Chapter One

Distinguishing Religion and Spirituality: Findings from Kendal

> You call us to leave our self behind . . . Son of God . . . grow in us, so that Your ways may become ours. (Intercessions, Anglican Parish Church, Kendal)
>
> Religion asks you to learn from the experience of others. Spirituality urges you to seek your own. (From an interview with a Kendal Unitarian Christian who is also involved in holistic activities)
>
> The aim is to build on people's own resources, spiritual resources. I never give my own ideas, but see what comes from the client. (Meg McCalden, hypnotherapy and relaxation therapy, CancerCare, Kendal)

According to the spiritual revolution claim, subjective-life spirituality is growing and life-as religion declining – to the extent that the former may be eclipsing the latter. An effective way of testing this is by comparing two distinctive associational territories, one having to do chiefly with subjective-life spirituality, the other chiefly with life-as religion. We now show that we found such distinctive but comparable associational territories on the ground in Kendal. And in the process of doing this, we put empirical flesh on the stark analytical bones of our language of subjective-life and life-as, thereby clarifying what we mean by 'the spiritual revolution'.

The Kendal Project began life with a feasibility study. Attention was paid to the designated places of worship in the town, where we hoped to find life-as religion, and to what is loosely referred to as 'alternative' or 'New Age' activities, where we hoped to find subjective-life spirituality. In particular, we wanted to know whether there were enough alternative activities taking place to justify taking things further. Having established that this was the case, the Project got underway. However, we were taking something of a gamble. We might have had a fair hunch, but we were far from certain that

the congregational domain (as we came to call it) was predominantly of a life-as nature, or that the holistic milieu (as we came to call it) was chiefly focused on the cultivation of subjective-life.

We now enter into the heartlands of religion and spirituality in Kendal to show that conformity to life-as *is* in fact the dominant emphasis in the congregational domain – and, conversely, that the resourcing of unique subjective-lives *is* in fact the primary focus of the holistic milieu. We find, in other words, that the congregational domain basically has to do with people being guided by higher authority to find fulfilment in a common good, whilst the sacred of the holistic milieu basically serves to help people live out their own interior lives in their own unique ways. Accordingly, the comparison of the two associational territories undertaken in the next chapter will constitute a fair test of the spiritual revolution claim. (It would be misleading to test the spiritual revolution claim by way of this comparison were it to be the case, for example, that the congregational domain contains a considerable amount of subjective-life spirituality.)

Life in the Congregational Domain: The 'Religion' of the Spiritual Revolution Claim

When we began our research in Kendal in the year 2000 there were 25 congregations. All are rooted in the Christian tradition. (For a full list see Appendix 2.) Since all have as their main activity a weekly public congregational service that includes theistic worship, is nearly always held on a Sunday, and generally takes place in a designated building, we had little difficulty in identifying and locating them. Initial access to their corporate life proved relatively unproblematic, and further access for research purposes was kindly granted by all the congregations in Kendal.

Unity-in-variety in the congregational domain

As we pushed open the doors of the churches, chapels and meeting houses on consecutive Sunday mornings, we became aware of a similarity that overrode all other differences. To step into a worship service is to find one's attention being directed away from oneself towards something

higher. By contrast, as will become clear in the second section of this chapter, to enter into the holistic milieu is to find attention directed towards oneself and one's inner life.

Thus we found all the congregations of Kendal to be united by the conviction that truth and goodness lie not in the cultivation of unique individuality so much as in curbing such individuality by way of conformity to a higher, common, authoritative good. This good may be envisioned and expressed in different ways: in rules, in ideals, in art and music, in visions of a family-based society, in concepts of God. But it is always transcendent: it is higher than those who subserve it and, as such, it binds them into something more than they would be on their own, for the whole is considered to be greater than the sum of its parts. Authority in the congregational domain lies outside rather than within, and with 'the same' rather than 'the unique'. As a consequence, life-as roles are privileged over subjective-life uniquenesses, and 'what I should be' over 'what I am'. Yet it is important to emphasize at the very outset that this does *not* mean that we found subjective-life to be wholly neglected within the congregational domain. Rather, as we shall see, we found that instead of being 'authorized' (treated as the primary authority in life) it is often 'normativized' (channelled into conformity with supra-individual norms).

The common good, the higher authority, the focus of united hope and striving in the congregational domain, is represented in somewhat different terms in different congregations. In some it takes the form of an encompassing social vision: of a united and harmonious society in which even strangers become neighbours. In others it is more closely tied to the congregation itself, to its growth in faithfulness and its success in evangelism. It can vary in scope, and it can vary in degree of other-worldliness. But in every case, we found that belonging to a congregation had more to do with being caught up into a vision of the higher good than in going inwards to discover truth and goodness by trusting and exploring one's own feelings, intuitions and experiences. Thus 83.5 per cent of respondents to our questionnaire survey of a cross-section of congregations indicated that the statement 'the important thing is to do your duty' came closer to their belief than the statement 'the important thing is to fulfil yourself' (15 per cent). (Appendix 1 provides further information about the questionnaire.) This was consonant with the way in which many congregations placed strong emphasis upon the importance of self-sacrifice, and the way

in which liturgy and hymns were saturated with the language of obedience, surrender and self-giving.

The same dynamics explain the pervasive stress on deference that we found to be characteristic of congregational life. Whilst different congregations differed slightly in the degree of deference they showed their priest or minister, nearly all were characterized by a hierarchical form of organization in which the most important decisions and activities were the responsibility of a small number of authorized personnel, who were nearly always male. Such deference was but a reflection of the much greater deference that was expected to be shown to 'Almighty God'. In all but a couple of congregations God was approached by way of male pronouns and imagery, particularly fatherhood, and was portrayed as a personal being of unlimited power who created and controls all things. His will is made known in the external, mediating authorities of text, tradition and community, and is to be willingly obeyed. The underlying belief is that God – and the Bible or the church – knows what is best for us better than we know ourselves, and better than our subjectivities might tell us. As one evangelical put it, 'We're told in scripture not to go on about how we feel'; and as a member of the Roman Catholic congregation put it (having just criticized the idea that one should only go to church on a Sunday if one *feels* like it): 'Why does the church give us an obligation to go to mass? Because if left to ourselves we won't because our basic human nature, our fallen nature, is pulling us away from God'.

We found that for many in the congregational domain it was Jesus Christ who functioned as the immediate focus of devotion, reverence and deference, and as the inspiring model of perfect obedience and self-sacrifice. He was interpreted not as an example of self-realization to be imitated by 'going one's own way', but as an example of deference who must be deferred to – by 'following in his footsteps', 'obeying the Lord', 'becoming a disciple', and 'giving my life to Christ', to pick a variety of expressions we heard many times in interviews and worship services. As one evangelical Christian put it: 'All I want to do is to obey the Lord. I want to stand there on that [judgement] day and hear him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant"'.

The congregational life of Kendal is also characterized throughout by a strong ethical and metaphysical dualism – a stress on the *difference* between Creator and created, the supernatural and the natural, the overarching moral order of things and the everyday (dis)order of things, my 'life I

should be living' and my actual subjective-life, the spirit and the body. Not that the body is explicitly repudiated, nor that its appetites are disciplined by way of systematic asceticism. Rather, they are handled by being channelled into acceptable forms of expression rather than being allowed to 'do their own thing'. Thus sexual activity, for example, is viewed as acceptable only when expressed in the context of faithful, loving, heterosexual marriage and family and for the sake of a higher good (love, children etc.), not for the sake of pleasurable sensation itself. That which is revealingly referred to as 'disordered' sexuality is often presented in congregational teaching as a key symptom of a disordered out-of-control society. We found the general view of such matters to be well summed up in one sermon in which the minister told the congregation that 'wholeness' (of body, mind and spirit) should be of less significance to Christians than 'holiness'.

The last example points to a final essential element in the logic of sacralized life-as in Kendal: a strong moralism. Not only is there widespread belief in overarching moral authority, there is also general acceptance that the authorities of church and chapel are there to instruct people in how to live their lives. We found the idea that there are standards, norms, ideals and expectations to which subjective-life must be conformed to be pervasive. Moral judgement and the language of 'should' and 'ought' are a central part of the currency of the congregational domain, and many interviewees spoke about how they appreciated the clear moral guidance offered by their church or chapel. It had helped them move from chaos to orderly living, from meaninglessness to meaningfulness, and from fearfulness to security. Such moralism is deeply embedded institutionally: in the very practice of preaching, the very medium of the sermon, the very office of the priest or pastor. Individuals are told what to do by higher authority, rather than being encouraged to look to their own inner resources to decide for themselves. Moral guidance is often offered in clear and concrete terms. As an OHP slide at an evangelical church, which draws on New Testament teaching to lay down the ideal characteristics of a church elder, puts it:

> A person is disqualified if he is self-indulgent or self-seeking. His qualifications are that he should be an integrated/controlled personality, and that he shows concern for moral standards. At home he should always have only one wife, his home should be hospitable and his children disciplined. At work, he

> should be organized and focused. In the world, he should have a good reputation.

The effect of such moral preaching is to discipline subjectivities by selectively nurturing some sentiments and dispositions whilst rendering others invisible. Since anger, hatred, sexual desire and ambition (for example) find little space for expression in the congregational domain, they either have to be renounced or expressed under the cover of more acceptable sentiments. Thus it is much more common to hear members of congregations say, 'I was saddened to learn' than 'I was furious', or 'It was a humbling experience' than 'I felt proud'. It is rare to hear people speak openly in this setting about the full range of their emotions. Generally speaking, that which one should be tends to be given more prominence in the congregational domain than that which one is.

Variety-in-unity in the congregational domain

As well as this commonality, we also found variety in the congregational domain. Though we found emphasis on life-as roles to be predominant throughout, we found that this emphasis varied, and that subjectivities were handled in different ways in different types of congregation. We discovered that congregations fell into one of four main types in this regard. Making use of the typology first developed in Woodhead and Heelas (2000), we classified these as 'congregations of difference', 'congregations of humanity', 'congregations of experiential difference', and 'congregations of experiential humanity'. Congregations of difference are those which stress the distance between God and humanity, creator and creation, and the necessary subordination of the latter to the former. Congregations of humanity narrow this distance by singling out 'humanity' as something that God and human beings have in common; they tend to emphasize the importance of worshipping God by serving humanity. Both types can also take more experiential forms, placing more emphasis on the authority of subjective experience in the religious life. Thus congregations of experiential difference continue to stress the gap between the divine and the human, but believe that God can enter directly into subjective experience as the Holy Spirit. And congregations of experiential humanity, whose humanitarian stress has already diminished the gap between the divine and

the human, close it still further by teaching that the divine is more likely to be found in inner experience than in the externals of religion like scripture and sacraments. (For details on which congregations in Kendal belong to which type, see Appendix 2.)

For congregations of humanity (chiefly churches of mainline-liberal denominations, both Catholic and Protestant), the authoritative common good and 'higher authority' is God-in-humanity and humanity-in-God. These churches emphasize ethics over dogma, love over the law, this world over the next, and unity over division. Since what matters, above all, is benevolence towards fellow human beings, these congregations are relatively 'liberal', offering a degree of freedom and tolerance with regard to other matters of belief and practice. The effect of their strongly moralistic emphasis on caring for others, and putting God and neighbour before self is, however, to render these the *least* subjectivized of all the congregational types. Instead of focusing on individual experiences, needs, desires, moods, bodily and emotional sensations, they direct their members' attention not inwards to themselves, but outwards towards God and fellow humans in need of care.

Within congregations of humanity the acceptable self is one that does not dwell on its own subjectivities, but expresses appropriate moral sentiments such as 'care', 'love', 'compassion' and 'gentleness'. 'God first, neighbour second, self last,' as one interviewee explained. So powerful is this message that individuals are likely to experience guilt if they pay too much attention to their own subjective-lives. We found it telling that many people within these congregations were uncomfortable talking about anything too personal – anything to do with their inner lives, including matters of faith. As one Anglican gentleman put it: 'it's something one doesn't talk a lot about . . . we are much better at the weather . . . such a deep and private thing . . . to leap straight into that is very difficult'. Through repetition of set liturgies, responses, hymns, and ritual actions, and by the shaping of personal time in conformity with the church's calendar, congregations of humanity conform subjectivities to common life and Christ's life. Attention falls so definitively on the higher authority of the common good that the unique remains always in the shadows of 'service' – both the worship service and service to others.

By contrast, congregations of difference and, to an even greater extent, congregations of experiential difference, give more explicit attention to individual selves and their feelings, fears, desires and hopes. (In Kendal congregations of difference are largely evangelical, whilst congregations of

experiential difference are charismatic-evangelical.) Though both types of congregation are united by the stress they place on the absolute difference between God and the world, they promise that those who submit to God will be rewarded by nothing less than reconstructed inner lives – 'born again' to 'new life'. The 'trick' which such congregations play is to offer subjective enhancement and cultivation in terms that can make sense to a subjectivized culture, but to insist that this comes not through reliance on one's inner resources but through submission to the higher authority of God, Christ, the Bible and congregational instruction. As one charismatic minister in Kendal put it, quoting Bob Dylan, 'You gotta serve somebody'.

Both congregations of difference and experiential difference make a powerful appeal to people who feel their lives are not working by offering to heal their brokenness and restore joy, contentment, calm, hope and security in the Lord. They teach that each and every one of us is uniquely loved by God and called to make a free, personal decision to give our life to him, that the means of salvation is placed in our own hands in the form of the Bible, and that fulfilment will be found in surrender to Jesus and ongoing, affective, relationship with him. Many such congregations pay serious attention to life problems and to the healing of minds and even bodies, and they devote considerable energy to affecting and enhancing memories, moods and feelings (for example, by extensive singing of emotive choruses). The promise is that lives that are offered up to God will be healed, enhanced, reordered and redeemed. Congregations of humanity offer to make individuals into (morally) better people; congregations of difference and experiential difference also offer to make people *feel* better.

Yet although we found individual subjective-lives to be attended to, catered for, nurtured and developed in such congregations, we did not find them to be fully authorized. Individuals are not encouraged to pursue their own spiritual paths on the basis of their own deepest experiences, but are guided by way of clearly defined, extensively articulated and tightly regulated roles and duties. Thus the climax of evangelical life is the point at which the individual surrenders his or her uniqueness and autonomy to God – the point of conversion. This becomes very clear in the 'testimony' narrative that we found to play such an important part in evangelical life in Kendal. Although testimonies as to how one was 'saved' begin with detailed attention to unique subjectivities including sexual urges, anger, drug-fuelled states of mind and so on, their climax is the point at which these 'negativities' are given over to God and destroyed in the fires of his cleansing. The language used to describe this process is that of unique life

being 'broken', 'poured out', 'surrendered', 'sacrificed' and 'given over to God', as the full array of personal subjectivities is sacrificed in favour of a far smaller authorized repertoire that conforms to the laid-down lineaments of the faithful disciple. Thus the new life that begins for the born-again Christian is highly normativized: life lived according to models, rules and expectations that are detailed and often rigorously enforced by way of a 'discipling' that quickly shades into 'disciplining'.

Though these general remarks apply both to congregations of experiential difference and to congregations of difference, we also found a significant distinction between them. In the latter, authority – God and scripture – lie outside one, and the good life is the life that is lived in strict conformity to this authority. In the more charismatic congregations, however, we found some disdain for such an 'externalized' and 'rigid' understanding of Christian discipleship. As a congregational leader in Kendal put it when he explained why he left an evangelical congregation to found a charismatic one, 'For us evangelism became a living thing, an experience, people were sharing reality rather than concepts', and as another charismatic explained, 'You know, when God speaks to us, he speaks, like, into our hearts'. In congregations of experiential difference, in other words, as well as remaining external and over-against the believer, God 'comes within'. The 'Word' must be not merely followed but internalized – 'eaten' and 'swallowed'. It must go all the way down. In such congregations the real point of conversion is understood to be the point at which God, as Holy Spirit, enters directly into an individual's experience. Far from overruling unique subjective-life, the Holy Spirit becomes the inner core of subjective-life, guiding and directing it from within. The believer's life is 'possessed' by the Spirit, so that 'it is no longer I who live but [the Spirit of] Christ who lives within me' (Galatians 2:20).

Because of this inspiration from within, the worship in congregations of experiential difference is characteristically emotive and expressive, and much less externally regulated than in other types of congregation. There is little by way of set liturgy, and hierarchies of leadership are more fluid and informal. Nevertheless, there are still clear limits on what can be said, done, felt, and expressed. Subjective-life is authorized only insofar as it conforms to external expectations and guidelines – above all, biblical teaching. Individuals are encouraged not in self-expression but in Spirit-expression, and the limits of what counts as spiritual inspiration are clearly laid down. We found that only a relatively narrow range of emotions and dispositions were able to be expressed in collective worship (even in small

group contexts), above all gratitude, joy, love and celebration. The purpose must always be the glorification of God, not self. As a member of a charismatic service in Kendal declared in the middle of a service: 'The Lord wants you to fix your eyes on him. Take them off yourself. Irrespective, take them off yourself, and fix your eyes on him. He'll sort out what's going on and what needs sorting out.'' ' And as the service leader replied in response,

> Yeah, we must keep our eyes fixed on him, on the one and only, Jesus, the Lord God. He is the only one who can lift us out of our own selves, our own introspectiveness, so to speak. . . .Let's just start again to look at Jesus as the one who has all the answers, all the answers. He's got all authority.

Of all the congregations in Kendal, we found that it was the congregations of experiential humanity (including the Unitarian chapel and Society of Friends) that went *furthest* in authorizing subjective-life. Rather than preaching a higher truth which believers were expected to hear, follow and obey, such congregations actively encouraged individuals to forge their own unique life paths and spiritual paths in their own unique ways. 'Sermons' took the form of a personal reflection on 'what I have found to be helpful', with the preacher sometimes suggesting that those who were listening might disagree. In worship services as well as small groups, the assumption was not that authorized teachers should be instructing the rest, but that each individual had the ability and responsibility to develop a personally meaningful spiritual path. As the Unitarian minister said proudly of his congregation, they are 'people of all strands, searching for truth . . . all on their own path'. And as a member of the same congregation who was experimenting with different types of spirituality told us, what was helpful in the spiritual life was to follow 'whatever seems heart-centred to you'. In keeping with this emphasis, we found that these were the congregations which went furthest in presenting and picturing God not in terms of an external authority set over against the individual, but as the deepest, 'spiritual' dimension of all life and all human lives. Instead of there being an external check on what counts as spiritual, it is only within the depths of personal experience that the Spirit can be encountered – indeed the Spirit *is* these depths, depths in which individual life is found to connect with all other life.

Despite strong tendencies in the direction of subjective-life spirituality, however, we also found some countervailing tendencies in congregations

of experiential humanity. For one thing, we found that older members of these congregations tended to be more comfortable with more structured and patterned ways of proceeding, and that moves towards a deeper emphasis on subjective-life were often being made by younger people outside the context of the main worship service (e.g. by setting up small spiritual groups). In addition, we found that these congregations share with congregations of humanity a strong stress on the overriding duty of humanitarian care. Instead of merely encouraging individuals to discover the sacred in their own way, whatever that might be, these congregations often identify the sacred task with the duty of care for fellow human beings and the whole planet (justice, peace and ecology). As a consequence, the encouragement to probe one's own spiritual depths may be checked or even contradicted by appeal to the higher good of a loving community.

Overall then, we found the congregational domain of Kendal to be a realm in which life-as roles take precedence. Rather then being encouraged to 'become themselves', those who participate in this domain are exhorted to conform their lives to higher authority. They are 'hearers', 'followers', 'disciples', 'servants', 'children' and 'sheep'. Salvation comes by hearing and heeding the voice of 'the shepherd', 'the Lord', 'Our Father', rather than by relying on one's own inner voice. The truth is 'out there' rather than within; the divine is transcendent rather than immanent. This is not to say that subjective-life is ignored or neglected in the congregational domain of Kendal, merely that it is expected to be conformed to acceptable norms rather than being regarded as a source of authority in its own right. Nevertheless, we found some interesting variations between different types of congregations in the characteristic ways in which they handle subjective-life and bring it in touch with the sacred. To sum up:

1 Congregations of humanity expect subjective-lives to be wholly dedicated to the service of God and fellow human beings. God is to be found outside oneself, in one's neighbour in need, rather than inside oneself in the depths of one's own experience. Since the imperative of self-sacrifice overrides any impetus towards self-cultivation, these congregations tend to offer *least* in terms of the cultivation and enhancement of unique subjective-life.
2 Congregations of difference render God wholly external to human beings and teach that he is known only through Jesus Christ and the

Word of scripture. Individual lives come into saving contact with the sacred only by obeying these higher authorities. Such congregations make an explicit offer of subjective reconstruction and satisfaction, but insist that this comes about not by heeding one's unique subjectivities but by putting them under the control of higher authority.

3 As their name suggests, both congregations of experiential difference and experiential humanity are the most willing to accept that God is not only external, but can also enter into individuals' unique experience. As such, they travel furthest in the direction of a subjective-life spirituality. However, congregations of experiential difference qualify this by insisting that subjective experience of God or the Holy Spirit must always be checked against the higher authority of the word of scripture. And congregations of experiential humanity step back from the full authorization of subjectively guided spirituality by steering subjective-life in a humanitarian direction.

Since none of these variations qualifies our overall observation that the congregational domain is predominantly a realm of life-as religion and life-as spirituality rather than subjective-life spirituality, they do not affect our test of the spiritual revolution claim in the following chapter. Their significance will become apparent later in the volume when we broaden our horizons to consider whether some of the more highly experiential forms of congregation found elsewhere may be developing in such a way that they have tipped over, or will at some point tip over, into the category of subjective-life spirituality, and so add momentum to a spiritual revolution. In addition, we also look at another possibility – that more subjectivized forms of life-as religion and life-as spirituality are doing relatively well, serving to slow down the decline of the congregational domain as a whole and thereby slowing down the momentum which favours the spiritual revolution claim.

Life in the Holistic Milieu: The 'Spirituality' of the Spiritual Revolution Claim

Having arrived at this 'life-as' conclusion concerning the congregational domain, we now pave the way for testing the spiritual revolution claim by showing that the activities of the holistic milieu are predominantly orientated around the cultivation of subjective-life.

Nuts and bolts

Two main forms of associational activity are found in the holistic milieu of Kendal and environs (the area within a five-mile radius of the town):[1] groups and one-to-one practices. During the autumn of 2001, there were approaching one hundred practitioners catering for the members of these groups and the clients of these one-to-one practices, all providing what they understand to be spiritually significant activities. Although the number of groups is the same as the number of one-to-one provisions, groups are more popular: around two thirds of those active in the milieu belong to them. Regarding the activities themselves, they range from aromatherapy to Buddhism, circle dancing to the Alexander Technique, naturopathy to reiki. The most popular is yoga, followed by various versions of massage, aromatherapy, homeopathy, reflexology, the Alexander Technique, tai chi, osteopathy, reiki and flower essences therapy. Activities take place in a variety of settings, including people's homes, the Town Hall and the Quaker Meeting House. Many take place at four main specialized centres, the Fellside Centre (an Alexander Technique training school), the Lakeland College of Homeopathy, Loop Cottage (largely groups and workshops) and Rainbow Cottage (largely one-to-one activities). In addition, holistic activities are catered for by relatively self-contained enclaves within institutional settings (settings which provide a wider range of provisions for the public): Kendal College (with its Holistic Therapy Diploma and various evening classes), Kendal Cancer Care (with its complementary health practices) and Kendal Leisure Centre (with its six yoga and tai chi groups). Finally, our introductory portrayal of the milieu would be incomplete without mention of one-off events – the gatherings, fairs, festivals, workshops and talks that take place as occasion demands. (Appendix 3 provides a list of holistic milieu activities in Kendal and environs taking place on a weekly basis during the autumn of 2001; Chapter Two provides an account of how we arrived at the list.)

As we enter into the holistic milieu, we turn to the nub of the matter. What evidence is there that subjective-life spirituality and the nurturing of unique subjectivities is characteristic of this territory, rather than life-as religion and life-as spirituality?

Statistics

Let us set the scene with some statistics from the questionnaire we distributed within the holistic milieu. (See Appendix 1 for more information regarding the questionnaire.) In answer to the question 'Do you believe in any of the following?' the greatest number of respondents (82.4 per cent) agree that 'some sort of spirit or life force pervades all that lives', with 73 per cent expressing belief in 'subtle energy (or energy channels) in the body'. Presented with a range of options and asked to select the statement which best describes their 'core beliefs about spirituality', 40 per cent of respondents equate spirituality with 'love' or being 'a caring and decent person', 34 per cent with 'being in touch with subtle energies', 'healing oneself and others' or 'living life to the full'. Spirituality, it appears, belongs to life-itself ('subtle energy in the body' which serves to keep us alive) and subjective-life ('love', 'caring'). It seems that spirit/energy/spirituality is understood to dwell within the lives of participants, an interpretation that is supported by the finding that very few associate spirituality with a transcendental, over-and-above-the-self, external source of significance. Just 7 per cent of respondents agreed that spirituality is 'obeying God's will'. It appears, then, that rather than spirituality serving to dictate the course and nature of life from beyond the self, it is experienced as being integral to life: 'pervading' or flowing through life, bringing life alive. (By contrast, the congregational domain questionnaire shows that almost 60 per cent believe that 'spirituality is obeying God's will', with almost 70 per cent agreeing with the statement that 'I obey God's commands'.)

Holistic activities

From the statistical evidence, then, it appears that the cultivation of unique subjectivities may indeed be central to the holistic milieu. But statistics only take us so far, especially in a setting where what matters has much more to do with activity-cum-experience than belief systems. So let us turn to our more in-depth research on whether the spiritually informed activities of the milieu serve to cultivate unique subjectivities.[2]

On entering the milieu, one is immediately struck by the pervasive use of 'holistic' language: 'harmony', 'balance', 'flow', 'integration', 'interaction', 'being at one', and 'being centred'. The great refrain, we might say, is 'only connect'. To provide three examples from the many which could be drawn upon from our interviews, yoga practitioner Gill Green says that 'what I'm aiming for really is a union between body, mind and spirit; to make people feel more integrated', kinesiologist Jan Ford Batey talks of 'dealing with emotional, mental, physical and spiritual aspects of the whole being', and astrologer Helen Williams told us that 'If you've got a sense of all the bits of you and how they can be integrated together, you can actually move through and grow'.

Above all, the activities of the milieu provide the opportunity for participants to 'grow': to move beyond those 'barriers', 'blocks', 'patterns' or 'habits' associated with 'dis-ease' by making new connections. So whether dis-ease has to do with the bad habits of the body (manifested as back aches, for example), emotional blockages or dysfunction (involving stress or anger, for example), or problems in relationships at home or at work (such as an inability to assert one's needs or a sense of low self-esteem), the important thing is to move on or 'grow' by linking up more holistically with other aspects of life – in particular with the spiritual dimension.

Reiki practitioner Fay Bailey makes the general point, 'You cannot heal one bit without the other'. And for the practitioners of the holistic milieu, the 'other' which is of greatest significance is the spiritual aspect of life. For whatever progress might be made by addressing bodily complaints (for example) by linking them up with and exploring underlying emotional factors (for example), the ultimate goal is to facilitate contact with the aspect of life which best serves the dynamics of the whole. For the spirit is that in which all things come together, and in which each life reconnects with its deepest dimension. To illustrate, yoga practitioner Celia Hunter-Wetenhall affirms the importance of 'weaving in the spiritual element, the relationship between the mind and the body and the spirit'. And Julie Wise describes her Infinite Tai Chi group as providing a 'very integrative approach' that serves 'to aid spiritual awakening and growth'. Participants, she says, are provided with the opportunity to 'undo those patterns and habits' which keep them locked into impoverished modes of being. They are enabled to get in touch with their 'true nature' – the 'energy' which, once experienced, serves to suffuse their life: 'The more you get in touch with your true nature, the more peace and love you have,' she says. Or as one-to-one aromatherapist practitioner Linda McGarvey puts it, 'because

we are part of the spiritual path, the journey is towards wholeness'. What matters is 'helping people to connect with who they are and the potential of who they are', thereby 'helping each person, whatever they are, in their own personal healing process'.

Typically, then, activities enable participants to go deeper to bring spirituality (or functional equivalents such as 'energy', 'chi', 'qi', 'prana', or 'true nature') to bear on the particularities of their experiences (low self-esteem, aches and pains, stress, and so on). Holistic milieu activities facilitate the convergence of the spiritual path and the *personal* path. What lies within is often envisaged as being person-specific. Fay Bailey, for instance, spoke of that which lies 'within us and makes us a person', and Linda McGarvey of the importance she attaches to the 'deep inner self and deep inner knowing'. Numerous group facilitators and one-to-one practitioners spoke of enabling people to get in touch with and explore the 'true' self; of 'dealing with issues of all the content in life from that aspect, the core of the person, the essence of the person' as Jan Ford Batey put it; of releasing people's own spiritual resources, as others said.

Flowing from one's 'true nature', the 'inner-directed solutions' provided by the spiritual aspect of one's being serve to cultivate one's personal life accordingly. Personal life thus remains as unique or distinctive as the spirituality or 'deep inner self' which suffuses it. Participants are enabled 'to live their own truth', 'heal themselves' or, as we might say, are provided with the opportunity to *be-come* themselves. 'Live in harmony with your life', as a flyer for Raja yoga meditation puts it – 'bringing out yourself', as we might put it.

Relationships

Additional evidence that the spiritually informed activities of the holistic milieu are serving to nurture unique subjectivities is provided by the nature of the relationship between practitioners and participants. Time and time again, we hear practitioners rejecting the idea that their relationships with their group members or clients have anything to do with pre-packaged, or what we are calling in this volume 'life-as', ways of transmitting the sacred. Statements like that of homeopath Beth Tyers, 'I certainly don't have a fixed faith or dogma I adhere to' were typical. So were words to the effect of shiatsu practitioner Jenny Warne's affirmation, 'We don't want to be something that we impose on somebody else'. Jaquetta Gomes, of the

Theravada Buddhist group, explained that 'People don't want a package, they want to think for themselves'.

Far from telling their group members or clients what to think, do, believe or feel, in the manner of life-as religion, practitioners continually emphasize the importance of 'serving' their participants. Their language is of 'helping', 'guiding', 'supporting', 'working with', 'encouraging', 'enabling', 'nurturing', 'facilitating' and 'steering'. The focus is on the unique participant rather than on some higher authority or common good. Especially in one-to-one activities, but also in groups (in particular smaller ones), practitioners explore what kinesiologist Jan Ford-Batey calls 'presenting details', namely the 'issues', the hopes and fears, of their participants. Practitioners say that they are then more than happy to tailor their activities to engage with the particularities they have encountered. Clients and participants are not introduced to the central, spiritual dimension of the dynamic 'whole' until they become 'open' or 'ready to hear' about it (if at all). In short, to draw on the words of acupuncturist Janet Conway, 'Because everybody is so different, everybody is treated completely differently'.

With widely used expressions like 'child-centred education' in mind, holistic milieu practitioners are thus highly 'participant-centred'. Fully recognizing that participants, alone, can truly experience their own lives, the job of the practitioner is to enable participants to become themselves by 'trusting their own life experience', to use Julie Wise's words, by 'listening' to what their bodies, feelings, intuitions, 'inner knowledge' or personally authenticated meanings have to tell them, and by sensing what is 'out of balance' so they can 'work through their blocks' appropriately. If participants should discover that a particular activity is not working for them, then it is right for them to look elsewhere: 'They've got to find out what works for them, basically', as massage practitioner Chloe Crossley emphasizes.

Psychosynthesis practitioner Caroline Cattermole provides a good formulation of the kind of relationship – between practitioners and participants – which is widely encountered within the milieu. What she does, she says, involves 'the client having a conversation with themselves, and you are simply making sure that that conversation is an honest one'. To elaborate on this, participants are provided with the freedom to exercise their own authority whilst seeking to heal themselves, grow, develop their life-paths, live out their lives, express themselves. Practitioners certainly see themselves as able to serve their participants, but generally speaking this is done by way of egalitarian, sharing, reciprocal relationships which greatly favour the cultivation of unique lives rather than the application of the authoritative

(Freudian) 'I know better than you . . . ' imposition of correct or standardized ways of life. Indeed, we encountered a number of practitioners who also participated in the activities of other practitioners. And to introduce a theme mentioned in the introduction and developed in Chapter Four, it is not an exaggeration to say that many of those active in the milieu understand themselves to be developing the 'me' of their lives by way of the 'we' of group and one-to-one encounters.

Experiences

It remains to emphasize the extent to which the holistic activities of the milieu serve to address, nourish, cultivate and enrich the experiences of subjective-life. Publicity material such as the leaflets and brochures spell out what is on offer in the holistic milieu. Yoga at Kendal Leisure Centre offers 'to take the stress out of life'; Jane Deeks's reiki offers 'a sense of wellbeing, good health, fulfilling relationships and enthusiasm for life'; Neil McKay's nutritional consultancy offers 'emotional balance' as well as 'good health'; Jenny Warne's leaflet on shiatsu explains that 'When our energy or Qi is moving freely, we experience overall wellbeing and vitality'; Bernadette Riley's brochure states that 'Rebirthing sessions develop awareness, sensitivity and self-confidence . . . a developing sense of physical safety, of trust in relationships'; and craniosacral therapist Adam Rubinstein writes of 'deep relaxation . . . calmness and wellbeing . . . vitality'.

In virtually every case, the publicity material which we have collected, which covers the great majority of the holistic activities of Kendal and environs, refers to the theme of enhancing the quality of subjective-life experiences. Hardly surprisingly, many participants refer to the same theme. To illustrate, Jeff Waters (client of kinesiologist Fiona Adams at Rainbow Cottage) talks of 'life having felt lighter and better on an emotional level', Marilyn Solsbury (yoga group member) of 'getting to a calmer side to life', and Erica Donnison (yoga group member) of yoga being 'pretty high for overall wellbeing'. Likewise, having said that 'spirituality is often about feelings', Infinite Tai Chi practitioner Julie Wise spoke of 'embracing things like our anger – love it, and by doing so to gradually transform it'.

Another way of making the point that the spirituality of the milieu is very much to do with the enhancement of the quality of personal experience is by showing that other goals are not to the fore. Consider, first, the

quest for enlightenment. Questionnaire returns show that just 7 per cent consider spirituality to be 'overcoming the ego', and under 10 per cent of participants in the holistic milieu are involved with activities, in particular groups, which focus on this quest. Or consider the opposite possibility that significant numbers are deploying spirituality to advance their progress with regard to the 'externals' of life: empowering themselves by way of spirituality to make more money; or drawing on spirituality to enhance their performance of life-as roles. Without denying that some in the holistic milieu attend to the 'externals' of life, we did not meet many who were using spirituality in an instrumentalized way, as a means to achieve prosperity. Neither did we find much evidence of the application of spirituality to serve life-as duties, obligations and responsibilities. The focus is very much on making life work by enhancing the quality of personal – belonging-to-the-person – experiences rather than on improving the quality of experiences by conforming to life-as roles.[3]

To pull out the main points of our discussion of the holistic milieu: rather than imposing pre-packaged life-as values, beliefs or injunctions, the great majority of the holistic practitioners of Kendal and environs are intent on enabling their participants to *be-come* themselves. Participants are not called upon to be anything other than what they are at heart. Practitioners work with their participants to enable them to be true to their deepest experiences of themselves, to know themselves, to build upon themselves. And by virtue of being holistic, practitioners enable their participants to experience spirituality as integral to the 'wholeness' of their being. Spirituality, however directive it might itself be, is thereby experienced as flowing through subjectivities, without violating or harming the unique as the sum of personal life-experience.

Finally, although the spirituality of the activities of the milieu in Kendal and environs has a great deal to do with the nurturing of unique subjectivities, this is *not* to say that holistic spirituality is to be found everywhere in the milieu. Numbers of participants draw on activities for this-worldly, personally orientated purposes. Some practise yoga as the means to the end of alleviating stress, for example, with little holistic, let alone spiritual, significance being attached to their engagement. However, this does nothing to detract from the fact that virtually all practitioners and a great many of their participants are holistically orientated, attaching importance to subjective-life spirituality, with life-as religion scarcely in evidence.[4]

Conclusion: Two Worlds

Our research in Kendal (and environs) has revealed that the 'massive subjective turn of modern culture' is indeed far more evident in the holistic milieu than in the congregational domain. For we have found that whilst the former is predominantly to do with holistic spirituality which acts with and through the particularities of subjective-lives, the latter is very largely to do with theistic authority structures which direct life to be lived in accordance with 'higher' values.

Thus the congregational domain and holistic milieu of Kendal are largely separate and distinct worlds. The one emphasizes life-as and the normativization of subjectivities, the other subjective-life and the sacralization of unique subjectivities. In the former, self-understanding, change, the true life, is sought by heeding and conforming to a source of significance which ultimately transcends the life of this world; in the latter, self-understanding, change, the true life, is sought by seeking out, experiencing and expressing a source of significance which lies within the process of life itself. The one has to do with deferential relationship to higher authority, the other with holistic relationship to the spirit-of-life. Concretely, a chasm lies between what we have heard in the congregational domain ('God . . . knows what is best for us better than we know ourselves', 'Fix your eyes on him. Take them off yourself', 'Lift us out of our own selves') and the holistic milieu where 'the aim is to build on people's own resources, spiritual resources'.[5]

This is not to deny that we found something of a spectrum from congregations of difference and congregations of humanity at one end (placing more emphasis on truth without than truth within) to spiritualities of subjective-life at the other (with the importance they attach to what belongs to 'this-life'). Somewhere between the two we find congregations of experiential difference and, even more so, experiential humanity, whose relative openness to the entry of the sacred into personal experience brings them closer to holistic spiritualities of this-life. Revealingly, we found that most of the very few individuals who are active within both the congregational domain *and* the holistic milieu are associated with the Unitarian chapel (however, the total numbers participating in experiential religions of humanity are small, around 6 per cent of the congregational domain as a whole). Overall then, we found very little overlap between the 'two worlds' of the congregational domain and holistic spirituality, with only around 4

per cent of congregational members having participated in the previous week in holistic activities that they regarded as having spiritual or religious significance, and only 6.4 per cent agreeing with the statement that 'alternative or complementary non-church forms of spirituality have things to teach Christianity'.

Post-modernists write about the disintegration of boundaries, the fusion or 'hybridization' of previously distinct beliefs and activities, and of people drawing on provisions which used to be kept apart. Journalists speak of a new 'pick 'n' mix' attitude to religion and spirituality. In Kendal at least, such a post-modern condition is scarcely in evidence. Instead, the congregational domain and holistic milieu constitute two largely separate and distinct worlds. So far as the spiritual revolution claim is concerned, this means that they can readily be used to see how life-as religion and subjective-life spirituality are faring – and thereby test the validity of the claim that the latter is overtaking the former.