

## THE ROLE OF SPIRITUALITY IN FORMULATING A THEORY OF THE PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION

by *Daniel A. Helminiak*

**Abstract.** I challenge the psychology of religion to move beyond its merely descriptive status and, by focusing on spirituality as the essential dimension of religion, to approach the traditional ideal of science as explanation: a delineation of the necessary and sufficient to account for a phenomenon such as to articulate a general “law” relevant to every instance of the phenomenon. An explanatory psychology of spirituality would elucidate the scientific underpinnings of the psychology of religion as well as that of the social sciences in general, all of which grapple with the issues of human meaning making. Three prevalent and debilitating errors preclude that achievement: (1) the confounding of the spiritual and the divine and the importation of “God” into psychology; (2) the uncritical association of any spiritual phenomenon with spirituality, and (3) the attempt to eschew value judgments from the study of religion and spirituality. To confirm the possibility of avoiding these errors in the face of radical postmodernism, I build on Bernard Lonergan’s analyses of intentional consciousness, or human spirit, and thus intimate a psychology of spirituality that is fully nontheological and potentially explanatory.

**Keywords:** consciousness; definition of spirituality; God and social science; Bernard Lonergan; nature of spirit; psychology of religion; psychology of spirituality; *sui generis* nature of religion; value-free and value-laden science.

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Religion and spirituality have recently become respectable topics in psychology. In 1988 the American Psychological Association (1988) added *spirituality* to the list of terms in its computerized database, PsycLit (now PsycINFO), which contains thousands of items. Moreover, the codes of ethics of the American Psychological Association (1992) and the American

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Counseling Association (1995) now require that psychotherapists be respectfully open to all clients' religions. And long-standing research programs on religion now routinely include research on spirituality.

However, serious ambiguity surrounds the psychological treatment of spirituality. There is widespread recognition that the notion of spirituality is "fuzzy" (cf. Hill et al. 2000; LaPierre 1994; Sheldrake 1992; Spilka 1993, 1996; Zinnbauer, Pargament, and Scott 1999). In most cases, the term *spirituality* functions simply as a generic and politically correct alternative for *religion* (Spilka 1996), and the terms are used interchangeably (Hall and Edwards 2002; Mahoney et al. 1999; Miller 1999; Pargament 1997; Slife and Richards 2001; Watts 2001). The *psychology of spirituality* often merely names what traditionally was the psychology of religion (Pargament 1999). The relationship between religion and spirituality is highly debated (Hill et al. 2000; Hood et al. 1996, 115–16; Pargament 1999; Rayburn 1996; Simkinson 1996; Zinnbauer et al. 1997; Wulff 1997, 5–6), and complicating the debate is the fact that there is not even agreement on what *religion* is (Cohn 1962; Meadow and Kahoe 1984; Paloutzian 1983; Pargament 1997; Wulff 1997). Nonetheless, whether or not spirituality is ultimately separable from religion, spirituality is surely one dimension of religion (Pargament 1997; 1999; Helminiak 1996a; 1998; Hill et al. 2000)—an essential dimension. Robert Emmons builds his research program in spirituality around this assumption. To support his case, he invokes Paul Tillich to the effect that "the essence of religion, in the broadest and most inclusive sense, is *ultimate concern*" (Emmons 1999, 8).

If spirituality is an essential dimension of religion, as is presumed here, clarification of spirituality and specification of its relationship to religion should help focus the nature of the psychological study of religion. Indeed, insofar as it can be argued that a spiritual dimension is distinctive of the human species, this clarification would help focus the nature of the social sciences in general. Such is the general argument of this essay.

Specifically, I address methodological issues bearing on the clarification of spirituality as a facet of psychological concern and research. The term *methodological* is used in its broad sense (Lonergan 1972) here; it refers not to specific procedures that govern research practice but to the preliminary and guiding definitions that set off an area of research and to the foundational or presuppositional decisions that determine a research program. For example, psychology, philosophy, and confessional theologies are all at stake and have a stake in the study of spirituality. Because in themselves these diverse fields demand different research approaches—different methodologies, in the narrow sense—the definition of these fields and the specification of their interrelationships also are methodological issues in the broad sense. The question is, How does one go about studying spirituality psychologically? I suggest that, unless the field is carefully delineated, the study is doomed to failure. At issue is methodology.

In this essay I call for a psychology of spirituality that is explanatory, not merely descriptive, and clarify what the goal of an explanatory psychology of spirituality entails. Because spirituality is an essential dimension of religion, deployment of an explanatory psychology of spirituality will bring clarity to the psychology of religion. The first section introduces this matter. Next, highlighting three methodological challenges to that goal, I address in turn three prevalent errors in the current psychology of spirituality: the confounding of the spiritual and the divine, the uncritical association of the spiritual with spirituality, and the attempt to avoid value judgments in the study of spirituality and religion. These challenges are daunting. Therefore, in order to confirm the possibility of actually avoiding these errors and meeting these challenges, at various points I intimate a possible explanatory approach to the psychology of spirituality. Without the availability of an alternative, it seems unlikely—at least in my experience—that one could recognize the ambiguities in the standard approach, so much are they part of current psychological culture.

#### THE CHALLENGE OF AN EXPLANATORY SCIENCE OF RELIGION

The overall need is to advance the scientific study of religion from a descriptive to an explanatory level. Much psychological study of religion is merely descriptive. It characterizes religious groups, documents their similarities and differences, studies their behaviors, and notes shifting trends (Hood et al. 1996), but it does not say why these things occur as they do. Accordingly, research findings, as in much of social science, tend to produce detailed accounts that philosopher Charles Taylor described as “wordy elaborations of the obvious” (quoted in Richardson, Fowers, and Guignon 1999, 1). Assessing what is probably the richest vein of research in the psychology of religion, Lee Kirkpatrick and Ralph Hood (1990, 453) comment, “The large number of published and unpublished studies in which these scales [measuring intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity] have been used have not really advanced the state of knowledge in the field much at all.” The collection of observational data, the descriptive function proper to incipient science, certainly has its place, but description is not yet science in its purest sense, explanation.

The challenge of explanation is to determine the necessary and sufficient factors to account for the phenomenon or, said otherwise, to specify the structures, mechanisms, and processes that essentially underlie it (Helminiak 1998). Barnet Feingold’s analogy is revealing (Feingold and Helminiak 2000). Suppose one wanted to study nutrition. Would one go to a supermarket to compile a detailed list of people’s purchases and compare the differences? Would one suppose that by noting the contents of shopping carts one could understand nutrition? The study of religion often has followed this shopping-cart model. Dutifully respectful of every person’s preferences, the psychology of religion catalogues people’s beliefs and

spiritual practices and compares them with one another (American Counseling Association 1995; American Psychological Association 1992; Dueck 2002; Holden 1996; Slife and Richards 2001; Tan 2002; 2003; Watts 2001). This consumerist approach could never result in an explanation of religion. Some breakthrough in understanding the nature of religion (or nutrition) is needed to categorize, weigh, assess, and interrelate the items in the shopping cart.

Attempts to sort out broad types of religion—intrinsic versus extrinsic (Allport and Ross 1967; Donahue 1985; Gorsuch and Miller 1999; Kirkpatrick and Hood 1990) and then religion as quest (Batson and Schoenrade 1991a, b)—do reach toward explanation. These different types of religion envision inherent religious configurations that could explain how religion functions and to what effect. However, a long line of research in this vein has not been successful: The proposed constructs do not prove to be discrete, and the expected correlations with them do not result (Donahue 1985; Kirkpatrick and Hood 1990). Evidently, this line of research is not addressing essential factors—the necessary and sufficient—to explain religion. Some other approach is needed.

Moreover, even today there is continued insistence that the psychology of religion—and, indeed, all science—is a value-free enterprise (Kirkpatrick and Hood 1990; Spilka and McIntosh 1996). Although intended to clarify the nature of science and thus to advance its explanatory power, such insistence debilitates the scientific enterprise by diverting attention from an issue that is essential, especially in the case of religion. For example, the categories of religion as intrinsic, extrinsic, and questlike were evaluative in their theoretical beginnings, the concern being to differentiate better or worse forms of religion (Allport and Ross 1967; Donahue 1985). Yet a value-free perspective neutrally views these categories as simply different and equally valid kinds or experiences of religion. The upshot is that research of these categories cannot evaluate specific religious commitments by explaining their usefulness or lack of usefulness to wholesome living.

Insistence on a value-free approach is especially problematic for the study of religion. The religions are, themselves, inherently value-laden: They propose beliefs to be held and ethics to be lived, and each offers a particular set of beliefs and ethics. Whereas a key religious claim is that these beliefs and ethics foster richer life, a value-free approach must avoid the substance of this claim. A value-free psychology of religion cannot say what religious expression is richer or poorer, why such judgment would be legitimate, and how the various positive or negative religious effects result. Such science must ignore a defining aspect of religion.

The longstanding debate over religious studies versus theology centers on this very matter (Pals 1987; Segal and Wiebe 1989; Wiebe 1984). The religious-studies approach is that of the social sciences in their current,

standard, descriptive mode; it would study religion neutrally as a phenomenon amenable to current research methodologies. In contrast, the theological or confessional approach would insist that religion deals with a *sui generis* phenomenon—the holy, God, the sacred, the transcendent—that is not amenable to scientific methodologies. The theological approach is correct at least to this extent: Until scientific methodology deals with the *sui generis* nature of religion (Helminiak 1998, 50–56), including its value-laden status, a psychology of religion can never be truly explanatory.

Siding with the theology camp, I acknowledge a *sui generis* core of religion but suggest that spirituality is that *sui generis* core and that adequate attention to spirituality would therefore significantly contribute to an explanatory psychology of religion. Nonetheless, also siding with the religious-studies camp, I suggest that spirituality is the product of an inherently and completely human capacity, so in the first instance spirituality and its study can be extricated from the complexities of theist belief and metaphysical speculation. Spirituality can become an empirically grounded science. Hence, the focus of discussion here shifts from religion to spirituality.

In fact, as a result of a recent shift in the popular culture, spirituality has become a topic within the psychology of religion (Hill and Hood 1999, 359; Larson, Swyers, and McCullough 1998; Ram Dass 1989; Schneiders 1989; Wulff 1997, 5–7). However, the old methodology—the shopping-cart model—prevails, and the results follow suit (Spilka and McIntosh 1996): Spirituality is taken to be whatever its practitioners profess, an array of different spiritualities is described, and attempts to measure spirituality depend on assumptions borrowed from particular religions or spiritualities (Gorsuch and Miller 1999, 48; Hill and Hood 1999, 3). Indeed, it is debatable whether the psychology of spirituality differs at all from the psychology of religion (Belzen 2002; Pargament 1999; Slife and Richards 2001; Wulff 1997; Zinnbauer et al. 1997; Zinnbauer, Pargament, and Scott 1999). William Miller and Carl Thoresen (1999, 14) recognize that something more is needed. Speaking of the documented positive effect of many spiritual practices, they lament that “little is known about why this occurs.” Similarly, commenting on consonant findings in his own team’s research, Emmons confesses, “The mechanisms responsible for these links remain largely unknown” (1999, 106). What is needed is a breakthrough that accounts for spirituality in terms of its essential dimensions and, thus, produces a psychology of spirituality that is explanatory and, perforce, able to account for and assess all instances of spirituality.

But what is *spirituality*? Most accounts suggest that it deals with people’s visions of meaning, purpose, and values insofar as in some way these foster self-transcendence. Miller and Thoresen, for example, insist on the “spiritual relevance” of concerns not labeled as spiritual but “referred to as personal values or philosophy of life issues” (1999, 13; see also Gorsuch and Miller 1999). Likewise, Emmons understands spirituality “to encompass

a search for meaning, for unity, for connectedness, for transcendence, and for the highest of human potential" (1999, 5). Similarly, resonating with Tillich's "ultimate concern," Jacob Belzen (2002) defines spirituality simply as "commitment to transcendence." I have defined it as "concern for transcendence" (Helminiak 1996a, 33). Accordingly, and although the term is used in many different ways, here spirituality—the object of study in the psychology of spirituality—is taken to be most essentially a concern for self-transcendence, and it is assumed that this concern is specified and lived out via some personally held set of beliefs and practices.

Three points will help clarify this definition of spirituality. First, "beliefs and practices" is a two-part formula that could be expressed in different ways. Other parallel formulations for the same or very closely related phenomena are doctrines and ethics/morals, or visions and virtues, or ideas and ideals, or meanings and values, or understandings and evaluations, or cognitions and choices, or, paralleling the medieval distinction between intellect and will, knowledge and love. Erich Fromm (1947; 1973) spoke of religion as meeting the human need for orientation and devotion. This twofold essential of spirituality is difficult to formulate in universally understood ways, but it is pervasive in human experience and pervasive in discourses across the humanities and the social sciences—hence my claim that it represents something that is inherently and simply human, not divine or otherworldly. In addition, the two-part formula is a shorthand version of Bernard Lonergan's (1972) four "levels" of consciousness, introduced below.

Second, the centrality of "beliefs and practices" in that definition—or, more pointedly formulated, "doctrines and ethics/morals"—suggests once again that spirituality is indeed related to religion, though the beliefs and practices in every case may not be strictly religious. All people, religious or not, hold some understanding about life and some concomitant commitment to live according to that understanding, and via such commitment many explicitly intend to achieve some kind of "growth." Therefore, the proposed definition applies to both religiously and nonreligiously affiliated spirituality, although for most people religion is the source of the overarching ideas and ideals that structure their lives.

Finally, according to the proposed definition, spirituality not only entails a sense of transcendence expressed in some set of visions and virtues but also includes an explicit concern for such transcendence. Although all people live by a set of beliefs and values of some kind or other, spirituality entails, additionally, explicit concern for growth or movement, deliberate commitment to self-transcendence, along the lines of the meanings and values that one holds. Emmons (1999, 91) documents this emphasis throughout the Western tradition. Kenneth Pargament (1997, 34) likewise includes "search" as a defining characteristic of spirituality. Insistence on this concern functions precisely to specify spirituality as a deliberate

dimension of living different from the passive possibility of living without any deliberate pursuit of growth or self-enhancement consonant with one's chosen beliefs and values. Hence, spirituality is understood as an active and deliberate endeavor.

The definition of spirituality developed in the previous paragraphs presupposes and expresses the understanding of spirituality that unfolds throughout this essay. Assuming this definition, I argue that, apart from any specific religion, spirituality is a legitimate topic of an explanatory psychology and, as explained, is open to embodiment in an array of specific religions. Hence, a psychology of spirituality would focus the psychology of religion and clarify the relationship between religion and spirituality. At stake in this enterprise is the traditional ideal of a science: the exposition of the necessary and sufficient causal conditions to account for a phenomenon such that the accounting articulates a general "law" relevant to every instance of the phenomenon. The goal is a single explanation that accurately applies to diverse instances of spirituality.

Three interrelated considerations generally confound the psychological treatment of spirituality: the implication of God and theist belief in spirituality, the identification of spirituality with any engagement whatsoever with the spiritual, and the value-free leveling of all spiritualities. These three are interrelated because, when a gratuitously imported God provides an unexplicated standard of the good, then God, the spiritual, and positive values tend to be identified, and spirituality is taken to be a commitment to this amalgam. Sorting out these matters will extricate the discussion from confounding entanglements and delineate the parameters of an explanatory psychology of spirituality envisioned here.

#### DISIDENTIFICATION OF THE SPIRITUAL AND THE DIVINE

*The Confounding of Theism and Spirituality.* Because Western religion centers on belief in God, spirituality is commonly understood to regard one's relationship with God. This understanding is pervasive and controls the field, as documentation and discussion here show. For example, writing for the field of secular nursing, Judith Shelly and Sharon Fish (1988, 29) state unabashedly, "That we are spiritual beings means a relationship with God is basic to our total functioning." Similarly, among the six "Scales of Spirituality and Mysticism" that Peter Hill and Hood chose to include in their volume of select *Measures of Religiosity* (1999, 359–38), five explicitly implicate God, and the sixth, "Mysticism Scale—Research Form D," includes the religious terms *holy*, *divine*, and *sacred*.

But opinions about God abound and are beyond adjudication, and theological consensus holds that God ultimately exceeds the capacities of human understanding, in any case (Armstrong 1993). Insofar as a construct such as "relationship with God" is implicated in a psychological enterprise, the enterprise is embroiled in irresolvable controversy. Moreover, the

enterprise exceeds the limits of its own professional competence (Stifoss-Hanssen 1999; Tjeltveit 1986) so that, as Brent D. Slife and P. Scott Richards (2001) insist, to treat of human beings, every psychologist is or must eventually become a theologian. Worst of all, the enterprise is simply misguided, mistaken, wrong. Implicating God and relationship with God in psychology guarantees senseless and ultimately contentless discussion. The methodological consequences at stake are specific and real and cannot be avoided.

The same conclusion applies to other formulations that make central to spirituality things like higher power (Emmons 1999; Kass et al. 1991), the sacred (Emmons 1999; Pargament 1997; Hill et al. 2000; Larson, Swyers, and McCullough 1998), the supernatural (Rayburn 1996), the inscrutable (Schneider 2004), and the ultimate or the absolute (Wilber 1996). Avoiding explicit reference to God, these formulations are “God-substitutes.” They posit constructs that continue to function as God, so the implied referents of God-substitutes must be extraneous to a psychological study of spirituality. To the extent that these referents are considered essential to spirituality, they also embroil a psychology of spirituality in matters that are inherently inexplicable and that exceed the scope of psychological competence.

*The sacred* is the most common of the God-substitutes and features in “A Consensus Report” sponsored by The John Templeton Foundation (Larson, Swyers, and McCullough 1998). Pargament, for example, originally defined the sacred as “a concept that includes the divine and the beliefs, practices, feelings, and relationships associated with the divine” (1997, 31). Later, apparently refining the construct, he explained that “the Sacred is a person, an object, a principle, or a concept that transcends the self” and that, “though the Sacred may be found within the self, it has perceived value independent of the self” (Hill et al. 2000, 64). One wonders why “the Sacred,” in the tradition of reference to God, is capitalized and what the Sacred “found within the self” but “independent of the self” would actually be. Whatever this Sacred is, it stands as something or someone other than the person relating to it. This construct appears to be built on the model of “God” and broadened to perhaps include something that is not strictly God, but its characteristics, even when not strictly divine, still function as those of God. To the extent that such a nonhuman reality, other than the self and peculiar in nature, is taken to be an essential of spirituality, one wonders how psychology could ever legitimately treat of spirituality. It could not. The fact that psychological studies may legitimately include as a significant consideration interaction with other people or with one’s physical environment does not legitimate interaction with God as a legitimate psychological consideration. According to all theological insistence (Aquinas 1955; Armstrong 1993; Lao Tzu 1972; Lonergan [1957] 1992; Tillich 1968), God is of a wholly different order from other things to which people can relate, so treatment of relationship with



God would require a different methodology: theology. Appeal to God-substitutes does not avoid this problem but, rather, obfuscates it.

Likewise, Ken Wilber's talk of the Absolute or the Ultimate is clearly a generic way of talking about God, for in different places, indiscriminately mixing Eastern and Western concepts, Wilber uses other terms to speak of this same supposed reality: "God or Buddha Nature or Tao" (1996, 34), "Godhead or the absolute" (1996, 162), or "(choose whatever term one prefers) God" (1996, 93). Of course, Wilber has no intention of avoiding the implication of God in his account of spirituality. Indeed, he takes this implication to a new level.

Relying on Eastern religion and philosophy, Wilber outright identifies human and divine consciousness: "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" (Wilber 1980, 75–76). Far from merely relating to God, on this understanding people actually are God—the human is the divine. This confounding of humanity and divinity makes impossible any purely psychological treatment of spirituality.

Accepting for the sake of argument the longstanding coherent logic of Western theology, *God* names that which explains the existence of all things; God is Creator, and all else is created (Helminiak 1987, chap. 5). Then, apart from any concern about religious commitments, to identify God and the human is to violate the principle of noncontradiction: The created is supposedly the Uncreated. Likewise, according to that same longstanding logical argument, God does not come in parts or degrees. Then, to speak of the human as somewhat divine is conceptually incoherent. Accordingly, one must wonder why, if the divine and the human are identical or if the divine is some specific dimension of the human or vice versa, two different terms are retained as if naming two different realities. Scientific research can hardly afford such ambiguity on a matter so central to the field. The extreme example of Wilber's position, which has become the paradigm in transpersonal psychology (Helminiak 2001a; 1998, 213–92; Marquis, Holden, and Warren 2001), highlights the methodological problem in a psychological explanation of spirituality via appeal to God or God-substitutes.

To be sure, these theist matters are highly debated, so I do not suggest that they can be resolved here. I do insist that identification of the human and the divine entails fundamental logical inconsistencies and suggest that there may be a way of treating spirituality without succumbing to such inconsistencies. In no way does this insistence on extricating God from psychology—whether as Someone/Something to whom humans relate or as the supposed innermost essence of the human—intend to address the question of whether God exists or to imply that there is no way whatsoever to treat of God. Allusions to a coherent treatment of God as Creator have

just been given. The point is only that such matters are simply not psychological.

However, people's beliefs about God and their images of God are another matter. Because these are fully human constructs, they are amenable to empirical investigation and do fall within the purview of psychology. Moreover, whatever else they might be and wherever they might derive, religious images, beliefs, and attitudes in the mind of any believer are his or her own and thus are merely human realities. Indeed, they may even be delusional or hallucinatory. Therefore, the mystique accorded supposed divine beliefs, relationship with God, revealed opinions, supernatural knowledge, or claimed cosmic ultimacy must fall away, and religious beliefs need to be acknowledged as but one instance of the sets of meanings and values that structure all human living, whether religious or secular. From God or other proposed ultimates, attention must revert to the strictly human and ordinary process of meaning making.

Todd Hall and Keith Edwards (2002) offer a rich and explicit example in this case. They present the Spiritual Assessment Inventory (SAI), grounded in object-relations theory, to measure one's spiritual development as a function of one's relationship with God. Each of the 54 items in the inventory assesses one's human-divine relationship in terms of good or bad object relations as currently understood.

On a theoretical level, important methodological questions arise. Because the inventory explicitly construes "God" on the model of idealized object relations, why should this inventory claim to measure relationship with God *per se*? Were Hall and Edwards to credit, not merely acknowledge, the difference between actual relationship with God and relationship with one's own image of God, the presentation of their research project would be more accurate. But would their claim to be dealing with "spiritual development" still be justified? If so, on what basis? Apparently, only "relationship with God" qualifies their inventory as a measure of spirituality. If God is not actually in the picture but only a person's affect-laden image of God, their inventory must be seen to deal in standard psychodynamic matters—cleverly and innovatively, to be sure, using religion to test the quality of a person's object relations, but still not departing from intrapsychic issues. Thus, in the purported realm of spirituality, the SAI is doing what Kirkpatrick and Hood suggest the scale of extrinsic religiosity is doing in its own realm, namely, "not really measuring religion at all . . . [but] . . . tapping, rather inadvertently, individual differences in more pervasive personality or cognitive characteristics, with religion merely providing the vehicle or manifestation of this trait" (1990, 454).

Hall and Edwards explicitly note that they are presenting "a theistic model" (2002) particularly suited to Christian contexts. But, again, why should the generic expression *spiritual development* pertain to this approach? Eastern religions and even much Western meditative practice insist that

movement toward God requires transcending all images, feelings, and thoughts and entering into an experience of pure presence devoid of all content (Ram Dass 1989; Keating and Pennington 1978; Kornfield 1989; Suzuki ([1970] 1976). Emphasis on object relations flies in the face of such meditative practice and its elaborated understanding of spirituality.

Granted these preliminary reservations, even more serious questions arise. Clearly, Hall and Edwards's inventory is value-laden; it accepts as normative the criteria of psychological health derived from object-relations theory. But even apart from the major question of whether or not those criteria are scientifically defensible as accurate indicators of human well-being—and apart from the equally ungrounded assumption that religious belief must automatically be granted validity—why should those criteria take precedence over religious belief, and why should one accept them to criticize religious beliefs?

Hall and Edwards have such criticism built into their inventory. In the Grandiosity subscale, the inventory negatively rates some standard aspects of religion: that others might not understand one's extraordinary relationship with God, that the prayers of some people are more effective than those of others, and that some people have the charism of discerning the will of God; and likewise in the Instability subscale: that God punishes people or that God might utterly reject a person (in hell). In the Disappointment subscale there is the supposition that it is unhealthy to feel frustrated and irritated with, or betrayed by, God; yet Elijah's despair with God in the wilderness (1 Kings 19:1–8), Jeremiah's (20:7) "Lord, you duped me," and Jesus' "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me" (Mark 15:34) suggest that the SAI is not even true to Christianity. In the Awareness subscale, the reality of the feeling of God's presence, the sense of direction that God gives to one's life, and the experience of communication with and help from God—these positively scored items might well imply delusions or hallucinations (Helminiak 1984b), and they could apply equally to some saintly person as to the terrorists who destroyed the World Trade Center (Helminiak 2002) or, still closer to home, to religiously self-justified racists, male chauvinists, gay bashers, and abortion-clinic bombers (Helminiak 1997).

What qualifies this inventory as a measure of spiritual development? In the name of psychological science, the SAI employs a personal and arguably gratuitous understanding of spirituality and an idiosyncratic conception of God to construct a measure of spiritual development that is supposedly appropriate for research, clinical practice, and ecclesiastical screening of ministerial candidates (Hall and Edwards 2002). In this case as in others (Dueck 2002; Marquis, Holden, and Warren 2001; Richards and Bergin 2005; Slife and Richards 2001; Tan 2002; 2003), recent psychological openness to religion may be becoming an occasion for smuggling into psychological practice or protecting from criticism the specific

belief-and-value systems of particular people and groups. The importation of God and then, necessarily, particular images of God into psychological constructs can hardly avoid such an outcome.

As commonly conceived, spirituality implicates God in another way. As part of the experience central to spirituality, people claim to actually experience God. Others, while not speaking specifically of God, a Western construct, report similar transcendent experiences (Hood 1995; McGinn 1995). In most cases—Buddhism may be an instructive exception with its emphasis on “Buddha Nature,” a dimension of the human mind—the religions relate these experiences to something beyond the human. Now, insofar as these are people’s experiences, they do legitimately pertain to psychology; but insofar as they are supposedly experiences of something nonhuman, God or some such thing, these experiences are entangled in the nonhuman and the transempirical and are not amenable to psychological investigation. Here is the telling question that a psychologist cannot fail to ask: Are these transcendent experiences really experiences of God? Recent research into the neurophysiology of transcendent experiences increases the urgency of this question (Albright and Ashbrook 2001; Crutcher 2003; d’Aquili and Newberg 1999), and unqualified use of the term *entheogens*—“sources of God within”—to refer to psychedelic drugs (Forte 2000) suggests how pervasive is the uncritical identification of such experiences with the experience of God.

Of course, a definitive answer to that question is impossible, and attention to it diverts discussion away from psychological concern and competence and toward the theological or metaphysical. However, if the transcendent experiences in question could be explained apart from appeal to God, to that extent the question about God becomes moot in psychology and can be left to the devotion of believers and the reasoning of theologians. Moreover, if the explanation appeals to some human capacity, these experiences fall within the bounds of legitimate psychological concern. I suggest that the latter is the case. From a psychological perspective, identification of the spiritual with the divine is not only mistaken and inevitably obfuscating but also fully unnecessary. There is an account of transcendent experience that has no need to appeal to God.

LONERGANIAN FOUNDATIONS FOR A PROPOSED  
PSYCHOLOGY OF SPIRITUALITY

*Intentional Consciousness or Human Spirit, an Inherent Ground of Spirituality.* Within the human mind there is a self-transcending dimension that is a topic of perennial philosophical discussion. Emmons intimates something of the kind when he strategically takes “no formal position on the existence of spiritual [that is, supernatural] realities” but, rather, wants to understand “the spiritual side of personality” (1999, 8). Using Lonergan’s terminology ([1957] 1992, 519; 1972, 13, 302), call this dimension of the

mind “intentional consciousness”—or human “spirit.” If this dimension of the human mind is rightly called “spiritual,” and if it can be analyzed and sufficiently articulated, it could ground a psychological treatment of spirituality (Helminiak 1987; 1996a, b; 1998; 2001b; 2005).

Loneragan claims to have done such an analysis and provided such an articulation. Fundamentally, this self-transcending dimension of the human mind is experienced as wonder, marvel, and awe. It sets us human beings ever beyond ourselves in a forward-looking dynamism, the purview of which is open-ended. This is to say, as “I” a person is always more than what he or she knows of him- or herself as “me.” The essence of human subjectivity is self-transcendence. Intentionally aware of any object or even of ourselves as an object to ourselves, we also are consciously aware of ourselves as the aware subject, aware of our own awareness. Human consciousness is both intentional and conscious (Helminiak 1984a; 1996a; Lonergan [1957] 1992, 344–46; 1972, 7–10; Roy 2003). Our conscious awareness can always be promoted to intentional awareness as we become an ever richer object to ourselves. Yet, even as our conscious awareness gets objectified in intentional awareness, another backdrop of conscious awareness always already contextualizes our experience and never-endingly sets up the conditions for another round of objectification, the promotion of conscious to intentional awareness. We are always more than we know or can say, for we are the always not-yet-articulated knower and speaker. The distance between what we can say and what we already somehow experience consciously constitutes our sense of wonder, marvel, and awe and determines the open-ended dynamism that is our human consciousness or spirit.

*The Structure of Human Consciousness or Spirit.* According to Lonergan, human consciousness is structured in four interacting levels/dimensions/facets/aspects (the multiplication of terms is to ward off imagination and reification): experience (or awareness), understanding, judgment, and decision. Lonergan uses *experience* in a restricted and technical sense to refer to spiritual functioning on a first level: the presentation of data for consideration. The term *awareness* also suggests what is meant, but in a broader, everyday sense, awareness, like experience, would apply to every level of consciousness/spirit and all of them together. The terms in this theory are defined in relation to one another, defined implicitly (Lonergan [1957] 1992, 37), and are not amenable to easy, nontechnical exposition.

In more detail: First, as *empirical*, the spirit makes one open to data. Implicitly defined by relationship to understanding, data are whatever there is to be understood. Awareness of data spontaneously provokes the question What is it? This “question” is not in the first instance an articulated question but the inherent operator of the dynamism of human consciousness that would express itself in an ongoing array of particular, articulated questions. This question advances spiritual functioning to a new level. Second, as *intellectual*, spiritual functioning seeks understanding of the

data. With insight and the resultant generation of an idea/concept/theory/interpretation/hypothesis, another question spontaneously emerges to shift spiritual functioning to yet another dimension: Is it so? That is, Is my idea correct? Third, as *rational*, spiritual functioning marshals and weighs the evidence and, via another kind of insight, seeks to arrive at a judgment of fact as to whether the idea squares with the data. The Yes or No of this judgment results in knowledge, fact, some degree of attainment of reality. Knowledge is a composite of data, understanding, and judgment.

These three unpack the first of the elements in the two-part shorthand formula “meaning and value,” congenial to social-science usage and employed along with alternative formulas throughout this essay. Obviously, here *meaning* is a solely cognitive notion. This usage differs from that which understands meaning more broadly as personal significance and, thus, includes and confounds cognitive and evaluative dimensions.

With the achievement of knowledge, human consciousness again shifts its focus and asks another question: What am I going to do about it? Fourth, as responsible, spiritual functioning calls for a choice, a decision, a judgment of value, an action; knowing moves into doing. One’s decision then changes both the external world and oneself and, in the process, sets up a new configuration of data, new grist for another turn of the wheel of human engagement in the world via the four dimensions of human intentional, spiritual functioning.

The four levels of spiritual functioning are fully interactive. As knowledge conditions one’s decision, decision also affects the availability of data for experience, and data in turn condition one’s understanding and knowledge, which reciprocally also condition one’s openness to data and one’s options for decision. Together the four levels constitute the activity of the spirit in shifting emphasis. If their articulation here is correct, these four levels in their interrelationship represent an explanatory account of human intentional consciousness or spirit. Like the factors in an equation such as  $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$ , the four facets of the spirit, in specified interrelationship, apply precisely and accurately to one and only one specific reality. They name the factors necessary and sufficient to account for this reality and thus constitute a highly abstract and universally applicable expression of this reality, the human spirit, as it relates on a sliding scale to an array of human activities in an array of human cultures and historical eras.

This account of the human spirit is proffered neither as philosophical speculation nor as something to be taken on faith, religious or otherwise. Although Lonergan built this analysis standing on the shoulders of the giants of Western civilization—Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Isaac Newton, Albert Einstein, Kurt Gödel—the ultimate ground of the analysis is supposedly the human spirit itself, available to be experienced by anyone who chooses to attend to it in him- or herself. Apart from radical postmodernism in which the principle of noncontradiction

and appeal to reasoned argument grounded in evidence are thrown to the wind, any attempt to refute Lonergan's formulation would engage the very process noted in this formulation: appeal to evidence, insightful understanding, and reasoned judgment, steps that parallel the textbook formula of the scientific method: observation, hypothesis, and verification. The attempted refutation would, thus, confirm in deed what was supposedly refuted in words. Provocatively and disconcertingly, Lonergan's account appears not to be subject to radical revision. Because it is empirically grounded—if at this point only in a kind of phenomenology-like empiricism determined by the peculiarity of the object of study itself, human subjectivity—in some sense this formulation is already scientific. Lonergan's analysis of intentional consciousness or spirit may well be the breakthrough that could transform psychological research from a descriptive to an explanatory science.

*The Human Spirit as the Ground of Spirituality.* The human spirit is a structured, open-ended, dynamic dimension of the mind. The human spirit is inherently self-transcending, geared to reach ever beyond itself. It is oriented to the universe of being, to all that there is to be known and loved, to reality. In the ideal, the spirit's spontaneous flow of questions would not be satisfied until one understood everything about everything, and the spirit's outward-moving decisions and choices would not rest until one rested in the love of all that is lovable. In that ideal fulfillment, one would hypothetically share in the knowledge and love consistently attributed to God in the Western tradition. Hence, without appeal to God, this approach can treat of matters commonly associated with God. However, only the human mind, not something divine, is in question here.

Moreover, appeal to the spiritual dimension of the human mind itself can plausibly explain experiences of transcendence such as mysticism and enlightenment (Helminiak 1998, 270–72; 2005). Whether in a passing moment of overwhelming occurrence or in an abiding way of being, were one to experience the unbounded, self-transcending potential of one's own mind, one might, upon reflection, believe that one had experienced something beyond one's own self. One certainly would have experienced something more than one's objectified, known, and prosaic self, the "me" with whom we tend myopically to identify. One might therefore be inclined to suggest that one had experienced God. However, apart from a set of presuppositions pertinent beyond mere appeal to empirical evidence, one could legitimately conclude "merely" that one had experienced the human spirit with its capacity for unlimited unfolding. Thus, appeal to the human spirit can explain matters of spirituality.

Longstanding ambiguity in these matters has tended to identify the spiritual with the divine and transcendent experience with an experience of God. On the incoherent assumption that God could come in parts or in varying degrees of intensity, widespread belief sees the human spirit as a

supposed “spark of divinity” within the “soul,” as “something of the divine in humanity” (Pargament 1997, 46).

The source of this ambiguity in Western thought can be pinpointed. It is rooted in the attempted integration of Jewish, Greek, and Christian thinking in the early Common Era (McGinn 1995). Pythagoras’s theorem and other such formulas—the results of human insight, human spiritual achievements—so awed Plato that he considered ideas to be the really real, eternal and unchanging, and things in this world to be but imperfect copies of those ideal forms. It would, indeed, be impossible to find an absolutely perfect right triangle in the physical world. So Plato projected the insightful achievements of the human mind into a supposed separate, spiritual realm, the World of Ideas or Forms, where perfect “realities” exist. Subsequently, Christian thinkers inherited the notion of a personal God from Judaism and used Platonic thought to fill out their theological speculation. Plato’s ideas became thoughts in the mind of God, the supposed blueprints according to which God created the world. The World of Ideas became heaven, the realm of God. Human intellect became a participation in the divine mind. Beatitude after death became the beatific vision, the eternal contemplation of God and of the ideas in the mind of God. But Christian orthodoxy insisted on the inviolable distinction between the Creator and every creature and, likewise, on the distinction between the Holy Spirit, poured into human hearts (Romans 5:5), and the human spirit itself. Nonetheless, in attempts to explain the relationship between the human spirit and God, ambiguity persisted. Even Saint Augustine was not clear on whether or not intellectual “participation in the divine mind” makes the human mind actually divine (Cary 1997). The ambiguity was whether the spiritual is identical with the divine, whether deep down inside a human is really God. Ongoing debate over the condemnation of Meister Eckhart in 1329 revolves around this very question (Colledge 1981; McGinn 1981). Gnosticism and New Age religion affirm outright the identity of the spiritual and the divine. Read through Western eyes, Hinduism seems to do so as well: Atman is Brahman, Thou art That. Thus, the far-reaching and wondrous functioning of the human spirit was projected into heaven and identified with divinity. Spirituality became inextricably embroiled in theology.

This chronology suggests that in the West the conflation of the spiritual and the divine is an accident of history, enshrined in religious faith, and become intransigent. In contrast, the possibility of explaining self-transcending experiences on the basis of the human spirit suggests that this conflation is unnecessary. Without prejudice to subsequent theological extrapolation, a viable psychology of spirituality needs to clearly distinguish the spiritual and the divine and to ground spirituality in the human alone. Such an approach, respecting professional boundaries and addressing tractable issues, holds a promise of generating a truly scientific treatment of spirituality.



THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE SPIRITUAL AND THE  
SPECIFICITY OF SPIRITUALITY

Second, there is the need to distinguish general involvement with the spiritual from a specialized involvement, spirituality. To understand *spiritual* in terms of the human spirit, as described above, shifts the meaning of the term from its general connotations to a technical denotation. In general usage, functioning ever as a synonym or analogue for *religious*, the term *spiritual* implies not only some engagement with God (or something of the kind) but also a positive evaluation of this engagement. To be spiritual is generally taken to be something positive. Thus, a spiritual person is one deeply committed to the things of God, to religion, or to the personal pursuit of increasing otherworldly sensitivity and the like, and to be so committed is deemed to be good. Likewise, a spiritual activity is one that fosters such laudable commitment and advances such positive pursuit. However, as already explained, reference to God can be extricated from this discussion, and appeal to the self-transcending human spirit can adequately explain such commitments and pursuits. In addition, when *spiritual* is understood in terms of the human spirit, the positive connotation of the term no longer necessarily applies.

*Spiritual* now names any human functioning that involves experience, understanding, judgment, or decision—which is to say, all strictly human functioning. The human spirit is what makes humans human. Therefore, unless routine “mindlessness,” dreamless sleep, coma, drugged debilitation, or something of the sort short-circuits the higher mental capacities and leaves one functioning, animal-like, without awareness, understanding, judgment, or decision, all human functioning is spiritual. The human spirit functions in a range of activities—from prosaic thinking and problem-solving as in the child’s relentless “Why?” or a scientist’s research, through subtle, awe-filled musings at the ocean or stars as in the reveries of a lover or poet, to the extraordinary engagement with one’s own open-ended spiritual capacity as in the mystic’s raptures. In all of these cases the human spirit is engaged; experience, understanding, judgment, and decision are operating in shifting emphases. These functions of the human spirit can be taken for granted, or they can be deliberately attended to. They generate sets of meanings and values that can be passively and unwittingly accepted or deliberately assessed and constructed. Just as all human beings have and use their bodies, but not everyone is an athlete or body-builder, so all have a human spirit, but not everyone is dedicated to enhancement and integration of his or her spiritual capacity. Moreover, like the bodily, one can also engage the spiritual functions for good or ill: There is the clever thief or charismatic demagogue as well as the dedicated saint. As understood here, all of these instances are *spiritual*, because all engage the human spirit. In contrast, *spirituality* refers to a particular usage of the human spirit.

In religious and general use, *spirituality* refers to deliberate commitment to growth and progress in things spiritual. To be on “a path” or “a journey” are common metaphors for spirituality, and the pursuit that is spirituality is taken to be a positive thing; growth and progress are at stake. Accordingly, it is important to distinguish between what is spiritual—in one way or another, everything human is—and deliberate pursuit of increasing sensitivity to the spiritual: spirituality. Poverty of language imposes linguistic limitations. No adjective corresponds exclusively with the noun *spirituality* nor exclusively with matters of whatever kind regarding the human spirit, so the adjective *spiritual*, now grossly ambiguous, needs to carry both meanings. While retaining the positive meaning of *spiritual* as in general usage, it would be helpful to have another adjective to refer to spiritual engagement that is not explicitly geared toward positive growth. Following the Greek of Plato, *noetic* might work, except that the English word generally tends to refer solely to the cognitive and overlooks the evaluative dimension of the human spirit, and some spiritual movements already use *noetic* to refer to matters of spirituality. All of the available terminology is already confounding. Of course, most important are the meanings and realities that we intend, not ultimately the words that we use. In these difficult and subtle matters, care will always be required until, perhaps, a consensual language expresses emerging scientific thinking. In the meantime, henceforth in this essay the term *spiritual*, contrary to popular use, will carry the generic meaning and *spirituality* the specific.

#### A VALUE-LADEN PSYCHOLOGY OF SPIRITUALITY: AUTHENTICITY VERSUS INAUTHENTICITY

Third, if God is extricated from a psychological treatment of spirituality in favor of appeal to the human spirit, and if the deliberate commitment of spirituality is distinguished from the generic engagement of the human spirit, it remains that not all spiritualities are equally valid. Spirituality refers to commitment to and deliberate pursuit of positive spiritual growth (Helminiak 1996a, 34–36). Yet, despite sincerity and good will, some spiritual practitioners or religionists might be misguided in their commitment and pursuit, and the result might be deleterious: “Spiritual experience and belief encompass both the divine and the demonic” (Gorsuch and Miller 1999, 59). In the post-9/11 era, there should be no need to emphasize this point, although for centuries people have berated the potential destructive effects of spiritual commitments and to no avail (Helminiak 1997). There can be false spiritualities, and an adequate psychology of spirituality must be able to adjudicate the matter.

The same point can be made in another way. Like modern medicine in the case of physical disease, contemporary psychology already distinguishes healthy and unhealthy mental experience. Psychology makes value judgments about human well-being (Browning 1987). This point was elabo-

rated above in the discussion of Hall and Edwards (2002). If spirituality is understood psychologically, and if growth in spirituality is taken to depend not explicitly on relationship with God or some other supposed metaphysical criterion but first and foremost on the ongoing integration of the human spiritual capacity into the permanent structures of the human mind, in general spirituality expresses a healthy enterprise. It refers to the advanced stages of human integration and results in more humanly human beings (Helminiak 1987). Accordingly, spiritualities—approaches to that path of growth—that for whatever reasons lead to human debilitation can and must be deemed misguided or false.

That statement flies in the face of current radical postmodernism, which insists on cultural conditioning to such an extent as to disqualify any possible claim to objective truth (Martin and Sugarman 2000; Rosenau 1992). But if self-consistency and self-contradiction still have meaning and import, the radical postmodern position disqualifies itself (Lawson 1986). Besides, critical realism offers a moderate postmodern alternative (Loneragan [1957]1992; McCarthy 1997). The options are not merely modern certainty or radical postmodern relativism. Commitment to the difficult and ongoing pursuit of correct understanding lies between these two and remains a valid option. Although human reality is a matter of meanings and values, data do constrain the process of human meaning making. Reality is a construct, but it is not a free-for-all. True and false, good and evil remain meaningful terms.

*The Necessarily Value-laden Status of a Psychology of Spirituality.* Opinions are not equally valid. There can be true as well as false spiritualities. Therefore, an adequate scientific psychology of spirituality must be able to distinguish between better and worse spiritualities, must be deliberately yet defensibly value-laden, and must be normative or prescriptive.

This same requirement derives also from the very meaning of spirituality as originally understood in religious circles. Like the religions, as already noted, the cores of their spiritualities—the sets of beliefs and ethics that religions offer as guiding norms—are proposed as absolute requirements. The religions do not offer their beliefs and ethics as options. Rather, they come with claims of objective and even divine and eternal validity. The religions propose particular visions of life and require specific ways of living, which supposedly guarantee “salvation” in the West or “enlightenment” or “nirvana” in the East. If one ignores the prescribed path, one supposedly will not achieve the promised fulfillment. A psychology of spirituality cannot adequately treat spirituality while taking a neutral stand regarding the epistemological and ethical claims that are essential to the phenomenon.

The same requirement derives from the notion of science as explanatory. Accurate explanation eventuates in normative requirements: To have explained how and why something functions as it does is to specify the

requirements for its effective functioning. Explanation and prescriptivity are opposite sides of the same coin. A scientific explanation determines precisely what something is, and scientific law formulates that determination. To the extent that the explanation is accurate, all things being equal, adherence to the law guarantees a predictable result, and violation of the law precludes the result. Scientific law functions not only to guide the achievement of a desired result but also to explain the failure in such achievement. This double effect follows not because some person or some culture has arbitrarily proclaimed a law but because the law articulates reality. In all cases the scientific explanation is one and unique; all alternatives are mistaken. At its core and of its very nature, explanatory science is value-laden: Not only is it the committed pursuit of accurate understanding, but it also results in prescriptive conclusions. Physics and chemistry allow travel to the moon; the law of gravity explains not only why bodies fall to earth but also how to make bodies escape the earth. Medical prescriptions cure and prevent disease. Psychology grounds the treatment of mental disorders. In like manner, an explanatory psychology of spirituality must determine the structures, mechanisms, and processes of healthy spiritual functioning and, on that basis, be able to prescribe behaviors that enhance such functioning, all the while also naming and accounting for the spiritually aberrant, pathological, and dysfunctional.

*The Criteria of Spiritual Health and Growth.* The overwhelming challenge in this case is to actually derive objective criteria of spiritual health. The religions claim such criteria for their spiritualities, and the religions derive these criteria from supposed divine revelation, longstanding tradition, or commonly accepted practice. The psychology of spirituality can hardly continue, wittingly or unwittingly, to appeal to such sources. If spirituality is to be explained in terms of the human spirit, the criteria of spiritual functioning must be inherent in the structures, mechanisms, and processes of the human spirit itself, and analysis of the spirit would provide an articulation of these criteria. Such is the general solution to the present scientific challenge.

Lonergan's analysis of intentional consciousness or spirit ([1957] 1992; 1972) offers an elaborated version of that general solution. The human spirit is taken to be an inherent, dynamic, open-ended, self-transcending dimension of the human mind. This dimension of the mind can be experienced, and reflection on the experience suggests that the human spirit entails a fourfold, interactive structure, as already noted. In addition, the dynamic and open-ended nature of the human spirit implies built-in criteria for effective functioning. Paralleling the fourfold structure of the human spirit, these criteria are four.

Insofar as on a first level of spiritual functioning one is open to data, to the extent that one is able, one should be attentive. A popular rendition of

this criterion suggests that “the mind is like a parachute: It works best when it’s open.” Insofar as on a second level one questions for understanding, one should be intelligent—that is, not foolish or silly but sincerely questioning, pondering, and seeking insight, using and trusting whatever degree of intelligence one has. Insofar as on a third level one questions the accuracy of an understanding, one should be reasonable—one should base one’s judgments on the evidence and be honest about the matter. A popular rendering of this criterion says that it is the honest person who will discover the truth. And insofar as on a fourth level one needs to make choices and decisions, one should be responsible—one should base one’s decisions on the known facts and act in such a way as to keep the open-ended dynamism of the spirit flowing. Anything that hampers or shuts down this spiritual dynamism is irresponsible, wrong, and evil, precisely because it debilitates open-ended human functioning. The popular admonition is “Do the right thing.”

Loneragan calls these four requirements—“Be attentive, Be intelligent, Be reasonable, Be responsible”—“transcendental precepts” (1972, 231). They are precepts because they impose requirements on human functioning, and violation of these requirements inevitably entails the diminution of human possibilities or even outright dehumanization. They are transcendental because they are built in and operative even before they are attended to or articulated and because they apply to human behavior across the board, everywhere and always. Yet, like the stages of Jean Piaget (1963), Lawrence Kohlberg (1969), or James Fowler (1981), they are merely formal constructs; they are content-free. They do not predetermine any specific answer or outcome; they do not prescribe *what* is to be believed or done. They require only that every question or procedure arrive at its natural conclusion; they specify only *how* any procedure ought to unfold: attentively, intelligently, reasonably, and responsibly. Thus, these precepts are human absolutes, but they are not absolutist. They cut down the middle between excessively optimistic modern certainty and excessively pessimistic, radical postmodern relativism. Only “the devil” or a fanciful, value-free conceit would protest that these criteria prejudice human functioning, for the only prejudice these criteria introduce is the stipulation of an open-ended, collaborative, self-correcting process that leads to the increased likelihood of a positive and successful outcome. Other current efforts to formulate a universally valid ethic come to similar conclusions (Küng and Schmidt 1998; Kane 1994; 1999).

*Authenticity and the Achievement of Objectivity.* On that understanding, the human spirit itself is the ultimate human ground of epistemology and ethics (cf. Fromm 1947). Open-ended spiritual functioning determines the criteria of the true (attentiveness, intelligence, and reasonableness) and the criterion of the good (responsibility) (Loneragan 1972). Indeed, the

transcendental precepts articulate the essential requirements of all human becoming (Helminiak 1987). For this reason, Lonergan (1972) names them as the criteria of human authenticity: One is an authentic or genuine human being to the extent that one is attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible; to the extent that one is not, one diminishes one's own humanity. Insofar as authenticity requires being true to oneself, Lonergan's authenticity is similar to the existentialist notion, but, insofar as Lonergan specifies the self-transcending human spirit as the ultimate ground of authenticity, the concept is more precise than the existentialist, which could be taken to enforce a personal status quo or in the name of "being oneself" justify restrictive or irresponsible behavior (Taylor 1991). Lonergan's understanding of human authenticity is explicitly less solipsistic and more communitarian and reality-oriented than the existential understanding—hence the claim of the possibility of attaining objectivity. In Lonergan's trenchant formulation, "Genuine objectivity is the fruit of authentic subjectivity" (1972, 292).

When, apart from theist and other metaphysical claims, spiritual growth is understood to be fundamentally the ongoing integration of the dynamic human spirit into the permanent structures of the personality (Helminiak 1987), the transcendental precepts specify the ultimate norms of spirituality. "Authenticity" (Lonergan 1972) is the criterion of valid spirituality, and inauthenticity characterizes false spirituality. On the basis of discernible criteria inherent in human functioning itself, true and false spiritualities can be differentiated. To be sure, this solution does not eliminate all debate about the implications of authenticity in particular, concrete situations, for, as Plato was painfully aware, things in this world of space and time are ever imperfect. But, like the abstract explanation  $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$  that is the goal of every science, specification of authenticity projects the heuristically formulated ideal toward which, in ethical probity, all human endeavor ought to move. This outcome regards the last of the three pivotal concerns conditioning an explanatory psychology of spirituality.

#### AN EXPLANATORY PSYCHOLOGY OF SPIRITUALITY

Attention to three prevalent errors and three concomitant challenges has intimated a hoped-for explanatory psychology of spirituality with prescriptive implications. Lonergan's analysis of the human spirit possibly provides the breakthrough for such an explanatory psychology. In line with this analysis, the fourfold structure of the human spirit with its open-ended, self-transcending dynamism would account for the process of human meaning making that is determinative of spirituality and central to religion; and the transcendental precepts, which govern the felicitous unfolding of the human spirit, would specify the normative or prescriptive dimension of this process. Of course, the human being is more than a human spirit. In addition to the spirit, there are other dimensions of the human mind—

emotions, imagery, memory, and personality structures—that Lonergan ([1957] 1992, 227–31 et passim) collectively calls *psyche*, and there is the human organism, including the nervous and endocrine systems. I do not address these further matters here. However, if attention to the human spirit is the key to a theoretical understanding of spirituality, attention to the interaction of the human spirit, psyche, and organism in a physical and social environment would provide a basis for explaining the rich phenomena of lived spiritualities (Helminiak 1996a), and attention to the embeddedness of spiritualities in social groups and organizations would open onto considerations of religion, culture, and society (Helminiak 1998). Such an approach would explain the essential, underlying, *sui generis*, meaning- and value-laden dimension of human experience that is commonly described as “religious” or “spiritual” and apply this explanation in different concrete cases. The end result would be a science of spirituality, and it would be fully open to coherent religious application and theological expansion.

Central to this enterprise is an explanatory account of the core element in spirituality, the human spirit (Lonergan [1957]1992; 1972). In turn, this account could ground an ordered analysis of the complex phenomenon, spirituality, as just sketched (Helminiak 1996a; 1998). Such a fully elaborated psychology of spirituality would be applicable to an array of spiritualities and their associated religions. Such application would lead to operationalization of the abstract constructs in Lonergan’s analysis, and testing and subsequent refinement of this supposed explanatory psychology of spirituality could follow (Feingold 2002; Feingold and Helminiak 2000; Helminiak 1994). In the face of such a psychology, the spiritualities and religions would themselves become subject to scientific assessment. Religion and/or spirituality would no longer stand above human evaluation, supposedly immune from normative judgment (Slife and Richards 2001). As unhygienic folk practices give way to the findings of modern medicine, so whimsical spirituality and fanciful religion must give way to contemporary psychology. Then, on the basis of authentic spirituality, there would emerge the possibility of a global community, grounded in the life-giving essentials determined by a common humanity yet open to personal and cultural diversity in nonessentials. The deployment of such an explanatory psychology of spirituality would have advanced the achievement of science, implementing a “generalized empirical method” (Teevan 2002), from the physical through the biological and, now, onto the personal, social, and cultural levels. A science of spirituality—including a normative approach to meanings and values and, thus, pertinent to all the human sciences—would be operative.

If religious believers and spiritual practitioners object that such an explanatory science of the spiritual does not do justice to their experiences or beliefs (Helminiak 2001a; Marquis, Holden, and Warren 2001; Slife and

Richards 2001; Watts 2001), the scientific requirement must be to refine the theories, redo the research, and accurately and adequately explain the phenomena in question—but not necessarily to satisfy all the concerns of believers. It is not to be expected that scientific explanation will square with popular opinion. Oversight of this fact has left the psychology of religion entangled for decades in a jungle of the popular expressions of a polymorphous phenomenon. Brant Cortright is correct that an adequate psychology must address people's perennial "seeking for the Divine" and "seeking for something sacred"—but not necessarily in theological terms like "the Divine" or "the sacred" (1997, 13–14). Accepting the definitions and acceding to the concerns of disparate religious believers is no more likely to produce an explanatory account of spirituality than a poll of popular opinions and superstitions about static electricity, magnets, and lightning would ever have resulted in the laws of electromagnetism. Explanatory science moves in a different intellectual realm from that of popular opinion, religious belief, and cultural expectations, although, at their best, these realms should cohere (Helminiak 1998, 198–208). The woman and man on the street may have no clue regarding a computer scientist's algorithms, but their lack of comprehension does not render the algorithms incapable of effecting the functioning of computers and allowing these very lay persons to get their e-mail. In this essay I envisage a similar scientific achievement in the realm of spirituality.

The psychology of spirituality sketched in this essay is specific and already significantly elaborated. My main concern has been to effect an explanatory psychology of religion and, toward this end, to highlight three methodological issues that confound the psychology of spirituality: confusing the spiritual with the divine, confusing the spiritual with spirituality, and attempting to ignore the value-laden status of spiritualities. Credible exposition of these three issues has required the intimation of a viable alternative to the reigning thought on these matters. The suggested psychology of spirituality is not, however, my main concern. Whether or not one accepts this proposed solution, the threefold problem challenging explanatory psychology remains. These perduring challenges to the psychology of religion—and, indeed, to the social sciences in general—need to be met. The concern of the study of spirituality is the meanings and values, the ideas and ideals, the visions and virtues, that lie at the heart of social reality. How can there be any explanatory social science unless spirituality is adequately addressed?

#### NOTE

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