


# First steps into the discipline: On the 'spirit' in the discipline of Christian spirituality

**Author:**Christo Lombaard<sup>1</sup> **Affiliation:**

<sup>1</sup>Department of Christian Spirituality, Church History and Missiology, College of Human Sciences, School of Humanities, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

**Corresponding author:**

Christo Lombaard,  
christolombaard@gmail.com

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In this article on entering the academic discipline of Christian Spirituality, terminological sensitivities in interdisciplinary work are taken as a point of departure. From this more general base, the following four points are argued: 'Spirituality' is a multivalence term, indicated from academic considerations and from non-academic writings of our time, with journalism serving as a productive example; terms 'spirit', 'spirituality' and 'Holy Spirit' ought not to be conflated with one another by new colleagues entering the discipline of Christian Spirituality; Christian Spirituality studies the experience-expression-dynamics of the Christian faith, and not the Holy Spirit as primary topic of investigation; however this should not be taken to imply an impoverished Christian theology, because the Trinity, as demonstrated, remains part of the core assumptions of this discipline.

**Keywords:** Christian spirituality; Inter-disciplinary; Entering the discipline; 'Spirit'; Holy Spirit.

## Our view forward

In this contribution,<sup>1</sup> the use of the term 'spirit' in the discipline of Christian Spirituality is considered. The ways in which the protocols of scholarship in academia, in general, operate are briefly reviewed, giving some practical examples of how misunderstandings develop easily. The phenomenon of spirituality offers, because of its naturally open nature, its own terminological timidities. Some instances from the world of journalism, in various forms, offer good opportunity to illustrate both public reception and divergent usage of the term 'spirituality'. Such divergence is, however, reflected in academia too, illustrated, for instance, when the term 'spirit', which resonates within the term 'spirituality', is at times equated to the third person of the Holy Trinity by new colleagues entering this field. This contribution thus traces instances of these various languages and application dynamics, offering implicit caution, namely that careful treading is required with such an open and current term.

## Home(y) language

Every academic discipline has its set of shared understandings, acquired by those who read and write in the discipline over a substantive period of time. These shared understandings consist of the tacit assumptions that influence, for instance, how the stock phrases, representing central aspects of the discipline, are employed. Such standard expressions develop not with the purpose of exclusion (although it may at times be perceived as such) but facilitate effectual specialist discussions. Such terminology, along with *inter alia* the standard methodologies and the most important primary and secondary sources relevant to the practice of the discipline, form what may be called the *protocols of science* within a certain field of scholarship.

Each field of scholarship is characterised by such protocols, reflecting specialisation – in the positive sense of depth of scholarship, rather than more negatively the isolation of a discipline from the broader endeavour of human understanding. Amongst the many effects of such specialisation, one result is that terminology may be shared across disciplines, but the terms in fact carry different meanings or nuances in those different disciplines. Such distinctions and gradations of meaning attached to the same term is something that dawns on practitioners only after immersion in the discipline/s concerned, and can be quite marked or more shaded<sup>2</sup>:

1. This article is the further development of the presentation at the 'Spirituality, Theology, Education' International Conference hosted by the Discipline of Christian Spirituality at the University of South Africa, from 20 to 22 September 2018, during a special panel session on Trinitarian Theology arranged by Dr Willem Oliver. The author extends his sincere appreciation for the encouragement to participate in that session and contribute to this special edition.

2. I directly draw here from my dual academic backgrounds, firstly, communications (Lombaard 2004) and secondly, theology (Lombaard 2009), and experiences in interdisciplinary research development from these backgrounds.

**Note:** The collection entitled 'God as One', sub-edited by Erna Oliver (University of South Africa) and Willem Oliver (University of South Africa).

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- An example of a more dramatic difference is the term 'communications', which (expanding here on the warning sounded in Lombaard 2019b:3) in Engineering and related sciences (e.g. Sadiku 2002) may well refer to, for example, radio waves and the machinery and technology required to harness these naturally occurring phenomena. However, the term 'communications' in social sciences (e.g. Littlejohn 2017) refers to understanding interpersonal human endeavours as we engage with one another, either individually or in groups of different sizes, by means of, for example, journalism, advertising, rhetoric and more. Although there may be some overlaps as these quite distinct fields of scholarship develop (e.g. the importance of Shannon and Weaver's (1949) *mathematical theory of communication* in both these academic fields of 'communications'), for the greater part the training and the subject matter treated are divergent.
- An instance, related more to the shades of nuance across disciplines is the term 'anthropology'. In humanities, in general, this term refers to the study of the phenomenon of culture and cultures (e.g. Welsch, Vivanc & Fuentes 2017), whereas in theology (e.g. Becker, Dietrich & Holm 2017), the term refers to the way human beings are in principle – foundationally or essentially – viewed in the Bible or in various formulations of theology as explained by Lombaard (2019b):

The one may be described as a 'view from below', relating to that which is found in practice amongst humans; the other is something more akin to a 'view from on high', as it were: as is discerned from the Bible and other forms of Christian religious authority how God would see humanity and/or would want us to see humanity. (n.p.)

Such shades of nuance are present in all academic disciplines, and are accepted by practitioners within each, generally understood but almost never explicated, as accustomed significances. Hence, scholars more established in a field soon realise when someone from another discipline writes in their field, or when a relative newcomer to their field employs its jargon. A sense of uneasiness develops when encountering contributions from such sources, as the terminology is indeed employed but in a way which does not resonate well with the established sense/s usually attributed to the stock terms, phrases, idioms, concepts, insights, methods and approaches. Analogous to when a person employs a language other than the one/s in which they are thoroughly at home, formulations then at times do not quite convey what the intention seems to be. This not in the manner of a certain playfulness one encounters with someone is thoroughly at home in the language, but more akin to the awkwardness that accompanies formulations that miss the surmised marks of intention. Of this, the term 'anthropology' provides a good instance.

It is clear from these examples that there is room for misunderstanding, and with not too much difficulty, within and between academic fields. Nor is such a possible misunderstanding restricted to only a few disciplines; it is a

natural corollary to specialisation. Moreover, it is especially newcomers to a discipline who tend to be more susceptible to misconstruing, from their backgrounds, what the denotations and connotations are implicit to the meaning of terms of the newly entered discipline. The present contribution relates to this vulnerability and has in mind specifically the second kind of terminological misconstrual indicated by the above examples of nuance. The practice and the discipline of spirituality carry within it, as one of its base terms, the word 'spirit'. In both popular and academic domains of society, this has implications for how the term 'spirituality' is employed.

## Entering into 'spirituality' as a scholarly discipline

Within the introductory (e.g. Perrin 2007) as well as the more specialised technical literature (e.g. Waaijman 2000) in the discipline of Christian Spirituality, the understanding of what the terms 'spirituality' and its 'spirit' refer to is often outlined. As Sheldrake (2016) summarises his own more substantial works (e.g. Sheldrake 2013) on the term spirituality:

The concept of spirituality originated within Christianity. The word translates a Latin noun *spiritualitas*, associated with the adjective *spiritualis* (spiritual). These [are] derive[d] from the Greek noun *pneuma* (πνεῦμα), spirit, and the adjective *pneumatikos* (πνευματικός) as they appear in St. Paul's New Testament letters. It is important to underline that, in the New Testament, 'spirit' and 'spiritual' are not opposed to 'physical' or 'material', Greek *soma* (σῶμα), Latin *corpus*. They are the opposite of the flesh or fleshliness, Greek *sarx* (σάρξ), Latin *caro*, and refer to everything that is contrary to the Spirit of God. A spiritual person (see 1 Cor. 2, 14–15) was simply someone who lived under the influence of the God's Spirit. (n.p)

That the meaning of 'spirituality' had changed over the centuries also becomes clear when one reads the primary sources, and such variance is no less the case either within different contexts. These have been amply traced in multiple volumes, with, for instance, Bernard McGinn who has been particularly productive in this regard (see, for example, McGinn, Meyendorf and Leclercq (1987) and Raitt, McGinn and Meyendorf (1989) amongst his many publications on the history of spirituality; not to forget the important work on Christian Spirituality by the ever-prolific McGrath (1999)).

The above has its reverberations on a more broadly cultural level, and also in more specific instances of culture, such as journalism, each of which is now touched briefly.

Broadly cultural, the instance of alterations over time and context in the meaning within a language, e.g. in French word *spiritualité* and in German word *spiritualität* alerts us to the difficulties in translating this term from western context into other, different cultural streams. The phenomenon of spirituality may in some respects seem largely similar, but as Wildman (2011:12) warns, it should not be assumed to be as such. Identifiability does not mean identity; parallels do

not imply equivalence; correspondence is not sameness. Hence, the more so with inter-culturality, there is ample room for misunderstanding. Precisely such problems of inter-culturality lead to a spirituality such as Christian spirituality that seeks to base itself on the Bible (cf. most recently Welzen 2017; in more piously reflective mode, cf. e.g. Pieper 2011), committing eisegesis – reading into the texts’ meanings that are not present there.

Such a ‘biblical spirituality’ may seem simple and straightforward at first glance for believers who live in intimate contact with the scriptures, but it becomes methodologically intriguing when most particularly the Old Testament is drawn upon because of the mentioned cultural differences between, in this instance, text and readers. These differences ought to lead to such searching methodological questions as follows (Lombaard 2015:4):

- What am I missing?
- What have I unwittingly read into it?
- Can these questions at all be answered?

Such self-critical procedural reflections apply as much when crossing the cultural barriers between the ancient scriptures and their modern readers as to when there is spiritual engagement across contemporaneous cultural expressions. To be sure, even with closely related terms within one language, difficulties of understanding are evident, such as when *spiritualiteit* [the experience and expression of faith] and *spiritualisme* [communicating with the deceased] are regarded as synonymous by some members of the Afrikaans churchgoing public.

It is no wonder, then, that it is well accepted amongst researchers into spirituality that this phenomenon, like some of the most basic terms of many fields of scholarship, remains essentially undefinable. Try as we may, and must, definition in the sense of capturing the meaning of these central terms precisely, and with stability of denotation across a substantial period of time, remains elusive. As formulated in Lombaard (2008):

Other such dimensions of humanity are equally ancient, similarly vague, and just as present in our time, yet beg no exact definitions from us. More strongly formulated, they positively defy sharp delineation (cf. Ponzio 2003:58–59). These facets of life include food, sex, music, dance, power, fear, love and hate, beauty and revulsion, life and death, sounds and silence, colours and movements, stillness — all of which we are thoroughly familiar with. Yet, description never quite captures these phenomena. In fact, any too firm a description will be experienced as limiting, even as destructive to the appreciation of what the phenomenon really is... Perhaps appropriately, thus, spirituality remains — *in* and *to* all senses — a mystery. (p. 95, in a section titled ‘Indefinite defining’)

It has been suggested in some instances that such attempts at capturing ‘spirituality’ ought to be foregone. Central to spirituality remains, namely, experience – this in both classic and current writings on the human phenomenon of spirituality (e.g. James (2002 [1902]) and Pretorius (2008:147–165),

respectively, are only two examples amongst many on this, as it is difficult to describe the human quality of ‘experience’). There is no spirituality that is not experiential. The innate sense of this leads to the popularity of what would have been the otherwise pleonastic expression ‘lived experience’ (cf., e.g., Chandler & Munday 2016). We as humans are engaged fully, drenched inescapably in what fills our lives. None the less so with the senses of faith which we come across and give expression to in our lifetimes – that is, our spirituality.

Contrary to the modernist assumption, there is no living without relating to these above-human senses of life, by means of which we then orientate foundationally even the minutiae of our existence, albeit in mostly unbeknownst ways. As the author Huxley (1937:252) formulated this unfathomability of the religious sensibilities we subscribe to, often unwittingly: A person could have good metaphysics or bad metaphysics, but it is impossible to have ‘no metaphysic’. However, perhaps because the majority of academic disciplines, and certainly the more popular ones, carry a heavy debt to the advances of modernism, many of which are positive and valuable, spirituality as a post-modern undertaking (Kourie 2006:75–94) has not been allowed this freedom from particularising itself in atomistic detail yet. Suggestions in public fora to do without too firm defining have therefore been met at times with quite vociferous objection.

The modern study of spirituality namely came of age especially within the post-modern societal context, in which relationships of meaning rather than the sharpest possible delineation had become increasingly accepted (Kourie 2009:148–173). Yet, a general sense of shared understanding within the discipline of spirituality/Christian Spirituality/spirituality studies (as this area of study is variously referred to) has long been established, and this is carried out reflexively and reflectively as academic colleagues enter this field.

## Entering from the ‘spirit’ of the times

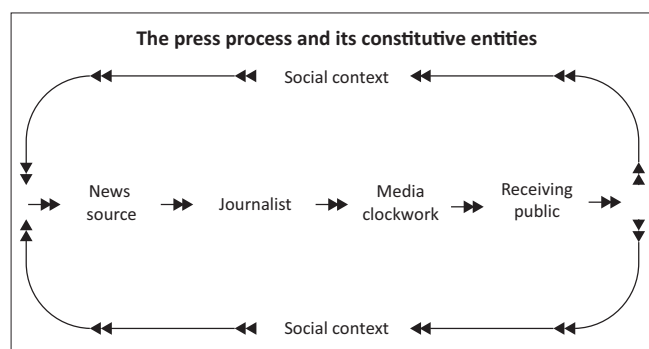
It is often pointed out in both academic and popular texts on spirituality, although in different ways, that the positive sentiments wielded around this term is part of our *Zeitgeist*. This term simply elicits popular affirmation – in all but extreme anti-religious circles, although this too is an expression of spirituality (less negatively so, cf. e.g. Comte-Sponville 2006; De Botton 2013) – in that ‘spirituality’ links to the underlying sensibilities and sensitivities of our time. (For an excellent philosophical analysis and South African case study of these practically hermeneutical dynamics, relating as in this contribution to both academic works and journalism, see Deist (1994).) That the word carries different meanings in broader society, likewise at present to what is the case in assorted non-academic contexts as had been briefly indicated above, is also clear when comparisons are drawn between how ‘spirituality’ is referred to in, for instance, self-help books (where spirituality is often understood as finding

meaning within and for oneself; cf. e.g. Chopra (1994)) and, even more accessible to the broader public, in journalism (cf. Glader (2016) for a non-academic, positive assessment; Proctor (2019) provides for a recent television example).

Journalism provides a particular kind of barometer of what is uppermost in the minds of people in current society. Linked as it is to its intended audience, both for the sake of economic survival and because of its adopted role in reflecting aspects of society to sections of society, it is valuable as a gauge of trends, for instance. This social connectedness of journalism can be graphically depicted in Figure 1 as follows (Lombaard 2002:5):

In this diagram, the placement of the press is depicted within a system's theoretical perspective: The society in which a news publication or organisation operates, forms the wider social context, consisting not only of the people involved but also of the technology and the legal and ethical norms operative within that community (which may be very small in size and in geographical placement, or may constitute vast numbers spread across many places). Within this social context operates the 'press process', including – following here the order depicted in the diagram – (1) the persons and documents and more from which information and views are obtained, (2) the reporter responsible for placing such information and views in formats recognisable as news, (3) the institutional workings of the news organisation within which the particular reporter operates, and then (4) the intended primary audience of the resulting news article or bulletin, to the realities of which (language, educational level and other demographic factors) any good news report is always adapted to.

It becomes clearer from this representation as to how social reality (as least some aspects of it) is funnelled through the mass media of our time, with press as the written media in both its traditional and electronic formats being particularly productive for argumentation such as the case here. The reasoned, written word namely implies reflection of some sort on the part of its author(s) and editor(s), with the resultant piece being an accessible and relatively stable source of interpretation and illustration. The latter is therefore employed to sketch in the broadest outlines the social reality from which many colleagues enter the discipline of spirituality. This, not while in any way suggesting that mass media are fully



Source: Lombaard, C., 2002, *The god of journalism is dead. Objectivity, subjectivity and the press*, p. 5, MedPharm Publications, Pretoria

FIGURE 1: The press process.

determinative of what their receivers think. Theories of the influence of media on society (cf. Lombaard 2002:77–90 for an overview) have moved beyond such earlier and more naïve conceptions of what the media may achieve. However, the ever-present mass media do help to shape the social reality in which we live (cf. McCombs 2004 on this delineated influence), and on which non-specialists on spirituality must necessarily draw, and engage with, as they enter the field. Hence, a few instances of recent media renderings (most particularly articles, given the methodological considerations mentioned above) are drawn to characterise in some ways what understandings are garnered under the term 'spirituality' in our time within this broader societal sphere.

Over the last decade and a little more, 'spirituality' in the news media has been understood often almost reflexively as something freer, or more liberative, over religion, with the latter then implied as something negative, namely restricted or restrictive. An example from recent South African radio journalism illustrates this precisely; note how this report on a radio interview from the radio station's website stresses spirituality as something more open (Radio 702 [2018], including here selected tweeted texts from the broadcast relating directly to such an openness, and the link to the podcast of the interview):

#### 'Spirituality goes beyond religion'– Christianity and ancestralism debated

Is it possible for ancestral worship and religion to coexist?

Presenter Eusebius McKaiser facilitated a debate between people with two opposing views.

Pelokazi Madlingozi is both a sangoma and a Christian. She believes that spirituality goes beyond the constructs of religion.

Madlingozi self-identifies as a spiritualist and says spirituality should not be limited by human thinking.

She grew up in a staunch Christian home and says that her own insights from her spiritual journey have challenged her to question common beliefs.

On the other hand, Mahlase Winston Mashu is a Christian pastor who believes that many aspects of ancestralism and Christianity are not compatible.

He says that elements of ancestralism, such as communicating with the dead, are not in line with Biblical Christianity.

The pair share their individual experiences and their divergent understanding of the Bible, Christian faith, and ancestralism:

I choose to call myself a spiritualist because I don't like being confined within a box.

– Pelokazi Madlingozi, healer, prophet Christian and physiotherapist

As much as the scriptures defined what I understood to be spirituality, I started to realise that spirituality goes beyond religion.

– Pelokazi Madlingozi, healer, prophet Christian and physiotherapist

Religion is not the only thing that defines spirituality. Spirituality is broad, and religion is just one aspect of it.

– Pelokazi Madlingozi, healer, prophet Christian and physiotherapist



The ancestors are very integral in my life.

– *Pelokazi Madlingozi, healer, prophet Christian and physiotherapist*

I don't think that Biblical Christianity is compatible with the deep core issues of ancestralism.

If I'm going to use the Bible as a lens, I'm going to say that it's not the ancestors who are calling you because the concept of the ancestors, according to the Bible, is problematic.

– *Mahlaste Winston Mashu, Director of Ravi Zacharias International Ministries in Africa*

Listen to the intriguing debate on The Eusebius McKaiser Show: Podcast link 'Is Ancestralism Compatible with Christianity. The Best of the Eusebius McKaiser Show' – [www.702.co.za/articles/318198/spirituality-goes-beyond-religion-christianity-and-ancestralism-debated](http://www.702.co.za/articles/318198/spirituality-goes-beyond-religion-christianity-and-ancestralism-debated). (n.p.)

This summary of the radio interview broadcasted on 6 September 2018 presents very well one popular (or perhaps populist) view on spirituality, namely as something newer, more specifically as being more inclusive than more traditional expressions of religion. Naturally, casting spirituality in this way is not truly new, but it is present freshly enough in the public domain that it can still be in the media cast as such.

This sense of what would constitute 'spirituality' can be taken a step further, though. Recently, an example has namely presented itself of an instance where the three spheres of journalism, entertainment television programming and home-made spirituality have overlapped in an unusually telling manner. Here, a media personality passes on – or perhaps, passes off – his own version of what may be called 'spirituality lite' (cf. MacKian 2012:22–44), or to coin a term, 'spiritualitiness'. The article (Hosking 2019), short enough to be quoted in full here (without the graphics and other articles linked to the original), illustrates what may be counted – or perhaps, touted – as 'spirituality', or more particularly because of its complete self-referentiality, as pop-spirituality tends to be:

#### **Apparently Killer Mike Really Does Have His Own Religion**

##### **Involving a shrine in his house full of 'women figures of divinity'**

Killer Mike is full of big ideas. On his wild new Netflix show *Trigger Warning with Killer Mike*, the rapper-turned-public personality goes to extreme lengths to shed light on systemic issues, often leading him to off-the-wall solutions, from creating educational porn to founding a sovereign nation within the US. The episodes escalate absurdly quickly, making it hard to tell what's real and what might be pseudo-scripted reality TV. But one of his most memorable escapades – when he starts a new religion – is apparently based on his actual, one-of-a-kind religious practices, according to a Friday BET<sup>3</sup> interview.

In the episode 'New Jesus', Killer Mike is frustrated that black Christian communities are taught to worship a white Jesus. So he starts the 'Church of Sleep', centered on the

3. BET here refers to *BET UK* ([www.betintl.co.uk/?cid=facebook](http://www.betintl.co.uk/?cid=facebook)), a British entertainment and television news site.

radical prospect of black people finally getting to rest, as his makeshift congregation naps, reflects, and writes their own scripture. But of course, like all Killer Mike ideas, he kicks it up a notch by the end, holding a sermon in his favorite strip club, where women pole-dance while a gospel choir sings and his parishioners pass around joints.

While that particular congregation only came together for the show, Killer Mike based the Church of Sleep on his own breed of worship. After being skeptical of organized religion since he was a kid and studying religious philosophy more seriously in college, he's invented his own rituals and prayer processes.

'I pray at an altar within my home; give gratitude to my ancestors, they're the ones that got me here. Then I do official things within that prayer', he told BET. 'I wake up and do my positive affirmations, and thank the Gods within me, and the Gods I see existing outside of me everyday'.

That goes for his children, too.

'I encourage my children to worship God within them and we take time specifically to do that', he said.

He told BET, he has a personal prayer room in his house 'filled with all women figures of divinity', including shrines to his mother and grandmother – then, because this is Killer Mike we're talking about, checked himself before things got too serious.

'I go to the strip club with my wife as often as possible', he added.

He went on to tell BET, in a surprisingly gorgeous little tangent, that he believes right before young children are taught about organized religion, they're the most in tune with personal spirituality.

'You're already in tune with God [before about four years old]. You're already talking to the air. No one knows who you are talking to', he said. 'You're walking out into the grass, so that's appreciating God to me'. (n.p.)

Apart from this instance illustrating again what Jonkers (2012) had earlier indicated as the unsustainable superficiality of what is presented as spirituality at times,<sup>4</sup> it is also an indication of the scope of what may fall within the descriptive range of the term 'spirituality'. In the above instance, it is clearly something to do with meaning-seeking, but in a home-made way.

Less dramatically so, different meanings of 'spirituality' associated with fully different spheres of society illustrate below the case further of how divergently the term functions within the mass media. This is illustrated in briefest fashion with three additional instances from recent journalism, in which the term 'spirituality' is employed, firstly, relating to non-religious Christmas celebration (McQuilan 2018):

#### **A Secular Guide to a Spiritual Christmas (McQuilan 2018)**

My husband is a long-lapsed Catholic, and I have never felt comfortable with organized religion – but we both consider ourselves 'spiritual'. Personally, I'm a deep seeker of meaning

4. This example relates (as formulated in Lombaard 2018) as much to:

[C]ontemporary *bricolage* spirituality which may draw (often disconcertingly superficially) on crystals, traditional religions, ecological sensibilities, Eastern philosophies, quantum physics and more, all of which constitute serious expressions of religiosity, yet have failed in combining these commitments with serious scholarship. (p. 8)

and connection; I believe in something bigger than myself, and kindness is my moral center.

Because we are religiously unaffiliated, our annual celebration of Christmas is completely secular and mostly habitual, continuing family traditions. But now that I'm a mom, and especially now that our son is 3 and full of questions about *everything*, I've started thinking more critically about some of these holiday practices...

We might not be raising our son in a religion, but we definitely want him to be a seeker of meaning. We're not exactly modeling that mindset if our biggest family celebration has no deeper reason behind it than 'just because'. (n.p.)

Secondly, and more unexpectedly, the term was employed in relation to a new cell phone (Simons 2018):

**4 reasons why HMD Global is a spiritual successor to Nokia, not just a brand licensee**

This week marks the second anniversary of the Nokia name's return to smartphones under HMD Global...

Here's why the company should be seen as a proper spiritual successor to Nokia...

HMD is, objectively, not Nokia.

And spiritually they aren't Nokia either. They govern themselves by nothing that made Nokia, Nokia. HMD's only mantra is 'make cheap phones and capitalise on a beloved brand as long as you can'. (n.p.)

Thirdly and most surprisingly, the term was applied to the captain of a rugby team (*Agence France-Presse* 2018):

**Jones: Farrell's aggression could trouble Boks**

*Eddie Jones* believes 'spiritual leader' *Owen Farrell's* aggression will serve England well when an injury-hit side face South Africa in their opening November international at Twickenham on Saturday...

'Owen's a good decision-maker and he has a very good tactical kicking game. He's bit of a spiritual leader in our side so being close to the action will help in that regard'. (n.p.)

In all these three cases, quite different denotations and connotations, associations and bisociations are related to the term 'spirituality'.

Together, these above-mentioned journalistic examples serve to demonstrate the wide variance related to this term that one encounters in only one genre of popular writing, journalism. This characterises to some extent at least the social world from which colleagues who choose to do so enter the discipline of spirituality.

## The 'spirit' in spirituality and Trinitarian theology

Above, both academic and popular 'incarnations' of the term spirituality are indicated – all too briefly, but substantially enough to make the case that colleagues who enter spirituality as a field of academic studies have no easy set frame of reference to draw on. In this, the closing section of this contribution, the conceptual problem that this at times creates for new entrants

into the discipline, is concretised around the term 'spirit' in spirituality. The vagueness surrounding the term 'spirituality' finds an opposite counterpart in church life, with church life situated, sociologically speaking, within an unusual intersection of the academic and media spheres of society. The church as an institution (or more accurately: as a range of institutions), its members and, for the argument sake here most important, especially its intellectual leadership are touched in various ways by the 'worlds' of academia and media. From these worlds they may well pick up the imprecisions around the term 'spirituality'; however, as mentioned above, the case is much the opposite in the counterpart of the church. Here, the meaning may well seem abundantly clear. As indicated earlier (and here expanding on that instance, Lombaard 2008:95), some churches openly exhibit a kind of inherent exclusivity claim when depicting their particular expression of Christianity as 'having spirituality'. The ecumenical insensitivity of such an attitude apart (cf. the essays gathered in Lombaard 1999), not to mention the implied hubris, it is for the purposes here most important that the connection in such pronouncements is made between (1) 'spirit', (2) the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, and (3) the term 'spirituality'. These three lexemes may easily be intuited as that they are related to one and have the same reference point – the Holy Spirit. Although it is clear that these terms are related to the same broad semantic domain (to employ here the influential lexicological theory of Louw & Nida 1989:xiii–xx; cf. Nida 1992), they are not synonymous. When they are erroneously regarded as identical, a different kind of terminological conflation is at play here than those indicated above.

When colleagues, admittedly coming from certain disciplines more than others, enter spirituality scholarship with this conflation of understandings in mind, the expressed reflex has been quite often to write, as a point of first entry into the discipline, an article or a chapter on 'the Spirit' (here the capitalisation is intentionally rendered). As formulated elsewhere (Lombaard 2017), a warning is at times required that colleagues:

[M]ie in 'n verderenuwelingslaggat [trap] nie, naamlikombloot op grond van die klank 'spirit' in 'spiritualiteit' as 'n eerstebydraeietsoor die Heilige Gees voortestel;

[... do not step into the newcomers' pothole, namely based only on the sound of 'spirit' and 'spirituality' to suggest as a first contribution a publication on the Holy Spirit]. (p. 10)

Whereas earlier such warnings to relatively speaking neophyte-colleagues to this discipline have only been sounded verbally, but as the discipline of Christian Spirituality matures, it ought to be encouraged that this is carried out more expressly, and in writing. The discipline of Christian Spirituality namely studies, as indicated above, the experience-expression-dynamics of the Christian faith; and the wider discipline of spirituality, how this experience-expression-dynamic relates to other religious and non-religious orientations of faith. It does not have as a main focus the third person of the Holy Trinity. Whereas the dogma-historical, missiological and ecclesiological aspects related to the topos of the Holy Spirit are certainly important,

if this topos does function within the discipline of Christian Spirituality, it would be related to the experience (*vide infra*) of the Holy Spirit by individuals and groups, as exhibited in actions and writings. As an academic discipline, the experiential-expressionism-dynamics remains the core interest of Christian Spirituality.

The above may be misunderstood that it seems that within the discipline of Christian Spirituality an inadequate understanding of the nature of God, as expressed within the mainstream Christian theology and in the basic confessions of the church, is operative. The Triune God would therefore not receive adequate recognition. This is however by no means the case. In introductions to the academic study of Christian Spirituality, stress has always been placed that this discipline cannot be what it is without the core Christian confessions. The latter includes *the mystery of the Trinity*. To illustrate this, insistence from three standard sources for the study of Christian Spirituality are as follows:

As McGrath (1999) formulates:

The basic theme of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is that of the richness of God, and the inability of human language or imagery to capture fully the wonder of God. *Even this very simple statement of the role of the Trinity will indicate its importance for Christian spirituality*. At one level, the doctrine is notoriously difficult to comprehend, particularly in its statements concerning 'three persons and one substance'. However, as Augustine of Hippo once pointed out, 'if you can comprehend it, it is not God'. The doctrine can thus be seen as a safeguard against simplistic or reductionist approaches to God, which inevitably end up by robbing God of mystery, majesty, and glory. (p. 47)

Perrin (2007) states much the same in this manner:

Many Christians settle on naming God as 'Father', 'Son', and 'Spirit'. They take as their basic point of departure the naming of God as Trinity, which is the foundational image of God in Christian spirituality....

There is no Christian spirituality without the Spirit – the Holy Spirit.... (p. 98)

The same with McIntosh (2005):

[T]he same Holy Spirit who beckons the divine Source or Father yearningly towards Another, and the same Holy Spirit who impels this Other, the Word and Wisdom of God, to give voice to the loving source from within the utter alterity of creation, and even human alienation from God, in the suffering and loving of Jesus. God the Holy Spirit may thus be identified as fostering Christian spirituality by pouring out within believers a beginning of that transforming state of existence that opens up toward the infinitely sharing life of God: Father sharing all in love and freedom with Son, who does not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but also equally and eternally shares divine life, and Holy Spirit whose very yearning and power of sharing both eternally unite and infinitely diversify the Trinity. (p. 179)

The implication that this generally accepted Trinitarian theology within the discipline of Christian Spirituality has for relating to other spiritualities (cf. Kourie 2011:10–31 on inter-spirituality) and to non-realist theologies of our time

(e.g. Cupitt 2002) may well be explored further; there could be no questioning the importance of these avenues of further consideration. However, those and other such explorations are for other fora; but for the sake of the intended argument in this contribution, the following points have been made:

- 'Spirituality' is a multivalence term which can be indicated from academic considerations as much as from non-academic writings of our time (with journalism serving as a productive example).
- The terms 'spirit', 'spirituality' and 'Holy Spirit' ought not to be conflated with one another either.
- Christian Spirituality studies the experience-expression-dynamics of the Christian faith, and not the Holy Spirit as a primary topic of investigation.
- The latter should by no means be taken to imply an impoverished Christian theology within the discipline of Christian Spirituality, because the Trinity remains part of the core assumptions of this discipline.

The terminological sensitivities that this has for interdisciplinary work, explored in the opening paragraphs of this contribution, ought, therefore, to be noted and constantly kept alive whilst engaging in such cross-disciplinary work.

## In our rear-view mirror

To conclude, what has been offered above are instances, both outside and within academia, of terminological freeness related to 'spirituality'. Caution is always required when dealing with such an open term in both popular usage (as illustrated by the examples from journalism above) and academic life (as illustrated above). As a solution to the vagueness inherent in such an open term, defining 'spirituality' in restrictive terms would do justice neither to the phenomenon nor to the academic disciplines studying it. Hence, care must be exercised when the term 'spirituality' is encountered that it is to be engaged with both sympathetically and critically.

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