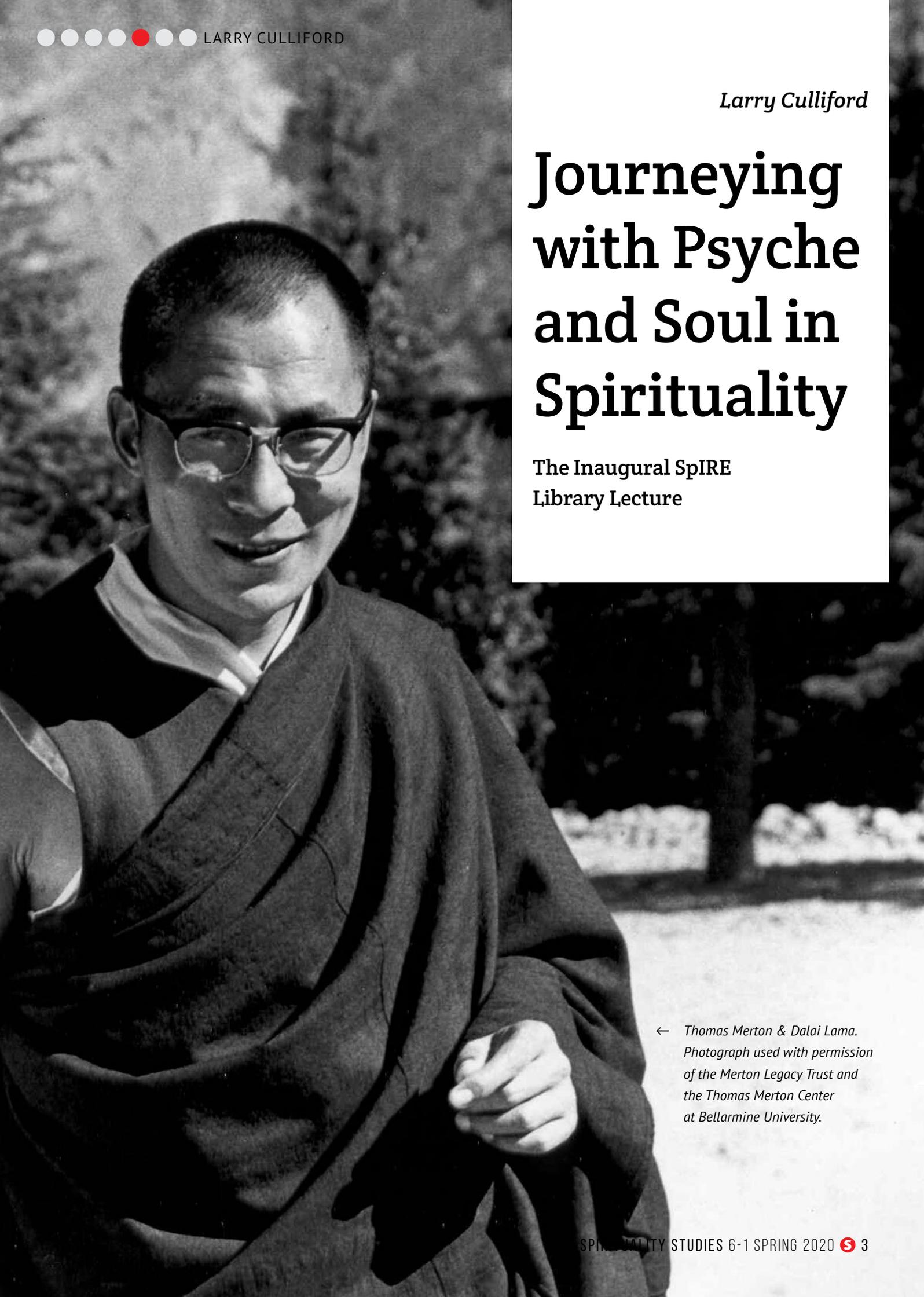


Larry Culliford

Journeying with Psyche and Soul in Spirituality

The Inaugural SpIRE
Library Lecture



← *Thomas Merton & Dalai Lama.
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Secular, global society has for many years been troubled, facing a wide range of significant challenges [1]. In this context, in search of both intelligent explanations and healthy solutions, a lecture given to mark the inauguration of a spiritual library, drawing on library-related themes – the meanings of key words from the lecture title, the value of books, and the benefits of silence – explores the notion of life as a journey in six stages towards spiritual maturity and wisdom. According to the lecturer, individual souls can be described as being permanently and harmoniously connected with an overarching, universal spirit. Nevertheless, the arc of this pilgrimage involves a split from infancy between the false *everyday Ego* and the true *spiritual Self*, which separation may begin healing as worldly ambitions give way to more spiritual priorities. Scientific observations and spiritual intuitions can both be shown to evince a holistic vision of universal connectedness. Wisdom, and associated spiritual values, are based on this profound sense of kinship with all others, with nature, and with the divine. People can improve their chances of experiencing cosmic wholeness through wisdom exercises, especially through engaging deeply with silence – as evidence by the lecturer’s personal story of having “the feeling that God was speaking directly into my ear” – and through the careful study of wisdom literature, a number of examples of which, from different religious traditions, are recommended. Prior to a concluding summary, the lecture ends by addressing the question of what might happen to the human soul after the body dies.

1 Introduction – A Perfect Reason for Congregating

The Spirituality Institute for Research and Education (SpIRE) has been based at Milltown Park in Dublin since being founded in 2015. The Institute recently acquired a new library containing many of the works once part of the extensive Milltown Institute library. In addition to important historical works in the field, it houses specialist books for applied spirituality studies, also the latest relevant articles and journals. At the invitation of SpIRE's Director, Michael O'Sullivan, and Chair, Bernadette Flanagan, the library was launched on 5th March 2020 by the author, who gave the following lecture to an invited audience of about eighty religious and lay people [2].

It is a great honour to be here, and we have a perfect reason for congregating, to proudly and joyfully inaugurate a library of spirituality, especially today as it is World Book Day. For the great privilege and by way of thanks, I will be donating a few of my own books to the library. I would also like to present an authenticated first edition copy of Thomas Merton's *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Merton 1966) signed by Merton himself, which I acquired some years ago from the Thomas Merton Center in Louisville, Kentucky.



About the author

Dr Larry Culliford MA, MB, BChir, MRCPsych, is an independent scholar trained in medicine at St Catharine's College, Cambridge, and Guy's Hospital, London. After working as a psychiatrist in New Zealand, Australia and the British National Health Service, he retired in 2007 to concentrate on writing, lecturing and giving workshops. His acclaimed books include *The Little Book of Happiness* (Rider 1999) and *Happiness: The 30 Day Guide* (Rider 2001) both under the pen-name Patrick Whiteside; also *Love, Healing & Happiness* (O Books 2007), *The Psychology of Spirituality: An Introduction* (JKP 2011), *Much Ado about Something: a Vision of Christian Maturity* (SPCK 2015) and *The Big Book of Wisdom* (Hero Press 2020). Larry has published several papers on spirituality and psychiatry, taking a spiritual history, teaching spirituality and health care to third-year medical students, and related topics. He has also written a long-running blog for *Psychology Today* under the by-line *Spiritual Wisdom for Secular Times*. In 1999, Larry was a co-founder of the Royal College of Psychiatrists' Spirituality and Psychiatry special interest group. He is a former Chair of the Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain & Ireland, and a longstanding member of both the British Association for the Study of Spirituality and the Scientific and Medical Network. Larry lives happily with his wife Sarah in West Sussex, UK. He runs a website www.ldc52.co.uk and is available at larry@ldc52.co.uk.

2 Key Words from the Lecture's Title

I shall also be speaking about some other rather special books later, but first wish to consider several key words and their meanings. The title of this lecture, *Journeying with Psyche and Soul in Spirituality*, was not a personal choice but a very interesting one, given to me by our hosts. So, what do these words mean? Let us start with the easy word, *journeying*. In the present context, this may suggest that life is a pilgrimage, a journey with a sacred purpose; a journey – perhaps with recognizable stages – aimed towards some kind of spiritual goal. Let us, for the moment, call that goal *spiritual maturity* or *wisdom*.

Now, what about the words *psyche*, *soul*, and *spirituality*?

I have been involved in many unresolved discussions about these, but how can you pin down and define the indefinable without taking the life out of it? I am mindful of poet Aline Kilmer's comment that, "*many excellent words are ruined by too definite knowledge of their meaning*" (Kilmer 2016). So today I take my cue from Lewis Carroll's Humpty Dumpty who said, "*when I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less*" (Carroll 1960). So, to set the scene, I will start by saying that human spirituality, as well as relating to wisdom, has something to do with awe, mystery, wonder, meaning and purpose; with fate, destiny, kismet, karma, Providence, God's will; and with a deep, heartfelt sense of self-worth and belonging.

The word *psyche* is a Greek word and denotes "personification of the soul as female or as a butterfly". This seems appropriate, as the life cycles of caterpillars, pupae and butterflies symbolise change/growth/evolution. According to the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (2002, 2389) *psyche* means "the soul", "the spirit", or "the *animating principle* of the universe", which indicates that we are already going in circles, especially as *anima* (as in animate – the *animating principle*) is a Latin word for soul. However, yet another, possibly more helpful meaning given for *psyche* is "the collective mental or psychological characteristics of a people". For tonight's purposes, then, I shall go with that. In 2020, we live in an increasingly

globalised society, so we can for now translate *psyche* as *world-mind* or perhaps *species-mind*. I hope we can agree on that for now.

The word *soul* can be defined as "the spiritual or immaterial part of a human being, regarded as immortal". It is usually contrasted with the body, and with the corporeal, worldly, material, or temporal aspects of human existence. I shall need to say more about this later. The word *spirit* (from which, of course, the word *spirituality* has been derived) is defined in some dictionaries in near-identical ways to *soul*; for example, "the non-physical part of a person". The word comes from the Latin *spiritus*, originally meaning "breath" or "wind", which came later to denote *life force* or *cosmic energy*, and similar words in other languages were derived the same way; for example, *pneuma* in Greek, *ruach* in Hebrew, *prāna* in Sanskrit, *ch'i* in Chinese. So this is the universal wind, blowing us along on our journey. I sometimes use the analogy of a hot air balloon, and here we are in the basket being blown along. However, because we keep pace with it, we are not necessarily conscious of this mysterious wind, nevertheless do well to tune in to it as best we can, discerning its effects, also paying attention to our fellow travellers on the same spiritual journey.

Having said all this, we are still left with a confusing degree of definitional uniformity between these words, *soul* and *spirit*. It therefore seems to me to help if *intellectually* we separate and distinguish between a *personal soul* and a *universal spirit*. As individual persons, everyone is influenced internally, either more or less consciously, by a powerful, invisible, cosmic breath or wind. I have to emphasize *intellectually* because we are also obliged to hold in our imagination the idea of a seamless and permanent connection between the two: indwelling soul and all-pervasive spirit. This is what is called a paradox: soul and spirit can be distinguished from each other mentally, but we can also imagine them to be undivided, as if connected by some kind of unbreakable, non-perishable elastic; not really separate at all!

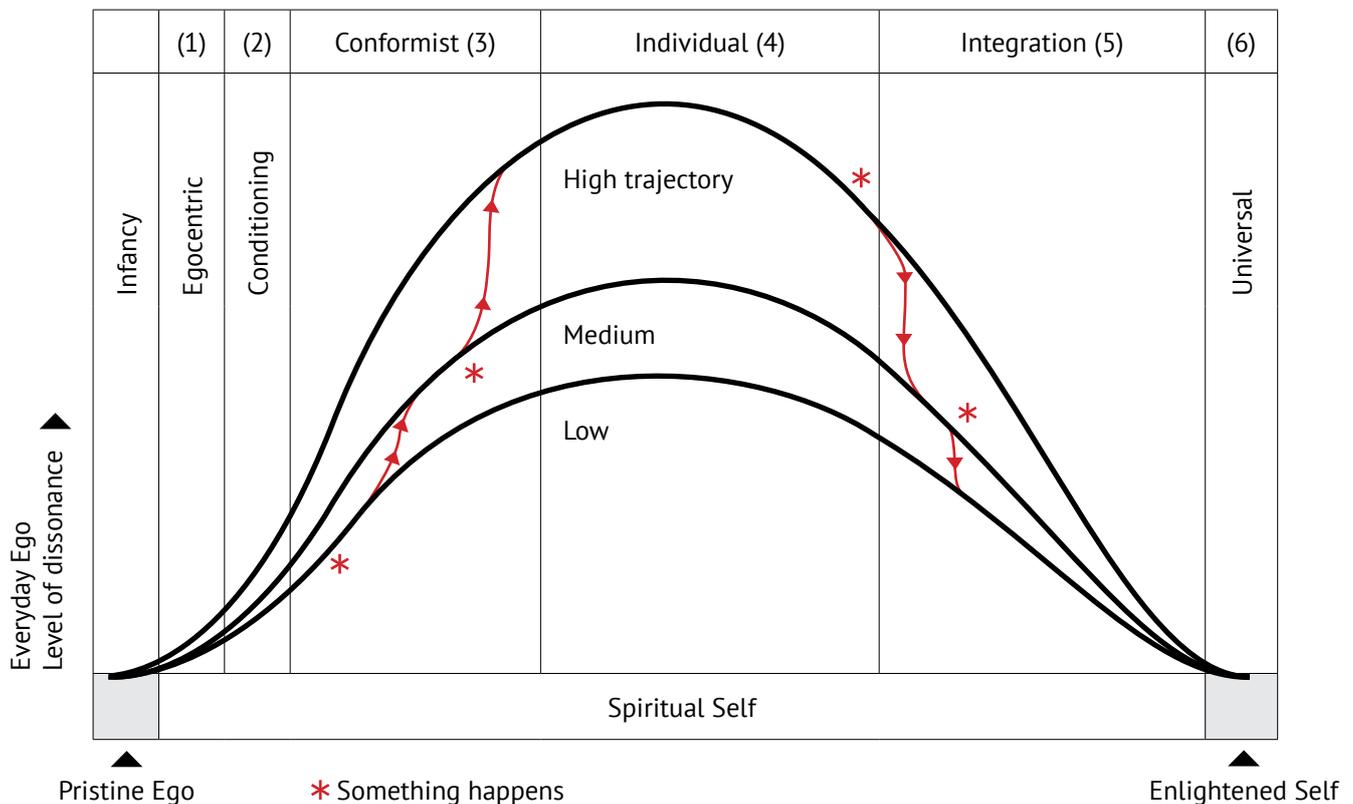
3 The Pilgrimage Journey of Life

So, our individual souls are permanently connected harmoniously with the overarching, universal spirit. Nevertheless, some kind of split does occur, and we have to call the separated off (but still connected) part something. The term I prefer, having used it before, is the *everyday Ego*, what we each think of as *me* in daily life. In contrast to which there is the *spiritual Self*, the *soul*. Others, Thomas Merton, for example, have referred to these split parts of one human being as the *False self* and the *True self*. The two parts become split from each other early in life, setting up a *dissonance* between them. The great pilgrimage of life, then, involves the split or dissonance growing, and in ideal cases later; with wisdom and maturity; closing back again. This is what Richard Rohr refers to as the “*journey into the second half of our own lives*” (Rohr 2012, vii). This is the sacred journey we are all on, to reunite our *everyday Egos* with our *spiritual Selves*.

I'd like to recap this quickly with the help of a diagram that I call *The Meaning of Life Diagram* (Culliford 2011, 29; Culliford 2014). This version is complicated, so I will break it down for you. Let us look at one line and the *Ego-soul split* or dissonance. Beginning with what some have called a *pristine Ego*, the split between the everyday Ego and the *soul* or *spiritual Self* normally grows quickly in the early years of life. As adulthood approaches, we each have to manage two opposing drives: to *conform* and belong on one hand; and to *be independent* of thought, speech and action on the other. To progress on the spiritual path, it is necessary to *individuate*, as Jung called it, not only to grow independent-minded, but also to take increasing responsibility for our thoughts, words and actions.

As we make our way in the world, we can be said to go initially through three or four stages, which, adapting James Fowler's rightly celebrated formulation (Fowler 1981), I have renamed *egocentric, conditioning, conformist, and individual*.

The Meaning of Life Diagram
showing six stages of spiritual growth (Culliford 2014)



This is Rohr's "first half" of life; dominated by worldly aims and ambitions; which he says involves *surviving successfully* by establishing an identity, home-base, family and friends, livelihood, regular pastimes and so on: the essential aspects of community and security. These are the sum of our attachments and aversions, likes and dislikes.

For the majority of people, this is all there is, valuing a sense of belonging, and prizing what is familiar, habitual and safe. Some go further, into a more individual way of life, but remain at risk of retaining a self-centred orientation, a focus on *me* and what's *mine*, holding on to possessions, position and other worldly achievements. From the individual stage, there is considerably further to travel.

4 Grace and the Spiritual Dimension

For Christians, of course, the universal breath-energy is designated the Holy Spirit, an aspect of the Holy Trinity of God, a blessed gift to encourage, heal, strengthen and guide people on our spiritual journeys. So, let us look more closely at this word *holy* in regard to spirit. Related as it is to both *wholeness* and *holistic*, the word *holy* brings to mind an undivided, unitary vision: *a seamless, timeless and infinite whole*; one that can only dimly and incompletely be grasped by the dualist/binary working mentality of the ordinary mind of our *everyday Egos*; but an undivided whole with which each of us is in permanent (if mostly unconscious) communication in the depths of our *true Selves*, through the mediation of our souls.

Monotheists, including Christians, Jews and Muslims, share a hope, and the expectation through faith, do they not, of a loving God's grace, bestowed through His infinite mercy, through the influence of the Holy Spirit? Through grace, the dissonance between *everyday Ego* and *spiritual Self* is reduced. The split comes to be healed. We are made whole. But, note,

What happens in the second half of life, the less temporal, more spiritual half? In this scheme, there are two more stages, called here the *integration* and *universal stages*, and this is where some people, spiritual pioneers like Thomas Merton and the Dalai Lama, for example, are already leading us, well ahead of the *world-mind*, the general cultural psyche or *zeitgeist* around them. How can the rest of us follow, catch up, and serve as exemplars in our turn? For that, I hope you agree, is one important purpose of a spiritual institute dedicated to research and education like SpIRE. Such an institute surely has as its purpose not only to learn and teach about spirituality, but also to exemplify and foster genuine, authentic spiritual growth in individuals and communities alike.

this is a lifelong journey. It takes time, and human effort is required. We have to help it along. I will say a little bit about how later.

So let us examine again the term *spirituality*, and the notion of a spiritual dimension to human experience and understanding. In doing so, I wish briefly to introduce a scheme consisting of just five seamlessly inter-linked dimensions covering the entirety of human understanding and experience (Culliford 2015, 22–29):

- *Physical* (energy and matter) – the miracle of existence;
- *Biological* (organs and organisms) – the miracle of life;
- *Psychological* (mental activity) – the miracle of consciousness;
- *Social* (relationships) – the miracle of love;
- *Spiritual* (souls and the sacred) – the miracle of unity.

In this scheme, the spiritual dimension takes pride of place, appearing as an originating principle, seamlessly creating, linking and shaping the other four.

5 Living in Error

The *psyche* or *world-mind*, according to the current, I would say *incomplete*, science-orientated paradigm, tends to dismiss the spiritual dimension, concerning itself with the first four only, with the physical universe and its temporal manifestations. This is the secular, left-brain world of words and numbers, of science and technology, of *reason*, of *evidence* and *calculation*, the world of *progress*, of *profit and loss*, of the *tragic imperative of growth economics*, of *merciless consumerism and advertising*, of *eco-destruction and global warming*, of increasingly devastating *natural disasters*, widespread *human aggression*, and the resulting displacement of millions, both as refugees and as so-called *economic migrants*.

This is the veritable shambles we are all in. How did we get there? According to Thomas Merton, since the philosopher Descartes announced, “*I think, therefore I am*” in the 1600s, humans have been living in error. The subsequent interpretation has always since been about reason, about thinking rationally. Logical, binary, either-or, right-wrong, us-them thinking, following Descartes, therefore tends, Merton says, “*to make the individual person central to his or her self-enclosed universe, seeing everything and everyone else as an object*” (Merton 1988, 131–2). Thus, in our secular Western culture, we define ourselves as separate from other people, and have grown increasingly mechanistic, materialistic, and mercenary to the detriment of the world. So, let me say a bit more about wisdom.

6 Discovering Wisdom

Wisdom can be defined as a “form of knowledge”, “sacred and intuitive knowledge” in contrast to scientific, evidence-based information. Wisdom is “*the knowledge of how to be and behave for the best, for all concerned, in any given situation*” (Culliford 2020, 19). As such, it can be seen to depend upon recognition of our profound kinship to each other. This is clearly the opposite of, and an antidote to, Descartes’ induced self-centredness. We human beings are ultimately of one kind. Hence the value of kindness, and an inescapably urgent need to re-sacralise human culture. I hope you will agree with me that what we seek is spiritual progress throughout the world, progress aimed at gently pulling everything back from discord towards social well-being, health and harmony.

Wisdom is intuitive, of the moment. It cannot be said to depend on any particular beliefs: ideological, political, religious or non-religious. A belief, in my view, is often a form of Ego-attachment, and much more important are deeply personal, spiritual experiences. To fit in with the spiritual theme of holiness, we can say, for example, therefore that wisdom ultimately depends on having a profound and mysterious sense of both personal and cosmic wholeness. Thomas Merton put it like this: “*We are already one... But we imagine that we are not... And what we have to recover is our original unity... What we have to be is what we are.*” (Merton 1973, 308).

Even from the perspective of the world-mind, the findings of science provide good evidence that all people everywhere,

past, present and future, are connected to one-another, and equally to everything else in the universe. To begin with, physics and chemistry teach that everything originated billions of years ago with the so-called *Big Bang*; that the first stars, formed of hydrogen and helium, eventually burned away and finally blew apart with such tremendous force as to create and spread wide all the atoms of the periodic table, leading to the creation of a multitude of galaxies, including our own, our solar system and planets, universally connected still by a mysterious force known as *quantum entanglement*. Biology, in turn, says that the same stardust atoms contribute to carbon-based life-forms that share a genetic heritage and evolutionary pathway towards the astonishing diversity and sophistication of life on earth today. The oxygen that we humans all breathe and share is produced in green plants by photosynthesis, a process which entraps light energy from the sun, our local star. The same oxygen, combined with carbon, is taken back up by plants and re-used in a continuous cycle. It is clear from such observations that we are each inextricably bound up with nature.

Psychology reveals, in addition, that human beings share universal faculties, among them: the five senses; being able to learn, think, calculate and reason; the ability to speak and act; also a range of emotions, both painful and pleasurable. As extensively elaborated in his magnificent book, *The Master and His Emissary*, Iain McGilchrist (2009) reports how neuroscience tells us that the two sides of our brains work on

7 Growing in Wisdom

different agendas: the usually dominant verbal, binary left hemisphere analysing and dividing things into their constituent parts, like a spotlight; and in contrast the usually neglected, silent, unitary, intuitive right-brain appreciating things whole, in context, moment by moment, like a flood-light.

Sociology and anthropology have also revealed significant commonalities of social groupings and behaviour. All these scientific observations combine to allow us at least an intellectual grasp of multiple cosmic inter-connections. Importantly, though, in terms of the spiritual journey, we can also both improve our chances of experiencing universal oneness and develop our understanding of this vital principle of existence, through what I call *wisdom exercises*. It is possible, our destiny even, to know this sacred unity personally, not just intellectually but through the direct perceptive capacity of the human soul; to experience it as a deeply seated, life-changing, indelible and incontrovertible truth. It is only through having such spiritual experiences, that allows a person to feel wonderfully, vibrantly and eternally connected to the divine totality of the universe, to all nature, and through this to everything and everyone else, to every other person, regardless of age, race, belief-system, colour, gender or anything. This kind of intuitive awareness, whether come by gradually or through a sudden epiphany, marks the entry-point to re-integration of Ego and soul. This is the start of the home-coming phase of our pilgrimage journey.

What changes as a person moves into the *integration stage*? Aware of universal connectivity means naturally and spontaneously feeling motivated to take increasing responsibility for one's thoughts, words and actions; not only this, but importantly also for what we do not speak up about and things left undone. Instead of prizing security and leisure, position, possessions and power over others, we increasingly recognise that spiritual growth occurs through letting go, and through engaging with adversity, our own and that of others, rather than by persistently trying to avoid or anaesthetise ourselves from it. And this leads us to discover and adopt a set of spiritual, as against worldly, values, such as (to name a few): *compassion, forgiveness, generosity, gratitude, honesty, humility, frugality, peace, joy and love*. These are among the alchemical elements essential to wisdom and are the attributes of what I would call supreme mental health, which is much more, of course, than simply the absence of mental illness.

So, what are wisdom exercises? How do we change, become spiritually mature, and grow in wisdom? It is a big subject, but let's get started with another theme from our focal point this evening: the library. In addition to words and books, something else we tend to associate with a library is silence. I often say this: *Spirituality is where the deeply personal meets the universal*; so let me tell you a personal story. I make no great apology for doing so, on the grounds that we do well to share instructive stories of our personal spiritual journeys with each other. I hope you will like this one because it's about an occasion, both momentous and ordinary, when I had "the feeling that God was speaking directly into my ear".

Once upon a time I lived in Australia. It was the 1970s, and there I associated briefly with some Tibetan Buddhist lamas. I learned a lot from them; in particular, how to meditate. Back in England in the early 80s, deliberately taking time out, not having worked for many months because completely unsure what to do next, I went to a newly established Buddhist retreat centre in Cumbria, on the banks of Morecombe Bay. I should mention that my (Anglican) Christian practice had been in abeyance for some time. I had not been to church for several years; and I was sitting alone in silent meditation in the meditation room at this place one afternoon when the Lord's Prayer started running repeatedly through my otherwise utterly still mind, to be followed by the words and tunes of hymns from my childhood. You may know this one, a well-loved traditional Irish hymn from the 8th century: *Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart, Be all else but naught to me, save that thou art, Be thou my best thought in the day and the night, Both waking and sleeping, thy presence my light* (Byrne and Hull 1986, 552).

"Well," I thought to myself, "You are in the wrong place, Larry!" At that stage, the religious life appealed to me, and I had begun thinking of the possibility of becoming a Buddhist lay person, or even a monk. But I knew I was not a Buddhist, and as it turned out God had other plans. The next day I walked in warm sunshine through the retreat centre garden and a patch of woodland, down to the banks of the bay, where there was a stone bench. Once again, I sat alone in stillness and silence, going deep enough into a trance to become oblivious for a time to myself and my surroundings. I do not know how long I was there, but suddenly I was fully awake and alert, and there were words, as if put straight from the void into my head; strong, clear and authoritative. "You are a psychiatrist, Larry. That is what you have trained to do... Go and do that!"

So, the next day I drove back to London and, soon after, looking at the positions vacant pages of the latest medical journal, I saw advertised the job I knew would be mine. I went immediately to see the professor at St George's Hospital in London, who encouraged me to apply, and was eventually appointed. The next few years were not totally plain sailing. I had to continue training and take two sets of professional exams, and then compete for jobs on the crowded career ladder; but I was always confident, having the Holy Spirit on my side. Even in the darkest moments of practising psychiatry in difficult circumstances; for it is a challenging, unpopular, misunderstood and under-resourced specialty; what I had, you could say, was faith, and the strongest sense of walking with Jesus beside me.

The point is that I was able to access the source of that guidance and faith through silence, stillness, and solitude; through meditation or (as you may prefer to think of it) silent prayer: and this, for me, is the most valuable of all possible *wisdom exercises*, enhancing the others, which are all aimed, similarly, at strengthening the connection between what we are calling *soul* and *spirit*.

In my recent book (Culliford 2020, 138–9), on my *Psychology Today*' blog (Culliford 2018), and through the *World Wide Wave of Wisdom* (Culliford 2019), I have been encouraging people to adopt a *Spiritual Development Plan* (SDP) or, for those less comfortable with the idea of spirituality, a *Personal Growth Programme* (PGP), according to which the simplest daily wisdom practice routine, PGP, or SDP, might consist of up to five parts, as follows:

- a) *Regular quiet time* – for meditation, reflection or prayer;
- b) *Appropriate study* – of religious, spiritual or other wisdom material, poetry, philosophy, etc.;
- c) *Maintaining supportive friendships* with others who share similar humanitarian or spiritual aims and values;
- d) *Regular acts of service, kindness and compassion*;
- e) *Time spent engaging meaningfully with nature*.

There is not time to include a more complete list, which can be found elsewhere (Culliford 2020, 138–142), and which

of course includes regular acts of worship, but by way of explanation, here is a short passage from my new title *The Big Book of Wisdom* (Culliford 2020, 138):

Wisdom practices, of a holistic and spiritual nature, can be divided into two main types: religious and secular. These are of time-honoured value, and have in common that they improve personal harmony by restoring an ideal balance between the left and right brain hemispheres, and so between spiritual and worldly values. These practices promote personal equanimity in the face of threats, also foster natural grieving and healing in the face of loss, with personal growth as a natural and permanent consequence. Between people, even people from widely different backgrounds, who may not even have a common language, shared holistic and spiritual practices tend to promote fellow-feeling and friendship.

This evening, in the context of a library, it is right that I should focus on the first two recommended components: regular quiet time and appropriate study of religious, spiritual or other wisdom material. So, before going on to mention some more books that I have found helpful on my own spiritual journey, I will add a word about *reflection*, reading *reflectively*, *Lectio Divina* as the Latin has it, or, to use another word, *contemplation*. This is Thomas Merton (1972, 1) again:

Contemplation is the highest expression of [author's note: a person's] intellectual and spiritual life. It is that life itself, fully awake, fully active, fully aware that it is alive. It is spiritual wonder. It is spontaneous awe at the sacredness of life, of being. It is gratitude for life, for awareness and for being. It is vivid realization of the fact that life and being in us proceed from an invisible, transcendent and infinitely abundant Source. Contemplation is, above all, awareness of the reality of that Source. It knows the Source, obscurely, inexplicably, but with a certitude that goes both beyond reason and beyond simple faith...

That resonates with me, as I hope it does with you. I really like it.

8 Some Books Worthy of Study

So here now are a few of the impressive books, the contemplation of which has helped me, in addition to those already mentioned: Firstly, Thomas Merton's famous autobiographical account of his conversion, *The Seven Storey Mountain* (Merton 1948). I would also like to mention Merton's book, *The Way of Chuang Tsu* (Merton 1969) in order to introduce you to the source text, Chuang-Tsu's *Inner Chapters* (Chuang Tsu 1974, 113; 37), because I want to read a couple of extracts from it.

1. *Perfect is the (person) who knows what comes from heaven and what comes from mankind. Knowing what comes from heaven, he is in tune with heaven. Knowing what comes from mankind, she uses her knowledge of the known to develop her knowledge of the unknown, and enjoys the fullness of life until her natural death.*

This is the perfection of knowledge. However, there is one difficulty. Knowledge must be based upon something, but one is not certain what this may be. How, indeed, do I know that what I call heaven is not actually mankind, and that what I call mankind is actually heaven?

First, there must be a true person, a true human being; then there can be true knowledge.

2. *When there is division, there is something which is not divided. When there is questioning, there is something beyond the question. Why is this? The sages keep their wisdom to themselves while ordinary people flaunt their knowledge in loud discussion. So I say, 'Those who dispute do not see.'*

I also recommend another Taoist text, Lao Tsu's *Tao Te Ching* (1973), beautifully illustrated with photos and exquisite Chinese calligraphy; and I want to say, please do not be afraid of Eastern religions and philosophy. I can vouch for how much they have enhanced my Christian understanding, providing holistic insights into the Gospel of Christ. Particularly helpful too has been *The Dhammapada: The Sayings of the Buddha*. Let me read from the first of the forty chapters (1976, 21).

*We are what we think,
All that we are arises with our thoughts.
With our minds, we make the world.*

*Speak or act with an impure mind
And trouble will follow you
As the wheel follows the ox that draws the cart*

*Speak or act with a pure mind
And happiness will follow you
As your shadow, unshakeable.*

I recommend familiarising yourself as well with the principle Hindu texts, *The Bhagavad Gita* (1944), for example, and *The Upanishads*. Numerous translations are available, so I have listed the ones I tend to favour. There are also plenty of other books I could name, books like Mother Teresa's inspiring volume *A Simple Path* (Mother Teresa 1995), and Neil Douglas-Klotz's revealing book, *The Hidden Gospel: Decoding the Spiritual Message of the Aramaic Jesus* (Douglas-Klotz 1999), but that will have to do... Except that I must also mention two highly praiseworthy volumes, whose authors or editors are present with us here tonight. First, Noel Keating's splendid *Meditation with Children* (2017). Speaking as a recently appointed school Governor, in a school where *character education* is an important part of the curriculum, I am sure that teaching children to meditate is the way to go to transform secular culture, and the world psyche over time. As David Hay and Rebecca Nye have shown in *The Spirit of the Child* (Hay and Nye 2006), young children almost all have a significant degree of spiritual awareness; which these authors call, *relational consciousness*; but this faculty diminishes as the teenage years approach. Meditation counters the effects of secular cultural pressures. What I particularly like about Noel's book is the way he explains and distinguishes between the *practical benefits* and the *spiritual fruits* of meditation.

Another great book on my list tonight is *The Routledge Handbook of Spirituality in Society and the Professions* (Zsolnai and Flanagan 2019). This impressive volume vigorously promotes a new paradigm for human self-understanding, one that necessarily includes a spiritual dimension. Providing more than a benchmark of current thinking and research, it will serve for many as a reliable signpost, a genuine beacon of hope. Whereas each of the chapters tends to be scholarly, cautious

and well-referenced, attempting to encapsulate spirituality in a specific context, read together they announce something wonderful, a significant measure of agreement in every sphere of human endeavour covered. Let me read a couple of quotations (Zsolnai and Flanagan 2019, 3).

Numerous studies document that the more people prioritize materialistic goals, the lower their well-being and the more likely they are to engage in manipulative, competitive, and ecologically degrading behaviours.

Professions which want to surpass the ecological, social, and ethical 'mess' that modernity [author's note: has] created are beginning to articulate within their own ranks the need to embrace spirituality and develop practices based on a less materialistic, more holistic worldview.

And about the need for deeply personal engagement (Zsolnai and Flanagan 2019, 49).

We came to acknowledge that the essential feature of transformative research is the scholar's encounter with the Sacred, a journey of transformation that involves the researchers' understanding of the topic and themselves as human beings.

The range of the fifty-one subjects covered is vast: from agriculture to architecture, ecology to economics, from movies to martial arts, through peace, policing and politics, etcetera. The book contains many additional nuggets of wisdom. You do not have to be involved in education, for example, to see that the following statement implicitly contains sound advice for every professional, politician, parent, indeed for any person engaged in human relations at work, in their community or at home: *"Having a deep authentic presence in the classroom, whereby a teacher stands centred, confident, and present to self, is critical to a teacher creating and generating an ambience of safety, setting boundaries, and being mindfully present to the task in hand."* (Zsolnai and Flanagan 2019, 435). For both their vision and hard work, the publishers, editors and authors are to be thanked and congratulated. The common psyche, the world-mind of today, may be best thought of as adolescent, still ripening towards maturity. Wonderful books like all these, and a library like the one we are launching this evening with due joy and reverence, can only help promote much-needed spiritual progress.

9 Does the Human Soul Survive?

I have almost finished, but there remains one important further question to address, *Where does the pilgrimage take us when life is over?* Is there an afterlife, Heaven and Hell? To put it briefly, *Does the human soul survive?* The most welcome short answer I put to you is, Yes. But what is it that happens? Here is a potentially provocative idea suggested by US Professor of Philosophy and LSD pioneer, Chris Bache (2020, 1696–1701).

The story of the Soul is in essence a story of individual consciousness – ultimately sourced in the Creative Intelligence of the cosmos – moving back and forth between the physical universe and a surrounding meta-universe on a long journey of self-development. The pulse of the Soul is the pulse of reincarnation, our awareness narrowing at birth and expanding at death.

Reincarnation is a dance in which our earthly lives emerge from and return to our Soul, the larger consciousness that preserves every thought, every tear, every joy we experience on Earth and in between our earthly lives, folding all our experiences into its expanding radiance.

Reincarnation gives individual consciousness an open-ended amount of time in which to learn from its mistakes and develop innate capacities... Properly understood, reincarnation is a work of genius, as is everything else we see in our universe, from supernovas to DNA...

I do not say that I concur with these ideas. I prefer the image of each single raindrop being received and welcomed back into a glorious, sacred, infinite and timeless spiritual and heavenly ocean, but they contain much worth pondering; and it seems fitting now to remind you briefly of Thomas Merton's poetic description in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* of what we are tonight calling the soul. It rings true for me, as I hope it does also for you. Merton calls it (1966, 141–2):

A point of nothingness... A point of pure truth... The pure glory of God in us... It is like a pure diamond, blazing with the invisible light of heaven. It is in everybody, and if we could see it, we would see these billions of points of light coming together in the face and blaze of a sun that would make all the darkness and cruelty of life vanish completely.

10 Conclusion

In conclusion and to summarise, our secular, global society has arguably, for many decades, through what may be characterised as spiritual immaturity, been in error; troubled, facing a wide range of significant inter-related challenges and problems. We do well, therefore to seek intelligent explanations and healthy solutions to these. As befits a lecture given at the launch of a spiritual library, themes have included the meanings of key words from the lecture title, the value of specified books, and the benefits of silence, using these themes to explore the notion of life as a pilgrimage journey in six stages towards spiritual maturity and wisdom. Progress on the path involves healing the unavoidable split between the false *everyday Ego* and the true *spiritual Self*, by re-awakening transformative awareness of the seamless and indestructible connection between our personal *soul* and an overarching, universal *spirit*. To this end, engaging regularly with one or more wisdom exercises; especially through periods of meditation or silent prayer, and through the careful study of wisdom literature; is highly recommended. Those who undertake such an enlightened regimen will benefit; learning to balance conformity with independence of mind and spirit, living in the moment, taking increasing responsibility for their thoughts, words and actions, and growing towards

the virtuous embodiment of spiritual values, included among them kindness, honesty, humility, forgiveness, gratitude, peace, joy and love. Great benefit will inevitably, then, also be enjoyed by those with whom such disciplined practitioners come into contact and influence; so this becomes a reliable and certain way of contributing meaningfully and powerfully to the gradual, unstoppable evolution of the *world-mind* or *psyche*. I believe Thomas Merton was inspired when, in 1968, he said this: “*We are already one... But we imagine that we are not... And what we have to recover is our original unity... What we have to be is what we are.*” (Merton 1973, 308). I leave you to ponder those words.

The lecture was brought to a close with a final prayer, taken from the second verse of the well-known hymn, quoted earlier (Byrne and Hull 1986, 553):

*Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word,
Be thou ever with me, and I with thee, Lord,
Be thou my great father, and I thy true son,
Be thou in me dwelling, and I with thee one...
Amen.*

Notes

- [1] Including most recently the advancing coronavirus pandemic, which resulted in lockdown in Ireland and the UK within two weeks of the lecture.
- [2] A podcast of the lecture can be heard at <https://www.jesuit.ie/podcasts/featured-audio/spire-library-launch/>.

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