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Whither the Psychology of Religion: A Spirituality-Focused Discussion of Paloutzian and Park's (2005)

Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality

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Abstract Presuming Rayburn's (2006: *Child & Family Behavior Therapy, 28*, 86–92) review of (Paloutzian and Park, 2005, *Handbook of the psychology of religion and spirituality*. New York: The Guilford Press) and sketching an alternative paradigm, this review focuses on the *Handbook's* virtual conflation of religion and spirituality; relates this conflation to the hegemony of Protestant theology in North American psychology of religion; highlights the *Handbook's* neglect of spirituality per se, which, if not inseparably linked with theism, is, nevertheless, related to the self-transcending, meaning-making dimension of the human mind, could provide an explanatory breakthrough in the field of the psychology of religion and of the social sciences overall; and sees *Handbook's* advocacy for a "multilevel interdisciplinary paradigm" as a regrettable acceptance of the failed, long-term strategy of the field of psychology in general.

Keywords Bernard Lonergan · Nature of human sciences · Psychology of religion · Psychology of spirituality · Reformation theology · Nature of social science · *Sui generis* in religion · Theistic psychology

Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality (Paloutzian and Park 2005) is the latest of a series of tomes that attempt to present an ongoing overview of the psychology of religion: Sperry and Shafranske (2005), Spilka et al. (2003), Larson et al. (1998), Wulff (1997), Shafranske (1996). As such, including chapters from most of the established and upcoming "names" in the field, *Handbook* considers the foundations and applications of the psychology of religion, explores the nature of religion and its important role in people's lives, and introduces an array of approaches to religion from the subdisciplines of psychology: developmental, neurobiological, cognitive, emotional, personality, social. This latter matter is important; it represents a new phenomenon in the field: Researchers trained in various psychological emphases, not specifically in the psychology of religion, are

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contributing to the psychology of religion as religion finally becomes an acceptable topic in psychological and, especially, psychotherapeutic circles.

Rayburn's (2006) review of *Handbook* invites a useful discussion. Former president of Division 36: Psychology of Religion of the American Psychological Association (APA), she concludes that the book contains much valuable information and that its publication is a significant achievement. Her assessment is beyond doubt. Her criticism that a handbook should have comprehensively represented the field is likewise indisputable as well as regrettable. *Handbook's* neglect of noteworthy topics regarding spirituality, the cutting-edge issue in the field for the last two decades, inclines me to offer further observations in this regard.

The Availability of Viable Theories of Spirituality

Repeatedly, *Handbook* names the lack of adequate theory as a chief challenge to the psychology of religion/spirituality: "the paradigm issue" (Paloutzian and Park 2005, p. 5; see also pp. 13, 16, 22, 115, 227, 439, 449, 454, 472, 553, et passim). Nonetheless, proposed solutions to this challenge do not appear in *Handbook*.

For example, in 1916, James Leuba suggested a fully psychological conception of the *spiritual*: "The word does not imply anything supernatural. It designates the higher reaches of the mental life, the mental activity referring to the good, the beautiful and the true" (cited in Wulff 2003, p. 21).

Similarly, decades before today's widespread discussion of spirituality, Viktor Frankl (1969/1988) focused on a "noetic" or "noological" dimension of the human mind, "that dimension in which the uniquely human phenomena are located. It could be defined as the spiritual dimension as well." Deliberately attending to a psychological, rather than a religious or metaphysical, phenomenon, he insisted, "However,…what we understand by the noological dimension is the anthropological rather than the theological dimension" (p. 22). Frankl (1969/1988, p. 22) noted that Nicolai Hartmann and Max Scheler held this same understanding. Accordingly, Frankl (1962, pp. 100–103) formulated a tripartite model of the human: somatic, psychic, and noetic, which the Institute of Logotherapy (1979) officially paraphrased as "the biological, the psychological, and the spiritual." Frankl, too, had proposed a fully psychological approach to spirituality.

Likewise, by "psychosynthesis" Roberto Assagioli (1965/1976) intended "the awakening and manifestation of latent potentialities of the human being—for instance, ethical, esthetic, and religious experiences and activities" (p. 37). As in Leuba's conception, reference to the true, the good (ethical), and the beautiful (esthetic) echoes Plato's characterization of the *nous*, the highest capacity of the human mind. It could grasp unchanging verities, such $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$. This realization so awed Plato that he conceived it as participation in a projected, eternal World of Forms or Ideas, which Augustine subsequently associated with the mind of God (Cary 1997; McGinn 1995). However, again like Leuba and Frankl, Assagioli insisted that, as a "scientific conception," "psychosynthesis does not aim nor attempt to give a metaphysical nor a theological explanation of the great Mystery—it leads to the door, but stops there" (pp. 6–7). Thus, appealing again to a purely psychological basis, Assagioli suggested an approach to a psychology of spirituality.

More recently, Helminiak (1987, 1996a, 1996c, 1998a) developed that approach into a comprehensive theory that differentiates and interrelates psychology, spirituality, and theology. Speaking of this theory at the 1996 annual convention of the APA in Toronto, at

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a plenary session of Division 36, senior scholar Bernard Spilka (Spilka and McIntosh 1996) noted,

> Clearly, the foremost thinker in the field of the psychology-of-spirituality area is Daniel Helminiak…. He desires to separate spiritual issues from theology and verbally stresses the development of a scientific spirituality…. This is an extremely broad stroke that merits much discussion. (see also Spilka et al. 2003, p. 8)

Helminiak's theory featured in an issue of *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* (Doran 1996; Helminiak 1996b, c; Richardson 1996); applied to psychotherapy, in *Counseling and Values* (Helminiak 2001a, c; Marquis et al. 2001; Slife and Richards 2001; Watts 2001); and applied to sexuality, in *Journal of Individual Psychology* (Helminiak 2008a, b; Punton 2008; Sperry 2008). The theory has also been applied to human development (Helminiak 1987), the crisis of HIV/AIDS (Helminiak 1995), the religious challenge of global community (1997, 2008c), the integration of sexuality and spirituality (Helminiak 1998b, 2006a), sexual ethics (Helminiak 2001b, 2004), meditation (Helminiak 2005c), the neurophysiology of transcendent experiences (2005a, 2007a), sexual orientation (2006a, 2007a, b), and contemporary Christianity (Helminiak 2007c). Lauding the theory, Spilka and McIntosh (1996) also insisted on the need for its operationalization and testing, which has been done preliminarily (Feingold 2002; Helminiak 1994) and is currently underway.

The heart of this theory is Bernard Lonergan's (1957/1992, 1972, 1980/1990) watershed analysis (McCarthy 1997) of intentional consciousness—or human spirit (Lonergan 1957/1992, pp. 372, 539–543, 640–642, 670–671, 696–697; 1972, pp. 13, 302) or "human spiritual reality" (2006/1968, track 51). It is an inherent principle of self-transcendence, exemplified most obviously in the experience of marvel, wonder, awe, and in the fact that we ask questions and expect reasonable answers about ever new topics (1957/1992, pp. 34, 196–197, 208, 354, 367, 380; 1972, pp. 105–106; 1980/1990, pp. 5, 36, 47, 142, 164, 189, 297, 299–300, 303). It is an open-ended orientation toward all reality, all that there is to be known and loved: being (1957/1992, chap. 12; 1980/1990, pp. 145–155). Spirit is but one facet of the human mind and functions in shifting interaction and tension (e.g., 1980/1990, pp. 205, 217, 257) with another facet—psyche (Doran 1977/1994; Lonergan 1957/1992, pp. 204–231, 480–484), comprised of emotions, imagery, memory, and structures of personality (Helminiak 1996a, Part 3; 1996c, p. 8). Together with the body, these facets of the mind comprise a tripartite model of the human: organism, psyche, and spirit, which presents a converging parallel with Frankl's and Assagioli's models. Helminiak's (1987, 1996a, c, 1998a, 2001c) theory invokes this spiritual dimension of the mind to ground a completely human account of spirituality that, presuming Lonergan's detailed explication, includes inherent criteria of epistemology and ethics (1972, pp. 20, 53, 55, 231, 302) and is fully open to religious and theist extrapolation (Helminiak 1996c, 1998a, chap. 2). But, significantly, this proposed comprehensive interdisciplinary model would leave religious and theist extrapolation to other specialized disciplines—religious studies and theology (Brown 1994, 1997; Gill 1994; Sharma 1997; Sharpe 1997; Wiebe 1994)—not to psychology.

This line of theorizing suggests at least a potential candidate for the paradigm that eludes the psychology of religion and of spirituality (Doran 1981). Likewise, so would Wilber's (e.g., 1995, 1996) comprehensive paradigm, recently called "integral philosophy," reliant on Hinduism and the so-called "perennial philosophy" and embraced by numerous psychologists of spirituality (e.g., Marquis et al. 2001). However, this paradigm's ultimate appeal to the mysterious "transrational" (which is not, it is said, non-

rational, irrational, or arational) suggests that it is theoretically incoherent if the rubrics of logical consistency of Western science are to be respected (Helminiak 1998a, pp. 213–292; 2001a).

The "Shopping-cart" Model of Psychological Research

As also noted repeatedly in *Handbook*, American psychology of religion is limited by its close affiliation with Protestant Christianity (e.g., Paloutzian and Park, pp. 16, 317, 449; Wulff 1997, 2003). In addition, research funding is linked to similarly committed institutions, such as denominational theological seminaries and The Templeton Foundation (Wulff 2003). Yet, on classical (not current) Protestant suppositions, no human effort, such as science, could get "behind" religious phenomena to accurately explain and validly assess their functioning. Supposed total human depravity taints all human endeavors and necessitates unquestioning obeisance to an inscrutable, saving God. This theme of sixteenth-century Protestantism still haunts the postmodern world.

The result is that Western theism becomes the a priori model for religion and spirituality. With its subject matter imposed in this way, as Barnet Feingold (Feingold and Helminiak 2000) graphically elucidated, the psychology of religion operates on a "shopping-cart model" of research. It offers little hope for an explanatory breakthrough (Helminiak 2005b, 2006b). A viable theory of nutrition, for example, could not have resulted from tabulating the contents of shopping carts—because at supermarkets people buy "junk food" as well as items fully unrelated to nutrition and, more critically, because at issue are inherent, normative processes, which concern the nutritionist but of which the merchant and consumer are comparatively ignorant. Likewise, no viable psychology of religion or spirituality will emerge from consumer opinion polls about religion and spirituality and from the accumulation of correlational studies that link the external elements cited in opinion polls. Yet, according to *Handbook*, psychology of religion continues to opt for such a fragmented approach, and now, deliberately.

Paloutzian and Park (2005) assert that a new "multileveled interdisciplinary paradigm" (pp. 9–10, 550–562) is bringing coherence to the field, yet they, too, admit that "the specific mechanisms, assumptions, and processes that allow this linking [or integration] of information [from various disciplines and levels of analysis] have yet to be developed" (p. 553). Thus, *Handbook*'s new paradigm remains but an abstract desideratum. Apparently *Handbook*'s psychology of religion is following psychology in general, which remains a much berated "hodgepodge of barely interconnected subdisciplines…inherently splintered due [to] its lack of a coherent paradigm" (Kirkpatrick 2005, p. 115). Without an integrating, core conceptualization—witness the history of modern psychology overall (Koch and Leary 1983)—it is unlikely that the multileveled interdisciplinary paradigm could be "useful in suggesting ways in which partial theoretical explanations…can be used to complement one another to provide a more complete and adequate explanation than one theory can provide by itself" (Hood 2005, p. 349).

This is the same situation that led Koch (1971, 1981) to suggest that we ought to speak, not of psychology, but of psycholog*ies*. Similarly, this situation adds credibility to Wulff's (2003) observation specific to the psychology of religion, summarized and then dismissed by Paloutzian and Park (2005): "The developments today are so fatally flawed, narrowly positivistic, closed to enrichment by alternative methods, and fraught with bias that the psychology of religion should start over" (p. 13).

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The *Sui Generis* Nature of Human Spirituality

Unless the psychology of religion can find its needed breakthrough and actually deal with the *sui generis* nature of its subject matter (Pals 1987; Segal 1983; Smith 1997), psychology in general will continue to languish. Indeed, the challenge to the human sciences in general is to adequately focus and address the distinctiveness of humanity, typified in religion, and to integrate the human sciences around this distinctive core. Some call it "meaning making" (Park 2005) and relate it to consciousness or the human spirit (Lonergan 1957/1992, 1972, 1980/1990). Paloutzian and Park (2005) recognize this urgency: "If religion is unique,…a psychology that does not address religion can never create a valid comprehensive theory" (p. 8).

However, the need is not to add one more disconnected dimension of human studies, the multi-faceted and encumbered phenomenon "religion," to the mushrooming mix. The need is for human psychology to explicate its essential *sui generis* element. It, I submit, is consciousness or the spiritual, characterized briefly above as a fully and distinctively human reality. Spirituality is human psychology's Rosetta stone, not religion. With a refined focus on spirituality and the resultant specification of the uniquely human, the contribution of the psychology of religion would be to facilitate the overall theoretical integration not only of psychology but also of all the human sciences (Bernstein 1976; Browning 1987; Doran 1981; Helminiak 2006b; Richardson et al. 1999; Wolfe 1989, 1993; Woolfolk and Richardson 1984). Only the psychology of religion specifically and deliberately addresses the spiritual dimension of humanity—William James's "'root and centre'" (cited in Hood 2005, p. 348). Neglecting this dimension, the human sciences are not really treating of human beings. Incisive attention to the spiritual would fill a critical gap.

The recent emergence of interest in spirituality, in addition and in contrast to religion, offered an opportunity that, thus far, remains to be seized. As even the title of *Handbook*—namely, *of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*—suggests, it virtually conflates the two notions and uses them almost interchangeably. It demurs regarding the treatment of spirituality. Without a clear understanding of spirituality—the narrower concept in substance but, perforce, broader or more widespread in practice—Zinnbauer and Pargament's (2005) attempt in *Handbook* to define spirituality by prioritizing it and religion comes to a non-illuminating standoff (similarly, Sperry 2008; Sperry and Mansager 2004; Sperry and Shafranske 2005, pp. 333–350; see Helminiak 2008b). Only one chapter (Hood 2005) in *Handbook* specifically addresses spirituality. But following suit, this chapter focuses on the varieties of spiritual manifestations—the shopping-cart model of research again—and never explores the essential, common nature of these experiences, that *sui generis* phenomenon, except for the obfuscating reference, pervasive in the literature, to some vaguely conceived other-worldly entity. Attention to human distinctiveness gets lost on a metaphysical detour.

To be fair, Hood (2005) does note the call for a non-theist account of transcendent experience, and he does attempt to extend the notion of spiritual experiences beyond the religious. Nonetheless, he conceives true religion as theist; he supposes that the essence of religion—and, perforce, spirituality—entails relationship with God. He even insists, "When religion is defined so broadly as to exclude the necessity for a sense of the divine[,] the term loses its analytical power" (p. 349). The nub of the problem, of course, is that this insistence inextricably links spirituality, that "sense of the divine," to divinity; and it is unclear in this context—and almost everywhere else—what "the divine" means (Helminiak 1987, 1998a, 2005b, 2006b, 2008b). For example, also acknowledging the need to broaden spirituality beyond theism, Pargament and Mahoney (2005) bafflingly note that

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some people sanctify secular objects "nontheistically by investing objects with qualities that characterize divinity," namely, "divine character and significance" (p. 179). But according to standard usage, in some sense *divine* refers to God. So the supposed non-theist sanctification of secular objects refers back to God for its meaning. But if God is "a wholly other beyond nature" (Hood 2005, p. 356), who can state the characteristics and significance of God without relying on personal or denominational preferences? There is no generic theism (*pace* Richards and Bergin 2005, and Slife and Melling 2006; see Helminiak 2007b). Were the up-front concern people's images of God and the function of these images in psychological life (e.g., Pargament 1997), the matter would be legitimately psychological; but to appeal to God per se is to appeal to an intractable metaphysical construct to elucidate a supposedly empirical science (Helminiak 2005b, 2006b, 2007a, b). Mesmerized by Protestantism's emphasis on God over against humanity, the psychology of religion becomes oblivious to its proper subject matter, the human.

The Hegemony of Protestant Theology in American Psychology of Religion

Emphasis on God is virtually ubiquitous in current psychology of spirituality. This emphasis relates to the Western and specifically Protestant roots of the field in North America. According to the classical Protestant view, through the "Fall" humanity was vitiated, corrupted through and through. According to the Catholic view, in contrast, humanity was only wounded and then intrinsically healed by grace. This central doctrinal difference about human justification has come back to haunt current interdisciplinary studies, for these Reformation opinions remain embedded in the popular religions although, in professional theological circles, interfaith consensus has long been achieved (Mattes 2004; Reumann 1982; Rusch and Lindbeck 2003).

The Reformers Luther and especially Calvin—and even the giant of a twentieth-century theologian Karl Barth—held that sin so debilitated human nature that only reliance on revelation could provide access to the truth and only Christ as known by faith could provide an example of true humanity. If so, then all human sciences are discredited. Above all, when religion and spirituality are in question, it becomes unthinkable that one could adequately address the issues by appeal to strictly human research and apart from appeal to revelation and to God or—to make token ecumenical room for non-Western theist religions such as Hinduism and Jainism but not, except by equivocation, for "officially" non-theist Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, and Shinto—to some other non-defined supernatural reality.

In contrast, the Catholic view relies on the early Christian axiom, "Grace builds on nature," and is comfortable with thoroughly "humanistic" notions: natural theology (i.e., adequate understanding of God and divine creation on the basis of human reason apart from supernatural revelation), natural law (i.e., ethics grounded in the inherent structures and processes of created realities and not gratuitously imposed by God), and universal salvation (i.e., human fulfillment dependent ultimately on human good will and apart from explicit knowledge of or faith in Christ or even God). In Catholic thinking, an adequately elaborated account of human nature and its functioning is the basis for any theological elaboration (Lonergan 1972. pp. 335–340). Accordingly, spirituality could easily be conceived first and foremost as a completely "naturalistic" phenomenon, expressive of inherent aspects of the human mind.

On this understanding, human consciousness or spirit (Lonergan 1957/1992, 1972, 1980/1990) easily qualifies as the *sui generis* phenomenon that characterizes religion and

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spirituality (e.g., Helminiak 1998a, pp. 22–24) even as Uncreated Divinity represents another *sui generis* reality, one of a wholly different order in comparison with all created realities. The concern of religious studies and the psychology of religion to specify the *sui generis* dimension of religion fails to acknowledge and distinguish these two instances of *sui generis* reality, fails to differentiate and coherently interrelate the spiritual and the divine (Helminiak 2005b, 2006b). While the Divinity may rightly be called spiritual, all that is spiritual is not thereby divine: By sheer dint of logic, the difference between the created and the Creator is inviolable; a mutually defining relationship of opposition distinguishes them. The human spirit and the Divine Spirit cannot be one and the same. Moreover, the human spirit is available to empirical investigation—inner experience and subsequent explication (Lonergan 1957/1992, pp. 344–348; 1972, pp. 6–20)—and this investigation provides a basis for a wholly psychological explanation of human spirituality (Helminiak 1996a, 1998a).

In light of religious affiliation, it is, perhaps, no wonder that within *Handbook* Piedmont (2005) is among the very few (note also, but for other reasons, Kirkpatrick 2005, and Corveleyn and Luyten 2005) who envisage some intrinsic, inherently human, explanatory treatment of spirituality. Few psychologists of religion would understand the spiritual to be a “*uniquely human* quality” (Piedmont 2005, p. 269), an overlooked dimension of human personality, not in the first instance an aspect of human communication with or participation in some extra-human, metaphysical reality.

Most psychologists of religion have an educated lay understanding of theology or, at best, the pastoral preparation of a degree in divinity. Accordingly, these subtle but crucial theoretical theological differences and methodological considerations are unlikely to influence the field. Indeed, Emmons (2005) suggests that researchers of the future will “likely need to be schooled not just in the sciences but in theology as well” (p. 249). The reason must be so that psychological theorists and researchers can knowledgeably differentiate and interrelate the specialized disciplines, psychology and theology.

In instructive contrast, Slife and Richards (2001) likewise suggest that every counselor needs “expertise in theology” (p. 205), but for a different reason. They want to combine psychology and theology; or, to be precise, they want to insist that the fields are intrinsically inseparable and even identical. Thus, they suggest that everything—science, psychology, philosophy, humanism, secularism, any worldview, even that of a non-theist—is theological; that in any realm of discussion, “theology is inescapable”; and that, in particular, “conceptions of spirituality have to stake out a position on God” (p. 205). This example demonstrates how radically confounded with theology the psychological discussion of spirituality actually is and how adamant some psychologists are about insinuating particularistic religious beliefs about God into psychology (Helminiak 2007b). So much does theism seemingly control the psychology of religion that the APA itself published an explicitly theist manual (Richards and Bergin 2005); the *Journal of Psychology and Theology*—excused, perhaps, at least on the theological side, as an “Evangelical Forum”—dedicated an issue to “theistic psychology” (Nelson and Slife 2006); and Richards (2005–2006) actually urges psychotherapists to claim their theist belief as a psychotherapeutic credential.

The Mistaken Importation of Theism into Psychology

My insistence, simply put, is this: God or some other such metaphysical construct cannot function as an essential element in psychological theory. Not only does theology exceed

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the competence of the field of psychology and, perforce, entail different presuppositions and methodology (Lonergan 1972, pp. 81–99; 1980/1990, chap. 1); but theism would also introduce into supposedly empirical research a vaguely defined, widely variable, other-worldly, and ultimately intractable construct (Helminiak 2005b, 2006b, in press). It can provide no basis for rigorous, scientific explanation—unless, to validate religion, one would dilute the notion of science and argue with Jones (1994) that it is as symbolic and merely suggestive as is religion and, thus, surrender all modern scientific advance (Lonergan 1972, pp. 93–96; 1980/1990, chap. 1).

To be sure, most psychologists of religion are aware of this methodological problem and attempt to limit or, at least, disguise the entanglement of God in their theorizing (but see Richards and Bergin 2005, p. 112; Sperry 2005, p. 311). Thus, reference rather to "the sacred" has become the "gold standard" of the field and emerges regularly in *Handbook* when the topic of spirituality arises. This same construct featured in "A Consensus Report" on spirituality sponsored by The Templeton Foundation (Larson et al. 1998). Pargament (1997, p. 31; Hill et al. 2000, p. 64) championed this construct. According to *Handbook*, the sacred

> refers to concepts of God, higher powers, transcendent beings, or other aspects of life that have been sanctified…perceived as holy, worthy of veneration or reverence…. Thus, the designation is not limited to higher powers or imminent forces, but includes others aspects of life that take on divine character and meaning through their association with or representation of the holy. (Zinnbauer and Pargament 2005, p. 22)

Consistently, the core feature of the sacred is the divine or "the holy" (Otto 1923/1958, but see Helminiak 1987, pp. 143–160; Proudfoot 1985, pp. 211, 222). The sacred is a God-substitute (Wulff 2003). Moreover and equally significant from a psychological point of view, the sacred is conceived as something that is essentially non-human, something that stands over against the human being, not something that is inherent to humanity. Thus, supposedly, a non-definable supernatural construct is to explain spirituality whereas, psychologically, one would expect the reverse: An empirically discernable human spiritual capacity (Lonergan 1957/1992, 1972), "consciousness" (Sperry 2008; Sperry and Mansager 2004, pp. 158, 159; Sperry and Mansager 2007) or "meaning-making" (Parks 2005), would explain the discovery and elaboration of the divine (without prejudice to its ontological status). Elkins (1998, pp. 61–99), cited several times in *Handbook*, offers the most extensive treatment of "the sacred" that I have encountered; it is avowedly non-religious but remains fuzzily but inextricably theist. Rayburn (1996c) had suggested that spirituality and religion were separable phenomena. Moreover, the deliberate development of separate and complementary inventories, one of religion (Rayburn and Richmond 1996a) and another of spirituality (Rayburn and Richmond 1996b)—the latter was conceived as applicable even to agnostics and atheists although, in my opinion, the achievement is dubious—was to foster awareness of the difference. *Handbook* makes no reference to this latter project.

Evidently, the consensus position in the psychology of religion cannot conceive of explaining spirituality apart from appeal to God or a God-substitute. Hence, spirituality gets conflated with theist religion; the potential scientific focus on the *sui generis* dimension of religion—*sui generis* not because it relates to a non-human, supernatural reality but because it expresses something spiritual, the inherently self-transcending dimension of the human mind (Helminiak 1998a, pp. 50–54)—gets side-tracked; the psychology of religion gets hopelessly entangled with theology; and all of psychology and the human sciences are the poorer. The psychology of religion of *Handbook* has chosen to

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imitate contemporary psychology in general, that oft lamented "hodgepodge of barely interconnected subdisciplines" (Kirkpatrick 2005, p. 115). Such is the implication and inevitable result of the "multilevel interdisciplinary paradigm" (Paloutzian and Park 2005, pp. 9–10, 62, 73–74, 75, 168–169, 171–172, 551–553). The psychology of religion has apparently declined to engage the distinctively human dimension of the mind, the human spirit, which goes ever unnamed and is taken for granted in other areas of psychology and in the human sciences overall but which the psychology of religion confusedly touts as its explicit *sui generis* concern.

The Challenge of Non-religiously-grounded Epistemology and Ethics

To be sure, extrication of theology from the psychology of spirituality presents a major challenge. Not only does the question of God, especially in our global society, demand detailed attention (but not by psychologists per se). And not only does appeal to the supernatural, in whatever form, provide psychology with an easy (if merely suggestive) accounting for mysticism and religious experience in general. But more prosaically, appeal to God also conveniently provides benchmarks of human health and spiritual wellbeing. Such appeal implicitly includes criteria of the true and the good (although they are often empirically ungrounded and conflict across religions, e.g., Helminiak 2008a). Thus, a psychology of spirituality that presupposes God or a God-substitute as an essential explanatory construct can (like any theology) pretend not to have to deal with the thorny questions of epistemology and ethics. Such a supposedly neutral, "value-free" psychology would treat of the human while ignoring its distinctive characteristic: inevitable concern about correct understanding and worthwhile living (Lonergan 1972, pp. 16–17; 1980/1990, pp. 4–6).

Equally so, such a value-neutral psychology of spirituality can avoid what Lee Kirkpatrick called "the *evaluative trap*" (Paloutzian and Park 2005, p. 560): Do not attempt to distinguish between good and bad religion. But why not? Because, supposedly, in an answer that struggles toward commitment to true explanation, "Both 'good religion' and 'bad religion' are the consequences of the same psychological processes that make religion what it is" (p. 560).

However, if evaluation is excluded a priori, urgent but now intractable questions arise on both the theoretical and applied fronts. Theoretically, what kind of accurate understanding of religion could exist without normative implications? Explanation is always unique; realities function in this or that particular way, not ad libitum. Explanation of realities always entails prescriptions for their effective functioning. Meaningful theoretical science always flows over into applied practice. The determination of "good religion" and "bad religion" would necessarily emerge in comparison within an explanatory accounting of religion per se. Then, regarding application: If evaluation is excluded, what relevance has the psychology of religion to understanding and fostering healthy—rather than destructive, neutral, or indifferent—therapeutic process and popular religiosity? Are we to suppose, as would fly in the face of all psychotherapeutic practice and everyday living, that psychological processes have no inherent structures, processes, mechanisms, and exigencies, which would specify functional and dysfunctional living and, perforce, scientifically differentiate good and bad religion? The psychology of religion currently avoids questions of epistemology and ethics because, committed in fact to versions of theist religion, it has already smuggled them in.

Similar criticism applies to the supposed need to avoid Kirkpatrick's "*veridicality trap*" (Paloutzian and Park 2005), the presumption that a scientific psychology might have

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something "to say about the truth or falsity of religious claims." Why is this presumption a trap? Because, supposedly, psychology can only "yield knowledge about the nature of religion in the human mind"(p. 560).

However, don't the structures and processes of the human mind entail their own normativity? What religion could exist as a reality in itself, apart from the human mind and independent of human construction? Can't nonfalsifiable metaphysical doctrines be distinguished from pragmatically consequential this-worldly religious teaching and from the this-worldly implications of the metaphysical doctrines? And don't theological and other implicit truth claims and values already suffuse current psychology of religion? Indeed, denunciation of the supposed evaluative and veridicality traps entails deliberate epistemological and ethical claims, proposed without justification by appeal to specifiable criteria.

In contrast, a psychology of spirituality could be built on the normative, spiritual processes and functioning of the human mind. Such a treatment could legitimately, explicitly, and cleanly introduce universally unavoidable and valid epistemology and ethics into psychological theory, thus reorienting psychology to the study of its distinctive, human subject-matter. Or, at least, such is the claim and implication of Lonergan's (1957/1992, 1972, 1980/1990) position, which appears to fill out the suggestions of Leuba, Frankl, and Assagioli.

Methodological Requirements Specific to the Psychology of Spirituality

Concern for knowing the truth and for championing goodness characterizes religion and, in particular, constitutes its this-worldly spiritual core (Muesse 2007), namely, beliefs and ethics—or, formulated variously, meanings and values, ideas and ideals, visions and virtues, cognitions and evaluations. Religion proposes these as normative. Likewise, spiritualities claim to specify what it means and what it takes to be a healthy, wholesome, integrated, developed, holy, saved, or enlightened human being. Admittedly, limited versions of the psychology of religion as currently conceived—the merely descriptive and comparative studies—could survive (and usefully so especially in the early, data-collection phase of science) under allegiance to a value-neutral notion of science, borrowed from an outdated, nineteenth-century philosophy of science (Kasser 2006). Ultimately, however, the psychology of spirituality certainly cannot.

The spiritual matters of truth and goodness are of the essence of lived spiritualities, and formulated spiritualities are elaborated positions on these matters. Therefore, any non-trivial treatment of spirituality must address them, not only to acknowledge their generic human significance and not only to categorize their contrasting varieties but also to take an evidence-based, normative stand on them. If, as Lonergan's (1957/1990, 1972, 1980/1990) analysis of human consciousness requires, these spiritual matters are inherent to and constitutive of humanity as such, psychology can, indeed, legitimately and thoroughly deal with them apart from metaphysical or supernatural hypotheses. Covert and even explicitly overt reliance on particular religious beliefs and ethics are antithetical to the psychology of spirituality if it is to be an explanatory enterprise. As explanatory, it must formulate a universal phenomenon that applies to all particular religions and, indeed, all human living.

If truly explanatory, as is the ideal of science, the psychology of spirituality must discern commonalities—structures, processes, mechanisms, exigencies—among diverse instances of spirituality and formulate "laws" that apply in all cases. Some of the items in the shopping cart of spirituality are misguided, erroneous, and downright destructive

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(Helminiak 1997; Trungpa 1973), and appropriate empirical research has every capacity and right to assess them—even as medical science routinely does regarding physical health and as psychiatry and psychotherapy already in fact do regarding matters of mental health. Radical, relativistic postmodernism (Jones 1994; Rosenau 1992; Slife and Richards 2001; see Helminiak 2001a) need not prevent a naturalistic psychology of spirituality from engaging epistemology and ethics and finally determining what it means to be a human being. There also exists a moderate postmodernism whose salutary lesson is merely that "knowledge and representation are not as simple as we once thought. But," as Kasser (2006) insists, this fact "doesn't mean that they're obviously impossible. That's to throw out a lot of baby with the bathwater" (lecture 17, track 6). A coherent, moderate post-modern treatment of epistemology and ethics may well already be available (Lonergan 1957/1992, 1972, 1980/1990; McCarthy 1997). Without exploring this availability and engaging these matters, psychology simply cannot address spirituality explanatorily—because it is not addressing humanity in its essential distinctiveness, including a desire to know accurately and to live fulfillingly. Moreover, without an explanation of spirituality, there can be no adequate psychology of religion because spirituality is religion's core and distinctive feature. Religion and spirituality are, indeed, distinguishable, and adequate treatment of both requires their differentiation and a prior explanation of spirituality. How separable they are is another, debatable, and relatively trivial question (Pargament 1999; Rayburn 1996c; Sperry 2005, 2008; Sperry and Mansager 2007; Sperry and Shafranske 2005, pp. 333–350; Zinnbauer and Pargament 2005; Zinnbauer et al. 1999).

Conclusion

By emphasizing spirituality, I have highlighted oversights in the recent *Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*. While offering a hefty cache of information to professionals unfamiliar with the field, *Handbook* has under-served foundational researchers within the field. Regrettably, by virtually identifying the psychologies of religion and of spirituality, *Handbook* ignores or obscures the fundamental questions facing the field. Taken seriously, these philosophical and methodological questions qualify what *Handbook* presents. Moreover, their scientific resolution, which has indeed been engaged elsewhere, as I have noted, would also finally and happily reorient the whole of the human sciences. As it is, however, despite its newly formulated "paradigm," the psychology of religion of *Handbook* is the expression of a field that, for historical reasons, has experienced a recent burgeoning of interest. Unfortunately, for additional reasons of politics, academic institutionalization, funding, and human limitation, the field does not address the burning issues—they are spiritual—that are at stake in these same contemporary forces.

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