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Introduction

William West

When I was ill, I certainly learned very quickly to keep the spiritual side of myself separate from the rest of myself whenever I met with any of the ‘professionals’. (Counselling client in Jenkins 2006: 80)

I think it is crucial to begin this book with these words of a client, disempowered and feeling forced to deny the importance of spirituality in her life. I would invite you, the reader, to remain engaged with the clients’ perspective as you read this book. Spirituality remains at the heart of the human condition for the vast majority of humans who believe in the Divine in some form or other. Even for those without such a belief, the language and cultures of religion and spirituality retain a deep communicative expressiveness.

The issue of spirituality and its relationship to therapeutic healing is a profound one and spirituality remains a word that is evocative and resonant. When a good friend of mine was compulsorily detained in a mental hospital a few years ago, her consultant, while not sharing my friend’s religious faith, was moved to describe her as ‘a soul in torment’. Was this merely the use of a powerful metaphor by this mental health physician, or was he pointing to the limits of a secular treatment; that is, to the point at which a spirituality-informed approach needed to take over? Indeed, John Swinton (2001) refers to spirituality as the ‘forgotten dimension in mental health care’. Regrettably, the physician in this case did not explore this spiritual dimension for my friend, for he was blind to her strong religious faith.

Sometimes my colleagues in the fields of counselling and psychotherapy question my view that there is a problem around therapy and spirituality in the western world. Some deny that there has ever been a problem, while others insist that there was a problem but that it is less
apparent now. Certainly, more and more is being written about therapy and spirituality, as will be apparent in this book. It has become easier in recent times for more clients to speak about their spirituality in therapy sessions.

Out of my research and research supervision, therapeutic practice and clinical supervision, I have an ongoing interest in the often cutting-edge work that arises when spirituality and healing are able to take their rightful place within the therapeutic encounter. To work in this way can be very challenging to the therapist. Indeed, in some of this work it feels that the boundaries of counselling are being creatively and ethically tested to benefit the client.

John McLeod suggests:

Psychotherapy can be viewed as a culturally sanctioned form of healing that reflects the values and needs of the modern industrial world. As such, it has not been ‘invented’ by scientists but has evolved from the healing practices employed in various historical periods by ordinary people, and necessarily contains within it the residue of these earlier forms. (1997: 2)

These earlier forms of healing practices largely occurred within a religious or spiritual context. Such healing continues to this day within all communities, whether in industrialized societies or not (Moodley and West 2005). Such practices are to be found within forms of pastoral care offered by most, if not all, religious groups.

So this engagement between spirituality and healing practices predates modern forms of therapy. Indeed, many therapy clients today will also access traditional and spiritual forms of care concurrent with their therapy sessions. In Chapter 9 in this book, Roy Moodley and Olga Oulanova discuss two such examples from clinical practice, exploring the challenges that such actions can represent for the therapist involved. Of course, such initiatives may well remain unknown to the therapist. On the other hand, this raises the question of whether the therapist should ask about such matters in the initial contracting and assessment process.

The broader debate around religion, spirituality and society is highly charged and increasingly polarized; witness the popularity of books that attack religion by Dawkins (2007) and Hitchens (2007). This polarization has been a feature of much discussion post 9/11 and the tensions around the spiritual and the secular remain huge. Any efforts to integrate and welcome spirituality into the therapeutic encounter are inevitably set against this societal and cultural backdrop.
I struggle at times to convince my colleagues in the therapy world that there is a problem around therapy and spirituality. I have played a modest part in the whole process of making it more possible to talk about spirituality within therapy. Most of the contributors to this book have bravely researched topics relating to spirituality and therapy, sometimes working without colleagues’ support.

**What is spirituality?**

At this point it would be helpful to begin to define spirituality and the related concept, religion. Most people seem to use the word ‘religion’ to cover the organized group of people, religious leaders and buildings that are used by a faith group. In contrast, ‘spiritual’ is often seen as being about the individual’s personal beliefs and experiences, which may well be in some kind of tension with the faith group they belong to, if any.

Not everyone accepts these distinctions. For instance, I have met some African Caribbean Christians and Jewish rabbis who equated the word spirituality with religion. So it is important for therapists to hear how clients use these words. However, a distinction between religion and spirituality does seem to reflect much common usage and dictionary definitions. For example, the *Compact Oxford English Dictionary* defines religion as ‘1. the belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power, especially a personal God or Gods. 2. a particular system of faith and worship’. In contrast, spiritual is defined as ‘1. relating to or affecting the human spirit as opposed to material or physical things. 2. relating to religion or religious belief’.

If we choose to equate religion and spirituality, we can be doing people a disservice. John Swinton warns us:

> A view of spirituality that does not look beyond institutional religion risks missing out on some of the very significant spiritual needs that are experienced by people with no formal religious interests, on a daily basis. (2001: 12)

It is precisely this group of people, who are awake to their spirituality but not contained within organized religious groups, who might well access therapy.

From my own viewpoint and for the purposes of this book, I would define religion as the formal structures and frameworks provided that enable people to belong to a religious group. These structures consist of buildings, religious services and other meetings and frameworks for
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religious instruction and pastoral care of members. In contrast, I regard spirituality as relating to the individual’s personal beliefs and lived experience of things of the spirit. Such spirituality might remain relatively private to the individual, or the individual may be engaged in individual or group practices that they regard as developing spirituality, for example yoga, Tai Chi, meditation or prayer. For some people, their spirituality will be contained and expressed through organized religion.

In Chapter 1, I will further explore definitions of spirituality that are pertinent to therapeutic practice. The whole question of spirituality and its role in the therapeutic process continues to remain a problematic, and controversial, area for practitioners, despite their interest in the topic (West 2000a, 2004a). In my view, it has received less development in terms of clinical practice, supervision, training and research than it warrants.

It seems, particularly in the US, that this picture is changing (Richards and Bergin 2005), somewhat encouraged by the generous funding made available for research into forgiveness (Worthington 1998) and by the many research studies into the use of meditation, mindfulness and other spiritual practices derived from eastern religions in therapy. (See Barbara Vivino and Barbara Thompson’s discussion in Chapter 5 of this book, for example.) A further example of this is the work of the Melbourne Academic Mindfulness Interest Group, which is a collaboration between academic staff from Monash University and the University of Melbourne who reviewed the evidence for mindfulness-based psychotherapy in 2006. (Mindfulness involves a concentrated awareness of one’s thoughts, actions or motivations and is an essential part of the practice of Buddhism.)

There is therefore a developing interest in spirituality among practising therapists and questions around spirituality continue to have a high profile among clients and in the wider society.

What is healing?

A focus on healing and therapy might appear to be a natural topic for practitioners. Indeed, it could be argued that healing is what all therapy – indeed, all caring work – is about. However, there are other uses of the word ‘healing’ to apply to the therapeutic encounter that are much more controversial. It can be linked to extraordinary moments of change within the therapeutic encounter, described by Buber (1970) as ‘I/Thou’. Buber contrasts this I/Thou experience with the more usual I/It encounters in which people treat each other as objects.
Somewhat similarly, Rogers (1980) discussed a way of being with clients that he called ‘presence’, which he described as ‘an altered state in which his inner spirit has reached out and touched the inner spirit of the other… Profound growth and healing and energy are present.’ Brian Thorne (1991) introduced a concept he called ‘tenderness’, which in many ways overlaps with Rogers’ presence. Thorne’s discussion of tenderness includes:

It seems as if for a space, however brief, two human beings are fully alive because they have given themselves and each other permission to risk being fully alive. At such a moment I have no hesitation in saying my client and I are caught up in a stream of love. (1991: 77)

Such moments as Buber, Rogers and Thorne are describing are also often talked about as ‘spiritual’. The word ‘healing’ could also refer to the use of specific healing techniques such as aura work or the laying on of hands. There are chapters in the second section of this book that specifically address the use of healing techniques alongside therapy. For example, Marie Wardle explores psychic energy and healing; Christa Gorsedene considers how counsellors might be guided in their work; and Roy Moodley and Olga Oulanova discuss examples of therapy clients also consulting traditional healers.

Summary of chapters

All of the contributors to this book have been engaged in research and practice around their areas of expertise. This is therefore a research- and practice-informed book organized around therapy, spirituality and healing. It is a unique book because theory, research and practice are not separated out, with each contributor drawing from their own and others’ research and from their practice as therapists and clinical supervisors. This fits within the tradition of the practitioner–researcher in which research is linked to practice and vice versa. Contributors also offer guidelines or pointers towards best practice and relevant points for discussion.

It should already be apparent that there are differing ways of viewing both spirituality and healing. Indeed, from a therapist’s point of view it is important to honour and respect the client’s view of both. The contributors to this book have researched their topics in their own particular way. There is plenty of overlap in how each views therapy, spirituality and healing; in fact there has been much dialogue among the contributors. Some of the differences will also be apparent in the research methodologies chosen and this extends to the voice and style
of writing of the contributors. These differences allow us to be aware of the varying ways in which we all make sense of the world.

The book is divided into three sections. The first section consists of seven chapters that focus on therapy and spirituality. In Chapter 1, Spirituality and Therapy: The Tensions and Possibilities, I begin by considering a recent example of a trainee counsellor experiencing difficulties around a spiritual moment in counselling. Particular aspects of her experience are used in order to explore a number of relevant issues relating to spirituality and counselling. This is followed by a consideration of what is meant by spirituality and the part it can play within the therapeutic encounter, including the notion of implicit and explicit spirituality. Some key questions are then addressed around culture and spirituality, including ethnic matching of client and therapist. The human urge to evangelism is considered, and finally some promising developments around the use of spiritual interventions in therapy, such as meditation, yoga, forgiveness and compassion, are acknowledged.

In Chapter 2 Chris Jenkins explores When the Client’s Spirituality Is Denied in Therapy. Chris draws on his research and practice to consider the clients’ experiences of having their spirituality denied in counselling and offers a model for counsellors to work integratively with spirituality. In focusing on the clients’ voice in this way, Chris alerts us to the challenge of facilitating the client’s therapeutic process, including their spirituality. His chapter provides further evidence of therapeutic failure, including the human consequences for the clients involved, when this does not happen.

In Chapter 3, Counselling and Pastoral Care, Terry Biddington draws on research and practice to explore the differences between counselling and pastoral care provided in faith communities. He offers a most useful exploration of pastoral care within the main religious traditions, teasing out its relationship with theology. He brings the practice of pastoral care alive by offering three brief case studies. In conclusion he asks: What are the interfaces and overlaps between counselling and pastoral care; when is referral appropriate – and to whom; and what are the possibilities of joint working? Clearly, this can only be achieved on a basis of mutual understanding and respect. Such questions are very pertinent to anyone working with spirituality in therapy and the answers enable us to locate therapeutic work with clients’ spirituality in relation to pastoral help from organized religion. This may well prove to be the most challenging but also the most useful chapter to read in this book.

In Chapter 4, Integrating Prayer in Counselling, Peter Gubi presents his mixed methods research that reveals the surprising amount of
prayer that is done in counselling, much of it covert, and not explored in supervision. Peter’s work challenges the notion of how secular counselling actually is in practice. For those therapists who choose to use prayer, he provides safe and appropriate recommendations for safe practice in the use of prayer within counselling.

In Chapter 5, Compassion in Psychotherapy, Barbara Vivino and Barbara Thompson present the findings of their qualitative study into psychotherapists’ understanding and use of compassion in their practice. Compassion is one of those key concepts that are able to bridge both secular and spiritual cultures, and represents a way of discussing spiritually informed therapy without getting too caught up on definitions of what spirituality is, or what language we need to use to discuss it.

In Chapter 6, Counselling, Spirituality and Culture, Fevronia Christodouli challenges us to reflect more deeply on issues of culture and spirituality in therapy. Her research is into the problematic but potentially highly creative area of counsellors working across cultures and spiritualities with clients. Drawing on her considerable experiences of practising and researching cross-cultural and spiritual work with clients, Fevronia presents guidelines for such work.

In Chapter 7, Embodied Spirituality and the Therapeutic Encounter, Dori Yusef takes us on a heuristically informed research journey into embodiment. She draws on her research conversations and her own story to explore issues for the client and therapist that deal with the fundamental realities of human spiritual experience and the intangible alternative realities that can emerge. Dori invites us into her exploration of liminal spaces and encourages us, in turn, to explore both the macro and micro levels of human existence. She addresses such questions as: How are these expressed in the therapeutic relationship and what are the implications for our ethical responsibilities?

Dori writes in a style that bridges the personal encounter and the profoundly spiritual and philosophical questions that relate to existence. Her work can be a challenge to read and engage with, but the experience, I find, is always fruitful. Her kind of research – heuristic – that lends itself to a disciplined personal as well as professional journey, has a particular relevance for researchers exploring spirituality, where there will always be a personal agenda however well disguised or hidden. Such a heuristic approach is also followed by Christa Gorsedene in Chapter 10 and Marie Wardle in Chapter 11.

The second section of this book has four chapters focused on therapy and healing. In Chapter 8, When Counselling Becomes Healing, I explore the varieties of healing that can happen within the therapeutic
encounter. I consider the vexed questions of how to deal with, and make sense of, experiences of healing when they arise within the therapeutic encounter; what kind of experiences can arise and how they can be explored in ways that benefits the clients involved; and how to maintain appropriate boundaries and the best use of supervision.

In Chapter 9, Traditional Healing alongside Counselling and Psychotherapy, Roy Moodley and Olga Oulanova draw on a rich range of relevant research literature and clinical practice to consider how to work with clients who also consult traditional healers. They consider how to deal with the boundary and other issues involved, including making sense of such consultations within the counselling framework and facing the possible challenges and dilemmas that arise. They present a rich case vignette of a client who sought traditional healing alongside counselling and they provide us with an exploration of relevant ethical issues and implications for practice.

The final two chapters in this section take us into even more challenging waters and the authors involved are to be applauded for their courage in highlighting and exploring their research topics. In Chapter 10, Assessing a Counsellor’s Use of a Seemingly Spiritual Gift, Christa Gorsedene addresses the issue that many counsellors do feel helped or guided in their work with clients but few will talk about it. Christa draws on her own innovative research work with an apparent spirit guide to provide guidelines for such work and reflect on the potential client benefit involved.

In Chapter 11, Psychic Energy and the Client, Marie Wardle invites us to understand the extraordinary work of a spiritual and/or healing nature that can occur in counselling in terms of a psychic energy framework. Marie draws on her years of research and practice to present a unique view of psychic energy and counselling. She considers what is meant by psychic energy within a counselling context and explores the ethical and supervisory issues involved, before finally offering some very relevant guidelines for practitioners.

The third section of the book has three chapters which focus on research and practice. In Chapter 12, Research in Spirituality and Healing, I suggest that while the question of research into spirituality and healing can be regarded merely as a problem area, it also offers possibilities of using innovative methodologies. I explore some of these possibilities before offering guidelines for researching the counselling of spirituality and healing.

In Chapter 13, Emergent Spirituality, David Paul Smith draws on historic and current descriptions of spiritual experiences, including
those of the author and other contributors to this book, to argue for an approach to such phenomena that does not rely on medical or religious classification. He suggests instead that there is much to be gained by adopting an experiential, phenomenological viewpoint, which could open the door to more collaborative work between traditional healing and modern psychotherapy.

In Chapter 14, Practice around Therapy, Spirituality and Healing, I focus on the challenges faced by the practitioner, including possible models for working with spirituality and healing. I conclude with guidelines for training and practice around counselling, spirituality and healing.

**Who is this book for?**

This book is intended for and should appeal to practitioners of therapy and related disciplines, including psychotherapists, counselling psychologists, counsellors, religious pastoral care, youth and community workers, social workers, probation officers, teachers involved in pastoral care and health care practitioners. It is also a book for practitioner–researchers. There is plenty of rhetoric about reducing the gap between researchers and practitioners and developing the notion of practitioner–researchers. This book is a fine example of such work. However, the gap between researchers and therapy practitioners largely remains (McLeod 1999).

This is also a book for researchers. The focus is research done by practitioners, choosing topics that appeal to them with congruent methodologies. Such research may not be the focus for all mainstream researchers, but some interesting dialogues could result. It is also a book for interested others. Therapy, spirituality and healing all attract their own audiences outside the role of professionals. This book is written in a way that is intended to be accessible to this wider group.

**A question of style**

As editor of this book, it has been important to me to encourage my contributors to find and use their own voice. As a result, I have not imposed a strong house style but have instead offered my contributors a framework to write within and have given them feedback on earlier drafts of their chapters. I hope that, as a result, their voices come through clearly and that any change of style between chapters will alert the reader to the diversity of approaches expressed here. Therapy, spirituality and
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healing are such important topics that we need to maintain a diversity of perspectives, since this reflects the human condition.

Note that in what follows we will tend to use the word ‘therapy’ to cover both ‘psychotherapy’ and ‘counselling’ and the word ‘therapist’ to cover both ‘psychotherapist’ and ‘counsellor’, except when we separate the terms for the purpose of quotation or to emphasize possible differences between counselling and psychotherapy.
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