

## Article

# Assessing Research Trends in Spiritual Growth: The Case for Self-Determined Learning

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**Abstract:** A review of the contemporary Australian church reveals a spiritual malaise in which passive learning has become the main staple for many church members or attendees. This sense is heightened by demographic trends over the last fifty years that reflect a sustained decline in Australians identifying as religious. Although commitment to Christianity is seemingly softening, this sociodemographic picture is contraindicated by other research that reflects a growing hunger for spirituality among many Australians. Given this disparity, there is an opportunity to re-examine pertinent understandings of spiritual growth. In the literature, notions of spiritual growth are conceptualised by a variety of definitions and operationalised by a range of tools and practices. Analysis suggests that many models are limited by linearity, passivity, and reductionism and do not adequately resonate with the complexities inherent in spiritual growth. This literature review extends previous research by examining the state of the art in relation to spiritual growth. The paper converges around the synthesis that heutagogy and coaching are effective twin strategies that may direct self-determined learning towards enhanced spiritual growth. This paper conceptualises opportunities for future research and thereby lays the foundation for an important emergent research agenda. This article charts pertinent perspectives and prospects.

**Keywords:** spiritual growth; literature review; heutagogy; coaching; theory and practice; research agenda



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## 1. Introduction: Issues and Trends in Spiritual Growth

According to some recent demographic studies, traditional religion has been declining across the Western world for over a century (Heelas 2005) and is being replaced by a subjective sacralization of self-awareness and inner connection to one's unique existence. Living according to an external higher ideal for the greater good is being superseded by ever-expanding subjectivity (Heelas 2005). Both international studies and landmark philosophical works have sought to explain recent secularisation trends as reflecting a pluralist world of competing beliefs and growing unbelief (Heelas 2005; Hughes 2022; J. K. A. Smith 2014; Svenungsson 2021; Taylor 2007). Similarly, segments of the Australian church are experiencing a decline in commitment to Christianity, along with a decrease in religious identification among some Australians (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2022; Hughes 2022; McCrindle 2020). This is especially highlighted in the 2021 Australian Census (Hughes 2022). While the percentage of people identifying as 'Christian' fell from 86.2% in 1971 to 43.9% in 2021, over the same period, the percentage of those not adhering to any religion rose by approximately 30% and now stands at nearly 40% of the population (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2022; Hughes 2022; McCrindle 2020). Notwithstanding this picture, there is also evidence of a growing hunger for spirituality among many Australians

(Hughes 2022; McCrindle 2020; Powell and Pepper 2017). This is exemplified by the rise in people identifying or affiliating with other religions (Hughes 2022). For example, there are now reportedly “more Buddhists than Baptists [and] more Muslims than Lutherans” (Bouma 2006, pp. 55–56). Given this diversity of contemporary experience with spirituality in Australia, it is opportune to re-examine relevant understandings of Christian spiritual growth.

Research indicates that “giving handouts”, including information handouts, as occurs in traditional church mentoring, “undermines the person’s capacity to be a steward of his [or her] own resources and abilities” (Corbett et al. 2014, p. 102). Statistics concur. Although contemporary Western Christianity has more access to biblical information than ever before, passive mentoring does not appear to be correlated with spiritual growth. Up to 80% of Christians are reportedly inactive in their congregations (Powell 2017), and 50% of Christians are not giving generously (Hawkins and Parkinson 2016). There is a sense that commitment to Christianity and commitment within the Church is in a prolonged state of decline (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2017, 2022; Bouma 2006; Heelas 2005; McCrindle 2017, 2020; Powell 2017).

In the literature, notions of spiritual growth are theorised by a range of definitions and operationalised by a variety of tools and practices. Notably, current models for conceptualising and operationalising spiritual growth are limited by linearity, passivity, and reductionism. Set against this background, it is timely to identify methods and approaches that may more effectively support and sustain the formation of spiritual growth. This paper argues that heutagogy and coaching could be employed as effective twin strategies that may direct self-determined learning towards enhanced spiritual growth. To this end, the article outlines opportunities for future research in this area.

This literary synthesis of recent and contemporary theory and practice has been penned from the positionality of a Christian pastoral care framework. This means that the article explores the effectiveness of approaches commonly used to support the formation of spiritual growth by churches or in pastoral care contexts. The occasional use of scripture from the Holy Bible in this article may be understood in this light. Operating from this vantage point, this paper expands upon previous research on spiritual growth by synthesising the state of the art in relation to spiritual growth and by identifying pathways that may more effectively foster and sustain it in contemporary ministry settings. Such an approach seems valuable for further scientific analysis and thereby fulfils an important research agenda-setting function.

This paper is organised as follows. To set the scene, we first discuss pertinent conceptualisations and definitional approaches to spiritual growth (Section 2). This includes a discussion of selected major schools of thought (Section 2.1), selected tools for measuring spiritual growth (Section 2.2), and an overview of practical pathways used to operationalise spiritual growth in different ministry settings (Section 2.3). Next, we discuss limitations inherent in linear approaches to spiritual growth (Section 3), which is followed by an overview of limitations that may be encountered in passive mentoring approaches (Section 4). Thereafter, we focus on non-directive coaching as a means to overcoming the limitations of linearity and passivity (Section 5), which culminates in our proposal of heutagogy as a strategy for informing and directing self-determined learning towards spiritual growth (Section 6). Finally, we acknowledge some paper limitations and offer a succinct concluding synthesis, recapitulating the paper’s main points and future prospects (Section 7).

## 2. Conceptualisations of Spiritual Growth

This section discusses conceptualisations of spiritual growth, selected tools for its measurement, and practical pathways used to operationalise it in ministry settings. Definitional variations and measurement limitations point to opportunities for emergent research on self-determined learning on spiritual growth. In the literature, conceptualisations of spiritual growth typically converge on Christian character formation or conformity to Jesus

being a lifelong process, with a view of Christian disciples reaching their fullest potential in alignment with God's purposes. Accordingly, spiritual growth is often conceived as an 'inside-out' transformation as a disciple cooperates with the grace of God. Notwithstanding these common traits, significant variations can occur across Christian traditions, as is highlighted by the Protestant–Catholic divide. The diversity among definitions of spiritual growth has spawned a plethora of spirituality measurement tools at the seminary, congregational, and individual levels. Analysis of specific measurement tools at each of these levels discloses a variety of characteristics and limitations. For example, the literature points to measurement tools being conceived as limited in scope, reductionistic, and typically masking the complexity of spiritual growth. Furthermore, such tools are invariably based on particular assumptions and cannot comprehensively capture a disciple's inner motivation (Hancock et al. 2005; Moberg 2010).

### 2.1. Selected Major Schools of Thought (Catholic and Protestant)

Calvin, from the Protestant tradition, defines spiritual growth as an inside-out transformation towards holiness based on the one-time imputation of righteousness through faith in Christ and his propitiation (Cho 2014; Calvin [1536] 2009). Sanctification, propelled by the Word, is by grace, although the disciple willingly cooperates in the process (Calvin [1536] 2009). Knowledge of God, in the biblical and cognitive sense, is foundational for sanctification. Its importance for Calvin is gauged by noting that the first five chapters of *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Calvin [1536] 2009) focus on the knowledge of God. This knowledge is only gleaned through the revealed Word via the illumination of the Spirit. Without a growing knowledge of God, spiritual growth is illusory. The ultimate goal of spiritual growth, the restoration of the image of God in humanity, ultimately brings glory to God (2 Corinthians 3: 18, Philippians 2: 13, Colossians 1: 10, 2 Peter 3: 18) and is one of God's sovereign purposes (Calvin [1536] 2009; Orthner 2021).

The Catholic Church defines spiritual growth as a deepening of a disciple's relationship with God via the work of the Spirit through the Word and mediation by the Sacraments (Barrette 2002; Ratzinger 2005, Question 186, p. 224) through which eternal life is bestowed (Ratzinger 2005, Question 224). The believer increasingly participates in Christ's priestly, prophetic, and kingly office by sharing Holy Communion, receiving the Word and proclaiming it to the world in words and deeds, and offering God a spiritual sacrifice by living in an honourable way and overcoming sin (Ratzinger 2005, Questions 189, pp. 190–92). The sacraments are necessary for salvation, conferring grace, the forgiveness of sins, adoption as children of God, conformation to Christ, and membership in the Church (Ratzinger 2005, Question 230, Romans 12: 1). Sin, the nemesis of spiritual growth, is initially abated by the sacrament of baptism and then by the sacrament of reconciliation (Ratzinger 2005, Question 200). Sanctification occurs through participation in the liturgy (Ratzinger 2005, Question 218). The sacraments of baptism and confirmation bestow a seal upon the recipients. Through the promise of divine protection, believers are formed to be like Christ and set apart for religious worship and church service (Ratzinger 2005, Question 227) as they choose to cooperate with God in the sanctification process.

Definitions for spiritual growth vary considerably across the Protestant–Catholic spectrum. Bergler (2014) highlights the notion of kingdom partnership between the disciple and God as the disciple participates increasingly willingly in kingdom works. For G. T. Smith (2014), growth is a movement of the disciple towards complete fulfilment of God's original design for humanity and is beyond mere morality. Hawkins and Parkinson (2016) focus on the two greatest commandments, loving God and loving one's neighbour, as the outworking of inner transformation. Benner (2002) attempts to unify this diversity. He suggests that the variations are all different parts of God's agenda. His conclusion is only tenable via an expansive definition of spiritual maturity and the minimisation of theological differences. But Benner's desire need not be jettisoned completely. Multiple definitions of growth are necessary so that each Christian tradition can continue to encourage and monitor growth in their disciples within the richness of their own tradition. Each model

has unique insights to add to the holistic picture of spiritual growth, together with blind spots that need to be recognized and overcome (Kaplan 2005; Valsiner 2005).

This diversity of definitions opens up a range of perspectives on the meaning of spiritual growth. Acceptable growth in one tradition may be objectionable in another. For example, a Catholic disciple exhibiting increasingly heartfelt attendance at mass is deemed to be growing spiritually in his or her faith tradition. Yet, in the Protestant tradition, this disciple may not be considered to be growing because of a different interpretation of mass (Calvin [1536] 2009). Each tradition has different views on whether changes in a particular disciple can be said to constitute spiritual growth. Such incongruence suggests that empowering disciples to determine their own growth needs may provide an authentic means to spurring personal spiritual growth.

More recently, a school of thought has emerged around post-traumatic growth (PTG). Ongoing research into the relationship between PTG and spirituality has revealed mixed results. Researchers have variously found an indirect relationship (Khursheed and Shahnawaz 2020), inconsistent correlations (Morgan 2009; Smith 2004), or a positive relationship (Eames and O'Connor 2022; Gesselman et al. 2017; Morgan 2009). Spiritual healing and development are increasingly being shown to be useful complements for developing treatments and technologies for trauma patients (Morgan 2009; Smith 2004). Trauma can lead to spirituality and transformation, which positively impact PTG (Khursheed and Shahnawaz 2020; Mahoney and Pargament 2004). Haack (2015) details how trauma leads to spiritual transformation as either the place of the sacred or the pathway to the sacred changes (Koss-Chioino and Hefner 2006). Despite Harbin's (2015) reservations about assuming patients' progression towards post-traumatic growth and their control over it, Haack's (2015) work paves the way for further investigation into the influence of self-directed learning on PTG, spiritual transformation, and the development of new frameworks for comprehending God, both among believers and non-believers.

## 2.2. Selected Tools for Measuring Spiritual Growth

Varying definitions for spiritual growth have yielded an array of spiritual measurement tools at different organisational levels—seminarian, congregational, and individual. This section discusses Hoelsing and Hogan's (2021) assessment of seminary spirituality, the Reveal congregational survey (Hawkins and Parkinson 2016), and Frazee's (2005) Christian Life Assessment Tool for individuals. It discusses the scope of these measurement tools and explains their limitations.

Hoelsing and Hogan (2021) assessed the efficacy of ministry training in a Catholic seminary. This was the culmination of Hancock and others' work from 2005 (Dwyer and Hogan 2013; Keating 2016). Measuring human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral formation, the tool measures observable characteristics in seminarians on a five-point scale (Hoelsing and Hogan 2021).

At the congregational level, the Reveal Spiritual Life Assessment tool (Hawkins and Parkinson 2016) focuses on loving God and others. The Church's role, individual spiritual practices, and faith in action are assessed to generate a Spiritual Vitality Index (SVI) that grades each congregation in relation to the others surveyed. A congregation can thus evaluate the effectiveness of its practices. By repeating the survey, a congregation can measure its growth and overall health.

At the individual level, the Christian Life Assessment Tool (Frazee 2005) analyses eleven core characteristics of Christian discipleship, ranging from salvation by grace to the sharing of life, faith, time, and money. Working in small groups, individuals answer 120 questions concerning Christian beliefs, practices, and virtues. Disciples also analyse each other and are encouraged to be accountable to each other. The survey is repeated after twelve months, revealing the individual's areas of growth and highlighting areas for improvement.

Measurement tools are typically founded on assumptions about spiritual growth (Moberg 2010). Differing assumptions warrant different subjective weightings on the



elements measured. Each tool and Christian tradition have unique assumptions and weightings according to the perceived importance of the items being measured. For example, [Hancock et al. \(2005\)](#) were unwilling to use tools that did not align with their evangelical beliefs. Without an adequate understanding of assumptions and weightings, some measurement tools may prove to be unhelpful or misleading.

Underlying assumptions about spiritual growth inherent to each measurement tool limit their use. Each seminary, congregation, or individual needs to choose a tool appropriate to their context. No single tool can capture the full complexity of spiritual growth. Limits in scope may necessitate the creation of new tools. [Hancock et al. \(2005\)](#) sought to measure spirituality at an evangelical university. No existing tool adequately captured the university's perception of spiritual needs within the context of its Christ-centred ethos. Their evangelical convictions led them to remove outward religious performance as a spirituality indicator. Thus, they created a new measurement tool, which generated a spirituality measure for their seminary.

Many tools assess spirituality by gauging outward participation in Christian activities ([Hancock et al. 2005](#)). Conclusions or predictions are drawn from this ([Moberg 2010](#)) and may include activities that are not uncommon among individuals who identify as either religious or atheist, such as generosity or charity. Such activities may not directly measure the quality of Christian spirituality since disciples from all (or no) religions can readily perform them. Moreover, outward religious performance may not correlate with genuine Christian spirituality, as the inner motivation of the heart remains immeasurable. Spiritual measurement tools should be used with care ([Thayer 2004](#)).

Furthermore, in seeking a valid measure of Christ-centred living among evangelical seminary students, [Hancock et al. \(2005\)](#) found that many spirituality measurement tools that purported to measure Christian spirituality were based on outward performance rather than inward Christlikeness. Hence, they resolved to strip away any concepts or constructs of modern psychology or philosophy from the tools which are potentially applicable to all people. Such a process then enabled them to measure the distinctive characteristics of born-again Christianity ([Hancock et al. 2005](#), p. 135). However, the spirituality measurement tools considered by [Hancock et al. \(2005\)](#) did not often reference the Bible for indicators of Christian maturity. This shortcoming thus limited the model's appropriateness for measuring the essence of Christ-centred living.

The numerical spirituality output measure produced by many tools is reductionistic, which tends to mask the complexity of spiritual growth ([Moberg 2010](#)). The Spiritual Vitality Index (SVI) generated by the Reveal survey grades churches in comparison to other churches ([Hawkins and Parkinson 2016](#)). The SVI ranges, which categorise churches as apathetic (less than 60), introverted (60–69), average (70–79), or high energy (85+), do not address particular issues that a church may have. While this tool provides good practice to emulate, it does not generate strategies that will resolve particular issues in congregations.

Numerical measures may also encourage comparisons between Christians, churches, and/or training institutions. According to 2 Corinthians 10: 12–18, such comparisons are not wise and may not be conducive to promoting spiritual growth. The Apostle Paul's detractors were commending themselves (v.12) while comparing themselves to him. He could never measure up to their standard. Rather than comparing himself to others (v.12), Paul boasts about the work the Lord has given him to do (v.13) and in God (v.17) ([Barnett 1997](#); [Gaebelein 1976](#)). Comparisons are often used to build oneself up or to put others down. The Spiritual Vitality Index ([Hawkins and Parkinson 2016](#)) captures the spirituality of a congregation in comparison to others that have taken the survey. This may inadvertently encourage inter-church comparisons, as lower-scoring church groups may seek to emulate higher-scoring ones rather than find their own pathway to spiritual maturity.

Although the literature contains many definitions for spiritual growth in the Christian context, they all tend to converge on similitude or likeness to Christ. Accordingly, in this theorisation, spiritual growth becomes a lifelong progress of inside-out transformation as a disciple chooses to cooperate with the work of God. Significant variations occur across

Christian traditions. Subjective and objective factors add complexity to conceptualisations of spiritual growth. A variety of spiritual measurement tools has arisen from this conceptual complexity. Analysis of these tools reveals them to be reductionistic, limited in scope, inadequate in many instances, and mostly unhelpful for assessing the intricacies of spiritual growth. Re-examining pertinent understandings of spiritual growth suggests that self-determined learning could provide a catalyst for instigating, orienting, and sustaining personal spiritual growth.

### 2.3. Practical Pathways: Operationalising Spiritual Growth

The literature on spiritual growth can be categorised into two broad pathways—psychologically derived and scripturally derived pathways. ‘Pathway’ refers to a roadmap to maturity. How one travels along the pathway is the ‘means.’ A pathway can have many means. For example, Bible reading is not so much a pathway but a means to progress along a pathway. An investigation of these two pathways reveals pertinent issues that warrant further research into spiritual growth. Evaluation of Fowler’s (1995) psychological pathway discloses inherent universalism and other theological considerations, which limit such models for purposes of Christian maturation (more on Fowler in Section 3). Investigation of Willet’s (2010) biblical pathway exposes the dangers of *eisegesis*<sup>1</sup> and the confines of advocating one pathway to maturity. These issues engender opportunities for further research to gauge the impact of self-determined learning on spiritual growth.

Pathways to maturity which parallel psychological development models postulate a positive correlation between spiritual growth and human development (Fowler 1995; Radcliffe 1984; Tyagi 2018). Fowler (1995) is included here as one of the most cited and influential modern thinkers in this field (Hancock et al. 2005). Fowler (1995) asserts that all faiths develop along a similar psychological pathway, passing through discrete levels towards maturity. He situates faith maturation with respect to Erikson’s psychosocial development theory, Piaget’s cognitive development theory, and Kohlberg’s moral development theory. Human and spiritual maturation obviously correlate (Radcliffe 1984). An older disciple can be reasonably expected to be more mature than a younger one. But the complexity of spiritual growth and the interplay between many subjective and objective factors relating to growth suggest that an increased knowledge of oneself and one’s faith does not necessarily equate to spiritual growth. Personal maturation does not guarantee biblical spiritual maturation from one level to another or within a particular level.

The universalism that is inherent in psychological models restricts their ability to measure biblical faith and its growth. Universalism is fostered in psychological models because all people, not just Christians, probably fit into the model.<sup>2</sup> Distinctly biblical elements of faith growth are necessarily excluded. Fowler (1995) failed to consider the exclusivity of biblical faith (John 14: 6b) even though Christians were included in his extensive study. His assumption of universalism becomes apparent in his Stages 5 and 6. Stage 5, ‘Conjunctive Faith’, culminates in accepting all other non-Christian faiths as complementary to, and corrective of, one’s faith (Fowler 1995, pp. 184–97). Stage 6, ‘Universalising Faith’, amounts to full-blown universalism (Fowler 1995, pp. 184–98). This final stage of faith climaxes in “an enlarged vision of the *universal* community” (Fowler 1995, p. 199, emphasis added). The phrase “all being”, repeated five times in the section, underscores the presence of universalism (Fowler 1995, pp. 209, 211). Fowler also questions exclusivist claims to universal truth, which have caused “religious wars, inquisitions, prejudice and suspicion” (Fowler 1995, p. 207). He contends that a ‘young child’ who is inculcated too quickly in the Christian faith, being convicted of sinfulness and fearing hell, will be stunted in his or her faith development (Fowler 1995, p. 286). As ‘universalism’ is not espoused by all Christians, it is problematic to attempt to map faith or faith growth beyond Stage 4.

Kaplan’s concept of genetic-dramatism (Kaplan 2005) seeks to overcome these psychological limitations by considering the individual’s holistic development, contrary to various psychological approaches to conceptualising development (Pea 1982). Kaplan’s

approach incorporates both the individual's genetic makeup and the influence of dramatic experiences throughout the individual's life (Valsiner 2005).

Other theological concerns similarly highlight the inadequacy of psychological pathways to characterise biblical faith growth. The Bible contains no psychological paradigm of faith development. Each pathway must justify its purported authority over the Bible. Likewise, each pathway has to adequately account for Jesus's words that correlate increased maturity with childlikeness, which is usually considered to be a regression in human behaviour (Matthew 18: 3, Mark 10: 15). Finally, human weakness and suffering are biblical means of fostering maturation (Burns 2020; Haack 2015). Many models cannot deal with such complexity. The distinctive features of Christianity cannot be bundled together with characteristics that are wholly consistent with other faiths. These theological considerations, combined with the inherent universalism of psychological pathways to maturity, limit their ability to adequately map Christian maturation.

Scripture does not depict one single pathway to maturity (Bergler 2014, 2020; Hawkins and Parkinson 2016). The Bible contains many interrelated verses covering many aspects of maturity. Spiritual growth is simultaneously a growth in grace and knowledge of God and the Word (2 Timothy 3: 16–17, 2 Peter 3: 18). It includes the work of God (Philippians 1: 12) as well as the disciple (Matthew 5: 6, Hebrews 6: 1–3, Philippians 2: 12, 2 Peter 1: 5–8). Spiritual growth is encouraged and formed by the community (Ephesians 4:15–16). It is fed by the Word (2 Timothy 3: 16–17) and driven and grown by the Spirit (Romans 8: 13, Galatians 5: 22–23) as the disciple obeys the Spirit's leading. Growth is an outcome of others' prayers (Colossians 1: 9–10) and the outworking of suffering and weakness (Romans 5: 3–5, 2 Corinthians 12: 10, James 1: 2–4). Advocating a single all-inclusive pathway contradicts the Bible and experience; it oversimplifies the intricacies of spiritual growth, and it trivialises the uniqueness of both the disciple and work of the Spirit therein.

Biblically aligned pathways to spiritual maturity must be used cautiously because of the ever-present danger of *eisegesis*. Willet's (2010) model of biblical growth is included because his pathway derived from 1 John 2: 12–14 is accepted by many leaders across Christian traditions. Willet's three stages of growth, consisting of eight "milestones", draws primarily on psychology and *eisegesis*. The milestones of each stage are not derived from this biblical passage. It cannot be deduced from 1 John 1: 12–14 that a 'child-like faith' includes experiencing God's grace and forgiveness, embracing God as Father, and growing together in a community. Nor is it evident that a 'young adult' faith consists of owning a first-hand faith and linking truth and life. Finally, empowering others out of one's own growth and experience cannot be constructed as constituting 'parenthood faith' (Willet 2010).

In summary, *eisegesis* and the limitations noted above combine to make it difficult to universally measure and chart Christian spiritual growth in all situations, traditions, and settings. Mapping a definitive pathway to spiritual maturity is as complicated as conceptualising and measuring spiritual growth. Certain concerns must be addressed, whether psychological pathways or biblically derived pathways are utilised. Psychological pathways inadequately depict and characterise Christian spiritual growth because of inherent universalism and other theological issues. Biblically derived pathways tend to narrow the complexity of spiritual growth and need to sidestep *eisegesis*. No single pathway to maturity exists in the Bible. The limitations of these two broad pathways to maturity provide opportunities for further research to assess how self-determined learning may impinge on and promote spiritual growth, where the disciple determines the content, the pathway, and the degree of learning necessary for spiritual growth.

### 3. Limitations of Linear Approaches to Spiritual Growth

Analyses of extant models of spiritual growth typically assume that growth is linear and adheres to a sequential progression (Fowler 1995; Willet 2010). Such models fail to capture the complexity of spiritual growth because of the multidimensional factors inherent in spiritual growth. A non-linear model of spiritual growth allows a proactive model of

self-determined spiritual growth to be posited as an alternative to traditional methods of spiritual growth used in the Church.

Fowler (1995) is representative of those who parallel spiritual growth with psychological development. He advocated that psychological and faith development was more comprehensively understood by synthesising Erikson's psychosocial development (Erikson 1993), Piaget's internal cognitive development (Piaget and Inhelder 1973), and Kohlberg's moral development (Fowler 1995, pp. 41–52; Kohlberg 1981). His research implied linear growth because faith grows cumulatively through six stages. Faith commences at birth in an undifferentiated form. It progresses through six age-related developmental stages (1. Intuitive—Projective Faith, 2. Mythic—Literal Faith, 3. Synthetic—Conventional Faith, 4. Individuative—Reflective Faith, 5. Conjunctive Faith, and 6. Universalising Faith) (Fowler 1995, pp. 119–209). Although a disciple may not reach every stage, faith development is assumed to follow a linear trajectory through these stages.

Some biblically aligned pathways towards maturity also tend towards linearity. Willet (2010) deduced three stages of faith (Childhood, Young Adult, and Parenthood) from 1 John 2: 12–14, which he described according to eight milestones (see Table 1). These stages are age-related because the descriptor nouns in 1 John 2: 12–14 (τεκνία, *teknia* children; νεανίσκοι, *neasiniskoi* young men; πατέρες *pateres* father) are age-related. The milestones are sequential and cumulative, though individual experiences may differ. Faith grows qualitatively, not quantitatively. The stages are idiosyncratic, not inevitable. Some believers may never mature in their faith (Willet 2010).

**Table 1.** Willet's stages of spiritual growth (based on Willet 2010).

Stage	Milestones
Childhood	1. Experiencing Grace and Forgiveness
	2. Embracing God as Father
	3. Growing Up Together
Young Adulthood	4. Owning a First-hand Faith
	5. Linking Truth and Life
	6. Defeating the Enemies of Spiritual Growth
Parenthood	7. Empowering Others
	8. Seasoned by Time and Experience

Stages and milestones of spiritual growth as conceptualised by Willet (2010).

The assumption that spiritual growth is necessarily linear does not allow for an adequate explanation of the relationship between God's role and the disciple's role in spiritual growth. According to Ratzinger (2005), G. T. Smith (2014), and Willet (2010), spiritual growth includes obedience to God (John 14:14, 21). But obedience cannot be reduced to mere human effort. The Apostle Paul chided the Galatians (Galatians 3: 3) for trying to finish (ἐπιτελεῖσθε, *epiteleisthe*, to accomplish, perfect) the work of maturation apart from the Spirit's involvement (Vine et al. 1996). Elsewhere (Colossians 1: 28), Paul uses this verb's cognate noun (τέλειον, *teleion*, to complete or perfect) to describe the goal of spiritual maturity for the Christians he discipled (Wuest 1997). God's work in the disciple and the disciple's acquiescence cannot be reduced to a linear model. An assumption of linear growth is incongruent with the inherent complexities of spiritual growth.

Several other non-linear and multidimensional factors are involved in the spiritual maturation process (Moberg 2010). Factors such as legalism, cold-hearted duty, hidden sinfulness, ulterior motivations, a biblical knowledge-application gap in the disciple, or the life experience of each believer, cannot be adequately accounted for by a linear depiction of spiritual growth. Moreover, transpersonal factors such as awe, ecstasy, love, and mystical experience are neither linear nor measurable (Moberg 2010).

Linear pathways of growth and numerical indicators of spirituality do not adequately represent simultaneous growth and regression. Moreover, 1 John 1: 8–10 suggests that continuous growth without regression is implausible. The disciples in Rome grew spiri-



tually (Romans 1: 8) but also condemned each other about food preferences (Romans 14: 3). The use of μή (μή, *mē*, not) combined with the present imperative in Romans 14: 3 (ἐξουθενείτω, *exouthenito*, to despise or disdain) shows that this was a reality in the early Church (Mounce 2003).

Those who seek to measure linear growth, whether via a linear graph or a numerical index of spirituality, overcome the above limitations by applying subjective weightings or scaling to elements associated with spiritual growth (Moberg 2010). The applied weightings or scaling are subjective. Changing them can influence the level of maturity a disciple is judged to have attained. The resultant measure of spirituality is simplistic and unrealistic, given that both growth and decline can occur simultaneously.

Similarly, the relationship between variables of spiritual growth in statistical analyses of growth is questionable (Moberg 2010). Any connection between concomitants—variables that are related to or attached to a main variable—may be coincidental. Correlated variables may be the causes or effects of the same event. If the variables are consequences, they should not be used to measure spirituality (Moberg 2010, pp. 108–9).

Linear depictions and numerical indicators of spirituality can thus instigate an artificial pass/fail dichotomy and thus a generalised mentality with respect to spiritual growth. Representing spiritual growth numerically in terms of an increase or decrease masks a complex array of issues associated with growth. Both Fowler (1995) and Willet (2010) concede that not every disciple will reach the final stages (or levels) of their models of spiritual growth because failure in an earlier stage halts progression. Thus, a pass/fail mentality within a congregation may prevent further growth. Likewise, a numerical spiritual growth indicator may demotivate future growth because it over-simplifies growth.

Extant models do not adequately consider adult conversion, even though this is a common occurrence in the New Testament (e.g., Acts 13: 48; John 8: 30). The psychological and biblical models assume faith growth from childhood. Willet's (2010) Milestones 1, 2, and 4–7 are not necessarily sequential in adult conversion but can co-occur, whereas Milestone 3 is likely to be irrelevant. Fowler's (1995) model exhibits similar tensions for adult conversion. He does not explain if an adult convert begins his or her faith at the age-appropriate level or if the previous stages need to be negotiated. For example, Saul (later the Apostle Paul) was not raised in a Christian home, nor did he experience linear growth upon his conversion. Soon after his conversion, he began preaching, teaching, and evangelising (Acts 9: 19–20). He baffled the Jews by proving that Jesus was the Messiah (Acts 9: 22). Some of Willet's milestones are evident in Paul's life, but none of Fowler's stages are detectable.

The Bible does not present spiritual growth in linear terms. It presents a series of components as growing or regressing concurrently. The non-linear nature of biblical spiritual growth is illustrated in 2 Peter 1: 5–7. This includes adding goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love to faith. The demonstrative neuter plural pronoun (ταῦτα, *tauta*, these) in 2 Peter 1: 8 indicates that these qualities grow simultaneously, not consecutively. If these qualities appeared consecutively, then brotherly kindness and love would only appear in mature disciples, which is demonstrably untrue. Similarly, adding love to faith does not negate the need to continue adding goodness, as a linear model would indicate. Each factor grows or shrinks in association with the others as well as a multitude of other factors already discussed. Spiritual maturity equates to becoming increasingly productive and effective with one's knowledge of Christ (2 Peter 1: 8), which cannot be satisfactorily depicted linearly or represented with a numerical indicator of spirituality.

Several non-linear models of growth have been suggested. Hall et al.'s (2023) recent work on relational spirituality and Porter et al.'s (2019) meta-theory of growth and change are intriguing developments in this field. Non-linear models of spiritual growth exhibit several distinct advantages. Ultimately, this gives a true picture of spiritual growth because it incorporates many of the multidimensional factors excluded or minimised by linear models. Subjective weightings for factors influencing growth can be discarded. Each

disciple can target areas of greatest need of growth according to his or her context. Such self-determination makes discipleship personally meaningful and relevant. It honours the agency of the individual above the process of discipleship and growth. The pass/fail mentality that linear models of growth typically engender is abandoned. Spiritual growth in one area can be acknowledged and celebrated, even if regression occurs in another area. The non-linear approach to spiritual growth also caters to adult conversion by allowing the new convert's learning, background, and current knowledge to be considered. Finally, non-linearity is inclusive because it works for disciples at all levels of spiritual growth in all Christian traditions and is not tied to a single pathway.

#### 4. Limitations of Passive Mentoring in Fostering Spiritual Growth

The literature generally accepts mentoring as a passive transaction between a more experienced mentor and a less experienced mentee (Lewis 2009; Stanley and Clinton 1992). Research suggests that two elements associated with passive mentoring are not conducive to maximising learning or change. The potential for negativity within the mentee, which may arise from the perception of being expected to confess his or her weaknesses to the mentor, may not be the optimal motivator for behavioural change and growth (Carey et al. 2013; Martínez de Pisón 2022; Moutsiana et al. 2013; Ruiter et al. 2001; Taubman Ben-Ari et al. 2000). Secondly, social scientists are questioning whether the input of additional information is necessary or relevant to behavioural change (Corbett et al. 2014; Luetz et al. 2020; Ruiter et al. 2001). Seeking to induce spiritual growth or behavioural change via informational inputs may be a less-than-optimal means of producing change.

In the literature, mentoring is widely accepted as an intentional outside-in, passive learning transaction between a mentor and a mentee (Biehl 1996; Garvey 2017; Krallmann 2002; Lewis 2009; Mallison 1999; Stanley and Clinton 1992). In the Christian context, the mentor, who is typically a mature disciple, empowers the mentee, who is perceived to be a less mature disciple, by adding new skills, knowledge, and wisdom. The mentor embodies the knowledge, experience, and wisdom desired by the mentee and the church community. Several foci exist. Ogne and Roehl (2008) elucidate a missional focus. Stanley and Clinton (1992) detail three levels of outside-in mentoring: (1) intensive mentoring, which includes the discipler, the spiritual guide, and the coach; (2) occasional mentoring, which includes the counsellor, the teacher, and the sponsor; and (3) passive mentoring, which includes contemporary and historical role models. Biehl (1996) focuses on a lifelong process of discipleship where the mentee ultimately reaches his or her God-given potential. Krallman's work (2002, p. 122) centres on the mentee and mentor sharing life together as the mentor models missional living. Mallison (1999) incorporates God's grace. In contrast, Lewis (2009) and Brailey and Parker (2020) advocate an inside-out model similar to Webb's (2019) and Collins's (2009) non-directive coaching.

Experience has shown that mentoring typically involves reading scripture, praying, asking about each other's spiritual journey, and progressing towards living in a manner pleasing to God. The relationship centres around accountability, which among other things, may utilise guilt as an emotional lever to promote change, which is a major consideration for fostering spiritual growth (2 Peter 1: 5–8). Indeed, the Church has "misused guilt motivation" as a tool to encourage change and spiritual growth (Bader-Saye 2007; Narramore 1974, p. 183). Christ's atonement has freed believers from the condemnation of a guilty conscience. God uses conviction rather than condemnation to induce transformational change. The latter are tools 'of the devil, not the Spirit' (Narramore 1974). Guilt has no basis in the Christian life. Research also suggests that fear and negativity are poor motivators of change (Carey et al. 2013; Luetz et al. 2020; Moutsiana et al. 2013; Ruiter et al. 2001; Taubman Ben-Ari et al. 2000). Studies regarding the impact of fear arousal on precautionary motivation and action and the effect of threat appeal to modify negative behaviour, suggest that fear and guilt are not strong motivators for behaviour change compatible with spiritual growth. Additionally, many professionals advocate that guilt stifles personal growth and fosters emotional maladjustment (Fowler 1995; Narramore 1974). Guilt can produce various

mental health issues, including inertia, bitterness, anger, depression, and neuroses which suppress change and growth (Martínez de Pisón 2022; Narramore 1974). Fear and guilt may unwittingly cause regression rather than growth (Martínez de Pisón 2022; Narramore 1974). Transformation induced by fear and guilt is neither proactive nor sustainable and creates a sub-optimal environment that suppresses long-term growth.

Although education and pedagogy have been historically and philosophically linked to transforming human behaviour, merely providing more information via mentoring is not necessarily the solution (Boyes and Stanisstreet 2012). Although education undoubtedly passes on critical knowledge that underpins rational decision-making and thereby informs and shapes behaviour, social scientists have questioned whether the addition of information in itself is sufficient to sustainably alter human behaviour (Luetz et al. 2020; Sapolsky 2018). Literary analysis suggests that group conformity or social norms, the desire to imitate others, transformative life experiences, and emotional positivity associated with change are more relevant than merely adding information through education (Russo-Netzer and Davidov 2020; Sapolsky 2018; Segar 2015; Segar et al. 2007). Similarly, Kelly and Barker (2016) have cautioned from a medical perspective that merely “giving people information does not make them change” (p. 111). Holistic and inclusive strategies that jointly use information inputs and social learning are more effective and successful in inspiring and sustaining long-term human behaviour change (Luetz et al. 2020).

Despite this, the Church has tended to prefer a pedagogical model where information, relayed through mentoring, is principally relied upon for behaviour change (Lewis 2009). Hence, there is scope to reimagine mentoring so that it affords the mentee more freedom and responsibility to identify and implement pathways for self-determined spiritual growth. A proactive model of mentoring which transfers the locus of control from the mentor to the mentee may generate a better environment for enhancing spiritual growth. Proactive inside-out mentoring sidesteps issues associated with traditional mentoring by reimagining learning as determined by the mentee rather than the mentor.

Self-determined learning can be guided by an inside-out mentoring model. Such a model assumes the mentee is Spirit-filled and able, albeit with guidance, to recognise and respond to the Spirit’s leading. Through the Spirit’s leading, the mentee proactively determines a relevant pathway for growth; thus, learning becomes personalised. The mentee may change their behaviour, take up or cease a particular practice, seek further input through collaboration with others, learn more, change assumptions, and so on.

Importantly, an inside-out mentoring model may solve the problem of guilt being associated with spiritual growth, especially in relation to traditional understandings of mentoring and accountability. Mentoring relies on mentee–mentor accountability. Accountability flourishes in a culture predisposed to a focus on guilt, which tends to hinder information disclosure (Velayutham and Perera 2004). This may partially explain why accountability relationships tend to be lacking in the contemporary church (Ogden 2016). Conversely, accountability in an inside-out mentoring model that is mentee-instigated and is sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit allows the mentor to nurture the mentee according to the Spirit’s conviction (Bader-Saye 2007; Martínez de Pisón 2022; Narramore 1974) and nurture long-term change and growth in the mentee (Jernigan 2015). An inside-out mentoring model provides fertile soil for the Spirit to inspire conviction and Godly sorrow, as well as the determination and empowerment to grow spiritually.

Additionally, the assumption that the mentor knows what is best for the mentee is abandoned. Educated guesses by the mentor regarding the content for each mentoring session can be discarded. The mentor no longer sets the content, agenda, direction, and/or level of learning. Potentially irrelevant pathways for the mentee are avoided. Gathering and learning irrelevant information can be relinquished. Striving for unrealistic and externally set targets is minimised. Such proactive learning encourages maximum growth as learning becomes personally meaningful.

Traditional mentoring tends towards passivity (Lewis 2009; Stanley and Clinton 1992). The mentor typically embodies and exemplifies the wisdom, skill, and knowledge desired

by the mentee and the church community. Sadly, in this framework, the mentee often remains a rather passive recipient in the learning process, which sometimes may even involve guilt in the process of aspiring to engender transformation. Current research provides two major conclusions that may help to reimagine the mentoring process. First, guilt-driven motivation does not optimally support spiritual growth. Second, even though education is a key factor in the growth and human behaviour change, other factors may be more important than merely adding extra information through pedagogical inputs. The need for a model is raised in which the mentee is a proactive rather than a passive learner.

### 5. Non-Directive Coaching: Overcoming the Limitations of Linearity and Passivity

Non-directive coaching facilitates the conceptualisation of a proactive mentoring model, which is informed by heutagogical principles and practices. The literature encompasses a wide range of definitions for coaching and reflects a dichotomy between directive and non-directive coaching models. A non-directive coaching model allows the coachee to proactively form goals that harmonise with heutagogical learning. Such a model overcomes the limitations of passivity and linearity often associated with spiritual growth. It is characterised by self-determined learning and, when combined with heutagogical learning, enhances the formation of spiritual growth.

Definitions of coaching in the literature range from unique, non-directive, and distinct approaches to mentoring (Collins 2009; Webb 2019; Whitmore 2017) through to conceptualisations that are largely synonymous with traditional mentoring (Stanley and Clinton 1992). The latter facilitates the transference of information and skill from the expert to the protégé via passive or semi-passive learning (Stanley and Clinton 1992). Non-directive coaching is proactive. It assists the coachee “in designing their future” (Williams and Menendez 2015, p. 5) through the self-discovery of relevant pathways, solutions, and levels of attainment that point the way forward. Advice or teaching are not given by the coach, nor are assessments or judgements made. Through an intentional conversation, the coachee is empowered to discern God’s calling and be transformed into a more “competent, committed, and confident” person (Collins 2009, p. 13; Webb 2019). The coach creates a “thought-provoking and creative” environment that inspires the maximization of the coachee’s potential (Williams and Menendez 2015, p. 1). The coach draws a sense of direction from the coachee by listening, asking questions, and stimulating reflection.

The literature on coaching is divided regarding the use of coaching models. Some prefer to use a model (e.g., Collins 2009; Drake 2018; Ogne and Roehl 2008; Webb 2019; Whitmore 2017), while others advocate for no model (e.g., Lewis 2009; Melander 2006). Lewis (2009) cites biblical examples that are antagonistic to models. He contends that coaching via a model can become impersonal. Garvey (2017) concurs, noting that spiritual mentoring has become detached and formulaic. Self-interest has replaced religious values, goodness, and other-centredness. Lewis (2009) and Garvey (2017) argue that models tend to detract from the coach–coachee relationship, which reduces the effectiveness of coaching. Collins (2009) advocates for flexibility in models. He includes four flexible stages in his model: awareness, vision, strategy, and action. He argues that these stages can be used in any order, but this may be an overstatement. For example, envisioning logically occurs before strategising. Without a model as a guide, coaching can degenerate into guesswork. Others have clearly defined models (Drake 2018; Ogne and Roehl 2008; Webb 2019; Whitmore 2017). A coherent but flexible model provides a structure for each coaching session and empowers the coachee to determine the content, direction, and goals of each session.

The effectiveness of coaching is often purported to lie in its action-focused outcomes via setting SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attractive, Realistic, and Time-bound) goals (Garvey 2017; Haughey 2014; Webb 2019). SMART goals clearly define objectives and include positive time constraints (Haughey 2014) and are easy to evaluate and review (Yemm 2012). Given that goals are coachee-determined rather than coach-imposed, the potential for the process to be informed or driven by guilt or fear is avoided (Martínez de



Pisón 2022; Narramore 1974). Moreover, the coachee's motivation to succeed is heightened (Blaschke 2017; Chiranjeev 2017; Hase and Kenyon 2013), and their goals can be articulated to be personally relevant and meaningful.

While the literature does not unanimously advocate goal setting, Ibarra and Lineback (2005) argue that goals are not as critical to transformation as a strong focus on a particular issue. Goal-setting has side effects that can be overlooked and should be carefully managed (Ordóñez et al. 2009a, 2009b). Taken to the extreme, goal-setting has been conceived as a pathway for overachievers to meet self-imposed guidelines (Spreier et al. 2006). A goal focus, rather than a people focus, may result, thus subverting the original goal (Spreier et al. 2006).

The importance of a good coach–coachee relationship is generally assumed in much of the coaching literature (e.g., Collins 2009; Garvey 2017; Hastings and Kane 2018; Hastings and Sunderman 2020; Ogne and Roehl 2008; Stanley and Clinton 1992). Ogne and Roehl (2008) modelled the coaching relationship on the Trinity. Collins (2009) modelled it on Jesus's relationship with his disciples. Melander (2006) and Webb (2019) insist that the coach–coachee relationship must be built on trust and truth because these virtues create a safe space for the coachee to explore, question, and share. The extent to which a coachee shares with their coach is positively correlated with the level of trust in the relationship (Webb 2019). Truth keeps the relationship in balance and prevents power from being abused (Garvey 2017; Melander 2006). Most authors, though, do not incorporate the notion of relationship into their model. For example, Whitmore's GROW model (Whitmore 2017) and Collins's (2009) four stages model assume a coach–coachee relationship but do not specifically include it. As such, they are susceptible to Garvey's (2017) and Lewis's (2009) criticisms noted above. In contrast, Webb (2019) underscores the importance of relationships by building them into his coaching model. His model commences with a 'Connect' phase where the coach and the coachee focus on building a strong relationship that fosters deepening trust (Webb 2019).

Non-directive coaching allows traditionally passive mentoring to be reconstructed as a proactive process. All the necessary elements for learner-determined spiritual growth are built into non-directive coaching. The use of a non-directive coaching model guides the coachee to proactively form goals according to heutagogical learning. Such a model bypasses the limitations of passivity and linearity often associated with spiritual growth. It encapsulates self-determined learning and, when combined with heutagogical learning, directs self-determined learning towards enhanced spiritual growth through a deepening coach–coachee relationship and the formation of SMART goals.

## 6. Heutagogy: Proactive Learning and Self-Determined Spiritual Growth

Heutagogy (from the Greek word *εὐρίσκειν*, *heuriskein*, 'to discover') is a method of learning that allows students to discover for themselves (Blaschke 2017; Hase and Kenyon 2013). Crucially, heutagogy moves the locus of control from the teacher to the learner, which allows the learner to determine the direction, content, pathway, and assessment of learning. Through a process of double-loop learning (elaborated below), heutagogy can inform, support, and sustain lifelong learning. The combination of a heutagogically informed mentoring model and non-directive coaching enables self-determined learning towards enhanced spiritual growth.

Heutagogy is holistic, non-linear, learner-determined, and learner-centred learning. The learner proactively decides the agenda, content, pathway, and means of learning according to her or his needs (Blaschke and Hase 2015; Hase and Kenyon 2013). The learner designs a learning pathway based on current learning needs, background knowledge, prior learning, and future goals (Blaschke and Hase 2015; Hase and Kenyon 2013). Accordingly, the learner functions as an "analyst and synthesizer" who curates his or her own knowledge rather than passively accepting information and knowledge (Blaschke and Hase 2015, p. 15). Curating knowledge and thus growing in understanding becomes more important

than merely accruing knowledge. Herein learning becomes increasingly meaningful and relevant, which in turn, further increases the motivation to learn (Hase and Kenyon 2013).

In the heutagogical model, the learner assumes full responsibility for curating their learning (Findley and Cooper 1983; Lefcourt 2014; Rotter 1966). Rather than blaming or crediting failures and successes to external sources, the learner progressively internalises responsibility for managing their knowledge, understanding, learning environment, and requisite learning resources (Lefcourt 2014; Polzin 2018; Salami 2021). Growth is sustained as the learner asserts control over learning.

Double-loop learning is foundational to heutagogical learning (Blaschke 2012; Blaschke and Hase 2015; Hase and Kenyon 2013; Moore 2020). In the first loop, students acquire new knowledge that is personally relevant. The second loop entails reflection on the learning process. One's worldviews, assumptions, long-held beliefs, and learning preferences are challenged and reviewed. Learning objectives and methodologies can also be reviewed and modified in the second loop (de Barba 2020; Blaschke and Hase 2015; Hase and Kenyon 2013). Double-loop learning can enduringly refine the learning content, the learning process, and the learner's ability to learn (Blaschke 2017; Blaschke and Hase 2015).

Heutagogical learning increases the learner's capabilities (Blaschke 2017, 2018; Hase and Kenyon 2013). Competency is the ability to perform a task to a predetermined standard, whereas capability is the extension of competency by being able to apply competencies to new and challenging situations (Blaschke 2012). Developing capabilities hinges on self-efficacy, the ability to self-learn and utilise appropriate resources. Capabilities are fully utilised in a self-determined environment (Blaschke 2017, 2018; Hase and Kenyon 2013). Capability develops as learners grow in their learning and curating ability (Oliver 2016b).

Proponents of heutagogy note key benefits to the learner and the learning community. Heutagogical learning gives learners more control over learning, improved critical thinking and reflection, increased engagement and motivation, heightened ability to apply knowledge, and enhanced development of independent thoughts and ideas. As a consequence, self-confidence can grow, including the ability to adapt to new environments. Furthermore, heutagogy promotes social justice and better prepares learners for the complexities of the real world, including through personal growth and empowerment (Blaschke 2018; Blaschke and Hase 2015; Hase 2016; Hase and Kenyon 2013; Oliver 2016a). Taking responsibility for one's learning produces greater 'joy' as learning is perceived to be 'relevant and meaningful' (Hase and Kenyon 2013, pp. 8–10, 22–23).

According to the literature, a further benefit of heutagogy is its contribution to lifelong learning, which holds particular significance in today's ever-changing and increasingly complex workplace culture (Blaschke 2012). Traditional pedagogy does not enable students to flourish in the contemporary workplace (Blaschke 2012; Eachempati et al. 2017). Learning should be conceptualised as an ongoing phenomenon rather than a finite process with discrete episodes. Ongoing learning equips the learner to find solutions in all circumstances (Abraham and Komattil 2017). Heutagogical learning increases the desire for lifelong learning by developing the learner's ability to curate knowledge. In turn, this enlarges the learner's capability; thus, the learner maintains the locus of control for their learning (Oliver 2016a). The learner develops the ability to adjust his or her pathway and goal to suit the context.

In summary, heutagogical learning refocuses learning away from the teacher and onto the learner. The learner proactively determines the agenda, direction, content, and pathway of learning as well as pertinent milestones of assessment. Through double-loop learning, self-determined development is deepened, resulting in the progressive and holistic growth of the learner. The learner's locus of control increases, which in turn improves the learner's ability to curate learning and improve the learner's capability. While heutagogical learning cannot guarantee progress towards maturity, it does create a fertile environment that maximises opportunities for the self-determined learner to grow and thrive. This will facilitate the spiritual growth of the learner and may additionally accrue as corollary benefits that may trickle down to society.

Although segments of the Australian church have experienced a decline in commitment to Christianity, along with a decrease in religious identification among some Australians (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2022; Hughes 2022; McCrindle 2020), popular commentators have also pointed to opportunities for creatively reimagining, reforming, and reshaping the concept of the contemporary church in meaningful ways (Kong 2023). Australian churches continue to have significant social influence, in addition to playing a crucial role in providing essential community and social services like aged care, education, and poverty alleviation, among others (Oslington 2015; Powell 2017; Powell and Pepper 2017). Church-linked not-for-profit organisations are well-known for their charitable role, providing “approximately half of social services in Australia through contracting arrangements with governments” (Oslington 2015, p. 79) at “high-quality low-cost” (p. 92). Moreover, research by Pepper et al. (2019) has noted that “Christian groups play a positive role in the promotion of social cohesion, building both bridging and bonding capital among those who participate” (p. 13). Given this heritage, it is crucial to harness the capacity of self-determined learning in support of church communities that may then constructively facilitate and channel the spiritual growth of people towards maturity, wisdom, and sustainable social engagement.

## 7. Concluding Synthesis

This literary review of conceptualisations and definitional approaches to spiritual growth uncovers timely opportunities for future research. Its analysis extends previous research by examining the state of the art in relation to spiritual growth. Scrutinising selected major schools of thought, tools for measuring spiritual growth, and practical pathways used to operationalise and foster spiritual development in different ministry settings exposes definitive limitations, including psychological issues, inherent in passive learning approaches. Many models that are used to either measure or heighten spiritual self-development are limited by linearity, passivity, and reductionism and do not adequately resonate with learners or reflect the complexities inherent in spiritual growth. This paper converges around the synthesis that heutagogy and coaching are effective twin strategies that may orient self-determined learning towards enhanced spiritual growth within the context of psychological well-being. Crucially, heutagogical learning, when synthesised with non-directive coaching, is aptly suited to stimulate, support, and sustain personalised spiritual growth. More specifically, the learner determines their preferred growth goals, pathways, and levels of achievement. As the learner’s locus of control internalises, she or he gains more control over the learning environment and process, thus rendering learning more personally relevant and meaningful, as well as minimising detrimental effects associated with guilt, fear arousal to orchestrate change, and associated factors. Moreover, double-loop learning refines the learning process and helps the learner to calibrate and increase their capabilities. As the learner grows in his or her ability to curate and direct learning, self-determined lifelong learning can become intrinsically desirable and practically achievable. The concluding synthesis presented in this paper intends to inform and advance further scientific studies and thereby fulfils an important research agenda-setting function.

This research is subject to some limitations. Given that this paper was methodologically focused on literary analysis, further opportunities for in-depth empirical and longitudinal inquiry are implied. Correspondingly, future research could investigate the degree to which proactive self-determined learning, informed by heutagogy and driven by non-directive coaching, can model and enhance non-linear spiritual growth. Importantly, relevant knowledge generation in this area could be helpful to inform and guide mentoring models towards non-linear proactive learning, thus passing the locus of control from the mentor to the mentee in a way that honours the agency of the learner. Towards this end, the paper conceptualises future research opportunities and thereby lays the foundation for a timely emergent research agenda.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> *Eisegesis* refers to an interpretation of a text, particularly of scripture, that reflects the personal ideas, biases, and/or perspectives of the interpreter rather than the originally intended meaning of the text.
- <sup>2</sup> For a fuller rebuttal of universalism, see Abraham Kuyper, ‘Particular Grace: A Defense of God’s Sovereignty in Salvation’. Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2014.

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