



Joynt, Shaun (ed.). (2024). *Spiritual Practices of South African Clergy: State of the Clergy*. Bloomsbury Publishing. ISBN 9781978798342

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This first volume in a proposed four-part series, edited by Shaun Joynt, presents an empirical investigation into the spiritual practices of South African clergy from five denominations: the Methodist Church, the Dutch Reformed Church of Africa, the Apostolic Faith Mission, the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa, and the Roman Catholic Church. The study focuses exclusively on four “inner spiritual disciplines” as categorised by Richard Foster: prayer, meditation, fasting, and Bible study. These practices are analysed within a biopsychosocial-spiritual framework, inspired by Luke 2:52 (“in wisdom and in stature and in favour with God and man”).

The book opens with an introductory chapter that explains the theoretical background: the biblical foundation, the different levels and realities of spirituality (as described by Principe and Holt), and the application of the biopsychosocial-spiritual model to spiritual health. This is followed by a broad overview of spiritual formation and disciplines, as well as a discussion of research from the Global North that highlights the lack of similar data in the South African context.

Each of the five denominational chapters provides a definition of “spiritual leadership” within their tradition, describes the methodology (surveys and focus groups) and provides quantitative and qualitative findings on the frequency, duration and perceived value of the four disciplines. There is variation in research approach between authors, contributing to a nuanced picture of spiritual practices in different traditions. The concluding chapter summarises the most important findings, presents comparative statistics and suggests recommendations for both academics and church leaders.

One of the book's greatest strengths is its combination of a clearly structured theoretical framework with concrete, empirical data from a geographically and theologically diverse sample. The choice to situate the study within the biopsychosocial-spiritual model prevents a narrow understanding of spirituality and emphasises the intertwining of spiritual practices with other dimensions of being human. Joynt's use of Luke 2:52 as a heuristic framework is methodologically creative and provides a thematic bridge between the different volumes of the series.

The denomination-specific chapters add to the value of the work by illuminating church self-understandings, liturgical traditions, and spiritual rhythms that often remain outside of academic discourse. This granularity makes the book relevant for practice-oriented theology and for clergy who want to evaluate their own disciplinary patterns.

Yet there are also limitations. First, although the book explicitly states that it is descriptive and not normative, there is a subtle tendency to suggest certain practices (e.g. daily Bible study or longer prayer times) as implicitly more desirable. These value judgments are not necessarily problematic but call for a clearer methodological reflection on the researchers' own theological frameworks.

Second, the diverse research designs in the five denominational chapters demonstrate the richness of variety, but this limits comparability. Some chapters contain extensive statistical analyses, while others are more narrative and qualitatively oriented. For a future edition, a more harmonised methodology could strengthen the synthesis.

Third, the study is strongly anchored in existing literature from the Global North, which is valuable for the theoretical framework, but the book could have integrated more local literature – especially from African-based spirituality research – to further highlight the uniqueness of the South African context.

In terms of academic contribution, this work clearly positions itself within practical theology, spiritual formation and religious sociology. It provides valuable baseline systems for future longitudinal studies on the spiritual health and disciplinary practices of clergy. For denominations, it can serve

as a self-diagnostic tool, while for researchers, it provides a framework for developing similar studies in other regions of the Global South.

Spiritual Practices of South African Clergy is a significant addition to the scarce but growing body of empirical research on spiritual practices in the South African and broader Global South context. It combines theological depth with research rigour and provides a nuanced picture of how clergy from diverse traditions engage in prayer, meditation, fasting and Bible study. While there is room for methodological refinement and greater integration of local literature, the book provides a solid foundation for further research and church self-reflection. It should be especially valuable for academics in practical theology, church leaders who want to evaluate their own spiritual health, and for all those interested in the dynamics of faith practices within a complex South African reality.