

## Conceptualizing Religion and Spirituality: Points of Commonality, Points of Departure

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“For scientific investigation to occur there has to be a consensus of meaning with regard to the phenomenon being observed . . . It is probably because such terms as ‘spiritual’ appear to have subjective meanings which are impossible to operationalize that behavioral scientists have avoided the study of spiritual health and disease.” (Ellison, 1983, p. 331)

Though scholars have long struggled to differentiate the *psyche* (the psychological soul) from the *pneuma* (the religious spirit) (Vande Kemp, 1996), most psychologists of religion trace their discipline back to the pioneering work at the beginning of the century of William James (1902/1961), G. Stanley Hall (1917), and Edwin Starbuck (1899). Indeed, what has been charted in the psychological study of religion during the 20th century is a fascinating course ranging from an impressive inauguration (the aforementioned works of such notable psychologists as James and Hall), to a neglect of the topic during the heyday of behaviorism, to a slumbering though detectable reemergence of the field where theories have been developed and at least some empirical studies conducted. The state of the discipline today can be characterized as sufficiently developed but still overlooked, if not bypassed, by the whole of psychology. One leading scholar (Wulff, 1996) recently concluded that “the literature in this field is far more voluminous than many psychologists would suppose, given its neglect in introductory textbooks and departmental criteria” (p. 44). Yet Wulff also points out that the status of the study of religion within psychology is best described as “precarious” and that there remains a relatively small number of credible contributors to the field.

The apparent neglect of religious experiences as topics of psychological inquiry is all the more surprising given the pervasive and persistent nature of religious belief, practice, and experience among the US populace. Recent surveys (e.g., Gallup, 1994; Gallup & Castelli, 1989; also see Shorto, 1997) suggest that a vast

majority of Americans continue to maintain active religious beliefs and practices: 94% believe in God, 90% pray, 75% report that religious involvement is a positive and enriching experience, and 88% believe that religion is either very important or fairly important in their lives.

One possible reason for overlooking the centrality and importance of religion in the lives of people by psychologists is that psychologists themselves tend to be considerably less religious. For example, only 48% of a sample of clinical and counseling psychologists found religion in their own lives to be either very important or fairly important (reported in Shafranske, 1996), though a much higher percentage (73%) rated spirituality as either very or fairly important. Similarly, Sheridan, Bullis, Adcock, Berlin & Miller (1992) found that only 34% of psychologists, 30% of licensed clinical social workers, and 49% of licensed professional counselors believe that "there is a personal God of transcendent existence and power" and that less than 80% of the surveyed professionals in these three categories maintain any form of religious or spiritual affiliation. Whereas one researcher (Shafranske, 1996) has recently questioned the magnitude of the differences in religious belief and practice between psychologists and the general public, the fact that differences exist has frequently been noted (e.g. Bergin, 1991; Ragan, Malony, & Beit-Hallahmi, 1980; Shafranske & Malony, 1990; Zinnbauer et al., 1997).

If indeed there is a continued reemergence of interest in the study of religion, it no doubt will reflect a major cultural shift in the religious landscape—a shift that is forcing social scientists of religion to rethink their subject matter. The veritable flood of interest in spirituality witnessed in the popular culture during the past few decades has resulted in disagreements and perhaps even confusion about what is meant by such terms as religion and spirituality. Both spirituality and religion are complex phenomena, multidimensional in nature, and any single definition is likely to reflect a limited perspective or interest. In fact, it will be argued that past attempts to define these constructs are often too narrow, resulting in operational definitions that foster programs of empirical research with limited value, or too broad, resulting in a loss of distinctive characteristics of religion and spirituality. Given our limited understanding of contemporary religion and spirituality, it is perhaps premature to insist on a single comprehensive definition of either term; as a result, no such attempt will be made in this article. Rather, the purpose of this paper is to examine religion and spirituality at a basic level by describing the fundamental characteristics of each construct, thereby identifying conceptual overlap and distinctiveness. Also, the emphasis here is to stress the implications of such overlap and distinction for future research, especially that of an empirical nature, rather than for a more effusive personal or subjective meaning.

What will be presented here is an overview and analysis of how religion and spirituality have been conceptualized and defined in the literature. It will be discovered that there is little systematic conceptualization of the relationship of the two constructs by social scientists, especially psychologists. This overview is

then followed by a listing and discussion of criteria perhaps useful in developing working definitions of the two constructs. It is our hope that these criteria will provide direction for future systematic research involving religion and spirituality. However, to begin, an even more basic question for psychologists deserves our attention: Why should psychologists study religion and spirituality?

#### WHY THE PSYCHOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY?

Religion has been one of the most fertile areas of theory and research in much social scientific thinking. Many classical social theorists, some of whom are considered founders of contemporary sociology (e.g., Comte, Durkheim, Marx, Max Weber, etc.), were early and distinguished practitioners of the sociology of religion. For them, religion represented an integral part of a late 19th century society in the midst of social and economic upheavals (Davie, 1998). Similarly, many early prominent psychologists (e.g., Freud, James, Hall, etc.) and some more recent noted psychologists (e.g., Allport, Jung, Fromm, Maslow, etc.) argued that religion or spirituality must be considered for a complete understanding of the person. In addition to the emerging interest in spirituality and the aforementioned data suggesting that religious beliefs and practices remain common and are of central importance to a large number of people, there are numerous inherent characteristics in religion and spirituality that should make their study of vital importance to psychologists. We shall briefly list some of these characteristics in light of basic psychological research as well as application of psychological knowledge.

#### Religion and Spirituality in Relation to Basic Psychological Research

- Religion and spirituality develop across the lifespan. Whether dealing with children, adolescents, adults, or the aged, religious development not only parallels general developmental processes but may shed at least shades of light on these processes; few phenomena may be as integral across life span development as religious and spiritual concerns (Elkind, 1964; Fowler, 1981; Goldman, 1964; Oser & Scarlett, 1991; Tamminen, 1991). Further, both clinical (Rizzuto, 1991; Shafranske, 1996) and experimental research (see Hood, Spilka, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 1996, pp. 44–182) have clearly documented the relevance of spiritual and religious issues in psychological development across diverse cultures, even among persons with little or no formal religious training.
- Religion and spirituality are inherently social-psychological phenomena. Religion and spirituality are typically expressed in groups or are at least influenced by reference groups (Preus, 1987; Stark & Bainbridge, 1980) and

many of the mores and norms of any culture are rooted in religious perspectives that provide an acceptable range of alternatives for normative behavior in any culture (Stark, 1984; Stark & Bainbridge, 1985). Even deviant behavior can be heavily influenced by religious and spiritual norms (Johnson, 1971; Pfeiffer, 1992).

- Religion and spirituality are related to cognitive phenomena. One example is the relationship between particular forms of religious commitment and complexity of thought. For instance, a quest orientation to religion (see Batson, Schoenrade, & Ventis, 1993) may entail more complex thought than other forms of religious commitment (Batson & Raynor-Prince, 1983). In contrast, religious fundamentalism may provide social support for less complex types of thinking (Hunsberger, Alisat, Pancer, & Pratt, 1996; Hunsberger, Lea, Pancer, Pratt, & McKenzie, 1992). Religious beliefs may also be conceptualized as schema, similar to other schema but activated only within religious believers (McIntosh, 1995). Many aspects of contemporary cognitive theory are fruitful in explaining elements of religious and spiritual psychological phenomena (McCallister, 1995).
- Religion and spirituality are related to affect and emotion (Hill, 1995; Hill & Hood, 1999). Classic descriptions of religious experience focus upon its affective aspects (James, 1902/1961; Otto, 1928). Research has long documented the role of affect in religious conversion, especially sudden conversion (Clark, 1929; Scobie, 1973; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 1998). Likewise, how affectual arousal is cognitively assessed has been shown to be an important determinant of religious and spiritual experience (Hill, 1995). In addition, religion supports and provides normative models for particular affective forms of intense arousal in rituals such as glossolalia (Lovekin & Malony, 1977) or the handling of serpents (Hood & Kimbrough, 1995).
- Religion and spirituality are relevant to the study of personality and in the genetic determinants of personality. Certain personality traditions have emphasized the integral relationship between religion, spirituality, and personality. This is especially true of humanist and transpersonal theoretical frameworks (Maslow, 1964; Tart, 1975). Sociobiological theories are particularly prominent in emphasizing genetic and evolutionary factors that have been posited to undergird religious and spiritual beliefs about morality (Wenegrat, 1990; Wilson, 1978). In addition, recent research suggests that a considerable amount of variability in religious behaviors and attitudes might be heritable (D'Onofrio, Eaves, Murrelle, Maes, & Spilka, 1999).

#### Religion and Spirituality in Relation to Application of Psychological Knowledge

- Religion and spirituality have been recognized as having important relationships with mental health status. While some forms of religious commitment

may be psychologically unhealthy in themselves and others may foster pathology, the religion and mental health relationship is complex and simply equating religion with psychopathology has been shown empirically to be no longer justifiable (Gartner, 1996; Schumaker, 1992). Though religion may enhance or support the potential for mental illness and differentially attract the mentally ill, it also can provide alternative treatment approaches for pathology and can furnish safe havens in encapsulated communities, such as the Amish (see Hood, Spilka, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 1996, pp. 406–442). An accumulating body of evidence (Bergin, 1994; Gartner, 1996) suggests that religion and spirituality is just as likely to be a positive as well as a negative factor in predicting mental health. Religion and spirituality have been found to be particularly helpful among the aged (Koenig, 1994; McFadden, 1995, 1996), providing both a meaning to death and hope at the end of the life cycle (Glick, Weiss, & Parkes, 1974; Pruyser, 1986). Religion and spirituality have also been shown to be effective in coping with disability, illness, and negative life events (Pargament, 1997). Prayer can be an especially effective coping mechanism (Poloma & Pendleton, 1989). Also, religion and spirituality are found to be related to physical health status, particularly in providing religiously based norms that govern diet, sexual behavior, and health care behaviors (Levin & Vanderpool, 1992; see also King, 1990 and Hill & Butter, 1995).

- Religion and spirituality are negatively related to drug and alcohol abuse. Mainstream religious commitment is a consistent negative predictor of drug abuse (Gorsuch, 1995). Not only are religious persons less likely to initiate drug abuse (Gorsuch & Butler, 1976), but both mainstream and sectarian forms of religion provide effective norms for discouraging and reducing drug and alcohol abuse among their members. Indeed, when drugs are used in religious or spiritual rituals, abuse is rare, most likely because of the normative framing and control of the drug within a religious or spiritual context (LaBarre, 1972).
- Religion and spirituality are increasingly recognized as having positive derivative social functions (Maton & Wells, 1995). For instance, some denominations provide effective sponsored alternatives to welfare and other government funding aid programs as well as alternatives to health care services. Likewise, many religious and spiritual practices teach that the individual and God should work cooperatively to prevent and cure illness, often relying upon prayer, meditation, or other forms of religiously sanctioned healing practices (Pollner, 1989; Poloma & Gallup, 1990). Religion is also negatively related to deviancy in both straightforward and more complex ways. Hedonistic deviancy such as extramarital sexuality is negatively related with personal religious beliefs (Cochran & Beeghley, 1991) regardless of context. Other forms of deviancy (e.g., theft, violence towards others) can be diminished by contextual factors such as the mere presence and social

prominence of churches, synagogues, and mosques (Bainbridge, 1989, 1992). An important caveat is that the protective and preventive role of religion and spirituality on deviancy is a function of the congruence between the influence of specific religious beliefs and the general cultural norms (see Hood, Spilka, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 1996, pp. 300–337).

Though the balance of the preceding discussion may seem to indicate that religion and spirituality involve positive psychological dynamics, this is not always the case. While arguing that the “moral net” of religion and spirituality is necessary for societal structure and is often of great benefit to the individual, Gartner (1996) concludes that particularly a religious moral net may also snare one “who is progressing in a healthy autonomous way along a path outside the boundaries of what is normally accepted” (p. 203). Clearly, various expressions of religion and spirituality that are characterized as more pathological or less healthy can be identified: for example, an impoverished authoritarian religion or spirituality (Fromm, 1950), a superficial literal religion or spirituality (Hunt, 1972), a strictly utilitarian and self-beneficial extrinsic religion or spirituality (Allport, 1950), and a conflict-ridden, fragmented religion or spirituality (Pargament, 1997). Researchers have recently argued for the need to avoid simple labels of religion and spirituality as wholly good or wholly bad (Zinnbauer, Pargament, & Scott, 1999).

#### EVOLVING PERSPECTIVES ON RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

The word “religion” comes from the Latin root *religio* which signifies a bond between humanity and some greater-than-human power. Scholars identify at least three historical designations of the term: 1) a supernatural power to which individuals are motivated or committed; 2) a feeling present in the individual who conceives such a power; and 3) the ritual acts carried out in respect of that power (Wulff, 1997). Drawing upon the work of the eminent scholar of comparative religion, Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1962/1991), Wulff maintains that religion has become increasingly reified in contemporary society; that is, frequently religion has been transformed from an abstract process to a fixed objective entity expressed through a definable system (e.g., denominations, theological traditions, major world religions, etc.). Smith (and Wulff) conclude that this unfortunate reification of religion, though sometimes useful for classification purposes, is a serious distortion and depreciation of religion because it overlooks the dynamic personal quality of much religious experience.

Philosophers and theologians (e.g., Heschel, 1958; Tillich, 1952) suggest that religion should be sensitive and responsive to ultimate questions, while urging the individual to pursue a search for answers to those questions. For Heschel, religious thinking is “an intellectual endeavor out of the depths of reason. It is a source of cognitive insight into the ultimate issues of human existence” (Heschel,

1958, p. 43). In a similar vein, anthropologist Clifford Geertz portrays religion as an attempt to conserve the fund of general human meaning, within which the individual interprets his or her experiences and organizes day to day conduct. According to Geertz (1973), “the force of religion in supporting social values rests, then, on the ability of its symbols to formulate a world in which those values, as well as the forces opposing their realization, are fundamental ingredients” (p. 131).

In addition to their portrayal of religion as a generally positive, stabilizing influence on the lives of adherents, what is noteworthy about approaches such as Heschel’s and Geertz’s to defining religion (or religiousness) is that they are broad enough to subsume a “spiritual” component. The word “spirituality” is taken from the Latin root *spiritus* meaning breath or life, with the Latin *spiritus* designating simply a person “of the spirit.” The term, frequently mentioned in the Hebraic Old Testament (*ruach*) and the Greek New Testament (*pneuma*), has historically been referenced in the context of religion and is still both experienced and expressed by many through conventional religious understanding (Bibby, 1995; Zinnbauer et al., 1997).

Not all current conceptions of spirituality are linked to religion, though the use of the term apart from religion has a surprisingly short history (Sheldrake, 1992; Wulff, 1997). Spilka’s (1993) review of the literature led him to conclude that most contemporary understandings of spirituality fall into one of three categories: 1) a *God-oriented* spirituality where thought and practice are premised in theologies, either broadly or narrowly conceived; 2) a *world-oriented* spirituality stressing one’s relationship with ecology or nature; or 3) a *humanistic* (or *people-oriented*) spirituality stressing human achievement or potential. Thus, according to Spilka, spirituality should be viewed as a multidimensional construct.

### Multidimensional Constructs

Many descriptions of spirituality emphasize one aspect of spiritual experience, sometimes to the neglect of other dimensions: an ultimate concern (e.g., Tillich, 1952), an integrating or unifying factor within the personality (e.g., Howden, 1992), authenticity (e.g., Helminiak, 1996), a source of yearning (e.g., May, 1988), a meaningful identity and purpose (e.g., Bollinger, 1969), a union with God (e.g., Magill & McGreal, 1988). Recognizing that spirituality may include any or several of these characteristics, a number of researchers (e.g., Beck, 1986; Elkins, Hedstrom, Hughes, Leaf, & Saunders, 1988; Helminiak, 1996; LaPierre, 1994) have proposed multidimensional frameworks. For example, LaPierre identifies the following components: 1) a search for meaning in life; 2) an encounter with transcendence; 3) a sense of community; 4) a search for ultimate truth, or highest value; 5) a respect and appreciation for the mystery of creation; and 6) a personal transformation. A profile analysis involving each element individually

and all elements collectively within a multidimensional framework may be a fruitful way to approach the study of spirituality (Spilka & McIntosh, 1996).

Religion is likewise multidimensional. For example, Marty and Appleby (1991), in the introduction to the first of their five edited volumes on religious fundamentalism, stress the multifaceted nature of religion. They suggest that religion deals with the ultimate concerns of people and provides personal as well as social identity within the context of a cosmic or metaphysical background. Quite importantly, such descriptions are similar to what have been included in many definitions of spirituality. But religion, according to Marty and Appleby, also stipulates behavioral patterns and encourages adherents to practice certain forms of religious expression, characteristics that many forms of spirituality do not support or even resist.

Therefore, though distinct in some regards, there are many common characteristics found between religion and spirituality. Thus, to view the two multidimensional constructs only by contrast is to ignore a potentially rich and dynamic interaction.

### The Recent Schism

Sheldrake (1992) suggests that the recent schism between religion and spirituality is the result of human knowledge and historical-cultural events that continually affect peoples' perceptions of the divine. Thus, each generation may be required to define what abstractions such as "religion" and "spirituality" are meant to encompass. The latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has witnessed a rise of secularism and a growing disillusionment with religious institutions in western society. The effect of these changes during the 1960s and 1970s was that spirituality began to acquire more distinct meanings and more favorable connotations separate from religion (Turner, Lukoff, Barnhouse, & Lu, 1995). This cultural differentiation has resulted in the present-day trend of viewing spirituality as having positive connotations through its association with personal experiences of the transcendent (Spilka & McIntosh, 1996), and to view religion with its demands of tradition in a much more negative light as a hindrance to spiritual experience (Turner et al., 1995).

A number of social scientists hold to the secularization model, the idea that society moves from a sacred condition to successively secular conditions whereby the sacred continuously recedes. Secularization, it is argued, is a normal modern phenomenon, the result of a triumphant rise of science and rational enlightenment over superstition and mysticism. Thus, over time, religion becomes less relevant or socially useful. Examples from the classical literature in sociology include Comte's contention that religion exists in a more primitive human developmental stage that gives way to the evolutionary emergence of a positive scientific stage. Durkheim (1912/1965) too insisted that religion declines as science



advances, though he maintained that the gods of traditional religion are replaced by secular gods. Both Comte and Durkheim view the displacement of religion by a rationally enlightened culture as signs of social progress. Max Weber (1922/1964), though agreeing with Comte's and Durkheim's analysis of the eventual demise of religion, views the replacement culture as impoverished and unable to fulfill a great void in the human search for meaning.

In light of what appears to be a persistent commitment, at least among the US populace, to religious and/or spiritual belief (e.g., see Gallup, 1994; Gallup & Castelli, 1989; Shorto, 1997), contemporary sociological theory now questions the adequacy of the secularization thesis (see Hammond, 1985). Though discussing specifically church-sect theory, Stark (1985) states:

Sometimes the pace of secularization is slower and sometimes it is faster (the rise of science in the West may well have produced relatively rapid secularization). But fast or slow, if secularization is universal and normal, then it *does not* imply the demise of religion. It *does* imply the eventual failure of specific religious organizations as they become too worldly and too emptied of supernaturalism to continue to generate commitment. (p. 145)

Revisionists of secularization theory (e.g., Hunter, 1983; Luckmann, 1967; Stark & Bainbridge, 1996) contend that secularization calls for the transformation, not the elimination, of religion. One such transformation is what Hunter (1983) calls the "deinstitutionalization of religious reality" (p. 14) in the world views of modern people. Hunter cites three characteristics of modern society that contribute to this deinstitutionalization: 1) the naturalistic metaphysic of "functional" rationalization (i.e., the infusion of rational controls into all human experience), 2) a cultural pluralism that both exposes people to variant social perspectives and undercuts the support of monopolistic world views, and 3) a structural pluralism that dichotomizes human experience into public and private spheres. The primary constraint, according to Hunter, that structural pluralism imposes on religion is privatization.

At the subjective level of people's world views, the privatization of religion is internalized. Among other things this means that religious symbols and meanings tend to be relevant only within certain contexts of the modern person's everyday life, the moments spent in the private sphere. The highly rational character of the public sphere and the inutility and implausibility of religious definitions of reality in that context make it less likely that a person's religious beliefs will be relevant to him in such settings. Religion will seem much more viable in ordering his personal affairs. (p. 14)

Hunter's (1983) privatization thesis does not mean that all individuals now experience only an internalized version of religion. Rather, it is contended that the privatization of religion, more than anything else, has encouraged a religious fluidity and perhaps pluralistic understanding in contemporary American culture. Yet historians of religion are quick to point out that American religious individualism

is not a phenomenon of just the past few decades, but in fact can be traced back to the Reformation's emphasis on a direct and personal approach to God and the removal of the church or clergy as a mediator (see Tillich, 1952, pp. 160–163). Here in the United States there were religious visionaries as early as the 1630s, such as Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson, who stressed the individual experience of religion and challenged the authority of the Puritan establishment as they fled Massachusetts for Rhode Island. Since then, says one historian, Americans have chartered "... new religious territory: Witness the continued proliferation and growth of new sects, denominations, and entire religions. The innumerable mansions of American religion have been constructed by many who have exercised their religious individualism by coming out of other houses of worship" (Silk, 1998, p. 5). What has resulted most recently is an approach to religion now identified by students of religion as "Sheilaism," self-named by a young nurse "Sheila Larson," one of the individuals identified by Bellah and his associates in *Habits of the Heart* (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985). The authors contend that "Sheilaism" is significantly representative of contemporary religious life in America. "I believe in God. I'm not a religious fanatic. I can't remember the last time I went to church. My faith has carried me a long way. Its Sheilaism. Just my own little voice" (from Bellah et al., 1985, p. 221).

Though "we do not have good measures of Sheila-like religiosity" (Greer & Roof, 1992, p. 347), it is within this context of individualism in American religious culture that new spiritual practices are evolving (Zinnbauer, Pargament, & Scott, 1999) to the point that Naisbett (1982) identified spirituality as a growing "megatrend."

#### CURRENT DISTINCTIONS AND OVERLAP BETWEEN RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

As spirituality has become differentiated from religion (and religiousness), it has taken with it some of the elements formerly included within religion. Therefore, recent definitions of religion have become more narrow and less inclusive. Whereas religion historically was a "broad-band construct" (Pargament, 1999) that included both individual and institutional elements, it is now seen as a "narrow-band construct" that has much more to do with the institutional alone (Zinnbauer et al., 1999). Spirituality appears to be the favored term to describe individual experience and is identified with such things as personal transcendence, supra-conscious sensitivity, and meaningfulness (Spilka & McIntosh, 1996). As Pargament (1999) states, "... the term spiritual is increasingly reserved for the loftier/functional side of life" (p. 6). Religion, in contrast, is now more often identified with rigid, or "formally structured," religious institutions that often are perceived to restrict or inhibit human potential (Pargament, 1997).

Also, as the label of “spirituality” has become distinct from religiousness, it has been adopted by identifiable groups of believers. For example, many of the 1,599 “baby boomers” studied by Roof (1993) had defected from organized religion in the 1960s and 1970s. Roof also discovered an increase in “New-Age” religious participation, with its emphasis on direct spiritual experience over institutional religion, especially among “highly active seekers” who had rejected organized religion and more traditional forms of worship in favor of a personal faith that they characterized as a “spiritual journey” or spiritual “quest.”

What are the differences in belief and practices between the spiritually versus the religiously committed? In a recent study by Zinnbauer et al. (1997), a group of respondents who identified themselves as “spiritual but not religious” were compared with a larger group of respondents who identified themselves as “spiritual and religious.” Findings indicated that compared with the “spiritual and religious” group, the “spiritual but not religious” group was less likely to view religiousness in a positive light, less likely to engage in traditional forms of worship such as church attendance and prayer, less likely to hold orthodox or traditional Christian beliefs, more likely to be independent from others, more likely to engage in group experiences related to spiritual growth, more likely to hold non-traditional “new age” beliefs, more likely to have had mystical experiences, and more likely to differentiate religiousness and spirituality as different and non-overlapping concepts.

Interestingly, the “spiritual but not religious” group identified by Zinnbauer et al. (1997) corresponds in several ways to the description of the “highly active seekers” within the baby boomer generation provided by Roof (1993). Both groups identify themselves as “spiritual” but not “religious,” both appear to reject traditional organized religion in favor of an individualized spirituality, both are likely to engage in emerging religions that may include New Age beliefs and practices and, compared with their contemporaries, both are more individualistic and more likely to come from homes in which their parents infrequently attended religious services.

Similarly, Bibby’s (1995) Canadian national survey found that over half of the 1713 adult respondents reported “spiritual needs.” A slight majority (52%) of this group expressed such needs in conventional religious terminology (e.g., increased faith in God, prayer, church attendance, etc.), while the rest used less conventional terms (e.g., meditation, reflection, a sense of wholeness, etc.).

Surveys such as Roof’s and Bibby’s uncover interesting data regarding how religion and spirituality are used in self-identification. However, neither study delineates clearly how people think about the relationship (i.e., similarities and differences) between religion and spirituality. Zinnbauer et al. (1997) studied a diverse range of sample populations from New Agers to religiously conservative Christian college students and found that the two concepts were not totally independent, although participants defined religiousness and spirituality quite differently. Definitions of religiousness included both personal beliefs, such as a

belief in God or a higher power, and institutional beliefs and practices such as church membership, church attendance, and commitment to the belief system of a church or organized religion. In contrast, spirituality was most often described in personal or experiential terms, such as belief in (or having a relationship with) God or a higher power, consistent with much of the recent literature already reviewed. Of particular interest, however, was the modest but significant correlation between self-rated religiousness and spirituality, and the finding that 74% of the respondents considered themselves to be *both* spiritual *and* religious. Hence, both religiousness and spirituality were associated with frequency of prayer, church attendance, intrinsic religiosity (i.e., applying religion as a guiding point for one's everyday decisions), and religious orthodoxy. With such findings, it appears that many individuals approach the sacred through the personal, subjective, and experiential path of spirituality; it is also apparent that this experiential path often includes organizational or institutional beliefs and practices. Thus, many individuals appear to see little difference between the two constructs (Pargament, 1997) and, given the complexity of both constructs, the possibility for considerable overlap frequently exists.

Also relevant is the "policy-capturing" study of religiousness and spirituality by Zinnbauer (1997). The policy-capturing approach is a method of using statistical analyses to characterize human decision making and judgment. In this study, 21 Christian clergy and 20 registered nurses were asked to provide ratings of both religiousness and spirituality for sixty profiles of hypothetical people that varied in terms of 8 attributes or cues. Two judgment policies were then statistically derived for each participant that reflected which of the cues were most important to the participants in making their judgments. Four religiousness cues were used in the profiles: 1) participation in formal or organizational religion; 2) acts of altruism; 3) personal religious practices such as prayer or Bible study; and 4) the degree to which an individual derives support or comfort from formal religious beliefs. Four spirituality cues were also used: 1) the spiritual process of seeking personal/existential meaning; 2) having spiritual experiences such as feeling close to God; 3) feeling a sense of interconnectedness with the world and all living things; and 4) the use of spiritual disciplines such as meditation or yoga.

The results of this study indicated that the participants held organized and coherent conceptions of religiousness as well as spirituality, and that the decision-making policies differed from participant to participant. For the clergy, a single cue, participation in formal or organizational religion, was used in a majority of religiousness (90%) and spirituality (63%) policies. As a group, the clergy displayed moderate variation in the cues they used to rate religiousness, versus a substantial variation in the cues they used to rate spirituality. Similar to the clergy, a majority (83%) of the nurses used the cue, participation in formal organizational religion, to rate religiousness, but quite interestingly, no single cue was used by a majority of nurses to rate spirituality. Likewise, the nurses as a group exhibited modest

variation in the cues they used to rate religiousness, and considerable variation in the cues they used to rate spirituality.

Additionally, Zinnbauer (1997) found group differences between the clergy and nurses in their judgment policies of spirituality and religiousness. For example, the clergy consistently used the cue "formal/organizational religion" to rate both religiousness and spirituality, suggesting that they viewed the constructs as conceptually overlapping, much like the rest of the populace. Unlike the clergy, most cues used by the nurses were associated with either religiousness or spirituality, and no single cue was found in a majority of the nurses' policies. The nurses' judgment policies were similar to several current conceptions of the constructs: religiousness was predominantly associated with formal/organizational religion, while spirituality was more often associated with closeness to God and feelings of interconnectedness with the world and living things. The reasons for these group differences were not determined in this study, but variables such as differences in religious training, age, and occupational background were proposed as potential contributors (Zinnbauer, 1997).

In contrast, Scott (1997) found substantial differences in how both religion and spirituality are viewed. She performed a content analysis of a sample of 31 definitions of religiousness and 40 definitions of spirituality that have appeared in social scientific writings in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and found that definitions of religiousness and spirituality were generally evenly distributed over the following 9 content categories: 1) experiences of connectedness or relationship; 2) processes leading to increased connectedness; 3) behavioral responses to something sacred or secular; 4) systems of thought or sets of beliefs; 5) traditional institutional or organizational structures; 6) pleasurable states of being; 7) beliefs in the sacred, the transcendent, etc.; 8) attempts at or capacities for transcendence; and 9) concern with existential questions or issues. Interestingly, no single category accounted for a majority of definitions. Her analysis points to substantial diversity in the content of religiousness and spirituality definitions. It further highlights, as already noted in this article, that comprehensive theories accounting for the multifaceted nature of either the religion or spirituality constructs are lacking in social scientific investigations.

#### POTENTIAL PITFALLS IN THE STUDY OF RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Researchers should be aware of several potentially cautionary issues when contrasting religion and spirituality. Pargament (1997, 1999) points out that current approaches to the study of spirituality include a lack of grounding in both theory and research, serious dangers in and of themselves. But, Pargament (1999) as well as Zinnbauer et al. (1999) also warn against two more subtle dangers, one which can be expressed in two potential forms of polarization: either individual

vs. institutional or “good” vs. “bad.” The second danger is perhaps the more serious: the danger of losing the field’s distinctive sacred core.

### The Danger of Polarization

First, to speak of either individual spirituality or institutional religion ignores, according to Pargament (1999), two important points: 1) virtually all religions are interested in matters spiritual and, 2) every form of religious and spiritual expression occurs in some social context. Second, to argue that spirituality is good and religion is bad (or vice-versa) is to deny a substantial body of research demonstrating that both religion and spirituality can be manifested in healthy as well as unhealthy ways (Allport, 1950; Fromm, 1950; Hunt, 1972).

### The Danger of Losing the Sacred

The term “spiritual” is used in modern discourse often as a substitute for words like “fulfilling,” “moving,” “important,” or “worthwhile.” However, ideologies, activities, and lifestyles are not spiritual (even though they can be fulfilling, moving, important, or worthwhile), we would argue, unless they involve considerations of the sacred. The Sacred is a person, an object, a principle, or a concept that transcends the self. Though the Sacred may be found within the self, it has perceived value independent of the self. Perceptions of the Sacred invoke feelings of respect, reverence, devotion and may, ideally, serve an integrative function in human personality. Such respect or reverence may, but may not, involve the personal commitment to live a life that is congruent with the principles or characteristics of that which is considered sacred. In the context of religion, this sacred content is often defined through institutional mechanisms such as ecclesiastical authority, sacred writings, and traditions. Such institutionalized sources of knowledge work together in religions to provide religious adherents with a picture of what reality is like (e.g., whether or not God exists, the meaning of life, the essential nature of people and the world, etc.), and recommend actions that people should strive to undertake or lifestyles that people should seek to embody to respond appropriately to this reality.

When some people invoke the concept of spirituality, they are indeed referring to an ideology or a lifestyle (de St. Aubin, 1999) that is an attempt to articulate and respond to the sacred. However, when the term “spirituality” is invoked to describe ideologies or lifestyles that do not invoke notions of the sacred in one way or another, they are not spiritualities at all, just strongly held ideologies or highly elaborated lifestyles.

For example, it seems reasonable to imagine someone stating “my spirituality is vegetarianism.” While there might be a strongly held ideology behind one’s

vegetarianism (incorporating such tenets, for example, as the belief that modern agricultural practices are unfair and cruel to animals; the belief that people should forego the consumption of expensive animal flesh in a world where most people do not have basic nutritional needs met; the belief that meat consumption damages the human body), unless such an ideology incorporates a sense of the sacred (e.g., the belief that all life is precious; the belief that the physical body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and that consuming animal products damages that “temple”), then the ideology behind vegetarianism is not spiritual, and the term spirituality is invoked inappropriately to refer to vegetarian ideology.

Similarly, behaviors or lifestyles are not spiritual simply because they serve an integrative function in life. To say “I find my spirituality in gardening” or “Music is my spirituality” might indeed suggest that a person finds great satisfaction and subjective well-being through gardening or playing music (and thus, the person may take gardening and music seriously, perhaps even to the point of building his or her life around those activities), but unless such lifestyles are responses to a perception of the Sacred (e.g., the person gardens because caring for nature is a way of experiencing the creative forces of the universe, the person plays and listens to music because its beauty and the complex mathematical structures underlying music cause the person to contemplate the beauty and order of God or the entire universe), then it is inappropriate to refer to gardening or music as “spiritual.”

#### DEFINITIONAL CRITERIA FOR RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

The discussion to this point highlights a changing religious and spiritual landscape. Whereas the current diversity of opinion regarding religiousness and spirituality has the potential to enrich and broaden our understanding of the constructs, inconsistency among the various conceptions and definitions can have negative implications for clinical applications and, in particular, for research (Zinnbauer et al., 1997). Without a clearer conception of what these terms mean, it may be difficult to know with any precision or reliability what researchers attribute to them. Also, communication within the social scientific study of these constructs and across other disciplines may be impaired by a lack of common understanding and clinical agreement. Finally, without common definitions within psychological as well as sociological research, it becomes difficult to draw general conclusions from various studies. Therefore, these definitions are in dire need of empirical grounding and improved operationalization (Spilka, 1993; Spilka & McIntosh, 1996).

Developing a set of criteria for defining and measuring spirituality and religion (or religiousness) that can be used in future research may be an important initial step. Such criteria may then become a benchmark by which a definition or measure being considered for a particular study can be assessed. A summary of

Table 1. Criteria for Definitions of Spirituality and Religion

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 Criterion for spirituality

- A. The feelings, thoughts, experiences, and behaviors that arise from a search for the sacred. The term “search” refers to attempts to identify, articulate, maintain, or transform. The term “sacred” refers to a divine being, divine object, Ultimate Reality, or Ultimate Truth as perceived by the individual.

## Criteria for religion

- A. The feelings, thoughts, experiences, and behaviors that arise from a search for the sacred. The term “search” refers to attempts to identify, articulate, maintain, or transform. The term “sacred” refers to a divine being, divine object, Ultimate Reality, or Ultimate Truth as perceived by the individual.

## AND/OR:

- B. A search for non-sacred goals (such as identity, belongingness, meaning, health, or wellness) in a context that has as its primary goal the facilitation of (A);

## AND:

- C. The means and methods (e.g., rituals or prescribed behaviors) of the search that receive validation and support from within an identifiable group of people.
- 

definitional criteria for religion and spirituality is presented in Table 1. Key concepts embedded within these criteria include: 1) the concept of the sacred, 2) a search process, 3) the concept of the non-sacred, and 4) the degree to which the search process is supported by a community.

### The Sacred Core

Central to the experience of both religion and spirituality is a sense of the sacred. It is this sense that makes the study of religion and spirituality distinctive from other areas of study. This premise is well-grounded in psychological and sociological theory. For example, Emile Durkheim, the French sociologist and author of the classic text *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912/1965), contends that sacredness is a universal feature of all religious phenomena. Furthermore, Durkheim maintains that it is society that helps define things as sacred, and every society has sacred objects. Thus, from a Durkheimian perspective,

certain objects become laden with value placed on them by the group, whereas for those outside the circle of the community they are not sacred at all. Their holiness is relative to the community they serve. If Buddhists ‘take refuge in the Buddha, the Teachings and the Community,’ Christians seek membership in Christ and His Church, Jews are at home in the Torah recorded by Moses, and Muslims submit to the Holy Qur’an as revealed through the Prophet Muhammed. (Paden, 1992, p. 31)



Durkheim reminds us that cultural and social forces are at work in defining the sacred; thus, even the individualization of spirituality (and some forms of religiousness) occurs in a culture that allows and encourages privatization.

What is sacred, therefore, is a socially influenced perception of either some sense of ultimate reality or truth or some divine being/object. Pargament (1997, 1999) maintains that we cannot confuse simply what is important in our lives with what is sacred or divine; for something to be sacred or divine, it must be able to take on sacred or divine attributes, either in character or because it is associated with the sacred or divine. For example, the religious person may not see his or her children, as important as they are, as sacred. However, that same person may see his or her parental role as a God-given gift or responsibility, and therefore as a sacred obligation. It is the association of this role as parent with a divine quality that provides the sacred character. Pargament (1999) sees potentially important (and measurable) consequences of this inclination to “sanctify” or spiritualize what are otherwise secular objects, roles, or responsibilities. “A job is likely to be approached differently when it becomes vocation. A marriage likely takes on special power when it receives divine sanction. The search for meaning, community, self, or a better world are likely to be transformed when they are invested with sacred character. Even if beliefs in a personal God fade, other objects of significance may remain sanctified” (p. 12).

### A Search Process

Both spirituality and religion involve a search process. In other words, the sacred is not automatically known nor does it necessarily impose itself on the individual. Many religious traditions and contemporary approaches to spirituality emphasize the responsibility, even the struggle, of the individual to seek that which is sacred. The search for the sacred involves a number of processes, each of which deserves the collective attention of psychologists of religion. First, a search includes the attempt to *identify* what is sacred and therefore worthy of devotion or commitment. Second, searching involves the ability to *articulate*, at least to oneself, what one has identified as sacred. Third, efforts at *maintaining* the sacred within the individual’s religious or spiritual experience is part of that searching. Finally, the search includes how the sacred is *transformed* or modified through the search process itself.

Attempts to identify, articulate, maintain, and transform the sacred will find experiential expression in different ways. For some, the spiritual or religious search for the sacred is primarily one of feeling. William James (1902/1961) viewed emotion as the driving force of religion. Rudolf Otto’s (1928) *mysterium tremendum* speaks of a powerful emotional experience as one encounters the “holy” or the sacred. Though both James and Otto stressed a cognitive basis to emotion, they both maintained that the heart of religion or spirituality is much more than the

mere rational. For others, the religious or spiritual search is primarily a way of thinking or reflecting about such issues as the nature of reality or one's purpose for existence. The content of what one believes may provide a *worldview* or a perspective through which the world is translated, understood, and experienced. Finally, for others, how one behaves in the search for the sacred is the defining characteristic of religion or spirituality. In this way, spirituality or religiousness is understood as a way of living or behaving. Though people typically may differ between their experiences of feelings, thoughts, and behaviors as they engage in a search for the sacred, for most, all three domains of human existence will be affected.

This discussion leads us to a primary criterion as well as a common denominator for the definitions of both spirituality and religion. As indicated in Table 1, both spirituality and religion include *the subjective feelings, thoughts, and behaviors that arise from a search for the sacred. The term "search" refers to attempts to identify, articulate, maintain, or transform. The term "sacred" refers to a divine being, divine object, Ultimate Reality, or Ultimate Truth as perceived by the individual* (Criterion A).

#### Additional Criteria of Religiousness

As indicated in Table 1, two other criteria (Criteria B and C) should be considered in the definition of religion only. Some forms of religiousness may involve a search for non-sacred goals either 1) in addition to or 2) in place of the search for the sacred. Often the search for the non-sacred may be conducted in a setting or context (e.g., a mosque, temple, church or synagogue) that is designed to foster the search for the sacred. For example, people whose religion is motivated by an extrinsic orientation (Allport, 1950) are said to use their religion as a means to achieve other, more external ends such as safety, personal comfort, or affiliation. Several considerations should be noted. First, not all forms of religiousness involve a search for non-sacred goals. Second, non-sacred goals need not necessarily replace sacred goals (Pargament, 1992). Third, the non-sacred may replace the sacred in some forms of religious expression. It is important to note, however, that although some goals may appear non-sacred (e.g., personal wholeness or finding meaning in life), they may become of sacred importance or "sanctified" if they can legitimately assume sacred qualities or transcendent or ultimate significance (Pargament, Mahoney, & Swank, in press). In fact, perhaps the most central part of the religious socialization process is the "sanctification" of seemingly non-religious goals. It is imperative, therefore, that researchers use caution in defining what is sacred and what is non-sacred.

This discussion leads us to a second major criterion listed in Table 1 for consideration in defining religion only and, even then, it applies only to some forms of religiousness. *Religion (only) may (or may not) include a search for non-sacred goals (such as social identity, affiliation, health, wellness) in a context that has as its primary goal the facilitation of the search for the sacred* (Criterion B).

Yet another criterion unique to religion is that both the means and the methods in the search for the sacred are prescribed and supported by an identifiable group that is formed on the basis of the search itself. The search thereby becomes “legitimated” (Berger, 1967) by the group. That is, the religious group provides a socially established explanation that can justify a course of action; such legitimation supports and encourages the religious group to interpret the meaning of its existence and to make sense of its social order (McGuire, 1981). Berger (1967) suggests that religious legitimation involves a certain degree of *mystification* in that it is understood as something beyond a human convention. Thus a religious wedding ceremony, though practiced only for the past few centuries, may be legitimated as a sacred tradition blessed by the God of that religion or belief system (McGuire, 1981).

To the extent that spirituality is privatized, legitimation of the search for the sacred is probably less operative and, therefore, less of a defining characteristic for spirituality than it is for religion. That is, because prescription of specific behaviors may even be resisted in contemporary spirituality, justifying spiritually sacred courses of action may be less necessary. Just as religion tends to legitimize and make normative certain beliefs, practices, and rituals, many forms of spirituality tend to leave such beliefs and practices more optional. Therefore, the degree to which legitimation is viewed as necessary for group functioning may be one characteristic that distinguishes religion from spirituality.

From this discussion, we can identify from Table 1 a third major criterion in considering religion only. Religion involves *the means and methods (e.g., rituals or prescribed behaviors) of the search for the sacred that receive validation and support from within an identifiable group* (Criterion C).

### Relationship with Culture

It should be noted, for example, that churches or emerging religious groups (e.g., sects or cults) qualify as being religious because they legitimate or justify their actions. The differences between churches, sects, and cults primarily have to do with the religious groups' external relationship to culture. The relationship with culture is important in identifying particular dimensions of religion or spirituality that create tension since their beliefs or practices must be justified in the face of other cultural values and beliefs. To the extent that religious or spiritual groups articulate specific beliefs at odds with mainstream culture, they risk having their internal systems of justification used by the larger culture as criteria for rejection.

A legitimated group that prescribes methods in the search for the sacred is religious, regardless of whether or not it receives external recognition or acceptance by the culture at large. Discussions of the church-sect typology (Niebuhr, 1929; Troeltsch, 1931) maintain that the church, or what is commonly called a denomination, is viewed as an inclusive group that accommodates the host

culture. Though it prescribes a search for the sacred, a church generally requires less specific commitment and conformity by its members to those prescriptions than what is expected in sects. Sects, in contrast, are more exclusive groups that reject the host culture and often demand strong commitments from members in the search for the sacred. Many sects view the church's accommodation of culture as a compromise of its religious values. Over time, some sects may accommodate culture and reemerge as churches (Stark & Bainbridge, 1979), though many sects retain their insulation. Like sects, cults can also operate in rejection of the host culture. Unlike sects, however, cults lack prior connections with religious bodies and often tend to emerge under the leadership of a powerful and charismatic leader.

Hood et al. (1996) contend that a key empirical issue is the degree of difference, indicated by belief as well as behavioral norms, between the religious group and the dominant social order that results not only in the accommodation to or rejection of the host culture, but also fosters a reaction of the host culture to the religious group. In addition, specific aspects of the difference between a sect or a cult and its host culture are clearly pertinent to health behavior and practices. Hood et al. provide an excellent example. They suggest that a parent who is part of a religion compatible with the orthodox medical culture will seek medical aid for his or her child; indeed seeking such aid may be seen as a religious act since children are "a gift from God." But the Christian Science parent may reject that medical assistance. This clearly sectarian but nevertheless powerful response of the Christian Scientist to the question about how a loving parent can reject something so necessary and good, such as the best available health care for his or her child, highlights the tension between a sect and the dominant culture.

Since churches, sects, and cults involve some search for the sacred, we can say they all practice spirituality, even if done within the context of a religious group (Criterion A). Therefore, just as religion can vary in terms of its acceptance (or rejection) of and by the host culture, so too can spirituality. In fact, the revitalization of spirituality in our culture can be attributed at least in part to its expression through a wide variety of emerging and evolving sects and cults (Hood et al., 1996).

#### CO-OCCURRENCE OF SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGIOUSNESS

The criteria discussed above suggest that spirituality is a central and essential function of religion. Therefore, spirituality and religiousness can (and often do) co-occur. To the extent that a person engages in spirituality that is prescribed by an identifiable group and whose spiritual pathways and goals receive some support and validation by that group, spirituality also occurs with religiousness.

These criteria also highlight the difficulty of separating religion from spirituality. Spirituality can and often does occur within the context of religion, but it also

may not. By the same token, the practice of spirituality can lead people to become religious and to become part of an organized or emerging religion, but it also may not. Additionally, to the extent that spirituality is defined as a more or less coherent picture of what is sacred and a lifestyle that incorporates beliefs, attitudes, values, or actions in response to this picture of the sacred, then religion can be understood as, among other things, a repository for one or more spiritualities. Individual religions (particularly those that are large, culturally heterogeneous, and have a long chronological record) might have adherents who endorse some spiritual core (e.g., Christians ostensibly reverence Jesus Christ and view God as one entity incorporated in three persons), even though the religion itself is broad enough to accommodate people who also endorse distinctive spiritualities (e.g., desert spiritualities, evangelical spiritualities, feminist spiritualities, nature spiritualities, etc.).

Given the significant sociological and psychological overlap among religion and spirituality, attempts to measure spirituality as a separate construct from religion are difficult. Beliefs and experiences that are considered to be an aspect of traditional religiousness (e.g., prayer, church attendance, reading of sacred writings, etc.) are also spiritual if they are activated by an individual's search for the sacred. In the absence of information about why an individual engages in a particular religious or spiritual behavior, it can be difficult to infer whether that particular behavior is reflecting religiousness, spirituality, or both.

## CONCLUSION

Our purpose has not been to force definitions of religion and spirituality on future social scientific investigators of these constructs. Rather, many working definitions for these constructs already exist, though investigators are cautioned against the use of restrictive, narrow definitions that yield programs of research with limited value, or overly broad definitions that can rob the study of religion and spirituality of their distinctive characteristics. Indeed, if any belief or activity that provides individuals with a sense of identity or meaning (e.g., involvement in a social club) is defined as a religious or spiritual endeavor, then this field literally knows no bounds and becomes outside the purview of what is spiritual or religious. Certainly, we may hold many things precious in our lives—a commitment to social justice, vegetarianism, gardening, or music for examples. However, none of these should be confused with a search for the sacred unless it takes on lasting sacred attributes.

Therefore, we have proposed a set of criteria for judging the value of existing operational definitions of religion and spirituality. These criteria are broad and flexible enough for scholars to readily adapt to the needs of the particular phenomena they are investigating in relation to religion or spirituality, but are not so broad that they dilute the meaning of either construct.

Those scholars and researchers who advocate for spirituality (or religiousness) and against religiousness (or spirituality) ignore the reality that these phenomena are inherently intertwined. They risk losing sight of the empirical data already gathered in studies of both phenomena, and can thereby close the door to future opportunities to explore the similarities and differences between the constructs. Characterizing religiousness and spirituality as incompatible opposites and rejecting conventional or traditional expression of faith and worship contradicts the experiences of many who appear to integrate both constructs into their lives. Likewise, polarizing the terms as individual-institutional or good-bad not only oversimplifies these complex constructs, but can confound their definition and measurement of these concepts with their outcomes (Zinnbauer et al., 1999). We recommend further work that builds on the criteria set forth in this article so that researchers can better investigate these two concepts that are so frequently used without definition and clarification. In so doing, perhaps that which is commonplace and important in the life experiences of many may be more amenable to social scientific research.

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