



A Comprehensive Theory of Spirituality: Humanistic, Theist, and Theotic

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Abstract

Especially among the Abrahamic religions, quite regularly spirituality implies a relationship with God or else some other supposed "sacred" entities or forces. This starting point precludes a fully psychological explanation of spirituality since appeal to God exceeds the methodology of the social or human sciences: Psychology is not theology. In contrast, a traditional Christian axiom holds that "grace builds on nature." Accordingly, recognize that a dimension of the human mind itself—consciousness or human spirit—is first and foremost the source and object of spiritual experiences. Then the natural becomes fundamental, theoretically the essential, and at its roots spirituality lies within the competence of human study, and religious accounts are further elaborations. This proposition is the thesis of this article. Following the trenchant analyses of Bernard Lonergan, this account recognizes human consciousness or spirit as a dynamic dimension of the mind, self-present, out-going, self-transcending, open-ended, geared to reality, and normative: These requisites inherent in consciousness orient a person toward the true and the good. Then personal integration and spiritual growth coincide—in this way: Psychotherapeutic healing frees the spirit to increasingly take the lead and guide one's living, constituting one as "a spiritual person." The specification of consciousness/spirit contrasts with other mental content—emotions, memory, imagery—and suggests a tripartite human model (organism, psyche, and consciousness) in place of the standard bipartite model (body and mind). Such a naturalistic starting point easily supports religious elaboration, seeing God as Creator (theology) and envisioning union with God (theotics). This theory foresees the collaboration of the world's religions in acknowledging a common spiritual foundation for themselves and for our pluralistic secular society.

Keywords: Bernard J. F.; Consciousness; deification; Human spirit; Lonergan; Psychology of spirituality.

Abstrak

Khususnya di antara agama-agama Ibrahim, spiritualitas secara teratur menyiratkan hubungan dengan Tuhan atau entitas atau kekuatan "suci" lainnya. Titik awal ini menghalangi penjelasan spiritualitas yang sepenuhnya bersifat psikologis karena seruan kepada Tuhan melebihi metodologi ilmu-ilmu sosial atau manusia: Psikologi bukanlah teologi. Sebaliknya, sebuah aksioma Kristen tradisional menyatakan bahwa "kasih karunia dibangun di atas alam." Dengan demikian, kita harus mengakui bahwa dimensi pikiran manusia itu sendiri-kesadaran atau roh manusia-adalah yang pertama dan terutama menjadi sumber dan objek dari pengalaman-pengalaman spiritual. Kemudian yang alamiah menjadi fundamental, secara teoritis menjadi esensial, dan pada akhirnya spiritualitas terletak pada kompetensi studi manusia, dan kisah-kisah religius adalah penjabaran lebih lanjut. Proposisi ini adalah tesis dari artikel ini. Mengikuti analisis mendalam dari Bernard Lonergan, akun ini mengakui kesadaran atau roh manusia sebagai dimensi pikiran yang dinamis, hadir dalam diri sendiri, terbuka, melampaui diri sendiri, terbuka, diarahkan pada realitas, dan normatif: Persyaratan yang melekat dalam kesadaran ini mengarahkan seseorang kepada yang benar dan baik. Kemudian integrasi pribadi dan pertumbuhan spiritual terjadi bersamaan-dengan cara ini: Penyembuhan psikoterapi membebaskan roh untuk semakin memimpin dan membimbing kehidupan seseorang, menjadikannya sebagai "orang yang spiritual." Spesifikasi kesadaran/roh berbeda dengan konten mental lainnya-emosi, ingatan, citra-dan menyarankan model manusia tripartit (organisme, jiwa, dan kesadaran) sebagai pengganti model bipartit standar (tubuh dan pikiran). Titik awal naturalistik ini dengan mudah mendukung elaborasi religius, melihat Tuhan sebagai Pencipta (teologi) dan membayangkan persatuan dengan Tuhan (teotik). Teori ini meramalkan kolaborasi agama-agama di dunia dalam mengakui landasan spiritual yang sama untuk diri mereka sendiri dan untuk masyarakat sekuler kita yang majemuk.

Kata Kunci: Bernard J. F.; Kesadaran; ketuhanan; Jiwa manusia; Lonergan; Psikologi spiritualitas.

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Received: January 01, 2023; Revised: February 18, 2023; Accepted: March 13, 2023

INTRODUCTION

Spirituality emerged as a field of study in mid-20th century France, replacing the traditional Roman Catholic study of “ascetic” or “mystical theology” (Principe, 1983; Tanquerey, 1930). Born into a period of extensive philosophical, theological, and scientific flux, the meaning of spirituality—its nature, its role, its relationship to God and to religion—has become highly debated. In some quarters, spirituality has completely branched off from religion and become a field of study in itself (Schneiders, 2021); and with still ambiguous terms, many report that they are “spiritual, but not religious” (Hollywood, 2010; Kitchener, 2018; Young & Medzon, 2020). I propose the neologism *spiritualogy* to name the study of spirituality.

With this paper I address this amorphous situation and present a concise summary of one approach to spirituality, a fully naturalistic theory, opening onto theist and, further, onto theotic elaboration. The term *theotic* refers to union with God; it comes from the Greek *theosis*, deification (D. A. Helminiak, 1986, pp. 17–18, 1988, 2015a). I treat the naturalistic or humanistic aspect of the theory under the term *psychology* since it is the current discipline defined by study of the human in itself. Besides, since spirituality is generally considered to be a mental phenomenon, locating its treatment in psychology seems appropriate. Finally, the psychological literature contains extensive treatment of spirituality, and it is the naturalistic scientific treatment that I know best. By making spirituality an essential aspect of human psychology, I am following the traditional Christian axiom that “grace builds on nature”; that is, a theological understanding must rely on a prior humanistic understanding. Thus conceived, what I present entails, I believe, a new paradigm for psychology (because the spiritual is essential to it) and a new perspective for theology (because human studies supply the bases for theological elaboration). Intended to propound one coherent account, this presentation makes few comparisons with the extant multitude of approaches to spirituality. For example, Schneiders (2021, p. 21) offers a list of some current spiritualities,

... of everything from gourmet cooking to motorcycle maintenance, from reading to child-rearing, conversation, marriage, meditation, friendship, sports, weight loss, sobriety, prayer, and so on. Dissertations are written on ecological spirituality, twelve-step spirituality, the spirituality of peace-making in figures such as Gandhi or Dorothy Day, comparative spirituality, Franciscan or lay spirituality, Protestant spirituality, non-theistic or cosmological spirituality, contemplative spirituality, feminist spirituality, liturgical spirituality, and on and on. [see also Emmons (1999); Good Feather (2021); Harris (2014); Gray (2017); Richards and Bergin (2017); Simonova (2020); Sperry & Shafranske (2005); Walsh (2000)].

This paper offers a concise summary of a theoretical account of spirituality: First and foremost yet open to theological elaboration, spirituality is grounded in, and sourced by, consciousness, a dimension of the human mind itself, which, according to its created nature, is not divine in any way. At its core, this theory is completely naturalistic and suggests that the immediate object of spiritual experience is the self-transcending human mind—although, in light of the characteristics of consciousness, it is easy to see how an intense experience of human consciousness, overwhelmingly for example in psychedelic drug experiences (W. Richards, 2015), could easily be thought to be other-worldly. However, applying Ockham’s razor, it seems unnecessary to appeal to God to explain experiences that can adequately be explained more simply, namely, by appeal to the unboundedness of human consciousness, as noted below (D. A. Helminiak, 1996b, pp. 122–127). In contrast, the purpose of this paper is not to inspire and offer spiritual guidance or to discuss different expressions of spirituality as much spiritualogy does—following what I call a “pastoral” approach. This theoretical approach seeks, rather, to understand what spirituality is in its essence—what I would venture to call a “scientific” approach (D. A. Helminiak, 1996a, pp. 36–38). My intent is to highlight only this one approach and expose it for analysis and criticism. Whether and how

this theory might fit with the field must be left to others' judgments, which are surely needed at this point. And, of course, I cannot present here a fully detailed account. I offer only a succinct yet coherent statement to allow readers to achieve a secure basic understanding of this proposal.

DEFINITIONS OF SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGION

The discussion of spirituality is a complicated and unsettled affair in religious studies as well as in the social sciences. There is no consensus on its definition, and explanations of it vary greatly (D. A. Helminiak, 1996b).

I offer my definition: Spirituality is awareness of transcendence and commitment to it. Its essence is openness to a dimension of experience that goes beyond the here and now and, ever outgoing, reaches toward the whole of reality, seen and unseen, existing or yet to come. Included is a desire for union with that whole. A religious understanding would also include union with God. Growth in spirituality implies ever greater sensitivity to this transcendent dimension of human experience (D. A. Helminiak, 1987), and a person with such natural or cultivated sensitivity would be described as "a spiritual person."

The term *spirituality* also refers to one's practices and the lifestyle that support commitment to transcendence. So someone's spirituality could include meditation, prayer, reading and study, fasting, sleep deprivation, almsgiving, works of charity, consultation with a guru or spiritual director, use of mind-altering drugs, and association with kindred spirits, among other things.

Spirituality resides in the individual, yet it is undeniably a social phenomenon: Humans are social animals, and most of one's understanding and practices of spirituality come from existing traditions. So spirituality easily tends toward organization among kindred spirits, and religions result. Nonetheless, many today persist in seeing spirituality as a stark alternative to religion. Accordingly, the term *spirituality* is now also commonly used as a non-specific, more politically correct, substitute term for religion: One asks about people's spirituality, not about their religion.

As for religion, it is the social agency whose prime purpose is to foster spirituality. However, in contrast to spirituality, organizational structure characterizes religion: membership, leaders, meetings, rituals, calendars, texts, codes of ethics, sets of beliefs, property, finances. These other concerns often obscure religion's central spiritual purpose (D. A. Helminiak, 2008). For this reason, many people gravitate away from religious affiliation and toward personal spirituality.

Since spirituality is closely related to religion, most often spirituality has God as the source and focus of transcendence, at least among the Abrahamic religions. In contrast, however, Buddhism, Taoism, and Shinto are profoundly spiritual yet non-theist religions. But the involvement of God further complicates a psychological treatment of spirituality (D. A. Helminiak, 2017). Attention to God—as well as other supposed non-human spiritual entities and forces—is not only incompatible with the dominant presumption of psychologists about what constitutes their field (D. A. Helminiak, 2010; Daniel A. Helminiak, Hoffman, & Dodson, 2012) but would also ground a central aspect of human psychology in some non-human reality.

THE PROBLEM OF GOD AND NORMS IN PSYCHOLOGY

Psychology looks for ways to circumvent that problem. One common approach posits "the sacred" as the defining object of spirituality (Larson, Swyers, & McCullough, 1998; Pargament, Oman, Pomerleau, & Mahoney, 2017). But the sacred—often capitalized—appears to be based on the notion of God and often functions as a thinly veiled God-substitute. It is argued in response, however, that the sacred could apply

to anything held in supreme regard, even physical objects. Yes, granted. However, this response highlights another challenge to a psychological treatment of spirituality: If the sacredness imputed to things depends on human decisions, who is to say whether those things are genuinely good or evil? Nazism and the swastika, for example, could qualify as sacred according to this subjective criterion, but spirituality is considered to be a positive phenomenon, a matter of truth and goodness. The Noble Eightfold Path of Buddhism stands as a powerful non-theist example (Buddha Weekly, 2022). As long as God is the focus of spirituality, the determination of truth and goodness could be thought to be covered. Different understandings of God, however, still allow for conflicting religious opinions on these crucial matters (On the experience of the presence of God, see Helminiak (1984, 2015a, pp. 343–364).

As with all other human sciences, psychology's problem is that it has no consensual way of adjudicating good and evil. Some psychology of religion insists on being value-neutral, for example Paloutzian & Park (2005, p. 560) although the sciences are now grappling with the role of value judgments in their enterprise (Mandel & Tetlock, 2016; Myrdal, 1958; Osbeck, 2019). Moreover, to be sure, certainly in practice as psychotherapy, psychology does intend to promote the good. The mission of the American Psychological Association (2013), for example, is "to advance the creation, communication and application of psychological knowledge to benefit society and improve lives" Yet the determination of such benefit and improvement usually depends on judgments that can vary from culture to culture. In this postmodern era, there is no philosophical consensus whatsoever about the meaning of "true" and "good" or about the means of determining them (Cahoone, 2019, p. 47).

On many fronts, a non-theological approach—humanistic, naturalistic, psychological—seems to face insurmountable problems if it would deal adequately with spirituality. All these problems, I suggest, have the same root cause: Following the model of religion, they locate the object of transcendence outside of the human being—in supernatural beings, in nature, in revered objects. Then, not only is the constitutive factor in spirituality not human but its understanding and acknowledged mystery vary with varied religions: Theologies differ. So a coherent social science could hardly be adequate to dealing with it.

THE HUMAN CORE OF SPIRITUALITY: THE HUMAN SPIRIT

The matter is different if the source of human experience of transcendence is in our human make-up itself. Then growth in spirituality would be tantamount to increasing personal integration. Such growth would allow the inherent source of transcendence to harmonize one's make-up ever further and guide one's living. In the process one would advance in self-transcendence, ever more sensitive to a transcendent dimension of life, ever moving beyond the limits of one's biased and enculturated self, ever more attaining to the universe of objective reality (Jastrzębski, 2021). Call this inner principle of transcendence "the human spirit," and the process of human integration itself qualifies as spiritual development.

Yet the critical question remains: What is this "human spirit"? I elaborate this notion by application of the work of the Canadian philosopher and theologian Bernard Lonergan. Having died in 1984, he is hailed as one of the geniuses of the 20th century. *Newsweek* (1970) magazine likened him to Thomas Aquinas, who also integrated the sciences and humanities of his times. Lonergan's focus was human consciousness. His major works are *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (1992) and *Method in Theology* (2001). The "theology" in this title should not obscure the fact that this work is relevant to all the humanities. A more accessible presentation of his work is *Understanding and Being* (1990).

Lonergan frequently refers to human consciousness as "human spirit" or "spiritual" for example, (B. J. F. Lonergan, 1992, pp. 372, 294, 538–543, 640–643, 2001, pp. 13, 210, 302, 352). That usage is what

inspired the theory I am presenting. Consciousness, or spirit, is that dimension of human mentality whereby we humans experience, understand, know, and love in our uniquely human way. A peculiar non-objectified self-presence characterizes consciousness; it constitutes our subjectivity. When we speak and say “I,” we are *tacitly* experiencing something (ourselves) in addition to that about which we are *explicitly* speaking. We are present to ourselves simply by being our human selves. This presence is immaterial: It is not a matter of this against that or of extension in space and time, but a matter of self-identity. The peculiarity in question is spiritual; it is constitutive of the human being. Or again, consciousness deals in meaning and value; it treats of ideas and ideals. These, too, are immaterial. All these considerations imply that the quality “spiritual” rightly applies to human consciousness. As such, it allows us not only to engage objects of interest. In a concomitant and simultaneous mode, it also allows us to be present to that engagement and later to reflect on it. That is, we experience, and thus can know, the very workings of our consciousness. The self-presence that constitutes consciousness allows us to know ourselves (D. A. Helminiak, 2014).

Thus, Lonergan insisted that the experience of our mental life provides us with evidence, data. This evidence is as real and valid as the evidence of our senses, on which the natural sciences rely. This assertion should not be surprising. Psychologists presume as much when in psychotherapy they elicit and reconfigure more healthily a client’s hidden (“unconscious”) mental content and functioning. The same applies to the spiritual director, guru, or shaman, and to ourselves when we reveal our inner thoughts and feelings. Insisting on the validity of the data of consciousness as well as the data of the senses, Lonergan proposed an account of consciousness that is empirically grounded. It rests on evidence. Hence, it is not mere speculation. It is an empirical account, as objectively valid as science in its own right as the natural sciences are in theirs.

Attending to the workings of his own mind as well as building on the thought of Western philosophers from Plato and Aristotle to Augustine and Aquinas, to Kant and Hegel, and onward, Lonergan proposed that consciousness has a four-faceted structure. He recognizes the essence of consciousness to be a non-objectifying self-presence, but beyond the awareness that is consciousness, he also recognizes a dynamism that unfolds within consciousness as it tends toward reality. He names the four facets—which he calls metaphorically “levels of consciousness”—“experience, understanding, judgment, and decision.”

An illustrative narrative would be as follows.

- a) First, when we encounter something new that strikes our interest, we have experience. That is, the object of interest passes from sensation and perception into consciousness; we are consciously aware of the object, and it becomes in us a non-physical representation.
- b) Second, in the alert mind, that object presents a puzzle. Spontaneously the question arises, “What is it?” “How is it so?” There follows an attempt to understand. It results in an insight, a concept, a hypothesis, and subsequent formulation. We have a possible understanding of what we experienced.
- c) Third, spontaneously a further and critical question arises, “But is it so?” “Have I understood correctly?” Now there follows a pondering that compares the suggested understanding with the original data and determines whether (a) the hypothesis fits and (b) leaves no further relevant questions unanswered. Given this set of affairs, a judgment emerges, confirming the accuracy of the understanding, and the result is knowledge, a fact, a sliver of truth. Human knowledge is a composite of experience, understanding, and judgment.
- d) Fourth, a still further question spontaneously then arises. The outward reach of dynamic consciousness allows us humans no rest. Now a very personal question, the existential question, exacts, “What am I going to do about it?” Then with a decision, knowing moves into doing, thought

turns to action. Consciousness is a whole; it aims is coherence, personal integrity. So (a) action should harmonize with knowledge and (b) in such a way as to keep this dynamic system open and flowing. If so, the action would be good, and it would contribute to our on-going advancement and ever adjusting development.

An anonymous reviewer noted that others (Iqbal, 2000; James, 1902; Lama, 2021; Radhakrishnan, 2015) also seem to discern a similar four-faceted pattern when treating religious experience—experience, interpretation, testing, application. The popular rendition of scientific method shows a similar abbreviated pattern—research, hypothesis, verification.

Is this account valid? Is it correct? Well, the evidence lies in the inner experience of each of us. The question becomes, Does this account match what I experience when I attend to anything? When I am solving a problem? When I am making a decision? Do I recognize this process in myself? What, as I grapple to grasp the meaning of the words before my eyes right now? The supporting data are available only in one's own experience; we have access only to our own consciousness. Everyone must be true to their own experience. It is the only experience that matters here—until numerous subjects report the same inner experience. Then, as in replicated scientific experiment, a consensus can emerge.

Another consideration supports the robustness of Lonergan's analysis. Consider this: How could one go about disproving this proposed dynamic four-faceted structure of consciousness? Surely one would have to appeal to different evidence, or offer a different interpretation of the evidence, or question the validity of the judgment about the interpretation. That is, however, one would be doing in deed what one was attempting to reject in words. There appears to be no way around this implication of Lonergan's analysis. To mount an argument against it only provides more behavioral evidence to support it. Only if consciousness were different from what it is or if some people's consciousness were different from the rest of ours, only then could a different analysis be valid—but in this case we must wonder if we are dealing with *human* consciousness or some other supposed variant.

For these reasons, in the face of postmodern relativism and agnosticism, Lonergan makes the bold claim that this analysis "is not open to radical revision. For that dynamic structure is the condition of the possibility of any revision" (B. J. F. Lonergan, 2001, p. xii). We can misuse it, distort its elements, skew its functioning, but we cannot escape our human way of experiencing, thinking, and choosing.

THE INNATE NORMATIVITY OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT

Concern for what is true and good focuses the question of normativity. How do we know what is true or false, good or evil? From where do valid norms come? The claim is that the good is that which results in the manner just described above; and the truth is that which is concluded in the three-fold process just described. The norms for correct knowing and doing are inherent in humanity, and Lonergan has formulated them. Violation of these norms results in discomfort, guilt, a bad conscience.

If these four mental activities express the structure of human consciousness—experience, understanding, judgment, and decision—they imply innate requirements for its happy unfolding. As with all things in nature, built into consciousness are normative processes, in this case, processes for thinking and doing. The goal of science is to discern the structure, mechanisms, and functioning—the nature—of natural realities and phenomena. Once they are understood, we can use them to our benefit—but only by respecting their nature. As Bacon famously stated, "We cannot command nature except by obeying it" (Snider, 1988, p. 67). An example would be electricity. It is not an instrument of divine vengeance or diabolical threat, as lightening was once thought to be, but a natural phenomenon dependent on specific

processes that could be understood, harnessed, and used. But misused, it can be deadly. Consciousness is similar. It has its own nature. Therefore, if we want to live successfully and to know personal and social advance, we must respect and support the inherent norms of consciousness to the extent that we are able—the peculiarity of humanity being that we can violate innate norms: We can work against ourselves. We can be distracted or fearful and thus avoid or miss useful experiential input. We can be silly or superficial and settle for foolish explanations. We can be dishonest and make judgments despite contrary or insufficient evidence. And we can be perverse, wicked, evil and act destructively. All these cases forbode inevitable demise.

If the mental acts of consciousness are four, then the norms are four. Lonergan formulates them succinctly as follows:

- a) Since experience is a needed prerequisite, *Be attentive*.
- b) Since understanding is desired, *Be intelligent*.
- c) Since factual knowledge is the goal, *Be reasonable*.
- d) And since the good is the objective, *Be responsible*.

Lonergan calls these four the “transcendental precepts”—*transcendental* because they pertain to consciousness itself and because, therefore, they apply across the board to every human endeavor. To follow these precepts is to be and become ever more an “authentic” or “genuine” human being. It is to become what humans are made to be. To violate these precepts is to debilitate one’s very being; it is to warp, to distort, to deform, to dehumanize oneself.

Given the spiritual nature of this conscious dimension of human mentality and given the normativity of its precepts, we have at hand the requisites for a naturalistic explanation of spirituality. Consciousness itself, able to transcend space and time, is spiritual. As spiritual, it is the basis of spirituality; it is the source of experienced transcendence; its integration is the mechanism of personal growth; its criteria of truth and goodness guide personal, spiritual, and social development. On the other hand, it eliminates the need to begin with an appeal to something non-human, such as God. Thus, giving warranted attention to the human spirit, psychology can incorporate spirituality and finally becomes a normative science. Indeed, it must be normative if it is to address flesh and blood human beings and their poignant concerns about what life is and how to live it well.

RELIGIOUS DIMENSIONS OF SPIRITUALITY

The theological expansion of this psychology of spirituality follows easily. Belief in God adds a further level of elaboration to the naturalistic account of spirituality (on expanding levels of explanation, “higher viewpoints,” see Helminiak (1998). Most basically, that addition is the traditional three-part theology of creation. Namely, as Creator, God (a) sets all things in existence, (b) sustains them in being, and (c) acts with them to allow them to function according to their created natures. Technically, theology names these three divine activities “creation,” “conservation,” and “concurrence.” They explicate the Creator’s presence to all creatures. The point is simply that nothing exists and advances according to its nature apart from the creative power and goodness of God. Such consideration about God also suggests that God is the ultimate goal of the human quest for truth and goodness because God is the Fullness of Truth and Goodness, the source of all reality.

Still, these theological considerations change nothing in the basic understanding of spirituality grounded in the human spirit. They only confirm that basic understanding with the seal of divine approval, as it were: With its spiritual dimension, humanity is God’s good creation, so it and every facet of the universe refer the believer back to God. Thus, to be authentic to one’s human nature—to ever act

attentively, intelligently, reasonably, and responsibly—is to be faithful to God, certainly in deed if not always in word. For one need not necessarily name God to be actually doing God’s work. Hence, Matthew 25:44: “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink...?” (New Revised Standard Version). Natural processes, including human spiritual growth, are built into the universe. Being true to them is being true to God, the Creator of the universe. Moreover, these processes function without God’s having to step in to confirm the divine presence or to adjust the divine plan. From the beginning God’s creation is already sufficiently well structured. Therefore, from a theist perspective, a valid humanistic understanding of spirituality spells out our divine calling.

Theotics adds a still further dimension to human spirituality, namely, not just to know and love God, but also to become one with God, to share something of the very nature of God. For Hinduism, granted the logically and ontologically suspect supposition that *atman* is *brahman*, union with the Ultimate is a given; it expresses the true nature of a person. The same idea occurs variably in Neo-Platonism, Gnosticism, New Age Religion, and numerous mystical and theosophical strains of thought. Wilber (1980, pp. 75–76), for example, states that “the core insight of the *psychologia perennis* is that man’s ‘innermost’ consciousness is identical to the absolute and ultimate reality of the universe, known variously as Brahman, Tao, Dharmakaya, Allah, the Godhead.” More coherently, following Judaism and preserving the logical distinction between the human and the divine, between the created and the Uncreated, Christianity explains this union by holding that, through Christ, the Holy Spirit has been poured into human hearts and dwells there (Romans 5:5). That is, through the gift of the Holy Spirit (*Grace* in its primary meaning), God is present to people even as through consciousness people are self-present to themselves. The Holy Spirit is present to the human spirit; and, again without changing the natural order, the Holy Spirit supports and fortifies the authentic functioning of the human spirit: Grace inclines us be the authentic persons we were created to be (D. A. Helminiak, 2015a; Jacobs-Vandegeer, 2007). It draws us godward.

Given this Christian understanding, we can correctly say that we experience God in a “religious experience” even as the saints throughout the ages spoke of their experiences. Experiencing our own spirits, we also experience God, the Holy Spirit, with whom we are united. Additionally, the mutual direct presence of the Holy Spirit in the human spirit is the beginning of the union with God that is fulfilled as the beatific vision in heaven. Then we will “see” God “face to face” (1 Corinthians 13:12) and become like God. Being like God, we will understand everything about everything as God alone can do; and with the fullness of love, we will love everything that is loveable. The dynamism of human consciousness will reach its ideal fulfillment. Enjoying these qualities proper only to God, we will share something of the divine nature. Of course, no creature could ever share God’s “un-createdness,” God’s eternal existence. For Christianity, deification is the ultimate goal of spiritual growth. Thus, from the Christian perspective, the humanistic psychological process of spiritual growth is literally an ever-intensifying union with God (D. A. Helminiak, 1987).

THE INTERACTION OF THE SPIRIT AND THE PSYCHE

There is more to be said about this purely humanistic understanding of spirituality. Once human consciousness is elaborated with the clarity of Lonergan’s analyses, it becomes clear that human mentality contains more than consciousness. Other phenomena occur in the mind—emotions, memory, imagery, and conations or urges. Lonergan subsumes these mental phenomena under the category *psyche* (Doran, 1981; D. A. Helminiak, 1996b, pp. 129–191; B. J. F. Lonergan, 1992, pp. 481–482). Interrelatedly, these phenomena do cohere: Natural urges, for example, can be expressed in images, be laden with emotion,

elaborated with memories, and then underlie habitual patterns of behavior, personality. Of course, the term *psyche* enjoys an array of meanings but commonly refers to the whole of the mind or to the soul, in contrast to the organism (Furnham, 1983, p. 493; VandenBos, 2007, p. 747). But Lonergan borrows the term *psyche* to refer to only one aspect of the mind. Consciousness, or spirit, is the other aspect. Thus, there results a tripartite model of the human. Not just “body and mind” or in religion “body and soul,” the human is a composite of “organism, psyche, and consciousness”—or more popularly said, “body, psyche, and spirit.”

Psyche is that dimension of mentality that we share with other animals, especially the mammals and, above all, the primates. They do have genuine mentality (Bekoff, Allen, & Burghardt, 2002; Donald, 2001; Griffin, 2001; Menzel & Fischer, 2011; Premack, 1986; Wynne & Udell, 2013), but it is not conscious to them as a possible object of experience. They cannot experience and then think about their mental processing as we do. Therein lies the difference between animal and human mind, I would argue (D. A. Helminiak, 1996b, pp. 151–162, 2015a, pp. 244–249, 304–305). Only humans are conscious, self-present, in part spiritual.

As stated, spirituality is commitment to transcendence, and spiritual growth is the resultant ongoing integration of the human spirit with the other facets of the person. Yet this process does not go on in a vacuum. Explaining the spirit, I spoke only of it and its functioning in the pure case. But in a person body, psyche, and spirit are interactive; and psyche not only supports, but also easily distorts spiritual functioning. Emotions cloud good thinking, and habitual dishonesty blunts sensitivity to truth, for example. But together and for the most part, psyche and spirit maintain a working equilibrium that sufficiently passes for mental health. In this process, the psyche is the more stable factor, sustaining a status quo; its concern is to be settled in, to be comfortable. It would stick with the routine “programmed in” through natural propensities, early up-bringing, the social environment, and the trends of history. Psyche is what determines the differences among people and shows differently in different cultures. So psyche—and the organism—account for the different forms and manifestations of spirituality, all in their own way expressing one and the same human authenticity that the spirit calls forth. In contrast, the spirit is a dynamic factor, the same in everyone, ever open to experience, ever urging onward to further personal integration and advance beyond the status quo. This tug and pull within the mind is the mechanism of personal growth, which is, given the spirit, also spiritual growth. Within the whole thrust of cosmogenesis and evolution, on the emergence of consciousness, see Helminiak, (D. A. Helminiak, 2015a, pp. 171–206), the ultimate goal is for the spirit to take the lead and for organism and psyche, in their diverse configurations, to harmonize, in ever unique ways, with that advancing movement. Of course, only in varying degrees do people achieve this goal. “Human authenticity is never some pure and serene and secure possession. It is ever a withdrawal from unauthenticity, and every successful withdrawal only brings to light the need for still further withdrawals” (B. J. F. Lonergan, 2001, p. 110). Those advanced in this way are the saints, the gurus, the mahatmas, the holy ones. And these terms suggest that this humanistic account of spirituality can flow naturally into religious and theist accounts, as already noted.

If spiritual growth is nothing other than personal integration fully conceived, it becomes obvious that today’s psychotherapy can correctly be understood as a spiritual practice, and a particularly powerful one. For attention to psyche is the *practical key* to spirituality. In contrast, the spirit is the *explanatory or theoretical key* to spirituality. That is, attention to the human spirit offers an explanation of spirituality, as is being elaborated here. But understanding alone does not effect change. A diagnosis of pneumonia, for example, can reveal what the ailment is, but the required procedures are needed to effect a cure. Similarly, once understood, in one way or another, attention to the psyche is needed to advance spiritual growth.

Only through massaging and shifting the psyche can the spirit be gradually integrated and become more dominant in a person's make-up. Psychotherapy or life-shaking traumas or, more gently, those standard spiritual practices listed above, all foster changes in the psyche and advance personal integration and, thus, spiritual development [for example, Helminiak, (2005); Richards (2015)].

This understanding of spirituality as personal integration stands in contrast to prevalent earlier understandings that tended to emphasize asceticism above all (Tanqueray, 1930). Commonly, spiritual growth was thought to be a matter of suppressing the body, controlling the emotions, reining in natural inclinations. Sheer willpower and heroic determination were often conceived as the key to spiritual growth. Today's psychology offers another perspective. Rather than suppression, the goal is acceptance and integration of all facets of one's being such that, in the ideal, all would eventually support the unfolding of the human spirit as the prime determinative for human living. To be sure, appropriate commitment and self-discipline would still be needed, but body, psyche, and spirit would all be moving in congenial harmony attentively, intelligently, reasonably, and responsibly.

FURTHER ELABORATION AND SUMMARY IMPLICATIONS

I have offered a fully naturalistic, or psychological, theory of spirituality. Further elaboration is surely necessary, and it is available in my publications cited in this article. I suggested that this theory entails a new paradigm for psychology and clarification of the relationship between religion and psychology, so I now mention some implications in summary of the theory.

First, Lonergan's elaboration of human consciousness, especially in contrast to other treatments of it, makes an unprecedented contribution for understanding the human mind (D. A. Helminiak, 2015a, 2015b; McCarthy, 1999; Webb, 1988). There is nothing on consciousness as coherent and elaborated in the scholarly literature, as far as I know.

Second, the distinction between consciousness and psyche requires that the standard bipartite model of the human, "body and mind," be nuanced as a tripartite model, "body, psyche, and spirit." The tripartite model will benefit theoretical psychology by keeping in focus the overlooked distinction between psyche and consciousness. Regarding the religions, one practical implication regards, for example, the ambiguous stance of many religions toward sexuality. Based on the Aristotelian and Thomistic theory of "matter and form" and grounded also in the Bible, the argument is that God created humans as a unity of "body and soul." To differentiate humans, this formula can appeal only to the body, male and female. But LGBTQ issues pertain to the psyche, which is lacking in the bipartite formula (D. A. Helminiak, 2018, 2019).

Third, the explanation of human consciousness as a spiritual reality definitively discredits the materialism that has been so influential in the human sciences and our world overall. Psyche is already immaterial. On the other hand, this explanation also restricts the religions from all too easily equating anything spiritual with God (D. A. Helminiak, 2017).

Fourth, specification of the four transcendental precepts allows human psychology to be normative. As medical science prescribes requirements for health, a complete psychology can authoritatively prescribe wholesome ways of living. This task is no longer a protected privilege of religion, and the religions should attune their teaching more closely to the findings of empirical science.

Fifth, therefore, psychology and the other human or social sciences can advance from academic disciplines to genuine, mature, explanatory sciences (Daniel A. Helminiak & Feingold, 2011).

Sixth, a psychological theory of spirituality clarifies the nature of authentic human living, what has been called virtuous, saintly, holy, or godly. Thus, matters that have traditionally been under the purview

of the religions, with their sometimes culturally varying criteria, can now be assessed empirically to some extent and their validity judged against standard consensual criteria (Daniel A. Helminiak, Feingold, & Donahue, 2020).

Seventh, inversely, as modern medicine might discredit some folk practices, for example, a normative, explanatory theory of spirituality now allows psychology to authoritatively criticize the religions insofar as they might impede human wellbeing—some of which is already happening, as in this simple example regarding the psychologically misguided biblical advice, “Spare the rod and spoil the child” (see Proverbs 13:24).

Eighth, a coherent theory of spirituality allows psychology to explain the mechanisms and effectiveness of traditional spiritual practices—how attention to things sacred elicits spiritual experiences—such as meditation, drug ingestion, fasting, or sleep deprivation (D. A. Helminiak, 2005, 2015a); and the theory could also authoritatively discredit harmful practices.

Ninth, grounded in humanity itself, a psychology of spirituality would be valid for all people across diverse cultures. It supplies a common basis to ground a spiritual dimension even within secular societies. The growing irrelevance of religion (Inglehart, 2021) can be redressed by invocation of spiritual concerns essential simply to human living. Then, without the imposition of religious requisites, explicitly spiritualized secular societies could again, but less dogmatically, achieve a coherence as in earlier eras in which society, culture, and religion were in harmony.

Lastly, this naturalistic spirituality highlights the commonalities among the world’s religions. It should foster harmony among them. Thus, through a common message in their public declarations, the religions could collaboratively foster wholesome living on planet Earth. At the same time, in their “in house” practices, they could continue to respect their traditional particularistic worldviews and sustain their inherited rituals—insofar as they foster and do not counter human authenticity (D. A. Helminiak, 2008). A purification of the religions becomes a realistic expectation, and a novel and solid basis for world peace could now be at hand.

CONCLUSION

Under the name of psychology, I have presented a summary of a humanistic spirituality. It elaborated the essential nature of spirituality grounded in the human spirit, or consciousness, and it clarified the relationships among psychology, spirituality, naturalistic spiritualities, theism, and theosis. I hope this summary interdisciplinary statement will find welcome in the social sciences and the religions. I hope it would provoke sufficient interest both to further advance theoretical psychology and its applications in psychotherapy and to suggest a refined understanding of religion and its role in the postmodern world.

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