Chapter 1

Just How It Is

I am a priest who is also a professor and a therapist. One of the blessings of this ministry is that I have regular opportunities to talk with people, in a variety of settings, as they negotiate their spiritual lives. Many of these conversations have been where you might expect them: with parishioners whose parents are critically ill, with clients looking to overcome addiction, with students trying to figure out what their studies have to do with their life calling. But surprisingly many—and probably the more interesting ones—have materialized out of conversations that started with a very different purpose with people who have little connection to my "flocks." The following is a great example.

I was sitting in a coffeehouse in Frederick, Maryland, with a friend from high school, one of those good friends with whom it is always easy to pick up even though we have lived in different parts of the country for the past twenty years. We are both professors, so we usually talk about teaching and the politics of higher education. He is a natural scientist and skeptic, and we had an unspoken détente in which we avoided talk about religion. This time was no different. We shared stories of crazy students, talked about life after tenure, then turned to our family lives.

We both had been through some difficult times of grieving recently, and my friend was sharing how he had taken up meditation at the recommendation of a counselor. It had given him a lot of relief, and he shared with me that he was contemplating learning more about Buddhism, but wasn't sure what that was going to entail. He knew I had background in religion, and he wanted my opinion. He was Roman Catholic by upbringing, agnostic through training as a scientist, and usually just indifferent to spirituality or religion. It wasn't part of the furniture of his life. Yet here he was, sitting in a coffeehouse, talking to a friend whom he rarely sees about his fascination with Buddhism. He liked that it was nontheist and empirical, but he was also intrigued by the artwork and ritual of Tibetan Buddhism.

I wasn't sure what to say, so I defaulted to empathic listening as he started to work out what this curiosity meant for him. At the end of our conversation, I mentioned a couple of books on Buddhist spirituality I had found helpful and

gently suggested that he might look for a meditation group on his campus. Ninety minutes had passed, and we both returned home and continued our friendship as usual through Facebook and Twitter but did not have another deep discussion until a year later when I visited him. He had enjoyed the books and was now including meditation alongside his regular yoga group. I didn't know whether to count that as a success of spiritual friendship or not.

I doubt that I am alone in finding myself having this kind of conversation more frequently. My experience suggests that there are plentiful opportunities for talking with people about the spiritual life, but frequently, these conversations do not fit the traditional format of spiritual companioning. My friend and I had closeness and frequent digital contact, but only occasional personal contact. He had some familiarity with Christianity, but only a basic level of formation in his Catholic tradition from childhood. He was not sure that spirituality even was a real thing, and his scientific outlook ruled out many traditional expressions of faith as superstition. And yet he also had a very strong social ethic and took part in groups of practice for yoga and sustainable agriculture. His pathway toward spirituality came through the psychotherapeutic use of an Eastern practice, and this practice intrigued him beyond its therapeutic value.

These kinds of conversations—which happen both outside and within organized religious groups—do not meet the assumptions that are behind the classical models of spiritual direction, such as geographical stability, a shared vocabulary

for the transcendent, plentiful mentoring opportunities, or lifetime affiliation with a single faith tradition. The primary concern of this book is to explore how the ministry of spiritual companionship can accept the invitation to change posed by this contemporary context.

One blessing for disoriented spiritual companions is that a great deal of social-science research is being conducted on exactly how spirituality and religion are changing. However, the breadth and complexity of this literature require some maps. Observers of contemporary religion and spirituality have pointed to many changes that impact the development of the spiritual life. Consider the following examples:

- Mobility, technology, and globalization have changed the nature of interpersonal relationships.
- Traditional religious organizations and authorities have declined as there has been a proliferation of new and alternate spiritualities.
- The fastest growing group in the United States is the spiritual and religious "nones," now 22 percent of the population.[1]

1. "America's Changing Religious Landscape | Pew Research Center," accessed October 6, 2015, http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/.

- Spirituality has taken on a do-it-yourself character rather than being handed on from one's cultural heritage.
- Spirituality is often encountered as a resource for psychological and physical health, frequently removed from its tradition of origin.
- Spirituality has increasingly become something commodified, marketed, and consumed.
- There are increased encounters between adherents of different faiths, and individuals are increasingly exploring multiple traditions in their own spiritual practices.
- The relationship between science and religion is often presumed to be antagonistic.
- Social and environmental ills engage the political side of many faiths just as many individuals have become alienated from overly political religious expressions.

The list could continue. In fact, scholars don't even agree on what to call the current period—secular? Postmodern? Late capitalist? Post-secular? Post-postmodern? A new Awakening? This is a complicated and rapidly changing picture. To be able to take things in, we can organize these dynamics by four emerging themes: fluidity, commodification, the secular search for control, and diversity.

Fluidity

The lack of agreement on what to call our current era reveals one of its key characteristics, *fluidity*. We don't know precisely what is going on or where we are going because the central characteristics of contemporary social phenomena are "precisely their fragility, temporariness, vulnerability and inclination to constant change."[2] While still modern, our era is different from earlier forms of modernity in which people were certain that scientific progress would slowly improve the human condition and allow everyone to live a good life. Now, the idea of incremental progress is less attractive, replaced by a faith in the power of infinite revision and liquidation.

We value things not for the confidence or certainty they provide, but for how easily they can be abandoned for something else. We can see this change in the enthusiasm for "disruption" and "creative destruction" in the world of business. And our culture values fluidity not just in capital, but also in ideas, organizations, relationships, and selfhood.

The metaphor of fluidity clarifies why so many of the assumptions of the spiritual life seem to be breaking down. A world in which every idea, relationship, and identity is only "for the time being" does not fit well with how spiritual formation is approached in many church environments.

2. Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 28. Bauman uses the term *liquid modernity* to describe our current era.

Instead, many structures that have been taken for granted are melting away, some at alarming rates.

Foremost among these is the idea of established religion. Religious organizations and their leaders may have had a special status and authority, but now they are just one voice among the many to which people turn for spiritual advice. In fact, for a growing portion of the population, religious leaders are not compelling enough to even make this cut. There are plenty of therapists, friends, writers, and the Internet to give most of us an overwhelming choice of advice on how to live our lives. Fluidity undercuts the idea of the imprimatur, the "official" source of information that we should all listen to. Denominations as organizations are irrelevant to the practice of spirituality and religion in liquid modernity. This is not to say that the traditions and habits that they carry are no longer of interest. At one and the same time, people are becoming interested in the wisdom of traditions like early Methodism and becoming indifferent to the structures and policies of organizations like the United Methodist Church.

Spirituality has become *open source*:[3] spiritual resources are seen as something shared, and people draw from across sources to piece together something new that works for them. It is the logic of the free and open Internet: Wisdom is not owned by any organization or hierarchy; it should be shared for the bigger common good, regardless of how costly it

3. Brian D. McLaren, *Finding Our Way Again: The Return of the Ancient Practices* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 65.

was to create. Open source movements can create new and powerful products, but they are also bad news for the "legacy" organizations that think they should hold the patents.

Fluidity undercuts the rationale of doing something because it is time-tested and traditional. There is no reason for loyalty to the old ways simply because they are old. By contrast, religion intrinsically involves looking to the past for lessons.[4] What is interesting is that spiritual traditions do not seem to be simply going away as we might expect. In fact, turning toward tradition seems to be associated with congregational vitality.[5] Therefore, fluid spirituality is not necessarily becoming more secular and less interested in the past, but the understanding of tradition has undoubtedly changed. Fluid spirituality has little place for custom, doing something simply to reproduce an existing structure, but it has a lot of opening for tradition when seen as a historically embodied argument about wisdom.[6] Tradition in this sense is not Chesterton's "democracy of the dead";[7] it is about bringing the wisdom of the past alive again in new ways.

Finally, fluidity changes the assumptions of what constitutes community, since no single community is central to a life lived in constant change. People are constantly moving, their relationships with others ebbing and flowing,

4. Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000).

5. Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity after Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2012).

6. Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

7. G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: Image Books, 2014), 45.

never keeping shape for long. Throughout each day, people move between several groups: congregation, PTA, yoga group, running group, workplace. Whereas many of these groups would once have been dictated by social convention, most of them now are entered into by choice and based on affinity. People are not living life on their own. The Internet has made it easier than ever for people to find others who share a bewildering array of interests, and contrary to the critique that they are all about dabbling, many of these groups are dedicated to serious practice.[8] But since these groups are chosen, they are unlikely to bring people into encounters with people very different from them. Instead, they provide the security of an "imagined community."[9] And because the focus of these groups is specialized, they often do not last long.

Fluidity creates a unique spiritual situation. It simultaneously opens up new possibilities for leading a meaningful life while depriving us of any standards for judging our success. Spirituality has become "do-it-yourself," and each person's journey can be like that of a nomad: visiting the caravan site from time to time to get new ideas from other travelers, but quickly departing again for the road without any specific destination. The campsite is not especially important beyond being a waypoint, and there is little need for critiquing or investing in it.[10]

8. Paul Heelas, *Spiritualities of Life: New Age Romanticism and Consumptive Capitalism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008).

9. Bauman, *Liquid Times*, 100.

10. Ibid., 23.

Commodification

Fluidity is one face of global capitalism. Another is the unceasing pressure to experience everything in life as a commodity to be obtained and consumed in the most efficient way possible. Consumer spirituality can be shallow and narcissistic, and self-help spirituality has often come in for this kind of criticism.

Any critique that is so easy to make probably hides a lack of nuance. In the case of spirituality as commodity, yes, people do sometimes search for spirituality as if they are finding the best diapers or car or exercise clothing, perhaps with more on the line. As long as there has been religion there have been people looking to buy and sell relics, talismans, shrines, and other spiritual goods. But this kind of sacred economy is more about magic and superstition than spirituality,[11] and magical consumerism has just as much of a history within the walls of the church as outside them. The real dynamics of religious consumerism are much subtler, and we discount many genuine experiences of the divine when we comfort ourselves by making fun of others' spiritual quests.

The relationship between consumerism and spirituality is very complex, but several aspects of it seem especially pertinent to growing in the spiritual life. The first of these is how consumer capitalism creates a way of being in the

11. In fact, the sociologist Max Weber goes to great lengths to differentiate magic from religion. There is no church of magic. Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963).

world (shaping our understanding, experiences, and actions) that defines human life in terms of infinite freedom, unlimited resources, and self-focused choices. Living this way tends to turn religion into a kind of cheap transcendence, Christotainment, or "special effect."[12] When we want to feel "spiritual" (because in this world, spirituality is a kind of peak experience), we listen to chanting monks, sit in a darkened auditorium while a praise band performs, or place icons and mandalas around our room. We become spiritual gluttons, susceptible to our faith's falling apart as soon as we no longer are "feeling it."[13]

Even more insidiously, consuming spirituality as a commodity has the effect of hiding the ways and purposes for which that spiritual item was created. Christianity, which has the potential to turn society upside down, can be reduced to comforting platitudes, as unthreatening and bastardized as the Che Guevara T-shirt sold in the local big box store. And spiritual community, which has the power to transform lives, can become a sort of aspirational brand identity—which necessarily excludes those different from us.

Consumer spirituality also focuses on technology as the model and vehicle of transformation. The message is straightforward: press a button, take this pill, meditate for

12. Graham Ward, *The Politics of Discipleship: Becoming Postmaterial Citizens*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 148.

13. This is not solely a modern phenomenon. John of the Cross describes this phenomenon in his treatment of the dark night of the senses. Commodification complicates this by making other aspects of faith atrophy.

this length of time, use this program, visit this place, set your mind on God's prosperity . . . and things will work together seamlessly to meet your needs. This "device paradigm" abstracts things from their material settings and makes them disposable, interchangeable, glamorous.[14] You buy the machine. You own it. And don't worry, because there are geniuses producing better and better machines to meet your needs down the line.

When spirituality is experienced as a commodity, then it is inevitably judged by its therapeutic value. There is nothing wrong with faith being therapeutic, generally speaking. Jesus promises complete joy, and Scripture promises comfort amid distress. Many of the characteristic doctrines of the church have developed out of a pastoral sensibility that links faith to the pursuit of happiness.[15] The problem created by consumer spirituality is that its idea of happiness is too thin. The therapeutic can be reduced to the *merely* therapeutic without anyone noticing, and the richness of a way of life can be turned into a utilitarianism that sees faith as something like wheat grass—usually unpleasant, but good for you.[16] And a faith that can be functionally compared to a pill is not

14. Albert Borgmann, *Power Failure: Christianity in the Culture of Technology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2003), 17.

15. Ellen T. Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds: The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

16. Here, it matches up with the Moralistic Therapeutic Deism that Smith has observed among teens and young adults in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Christian Smith et al., *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

threatening in any way to the powers and principalities of this world. Consumption inhibits critical thinking, and there is no room for spiritual ideas such as the Christian practices of giving one's self for others and living simply.

The good news where consumerism and spirituality are concerned is that spirituality contains seeds of resistance that, if nurtured, can rip apart the logic of consumerism from within. Many spiritual practices, such as meditation, hospitality, and singing, have benefits that can be obtained only through the practice itself. Such practices are pursued for their own sake, and they look to a tradition for standards of excellence that can lead us in further training.[17] Research has repeatedly demonstrated the potency of these kinds of practices as people move from dabblers to serious practitioners. Even in the supposedly consumerist and therapeutic spiritual scenes of the yoga session or the growth group, practitioners can begin to get interested in the practices for their own sake, often reproducing the structure of monastic communities (gurus, ongoing practice spaces, traditions, spiritual guidance) while steadfastly insisting that they are not "religious."[18] It is a powerful thing to open oneself

17. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*.

18. In *Spiritualities of Life,* Heelas has an extended refutation, grounded in field research, of the claim that these spiritualities are necessarily consumeristic. Courtney Bender also has shown that communities of practice take on structure even among those who eschew the very idea of structure, such as those in New Age movements. See Courtney Bender, *The New Metaphysicals: Spirituality and the American Religious Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

to the depth of the Spirit, and all of us are in over our heads in terms of what we can expect from our spiritual practices. They can lead us to totally reorient our lives and provide us with a passion that we didn't know we could have.

The Secular Search for Control

Understanding the spiritual situation of the West inevitably involves answering the question of how it has moved from "a society in which it was virtually impossible not to believe in God to one in which faith, even for the staunchest believer, is one human possibility among others."[19] Understanding secularism in this sense, as a change in the conditions under which belief happens, is key to understanding the way spirituality now plays out.

The philosopher Charles Taylor has identified two conditions necessary for this form of secularity to have developed.[20] First, the culture must have made a strong distinction between the natural and supernatural, often based on theological principles. Second, as an unintended consequence of this distinction, it came to be seen as possible to live entirely within the natural arena without reference

19. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 3.

20. Charles Taylor, "Afterword: Apologia pro Libro Suo," in *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*, ed. Michael Warner, Jonathan VanAntwerpen, and Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

to transcendent reality (if indeed there were such a thing). Taylor calls this perspective the *immanent frame*. Life in the immanent frame disenchants the world, but it has the benefit of buffering the self from contact with supernatural entities. People no longer have to worry about demons or magic or spirits, since these are irrelevant and probably meaningless.

This development is framed as reason's triumph over outdated and superstitious illusions that have limited human progress. Freed of the meaningless gloss of the sacred, people are free to see the reality of human nature and to work to improve it scientifically. Taylor notes that the way in which modernity tells this story is through subtraction: "This is no more than ___"; "What is really happening is ___"; "The real truth about Jesus is that ___"; "I have no need for that hypothesis." We get rid of overly complicated explanations that involve entities beyond our control (such as God) in favor of simpler ones that give us the ability to control things for our own purposes. The result is a flatter, simpler world, but one that seems predictable.

This worldview has an internal tension. Human life requires a global sense of meaning,[21] even if the meaning we live by is that there is no meaning. This in turn requires a sense that there is a fullness/wholeness/depth to reality. The immanent frame is supposed to be able to be inhabited without any reference to anything beyond it. Talk of fullness, whether arising from the natural world or transcending it, goes against the clarity and predictability that the immanent frame is supposed to

21. Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006).

provide. Therefore, when there are experiences of some fullness breaking through into our reality, these are fragile and subject to argument.[22] With each new epiphany, ways of experiencing fullness multiply, leading to an explosion of new spiritual options as people search for contact with depth.

This analysis highlights a key spiritual challenge. The default, scientific position of modern thought precludes the ability to conceive of reality in ways that were critical to prior generations of spirituality. There is no demonic, but there is no grace as well. There are no "thin places." Science and technology should solve all our problems, and if we still suffer, it is because we are ignorant or not using them well. It is not tragic. Important spiritual concepts, such as the soul, which exists in the trust and invitation of the Other, are lost and inaccessible.[23]

This emphasis on certainty and control is not the only way of living in the world, even if it is a prominent one. There are other modern modes of existence, for example, law, technology, religion, fiction.[24] Each has its own chain of reasoning that flourishes or flounders under specific conditions. As a result, many problems of modernity stem from category mistakes, judging one way of being modern according to the standards of another.

22. Taylor, "Afterword: Apologia pro Libro Suo."

23. Rowan Williams, *Lost Icons: Reflections on Cultural Bereavement* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 2000).

24. Bruno Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence: An Anthropology of the Moderns* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

Modern science is obsessed with finding the naked, unadulterated, and indisputable facts of the world and transmitting them to others without any mediation, bias, or alteration.[25] It is in search of "nothing but the facts," assuming those can be known. The dominance of this framework, known as positivism, leads to its being imposed on religion, with the result that religion and spirituality tend to accept the terms of debate from the positivist worldview. This leaves spirituality and religion with the choice between translating itself into secular terms or into an antirational fundamentalism. It comes to believe in "belief."[26] The very speech that once motivated people to change the world becomes unspeakable, a bunch of meaningless terms from a metaphysical debate in another century.

In the fundamentalist/modernist framework, religion loses its soul. Religious speech transforms and converts those who receive it. It is not detached or objective.[27] Its unfathomable depth leads it through an endless cycle of affirmation and denial, constantly renewing itself while seeking to be faithful to its origins, confounding those who want to contain its meaning. God is not a thing to be grasped. This makes talk of the Spirit fundamentally opposed to positivism, and it means

25. Latour refers to this mode of existence as "double click," evoking the way in which hyperlinks seem to magically make pure information appear immediately, without any account of how it got there.

26. Latour, *An Inquiry*, 313.

27. Latour, *An Inquiry*.

that spirituality has to always answer the charge that it is meaningless in a time in which positivism is in the driver's seat.

Diversity

A final theme emerging from recent scholarship is spiritual diversity, seen clearly in recent demographic studies.[28] Immigration and access to information have increased the number of religious/spiritual traditions to which people are exposed. Buddhists, Muslims, and Hindus each comprise 1 percent of the US population, and these proportions are growing. Twenty-four percent of married Americans report that their spouse is of a different religious tradition. An equal number report belief in reincarnation, the power of crystals, and astrology. Twenty-two percent of Americans are religiously unaffiliated, forming the plurality in twenty-three states. In short, people have many more choices and less belief that theirs is the only way, and they often combine multiple traditions in ways that traditional spiritual direction did not anticipate.

Christianity was born in an era of great religious diversity, but contemporary pluralism has its own characteristic set of challenges. As faiths come into contact with one another in

28. Public Religion Research Institute, "PRRI—American Values Atlas," accessed October 6, 2015, http://ava.publicreligion.org/; "Religious Landscape Study," *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project*, accessed October 6, 2015, http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/.

the modern world, they must navigate issues such as dialogue and relationships among groups, conversion and proselytizing, relations between majority and minority groups, multiple belonging, cooperation among groups, faith in the public square, peacebuilding, and fundamentalisms.[29] Added to the complexity is the fact that the other aspects of modernity interact with this dynamic.

Diversity calls for a response, and the theologian Paul Knitter provides a helpful summary of these responses: "only one true religion," "the one fulfills the many," "many true religions called to dialogue," and "many religions: so be it."[30] This is not just an exercise for scholars. Each individual has to find ways to understand diversity and choose among these options. Our answers shape our spiritual lives in profound ways. If we think our tradition is the one and only true one or that other religions are fulfilled in it, our interest in learning from those of different faiths decreases. At the very least, we will find it difficult to work with these other groups on shared projects. We will also miss opportunities for growth in our own faith through dealing with difference. More pluralist approaches, such as dialogue and acceptance, can enrich our spiritual lives through encounters with the other, but they

29. David Cheetham, Douglas Pratt, and David Thomas, "Introduction," in *Understanding Interreligious Relations*, ed. David Cheetham, Douglas Pratt, and David Thomas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

30. Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002).

bring the risk of staying on the surface of our own and others' traditions to create a false spirit of hospitality.

In addition, diversity is not just a reality between faith groups. While we remember that there are different denominations within each religion, we tend to treat each denomination as monolithic. Some of the most challenging diversity to handle in the spiritual life is disagreement with people in our own faith communities who seem authentic in their faith but differ with us in belief or practice. These encounters call some of our basic assumptions into question, and we can't just dismiss them as other or mistaken since they appear to have come to their approach through the same traditions as we have.

Some recent theology can exacerbate this tendency to homogenize our faith communities. In response to modernist approaches that see religion as being about certain fundamental truths or as the attempt to put a special kind of experience into words, theologians in the postliberal approach have favored seeing religion as a cultural and linguistic reality, a way of life comprised of practices rooted in a tradition.[31]

There are many benefits to this approach, such as stressing the distinctiveness of faith as a way of life and not just beliefs or experiences. However, the shorthand version of this theology tends to talk about engaging "*the* tradition," as if traditions were well defined and well regulated. The

31. The foundational text of this movement is George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984).

reality is that traditions are more of a style than a set of identical items.[32] No one polices the boundaries of traditions, even if there is consensus on their core ideas. In this way, contemporary diversity changes the very content of traditions as people come into contact with different denominations and religions and their ideas diffuse into one another.

In upcoming chapters, we will examine these four trends as they impact different parts of the spiritual life. But first, we must make a choice: How should we understand these phenomena? For each of them, there is a vocal contingent of commentators who see their job purely as one of critique—to the extent that contemporary spirituality diverges from classical norms, it needs to be confronted and reshaped. There are also cheerleaders for adapting to these new trends, accepting their internal logic as unambiguously good for religious traditions. I think the wisest approach is in between, a critical appreciation. None of these is entirely good or bad; they just are how it is. They are the setting, and they can be transformed by grace. Some trends create specific challenges for spiritual formation as traditionally understood. Other trends indicate that the serious cultivation of spirituality tends to be a resilient phenomenon and that there are new manifestations of spiritual friendship that can be drawn upon in moving forward.

32. Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997).

In taking this approach, I differ from some authors[33] in assuming that there is much to be learned from contemporary spiritual trends outside the bounds of the Church and that the spiritual lives of those who practice them are not necessarily lacking when compared to those of many churchgoers. The Czech priest and psychologist Tomáš Halík provides a helpful illustration from the experience of the Church after the Velvet Revolution:

> When . . . Christ's followers came out freely into the open after so many years, they noticed many people who applauded them and maybe a few who had previously shaken their fists at them. What they didn't notice, however, was that the trees all around them were full of Zacchaeuses—those who were unwilling or unable to join the throng of old or brand-new believers, but were neither indifferent nor hostile to them. Those Zacchaeuses were curious seekers, but at the same time they wanted to maintain a certain distance. That odd combination of inquisitiveness and expectation, interest and shyness, and sometimes, maybe, even a feeling of guilt and

33. See for example Lillian Daniel, *When Spiritual but Not Religious Is Not Enough: Seeing God in Surprising Places, Even the Church* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2013).

> "inadequacy," kept them hidden in their fig trees.[34]

A similar challenge now faces religion in the Western world: as church attendance drops, we tend to notice those loud voices of secularization and those bright spots within our existing religious structures. But Jesus suggests that we notice the Zacchaeuses, those who would be interested in engaging us if we just learned to speak their names. Zacchaeuses are not limited to the "nones" or the "spiritual but not religious." The same trends that create that mixture of interest and shyness about faith outside of the church are operating in the church, and the borders between "insiders" and "outsiders" are fuzzy. We do not always have recourse to our traditional models of spiritual friendship even within parish ministry. And this can be good.

34. Tomáš Halík, *Patience with God: The Story of Zacchaeus Continuing in Us,* Kindle edition (New York: Doubleday, 2009), Kindle locations 166–71.

Questions for Discussion

1. Think about conversations you have had recently with people who might be considered "Zacchaeuses." How did these emerge? What kind of settings, situations, and relationships made them possible? What can make them difficult to recognize?

2. Which of the four contemporary dynamics impacting spirituality (fluidity, commodification, the secular search for control, and diversity) were most familiar? Least familiar? Do you think they are equally important? Why or why not?

3. Is your first impulse to see the dangers or the opportunities in contemporary spiritual trends? What does this suggest is important to you as a spiritual companion? How might you learn from the other tendency without sacrificing the insights that your perspective gives?

For Further Reading

Bass, Diana Butler. *Christianity After Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening*. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2012. A survey of contemporary religious trends arguing that these changes constitute a new spiritual awakening.

Bauman, Zygmunt. *Liquid Modernity*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000. An overview of Bauman's account of liquidity.

Heelas, Paul. *Spiritualities of Life*: *New Age Romanticism and Consumptive Capitalism*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008. An in-depth examination of alternative spiritualities moving beyond surface criticisms of their consumer nature.

An Inquiry into Modes of Existence. http://www.modesofexistence.org. The online home of Bruno Latour's research into types of modernity. Comprehensive, but requires effort.

The Pluralism Project. http://www.pluralism.org. The online home of the Pluralism Project at Harvard University, which explores the varieties and dynamics of religious pluralism.

Smith, James K. A. *How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor*. Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2014. An introduction to Taylor's thought on secularism with a proposal for resisting some of these changes.