be included. Much of the work of pastoral counselling and chaplaincy includes being sensitive to and sorting out the relationships between various realms of human experience. It involves separating what hurts and hinders from what can be helpful and healing, enabling new ways of looking at things and in drawing support from areas yet unknown. The hermeneutical task of investigating and exploring fields of meaning remains a central and crucial focus.

2.2 Spirituality and cultural difference (Lartey and Swinton)

Swinton and Topper highlight spirituality and cultural difference. Gender, too, constitutes an important realm. Swinton (2001, p. 22) adapts a distinction by Lartey (2003, p. 171) to illustrate such differences.
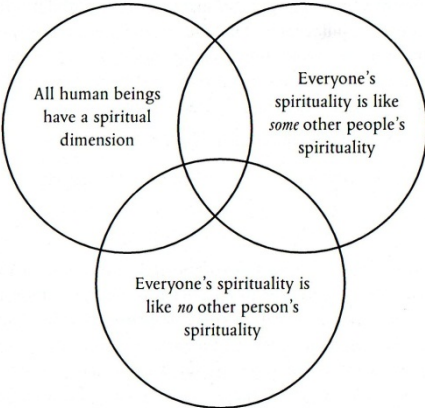
Swinton asserts the universality of a spiritual dimension: "All human beings have a spiritual dimension." (2001, p. 22) He promotes, at a second level, the notion of certain commonalities that are often shared by individuals, even groups: "Everyone's spirituality is like some other people's spirituality." (2001, p. 22) At a third level Swinton suggests specificity within this universality that everyone's spirituality is in some ways unique to that

person: Everyone's spirituality is like no other person's spirituality."(2001 p. 22) These three dimensions, universal, cultural and intrapersonal, are both overlapping and individually distinguishable.

Swinton's model is practical, insightful, and helpful. Applying this model to the various conceptualizations of spirituality raises some questions. How universal and how cultural are the understandings? Distinctions between religion and spirituality could seem foreign to some cultures. Does the claim that all human beings have a spiritual dimension evaporate if some do not share that conviction?[8] Here, again, the term spirituality encounters difficulties that terms like *meaning* and *existential* do not. It becomes clear, as Pargament and Zinnbauer (2005) indicated that academic or professional distinctions can encounter great problems in practical application and in confrontation with self-definition.[9]

2.3 Authenticity and the heart of spirituality

In an investigation of spiritual care needs of people with autism in the Netherlands (Kelder, 2010), one of the respondents who worked with autistic persons questioned whether people with autism could have faith in an existential sense. Their experience of faith was more ritualistic and had to be supported by clear teachings. Upon further questioning, it became clear that the respondent had an understanding of faith very similar to the New Age spirituality described by Meester (2008). For him, spirituality was practically synonymous with experiential authenticity and feelings of belonging.

Where does the definitional problem emanate, in the experiential world of autistic persons or in a dominant understanding of faith[10] and spirituality as emotional authenticity? The authenticity of autistic people may express itself in different ways than emotional expression characteristic of dominant cultural expectations. In specific cases, spirituality may follow different neurological patterns and take emotional detours. Waaijman (2010, p.5) pointed out that the language of experience has become the dominant language of spirituality studies. There is hardly a conversation on spirituality that does not touch on such experiential and emotional terms as authenticity, heart, and intuition. Even the word connectedness becomes open to challenge in this context. Part of the experience of autism is one of connectedness different than that of the majority of persons.

2.4 Spirituality and the experience of otherness

Relative to the concept of spirituality, the phrase "experience of connectedness" becomes provocative. Much of religious, philosophical, and spiritual traditions have to do with experiences of disconnectedness. Solipsism, estrangement, sin, illusion, absurdity, dark night of the soul, emptiness, remain fundamental (existential or mystical) experiences of disconnectedness. Is not the ability to live with tragedy an acceptance of disconnectedness, requiring the virtue of letting be[11], a surrendering, at times, of the ways in which humans seek and express meaning and purpose? Might the experience of transcendence include both an experience of connectedness and of disconnectedness? Might disconnectedness be intrinsic to the term transcendence?

While not advocating experiences of disconnectedness in a general sense, I seek to account for them within the realm of spirituality. I speak from my own tradition of Christian

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[8] Cf. the protest of Paley: "spirituality now applies to everybody, so it can be ascribed to the atheistic hedonists among us…whether we like it or not." (Paley 2008, p. 5)

[9] What does it mean, I would also ask, to say that a person *has* a spiritual dimension? That is stronger language than the observation that there is a spiritual aspect or dimension to human life or of the human community. Is the suggestion that there are universal spiritual questions on the one hand and cultural and individual answers on the other hand, generic experiences and particular interpretations?

[10] One might ask how much influence Fowler's (1981) understanding of faith as a universal human concern beyond the specific domains of religion and belief and as imagination has had on understandings of spirituality. Bregman (2004, p. 165) suggest that "spirituality" fills the niche that Tillich's faith aimed to fill.

[11] I think of Master Eckhart's virtue of "Gelassenheit", also to be translated as "releasement".

spirituality, as informed by Jewish spirituality, when I ascertain that spirituality has traditionally been formed by experiences of otherness[12], in the form of transcendence, that which is beyond or greater than oneself, beyond the human and the known world in a general sense. It is that which is beyond oneself in a social sense, the other, the Thou (Buber 1970), and which is beyond oneself in a socio-ethical sense, the stranger, the exterior, the marginalized (Levinas, 2003; Dussel, 1988). Pointing to relations to others in general or to connectedness and to the sacred and/or transcendent, as most definitions do, insufficiently articulates such fundamental experiences of 'otherness' that are part and parcel of spiritual traditions.

Waaijman (2010, p.32) has expressed a related point in speaking of the dialogical structure of spirituality as an orientation toward the other. He emphasizes the dialogical structure over against terms that could be understood in a more individual and monological sense like 'experience' or 'search for meaning'.[13] It might be questioned whether such a dialogical understanding is not a culturally bound understanding of spirituality, influenced by dialogical philosophy. Are conceptualizations of spirituality that emphasize union or dissolution ultimately dialogical? Conversely, the fact that people might change and learn to look at life differently with altered values and perceptions of meaningfulness, with transformed understandings of oneself in relation to being suggests that an experience of otherness, including aspects of interruption and disconnectedness, could be an important element of spirituality. Waaijman refers to a passive aspect of spirituality in contrast it to a more active component such as the term search might connote, such as a search for meaning or for the sacred (2010, p.16). In this instance, otherness becomes important in a passive or receptive mode. This observation suggests than an adequate definition of spirituality needs to include this dynamic nature of otherness.

2.5 Spirituality and the ethics of human dignity
The process of interviewing patients in psychiatric treatment on their perceptions and interpretations of chaplaincy care suggests an additional dimension of spirituality.[14] Those I have interviewed frequently emphasized the importance of feeling accepted as a human being as one of the primary fruits of their encounters with chaplains. In emphasizing the recognition of their basic humanity (dignity, personhood and agency as human subjects) they point to the attention paid to their everyday concerns as an essential element in the contact with the chaplain and as a significant contribution to their recovery. By most of the patients (in a Dutch context), the attention attributed to the basics of human existence was distinguished from the more religious and spiritual aspects of chaplaincy care. That distinction was reflected in the use of contrasting language.

The difference in language suggests, in turn, a difference in discourse. The discourse of spirituality is a different discourse than that of human dignity or ethics. Relating those different discourses, the overlaps and significant ties, would seem desirable, but not subsuming one discourse in another. Ethical discourse represents one of the ways in which humans seek to explore meaning, value and connectedness. However, ethics employs a specific terminology and argumentative structure that is distinguishable from spiritual discourse. Employing spirituality as an all-encompassing term runs the risk of insufficiently

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[12] A similar description is provided by Nolan who understands spirituality "as the naming of the discourse that offers subjects ways of being that are open to ultimate, radical otherness (both of the other and of the self), an intellectual and existential openness to that which we might call the unknown or the mysterious; ways of being that are open (if you will) to that which is left remaindered (unsaid and unsayable, in Wittgenstein's sense) by the discourse(s) of psychology." (Nolan 2009, p. 209) This description, which I only discovered after completion of my manuscript, shares with my own approach the central notions of 'otherness' and 'discourse', but is not further developed in the article from which it is taken.

[13] The literal translation of the word "zingeving" that Waaijman confronts would be "meaning giving".

[14] Publication will be forthcoming in 2013. Preliminary findings were presented in March of 2012 at a conference on "Spiritual Care and Health: Improving Outcomes, Enhancing Wellbeing in Glasgow.

recognizing the specific character of the discourses of ethics and human dignity, the different ways in which people seek meaning and connectedness.

2.6 Everything is spiritual but spirituality is not everything

A similar issue presents itself when spirituality is listed along with other aspects like the physical, social or psychological as it is, for example, in the World Health Organization's definition of palliative care [15] It might be questioned whether the spiritual is an aspect alongside other aspects or a sphere or dimension that might be related to all other aspects. In other words, does spirituality represent a uniquely different quality of human life, or is it a description of a type of experience among others? Is it both? All- encompassing definitions of spirituality incorporate most anything as containing a spiritual aspect, bearing, connotation or dimension. As mentioned before, the trouble with the all-encompassing definitions is that they insufficiently identify those aspects which are characteristically spiritual, thus failing to adequately sensitize caregivers to what might be spiritual needs. As a result, matters that also call for care by a chaplain such as moral dilemmas or bereavement might not be recognized as belonging to the realm of the spiritual and/or to chaplaincy care.

There still seems to be a tendency such as Swinton's (2001) effort, to define spirituality and spiritual care such that includes all of what a chaplain might do. Brent Peery suggests that spiritual care may be a good term for *part* of the work of a chaplain, for part of *chaplaincy* care, but not for the whole. (2009) Attention to religion and world views, to ethics and aesthetics, are also components of such care. However, the hermeneutical task of exploring meaning is more basic to chaplaincy care than spirituality as such. This does not mean that hermeneutics is more fundamental than the experience of spirituality in a general sense. Rather, hermeneutics contains the tools necessary to discern spiritual experience and contextualize spiritual care.

An analysis or assessment of spirituality, both in a general sense and in relation to a particular patient or client, is essential to the work of a chaplain. However, the term spirituality does not serve as a summary of chaplaincy care without diluting the very quality of what spirituality stands for. Adequate analysis of the spirituality and the spiritual resources of a patient become important. Such analysis of spirituality in health care should seek to:

1. respect individual and particular self-definitions of spirituality and be adaptive to them;
2. allow for differences in context, culture, and religious or ideological persuasion;
3. allow for a broad range of spiritual direction ranging from the significant to the sacred, from the religious to the secular, from the holy to the everyday and mundane;
4. respect the position of those who reject spirituality;
5. pay close attention to the *ways* in which people seek and express meaning, purpose and connectedness, i.e. live their spirituality both in the form of specific practices and in fundamental dispositions and attitudes;
6. understand spirituality as a distinctive dimension of human life with a distinguishable quality and significance for the search for meaning in life;
7. provide a terminology and framework of thought for a recognizable and distinguishable discourse;
8. include experiences of connectedness *and* disconnectedness;
9. account for the passive and receptive mode of spiritual experience; and
10. appreciate the significance of the experience of otherness as witnessed to in spiritual traditions.

The first five criteria seek to account for spirituality in terms that run close to the *lived spirituality of persons in their unique individuality, differing contexts and various persuasions.* The second five criteria advocate a *distinct discourse on spirituality that is sensitive to the receptive experience of otherness.*

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[15] See http://www.who.int/cancer/palliative/definition/en/.

These criteria might be self-evident. However, I offer that the analysis and (some of) the resulting criteria should be uppermost in chaplaincy encounters. Hopefully, doing so will contribute to the on-going conversation about and conceptualization of spirituality. I hope to explore whether the criteria can, in fact serve, to inform a more explicit and constructive approach to spirituality in health care in a subsequent article.

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