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THE SPIRITUAL REVOLUTION OF NORTHERN EUROPE: PERSONAL BELIEFS

Abstract

Questionnaire research finds that 37 per cent of the population of Britain agree with the statement, «God is something within each person, rather than something out there». The figure for Sweden is 39 per cent; for Denmark 35 per cent. In several northern European countries these percentages are higher than those for belief in a «personal God». *If* evidence of this variety is reliable, it can be concluded that belief in the sacred, the spirituality, of the inner-life has become more popular than belief in the sacred of transcendent, «personal God», theism. Having critically reflected on the evidence, the conclusion is drawn that a spiritual revolution of belief could very well have taken place in several countries. To arrive at a more determinate picture, however, it is argued that it is vital that we (a) keep up with the times by developing research strategies, including additions to questionnaires, and (b) devote increased attention to developments which might come to provide an important «third way»: drawing on whilst «between» inner-life spirituality and transcendent theism.

Key words: inner-life spirituality; characterizing beliefs; spiritual revolution; questionnaire design; sociology of religion

Introduction

...in fact New Age beliefs and attitudes are now so widespread in our society and its culture as to effectively dominate all areas of life (Campbell 2004:40).

The evidence suggests that the inhabitants of virtually all the countries of northern Europe are living through the most radical period of change since Christianity took root in their lands. More exactly, it appears that belief in the sacred of inner-life spirituality is becoming more popular than belief in the sacred of transcendent theism. Indeed, on one interpretation of the evidence countries like Sweden and Holland are global «pioneers» of change: beliefs to do with inner-life spirituality have become numerically more significant than beliefs to do with transcendent theism, meaning that a *spiritual revolution* of belief has already taken place.

The spiritual 'life' of the spiritual revolution

Before turning to northern Europe and the evidence, I specify what I mean by the term spiritual revolution as clearly as possible. The term covers revolutions which have taken place, or might be underway, in a variety of contexts: educational practices, mainstream health provisions, mainstream business activities, for example, together with what is focussed on in this article: personal beliefs. In all instances, a revolution is in evidence when beliefs and/or activities to do with *inner-life spirituality* become more numerous than beliefs and/or activities to do with the *life-as religion and spiritualities* of transcendent theism. And there is nothing especially «fuzzy» about this.

Dwelling first on the meaning and appropriateness of the term «inner-life spirituality», my own «discovery» of the key term, «life», remains vividly etched in my mind. For a number of years leading up to 1998 I had been content with the expression «Self-spirituality». Early in 1998, however, I was waiting for a flight at Schiphol airport, reading Martin Goodman's *In Search of the Divine Mother: The Mystery of Mother Meera* (1998). Arriving at page 216, I read of «the forces of life»; of the «current of life». On the same page, I came to the passage which runs,

Slowly, against my resistance, I was brought back into connection with what I call the divine but what is really the essence of living. Slowly, I was brought to see that what is so is so. There is one force that connects all life, that is all life (Goodman 1998:216).

These lines triggered an eureka moment. «Life» is *the* term, not «Self-spirituality», with its connotations of the self-obsessed. Life is what lies at the heart of the so-called New Age movement; the life of so-called alternative spiritualities is what provides the crucial link with the greatest of all our cultural values – life-itself and the fulfilled experiential life. Reflecting upon the eureka moment as I flew back to Manchester, I became more and more convinced of what had in fact long been staring me in the face – that the term was perfect for the job. I thought of all the New Age publications with the term in their titles (for example Keyserling's *The Art of Life* 1937); I thought of the massage outlet I had just walked past at Schiphol, namely «Back to Life»; I recalled what I had read of the Romantics, not least Wordsworth's «the spirit of life». By the time I arrived back home, I had come to the conclusion that the key to making sense of a very great deal of the «alternative» sphere lay with the simple equation life = spirituality = life = spirituality, *when* this conjunction is taken to *be* at the *heart* of what it is to live in the here and now. My vocabulary changed: from Self-spirituality to «inner-life spirituality» or «spiritualities of life», for example.

Seeking to test this conclusion, I first turned back to the Romantics – in particular M. H. Abrams' classic, *Natural Supernaturalism* (1973). Having drawn attention to «the high Romantic words», namely «life, love, liberty, hope, and joy», he writes,

The ground-concept is life. Life is itself the highest good, the residence and measure of other goods, and the generator of the controlling categories of Romantic thought. ... Life is the premise and paradigm for what is most innovative and distinctive in Romantic thinkers. Hence their vital-

ism: the celebration of that which lives, moves, and evolves by an internal energy, over whatever is lifeless, inert, and unchanging (Abrams 1973:431).

Alongside other Romantics, Hegel's «Only the living, that which is spirit, sets its own self in motion and develops» is then referred to (Abrams 1973:432).

I then turned to the nineteenth-century, predominantly Germanic, popular romanticisms of healing, health and education, the counter-cultural sixties (which bears many resemblances with the popular romanticisms of the nineteenth-century), the seminar spirituality of the 1970s and 1980s, and the beliefs and activities found today: the well-being spirituality of purchasing culture, spirituality in business, spirituality in education, spirituality in CAM (Complementary and Alternative Medicine), spirituality in mainstream health care, and so on.

Notwithstanding the fact that the language of life – of inner-life spirituality or spiritualities of life – has rarely been given prominence in the academic literature on the history of «alternative spiritualities» and their contemporary manifestations, I became convinced that the «life» epiphany at the airport was justified. For whatever the differences between the ways in which «alternative» spirituality has been manifested during and since the Romantics, the enduring refrain is that spirituality lies at the heart of life *in* the here-and-now. For participants, spirituality *is* life-itself, the life-force or energy which flows through all human life (and much else besides), which sustains life, and which, when experienced, brings life «alive». For participants, spirituality *is* the truth of subjective-life, the truth of love, harmony, vibrant health or agency, the essential truths *of* what it is to *be* alive. And granted the importance of holism, especially today, spirituality ultimately *belongs to* the mind-body nexus.

Spiritualities of life can readily be distinguished from spiritualities associated with the God of transcendent theism. Quoting from *Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language*, Charles Hartshorne's characterization of «transcend» says that the term is used of «the relation of God to the universe of physical things and finite spirits, as being ... in essential nature, prior to it, exalted above it, and having real being apart from it» (1987:16). As for theism, Robert Wuthnow's characterization of a theistic world view is one which involves «an understanding of life that identifies God as the agent who governs life. God is assumed to have a purpose for each person's life» (Wuthnow 1976:3-4). Accordingly, transcendent theism involves a God who is essentially located beyond this world, acting upon this world and the life within it. The spiritualities of transcendent theism are spiritualities for life. The spirituality of experiencing the God-head itself, typical of more mystical paths, serves *to* transform life; the spirituality of the Holy Spirit, most pronounced in more charismatic or Pentecostal paths, is a spirituality which emanates from the transcendent realm *to* inform life in this world; the spirituality of obeying the will of God, typical of more conservative religions of the text, serves *to* direct life in this world.

The contrast, then, is between spiritualities *for* life and spiritualities *of* life. Fundamentally, the God of transcendent theism is not *of* the world of the here-and-now. Remove the God of transcendent theism, and Christianity – as it is widely understood – collapses. Remove the God of transcendent theism, and spiritualities of life continue

(much as) before. Quite simply, when spirituality emanates from the depths of life within the here-and-now, with the inner realm of life serving as *the* source of significance and authority, the realm of transcendent theism does not enter into the ontology.

Going further into the contrast between the two basic forms of spirituality which underpin the meaning of the term spiritual revolution, the God of transcendent theism is revealed, put into operation, in this world by way of forms of religion and spirituality. As *the* source of truth and authority, God is put into practice by forms of the sacred which transpose *the* source into human affairs. Religion-cum-spirituality is thus of a *life-as* nature. For the adherent, what matters is obeying *the* source. To strive to live one's life-as a good Christian is to strive to conform to what has been laid down from on High. And it is this *conformity* – ultimately to the «life» of the God of transcendent theism – which generates a crucial disjuncture with many forms of inner-life spirituality.

Leaving to one side holistic versions of inner-life spirituality (as found, for example, during the Third Reich) – where the totalized «whole» (*Volk*) of inner-life is taken to be more than the sum of all the inner-life constituents to serve in life-as, dictatorial fashion – inner-life spiritualities are very much bound up with the theme of transforming the quality of the *unique* life of the person. When spirituality *is* experienced as one's true, essential self, when spirituality *is* experienced as flowing through other aspects of one's life, it can but only serve to cater for one's distinctive, *singular* life. Clearly, uniqueness – and the freedom which is required to develop and express one's uniqueness – is attacked if one has to conform to an order which is not of one's making. In short, life-as conformism prevents inner-life spirituality from doing its job, the reverse side of the coin being that inner-life uniqueness throws various spanners into the operation of transcendent theism.

Durkheim found it necessary to distinguish his «social» definition of religion as «a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things...» from another form of «religion», one «which would consist entirely in internal and subjective states, and which would be constructed freely by each of us» (1971:47). Jesus' «I am» pronouncements, perhaps most famously «*I am the way, the truth and the life*» (my emphases), are far removed from Romantic Georg Simmel's insistence that «*We are* life in its immediacy» (1997:24; emphasis provided). Faith in the texts of traditions is very different from treating the past by way of the present to liberate the future. True «life» dependent on the sacrality and will of another is not the same as «life» which is ours and ours alone – expressed as our true «will». Being true to «oneself» by being faithful and obeying (or «having» in many forms of Islam) the will of God is very different from what Charles Taylor calls the «ethic of authenticity», an ethic where «Being true to myself means being true to my own originality ... something only I can articulate and discover» (1991:29). Finding *the* Truth of the transcendent *for* oneself is not the same as finding *what* is true *about* oneself. With Truth differing between the different *formalized* traditions of transcendent theism, Truth (including the Truth of life) is *exclusivistic*; with Truth *experienced* by way of the spirituality at the heart of all (human) life, Truth is *inclusivistic*. In a nutshell, the hierarchical dualism of the spiritualities of transcendent theism contrasts with the egalitarian monistic (a more appro-

priate word than immanentistic) holism of spiritualities of the unique life (see Tipton 1982 on monistic ethicality).

Critical reflections

Since it is vital to know what we are looking for when we turn to the evidence that beliefs to do with inner-life spirituality have become of considerable numerical significance, perhaps of an order which amounts to a spiritual revolution in northern Europe, I now briefly attend to three criticisms of the distinction – between spiritualities of life and spiritualities/religions for life – on which everything hangs.

According to Jan-Olav Henriksen, the distinction is between experiences determined or otherwise influenced by life-as formations and experiences which are somehow «pure» manifestations of the depths of the interior life (2005:75-6). In reply, as an academic I am certainly not committed to the belief that there is such a thing as a pure experience (or experiences) of inner-spirituality. I am committed, though, to making a distinction based on what is publicly available – the evidence provided by what believers or participants say. In *The Spiritual Revolution* volume we wrote of «subjective-life forms of the sacred which emphasise inner sources of significance and authority and the cultivation or sacralization of unique subjective-lives» (Heelas and Woodhead 2005:6). Rather than being based on agreement *with* the participant assertion that there *is* an (unmediated) inner source, the characterization is based on the assertion itself.

Kimmo Ketola's criticism of the distinction drawn in *The Spiritual Revolution* has a rather different emphasis. As Ketola makes his point,

Religion is something that requires you to live your life according to externally imposed expectations, roles, and duties, while – of course – spirituality is nothing of the sort! This sounds rather dubious, to put it mildly. The distinction between religion and spirituality as used in the book is exceedingly vague and ambiguous (2005:290).

In reply, I am certainly not committed to the (non-academic) belief that inner-life spirituality somehow operates – in experience, let alone practice – without the help of «externally imposed expectations, roles, and duties». As I have argued elsewhere (Heelas 2006a), it is perfectly possible for the researcher to draw attention to the operation of «context setting» rules, principles, cultural and/or practice-specific expectations, values, meanings and truths in yoga groups, for example. It is for this reason that we wrote of «subjective-life forms of the sacred» in *The Spiritual Revolution* (Heelas and Woodhead 2005:6). However, whatever the role played by socio-cultural factors, quite possibly sometimes exercising conformist pressure, the fact of the matter that is that participants or believers almost always understand things differently. Talk is of being «free spirits», being «in tune with inner truth» or of «living out of the spiritual dimension». And by virtue of the fact that participant understanding takes such a detraditionalized, de-externalized nature, we are provided with the ethnographic reality which serves to make the distinction between inner-life spirituality and life-as religion and spirituality.

As for the third criticism, Steven Sutcliffe writes of *The Spiritual Revolution*, «I can find no clear, unequivocal definition of «spirituality»» (2006:307). The definition we offer, he claims, is «fuzzy» (Sutcliffe 2006:308). If inner-life spirituality is so lacking in clarity, it would indeed be difficult to measure the extent to which beliefs (and activities) have increased in popularity, thereby testing the spiritual revolution claim. Whether because of their aversion to «belief» as opposed to experiencing experience, or because of the mystery they found *in* life, it is true that the participants we talked with during the research which informed much of *The Spiritual Revolution* volume rarely if ever tried to explicate what they meant by life-spirituality in and of itself. However, they were more than happy to talk about the depths of life serving as the key to bringing life alive, or about the ways in which spirituality was making a difference to their lives, including the values they experienced as being bound up with living the spiritual life. And this is the discourse which provides our fairly determinate characterization.

Despite criticisms, I remain convinced that there is a world of difference between inner-life spirituality and the spiritualities of life-as religion. Basically – or logically, if you prefer – they are incompatible. Logically, it is impossible to reconcile an inner «god» which facilitates *self*-actualization, the expression of the uniqueness or originality of the person, with the transcendent, theistic God of life-as religion-cum-spiritualities, which emphasises conformity and places limits on autonomous self-development and expression. The «god» within and the God without cannot serve at one and the same time as *primary* sources of significance and authority. Neither, for that matter, can one reconcile a spirituality which is generally taken to flow through all that lives, where we «are all gods», and which is thus fundamentally egalitarian, with spiritualities bound up with and emanating from a hierarchically located God-head on High.

A spiritual revolution of personal belief?

Having clarified and supported the distinction which enables one to speak of a spiritual revolution – namely that inner-spirituality beliefs or beliefs-cum-activities have become numerically more important than the beliefs or beliefs-cum-activities of life-as religion and spiritualities – I now turn to the evidence from northern Europe, listing some of the more significant findings. Northern Europe, it should be born in mind, provides the centre of attention because it is more likely that a spiritual revolution of belief has taken place, or is underway, here than in more southern European climes. Together with the fact that church attendance and «religiosity» is higher in the south (summarized by Borowik et al. 2004:13), a rough guide is provided by Eileen Barker's summary of a 1998 survey which shows that 24 per cent of Swedes belong to the «spiritual but not religious» category, 22 per cent of Norwegians, 13 per cent of Danes, Finns and British and 12 per cent of the Dutch and Belgians – figures which are significantly enough higher than the 8 per cent for Italians and the Portuguese to support the case: a case which is also supported by the fact that the populations of these two countries rank high when percentages of the «religious but not spiritual» category are

looked at – Portugal at 20 per cent compared with Sweden at 5 per cent, for example (Barker 2004:36; see also Heino 2006, Houtman and Aupers forthcoming). The only significant exception to this picture is Poland.

Some data

First, according to Robin Gill, C. Kirk Hadaway and Penny Long Marler's review of almost one hundred surveys carried out in Britain, during the 1940s and 1950s 38 per cent believed in «God as Spirit or Life Force» – a figure which can be compared with 43 per cent who Britain believed in «God as Personal». During the 1990s, however, the respective figures became 40 per cent and 31 per cent (Gill et al. 1998:509).

Second, in answer to the question «Which of these statements comes closest to your beliefs?», 21 per cent of respondents to the «Soul of Britain» 2000 survey selected the «There is some sort of spirit or life force» option, 23 per cent «There is something there» – a total of 44 per cent, compared with the 26 per cent «There is a personal God» response. In addition, in answer to the question «Independently of whether you go to church or not, which of these would you say you are?», 31 per cent reported «a spiritual person», 27 per cent «a religious person» (Heald 2000).

Third, drawing on the 1998 Pan-European Study on Religious and Moral Pluralism (RAMP) survey of eleven European countries, including Britain, Eileen Barker reports that 29 per cent selected the statement «I believe that God is something within each person, rather than something out there», another 15 per cent the statement «I believe in an impersonal spirit or life force» – a total of 44 per cent, which is significantly more than the 33 per cent who selected the «I believe in a God with whom I can have a personal relationship» option (2004:38). «Only spiritual» respondents, it can be added, amount to 12 per cent, more or less equally divided between males and females (Barker 2004:36).

Fourth, and turning to Denmark, Lars Ahlin reports an European Value Systems Study Group finding of a 2000 survey, namely that «belief in a personal God» rests at 25 per cent. This compares with surveys which show that 21 per cent believe in «an impersonal higher power or energy» and the 35 per cent that hold the «god is something that is inside man rather than outside» belief (Ahlin 2006:1-2).

Fifth, and turning now to Sweden, Eva Hamberg (2003) draws on the 1981 European Values Study to report that 37 per cent affirmed belief in «some kind of spirit or life force» – another survey showing that this figure had risen to 44 per cent by 1990, with the figures for belief in a personal God dropping from 20 per cent in 1981 to 15 per cent in 1990 (2003:48). (See also Frisk 2003:244 on percentages from the EVSSG survey of 1990 – and how they compare with her questionnaire study of some New Age groups in Sweden.)

Sixth, to look more closely at the situation in Sweden by drawing on findings from a questionnaire distributed in the town of Enköping in 2004 (N = 958) and comparing them with RAMP figures for the country as a whole (1998; N = 1007), in response to the question «Which of the following statements most correctly reflects your view?» 14.6 per cent of the 1000 or so respondents from Enköping selected «I believe in a God

with whom I can have a personal relationship» (RAMP Sweden 18 per cent), 16.4 per cent «I believe in an impersonal spirit or life force» (RAMP Sweden 19.7 per cent), 24.4 per cent «I believe that God is something within each person, rather than something out there» (RAMP Sweden 36 per cent), 15.3 per cent «I don't believe there is any sort of God, spirit or life force» (RAMP Sweden 11.6 per cent), and 29.2 per cent «I really don't know what to believe» (RAMP Sweden 14.7 per cent) (Palmer and Willander, forthcoming, for the data from Enköping; Pettersson and Gustafsson 2000 for Swedish/Nordic RAMP data). It can be added that according to Harri Heino's summary of the 1995/6 World Values survey, in Sweden (and Denmark) «more than half the population (56%) believe in God in a different way from that taught by the church» (2006).

Seventh, now moving west to Norway, Pål Ketil Botvar writes, «One way to separate the «New Age sympathizers» is to put in one category those who believe in the majority of such New Age ideas as astrology, reincarnation, Karma, fortune tellers and spiritism. By doing this we end up by calling approximately 15 per cent of the population «New Agers». One way to operationalize church orientated religiosity is by making a category out of those who believe in a personal god and regard Jesus Christ to be their saviour (about 20 per cent of the population)» (Botvar 2006:2).

Eighth, a 2004 survey of the «religious identity» of urban young adults in the Helsinki metropolitan area, reported by Kati Niemela, finds that 34 per cent identify themselves as «spiritual but non-religious», a percentage which can be compared with the 8 per cent who are «religious but non-spiritual» (2006:157).

Ninth, and briefly moving beyond northern Europe, Ralph Hood reports the «persistent finding that about 25-30% of individuals in U.S. culture identify themselves as spiritual but not religious» (2005:350).

Tenth, to return to Britain, Eileen Barker's British component of the RAMP survey, with 1500 interviews, determines that «only 9% of Britons say that they do not believe in God; 16% «don't know what to believe»; 23% believe in a personal God, while 14% opt for a concept of God more as a spirit or life force; the largest group (37%) sees God as «inside each person»» (Summary of Research Results, www.regard.ac.uk: 4). Totalling the God within and spirit/life force percentages, it can be noted, results in a figure – 51 per cent – which is considerably higher than the percentage believing in a personal God.

Eleventh, to think of Scotland and the 2001 Scottish Social Attitudes Survey, Tony Glendinning and Steve Bruce write that «The Scottish sample was more or less equally split between respondents who believed in a personal God, those who believed in a «spirit or life-force», those who held a more diffuse belief in «something there», and secular respondents who believed none of these things» (2006:402).

And twelfth, to conclude with an overview of countries, Dick Houtman and Stef Aupers' analysis of 1981, 1990 and 2000 World Values Survey data from 11 European nations shows that «mean affinity with spirituality» is highest in the Netherlands, followed by Great Britain, Sweden, France, Belgium, and West Germany, southern (Mediterranean) countries, Spain and Italy, being lower (Houtman and Aupers, forthcoming: Table 2). The sequence of those not attending church (indicated by «post-traditionalism») runs along broadly similar lines (Houtman and Aupers, forthcoming, ms:19).

Inferring inner-spirituality beliefs from the data

Show these figures to a quality journalist, and the response is likely to be, «Extraordinary. If all of this is to be believed, we are passing through the most momentous of times.» For it certainly *seems* that the 40 per cent of the British of the 1990s who believe in «God as Spirit or Life Force», the 29 per cent of the population of eleven European countries who agree with the statement «I believe that God is something within each person, *rather than* something out there» (my emphasis), the 56 per cent of Danes who believe in a higher power or energy or the god «inside» serve to show that very significant numbers equate the sacred with what lies within – presumably the depths of life.

However, before one can get excited about these and similar survey findings, alarm bells have to be rung.

The «Soul of Britain» survey finding that more people think of themselves as «a spiritual person» (31 per cent) than «a religious person» (27 per cent), might tell us something about the relative popularity of the language of spirituality, but it is of little help in ascertaining the numerical significance of beliefs to do with inner-life spirituality. For although some of the 31 per cent of respondents who reported that they were «a spiritual person» almost certainly have inner-life spirituality in mind, other respondents could very well include those who think of themselves as spiritual by virtue of the fact that they consider themselves to be profound, wise, thoughtful, sensitive, serene, serious or «deep» (Hunt 2003:161). The 31 per cent figure could also very well include believers in a transcendent, theistic God who emphasise the experiential, the life-as spirituality of their faith – perhaps the spirituality of the Holy Spirit – rather than the doctrinal. Summarizing the European RAMP findings, Barker reports that «71 per cent of the religious considered themselves spiritual» (2004:33); and questionnaires of four reasonably indicative congregations carried out during the Kendal Project (www.kendalproject.org.uk) showed that a mere 1 per cent said that they «don't believe in spirituality».

And neither are percentages for the «spiritual but not religious» option, which is increasingly used in questionnaires, of much help. On first sight, one might be tempted to conclude that selection of this option demonstrates rejection of Christianity (which, after all, is generally taken to be a «religion») in favour of belief in non-theistic spirituality. However, «only spiritual» responses could well include Christians who experience the life-as spirituality of an authoritative transcendent source but who reject «the Religious» as dogmatic, discriminatory, intolerant, perhaps dangerous. And faced with questionnaire options, some might feel obliged to answer with something «positive», responding with «spiritual, not religious» to distinguish themselves from the shallow, superficial, mundane, consumeristic and materialistic (Hunt, 2003:161) but without the sacred in mind – the existence of «secular» spirituality being indicated by the fact that 15 per cent of the «spiritual not religious» European respondents to the RAMP survey agree with the statement «I don't believe in any kind of God, spirit or life force» (Barker 2004:38).

«Only spiritual» or «spiritual person» percentages might be unreliable guides to the prevalence of inner-life spirituality. But surely the RAMP questionnaire option «I

believe that God is something within each person, rather than something out there» (Barker 2004:38) can be relied upon to gauge the prevalence of inner-life beliefs. After all, agreement with this option would appear to involve the rejection of transcendent theism. Or does it? Consider the fact that 37 per cent of «religious not spiritual» European respondents agree with the questionnaire option under consideration (Barker 2004:38). One might well ask what it means to be «religious not spiritual» whilst believing in the God «within», not the traditional Christian God «out there». One answer is that those who think of themselves as «religious not spiritual» are probably rather conservative Christians, rejecting spirituality as «New Age» and the like whilst emphasising their «inner» – as saved – closeness to God. Immanence is more important than transcendence. Whatever (and other interpretations are possible) the 37 per cent figure means that one cannot simply equate «God within» data with inner-life spirituality. Furthermore, to consider the RAMP finding that 28 per cent of those identified as «neither religious nor spiritual» agree with the questionnaire option concerning the inner God (Barker 2004:38), what can it mean to be neither religious nor spiritual yet agree with the statement, and on what grounds, if any, can these respondents be included within the category of inner-life spirituality?

Without going into this last matter any further, there is another problem with the «God within rather than without» data. It concerns the term God. The term is primarily associated with religion, most significantly, in northern Europe, Christianity. The term religion is not favoured by those who advocate inner-life spirituality, rarely being found, except as something to be criticised, in the mind-body-spirituality literature, for example. With its associations with «dogmatic» religion and authoritative hierarchy, neither is the term God. One cannot but suspect that if the «I believe that God is something within each person, rather than something out there» option had been formulated in another way, the response rate would have been higher. People like Shirley MacLaine aside, it is doubtful that many are happy to say to themselves – let alone others – that «I am God». To use this term is not just the ultimate affirmation of individuality; it also very much sounds like *hubris* incarnate.

Another term which is likely to put people off, thereby deflating the number of respondents to questions using it, is «impersonal». The 15 per cent of European respondents to the RAMP survey who concur with the statement «I believe in an impersonal spirit or life force» (Barker 2004:38) might well have been higher if the word impersonal had not been used in the questionnaire – for what is impersonal about a «spirit» or «life force» for those who believe that their spirit belongs to and animates their lives, to bring their lives alive? What is impersonal about the life force of personal life?

As for the expression «There is some sort of spirit or life force», one of the findings from the 2001 Scottish Social Attitudes Survey is that 33 per cent of those who «attend services regularly» hold this form of belief, a percentage which is basically only capped by the 39 per cent figure for respondents who stopped attending «after age 15» (Glendinning and Bruce 2006:407). Quite clearly, the belief is abroad within Christian congregations. This could reflect the way in which the Holy Spirit, emanating from the God of transcendent theism, can be understood; it could also indicate the presence of inner-life spirituality within congregations. The fact that the Holy Spirit could be

involved, it follows, means that the belief under consideration cannot be used to simply infer the numerical significance of inner-spirituality belief, and if it is used to do this, it is highly likely that the procedure will result in a misleadingly high percentage. (See Houtman and Aupers, forthcoming, ms:9, however, on the relative reliability of the «There is some sort of spirit or life force» option.)

The formulation «personal God» has probably served to generate misleading percentages. Survey data derived from questionnaire use of this term, used by academics to signify the numerical significance of the personal God of theistic religion, could well be inflated by including those who take «personal God» to mean themselves – their own deeply personal god-nature. This possibility, it can be added, is at least indicated by a finding from research carried out in Kendal and environs, namely that 30 per cent of those active in the holistic milieu – where the great majority hold inner-life spirituality beliefs – agreed with the questionnaire option that «There is a personal God» (www.kendalproject.org.uk). Given all the other evidence collected during the research project, including interviews and case studies, it is highly likely that most locate this «god» within life.

Then there is the expression «higher power». Assuming that respondents are also provided with a «personal God» option, it is unlikely that many Christian respondents will select the «higher power» box on the questionnaire. But the term could refer to some form of non-theistic transcendent power, of the kind found in many versions of astrology, for example. Alternatively, it could refer to that «higher» power which is taken to dwell within – perhaps being referred to in connection with the «higher self». The last usage of the term «higher power» serves to gauge the numerical significance of inner-life spirituality; the former does not.

A provisional conclusion

Having presented survey data which apparently shows a spiritual revolution of belief in a number of northern European countries, I have cast doubt on what can be «read off» from the very same kind of information. So to the key question: is the evidence robust enough to establish whether or not a spiritual revolution has taken place with regard to belief?

At least in countries like Sweden, Denmark and Britain, it is surely safe to conclude that belief in the God of so much of traditional Christianity – the God of transcendent theism – is now significantly less popular than forms of belief which would once have been described as «alternative». «God within, not without» figures in particular mean that it is also surely safe to conclude that much of the «alternative» realm is characterized by beliefs which express the innerness – the «inward-out»-nature of the sacred. But how much?

Bifurcation or an emerging synthesis?

To pave the way for a somewhat more determinate answer to this question, a major issue has to be tackled. As formulated earlier in this article, the spiritual revolution of beliefs takes place when inner-life spirituality beliefs become more numerous than the spiritual-cum-religious beliefs of transcendent theism. Obviously, the *very idea* of this spiritual revolution depends on there being two distinct domains of belief: one to do with the sacred within life, the other to do with the sacred being primarily located beyond the life of this world – or any other «world» of the universe, for that matter. But what if there are ways of synthesising, integrating or holding together the two domains, ways which are of increasing importance and which thus could be serving to qualify, perhaps undermine, the two domains formulation of the spiritual revolution thesis?

As I have already noted, logically speaking the sacred with an inner locus and the sacred with an outer locus cannot serve at one and the same time as *primary* sources of significance and authority. But with the exception of rational choice theorists, few would dream of arguing that human affairs are exactly logical, many also arguing that human affairs should not always seek to conform to the dictates of the exercise of «enlightened» reason. Despite the relatively limited role played by logic, however, the fact of the matter is that the «logical» division between two forms of the sacred is reflected in much of the empirical evidence. Although it might not be due to the exercise of logical thought *per se*, the difficulty of combining two very differently located sources of significance and authority means that people concerned with the sacred generally opt for one or the other. It is simply too confusing, paradoxical, if not nonsensical to place one's «faith» in what lies within life in the here-and-now *and* what lies beyond life in the here-and-now at one and the same time: or so it might very well appear too many.

To the extent that the empirical evidence shows that bifurcation operates «on the ground», then to that extent it is perfectly reasonable to think of two domains of belief and to test the spiritual revolution claim accordingly. And indeed a considerable amount of evidence suggests that bifurcation has been, and continues to be, the order of the day.

History shows that rather than integrating the «full» thrust of inner-life spirituality, where significance and authority lies with what is integral to life in the here and now, with the «full» thrust of life-as spirituality and religion, where significance and authority lies with the «other» of the transcendent, contact between the two forms of the sacred typically results in one form «giving way» or adjusting to the one which is treated as primary. To illustrate, consider what Charles Taylor (1989) has to say about the Romantics and the transcendent theism of the Christianity which surrounded them in northern Europe. He writes

the gradual fading of a believable notion of cosmic order, whose nature could be specified and understood independently of the realization/manifestation of the current of nature in our lives. The old order based on the ontic logos was no longer acceptable (Taylor 1989:380).

In close related vein, history shows us that contact between the two domains of belief frequently results in the reinterpretation of one form of the sacred to enable it to absorb (and so in a sense «cohere with») the other – a point illustrated not just by the Romantics (including many passages of Friedrich Schleiermacher's *On Religion* (1958; orig. 1799)) but by all those who have followed in their footsteps by adopting the strategy of subjectivizing or psychologizing Christianity to leave little (if anything) of transcendent theism in their wake. Then there is the point that contact between the two domains often results in oscillation (a term used by Bernard Reardon (1985:19) in his discussion of Romantic «religion») or, as in the case of Schleiermacher himself, in a quite radical shift from inclusion of one source of significance to the domination of another during his lifetime.

As for the present day, a key finding of the Kendal Project is that just 4 per cent of the occupants of the congregational domain of Kendal were also active within the holistic milieu of the inner-life spirituality activities of the town and environs (www.kendalproject.org.uk). And since virtually all of these people were treating their holistic activities in a pretty «secular» fashion (yoga for stress relief, for example), it is unlikely that very few, if any, of them had developed, or even were intent on developing, some kind of synthesis or fusion between the two domains.

So far so good, in that it looks as though the «two domains» basis of the way I have formulated what is involved in a spiritual revolution of belief stands firm. However, recent decades have witnessed the proliferation of networks, groups, centres, retreats, even congregations, which could well serve to complicate the picture. (A rough index of popularity is provided by the fact that a Google search for «UK Christian Spirituality Networks» offers 1,870,000 sites (Wharton 2006:5). Wharton's search took place at the end of June 2006; as of the end of September, the figure is 2,270,000.) Typically attracting people with a Christian upbringing, who to varying degrees have become disillusioned with «mainstream» hierarchical (and discriminatory) Christian congregations, and typically attracting people who to varying degrees have come to appreciate what inner-life spiritualities have to offer, these informal «organizations» – «growing around the edges of the Church» as the Archbishop of Canterbury (2006) recently put it during an extensive TV interview – provide exactly the sort of territory where one might expect to find «synthesis» – the welding together of what are considered to be the key aspects of the two domains of belief to form a seamless whole.

Rita Wharton's (2006) research into the Living Spirituality Network (a grouping which is listed first by the aforementioned Google search listing) provides a useful impression of what is taking place within this «middle» territory. Citing from a Newsletter, spirituality is the «search for a deeper connection with the sacredness of life» (Wharton 2006:6). As Wharton continues, now including an extract from David Tacey's *The Spirituality Revolution* (2004) which is drawn upon by the Newsletter, «There is the sense of the Spirit within, either in traditional terms or in terms «that appear to break with doctrinal rules in its holistic rather than perfectionist strivings; in its quest for human authenticity, body-mind integration, psychological health, ecological integrity and sexual wholeness»» (Wharton 2006:7). The emphasis on holistic *human* authenticity tends to mean that the Spirit is experienced as part and parcel of the

sacredness of one's own life – an emphasis which, it is indicated, can readily generate tension with traditional doctrines of the Spirit teaching that «wholeness» includes, and is primarily dependent upon, one's relationship with the Spirit of the authoritative God of transcendent theism.

In her discussion of the closely related, but much smaller, Lancashire Spirituality Network, Wharton refers to a participant who says, «I learn so much from the sharing of each other's spirituality where each understands scripture, explores into the depth – wonderful, awesome, beauty, preciousness, enrichment – discernment by the sharing with others – recognise what the Lord is asking of me» (2006:12). Drawing on the work of Yves Lambert (2000), Wharton also writes that participants are «engaging in an intense kind of spirituality, off-piste [*hors-piste*], on tracks through the wilderness, in a do-it-yourself way» (Wharton 2006:13). The values ascribed to both consensual discernment and autonomy, then, might generate tension; and both these values can readily exist in tension with what the Lord asks by way of the life-as doctrines of Christianity.

For another illustration of what is taking place within the territory betwixt-and-between «clear cut» inner-life spirituality and the life-as spiritualities of transcendent theism, I turn to Kristine Borgen's analysis of the Trinity United Methodist Church in Austin, Texas. «I will define Trinity,» writes Borgen, «as a holistic community, a congregational one, and as a community where the subjective-life aspects are strongly emphasized and validated» (2006:4). As Borgen advances her analysis,

Trinity's focus on the uniqueness of everyone's spiritual path, and the validation of it, points to a subjective basis for their understanding of human life and human spirituality. The lack of dogma also points in the same direction, namely that what is important is your own search for your inner self and God, Great Spirit, the Divine, Mother God, or whatever is your preferred name for God. Trinity's slogan is «where you can be you» (2006:4).

To arrive at a more general picture, to the extent that the Christian God of transcendent theism is reformulated as the God within, or is reinterpreted as an egalitarian figure or «person» who enters into one's life in a non-impositional way, one can include Christian congregations (like Trinity), «post-Christian» communities and groups (like a number of Unitarian gatherings in Britain), or many of those participating in networks like the Living Spirituality Network, within the realm of inner-life spirituality. In contrast, to the extent that the God of transcendent theism remains located at the top of the hierarchy, and serves as the source of doctrine in the way which appears to be the case for some of those active within the Living Spirituality Network, for example, one can include what is taking place within the realm of Christian life-as religion-cum-spirituality – albeit with a strong inner-life orientation.

So it looks as though the «middle ground» can be «dissolved» into the inner-life or the life-as camps: entailing that the way I have formulated the spiritual revolution thesis remains intact. However, this is not the whole of the story. For a great many of those participating in the networks, small groups and the other activities operating on the «edges» of mainstream Christianity are more or less at one and the same time

drawing on two sources of authority and significance – a best of both «worlds». Whether it be by emphasising the immanence of the God of transcendent theism whilst retaining a role for the theistic by experiencing the Holy Spirit as largely – but not entirely – operating from within, by following the path of «autonomous conformism» to choose to obey in order to have the freedom to express God’s gift of the unique inner life (Madonna’s «protean obedience»), by developing some form of gnostic Christianity (Quispel 2006; Pagels 2006; Bloom on that «indigenous American Christianity» which is «rather more Gnostic than orthodox in its temper» (1996:221)), by the valorization of «life» within Catholic circles, or by some other means, the two sources co-exist. (See, for example, Robert Wuthnow 1996 and Donald Miller 1997; see also Gordon Lynch, forthcoming 2007, on «progressive spirituality» with particular reference to Britain; Leigh Schmidt 2005 on the interior life and the religious resources of liberal Christianity with particular reference to the USA and; Elizabeth Dreyer and Mark Burrows’ *Minding the Spirit* 2005, the cover promising «a deeper understanding of what it means to be human within the Christian faith». For a comparative analysis of relationships between Christianity and unique, «finding my own way» self-authenticity in Norway, see Inger Furseth’s discussion in her aptly titled book *From Quest for Truth to Being Oneself* (2006:297).)

And it is not just those who are «on the edge» as defined above. It is becoming increasingly apparent that many apparently conformist Christians – including those within congregations – have become selective about the teachings which they accept. Kim Knibbe (2006:5), for example, reports research from the Netherlands which shows that «belief in the «traditional» articles of faith of the Christian [especially Catholic] tradition is even lower than among the rest of the population» (see also Heino 2006, above; Gibbs and Bolger 2006 on «personal experience» and «loyalty to historic institutions»). It is more than likely that a fair number of these Christians draw on both the «New Age» and the theistic.

The God within *and* the God without; the God within, not without, *and* the God without; an autonomous spirituality of the unique self *and* conformist spiritualities; an egalitarian spirituality *and* hierarchical forms emanating from God on High: perhaps welded together by way of the language of «mystery»; perhaps co-existing in creative tension; perhaps with a *supra*-logical «synthesis» of the «thesis» (transcendent theism) and the «antithesis» (inner-life spirituality); perhaps «selecting» the best of what the god within and the god without have to offer, to find some kind of experiential harmony; perhaps «yoga in the aisles» existing in an uneasy relationship with «worship in the pews». (A limitation of the Kendal Project is that not enough attention was paid to exploring the likely «middle ground», especially among congregants. As a consequence, the *Spiritual Revolution* volume almost certainly presents too polarized a picture.)

To the extent that this kind (or kinds) of «synthesis» and/or co-existence is emerging, then to that extent the «map» of the sacred takes at least three forms: inner-life spirituality, spiritualities-cum-religions of transcendent theism, and a territory where both are in some form of «real» evidence. But this does not invalidate the two domains formulation of the spiritual revolution thesis. We can still gauge the numerical significance of these two domains to see if one has «overtaken», or is in the process of «over-

taking» the other – the territory occupied by some form of both the domains being ignored on the grounds that it is impossible to allocate this territory to either of the two. However, what cannot be ignored is the *possibility* that the middle ground of co-existence, interplay, experiential fusion or coherence, or mysterious unification might become numerically important enough to mount a «third way» challenge to the spiritual revolution of belief defined in terms of the contrast between transcendent theism and inner-life spirituality. After all, the middle ground under discussion draws on the best of both worlds – within and without. And the fact that it is logically impossible to unify the two «basic» forms of the sacred, certainly without compromising or qualifying one or the other or both, means that this is a vital, energetic, development. The dynamics of challenge tends to serve the sacred well – certainly better than stultifying stability.

Methodological considerations: looking more deeply into change

Sociologists of religion and spirituality, especially those of us dwelling in northern Europe, are extremely fortunate. We have the golden opportunity to monitor and explain change: most especially the apparently arresting shift from the life-as beliefs and practices of transcendent theism to the beliefs and activities of inner-life sacrality. But are our current research tools up to the job?

In 1993 Bernard Spilka referred to «spirituality» as a «fuzzy» concept, a concept that «embraces obscurity with passion». Although it is subtitled «Unfuzzifying the Fuzzy», Brian Zinnbauer et al's article of 1997 then did much to fuel the contemporary fashion of using words like fuzzy, obscure, vague, ambiguous, inchoate, diffuse or nebulous in connection with spirituality. As should be apparent, however, I think that it is perfectly straightforward to distinguish between different verbalized forms of spirituality. Of particular note, inner-life spirituality is readily specifiable. «Life» might ultimately be mysterious, but to equate spirituality with life-itself and/or the depths of subjective-life in the here-and-now is to make a clear demarcation from the spirituality of obeying the will of the God of transcendent theism, experiencing the spirituality of this Godhead itself, or experiencing the emanation of the Holy Spirit. To equate spirituality with what it is to truly manifest *human* love might be impossible to grasp «in itself» for those who have not had the experience – but this is clearly not the same kind of discourse of spirituality as talking of experiencing a *supra*-human Godhead as love.

Analytically speaking – and often «on the ground» – inner-life and other (verbalized) forms of spirituality are not fuzzy, that is indeterminate, categories or ways of talking. As we have seen, though, the fact remains that we do not yet have a clear idea of how many people «believe» in particular forms of spirituality, most especially those of an inner-life variety. Why should this be the case?

The most important reason lies with the ways in which questionnaires have been focussed and formulated. Until quite recently, attention has been focussed on monitoring change to do with Christian beliefs, values and activities. Although questions to do with «spirit or life force» (for example) have been asked for some time (recall that

Robin Gill et al's (1998) review of surveys includes those which go back to the 1940s and 1950s), the quite understandable attention paid to charting the decline of Christianity in northern Europe has meant that «alternative» (as well as partially «alternative») beliefs have not received the attention that they deserve. Today, though, it is impossible to escape the fact that «alternative» or «quasi-alternative» beliefs have become of considerable numerical significance. With belief in «a God with whom I can have a personal relationship» down to 33 per cent of the populations of the eleven European countries summarized by Barker (2004:38), with just 12 per cent of respondents agreeing with the statement, «I don't believe in any kind of God, spirit or life force» (2004:38), and with only another 10 per cent agreeing with the statement «I don't really know what to believe» (2004:38), at least 45 per cent of beliefs remain to be studied. That is, if this kind of magnitude is *anything* to go by.

Partly because of the focus on Christianity, but also because of the fact that questionnaires retain questions in order to facilitate comparison over time, questionnaire design has not really kept up with change. There is surely something odd about the fact that spirituality is so intimately bound up with the «life» of the body and mind, as in the cultural slogan «Mind-Body-Spirit», with the word «life» itself appearing so frequently in connection with spirituality: when «life» is not exactly focussed on in relevant questionnaire questions (or, indeed, in the indexes of academic volumes). And above all else, this lag between questionnaire design and change within the population explains why sociologists of religion-cum-spirituality have yet to arrive at a clear «map» of the number of people who «believe» in particular forms of spirituality, most especially the significance of those of an inner-life variety within the «non-» or «quasi-» Christian territory. (See also Houtman and Aupers, forthcoming, ms:8.) Quite simply, and as illustrated earlier in this article, the questions currently in use raise too many interpretative issues to provide quality data. Even more simply, a great deal of fuzziness or lack of clarity owes more to the questions asked than the beliefs and discourses being explored. However ingeniously existing questionnaires are used (Houtman and Aupers, forthcoming, ms:8-11), however sophisticated the statistical analysis, new questions are urgently required.

As attested by questions introduced or developed by the Soul of Britain (national), RAMP (transnational) and Enköping (local) surveys, for example, innovation is underway. Questions are being devised which should do more to «tease out» various forms of spirituality, thereby enabling us to track how they fare in the future. Of particular note, we need to refine existing questions, and devise new ones, to test the spiritual revolution thesis; to compare the fortunes of the beliefs of transcendent theism and the beliefs of the interior life. To illustrate, for longitudinal comparative purposes the RAMP option, «I believe that God is something within each person, rather than something out there» could usefully be included in a future questionnaire. In addition, though, those who select this option could then be asked to select from an extra set of options: including, perhaps, improvements on two used during research in Kendal and environs, namely the «some sort of spirit or life force [that] pervades all that lives» option and the more specific «subtle energy (or energy channels) in the body» choice (Heelas and Woodhead 2005:25); a question to do with Jesus as the son of God and our

saviour; and one to do with the God within *and* without. Careful introduction of open-ended questionnaire responses (as in Hamberg 1990), together with follow-up interviews with a representative sample of individuals selecting especially significant options (or providing especially illuminating open-ended responses) would then further enrich the picture. Furthermore, closer attention could be paid to what is arguably *the* greatest of the issues to be tackled in the future: probing the intersections between uses of the term «spirituality» which refer to trans-secular (or quasi-secular), empirical, scientific, rationalistic, aesthetic, or psychological ontologies, realities or experiences, and those which do not (as when someone «merely» uses the term to emphasise «the warm glow», the translucency or sublimity of the seascape, gelling with a close friend, «the best of human nature» or the harmonious unfolding of events, for example). Somehow, we have to get a handle on the beliefs of elusive «science» (unseen, paranormal powers, etc.) which are not associated with «spirituality» and those which are – in both cases exploring what they might have to do with «life-itself» and agency.

To provide another illustration, this time highlighting the value of the qualitative, open-ended question and the follow-up interview, attention can be paid to innovative research recently carried out by Susannah Rigg (2006). Framing her investigation in terms of the «Which of these statements comes closest to your beliefs?» RAMP-informed question, Rigg added the open-ended question and the follow-up interview approaches to probe more deeply into what her respondents mean when they select a particular statement. As she writes of the most popular choice of her respondents, namely the «I believe in an impersonal spirit or life force» option,

On further investigation it [the formulation of this option] hardly expresses exactly what it is that respondents believe. Those who felt that this answer most reflected their beliefs explained it in very different ways. Most felt that there was «something out there» that was beyond their control, while at the same time equating this force with the very essence of who they are. Katie, a twenty three year old actor who felt herself to be both religious and spiritual explained, «I believe in a power higher than ourselves, whether that is energy or god or spirit, it is a power in life that causes things to grow and breathe.» Despite her uncertainties of the exact «form» of the entity she believe in, Katie very much articulated that it was a power beyond her grasp that, nevertheless, was the very essence of the «flow» of life itself. ... As twenty-four year old Susie [who selected the same questionnaire option] explains, «I believe that there is an energy that connects us to the people that we should meet in life. I believe that if we project positive intention on things then this energy directs in the right path to take.» Evidently, the kind of «life force» that Susie believes in is inextricably part of herself and the universe. Therefore, to describe it as impersonal is to negate its meaning entirely (Rigg 2006:10).

Together with revealing the inadequacies of mapping using the questionnaire option under consideration, the kind of responses provided by Katie and Susie point to the future: a task which I won't go into here, but which would involve teasing out meanings of «power», «life», «connection» and «control».

Addressing the «diversity of definitions of religiousness and spirituality among ... adherents,» Brian Zinnbauer and Kenneth Pargament write of the research which «suggest[s] that individuals have *clear ideas* about the meaning [of the terms they use and]

are able to describe their beliefs in a *reliable fashion*» (2005:22; my emphases). To the extent that responses of the kind provided by Katie and Susie are typical, questionnaire «R&D» should work wonders in establishing a pretty accurate «map» of the sacred and assessing the spiritual revolution claim in northern Europe. However, this is not to say that challenges do not lie ahead.

The beliefs of many individuals could be pretty «chaotic». To the extent that post-modern, relativistic «multi-truth» is in evidence, then to that extent there are too many «incompatible» beliefs, too jumbled up in the lives of too many people, for «mapping» to be effective. However, without wishing to condone the surely over-deterministic powers accorded to the exercise of reason by rational choice theorists and the like, the evidence to date suggests that postmodernists have overemphasised the case for disorganized religion, spirituality, and, more generally, culture. The evidence to date – for example the *very* few people participating in the associational activities of the congregational domain or the holistic milieu of Kendal and environs who even draw on both at once – indicates that many live in terms of *relatively* coherent and/or homogenized beliefs. To give another example of relative rhyme and reason, the «autonomous spirituality» (Glendinning and Bruce 2006: 400) of inner-life circles might be expected to be associated with all sorts of beliefs. In fact, research in Kendal found that the same, or very similar themes recurred time and time again with the holistic milieu (Heelas and Woodhead 2005: 25-30); and the same, or very similar themes are also repeated time and time again among the publications devoted to mind-body-spirituality (for example) (Heelas 2006a; see also Hervieu-Leger's «homogenization» arguments against the «chaotic shattering of beliefs» judgement of our times (2006:65,61)). The idea that spiritual seekers arrive at their *own*, personal spiritualities, largely if not entirely on their own, has almost certainly been over-emphasized.

Then there are the challenges thrown up respondents who reply in the affirmative to the «I really don't know what to believe» questionnaire option (29.2 per cent of the Enköping sample) or the «There is something there» selection (23 per cent of the respondents to the Soul of Britain survey). «There *is* something there and I think it *is*...» «There *must* be something there which I *sometimes* think is..., at other times...» «There *is* something there but I have *no idea* what it is,» «I really *don't know* what to believe, but *on balance* I think that...»: the range to be mapped as best as possible goes on and on. Probably reflecting a widespread cultural shift from «belief» to «experience», more specifically from the «positivistic» or literalistic «Truths» of the past to an appreciation of the finitudes of human comprehension, a shift from a «know it all» outlook to «we will never know it all», a shift from determinate knowledge to the indeterminacy of the «beyond labels», a sense of the mysteries of life – and the universe – is abroad (Heelas 2006c). And the «silence» of the mysterious – quite possibly a sense of the infinite which cannot be «captured» by the finite, a sense of the formlessness which escapes form (Simmel 1997:24), a sense of the «flow» of ontologically pregnant experiences which escape words (the emphasis on experience meaning that the term «belief» often has to be heavily qualified when it is used in connection with inner-life spirituality) – does not exactly help the cartographer of the sacred. However, as Rigg's (2006) research indicates, those who think about ultimate issues-cum-expe-

riences are rarely – if ever – content with silence. Given the opportunity to go beyond a tick in the box of «There is something there», for example, they have things to say. Typically to do with the depths of life, their experiential allusions or cognitive hints can then enter into the mapping process *via* questionnaire «mystery questions» and follow-up discussions.

Furthermore, there are the challenges thrown up by the fact that it often appears to be difficult to decide where to place beliefs on the map. To illustrate, given that one of the defining features of inner-life spirituality is egalitarianism, where is the line to be drawn along the spectrum between life-as forms of spirituality where the person encounters an over-and-above the self locus of authority-cum-significance and inner-life forms where the person encounters others as (more or less) equally spiritual at heart? To which camp should we allocate the «theistic» God serving as a caring, protective, «familiar» friend, facilitating self-development? (See Hervieu-Leger on that «theological minimalism», «which reduces the relation with transcendence to the mere emotional and personalized closeness experienced with the divine being» (2006:64).) Where does the God of «conversations with God» (Walsch 2005) belong? The «softer God», the God of «cosy majesty», charted by the «God at Sørlandet» Project (Repstad 2006; Sødal 2005)? At which point does Christian «spiritual guidance» become so imbued with the spirit of «mutuality and authenticity» so as to effectively enter the territory of inner-life spirituality (Ørskov 2003)? At which point does the «subjective ordering of experiences» of religious tradition become more important than the «objective» (Furseth 2006)? To which camp are we to allocate spiritual entities «channelled» as relatively powerful and wise «guardians», perhaps taking the form of «angels» (Bloom 1996)? What is to be made of the complex interplays between polytheism and monism in a great deal of paganism/neo-paganism (Heelas 1996:34-5)? The answer is to these and related questions, however, is simple. The greater our confusion as researchers, the more likely it is that the beliefs (and associated values and activities) belong to that «middle ground» of co-existence we discussed earlier.

Conclusion

Like social scientific buzz words in general, «fuzziness» is currently over-emphasized. A better, «qualitatively-quantified», map *is* possible, especially, as is likely, once things have settled down after the current transitional period. But what is it likely to demonstrate? Among other things, the self-complete supplement of the 2001 Scottish Social Attitudes Survey contained a list of conventional and non-conventional religious or spiritual experiences. Just 14 per cent of the sample selected the option to do with «having experienced an awareness of a sacred presence in oneself» (Glendinning and Bruce 2006:399). This rather puts a damper on the spiritual revolution claim. On the other hand, there are the high «I believe that God is something within each person, rather than something out there» percentages in northern Europe (37 per cent in Britain, 36 per cent in Sweden, 35 per cent in Denmark). Bearing in mind other sources of evidence which indicate popularity – in Britain the cultural presence of mind-body spiri-

tuality and cognate literature, the ways in which «humanistic», holistic, perennialistic spirituality is progressing within mainstream educational, health and business sectors, the fact that holistic activities have entered such a wide diversity of settings (prisons, gardens, kitchens, clubs, hotels, holidays, spas, sports, university campuses, centres for the retired, beauty salons, government policy-making bodies, the advertising and products of subjective wellbeing culture, and, most significantly, CAM (complementary and alternative medicine), for example (Heelas 2006b; 2006c; 2006d; forthcoming)) – my strong hunch is that the latter numerical order will turn out to be closer to the truth than the former. Even if only 25 – not approaching 40 – per cent of the British equate spirituality with the depths of life within the here and now, this is a slightly higher figure than the 23 per cent «I believe in a God with whom I can have a personal relationship» reported by Barker. We might not want to go as far as Colin Campbell, with his claim that «in fact New Age beliefs and attitudes are now so widespread in our society and its culture as to effectively dominate all areas of life» (2004:40), but it is surely reasonable to conclude that in countries like Britain, Sweden, Denmark and Holland, belief in inner-spirituality has overtaken belief in the transcendent theism of traditional Christian teaching. (Inner-life forms of Hinduism in the west, it can be noted, are well-established; inner-life spiritualities are in evidence with regard to Judaism, esoteric-cum-mystical-cum-New Age being especially popular in Israel (Philip Wexler, personal communication); and inner-life forms of Sufism are growing in many settings.)

The last flicker or a new dynamo?

Drawing on the European Values Study survey of 1990, Loek Halman and Ole Riis write, «In most countries, the number of people who do not believe in God or any sort of spirit or life force ranges from around 20% in Denmark and Sweden to less than 1% in Ireland» (2003:12). And in her summary of RAMP findings covering the eleven European countries surveyed in 1998, Eileen Barker notes that just 12 per cent of respondents agreed with the statement, «I don't believe in any kind of God, spirit or life force», with only another 10 per cent agreeing with the statement, «I don't really know what to believe» (2004:38). With relatively «clear-cut» Christian beliefs – most significantly in a personal, theistic God – declining, let alone with regular church attendance also being in seemingly remorseless decline in northern Europe, it could very well be expected that a commensurate number of people are becoming secular. However, contrary to the claim of those secularization theorists who argue that modernity undermines the sacred *in toto*, the «going, going gone» claim is not supported. For together with the «belief» figures presented earlier in this article, these «don't believe/don't really know what to believe» percentages show that the decline of Christianity has *not* been accompanied by anything like a commensurate increase of hard-boiled secularism or rationalism, characterized by the rejection of any type of religion or spirituality as mere superstition.

Having formulated the «decline of the traditional Christian God without a corresponding increase of secularity» point, Halman and Riis quite logically go on to ask:

«what alternative meaning systems are arising?» (2003:12; see also Heelas 2002). Their answer is that «There seem to be an increasing number of people who are attracted by some sort of spirituality or paranormal experiences in order to interpret life and give meaning to it» (Halman and Riis 2003:12). In similar vein, now with an eye on Sweden, Rodney Stark, Eva Hamberg and Alan Miller write,

Is Sweden undergoing a transition from faith to secularity or are Swedes mainly abandoning what they perceive as a moribund state church and adopting unchurched spirituality? Many new surveys suggest that it is the latter, that in place of conventional Christian commitment, most now describe themselves as «Christians in their own personal way» and many other Swedes advocate a whole range of New Age and Eastern spiritualities (2005:14).

Looking at some of the ways in which the apparently high level of belief found in northern Europe can be explained, one argument is that a great deal of «belief» is more apparent than real. People who stop going to church or chapel on anything like a regular basis «drift» away from whatever orthodox Christian beliefs they might have held in the first place (the term is Grace Davie's (1994:76)). Having ceased to be immersed in congregational activities, and with the culture no longer doing much to transmit Christian teachings, peoples' beliefs become increasingly attenuated, inconsequential, vague, or «nominal» (another term used by Davie (1994:43)). A considerable amount of «belief», in other words, reflects the last «flicker» of Christianity. Nominal today, this kind of «belief» could well fade away altogether in the near/ish future.

A second argument is that *quasi* or non-conventional «*Christian commitment*», of the «Christians in their own personal way» variety referred to by Stark, Hamberg and Miller, have a role to play. Commitment of this kind might emphasize immanence to the virtual exclusion of the transcendent, for example.

A third argument is that the growing realm of the less conventionally Christian or the «nominal» provides the soil for «*new*» or «*alternative*» developments. As Davie puts it,

The decrease in institutional religion has not destroyed religious belief (not so far anyway) but it has rendered such beliefs vulnerable to all kinds of external pressures. Nominal (as opposed to organized) *Christianity*, for example, provides a *rich seedbed* of *alternative* versions of the sacred. Hence for certain kinds of people, though by no means the population as a whole, the undoubted attractiveness of New Age ideas (1994:43; my emphases).

The evidence discussed earlier, however, suggests that a fourth argument is important, perhaps very important indeed. Primarily catering for the significant number of those who have lost faith in traditional Christian belief more or less *in toto*, together with those who have never (really) been Christian, the argument is that the growth of inner-life spirituality goes a long way to account for why so many continue to believe in the sacred; why inner-life beliefs are helping to «compensate» for the decline of beliefs in a personal, theistic God.

The great challenge largely remains: explaining the growth of inner-life beliefs (Heelas 2006c). Suffice it to note for present purposes that a great deal hangs on whether we are witnessing «seedbed» consequences of the ebb of orthodox Christian belief or a «genuinely» new wave of the sacred – or some mixture of both. To what extent are inner-life beliefs explicable as parasitic, a «new» outcome of the fanning of the more «down to earth» embers of the fire that was once Christianity? Are inner-life beliefs sufficiently *different* from those of a «Christian» variety (including those which could lie within the «ashes» of Christian belief) to demand that we attend to «new» dynamos or motors of change? In addition, what are the more particular factors at work which serve to explain the spiritual revolutions which might be underway – or which might have taken place – within specific settings like the domains of bookshops, education, mainstream health provision and mainstream business activity, or with regard to «specialized» associational (congregational and holistic) activities? (On holistic themes, spirituality, therapists and health promotion activities in Denmark and Sweden, see Ahlin 2006 and Willander 2006; on holistic milieu activities in Kendal and Britain, see Heelas 2007; on recent general population survey data from Scotland, which includes association activities as well as those who practice alone, see Glendingning and Bruce 2006:403-4.)

To draw to a close on a speculative note, we might well ask – «Why northern Europe?» I raise three questions. Could it be the case that the mythological currents of some countries – of the hero, the *Übermensch* of «anthropomorphized» power and agency – have something to do with the matter? Could it be the case that it is more than a coincidence that northern Europe was the home of much of the Reformation? (See Hervieu-Leger 2006:64.) And third, is it coincidental that Holland and Sweden – those important homes of the shift to «alternative» beliefs in the west – are also the homes *par excellence* of egalitarian social and cultural policy? (Holland has long played a pioneering role in the development of the ethic of humanity; during the last century, Sweden has done a great deal to pioneer democratic socialism and welfare.) To provide just one response, the third question surely has to be answered with a «no». For whereas the God of transcendent theism is hierarchically located, the «God with» is widely taken to be shared by all. No doubt it is an oversimplification, but there is surely much to be said for the proposition that the more democratic, consensual and egalitarian a society, the more likely it is that the sacred takes a corresponding form. (See Inglehart and Welzel 2005 for global evidence concerning the connections between «democratic values», «self-expression values», where inner-life spirituality has its home, it can be added, and wealth, on the one hand, and «traditional values», where traditional religion has its home, «survival values» and poverty on the other).

But of course it is not just northern Europe. Inner-life spirituality is almost certainly a growing force among the «elite» of cities like Lahore and Tehran, where the «cultural creatives» are at work, and where Sufi spirituality provides the main resource. Inner-life spirituality is of considerably greater significance in India, especially among the liberal sectors of the middle/upper middle class. And in Japan – the «world leader» might be here, not countries like Sweden. There is, indeed, much to chart and explain.

Policy implications

When I tell my wife about the exciting data from her home country, Sweden, the response is a shrug. And as County Director of Plan Pakistan, it certainly appears that she has more important statistics to consider. However, the growth of inner-life beliefs is replete with socio-cultural significance – in the west and elsewhere. Among many other considerations, humanistic, perennialized spirituality provides a middle way between the dangers of multi-culturalism informed by exclusivistic life-as theisms and assimilation to «mere» secular (sometimes «Christian» and secular) society. Emphasising the shared whilst embracing diversity and the unique, humanistic inner-life spirituality can enter into the educational system without much fear of offence – especially if proper attention is paid to inner-life aspects of Sufism and Hinduism, for example. In hospitals and hospices, all but the most die-hard of atheists and the most conservative of the religious are likely to appreciate what inner-life carers or therapists have to offer. Which is why the policy of the UK Department of Education and Skills, and that of Health, is to encourage inner-life practices; which is why the Government supported, best-established and largest system of private education in Pakistan is grounded in the work of that influential inner-life educationalist, Montessori. The SLS Montessori & School, with its «Seek the Light & Spread it» manifesto – facing a traditional Islamic school in Islamabad, a school belonging to the AIMS Education System, whose manifesto is «Learning with Faith».

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