THE STATE OF CURRENT RESEARCH INTO AGEING AND SPIRITUALITY
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Introduction:

One of the three main areas of focus for SCAS is to facilitate and/or conduct research into ageing and spirituality. The results of such research are expected to help support the Selwyn Foundation in its decision-making in this area of aged care, and also feed into the Advocacy and Education areas of SCAS' work. SCAS also expects to be able to share the results of its research work with other organisations involved in aged care.

As an early step in this process it seemed appropriate to ascertain what research had already been carried out in the area of ageing and spirituality, and attempt to review the various outcomes of such work. Not only would this provide some idea of research to date, it would also identify areas where much research had already been carried out, along with areas that had received little attention. Reviewing and summarising existing research is a useful way of generating questions relating to ageing and spirituality in the New Zealand context. It also provides an index to, and barometer about, the components of ageing and spirituality which have captured the time and attention of people who have an interest in this field.

The Literature Review

While not claiming to be the full suite of published research on ageing and spirituality, approximately 355 journal papers, books, theses, and dissertations, covering the period from 1975 to 2007, were reviewed, and clustered into categories that reflected the themes of the various publications. It is reasonable to consider that this number of publications does adequately reflect the type and range of research being carried out in this field, which was indeed more substantial than initially thought. For the most part, the review process was an examination of the abstracts of journal papers, theses, and dissertations, and published reviews of a number of books. Some journal papers were read in more detail if the abstract was not clear. The writings were initially grouped into some high level categories, according to the general theme of the document, and later some of these general themes were split out to more detailed and specific ones. Even so, there were a few publications that crossed themes, or could have been allocated into different ones. Since the object of the exercise was to identify generally what had been researched in this field of Ageing and Spirituality, no great rigour was applied at this time to justify a particular theme chosen for writings that could equally have sat comfortably in another. Indeed, there were some writings that did end up in more than one group, since their content clearly covered more than one of the categories chosen as headings.

The following research themes appeared:

Ageing and Spirituality in relation to active ministry –
This was one of the smallest areas covered in the reviewed literature, with only 18 journal papers or books found that commented on actual religious or spiritual ministry to the elderly. For the most part the writings focused on how religious leaders and/or communities could be spiritual mentors, or carry out ministry with the aged. Older adult ministry was regarded not just as a programme, but as a process, of "spiritual care spiritual development, and spiritual formation as older adults are confronted

with challenges to their spiritual perspectives due to the changes inherent in the process of ageing" (Koepke, 2005) p19. Some challenges to religious communities resulting from a need to create new religious rituals to reflect these life stages were described, along with suggestions about suitable activities that could be used by those who minister to the elderly, to help address issues such as depression, facing mortality, and embracing ageing (Mattes, 2005, Leder, 1999/2000, Address, 2005, Auls, 1996, Jones, 1999). These writings had a different focus from those considering care giver situations, and were more directed towards ways in which the church and individual priests/pastors could assist the spiritual development of older adults.

Ageing and Spirituality in relation to the care giver –
This was also a very small area of research, (about 23 journal papers or books were reviewed here, although one paper was a substantial review in its own right of published literature about caregiver well-being (Herbert et al., 2006)), and was divided into two sub-areas covering the care giver's relationship with this component of their dealings with elderly people.
The first, and more substantial of these comprised practical advice to care managers and caregivers engaged on long term care so they would better understand how to respond to the spiritual needs of a family member, or institutionalised resident, as well as their clinical ones (Barton et al., 2003, MacKinlay, 2006, Miller, 1996, Tindell, 2003, Berggren-thomas and Griggs, 1995). Most of these had a particular focus on the special challenges presented when caring for people with Alzheimer's disease. It was clear from the works reviewed that in order to cultivate and support the spirituality of residents, care home management needs to "recognize the importance of pastoral care as a key component of resident care; pay attention to staff and their attitudes; and sensitise staff to the spirituality of even the most severely disabled patients" (Anonymous, 1997) p39.
The second sub-area was a small set of literature which addressed issues faced by care givers themselves. It attempted to provide strategies and/or advice to help care givers cope with the stress of their role, and gain some spiritual comfort of their own (Griffin, 2005, Ewing, 2005, Doka, 2004).

Ageing and Spirituality in relation to religious needs in ageing persons –
This larger group of 61 journal papers and books, covered issues around the relationship between ageing and religion or religious beliefs, especially the need for affirmation in the face of death (Green and Simmons, 1977, Aden, 2005, Peckham and Peckham, 1979), as opposed to a more general spirituality and/or faith in a God that may not be aligned to a particular religious doctrine. Some dealt with one particular religion such as Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and the perspectives each brought to ageing and spirituality (Ingram, 2003, Melton, 1997, Mirel and Werth, 1998, Grudzen et al., 2005). (The majority discovered in this search, were related either to Christianity or Judaism, but that may have been because only English language journals and books were reviewed.) Others drew on facets of each, comparing and contrasting them, to demonstrate understanding of a particular doctrine as it pertained to spirituality in the ageing person's life (Mitchell, 1991, Simmons, 1992). All of them explored the importance of religion in the field of ageing. This group of writings included a number that reported on reasonably formal empirical studies carried out with older people in particular faith communities, on their spiritual experiences and faith commitment (Eisenhandler, 2005, Genia, 1991). One or two of these looked closely at the correlation between these older people and longer life spans, shorter hospital stays and reduced incidence of depression (Koenig et al., 2004, Hill and Pargament, 2003, Hays et al., 2001) These were noteworthy, because by far the majority of writings in all categories were aligned with personal experience, or experience with very small groups of elderly people, which was then described in an interpretive, qualitative manner. A constant theme running through all the papers in this group was that alignment to religious doctrines and teaching does play a significant role in the lives of older adults, and helps individuals and communities confront the ageing

process in a positive manner. Religion, and religious communities clearly offer comfort, and are a source of meaning for older people (Devine, 1980, Levin and Tobin, 1995).

Ageing and Spirituality in relation to general faith issues in ageing persons –
This group of 52 writings, which included a number of PhD and Masters theses, was separated from the group of writings on religion and faith. This was because on closer examination, they had an interesting, non-doctrinal approach to their discussions. Typically, this was either about the ageing person's view of his or her own spirituality, or a more general view of an understanding about a God, who may not necessarily be identified according to a traditional religious model (Rowe and Kahn, 1997, Borelli, 1982). There were discussions on new or changed spiritual needs as people entered the later years of their lives (Boswell et al., 2006, Bianchi, 1991), concepts of an afterlife in the context of a scientific age (Fischer, 2004), and presentation of a variety of models of faith development (Ford, 1988). There was quite an emphasis on the relationship between spirituality and life issues, including onset of Alzheimer's disease, depression, suicide, dealing with loss and grief, developing awareness of body changes, recognition of spiritual traditions, and facing death itself. While not associating with any particular religion, there was a consistent trend of affirming the spiritual quality of life and the human experience, the spiritual development of the older person, and an image of God as an empowering presence within each person (Sabatino, 1998), particularly "where different faith traditions share common ground" (Moody, 1995). All the writings indicated findings that affirmed higher levels of meaning in life were associated with higher levels of spirituality (Nelson, 2004). Interestingly, there were a number of authors who had works which fell into both this category and the previous one on religious needs, and there was a bit of an arbitrary line drawn when allocating into which of the two categories a document might be placed.

Ageing and Spirituality in relation to cultural issues –
(Hardly any of the books or journals covered at the time of this review addressed aspects of culture which applied to the specific New Zealand context. Efforts to track down published writings pertaining to this area have produced fewer than half-a-dozen publications, most of them from Professor Mason Durie of Massey University).
This was a very small group of writings, only 11 journal papers, books or theses addressed cultural issues related to Ageing and Spirituality. There was some attention paid to the cultural changes taking place both in the people who are ageing, and those in the rest of society, especially for minority groups within a predominantly Caucasian environment, where "unfinished cultural business accumulates" (Heinz, 1994). These writings reflected on experiences gained from contact with groups of elderly people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds trying to cope with their often marginalized situation within a different dominant culture (Cameron, 2001, Thursby, 2000, Villa, 1994, Nakasone, 2005).
There was also a small amount of discussion on what could be called unfinished cultural business when the ageing person begins the process of life review. Particular note was made in a couple of papers of this issue in relation to the 'ageing baby boomers', where there is a very large, (and expected to be vocal), group entering what has traditionally been regarded as 'elder years' (Freedman, 1999, Roschen, 1991, Achenbaum, 1997). The writings around this area are predicting both sociodemographic and societal culture changes, which will reflect a different view of spirituality and the ageing process, from a group that has grown up in a largely secular context (Simpson, 1991). There is discussion on some searching for cultural roots, and attempts to reconnect with a kind of spirituality that is part of memory (Wall and Arden, 1990), particularly for those who have drifted away from any faith connection beyond their early years.

Ageing and Spirituality in relation to gender issues –

This group of writings was not categorised thus because of the gender of the authors, but because they dealt specifically with what were seen by the authors as gender issues related to ageing and spirituality. There were 29 journal papers or theses that focused on male or female issues related to ageing and spirituality. Of these only 5 looked at these issues for men , especially the role of being 'elder' (Jones, 2001), spiritual transitions undergone by men as they age (Robinson, 1994), or the fragmentation of men's lives "leaving religious commitments and feelings for Sundays" (Neuger, 2003) p64. All the others were focused on ageing and women's spirituality in a variety of theological contexts (Orenstein, 1994, Spencer, 1992, Alford and Nunn, 2004), There was particular emphasis on the complexities of women's life experiences (Findley, 1996), along with the development of personal and spiritual maturity for women moving from middle to old age (Harris, 1995, Spencer, 1982, Orcutt, 1993), when their traditional roles and responsibilities change (Harrison, 1994), and the need for "help in coping with the double stigma of being old and being female, and the invisibility that can result" (Fischer, 1995). Interesting, and unsurprising, is the finding that only one of the writings about women in this context was by a man, (Daniel Levinson, who also co-wrote one of the books about the season's of men's lives, with Charlotte Darrow), and only one of the writings about gender and late-life spirituality that included men, was by a woman.

Ageing and Spirituality, the personal journey –
This small group of 11 journal papers and books were quite cathartic in the way they covered the authors' own experiences with issues related to ageing, and their spiritual journey that often was generated out of a crisis of grief or illness (Clemons, 2004, Kimble, 1994). The writings mostly described journeys of spiritual reflection (Weaver et al., 1998), and were often related to a general concept of personal spirituality that was not necessarily part of a particular religious belief, or component of a religious community (Samples, 2005, Manheimer, 2000a). The joys and burdens of ageing, plus the way cultural forces affect this process were also explored, as part of a personal faith journey (McFadden, 1999).

Ageing and Spirituality, facing real life issues –
This group of 22 writings dealt much more with specific crises related to ageing, such as dealing with the disintegration of body and mind of a loved one, loss of identity after leaving the workplace along with the challenge of 'rediscovering oneself', and other aspects of the ageing experience (Manheimer, 2000b, Simmons, 2001, Clements, 1979, Fisher, 1993, Brister, 2006). A few of these papers were reporting results of interviews or surveys with elderly people dealing with various crises in their lives, and this influenced the more detached tone of the writing (Millner, 1998, Thomas and Eisenhandler, 1998, MacKinlay, 2001). There was less personal reflection and more summary reporting of findings, general comments, and advice about how to handle day to day experiences, than the writings that described personal journeys of faith and the ageing process.

Ageing and Spirituality, philosophical perspectives –
This category could probably be divided further, but at this stage there are 107 journal papers, books and theses in this collection that in one way or anther discuss the issues of ageing and spirituality in a variety of philosophical ways, where a person's spirituality is defined as a personal quest for meaning and purpose in life, and can include both beliefs and practice (Atchley, 2003, Sadler and Biggs, 2006). Many of them use existing stories, myths, poetry, or essays from other authors (Chinen, 1992, Doherty and McNamara, 1993, Leder, 1997), to support the points they are trying to make about the psychology and spirituality of the elder years. A few authors also looked at established sociological theories to reflect their views on self-identity, spirituality and ageing (Brewer, 1995, Clements, 1990, Erisman, 2000, Hall, 1985). The most prevailing sense that comes from these writings is that of reflection on the final journey of life, and preparation for leaving it (Luke, 1987, Mowat, 2005, Wong, 2000). Phrases

such as spiritual journey, pilgrimage, personal quests for meaning of life, finding direction, spiritual milestones, or spirituality as an integral part of ageing, occurred with regularity throughout this group of writings (Kaufman, 1986, Crowther and Parker, 2002, Kimble, 2000). The difference between these writings and the other groups was definitely the reflective, philosophical tone, and the frequent relationship to other writings as the starting point for the discussions presented. (Hillman, 1999, Meserve, 1976).

Comment on the Findings to date

The choice of categories used to 'slice and dice' the various journal papers, books, and theses that were reviewed for this exercise are certainly not definitive. However, they do give a general sense of the type of research that has been carried out into ageing and spirituality (Sinclair et al., 2006), and could act as question generators for areas the Selwyn Foundation Group and SCAS may be interested in pursuing further. Within the groups summarised here are many opportunities for deeper analysis of the contents of the reviewed works, or considerations of further research into the issues raised by them. Those 96 writings that have been specifically cited in this review were both typical of the research in their area, and interesting reading in their own right. They are listed in the References at the end of this review for any readers who wish further exploration of the sub-sections to which they relate.

Recommended as priorities for initial research projects that could be immediately beneficial to the work of the Selwyn Foundation and SCAS, are the areas of :
- Ageing and Spirituality in relation to the care giver – the rationale being that the relationship between care giver and care receiver in the delivery of holistic care is one of the keys to the Selwyn Foundation Group fulfilling its Mission of 'Quality Christian Care for the Elderly', and there is very little empirical research on factors which influence this.
- Ageing and Spirituality in relation to cultural issues – the rationale being that there is very little research addressing ageing in Aotearoa-New Zealand in the context of the three Tikanga model within which the Selwyn Foundation is operating, (Maori and Pasifika as well as Pakeha). Also, relating back to the previous recommendation, there was no significant research found in this review on the relationships or challenges that occur between care givers of nationalities and cultures which are different from those receiving care.
- Ageing and Spirituality in relation to Gender issues – especially as it relates to men. The rationale here being that there appears to be very little research on this area anywhere, and none on a cultural context that reflects the particular nature of men ageing in an Aotearoa-New Zealand environment. Typically, the lives of New Zealand men in the 20th Century have been influenced by traditions of physical identity rather than any spiritual one, and ageing has brought challenges for addressing this side of 'the kiwi male'.

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