Trends in Church Life: *The Spiritual Revolution*

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If the proverbial Martian were to be sent to earth in 2005 to survey the state of Christianity, she might well find herself perplexed. A quick perusal of David Barrett's *World Christian Encyclopedia* (2001) would reveal that Christianity is the world's largest religion, with the most extensive coverage across the globe. In many parts of Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa it is visibly flourishing. Yet the picture in Europe is very different: churches are closing and belief is declining. The baby boomers were born into a culture which was still recognisably Christian; many of their children and grandchildren lack even a passing acquaintance with their ancestral religion.

Even in Europe, however, the picture is not clear-cut. The status of Pope John Paul II was signalled by the astonishing array of world leaders who attended his funeral. One of his successor's first duties was to preside over a vast and enthusiastic gathering of around 800,000 young people at the 'World Youth Day' held in Cologne in August 2005. Pilgrimages are flourishing, historic churches and cathedrals are visited as never before (including in times of disaster), and the national census of a supposedly secular country like Britain reveals that almost 72% of the population identify themselves as Christian. The USA muddies the waters still further. In many ways it remains the paradigmatic secular state, yet in George W. Bush it has twice elected a president who sees himself as mandated by God to uphold conservative evangelical Christian values in America.

So our Martian scratches her bulbous green head as she tries to prepare her report on the current state of Christianity. She has plenty of striking fragments of evidence, but how on earth is she to assemble them into a coherent picture? Although I am not confident of being able to help her produce a report which will satisfy her Martian line managers, I do think it is possible to detect some patterns in what has

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been happening to Christianity in the last few decades, and to relate these to broader social trends. It might even be possible – however tentatively – to suggest some of the directions in which Christianity may need to develop if it is to retain active support in the West in coming decades.

The Kendal Project

In order to make the task more manageable, I am going to concentrate on the situation in the UK today, and look outwards from that vantage point. In order to build on empirical evidence I am going to begin in the town of Kendal in Cumbria where, between October 2000 and July 2002, a team of us from Lancaster University began a locality study whose aim was to map 'contemporary patterns of the sacred'.[1]

For two years we tracked down every form of religion and spirituality we could find in this town of 28,000 people, observed their characteristic activities, and interviewed those involved. We found that the religious and spiritual associational activities of Kendal could be divided into two camps: what we came to speak of as 'the congregational domain' and the 'holistic milieu'. The congregational domain was relatively easy to survey, for it was made up of churches, chapels, meeting houses and Kingdom Halls, all with a Christian basis and a weekly congregational worship service (there are no significant immigrant groups in Kendal, and it remains a strikingly 'white' town). The holistic milieu was harder to map. Its activities took the form either of group meetings or one-to-one consultations, and took place in a wide variety of settings – private homes, rented rooms, the sports centre, dedicated complementary therapy centres. There was, moreover, a huge range of different activities – from Tai Chi to Yoga, from a Greenspirit Group to a Wild Women group, from Circle Dancing to Sai Baba. We concentrated our research only on those activities identified by their facilitators as having a clear spiritual dimension, and excluded from consideration such things as Yoga groups which concentrated only on enhancing physical health or mental calm.

The separation and distinctness of the congregational domain and the holistic milieu surprised us. Very few people were active in both, and it quickly became clear that this was due to the very different orientation of the two spheres. In the congregational domain attention was focused on 'higher good' – on God, scripture, sacraments, morality, and the church community (the emphasis fell differently in different congregations and denominations). In the holistic milieu, by contrast, attention was focused inwards upon the lives, bodies and emotions of the individual (their 'subjective lives'). The sacred was identified not with that which transcends one's own unique life and to which this life should be conformed, but with that which is identified as one's true spiritual 'core'.

By counting the numbers involved in the congregational domain and holistic milieu, and by undertaking some longitudinal research, we found that although the former outnumbered the latter by a ratio of 4:1 at the time of our research (7.9% of the population of Kendal were active in the congregational domain, 1.6% in the holistic milieu), the congregational domain was declining and the holistic milieu was expanding – rapidly. If the current rates of change were sustained, the holistic milieu would begin to overtake the congregational domain in about forty years' time. With this finding in mind we entitled the book we wrote about the project *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, 2005). We were not predicting some 'age of Aquarius' in which holistic spirituality sweeps the world; even if spirituality does continue to grow at the present rate it will not make up for congregational decline – in other words, overall secularisation will continue in Britain.

The subjectivisation thesis

The bearing of these findings on trends in church life is obvious: churches in the UK, most of Europe, and even the USA,[2] have been declining fast since the 1970s, and there is no sign of a slowdown in the rate of decline.[3] Secularisation has an impact at three levels: on the lives of individuals (declining Christian belief, declining church attendance), on the lives of congregations and denominations (which

have to make hard decisions as numbers and finances shrink), and on the life of society – locally, regionally and nationally (as Christianity loses social power and visibility).

This is all important and well established. Less widely discussed is another main finding of the Kendal Project: that forms of religion and spirituality which resource the lives of individuals and enhance personal wellbeing are doing well, whilst those which require individual lives and wellbeing to be subordinated or sacrificed to some higher good are doing badly. How to explain this? In *The Spiritual Revolution* we suggest that 'subjectivised' forms of religion and spirituality – those which speak to and resource personal subjective life – are faring well chiefly because they chime in with a widespread cultural 'turn to the self'. One of the most perceptive commentators on the latter, Charles Taylor (1991), describes it as 'the massive subjective turn of modern culture, a new form of inwardness, in which we come to think of ourselves as creatures with inner depths' (p. 26) and rely on our innermost feelings and thoughts as the ultimate authority in our lives (see also Taylor, 1989). It is this cultural turn, we suggest, which explains why subjectively focused forms of 'spirituality' are growing at the expense of traditional forms of religion which subordinate projects of the self to some higher good – an hypothesis we label the 'subjectivisation thesis'.

In *The Spiritual Revolution* we offer a concise and fairly abstract account of the subjectivisation thesis. If one begins to put more historical flesh on its bare theoretical bones, I think that its power to illuminate recent trends in church life can be enhanced – not least because such historical contextualisation highlights issues of gender and power which seem to me to lie at the heart of the subjective turn.

The place to begin is the immediate post-Second World War period in the West. This neglected period was characterised by hope (for a new and better era) as well as by fear (of unionised working class power and the growing 'threat' of communism). It witnessed a strange mixture of audacious hope and optimism – expressed in grand projects aimed at remodelling many aspects of society – and of anxious longing

for tradition and security. One result was the brief but widespread triumph of an ethos of benevolent paternalism. Western societies were run by relatively small numbers of powerful men (politicians, captains of industry, churchmen, local community leaders) who generally knew one another, retained power for themselves, and were inspired by an ideal of benevolent paternalism – of working selflessly to shape a welfare-based post-war society which would be better for all its members. Such paternalism also held sway at the domestic level, for the immediate post-war era witnessed a nostalgic yearning for the security of home and family and 'traditional' gender roles as women were encouraged to return to the home and the duties of full-time unpaid care, and fathers were expected to earn 'the family wage' (Tyler May, 1999). Paternalism also triumphed at the intermediate level of society in the clubs, societies and political parties which flourished at this time, and which were run by men or committees of men (reverend fathers, management committees, chairmen), with women's organisations as 'auxiliary'.

It was against such benevolent paternalism – and the fathers of society – that growing numbers of people began to rebel from the 1960s onwards. Erica Jong summed up the rebellion in her iconic novel *Fear of Flying* (1973) when she narrated her semi-autobiographical tale of 'the gods, the daddies, who had failed' (2003, p. 285). The rebellion began amongst students in the late 1960s, and gradually spread to affect young people more generally, including the many women inspired by feminism and/or the new sexual, educational and economic opportunities opening to them (Marwick, 1999). The resulting change in ethos has been enormous. One has only to look at a TV commercial from the 1950s (or even 1970s) to see how stereotypes of authoritative men and domesticated (and/or sexualised) women which now make us cringe were once an accepted part of quotidian life.

Trends in church life

If we sharpen our understanding of the subjective turn by contextualising it in this way, it becomes clearer not only why it took place, but also why it had such a devastating impact on the churches.

Large numbers of men and women, faced with new opportunities, rebelled against the control of the fathers of society. They wanted a greater share in social power, they refused to defer, they rejected the roles prescribed for them. Since most churches were also run by (reverend) fathers who assumed paternal control over their 'children', the same dynamics were at play. Insofar as churches underscored and legitimated paternalistic social roles, they suffered. As Callum Brown (2001) has argued persuasively, this was particularly the case for those women who rejected the models of domesticated femininity which the churches had tended to support and endorse. In breaking away from paternalism, new generations of women also began to break away from forms of Christianity with which it had become associated.

Two types of church might be expected to escape this fate after the 1960s. First, churches which continue to defend paternal power – but which succeed in catering to a niche market which rejects the subjective turn and seeks a return to traditional gender roles and 'family values'. Second, churches which revise or abandon paternalism, and present the sacred in a way which is found to be fruitful for the growth and development of personal subjective life.

In Kendal we found this expectation fulfilled. On the one hand there were a few very conservative congregations like the Jehovah's Witnesses which had done relatively well since the 1970s, perhaps by virtue of the extremely clear roles, duties, hopes and explanations they offer their members (though the expansion of these congregations now appears to have come to a halt – perhaps because their niche market is exhausted). On the other hand, we found that the other category of congregation which has done relatively well in recent decades (though again with a recent slow down) is that of congregations and groups influenced by charismatic renewal, both Protestant and Catholic.

Instead of going as far down the road of subjectivisation as holistic spirituality, most charismatic-influenced congregations manage to blend elements of objective religion (clear scriptural teaching, a moderately conservative message about gender roles and certainly about sexuality) with more subjectivised offerings, most notably

a style of worship and engagement with the sacred which has a direct and powerful impact upon personal mood, experience, and development. Thus charismatic Christianity really took off after the 1970s when it merged with evangelical Biblicism to form charismatic evangelical congregations, or with Catholic sacramentalism to form pentecostal Catholic groups. The subjective focus of pentecostalism is tempered and channelled by the 'objective' container of the Bible or the sacraments.

The success of both these varieties of Christianity – conservative counter-cultural Christianity and conservative experiential Christianity – has, of course, been even greater outside the UK. Most striking of all has been the charismatic upsurge that has taken place in many parts of the southern hemisphere from the 1970s onwards (Martin, 2001). This growth has been so extensive that it has allowed Christianity to maintain its status as the world's largest religion despite the decline of Christianity in the West, and despite the upsurge of Islam. In Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia charismatic Christianity proves particularly successful in assisting uprooted and recently-urbanised populations in adjusting to the demands of a global capitalist economy, whilst retaining a firm bedrock of social support undergirded by clear moral guidelines (Woodhead, 2004). Charismatic Christianity allows women a significant degree of spiritual autonomy, without undermining an overarching paternal framework (Cucchiari, 1991).

Charismatic evangelicalism has also been successful in the USA, and partly accounts for the greater strength of the churches in that country than in Europe. Equally, however, many less experiential, less subjectivised forms of Christianity continue to do well in the USA, particularly away from the seaboards with their more subjectivised cultures. As the success of the New Christian Right in the 1980s and since, and the prominent influence of a conservative Christian agenda in the election and presidency of George W. Bush indicate, conservative forms of Christianity continue to maintain a strong following in the USA. That they appeal to a cultural stratum which wishes to defend paternalistic values against the solvents of a post-

paternal, subjectivised culture is evident from the agenda they defend: focused, above all, on issues of sex and gender roles and the defence of ‘family values’.

In striking contrast to the success of these varieties of Christianity is the decline of many historic churches and denominations in the West, particularly those of the so-called ‘liberal mainline’ (both Catholic and Protestant). Though they often continue to have an important place in the local community, to perform rites of passage and welfare functions (sometimes with state support), and to attract large attendances at major festivals, both membership and attendance have declined sharply since the 1960s. Part of the explanation must surely lie in the fact that these were the churches which were most tightly entangled with the social order of the immediate post-war years. They tended to support and echo the ethos of benevolent paternalism, with some playing a role nationally in the creation of the welfare state, locally in their legitimation of the local social order, and domestically in their support for traditional family values and gender roles. During the 1950s many such churches enjoyed an increase in membership and attendance levels, with new churches being erected at the heart of new housing schemes. When benevolent paternalism began to fall out of favour after the 1960s, however, that which had benefited mainline churches began to prove a liability. Growing numbers of young people defected from churches they found ‘stuffy’, ‘boring’, ‘square’ or simply ‘irrelevant’. In the 1950s churchgoing had been respectable, ‘the done thing’; it had marked one’s place in society and underlined one’s class and gender identity. By defecting one could mark one’s difference from the older generation and signal a desire to forge an identity based around different values, forms of belonging, and markers of status.

The decline of the mainline is somewhat ironic, however, given that these were the churches most likely to be committed to liberal humanistic values – as exemplified in some of the documents of Vatican II and, in a more extreme way, in the Tillichian liberalism which came to public notice in the UK in the debate aroused by the publication of John Robinson’s *Honest to God* (1963). More research is required

to explain why such liberalism proved insufficient to capture and retain the allegiance of the younger baby boomers, but a number of possibilities suggest themselves. First, that the commitment of these churches and their clergy to liberalism in theory (teaching, preaching and personal commitment) was undermined by paternalism in practice (in liturgy, hymnology, and – most important – in continuing male control of church life). Second, that Christian liberalism lost its nerve and failed to follow through its agenda either intellectually – in the face of the neo-orthodox challenge – or in practice. Third, that part of the reason for this failure of nerve was the increasingly visible and self-proclaimed success of more conservative churches after the 1960s – a challenge given voice by Dean Kelley's book *Why Conservative Churches are Growing* (1972).

The final and most important point to make in this connection is that liberal 'humanisation' is not the same as subjectivisation. Both processes affirm the equal value and dignity of all human beings, but the former gives this value an extrinsic basis (in being created by the father God, being made in God's image, being redeemed by Christ), whereas the latter gives it an intrinsic basis (in the unique selfhood of each individual, or at least the potential that exists for the realisation of such unique selfhood). The latter therefore cuts freer from paternalism, and gives higher priority to individual projects of the self than to collective projects of humanitarian service. Humanitarianism can be *preached* because it makes a universal demand that one serve one's fellow human. (In Kendal we found that this was the still core message in the sermons of the mainline Catholic, Anglican, Methodist and URC churches.) By contrast, the medium of the sermon contradicts the subjectivised message that true religion consists in each and every individual finding and forging his or her own unique path. Generally speaking, mainline churches – however liberal – have been good at telling people how to behave, but bad at offering individuals resources with which to deepen and expand their unique spiritual lives in their own ways (with exceptions that will be considered in the final section of this essay).

Trends in congregational life

How have these trends in church life played out at the congregational level? Even though this may be dimly perceived and scarcely articulated, I think that most people who have remained faithful members of congregations in Britain throughout the latter part of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first have some awareness of the way in which congregational life has shifted from being relatively central to local and national life, to becoming increasingly marginal. This may be true even for congregations which have not experienced numerical decline, and which still play important roles in civic life.

One way in which this sense of marginality expresses itself is in a growing sense of distance from the wider society. In Kendal we found that both clergy and church members would quite often speak of the world outside church in a way which indicated puzzlement, sadness, disquiet, distrust or hostility. A full 72% of those church members who returned our questionnaires (distributed amongst a representative sample of congregations in the town) believe that 'society is getting worse'. Members of mainline churches were most likely to adopt a tone of gentle regret, expressing concern and disappointment – but not condemnation – that so many young people were alienated from church life. Some mainline church members expressed a desire to see worship and church life become 'more relevant' to young people, so that they would be able to benefit from congregational life in the way that they felt they themselves had done. Members of more conservative churches tended to be more overtly hostile to 'the world', and to condemn it for shallow materialism, consumerism and individualism. They were concerned that society was straying far from the Word of God, but convinced that if people could be brought into contact with the new life offered in Christ they would recognise the shallowness of their current worldly 'satisfactions'. Of all the congregations in Kendal, it was the charismatic congregations were the most convinced that 'renewal' was just round the corner (ironically, since we undertook our research the most prominent of these congregations has closed down).

The last few decades have, in other words, seen congregations become more separate from wider society and develop clearer boundaries and more accentuated markers of difference. The change has been greatest for mainline, established and monopolistic churches – like the Church of Scotland, the Church of England, and the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland – which were formerly accustomed to a much closer relationship with society and much more permeable boundaries. Remnants of this earlier status remain in the fact that large numbers of people claim some nominal allegiance to such churches (or at least to 'Christianity', as in the 2001 UK census), expect churches to perform certain functions like baptism and weddings on demand, and may retain a sense that the local community comes to some sort of symbolic focus in the local church (particularly at times of disaster). Such commitment is residual, however, and contrasts with the relentlessly declining levels of Christian knowledge and belief since the 1970s.

'Dissenting' churches outside the mainline have, of course, been more accustomed to stand at a critical distance from society, and have therefore found adjustment to the present situation somewhat easier. Indeed one of the most interesting aspects of the situation is that in many ways the mainline churches have been drawing closer to the dissenting, 'sectarian' model than has previously been the case. The latter have always maintained a clear boundary with the wider culture; increasingly the old mainline is doing the same. This seems to be true throughout the West. It is true in the UK, where (for example), the current Archbishop of Canterbury has adopted such a conservative stance in relation to the issue of sexuality that he has virtually imposed silence upon the liberal wing of the Anglican Church. It is true in continental Europe, where official Catholicism has become increasingly conservative in matters of doctrine and institutional practice, and controlling of its clergy and teachers. And it is true in the USA, where liberal Christianity has been put on the defensive as never before – witness the travails of liberal Catholic bishops and other clergy, and the massive reaction against the liberal, pro-homosexual wing of the Episcopalian Church.

As these examples illustrate, the main issue around which the high boundaries of Christian identity have lately been erected is that of gender and sexuality. It is in reaction against the ‘permissive’ sexuality of the contemporary milieu, and in defence of a Christian commitment to heterosexuality and the nuclear family, that contemporary Christian identity is increasingly taking shape. Why should this be? Although it would take a great deal more work to establish the case fully, it seems plausible to suggest that it may be related to a nostalgia for post-war paternalism: for a situation in which the church and its members had higher status in society, men and women had clearer and more demarcated roles, sexuality was more tightly controlled, the family seemed to offer a place of security and sanctity, and Christianity was woven into the fabric of it all. Having said all that, it is necessary to make two important qualifications.

The first is that besides the churches’ increasing distance from wider society – both imposed and embraced – the second main trend I would single out as distinctive of congregational life since the 1960s has been a *decline* in paternalism and clericalism. This point was brought home to me when our research in Kendal uncovered some archival materials, including parish newsletters from the 1960s and 70s. Even in the latter the tone was thoroughly paternalistic. It was not only that the vicar assumed a right to ‘preach’ to the congregation to whom he was writing, but that the newsletters were dense with comments to and about women which assumed that they would be occupying roles of service, self-sacrifice and domesticity. Such clerical paternalism has declined or even disappeared in a very short space of time. The ordination of women in some churches has been both a symptom and a cause of this trend, and the changing status of women in wider society has undoubtedly been a major factor. So too has the declining status of the clergy in society, even in the ‘highest’ congregations. The rapid decline of the Anglo-Catholic movement in the Anglican church may be one of the most striking symbols of this decline; despite continuing representation, the movement is ceasing to recruit young people – which may well be a sign that sacerdotalism has ceased to be credible in the contemporary context. (The decline in Roman Catholic

vocations, though often attributed solely to a rejection of the ideal of celibacy, may indicate something similar.)

The second qualification to my remarks about the prominence of sexual issues in the construction of contemporary Christian identity has to do with the way in which such issues often seem to feature more prominently at denominational rather than congregational level. One reason for this may be simple reluctance or embarrassment in speaking about such issues, but another may be that they are of greater concern to church leaders than to most people in the pew – plus the fact that it tends to be at denominational rather than congregational level that issues of institutional identity and public presentation come to a focus. Our questionnaire research revealed that Christians *do* tend to be more conservative on sexual issues than non-Christians: 56% thought sex before marriage was ‘always wrong’ and 66% said the same of homosexual relations between consenting adults. Nevertheless, we did not find that sexuality was an issue which came up as frequently in congregational life in Kendal, contrary to what one assume if one based one’s knowledge on national newspapers.

In fact, at congregational level, the more important trend seems to be toward an identity based around a self-conscious sense of ‘community’. This was a word we heard many times in Kendal, and from its context and associations it became clear that it signalled (a) something new, or at least something which has become more prominent since the 1960s; (b) something to do with a sense of commitment to, sharing in, and mutual support within a congregation; (c) something ‘informal’ and with a mild affective dimension; (d) something which church people enjoy but others do not. The notion was often drawn upon in sermons, where a contrast was frequently drawn between the ‘community’ which Christians enjoy, and the ‘individualism’ which afflicts wider society. But talk of community was also fairly common amongst members of congregations, and was sometimes used in response to questions about why people go to church and what they value about church, as well about what has changed in congregational life. When asked what had changed in congregational life in recent decades, a

frequent answer was that it had become more 'informal', that coffee and chat after the service had become more important, and that there is now greater lay participation in the church community.

Of course this turn towards 'community' in the sense of the congregational community (or at least the community of committed members) is yet another sign not only of the marking and raising of church boundaries, but also of their shrinkage: from being coterminous with the boundaries of society, a particular group within society, or even a denomination, to becoming identical with the boundaries of the congregation. To some degree the emphasis on community is able to accommodate the subjective turn, for this is community bound by ties of 'informal' affection as much as 'formal' belonging to a hierarchical church order – something which is even clearer in relation to the small groups, including cell groups, which have also become more important in congregational life. Equally, however, the notion of community is able to support the idea that there is a common good which transcends my personal wellbeing, and to which I should in some sense be subject. As such, it is able to draw up the boundaries of Christian identity, whilst drawing in just a little of the wider culture.

Shoots of vitality

By way of conclusion, I would like to draw attention not to fully-fledged trends in church life, but to a few shoots of growth and vitality which may or may not turn into something more sustained. Taken together they may offer some hints of the sort of Christianity that may be able to make headway within a subjectivised culture (besides the more conservative, counter-cultural varieties of Christianity discussed above).

I begin with the success of what might be called 'spectacle-' or 'event-based' Christianity. What I have in mind is, for example, the success of the World Youth Day mentioned above, and the many earlier rallies presided over by Pope John Paul II, or the growth of interest and engagement in pilgrimage in the last few decades. Lourdes, for instance, now receives around six million visitors a year, and

Medjugorje has gone beyond being a regional pilgrimage centre with a clientele centred on the former Yugoslav region, to one now attracting a growing international pilgrimage community, in which there is a particularly strong American Catholic presence, with organised pilgrimage tours there run by American organisations.[4]

What such developments suggest is not a massive revival of interest in church-based Christianity, but the interest amongst people of many different ages in events which have a basis in Christian tradition, but which allow for individual participation – and mood-enhancement – in a collective context. In other words, they allow people to draw on some powerful resources of the Christian tradition in a way that is not found to be threatening or overwhelming to individuality. Pilgrimage serves as a powerful metaphor for the 'journey' of the individual self as it develops its own unique life-project. You can have your own experiences on a pilgrimage, even though you are doing so within a context and limits laid down by tradition. The latter gives shape to the experience, but does not dictate it.

Similar factors may lie behind another sign of vitality: a renewed interest in some quarters in liturgical Christianity. I have in mind, for example, the growth of interest in Orthodox worship on the part of mainly educated and middle-class people in countries like Britain and America – or the relative success of cathedrals and cathedral worship in Britain. So long as they are not too heavily clericalised nor too didactic, liturgical forms of worship can perform a similar function as pilgrimage: drawing on aspects of the Christian tradition in a way which can stimulate subjective life very powerfully, without compromising personal projects of the self. As one of my interviewees in Kendal explained, she uses the ritual of high Anglican communion as a focus for her own meditation practice. Equally, such subjectivised sacramentalism offers the stimulation of a collective engagement without the troublesome demand of commitment to the 'higher good' of a church community.

Such pockets of vitality also have in common the fact that they engage many or all of the five senses. As with holistic spirituality, there is a

clear demand for forms of engagement with the sacred which engage the whole person – body, mind and spirit. Such engagement is still relatively rare in most congregations, particularly Protestant ones, where word-and-mind are catered for, but there little explicit attention or stimulation is given to the body and emotions (at least, unique personal emotions rather than the common emotions engendered by music and worship). The broadening of attention from the mental and spiritual dimensions of existence to the bodily, affective and natural/material world has, of course, been a feature of other areas of vitality, such as (neo) Celtic spirituality, liturgical dance, and the practice of labyrinth-walking.

Finally one must make mention of the success of Christian retreats, retreat-houses and spiritual direction. All appear to be flourishing, and all bring ancient resources to bear on individual lives, subjective concerns, and desires for spiritual growth. Emotions nearly always occupy a central place, as does personal development (with a great deal of interest in tools of personal analysis such as the Enneagram). In addition, the body appears to be becoming more prominent, not only in the beautiful built and natural environments that many retreat centres boast, but in such offerings as massage, aromatherapy and other cross-over offerings with the holistic milieu.

This brief survey hardly adds up to a rounded portrait of the sort of Christianity that may succeed in the West in coming decades, nor provides a recipe for any such thing. It may, however, contain hints of some of the ingredients that will have to be included, and some of the priorities that will need to be attended to. The underlying message seems to be that it is not necessary to abandon the Christian tradition in a rush to cater for the latest needs of a subjectivised marketplace. Rather, it may be possible to respect the validity of the deeply-cherished contemporary desire to forge worthwhile projects of the self which take personal wellbeing seriously, whilst maintaining commitment to the belief that the Christian tradition contains resources that can broaden, deepen and enrich such an enterprise.

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[1] For further information and data see www.kendalproject.org.uk.

[2] For a summary and discussion of the accumulating evidence of significant church decline in the USA since the 1970s see Heelas and Woodhead 2005, 55-60.

[3] The evidence is gathered in Heelas and Woodhead 2005, 50-68; 139-141.

[4] These remarks draw on the unpublished work of my colleague Ian Reader, in particular his paper 'Pilgrimage Growth in the Modern World: Meanings and Implications'.