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# Theology and Spirituality

BEFORE THE PRESUPPOSITION SET forth in the first chapter is addressed (the potential gulf between theology and spirituality), this chapter traces the historical relationship between theology and the study of spirituality. This chapter has two main sections, both significant in their aim and scope. The first section lays out the history of the relationship between theology and spirituality. The second section offers an impression of the current landscape today between the two fields. In so doing, the alleged problematic nature of their divorce or separation will be addressed.

### The History of the Relationship

From Paul through the patristic era<sup>1</sup> up till the onset of Scholasticism, the Pauline sense of *spiritualitas* (life in the Spirit) remained, more or less, part of a unified theological whole; that is it was a part of a theology that had few, if any, divisions. Distinctions among moral theology, spiritual theology, dogmatic/systematic theology and biblical theology were absent at this point. Theology in the patristic sense was, by and large, what might be referred to today as Biblical theology or scriptural commentary, which seeks

1. Philip Sheldrake remarks, “There is disagreement about how long this [patristic] period may be considered to have lasted—so, for example, the Protestant tradition has tended to accept the Council of Chalcedon in 451 C.E. as an approximate end. The Eastern Orthodox would include such figures as Gregory Palamas who lived from 1296–1359. Others use the term somewhat broadly, to describe the whole period up to the development of the ‘new theology’ of scholasticism in the West in the twelfth century” (Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History*, 45).

knowledge of God and faith based on a rigorous hermeneutical method and scriptural exegesis. All theological pursuits were grounded in scripture as their primary starting point. For instance, Origen, who is sometimes deemed the first major systematic theologian, is most well-known for his scriptural hermeneutics and his allegorical method of interpretation which yielded three distinct 'senses' of scripture (literal, moral, spiritual). It was largely upon this method that a customary medieval reading of scripture grew. The method contained no division or sub theological fields, but was one unitary holistic pursuit.

Since all (perhaps most) of the major scriptural commentators and theologians of this era were in pastoral positions, it followed that their theology was largely pastoral, liturgical, and ecclesial. This naturally lent itself to placing a priority on explaining to the faithful basic doctrines and practices. Further, all faithful Christians of this time were considered capable of attaining 'life in the spirit' and thus the call to mysticism was universal. Mysticism (the quest for grasping, understanding and/or living in the 'mystery'), then, for the patristic era, differed from the later medieval and reformation periods, which shifted emphasis to refer to a more esoteric subjective experience and union with God via a rigorous spiritual path involving exercises and disciplined ascetic tasks. Mystical theology in the patristic era involved solidifying the fundamentals of key doctrines (the Incarnation, the Trinity, the so-called official Sacraments) for the church. It is in and through these basic doctrines that life in the spirit was thought to be attained. This is neither abstract nor subjective, but aims at bringing the faithful into the mystery of God, which inherently involves participation in the sacramental life of the church and the revelation of God in the Trinity and the Incarnation.<sup>2</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius, an appropriate representative of the patristic mystical tradition, emphasized the personal surrender to God in the process of understanding the 'mystery' of attaining the life in the spirit. Philip Sheldrake reminds us that in Dionysius, "the later interest [of medieval mysticism] in subjective experience is not present."<sup>3</sup>

In addition to their pastoral context, the majority of the patristic theologians were set in a monastic context (and therefore living in a community that promoted celibacy), from the upper class (and therefore received an elite education), and of course were men. This context, to be sure, shaped their resulting theology. To be clear, this era maintained a unified theology, with no divisions or branches (to its benefit as well as to its detriment), that sought a synthesis of mysticism, doctrinal clarity, reason, and biblical

2. Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History*, 46.

3. *Ibid.*, 47.

exegesis. What might be referred to as spiritual theology (not necessarily the contemporary study of spirituality as such) was found therein, particularly in its Origenian method of scriptural interpretation.

The breach, divorce<sup>4</sup>, or break between theology and spirituality is not clearly denoted in history. Various scholars have differing opinions concerning when and what served as the most influential factor contributing to the breach. There are a number of factors which, without doubt, helped to bring it about. These include, but are not limited to, scholasticism, the (re)emergence of Aristotelian philosophy, the contrast of the spiritual with the corporeal, the advent of sub-divisional theological fields, the European Reformations, the Enlightenment, greater (over)specialization in academia, and the scientific-historical-critical method, to name the major ones.

With the onset of Scholasticism, the so-called 'New Theology,' in the middle ages came early signs of fissures between theology and spirituality, which heretofore had, for the most part, been held together in a single unitary theological pursuit for God as discourse about God.<sup>5</sup> Theology had been done primarily under the auspices of monastic males, and Scholasticism shifted that locus for doing theology to the schools where the new theologians developed a more systematic form of theology drawing on new sources such as ancient Greek philosophy (Aristotle). The twelfth century demonstrates a shift to the new attitude of ordering (*ordinatio*) religion in general, thus rendering to each thing its proper relationship and placing emphasis on measure, order, legalism, political frameworks, discipline, ceremonies, ecclesiastical offices, and duties.<sup>6</sup> Bernard McGinn recognizes this when he writes, "medieval society of the eleventh and twelfth centuries was avid for order, in this sense of putting things in order, across the whole range of its creative endeavor."<sup>7</sup> This new obsession with order found its way to the university in theology resulting in scholasticism, particularly taking hold in the schools of urban Northern Europe.

4. Both Philip Sheldrake and Keith J. Egan refer to the breach as a 'divorce.' See Sheldrake, "Chapter 2: The Divorce of Spirituality and Theology," in *Spirituality and Theology*, 33–64 and Egan, "The Divorce of Spirituality from Theology."

5. Andrew Louth points out that for "the Fathers *theologia* is strictly discourse about God" (Louth, *Discerning the Mystery*, 3).

6. Jean Leclercq points out that it is important to state what one means by 'scholasticism' due to prior disputes over the term. "Today, it is more generally agreed that the scholastic method is characterized not by the use of Aristotle but by the teaching procedures, principally the *quaestio* applied to the *sacra pagina*" (Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, 2).

7. Bernard McGinn credits this recognition to R. W. Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages*, 153.

This new theology, with its precision oriented method, posed a threat to the existing theological method of monastic theology (since prior to scholasticism, theology was primarily done by monks in monastic settings). Scholasticism sought to appropriate the faith in a new way, which seemed more intellectual. It represented a new posture, attitude, or orientation toward theology. At its core, scholasticism did not necessarily seek new answers to theological questions, but rather provided a new method. It went beyond the mere citation of authorities. Matthew Fox reminds us that,

What the West has forgotten about scholasticism is that it was, in its healthy days, a radical intellectual movement that came to Europe from Islam and that was essentially *a methodology of asking questions*. This is why it appealed to the radical new movements of the renaissance of the twelfth and early thirteenth century: it assisted the overthrow of the established intellectual methodology of simply citing authorities, usually fathers of the church.<sup>8</sup>

In Aquinas's *Summa*, the confluence of the Patristic and Scholastic approaches is evident. Citation of patristic authority is subjected to the scrutiny of reason and the philosophical categories of Aristotle, 'the Philosopher,' which naturally entails a deliberate effort to properly distinguish one thing from another. Jean Leclercq provides a helpful distinction when seeking to understand how these two methods of theology might differ by noting that the monastic emphasizes *credo ut experiar* (I believe in order to experience) while the scholastic emphasizes *credo ut intelligam* (I believe in order to understand).<sup>9</sup> In other words, the monastics were less interested in the knowledge (*scientia* to be placed alongside all other human knowledge) yielded by scripture, and more interested in wisdom (*sapientia*) as it pertains to salvation from God.<sup>10</sup>

Since these schools were often under the direction of local bishops, understandably their theology differed from monastic theology. Further, since the bishops obviously served as major controllers of ecclesiastical affairs, it is reasonable that their theology took on a more pastoral, apologetic, and ecclesiastical tone in contrast to the more mystical and ascetical monastic theology. Scholastic theology sought answers to questions and concerns that did not burden the monastics. Embedded in the urban universities, scholastic theology sought to integrate itself with the liberal arts

8. Fox, *Sheer Joy*, 20 (italics his).

9. Bernard McGinn credits this recognition to Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, 367.

10. McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism*, 368.

and incorporate knowledge from sources outside scripture alone. Bernard McGinn quotes Hugh of St. Victor in characterizing this attitude, “Learn everything; you will see later that nothing is superfluous.”<sup>11</sup> A good example of this might be Aquinas’ synthesis of Aristotle and the Christian tradition.

Not all scholastics were unified in their theological conclusions. Of course there remained a wide range of differing opinions, but they shared a general scholastic attitude, orientation, and method. Some (perhaps many) medieval theologians cannot be easily placed into one camp or another (e.g., Thomas Aquinas). The point here is that this contrast in theological method helped to set the stage for the problematic divorce between theology and spirituality. Scholasticism naturally encouraged a move away from analysis and consideration of the spiritual life and replaced it with a more ‘scientific’ approach to dogmatic and moral concerns. This is why many scholars point to the advent of scholasticism as a major culprit in the separation of these two fields.

The number of key medieval theologians worth looking at is far too great for the scope and parameters of this chapter. However, there are three that stand out from the rest that deserve a closer look, namely, Peter Abelard, Bernard of Clairvaux and Thomas Aquinas. The conflict between Abelard and Bernard has been recognized by some<sup>12</sup> as ‘symbolic’ of the conflict between monastic theology and scholasticism. Symbolic or not, its importance remains central to understanding the breach between the two fields, for the two figures, in their conflict with each other, represent the older monastic method and the newer scholasticism. Abelard is heralded as perhaps one of the greatest logicians of the middle ages and certainly a top-tier scholastic. He contributed to the revival of Latin philosophy and defended the use of reason in the doing of theology. Among other things, he is remembered for his conflict with Bernard, who served as the living icon<sup>13</sup> for the contemplative monastic tradition. Bernard was truly *the* twelfth century mystic (who also enjoyed fame as a crusader, politician, poet, and writer). He excelled in both religious and political life in France and eventually all of Western Europe.<sup>14</sup>

Abelard operated in the scholastic system while Bernard’s audience was primarily monastic. Taken as representatives of these two camps

11. McGinn quotes Hugh of St. Victor and Charles Henry Buttmer, *Hugonis De Sancto Victore Didascalicon De Studio Legendi*, 115.19–20 in *The Growth of Mysticism*, 369.

12. Louth, *Discerning the Mystery*, 5; and Jones, “Spirituality and Theology,” 164.

13. Dante, in the *Paradiso* of his *Divine Comedy*, casts Bernard as the “elder clad like the folk in glory” who guides Dante to Mary and the vision of the Trinity.

14. McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism*, 164.

respectively, they give clear insight about some of the fundamental points of tension. Abelard's greater confidence in the role of reason clashed with Bernard and his fellow anti-dialecticians,<sup>15</sup> who held that truths of religious faith were plain and thus no careful scrutiny via dialectical reason was required in order to discover them. Further, according to the anti-dialecticians, if the plain sense of a religious sentence (scripture) was not clear, then reason would be of no assistance. Abelard, and those who held a greater confidence in reason, were seen as only confusing and distorting the plain sense of a proposition of faith, and thus were railed against. He had little patience for Bernard and his monastic reason-denying ilk. He outright rejected the notion of a plain meaning to begin with, and endorsed his dialectical method of questioning, gathering (often opposing) answers, and finally discerning a meaning, if one was to be had. According to Abelard, it is often the case that when citing authorities (a trait preferred by the monastic method) one is often led to the possibility of citing equally reliable, yet conflicting, authorities. This forces one to use reason in order to discern the appropriate meaning.<sup>16</sup>

These two figures are often cited as representatives of the monastic-scholastic conflict and therefore symbolically foreshadow the theology/spirituality divorce. In fairness to both Abelard and Bernard, we should recognize that neither of them blindly dug their heels in their respective camps. For instance, though Abelard clashed with Bernard and the anti-dialecticians, he held even less respect for those who posed as dialecticians (pseudo-dialecticians) and over-estimated the strength of reason. Abelard believed that, unlike himself, they did not recognize the limits of reason nor did they put stock in any authority. He believed that authorities did hold persuasive force and further, that some truths may simply lie beyond the limits of reason. In this respect, this would put Abelard somewhere in the middle between these pseudo-dialecticians and Bernard (and the anti-dialecticians). We should also be careful not to judge Bernard too narrowly and deem him a mere blind fideist. He did, in fact, hold some confidence in the intellectual faculties, though he always tempered this confidence with caution and intellectual humility. Intellect, he believed, was part of human nature; however, due to his Christian belief in 'the Fall' and the human condition of being tainted by sin, it (the intellect) operates imperfectly and remains vulnerable to corruption and pride. Thus all true knowledge begins

15. Anti-dialecticians resisted the use of the scholastic method of dialectic in seeking and grasping religious truth.

16. King, "Peter Abelard."

in “the self-knowledge of humility.”<sup>17</sup> Even though these two serve as the symbolic representatives of the monastic-scholastic divide, they both still held to the idea that knowledge and faith each play central roles in the pursuit of knowledge about, and ascension to, God.

Not long after this conflict surfaced, the medieval world produced one figure who held these two sides together, perhaps more than any other theologian in the West up to his era. This was Thomas Aquinas.<sup>18</sup> Aquinas was neither a strict rationalist nor a fideist.<sup>19</sup> Nor can he be categorized as a strict dogmatist or a skeptic. Matthew Fox, the Episcopalian theologian and scholar of Aquinas, believes Aquinas is best labeled a mystic,<sup>20</sup> while Thomist scholar Brian Davies prefers simply to refer to him as a Christian Saint and thinker.<sup>21</sup> Whatever label is applied to him, his influence cannot be doubted. As both a monk and a scholastic it is not surprising that he represents a *via media*, an inner harmony, between scholasticism and monasticism, though this may seem to have been lost on some (perhaps most) of his followers. This is observed by Marie-Dominique Chenu when he points out that sixteenth century Thomists had, “lost the eminent spiritual equilibrium of their master which would have enabled them to understand, assess and

17. McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism*, 201.

18. Aquinas fulfilled “more than anyone else the essential medieval program of a marriage between faith and reason, revelation and philosophy, the Biblical and the classical inheritances . . . He represents the medieval mind par excellence, and the Middle Ages are the parent and source of all the divergent streams in the modern world, like a mother whose many children went their own various ways. [He represents] a unity of ingredients that were later to separate . . . For one brief, Camelot-like moment it seemed that synthesis was possible” (Kreeft, *A Summa of the Summa*, 13).

19. “Aquinas’s balanced appreciation of the respective roles of reason and faith within the unity of the theological horizon also makes it possible to avoid the dichotomy or rationalism and fideism. He rejects arrogant rationalism by insisting on the subordination of reason to the principles of faith as a servant to a master. He rejects fideism by insisting on the essential role of reason in supplying the philosophical presuppositions of faith, defending faith against its opponents, deducing other truths from the *revelata*, and in general rendering the content of faith humanly intelligible and plausible” (Min, *Paths to the Triune God*, 43).

20. Aquinas “was not a rationalist. On the contrary, he was a mystic . . . This is where Aquinas’s amazing balance shows itself: he exercised to the full, it seems, both hemispheres of his brain” (Fox, *Sheer Joy*, 27).

21. “One might just as well say that Aquinas was both a theologian and a philosopher. Much of what he says can be read either as philosophy or as theology. It is, perhaps, most accurate of all simply to call him a Christian thinker, though this should not be taken to mean that his thought can be divided into two: a system of philosophy, founded solely on reason, and—based on and completing this—a system of revealed theology . . . He was also, of course, a Christian saint” (Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 14).

assimilate the rational values of this second Renaissance . . . their theology had lost the spirit of daring as well as its original freshness and had forgotten the need of continual rediscovery."<sup>22</sup> Aquinas himself sought truth wherever he could find it, be it from Aristotle, ancient philosophy, Islamic philosophy, the Fathers, monastic spirituality, revelation, scripture or reason.

Aquinas had sought to keep the spirit of contemplation in union with scholastic theological speculation,<sup>23</sup> though in the process of producing his work, it may be that, by dividing his *Summa* into parts, he unfortunately laid the groundwork for enduring divisions within the theological field as a whole. He subdivides the *Summa* into parts dealing with 1) God (the principle and *telos* of humankind), 2) humankind (including anthropology, purpose and ethics), and 3) Christ (humankind's means back to God), and in so doing establishes theological subdivisions, such as dogmatic and moral theology. Sheldrake makes the point that content pertaining to the life of the Christian fell under the rubric of moral theology, thus distancing it from other theological divisions.<sup>24</sup> This led to, as Sandra Schneiders has recognized, the removal of spirituality from "being a dimension of all theology" to "a subordinate branch of theology."<sup>25</sup> This resulted in further subdivisions of theological branches and gave birth to the trend of specialization in academia which only grew in the centuries to come. For the reasons outlined above, many contemporary scholars<sup>26</sup> of spirituality point to the rise of scholasticism as the main catalyst for this breach between theology and spirituality, since it eventually led to, as Chenu has declared, the "false modern idea that there is opposition between mysticism and scholasticism."<sup>27</sup> However, as seen in Aquinas, this opposition need not exist. It is part of the task of the contemporary study of spirituality (and this book), to recover that unity and lay to rest such 'false modern ideas.'

As scholasticism gained steam in the ensuing centuries, the pursuit of mysticism and monastic spiritual theology were increasingly viewed with suspicion. Francois Vandenbroucke interprets the 14th century as decisive in the fate of these two fields. He recognizes the widening breach due to "a degenerative speculative mysticism on one hand and the character of

22. Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century*, 33.

23. Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History*, 49.

24. *Ibid.*

25. Schneiders, "Spirituality in the Academy," 685.

26. Philip Sheldrake, Sandra Schneiders, Eugen Megyer, Keith Egan, Bernard McGinn, and Andrew Louth.

27. Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, 63.



*Devotio moderna* on the other.”<sup>28</sup> Perhaps the most well-known representative from this century is Thomas à Kempis, the spiritual writer of the renowned work *The Imitation of Christ*, a model of the *Devotio moderna* movement.<sup>29</sup> This work, and movement, focused on interior attitudes in working towards perfection. A leading representative of the fourteenth century spiritual renewal was Gerard Groote who sought to systematize interior prayer. *Devotio moderna*, as a precursor to pietism, sought to sync the outward *figura* (which encompasses both the inner seen substance and the outer incisive form; the inner character and outer gesture) with the inner state of grace. The influence of both *Devotio moderna* and pietism on the development of spirituality cannot be understated. It was an interior pursuit of perfection in an era in which mysticism was increasingly seen as too subjective and psychological to be taken seriously. It had deviated too drastically from the synthesis Aquinas had achieved under his usual clear metaphysical and (seemingly) objective language. Further, spirituality was being gradually separated from concrete experience, whether it was moral theology, ecclesiology, and/or liturgy. Amidst such a climate, “an interest developed in specific experiences and activities: prayer, contemplation and mysticism,” Sheldrake writes, “and growth was conceived more and more in terms of ascent, whereby the active life was merely a preparation for the contemplative and was thus viewed as a ‘lower’ way.”<sup>30</sup>

Ann Clifford, in her article “Re-membering the Spiritual Core of Theology,”<sup>31</sup> places the initial point of the ‘dis-membering’ of theology from spirituality in the fourteenth century, but acknowledges that deeper chasms opened up by the time of the sixteenth century reformations, a point at which the tension between the two fields became antagonistic. With Clifford, Regina Bechte points to the sixteenth century as a crucial turning point for these two fields, particularly due to “the specialization which marked the end of the medieval synthesis and the beginnings of the modern era [which] had had its impact on theology.”<sup>32</sup> This played out further, of course, in the ensuing Enlightenment. Alan Jones takes a similar approach in his article “Spirituality and Theology,”<sup>33</sup> in which he diagnoses the source of the divorce in an academic obsession with ‘over-specialization.’ In arriving at this

28. Vandenbroucke, “Le Divorce Entre Théologie Et Mystique,” 372–89.

29. For a substantive overview of this movement and its writings, see John H. Van Engen, ed., *Devotio Moderna*.

30. Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History*, 52.

31. Clifford, “Re-membering the Spiritual Core of Theology,” 19–21.

32. Bechte, “Theological Trends,” 305.

33. Jones, “Spirituality and Theology,” 161–76.

conclusion, he draws on Dorothy Sayers, who attributes the obsession to the scientific method of definition, segmentation and separation.<sup>34</sup> She writes about "the increasing segregation of specialists in their own specialties, so that the scientist is not expected to study theology nor the theologian to study science, nor either of them to be an artist or a poet."<sup>35</sup> If this is indeed the case, it is understandable why theology (done by the theologian) need not be concerned with mysticism (experienced by the mystic) nor spirituality ("lived religious experience").

The Reformation set Roman Catholicism and Protestantism on their separate trajectories, and with them also went their approaches to spirituality. On the Catholic side are the Spanish mystics (Ignatius of Loyola, Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross) and Francis de Sales. Sheldrake recognizes these individuals to be without "the terminology of later 'ascetical' or 'mystical' theology, [which] developed [later] in the eighteenth century and [became] common currency in the late nineteenth century."<sup>36</sup> However, they showed the clearest signs of coming close to practicing what is referred to by the contemporary study of spirituality,<sup>37</sup> which focuses on the particular experience of lived religion, and not just a mere interior climb up the ladder of perfection. On the other hand, the new Protestant offshoots maintained a more pronounced suspicion of theological knowledge being derived from experience or methods of seeming self-perfection as to avoid (or, at the very least, to maintain caution regarding) any dangerous idolatrous self-sanctifying or salvific meritorious processes. Attempts to merit perfection on one's own, be it through mystical or ascetical means, was seen as possible works righteousness. Instead, the cornerstone of spiritual piety for the reformers resided in 'divine monergism,' the faith in God alone to initiate and accomplish everything pertaining to salvation.<sup>38</sup> According to Sheldrake, the "classic Protestant emphasis was on God as the sole source of holiness. The classic Catholic emphasis was on the practical consequences in the life of the individual Christian of justification and redemption."<sup>39</sup>

In keeping with the uniqueness from their continental ancestors, the Anglo-Reformation took its own approach to spirituality. Emerging in the

34. *Ibid.*, 165.

35. Sayers, *Further Papers on Dante*, 88.

36. Sheldrake, *Spirituality and Theology*, 44.

37. Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History*, 53.

38. Sheldrake, *Spirituality and Theology*, 46.

39. *Ibid.*, (parenthesis omitted). Here Sheldrake also argues that classical Protestantism never developed the idea that theology and spirituality were opposed since the two, from the very outset of the reformation movement, were inherently included in the doing of theology.

seventeenth century, and taking their primary cues from *The Book of Common Prayer*, the English produced an emphatically ethical spirituality. Their spiritual method was, in large part, aimed at guiding persons in right living through a spiritual means such as prayers, meditations, art (such as poetry) and devotional readings.

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries brought on the Enlightenment which has received notable attention as a contributor to the divorce of spirituality and theology. The Enlightenment produced the so-called 'modern' frame of mind which entails, among other things, a new found confidence "that there is a *method*<sup>40</sup> by which we can reach the truth"<sup>41</sup> whether it be through empiricism or Cartesian clarity and distinct perception. The method sought to expose all of the dark corners of knowledge. Commencing in doubt and ignorance, the method cast a climate of suspicion on anything seemingly subjective (more accurately, anything 'non-objective'), thus any fields pertaining to mystical, spiritual or religious experience remained in doubt. The distinction that began in the middle ages between, on the one hand, an affective piety separated from doctrinal theology and, on the other, an overly intellectual and removed speculative and scientific theology, had become solidified during the Enlightenment. In such a climate, we might reasonably understand why theologians would, in order to legitimize themselves as scientists and hope to be taken seriously, distance themselves from the subjectivity of spiritual theology.

Romanticism, in a sense, sought a return to what T.S. Elliot referred to as 'sensibility' and what Wordsworth understood to be 'feeling intellect.' It called for a return to the unity of the two halves of head and heart, thought and feeling, and so on.<sup>42</sup> However, this only resulted in further specialization (perhaps over-specialization). Andrew Louth notes that art and aesthetic experience, in particular, received the brunt of such marginalization in its being relegated to the sidelines of life, thus settling in the fringy sphere of extraordinary experience cut off from "any real context in life."<sup>43</sup> This mentality, Louth argues, impacted theology. For instance, the Romantic spirit in the field of religion, beginning with Schleiermacher, only set the essence of religion apart as something to be grasped by the 'cultured.' Further, argues Louth, the theological "cracks and divisions go deeper and have been

40. E.g., Scientific method, Cartesian epistemology, the historical-critical method, etc.

41. Louth, *Discerning the Mystery*, 7 (italics his).

42. *Ibid.*, 1.

43. *Ibid.*, 2.

there longer"<sup>44</sup> as evidenced by the endless sub-dividing of theology and the continued 'remoteness' of theologians (although this is perhaps changing in the current era as more theologians are embracing interdisciplinary approaches). Louth concludes that "one way in which the division in theology manifests itself is in the division between theology and spirituality."<sup>45</sup>

Mystical theology and ascetical theology were gradually replaced in the twentieth century by the term 'spiritual theology.' The two former terms were not completely dropped from religious and theological terminology, but rather spiritual theology was seen as more comprehensive than the other two. Mystical theology is primarily concerned with an extraordinary experience of the union with the divine, something not necessarily considered accessible to most ordinary believers, whereas ascetical theology is primarily concerned with the pursuit of interior perfection. However, until around the time of the Second Vatican Council, spiritual theology, as a field, remained subordinate to both dogmatic and moral theology. Though perhaps there are advantages for employing 'spiritual theology' over and above the narrower ascetical and mystical theology, one detriment might be that it has contributed to the confusion of the term spirituality today. The concern here is whether the term adequately represents what people mean when they employ the word. Additionally, prior to Vatican II (and for some time after), the term 'spiritual theology,' as employed by the Roman Catholic tradition, had "a tendency to be individualistic, to ignore the social dimensions of Christian spiritual life and to reduce the ecclesial aspects of spirituality to participation in the sacraments."<sup>46</sup>

In the current post-Vatican II twenty-first century context, "spiritual theology' has given way to a more dynamic and inclusive concept known as 'spirituality.'<sup>47</sup> It is that which is studied by the contemporary study of spirituality. Prior to moving ahead and defining further the contemporary study of spirituality, I will briefly distinguish it from four other fields, all of which are by no means mutually exclusive from it, but included in it to various degrees. These fields are mystical theology, spiritual theology, monastic theology and ascetical theology.

Mystical theology can be distinguished from the theology of mysticism. The theology of mysticism,<sup>48</sup> as used by Rahner, refers to the "systematic

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid.

46. Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History*, 54.

47. Sheldrake, *Spirituality and Theology*, 55.

48. Rahner, "The Theology of Mysticism."

theological reflection *on* mystical experience;<sup>49</sup> that is, it is a reflection on the experience of the mystical. Mystical theology, on the other hand, used in the pre-medieval era, refers to the nebulous (mysterious?) knowledge of God that comes through the *mystic* experience itself. In short, theology of mysticism is reflection on the mystical experience, which thus produces knowledge, whereas mystical theology is knowledge that comes precisely from the mystical experience, without reflection. Note here that mystical theology, systematic theology, and any other theology may apprehend the same truth, but through different means.

Ascetical theology refers to the reflection on knowledge apprehended through asceticism, which is the polishing or refinement of one's life through spiritual exercise such as prayer, fasting, watching, and the like. Whereas mysticism yields knowledge through extraordinary experiences of the divine, asceticism yields knowledge through a rigorous striving on behalf of the subject. Ascetical theology, involving a striving on behalf of the person for perfection, is not dissimilar from spiritual theology.

Spiritual theology, as noted above, is that branch of theology that blossomed in the seventeenth century and is concerned with striving after interior perfection through mystical and ascetical avenues.<sup>50</sup> This term, perhaps more than the others mentioned here, is most often confused with the contemporary study of spirituality. It is often placed under the auspices of either dogmatic or moral theology. Jean Leclercq employs this meaning of 'spiritual theology' when he speaks of 'monastic theology' as "a spiritual theology which completes speculative theology."<sup>51</sup>

Monastic theology, though a type of spiritual theology, is the most particular of the types mentioned here. Monastic theology refers to theology done by monks in monasteries. It often includes knowledge apprehended through asceticism and mysticism, but also includes the authority of scripture and the Patristic figures. These sources are not unique to monastic theology alone. On the contrary, scripture and Patristic thinkers may be sources for many (perhaps most) theologies (such as scholastic theology), but the difference here may lie in the context and method by which one goes about appropriating those sources. Monastic theology, as opposed to scholastic theology, incorporates experience (be it mystical, ascetical or other) into its reflection, whereas scholasticism, as Leclercq writes, "puts experience aside" and, should it so desire, operate on a plane of impersonal

49. Schneiders, "Spirituality in the Academy," 688.

50. *Ibid.*, 689.

51. Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, 223.

and universal metaphysics.<sup>52</sup> With these definitions laid out, I now proceed to the situation today and the field being referred to as the contemporary study of spirituality.

### The Situation Today

One aim of this book is to make an argument for why theology and the study of spirituality ought to be inherently linked. Both fields examine religion from different angles and ask different questions. Theologians make claims about the divine and provide explanation and elaboration on how these claims cohere with one another. Likewise, mystics, saints, and those who claim to spiritually access the divine (via 'lived experience') claim to know God through particular experience and make claims about the nature of the human spirit and how it accesses the divine. Both claim knowledge of the divine, yet through different epistemic means, or as Schneiders puts it, the two do not differ on *what* is apprehended, but *how* it is apprehended. They have different sets of data, yet claim a shared source and object: the divine. Before commentating on the current relationship between the two fields, I will offer a more in-depth review 'the contemporary study of spirituality.'

To elucidate the definition (if possible) and parameters of the emerging field of the contemporary study of spirituality, I rely on three primary scholars whom I understand to be among the most lucid, definitive, and deliberate in their explanations of the field. Further, these three have not only offered insight into definition of the field, but have made significant contributions to the various studies within the field itself. These three thinkers are Sandra Schneiders, Bernard McGinn, and Philip Sheldrake.

Defining the field, or the term itself, can be a tricky matter indeed. Since it is true that, as Sheldrake says, "Spirituality is one of those subjects whose meaning everyone claims to know until they have to define it,"<sup>53</sup> then defining it will be the burden of what follows in the next few pages. Thus far I have been intentionally referring to the study of spirituality as 'the contemporary study of spirituality,' as that is the preferred nomenclature given to it by the small, but growing, number of scholars devoted to it. The qualifier 'contemporary' has been affixed to denote its uniqueness from the various ways it has been approached throughout history.

Sandra Schneiders broadly defines the discipline as "the field of study which attempts to investigate in an interdisciplinary way spiritual experience

52. Ibid.

53. Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History*, 40.

as such.”<sup>54</sup> More specifically, she says it studies a contemporary understanding of spirituality which “refers to the experience of consciously striving to integrate one’s life in terms not of isolation and self-absorption but of self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives.”<sup>55</sup> The object of study, notice, if one were to study ‘contemporary spirituality,’ is precisely ‘experience’ as such, whereas for theology, it is God (or the gods) as such.

To begin with, Schneiders offers four helpful negative statements, that is, what the contemporary study of spirituality is not. First, it is not (or nor longer) exclusively Roman Catholic. Secondly, it is “neither dogmatic nor prescriptive.”<sup>56</sup> Thirdly, it is “not concerned with ‘perfection’” nor fourthly, is it concerned with the “interior life.”<sup>57</sup> Positively, she offers at least four major characteristics of the field that distinguish it from theology. First, since it is interested in ‘experience as experience,’ it is inherently interdisciplinary because it seeks to utilize any and all modes of knowing about experience. Second, it takes a descriptive-critical approach, not a prescriptive-normative one. The goal is to know the nature of experience (descriptive) and critique its authenticity (critical). It is not an application of theological principles to life and practice, as one might do when engaged in moral theology. Third, it need not be sequestered to one particular religion or tradition (and for this reason remains exceptionally open to interreligious and ecumenical dialogue). Since the goal is not always coherence of theological principles, but the understanding of experience as such, spirituality can account for a diverse range of religious experiences. Finally, much like the first, spirituality is a holistic “inquiry into human spiritual experience [and] is not limited to explorations of the explicitly religious, i.e. the so-called ‘interior life,’”<sup>58</sup> thus it should not be reduced to mere mystical and/or ascetical theology. All facets of human experience remain important to the discipline such as psychological, exterior-bodily, social, historical, aesthetical, intellectual, and others.<sup>59</sup>

Sheldrake offers four characteristics of contemporary spirituality that help distinguish it from the ‘spiritual theology’ common to the early twentieth century. First, it is not exclusive to the Christian tradition. Second, it is not just a mere prescriptive application of dogmatic theology to concrete religious life. Third, it is less concerned with delineating the contours of

54. Schneiders, “Spirituality in the Academy,” 260.

55. Schneiders, “Theology and Spirituality,” 684.

56. *Ibid.*, 264–65.

57. *Ibid.*

58. Schneiders, “Spirituality in the Academy,” 693.

59. *Ibid.*



perfection, but rather seeks to 'survey' the various human responses to the divine mysteries. Fourth, it goes beyond the sole concern for the interior life, but seeks to understand all facets of the human experience as it relates to the divine.<sup>60</sup>

Like theology, spirituality employs a similar methodology of seeking to integrate horizons (including scripture, doctrine, history, experience, etc.) but differs in that its object is not universal knowledge about the divine nature of God (or the gods), but knowledge of human nature (or the human spirit) as mediated through particular religious experience. A question primarily motivated by *theology* might be 'what does the conversion experience of Ignatius of Loyola teach us about the nature of God,' while a question primarily motivated by the study of *spirituality* might be 'what does the conversion experience of Ignatius of Loyola teach us about the way Ignatius, as a human subject, knew, responded to, and experienced God?' Put another way, theology seeks to know the *nature of the divine* exhibited in such an experience while the contemporary study of spirituality seeks to know the *nature of human experience* in relation to the divine exhibited in the experience. Thus, theology strives for knowledge of divine nature while spirituality strives for knowledge of human experience. Christian Spirituality need not be reduced to a mere philosophical anthropology for it differs in that it seeks knowledge of "the conscious human response to God" or of the Pauline "life in the spirit"<sup>61</sup>

In her influential 1989 article, "Spirituality in the Academy," Schneiders distinguishes between two basic approaches in defining spirituality: 1) "from above" (dogmatic position) and 2) "from below" (anthropological position).<sup>62</sup> From above, spirituality is subordinated to dogmatic theology, and is defined as the "life of the Christian communicated by the Holy Spirit and governed by divine revelation."<sup>63</sup> Schneiders argues against the former position and in favor of the latter, "from below," which she understands to be, as Jean Claude Breton explains, "a way of engaging anthropological questions and preoccupations in order to arrive at an ever richer and more authentically human life."<sup>64</sup> In other words, she reduces the approaches to spirituality to either a theological (from above) or anthropological (from below) approach. Thinkers such as C.A. Bernard, James Wiseman, Bradley Hanson, Kenneth Leech, and Louis Boyer (and possibly Rahner, von

60. Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History*, 58.

61. *Ibid.*, 45.

62. Schneiders, "Spirituality in the Academy," 682.

63. *Ibid.*

64. Breton, "Retrouver les Assises Anthropologiques de la Vie Spirituelle," 101.



Balthasar, Jordan Aumann, and Walter Principe as well<sup>65</sup>) might be considered to be representatives of the former while thinkers such as Jean Claude Breton, Sandra Schneiders, Edward Kinerk, Michael Downey, and Rachel Hosmer (to name a few) might be considered representatives of the latter.<sup>66</sup> Bernard McGinn cautions against the reduction of methodologies to only two when defining spirituality and, in so doing, offers a third possible approach, namely the *historical-contextual approach*. This approach “emphasizes spirituality as an experience rooted in a particular community’s history rather than as a dimension of human existence as such.”<sup>67</sup> Representatives for this third approach might include thinkers such as Rowan Williams, Urban T. Holmes, André Vauchez, and Philip Sheldrake. Though McGinn recognizes a third possible approach, he acknowledges that any one approach on its own ultimately falls short. Instead he advocates “that all three options remain in the conversation.”<sup>68</sup>

McGinn recognizes that “at the present time,” no universal and fully adequate definition for contemporary spirituality may exist—nor may it ever exist—and this is not to its detriment. Instead, he understands this “open warfare . . . [to] actually be an advantage.”<sup>69</sup> It may encourage lively debate amongst its scholars to further hash out the contours of the field, while at the same time remaining open to a broad spectrum of possibilities.

Sheldrake, in his 1994 article, “Some Continuing Questions,”<sup>70</sup> raises some rather basic (and I believe commonly overlooked) questions regarding situating spirituality in relation to theology. To begin with, he recognizes that, in large part, the relationship between the two not only depends on how spirituality is defined, but how theology is defined as well. He points out the danger of scholars of spirituality sometimes reducing the term theology to that which inherently excludes spiritual concerns, matters of spirituality, and/or concrete realization of faith. This conception of theology, writes Sheldrake, “would not correspond to the search for a contemporary

65. These last four particular thinkers place significant emphasis on ‘transcendence’ and as McGinn argues, build “upon a distinction between a generic notion of spirituality based upon human hunger for transcendence and specifically Christian spirituality which is to be measured by the norm of revelation (which does not necessarily have to mean that Christian spirituality is just a specialization of dogmatics” (McGinn, “The Letter and the Spirit, 31).

66. McGinn, “The Letter and the Spirit,” 30–33.

67. *Ibid.*, 33.

68. *Ibid.*, 35.

69. *Ibid.*, 34.

70. Sheldrake, “Some Continuing Questions,” 15–17.

theology 'from below'<sup>71</sup> like we perhaps find in theologies that are inherently spiritual such as the theology of Karl Rahner and many liberation theologies.

Sheldrake also suggests that though much has been made of the contemporary study of spirituality as a "self-implicating"<sup>72</sup> field, theology is just as much so.<sup>73</sup> This is the claim that one must have *fides* in order to *quaerens intellectum* and thus satisfy Anselm's classic definition of theology. This claim can be appropriately challenged. One might argue that a position of confessional faith is not a necessary prerequisite for the doing of theology. Theologian Michael Himes tells the story of his experience as a graduate student at the University of Chicago under the tutelage of Paul Tillich. Tillich would enter the classroom on the first of the semester, stand at the front of the classroom, pause, and then look out at his students while he uttered the single word, "Gott" in a thick, German, accent. Another pause followed by Tillich declaring, "Whatever came into your head when I said the word 'God,' is not God."<sup>74</sup> Tillich's main point is that no matter what we say or think about God is inadequate. A further point might be made here that if theology is simply "talking about the divine," then anyone with the concept of God (even if they never utter the word) is a theologian, regardless of their implication in the field, no matter how inadequate. The contemporary study of spirituality, on the other hand, has been defined, in essence, as self-implicating, meaning one cannot study spirituality without 'lived religious experience.' Thus in order to be considered a legitimate scholar of spirituality, one must be a player on the field, and not just in the stands. In the doing of theology however, if we take the definition suggested above drawing on the Tillich story, one need not be on the field, but may remain in stands.

71. *Ibid.*, 15.

72. This assertion is made routinely by thinkers in the field of contemporary spirituality, beginning with Schneiders. See Lane, "Writing in Spirituality as a Self-Implicating Act," 53–69.

73. Even the academic field of "religious studies," conventionally understood as an interdisciplinary attempt to study the phenomena of religion from an outsider and/or secular perspective without self-implication or confession, has increasingly come under questioning. Oddbjørn Leirvik, drawing on Gavin Flood's chapter "Dialogue and the Situated Observer" from Flood's *Beyond Phenomenology*, critiques "the idea of 'the detached, epistemic subject penetrating the alien world of the other through the phenomenological process.' Instead, Flood writes, 'the subject must be defined in relation to other subjects.' Flood goes as far as to say that religious studies thus become 'a dialogical enterprise in which the inquirer is situated within a particular context or narrative tradition, and whose research into narrative traditions, that become the objects of investigation, must be apprehended in a much richer and multi-faceted way'" (Flood, 143; Leirvik, "Interreligious Studies," 15).

74. Himes, *Doing the Truth in Love*, 9.

Regardless of one's approach to theology, the need for critical examination in both fields remains clear.

Further, offering too broad of a definition for the contemporary study of spirituality may result in simply renaming a field that already exists. For instance, if it is simply about human experience, why then can this concern not be addressed in the more established fields of anthropology, sociology, and phenomenology? Further, and perhaps a more obvious concern, is one that both Sheldrake and McGinn hint at: though it is clear that the study of spirituality and theology refer to distinct fields and methods, is it the case that spirituality is adequately distinct from religion as such? McGinn is concerned with reducing our spiritual method to the anthropological approach alone. He writes, "In trying to determine what spirituality is by taking the anthropological route alone, it may well be that all we have come up with is another name for religion." This does not seem to be a new issue, since today the terms spirituality and religion are often used in tandem,<sup>75</sup> but are somehow assumed to be different.

Schneiders tackles this issue in her article "Religion vs. Spirituality: A Contemporary Conundrum," in which she seeks to make sense of the more recent expression, "I'm spiritual, but not religious." She reintroduces a previous opinion that of her three conceived relationships between spirituality and religion (strangers, rivals, or partners), partnership is the most helpful. To do so, she defines spirituality anthropologically; that is, spirituality is a basic and a fundamental characteristic of what it means to be human. This understanding of spirituality allows for a broad understanding thus making it more appropriate to speak about spiritualities in the plural. Schneiders also reiterates her fundamental understanding of the term in that it "denotes experience of conscious involvement in a project of life-integration, which is pursued via self-transcendence toward ultimate value."<sup>76</sup> Thus, it is not an abstract idea or theory (e.g., a pure mental concept), nor is it an accidental experience (e.g., brought on by a drug overdose), but an effort to integrate all life experience towards one's ultimate concern. This understanding of spirituality can then be particularized (e.g., Christian Spirituality, Lakota spirituality, *Gitchigami* spirituality, Norse *Ásatrú* spirituality, etc.) to specific traditions and contexts.

75. For instance, Phyllis Tickle, popular writer on religion in America for general lay readers, employs the terms sacred, religious, and spiritual all interchangeably and synonymously. Though she acknowledges that many understand these in distinction, she credits this to the current state of the society in its striving toward the sacred (Tickle, *Re-discovering the Sacred*).

76. Schneiders, "Religion vs. Spirituality," 167.

Religion, on the other hand, reports Schneiders, "at its most basic [level is] . . . the *fundamental life stance* of the person who believes in transcendent reality."<sup>77</sup> It involves total creaturely dependence on the principle of life and is the "root of any spiritual quest."<sup>78</sup> It can denote a spiritual tradition and/or an institutionalized foundation of a particular spiritual tradition. In popular usage, religion is often set apart as distinct from spirituality precisely due to its institutionalized components. Perhaps this is what is often intended by those who identify as 'spiritual, but not religious.' Schneiders reminds us that religions are set apart from spiritualities in that "they are [institutionally] organized in particular patterns of creed, code, and cult."<sup>79</sup> These patterns, often cultural, are not always present in every particular form of spirituality.

Religions give rise to particular spiritualities because "if a spirituality of a religious tradition is to be made available to others there has to be a way of initiating people into the mystery that has been discovered by or revealed to the founding figures and of sustaining them in living it."<sup>80</sup> In short, a spirituality can rise out of an institutionalized religion, and, in turn, the task of theology can be understood, as it is so often, as the reflection upon religion (and its particular spiritualities); that is, it is the 'second step.' Spirituality is lived religious experience of God and theology reflects on that experience and talks about God.

Himes states it thusly, "if we understand theology as a reflection on the deepest roots of all human experience in order to see how all experience relates to our being believers, then theology and experience become very relevant to one another, indeed . . . Theology is the attempt to give the right name, the deepest and truest name to what is going on."<sup>81</sup> Religion, then "is the name of a way of life and action; theology is a name for reflection on the ground, meaning and goal of that way of life and action."<sup>82</sup> According to Schneiders, religions are related to spiritualities in that they are both born(e) out of intense (perhaps mystical) experience. Religion provides a way to make this experience and worldview available to others.<sup>83</sup> On the

77. *Ibid.*, 168 (italics hers).

78. *Ibid.*

79. *Ibid.*, 169.

80. *Ibid.*, 170–71.

81. Himes, *Doing the Truth in Love*, 87.

82. *Ibid.*, 90.

83. There are, of course, critics of this view that religion or spirituality grow out of experience. For instance, George Lindbeck, in his well-known postliberal cultural-linguistic approach to religion and experience, argues that spiritual experience grows out of, and is informed by, religious language and not the other way around as Schneiders

one hand, religions can promote fundamentalism, extremism and dangerous theocracy, yet on the other hand they can provide a way to collectively and communally access this spirituality. As a result, today we are seeing the proverbial throwing out of the baby with the bath water in a total rejection of religion altogether. “Such global rejection of religion,” writes Schneiders, “involves a failure to distinguish between the authentic and life-giving religious tradition and the spirituality to which it gives rise on the one hand, and its institutional form on the other. It is a classic case of curing a headache by decapitation.”<sup>84</sup>

Schneiders offers several reasons for why this might be the current trend. She, along with others, points to some reasons for why the emerging culture of postmodernity provides a welcoming and incubating environment for the growth and development of spirituality. In other words, postmodern culture may offer insight as to why there might be a seemingly ‘global rejection of religion’ and an increasing openness to spirituality. Postmodern sentiment fosters the rejection of foundationalism, meta-narratives, and “claims to normatively or non-negotiable ultimacy by any institution or agency.”<sup>85</sup> Sheldrake points out that both the spiritual mystic and the postmodern embrace an apophatic knowing; “all religious language is relative” and “reminds us that religious definitions are to be treated as provisional.”<sup>86</sup> This provides a safe space for spirituality to operate. Sheldrake adds, “postmodernism seems to enable religious traditions to be themselves. It frees the notion of ‘God’ from the constraints of rational philosophy and the need to justify belief in rational terms.”<sup>87</sup> With spirituality, postmodernism shares a common foe in its rejection of certain lingering aspects introduced by the so-called Enlightenment. It has assisted spirituality in wrestling itself free from the purely rational constraints that once served as the sole arbiter in the quest for truth. The postmodern is suspicious of the human capacity for reaching essential truths and instead places emphasis on the particularity of one’s context and culture. In this regard spirituality too places emphasis on one’s particular culture and context when analyzing lived religious experience.

With their master narratives and universal worldviews, some major world religions, certainly Christianity, are often interpreted to be at odds with postmodern inclinations. However, this is not necessarily the case

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here seems to be claiming (Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, chap. 2).

84. Schneiders, “Religion vs. Spirituality,” 171.

85. *Ibid.*, 173.

86. Sheldrake, *Spirituality and Theology*, 29.

87. *Ibid.*, 10.

for spiritualities. There are several postmodern tenets which bode well for spirituality which may simultaneously explain the recent and growing interest in spirituality and the waning interest in institutionalized religions. As Schneiders observes,

The Christian religion is intrinsically difficult to reconcile with a postmodern sensibility. By contrast, a non-religious spirituality is often very compatible with that sensibility precisely because it is usually a privatized, idiosyncratic, personally satisfying stance and practice which makes no doctrinal claims, imposes no moral authority outside one's own conscious, creates no necessary personal relationships or social responsibilities, and can be changed or abandoned whenever it seems not to work for the practitioner.<sup>88</sup>

What Schneiders describes is a popular understanding of a privatized spiritual understanding of religion. This popular definition of spirituality makes it unmistakably "more compatible with a postmodernism sensibility" than traditional religion. Schneiders argues that this understanding of spirituality or religion, as a purely private and personal endeavor devoid of any social or historical commitments, though a legitimate form of spirituality, is "not an optimal formula for the spiritual life of individuals." Rather, she argues that the optimal context for spirituality is within religion itself. First, a privatized spirituality that lacks roots and self-criticism is prone to extremism and fanaticism. Second, spirituality must have a theological structure for critical support. Third, a purely private religion or spirituality faces the possible danger of eventually fading away with the passing of the person. In short, she argues that "the quest for God is too complex and too important to be reduced to a private enterprise."<sup>89</sup> For Schneiders, a personal spirituality may still be considered a spirituality, though removed from its optimal social context. Despite her rather rigorous criteria for establishing an optimal set of conditions for spirituality, I am inclined to view spiritualities with a broader lens by accepting those that may satisfy some of her criteria but not all (e.g., doctrinal claims, in certain contexts may in serve as an obstacle to spiritual experience and its absence may in fact promote or facilitate a robust spirituality).

Certainly volumes could be filled on the relationship between religion and postmodernism. This book is not the place to attempt such a feat, but rather the concern here is to understand how religion and spirituality function in relation to one another in the current postmodern context. If

88. Schneiders, "Religion vs. Spirituality," 173.

89. *Ibid.*, 176-77.

anything, Schneiders' 2003 article points to some of the main reasons why, in a postmodern context, interest in religion (institutionalized) is waning and interest in spirituality is growing. This might also help to explain why, in part, "spirituality as a research discipline is gradually taking its place in the academy as a legitimate field of study." The danger, of course, is that religion becomes completely phased out while spirituality continues to grow in popularity completely disconnected from religion. The challenge is to seek ways to retain their connection and interdependence. Though this is not the direct concern of this book, it is certainly related. A more direct concern, rather, is to retain the interdependence between theology and spirituality, but closely related is maintaining a link to religion.

To restate, theology is a 'second step' to both religion and spirituality since it serves as a critical, and sometimes (perhaps often) systematic, reflection on either that particular spirituality or religion (sometimes institutionalized). J. Matthew Ashley writes, "most theologians are now comfortable with the recognition that theology is a 'second step,'"<sup>90</sup> If this is the case, then the overall thrust of this book, in offering an argument for a (pan) sacramental mediation between spirituality and theology, might best be understood as putting forth a means to get to this second step.

The current state of affairs might be described as follows: despite their common source and similar goal, the study of spirituality and theology can potentially become completely disengaged from one another and end up having little (perhaps nothing) to do with one another. This is not only evident in the historical outline laid out above, but is made clear in contemporary practice. Theology, especially rigorously philosophical and systematic theology, *can* devolve into an isolated mental task dwelling solely in the world of theory, concept, and abstraction. It *can* become a strict mental gymnastics (though entertaining at times) devoid of practical application and coherence with lived experience. For example, from the early Christology of the New Testament communities, to the Trinitarian theology of the Patristic theologians and early councils, to the philosophical theology of Aquinas, to Calvin's emphasis on God's sovereignty, to the transcendentalism of Rahner, profound ideas about the nature of God are proffered. Justin Martyr explains that Jesus is the eternal *logos*, Aquinas teaches that God is *ipsum esse subsistens*, and Augustine, following the Patristic theologians, teaches God as one and three in perfect Trinitarian relationship. These traditional Christian theological concepts fit nicely and neatly together in a system of thought, but can sometimes be void of direct relation to practical human experience. Doctrinal concepts that grew from the liturgical life and

90. Ashley, "The Turn to Spirituality?" 15.



practices of the church can become empty and outdated in new contexts. These concepts are in danger of becoming empty, but this is not to say that they are insignificant and unhelpful. Nor is this to say that they cannot be (and/or have not been) correlated with religious experience. Rather, the idea here is that the optimal context for theology entails spiritual consultation; that is, it needs the contextual element of lived experience to nourish, concretize, and nuance its significance. Without being in conversation with spirituality, theology flirts with practical meaninglessness. On the other hand, spirituality *can* easily become detached from any theological reflection and devolve into a *possibly* meaningless isolated quasi-religious incoherent conglomerate.

In related fashion, F. LeRon Shults recognizes a few of the modern trends which have led to this potential breach between theology and spirituality. Most specifically, he argues that "shifts in the meaning and use of three concepts—matter, person, and force—have played a particularly influential role"<sup>91</sup> in the relationship between the theological doctrine of the Holy Spirit and spirituality. He argues that "many systematic theological treatments of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit have been relatively detached from the practical concerns of spiritual pilgrims and directors. The healing of this dichotomy has been facilitated by a broader and growing interest in integrating spirituality and theology in general."<sup>92</sup> This book represents one major attempt to heal this dichotomy.

Why do the two fields need one another as dialogue partners? For one, both are interested in the manifestation of the sacred. Theology tends to how we ought to talk about these manifestations and how they might universally cohere with one another within a tradition and with other traditions, while the study of spirituality tends to the particularity of each manifestation itself in seeking to express the human response to the divine. Both fields share a common object and source: understanding the divine, yet diverge in their primary concerns. The challenge is to keep the two in dialogue. Certainly there might be many ways to retain the tension between the two. In this book I propose *one* solution to do so: a *philosophy of pansacramental and panentheistic mediation*.

91. Shults, "Spirit and Spirituality," abstract.

92. *Ibid.*, 272.