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Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence: Moving to the Scientific Mainstream

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Around the world, there appears to be a growing concern with spirituality in the general public as well as among scholars. Whether one looks at the list of best-selling books, searches the Web, watches contemporary movies or TV shows, or reads general-interest magazines, one quickly finds evidence of this trend. And one sees religion and spirituality (mixed with nationalism and ethnic tensions) playing defining roles in most major geopolitical conflicts in a world that is becoming both smaller and more fragmented.

While spirituality in general has considerable currency, there is additional focus on the spiritual development of children and adolescents. The source of this interest varies considerably. For example, some people—particularly those within religious communities—worry that the beliefs, narratives, and commitments of the world's religious traditions are not adequately taking root in young people's lives (e.g., Lindner, 2004). As Wuthnow (1998) puts it, "When the sacred no longer has a single address, people worry that it may disappear entirely" (p. 10). Other observers contend that the world's religious heritage is "tainted by an incriminating record of injustice, tribalism, violence, and the violation of fundamental human rights" (King, 2001 p. 2). Instead, they say, the urgent need is to engage young people in new ways of seeing, knowing, and discovering, since "a simple return to or retrieval of past spiritualities is no longer enough to meet urgent contemporary social and personal needs" (King,

2001, p. 2). Still others note that children are, too often, at the center of major conflicts, terrorism, and the trauma of war, all of which point toward spiritual pathology or pain (see Wagener & Malony, chapter 10, this volume). Finally—and perhaps most germane to this handbook—there is an emerging sense among developmental scholars that something has been missing in the scholarship, and that domain is spiritual development (Benson, chapter 34, this volume; Coles, 1990; Lerner, Anderson, Alberts, & Dowling, chapter 5, this volume).

Although this appears to be a "moment" in the public imagination when things spiritual have gained attention, there has been little consensus in the scientific community about the nature and scope of this dimension of life. To be sure, there are consistent strands in the social sciences, such as the subfields of psychology and sociology of religion, that have, for more than a century, built a growing knowledge base of theory and research. To this point, however, most of this knowledge base has been dispersed into textbooks, journals, conferences, and interest groups focused in a particular discipline, geographic area, or religious tradition, with little overlapping scholarship or dialogue. Much of the work finds its "home" in the psychology of religion. This field interfaces more with social psychology and personality than it does with developmental psychology (Spilka, Hood, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 2004). Furthermore, the psychology of religion is quite insulated from anthropology and sociology. Spiritual development cannot be understood without significant conversations across these and other fields.

For the first time, this handbook draws together leading social scientists in the world from multiple disciplines to articulate what is known and needs to be known about spiritual development in childhood and adolescence. In doing so, this volume presents a rich and diverse array of theory, qualitative and quantitative research, and proposals for the future that are designed to move spiritual development from a sidelight in the academy to become a mainstream, accepted, and sustained field of inquiry and learning.

The editors of this volume share two goals, one short term and one long term. The short-term goal is to synthesize the research on spiritual development in a way that encourages and guides additional scholarship. The long-term goal is to help position spiritual development as a central and mainstream issue in the social sciences, including psychology, sociology, and anthropology, which have had a tenuous relationship with this domain. The lack of full engagement with this domain in the mainstream social sciences has limited our capacity to fully understand the person in its entirety at all points in the life span and within its multiple social, cultural, and national contexts. This volume is an effort to fill this gap.

To set a context for the book, this introductory chapter first examines some of the history of how the mainstream social sciences have neglected this area of inquiry, then it highlights some of the challenges and approaches to defining spiritual development. Next, the chapter highlights the major theoretical traditions that have informed and shaped the current scientific understanding of spiritual development, particularly in developmental psychology and psychology of religion. Growing out of those theoretical underpinnings, we then articulate several themes and assumptions that guided the development of the handbook.

Marginalization in the Social Sciences

Although pioneers in the social sciences such as William James, G. Stanley Hall, J. H. Leuba, Edwin Starbuck, Max Weber, and Emile Durkheim considered religiousness and spirituality to be integral to their fields, the study was marginalized throughout much of the 20th century. Through the years, many scholars have documented the relative lack of attention to issues of religion and spirituality in the social sciences in general (Davie, 2003; Gorsuch, 1988; Paloutzian, 1996; Weaver et al., 1998; Weaver et al., 2000) and, more specifically, in the study of adolescence (Benson, Donahue, & Erickson, 1989; Bridges & Moore, 2002; Donelson, 1999; Kerestes & Youniss, 2003; Markstrom, 1999; Wallace & Forman, 1998) and childhood (Hay, Nye & Murphy, 1996; Nye, 1999). The scientific study of religion began reemerging in the 1960s and, by the new millennium, Hill et al. (2000)

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concluded that "the state of the discipline today can be characterized as sufficiently developed but still overlooked, if not bypassed, by the whole of psychology" (p. 51). Today, this subfield of psychology of religion is struggling with how it relates to notions of "spirituality," with some arguing that the subdiscipline should be renamed "psychology of religion and spirituality" (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003; Pargament, 1999).

The inattentiveness to spiritual development in the mainstream social sciences can be graphically illustrated in the study of developmental psychology. Benson, Roehlkepartain, and Rude (2003) searched six leading developmental psychology journals *(Child Development, Developmental Psychology, International Journal of Behavioral Development, Journal of Adolescent Research, Journal of Early Adolescence,* and *the Journal of Research on Adolescence)* to ascertain the frequency of citations to religion, religious development, spirituality, or spiritual development. Of 3,123 articles published between 1990 and July 2002 having to do with children or adolescents, only 27 (0.9%) referenced one or more of these key words. And only one article explored issues of spirituality in childhood and adolescence. Content analyses of other journals and publications have reached similar conclusions, though some have documented somewhat higher proportions based on other search criteria (Weaver et al., 1998; Weaver et al., 2000).

A variety of explanations have been given for the historic marginalization of religion and spirituality in the social sciences. Almost all have to do with the academy's biases about religion. And because religious and spiritual development share conceptual space, the former has affected the reputation of the latter. Wulff (1997) identifies some of the more prominent obstacles. Among them is the pervasive personal rejection of religion by social scientists, a fact supported by several studies of academics' attitudes toward religion (Bergin, 1991; Campbell, 1971; Larson & Witham, 1998; Shafranske, 1996). Another is the view that religion, like art or music or politics, is a discretionary human activity and not a core, fundamental dynamic of human life. The area may also be shied away from because it is "politically sensitive and philosophically difficult" (McCrae, 1999, p. 1211).

In addition, Smith (2003) documents reductionist thinking among sociologists that dismisses religious or spiritual phenomena as expressions of something else. "What appears to be divine or spiritual or transcendent or pious or sacred are *really only* about social class, race, gender, ethnicity, nationalism, solidarity, social control, and so on" (p. 19, italics in original; see also Wuthnow, 2003). And, although there are exceptions, many anthropologists have concluded that religion or spirituality is "a by-product of cognitive adaptations selected for 'more mundane' survival functions" (Alcorta & Sosis, in press; see also Atran, 2002).

Recent years, however, have seen a marked growth in scholarship related to spirituality and spiritual development. A number of reviews of the literature in child and adolescent religion and spirituality provide access to the knowledge base in multiple disciplines (see, for example, Benson, Donahue, & Erickson, 1989; Benson & King, in press; Benson et al., 2003; Bridges & Moore, 2002; Donahue & Benson, 1995; Donelson, 1999; Hay et al., 1996; Kerestes & Youniss, 2003; Markstrom, 1999; and Smith, 2003.) In addition, several special issues of peer-reviewed journals have been published that address spirituality or spiritual development, including *Annals of Behavioral Medicine, Review of Religious Research, Journal of Health Psychology, Journal of Personality,* and *American Psychologist* (special section). Mills (2002) documents a substantial increase in medical journal articles that address religion or spirituality and health (also see Thoresen, 1999). Though the word *spirituality* did not even appear in the MedLine database until the 1980s, "in recent years, every major medical, psychiatric, and behavioral medicine journal has published on the topic" (Mills, 2002, p. 1), fueled, in part, by the pioneering work of Harold G. Koenig and the late David B. Larson (e.g., Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001). This work has not focused specifically on children and adolescents, but it has generated significant attention in the public and media to this domain of life.

In addition to this growing attention to the broad domain of spirituality, a number of recent contributions in mainstream developmental science publications have also focused specifically

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on children and adolescents. Reich, Oser, and Scarlett (1999) have compiled a volume titled *Psychological Studies on Spiritual and Religious Development,* uniquely featuring European scholars. A major article on spiritual development appeared in *Developmental Psychology* in 2004 (King & Furrow, 2004). The *Journal of Adolescence* published an issue focused on adolescents and religion (1999), and a special issue of *Applied Developmental Science* on spiritual development was published in 2003. For the first time since it began publication in 1946, the *Handbook of Child Psychology* includes a chapter on spiritual development in its sixth edition (Oser, Scarlett, & Bucher, in press). And, in addition to this volume, Sage Publications has released the *Encyclopedia of Religious and Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence* (Dowling & Scarlett, in press), which offers brief introductions to hundreds of topics.

Definitional Issues

Although there is evidence of increased attention to this domain, there is no consensus about what "this domain" really is. Indeed, a fundamental challenge in compiling scholarship on "spiritual development" is a definitional issue, knowing that how the subject is defined not only sets boundaries on the areas of scholarship but also influences whether it is deemed legitimate in the academy. What is meant by spiritual development? How is it different from spirituality? And how it is it different from religious development—the domain with which it has been most closely associated? Despite a number of helpful explorations of these definitional issues (see, for example, Hill et al., 2000; King, 2001; MacDonald, 2000; Marler & Hadaway, 2002; Oser et al., in press; Reich, 2001; Slater, Hall, & Edwards, 2001; Stifoss-Hanssen, 1999; Wuthnow, 1998; Zinnbauer et al., 1997; and Zinnbauer, Pargament, & Scott, 1999), there has yet to emerge any consensus. As Zinnbauer and colleagues (1997) write: "The ways in which the words [religiousness and spirituality] are conceptualized and used are often inconsistent in the research literature. Despite the great volume of work that has been done, little consensus has been reached about what the terms actually mean" (p. 549).

There are several ways to think about the terms *spirituality* and *spiritual development,* all of which are reflected in various contributions to this handbook. First, they have been described by many scholars as a particular dimension of the religious experience. Wulff (1997) has suggested that this situation has been necessitated by a change in the use and meaning of the term *religion.* William James (1902/1958), he notes, recognized that religion had several intertwined dimensions. There are both institutional aspects to religion, including belief systems and rituals that one inherits when choosing to be part of a religious tradition. At the same time, there is an experiential dimension, which is more direct and immediate.

In Wulff's view, the meaning of religion has evolved to focus more on the first of these two, with religion "becoming reified into a fixed system of ideas or ideological commitments" (p. 46). This has led to the use of the term spirituality to convey the more subjective and experiential aspects of religion. According to Zinnbauer and colleagues (1997): "Spirituality is now commonly regarded as an individual phenomenon and identified with such things as personal transcendence, supra consciousness sensitivity, and meaningfulness. . . . Religiousness, in contrast, is now often described narrowly as formally structured and identified with religious institutions and prescribed theology and rituals" (p. 551). In fact, some models now subsume religiousness as a category within spirituality (see, for example, MacDonald, 2000).

This bifurcation of religion and spirituality has both proponents and detractors. For some, these are artificial lines of demarcation, blurring the fact that belief and tradition are dynamically intertwined with the experiential (Wuthnow, 1998). Another concern voiced by some scholars is that the split between religion and spirituality unnecessarily fuels the idea that one is bad (i.e., religion) and the other is good (i.e., spirituality). (See, for example, Hill et al., 2000; Pargament, 1999.) Such evaluations are likely to emerge in postmodern societies in which social institutions are viewed with suspicion and individual development is held as a primary value. In these cases, individuals may seek to know,

relate to, and respond to the sacred without the perceived trappings and constrictions of traditional religious doctrine, ritual, and institutional engagement. Still others argue that the debate is really a Western—even North American—one in that it ignores how these terms are experienced and used in non-Western and developing societies (see, for example, Mbiti, 1969; Stifoss-Hanssen, 1999).

A relatively new wave of definitions is predicated on finding a common denominator that can bind religion and spirituality together and at the same time demarcate their differences. This anchor point is the concept of the sacred. Pargament (1997) suggests that examples of the sacred include the concepts of God, divinity, transcendence, and ultimate reality. Accordingly, spirituality can be defined as "a search for the sacred, a process through which people seek to discourse, hold on to and, when necessary, transform whatever they hold sacred in their lives" (Hill & Pargament, 2003). Similarly, Miller and Thoresen (2003) suggest that spirituality refers to one's engagement with that which she or he consider holy, divine, or beyond the material world. Religion also seeks the sacred, creating the doctrine, beliefs, and rituals that bind believers to it and to each other.

A second recent effort seeks to define spirituality without explicit reference to a sacred or transcendent realm. Beck (1992), for example, refocuses the concept of spiritual on a set of human qualities rather than a search for the sacred or transcendent. These qualities, he suggests, can be developed by either religious or nonreligious persons. Among these are insight and understanding; an awareness of the interconnections among and between persons and other life forms; an experience of mystery and awe; and a posture of generosity and gratitude. Roof (1993) puts it this way: spirituality "gives expression to the being that is in us; it has to do with feelings, with the power that comes from within, with knowing our deepest selves" (p. 64).

A new line of theory and research introduces a third perspective. This work suggests that there is a core and universal dynamic in human development that deserves to be moved to center stage in the developmental sciences, alongside and integrated with the other well-known streams of development: cognitive, social, emotional, and moral. The name commonly given to this dimension is spiritual development. And it is hypothesized to be a developmental wellspring out of which emerges the pursuit of meaning, connectedness to others and the sacred, purpose, and contributions, each and all of which can be addressed by religion or other systems of ideas and belief.

One way to think about this core developmental dimension is to focus on the human capacity (and inclination) to create a narrative about who one is in the context of space and time. Persons are active participants in creating this narrative, working with "source" material that comes from and is handed down by family and social groups, but superimposing on this material a great deal that emerges from personal experience and personal history. This process of constructing the self in social and historical context is universal, transhistorical, and transcultural.

A variety of theoretical perspectives can be brought to bear on this narrative-shaping journey. Building on the neo-Freudian ideas in Rizzuto's *The Birth of the Living God* (1979), Robert Coles grounds spirituality in the deepest of human needs (without pathologizing this dimension of life, as did Freud). In Coles's (1990) words:

> We are the creatures who recognize ourselves as "adrift" or as "trapped" or as "stranded" or as being in some precarious relationship to this world; and as users of language, we are the ones who not only take in the world's "objects" but build them up in our minds, and use them (through thoughts and fantasies) to keep from feeling alone, and to gain for ourselves a sense of where we came from and where we are and where we're going. (p. 8)

In this vein, a second definition of spiritual development—which was used as a starting point for shaping this volume—also focuses on the person as actively constructing a view of the self-in-context:

> Spiritual development is the process of growing the intrinsic human capacity for self-transcendence, in which the self is embedded in something greater than the self, including the sacred. It is the

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> developmental "engine" that propels the search for connectedness, meaning, purpose and contribution. It is shaped both within and outside of religious traditions, beliefs and practices. (Benson et al., 2003, pp. 205–206)

Given the emergent nature of this area of inquiry, it is premature—and potentially counterproductive—to propose that a single definition could adequately capture the richness, complexity, and multidimensional nature of spiritual development. As Nye (1999) writes: "Attempts to define [spirituality] closely, and derive an adequate 'operational definition' can be sure of one thing: misrepresenting spirituality's complexity, depth and fluidity. Spirituality is like the wind—though it might be experienced, observed and described, it cannot be 'captured'—we delude ourselves to think otherwise, either in the design of research or in analytical conclusions" (p. 58). Furthermore, without further field exploration, this approach risks being another "ungrounded theory" that does not reflect human realities in different cultures, contexts, and traditions (see Pargament, 1999). Thus, while the preceding definition has been offered as a starting point for shaping this volume, all authors have been encouraged to articulate their own approach and assumptions, in hopes that the resulting diversity enriches the dialogue and understanding.

Research Traditions That Inform This Field

Although this emerging field of child and adolescent spiritual development is relatively new in the social sciences, there is an extensive literature that can inform this area of inquiry. Several major works have synthesized various aspects of the domain. Three works in the psychology of religion are particularly noteworthy. Wulff's (1997) monumental text reviews the contributions of some of psychology's most influential thinkers, including James, Hall, Freud, Jung, Erickson, Allport, Fromm, and Maslow. In addition, Spilka and colleagues (2003) have produced a third edition of their extensive synthesis of the scientific literature in the psychology of religion. Similarly, Oser, Scarlett, and Bucher (in press) have examined and synthesized these themes. And Strommen (1971) produced an important edited volume synthesizing the research on religious development. That 1971 volume is, to a certain extent, a forerunner to this volume.

Throughout the history of the social sciences, noted scholars have examined the intersection of religious or spiritual development with personality, society, and/or human development. Although their view of religion (and, by extension, spirituality) has not always been favorable, religion has been acknowledged as either a helpful or a hindering force in the developmental process. Several strands of this ongoing theory building and research have informed current understandings of child and adolescent spiritual development, including psychoanalytic theories, stage theories, and systems-oriented approaches to psychological development.

Psychoanalytic Theories

As noted, religion and spirituality were initially maligned by psychoanalysts, particularly by Freud (1961), who referred to "religion as a universal obsessional neurosis," a mere illusion derived from infantile human wishes (p. 43). However, a number of prominent psychoanalysts have proposed meaningful and productive ways in which spirituality or, in most cases, religion can function in the developmental process.

Although Carl Jung saw religion as a delusion, he recognized its value in providing assurance and strength, allowing humankind to transcend the instinctive stage of the unconscious into the heights of great moral and cultural achievements (Wulff, 1997). He noted that religion was "incontestably one of the earliest and most universal expressions of the human mind" (Jung, 1938, p. 5) and that religion was not only a sociological and historical phenomenon, but also something of considerable personal concern to a great number of individuals.

From the object-relations tradition, Ana-Maria Rizzuto (1979) argued that representations of God are an inevitable universal outcome of the child's relationships with the parents and other caretakers along with the child's growing interest in causal events. Whether or not the individual believes in the representation as a divine entity remains a potentiality throughout

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life. For Rizzuto, these God images serve as an illusory transitional object, bringing comfort and meaning to the individual. She also found that God images develop at every life stage, leading her to conclude that "each new phase in the identity cycle brings with it a specific religious cycle" (p. 52).

As a self-identified psychoanalyst turned fieldworker, Robert Coles (1990) broke new ground by articulating the natural, complex, and adaptive function that spirituality played in the lives of children. In his 30-year project on the inner life of children, Coles and his wife, Jane Coles, gathered data from interviews and drawings from children around the world. He recalls that it was not until years into the project that he began to take note of the spiritual lives of children. As a classically trained analyst, Coles was initially concerned with the illusionary quality of religion, but over time his conceptualizations were transformed as he noted with surprise the positive and sometimes life-changing quality of children's spirituality. After witnessing how children's religious beliefs and experiences helped them cope with racial discrimination and transform civic culture during the civil rights era in the South, he wrote, "whether our emphasis is sociological or psychological or theological, . . . even the most private 'illusions' can become part of a decidedly public event" (Coles, 1990, p. 20). His phenomenological approach to understanding child spirituality brought a deep quality of respect and illumination to the complex spiritual lives of children.

Stage Theories

Stemming from the psychoanalytic tradition, Erik Erikson's epigenetic theory of development introduced stage theory to the psychology of religion. In addition, Erikson gave unprecedented attention to the potential role of religion and spirituality in development. For example, he suggested that the successful resolution of the first stage of development brings about the virtue of hope, which "is the enduring belief in the attainability of fervent wishes" (1964, p. 118). Hopefulness over time is transformed into mature faith, allowing one to believe without evidence that the universe is trustworthy. Erikson acknowledged that religion is the institutional confirmation of hope and can serve throughout the life span as a source of hope. And he asserted that religion not only provides a transcendent worldview, moral beliefs, and behavioral norms, but religious traditions also embody these ideological norms in a community of believers (Erikson, 1968).

Erikson's stage theory greatly contributed to the faith development theory of James Fowler (1981; also see Fowler & Dell, chapter 3, this volume). For Fowler, faith is universal and can exist within and outside of religious traditions. It's a person's way of responding to transcendent value and power in such a way that the trust in and loyalty to the source of transcendence integrate our identity and give our lives unity and meaning (Fowler, 1981). Although stage theories such as Fowler's have been criticized for its strong cognitive basis and for suggesting that children are limited to less mature faith (e.g., Balswick, King, & Reimer, 2005; Day, 2001; Loder, 1998; Streib, 2001), they have been invaluable in allowing the study of the transcendent domains of religion, spirituality, and faith to gain more serious consideration.

The research of Fritz Oser and Paul Gmünder (1991) has produced the "European school" of cognitive-psychological religious stage theory. Although the stages are related to the work of Fowler, these stages specifically focus on religious judgment. Their work concentrates on the nature and structure of religious thinking, elucidating how persons interpret their personal experiences both of self and the world in life of the Ultimate (God, transcendent other). Oser and Gmünder argue for a sphere of knowing that is distinctively religious. Although related to moral cognition, this religious intellect is independent of moral knowledge and other forms of cognition.

There are strong similarities between the theories of Fowler (1981) and Oser and Gmünder (1991). Both are indebted to genetic structuralism and describe a development that leads from the particular to the universal and from heteronomy to autonomy. Both approaches establish significant age trends, and the stages from both theories, to a certain extent, parallel one another. Notwithstanding these similarities, there are differences (see Oser et al., in press; Fowler, Nipkow, & Schweitzer, 1991). Primarily, Fowler incorporates into his scheme of stages

many different psychological elements, including moral, social, and cognitive development; identity; and comprehension of symbols. In contrast, Oser and Gmünder concentrate on religious judgment. Fowler addresses faith in a very general sense; in contrast Oser and Gmünder speak of religious judgment for establishing control and regulating the relationship between oneself and an Absolute. Whereas Fowler's approach may be more suitable for raising questions related to life history and existential themes, Oser and Gmünder's approach elucidates the transformation dynamics of cognitive structures.

Developmental Systems Theories

Increasing attention has been given to understanding the role of context in spiritual development. Developmental systems theories shift the focus to transactions between individuals and their various embedded contexts (see Lerner et al., chapter 5, this volume). Developmental process is located in the ongoing transactions between the person and her or his multilayered contexts. From a developmental systems perspective, the goodness of fit between person and environment is of primary concern. Oser and colleagues (in press) point out that in the current literature, religiousness and spirituality are of interest insofar as they provide opportunities to foster a better fit.

Assumptions Guiding the Handbook

Each of these research and theoretical traditions, among others, has brought important insights and accents to the science of child and adolescent spiritual development. Reviewing these various approaches and the current research, the editors of this handbook identified a series of theoretical assumptions that have guided the process of structuring this handbook. Each of these core assumptions is woven into Benson's (chapter 34, this volume) thinking about an architecture for a theory of spiritual development.

Spiritual Development as a Universal Human Process

Throughout history and across all societies, forms of spirituality have become part of human experience, and it has remained a robust force in life for both individuals and societies, despite numerous predictions of its demise. To be sure, such a conclusion is not readily apparent through available survey research on religion among youth and adults. For example, Norris and Inglehart (2004) document two countervailing dynamics. First, they document an ongoing decline in the influence of religious institutions in affluent societies (with a public that remains more traditionally religious, the United States is a notable outlier among industrialized nations). This secularization trend is counterbalanced in poorer, nonindustrialized societies by a *growing* proportion of the world's total population being traditionally religious (owing to the comparably higher population growth in these societies).

As noted, the United States (where much of the scholarship on spiritual development and religion has occurred) remains a unique case. Although there has been growing attention to those adult populations who are "spiritual, but not religious" (Fuller, 2001) and although that percentage may be rising, Marler and Hadaway (2002) document that only about one in five U.S. adults places her- or himself in this category, with the majority of American adults (64%) currently describing themselves as spiritual *and* religious (9% describe themselves as religious only and 8% indicate that they are neither religious nor spiritual). Lippman and Keith (chapter 8, this volume) report similar findings among adolescents in the United States (see also Smith, 2005), but they also document the uniqueness of these American patterns in a broader global context.

These various forms of survey research on religious participation or belief are helpful as proxies for spiritual development in countries such as the United States with a relatively high overlap between religiosity and spirituality. They are inadequate, however, for understanding spiritual development, in its many diverse forms, as a universal process. For example, a growing, though still limited, body of scientific evidence suggests that spirituality or religiosity has biological or physiological roots (e.g., Brown, Murphy, & Malony, 1998; d'Aquili & Newberg, 1999; D'Onofrio, Eaves, Murrelle, Maes, & Spilka, 1999; Hay, Reich, and Usch, chapter 4, this volume; Newberg & Newberg, chapter 14, this volume).

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Although the evidence is incomplete, the editors hypothesize that spiritual development is a dimension of human life and experience as significant as cognitive development, emotional development, or social development. All of these dimensions of development are interrelated. It is the spiritual dimension that is most involved in a person's effort to integrate the many aspects of development. As a core process of development involving the creation of a life narrative (in which the self is connected to larger constructs of values, tradition, space, and/or time), spiritual development cannot be reduced to merely human need or desire.

The narrative-building and self-transcending tasks of spiritual development can, but do not necessarily have to, be about the divine or the sacred. While it is commonplace for persons to draw religious imagery, doctrine, symbol, and tradition into this developmental "work"—particularly in cultures and social contexts grounded in such perspectives—notions of divinity, God, or gods are not essential for spiritual development.

It is problematic, however, that the vast majority of published scholarship in well-established journals presumes a North American context with a primary focus on the majority population (Caucasian and Judeo-Christian). And, as multiple chapters in this volume document, this lack of cross-cultural research and understanding has greatly limited advancements in the field, not only because its relevance to the majority of the world's population is untested, but also because it carries with it a set of assumptions about the dynamics and processes of spiritual development that are not universal and may, in fact, be anomalies. Several chapters in this volume (notably Gottlieb, chapter 11; Lippman and Keith, chapter 8; Mattis, Ahluwalia, Cowie, & Kirkland-Harris, chapter 20; Verma and Sta. Maria, chapter 9) make important contributions to closing this gap.

A Multidimensional Domain

The vast majority of researchers in the field agree that spirituality has multiple domains (e.g., Gorsuch & Walker, chapter 7, this volume; Hill & Hood, 1999; Lerner et al., chapter 5, this volume;). For example, MacDonald (2000) analyzed 20 measures of spirituality, identifying five "robust dimensions of spirituality" (p. 185): cognitive orientation; experiential/ phenomenological dimension; existential well-being; paranormal beliefs; and religiousness. These examples point to the many accents that surface in this field. They reinforce the understanding of spirituality and spiritual development as complex, multidimensional phenomena and processes that require sophisticated theory, measurement, and analysis across diverse populations, cultures, and traditions.

However, much of the current research (including many, though not all, contributions to this volume) rely primarily on relatively superficial measures of spirituality or—perhaps more common—on measures of religious commitment, belief, or participation as proxies for spirituality or spiritual development (Benson, Scales, Sesma, & Roehlkepartain, 2005). This gap holds true, despite the abundance of available scales that measure dimensions of religiosity and, increasingly, spirituality (Gorsuch, 1984; Gorsuch & Walker, chapter 7, this volume; Hill & Hood, 1999; Tsang & McCullough, 2003). The contrast between the call for deep, multidimensional theoretical frameworks and the "shallow" measures most often used in this domain represents one of the major challenges for the future of research in child and adolescent spiritual development.

Spiritual Development as a Process

The notion of spiritual *development* adds an important dimension in its emphasis on process. Spiritual *development* introduces questions about the nature of spiritual change, transformation, growth, or maturation as well as life phases and stages. For example, Wink and Dillon (2002) argue that spiritual development "demands not only an increase in the depth of a person's awareness of, and search for, spiritual meaning over time, but it also requires an expanded and deeper commitment to engagement in actual spiritual practices" (p. 80; see also Scarlett, chapter 2, this volume).

Through most of the 20th century, spiritual (or, more often, religious) development was viewed through stage theory (e.g., Fowler, 1981) or was dominated by nondevelopmental

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approaches (see Oser & Scarlett, 1991). In the same way that developmental psychology has moved beyond stage theory as a primary frame (e.g., Overton, 1998), spiritual development must also move beyond an overreliance on stage theory, which "implies a certain amount of discontinuity in religious [and spiritual] development, whereas it may actually be a reasonably continuous process" (Hood, Spilka, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 1996, p. 55).

The emphasis on process also grows out of an emphasis on the developmental trajectory across time (instead of emphasizing distinct, predictable, and often disconnected developmental stages). This approach highlights development as a continuous process in which early experiences and opportunities shape (though do not predetermine) future experiences and choices (Rutter, 1983; Scales, Sesma, & Bolstrom, 2004). Hence, understanding the continuity of development through childhood and adolescence is as vital to understanding spiritual development as it is to recognizing the phases and stages that are also part of that process.

It is important to acknowledge that to some, however, the term *development* implies growth from less to more, which is incongruent with some religious and philosophical understandings that spirituality is fully formed in a newborn and is too often suppressed, not nurtured, in society (see Yust, Johnson, Sasso, & Roehlkepartain, in press). Others note that spirituality is more mystical, relational, and divinely gifted than is suggested by the use of the word development, which can imply a sort of inevitability to the process. Coming to terms with the language to suggest both the reality of process as well as these related issues remains an important area for dialogue and discovery.

Interaction Between Person and Context

Many conceptualizations of spirituality, particularly in the West, have been highly focused on individual experience and impact. Mattis and Jagers (2001) note that the vast majority of conceptualization and research in the area of spirituality has emphasized the individual "quest," rather than the social and relational context of spiritual development. However, their research in the African American community and tradition consistently finds that interpersonal relationships (with family, peers, etc.) play a vital role in cultivating and shaping the spiritual development of children and adolescents. (See also Gottlieb, chapter 11, this volume; Mattis et al., chapter 20, this volume; Schwartz, Bukowski, and Aoki, chapter 22, this volume.)

Their perspective is consistent with developmental systems theories that emphasize the interaction between person and context, in which the child or adolescent is embedded within multiple contexts or ecologies (including culture, family, school, faith community, neighborhood, community, nation; see part IV) that shape the young person's developmental path (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Lerner, 1998, 2002; Lerner et al., chapter 5, this volume). This perspective would suggest that spirituality is not only an individual quest but also a communal experience and phenomenon.

Just as important as recognizing the ways in which various contexts shape young people's spiritual pathway is to see this influence as bidirectional, with children and adolescents also affecting the people and places that are part of their lives. This interaction speaks to the importance of "goodness of fit" between the young person and her or his ecological contexts (Pearce & Haynie, 2004), as well as emphasizes personal agency in shaping one's own spiritual pathway. This perspective challenges widespread practices of emphasizing "passing down" traditions and beliefs that effectively "erode the perception of children as agents within society" (Lindner, 2004, p. 57). Lindner goes on to note that, despite the burgeoning research on religion and spirituality, "scant attention as been given to children's own views of religion and their spiritual life" (p. 60). Multiple chapters in this handbook (most notably, Hart, chapter 12) emphasize this theme.

Spirituality as a Life-Shaping Force

The preponderance of available research suggests that spirituality has a powerful effect in life. As documented in part V of this handbook, spirituality has been found to be inversely related to numerous negative outcomes and positively associated with numerous positive outcomes.

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Indeed, in the realm of spiritual development, the area of scholarship that perhaps has generated the most scientific study is the exploration of spirituality and religion and their developmental correlates. It is arguable that the consistent positive relationships between religion and developmental benefits have captured the attention of the public and the academy.

It is important, though, to note that spirituality, like religion, can have both positive and negative expressions and outcomes. Some scholars have found, for example, that certain forms of religiousness may be more pathological, including a strictly utilitarian or extrinsic religion or spirituality, a conflict-ridden, fragmented religion or spirituality, an impoverished authoritarian religion or spirituality, and a defense mechanism that allows people to deny and retreat from reality (summarized in Hill et al., 2000; also see Wagener & Malony, this volume). Although the field of psychology in the 20th century too often emphasized the pathological outcomes of spiritual commitment (e.g., Ellis, 1980), the recent openness to spirituality tends toward recognizing only its positive aspects and impact. It is important that this trend not lead to defining spiritual development as only a positive process; nonetheless, the growing recognition of the positive contribution that spirituality can make in the lives of children and adolescents bodes well for continued attention to and examination of this pivotal dimension of life.

Conclusions

Spiritual development may be at a "tipping point" for becoming a major theme in child and adolescent development. A growing number of scholars in various disciplines have invested themselves in this field. The public imagination appears to be ready in numerous cultures, traditions, and contexts, all of which are struggling with social changes that threaten to undermine the spiritual lives of young people.

It is impossible to know whether the current popular interest in spirituality is a passing fad or a long-term trend. Perhaps this interest will be eclipsed by other crises or concerns. Perhaps it will just fade from public consciousness. Or perhaps we are only at the beginning of a major, lasting resurgence in things spiritual that will be sustained for decades.

In some senses, it hardly matters. As documented by the contributors to this handbook, the evidence is growing that spiritual development is a vital process and resource in young people's developmental journey from birth through adolescence. Indeed, when human development marginalizes spiritual development, it does a great disservice to itself and to young people. Without accounting for the spiritual dimension, human development builds theories, research endeavors, and, by extension, practices on an incomplete understanding of our humanness.

Just as important, the developmental sciences add too little to vital questions of our time if they do not apply themselves to these complex issues. As Benson et al. (2003) write: "Spiritual development is likely a wellspring for the best of human life (e.g., generosity, unit, sacrifice, altruism, social justice) as well as for our darkest side (e.g., genocide, terrorism, slavery). Using social science to examine this potent force in society and individual lives of young people has been neglected for too long" (p. 210). *The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence* seeks to ensure that this oversight does not persist.

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