



Spirituality is the new black ...and it has social impact!

Part II – Explaining the increased interest in spirituality

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The dawning sense in modern times that we are in a meaningless universe, that our most cherished meanings find no endorsement in the cosmos, or in the will of God, has often been described as a traumatic loss, a second and definitive expulsion from paradise.¹

Introduction

In a previous paper I examined the conceptual and definitional issues surrounding the term spirituality and suggested that part of the confusion and difficulty in defining spirituality is that the terms spirituality and religion have traditionally been used synonymously.² The paper also outlined the polarization of views that has occurred more recently between spirituality and religion and the attempts to reach reconciliation between them. Three main disciplinary approaches (theological, psychological and biological) were identified that have attempted to reconcile religion and spirituality and in the process outline what they see as an 'appropriate' definition of spirituality.

It was argued that the biological view offers the best starting point for examining spirituality in the context of business and organizations. In brief, the biological view sees spirituality as:

- A separate and biologically prior concept to religion and provides a synthesizing framework for the concepts without necessarily polarizing them;
- Being expressed primarily through the notion of 'relational consciousness', namely, how we relate to ourselves, other people, the world, and the notion of transcendence, whether seen as god or some other universal force;
- A unique and innately human trait, one that is physiologically determined and has both secular and theist expressions.

This previous paper also noted the growing scholarly interest in spirituality. For instance, one study that examined the extent of articles published on the relationship between religion, spirituality and health since the mid 1960s found a statistically significant increase for the rate of articles dealing with spirituality and health but a significant downward trend for those articles that only focused on religion and health.³

Indeed many believe that the present century will involve a 'global shift' that will see a mushrooming spiritual consciousness take root.⁴ To an extent the increased academic interest is merely reflecting the continued trend among most Western industrial countries of a decline in the participation and affiliation to traditional, institutionalized religion (especially as reflected in church attendance) and a rise in the more private and individual realm of spirituality. This spirituality refers to people's general spiritual orientation and beliefs which may co-exist within their traditional religious affiliations or alternative spiritual beliefs and practices that are not affiliated with traditional religions. The trends and research across most western countries all point in similar directions – an emptying of church pews at the same time that interest in a different kind of spirituality (variously described with words such as eclectic, inner, quest, seekers, believing without belonging) is growing.

Western society, as Charles Taylor, has argued, is experiencing a 'mutual fragilization of different religious positions'. Traditional religion has been 'de-stabilized and rendered virtually unsustainable...

¹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007, p.587

² Gianni Zappalà, 'Spirituality is the new black...and it has a social impact! Part I – definitions and concepts', CSI Background paper, May, 2009.

³ Andrew J Weaver, Kenneth I Pargament, Kevin J Flannelly & Julia E Oppenheimer, 'Trends in the Scientific Study of Religion, Spirituality, and Health: 1965 – 2000', *Journal of Religion and Health*, 45(2), 2006, pp. 208-214.

⁴ See for example Edmund J Bourne, *Global Shift: How a new worldview is transforming humanity*, Oakland, CA: New Harbinger, 2008.

religious life of Western societies is much more fragmented than ever before, and also much more unstable'.⁵ Between the cracks and fissures of religious decline the consciousness of a new spirituality is rising and, in contrast to the situation one or two decades ago, people (especially younger generations) are more willing to openly admit and discuss their own spirituality and spiritual experiences. As one British academic and preacher recently observed when commenting on these trends in the UK:

It is no longer an option for religious institutions to ignore the evidence, which shows all too clearly that at the same time as the churches are in serious decline, interest in spiritual matters of all kinds has scarcely been greater.⁶

These trends, especially (but not solely) concerning youth, are now well documented in several countries including Australia,⁷ the UK,⁸ the United States,⁹ and Western Europe¹⁰, and have been undertaken by scholars who are sympathetic to traditional religious traditions and beliefs as well as those who would describe themselves as secular.

How can this increased interest in spirituality at societal and academic levels be explained? This paper seeks to shed light on this question by examining a key macro-level factor within which individual change is occurring – namely – the shift from our dominant 'modern' world view to that of an emerging (for want of a better term) 'post-modern' world view.

Shifting world views

The concept of world views was introduced in the prequel to this paper. It noted that world views matter – they provide the context for understanding and interpreting the key questions of life. They are a way of thinking about, understanding and conceiving the world and contain the assumptions that we hold to be true about 'reality'. World views also shape and mark boundaries on what we perceive in the world. While they are ever changing they remain critical in shaping 'our' world and the perception of ourselves. As philosopher Richard Tarnas puts it:

Our world view is not simply the way we look at the world. It reaches inward to constitute our inner most being and outward to constitute the world.¹¹

A key macro-level factor that may explain or at least contextualize the increased interest in spirituality is that we are experiencing a shift in world views – away from the previously dominant materialist world view towards an emerging 'post-modern' world view that is informed by a new spiritual consciousness. In order to illustrate this point it may be useful to provide a brief history of world views, summarized in Table 1, in order to place the emerging world view within a wider context.

⁵ Taylor, op.cit, pp.594-5.

⁶ John Drane, 'Unknown gods, declining churches, and the spiritual search of contemporary culture', Henry Martyn Seminar, Westminster College, Cambridge, October 2001.

⁷ David Tacey, *The Spirituality Revolution*, Sydney: Harper Collins, 2003; Michael Mason, Ruth Webber, Andrew Singleton & Philip Hughes, *The Spirit of Generation Y*, Australian Catholic University, 2006; Paul McQuillan, 'Youth Spirituality – A reality in search of expression', *Australian EJournal of Theology*, 6, 2006; The work of Alan Black, Peter Kaldor, John Bellamy, Keith Castle, and Philip Hughes at the Christian Research Association (see for instance www.cra.org.au/pages/00000071.cgi); and Gary Bouma, *Australian Soul – Religion and Spirituality in the Twenty-first century*, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.

⁸ David Hay, *Something There – The Biology of the Human Spirit*, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2006; P. Heelas & L. Woodhead, *The spiritual revolution: Why religion is giving way to spirituality*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2005

⁹ Wade Clark Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby boomers and the remaking of American Religion*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999; *Spirituality in Higher Education: A National Study of College Students' Search for Meaning and Purpose*, (www.spirituality.ucla.edu/index.html)

¹⁰ Dick Houtman & Stef Aupers, 'The Spiritual Turn and the Decline of Tradition: The spread of post-Christian Spirituality in 14 Western countries, 1981-2000', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 46(3), 2007, pp.305-320.

¹¹ Richard Tarnas, *Cosmos & Psyche – Intimations of a new World View*, New York: Plume, 2007, pp.16-36.

The first world view referred to in Table 1 is the 'primal world view', which Richard Tarnas suggests is most characteristic of traditional indigenous societies. It was (and is) a world view where the natural world is imbued with meaning, both human and spiritual, understood through the language and symbols of myth, so the 'external' world has the same level of subjectivity as do human beings, such that:

Creative and responsive intelligence, spirit and soul, meaning and purpose are everywhere. The human being is a microcosm within the macrocosm of the world, participating in its interior reality and united with the whole in ways that are both tangible and invisible.¹²

The medieval world view shared some aspects of the primal in that the external world was seen as sacred and enchanted but it was seen as being governed by a rigid hierarchy, with a personal God at its apex. The world and people's place within it was basically understood and interpreted in religious terms and transmitted through the Church, which held a monopoly over knowledge and to an extent political power. The earth was literally seen as being the centre of the cosmos and all upon it had a specific status and purpose. During this period (approximately from the 7th to early 17th centuries) the world was a:

[S]acred but rigid hierarchy with God at the top. Divinity commanded unquestioned power and authority in the unfolding of world events. This power was mediated to the people through God's appointed representatives on earth, primarily popes and kings.¹³

Perhaps the best image from literature that captures the essence of the medieval world view is Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*, written in the 14th Century, with its concentric circles of Hell, Purgatory and Heaven, where even the afterlife reflects a certain kind of rigid order and hierarchy with the severity of the sinner's penitence in hell reflecting the severity of the crime committed on earth. Charles Taylor's portrait of the lost medieval world view captures its essence, a world in which:

[S]piritual forces impinged on porous agents, in which the social was grounded in the sacred...a society moreover in which the play of structure and anti-structure was held in equilibrium; and this human drama unfolded within a cosmos.¹⁴

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¹² Tarnas, op.cit, pp.16-7.

¹³ Bourne, op.cit, p.31

¹⁴ Taylor, op.cit, p.61

Table I Historical summary of major world views

Dominant worldview	Period	Key characteristics	Key figures
<i>Primal</i>	Traditional indigenous cultures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No separation between subject & object • Natural world permeated with meaning 	
<i>Medieval</i>	~ 7 th to early 17 th Centuries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • World was a sacred & enchanted but rigid hierarchy governed by God • Earth literally seen as the centre of the universe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aquinas
<i>Renaissance & Scientific Revolution (Modern)</i>	~ 17 th to mid 20 th Centuries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church divested of authority to dictate nature of the world • World became a neutral object for scientific investigation • Rise of empiricism as basis of knowledge • Separation of 'subjective mind' from 'objective matter' • Universe & nature assumed to be devoid of spiritual meaning – 'disenchanted' • World seen & explained in mechanistic/materialistic terms • Technological & economic advances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copernicus • Galileo • Descartes • Newton • Darwin • Freud
<i>Emerging world view (Post-modern)</i>	~ mid 20 th Century to present	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breakdown of 'science' story but not science itself • Quantum & relativity theories undermined Newtonian world view about nature of the universe • Calling into question of the key metaphysical assumptions of scientific worldview • Return to a more spiritual view of the world, a 're-enchanted' cosmos • Universe seen as conscious, evolving & self organizing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thomas Kuhn • Albert Einstein • Richard Tarnas • Fritjof Capra • Stuart Kauffman

Source: Adapted from Bourne (2008) & Tarnas (2007)

The end of the medieval world occurred with the coming of the enlightenment and the scientific advances associated with the Industrial Revolution and led to the almost 400 year dominance of the current Modern world view. The 'grand narrative' of the modern world view (in which most readers of this paper will have been formed) is well known and requires little explanation. As summarized by Bourne, during this period:

The church was divested of its authority to dictate the nature of the world, and the world became a neutral object for scientific investigation and ultimately technological control. What was deemed sacred retreated from the outer world and into the subjective minds of human beings, while the universe (nature) was assumed to be devoid of spiritual meaning and significance.¹⁵

In contrast to the primal and to a certain extent the medieval narrative, a key feature of the modern world view is the sharp distinction between the subjective human self and the objective external world, otherwise known as the subject – object divide.¹⁶ In what became the leitmotif of the scientific method the role of the ‘subject’ is to observe the ‘object’, situated in a neutral domain of facts, and through the application of the human faculty of intelligence, be able to understand and analyze the situation and its environment. This in turn would provide the means to control and manipulate that external environment. As only humans have consciousness in this view, they are therefore the only source of meaning and thus can act over and against the external ‘objects’.

This world view was made possible by the work and intellect of people such as Copernicus (whose heliocentric model displaced the geocentric view of the medieval world), Galileo, Descartes, the science and mathematics of Isaac Newton, and Darwin’s theory of natural selection. The cosmos became an impersonal and unconscious entity, governed by mechanistic laws (similar to those of a clock) and without the sense of purpose that existed previously. As Tarnas writes:

The systematic recognition that the exclusive source of meaning and purpose in the world is the human mind, and that it is a fundamental fallacy to project what is human onto the nonhuman, is one of the most basic presuppositions – perhaps *the* basic presupposition – of modern scientific method.¹⁷

The scientific method and its resultant technological advances combined with the system of individual property rights and bolstered by liberal democracy led to the thriving of capitalism as the dominant mode of economic production and ensured material progress in the West.

Yet importantly for our purposes, what accompanied the scientific and material progress however was a steady erosion of the spiritual in nature and the cosmos – resulting in a process of ‘disenchantment’. Tarnas explains disenchantment as the ‘denial of intrinsic meaning and purpose, [which] essentially *objectifies* the world and thereby denies *subjectivity* to the world’.¹⁸ Disenchantment furthermore strengthened and gave legitimacy to the view that the natural world is primarily an inanimate resource that can be shaped and exploited for the benefit of humans.

It was this period that also saw the rise of individualism as an ideology in the general political economy, as David Hay has observed, an ideology that was in principle ‘hostile to relational consciousness’ and hence led to a closing off of spirituality.¹⁹ As Charles Taylor has detailed in his majestic tome, the ordered, structured and ‘enchanted’ pre-enlightenment world was ‘dismantled and replaced by something quite different in the transformation we often roughly call disenchantment.’²⁰

¹⁵ Bourne, op.cit, p.31

¹⁶ Tarnas, op.cit, pp.16-25.

¹⁷ Ibid, p.19

¹⁸ Ibid, p.21

¹⁹ David Hay, *Something There – The Biology of the Human Spirit*, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2006, p.142. See Part I of this paper, Gianni Zappalà, ‘Spirituality is the new black...and it has a social impact! (Part I – Definitions and concepts)’, CSI Background Paper, May 2009 for an exposition of the concept of relational consciousness.

²⁰ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, Harvard University Press, 2007, p.61

The modern world view was well in decline (and breakdown) by the end of the 20th century, and as Bourne writes, it:

[L]eft humanity with a world disenchanted, a world devoid of purpose, meaning, or spiritual significance...[which] has led to the ascendance of materialistic values...(the) disenchantment of our world underlies our present emphasis on unlimited (and thus unsustainable) economic growth and on placing the needs of multinational corporations over the needs of the environment and impoverished peoples.²¹

This 'Cook's tour' of world views brings us to the present, a period difficult to depict as it an 'age between world views, creative yet disoriented, a transitional era when the old cultural vision no longer holds and the new has not yet constellated.'²² Or as Charles Taylor has put it, we are living in a time of 'cross pressures' between the narratives of science-based materialism and an emerging type of spirituality.²³

While it is not possible to paint a full picture of this 'post-modern' world view, some key characteristics pertinent to the broader theme of this project (the intersection between spirituality and business and the implications for corporate responsibility) can nevertheless be sketched. One recent attempt at summarizing the post-modern world view put it in the following way:

Humanity finds itself in the midst of a major shift in worldview. Such a shift involves a fundamentally new way of perceiving the world, the environment, each other, and ourselves... the shift involves a movement away from a material view of the universe and our place in it to a more spiritual view...Nature is no longer merely a neutral object for scientific investigation or a resource for industrial exploitation. It is a sacred order infused with intelligence and purpose – one with which humanity needs to cooperate.²⁴

While challenges to the dominant assumptions of the modern world view have occurred across most areas of knowledge, it has been (perhaps somewhat ironically) within science that the greatest undermining has and is continuing to happen. While Newtonian science achieved great success in explaining most of the visible universe, it struggled with explaining the very large (cosmological) or the very small (quantum physics). The latter part of the 20th century saw the rise of the new science of Complexity theory (a variant of Chaos theory), which is a critical part of the emerging world view.²⁵ In brief, Chaos theory examines and explains the behaviour of nonlinear dynamic systems that are widely found in nature (e.g. weather, heartbeats). Complexity theory looks at the qualitative features of these non-linear systems and the organizational and evolutionary dynamics that result from the interaction of complex living systems with each other and their environments.

A key shift that has occurred in the basic paradigm of science is from the metaphor of the machine (modern world view) to that of the self-organizing living organism (emerging/post-modern world view). The key concept of the new science is that of 'complex adaptive systems' (CAS), systems where organization arises spontaneously and can adapt to the changing external environment. The aim is not to describe this new science in detail here but more to highlight the key differences with the

²¹ Bourne, op.cit, p.83

²² Tarnas, op.cit, p.26

²³ Taylor, op.cit.

²⁴ Bourne, op.cit, p.53

²⁵ There are several very good expositions of Complexity and Chaos theory, see for instance Fritjof Capra, *The Web of Life: A New Scientific Understanding of Living Systems*, New York: Anchor Books, 1996; J. Gleick, *Chaos: the making of a new science*, New York: Penguin Books, 1987; Stuart Kauffman, *At home in the universe: the search for the laws of self-organization and complexity*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

traditional scientific paradigm. Importantly, CAS are characterized by nonlinearity; unpredictability; and instability. They are systems that:

- Are less amenable to being controlled;
- Cannot be broken down into more simple parts;
- Are characterized by the whole being greater than the sum of its parts;
- Emerge through self-organization (a spontaneous ordering process);
- Adapt and evolve with the environment.

Some of the key differences in assumptions between the conventional science that is part of the modern world view and the new science that is part of the emerging world view are summarized in Table 2.

Importantly for our purpose, this 'new science' has led to the welcoming back of human traits such as creativity, passion, spirituality, meaning, connectedness, and the link to nature and ecosystems.²⁶ Fritjof Capra is one of the people who has synthesized some of the various strands of the 'new science' to develop a new understanding of living systems. He argues that the new scientific world view is consistent with notions of spirituality that emphasize aliveness, mindfulness, embodiment, oneness, belonging and connectedness.²⁷ These are all characteristics of the notion of 'relational consciousness' that was examined in Part I of this paper.²⁸ The connecting theme is that of connection itself!

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²⁶ Margaret J Wheatley, *Leadership and the new science – Discovering order in a chaotic world*, San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2006.

²⁷ Capra, op.cit. & Fritjof Capra, *The hidden connections: A science for sustainable living*, London: HarperCollins, 2002

²⁸ Zappalà, op.cit.

Table 2 Scientific assumptions according to modern and emerging world views

Core assumptions of traditional science (Modern world view)	Assumptions and principles of new science (Emerging/post-modern world view)
<i>Dualism</i> – sharp demarcation between the subject as observer and the object being observed	<i>Non-dualism</i> – no sharp line drawn between the subject as observer and the object being observed; the act of observing influences what is being observed
<i>Materialism</i> – all of life can be reduced to matter (only matter matters!); ‘true’ knowledge is that gained via our sense; consciousness arises solely from neuro-physiological and biochemical processes in the brain	<i>Consciousness</i> – mind as well as matter are the fundamental essence of life; consciousness may be a global phenomenon; associations that may exist between the brain and specific mental states are correlational not causal
<i>Reductionism</i> – the universe is merely the sum of its parts	<i>Connectivity</i> – the universe is one, single unbroken pattern of relationships in which no ‘thing’ can exist independently of the whole; wholes have unique, irreducible properties that cannot be fully explained by their constituent parts
<i>Determinism</i> – events (causes) produce effects; the future of the universe can be predicted and hence is amenable to human control	<i>Indeterminacy</i> – the universe is dynamically complex which obscures any link between cause and effect; the future is unpredictable
<i>Mechanism</i> – the universe (seen as ‘clockworks’) becomes more complex through the intent and actions of an intelligence existing external to it	<i>Emergence</i> – the universe moves towards infinitely ascending orders of differentiation, coherence and complexity
<i>Conservatism</i> – the growth and progress of the universe is unlimited as long as it stays in a steady state of equilibrium	<i>Dissipation</i> – the universe is a dissipative structure which moves through cycles of breaking apart and coming together

Source: adapted from Laurie A Fitzgerald, ‘Chaos: the lens that transcends’ in *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 15(4), 2002, pp.339-358 & Bourne (2008)

It is worth quoting in length from a recent report that explored the link between the new science, the emerging world view and spirituality in detail:

We are entering an era in which a new balance is being struck between matter and spirit. After centuries of being strictly separated, these integral elements of our universe are reunited. Physics, biology, and biochemistry show us that *our world is interconnected at the deepest possible levels*. Science is proving what the sages from the East have said for thousands of years: There is no “us”; there is no “them”. This growing consciousness changes politics, economics, science, and the arts. Scientific discoveries and spiritual growth lead to a new paradigm, just as it did when Copernicus postulated that the Earth revolved around the sun²⁹...

Science is telling us that we live in a highly dynamic, interactive, interconnected world that is full of potential. Chaos theory tells us that our universe is self-referential, meaning it has feedback loops that magnify signals and enable small changes to have profound impacts. It also tells us that our universe is more ordered and enmeshed than previously thought. *This interconnectivity means that from a certain perspective we are not really separate from one another...since our actions and thoughts have such potential to impact one another, we can no longer afford to act out of this illusion of separateness.*³⁰

What is critical to note from this necessarily brief and crude historical journey of ideas is that the emerging post-modern world view ‘restores a *profound sacredness to the world*, but one that is entirely different from the medieval sacredness that existed prior to the Renaissance and Scientific Revolution’.³¹ We are once again entering an ‘enchanted universe’ albeit of a different kind to that which existed in previous eras. According to Tarnas we are witnessing a philosophical and psychological reconciliation between previously counter-posed concepts such as human being and nature, spirit and matter, mind and body, the conscious and unconscious and the secular and the sacred.³² Much of this reconciliation has occurred as a result of the developments in science outlined above. A recent illustration of this can be seen in the recent work of complexity theorist Stuart Kauffman, who in his book *Reinventing the Sacred – A new view of science, reason and religion*, presents an intriguing, powerful and non-reductionist account of the intersection of spirituality and science in the emerging world view.³³

In part it is the fact that we are still in a transitional period (between modern and emerging world views) that the increased awareness and interest in spirituality is often accompanied (or preceded) by a crisis of meaning and existential angst among many (especially younger) people. It is this disorientation and fluidity that causes commentators to often characterize the manifestations of post-modern spirituality (often disparagingly) as eclectic, privatized, inward-looking, and individual (e.g. the pursuit of the spiritual quest). As Charles Taylor writes:

Perhaps the clearest sign of the transformation in our world is that today many people look back to the world of the porous self with nostalgia. As though the creation of a thick emotional boundary between us and the cosmos were now lived as a loss. *The aim is to try and recover some measure of this lost feeling...that “this life is empty, flat, devoid of higher purpose” has been a key factor driving the young in particular to follow “their own spiritual instincts”*³⁴

²⁹ Cited in, Institute of Noetic Sciences, *The 2007 Shift Report: Evidence of a World Transforming*, IONS, 2007, p.22

³⁰ Ibid, p.41.

³¹ Bourne, op.cit, p.53

³² Tarnas, op.cit, p.27

³³ Stuart Kauffman, *Reinventing the Sacred – A new view of science, reason and religion*, New York: Basic Books, 2008.

³⁴ Taylor, op.cit. p.38, 506

Or as David Tacey has observed, the increased interest in spirituality is an 'emotional and urgent reaction to *widespread alienation, disempowerment and disillusionment*. It is an almost panic response to the apparent lack of relationality and connectedness in contemporary life'.³⁵

The further breakdown of traditional morals and values (associated with the Church and institutional forms of religion that managed to survive modernity) enable people to look towards their own inner spirituality to give meaning and identity to their lives. One study of spirituality across 14 Western countries, for instance, found evidence to support the hypothesis that 'detraditionalization' – the decline and loss of legitimacy of the traditional moral values associated with Christianity – is associated with the growth of 'post-Christian' spirituality and the occurrence of a 'spiritual turn', especially evident among the younger and more highly educated.³⁶

This *spiritual turn* has in part been bolstered among these cohorts by the failure of materialist-based politics and philosophies (e.g. communism and socialism) to achieve the social change these philosophies promised. As David Tacey soberly put it, the 'secular world is running on empty, and it has run out of answers...in this depleted state, with less to believe in, we are ready to reconsider what we had once thrown out: religion and spirituality'.³⁷

One can also point to the role of economic and demographic factors in this 'spiritual turn'. Len Tischler, for instance, has applied and adapted Maslow's hierarchy of needs, originally developed to understand individual level development, to the broader societal level, to explain the growing interest in spirituality, especially among business.³⁸ In brief, as the industrial revolution has given way to a post-industrial age in Western societies, prosperity has become more widespread. This has meant that a greater number of people are able to focus less exclusively on survival needs and give greater focus to higher order needs such as self actualization and spirituality.

A more empirically grounded exposition of this argument has recently come from Nobel prize winning economist Robert Fogel, who argues that the unprecedented levels of affluence in the West, what he describes as the 'technophysio evolution' has enabled more people than ever before to muse on the meaning of life. According to Fogel, this evolution has altered the way people in industrialized countries spend their time and money, which can in turn explain the rise in interest in spirituality and immaterial aspects of life. Fogel writes:

Today, people are increasingly concerned with the meaning of their lives. A half century from now, perhaps even sooner, when increases in productivity make it possible to provide goods in abundance with half the labor required today, the issue of life's meaning and other matters of self-realization may take up the bulk of discretionary time.³⁹

Related to the economic shifts have been changing demographic trends that have resulted in a greater emphasis on values rather than money (i.e. the post-materialist thesis).⁴⁰ The analysis of societal trends and demographics by Paul Ray and Sherry Ruth Anderson in the late 1990s, for instance, describes three distinct sub-cultures in the US and Western Europe based on people's values:

³⁵ Tacey, *op.cit.*, p.215

³⁶ Dick Houtman & Stef Aupers, 'The Spiritual Turn and the Decline of Tradition: The spread of post-Christian Spirituality in 14 Western countries, 1981-2000', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 46(3), 2007, pp.305-320.

³⁷ Tacey, *op.cit.*, p.19.

³⁸ Len Tischler, 'The growing interest in spirituality in business – a Long-term socio-economic explanation', *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 12(4), 1999, pp.273-279.

³⁹ Robert Fogel, *The Escape from Hunger and Premature Death, 1700-2100: Europe, America and the Third World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

⁴⁰ See for instance, Ronald Inglehart & Pippa Norris, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004; Ronald Inglehart & Christian Welzel, *Modernization, Cultural Change and Democracy: The Human Development Sequence*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

1. *The Moderns*: At the time of their analysis, this group was still the dominant sub-culture making up about half of the population. The focus of this group is material success, represented by money and corporate careers;
2. *The Traditionals*: As the name implies, this group emphasize traditional Christian values and made up about one-quarter of the population, but as Houtman and Aupers also found, it's a sub-culture on the decline;
3. *The Cultural Creatives*: This third sub-culture, representing between one-quarter and one third of the population, were found to value nature and ecological sustainability, authenticity, *spirituality*, peace, social justice and social responsibility.

To put it somewhat simplistically, the first two groups are still tied to different aspects of the modern world view, whereas the so-called *cultural creatives*, are those people who have begun to shift their values away from the materialist ethos of the current world view to that of the emerging post-modern view. They have taken the spiritual turn and are well and truly down the path and according to Ray and Anderson, are likely to become the dominant sub-culture by the end of this decade.⁴¹ In the Australian context it is likely that 'cultural creatives' would be reflected in the one-quarter of the population aged between 30 and 59 that has 'downshifted', namely, made a voluntary change to their lifestyle that has resulted in them earning less money, in part to pursue post-materialist values.⁴²

Returning finally to an area closer to this project's purpose, it should come as no surprise then that the 'spiritual turn' has found its way into the workplace and organizations. The decline of institutions such as churches, clubs, and civic associations that previously generated feelings of community, trust and connectedness (what has now become known as social capital) has meant that people place a greater reliance on their place of work as a site and place to fulfill these needs. As one article in a business magazine observed:

Work has always provided identity and belonging; now it also offers to provide purpose and meaning. It used to be religious institutions, political parties and the state that met such needs; now *faute de mieux* they are channeled into work.⁴³

Indeed a key driver for why companies over the last decade have adopted a range of corporate citizenship and community involvement policies and practices is recognition that their employees are looking for greater meaning in the work they do – is their work and job able to engage employees on an emotional level and provide them with a sense that they are making a difference or lift, what Michael Rennie, director with McKinsey & Company in Australia describes as their 'spiritual quotient'.⁴⁴ In short, companies of the 21st century need to increasingly be places where employees can bring their *whole selves* to work.

The reality is (with some minor exceptions) that most organizations are operating from the modern world view rather than the emerging one. As the sequel to this paper will illustrate, a spiritually informed workplace and organization needs the re-design of the organization according to the traits and characteristics of Complex Adaptive Systems. Similarly, the corporate responsibility movement

⁴¹ See also the work of Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class. And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure and Everyday Life*, New York: Basic Books, 2002.

⁴² Clive Hamilton & Elizabeth Mail, 'Downshifting in Australia – A sea-change in the pursuit of happiness', The Australia Institute DP 50, 2003.

⁴³ Madeleine Bunting, 'In work we trust', *AFR Boss Magazine*, September, 2004, pp.56-60.

⁴⁴ Gianni Zappalà, 'Corporate Citizenship and Human Resource Management - A new tool or a missed opportunity?' *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, 42(2), 2004, pp.185-201.

needs to take its cues from the emerging rather than modern world view if it is to influence the impact that corporations have and will have on society.

Conclusion

This paper is the second in a series that examines the intersection of spirituality and business. It focused on the reasons that may account for the increased interest in spirituality. It suggested that a significant factor that may explain or contextualize the increased interest in spirituality is that we are experiencing a shift in world views – away from the previously dominant materialist world view towards an emerging ‘post-modern’ world view that is informed by a new spiritual consciousness.

Within this macro-level shift certain economic, socio-political, and demographic changes were also briefly discussed, factors that are closely intertwined and in reality difficult to separate out. In totality, this shift is leading people (and organizations) towards taking what has been described as a ‘spiritual turn’. The sequel to this paper will examine what this shift means for organizations and for the concept and practice of corporate responsibility.

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