

SPIRITUALITY AS AN ASPECT OF WELLBEING AMONG A SELECT GROUP
OF CAPE TOWN CHRISTIANS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

by

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I declare that SPIRITUALITY AS AN ASPECT OF WELLBEING AMONG A SELECT GROUP OF CAPE TOWN CHRISTIANS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Signature HM van de Vyver

08 July 2010
Date

ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the relationship between Christian spirituality and the general wellbeing of the individual. To this end a literature review is conducted, as well as qualitative interviews with eleven individuals in the Cape Town area (South Africa). Snowball sampling was used to gain access to these eleven research participants who fitted the criteria of adults exhibiting a particular Christian lifestyle.

The literature review revealed that nurturing, non-punitive religion has been associated with mental and physical health and that active participation in church activities that enhance a person's social support system is beneficial.

The qualitative interviews yielded the finding that those interviewees who had positive experiences with Christian spirituality during their childhood regard it as a significant contributor to meaning, hope and happiness in their lives.

Key terms: wellbeing, subjective wellbeing, εὐδαιμονία, spirituality, Christian spirituality, health, social support, satisfaction, actualisation, fellowship, activism, spiritual retreat, youth, spiritual disciplines.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on how Christian spirituality (defined in section 2.3 below) might contribute to or detract from wellbeing (section 2.1), for example in contributing to life satisfaction, morale, happiness, positive emotions such as hopefulness, meaning and purpose, and other indicators of a life that is flourishing.

Philosophers have been discussing the topic of human wellbeing and happiness for millennia. They have developed several theories on what wellbeing consists of and how it can be achieved. The main theories are first that wellbeing is based on the satisfaction of human needs and desires; second that it can be judged based on an objective list of standards that are applied in deciding when someone's life is good; and third that it is relationships with other people that make life worthwhile. These theories are further discussed in section 2.1.1.

Traditionally research in psychology has focused on psychopathology, but recent studies changed their focus to determining which aspects of human functioning lead to psychological and subjective wellbeing and optimism (Şimşek 2009: 515). This new approach is termed positive psychology. One of the research questions in positive psychology focuses on the relationship between spirituality and wellbeing. An influential project called *The quality of American life*, found that religion has a negative effect on wellbeing (Campbell et al 1976). More recent studies, however, provided evidence that religion may have a positive effect on personal wellbeing in that it provides meaning in life and that it contributes to cohesion in communities, for example in the distinctive religious subcultures among black people in the United States (Ellison and Gay 1990: 123-124). Wellbeing and the relationship between Christian spirituality and wellbeing are further discussed in sections 2.1 and 2.3.

In sociology, research on the relationship between religious involvement and wellbeing adopted mainly two approaches. The first, initiated by Durkheim in 1897, focused on the influence of participation in religious activities on distress, in particular suicide rates. This research concluded that religious affiliation has a significant positive effect on wellbeing. The second approach focused more on the

connection between religion and wellbeing in individuals. There were some inconsistencies in the results, but the general conclusion was that religious activities are positively related to wellbeing (Schnittker 2001: 393). The influence that certain socio-demographic factors, such as age, financial status, ethnicity and gender, have on wellbeing is discussed in section 2.3.

In summary, this project researches the relationship, if any, between the respondents' reported experience of their spirituality and other aspects of wellbeing. Consequently, this project will contribute to the better understanding of the concepts of wellbeing and Christian spirituality, and to the role of spirituality and how spirituality may influence the level of wellbeing in individuals.

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The overall focus of this research is to advance the understanding of the way in which the spirituality of Christians affects their general wellbeing. It is widely accepted that religion provides benefits such as comfort, hope and meaning, but the empirical evidence has not always been that conclusive. The study will aim to answer the following question: *What is the influence of spirituality on the wellbeing of a select group of Cape Town Christians?*

The research questions are aimed at identifying the factors that influence people's subjective experience of their wellbeing, determining how Christian spirituality and wellbeing influence each other, and establishing the role that Christian spirituality plays in the respondents' lives.

1.2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to try to understand the relationship between the respondents' spirituality and their general wellbeing.

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study are, consequently, to contribute to an understanding of:

- the concepts wellbeing, spirituality and Christian spirituality;
- the role of Christian spirituality in the respondents' lives; and
- certain aspects of the relationship between Christian spirituality and wellbeing.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following subsidiary research questions will be addressed:

- What are the influences that affect the respondents' subjective experience of wellbeing?
- What is the role that Christian spirituality plays in the respondents' lives?
- How do Christian spirituality and wellbeing affect each other in the respondents' lives?

1.5 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

It is noteworthy that some individuals not only cope in their difficult circumstances, but seem to flourish (Jones 1991: 135-144; Barnard 1994: 95-108). In a society such as South Africa where extreme challenges in the form of poverty, violence, incurable disease and corruption are faced by all, how people cope with such constant stressors is a pertinent question. Individual wellbeing is, however, not isolated from a person's spiritual nature and what the relationship is between people's spirituality and their wellbeing is therefore a pertinent question. Analysis of the qualitative data of this study will indicate whether the interviewees' spirituality contributes or detracts from their general wellbeing. It is hoped that this study will contribute a better understanding of the concept of wellbeing and the influences, including Christian spirituality, which may affect it.

1.6 METHODS USED

In addition to a literature review of the available research on wellbeing and the relationship between Christian spirituality and wellbeing (chapter 2), the research design consists of a qualitative approach with unstructured interviews with eleven

respondents. This approach was chosen, as it was the most likely research method to provide the depth and complexity required in investigating the wellbeing and spirituality of the participants.

The interviewees were approached with two basic questions. The first tried to ascertain their religious background and the spiritual influence of their caregivers during their formative years. The second question aimed to obtain a clear picture of the role that spirituality plays in the respondents' lives and how spirituality and wellbeing affect each other in the respondents' lives. Their responses are analysed and discussed in chapter four.

1.7 DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

In chapter two the terms wellbeing, spirituality and Christian spirituality are analysed in detail. Spirituality in particular is a term that has many varied uses, but the focus in this study is on its articulation as Christian spirituality.

A person's life consists of many aspects, for example health, relationships and finances, which are dependent upon one another and influence one another. It is necessary to function well in every aspect in order to achieve optimum wellbeing. Wellbeing can therefore be defined as healthy functioning in all the aspects of a person's life. The concept of wellbeing is further discussed in section 2.1.

My study considers a person as a spiritual being whose spirituality encompasses his/her whole being. A wide variety of definitions of spirituality is used today, but it is often defined as a personal experience with the purpose of discovering meaning, purpose, transcendence, connectedness and energy (further discussed in section 2.2).

For the purpose of this study, Christian spirituality is defined as an internal relationship with the Trinity (God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit) that has a profound impact on the way a person lives. Aspects such as loving other people and a concern for the environment are regarded as manifestations of Christian spirituality.

1.8 OUTLINE OF THE DISSERTATION

The dissertation consists of a literature review, a discussion of the research methodology and the research results, as follows:

Chapter two is an in-depth literature review on the topics of wellbeing, spirituality, Christian spirituality, and the relationship between Christian spirituality and wellbeing. That part of the dissertation aims to address the research question about a practical working definition for the concepts wellbeing and spirituality, and to summarise my observations on the relationship between these two concepts in the publications that I reviewed.

Chapter three focuses on the research methodology, with a clarification of the reasons for choosing the method adopted and a detailed description thereof. It also explains the approach used in sampling and the procedures employed to ensure trustworthiness (that the researcher's conclusions are in correspondence with what the participants intend, rather than with his/her own opinions) and authenticity (gaining and reporting a realistic, accurate understanding of people's experiences and lives).

In *chapter four*, the research questions about the influences that affect the respondents' subjective wellbeing, the role that Christian spirituality plays in the respondents' lives, and the manner in which Christian spirituality and wellbeing affect each other in the respondents' lives are addressed by analysing the respondents' narratives and reported experiences.

In *chapter five* I conclude by summarising the patterns and themes identified in the previous chapters, and propose an answer to the research question.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter the definitions of and research done on the concepts used in the title of this dissertation are discussed. First, I look at the concept of wellbeing, which is a topic that has interested people for a very long time. A significant amount of writing and research has been done in philosophy and psychology on what it means to be well, which I discuss in a thematic, rather than chronological manner.

Thereafter the terms spirituality and Christian spirituality are discussed, and finally I summarise the results of the research done on the relationship between Christian spirituality and wellbeing.

2.1 WELLBEING

Wellbeing is often defined as a contented state of being happy, healthy and prosperous. Most people do not just try to avoid pain and conflict, but instead actively try to experience enjoyment, completeness, and meaning (Koenig et al 2001: 97). Diener (2006: 151-157) wrote that “policymakers should be interested in subjective wellbeing not only because of its inherent value to citizens, but also because individuals’ subjective wellbeing can have positive spillover benefits for the society as a whole”.

In the following pages I discuss what philosophers and psychologists have said about wellbeing and happiness, as well as the results of research on this topic.

2.1.1. Philosophy

The term wellbeing is often used in philosophy to describe what is good for a person or how well a person's life is going (Hurka 1996: 17). Philosophers tend to use the Greek word εὐδαιμονία (eudaimonia) when talking about wellbeing. Εὐδαιμονία is composed of two words: εὐ (eu), meaning good, and δαίμον (daimon), meaning spirit or divinity. Εὐδαιμονία is thus, when translated literally, a “good divine state.”

Εύδαιμονία and its synonym μακαριος (blessedness) traditionally describe the condition of the gods. Most texts translate these words as happiness, but εὐδαιμονία does not refer to a mere subjective feeling on the part of a person. Translating it as wellbeing or ‘flourishing human life’ comes closer to the meaning of εὐδαιμονία (Sarot & Stoker 2004: 182).

The classic description of εὐδαιμονία occurs in Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics, where he describes it as doing and living well. He asks whether wellbeing can be learnt or acquired by training, or cultivated in some other manner, or whether it is bestowed by the gods, or even if it is merely good fortune (Aristotle 1996 [c. 350 BCE]: 16).

Further thinking on the concept of wellbeing within the philosophical tradition can be located in two main viewpoints, namely the *satisfaction theory* and the *actualisation theory*. A third argument is that the goodness of life is dependent upon *relationships* with other persons. These different approaches are discussed in the following pages. Lastly I discuss an interesting, more recent hypothesis on wellbeing that focuses on the different aspects of a human being and the interdependence of those aspects, namely the *Shalom Hypothesis*.

2.1.1.1 Satisfaction

Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do (Bentham 1988:1).

In hedonism the things that make life worthwhile and enjoyable for a particular person are determined by that person’s needs and desires. It is about how a person experiences the quality of his/her life. As such hedonism seems to be a plausible view of personal wellbeing, because what is good for us may be what we experience as good; and seeking pleasure and avoiding pain usually do seem good to us (Sarot & Stoker 2004: 177).

Hedonists believe that life has no objectively fixed meaning, and what makes life appealing varies from person to person. As Klemke said (in Sarot & Stoker 2004: 177):

Life has no objective meaning. Let us face it once and for all. But from this it does not follow that life is not worthwhile, for it can still be subjectively meaningful. And, really, the latter is the only kind of meaning worth shouting about. An objective meaning ... would, frankly, leave me cold. It would not be mine. It would be an outer, neutral thing, rather than an inner, dynamic achievement. I, for one, am glad that the universe has no meaning, for thereby is man all the more glorious. I willingly accept the fact that external meaning is non-existent for this leaves me free to forge my own meaning.

In agreement with the satisfaction theory, the Dutch sociologist Ter Borg (1994) points out that in contemporary Western society most people are not concerned with questions of the meaning of life, but merely try to live life as pleasantly as possible. People within this society are consumers who can freely choose from what is on offer: a bit of fun, a bit of sex and a bit of excitement. One argument against this view of Ter Borg is that not all goods are passively consumed. People actively expand and explore their limits, for example in sport and space travel, as a way of giving meaning to their existence. This can be seen as a secularised manifestation of people's desire for transcendence (Sarot 1996: 21).

When pursuing satisfaction our needs and desires are in conflict with a hostile world. There are two strategies to address this conflict: optimising and adapting (Sarot & Stoker 2004: 177).

In optimising we try to modify the world to suit our purposes. This is a popular strategy in the West today (Sarot & Stoker 2004: 178). Wellbeing is seen as something that can be achieved by changing our circumstances, skills, opportunities and contacts in order to achieve what we wish. Popular psychology inundates us with messages that we have to be true to ourselves, for example: "If you do not like your

job you are not being true to your authentic self. Change your job. You owe it to yourself.”

One of the first famous hedonists was Aristippus of Cyrene (c. 435-356 BCE), a pupil of Socrates. His aim was to adapt circumstances to himself, not himself to circumstances (Horace 2008: 188). The Cyrenaics, from the school of Aristippus, taught that pleasure belonged to the body, but that happiness is a state consisting of a number of particular pleasures. They stated that pleasure is good, even if it arises from the most improper causes, for even if an action is inappropriate the pleasure that arises out of it is good and desirable (Diogenes 1853 [c. 200-500 CE]: 89-90).

Adapting, in contrast to optimisation, strives to adjust people’s own desires to their situation. This line of reasoning accepts that our environment is hostile and cannot be controlled. Only by reducing our wants, desires, will and wishes will it be possible for us to satisfy them and become happy. Adapters will tell you that the main problem of society is that people just want too much. Adapting is popular in Eastern cultures, but also played an important role in Western history (Sarot & Stoker 2004: 178).

Hegesias, another hedonist from the Cyrenaic school, taught that wellbeing is the absence of pain and sorrow. Hegesias was of the opinion that we should prefer death as the happy, pain-free alternative to suffering, and he was as a result nicknamed "the death-counsellor". His lectures at Alexandria led to so many suicides that King Ptolemy ordered him to stop teaching. It is ironic that a branch of hedonism, which set out to promote the pursuit of pleasure, produced a line of hedonist thinking that ended up advocating the end of all pursuits (Sarot & Stoker 2004: 179).

Some hedonists advocated restraining oneself when it comes to transitory desires in order to increase wellbeing in the long term. Epicurus (341-270 BCE) distinguished between desires that grow stronger when they are not satisfied (e.g., food and clothes) and transitory desires that will eventually disappear when they are not satisfied (e.g., the desires for sex, luxury and power) (Sarot & Stoker 2004: 5, 180). Epicurus wrote (Sarot 1996: 20):

... we sometimes pass over many pleasures in cases when their outcome for us is a greater quantity of discomfort; and we regard many pains as better than pleasures in cases when our endurance of pains is followed by a greater and long-lasting pleasure... So when we say that pleasure is the end, we do not mean the pleasures of the dissipated but freedom from pain in the body and from disturbance in the soul. For what produces the pleasant life is not continuous drinking and parties ..., but sober reasoning which tracks down the causes of every choice and avoidance, and which banishes the opinions that beset the souls with the greatest confusion.

Here the curbing of desires is the focus: people should reduce their needs and wants to a minimum and cultivate tranquillity, which for Epicurus is a sort of pleasure (Sarat 1996: 20). He believed that if we ignore the short-lived desires we will in the long term have simple, but tranquil and satisfactory lives. This is an example of adaptation rather than optimisation (Sarat & Stoker 2004: 5, 180). The focus here is on the bigger picture, where the decision to restrain oneself in any scenario depends on whether satisfying that specific desire will increase the person's overall happiness and wellbeing in the long term or not.

The Stoics went even further in adapting to their environment. Epictetus (55-135 CE) wrote that if you do not succeed in fulfilling your desires or avoiding your aversions you will be disappointed. If you are averse to sickness or poverty, for example, you will be miserable if you get sick or poor. The solution is to confine your desires and distastes to things that you have control over. He also taught that we are upset not so much by something in itself, but by the perception that we have of it. Death, for instance, is not terrible, but we are afraid of it because we believe that death is terrible (Epictetus 1866 [c. 135 CE]: 373-377). In other words, it is not our circumstances that determine whether we are happy or not, but how we perceive those circumstances.

Epictetus lived according to his own philosophy. Legend has it that he was a slave and was once tortured by his master, who twisted his leg. He endured the pain and merely calmly mentioned that the leg will break. When it broke, he said 'I told you it would break' with complete composure. The incident resulted in him becoming disabled (Sarat & Stoker 2004: 5, 180).

The apostle Paul also seems to have lived according to this adaptation theory, for he wrote to the church in Philippi: “I have learned to be satisfied with what I have. I know what it is to be in need and what it is to have more than enough. I have learned this secret, so that anywhere, at any time, I am content, whether I am full or hungry, whether I have too much or too little. I have the strength to face all conditions by the power that Christ gives me” (Philippians 4:11-14 Good News Bible).

A more recent example of adaptation and positive perception is the life of Martha Mason, who was paralysed from the neck down and lived in an iron lung until her death shortly before her 72nd birthday in May 2009. She spent all of her time lying on her back in a machine that forced air through her lungs, for 61 years. Her mother was abusive and beat and cursed her. Despite her circumstances Mason earned a bachelor’s degree in 1960, graduating first in her class, and later wrote her autobiography, titled *Breath: Life in the Rhythm of an Iron Lung*, with the aid of a voice-activated computer. In 2003 she told a reporter: “I’m happy with who I am, where I am. I wouldn’t have chosen this life, certainly. But given this life, I’ve probably had the best situation anyone could ask for” (Fox 2009). Before she died Mason told another reporter: "My story's been one of joy, one of wonderful experiences. It has not been perfect. But that's what people need to understand - that I have had a good life" (Tarpley 2009).

2.1.1.2. Self-actualisation

In the self-actualisation or perfectionist theory of the good life, for example in classical humanism, there is an objective list of standards that are applied in deciding when someone’s life is good and an individual’s personal views do not determine what those standards are (Sarat & Stoker 2004: 181). A person can therefore subjectively be unhappy as a result of thwarted desires, but based on objective standards, for example health, income, and supportive friends, an outsider can judge that he/she has a high level of wellbeing.

Supplementing the above approach is the belief of certain philosophers that such an objective list should include the meaning attached to one’s own life. What is referred

to here is the type of questions people ask when considering important life decisions or when on their deathbeds: whether their life was worthwhile or meaningful. Wolf (1997: 208-209) argues that any model of wellbeing that completely relies on a person's subjective evaluation of enjoyment of life is inadequate, but that at the same time a person will not have wellbeing if his/her preferences are completely ignored. It cannot be good for a person to have a life that is judged meaningful by others, but that does not make him/her happy.

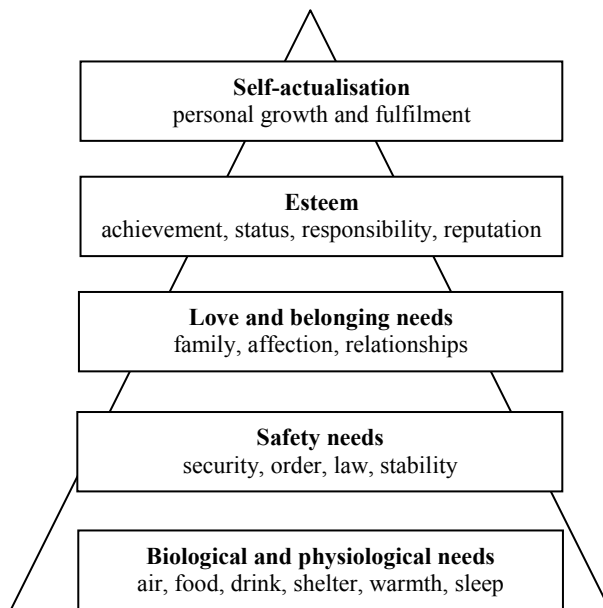
Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and the early Stoics provided another objective standard by teaching that virtue supplies the necessary and sufficient conditions for εὐδαιμονία (Annas 1989: 97-98). In a nutshell, this view postulates that if you are a good, moral person, you will be well and happy.

The self-actualisation view states that people must develop and perfect their innate potential abilities (their "selves"). What these aspects are that should be developed varies from person to person. Although there are significant similarities between people, there are also great differences when it comes to their talents, abilities and potential, as well as what they value as excellent. The aspects that people focus on to achieve self-actualisation are therefore likely to vary significantly.

Aristotle had significant influence on the development of the self-actualisation ideal. According to Aristotle, the good life consists of εὐδαιμονία, that is to say in developing one's δαίμων (innate potential godly spirit) so that it becomes εὖ (good) or flourishing (Sarot & Stoker 2004: 181). Aristotle advocated two different ways of self-actualisation. The first is to select a worthy human characteristic, for example our reasoning ability, and try to perfect that. In the second self-actualisation approach Aristotle suggests that people should try to develop as many different abilities as possible to become a complete and well-rounded person (Sarot & Stoker 2004: 181).

Another author that regarded self-actualisation as a higher ideal in which we optimise our potential to experience joy, happiness and true vibrancy is Maslow. He developed a generalised hierarchy of people's needs that are illustrated as a pyramid with five levels, starting with the most basic physiological needs and ending with self-actualisation. Deficiencies are met first, after which the drive to grow focuses the

attention on higher needs. In order to self-actualise, the lower needs must first be met (Maslow 1974: 153-175). This can be illustrated as follows (Chapman 2007):



Maslow's theory has been widely criticised and research done in a shack settlement near Durban presents a definition of wellbeing that further illustrates the flaws in his theory. Residents in this poorest of communities defined wellbeing as a situation where "soldiers do not favour any side, children are well looked after, there is stability, all-embracing peace, happiness, love, equality, religious unity, sympathy and empathy, no apartheid, no different racial groups in church, no violence and only kindness" (Cochrance 1996: 89). They did not mention their unmet physiological needs or their extreme poverty. On an objective assessment of their needs using Maslow's hierarchy, research would probably have focused solely on their unmet physiological needs.

In formulating his theory, Maslow concentrated on exceptionally high functioning individuals, writing that "the study of crippled, stunted, immature, and unhealthy specimens can yield only a cripple psychology and a cripple philosophy". He assumed that these high functioning individuals were able to focus on meeting more advanced needs because their basic physiological needs have been met (Slee 2002: 62).

The needs that the residents of the informal settlement near Durban describe are very “advanced” in terms of Maslow’s theory. It seems that human beings and their needs are complex; the different types of needs overlap and cannot as easily be categorised into successive levels as Maslow assumed.

2.1.1.3. Fellowship

The fellowship theory of the good life advocates that it is healthy relationships with other persons that make a life worthwhile. Only in and through communion with other people can we become fully human. A life where fellowship is the ideal is more focused on other people and will most likely lead to receiving appreciation and positive feedback from people, which will increase wellbeing (Sarot & Stoker 2004: 187).

Aristotle also emphasised relationships with other people. According to Aristotle, εὐδαιμονία consists of actions and goods. Actions were discussed above in the section on the self-actualisation theory but friendship, love and political commitment are the main relational goods that Aristotle had in mind when speaking of εὐδαιμονία. They have an intrinsic value, but are fragile as they are based on reciprocity and lead to suffering when it is lost (Bruni and Porta 2007: xiv). About friends he said: “without friends no one would choose to live, though he had all other goods” (Aristotle 1996 [c. 350 BCE]: 205). Augustine wrote along these same lines about his grief upon the death of his friend (Augustine 2002 [c. 397 CE]: 51):

I lived in misery, like every man whose soul is tethered by the love of things that cannot last and then is agonised to lose them. Only then does he realise the sorry state he is in, and was in even before his loss... The grief I felt at the loss of my friend had struck so easily into my inmost heart simply because I had poured out my soul upon him, like water upon sand, loving a man who was mortal as though he were never to die.... Blessed are those who love you, O God ... No one can lose you, my God, unless he forsakes you.

2.1.1.4. *Shalom Hypothesis*

A more recently developed theory that encompasses elements from the satisfaction, self-actualisation and fellowship theories discussed above is that of the Dutch philosopher Dooyeweerd (1894-1977). Dooyeweerd developed an ontology of fifteen aspects of reality, each having a distinct core meaning, that form an ordered spectrum of meaning. The different aspects enable us to function, because each aspect has a set of laws to which entities respond. The fact that there is more than one aspect results in our experiencing diversity. Our functioning and experience can be logical and consistent as a result of the interrelationships among the aspects. Dooyeweerd thus brings a basis for understanding the diversity and coherence of εὐδαιμονία (Basden 2008: 105-106).

Dooyeweerd's notion is that our human living is multi-aspectual in nature and we function in all (or most) aspects, responding to each aspect's respective laws and there are repercussions of our functioning in each aspect. If we live according to the laws of an aspect, then the repercussions will be positive and will promote success, prosperity, health, etc. in that aspect, but if we go against the laws of an aspect then the repercussions will be negative in that aspect. Since all aspects are dependent upon one another and influence one another, it is necessary to function well in every aspect in order to achieve optimum wellbeing, success or prosperity. Functioning poorly in any aspect jeopardises the sustainability and success of the whole person (Basden 2008: 105-107).

What Dooyeweerd scholars have recently named the 'Shalom Hypothesis' takes this further by stating that all the aspects work in harmony and we must function well in every aspect if we wish to achieve *shalom*. This Hebrew word is used since there is no adequate English equivalent to express what is meant: a deep and lasting peace, health, prosperity and wellbeing, with strong overtones of completeness and wholeness. If we function poorly in any aspect, *shalom* is jeopardised (Basden 2008: 105). The fifteen aspects are:

- i. Quantitative aspect, of amount
- ii. Spatial aspect, of continuous extension
- iii. Kinematic aspect, of flowing movement
- iv. Physical aspect, of energy and mass
- v. Biotic aspect, of life functions
- vi. Sensory aspect, of sense, feeling and emotion
- vii. Analytical aspect, of distinction, clarity and logic
- viii. Formative aspect, of history, culture, creativity
- ix. Lingual aspect, of symbolic meaning and communication
- x. Social aspect, of social interaction, relationships and institutions
- xi. Economic aspect, of frugality, skilled use of limited resources
- xii. Aesthetic aspect, of harmony, surprise and fun
- xiii. Juridical aspect, of 'what is due', rights and responsibilities
- xiv. Ethical aspect, of self-giving love and generosity
- xv. Pistic aspect, of faith, commitment, vision, creed and religion.

The result of wellbeing or dysfunction in some of these areas can be summarised as follows:

<u>Aspect</u>	<u>Wellbeing</u>	<u>Dysfunction</u>
Biotic	Health	Disease
Psychic or Sensitive	Mental and sensory health and alertness	Emotional instability
Analytical	Clear thinking, logical, good critique	Confusion
Formative	Creativity, good planning and achieving	Laziness
Lingual	Articulateness	Incoherence
Social	Friendliness and respect, sociable	Hatred, disrespect
Economic	Careful, frugal	Waste, squandering
Aesthetic	Enjoyment, rest, leisure, fun, harmony, find everything interesting and beautiful	Boredom, ugliness
Juridical	Justice	Injustice

Ethical	Self-giving and generosity	Selfishness
Pistic	Commitment and loyalty, courage, high morale, vision and faith	Idolatry, disloyalty, lack of moral and ethical values

(Basden 2008: 104-107)

The pistic aspect that Dooyeweerd refers to is probably more commonly referred to today as a person's spiritual dimension. My study will concentrate on this spiritual aspect, the definition thereof, research into how it functions and its relationship to the other aspects of personal wellbeing. The focus of my study, however, regards a person as a spiritual being whose spirituality encompasses all of him/her.

2.1.2. Psychology

The hedonic and self-actualisation philosophical views have resulted in a large amount of research in the field of psychology on wellbeing and its determinants, especially on objective measures of wellbeing. The use of the term objective wellbeing in psychology is, however, not the same as the philosophical meaning. Objective theory in philosophy does not include the subject's own subjective valuation. In psychology objective wellbeing does take the individual's subjective evaluation of his/her wellbeing into account by asking respondents to state how happy they are. These subjective evaluations include both cognitive judgements of life satisfaction and emotional evaluations of moods and emotions. Psychology does, however, take the fallibility of such subjective evaluations into account by accepting that a person's own judgement is not a reliable estimate of his/her objective wellbeing (Kahneman et al 2003: 4-6).

Recent research in psychology started to focus on people's strengths and the positive methods that can improve wellbeing, rather than merely on the trials that people face in a psychopathology-oriented view of human functioning. As a result, positive psychology has emerged as a field within psychology that studies positive subjective experiences such as wellbeing, contentment, satisfaction in the past; hope and optimism for the future and flow; and happiness in the present (Şimşek 2009: 515).

One of the most important goals in positive psychology is to indicate which actions lead to wellbeing. Two different approaches have emerged: subjective wellbeing and psychological wellbeing. Subjective wellbeing focuses on hedonic elements of life such as positive emotions, lack of negative emotions and life satisfaction, without depending on theories of wellbeing. Subjective wellbeing is not merely a minimum threshold of positive feelings, but rather exists on a range of emotions from low to high levels of joy and satisfaction (Lewis et al 2000: 325-337). Psychological wellbeing, on the other hand, studies the εὐδαιμονία dimensions of growth, meaning and goals, and is based on a comprehensive theory of exactly what wellbeing is (Şimşek 2009: 506-515).

Since psychologists became more interested in positive emotions and feelings of wellbeing, consensus grew that self-reports on how well life is going can convey important information on underlying emotional states. As a result there are now hundreds of scales that purport to measure subjective wellbeing, usually by asking people how satisfied they feel with the various areas of their lives. While some apply universal standards in the measurement of wellbeing, others take personal context into consideration and ask individuals to choose which aspects are important to the quality of their lives before proceeding to measure quality. These tests do have some shortcomings, for example, a lack of attention to the effect of social and environmental factors, problems with defining the terms used, dependence on the assumptions of researchers and a lack of theoretical foundation (Cronin de Chavez et al 2005: 74).

One study focused on determining whether happiness is a trait of certain people, or whether an improvement in circumstances is likely to make most people happier. The answer was that changes in their living conditions do make people happier and although they do not change their judgement of life every day, they do re-evaluate their quality of life periodically and take major life changes into account (Veenhoven 1993: 520). The causes that may lead to such a re-evaluation are discussed below.

2.1.3. Considering the influence of socio-demographic factors on wellbeing

In 1967 research concluded that the happy person is a "young, healthy, well-educated, well-paid, extroverted, optimistic, worry-free, religious, married person with high self-esteem, job morale, modest aspirations, of either sex, and of a wide range of intelligence". During the forty years since, thousands of studies on happiness and wellbeing have been conducted and many of those early conclusions have been overturned (Lewis et al 2000: 476). Research has focused on the following major factors:

2.1.3.1. Age

Many early research studies reported that young people were happier. More recent research, however, suggested that older people are slightly happier than young people. One possible reason for this is simply that 'happy people live longer'. It may also be that the decreases in positive affect in older people reported by earlier studies may be due to the fact that those studies measured mainly the types of pleasant emotions that are stimulated or aroused by external factors. If the type of pleasant emotions that are less dependent on stimulation, such as contentment and affection, are examined, the results may have been different (Lewis et al 2000: 477).

In a recent study that examined data on two million people from nearly 80 countries it was found that life satisfaction was at its minimum and depression most common in the mid to late forties. It is not clear why middle age is a time when life satisfaction is lowest and psychological distress highest. It is possible that people at that age struggle with the realisation that they will never achieve their youthful goals and have to redefine themselves (Koenig et al 2009)¹.

¹ Professor Harold Koenig from the Centre for Spirituality, Theology and Health at Duke University is studying the results of research on the characteristics of people who experience a high level of wellbeing for the second edition of his book entitled 'Religion and Health'. Professor Koenig was kind enough to send me the Wellbeing chapter of the unpublished manuscript and references thereto merely state the 2009 year that it was written in.

2.1.3.2. Financial status

Wealth has been found to be a poor predictor of happiness and increases in income do not necessarily lead to proportional increases in wellbeing. The effect of income on happiness is mainly seen with very poor people, but once their basic needs are met there is no proportional increase in happiness with further increase in income (Koenig et al 2009). One reason why more money buys little more than a temporary surge of happiness is people's tendency to judge things relative to what they have previously experienced (called the adaptation-level phenomenon). They feel an initial surge of pleasure if their current condition improves, but then quickly adapt to this new level of achievement and it becomes their normal level. Then they require something even better to give them another surge of happiness (Myers 2009: 524). The achievement of a goal or accepting that a goal will not be reached has a similar affect:

It may be necessary to distinguish between a satisfaction which is associated with an experience of rising expectations and one which is associated with declining expectations. An individual who has achieved an aspiration toward which he has been moving may be said to experience the satisfaction of success. Another person may have lowered his aspiration level to the point which he can achieve, and he might be said to experience the satisfaction of resignation. The two individuals might be equally satisfied in the sense of fulfilled needs, but the affective content associated with success and resignation may well differ. In experiences of dissatisfaction, we might expect the affective content of disappointment and frustration to accompany any failure to achieve one's expectations (Campbell et al 1976: 10).

The other reason why increased wealth does not have a lasting effect on wellbeing is because people tend to compare themselves with others. This explains the research result that rich people in a poor country tend to be slightly happier than poorer people in the same country, but they are just as happy as the much richer people of a wealthy country. People mostly compare themselves with their equals in their own environment (Myers 2009: 525). People do not assess their material wellbeing in

terms of an absolute amount of goods they have, but compared to a social norm of what goods they think they ought to have (Duncan 1975: 137).

Comparing ourselves with others may also have a positive effect if we consider people who are worse off than ourselves. Such comparisons may lead us to count our blessings and increase our contentment. A Persian saying states: “I cried because I had no shoes, until I met a man who had no feet” (Myers 2009: 526).

2.1.3.3. Employment

Many studies report that employment increases happiness and unemployment results in unhappiness and a loss of self-esteem. One specific exception is that homemakers are not less happy than women with salaried jobs. Whether a person is happy at his/her workplace does, however, affect overall happiness (Koenig et al 2009).

2.1.3.4. Gender

Women report more negative emotions than men but also tend to experience greater joy. Gender differences in reported subjective wellbeing are not significant (Koenig et al 2009).

2.1.3.5. Ethnicity

After controlling for factors such as education, income and urban residence, it was found that in the United States race exerts a small, but significant, effect on wellbeing. African-Americans had lower wellbeing in most aspects than white people. This trend, however, reverses in later life when older African-Americans tend to be happier than older white people (Koenig et al 2009).

How wellbeing is defined can differ significantly between cultures. Wellbeing for Koreans, for example, does not relate to whether a specific individual is well, but rather to whether that person is being well with someone else or doing well for someone else. In contrast to Western society, in Korea meditating for other people

and society as a whole, rather than meditating for oneself, is considered as optimal spirituality and wellbeing (Kwon 2008: 583-584).

2.1.3.6. Marital status

Marital status has a small positive effect on wellbeing. Married persons report greater happiness than never married, divorced, or separated persons. It is also possible, of course, that happier people are simply more likely to attract marriage partners. Marriage offers people new roles and new stressors, but also provides additional rewards and new sources of identity and self-esteem. Numerous studies have found that family and marital satisfaction have a greater effect on wellbeing than mere marital status. In other words, it is better to be single than in an unhappy marriage. As Henry Ward Beecher said: “Well-married, a man is winged: ill-matched, he is shackled” (Myers 2000: 56-67).

2.1.3.7. Social support

Francis Bacon (Bacon 1985 [1597]: 141) wrote that:

Friendship redoubleth joys and cutteth griefs in halves. For there is no man that imparteth his joys to his friend, but he joyeth the more; and no man that imparteth his griefs to his friend, but he grieveth the less.

More social contact is associated with greater wellbeing and predicts about two to four percent of the variance in wellbeing. Studies show, however, that while some social contacts, like friends, are associated with greater wellbeing, other social contacts, for example relatives, may have the opposite effect (Koenig et al 2009).

2.1.3.8. Locus of control

Personal control, or the extent to which a person perceives that he/she has a choice, is a strong predictor of happiness. People with no control over their lives, for example prisoners, tend to be unhappy. Research has also found that people with an internal

locus of control, in other words a tendency to attribute outcomes to myself rather than to external causes, have higher wellbeing than those with an external locus of control.

Surprisingly, while it may be expected that religion involves an external locus of control (because a religious person looks to God as the agent of control), most studies examining this relationship have found that religious involvement is related to a greater internal locus of control. A possible reason for this is that if a person really believes that there is no limit to God's power and that God is sympathetic towards him/her, it becomes possible to endure difficult circumstances. Praying that God change his/her circumstances also creates the possibility that the situation may improve. In this way, the religious person acquires a form of indirect control over their lives (Koenig et al 2001: 191).

2.1.3.9. Health

Health is the strongest predictor of wellbeing in all populations, although it has been found that wellbeing is more strongly related to subjective measures of health (your own perception of how healthy you feel) than to objective measures (what the medical results show) (Koenig et al 2009). Self reports of health reflect a person's level of emotional adjustment as well as his/her objective physical health (Lewis et al 2000: 477).

Although the contemporary Western world, in particular, attaches enormous value to health, it is important as a means, not as an end (Sarot 1996: 17). Physical health is valued by most of us, but we want it primarily because we hope that it will enhance our overall wellbeing (Diener et al 1998: 37).

2.1.4. Individual characteristics

According to research results all socio-demographic factors combined predict less than 10% of the variance in wellbeing, which is too small to draw any real conclusions about the determinants of wellbeing. Researchers have therefore shifted their focus to the psychological factors that regulate the effects of external variables.

2.1.4.1. Psychological factors

Psychological factors such as optimism, purpose in life, high self-esteem and hope predict a much larger proportion of the variance in wellbeing. People's needs and the resources available to meet those needs should be examined in the bigger context of their lives, their goals, values and personalities (Lewis et al 2000: 477). For example, two independent recent studies found that hope and meaning in life were strongly correlated with wellbeing (Koenig et al 2009).

Six common needs have been identified as core dimensions of positive psychological functioning:

- i) self-acceptance;
- ii) positive relations with others;
- iii) autonomy (self-determination);
- iv) control over environmental conditions;
- v) purpose in life;
- vi) personal growth.

Although it may be argued that positive psychological functioning in these aspects of a person's personality is merely the fulfilment of basic needs as the means to an end (the end being wellbeing), it has also been argued that such positive functioning is in itself wellbeing. These psychological variables may themselves be components of wellbeing, rather than autonomous sources that lead to greater wellbeing (Koenig et al 2009).

Research has further shown that certain personality traits, such as motives and values, affect the relationship between subjective wellbeing and these dimensions. People's characters, motives, and values reflect their needs and those needs determine which areas of their lives have significance and meaning. Acting in line with your deeply held values and pursuing self-generated goals that match your needs (rather than purely adopted social norms and obligations), will lead to enhanced levels of wellbeing (Hofer et al 2008: 504-517).

2.1.4.2. *Emotions*

As stated in section 2.1.2 above, psychology does take the individual's subjective evaluation of his/her wellbeing into account by asking respondents to state how happy they are (Kahneman et al 2003: 4-6). An important factor in evaluating wellbeing is whether people feel that, their lives taken as a whole, they experienced more pleasant or more unpleasant emotions. People experience some emotion almost all of the time and all emotions are experienced as either pleasant or unpleasant. Emotions therefore contribute to personal experience on a continual basis and are vital in evaluating subjective wellbeing (Lewis et al 2000: 325-337).

Our emotions react to immediate events and also depend on our physiological state at any given moment. Our emotions therefore fluctuate over time, but factors such as genetics and personality do seem to temper the effect that our bodies and experiences have on us. Emotions are usually experienced at mild levels and intense emotions are rare in the normal daily lives of most people. Although strong emotional experiences are important in our evaluation of our own wellbeing, the fact that they occur so rarely reduces their long-term impact on our wellbeing. Some theories proposed that people are neutral or unhappy most of the time, but existing subjective wellbeing data strongly contradict this prediction. Most respondents in these studies indicated that they are a little bit happy most of the time (Lewis et al 2000: 325-337).

A last noteworthy opinion on the factors that influence wellbeing is that of Csikszentmihalyi, who said that people are happy when they are unselfconsciously involved in a task that absorbs them in a mindful challenge. He called this a state of 'flow' (Myers 2000: 56-67).

2.1.5. *Concluding remarks*

The main viewpoints in philosophy are the *satisfaction theory*, the *actualisation theory*, the *fellowship theory* and the *Shalom Hypothesis*.

When pursuing *satisfaction* our needs and desires are in conflict with reality and there are two strategies to cope: optimising and adapting. Optimising tries to modify our

situation to suit us. Adapting, on the other hand, tries to adjust our needs and desires to our situation. In the *actualisation theory* an objective list of standards are applied in deciding when someone is experiencing wellbeing (Sarot & Stoker 2004: 181). According to the *fellowship theory*, healthy relationships with other persons play a major role in determining wellbeing. The *Shalom Hypothesis* states that there are different aspects that enable us to function, each of which has a set of laws by which it is regulated. All the aspects work in harmony and we must function well in every aspect if we wish to achieve wellbeing.

In psychology, the term objective wellbeing takes a person's subjective evaluation of his/her own wellbeing into account and includes cognitive judgements of life satisfaction and emotional evaluations of moods and emotions. Psychology also takes the fallibility of such subjective evaluations into account (Kahneman et al 2003: 4-6).

Psychology does not regard subjective wellbeing as a set point that we achieve when we have enough positive emotions. Wellbeing exists on a range from low to high. At a low level feelings of oppression, sadness and hopelessness dominate, and at a high level we have lasting joy and optimism (Koenig et al 2001: 97).

Researchers have shifted their focus to the psychological factors that regulate the effects of external variables on people's perception of their wellbeing, because it has been found that all socio-demographic factors combined predict less than 10% of the variance in wellbeing. Factors that predict a much larger proportion of the variance in wellbeing are optimism, purpose in life, high self-esteem and hope (Lewis et al 2000: 477). Recent research has also found that hope and meaning in life were strongly correlated with wellbeing (Koenig et al 2009).

Human life consists of different aspects, for example health, relationships and finances, and these aspects have an influence on one another. In order to achieve optimum wellbeing a person will have to function well in every aspect. For the purpose of this study wellbeing is defined as healthy functioning in all the aspects of a person's life.

The research discussed in this subsection does not address our spiritual dimension and the effect that spirituality has on wellbeing. The next subsections attempt to define spirituality and discuss the relationship between spirituality and wellbeing.

2.2 SPIRITUALITY

It was not man who implanted in himself the taste for what is infinite, and the love of what is immortal: these lofty instincts are not the offspring of his capricious will; their steadfast foundation is fixed in human nature, and they exist in spite of his efforts. He may cross and distort them; destroy them he cannot.

The soul has wants which must be satisfied; and whatever pains be taken to divert it from itself, it soon grows weary, restless and disquieted amidst the enjoyments of sense. If ever the faculties of the majority of mankind were exclusively bent upon the pursuit of material objects, it might be anticipated that an amazing reaction would take place in the souls of some men. They would drift at large in the world of spirits, for fear of remaining shackled by the close bondage of the body... I should be surprised if mysticism did not soon make some advance amongst a people solely engaged in promoting their own welfare (De Tocqueville 1864: 161-162).

De Tocqueville wrote this after the eighteenth century Enlightenment period, a time in Western philosophy and culture in which reason was promoted as the basis for any authority. The Enlightenment is regarded as the source of critical ideas and the inclination to apply rationality to every problem. There was a conviction that universal truths, independent of context, exist. This led to the centrality of freedom and democracy, the establishment of a contractual basis of rights, the scientific method, the democratic organisation of states into self-governing republics, and strong individualism (Gary 2006: 315–326; Kourie 2006: 19-38).

Confident in reason, the Enlightenment promised a rational justification for morality on which it did not deliver. Though it left us valuable traditions of freedom, democracy and progress in scientific and technological endeavours, the

Enlightenment and the modern era have weakened our ability to form a normative ideal of goodness. Two world wars and our shock at the mass of humanity who live in hunger, violence and ethnic hatred, have caused us to be disillusioned and to question modern values. It is now clear that such extreme individualism and political self-interest leads to oppression and violence (Gary 2006: 315–326; Kourie 2006: 19-38).

In the wake of the Enlightenment, the study of how moral values should be determined focused on a value-free analysis of moral reasoning, without developing a theory on how life ought to be lived. Without worthy ideals and a normative vision of a good beyond oneself, we turn inward and give over to solipsism - the type of scepticism that believes that nothing exists except my mind and the creations of my mind. This has contributed to a rise in instrumentalism, which holds that ideas should guide our actions and their value are to be measured by their success. Such an exclusive focus on reason leads to a general loss of spirituality (Gary 2006: 315–326; Kourie 2006: 19-38).

2.2.1 *What is spirituality?*

If claiming to have read all that is written about spirituality makes one a braggart and a liar, then claiming to know how to define the subject must make one a fool (Neire 1990: 60).

A vast array of definitions of spirituality exists that vary in their degree of commonality, but do not reflect a consensus of thought. These definitions range from a relationship with a higher being, to the lived experience of being human, to connection with a cosmic energy of consciousness. This led some researchers to suggest that what is described is an unlimited and meaningless concept. It seems that almost all these definitions are based on the assumption that human beings have a spiritual nature, whether they recognise it or not. Even those who hold no belief in God have spiritual needs, because to be human is to be spiritual. Spirituality is for the most part, however, defined as a personal journey with the purpose of experiencing meaning, purpose, transcendence, connectedness and energy (Pesut et al 2008: 2803–2810; Cook 2004: 539–551; Speck 2005: 3-13).

Few if any of these synonyms or definitions are objectionable. They do not, however, provide much more precision than the word spirituality itself does, because they suggest worldviews that are incompatible with one another and not always fully articulated in the literature. The definitions are often based upon religious and philosophical ideologies that disagree with each other about what spiritual health consists of (Moberg 2002: 47). It appears that some scholars use these terms to avoid criticism that their views lack open-mindedness and diversity. It may be that no consensual definition can be found, but authors who use the term spirituality should at least clarify the worldview from which their definitions arise (Cook 2004: 539–551; Speck 2005: 3-13). My definition of Christian spirituality for the purpose of this study is discussed in section 2.3 below.

Some authors consider spirituality and religion as being closely related. For example, Emmons (2006: 65) wrote that both religion and spirituality arise from a search for the sacred - attempts to identify, articulate, maintain, or transform a "divine being, divine object, ultimate reality, or Ultimate Truth as perceived by the individual". For people whose lives are totally devoted to the search for the sacred, there is little difference between religion and spirituality, because they find the whole of life sacred. Moberg (2002: 50) wrote that spirituality and related concepts such as spiritual wellbeing are so closely connected with religion that one must see "religion and spirituality as phenomena in a continuous relation to each other". In another example, Mercadante (1996: 13) challenged the Alcoholics Anonymous assertion that it is spiritual, but not religious, by arguing that 'spirituality by definition is supported or formed by a conceptual and religious structure'. In contrast, others see spirituality and religion as virtually antithetical. Berenson wrote that "(s)pirituality, as opposed to religion, connotes a direct, personal experience of the sacred unmediated by particular belief systems prescribed by dogma or by hierarchical structures of priests, ministers, rabbis, or gurus" (in Cook 2004: 539–551).

A decade ago a lively debate raged in the academic discipline of the Psychology of Religion. The question was whether the field should rename itself the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality, as the meanings associated with the terms religion and spirituality seemed to be evolving and gradually taking on positive and negative connotations respectively. "Religion" was changing into a static, narrow institutional

concept that restricts and inhibits human potential; “spirituality” was becoming a term that related to a dynamic, individual process associated with a search for the sacred, for meaning, unity, transcendence and the highest of human potential. Religion, which has to do with institutionalised and formalised belief, was thus no longer regarded as essential to the worthy task of spirituality. Pargament argued that one of the advantages in viewing spirituality as the search for the sacred is that "we avoid restricting ourselves to narrow or traditional conceptions of God" (Pargament 1999: 3-16). Emmons reacted by asking how the sacred can exist without God, given that divinity, by definition, means “of or like God”. Wherein would the terms sacred and divine derive their meaning if it does not relate to God? He wrote that the manner in which people think about and envisage God may be the root of the division between defining oneself as either religious or spiritual (Emmons and Crumpler 1999: 17-24). C.S. Lewis (quoted in Emmons and Crumpler 1999: 22) expressed this well:

Men are reluctant to pass over from the notion of an abstract and negative deity to the living God. I do not wonder... The Pantheist's God does nothing, demands nothing. He is there if you wish for Him, like a book on a shelf. He will not pursue you... An impersonal God - well and good. A subjective God of beauty, truth and goodness, inside our own heads - better still. A formless life-force surging through us, a vast power which we can tap - best of all. But God himself, alive, pulling at the other end of the cord, perhaps approaching at an infinite speed ... that is quite another matter.

Spirituality and religion are both complex and multidimensional concepts, and any single definition is likely to reflect a limited perspective or interest (Hill et al 2000: 51-77). They can, however, be co-workers and not rivals, as spirituality can serve to revitalise religion and religion can prevent spirituality from being without purpose (Schneiders 2003: 176). Religion and theology may even be essential for a spirituality that moves one towards God and not down some blind alley or toward a dead end (Schmidt 2008: xv).

2.2.2. *Spiritual intelligence*

The psychology of religion assumes that spirituality is multidimensional and has identified three main aspects (Emmons 2006: 62-82):

- spirituality as a compelling drive that determines the personalised goals that one strives to obtain;
- spirituality as an aptitude in which people have differing abilities;
- spirituality as manifested in emotions such as gratitude, awe, reverence, wonder, humility, love, hope and forgiveness. The presence of the spiritual ability together with goals centred on spiritual concerns increases the likelihood that the person will experience these spiritual emotions.

Based on these identified aspects, Emmons argues that spirituality is a type of intelligence, “a set of capacities and abilities that enable people to solve problems and attain goals in their everyday lives,” and that people have different levels of spiritual abilities. In formulating his argument, Emmons uses Tillich’s definition of spirituality as the state of being ultimately concerned (Emmons 2000: 4). Tillich understood ultimate concern in the sense of Hamlet’s “To be or not to be.” This does not refer to a choice of dying now or living a bit longer, but rather to finding an answer to the definitive question on the meaning of life. It is about seeking and fulfilling the meaning of life (cf. Brown 1965: 20-21).

It is important to clarify that discussing spirituality as a type of intelligence does not imply that spirituality is only good for problem solving or reaching personal goals. The suggestion is not that spirituality is now only seen as a set of cognitive abilities and capacities, or that faith can simply be explained in terms of what it is useful for (Emmons 2000: 9). Intelligence can be defined as the level of skills and knowledge available for solving problems and attaining goals necessary for adaptation to any environmental context. Goal setting requires making plans to devise strategies to overcome external obstacles or internal obstacles such as frustration, depression, anxiety, and conflict with other pursuits. Religions have been described as systems of information and rules that provide resources for living a good life and a context for the generation of solutions to life problems, particularly moral issues (Emmons 2000:

5-6). In line with this understanding, Emmons (2000: 59) defines spiritual intelligence as “the adaptive use of spiritual information to facilitate everyday problem solving and goal attainment”.

Spiritual intelligence is the implementation of abilities and strategies to achieve a more “productive, effective, happier, and ultimately more meaningful life”, in other words, how to improve the overall quality of your life. Spiritual intelligence has mainly a positive effect that promotes personal wellbeing. Spirituality on the other hand may be positive or negative depending on how it is used (Emmons 2000: 59). Emmons writes that spiritually intelligent individuals have at least the following four characteristics (Emmons 2000: 10-13; 64):

2.2.2.1 The capacity for transcendence

Transcendence relates to going beyond the ordinary limits of our bodies, for example to relate with a divine being, or experience a heightened awareness of ourselves. The concept of transcendence is often found in definitions of spirituality, for example spirituality is “a way of being and experiencing that comes about through awareness of a transcendent dimension and that is characterised by certain identifiable values in regard to self, others, nature, life, and whatever one considers to be the Ultimate” (Emmons 2000: 10).

2.2.2.2 The ability to enter into heightened spiritual states of consciousness

A person has the ability to experience heightened forms of perception such as mysticism, which has been described as an awareness of an ultimate reality. This awareness is a sense of unity without restriction. Contemplative prayer can be regarded as such a heightened state of consciousness. Extensive research has been conducted on mystical experience and some of the results indicated that ceremonial religious rituals have social significance in that they connect people in a unique way. The physiological benefits from individual meditation have also been documented (Emmons 2000: 10-11).

2.2.2.3 The ability to invest life with a sense of the sacred

This ability leads people to sanctify (make holy or set apart as special) their ordinary lives and as a result experience an inner process of transformation (Emmons & Crumpler 1999: 17-24). Sanctification can be viewed as expertise that spiritually intelligent people use to solve problems and plan effective action. As a result they tend to experience a sense of meaningfulness and fulfilment. Research has shown that when day-to-day activities like work, marriage or parenting are seen as sacred responsibilities, greater levels of satisfaction, more constructive problem-solving behaviours, decreased conflict, and greater commitment are manifested (Emmons 2000: 11). Personality unification and integration (as opposed to conflict and fragmentation) is an aspect of mental health that may be enhanced by religion and spirituality (Emmons 2000: 11 and 1999: 10, 121-123).

The process of sanctification may have far-reaching implications on areas such as (Pargament & Mahoney 2005: 179–198):

- “a) the ways people invest their resources
- b) the aspects of life people choose to preserve and protect
- c) the emotions people experience
- d) the individual’s sources of strength, satisfaction, and meaning, and
- e) people’s areas of greatest personal vulnerability.”

2.2.2.4 The ability to utilise spiritual resources to solve problems

To cope in life we need effective problem-solving skills. Problem solving consists of identifying the problem, thinking of alternative solutions, considering the possible outcome of each alternative solution and then choosing a solution and implementing it. Spiritual and religious persons are more likely to find meaning in traumatic crises and experience growth following trauma than are less religious persons. The different forms of spiritual coping are not equally effective, though. Some believe that working together with God, for example talking a problem through with God and listening to find a solution to a problem, is more effective than just passively waiting for God to solve the problem (Emmons 2000: 12).

In summary, Emmons concludes that spirituality does indeed meet several of the acceptable criteria for intelligence. There are, however, some questions that have not been answered satisfactorily: Is there evidence that spirituality aids functioning and wellbeing in life? On the other hand, will lack of spiritual intelligence lead to dysfunction? (Emmons 2000: 17). Is there an optimal level of spiritual intelligence? His critics have identified some problems with his theory, although they do not suggest that it should be abandoned altogether.

A further problem with the theory is the lack of distinction between religious and secular definitions of wellbeing. As a result, spiritual effort is expected to lead to wellbeing in terms of psychological criteria. Although spirituality does in some lives lead to health in terms of psychological criteria, there are no guarantees that it would and there are cases on record where it did not (Kwilecki 2001: 45).

2.2.3. Spiritual wellbeing

There has over the last few decades been a widening in the definition of what it means for a person to be healthy. In medicine, in particular, there has been a shift in emphasis from merely treating disease to considering the overall health and wellbeing of the person as a whole, hence the term holistic medicine/healing. In one study, for example, healing was defined as “a sense of wellbeing that is derived from an intensified awareness of wholeness and integration among all dimensions of one’s being” (Fisher et al 2000: 133).

Several researchers who are interested in the spiritual dimension of a person have developed the concept of ‘spiritual wellbeing’. In 1975 the National Interfaith Coalition on Aging in the United States suggested that “(s)piritual wellbeing is the affirmation of life in a relationship with God, self, community and environment that nurtures and celebrates wholeness.” Subsequent discussions on spiritual wellbeing have developed theories on the four sets of relationships identified here: with self, others, the environment, and with God (or Transcendent Other). Based on a similar concept, a research study developed the Spiritual Health in Four Domains Index and proposed that spiritual wellbeing is a fundamental dimension of overall health and wellbeing, as it affects and integrates all the other dimensions of health (for example

the physical, mental, emotional and social dimensions). This theory states that spiritual wellbeing depends on the quality of the relationships in and between these four interrelated areas (Fisher et al 2000: 134-135):

- a) Personal – your relationship with yourself, which determines self-awareness, self-esteem and identity;
- b) Communal – the quality and depth of your relationships with other people, relating to morality, culture, love, justice, hope, and faith in humanity;
- c) Environmental – the care and nurture of and the notion of connectedness with the physical and biological environment;
- d) Transcendental – your relationship with something or someone beyond the human level (some use terms such as God, ultimate concern, cosmic force or transcendent reality). This involves faith in and worship of the transcendental.

Many individuals tend to give priority to one of the four domains, often neglecting the other areas. The following groups of people, however, tend to value the different areas on a progressive basis, called progressive synergism (Fisher et al 2000: 136):

Personalists are people who accept the personal domain as the essence of spiritual wellbeing and who believe that it is their own human spirit that provides the motivation to seek meaning, purpose, and values in life. They believe that their spiritual wellbeing depends entirely on themselves and that they are wholly self-sufficient regarding the improvement thereof, although they might acknowledge that interpersonal relationships are required for specific dimensions of their wellbeing, such as the social or emotional dimensions.

Communalists recognise the need to have harmony in their personal domain, as well as a need for quality and depth in interpersonal relationships. They believe that when we significantly interact with other people, it leaves an impact on our spiritual wellbeing.

Environmentalists are people embracing the environmental domain as the foundation of spiritual wellbeing. They have an appreciation for the personal and communal domains, and in addition have such a sense of awe and wonder about the environment

that it adds meaning to the rest of their lives. They go beyond responsible management of the environment to a sense of connectedness with it.

Transcendentalists focus on their relationship with the transcendental and regard themselves as spiritual beings whose potential can be realised when they come into harmony with their transcendent reality (for example God). They are very aware of the fact that once they have connected with the ultimate source of being in the universe, it will have a profound effect on their sense of identity and destiny, their relationships with other people and with the environment.

I recognised some of the domains described above in some of the individuals I interviewed for this study. Examples follow in chapter four and five. I do, however, question the simplistic ‘progressive synergism’ described in the article by Fisher et al (2000). One reason is that some religious or spiritual people often appear to focus on their interpretation of what God requires of them to total exclusion of the other domains described above, for example the desert hermits who isolated themselves in caves in search for the ultimate spiritual life. Also, many people whose spiritual domain is their priority seldom spend much time thinking of their physical and biological environment. On the contrary, they often regard their temporary home here on earth as of little significance. I am reminded of Paul’s admonition to the Colossians to set their minds and keep them set on what is above (the higher things), and not on the things that are on the earth (Colossians 3:2 Amplified Bible).

2.3 CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

Christian spirituality is recognised by its specifically Christian content: the Creator God revealed in Jesus Christ, the paschal mystery, the indwelling Holy Spirit, the Church as the body of Christ, the sacraments, etc. It is a life in which believers put on the mind of Christ and live with faith, hope, and love within the community of the Church and participate sacramentally and existentially in the death, resurrection, and glorification of Christ. These fundamentals of Christian spirituality are integrated in their lives by their personal transformation in Christ (Schneiders 1986: 266 and 2003: 163-185). Bonaventure (Bonaventure 1978 [1259]: 55) confirmed this integration when he wrote:

I invite the reader to the groans of prayer through Christ crucified . . . so that he not believe that reading is sufficient without unction, speculation without devotion, investigation without wonder, observation without joy, work without piety, knowledge without love, understanding without humility, endeavour without divine grace.

In this passage, Bonaventure makes the point that theology does not merely consist of intellectual study and commentary. He visualises theology as a ladder with two sides that are held together by prayer in the name of Christ. On one side of the ladder are the building blocks of study, for example research, interpretation, observation, analysis and the pursuit of knowledge. The other side of the ladder consists of the spiritual gifts, such as anointing, devotion, joyfulness, love, humility and divine grace. As a result, the depth of a person's spirituality corresponds to the depth of theological insight and vice versa (Delio 2008: 151).

The characteristics of Christian spirituality and the polarity in some of the principles that were significant in the development of Christian spirituality throughout history are discussed below.

2.3.1 Characteristics of Christian Spirituality

The main characteristics of Christian spirituality are the relationship that a Christian has with God, and the effect that this relationship has on the Christian.

2.3.1.1. A relationship with the Trinity

When I attempt to interpret the religious content common to the several Christian doctrines of salvation, the essential point is that the goal of salvation is spiritual communion – communion with God (Sarot 1996: 23).

A fundamental part of Christian spirituality is the relationship between God and the individual person. The relationship occurs in growth phases, affects the whole of

human experience and all aspects of a person's life. The way in which people think about God and the long list of names that they call God are influenced by how God is revealed in the relationship. Scripture, the sacraments, as well as other believers may be effective in bringing people closer to God (Waaïjman 2006: 13-18).

2.3.1.2. Transformational

Being in relationship with God and having fellowship with God means getting to know the character of God, which is a transforming reality in a person's life (Van der Merwe 2006: 182). This transformation is a gradual, ongoing process that may not reach completion in our lifetime (Svoboda 2006: 5-6). The goal of the transformation is to be like Christ.

Conformity in Christ cannot be isolated from the multilayered process of transformation, encompassing, on the one hand, processes of creation and recreation, leading to the ability to grow in conformity with Christ, on the other hand, initiating into processes of transformation in love and glory, as the completion of the conformity in Christ. The process of conformity in Christ itself is a double-sided process. It is a continuous process of conformation, but at the same time a process of unformation, caused by the unformed infinity of God (Waaïjman 2006: 47-51).

The person does not merely conform externally to specific behaviour, but his/her whole being is changed to acquire the holiness and perfection of Christ. This is achieved by having direct contact with God and the power of the Holy Spirit. The unformation that Waaïjman mentions relates to a relinquishing of all images and pre-conceived ideas that we have of God in our intellect, will and memory so that we can be transformed to what Christ is truly like (Waaïjman 2006: 47-51).

Evidence of this transformation can be found when the fruit of the Spirit is visible in that person's life (John 15:8 Amplified Bible). The apostle Paul describes this fruit as "love, joy (gladness), peace, patience (an even temper, forbearance), kindness, goodness (benevolence), faithfulness, gentleness (meekness, humility), self-control (self-restraint, continence)" (Galatians 5:22-23 Amplified Bible).

2.3.2 Polarities

Throughout Christian history the relationship between two oppositional attributes of various principles has had significant influence on Christian spirituality (Schmidt 2008: xvi-xix). Some of these polarities are discussed in the following paragraphs.

2.3.2.1. Holistic versus Dualistic

The ancient Hebrews regarded the earth and our body (materiality) as good, as a manifestation of God's glory. Our earthly lives are where God can be encountered. God comes to meet us here in our current condition. The Greek philosophers, on the other hand, regarded material things negatively and sought to rise above them. The human body, in particular, was seen as inferior to spirit, soul, energy or mind and they taught that the material body should be subdued by applying discipline and constraint (Shults 2008: 275-276; Schmidt 2008: xvi-xix).

As Christianity spread, the Greek and Roman worldviews influenced the young Christian church, and two conflicting views of spirituality and human nature emerged. In one, all of creation was seen as positive and in the other, the material world was something to be liberated from. Irenaeus strongly opposed the dualistic view that regarded materiality as inferior to spirituality. Augustine of Hippo, the Council of Nicea (325) and the Synod of Toledo (400) similarly stated that everything that God made is good. Augustine added that the evil that exists in the world is as a result of people's misuse of their freedom (Schmidt 2008: xvi-xix; McGrath 2007: 225-226).

Gnosticism, on the other hand, taught that there is a dualistic cleavage between God and the universe and that the material world and all the evil that people experience was caused by a powerful force other than God. In pursuit of spirituality one therefore has to escape from matter and time through either an ascetical lifestyle or the opposite thereof, a complete contempt for ethical behaviour. The Gnostics believed that there is a divine spark in human persons through which they are able to ascend to God and become free of the evil world of matter through knowledge of one's original state and

the secret mysteries. Christ's role is to reveal this knowledge to a few privileged Gnostics (Meredith 1986: 93-94; Aumann 1985: 31-33).

This conflict led to extremes, even later in history. Hobbes (1588-1679), for example, regarded everything as material. Spirits and incorporeal substances did not exist. On the opposite pole, Berkeley (1685-1753), a bishop in the Church of Ireland, believed that there are no material objects, only people's thoughts. Everything, including creation, is immaterial. Theologians are still today finding it difficult to understand and explain the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the material creation, without inappropriately resorting to deism or pantheism (Shults 2008: 273).

2.3.2.2. *Mystical versus Cognitive*

Apophatic and other elements of mystical traditions draw attention to the dangers of relying exclusively upon our logic and conceptual constructions when dealing with ultimate matters. The aim of Christian mysticism is to become like Christ, often by assimilating spiritual truths not cognitively attainable. The mystical process (*via mystica*) can be illustrated as a ladder reaching to heaven divided into a purgative or ascetic stage, an illuminative or contemplative stage, and at last the stage in which union with God is experienced. Many mystics expect this union to manifest in ecstatic revelations, trances or visions (Inge 1899: 21-24; Jones 1993:14).

As stated above, Bonaventure wrote that both study, as well as exercising the spiritual gifts is necessary in Christian spirituality. Some theologians, however, tend to focus on systems of thought, some of which were constructed based on very little practical experience of a relationship with God. As a result, their cognitive understanding and verbal analysis often takes the place of a sense of awe, power or presence that the mystics wrote about. As academic theology is frequently suspicious of supernatural experiences, there is a risk that some theologians will be satisfied with theories formed in the absence of mystical experiences (Schmidt 2008: xvi-xix and Jones 1993: 14).

2.3.2.3. Communal versus Individualistic

In the first few centuries of the Christian church, being part of body of Christ (the church) was regarded as of central importance. Your personal behaviour and beliefs were not ignored, but they were much less important than the community of believers and your place therein (Schmidt 2008: xvi-xix). Paul wrote to the church at Corinth that they are collectively Christ's body and individually members of it, each with his/her own place and function. Figuratively speaking they each had different abilities, so that one can be regarded as the eye of the body, while the other is the hand, etc. Nobody is more important than anybody else; they are all needed, and the members should take a mutual interest in each other and care for one another. The implication is thus that they cannot function without each other (1 Corinthians 12 Amplified Bible).

It is not clear exactly which influences caused a more individualistic approach in recent times, but some trace the roots of individualism as far back as Plato (429–347 BCE). In Christian spirituality the emphasis on individualism has developed largely in Protestant circles in the West, particularly as a result of the focus on the salvation of souls and on personal decisions for Christ (Schmidt 2008: xvi-xix). Kierkegaard is a good example of someone who focused on a spiritual journey of the individual before God. He expressed doubt that the Church in his society represented the original gospel of Jesus Christ in any sense. As a result, the “spiritual longing of the self to escape from the social swamp was for him the umbilical cord of the higher life” (Hart 1986: 470-471).

Winthrop expressed a more balanced approach when he wrote that although we are saved individually, we are then called to live out our faith in a covenanted community (Jeavons 1994: 23).

2.3.2.4. Inward versus Outward

Mysticism and spirituality for many suggest an inward, individualistic focus on a spiritual path through solitude, prayer, meditation, and acts of self-denial. In the monastic orders, for example, individuals are engaged with one another and with the

world through prayer, but their time is mainly spent alone. More introverted personality types are inclined to find renewed energy during times of solitude. Other people, in contrast, are energised through their relationships and acts of service such as feeding the hungry, caring for orphans, and working for reconciliation (Schmidt 2008: xvi-xix). If we are to be like Christ, however, both prayerful retreats, as well as time spent in serving others, are needed.

2.3.2.5. Prophetic versus Institutional

Throughout history, prophetic figures, inspired by mystical experiences or Scripture, have attracted large followings. They often challenge institutions and traditions and chafe under what they regard as insensitive or unfaithful institutional authority. Their goal is to reform the church and recall it to their interpretation of the gospel. They are also often aware of having been nurtured within the institution and are usually loath to abolish it (Schmidt 2008: xvi-xix). Many start new churches and denominations to rectify the errors of the institutions in their society. It reminds me of a well-known South American preacher that I heard expressing the opinion that if a church is full of ‘dead wood’ it is not possible to get life back into it. It is best to start another church right next to it with the handful of people that are spiritual. In this way these prophetic figures make enemies as well.

Other people, while recognising the shortcomings of their church, are loyal to their community of believers and find security and a calling in serving the institution of the church (Schmidt 2008: xvi-xix).

2.3.3. Concluding remarks

Christian spirituality is lived Christian faith (Frohlich 2001: 65) and is recognised by its specifically Christian content. It is a relationship with God that leads to a personal transformation in Christ (Schneiders 1986: 266 and 2003: 163-185).

Some of the principles and polarities that had an influence on Christian spirituality throughout history are (Schmidt 2008: xvi-xix):

- A *Holistic* view in which all of creation was seen as positive versus a *Dualistic view*, in which the material world was something to be liberated from.
- *Mysticism* often involves integrating spiritual truths that can not be understood intellectually. Some theologians, however, tend to base their theology purely on *Cognitive* systems of thought.
- In a *Communal* style of living, each member is important and has a particular function. In contrast, *Individualism* has led to a focus on the salvation of souls and on personal decisions for Christ.
- For many, Christian spirituality entails to a large degree *Inward*, solitary pursuits such as prayer and meditation. Other people find being alone difficult and define their spirituality in terms of their *Outward*, people-orientated activities.
- Some *Prophetic* figures often challenge institutions and traditions and sometimes start new churches and denominations to rectify the errors of the institutions in their society. Others find security and a calling in serving the *Institution* of the church of which they are a member.

2.4 CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY AND WELLBEING

The emotional benefits of religious belief have been widely accepted over the years. It is expected to lessen psychological distress, especially depression and anxiety, to provide comfort, alleviate pain and suffering, provide hope and meaning, and to help people cope with problems. The empirical evidence has, however, not always been conclusive that religion provides these benefits (Ross 1990: 236). The results of research and theories on the benefits of Christian spirituality are discussed in the following pages.

2.4.1 Benefits of Christian spirituality

The value of social support found in Christian communities, as well as the effect of Christian spirituality on behaviour, life satisfaction, personal goals, coping mechanisms and physical and mental health are discussed below.

2.4.1.1. Social support

The French sociologist Durkheim (1858-1917) did research on how and why religion keeps believers from committing suicide. He found that individuals who were isolated and who were not active participants in family, religious, or other community groups, were more prone to suicide than people who were well integrated in society². Religious groups provide the necessary support, nurturing and integration to help people avoid what Durkheim called egoistic suicide (Idler 1998: 52-53). Several recent studies showed that people who were single, old, retired, or in poor health benefited more from church membership than other people. This confirms that the social support provided by a church community is beneficial for some people (Argyle 2000: 141-154).

One study in particular found that engaging in organised religious activities provided older women with friendships, a sense of community, helped define their role in society and gave them a way of contributing to the welfare of others. There was a significant relationship between religious activities and the life satisfaction the interviewees reported (Neill & Kahn 1999: 327-328). Merely attending church services do not, however, necessarily lead to increased wellbeing. Instead, it is active participation in those church activities that enhance the member's social support system that is beneficial (Seifert 2002: 65).

² Durkheim further argued that this is not the case in altruistic suicide, where coercion by and over-integration into a group leads to suicide that is regarded as an honourable escape (Hamilton 1990: 157).

2.4.1.2. Life satisfaction

Having firm beliefs and existential certainty lead to life satisfaction, especially for older and less educated individuals. Fundamentalists have been found to be more optimistic. The members of the fundamentalist Baptist churches in the United States, for example, have been found to be happier on average than members of more liberal churches. Belief in the after-life and faith in a supportive, caring God are strong predictors of happiness for the elderly, in particular, as it leads to a greater sense of control and hope (Argyle 2000: 141-154).

2.4.1.3. Goals

People often define themselves by what they want to do and who they want to be. In 2005 Emmons did a literature review of recent academic publications in Psychology and concluded that research has shown that spiritual and religious goals, more so than other goals, seem to provide people with significant meaning and purpose for their lives. As long as they have religious and spiritual objectives people are likely to experience life as fulfilling, meaningful, and purposeful, even in the face of a deteriorating and disabling physical condition (Emmons 2005: 742-743).

Religion also seems to serve as a general unifying framework to bring about consistency in a person's diverse aspirations. Spiritual goals do not, however, necessarily guarantee emotional wellbeing. Spirituality that results in excessive self-preoccupation, for example, may be detrimental for the wellbeing of that person and those around him/her. Goals that fulfil individualistic, but not collective meaning and goals, or societal needs, may ultimately lead to a lower quality of life and the deterioration of interpersonal relationships (Emmons 2005: 742-743).

2.4.1.4. Coping mechanisms

Churches often impart emotional skills to their members and thus enhance and maintain their wellbeing. Two possible ways in which this may be achieved is, first, that members may have increased access to avenues for emotional disclosure and opportunities to share their burdens, as they may have greater access to counsellors

and emotional support. Second, religions often promote exercises such as prayer, rituals, meditation, Sabbath rests, or morning devotionals that are effective in reducing stress, alleviating negative moods, and increasing positive moods (Pizarro & Salovey 2002: 221-222).

Religion buffers stress, especially for life-and-death issues. People appear to apply different mixtures of religious thought, feeling, behaviour, and relationships in their attempts to deal with major life stressors. Some forms of religious coping are used with success (Argyle 2000: 155-199; Pargament et al 1998: 720-721).

Researchers have classified the coping methods in positive and negative patterns. The positive pattern was found to be the most successful and consists of several religious coping methods such as:

- seeking spiritual support;
- asking forgiveness from God and others;
- spiritual relationships with God and people;
- sacraments and purification rites;
- awareness of guidance and support by God;
- collaborative life management where God is a partner in decisions;
- a positive perspective of negative events as being the will of God;
- seeking support from the congregation or clergy (Argyle 2000: 155-199; Pargament et al 1998: 720-721).

Participants in research on this topic made considerably more use of positive than of negative religious coping methods. They drew on approaches that are based on a secure relationship with God and on a trustworthy worldview. The positive coping pattern resulted in positive results, including fewer symptoms of psychological distress and in some cases even led to psychological and spiritual growth triggered by the stressor (Argyle 2000: 155-199; Pargament et al 1998: 720-721).

Other methods of religious coping are not successful. The negative patterns consist of, for example:

- spiritual discontent;
- thinking that negative events are God's punishment;

- feeling abandoned by God;
- discontent about relationships with other Christians;
- focusing on demonic powers;
- a reappraisal of God's powers (Argyle 2000: 155-199; Pargament et al 1998: 720-721).

Negative religious coping methods were also used by participants in the studies, but much less frequently. These methods of coping reveal an unhealthy spirituality, involving a shaky relationship with God, spiritual struggle, fear of the world, and emotional distress such as depression and callousness towards others.

These findings suggest that religion can be a source of distress as well as a source of successful solutions in coping (Argyle 2000: 155-199; Pargament et al 1998: 720-721).

2.4.1.5. Physical and mental health

Nurturing, non-punitive religion has been associated with mental and physical health. Numerous studies have found a positive relationship between traditional Christian practices, such as regular worship attendance, Scripture reading, prayer, and positive mental and physical health among seniors. Religiously involved older adults are generally less prone to suicide, depression, anxiety, smoking and alcoholism, and are more satisfied with their lives, with a greater sense of wellbeing. Studies have found that older adults who practice their faith regularly have lower blood pressure, fewer heart attacks, stronger immune systems to fight diseases such as cancer, and are less likely to die of coronary artery disease (Weaver et al 1998: 18; Argyle 2000: 155-199). The emphasis is again on actively participating in Christian practices and not merely attending the services.

Religious healing is successful in improving subjective health and subjective wellbeing. This is at least partly due to defining health as more than just the state of the body, and in embracing a happier view of life. Although in research studies religious healing events had little or no immediate effects on objective health, the

researchers expected that the effects were likely to improve in the longer term (Argyle 2000: 155-199).

Even when controlling for self-perception factors, a 1989 study in the United States found that respondents who report that religion is very important or not at all important in their daily lives are more depressed than those who are only moderately interested in religion (Schnittker 2001: 405). Another study in the same period in the state of Illinois found that those who believed strongly in their religion had lower distress levels than did those who professed a weak belief. Those who rejected all religious belief also had low distress levels. This is probably not because they are indifferent, but because they have rejected religion and are committed to other, non-religious beliefs. The highest levels of anxiety were found among those who participate in religion without religious conviction (Ross 1990: 243).

2.4.1.6. Effect on behaviour

Durkheim did research on how and why religion keeps believers from committing suicide³. He concluded that religious groups make rules for many areas of life and that these rules have a stabilising effect on people, for example in lowering the rates of substance abuse and extramarital affairs. Churches regulate the behaviour of their members⁴ and the rules of the church restrain individuals from following their own selfish desires, oblige them to consider the welfare of society and protect people from anomie. Individuals who do not have norms and guides for their behaviour are more prone to commit suicide than people with a strong sense of shared beliefs and moral attitudes (Idler 1998: 52-53).

Other research has found that church members donate on average twice as much as non-religious people. A large percentage of what is given is, however, donated to the church itself or to Christian projects. Church members are involved in more than twice as many good works, such as doing social work and community projects, than the non-religious. This is to be expected from the contents of Christian teaching

³ Durkheim's book *Le Suicide* was published in 1897.

⁴ Durkheim found that Catholicism notably regulated and constrained the behaviour of their members more than Protestantism did (Idler 1998: 52).

(Argyle 2000: 184-198). Religion therefore produces benefits for society through social cohesion and social support, and through the moral effects of care and philanthropy (Argyle 2000: 239-248).

Except for specific groups like the Mormons, membership of churches in the United States and Britain has little effect on law-breaking other than reduced drug and alcohol abuse. Disciplined behaviour fostered by churches is good for health, marriage and occupational success. There are less extra-marital and premarital sex, but approximately the same level of contraceptive use and abortions than in the rest of the population - even for Catholics. Churches value the integrity of the family and as a result the divorce rate for church members is lower than for other people. One exception is with racially mixed marriages, where the divorce rate is high. This may be due to the social cohesion created by cultural groups, and the loss of it when one partner has to adjust to the beliefs and practices of another group (Argyle 2000: 184-198, 239-248).

Except for Christians who are actively involved in spiritual activities, church members tend to be more prejudicial than other people, especially fundamentalists. They are also prejudiced towards members of other churches. This is contrary to Christian teaching, but consistent with the theory that religion is a social phenomenon that creates bonds between members, but as a corollary sets them apart from people who do not share their beliefs (Argyle 2000: 184-198).

2.4.2 Spiritual and mystical experiences

Religious experience has been found to be widespread and contain widely shared core components. Christian convictions consist partly of images, the most common images of God being of a great transcendent power, and of a person (like a father or king) who can be known and related to. As emotional religious experiences, which are not much affected by logical arguments or demands for consistency, are a significant part of religious beliefs, it cannot be reduced to dogma (Argyle 2000: 239-248).

Reported intimacy with God correlates with happiness, independently of church attendance. Religious experience and prayer have been found to improve wellbeing

(Argyle 2000: 141-154). Transcendent experiences are common and may form the basis for belief in God, because experience of timelessness and near-death experiences can lead to belief in eternity and the after-life. Spiritual encounters can convey a feeling of having been in contact with a powerful force and a transcendent being, and a feeling of unity in the whole of creation. It often leaves people with a sense of joy, a feeling of being more integrated, forgiven, and with a sense of timelessness. They are then convinced that they have been in contact with something real, and it can bear good fruit in that many people afterwards want to lead better lives and do more for others (Argyle 2000: 60-75).

It has been found that prayer has a beneficial effect, but the impact is mainly on the person praying. Prayer has also been found to induce religious experiences and healing. As these experiences are partly directed to asking for help for other people, it is likely that prayer will motivate loving behaviour towards others (Argyle 2000: 239-248).

Believers may sometimes enjoy the grace of experiencing what might be called brief glimpses of eternity and find happiness in striving to realise the will of God in their lives. The ecstatic union with God and ultimate happiness in the love of God as described in the third stage of the *via mystica* can, however, not be fully attained in this life (Brümmer 2004: 261-265).

2.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Within the philosophical tradition viewpoints regarding wellbeing are mainly found in the *satisfaction*, *actualisation* and *fellowship theories*. The *Shalom hypotheses* combines these theories by stating that healthy functioning in all the different aspects of a human being, as well as in the interdependence of those aspects, are necessary for personal wellbeing.

In psychology the theory exists that subjective wellbeing exists on a range from low to high. Research over the years has found that all socio-demographic factors combined predict less than 10% of the variance in wellbeing. As a result, researchers have recently started to focus on how people perceive the different factors that

influence their wellbeing. Optimism and self-esteem are examples of aspects that affect people's perception (Lewis et al 2000: 477).

A concise definition of wellbeing for the purpose of applying it to the interviews of this study is that wellbeing is healthy functioning in all aspects of a person's life. The different aspects, for example health, relationships and finances, are dependent upon one another and influence one another.

A wide variety of definitions of spirituality is employed that ranges from a relationship with a higher being, to the lived experience of being human, to a connection with a cosmic energy of consciousness. Spirituality and religion are both complex and multidimensional concepts, and any single definition is likely to reflect a limited perspective or interest (Hill et al 2000: 51-77).

In order to proceed with this study Christian spirituality is defined as an internal relationship with the God that transforms a person in the way he/she lives now. This will include loving other people and the environment.

In researching the relationship between Christian spirituality and wellbeing, it has been found that nurturing, non-punitive religion is associated with mental and physical health (Weaver et al 1998: 18; Argyle 2000: 155-199) and that active participation in church activities that enhances the member's social support system is beneficial (Seifert 2002: 65).

In the next chapter the research methodology of this study is discussed.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The qualitative approach was used in this study, and this chapter starts with a discussion of the reasons why this approach was chosen and what the criteria for authenticity in a qualitative approach are.

The sampling procedure and the research method, which primarily consisted of in-depth interviews, are outlined and thereafter the way in which the interviews were conducted is described. Researchers should constantly reflect on their role in the research process (Mason 2002: 7), and therefore some ethical considerations and a reflection on my role as interviewer are also considered below.

The data analysis and interpretation follow in chapter four.

3.2 A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

The research design consists of a qualitative approach with unstructured interviews in the participants' own homes or offices to enhance a relaxed atmosphere wherein they are comfortable.

Qualitative research has a holistic approach: a focus on human experience, contact with people in their normal lives, a high level of researcher involvement, and the production of descriptive and / or narrative data (Rolfe 2006: 306). It aims to offer explanations and interpretations rather than merely reports or descriptions. This research method involves selective viewing and analysis of the data and can as a result not be neutral or objective (Mason 2002: 7-8). Subsequently a continuous reflection on my role as researcher is considered in the analysis of the data.

A qualitative research approach fits this study project best since depth and complexity are needed to attain an exploration of spirituality within the context of the daily lives of the participants. Such a qualitative approach offers the opportunity to seek

profundity in the understanding of a complex experience such as spirituality, rather than the breadth of findings that a quantitative design would offer (Lietz et al 2006: 445).

The quality of qualitative research cannot be assured by the rigorous application of a set of universally accepted strategies and procedures, as no cohesive qualitative research theory currently exists (or may ever exist since the nature of the approach is context specific). There are therefore no standard principles for making quality judgements about qualitative research studies (Rolfe 2006: 306-309), but useful guidelines have been identified, which are discussed in the following paragraphs.

The quality of a research study is revealed in the research report or publication, and assessing its strength is to a large extent subject to the judgement and insight of informed readers. Researchers should therefore leave an audit trail that not only recounts the motivation for the research decisions and the course of the research process, but that also provides evidence of ongoing self-critique and self-appraisal by the researchers, including an exposition of the moral and spiritual stance of the researchers themselves (Rolfe 2006: 309). This awareness is referred to in the rest of this section as reflexivity.

In addition to reflexivity, Rolfe (2006: 305) also refers to authenticity, credibility, and transferability which all contribute to the quality and trustworthiness of qualitative research. I will briefly describe each of these four terms.

Reflexivity occurs when the researcher is, throughout the research process, aware that his/her own actions and choices will undoubtedly influence the significance and context of the investigation. It is important to acknowledge the potential for reactivity and bias and how one's own identity could both assist and hinder interpretation of the narrative data. Reflexivity therefore involves clarifying who we are and the ways in which our beliefs, experiences and identities intersect with those of the participants and in situating ourselves socially and emotionally in relation to the respondents. The researcher should explicitly state his/her own socio-cultural stance and perspectives (Lietz et al 2006: 447-448), which I do in part 3.5 below.

An aspect of reflexivity that is a particular issue in the study of Christian Spirituality is its self-implicating character. For researchers in Christian Spirituality their research questions are often of an intensely personal nature and relevant to their own lives. Researchers are not neutral or objective about the questions or the answers that the research will reveal. This personal interest in the research questions can lead to a conscious or unconscious distortion in the formulation of the questions, manipulation of the method or selective interpretation of results (Schneiders 2004:17-18). Attaching subjective meanings to life events may also reveal multiple views and as a result several interpretations of the truth may transpire.

Another main concern of qualitative research is *authenticity*, which relates to the validity, reliability, fairness and rigor of the research (Denzin and Lincoln 2005: 207). It entails gaining a realistic, accurate understanding of people's experiences and lives and reflecting the authentic views of the interviewee with minimal interference or distortion by the researcher. The researcher should also be able to demonstrate a more "sophisticated understanding and enlargement of personal constructions of the phenomenon being studied" (ontological authenticity) (Tobin and Begley 2004: 392). Open-ended questions are usually the best way to achieve authenticity when using in-depth interviews (Silverman 2001: 20), and I describe how the interviews were conducted in this manner in part 3.4 below.

As self-awareness is important, *credibility* is served when researchers describe and interpret their experiences and reactions during the research process. One way to do this is to keep a field journal in which the researcher's reactions and impressions during the research process are documented. The journal provides material for further reflection (Koch 2006: 92). In my journal I noted my prejudices and perspectives, which are further discussed in part 3.5.

In quantitative design, researchers use large and random samples to generalise their findings to the entire research population. In qualitative studies, however, the goal is not to generalise the findings, but rather to use the results in other contexts. This is called *transferability*. Transferability can be improved by thoroughly describing the context, method and assumptions of the research, as I have done in this section (Ritchie & Lewis 2003: 277; Koch 2006: 92).

Trustworthiness is established through procedures that increase assurance that the researcher's conclusions are in correspondence with what the participants meant, rather than with his/her own viewpoints and experience. Understanding and analysing the respondents' narratives consists of "an active process that requires scrutiny, reflection, and interrogation of the data, the researcher, the participants, and the context that they inhabit". Reactivity and prejudice during the research process and analysis of the narrative should be reduced in order to enhance credibility (Lietz et al 2006: 443). I gave concrete expression to these matters by noting down and challenging my own reactions, some of which are discussed in part 3.5.

3.3 THE RESEARCH POPULATION AND SAMPLING

Once it had been established that the qualitative research method is most appropriate for the subject matter of this study, the process of data collection could start. This includes determining who the research population would be. As the main objective of this project is to establish whether Christian spirituality contributes to or detracts from general wellbeing, my initial task in sampling was to determine what the characteristics would be of people who could shed light on this question. I decided that the participants would have to be Christians who are aware of and are actively involved in the development of their own personal spirituality, i.e. they have a lived Christian faith (Frohlich 2001: 65). In addition, it was necessary that the participants should reside within driving distance from me, be adults and able to converse in English or Afrikaans.

The next research step was sampling. The main sampling categories in social research are probability and non-probability sampling. In probability sampling, which is mostly associated with quantitative research methods, research units (e.g. respondents) in the research population are chosen randomly, with a known probability to be chosen, in order to produce a statistically representative sample. In qualitative research designs choosing research participants or other units of observation (sampling) is generally done with the aim of identifying cases that will provide insight into the research problem and the participants are thus purposefully

chosen, based on their specific characteristics. This is known as non-probability sampling, which was used in this study (Ritchie & Lewis 2003: 77-78).

In order to achieve useful results, it was important to choose the participants who would be most appropriate for this study. Snowball sampling was therefore chosen as the appropriate approach, as the other sampling methods⁵ were unlikely to produce a sample of respondents who are judged by other Christians as Christians who are aware of and are actively involved in the development of their own spirituality.

After deciding who the research population would be and what sampling method to use, I approached many people whom I knew, and some that I did not know, and asked them whether they could recommend a suitable candidate to interview. I asked my contacts whether they could recommend anyone who they regard as a Christian whose faith has an influence on the way they live, who has a meaningful relationship with God and who are actively involved in the development of their own personal spirituality.

I approached seventeen people who have been recommended in this manner and whom I judged would meet the sampling requirements. Eleven of them agreed to an in-depth interview after I explained the context and purpose of this study. The eleven respondents are white and coloured⁶ Afrikaans and English speaking people between the ages of 30 and 70.

The sample size in qualitative research should enable understanding of the issue that is being investigated. The aim is to focus on a particular matter in a strategic and meaningful way, rather than to represent a population. In contrast to quantitative methods, where it is possible to determine beforehand what an adequate sample size

⁵ The four main types of non-probability sampling are reliance on available subjects, judgemental sampling, snowball sampling and quota sampling. In reliance on available subjects, respondents are, for example, stopped on street corners or in shopping malls. This method seldom produces valuable data as there is no control over how representative the sample is. In judgemental sampling the participants are chosen based on the researcher's judgement of who would be most useful to study the phenomenon in question. In snowball sampling each respondent may be asked to suggest more people to be interviewed, for example in a study of illegal immigrants where the researchers ask one such individual to introduce them to a few more illegal immigrants. Quota sampling formulates a set of characteristics and chooses participants on the basis that they match those characteristics. The assumption is that the total population will have these same characteristics (Babbie 2007:183-185).

⁶ The term *coloured* refers to people of mixed descent. Nothing negative is meant by the use of the term.

would be to represent the population, in qualitative research the objective is to obtain enough information to understand and explain the phenomenon under investigation, and the researcher will seldom be able to anticipate in advance how many in-depth interviews it would take to provide sufficient data (Mason 2002: 134-136). An adequate sample size is not too large, as it should permit intensive interviewing and analysis. The sample size should also not be too small, as the aim is to gain a new and a richly textured understanding of experience (Sandelowski 1995: 183).

In my view the sample of eleven is sufficient considering the in-depth interviews and analysis that had to be done. I have obtained sufficient information to draw conclusions about the relationship between the respondents' spirituality and their overall wellbeing (Mason 2002: 134), in order for transferable insights to be concluded with trustworthiness.

3.4 CONDUCTING THE RESEARCH: IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Interviewing is a critical method in qualitative research, but instead of a rigid question and answer format, the interview in qualitative research can be in a variety of formats, going beyond mere fact gathering. It attempts to construct meaning and interpretation and to create knowledge in the context of conversation, while assuming that such knowledge is contextual (Puebla et al 2004: 2). It is important that qualitative researchers are sensitive to the contexts and situations in which research takes place (Mason 2002:7), because qualitative research can only be interpreted within a specific context. The meaning of an action or statement, and in this case the meaning of the narrative that the interviewees present, depend on its own specific context. The same comment and behaviour can have very different meaning in different historical or geographical areas (Neuman 2006:158).

As open-ended questions are usually the best way to gain understanding of people (Silverman 2001: 20), I approached the respondents with a set of broad themes to give direction to the conversation and tried to get them talking about their relationship with God and how it had developed. I asked them to tell me about their lives, how they experience their spirituality, and who influenced their spirituality, namely by starting with their parents or grandparents, or whoever they remember as having the

greatest impact on them. The interview schedule used to achieve this is attached as Addendum B.

This usually produced a narrative that highlighted the main authorities and events that illustrate their spirituality and wellbeing at different stages of their lives. Where towards the end of the conversation I did not think that I could make a link between the interviewee's spirituality and general wellbeing, I specifically asked what he/she thinks a spirituality-wellbeing relationship is or has been. I seldom, if ever, interrupted their story, which had the result that the length of the interviews ranged from one to two and a half hours.

In some cases e-mail exchanges took place after the interviews that led to new discussions and provided new insight. One respondent afterwards sent me a few journal entries and poems that he wrote about his spirituality. Another respondent wrote an autobiography of which I bought a copy. These items were used in my analysis to develop a more complete picture of the wellbeing and spirituality of the particular respondent.

The interviews were conducted in an informal way, in a setting that is as close to the respondents' everyday lives as possible. Almost all of the interviews took place in either the respondent's own house or office. As the respondents were comfortable in a familiar environment where they not only felt safe, but also in control, they tended to relax and talk spontaneously without much need to be prompted.

I digitally recorded the interviews and transcribed it, but I made no attempt to standardise the narrative or alter any idiosyncrasies in the respondents' speech in order to avoid separating the content of people's lives from their style and the way they express themselves (Blauner 1987: 48-49). The digital version of the interviews made it possible to listen to the narratives repeatedly to ensure that the transcription is accurate, and to identify trends not noticed during the interview itself.

The next step was to edit the transcriptions. The raw material of a narrative is unorganised and editing has the purpose of identifying specific trends and relationships in the blend of stories, events and convictions that the respondents spoke

about. Through the editing process I attempted to be faithful to the original interview and at the same time provide a version of the narrative that is economical, clear, compelling and useful for illuminating the aspects under investigation (Blauner 1987: 52).

The data analysis was conducted in two phases: open coding, where I read the transcripts and identified themes and concepts, and selective coding, where I focused on the main ideas and developed a theory regarding the relationship between Christian spirituality and wellbeing (Flick 2002: 177). Those ideas and theories are discussed in chapter four.

3.5 THE RESEARCHER'S ROLE IN THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Factors that influence both my perspective and the people I came into contact with are that I am a white woman living in Cape Town with Afrikaans as first language. I grew up in the Dutch Reformed Church and studied theology full-time at the Dutch Reformed seminary in Pretoria for three years. I am a qualified chartered accountant who has worked for large financial corporations for the last decade, and I have met many of my current acquaintances in that environment. As a result, all of the respondents that my contacts referred me to are highly qualified professionals with several degrees and most are white Afrikaans speaking people who grew up in the Dutch Reformed Church. This was beneficial in the interview process, because their backgrounds are similar to mine.

Many of the people I had asked could not, or did not feel comfortable to, recommend such a candidate as I have described to interview. I noted more than once in the journal how this saddened me. I reflected that there must either be something wrong with the way in which I have defined Christian spirituality, or there are less Christians in my environment than I had hoped. It is also possible that the mere use of the word spirituality⁷ and the mention of my working towards a research degree in Christian Spirituality affected their response in that they then tried to think of someone that is a

⁷ As discussed in the literature review above, the term spirituality has such a wide range of definitions, that some time should be spent in agreeing on a basic understanding before meaningful dialogue can take place.

bit different, mystical or supernatural. That was indeed the result and highlights the fact that people attach different meanings to the same terms. The people who were referred to me are in my view all very interesting characters, but based on the information that I was able to obtain not all of them fit my definition of Christians. One of the interviewees was not even comfortable with confessing faith in Jesus Christ, as he found that it limited his spirituality.

The researcher should explicitly state his/her own socio-cultural stance and perspectives (Lietz et al 2006: 447-448). I did this by noting my reactions and opinions to the stories of the respondents in a field journal. For example, I found the interview with an actively homosexual pastor⁸ disturbing on many levels, particularly as I again met him at a few events after our interview. We by chance sat next to each other in a movie documentary called *Fierce Light: When Spirit Meets Action*⁹. While watching the movie I saw many parallels between the type of activism illustrated and the activities that he chooses to be involved in, for example campaigning for gay rights and the protection of the environment. I noted in my journal thereafter that from my perspective the movie summarises his 'spirituality' well. It included matters such as human rights, human possibility, human potential, love for people and love for the earth they live on. Although I recognise that love for our fellow human beings and our environment is part of the biblical metaphor of the fruit of the Spirit, such an exclusive focus on the things that God created is in my view not spirituality, but humanism.

As my reactions and prejudice should be reduced in order to enhance credibility (Lietz et al 2006: 443), I asked myself to what extent a healthy Christian spirituality could involve campaigning for human rights or environmental issues, and I spent some time reflecting on these issues. I also reflected on Sheldrake's comment that a preference for inward experience over social action tends to support a separation of spirituality and ethics (Sheldrake 2007: 93). I concluded that although spirituality relates to more than just the reality of our earthly lives and the people and creation around us, an exclusive focus on inward experience has the danger of our spirituality

⁸ For the sake of simplicity, all clergy (including ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church) are referred to as pastors in this dissertation.

⁹ *Fierce Light* documents the quest for a union of spirituality and activism by focusing on events of spiritual activism around the world.

being separated from the way we live here on earth. A Christian's spirituality should therefore lead to the person living in such a way that there is no dissonance between his/her spirituality and earthly life.

3.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND DISSEMINATION

Ethical factors were considered throughout the entire research process and the names used in this study are therefore fictional to ensure anonymity of the respondents (cf. Koch 2006: 92).

All respondents were informed of the purpose of the interview and the ways in which the information obtained will be used. They were assured of the confidentiality of our discussion and that their identities would not be revealed in this dissertation. It was also made clear to them that they can withdraw from the research at any point. If respondents request feedback, the final dissertation will be made available to them.

The written consent of the interviewees was obtained and an example of the consent form is attached as Addendum A. One exception is the respondent who has no fingers on his only hand, who consented verbally.

CHAPTER 4 ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter two discussed the definitions of wellbeing and spirituality, as well as the relationship between a person's spirituality and overall wellbeing. With some caveats, the conclusion in many studies was that religion has positive effects, in particular as a result of the social support experienced in a religious community.

In this chapter the respondents' interviews are discussed on a thematic basis. First, the focus of the discussion is on the way the respondents grew up and the manner in which their own spirituality developed. These themes were anticipated and therefore form part of the original interview schedule (see Appendix B). The other themes discussed below transpired from the interviews as being important to the particular respondent¹⁰.

The following biographic detail and pseudonyms of the eleven respondents are intended to provide a basic context within which the thematic aspects of their life stories can be placed:

Name	Age	Marital status	Race	Occupation
Amanda	38	Single	White	Social worker and evangelist
Andries	44	Married	White	Business and environmental advisor
Anton	49	Married	White	Pastor
Ben	37	Single	White	Suspended pastor
Cornelia	52	Married	White	Psychologist and lecturer
Etienne	Fifties	Married	White	Pastor
Gustav	44	Divorced	White	Defrocked pastor

¹⁰ In this chapter I use the same terms as the respondents did when referring to God. This is not to promote a particular view or interpretation, but to provide an accurate reflection of how the respondents presented their experience and interpretation.

Nick	43	Married	White	Business and personal coach
Rose	30	Single	White	Journalist and PhD student
Theresa	36	Married	Coloured	Community worker for a church
Willem	Sixties	Married	White	Retired pastor

4.2 CHILDHOOD

As per the interview schedule in Addendum B, I started all the interviews by saying that I am interested in the respondent as a person and in particular in how they experience their spirituality. Then I suggested that the respondents start with telling me about their youth, the house they grew up in, how they experienced their parents, and how their parents imparted their spirituality.

While discussing their childhood years, many of the respondents attached significance to their relationship with their parents or grandparents. These relationships in many cases had a lasting influence on how they experience their spirituality. The second aspect that was mentioned in several interviews was the influence of Christian youth groups during their childhood. These two factors are therefore the focal points in this section.

4.2.1 Relationships

A first general trend that may be noticed is the significant effect early exposure to the Christian belief system, a Christian community, and the manner in which their parents behave in that context have on how people experience their wellbeing and spirituality. This may be illustrated by the responses from eight of the interviewees, which are characterised in the following paragraphs.

4.2.1.1 Positive recollections by respondents

Amanda describes the small town in which she grew up as a place where many people were Christians who had set a good example for her and protected her. She remembers one event where, as a young girl, she mentioned to her parents that a male friend of theirs tried to touch her inappropriately, and she never saw him again. She

felt protected in the community she grew up in and today she experiences her relationship with God similarly. Her spirituality is being motivated by a relationship with God within which she feels safe. Her faith is not inspired by fear, but by having a relationship with God. She says that she does sometimes experience uncertainty, sadness and other struggles, but never darkness and despair. She always has faith and hope that things will work out well for her and for others.

Theresa's family environment also had a significant influence on how her spirituality developed. She grew up as the youngest of five girls in a very close-knit family. She experienced her parents as very positive, nurturing and caring:

I grew up knowing that the sky is the limit and I must aim for it, but if I were to choose to be a chimney sweep they would be cheering me on. I have a vivid memory of being cared for. That is also my feeling of who God is.

Her father took his family along when he would drive around in that community to drop off food parcels. Theresa was therefore from a young age aware that she is privileged. Her parents also gave their children a strong sense of identity: "You are a Johnson and Johnsons don't do that".

Theresa's parents expressed their faith in a public, communal way. They were always involved in some community project and there were very often fellow church members visiting their home. She said that in her experience there was virtually no individualistic expression of faith in her family. All prayer, worship and Bible study were done as a group. She only learned later at college that some people are individualistic in their faith, and she had great difficulty in adapting to such a setting. Her experience in this regard is discussed in section 4.4.2 below.

In summary, the development of Theresa's identity in her childhood was characterised by a strong sense of belonging to a family and a group. This also applied to her spirituality, which she experienced through other people. Her sense of being cared for by her family and community affected her spirituality in that she consistently experiences God as the One who provides in her needs.

Etienne's childhood was very different from Theresa's in that he spent a lot of time wandering alone on the farm on which he grew up, because his younger siblings demanded his parents' attention. On one such occasion during his primary school years, he had his first mystical experience when he looked at the stars. He gained a perception of the infinity of the starry heavens and of the infinity of God. It was in his words "a very abstract, diffuse idea of God". His theology transformed significantly in later years, as described in section 4.5.1 below.

Etienne's parents were "good church people", and in his childhood he had the impression that people go to church because it is expected of them. Religion later became significant for his mother when she fell very ill and had a strong experience of God's presence, which went over into a pietistic religion. Etienne described it as "Andrew Murray with a bit of charismatic influence". The model of Christianity that he developed as a result was pietistic and moralistic. "It was the type of spirituality where you are taught that you must feel guilty about your sins and where you want to become better. You therefore regularly start self-improvement projects". Such a dualistic, anti-intellectual theology was difficult for Etienne to accept, but on the other hand it had a strong mystical aspect that appealed to him. There was a real contact with God that he desired.

Another respondent whose family values clearly had an effect on how he approaches life today is Andries, a white man who grew up during the apartheid years. He said that his father did not talk much about his faith, but he did live its values. One of the earliest things that Andries can remember his father saying is that 'we are all equal.' It was clear that he also meant that people of all races were equal. Andries therefore grew up with a strong sense of justice and fairness, which played a significant role in the decisions he had made throughout his life. They did not have deep theological discussions at home, but they did spend a lot of time having value-driven conversations. The effect of this focus on values in his life is clear. Today Andries helps communities to develop holistically and to have respect for nature. He does this by working on ecological sustainability, which is discussed in section 4.3.4 below.

Willem's father was mayor of a small Karoo town, and was very private about his spirituality. He was a person who was aware of and felt a strong connection to nature.

This trait of his father helped Willem to integrate the concrete aspects of life in his spirituality. Both Willem and his brother became Dutch Reformed pastors, which was a surprise and disillusion for their father, because he had other ideals for them. Willem's mother was Irish and had come to South Africa when she was 19. She did not grow up in a Christian house and was very open minded, but not indifferent to religion. She believed that there was a god, but it did not matter to her what the face of that god was. Her sons made her think more about spirituality later on in her life. She struggled to adjust in the small South African town, but she made friends at the tennis club and met her best friend – a Jewish lady – there. Willem regards his mother's background as an advantage, in that he was spontaneously attracted to ecumenism from a young age. In his opinion, he would have felt comfortable in any church. His experience and perception of God were influenced by his parents, his exposure to nature in the Karoo, as well as his early studies in Philosophy that enriched his theology.

4.2.1.2 Negative recollections by respondents

In the previous section the positive effect of early spiritual experiences was highlighted, however, some interviewees referred only to negative recollections with regards to religion and spirituality.

Gustav has throughout his life had an acute awareness of other people's feelings as a result of his mother's emotional manipulation. Instead of telling him not to do something, she would tell him to imagine how he would feel if someone did the same thing to someone he loved. Most of what he has done in life has as a result been motivated by feelings of guilt, and he still feels responsible for other people's emotional state. After his mother's sister died, Gustav became the focus of attention and hope of his grandparents. The family found consolation in their Christian religion and in their new grandson, who they raised to be a clergyman. Gustav believes that the combination of these factors today makes him a good counsellor who can help people. On the other hand, he is unable to say no to people who ask for help and struggles with knowing where his responsibilities ends and someone else's begins. It was not easy to ascertain how Gustav experiences his spirituality, and even in

response to a direct question in that regard, he only referred to being in touch with himself and other people.

Nick started our interview by saying that his first formative spiritual experience was when his father gave him a Bible for his birthday instead of the tennis racquet that he had wanted. He continued that it was “an ordinary, cheap Bible - not even a leather-bound or fancy Bible”. In Nick’s view his childhood desires were not fulfilled by his family.

His father was very involved in the church: “on the first team”. He was responsible for giving the pastors feedback on and assistance with their sermons; sang in the choir, and served on the church council. Nick described his own reaction to church as follows:

In church there were things like you have to sing and I didn’t want to. I like singing, but I didn’t like the fact that they told me to. In Sunday school nothing much went on, so there wasn’t much to upset you. I just had to bear it. Church was more difficult, because it was an hour of sitting still and I hated it when people preached to me. They gave themselves the right to say things to you and you don’t have the opportunity to say something back. It made me angry.

After school Nick stopped attending church completely, upon which his father asked him if he can afford not to attend church. He answered that the three things that are important to his father – the church, academics and the lawn – are not important to him, and that was the end of any further discussion on the matter between Nick and his father.

It seems that the lack of relationship and association between Nick and his father negatively affected specific aspects of his life, in particular how he felt about the church where his father spent a lot of time. This led to a rebellion against everything that happened at church from a young age. It is, however, noteworthy that this aspect of life that was so important to his father also now occupies a large part of Nick’s focus. Even though he does not attend church services with his wife and children, he is currently involved in “coaching Dutch Reformed pastors who have burn-out”.

Rose also rebelled against religion as a child, and still feels some rebellion. Her reaction to churches is described in section 4.4.2 below. Religion did not play a significant role in her family home and her parents divorced when she was young. She describes her own father as more of a destroyer than a creator. Her mother wrote an appendix to Rose's autobiography (referred to in section 3.4 above) in which she admitted that although she is aware that people who have a specific religious faith find solace in it, to her God is unknowable. She does not regard God as a father or a friend, but simply as the inexplicable. She is, however, aware that this "inexplicable" is all around us. From my discussion with Rose I gained the impression that she has a similar perception of God.

4.2.1.3 Concluding remarks

In analysing the respondents' comments about their childhood experiences and exposure to Christianity, I concluded that their parents' behaviour and belief system, the Christians they got to know, as well as the church they grew up in, had an important influence on how they experience their wellbeing and spirituality today.

Some of the respondents, for example Amanda and Theresa, were happy children who felt safe, taken care of and who had a sense of belonging. They still feel safe, taken care of by God and that they belong to God's family. This contributes to them being enthusiastic about their spirituality and motivated to serve God.

Etienne's mother's pietistic faith and the large amount of time that he spent alone led to him developing a desire for the mystical. He saw sincerity in his mother's faith, as well as a level of communication with God that he found appealing. For the rest of his life this aspect of his theology was something that he found attractive, but also battled with, because it's dualistic and anti-intellectual elements were not acceptable to him. This is further discussed in section 4.5.1 below.

In contrast, Nick, Gustav and Rose's family environments and relationships with their parents negatively affected how they feel about the church. As a child, Nick felt that

his desires were not fulfilled because of his father's consuming involvement in church matters. This led to resistance in him against anything to do with church.

Gustav spent most of the interview time talking about how he feels about how other people have treated him. Many of the decisions in his life were motivated by the desire to please other people. In analysing his narrative I gained the impression that such an exclusive focus on his own and other people's feelings has led to Gustav's spiritual awareness not receiving the necessary attention for healthy development.

Rose said that her father is more of a destroyer than a creator, and as a result her parents divorced when she was young. Neither of her parents is religious. Her mother does not regard God as someone she can enter into relationship with, but simply as "the inexplicable". In analysing her narrative I concluded that she does not regard God as a being with which she can have meaningful interaction with. Similar to her mother, her perception is that he/she is rather merely an incomprehensible force. Rose also had some unpleasant experiences in church as a child (described in section 4.4.2) and still feels some rebellion against the church.

From the narratives above I conclude that the respondents who had positive childhood experiences and Christian influences are still positive about and interested in developing their Christian spirituality.

4.2.2 Christian youth groups

It is noteworthy that many of the interviewees associated their first spiritual experiences with Christian youth groups that they had been involved with as teenagers. The following examples from the research interviews serve to underscore this assertion.

Amanda said that at age ten, one specific event prompted a realisation that she should confess her sins and accept Jesus as Saviour. She loved athletics and Athletes for Christ¹¹ visited their town in 1980. She participated in their events and responded to

¹¹ *Athletes for Christ* is an outreach program of the Dutch Reformed Student Church in Stellenbosch.

their message with enthusiasm. Her parents, Sunday school and other influences continually built knowledge about God from a young age, but the Athletes for Christ event created the opportunity for her to be confronted with the invitation to make a personal decision.

Similarly, Etienne indicated that, throughout his high school years, there had been moments that inspired him spiritually, such as hearing a visiting pastor preach, and becoming a leader at the UCSA¹². He had a conversion experience in his matric year (standard 10/grade 12) at an UCSA camp where he made a real commitment to the Lord, but he is aware that his spiritual development had started long before then.

Willem experienced a short pietistic phase during his high school years, after he was confronted by his brother who had a spiritual experience at a Christian youth camp. Willem had obtained provincial colours in tennis and rugby at school, and was busy with sport during holidays when his friends attended UCSA camps. He said that he was surprised when they came back and told him about their wonderful spiritual experiences at those camps. Apart from taking part in other activities, Willem also did not get involved in Christian youth groups because his mother was a reserved English lady for whom it was not appropriate to talk enthusiastically about religion in public. As a result he developed a quiet faith in which he knew he was “being held and carried by God”.

Amanda, Etienne and Willem were therefore confronted by the Christian gospel during their childhood and were at some stage during their teenage years confronted with the decision to “follow Jesus”. These were positive experiences for them and in their view it formed a good foundation for their later development.

Andries had grown up in a Christian home and “gave his heart to the Lord” at age thirteen. During his second year at Stellenbosch University, in 1985, “an unbelievable revival broke out”. One of the places where it started was the hostel in which he was living. One week they were still having a small prayer meeting with six people, and

¹² United Christian Student Association aims to present holiday camps for children and projects at schools in order to “guide a new generation to a new lifestyle in Christ.”

two weeks later they had to meet in the hostel's hall. In that year SCAS¹³ started to use sport as a platform for evangelisation, and Andries also got involved with them. After graduating he became a teacher and was passionate about using sport and youth groups like the UCSA to reach teenagers spiritually. His academic background in constructivism influenced Andries to attempt to create contexts where children can hear the gospel and be encouraged to develop their spirituality. As a result, he participated in developing adventure camps and walking tours where the children were encouraged to reflect on their activities by referring to Bible texts that relate to those activities.

Since his conversion experience, one of the biggest issues for Andries was that his relationship with God should influence his daily life. In our interview he said that he still battles with the question of what should happen once you converted and made a commitment to God. What is next? He did not hear any conversations during the revival period in his student days about the daily life of a Christian, and he is concerned about what happens after these large revivals. Do they have a theology that helps them further than a conversion? Andries is concerned about the fact that all he heard was “go and make disciples” as the main command. He feels strongly that there should be more teaching in all Christian organisations on how Christians are supposed to live after their conversion.

Andries's experience with youth groups and experiencing a revival in his youth were therefore generally positive, but he was from early on concerned about what he regarded as an exclusive focus on evangelisation and a lack of attention to developing mature Christians after conversion.

Ben's childhood experiences were more troublesome than the four described above, but Christian youth groups also had a positive influence on him. Ben's father is a well-known preacher in South Africa, which made Ben uncomfortable and self-conscious from a young age. He deliberately behaved as was expected of him, but found it very frustrating. His mother is creative and the home environment was in that sense stimulating, but being the preacher's wife inhibited her as well. He found

¹³ Sport for Christ Action South Africa was founded in 1985 by a group of Christian sportsmen and women. The aims of the organisation are fellowship and evangelisation.

church to be “super boring” and at a young age wondered how a person could spend his life in church. Being involved in the UCSA in high school, however, had a considerable positive influence in forming Ben’s faith, and he had felt a strong attraction to its activities.

Ben was a serious child for whom the question of meaning of life was important. He was convinced that he should be busy with the significant things in life, and concluded that the important things involve making a difference in people’s lives, and that would in some way be about God. The other reason why he focused on the faith dimension as a teenager was because he struggled with relationships with other people. His self-image and the struggle with his sexuality alienated him from his peers. Now, twenty years later, he realises that focusing on religion at that stage prevented him even further from dealing with his sexuality.

In a sense, Ben’s participation in Christian youth group activities was therefore congruent with his serious nature and his desire to be involved with meaningful activities. Focusing so much of his attention on the Christian youth group activities as a child also ensured that he was accepted by a group. This was important, as he struggled to fit in. It also did, however, put further pressure on him to ignore his homosexuality instead of working through what he believes about it and how he is going to live with it.

In strong contrast with Ben, and in line with his rebellion described in the previous section, Nick bluntly refused to attend the UCSA at school, although all of his friends had attended. He did, however, meet his wife at a church youth group, and he has some positive memories of those meetings.

While analysing the interviews it occurred to me that almost all the interviewees, for whom it seemed that their Christian spirituality is a priority (Amanda, Etienne, Willem and Ben), talked about a significant spiritual experience they had had while attending a Christian youth group activity.

Amanda, for example, was touched by the Athletes for Christ event she attended when she was ten. They used an activity that she was enthusiastic about to share their

interpretation of Christian spiritual values with her and she felt inspired to associate with them. Despite attending church every Sunday and being influenced by his pietistic mother, it was as a teenager at an UCSA camp that Etienne “made a decision for the Lord.” He enjoyed the activities and accepted the spiritual ideals they proposed at the UCSA. Willem’s brother also had a conversion experience at such a youth camp during their high school years and had a strong influence on Willem at that stage. Willem’s friends all attended UCSA camps during holidays and came back so enthusiastic that it made an impression on him. Ben went even further and said that it was the UCSA camps and Bible studies, rather than his experience at church, which contributed positively to developing an interest in spirituality in him.

4.3 ACTIVISM

Several of the interviewees spent a significant portion of the interview time talking about how their beliefs lead to activism. In each case, a particular aspect of inequality or abuse in society strongly motivated the interviewee to spend a large part of his/her life to work towards addressing that problem. They have all had to bring their spiritual values and theology in line with the particular issue that they feel so strongly about. Those issues are: socio-economic inequality and exclusion, homosexuality, ecological sustainability and prostitution. In this section I discuss how their strong convictions on these matters influenced their spirituality and *vice versa*.

4.3.1. Socio-economic inequality and exclusion

Theresa is a coloured woman who grew up during the apartheid years. An important influence in her childhood was her parents’ involvement in social activism. Her father often took her out of school to go to anti-apartheid mass rallies. She concluded talking about her youth by stating that she “grew up always very aware and always very certain of who I am and who God is in our community. God is the provider”. Despite being aware of the inequality and the poverty around her, she believed that God is on the side of the poor and oppressed. Theresa is still involved in working in social improvement projects and as mentioned in section 4.2.1.1 above, she experiences and expresses her faith in a public, communal way. That means that for her, her spirituality depends on how she stands in relation to the people around her.

Willem is a white, Afrikaans, Dutch Reformed pastor who is more than thirty years older than Theresa, but anti-apartheid activism formed a large part of his life as well. During the seventies, when apartheid was strongly enforced in South Africa, he became friends with black and coloured Christians. The political activists in the black community started to visit him, because they took note of him crossing the racial divide. In the white community it also attracted attention, and he was accused of being a communist by people in his community. He organised missionary weeks in conjunction with the black churches and had to use rugby fields for their meetings, because they were forbidden to use any of the church halls. Willem concluded that there was more living faith to be found in the black communities than in the leadership of the Dutch Reformed Church.

He got to know Beyers Naudé¹⁴ well during that time, which gave him exposure to anti-apartheid activities and people like emeritus Anglican archbishop Desmond Tutu¹⁵, who also visited Naudé regularly. Willem was later appointed as pastor by a student congregation, but by then he had made a lot of changes in his life and held political beliefs that they were not aware of. As a result he felt “unbelievably isolated”. In his view, they were a congregation who “lived under God’s condemnation,” because they did nothing to oppose the racial segregation. He immediately started organising tours to give the students exposure to black townships, and became “almost an activist”. It caused conflict in the congregation when he was invited to address a youth gathering organised by the ANC.¹⁶

Willem had such strong convictions against apartheid and the way in which it was enforced in South Africa that it had a significant influence on how he chose to spend his time and what he spoke about. He said that he found it impossible to stand on the

¹⁴ Christiaan Frederick Beyers Naudé (10 May 1915 – 7 September 2004) was a white, Afrikaans, Dutch Reformed pastor and anti-apartheid activist. From 1977 to 1984 the South African government placed him under house arrest as a result of his outspoken criticism of the government.

¹⁵ Desmond Mpilo Tutu (born 7 October 1931) is a South African cleric and opponent of apartheid. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984 and became the first black South African Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town in 1986.

¹⁶ The African National Congress describes itself as a “national liberation movement. It was formed in 1912 to unite the African people and spearhead the struggle for fundamental political, social and economic change”. It has been the ruling political party in South Africa since 1994.

pulpit and preach about anything other than the sinfulness of the political system supported by his congregation.

Cornelia is about fifteen years younger than Willem, but has similar convictions. She grew up on a farm in a wealthy Afrikaans community. Her parents were devoted Christians, and one of her earliest memories are of finding her father on his knees in his study early in the morning. Her mother was committed to do Bible study with the people who worked in her house and garden, and also started the farm workers' day with prayer. Her mother had a serving nature and was very involved with the ACVV¹⁷, school committee and the church. Cornelia said that she grew up with the idea that it was just Afrikaans members of the Dutch Reformed Church who were really Christians. Afrikaner nationalism, strongly connected with Dutch Reformed Church membership, was the prevalent ideology in her parents' home.

Despite this, Cornelia was from a very young age aware of the conflict between what the Bible teaches and how her family lived. She remembered crying so profusely each time her parents read her the parable of the Good Samaritan that they later refused to read it to her. She said that it broke her heart that "people from the church" (a priest and Levite) could walk past the wounded man without helping him. Even as a young girl she saw the analogy between that parable and her family giving the drunk people next to the road a wide berth so as not to dirty their shiny Mercedes on their way to church.

Cornelia had a successful practice as a psychologist, but became severely depressed when she turned 40 in 1997, which led her to closing her practice for two years. The main reason for her depression was that she realised that she was now an adult and could no longer blame previous generations for suppressing people. She was sad about apartheid, colonisation, how the Bible was used to justify apartheid, and how paternalistic models were used to reach out to people and convert them. She felt obliged to give account of her part in it and how the way she lives still contributes to it. She felt guilty, because ninety per cent of the population did not have access to her practice due to lack of medical aid or sufficient funds. She started to question her

¹⁷ The Afrikaanse Christelike Vrouevereniging (Afrikaans Christian Women's Organisation) is the oldest welfare organisation in South Africa and provides social services to families in need.

whole existence, and felt that she was not fulfilling God's expectations of her. Her understanding of being a Christian healer implied that she had to get involved in the wider community. She then started to give counselling to poor people at no charge on one day a week, but they brought problems that she had no understanding of and disappointed her by arriving late for appointments or not at all. Her Western model of psychopathology did not correspond with their behaviour and social problems. She later changed her strategy and developed a practice that focuses on community development and training. A large part of her understanding of what she is doing now has to do with restitution. She believes that she must serve people and be aware that "where we are and what we own were built on the suppression of other people".

Cornelia gets very angry with some of her wealthy clients. She regards their sense of entitlement as the source of South Africa's social problems. In her view the economy will improve if more people are prepared to have less. She says that she sees Christ primarily as the example and a lot less as the saviour. She sees the kingdom as less in heaven and more here on earth. She values the example of what Jesus did here on earth and does not relate so strongly with his death on the cross. "The ultimate experience of Christ was that He was prepared to become human and be an example for us. We can't tell people that Jesus was crucified for their sins and then we don't offer them anything else. Then we don't offer much. We must be able to offer compassion, friendship; walk with them and suffer with them".

In summary, for at least the last decade Cornelia has experienced strong emotions about the inequalities in the South African society and has changed the way she approaches her psychology practice to address some of those inequalities. She is now a much happier person and feels a sense of achievement, because she can see the positive results of her work.

Ben was born more than twenty years later than Cornelia, but had a similarly frustrating experience as a child during the seventies and eighties, when he had to deal with the dissonance between the serious conversations his family had at home about church and politics, and the fact that in practice they supported apartheid. It was important for him to deal with it, and as a result he struggled with being loyal to his father, who was a Dutch Reformed pastor. As a theology student he enjoyed

participating in outreaches to the black townships. After one such outreach he wrote a poem about how to see God through the eyes of a black man, and in the eyes of a black man. He suspected then that the black people may know more about experiencing God than he did.

After qualifying as pastor in the Dutch Reformed Church, Ben served as assistant pastor in a church in a black township for four years. He said: "I worked there with my apartheid guilt. It was a fascinating experience." The senior pastor was a Xhosa with a "fascinating image of church and faith that is much broader than our Western understanding". A major part of his work was to organise activities for children to get them off the streets and equip them for life. In his view it is important that "religious help should be life help". Faith should help you to live a better, more complete and fulfilled life. Faith should not estrange you from reality. Ben said:

In apartheid South Africa I remember that it was said that we shouldn't talk politics in church and with that they wanted to keep everything quiet. In the meantime they were involved in politics on a large scale within the church by justifying racism biblically. It was their way of maintaining the *status quo*. We are called to reality and just to *be* where we are. *Be* good, to the glory of God.

In summary, the convictions and personalities of Theresa, Cornelia, Willem and Ben led to a large part of their spirituality being manifested in their relationships with the people around them. Cornelia admitted that for her, Christ has more value in that He is an example of how we are supposed to live now, here on earth, than in being a saviour who died on the cross for the sake of us entering the kingdom of heaven. She feels strongly that Christians can not merely bring people the gospel. It is important that Christians also offer people compassion, friendship and assistance.

Willem spent a large part of his life reaching out to those who were being discriminated against and in admonishing their persecutors. He felt strongly that there was no point in even talking about what the rest of the Bible said if Christians did not love other people and treat them with respect. During the apartheid era this did not in his view happen and he therefore felt that it was necessary to focus his efforts on activities that could change the way in which people treated each other.

Ben summarised their views well by saying that your Christian faith should not estrange you from the reality you find yourself in. Christians are supposed to live and be good, to the glory of God, right where they are. One aspect that he feels strongly about is that the church should treat homosexuals fairly. This is further discussed in the next section.

4.3.2. *Homosexuality*

A significant part of Ben's spiritual struggle and activism relates to his sexuality. When he grew up homosexuality was not accepted in his community and he still experiences some rejection. His comments in this regard are discussed in this section.

Ben said that his relationship with himself, the issue of sexuality, and his relationships with other people have isolated him since his teenage years. He now thinks that the fact that he felt strongly about his Christian faith as a child prevented him from dealing with his sexuality early enough. During his theology studies he started discussing the matter with a pastoral psychologist, who helped him to integrate his sexuality with the idea that he was made in God's image, even though he is different from other people. It was important to him to find a way to reconcile his sexual orientation, faith and calling. He now understands that God made him as he is and that God said that it was good. "I have to live up to who I am and have to live responsibly before God as a gay believer".

After finishing his theology studies, Ben worked for an evangelical group in Belgium for a year. He did not agree with their total condemnation of Roman Catholicism and sought out some Roman Catholic priests for discussions about theology, after which he concluded that "they might know more than we do". The evangelical group's fundamentalist reading of the Bible and their opposition to humanism and liberal theology was a problem for Ben, especially in how it would affect their views on homosexuality. As a result of his interaction with the Belgian organisation, his theology moved away from the evangelical, mission-oriented focus of his youth.

Ben believes that living responsibly before God “does not mean no sex before marriage”. In his view, such a rule would make no sense, because it is important that we see ourselves as a whole. “The dividing of ourselves in body and spirit is a dualism that doesn’t make sense. We must bring these things together and live responsibly before God”. He said that to integrate his faith would practically mean to live in relationship with someone, and it would be dishonest for him to be in a relationship with a woman. He had had his first homosexual relationship in his early thirties, and he described the relationship as “a bit unstable and complex”. At that stage, he was a pastor in a Dutch Reformed congregation which did not know that he was homosexual, but he said that he tried to live it as “an open secret.” He felt that to hide his partner would have been unhealthy. He did not, however, have the courage to publically tell the congregation, because he was aware that they would not all accept his active homosexuality. In his opinion, some of the pastors of other congregations were aware of his lifestyle and already ostracised him.

After his homosexual relationship ended in a public manner, Ben was asked to leave the congregation where he served as pastor and was suspended by the Dutch Reformed Church, unless he agrees to live a life of celibacy. During that time he experienced being carried by the prayers of some of his fellow Christians. He believed that something of his spirituality should be shown as a positive testimony; that God must be his source, and that he must behave with compassion towards the people who “persecute” him. Now he regards it as a privilege to have been in that “battle”, because there are many other people who struggle with their sexuality and to integrate their sexuality and spirituality. He currently counsels homosexual people, and has also started writing on the topic. Although he is no longer employed by the church, he feels that his ministry has become wider: “it is no longer limited to the church”. He is also involved in actively campaigning for equal rights for homosexual people within the church and all aspects of society.

Ben said that his spirituality is more focused on activism and prayer. Silence and meditation does not appeal to him. He realises, however, that it is important to keep action and contemplation together. If it is not kept in harmony, contemplation becomes estranged from the world and activism only focuses on intentional action.

He regards emeritus Anglican archbishop Desmond Tutu as an example of someone who succeeds in keeping action and contemplation in balance.

In summary, Ben believes that no person should be reduced to his/her sexuality and judged based on that alone. Furthermore, he does not agree with a theology that condemns homosexuality and sex outside of marriage. In his view such a theology is rooted in a dualism of body and spirit that should be avoided.

Although being with people and being involved in activities related to activism are more appealing to him than silence and contemplation, he believes that a balance is needed between activism and contemplation. Such a balance will enable a healthier spirituality.

Another person who finds activism more appealing than the spiritual disciplines of silence and solitude is Amanda. For her, standing in the right relationship with the people around her, and helping those who need her, form the basis of her spirituality. Her views and activities are described in the next section.

4.3.3. Prostitution

Activism is an important part of how Amanda has fellowship with God. Going out on the street, looking for prostitutes and talking to them is one way in which she “hears God’s voice”. Aside from sharing the gospel with them, her work consists of creating alternatives for the prostitutes by providing accommodation and skills training. She is also currently actively involved in petitioning government to refuse the appeals to legalise prostitution before the 2010 Soccer World Cup is to take place in South Africa.

In Amanda’s experience, God will meet her in the people who need her. She is not able to live with less activity, because her theology is practical, not theoretical. The relevance of her theology is “what it means for this person in front of me in this moment and for me in this season of my life”. In this way she addresses issues and seeks God’s will.

She believes that God wants us to be part of his greatest works, but not by us doing it; rather by us taking front spectator seats. For example, she recently “had the privilege of talking to a lot of prostitutes on the street and to a thousand school children about the dangers of prostitution and pornography”. In the same period she read that God told the Israelites before a major battle: “You shall not need to fight in this battle; take your positions, stand still, and see the deliverance of the Lord” (2 Chronicles 20:17 Amplified Bible). It was clear to her that this means that the activities that she is involved in are not her work, but the work of God.

In her view we are privileged to be part of what God is doing. It is a gift and we do not have to worry about being unqualified or too immature. God breaks through our paradigms, touches our hearts deeply, and as a result we want to do what He wants us to do. Amanda finds joy in life’s momentum and describes it as her “journey with the Lord”.

Activism, rather than contemplation, is therefore the basis of Amanda’s spirituality. Like Theresa and Cornelia, she also believes that her relationship and communication with God is based on her contact with other people. For Amanda, it is specifically people who need her who provide a spiritual link to God.

In line with the progressive synergism described by Fisher (see section 2.2.3. above), *communalists* like Cornelia, Amanda, Theresa and Ben mainly focus on themselves and the people around them, but for some of the interviewees there are more areas of life that they feel strongly about. Andries, for example, regards people’s relationship with the environment as an important foundation of their spiritual wellbeing. How his viewpoints in this regard developed is discussed in the next section.

4.3.4. Ecological sustainability

The realisation that God’s creation and sustainable communities have an ecological foundation had a significant influence on Andries’s spirituality. He finds it difficult to deal with the fact that he does not know any Christian theologians who integrate the idea that the earth is an important place to be on with their main teachings. He also does not know of any theologians who address the environmental crisis and climate

change. What he knows about ecology, he learned from non-Christians: “it is New Agers and people from other spiritual frameworks who seamlessly integrate these things”.

Andries was taught that the Christian message is that one has to convert, live close to God, and then out of grace we will one day go to heaven and leave this mess on earth. This concept strained his spirituality, because it was in conflict with his concern for the environment. Some of this conflict was resolved when he came across an argument that the Bible does indeed address the ecological issue. In the book *Rus vir die hele aarde*¹⁸ the author argues that human beings are not the high point of creation. The high point of creation is the seventh day: the day of rest; the day of being. On the seventh day we should reflect on God and his creation, which is a context where we can see something of God. “We should have respect for the tree outside just as we should have respect for people. Not because the tree or person has any value, but because God created it”. The theological basis of our ecological responsibility is therefore our relationship with God, other people and the rest of creation.

Andries also found Jan Smuts’ book entitled *Holism and Evolution* useful in understanding the nature of our relationship with the rest of creation. In order to understand Andries’s comment I read the book and found that these paragraphs provide a good summary of Smuts’s view (Smuts 1926: 88):

This character of “wholeness” meets us everywhere and points to something fundamental in the universe. Holism (from ὅλος = whole) is the term here coined for this fundamental factor operative towards the creation of wholes in the universe. Its character is both general and specific or concrete, and it satisfies our double requirement for a natural evolutionary starting-point. Wholes are not mere artificial constructions of thought; they actually exist; they point to something real in the universe, and Holism is a real operative factor, a *vera causa*. There is behind Evolution no mere vague creative impulse or *Èlan*

¹⁸ Conradie, E.M. 1996. *Rus vir die hele aarde: Wat doen ons aan onself en die aarde?* Cape Town: Lux Verbi.

*vital*¹⁹, but something quite definite and specific in its operation, and thus productive of the real concrete character of cosmic Evolution. The idea of wholes and wholeness should therefore not be confined to the biological domain; it covers both inorganic substances and mental structures as well as the highest manifestations of the human spirit.

Andries struggled to use biblical terms to discuss sustainability until he came across the word *shalom*, which according to his understanding relates to social and ecological wholeness. Another relevant term is simplicity, which he uses to refer to our ecological footprint. In order to stand in the right relationship with creation, we should mimic its natural processes and limit our consumption and lifestyle. Our human greed often makes this difficult, which is why the Bible mentions mammon so often.

He continued that the key in the word wellbeing is “being”. The Bible is a “be” book before it is a “do” book. If we work holistically, we must first describe the wellbeing of the whole. If we understand our “being” side better, our “doing” side will function better, and then we can address the issue of sustainability with greater efficacy. The biblical message is that it is in Christ possible to recreate relationships so that something of God’s kingdom can come. The coming of God’s kingdom has to do with *shalom* (social and ecological wholeness). The church has to create a context where we ask God for insight to live in harmony with the environment. That “being” aspect can in Andries’s view not be given to us by science. It must be given to us by the church.

In Andries’s opinion, therefore, the coming of the kingdom of God will entail a restoration of social and ecological wholeness. We can now already be part of that healing process by limiting our consumption and adopting a simplistic lifestyle. He also emphasised that Christians should spend more time in understanding how we should be, rather than what we should do. That will lead to a healthier spirituality. In this it is the church that has specifically to seek insight in how to live in wholeness and harmony with the environment.

¹⁹ *Élan vital* is usually translated as "vital impetus" or "vital force." It relates to a consciousness that some believe is the reason for evolution and the development of organisms.

4.3.5. Conclusion

For the interviewees mentioned in this section, the effect of their spirituality on the way in which they treat other people and their environment is of great importance. That is in line with the biblical metaphor that followers of Christ are known by their good fruit (John 15:2), and that it should be possible to identify them by the activities they are involved in.

Cornelia thinks that what she should be busy with now is restitution and serving the previously disadvantaged people. She believes that Christians cannot merely do evangelisation, but should also offer people practical love and support. Similarly, Amanda and Ben are currently involved in activism to improve the lives of people they regard as disadvantaged. Willem shares Cornelia's strong convictions about the apartheid policies being in conflict with Christian values and spent a large portion of his life advocating the end thereof.

As an active environmentalist, Andries believes that the ultimate aim of God's kingdom plan is to restore social and ecological health and holism and that a Christian's duty in this regard is to live in harmony with nature.

The interviewees whose views were discussed in this section argue fervently that Christian values should determine how Christians live in the current situation they find themselves in. Instead of focusing exclusively on their spiritual dimension or the afterlife, Christians should realise that how they live now is a crucial part of their spirituality.

4.4 FRUSTRATION WITH THE CHURCH

Most of the interviewees expressed frustration with the institutional church, and struggle to find their place in it. These reasons are discussed in the following pages.

4.4.1. Theological and ideological reasons

Although Andries said during his interview that insight into how we should live is to be given by the church, and not by science, he is not confident that the church as an institution will make any significant contribution to the ecological issue. He commented that change always comes from the fringes. The most devoted believers he knows attend home churches, and are “finished with the church as institution”. From a constructivism²⁰ viewpoint, the church and pastor should create a context for believers in which to experience God. The large congregations are merely crowds getting together to passively listen to behaviourist lectures. Andries argued that this is very different from how the apostle Paul describes the church in 1 Corinthians 12:14-27. The church is supposed to be a body, a family, where every member has a function and supports the others; where each member is more than just a part, and together the whole is more than the sum of the parts.

The other major issue that bothers Andries is that the church tends to make the “last command” – to go and make disciples – the great command. Most of the churches’ committees and organised activities are focused around evangelisation. In his view, the command to love God and our neighbours as ourselves is the great command, and that should be what the church spends most of its energy on.

Cornelia’s major criticism of the Dutch Reformed Church also relates to its lack of response to what is for her a crucial theological issue and personal value: social equality. She sought answers to her question in how to address this “in roads far away from church while I was still in church with one foot”. She admits to have developed a very critical voice:

My frustration is with the church as a hierarchical, patriarchal institution. And that is enormously sad, because the church is the place where communion and baptism is served and where the word of God is read and where people do care for one another. I am a strong community person and like to be connected. The connection with the church is important to me, but the judgement of the church

²⁰ By *constructivism* Andries refers to the psychological theory of knowledge in which it is argued that people generate knowledge and meaning from their experiences.

and its people, the individualism in the church, and how the church buys into corporate ways of doing things, hurts me. One of the church leaders asked me recently if it is hard for me to be a “seven day Christian²¹”. It was a difficult question, because I never thought you could be anything other than a “seven day Christian”. I eventually answered him that for six days a week it is very nice and easy to be a Christian. It is on the seventh day, a Sunday, when I have to deal with the church, that it is difficult and painful for me to be a Christian.

One of Cornelia’s problems with the church was that she wanted to become a pastor, but in the mid-seventies, when she had to make a career choice, women were excluded from ordained ministry and all positions of leadership within the Dutch Reformed Church. She always felt disqualified by the church; never disqualified by God, always by the institution: “the church lied to me. They told me I am not good enough. It was with great pain that I decided to follow an alternative career path by studying psychology”. She is also increasingly frustrated with the way in which the church so seldom recognises laypersons as theological agents in their own right.

Cornelia said that she “wrote the church off a long time ago”, but then she was elected as chairperson of the church council of a large congregation recently. She continues to participate in the Dutch Reformed Church, but hers is now a critical voice in a church that struggles to deal with its apartheid past and with finding ways to transform itself. Her spirituality is one of inclusion and critical participation in the church. She believes that God will not leave her and will also not leave the church. She quotes an Anglican bishop as saying that he is in the church and will always be in the church, because that is the place where he can have the greatest influence. If he can influence church members, then he is busy influencing the nation.

Cornelia does, however, find participation in the church very difficult, and said that it is only possible if she also belongs to alternative faith communities. She therefore participates in a group that has strong feminist viewpoints, a group of coloured

²¹ The term “seven day Christian” refers to a person who lives according to Christian values all seven days of the week. This is the antithesis of someone who goes to church on Sundays, but does not behave in terms of Christian principles during the rest of the week.

friends who help her to understand the Confession of Belhar²², and black friends and colleagues who help her to understand the things that happened in the past. Some of the biggest problems in the Dutch Reformed Church are as a result of the largely homogenous group it consists of. Cornelia says that she becomes nauseous when she hears holy songs in church and then later hears racist and homophobic comments and sees how inconsiderate churchgoers are towards disabled people. She has gained a new understanding of God since working with poor people, gay people and other cultures in her psychology practice.

Etienne's frustration with the church has to do with how it deals with people's spiritual needs. In his view, the church does not realise that many people are currently making a move away from a place where everything is clear-cut to a more paradoxical kind of faith. They are on a mystical path that most churches are not able to accommodate. Many people are increasingly moving into a mystical spirituality, and are thus uncomfortable in church. Etienne's large congregation recently started a meditative service in a small chapel next to the church at the same times as the main services. The meditative service attracts people who no longer feel comfortable in any church. He says that there is a tremendous desire for the mystical aspects of Christianity. One of the ways of meeting that need is that the church should not prescribe the way in which people should worship God. The church is often a dominating and intimidating community, where people are wounded, instead of it being a healing community. He comments:

It is a shame that spirituality is not taught at seminary. It is so necessary and there is such a hunger for it. You cannot equip people for ministry without attending to their "being functions." We only attend to "knowing functions". We cannot continue and give pastors a humanistic, modernistic education. They don't know how to accompany people on their spiritual journey. There are no teachers. We are really in trouble.

²² In the nineteenth-century the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa separated all non-white members into the Dutch Reformed Mission Church. In 1986 these events gave rise to the Belhar Confession in protest of what became regarded as the sin of apartheid. The name of the Confession refers to the Cape Town suburb of Belhar where the Synod met.

Etienne said that another problem in the institutional church is all the coercion. The church is always trying to push people into projects; into “doing”, instead of creating room for and feeding their “being”. The coercion is a form of violence committed against people. God does not dominate or force Himself onto you. He invites us into a relationship with Him. In the parable of the prodigal son, the father does not go and look for the son. He sits in pain and waits, looking at the horizon. One of the ways you can test whether something is from God is to assess whether you felt forced or attracted. God does not force or coerce. Pastors tend to be either in manager mode or in messiah mode. They sift people into two categories: whole or broken. If they are broken they try to fix the problem as soon as possible. In messiah mode pastors often do a lot of damage, because they try to fix the problem before the person has walked the path with God and learned what they can out of the crisis. If they are whole, the pastor gets them a job in the church as soon as possible, in manager mode:

We are all in contact with enough people and projects. There is no need to organise yet more. We can trust God to change people and the world, without organising all these grandiose projects.

Etienne can relate to Augustine’s comment that the “church is a whore”, but she is his mother²³. Etienne has a lot of emotions and sadness about the church doing damage through bad relationships. On the other hand, he recognises that history teaches us that many hopeful things have also happened in the institutional church. It tends to happen on the margins, however. The answer is to learn how to ignore the centre and to live on the margins; to realise that dealing with the church will never be easy. The world is imperfect, and the church as well.

Gustav has alternative views to those of most churches and Christians regarding homosexuality and other moral issues. “God is not a white Afrikaans man”. Most of the Afrikaans men that were his fellow pastors and members of his congregation imagine that God is very much like themselves: a white Afrikaans man with a value system similar to theirs. This leads to discrimination and persecution of people who are different from them.

²³ Although Augustine is often quoted as saying this, there is according to my information no record of him making this statement.

Gustav is astounded by people who assume that they have sole rights to interpreting God and preach about their accurate version of the Bible or spirituality. Gustav gets angry about it, because he believes it is all speculative, and that theological statements are always preliminary statements. Unfortunately the church does not see it that way. Most believers think that theological statements are things one cannot change and that they have eternal value that never deviates. In Gustav's view, however, theological comments are always preliminary comments - it is not unchangeable, and nobody has exclusive rights to interpreting God. He said that the church, the believers that he knows, and his parents have a naïve spirituality that simply ignores anything in conflict with it.

Apart from the above ideological and theological reasons, certain personal reasons were also cited as reason for frustration with the church. These reasons are discussed in the next section.

4.4.2. Personal reasons

Four of the interviewees spent a large part of the interview time talking about their personal discontent about how they have been treated by the church and Christians. Gustav, for example, feels mistreated by the church. He was a pastor for eighteen years and during that time his wife had three miscarriages, and one of their children was born severely disabled and died soon thereafter. While that child was still alive, he asked to be transferred to a city where there was good medical care, but in his view he did not get such help from the church because of his liberal views. The people the church appointed in the positions that he had aspired to, were appointed because they were just as politically right-wing as the church leaders. In the meantime, he had had to focus on collecting money for his congregation to survive.

Gustav's marriage ended in a divorce after the death of their disabled child, and he has since been defrocked as a result of the divorce. He is disillusioned in the ability of the church to reach out to people. He is also disappointed in many of the Christians, for example one of his lifelong pastor friends who avoids him since his divorce. Gustav feels strongly that one cannot have a vertical relationship with God if one is

not able to have a horizontal relationship with people around you. If you cannot reach out to another human being, how do you pray to someone who is transcendent? He does not want to be a pastor in a church again, because he is disillusioned with people. The church does not focus on making its members spiritually mature and emotionally independent, because it needs their money. This disillusionment with people has also damaged his relationship with God. If the factors that lead to happiness and wellbeing, as discussed in section 2.1.3 and 2.1.4 are taken into account Gustav currently experiences several in a negative way, for example financial status, employment, marital status, social support, psychological factors and emotions. This leads to a low level of wellbeing, which may prevent his spirituality from developing and functioning well.

Ben has experienced a similar disillusionment with the church and church members and now seldom attends church services. Although he has not been defrocked, he has been suspended by the Dutch Reformed Church until he undertakes to live a life of celibacy. He has, however, found a spiritual group that he joins from time to time:

The Reconciliation Group of a nearby church does fascinating things. They would, for example, walk through District Six, stop in places of significance, read a Bible text and reflect on it. They connect with something in our history or current issues and reflect on it biblically. Where contemplation and action meet in such a manner it makes absolute sense to me. That is now church for me.

Theresa's disillusionment was mainly due to her crossing the racial divide. She went to Huguenot College²⁴ after high school in 1992, and it was a major cultural shock for her. First, almost all of the students were white girls, and second, it was a community that talked about the God of a nation, which was not something she had heard of before. In her view God does not favour any people group.

²⁴ Huguenot College opened in 1951 and developed from three earlier educational institutions in Wellington, namely the Huguenot Seminary (opened in 1874 by Andrew Murray), the Huguenot University College and Friedenheim. Huguenot College currently offers degree courses in Social Work, Community Development and Play Therapy. It historically had white, Afrikaans students and Theresa was one of the first coloured people accepted as a student.

She also experienced the people there as strong individualists with definite boundaries. This was in strong contrast with the way she had grown up, as discussed in the Childhood section above. Her family and community expressed their faith in a very public, communal way. She found it very difficult to adapt to these differences. She could not relate to the God that her fellow students described either. Coming from such a strong familial and societal bond, she found it almost impossible to adjust to College life, because there was nobody that she could relate to. As a result, she felt very isolated and became depressed.

She remembered one of the first church camps she attended at College, where they were instructed to each sit alone somewhere, visualise God, sit on God's lap, and communicate with God. She could not imagine God and found it impossible to imagine God as a very old white man like the rest of the group. She says that to imagine God and to say something to Him is not at all her understanding of how God talks to people. God has never spoken to her individually. God has spoken through her to other people and has spoken to her through other people, but He has never spoken directly to her.

This conflict in style and culture that she was confronted with created a spiritual problem that remained with her. After College she studied theology at a Dutch Reformed seminary, and thereafter worked for a large, Dutch Reformed congregation with mainly white members for two years. She had the same negative experiences there and was unable to adapt. White people's individualistic way of approaching theology, spirituality and community work is unacceptable to her. She has a very contextual understanding of who God is, which was omitted in the teaching at the College and seminary. For her it is crucial to be part of and involved in a community, because she experiences God only in and through other people.

Unlike the interviewees discussed above, Rose's family did not go to church regularly when she was a child. In the few times that they did go, she experienced the church as focused solely on the punitive aspects of the Bible. It seemed to her that all preachers were busy perfecting the art of pointing a finger at the congregation. She poetically added that every time the preacher lashed his sharp tongue over the flock she could not help thinking that the angels in heaven probably forgot their chorus lines in shock.

She stopped going to Sunday school when her teacher scolded her as follows for forgetting her collection money: “Do not tempt the Lord, girl. Our Lord’s wrath can flare up and lick the skin off your baby-soft bottom!” She wished that she could join her black nanny at the church in the township, which was jam-packed and where everyone was singing and dancing.

Rose has an incurable disease that is progressively paralysing her. In her twenties she went through a phase where she visited many churches that held healing services. It was on the whole a negative experience to have the men try to “exorcise me by placing their creepy hands on me and instructing the evil spirits to leave my body.” They repeatedly told her to just believe like a child, and she usually afterwards felt that she was not healed, because she just did not try hard enough. In her experience the “healers” were trying to draw the sickness out with their personal force. Rose described their behaviour as sheer exhibitionism that provided an emotional rush for the exorcists who claimed to offer a quick fix for each and every ailment. She started attending church services a few years ago again, because she was lonely, desperate and unhappy. She said that she found social support and unconditional love there, but at present she does not attend any church meetings because her current boyfriend is an atheist.

As discussed in section 4.2.1.2 above, Nick was forced to attend church every Sunday when he was a child. He stopped attending as soon as he left his parents’ home. Nick said that in the past the church was in power and for a long time used the framework in which power games was played. Now with the internet, mobility, and freedom of choice, the church has lost its power. For the first time the church must ask itself whether it has right to existence. Nick is pleased about this, because the church is now almost the underdog that he thinks he was in the past. With his child’s baptism, the church presented him with a statement of faith and an undertaking that he had to sign, which he refused:

I liked the idea that my child became part of the covenant, but it was the spiritual ritual that was worth something to me, not what it meant specifically. A healthy child is raised by a village and with the baptism the congregation almost accepted the responsibility to raise the child with me.

Nick still does not attend church services, but admits that his view of the church is more related to his personal journey than to the shortcomings of the church. His wife and children enjoy going to church, and he can see that it is a positive experience for them.

4.4.3. Conclusion

Several of the interviewees expressed their disappointment in how they were personally treated by Christians and churches. This affected their spirituality and they have not yet found a Christian group where they feel comfortable. A few of the interviewees also spoke about the theological and ideological reasons for their frustration with the institutional church, which include the following:

- Christians and the church should address the environmental crisis and climate change and incorporate a responsible ecological stance in their theology;
- instead of church services consisting of large meetings of crowds listening to sermons (behaviourist lectures), church members should get together in such a way that every member is known, has a function and receive support from other members. This will be more congruent with the New Testament portrayal of the church as a body where every member is important (1 Corinthians 12:14-27);
- the Dutch Reformed church is traditionally a hierarchical, patriarchal institution that excluded other races from membership and women from serving as pastors, elders and deacons. This has changed to some degree, but not sufficiently;
- many people who are interested in Christianity are on a mystical path that most churches are not able to accommodate. One of the ways to address this is that the church should not prescribe the way of worshipping God, but should instead create more opportunities for participating in silent and meditative services;

- three of the interviewees also commented that the way in which the church has adopted the business world's ways of making decisions and planning activities is incongruent with Biblical principles and does damage to members' spirituality.

4.5 EXPERIENCES OF GOD AND SPIRITUALITY

As explained in the methodology chapter, I seldom asked any direct questions about the interviewees' spirituality. Insights on this aspect were instead gained by analysing what they chose to talk about. The thoughts, experiences and viewpoints that they shared are summarised in the following pages.

4.5.1. Spiritual wellbeing

While studying theology, Etienne went into a "dark phase" where the pietistic framework did not make sense anymore: "The dualism of it, the contempt for the ordinary, earthly life, the anti-intellectualism of it, bothered me. There were so many assumptions that were not tested". He realised that everything cannot be tied down in the total black and white way in which modernistic certainties worked. We do not know everything. The mystery of God was lost in the formulas created. Etienne found answers in getting to know one of his lecturers at seminary as someone who had piety, a deep thinker. He described this lecturer as someone that had a holiness that was not hypocritical and a piety that did not ignore the rational element. There was simplicity in the lecturer's relationship with God that he could relate to, and this helped in giving him new direction in his personal spirituality.

Etienne experienced theology at seminary as cold and rational and he always felt that one cannot stop there. The way they were taught to do exegesis enabled them to tell you everything about a Bible text, but after they have dissected it with all the methods they have learned, Etienne's reaction was: "so what"? The modernistic idea of the more you know, the better you can cope, was forced onto them – as if more information will give you a better understanding of the mystery of God. God was not thought of in terms of the mystical. As discussed in the polarity between the mystical and the cognitive in section 2.3.2.2 above, spiritual truths are not cognitively attainable. As a result Etienne did not feel equipped to do his job as pastor. He was

still working in the pietistic framework, but was looking for something else, because he found it to be a poor framework. He then started to read Thomas Merton, Henry Nouwen and the popular modern authors who have a mystical streak, as well as some of the older authors like Bernard of Clairvaux, John of the Cross and Theresa of Avila. In the early nineties he encountered Eugene Peterson, who quoted a lot of authors, for example Annie Dillard, whose books he also started to read and which contributed to developing a theology that acknowledges God's involvement with the world - not only with people, but with the whole of creation. Ecological issues also became important to him.

In his thirties Etienne developed kidney stones, the pain of which drove him to unconsciousness. During this experience, he associated with the pain Christ had on the cross and saw it as an opportunity to relate to Christ on a new level. "It did something to me that I cannot describe. I had an overwhelming experience of Christ's love. As if Christ said: but I was prepared to endure it..." Etienne said that he was, however, aware that he would have stopped the pain if he was able to, whatever the consequences. That gave him some new insight into God's love. He also experienced several other personal crises shortly thereafter, and as a result had a much deeper, richer experience of God's presence. Up to then he felt that he had to solve the problems of people who came to him for counselling. After this deepening experience he realised that he is not there to solve their problems, but to make God discernable in their situation. He also learned to pray the Psalms and experienced that it enriches him in unexpected ways. It gave him a way to deal constructively with conflict and pain: "I can complain to God in a believing manner and tell God that something is too much for me".

Contrary to popular psychology discussed in section 2.1.2, Etienne believes that it is not important to be happy or positive. Instead, spiritual health involves taking your place in the network in the world, and that starts with your key relationships, especially with God, who understands where you fit in. It involves being the person God created you to be and not who society forces you to be; to be sad at the right times, but not in unsuitable ways or about unsuitable things. Spiritual wellbeing also involves accepting the right things and being angry about the right things. It is to be moving in the right direction, and not to be standing still. It is not a ladder that you

climb to become more perfect. The key to spiritual wellbeing lies in occupying your place in the network of relationships.

Etienne continued that he is inspired by Bernard of Clairvaux's four degrees of love,²⁵ which sketches an individual's place in the network of relationships well. The levels build on each other, and the basic level is love for yourself for your own sake. We should not neglect that, because that is how we are made. If you do not look after yourself, something is wrong. That opens the way to the second level, which is love for God for your own sake, where you start discovering that the things in the world that you can use to your own advantage and that make your life worthwhile comes from God. You develop a love for God that is based on the advantages that you receive from it. It is an immature love, but it is good and right. God wants us to enjoy those things, and it leads to the next level, which is love for God for God's sake. In time, through God's gifts and goodness we learn to love God so much that it is no longer about the gifts. The fourth, higher level of love is love for yourself, for God's sake. Etienne sees spiritual health here. It is to look at yourself through God's eyes and to sacrifice yourself without self-contempt, to put someone else's needs before yours, without it being unhealthy or affecting your love for yourself, as is seen in cases of co-dependency. It is a mature form of love that is built on and includes the first three levels described above.

Amanda also talked about a love for God and spiritual health, but she is much more focused on her own day-to-day life. She believes that the end of the path that she is on is to be with God and is merely a continuation of the relationship that she now has with God:

We already have eternal life and the destination is this moment. If we don't live this moment, we have nothing. This moment and God's presence in this moment is all we have. I don't spend time thinking where I am, where I want to be and how to get there. I live life and do what my hand finds to do. I won't

²⁵ Afmeric, cardinal deacon of the Church of Rome, asked Bernard of Clairvaux to write a book on loving God. The resultant book entitled *On Loving God* was written between 1125 and 1141 and can be found in:
Bernard of Clairvaux. 1987 [1125-1141]. *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works*. (Evans, G.R. Transl.) Mahwah: Paulist Press, 192-197.

necessarily remember tomorrow what happened today. What I have in a relationship with God is what I have now. It is an experience and context, a reality that I live with. We are limited, but Christ is not limited in his power. I have to only have to continually listen what I have to do.

4.5.2. Experiencing God through other people

Amanda believes that the motivation for Christianity should be a relationship with God, and not fear. She has full confidence that God can protect her from her own shortcomings and has a strong desire to live based on her relationship with God. She quotes Oswald Chambers on prayer being the blood in our heart and the air in our lungs. She desires to be like that – no life without prayer. Prayer for her is, however, not limited to talking and listening to God when she is alone. She experiences God talking to her through other people. Theresa expressed the same view, as discussed in section 4.2.1.1 above. This is in line with the *inward* versus *outward* polarities discussed in section 2.3.2.4. Amanda and Theresa are not energised by solitude, but by their relationships with others and by feeling that their service is benefiting others.

Similarly, Cornelia seldom gets ideas by spending hours alone on her knees. She rather gets ideas and an understanding of who God is by her everyday life among people. She said: “communicating with God is like breathing. I talk to God and God talks to me. I am very blessed. Everything I touch works out well. It doesn’t come from me, so it must be from God”.

Ben also admits that he struggles with the disciplines of silence, meditation and prayer. He goes on a meditative retreat once a year, but he does not enjoy the silence and solitude. For him, God is in the everyday things:

God came to us from between the legs of a woman. The earthly and reality of God is here and now, in our interaction and our fleshliness. The incarnation is God associating him with me, to be with me in my pain, concretely, in the blood and semen. Spirituality is about becoming aware, consciousness and to be more present in life and to experience it as it is and feel God in it.

Ben said that he is not open to supernatural experiences. “The more real and fleshly it is, the nearer it feels to me, and the more it works for me. The things that do speak to me are as if God comes through the sensual”.

4.5.3. Divine healing

Anton’s parents were believers in the Dutch Reformed Church, but did not go to church regularly. “God did not have a place in my life”. After school he participated in rugby and boxing in the army for the benefits of the social life, the perks, and to be highly regarded by others. At age 28 the tips of Anton’s feet and hands started dying, and doctors started to amputate the dead flesh. After years of uncertainty and suffering he was diagnosed with the incurable Buerger's disease, which is related to nicotine use. The medical doctor who eventually diagnosed him told him that it is incurable, but the same doctor also told him that there is a “higher hand above for which nothing is impossible”. Anton heard what he said about God, but did not take notice of it, as he was not religious at all. “The situation was hopeless. I had to give up my dreams, my army career and my sport”.

On his first day in a new job after leaving the army he was invited to a lunchtime prayer meeting in which he made a commitment to follow Christ. Someone in the meeting prophesied and said: “the Lord says that you will be a living witness for Him”. A few years later Anton started to get the disease internally, and the same doctor that diagnosed him came to say goodbye, adding that they would not see each other again. Anton’s oesophagus was eaten away over the next four years, and he was unable to eat. After four years he weighed 39 kilograms. The only medical treatment he received at that stage was morphine, sleeping pills and anti-depressants. Many church people came to him and told him to prepare, because God is coming to fetch him. A lot of people also told him that he is not being healed because of sin in his life. Anton says that in such circumstances he would hold on to the promise that he would be a living witness. “How can God come to fetch you if He made such a promise to you?”

One day Anton saw a vision of people standing in a light discussing on his condition and mentioning that they see him getting a new stomach and other internal organs.

When he shared what he saw with his family, they thought that he was hallucinating as a result of the high dosage of painkillers. The next day he heard a healing sermon on television and experienced it to be directed at him. Directly after hearing the sermon, he heard a grumbling sound in his stomach for the first time in four years. Two days later he felt very weak and was admitted to hospital. His family was called to say their final goodbyes and he was put under strong sedation, because the doctors did not expect him to survive the night. The next morning he woke up and ate two plates of food. Internal tests revealed that his organs were normal and that everything worked perfectly. Anton believes that the healing first happened in the spiritual dimension before it happened in the flesh. Now, nearly ten years later, he is still healthy. He says that two of the medical specialists who treated him also believe that God performed a miracle. Anton thereafter qualified as a pastor and now regularly preaches and holds healing services. He says that many people are healed from cancer, heart disease etc. during his services. He believes that “the Lord came and says we will have life in abundance, which includes abundance in physical health”.

He therefore believes that Christ’s promise that his followers will have life in abundance (John 10:10) refers to our current life here on earth and includes a promise of physical health. This belief is similar to that of Andrew Murray and the Keswick movement, who believed that it is possible for Christians to live without physical illness, as Christ came to bring complete restoration (cf. Van de Vyver 2009: 308-311).

4.5.4. Spirituality broader than Christianity

Nick and Gustav regard themselves as spiritually aware, but neither of them is involved in church communities.

Gustav finds the Christians confessions of faith beautiful and he acknowledges their spiritual value, but he does not necessarily believe that the virgin birth and Jesus’ rising from the dead “magically happened as stated in the confessions”. He feels more comfortable with “uncertainty, fluidity and keeping his options open”. The methodological doubt that Descartes, for example, subjected everything to, appeals to

him. He feels attracted to a greater variety of spiritual traditions. At AfrikaBurn²⁶ this year he experienced an awe he did not sense for a long time in any church. One of the reasons for this is that he does not feel comfortable with any set forms of prescribed religion. At present he does not go to church, seldom reads the Bible, listens to a wider variety of spiritual sources, and relates to the doubt expressed in the gospel of Mark. According to Gustav, doubt, uncertainty and anxiety are at the root of Mark's message. In his mind the Christian faith exists best in conjunction with uncertainty and fear.

Nick's theology is also not traditionally Christian. He attended a course presented by The School of Practical Philosophy, based on Eckhart Tolle's *The Power of Now*²⁷. It is important to them to recognise that there is value in different belief systems. They taught that being conscious is important, and trained him to meditate with the focus on being present in the moment.

During the time of attending the course, Nick heard a Dutch Reformed pastor preach that God is not dependent on us to serve him/her and that sometimes it is just enough to hang on to what we are. Nick went to speak to that pastor about the course he attended, as well as about struggling with depression. The pastor told him that the course sounds positive and that he should continue with it, even though to Nick it increasingly sounded different from what the church believes. For Nick it was wonderful to speak to a leader in the church who recognises that there are many things that we do not understand. He grew up with the Christian faith and does not think that it is bad or wrong, but he does not read the Bible and is not convinced that the Bible is the only revelation that God²⁸ gave us.

Nick believes that faith, or spiritual truth, lives itself out in the world. Faith does not live in the Bible or interpretation of the Bible. He says that he is tired of people

²⁶ The Burning Man festival grew out of a loose grouping of individuals and organisations that questioned, and continue to question, mainstream, highly commercialised society and what it does to the notion and workings of community. Burning Man's mission statement states: "Our intention is to generate society that connects each individual to his or her creative powers, to participation in community, to the larger realm of civic life, and to the even greater world of nature that exists beyond society". (<http://www.afrikaburns.com/>)

²⁷ Tolle, E. 1999. *The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment*. Novato: New World Library.

²⁸ Nick sometimes referred to "God" and at other times to "it" or "a higher being."

saying you must just read the Bible to hear the truth, and he does not want any conversations with such people. Those people do not even recognise that their worldview influences the way they interpret the Bible.

For Nick, what is important is whether people can live happily; and someone is happy when he/she lives in harmony with a spiritual perspective. What that perspective is – Jewish, Christian or Muslim – is not important to him. His view correlates with the *Shalom Hypothesis* discussed in 2.1.1.4 above. Nick emphasises that the different aspects of a person's being interact with one another and that spirituality, for example, has an influence on a person's wellbeing. With regards to spirituality he believes that there is a higher power, but does not necessarily see it as a person. It has value from a humanist perspective to see a relational God, because it provides something people can understand. What or who the higher power is, is not important, because he does not pray to it or rely on it. At most he thinks about the things he has witnessed that can be signs of the presence of a higher being. Such a presence gives life meaning, and he acknowledges it. Merely being aware of it is his form of communication with the higher power. He has not made the issue of Christ's redemption according to the Bible important in his life, and stated that he does not want to be confronted with it.

Nick is mainly interested in his own process of finding a belief system with which he is satisfied. For him the ultimate spiritual process is to acquire God's perspective of who Nick is, and to be who God made him to be. He said that the biggest role that religion plays in a person's life is what they take out of it for themselves, not the objective value of it. For most people their faith is merely a coping mechanism to deal with being wounded and they only use their faith as a crutch.

4.5.5. *Concluding remarks*

In section 4.5 I summarised the interviewees' comments on how they experience their spirituality and how they relate to God.

Nick and Gustav said that they do not accept the confessions of the Christian churches, nor do they accept the general interpretations of the Bible. They also do not

attend church or practice any of the spiritual disciplines like prayer or meditation. Gustav can associate better with the doubt that is in his view expressed in the gospel of Mark than with the certainty with which many Christians profess belief in the Bible and the confessions of the church. Similarly, Nick emphasised that there are many things that we do not understand and expressed irritation with people who believe that the Bible is the main way in which God is revealed and that they know how to interpret the Bible.

In Etienne's view spiritual wellbeing depends on a person accepting and fully living in his/her place in the world. That involves having healthy relationships with God, yourself and the people around you. As per Bernard of Clairvaux's four degrees of love, you should love yourself for your own sake and for God's sake. You should also love God for your own sake and for God's sake. To love in this way is mature Christian spirituality.

For Amanda, eternal life is living in this moment. Living in this moment in the presence of God is all we have. She doesn't think much about the future, but strives to live every moment fully in continuous communication with God.

It is noteworthy that it is the same interviewees who feel strongly about and spend a large portion of their time in activism that are not comfortable with spending much time alone practicing the spiritual disciplines of silence, solitude and meditation. For Ben, Cornelia, Amanda and Theresa, God is present in the everyday things and speaks to them through people and nature.

Anton spent most of the interview time relating his understanding of how he was divinely healed. He believes that Christ's promise about an abundant life means that Christians can enjoy complete physical health here on earth.

4.6. Conclusion

In this section I discussed what the respondents told me about their spirituality, their wellbeing and the relationship between their spirituality and wellbeing. The main differences and themes are summarised in the following pages.

4.6.1. *Childhood experiences*

While analysing the narratives of the interviewees it occurred to me that their underlying personality types and those of their parents seem to have had a significant effect on their experiences and perceptions. How they experienced their home environment laid a foundation for their attitude towards themselves, other people and religion.

The respondents who have a positive recollection of their relationship with their parents and experienced their parents' spirituality positively came across as enthusiastic about their own relationship with God. Amanda's childhood perception of adults protecting her has continued throughout her life and today it forms a foundation for her theology and the way she thinks of God. She mentioned several times during our discussion that she feels safe as a result of her relationship with God. Theresa also has positive recollections of a nurturing family environment. As she grew up in a large family who often received and visited people, she seldom spent time alone. Her perception of spirituality is wholly encompassed in being in the presence of and in relationship with people and connecting with them. Amanda and Theresa are good of examples of *communalists*, as described in chapter two, who believe that meaningful interaction with other people is indispensable for spiritual wellbeing.

It was also noticeable that the interviewees who were passionate about their Christian spirituality had significant exposure to spiritual activities and Christians they respected when they were teenagers. Christian youth group activities were mentioned often.

Some of the interviewees do not have positive recollections about their family home and their family's spirituality and it was clear that they now struggle with their own personal relationships and spirituality. Gustav chose to talk almost exclusively about his negative emotions in relation to other people, as a result of which he is now disappointed in the church and in God. His conclusion is that people's unsatisfactory behaviour means that they are not Christians, because they cannot have a good

relationship with God if they are not able to have a good relationship with the people around them. Interestingly enough, it seemed that he did not realise that his conclusion also applies to himself. He is currently attempting to maintain his spirituality by avoiding the gathering of Christians completely. Along similar lines, Nick's perception of God and openness to God were damaged by the way in which he chose to react to his father from a young age. His rebellion against his father led to rebellion toward religion – the area of life that his father valued most.

4.6.2. Activism versus spiritual retreat

I found it surprising that some of the interviewees tend to focus almost exclusively on activism and do not feel comfortable in spending time alone in prayer, silence, or meditation. My expectation in interviewing people who are referred to me as examples of people who are actively living their Christian faith, was to meet people for whom spending time alone in prayer and practicing the spiritual disciplines were a priority. Instead, Ben, Theresa, Amanda and Cornelia admitted that they do not spend much time in silence and prayer and that for them God is interacting with them by being involved in their everyday lives.

4.6.3. Frustration with the church

Much of the hurt and frustration expressed by the interviewees relates to their personal issues and their struggles in dealing with people around them.

The other comments relate to the church being hierarchical, patriarchal institutions, where all people are not treated equally and that have adopted many of corporate businesses' way of doing things. As a result, churches are generally not able to meet people's spiritual needs.

4.6.4. Christian spirituality and wellbeing

Etienne has a clear and well-developed theology and has many stories that indicate how he experienced his relationship with God. He does not believe that Christian spirituality will necessarily always lead to the believer feeling happy or positive and

that anger and sadness will be a normal part of life. Spiritual wellbeing for Etienne does not involve becoming progressively more perfect, but is rather dependent on standing in the right relationship with God, yourself, other people and the rest of creation. It is to see yourself as God sees you.

Anton stated that Christ's promise that we will have life in abundance in John 10:10 relates to our physical life here on earth and includes physical health.

I had difficulty in gaining a clear understanding of what Gustav and Nick believe and what their spirituality consists of. Their focus during the interviews was mainly on themselves, the way in which people have hurt them, and their own unresolved emotional issues. One possibility is that low levels of wellbeing may prevent a person from developing spiritually. This is further discussed in section 5.2.4 below.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This concluding chapter summarises the research findings in response to the research question about the influence of spirituality on the wellbeing of a select group of Cape Town Christians (as formulated in sections 1.1 and 1.4). Some of the limitations of this study and recommendations for further studies are then briefly discussed.

5.2 THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

The main research question posed by this study is whether Christian spirituality (defined in section 2.3) is a factor in determining personal wellbeing (defined in section 2.1). The following subsidiary questions were formulated to facilitate the discussion of this broad question:

- What are the influences that affect the respondents' subjective experience of wellbeing?
- What is the role that Christian spirituality plays in the respondents' lives?
- How do Christian spirituality and wellbeing affect each other in the respondents' lives?

The concepts used in the study are first defined below and thereafter proposed answers to these questions are discussed.

5.2.1 Definitions for the concepts wellbeing, spirituality and Christian spirituality

The definitions used for these terms in various different academic fields, as well as the definitions for the purpose of this study, are summarised in this section.

5.2.1.1. *Wellbeing*

Philosophers have developed several theories on wellbeing, as discussed in section 2.1.1. The three main theories are that a person's needs have to be satisfied in order to be well and happy; that to be well a person should score high on all or most of an objective list of standards, which includes being a good, moral person; and that wellbeing requires having positive, healthy relationships with other people. A fourth theory that encompasses all of these theories is the *Shalom Hypothesis*. It states that life has many aspects, which includes our needs, morality and relationships, and if we function well in all aspects, we will be well.

In the field of psychology (see section 2.2.2.), these theories have been further developed, and the concept of subjective wellbeing thus emerged. Subjective wellbeing includes a person's own evaluation of his/her wellbeing, and ranges from low to high. Feelings of depression, sadness and hopelessness dominate on a low level, and joy and optimism on a high level.

Research in the field of psychology found that psychological factors such as optimism, purpose in life, high self-esteem and hope predict a much larger proportion of the variance in wellbeing than do socio-demographic factors. People's characters, motives, and values determine their needs and the aspects of their lives to which they attach significance. Acting in accordance with those motivations and values leads to enhanced levels of wellbeing.

For the purpose of this study, wellbeing is defined as healthy functioning in all aspects of a person's life, for example physical and emotional health, relationships and finances. Spirituality is not considered to be one of the aspects of a person's being. Instead, a person is seen as a spiritual being.

5.2.1.2. *Spirituality*

Spirituality is a multifaceted concept and there are widely differing definitions, but it is often defined as a personal journey with the purpose of experiencing meaning, purpose and transcendence. It has also been argued that spirituality is a form of

intelligence that involves using spiritual knowledge to cope in life, and that people have different levels of spiritual abilities.

Spiritual wellbeing is a fundamental dimension of overall health and wellbeing, as it has an effect on the physical, mental, emotional and social dimensions of health.

5.2.1.3. Christian spirituality

For the purpose of this study, Christian spirituality is defined as an internal relationship with the Trinity (God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit) that has a profound impact on the way a person lives. Aspects such as loving other people and a concern for the environment are regarded as manifestations of Christian spirituality.

5.2.2 Influences on the respondents' subjective experience of wellbeing

From the interviews it emerged that certain factors had an effect on the way in which the interviewees experience wellbeing since childhood. These influences are discussed in the following paragraphs.

5.2.2.1 Childhood experiences

After analysing the narratives I concluded that the way in which the interviewees experienced their relationships with their caregivers as children, as well as the communities in which they grew up laid a foundation for their attitude towards themselves, other people and their parents' religion. Those who mentioned their negative experiences of their parents' behaviour also told of several occasions where they felt hurt by Christians and the church throughout the rest of their life.

One exception to this is Theresa, who only related positive memories of her parents and childhood. Although the tight-knit social group and unconditional love that she experienced during her childhood had the positive effect of her feeling safe and accepted, it also failed in providing the opportunity for her to develop a healthy sense of personal identity and independence. This created significant problems for her when she had to function in work and social environments as an adult. As she chose to

study theology and work as a pastor, this means that the people with whom she could not get along were mostly Christians.

Several of the interviewees mentioned that they made their first spiritual commitment at a Christian youth gathering. Belonging to these youth groups and participating in the enthusiastic spiritual decisions that their friends made at these gatherings gave them a sense of belonging and social acceptance.

5.2.2.2 Relationships with other people

For the interviewees for whom activism is a priority, the effect of their spirituality on the way in which they treat other people and their environment is of great importance.

Theresa, Amanda, Cornelia and Ben are *communalists*, as described in section 2.2.3, whose focus is mainly on themselves and the people around them. For them, spiritual wellbeing depends on quality and depth in relationships, and significant interaction with other people. They do not spend much time in cultivating their spirituality in solitude and said that the spiritual disciplines that are to be practiced in solitude are not important to them. God speaks to them primarily through other people.

I would describe Etienne as a *transcendentalist* (see section 2.2.3), who realises the importance of having a healthy personal life, relationships and responsibility to the environment, but for whom his transcendental nature and being in harmony with God is the priority.

5.2.3 The role that Christian spirituality plays in the respondents' lives

Several of the interviewees expressed strong opinions on the relationship between their spirituality and the activities they are involved in. The way in which spirituality affects their lives are discussed below.

5.2.3.1 *Activism*

All of the interviewees whose spirituality is rooted in relationships with people also feel strongly about a particular social problem and are involved in activism to improve that situation. Those problems are socio-economic inequality and exclusion, homosexuality, ecological sustainability and prostitution. Several of them said that Christians cannot merely evangelise, but should offer people real help and friendship. They are involved in activism to improve the lives of people they regard as disadvantaged. Amanda summarised the underlying theology to her focus on activism well when she said that for her it is about God's presence in each moment as she goes about her daily activities.

In section 2.2.3 I discussed Fisher's theory of progressive synergism, in which the third group of people are called *environmentalists*. They are defined as people who regard their appreciation for and connectedness with the environment as the basis of spiritual wellbeing. Andries is an example of an *environmentalist*. He is involved in teaching about and lobbying for responsible management of the environment. Integrating his strong views on ecological sustainability with the prevalent theology in his community was a significant challenge for him, as he found very little written on the topic.

5.2.3.2 *Church involvement*

Most of the interviewees are not comfortable in the institutional church. For the activists, the main reason for their disappointment is that the church and church members do not respond appropriately with regards to the particular issue, for example social equality or being responsible towards the environment, as discussed in chapter four. A few of the interviewees have well-defined theological and ideological reasons for their discontent, while others have mainly personal emotional problems and struggles in dealing with people around them. Some of the comments that were not personal and that may merit further investigation are:

- large congregations are merely crowds listening to a behaviourist lecture, instead of functioning as the body of Christ in which every member has a role and where the members support each other;
- an inordinately large portion of churches' committees and organised activities are aimed at evangelisation, instead of centring on loving God, our neighbours and ourselves. In other words, not enough time and energy is spent on developing mature disciples of Christ;
- many churches are hierarchical, patriarchal institutions, where women and people from all races do not have equal opportunities and responsibilities;
- the church is focusing on projects and on "doing", instead of feeding the "being" aspect of its members;
- there is a rising need for a mystical spirituality that churches are not able to accommodate. Seminaries are not equipping pastors to address the spiritual needs of people and instead focus solely on academic training based on humanistic and modernistic principles. This view is supported by Ruthenberg's research on the state of contemporary spirituality. Ruthenberg concluded that Christian ministry today is "impoverished and lacking in authenticity" and that reflective spirituality in the contemplative and mystical realm can address these inadequacies in ministry (Ruthenberg 2005: 254);
- the way in which the church has adopted corporate ways of managing its affairs is inappropriate and harmful. More attention is given to collecting funds, forming committees and voting on decisions than on spending time in fasting and prayer to ascertain the will of God. In this manner, the churches are no different from worldly organisations, instead of being the body of Christ. Ruthenberg confirmed this assertion as well. He wrote that a consumer-dictated mood has taken over in the church and that it is "flagrantly following the examples of big business or unscrupulous marketers" (Ruthenberg 2005: 265). It is necessary that Christians focus on being like Christ, instead of on a long list of achievements as in the corporate world.

5.2.4 How Christian spirituality and wellbeing affect each other in the respondents' lives

Some of the interviewees emphasised certain aspects of their lives that made it clear that there is a relationship between the way in which they experience their spirituality and their general wellbeing. Their comments in this regard are discussed below.

5.2.4.1 Effect of Christian spirituality on wellbeing

Many of the interviewees told of times when their disappointment in the prevalent theology, the Christians they met and the church had a negative effect on their wellbeing. Those who have a positive relationship with God, however, repeatedly emphasised that their faith and the love they experience in their relationship with God have always carried them through the difficult periods.

In Etienne's view and experience Christian spirituality will not always result in happy or positive emotions. Anger and sadness is a normal part of life. He also commented that wellbeing does not involve perfection, but rather healthy relationships with God, oneself, other people and the rest of creation.

5.2.4.2 Childhood experiences

The interviewees' relationships with their caregivers were discussed in sections 4.2 and 5.2.2.1 above. I concluded that those interviewees who had positive experiences with and significant exposure to Christian spirituality during their childhood still make spirituality a priority, and regard it as a significant contributor to wellbeing in their lives. Amanda, for example, regularly referred to her childhood in which she felt safe and nurtured. She has the same experience in her relationship with God. This created the impression that there is a strong causal link between how she experienced being treated by those she depended on as a child and how she experiences her spirituality today.

In Gustav's case, on the other hand, my impression was that spirituality is not something that is a priority in his life. One of the reasons for that may be that his

personality and troublesome relationships with his parents resulted in him focusing on his own and other people's emotions.

5.2.4.3 Time spent alone

One factor that emerged as having an effect on how some of the interviewees experience their spirituality is the time spent alone. Etienne, for example, spent a lot of time alone as a child on his family's farm. He had early mystical experiences when he was alone under the night sky and reflected on the wonder of creation. In contrast, Theresa was virtually never alone as a child and did not develop a sense of personal connectedness with God. For her, all spiritual experiences are dependent on interacting with other people.

5.2.4.4 Sexuality

It was clear from my analysis that a person's struggles with his sexuality, in this case being homosexual, may have a significant impact on his spirituality. This is particularly true if the community and church in which one lives have negative views on the particular issue. The social support generally available in Christian communities (mentioned in section 2.4.1.1 as a significant positive contribution that religion can make to wellbeing) is then not available to all. This may result in a suppression of sexuality instead of finding a way of integrating it with spirituality.

5.2.4.5 Physical Health

Physical pain and health problems may result in mystical experiences and a new depth in spirituality. This was the result when Etienne's experienced such intense pain that he lost consciousness in hospital, as discussed in section 4.5.1 above. It should be noted, however, that he made a deliberate choice to focus on Christ during this experience, instead of on the pain.

Anton believes that the reference to life in abundance in John 10:10 means that Christians can expect perfect physical health. His enthusiastic emphasis on his expectation that he would be healed even further and that he would be used to heal

other people reminded me of the teachings of nineteenth century perfectionism, which also linked Christ's promise of life and abundance to a life here on earth that is without sin or sickness (cf. Van de Vyver 2009: 308).

5.2.4.6 Unresolved emotional problems

Several of the interviewees spoke mainly about the way in which their parents and the church hurt them. Their unresolved emotional issues and disillusionment led to poor relationships throughout their lives. They also tended to conclude that God, Christians and the church have failed in giving them the love and support that they deserved. These interviewees experience low levels of wellbeing in several aspects of their lives. This may be the reason why the impression was created during the interviews that their spiritual dimension is being ignored.

One of the interviewees do not accept the Bible and Christian confessions of faith, but talked about seeking spiritual truth and regards a person as happy when he/she lives in harmony with a spiritual perspective. He contradicted himself a few times, for example when he said that the ultimate spiritual process is to acquire God's perspective of who one is, but later on that religion has no objective value and is merely a coping process, the only benefit of which is what you take out of it (section 4.5.4).

5.3 LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

The chief limitation of this study is a time limit. It is not possible to identify all the factors that influence the relationship between spirituality and wellbeing in the respondents' lives during one interview.

Since the study was based on confidential interviews, the data consists of the interviewees' accounts of their spirituality and wellbeing. Methods of confirming the information provided were not available.

A further limitation relates to the interpretation of the interviewees' narratives. Different interpretations can often be given to words and it is possible that my interpretation is different from what the interviewee intended to convey.

In addition, as a representative sample of Cape Town Christians were not selected, it will not be possible to generalise the research results to all Cape Town Christians.

It is further noteworthy that this is an initial study that did not intend to answer all the questions on the relationship between Christian spirituality and wellbeing, but rather to explore where there are any further possibilities for research. Those are discussed in the next section.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

The contributions of this study are considered here by focusing on the methodological, theoretical, and practical recommendations discussed in the following paragraphs.

From a methodological perspective this study was limited to a small group of respondents from a specific geographical area with certain characteristics. Similar research may be conducted in other groups to provide a broader perspective on the relationship between Christian spirituality and wellbeing.

In the theoretical chapter of this study (chapter two), the broad, extensive nature of the terms used are discussed. In further research the terms wellbeing, spirituality and Christian spirituality could be specifically defined. This will contribute to a credible reflection of the relationship between Christian spirituality and wellbeing in the respondents' lives.

Research discussed in chapter 1 concluded that one of the benefits of religion was that it formed the basis of distinctive religious subcultures within the black population in the United States of America. Further research concluded that the determinants of life satisfaction differ for black people as well (Ellison and Gay 1990: 123-124). If these two conclusions are investigated in a South African context, it may result in

evidence that contributes to an understanding of how wellbeing can be improved in the South African population.

Practically, it may serve churches well to take note of the frustrations mentioned by the respondents. First, it is recommended that the church addresses the spiritual needs of their members by creating more opportunities for participating in silent and meditative services. Part of the process of addressing the spiritual requirements of members is to move away from a corporate style of managing the church. It is also important that equal opportunities should be created in all churches for people of all races and both sexes. In addition, a clear stance is needed on and an engagement with the environmental crisis and climate change.

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Addendum A

Consent Form

My name is Esmari van de Vyver and I am currently working towards a Master's degree in Theology.

My research focuses on how Christians experience God and their relationship with God. I would like to interview you by asking you a few questions on your life history and your spiritual experiences. The aim of the research is to gain an understanding of your spiritual experiences. I want to interview a number of Christians with different backgrounds and that is why you were selected for this research. Should you agree, I shall record our conversation digitally. The interview will take approximately one hour. I would like to do two follow-up interviews with you in the near future. Your participation in this research is voluntary and you may refuse to answer any questions.

Our conversations will be treated as confidential. Your name will not be linked with the information you provide nor will your name be mentioned in the dissertation I am writing.

Consent

I, Esmari van de Vyver, will not discuss any of the information of this interview with other people or mention your name in my thesis.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

I understand that my views and the information I provide in these conversations will not be linked to me personally.

I agree to take part in the research

I agree that our conversations can be recorded

Name: _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Addendum B

Interview Schedule

Family Background and significant influences

I am interested in you as person and in how you experience your spirituality.

Maybe we should start at the beginning, with the house you grew up in, how you experienced your parents, and how they imparted their spirituality?

Development of own spirituality

How have you experienced your spirituality, or God, throughout your life?

How would you describe your view of and perception of the spiritual dimension, or of God?

Do you experience God as a separate being, or how would you describe your awareness of God, if any?