CHAPTER 1

What is Spirituality?

The Rise of Spirituality in Contemporary Western Cultures

Contrary to what might often appear to be the case, the latter part of the twentieth century has seen a major upsurge of interest in spirituality within the Western world. As Davie and Cobb observe (in Cobb and Robshaw 1998, p.89),

> Despite a commonly held assumption – strongly bolstered by unrepresentative voices in the media – that secular attitudes prevail in modern Britain, the sociological evidence reveals that relatively few people in the population have opted out of religion altogether or out of some sort of belief; in other words, experiences of the sacred or spiritual remain widespread, notwithstanding a recognized and much talked about decline in religious practice.

It is true that institutionalized religion is becoming less popular. All of the major Christian denominations have seen a sharp decline in the post-war period, and this decline has carried on into the new millennium. However, whilst people may be becoming less *religious*, it would be a mistake to assume from that that they are necessarily becoming less *spiritual*, or that they are no longer searching for a sense of transcendence and spiritual fulfilment. What seems to have happened is that the spiritual beliefs and desires that were once located primarily within institutionalized religions have migrated across to other forms of spirituality. The spiritual quest continues, but in very different and much more diverse forms than those traditionally assumed to be normal.

This migration of spirituality from the 'religious' to the 'secular' has led to a change in the meaning of spirituality, as popularly conceived. Rather than being viewed as a specifically religious concept, spirituality has broadened in meaning into a more diffuse human need that can be met quite apart from institutionalized religious structures. This changing meaning of spirituality is reflected in the variety and diversity of definitions and understandings that are found in the literature on spirituality and mental

health. The concept of spirituality is no longer confined to religion, nor is the practice of spiritual care necessarily located within any formal religious or spiritual tradition. Spirituality has become a wide and multi-vocal concept (i.e. it has many different meanings and interpretations), which is understood and interpreted in numerous different ways, from Christianity to Buddhism, to Islam, humanism and the New Age (Barnum 1998).

A slippery concept

Spirituality has therefore become a slippery concept within Western culture. As one works through the literature that explores the relationship between spirituality and mental health, it very soon becomes clear that whilst there may be a number of common themes such as God, meaning, purpose, value and hope, there does not appear to be a common definition that can fully encapsulate what spirituality is.

Positively, the disparate understandings of spirituality present within culture alert us to the need for thoughtfulness, imagination, creativity and flexibility when we are seeking to address the spiritual needs of people with mental health problems. A view of spirituality that does not look beyond institutional religion risks missing out on some of the very significant spiritual needs that are experienced by people with no formal religious interest, on a daily basis. Negatively, the very diffuseness of definitions and understandings makes it difficult to tie down precisely what spirituality is, and what its implications are for the process of caring. When spirituality is defined primarily in terms of a particular religious tradition or denomination, it is relatively straightforward to identify and meet spiritual needs through such avenues as prayer, scripture reading, meditation and so forth. However, when spirituality appears to mean all things to all people, it is more difficult to tie down specific strategies to deal with people's spiritual needs. One of the tasks of this book will be to explore ways in which spirituality, in all of its divergent forms, can be identified, understood and worked with. For now the significant thing to bear in mind is that spirituality may well be highly significant to many people with mental health problems, even though they may not express an interest in or adherence to an established religious tradition.

Spirituality: a usable concept?

This does not mean however that spirituality is so diffuse as to be meaningless as a working concept. Irrespective of the diversity of its

manifestations, it does contain identifiable components and experiences that can be understood, nurtured and cared for. However, in order to understand spirituality it will be necessary to let go of our positivistic desire for absolute certainty, neat definitions and universally applicable categories, in order that we can enter into an aspect of human experience which, in many respects, transcends final categorization. Alongside the cultural changes highlighted above, one of the main reasons for the lack of conceptual clarity surrounding spirituality relates to the difficulties of capturing, in words, dimensions of human experience that are essentially inexpressible. Experiences and feelings such as spirituality, love, meaning and hope are not easy to analyse and conceptualize in the language of science. Consequently writers find themselves stretching their language and concepts beyond the boundaries of the normal scientific discourse, as they attempt to express something of the inner depths of human experience. If we are to develop a therapeutic understanding of spirituality it will be necessary to learn to be comfortable with uncertainty and mystery. This is not to say that we need to become 'unscientific' in the sense that we refuse to seek empirical evidence for our claims. To adopt such an approach would be to exclude spirituality from participating in what is undoubtedly the dominant epistemological discourse within contemporary Western culture, and one which has been deeply influential on the development of mental health care practices. As we shall see, spirituality can in fact be studied scientifically, although our understandings of science may have to alter to accommodate for the new perspectives that spirituality brings to it.

What we *do* need to do, however, is to begin to expand our understandings of science and empirical evidence to include methods and ways of looking at the world which will not overlook the spiritual dimension of the person. This chapter will seek to wrestle with the tension between the inherent inexpressibility of the spiritual dimension, and the need to find ways of identifying and working with this important dimension of human experience. In working through these issues it will be possible to develop a working understanding of spirituality that will guide and inform the remainder of the book.

What is the Human Spirit?

In developing an understanding of spirituality, it is necessary to begin by reflecting on the nature of the human spirit. This starting point is not in itself uncontroversial. Within a cultural milieu that has come uncritically to accept

the assumptions of science, empiricism and positivism, there might appear to be no justification for drawing upon such an ethereal and apparently unverifiable concept as 'spirituality'. However, one of the continuing arguments of this book is that the way in which we currently view the world is only one possible construction of it. Certainly a narrowly conceived scientific perspective will not recognize or acknowledge the reality of the human spirit. Nevertheless, this study will aim to expand our view of science to include aspects of human experience that may be excluded from the present paradigm of ideas and worldview.

It is important to begin by noting that while the terms 'spirit' and 'spirituality' are closely connected, they are not synonymous. The human spirit is the essential life-force that undergirds, motivates and vitalizes human existence. *Spirituality* is the specific way in which individuals and communities respond to the experience of the spirit. This distinction is quite subtle, but very important.

The word 'spirit' is derived from the Latin *spiritus* meaning 'breath'. An analogy would be human respiration, by which oxygen is taken in to sustain and maintain the existence of the person. The spirit provides a similar sustaining and maintaining role on a more ontological level. The spirit is the fundamental breath of life that is instilled into human beings and which animates them and brings them into life. An example drawn from the Judaeo-Christian tradition will help clarify this point.

> The word [spirit] is etymologically related, in Hebrew (*ruach*) and Greek (*pneuma*), to the concept and picture of the stirring of air, breeze, *breath* and *wind*. In Hebrew anthropology, *ruach* was the enlivening force of a person – the breath of God which turned the prepared clay into a living soul. In the second creation story in the book of Genesis, Yahweh breathes into the prepared earth and the clay becomes a living nephesh. Thus the very being of the person is permeated by the *ruach* [spirit/spiritus] of God. (Lartey 1997, p.114)

The spirit energizes human existence and fills it with meaning and purpose. The source of the spirit is open to a number of understandings. It is variously described as God, Brahma or energy, and can be understood as an internal or interpersonal force of interconnectivity, or an external force that is given to people by some form of higher power. However it is perceived, it is 'usually considered to be untouchable, indescribable and untestable by any physical science,' (Pullen, Tuck and Mix 1996). Although ultimately mysterious and,

to an extent, indefinable, the effects of the spirit *can* be described and understood.

Spirit as personal force

In contrast to the assumptions that the use of words such as 'life-force' and 'energy' might conjure up, the human spirit is not an impersonal, distant power that is unaffected by the experiences of the individual. As van Kaam in Goddard (1995, p.809) puts it, the human spirit is 'the dynamic force that keeps a person growing and changing continuously involved in a process of emerging, becoming and transcending of self; it is through this gestalt process that life is imbued with meaning and a sense of purpose for existence.' One of the dangers in using metaphors such as 'energy' to help us understand and describe the human spirit is that there is a temptation to forget about the metaphorical nature of our language, and to assume that spirituality *is* energy, rather than *is like* energy. The spirit is a unique force that has a quality of its own. We may be able to reach towards it using analogy and metaphor, but we must be careful to acknowledge these explanatory concepts for what they are.

A good example of this type of confusion between metaphor and reality is found in Goddard's (1995) use of the term 'integrative energy' to describe the human spirit. She argues that 'spirituality pervades, unites and directs all human dimensions and, therefore, constitutes the internal locus of natural health. Consequently, a definition of spirituality as integrative energy is hereby proposed' (p.813).

However, as Dawson (1997, p.283) correctly observes, there is a

> world of difference between agreeing to consider spirituality, for discursive purposes, *as* an integrative energy, and stating that spirituality *is* integrative energy. The first statement is metaphorical. As all metaphors do, it attempts to explain the unfamiliar (spirituality) by the familiar (energy). The second statement asserts an isomorphic relationship between spirituality and integrative energy; the two are deemed equivalent in every respect. In any context one can then replace the term spirituality with integrative energy and the meaning will be retained.

In order to understand any new thing it is necessary to begin by drawing it into our current frame of reference and exploring and describing it using that which is familiar to us. In this way we build up concepts and understandings that enable us to make sense of that which is alien. Terms such as 'force' and 'energy' are familiar concepts drawn from physics that

enable us to approximate an understanding of some aspects of the way in which the spirit functions. These analogies and metaphors are helpful in enabling understanding. However, though the spirit may be *like* force and energy, that is not what it *is*. Energy is an impersonal force that functions according to fixed laws and principles. As such it is predictable and unchanging. The spirit is a personal force that responds to the life experience of human beings. Common expressions such as: 'her spirits are high'; 'his spirits are at a very low ebb'; 'her spirit has been quenched'; 'I feel inspired (inspirited)'; 'he is feeling rather dispirited'; 'she has lost her spirit'; point towards the ways in which the spirit can be nurtured or quenched in response to human experience. The human spirit is therefore seen to be more of a continuing *process* than a fixed form of energy. The important point to bear in mind as we move on is that the spirit is a unique aspect of the human being that can be *illustrated* by drawing on language from other areas, but cannot be *translated* into that language. As such it challenges narrowly scientific language, and may well require the introduction of a broader, more appropriate range of vocabulary that captures this dimension of the human person.

Spirit and wholeness

Ellison describes the essence of the spirit thus:

> It is the *spirit* of human beings which enables and motivates us to search for meaning and purpose in life, to seek the supernatural or some meaning which transcends us, to wonder about our origins and our identities, to require mortality and equity. It is the spirit which synthesizes the total personality and provides some sense of energizing direction and order. The spiritual dimensions does not exist in isolation from the psyche and the soma, but provides an integrative force. It affects and is affected by our physical state, feelings, thoughts and relationships. If we are spiritually healthy we will feel generally alive, purposeful and fulfilled, but only to the extent that we are psychologically healthy as well. The relationship is bi-directional because of the intricate intertwining of these two parts of the person. (Ellison 1983, pp.331–2)

Ellison's reflections on the spirit are helpful. First, he emphasizes the important point that the human spirit is not simply a *component* of the person, which can be treated apart from the whole. Rather, the human spirit is seen as an integrative presence that permeates and vitalizes *every* aspect and *every* dimension of the human person. In other words, while we might

legitimately separate body, mind and spirit for the purposes of exploration and clarification, it is crucial to bear in mind that 'we are totally present in every cell of our body. You cannot have a 'soul – or whatever you call it – without a body' (Ashbrook 1991). The human spirit is therefore not measurable as an independent variable in and of itself, any more than 'would be such concepts as physicality, emotionality or wholeness' (Reed 1992). The human person

> 'is an animated body, and not an incarnated soul.' ...Man [*sic*] does not have a body, he is a body. He is flesh-animated-by-soul, the whole conceived as a psychospiritual unity: 'The body is the soul in its outward form. There is no suggestion that the soul is the essential personality, or that the soul (nephesh) is immortal, while flesh (basar) is mortal...' (Robinson 1957, p.14)

Such a suggestion regarding the unity of persons is fully in line with the findings emerging from a number of health care disciplines. For example, contemporary developments within the field of psychoneuroimmunology have made it increasingly apparent that the relationship between a person's body, soul/spirit and mind can no longer be understood in dualistic terms (Althouse 1985; Birney 1991; Gatchel, Bawn and Krantz. 1989; Hillhouse and Adler 1991; Houldin *et al.* 1985). Psychoneuroimmunology is the scientific investigation of the ways in which the brain affects the body's immune cells and how the immune system can be affected by emotions, feelings and behaviour. It concentrates on the ways in which personality, behaviour, emotion and cognition can all change the body's immune response, and thereby increase or decrease the risk of a person suffering from particular immune-related diseases. Psychoneuroimmunology emphasizes the wholeness of persons and the interconnectedness of emotions, experiences and somatic processes. Although the majority of the research does not concentrate on the human spirit, some of the therapies that have emerged from this field have recognized and sought to work with the spiritual dimension (Hill and Mullen 1996).

Within neurobiology and psychology the connection between the mind and the brain is becoming more and more apparent (Jeeves 1997; Kitwood 1997a). Similarly, within psychiatry, the lines between the biological, psychological and sociological etiology and treatment of mental health problems are no longer as clear as they once appeared to be (Kendell and Zealley 1993). More and more it is being recognized that human beings are

whole persons whose physical, emotional, social and spiritual needs are inextricably interlinked.

This suggestion concerning the wholeness and interconnectivity of persons has important implications in terms of mental health care. Mental health problems are not entities that simply affect one dimension of the person: the mind. They are whole-person experiences that affect a person in every dimension of their existence. What goes on in the psychological and spiritual realms can have a profound influence on what goes on in the physical realms, and vice versa (Kendell and Zealley 1993). Malfunctioning in one aspect of the person, be that their psychological, social or biological processes, can have an impact upon the person's spirit. This can manifest itself for example, in the deep dispiritedness of depression or the delusional religious identities and spiritual experiences of people living with psychotic disorders, both of which may have a biological root, but which at the same time, are deeply spiritual in their consequences. Again, disturbance in a person's spirit may have a significant impact upon their illness experience. For example, the loneliness, exclusion and lack of value experienced by many people with highly stigmatized forms of mental health problems such as schizophrenia are a profoundly spiritual problem that can significantly impact upon the recovery and stability of the person (Swinton 2000b).

Because of this deep interconnectivity within human persons, it is a mistake to assume that forms of spirituality that appear to be distorted by pathological experiences are *nothing but* an aspect of their pathology (although of course they may be profoundly influenced by it). A person's spirit may well be affected by their mental health problem. However, even distorted spirituality can reflect a genuine response to the types of spiritual longings and responses highlighted by Ellison in the previous quotation. The task of the spiritual carer is to acknowledge the implications of human interconnectedness and to develop the ability to discern between forms of spirituality that may be negatively affected by the person's mental health problems, and the more helpful and constructive responses of individuals to the longings of their spirits. One of the tasks of this book will be to explore ways of enabling carers effectively to achieve such a task of discernment and develop effective forms of care and intervention in the face of confusing forms of spiritual expression.

Second, Ellison's exploration of the nature of the human spirit shows clearly that it is this aspect of the person that provides the drive and the desire to find meaning, purpose and value in our lives. Again this reinforces the difference between impersonal energy and the purposeful process of the

spirit. The human spirit is an essential, dynamic life-force which vitalizes human beings and provides the motivation to discover God, value, meaning, purpose and hope. A useful analogy for understanding this aspect of the spirit is the difference between *reflexive* and *meaningful* action. *Reflexes* are actions that have no meaning or purpose beyond their immediate function. Reflexive actions are actions that are nothing more than automatic responses to electronic stimuli. They have a technical/functional meaning in the sense that biologists and anatomists can identify their source and highlight their function within the overall bodily processes, but they do not have any *personal* meaning or independent sense of purpose beyond their specific function. It is a person's *spirit* that makes the difference between *reflexive* human existence in which human actions and experiences are viewed simply as the effect of an unending stream of meaningless causes, and *meaningful* human existence in which actions and experiences are understood as containing meaning, hope, purpose, direction and possibilities beyond themselves.

Take, for example, a person who is depressed. What we find here is that a person's spirit has been inhibited, crushed or flattened by biological, social or psychological events. Often they feel as if they are simply going through the motions. Their actions and experiences appear to have no meaning beyond themselves. They are living *reflexively*, rather than *meaningfully*. Within such a situation, the task of the spiritual carer is not simply to locate the locus of *pathology*, but also to locate the locus of *meaning* within the person's life and in so doing begin to explore ways in which the person's spirit can be revitalized and the movement from reflexive existence to meaningful living can be initiated and followed through.

It would of course be possible simply to translate this process into psychological terms that exclude the spiritual dimension as a valid interpretative framework. However, the empirical evidence presented later in this book would suggest that such a process of translation may not be as easy to justify as previously assumed. Translation may be the easiest option, but it may well not be the most authentic.

The necessity for a multidisciplinary approach to care

The suggestion that human beings have spirits presents an important corrective to understandings that see them simply as a conglomerate of parts reacting blindly to an unending series of environmental stimuli. To suggest that human beings have a spirit presupposes that they are creatures who

require more than basic needs to achieve health and well-being, and that issues of meaning, hope, purpose and transcendence are not secondary to the caring task, but are in fact a fundamental part of it (Frankl 1964; Moltmann 1985). An approach that accepts the reality and significance of the human spirit is also a corrective for the fragmented forms of 'specialist' care that have become the norm within contemporary health care practices. If human beings are whole persons and if mental health problems affect every aspect of the person, then spiritual care on its own will not be enough. Nor will pharmacological or psychotherapeutic intervention be sufficient to meet the needs of the whole person. What will be required is a multidisciplinary approach that seeks through constructive dialogue between the disciplines to develop ways of caring that acknowledge and reach out to the whole person, including those more mysterious and less tangible aspects that emerge from reflection on the human spirit. One of the aims of this book is to provide a foundation from which such a multidisciplinary approach might be built.

What is Spirituality?

A particular understanding of spirituality flows directly from this understanding of the human spirit. *Spirituality is the outward expression of the inner workings of the human spirit.* It is a personal and social process that refers to the ideas, concepts, attitudes and behaviours that derive from a person's, or a community's interpretation of their experiences of the spirit.

> Spirituality...is a way of being and experiencing that comes through awareness of a transcendental dimension and that is characterized by certain identifiable values in regard to self, others, nature, life and whatever one considers to be ultimate. (Elkins *et al.* 1988)

Spirituality is an intra, inter and transpersonal experience that is shaped and directed by the experiences of individuals and of the communities within which they live out their lives. It is *intrapersonal* in that it refers to the quest for inner connectivity highlighted in the previous discussion on the spirit. It is *interpersonal* in that it relates to the relationships between people and within communities. It is *transpersonal* in so far as it reaches beyond self and others into the transcendent realms of experience that move beyond that which is available at a mundane level.

While the human *spirit* may be deeply mysterious, pointing as it does towards aspects of reality that are deep, unfathomable and transcendent,

spirituality is a human activity that attempts to express these profound experiences and inner longings in terms that are meaningful for the individual. The form and content of spirituality is therefore diverse, contextual and to greater or lesser extent defined by its prefix: Christian, Buddhist, Jewish, humanistic, agnostic and so forth. Each of these prefixes indicates specific ways in which human beings have chosen to respond to the inner experience of their spirits.

The universal and the particular

Emmanuel Lartey (1997) offers a useful model that will enable us to understand clearly what is being said here. In reflecting on how care and counselling can effectively cross cultural boundaries, Lartey develops a model of what he describes as 'intercultural care'. Rather than assuming that cultures are monolithic wholes within which all people believe the same things and act in a similar, predictable manner, Lartey highlights the critical tension between the uniqueness of individuals and the uniformity of cultural systems. In order to avoid stereotyping, negative and at times racist assumptions, Lartey, drawing on the cross-cultural thinking of David Augsberger (1986), argues that every human person is in certain respects:

Like all other people (the Universal Human Dimension)

Like some other people (the Historical, Cultural, Social and Political Dimensions)

Like no other people (the Intrapersonal Dimension)

This framework captures something of the universal and unique aspects of being human. Understood from this perspective, it is not possible to assume that simply because a person comes from a particular country or culture they will necessarily behave or believe in the same way as everyone else within that culture or country. In order to understand and to care for them appropriately, it is necessary to enter into their cultural life-worlds and look around for the meaning structures that enable them to make sense of the world.

When translated into the realm of spirituality, Lartey's model is illuminating. At one level, spirituality is a universal human experience. At this level we might safely approach everyone whom we encounter with the expectation that the spiritual dimension will be present either implicitly or explicitly.

At a second level, spirituality manifests itself in different ways according to culture, context, experience, cognitive set, personality factors and so forth. Spirituality is inevitably expressed through the particular concepts of context, culture and personality, as well as via the particular spiritual assumptions and religious traditions that exist within different cultures. A person will therefore express their spirituality in ways that may be similar to those of certain others. This is particularly so with regard to formal religious systems.

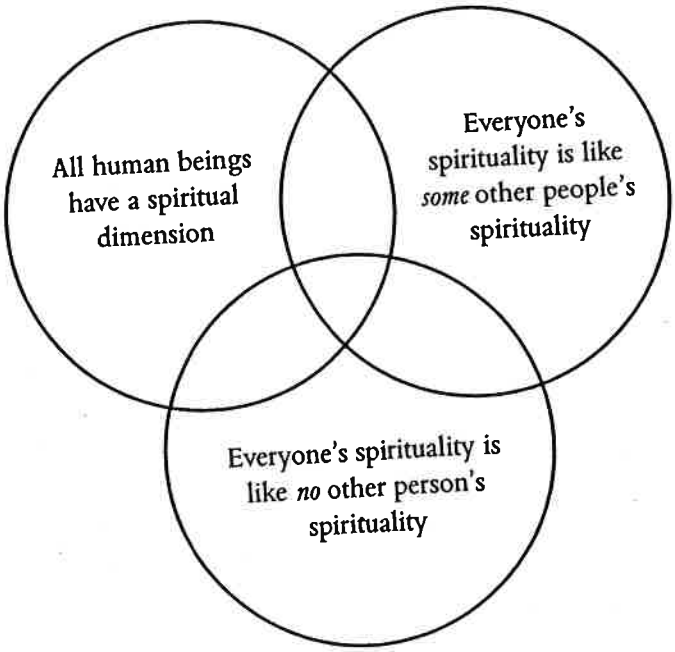

Figure 1.1. The universal and the particular dimensions of spirituality (adapted with permission from Lartey 1997)

At a third level, spirituality is a unique and deeply personal thing that people express in their own specific ways. Even people who appear to share the same religious tradition may well express it very differently and have a diversity of beliefs. The knowledge that a person is Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist or whatever is not particularly helpful, apart from providing a general field of reference in itself. It is only when we are enabled to enter into the person's life experiences that the meaning of their faith commitment becomes clear. In order to discern the meaning of a person's spirituality for their lives and their illness experiences, it is necessary to hold

in tension all three dimensions of human spirituality: the *universal*, the *cultural* and the *intrapersonal*. Figure 1.1 illustrates what is being said here.

Spirituality as a common human experience

For current purposes, spirituality can be categorized into two types: non-religious and religious. Both forms of spirituality have implications for mental health care. Although traditionally spirituality has been understood primarily in religious terms, as has been suggested, a good deal of the literature looking at the relationship between spirituality and health works with a wider understanding of spirituality which may include, but is not defined by, institutional religion. While human spirituality is institutionalized and ritualized within particular religious traditions, it is not defined as a specifically religious concept. Formal, organized religion is viewed as one of a number of vehicles for the expression of human spirituality. This broader understanding views spirituality as a common human experience that forms an integral part of every person's striving to make sense of the world and their life within it. Such understanding incorporates humanistic, existential and philosophical perspectives as well as religious ones. Larson, Swyers and McCullough (1997, p. 21) define the criterion for such a wider understanding of spirituality thus:

> (A) The feelings, thoughts, experiences, and behaviours that arise from a search for the sacred. The term 'search' refers to attempts to identify, articulate, maintain, or transform. The term 'sacred' refers to a divine being or Ultimate Reality or Ultimate Truth as perceived by the individual...
>
> (B) A search for non-sacred goals (such as identity, belongingness, meaning, health, or wellness) in a context that has as its primary goal the facilitation of (A)...
>
> (C) The means and methods (e.g. rituals or prescribed behaviours) of the search that receive validation and support from within an identifiable group of people.

Like religion, spirituality strives to answer deep existential questions pertaining to the meaning of life, suffering, illness and so forth, as well as recognizing the need for human interconnectivity and the desire to transcend the self in meaningful ways. However, unlike religion, this wider understanding of spirituality does not necessarily find its primary focus in any kind of transcendent being or force. Nor does it require affiliation with a specific community. 'God' is conceptualized as whatever a person takes to be

their highest value in life. 'The key element in this broader definition is that whatever the "god" may be, it provides a force which activates the individual or is an essential principle influencing him/her' (Oldnall 1996, p.139). Meaning is assumed to be found in a person's relationship with their god, with others and with their inner selves (Dyson, Cobb and Foreman 1997). Oldnall (1996) points out that within this wider model of spirituality:

> [t]he concept of god does not constitute a transcendent being or a set of religious beliefs. Instead, the person has consciously or unconsciously chosen a set of values which become the supreme focus of life, and/or around which life is organized... From this perspective it may be argued that the perceived values embraced by the individual have the ability to motivate the individual's life style towards fulfillment of their individual needs, goals and aspirations. Leading to the ultimate achievement of self-actualization. (Oldnall 1996, p.139)

This expanded understanding of spirituality manifests itself in various forms and includes perspectives drawn *inter alia* from religious, humanistic, atheistic and agnostic conceptions of spirituality. Table 1.1 draws together some of the central features of this expanded definition of spirituality. Here, spiritual care pertains to identifying and working with that which gives the person their source of meaning, value and a sense of inner and outward connectedness. Some of these spiritual needs are outlined in Table 1.2. In order to fulfil such needs, carers need to learn skills that will enable them to identify spiritual needs without reducing them to *nothing but* psychological phenomena. This will mean learning skills of spiritual exploration that will allow both carer and cared for to enter into the spiritual experience and feel comfortable sitting in those realms that are not part of our normal therapeutic world.

Table 1.1. The central features of spirituality	
Meaning	the ontological significance of life; making sense of life situations; deriving purpose in existence.
Value	beliefs and standards that are cherished; having to do with the truth, beauty, worth of a thought, object or behaviour; often discussed as 'ultimate values'.
Transcendence	experience and appreciation of a dimension beyond the self; expanding self-boundaries.
Connecting	relationships with self, others, God/higher power, and the environment.
Becoming	an unfolding of life that demands reflection and experience; includes a sense of who one is and how one knows.

Data extrapolated from Martsolf and Mickley 1998.

Why call this spirituality?

It could of course be argued that the 'spiritual needs' identified above can be explained equally as well in psychological terms without having to draw upon the rather ethereal and 'unscientific' idea of spirituality. However, on deeper reflection it becomes clear that such words as 'hope', 'faith' and 'purpose', and ideas such as 'the search for meaning' and 'the need for forgiveness', are not adequately captured in language that assumes they are *nothing* but thought processes or survival needs. Although it may not fit neatly into the current scientific paradigm, as one encounters such language, one experiences a deep, intuitive sense of affirmation that these desires refer to dimensions that include, yet at the same time transcend psychological explanation. Of course the idea of intuition and intuitive knowledge is not popular in an atmosphere that thrives on evidence-based practice, with evidence tending to be understood in narrow, positivistic terms. However, intuition and feeling form a significant aspect of the ways in which human beings make sense of large parts of their experiences. This book will argue that this dimension of human experience should be taken seriously.

Table 1.2. Non-religious spiritual needs

Values/structures of meaning
Hope
Faith
Search for meaning/purpose to life
Dealing with guilt and initiating forgiveness
Relationships
Therapeutic presence
The possibility of intimacy
Transcendence
The need to explore dimensions beyond the Self
The possibility of reaching God without the use of formal religious structures
Affective feeling
Reassurance
Comfort
Peace
Happiness
Communication
Talking and telling stories
Listening and being listened to

Adapted from Swinton 1999a and Emblen and Halstead 1993.

A second reason why we should be wary of translating spiritual experiences into the language of psychology, or any other discipline, relates to issues of *reductionism.* Simply to baptize experiences such as those mentioned above into the psychological worldview is to engage in a form of reductionism that reflects a Western milieu that has come to assume that everything can be explained in either material or psychological terms. Psychology, science and medicine have become very powerful interpretative frameworks within which we assume that all knowledge can be captured and understood. The language of these disciplines is so ingrained in our cultural worldview that it is difficult to imagine a world that could not be explained in such terms. Consequently, when we encounter something that is different (such as the suggestion that there may be a spiritual dimension to human beings), and which in some senses falls out with this interpretative perspective, the temptation is simply to draw it within the accepted plausibility structures

(Newbigin 1989) and to explain it using the categories that we are most familiar with. It is true that it is easier to avoid spiritual language and engage with these needs at a level and within a structure with which we are comfortable. However, before we do so, we must ask ourselves *why* we would want to do that. The questioning of the reality of the spiritual dimension is a relatively new innovation for Western cultures, and is in fact, as we have seen, unrepresentative of the views of a good deal of the population. This being so, the psychologizing of spiritual experience may simply be a product of the limitations of our cultural worldview and the ways in which we have constructed society's understanding of what are considered legitimate forms of knowledge in general, and the knowledge used to underpin mental health care in particular.

Spirituality as a Religious Concept

The expanded understanding of spirituality is a growing strand within the literature on spirituality and mental health. However, a high percentage of the research literature refers to spirituality that manifests itself in religious forms. Despite the decline of interest in institutionalized religion within the Western world, on a worldwide scale, as Table 1.3 indicates, religion remains a highly significant aspect in the lives of billions of people.

Table 1.3. The major world religions
Christianity: 2 billion
Islam: 1.2 billion
Hinduism: 900 million
Secular/Non-religious/Agnostic/Atheist: 900 million
Buddhism: 350 million
Chinese Traditional Religion: 225 million
Sikhism: 19 million
Judaism: 15 million

Data extrapolated from Adherents.com.