# CHAPTER 18
# Personality Sciences

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The study of Christian spirituality is rapidly developing as an interdisciplinary field. According to Sandra Schneiders, "it seeks to understand [Christian experience] as it actually occurs, as it actually transforms its subject toward fullness of life in Christ, that is, toward self-transcending life-integration within the Christian community of faith" (1998: 3). As such, Christian spirituality is studied within the horizon of meaning and practice created by its specifically Christian content and context. Its interdisciplinary partners will ordinarily include the history of Christian spirituality, Scripture as its foundational source, and the particular history and theological emphases of specific Christian traditions. The particular aspect of spirituality, a given issue or problem constituting a scholar's inquiry, will dictate which additional disciplines the researcher will bring to bear on the particular problem.

Because of the intrinsic inter-relationships between spirituality and psychology – both fields concentrating on human interiority and its patterns of deformation, development, integration, and its relationship to the sacred – this particular dialogue has moved from hostility to rivalry, to mutual cooperation, and to mutual respect. In many schools of psychology today, the significance of spirituality as one aspect of the client's worldview and its importance in contributing to positive or negative therapeutic outcomes have made spirituality a major contemporary research topic. The current interest from the perspective of psychology is so intense that psychology may well become the authoritative discipline in the study of spirituality on the basis of the sheer quantity of studies and practitioners who are rapidly incorporating spirituality into their research and therapeutic work. The vast majority of these researchers and therapists embrace generalized definitions of spirituality that assume the independence of spirituality from religious communities of faith, an eclectic approach to spiritual practices emphasizing Eastern meditation, and frequently a markedly privatized account of spirituality and religious experience detached from commitments to actions of love, compassion, or justice in church and society.

Scholars specifically interested in the study of Christian spirituality will need to be alert to these subtle biases and correct for the way in which Christianity historically specifies spiritual life *vis-à-vis* the triune God revealed in Jesus and the ongoing participation in the paschal mystery in actual communities of faith in and through the gift of the Spirit. This kind of dialogue implies the need to incorporate mutually critical correlations in the use of the personality sciences in the study of Christian spirituality. Despite the need for a critical reading of psychological resources, the explosion of research in the past fifteen years provides a rich starting-point for this dialogue. Specific contributions from psychology include: the development of psychoanalytic theory that is appreciative of spirituality as well as critical of its pathological uses, developmental psychology, cognitive psychology, gender differences, understanding of the neurological and physical benefits of meditation practices, the development of qualitative research methods, and a variety of psychometric scales measuring some aspects of spirituality, as well as a rich source of potential correlations between spiritual practices and physical and psychological wellbeing in health-related research. There is also a host of individual topics, such as consciousness studies, transition theory, sexual issues, therapeutic modalities, forgiveness, and trauma, among other possibilities.

## Problems of Definition

Frequently, various psychologies understand spirituality in ways that may be subtly or dramatically at variance with a Christian perspective. Ewert Cousins developed this definition of spirituality for the Crossroad "World Spirituality" series:

> that inner dimension of the person called by certain traditions "the spirit." This spiritual core is the deepest center of the person. It is here that the person is open to the transcendent dimension; it is here that the person experiences ultimate reality. The series explores the discovery of this core, the dynamics of its development, and its journey to the ultimate goal. It deals with prayer, spiritual direction, the various maps of the spiritual journey, and the methods of advancement in the spiritual ascent. (Cousins 1985: xiii)

My own definition further specifies Cousins: Christian spirituality is our way of being, the way we live our lives as a consequence of our experience of God in Jesus. It is how we respond to the "Holy" and how we express the implications of that experience in our relationship with ourselves, with others, with society, with the creation. It is a dynamic love relationship, responsive to the ultimate loving source of our being who desires for us fullness of life. It includes our reciprocation of that love by our being loving, caring, justice-making inhabitants of our world, appreciators of this beauty and life.

The assumptions in these definitions from a theological perspective include the reality of God and the reality of spirit in the human person that has the graced capacity to move toward self-transcendence. Relationship to transcendence imbues life with profound meaning both as belief and as relational experience. Christian tradition offers a horizon of meaning, a community of believers, a way of life, a history of this

spiritual quest, and practical means to achieve it. It includes not only a privatized realm of personal religious experiencing, but also actual commitment to love of neighbor as a criterion of our love for God whom we do not see. Implied in these definitions is that this dimension of human life unfolds over time and admits of development.

Depending on the particular psychological theory employed, psychologists often define spirituality functionally as comprising beliefs and values as its meaning-making function and spiritual experiences as its experiential component. Typically, religious practices such as church attendance or affiliation, reading/study, meditation and prayer constitute behavioral dimensions. Less obvious in the psychological definitions are commitment to spiritual practice, a relational context for mystical experience, and criteria for recognized behaviors and attitudes that show continuity between religious experience, worship in a committed faith community, and activities in the world.

## Psychoanalytic Theories

Psychoanalytic theory began as hostile to religion/spirituality, framed by Freud as an "illusion" that people would eventually outgrow. Akhtar and Parens summarize two of his points on the origins of religious belief: "1. Religious beliefs derived from the child's earliest experiences of helplessness, which is continued in the adult. 2. 'Religion is comparable to a childhood neurosis' and Freud wondered if 'mankind [can] surmount this . . . neurosis'" (2001: 5). Nevertheless, Freud's discovery of the unconscious, of unconscious conflicts within the psyche and their origins in very early childhood experiences, of the phenomena of transference and counter-transference, and of methods of access to the unconscious through dreams, everyday slips of the tongue, and the therapeutic process of free association have all become part of our understanding of the human. From the perspective of Christian spirituality, Freud's reductionism of religion exclusively to neurosis or pathology must be rejected, although pathological manifestations of spirituality or religious practice can certainly be recognized through his theories.

Freud's drive theory based on the instincts of sex and aggression within a self-contained, autonomous model of the psyche has undergone the greatest amount of revision in the psychoanalytic tradition that developed after him. Freud's emphasis on psychopathology, while continuing to offer considerable insight into what has gone wrong in individual psychic life, was amplified into theories of the psyche accounting for normal growth and development. The ego psychology of Erik Erikson, Margaret Mahler, Anna Freud, and Heinz Hartman might be placed in this category. Mahler's work detailing the singular importance of the mother in normal development modifies Freud's placing the need for protection and dependence on the father, suggesting that God-representations and Freud's "oceanic experience" are more accurately rooted in the maternal. She further developed the idea that dependence is not restricted to childhood experience and that adults continue to be dependent as adults, not necessarily in a regressed form. Akhtar and Parens build on this insight to assert that "religious belief can be a fulfillment of some people's adult dependency needs" (2001: 10). Erikson's "basic trust" established in the maternal matrix also suggests a non-pathological basis for faith, and his developmental schema, which extends through the life-cycle with characteristic tasks and virtues for each stage, has been a frequent dialogue partner for the study of Christian spirituality. Feminist critique points out the male bias of this "normative" schema and requires correction for female development over the life-cycle.

Object relations theory and self-psychology offer rich and complex possibilities for understanding Christian spirituality. Theorists such as Winnicott, Milner, Stern, Mitchell, Kernburg, Bowlby, and, more recently, a number of feminist psychologists at the Stone Center in Massachusetts, have been part of a paradigm shift in psychoanalysis. According to Stephen Mitchell (1988: 17): "mind has been redefined from a set of predetermined structures emerging from inside an individual organism to transactional patterns and internal structures derived from an interactive, interpersonal field." Mitchell describes contributions from these theorists along three main lines: discoveries that humans are relational by design, by intent, and by implication. He summarizes the complexity of this relational matrix:

> human beings are simultaneously self regulating and field regulating. We are concerned with both the creation and maintenance of a relatively stable, coherent sense of self out of the continual ebb and flow of perception, and affect, and the creation and maintenance of dependable, sustaining connections with others, both in actuality and as internal presences. The dialectic between self-definition and connection with others is complex and intricate, with one or the other sometimes being more prominent. Self-regulatory and field regulatory processes sometimes enhance each other and sometimes are at odds with each other, forming the basis for powerful conflicts. The intrapsychic and the interpersonal are continually interpenetrating realms, each with its own set of processes, mechanisms, and concerns. (Mitchell 1988: 35)

Heinz Kohut's self-psychology emphasizes early "narcissistic" functions of the parent's admiring "mirroring" of the child's perfection and the child's "idealizing" this perfect parent. He saw that the sense of self as stable and valuable grows out of these two key experiences. The self object provides an empathic function. In Kohut's theory (1971, 1977), this use of "narcissistic" is developmental rather than a disorder.

D. W. Winnicott (1965, 1971) built his theory on the basis of his observations of mothers with their children. He developed rich theories of these interactions, describing functions among them, such as "facilitating environment," "holding environment," "transitional objects," and "transitional phenomena." The good-enough mother provides an environment in which the child's needs are sufficiently met in an almost invisible way so that the child feels a "subjective omnipotence." Gradually, the child becomes aware of her as a presence, and can both internalize an image of her and maintain symbolically a connection with her through a "transitional object" imbued with her presence, even when she is physically absent. Winnicott also talks about the space between the child and its mother. This space in between the self and an "object" (the actual mother) provides the psychic space for their interaction, a between within which self and other can be differentiated and discovered. In Winnicott's theory, this "space between" grounds the capacity to be alone, which first needs to happen in the presence of another and is also the space in which play unfolds (Winnicott 1965). Winnicott generalizes this transitional kind of experiencing to the realms of creativity and culture in adult life.

William W. Meissner and Michael Eigen both recognized the potential for religious or mystical interpretations of transitional phenomena. Meissner (1987) applied this term to faith, God-representations, symbols, and prayer. Eigen (1998) not only incorporates these transitional phenomena into his understandings of the mystical, but also adopts the sacred "incommunicado core of the self" and the necessary "unintegration" that allows new experiences to emerge and fosters a reworking of the sense of self. Akhtar and Parens (2001: 7) add to the possibilities for the relationship of "transitional phenomena" to religious experience:

> *Transitional space*, Winnicott suggests, is where the feeling of oneness and vagueness experienced while being nurtured by mother resides. It is experienced as a confluence of reality and unreality but such matters do not form its content. It is the psychic area where imagination is born and paradox reigns supreme. *Transitional object* is a concrete representative of the experience of being nurtured by mother, whereas the *transitional phenomenon* is an affective-perceptual psychic state that is transportable into selective experiences. The transitional object can be held, cuddled, sucked on, thrown into a corner, subjected to abuse. The transitional phenomenon is not contained in a concrete structure; it cannot be held or discarded. It is subjectively experienced, enjoyed, and neither questioned nor not questioned for its verity. Religious feelings and belief seem to lie in this realm.

Jones (1991) describes how "In prayer there really is no 'object' that the believer manipulates but rather a psychological 'space' or state of consciousness which s/he enters. From a religious standpoint that may be the most significant referent of the term 'transitional'" (1991: 126).

Object relations theories and self-psychology offer great potential for elucidating the self/other relationship that unfolds over time in Christian faith and mystical experience. Prayer can be understood as entering into a state of consciousness that promotes this mutual influence and discovery of two subjectivities. It can be seen as more than an exercise in projection but something much richer in the interplay between two others. These theories also suggest models for understanding the positive psychological growth and development of the self as a result of encounter with God in prayer, as well as the likely transformation of both self-objects and God-representations (Frohlich 1993; Gillespie 1995). A relational theory of psychological development is more congruent with Christian spirituality's belief in a God who self-reveals and relates. These theories might also suggest compassionate ways of understanding what might have gone wrong in an individual's development that makes it psychologically impossible or unlikely to achieve religious ideals such as a capacity for agapic love.

## God-representations

Ana-Maria Rizzuto (1979) pioneered the psychoanalytic study of God-representations, or images of God, in her client population as well as in research with other subjects. Her approach as an analyst to this phenomenon is carefully intrapsychic. In other words, therapists need to explore with a high degree of sophistication the client's subjective experience of God. Rizzuto (2001) notes the way in which most people in American culture form an unconscious and frequently conscious representation of God based on their life history, object relations, narcissistic balance, and defensive structures – all areas to be worked with therapeutically. She asserts that therapists need to explore these representations and their sources as they would any other psychic content. She also claims that therapists should refrain from theological assertions or rejections of the existence of God, which she says lie outside the realm of empirical work. She restricts her consideration to the formation of what she calls a "personal God" that may bear great or little resemblance to the images of God presented within the client's religious tradition. She describes ways in which this internal representation of God develops and changes over time. Finally, she offers accounts of helpful and harmful client relationships with their personal God. "The help or lack of it coming from such a God depends on the relational dynamics between a particular personal God and the conception of oneself in relation to God" (2001: 23). These God-representations contain parental images, but Rizzuto has also discovered that they are usually not purely exalted parental images. When they are, it is often seriously pathological. Rather, these representations are "collages of significant aspects of primary object, significant adults, (grandparents, aunts and uncles, and at times siblings and religious figures) who have created meaningful, real or imagined libidinal ties with the child" (2001: 29). In the course of development, God, as an internally represented object, undergoes modifications as the result of a person's experiences and encounters with others.

Rizzuto also finds that believers engage in a lifelong process of forming and reforming their personal God in relation to the teachings of their tradition, which presents a God who transcends this personal representation, and in relation to events that challenge their representations. She finds that a positive, loving, responsive image of God corresponds to human desires for intimacy and relationship. This God is "always there" – similar to Winnicott's "good-enough mother" in whose presence the child can be comfortable being alone. When parents also believe in God, children can take comfort and hope that their parents' omnipotence can be moderated by a God who is greater than the parents. However, Rizzuto concludes that God-representations may either help the person or be exceedingly persecutory and destructive. It depends on the God-representation through which the person relates to God in prayer, as well as on the person's unconscious dynamics. God-representations may be part of the transference, may be a resistance, or may be used defensively. If a therapist is willing to follow all the ways in which these God-representations offer clues into a client's psychodynamics, the client may "acquire a new mode of believing that is devoid of its old psychological burdens" (2001: 46).

Elsewhere Rizzuto carefully states that for this benefit to be attained:

> it is indispensable that the analyst *never make any pronouncement about God or religion*. Technically, such pronouncement disrupts the working through of the personal representation of God and of personal belief. It also conveys to the patient that the analyst knows God for sure, and has the right to demand that the analysand submits to the authority of the analyst. This goes against the aim of treatment, which is to help the patient find maximal autonomy and internal freedom. It is not the responsibility of the analyst to help

the patient find the "true" God and religion. His responsibility is to help the patient to find God and religion in the context of his past life history and present circumstances. (1996: 429)

Rizzuto suggests that this type of analytic work is very difficult for therapists who have not explored their own development and transformation of their God-representations.

In addition to this psychoanalytic research and reflection on clinical experience, Joseph Ciarrocchi (2000) reports that extensive empirical studies of people's perceptions of God have been done at Loyola College in Maryland. Pointing to a growing body of data that requires further exploration to discover the inter-relationships of various factors, he calls for theologians (and I would add those who study Christian spirituality) to take these findings seriously, critically incorporating them into their own work.

## Cognitive Theorists

One of the most common definitions of spirituality in the psychological literature is "the sense of meaning and purpose in life." Developmental psychologists, beginning with Piaget's account of cognitive development, have created a variety of stage theories of development. These are primarily ways of describing the ability to increase cognitive complexity as one progresses through the stages. In relation to spirituality, this means that the worldview and meaning-making approaches of people in each stage of development are distinctive ways of viewing multiple aspects of reality within a comprehensive worldview. Stage theories assume that the stages are sequential, with each requiring the achievement of the preceding stage and including it. Typically, stage change, which is not necessarily achieved by all beyond a conventional level, is facilitated by "pacers" (some kind of challenge that promotes change) combined with an adequate "holding environment" that provides a context for a person undergoing stage change to experience both confirmation and challenge. Ordinarily, persons within a particular stage cannot abstractly recognize the worldview in which they are currently embedded until they progress to the next stage.

Lawrence Kohlberg explored stages of moral development by exploring children's moral reasoning. His colleague and collaborator Carol Gilligan challenged the gender bias of his theory and described a relational ethic of care as more typical of women than Kohlberg's ethic of rules. James Fowler applied the general stage theory to faith development. Robert Kegan (1982, 1994) developed yet another model of cognitive development, giving a progressive account of what constitutes the "self" and what constitutes the "other," noting the affective process of losing the self one knows and reconstituting a new self. Elizabeth Liebert (1992) adopted Kegan's account of process and combined it with Jane Loevinger's (1976) account of ego development based on studies of women. More recently, Fredric Hudson (1999) has proposed a more complex and socially integrated theory of adult development in his theory of self-renewing adulthood. Hudson focuses on life mission as the core around which each new life-chapter

is organized. This makes a core sense of meaning the point of stability around which other changes of the self revolve. Both Liebert and Joann Wolski Conn (1989) have shown the applicability of these theories to spiritual development, spiritual direction, and pastoral counseling.

## Analytic and Transpersonal Psychology

Even in Freud's own lifetime, Carl Jung broke with him over his exclusively sexual interpretations of libidinal theory and rejected his interpretation of religion as a defensive distortion of individual libido. Jung in 1912 broadened the meaning of libido from sexual need and sexual desire to "passionate desire" (Halligan and Shea 1992). Jung sought to include all dimensions of psychic life as important, and posited that psychological healing could occur through a spiritual dimension which he accessed through dreams and myths. Analytic psychology focused its attention more on psychological developments that tend to take place at midlife or later, and that Jung believed were essentially spiritual issues – questions related to meaning and openness to the unconscious and its collective archetypes, including the numinous archetype of the self. This inherent openness to admit spiritual experience into analysis through dream, symbol, and experiences of the "numinous" made analytic psychology a natural conversation partner for studies in Christian spirituality. Jung himself wrote from considerable familiarity with various mystical traditions, and although the way he posited the possible existence of God or Spirit remained conceptually ambiguous in his scientific writings, this conceptual lack of clarity became an intensive object of focus and stimulated many studies relating the compatibility of this theoretical frame with Christianity. Although feminist scholars have consistently critiqued the patriarchal bias within the Jungian system, his model of the unconscious and the psyche's journey through individuation continues to attract scholarly and practical interest.

As a psychologist, Jung tries to describe the intrapsychic process of relating to multiple aspects of psychic life through conscious assimilation of the personal and collective archetypes activated uniquely in each person's psyche. The primary disadvantage of analytic psychology is its neglect of instinctual and relational life. This intrapsychic exploration can tend to become increasingly intellectualized and abstracted from life, and maintain the analysand's focus on the products of his/her own consciousness within his/herself rather than an actual relatedness to others and activity in the world that revolves around the progressive transformation of the self in relationship to the reality of Godhead. For some, Jungian psychology functionally becomes a gnostic form of spirituality. Nevertheless, analytic psychology opened the way for many rich explorations of Christian symbols, rituals, and images that shape Christian consciousness and organize psychic energy in particular directions.

Roberto Assajoli (1971), one of Jung's followers, developed this symbolic aspect of analytic psychology in quite practical ways through his system of psychosynthesis. This school of transpersonal psychology developed methods of discriminating between the disintegrating and integrating potential of working directly with symbolic material as it emerges from the middle-unconscious, that part of the unconscious ready to emerge

into consciousness. These methods and techniques presuppose a higher transpersonal center of consciousness that is not identified with the ego or with any of the partial contents of the unconscious. Using waking imagery guidance, therapeutic interventions can encourage psychic growth integrated around this transpersonal center by safely encountering the disintegrative images and modifying them with alternative images until they transform into a new synthesis. This approach to symbols and how they organize, express, or dissipate psychic energy is particularly helpful for understanding and nurturing these processes within imaginative prayer or as they appear in visionary mystical states. This connection between imagery and psychic and even physical health has produced a voluminous literature.

Transpersonal psychologists have continued to hold as their central concern the "movement and growth of consciousness – its development, vicissitudes, and varied expressions in its divine unfolding" (Cortright 1997: 49). Again according to Cortright, "the ideal would be both great cohesion of the conditioned part of consciousness, that is the self, along with a free, unobstructed connection to the unconditional, spiritual being underlying this surface self" (1997: 48). William James pioneered a religious experience model, while Abraham Maslow focused on self-actualization and peak-experiences. Both tended to privatize their accounts of religious experiencing, deracinating them from specific religious traditions. Yet they gave accounts of healthy spiritual development within these limitations. Transpersonal psychology consistently resists the attempts of psychological theory to reduce the search for God, for self-transcendence – a major human motivation – to the kinds of regressive interpretation favored by early Freudians. Transpersonal psychology takes for granted a worldview that includes and learns from the world's spiritual traditions and that posits multiple rich forms of consciousness. As Cortright says, "the first two decades of writings in the field were largely focused on the 'high end' of human experiencing" (1997: 12). The mission statement of the first *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* illustrates these concerns:

publication of theoretical and applied research, original contributions, empirical papers, articles and studies in meta-needs, ultimate values, unitive consciousness, peak experience, ecstasy, mystical experience, B-values, essence, bliss, awe, wonder, self-actualization, ultimate meaning, transcendence of the self, spirit, sacralization of everyday life, oneness, cosmic awareness . . . and related concepts, experiences, and activities. (Sutich 1969: 16)

These particular research interests have contributed considerably to the understanding of altered states of consciousness, the psychology of meditation, and the pleasurable side of spiritual experience.

The work of Cristina and Stanislov Grof (1989) challenged a previous tendency of clinicians to pathologize some "breakthrough" experiences into unfamiliar states of consciousness as psychotic states requiring medication to eliminate them. The Grofs recognized some confusing altered states of consciousness as "spiritual emergencies" requiring, instead, a safe holding environment enabling the person to understand the emergence of a transpersonal realm in their experience and to integrate it, with or without the help of medication. Transpersonal psychology sought to understand the

kind of personality development needed in order to sustain intense states of consciousness or sensory deprivation without temporary or permanent psychic disintegration and to begin to differentiate when both mystical and psychotic features were simultaneously present (Lukoff 1985). The ability to recognize that mystical experience may occur in some people without pathological symptoms once the mystical interlude has ended validates long-held assumptions within the Christian mystical tradition. Recognizing the simultaneous presence of pathological symptoms and mystical experience enables researchers to identify pathological symptoms within the life histories of some mystics (Agosin 1992). Transpersonal psychology frequently attempts to demonstrate that it is possible to contact a deeper source of wisdom or guidance within than is available through surface levels of personality, and that this is helpful to psychological growth. Further, fostering conscious alignment of personal will and desires with spiritual impulses is a positive life value (Cortright 1997).

As transpersonal psychology has developed, it is now giving more attention to spirituality and ordinary life, as well as to experiences of suffering, pain, and abuse. The transpersonal psychologists have contributed to a more general shift in clinical work toward respect for spirituality and a variety of therapeutic approaches that work with wounds from early development without denigrating the transpersonal dimensions of human life. Nevertheless, there remain within the psychological literature, even the transpersonal work, explanatory systems that conceptualize the "transpersonal" as some part of the unconscious, some aspect of human experience, some aspect of psychological experience that falls short of the complex interpersonal relationship with God, a divine Other, not identified with the self but certainly experienced as affecting the self. It appears as if soul/spirit has so thoroughly collapsed into psyche that there is little conceptual room left for the mysterious and unaccountable spiritual effects of this relationship, which, according to Christian mystics, often takes place beneath psychological awareness, but nevertheless brings about transformations in both the divine–human relational life and the Christian's day-to-day experience.

Most of the literature in transpersonal psychology is focused on non-dualistic Eastern forms of religion or spiritual practice. Many of the "maps" of consciousness, such as Ken Wilber's spectrum of consciousness and other theories, tend to force the more theistic, inter-relational forms of religious experience into this overarching framework. Wilber has attempted to delineate various levels of consciousness, each affecting personal growth, largely in a Buddhist framework (1981). Wilber attempts to relate psychotherapy to personal growth by showing which levels of personal reality are addressed by specific therapeutic approaches. His map of consciousness does not necessarily correspond to the progression of Christian spiritual life. For Wilber, psychological work precedes spiritual development.

Wilber is a creative and original thinker who is currently attempting to form a unified theory that can join science and spirit, but he frequently fails to correct his earlier constructions on the basis of more recent understandings (1999). His model contributes the basic insight that psychological therapies of various kinds can only address certain layers of the psyche. (Early wounds require a psychoanalytic approach, and so on.) His model of psychological growth preceding spiritual growth, which has been taken up by

many, fails to take into account the possibility that spiritual awakening can and does happen in very young children and can occur at any point in the life-cycle. At the same time, he rightly recognizes that spiritual practices alone do not adequately address psychological deficiencies suffered along the way. His recognition that spiritual levels of consciousness are not addressed by therapeutic means places some limits on psychology – limits psychologists need to pay attention to. Psychological training is not the same as spiritual development within a specific religious tradition. Nor do one's personal religious experiences alone qualify one to facilitate another's spiritual growth. A second important contribution made by Wilber is his concept of the "pre/trans fallacy." He suggests that Western psychotherapy typically made the mistake of associating transpersonal states, Freud's "oceanic feeling," with pre-personal development or regression to that level in a psychosis. Wilber asserts that transpersonal states, rather than being psychotic or regressive, represent a development beyond solid reflexive ego consolidation. They also introduce a non-ego bound way of experiencing reality. It makes a difference whether or not these experiences occur before or after ego development.

An interesting attempt at applying Wilber's framework to an explicitly Christian context is Jim Marion's (2000) account, which sets his personal spiritual journey within this structure. Marion describes this testimony as an account of the "inner work of Christian Spirituality" illustrating his application of Wilber's schema to Christianity. But his assertions of completely non-dual states of consciousness and the restriction of his account exclusively to the inner states he experiences raise critical questions. Is he still within a Christian paradigm? And what has happened to the actual community of believers we understand to be the church? More exemplars will be needed to substantiate his claims.

Finally, among the transpersonalists is Michael Washburn (1994), who integrates a Jungian approach to the mid-life experience with psychoanalytic perspectives in the first half of life. Washburn uses John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila almost exclusively as Western mystics who represent a theistic, more interpersonal mysticism. One of his most valuable insights is his description of "regression in the service of transcendence," which he characterizes as periods in which the ego finds itself alienated or distanced from ordinary preoccupations, combined with the emergence of new experiences from the dynamic ground including both the lifting of repressions and spiritual experience (Washburn 1995). Although his account of the mid-life experience is highly nuanced, he often conflates descriptions of the dark nights with ordinary mid-life deconstruction, without being able to account for the spiritual aspects of this experience, the transformations happening within systems of belief, the experience of faith, and contemplative experiences that are beyond ego control. Although the dark nights can be described in the psychological terms he employs, his schema does not account for the individual quality of these experiences, nor for the ordinarily competent personality functioning in daily life that tends to accompany these passive purifications. Every mid-life experience is not theologically a dark night of either sense or spirit. His account is helpful in appreciating insights from psychoanalysis, especially developments in object relations and self-psychology, and how they play out spiritually. But, again, he does not ade-

quately account for earlier spiritual awakening and development prior to the mid-life experience, nor does he really suggest what happens spiritually or psychologically after mid-life, if both passive purifications are mid-life phenomena.

## Transcendence

Of singular importance for the study of Christian spirituality is the goal of human development, regardless of the particular school or theorist scholars work with. As Walter Conn puts it, "Can psychological ideals of self-realization, self-fulfillment, and self-actualization be reconciled with traditional Christian ideals of self-denial, self-surrender, and self-sacrifice?" (1998: 35). Conn affirms that self-realization can be understood as compatible with Christianity if it refers to the fulfillment of our true selves, so that self-denial is understood as the "rejection of any interest, desire, or wish of the self that interferes with the realization of our true selves." The self realizes its authentic being in its drive for meaning, truth, value, and love, and rejects self-centered striving for happiness. Authentic self-realization results from a movement beyond oneself in an effort to bring about the good of others. This can even mean losing one's life in the service of love of another. He concludes his introductory treatment of transcendence with this summary: "Every achievement of creative understanding, realistic judgment, responsible decision, and generous love is an instance of self-transcendence. Such cognitive, moral, and affective self-transcendence to which the gospel calls us in service of the neighbor – and nothing less – is the criterion of authentic self-realization" (1998: 36).

This movement toward self-transcendence is a repeated spiral of response within a relational matrix. It requires freedom of spirit and of choice-full commitment, so it cannot be coerced. Various psychological understandings of lack of freedom resulting from wounds in the past, visions of life that are inadequate to account for the complexity and ambiguity of graced human existence, an exclusive focus on self apart from the entire interpersonal context of relationship – all of these can impede the process of self-transcendence. To what shall we commit ourselves in love? Psychological understandings of the self and the goal of human development need to be critiqued and appropriated in such a way that they are compatible with this central goal of Christian spiritual life.

## The Development of Empirical Measures of Spirituality

A major impetus to the development of reliable measures of spirituality during the past decade emerged from interests in finding relationships between religiosity/spirituality and health (Larson 1993; Matthew et al. 1993; Matthew and Larson 1995; Matthew and Saunders 1997). Early studies on meditation documented some of the physiological effects of primarily Eastern meditation practice. A recent review of the current state of the question, now using MRI and other brain scan technology, offers greater

possibility for more significant findings and points to further research. The primary measure of spirituality within Judeo-Christian traditions has been church attendance, which potentially conflates multiple variables related to church affiliation, such as intensity of religiosity, social factors, worship styles, personal prayer practices, values, and beliefs. The meditation studies tend to neglect Judeo-Christian prayer practices and focus on Zen, yoga, and transcendental meditation (Seeman et al. 2003). There are fruitful research opportunities here that will require scholars in Christian spirituality to build on the existing measures and assessment tools to further refine them conceptually and to work with psychologists toward greater context specification.

Hill and Hood (1999) reviewed 125 measures of religion and spirituality, which they placed in seventeen different categories. These included, for example: beliefs, attitudes, religious orientation, faith development, fundamentalism, attitudes toward death, congregational involvement, and satisfaction (Hill and Pargament, 2003). The more specialized Fetzer Institute/National Institute on Aging Working Group (1999) developed a multidimensional measurement of religiousness/spirituality based on twelve domains, which could be used by health researchers without much familiarity with the multiple ways in which religion and spirituality function in people's lives. These twelve domains are: daily spiritual experiences, meaning, values, beliefs, forgiveness, private religious practices, religious/spiritual coping, religious support, religious/spiritual history, commitment, organizational religiousness, and religious preference.

Hill and Pargament identify three conceptual cautions related to the development of these measures as they now exist. They note that the tendency to bifurcate the meanings of religion and spirituality creates greater polarization than is necessary. They point out that *spirituality* is coming to mean "the personal, subjective side of religious experience" in contrast to *religion* as identified with "a fixed system of ideas or ideological commitments" (2003: 64). Thus religion is equated with "an institutional, formal, outward, doctrinal, authoritarian, inhibiting expression" and spirituality with "an individual, subjective, emotional, inward, unsystematic, freeing expression." This split creates different measures for institutional and individual domains. This privatized notion of spirituality neglects the fact that all spiritual expression takes place in larger social contexts, and that organized faith traditions are concerned with both public and private domains of experience. This split assumes that spirituality is generally a positive factor and religion a negative one. This assumption may result in overlooking the negative aspects of spirituality and the positive benefits of religion. Participants in faith traditions experience spirituality within organized religious contexts, although not all persons who espouse spirituality embrace an organized religion. Unnecessary duplication of effort could result from this conceptual trend, instead of the refinement of current measures of religiosity and spirituality. Religion and spirituality are distinct but related constructs and need to be defined in ways that acknowledge their common orientation to the sacred. The same authors note that the empirical research developed by psychologists of religion is not well known by health researchers, and that religion other than religious pathology is not well represented in psychology textbooks.

Nevertheless, Hill and Pargament describe advances already made in developing "spirituality concepts and measures that are functionally related to physical and mental

health" (2003: 66–7). They discuss several of these in some detail: perceived closeness to God; orienting, motivating forces; religious support; religious and spiritual struggle. They hope for the development of alternatives to self-report measures, measures of religious and spiritual "outcomes" rather than of "predictors" alone, and measures of religious and spiritual change and transformation. A further area of development is in longitudinal studies rather than the more popular cross-sectional studies that do not chart development over time. The development of these measures that build conceptual bridges between the study of Christian spirituality and this current empirical work of psychologists of religion could open rich areas for more complex study designs. The implications for further studies and for more competent dialogue between empirically based information and understandings of Christian spirituality could be rich, indeed. How do these findings require changing assumptions about spirituality based in theological and historical disciplines? How might researchers in Christian spirituality contribute to the development of measures that are congruent with Christian experience and practice?

## Qualitative Research in the Study of Christian Spirituality

Qualitative research is becoming increasingly popular as a research methodology in a variety of fields, including psychology, and offers new avenues of inquiry for Christian spirituality as well. Qualitative research is often the starting-point of projects that begin with a conceptual development of the focus of study and eventually result in quantitative studies that can further test the hypotheses and findings of the smaller-scale interview process usually used in qualitative work. Qualitative work is rich in suggestive detail and fosters an exploration of multiple aspects of the study subjects' experience (Miles and Huberman 1984; Moustakas 1990, 1994; Ruffing 1995; Anderson 1998; Hay 1998). The use of qualitative methodology enables ethnographic, phenomenological, and heuristic forms of research that enable the researcher to go beyond his or her own limited perspective yet draw on the researcher's empathic understanding and insight as they emerge in the process of the study. Although the results of such studies do not yield statistically reliable data, they do produce new insights about a broad range of human experiences which may be infused with the sacred, and are thus an appropriate method of research for scholars in Christian spirituality.

## Conclusion

Each approach to the personality sciences presents its own perspectives, insights, and limitations. Therapeutic approaches remain limited to human means. Beneficial interventions can be compared to ascetical means; therapy is a human activity that contributes to self-knowledge, repairs psychic wounds, and contributes to better ego integrity and agency by increasing the client's freedom. It is no longer possible to understand human personhood in its process of choosing some form of self-transcendence, union with the divine, altruistic dedication to others, or even minimally the robust

recognition of the claims of others to the same full personhood as one claims for oneself, without appropriating an adequate understanding of depth psychology. Psychological studies that demonstrate the health benefits of certain meditation practices or forms of Christian prayer may help scholars in Christian spirituality make better recommendations about specific means at certain times in people's lives related to both their existential condition and progress in contemplation.

However, the Christian contemplative tradition holds that prayer and meditation have as their primary purpose the fostering of one's personal relationship with God, and that the ongoing transformation of life and consciousness, resulting over time, unfolds in unpredictable and unique ways for each person. The results of the mysterious interaction of God and the human (spirit/psyche, body) can never be limited to what can be empirically measured or expected from human technologies of the self. Prayer during times of spiritual struggle and change may be one of life's stressors rather than a stress-reducer. Practices that promote healing do not prevent mortals from eventually dying. The quest for meaning or achieving a sense of the value of one's life remains a lifelong project, as does the commitment to the practices that sustain the whole web of relationships constituting Christian life. Psychological language, concepts, and therapies are important, but remain only part of the picture. They cannot become the single methodological lens for the study of Christian spirituality. Scholars in this field will need considerable control over the emerging schools and insights of psychology in order to discover which theorists and which studies offer the greatest potential for adequate understanding of the particular phenomenon that forms part of the problematic for each specific study.

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