

# **INTENTIONALITY AND TRANSCENDENCE AS CORE COMPONENTS OF THE SPIRITUAL-RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE. A REVIEW OF THE QUESTION FROM THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF DIETRICH VON HILDEBRAND AND THE PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION OF KENNETH PARGAMENT**

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**Abstract.** In psycho-clinical research, the notion of spirituality acquires a semantic plurality. This equivocal and ambiguous connotation that characterizes this term represents an obstacle to research designs' epistemic and methodological validity, recognized as the threat to construct validity. To overcome this difficulty, we introduce the notions of intentionality and transcendence from Dietrich von Hildebrand's phenomenology insofar as these can account for the specific element of the spiritual-religious phenomenon and discriminate it from the other phenomena or variables that may be included under the notion of spirituality. This conceptual elucidation task allows evaluating the legitimacy of the variable selection process and establishing why they are or are not representatives of the phenomenon of spiritual-religious experience. Along the same lines, we believe that Hildebrand's efforts to delimit a philosophical notion of spirituality are clearly articulated in the definitional approach by the psychologist of religion, Kenneth Pargament.

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

In recent years, the body of literature that visualizes the connotations or psychotherapeutic implications of spirituality has grown exponentially. Various research designs — belonging to psychiatry and social psychology, personality psychology, clinical psychology, cognitive psychology, psychobiology, and educational psychology — attempt to select various variables representing this human dimension. In one way or another, they analyze the correlations and

impacts that it has on the functioning of other non-religious variables such as morality, personality configuration, physical and mental health, coping processes, quality and satisfaction with life, behaviour correlates, etc.<sup>1 2 3</sup> This notion of spirituality that emerges in psycho-clinical research is an essential resource for diagnostic evaluation and a tool for the same therapeutic instance.

The religious fact is more than the sum of the parts studied by these areas of the psychology of religion. Indeed, each one, in a different way, contributes to the explanation and understanding of the object of study that it is own. All of them constitute links in the process of knowledge interpretable as a continuum. But it is the philosophy of religion that makes it possible to think about the specificity of the religious fact.

This study seeks to be part of a long discussion that has been installed in recent decades around the concept of spirituality. It is a concept subject to two diverse and reciprocally incommensurable understandings. While some define spirituality in opposition to religion, others strive to present it as a complementary dimension. This duality of points of view is naturally reflected in the literature in two lines of research.

On the one hand, in an extensive series of studies, spirituality is conceived as a different and antagonistic construction of religiosity: while the

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1 Jacob A. Belzen, "Infrastructure in Early Psychology of Religion: The Fate of the First European Journals.", *International Psychology, Practice and Research* 5 (2015).

2 Jacob A. Belzen and Ralph W. Hood, "Methodological issues in the psychology of religion: toward another paradigm?", *The Journal of psychology* 140, no. 1 (2006).

3 Antonio Muñoz, "Cuestiones Epistemológicas Relativas al Estudio Psicológico de la Vivencia Religiosa", *Psykhé* 13, no. 1 (2004).

first would behave as a dynamic, experiential and subjective reality, religion would represent a static, institutional and objective reality.<sup>4 5 6 7 8 9 10</sup>

On the other hand, Streib, Hood<sup>11</sup> and Pargament<sup>12</sup> insist on identifying or, at least, understanding the concept of religion and spirituality as complementary notions. Hill and Pargament summarise: “The empirical reality is that most people experience spirituality within an organized religious context and fail to see the distinction between these phenomena”.<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, an ever-growing population can identify or be self-recognized as spiritual but non-religious people. Others, instead, describe themselves as spiritual and religious. But the object of this study is not located in this psychological field of self-perceptions but the epistemic and methodological difficulties that arise when measuring spiritual-religious experience as an objectifiable variable independent of the notes of intentionality and significance that characterize it.

The notion of spirituality — as we will see — acquires characterizations that are not only diverse but also, in some cases, ambiguous. Its generic reference to the most diverse dynamics and processes leaves the term subject to a discursive ambiguity.

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4 Alan B. Astrow, Christina M. Puchalski, and Daniel P. Sulmasy, “Religion, spirituality, and health care”, *American Journal of Medicine* 110, no. 4 (2001).

5 Shane Sinclair, Jose Pereira, and Shelley Raffin, “A thematic review of the spirituality literature within palliative care”, *Journal of palliative medicine* 9, no. 2 (2006).

6 William R. Miller and Carl E. Thoresen, “Spirituality and health”, in *Integrating spirituality into treatment*, ed. William R. Miller (American Psychological Association, 1999).

7 Teresa A. Wilkins, Ralph L. Piedmont, and Gina M. Magyar-Russell, “Spirituality or religiousness: Which serves as the better predictor of elements of mental health?”

8 Bruce D. Rumbold, “Caring for the spirit: lessons from working with the dying”, *The Medical journal of Australia* 179, no. S6 (2003).

9 Armando Rivera-Ledesma and María Montero-López Lena, “Medidas de afrontamiento religioso y espiritualidad en adultos mayores mexicanos”, *Salud Mental* 30, no. 1 (2007).

10 Tatjana Schnell and William J. F. Keenan, “Meaning-Making in an Atheist World”, *Archive for the Psychology of Religion* 33, no. 1 (2011).

11 Heinz Streib and Ralph Hood, ““Spirituality” as Privatized Experience-Oriented Religion: Empirical and Conceptual Perspectives”, *Implicit Religion* 14, no. 4 (2011).

12 Kenneth I. Pargament, *Spiritually integrated psychotherapy: Understanding and addressing the sacred*. (Guilford Press, 2007), 65.

13 Peter C. Hill and Kenneth I. Pargament, “Advances in the conceptualization and measurement of religion and spirituality. Implications for physical and mental health research”, *The American psychologist* 58, no. 1 (2003), 65.

The deficiencies in the formulation of theoretical explicitness regarding the unique or emergent properties of the spiritual may represent an epistemic threat to the very methodological validity of such studies. The broad spectrum of reference that spirituality possesses in clinical studies naturally hinders the selection of specific variables representing this phenomenon. How could one resolve the question of whether the variables selected in the clinical designs effectively represent the spirituality of a population if the same theoretical constructs do not make explicit the properties or specific notes that define such phenomenon?

From the phenomenology of Dietrich von Hildebrand, this work postulates intentionality and transcendence as distinctive notes of the spiritual-religious experience. This study simply seeks to delineate a particular definition of spirituality that finds echoes in Kenneth Pargament's developments in the psychology of religion. Both approaches to the notion of spirituality are articulated to enable mutual understanding and intelligibility between the philosophy of religion and the psychology of religion, without either of these fields going beyond their respective epistemic competencies.

Both definitional approaches allow us to postulate intentionality and transcendence as distinctive elements. Moreover, they enable defining and discriminating the personal search for the absolute or sacred from other spiritual experiences.

The value of this study does not lie so much in the novelty of its thesis but rather in the systematization in which it seeks to put notes that can be recognized as central components of psycho-clinical research around spirituality. Its objective is to support and encourage the progress of those investigations that highlight intentionality and transcendence as one of the specific and representative variables of the various ways of experiencing the absolute/divine.

First, we will show why the discursive ambiguity that characterizes the term "spirituality" represents an obstacle to the methodological validity of psycho-clinical studies (II). Then, we will argue, from Hildebrand, the need to incorporate intentionality (III.1) and transcendence (III.2) as distinctive notes of spiritual-religious experiences. We will expose how these notes are articulated with Kenneth Pargament's psychology of religion and how they can strengthen psycho-clinical research on spirituality (III).

## II. THE AMBIGUITY OF THE NOTION OF SPIRITUALITY AS A THREAT TO CONSTRUCT VALIDITY

We have multiple studies that show the heterogeneity between the apparent indicators of spirituality. For example, Hill, Pargament, Hood, McCullough, Swyers, Larson and Zinnbauer,<sup>14</sup> Koenig,<sup>15</sup> Oman,<sup>16</sup> and Piedmont & Wilkins<sup>17</sup> have identified more than 30 different definitions for the notions of spirituality and religion. Chochinov and Cann<sup>18</sup> broaden the spectrum even more, enumerating more than 90 attempts at definitions of spirituality. They include concepts as varied as the relationship with God or a spiritual being, something greater than oneself, transcendence, meanings and purposes of life, the vital force of the person, inner life, inner peace, communion with others, contact with nature, relationships with family and friends, among other characteristics.

For their part, Vachon, Fillion and Achille<sup>19</sup> discriminate 11 different dimensions to which the notion of spirituality would refer in the empirical studies published in the MEDLINE and PsychINFO databases between 1996 and 2007. Among such measurements, they list: 1) the purpose that gives meaning to life; 2) the self-transcendence that allows being in harmony and at peace with oneself; 3) transcendence towards a higher being; 4) a feeling of communion with one's self, with God, the Universe or Nature within a network of interpersonal relationships; 5) a body of beliefs that are the object of faith; 6) hope as an attitude in the face of life's difficulties; 7) the attitude towards death; 8) appreciation of life; 9) personal values; 10) a dynamic process and 11) conscious.

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14 Peter C. Hill et al., "Conceptualizing Religion and Spirituality: Points of Commonality, Points of Departure", *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 30, no. 1 (2000).

15 Harold G. Koenig, "Concerns about measuring "spirituality" in research", *The Journal of nervous and mental disease* 196, no. 5 (2008).

16 Doug Oman, "Defining religion and spirituality," in *Paloutzian Raymond F, Park Crystal L. (Ed.) 2013 — Handbook of the psychology*:

17 Ralph L. Piedmont and Teresa A. Wilkins, "Spirituality, religiousness, and personality: Theoretical foundations and empirical applications", in *Pargament Kenneth L.*:

18 Harvey M. Chochinov and Beverley J. Cann, "Interventions to enhance the spiritual aspects of dying", *Journal of palliative medicine* 8 Suppl 1 (2005).

19 Mélanie Vachon, Lise Fillion, and Marie Achille, "A conceptual analysis of spirituality at the end of life", *Journal of palliative medicine* 12, no. 1 (2009).

This extensive spectrum of references in psycho-clinical research can be explained in terms of the different approaches or theoretical modulations that coexist in the psychology of religion.

Although there is no clear consensus on the definition of spirituality, certain lines of research emphasize the subjective and individualistic character that it denotes.<sup>20 21 22 23</sup> This broad and diffuse term would refer to new personal and idiosyncratic ways of relating to the transcendent or absolute, without reference to religious traditions. The understanding of spirituality as a dynamic, experiential and subjective reality; in opposition to the static, institutional and objective reality that characterizes religion remains fully active in a long series of studies.<sup>24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31</sup>

This subjective imprint can be traced back to the fundamental distinction between institutional religion and personal religion that Williams James made between 1901 and 1902 in a series of lectures at the University of Edinburgh and which were later published under the title *The Varieties of the Religious Experience*.<sup>32</sup> According to the pragmatic philosopher, the institutional religion would be circumscribed to a system of beliefs, rituals, and cults es-

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20 Paul Heelas et al., *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality*. (Wiley-Blackwell, 2005).

21 Hill et al., "Conceptualizing Religion and Spirituality: Points of Commonality, Points of Departure".

22 William R. Miller and Carl E. Thoresen, "Spirituality, religion, and health. An emerging research field", *The American psychologist* 58, no. 1 (2003).

23 Ralph. L. Piedmont, "Does spirituality represent the sixth factor of personality? Spiritual transcendence and the Five-Factor Model.", *Journal of Personality* 67, no. 6 (1999).

24 Astrow, Puchalski, and Sulmasy, "Religion, spirituality, and health care: social, ethical, and practical considerations".

25 Sinclair, Pereira, and Raffin, "A thematic review of the spirituality literature within palliative care".

26 Miller and Thoresen.

27 Wilkins, Piedmont, and Magyar-Russell.

28 Rumbold, "Caring for the spirit: lessons from working with the dying".

29 Brian J. Zinnbauer, Kenneth I. Pargament, and Allie B. Scott, "The Emerging Meanings of Religiousness and Spirituality: Problems and Prospects", *Journal of Personality* 67, no. 6 (1999).

30 Len Sperry and Edward P. Shafranske, *Spiritually oriented psychotherapy* (American Psychological Association, 2005).

31 Rivera-Ledesma and Montero-López Lena, "Medidas de afrontamiento religioso y espiritualidad en adultos mayores mexicanos".

32 William James, *Las variedades de la experiencia religiosa. Estudio de la naturaleza humana*. (Peninsula, 2002).

tablished by an institution or organized community to establish a relationship with a divine being. On the other hand, personal religion would refer to the subjective way in which a relationship with what is considered sacred is experienced. This personal religion is the direct antecedent of today's mental health sciences understood by spirituality.

The notion of spirituality aims to describe a new existential orientation of the West that seeks personalized and idiosyncratic ways of relating to the absolute or sacred without subscribing to any religious tradition.<sup>33</sup>

The notion of spirituality is subject to a lengthy dispute within the most critical conceptual frameworks of psychology. The approaches to the spiritual turn out to be not only diverse but even reciprocally incommensurable. It exceeds the limits of this work to expose the diverse understandings that the primary psychological currents have formulated about spirituality. Suffice it to say that naturally, such accounts are reflected in psycho-clinical research. Some of them limit themselves to revealing the ontological assumptions assumed in their phenomenological descriptions without giving room for an explanation or justification about the specific notes of this primordial human dimension. At this point, it is necessary to review some particular properties that would define spirituality from a strictly epistemic point of view.

One of the obstacles or threats of validity that affects the recent literature on the psychological effects of specific spiritual practices can be recognized as the threat to construct validity. The threat to construct validity is the incapacity of the conceptual basis to account for the dynamics of the phenomenon studied.<sup>34 35</sup>

The generic definitions generate inadequate preoperational explication of the spirituality construct. Moreover, the ambiguous notions directly affect the very possibility of attributing the results of the studies to the underlying phenomenon that they claim to represent.<sup>36</sup> Such a situation is mainly

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33 Tatjana Schnell, "The Sources of Meaning and Meaning in Life Questionnaire (SoMe): Relations to demographics and well-being", *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 4, no. 6 (2009).

34 Michael Finger and Kevin Rand, "Addressing Validity Concerns in Clinical Psychology Research.", in *Handbook of Research Methods in Clinical Psychology*, ed. M. Roberts and S. Illardi (Blackwell, 2003), 22

35 Alan Kazdin, *Métodos de investigación en psicología clínica* (Prentice Hall, 2001).

36 Kazdin, *Métodos de investigación en psicología clínica.*, 16

an obstacle to selecting observable variables and the indicators that the same psycho-clinical investigation requires.

A fundamental requirement of experimental designs is to distinguish the specific variables representing the phenomenon to be studied and differentiate them from the extraneous variables that could intervene in the design. In addition, experimental designs require establishing operational definitions of spirituality. They translate into observable indicators such as speech acts or behaviours that specifically manifest the spirituality of a population. These empirical references allow establishing a baseline that is nothing more than the comparative parameter that allows evaluating, to cite an example, its possible psychotherapeutic effects.

Among the projects that strive to delimit variables that expressly represent spirituality, it is worth highlighting the works of Feather,<sup>37</sup> Roccas,<sup>38</sup> and Saroglou, Delpierre and Dernelle.<sup>39</sup> They point out that spirituality would be represented explicitly in the intensity and priority individual that is granted to certain specific values. In this same direction, Saroglou and Muñoz-García<sup>40</sup> define values as the empirical indicators not of what people are but of what people want to be. Individual differences in spirituality would be reflected in specific preferences for certain values. The problem here, in our understanding, is that these empirical indicators are not representative of spirituality as such but only of one of its manifestations, such as the axiological or moral system. A reality as multidimensional as spirituality supposes experiences of a religious, scientific, philosophical, aesthetic and ethical type.<sup>41</sup> Then, those operational variables, and the results obtained by the studies mentioned above, can be effectively related to the measured axiological system but not to spirituality. Therefore, spirituality cannot be reduced to a value system.

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37 Norman T. Feather, "Values, Religion, and Motivation", in *Maehr Martin L, Karabenick Stuart A. (Ed.) 2005 — Motivation and Religion:*

38 Sonia Roccas, "Religion and value systems", *Journal of Social Issues* 61 (2005).

39 Vassilis Saroglou, Vanessa Delpierre, and Rebecca Dernelle, "Values and religiosity: a meta-analysis of studies using Schwartz's model", *Personality and Individual Differences* 37, no. 4 (2004).

40 Vassilis Saroglou and Antonio Muñoz-García, "Individual Differences in Religion and Spirituality: An Issue of Personality Traits and/or Values", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 47, no. 1 (2008).

41 Antoine Vergote, *Religion, belief and unbelief: A psychological study* (Leuven Univ. Press, 1997), 19.



Here we are particularly interested in reviewing certain theoretical assumptions that intervene in selecting variables representing the spiritual-religious experience. First, the personal search for the absolute, transcendent, or sacred cannot be reduced to an axiological system. Spirituality is not identical with ethics, although naturally, recognizing an object as divine, transcendent or absolute can lead to certain goods becoming valuable and important. After all, values are nothing but cognitive representations of desirable goals that, for that reason, have a solid motivational dimension.

The studies that seek to measure the effectiveness of spirituality by translating it into these operational terms mentioned above do they effectively measure the phenomenon they intend to evaluate? Which of the variables discussed above are more apt to represent the complex phenomenon of religious-spirituality?

Certainly, psycho-clinical research must establish a phenomenological cut by which it is possible to translate spirituality into quantifiable variables. However, and even admitting that the cited variables could at least partially reflect the spirituality of a population, it is necessary to review whether these variables are formulated in a sufficiently specific way to represent the religious-spirituality of an experimental group.

In the next section, we will present intentionality and transcendence as the specific notes by which it is possible, according to Dietrich von Hildebrand and Kenneth Pargament, to discriminate spiritual-religious experiences. Although of a metaphysical nature and slight empirical accent, these notions can maintain, as we shall see, the cohesion between the multiple variables selected by psycho-clinical research on spirituality. They can lead the growing research on spirituality to a coherent synthesis.

### **III. INTENTIONALITY AND TRANSCENDENCE, SPECIFIC COMPONENTS OF RELIGIOUS SPIRITUALITY**

Kenneth Pargament has underlined the need to clarify the notion of spirituality because otherwise, we will only have a “fuzzy construct”.<sup>42</sup> As we saw above, the idea of spirituality suffers a semantic ambiguity in the field of psycho-clinical research insofar as its multiple variables refer to experiences as

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42 Pargament, *Spiritually integrated psychotherapy: Understanding and addressing the sacred.*, 50.

diverse as religious, scientific, philosophical, aesthetic experiences or moral. Spirituality as a human dimension is a broad and encompassing concept of all these experiences. However, when this same term is used to conceptualize the status of a specific modality of relating to the absolute and the sacred, then the epistemic and methodological difficulties, just mentioned, appear.

To carry out this study, presented at the interface of psychological and philosophical research, we will use two core distinctions that Hildebrand formulates in ethics regarding the intentionality and transcendence of moral action. In our view, both distinctions have the potential to shed light on the specific and distinctive notes of spiritual-religious experiences.

These distinctions are framed in the Roman Catholic tradition of this philosopher. But not because of this; they lose — as we will see later — their potential to clarify non-Christian modalities or non-religious forms of spirituality.

In addressing problems, generally of a moral nature, Hildebrand develops rich spiritual psychology in which it integrates Aristotelian-Thomist anthropology with the return on the human experience of the Phenomenology. He adopts the phenomenological method, outlined by Husserl in his early works and continued later by Reinach. Although he sought to distance himself from what he judged to be Husserl's idealistic evolution that began in 1913. In this sense, he aims to develop what Hildebrand himself considered a realistic phenomenology.

To deepen what Hildebrand recognizes as his realistic phenomenology, you can read his work *What is philosophy?*.<sup>43</sup> Mezei<sup>44</sup> has studied the relationship between realistic phenomenology and the philosophy of religion.

In line with what was indicated by Burgos<sup>45</sup> and Mejía<sup>46</sup>, we believe that the legacy of this philosopher acquires in the problem at hand, a particular relevance today. While psycho-clinical research emphasizes the need to deal

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43 Dietrich von Hildebrand, *What is philosophy?* (Encuentro, 2000).

44 Balázs M. Mezei, "Realist Phenomenology and Philosophy of Religion. A Critical Reflection", *Logos i Ethos* 23, no. 1 (2017).

45 Juan M. Burgos, "Presentación", in *El corazón. Un análisis de la afectividad humana y divina*, ed. Dietrich von Hildebrand (Palabra, 2009), 7

46 Ricardo Mejía, "La fenomenología de la afectividad de Dietrich von Hildebrand: una provocación cordial para la teología", *Aporía Revista Internacional de Investigaciones Filosóficas*, no. Numero Especial 2 (2019), 121

with spirituality as the centre of the personality, Hildebrand argues that the heart “constitutes the most intimate part of the person, its core, the real self”.<sup>47</sup>

In a broad sense, his spiritual psychology underlines the nature of supra-psycho-biological phenomena. According to our phenomenologist, the soul is not only the principle of bio-psyche processes, but transcending this sphere, it contains within itself the potentialities of spiritual life (which does not happen in the animal).

### *III.1 Intentionality*

Hildebrand places intentionality as the first presupposition of the spiritual character of a human experience. By intentionality, meaningful responses can be distinguished not only from mere psychic states but also from drives and instincts. Mere psychic sensations differ from spiritual dynamics in that the former lacks a meaningful and conscious relationship with an object. “Intentionality, in this sense, is precisely an essential mark of spirituality”.<sup>48</sup> Spiritual dynamics necessarily involve the consciousness of an object. Unintentional sensations, experiences, emotions, or behaviours are thus decidedly unspiritual. The lack of intentionality separates them from the sphere of spirituality. Furthermore, the philosopher explains that “the most forceful reason for the discredit into which the entire affective sphere has fallen is found in the caricature produced by separating an affective experience from the object that motivates it and to which it responds in a significant way”.<sup>49</sup>

The presence of objects within the subject is what Hildebrand recognizes as intentionality. There is a rational and conscious relationship between the person and an entity. In unintentional experiences, on the other hand, this significant relationship does not occur. Still, instead, they are phenomena that develop in us according to an immanent and a-significant direction, as is the case of the tendency to conserve the individual or the species through nutrition or reproduction, respectively.

According to Dietrich von Hildebrand, the character of intentionality can be found in every act of knowledge, in every theoretical response, in every voluntary response, and every affective response. Spirituality indicates the

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47 Dietrich von Hildebrand, ed., *El corazón. Un análisis de la afectividad humana y divina* (Palabra, 2009), 133.

48 Ibid., 66

49 Ibid., 36

true character of the higher activities of the consciousness, taken individually or in their mutual influences.

No spiritual experience (be it an aesthetic, moral or religious experience) can be understood without reference to the object that motivates it and to which it responds in a significant way. Intentionality constitutes the specific feature of conscious human activity and makes it possible to discriminate the person's various experiences or spiritual activities by the known object. In the intentionality resides the possibility of differentiating the different activities, states and spiritual experiences.

Turning now to considering the spiritual-religious experience, we can say that it also has an intentional object as its core component. If this cognitive aspect is not delimited — be it a God, world, cosmos or attribute of divinity — then there is no longer appropriately a spiritual-religious experience, but somewhat irrational emotion or illusion. If spirituality is understood as a mere experience based on emotions and not on beliefs, as Zinnbauer and Pargament explain, we run the risk of not revealing the specificity of the religious fact.<sup>50</sup> Religious experience is not purely subjective enjoyment. It is also an authentic cognitive situation that cannot be actualized without a reference founded on a specific object (intentionality).

The religious experience belongs to the “lived life” and is not mediated by discursive and demonstrative thought. It is fundamentally an intuitive moment in which the human spirit notices the presence of the “sacred”, “of the Other”<sup>51</sup> “of the divine”<sup>52</sup>. Certain experiences, such as mystical ones, are in their very essence ineffable, incommunicable in the sense that language may prove inadequate and insufficient to communicate it. However, this does not hinder the possibility of partially translating the intentional content of this experience.

The essence of religious or spiritual experience relates the subject to the sacred. This relationship of convergence of our spirit with the Absolute could be resolved in different directions: in the world and cosmic energies, in the subject himself, or a transcendent and personal reality.<sup>53</sup> Whatever the active and concrete understanding of the Absolute, this defines spiritual as spir-

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50 Brian J. Zinnbauer and Kenneth I. Pargament, “Religiousness and Spirituality”, in *Paloutzian Raymond F., Park Crystal L. (Ed.) 2013 — Handbook of the psychology.*

51 Rudolf Otto, *Lo santo. Lo racional y lo irracional en la idea de Dios* (Alianza, 1991).

52 Cornelio Fabro, *Drama del hombre y misterio de Dios* (Rialp, 1977), 278

53 Fabro, *Drama del hombre y misterio de Dios.*, 279.

itual-religious experience. This experience or dimension is fundamentally an intuitive moment in which the human spirit notices and experiences the presence of the “sacred” and the “divine” in itself and the world.

What defines experience as spiritual-religious is this object precisely. It is distinguished from other human experiences, such as scientific, aesthetic or moral experience. Therefore, religious fact is different and cannot be reduced to other human facts.<sup>54</sup>

The preoperational explanations around the construct of spirituality must attend to this intentional element. In turn, this must become one of the axes of the selection process for specific variables. Otherwise, the understanding of this spiritual dimension will be fragmented and deprived precisely of one of the notes that define it. This dimension cannot be separated from the form of knowledge that corresponds to it and the intentional object that makes the subject’s experience possible.

These Hildebrand considerations regarding intentionality also occupy a central place in the spirituality integrated therapy of Kenneth Pargament.

In *The Psychology of Religion and Coping: Theory, Research, Practice*<sup>55</sup> and *Spirituality Integrated Psychotherapy: Understanding and Addressing the Sacred*,<sup>56</sup> Pargament is in charge of defining, from his epistemic field, a notion of spirituality. After all, he explains: “Being able to think clearly about spirituality is a prerequisite to working with this dimension in treatment. After all, how can we integrate spirituality into psychotherapy if we cannot define what spirituality is?”<sup>57</sup>

Pargament is interested in clarifying spirituality’s role in mental health. The objective of his study is to distinguish “when spirituality is a source of problems and when it is a source of solutions?”<sup>58</sup> When does the spiritual dimension behave constructively or destructively concerning mental health? The therapist, explicate the psychologist, cannot claim to offer absolute truth.<sup>59</sup> From a psychological perspective, the practitioner cannot know in an

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54 Juan M. Velasco, *La experiencia cristiana de Dios* (Trotta, 2007).

55 Kenneth I. Pargament, *The psychology of religion and coping: Theory, research, practice*. (The Guilford Press, 1997).

56 Pargament, *Spiritually integrated psychotherapy: Understanding and addressing the sacred*.

57 *Ibid.*, 20.

58 *Ibid.*, 20.

59 *Ibid.*, 19.

ontological sense what is true, what (if anything) is sacred, or whether there is a divine power and, if so, what is its nature. Indeed, each science has its object, and it is not suitable for psychology to try to resolve the problem of God or the sacred. Psychology is not responsible for solving the issue of the truth of religion but that of its incidence on psychic life.<sup>60</sup>

In the same vein as von Hildebrand, Pargament understands spirituality as a vital dimension of the person by which the sacred is sought. He distances himself from Jung, recognizing that not all problems are spiritual. But this does not stop him from emphasizing that the search for the sacred in life is the most distinctively human search of all.<sup>61</sup>

“The sacred is key here”, writes the psychologist of religion.<sup>62</sup> His Spiritually integrated psychotherapy seeks precisely “makes the implicit explicit”<sup>63</sup>. He formulates a form of treatment where the therapists and clients speak openly to spirituality as a significant dimension in its own right. In contrast to Rogers and ACT therapies that keep the spiritual dimension of treatment in the background, Spiritually integrated psychotherapy “encourages clients to give voice to what may be difficult to express.”<sup>64</sup> The intentional content — that Hildebrand highlighted as a specific element of spirituality — is integrated by Pargament both in a therapy modality and in a program of empirical research.

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60 In contemporary literature, there are two ways of approaching spiritual-religious phenomena: the etic and the emic models. In the ethical model, the various modalities of spiritual-religious searches are seen as universal phenomena with similar characteristics across all cultural contexts. This type of study assumes all religions or forms of spiritualities share certain attributes like having a view of transcendence. In the emic model, on the contrary, it is assumed that each spiritual-religious form is unique, and it must be understood and evaluated on its own merit. The psychology of religion, unlike theology and philosophy, tends to use etic models. It addresses spiritual-religious searches from functional analysis and looks at it in terms of its functions, for example, to help us cope with life stresses, instead of a substantive analysis that looks at its content and specific beliefs. However, continuing Hildebrand and Pargament’s line of analysis, we will point out the danger that this functionalism can entail for the same objectives of the psychology of religion. A functional analysis could leave the notion of spirituality subject to discursive ambiguity. In this sense, they both postulate the need for the same functional studies to attend to some important substantive differences of spiritual-religious searches, such as their intentional content.

61 Pargament, *Spiritually integrated psychotherapy: Understanding and addressing the sacred*. 25.

62 *Ibid.*, 176.

63 *Ibid.*, 18.

64 *Ibid.*, 18.

In research and clinical practice, he attends explicitly to the sacred concepts and all other aspects of life that take on sacred character and significance by their association with the sacred.<sup>65 66</sup>

The term “sacred refers to a divine being, divine object, Ultimate Reality, or Ultimate Truth as perceived by the individual.”<sup>67</sup> Such a definition is reasonably specific and at the same time flexible enough to contemplate the multiple religious traditions and people whose search is being conducted at different levels of information and intensity. Pargament explains that “Although religion serves a host of purposes—providing a sense of meaning and purpose to life, comfort, intimacy, health, and self-development—the most essential of all religious functions is the desire to form a relationship with something we consider sacred.”<sup>68</sup>

Despite the central place that Pargament grants to the intentional content of the client’s spirituality, he warns of the danger of conceiving spirituality as a static or compartmentalized set of beliefs, practices, or emotions. Instead, he insists on understanding it as a set of pathways that people follow in search of the sacred. In this sense, his Spiritually integrated psychotherapy can be applied to clients from diverse religious and non-religious backgrounds by therapists from various religious and non-religious backgrounds.

Pargament provides a systematic program of empirical research on the psychology of religion. He collects and presents clinical research that somehow identifies this intentional content.<sup>69</sup> Finally, today we have a few studies of what is technically termed God images.<sup>70</sup> Certainly, the research remains to resolve several critical questions about the effectiveness of spiritually integrated therapy. However, we believe that we can obtain promising results by strengthening this line of research.

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65 Kenneth I. Pargament and Annette Mahoney, “Spirituality: Discovering and conserving the sacred,” in *Handbook of positive psychology*, ed. Snyder C. R. and Lopez S. J. (Oxford Univ. Press, 2002), 66.

66 Pargament, *Spiritually integrated psychotherapy: Understanding and addressing the sacred.*, 32.

67 Hill et al., “Conceptualizing Religion and Spirituality: Points of Commonality, Points of Departure”.

68 Pargament, *Spiritually integrated psychotherapy: Understanding and addressing the sacred.*, 31.

69 Ibid. 65 and 181.

70 Nicholas J. Gibson, “Chapter 11. Measurement Issues in God Image Research and Practice”, *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health* 9, no. 3–4 (2007).

### III.2 Transcendence

Spiritual-religious experiences, like any other spiritual activity, are conscious and meaningful responses to an object. Its reason for being is not in the subject but in the object itself. Therefore, its object is essential in itself. It is the source of the second distinctive note that, according to the phenomenologist, characterizes spiritual activities: their transcendence or importance.

In addressing the objective foundations of moral acting, Hildebrand makes a crucial distinction between the values, understood as something important in itself or as subjectively satisfying.<sup>71</sup> In moral action, but by extension in all spiritual activity, the phenomenologist points out the need to distinguish where the important thing lies: is something presented as valuable because it is intrinsically valuable or only because it can provide a particular satisfaction?<sup>72</sup>

In *Transformation In Christ: On the Christian Attitude*<sup>73</sup>, our author extends this distinction as a criterion to distinguish (not only the foundations of moral action) but also two qualitatively different religious experiences. On the one hand, there would be an authentic spiritual experience characterized by growing awareness of the sacred object. But, on the other hand, there would also be religious pseudo-experiences where consciousness, abandoning the intentional content of its object (Christ), turns to reflective self-observation:

The man who is falsely conscious is no longer capable of full response to an object or situation. His mind is no longer able to sense the substance of things or of situations, nor the appeal which emanates from them; the normal contact between subject and object appears severed.<sup>74</sup>

This perversion of consciousness destroys the attitude of genuine absorption in the object through an excess of reflective self-observation.

Hildebrand refers specifically to Christ. He, as a Catholic, has a specific religious point of view. But this does not prevent his philosophical ideas from being relevant to diverse religious traditions, not solely Christianity or Ro-

71 Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Ética* (Encuentro, 1983), 34.

72 Dietrich von Hildebrand, *La idea de la acción moral*. (Encuentro, 2014)., 95–96.

73 Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Transformation in Christ. On the Christian attitude*. (Ignatius Press, 2001).

74 *Ibid.*, 43–44.



man Catholicism. His disquisitions are valid in the face of the task of formulating a broad definition of the spiritual-religious search.

His distinction just cited, for example, can also be extended to any other modality of spirituality. In continuity with these disquisitions of Hildebrand, we can say that certain spiritual-religious practices or experiences can be revealed as falsely spiritual insofar as they represent an inversion of this transcendent-spiritual relationship towards the object and turn the latter into an object for the subject. For example, suppose the object of spiritual experience becomes a subjectively satisfactory consumer good and not a good with intrinsic importance. In that case, according to Hildebrand, the spiritual character that a relationship of a spiritual order should have is spoiled. It does not reach a genuinely spiritual and transcendent nature.

When the subjectively satisfactory behaves like the core motivation of spiritual-religious practices or searches, the subject remains in an immanent sphere. The subject does not surrender to the logos of the known object. On the contrary, the person appropriates it for his enjoyment and profit. Therefore, in line with Hildebrand, we could say that those forms of spirituality in which the subject does not attend to the intrinsic demands of the religious object or content behave as imperfect or falsifying modalities of human spirituality.

On the contrary, in those experiences where the subject transcends the immanence of his interests to be affected by the religious object, the subject reaches a higher mode of freedom, spirituality, and intentionality.

Kenneth Pargament not only highlights intentionality but also discusses transcendence as one of three “sacred qualities” that can help, in turn, to give adequate specificity to the term “sacred”. The others qualities are boundlessness and ultimacy. He defines transcendence as the perception that something out of the ordinary in a particular object or experience goes beyond our everyday lives and our usual understanding. It refers to the essential and absolute ground of truth. Ultimacy is not simply an abstraction; it has to do with what is perceived as “really, real”.<sup>75</sup>

Also, Pargament, as does Hildebrand, admits that the motives of these spiritual searches can be superficial and even false.<sup>76</sup> But, the psychologist,

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75 Pargament, *Spiritually integrated psychotherapy: Understanding and addressing the sacred.*, 39–40.

76 *Ibid.*, 60.

more attentive to the complexity of psychic dynamics, makes a series of disquisitions that temper Hildebrand's disquisitions about transcendence. He considers that spiritual motivations are certainly intertwined with other organic, psychological or social needs. But this is not an obstacle to stop recognizing spirituality as a specifically human motivation. He writes:

It may be difficult to disentangle spiritual motives from a search for intimacy, meaning, or comfort, particularly since any of these motives can take on sacred power and significance. The point I want to stress is not that the sacred is the whole story when it comes to motivation, but rather that the sacred is one among many important elements within the individual's configuration of significant objects. Spirituality is, in short, a critical and distinctive dimension of human motivation.<sup>77</sup>

Pargament warns psychotherapists of risk trivializing spirituality by reducing it to nothing more than a set of more basic psychological needs. In this sense, he moves away from the Freudian understanding that explains spirituality as an unconscious and defensive need designed to reduce anxiety and guilt. But, even more, he also taking a step forward concerning those theorists who reduce spirituality to psychological needs; such as the needs for meaning,<sup>78</sup> intimacy and social solidarity,<sup>79</sup> confrontation with human mortality,<sup>80</sup> the individual's understanding of the world and the development and cohesion of the self.<sup>81 82 83</sup> Certainly, all these factors can affect, according to Pargament, the search for the sacred. But spirituality is much more than the sum of these factors. Following Allport, he believes that spirituality can become, with maturity, "functionally autonomous" from these original fears, appetites, and desires and constitute an irreducible, dynamic, and intrinsi-

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77 Ibid., 60.

78 Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a cultural system", in *Anthropological approaches to the study of religion*, ed. M. in Banton (Tavistock, 1966).

79 Émile Durkheim, *The elementary forms of the religious life*. (Free Press, 1965).

80 Jeff Greenberg et al., "Evidence of a Terror Management Function of Cultural Icons: The Effects of Mortality Salience on the Inappropriate Use of Cherished Cultural Symbols", *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 21, no. 11 (1995).

81 Hans Loewald, *Psychoanalysis and the history of the individual* (Yale Univ. Press, 1978).

82 Ana M. Rizzuto, *The birth of the living God: A psychoanalytic study*. (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1979).

83 Heinz Kohut, *How does analysis cure?* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1984).

cally life-orienting force. In this sense, he stresses that spirituality “is a significant motivation in and of itself”<sup>84</sup>.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The articulation and continuity between the philosophy of Dietrich von Hildebrand and the psychology of religion of Kenneth Pargament invite us to deepen the dialogue and mutual understanding between both disciplines. The theoretical approach to the notions of intentionality and transcendence in the works of Hildebrand and Pargament establishes an epistemological basis that allows safeguarding the identity and significance of spiritual searches. According to both, intentionality and transcendence are distinctive notes that define spirituality. Spirituality as a human dimension is a broad concept that refers to experiences as diverse as religious, scientific, philosophical, aesthetic or moral experiences. The intentional content of these experiences allows discriminating the specific elements that define them.

If the intentional element and the transcendent character of the spiritual-religious are excluded from the same process of identifying variables, a series of epistemic and methodological limits are followed for psycho-clinical research, which can be recognized, as we pointed out in the first part of the study, as the threat to construct validity.

Hence, it is necessary for psychotherapy and psycho-clinical research, both in the preoperational definitions of the construct and the same process of identifying variables, to contemplate the intentional content and the transcendent character of the spiritual-religious experience. Furthermore, it should be strengthened and encourage the models for measuring spirituality that incorporate this intentional and motivational character of spiritual-religious experience. Otherwise, future research will likely only contribute to further fragmentation and obfuscation of scientific knowledge about spirituality.

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<sup>84</sup> Pargament, *Spiritually integrated psychotherapy: Understanding and addressing the sacred.*, 69–70.

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