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SURVIVAL OF HUMANITY DEPENDS ON INDIVIDUALS BEING SPIRITUALLY ENLIVENED AND UNITED BY GOD

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Just as a chain is only as strong as its weakest link, a community is only as strong as the weakest, or most vulnerable, member. Communities are comprised of varying numbers of members, with the best ones coming together in unity, by working cooperatively for the purpose, and with the outcome, of becoming one in head (thinking in tune with each other), and in heart (sharing the same passions). However, the most important aspect of each community is the underlying base on which it is built. Without a sound philosophy of life underpinning each community, it can be likened to a sailing ship without a rudder, floating freely on the sea of life without direction, or being becalmed by the absence of wind, or even buffeted here and there by waves of uncertainty. As challenging as it is to nurture the needs of a community, that is really only a small task in comparison to comprehending and conquering the survival needs of humanity as a whole. Handling the physical, social and emotional needs of humanity is placing more pressure on some communities and countries than others. However, those needs are temporal and subject to seasonal or epochal change, without the cessation of humanity as a whole. The most basic concern for the survival of humanity is in the realm of the spirit. Until a sound source of human spirit is identified, discussions of spiritual well-being are moot. Spirituality is a term that is increasingly used, and abused, in everyday speech and many publications. If spirituality is accepted as having different meanings for different people, then it lacks authority. There are two apparent forms of spirituality. The genuine one leads to life, the other one to death. Jesus Christ is the key to spirituality, thus spiritual well-being. A life built on a solid spiritual foundation in Christ, the cornerstone of the Church, contrasts with one on the shifting sands of Humanism (a form of pseudo-spirituality), which are likely to wash away in the storms of life. Relating with God, through Jesus Christ, is the only means to, and, also the measure of, spiritual life and well-being. Humanity can only be saved by individuals being spiritually enlivened and united, in community, by God.

Keywords: Spirituality; God; humanism; survival.

Problem statement

A key outcome of the COVID-crisis, and prevailing conflict between nations, is an increased demand for counselling of people experiencing mental health issues and psychological distress. At least, that is what it appears to be on the surface. In reality, it is more likely to be existential angst as people find themselves unmoored, floundering, as their humanistic foundation crumbles under increasing pressure of uncertainty, not only of the distant future, but of every day. This real-life experience has emerged at a time of increased expression of interest and practice in things labelled as 'spirituality'. However, this term has been devalued by over-use and improper use. It is a trick of God's enemy (Satan) to turn something which is excellent into something ordinary, common-place, worth-less. It is time to restore spirituality to its rightful value and place, at the heart of God's relationship with humankind. The human spirit, as the crowning act of God's creation, is the essence of (eternal) life for individuals living in harmony in community with Him.

Recent research

There is a problem with so many of the recent publications reporting on *spirituality* and *spiritual well-being* in that they have merely summarised contemporary views that often build on each other and have not started from the very beginning to provide a firm foundation concerning the origin of the terms. For example, a recent article 'synthetically describes historical and *present-day challenges* in defining spirituality' (Jastrzebski, 2020).

Two exceptions to the generally prevailing practice declared (1) 'Jesus' spirituality is grounded in the abiding presence of the Spirit-Paraclete whom he bequeaths to the disciples. In handing over the Spirit to the gathered community through his death and resurrection, Jesus donates his own spirituality, ultimately drawing all creation into the divine circle of love' (Lee, 2023) and (2) 'The crux of Pauline spirituality...is not ecstatic experiences or ethical imitations but *union-reciprocal residence*, where we are *in Christ* and Christ is *in us*; a mutual indwelling consummated by the "Spirit of life" (Rom.8:2)' (Wood, 2003). Beringer (2000) also attested that 'a conceptual analysis of spirituality reveals "the sacred" to be fundamental to understanding spirituality'. Davis et al. (2021) proposed that 'doctrinal-experiential congruence forms the basis of a healthy theistic relational spirituality'. More confirmatory detail from recent related research reports on this topic can be found elsewhere (Fisher, 2022).

It is worth noting that Ephesians 2: 1-10 is the key reference which clarifies that the origin of spiritual life is through Jesus Christ, for all who believe and trust that God wants a wholesome relationship with His Creation, including humanity. God's grace, rather than any human effort, such as good deeds or slavish response

to religion, is the spiritually-enlightened way to relate with God, a concept which is reinforced by Ephesians 2:13, 18-22.

Setting

Many opinions have been expressed in a deluge of recent publications relating to spirituality and well-being, but too many are founded on feeble philosophies, rather than facts. A literature search revealed a wide range of definitions to match almost any belief or opinion, related to 'spirituality'. Such a wide spread of opinion makes it almost impossible to gain agreement on a complete, correct view. That said, consensual views cannot present truth, as they are compromises containing only the majority opinion of people present in a given place at a particular time.

It would be invaluable to know if there is just one, correct description of 'spirituality' among the many. This paper has been prepared to address the question, 'What is the origin and nature of the human spirit and its impact on the future of humanity?'

A few key references will be reported in summary form to help answer this question.

Past research

Many people, such as Helminiak (1996), believe that spirit is simply a higher-order function of the 'mind', which is itself a concept that is not clearly defined by psychologists and psychiatrists. Tillich (1967, pp. 21-24) argued, 'a new understanding of the term "spirit" is a dimension of life that is a theological necessity'; 'although the word "mind" cannot substitute for "spirit"...it is related to perception and intention'. Therefore, spirit cannot be conflated with mind; the study of spirituality goes beyond the limits of psychology.

Academically, "spirituality" has now begun to appear in disciplines well beyond those classically represented by theology, or religious studies, such as philosophy, psychology, and the social sciences (Waaijman, 2002). 'Overall, the spiritual quest has increasingly moved away from outer-directed authority to inner-directed experience' (Sheldrake, 2013, p. 5). 'Christianity is the original source of the word "spirituality", although it has now passed into other faith traditions' (Sheldrake, 1995), which have borrowed the word, whilst belittling its genuine meaning. According to Sheldrake¹⁴, four modern, major "types" of spirituality are distinctive styles of wisdom and practice, which are human interpretations of *reality*, labelled as "ascetical-monastic", "the mystical", "the active-practical", and "the prophetic-critical". These are not unique categories as they sometimes overlap, with different "types" fostering self-transcendence through attempting to address the context (where), practices and disciplines (how), and purpose or destiny (what) of these practices or disciplines.

A contemporary American theologian, David Tracy, believes ‘spirituality cannot be innocent of generally accepted developments in human knowledge...such as evolutionary theory, psychology, cosmology and quantum theory’ whilst, at the same time, claiming ‘any spirituality needs to relate us to a God worthy of our loving commitment’ (quoted in Sheldrake, 2013, p.19). Therein lies a problem of limited understanding of the human ‘wisdom’ employed in the development of human knowledge, in contrast with Godly Wisdom (Tracy 1975, pp.72-79). A challenge to this human ‘wisdom’ regarding spirituality is provided by Jesus’ words, ‘You will know the truth and the truth will make you free’ (John 8:32), which coupled with Jesus’ words, ‘I am the way, the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me’ (John 14:6) show that the term ‘spirituality’ appears to have been high-jacked and devalued due to misuse, by humanists and other religions.

Moberg’s (2011, 41) presentation of 18 specific descriptions, with many other intangibles, having their own operational ‘definition’ of spirituality, concluded, ‘the recent research and its interpretations do seem to reflect and confirm ancient teachings of the Judeo-Christian Bible. They support my conviction that the “something more” than merely a biological organism that is the core of human nature is the human spirit’.

In his book ‘True spirituality’ (1988, p.77), Francis Schaeffer claimed, ‘You (that is ‘believers’) are God’s temple, and...God’s Spirit dwells in you’ (1Corinthians 3:16) - genuine living communication with a personal, infinite God. Indwelling Holy Spirit is the active agent of the Son and Father God’.

The source of human spirit coming alive

Alternative belief systems (in brief). Do any of these provide evidence to ascertain the origin, or source, of the human spirit?

Humanism - Humanism is a philosophy fabricated on flimsy foundations, namely shaky (Evolution) and hollow atheism (no God). It does not have the capacity, nor the authority, to address the human spirit, certainly not regarding its origin or source, nor its genuine nature. Although the Humanist Manifesto III contains more moderate language, it still maintains the basic evolutionary, anti-theistic position of the first two renditions of these belief statements, reported without supporting evidence (American Humanist Association, 2003; see also Dein, 2016).

Islam – The Qur’an has nine references to spirit in the text penned by Mohammed around 600AD. However, one of these merely duplicates the Creation story written in Genesis many centuries earlier, that states God breathed life (breath/spirit) into ‘man’. As stated above, ‘man’ sinned leading to spiritual death,

which is separation from God, thus a path is needed, and living by rules (religion) does not lead, to spiritual life.

Hinduism/Buddhism – Sri Swami Sivananda’s comments on the Bhagavad Gita (2020) contain bountiful references to spirituality, none of which provide insight into the origin or source of the human spirit.

Christianity - Holy Bible reports that Jesus Christ overcame death, for himself and others, and provides convincing evidence in support of his claim that He is the Son of God (John 14:6 The Way, The Truth, and The Life); the only way through which people can obtain spiritual life (Ephesians 2:1-10).

Sire (2009) provides a valuable resource for understanding various worldviews that compete with Christianity for the allegiance of hearts and minds. Most religions involve humans attempting to reach their transcendent. Christianity differs, in that God reached out to us in love, in the form of Jesus Christ, His Son, who made the way possible for us to have a wholesome relationship with Father God (John 1: 14 & 18, John 3:16).

In a recent concept analysis, Clark and Emerson (2021, p. 26) contend ‘spirituality’ is ‘the essence behind each religion and can therefore transcend yet unite world religions’. Many descriptions of spirituality use the terms ‘sacred’ and ‘transcendent’. However, these terms are not sufficient to capture its genuine heart, as they can refer to objects, places or people, but it is only God (Jehovah) who transcends all of creation. Jaber et al. (2019) listed several Transcendents (including God or Allah [as if the two names were interchangeable]) in reference to connection with God. However, the Bible is clear – Jesus is THE way to eternal life, through connecting with the one true God. It is only by the grace of God that salvation (eternal life, with total, including spiritual, healing) has been made possible, through Jesus Christ, ‘the pioneer and perfecter of our faith’ (Hebrews 12:2).

Theory

Spiritual formation

The basis of being

The Bible makes it very clear that each person’s spirit is either alive or dead. Ephesians Chapter 2: 1-2, 4-5 clearly states, ‘You were (spiritually) dead through your trespasses and sins, in which you once lived following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the (demon) spirit that is now at work in those who are disobedient...But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us (spiritually) alive together with Christ’.

There are only two options regarding each human’s spiritual state; being either alive, or dead.

God's plan for humanity

God's plan for humanity started and ends with love. As His crowning act of creation, God created humans in His likeness, which is love personified – thinking and doing what is best for the other, rather than any notion of self-centredness. He placed Adam and Eve in a perfect environment, where He walked and talked with them (Genesis 3:8). However, God did not make humans to be puppets, to dance at His command. Through His perfect love, God gave us free will, which enables us to choose our destiny, by which we either love God in return, living as ambassadors for His kingdom, here on Earth, or we wrest control of our life from His loving embrace, falling for the lie of Satan, that we can become like God by exercising self-will (Genesis 3:5), when fed with fruit from the Tree of Knowledge. In reality, separation from God equates to spiritual death, struggling and striving to do our best, rather than focus and feeding on His glorious giftings in our lives, through Holy Spirit. Adam and Eve's disobedience to God brought judgement upon His perfect creation, which He cursed with weeds; subjected humans to toil, and women to bear children in pain (Genesis 3:16-19). Since that time, humans have inherited the fallen nature of Adam and Eve. However, God's love is perfect. He has not abandoned His plan for creation and humans' key role within it.

The Old Testament of the Bible records the many ways God tried to reconnect with His people through sending prophets to remind them of His love, and providing them with kings, when they rejected Him as King of kings. God's plan to restore humanity to Himself was revealed by the promise of a Messiah (the saviour of humankind). In the New Testament of the Bible, Jesus Christ is revealed as the personification of that plan – born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, reflected his Father's glory, embodied God's plan, and showed his authority over nature through many miracles.

The ultimate of God's salvation plan for humanity led to the Cross at Calvary, where the sinless Son of God surrendered his life as the perfect sacrifice, by shedding his blood to fulfill the need for a sin offering, to pay for our selfish, human failings. Not only was Jesus the perfect sacrifice (Pascal Lamb), but he was also the last High Priest of the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 5:6), who officiated at his own sacrificial death. That was not the end of the story, as Christ defeated death, being resurrected on the third day after his crucifixion, after which He met with, and ministered to, many people before being carried up into heaven (John 20-21, Luke 24:51). Fifty days later, at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4), the promised Holy Spirit-God empowered the faithful followers of Jesus to continue his ministry. From that time till this, God's continuing plan, to reconcile humanity to Himself, has been entrusted to people, who acknowledge their dependence on Him to overcome their shortcomings (sin), who are prepared to turn away from their self-centred living (repent) and follow His leading, feeding on the Word of God (Holy

Bible), in fellowship with like-minded believers (the Church), empowered by Holy Spirit-God to overcome temptation and reveal God's plan, to rescue other people from the jaws of spiritual death, before the final consummation of God's plan, when Christ will return in glory to take home (to heaven) those who have committed their lives to Father God, through him (God the Son). This is spiritual life!

Source of Spirituality

As the Creator, God is before and beyond the limits of His creation; so is not bound by matter, space and time (Genesis 1:2, John 1:1).

There is no spiritual life without the Godhead. God - The Father, is the source of spirituality (an integral part of His plan and Creation of everything); God - the Son (Jesus) is the sacrifice or switch that enlivens spirituality; God - Holy Spirit is the substance, who provides sustenance to empower each believer's spiritual life. People cannot work or buy their way into heaven. It is a free gift planned, paid for and produced by a perfect, loving God (Through Jesus' sacrifice at Calvary). Also, our righteous deeds are only seen as filthy cloth to God (Isaiah 64:6). Manmade rules (including religions) are more likely to stifle spiritual life than support it. Christ said that love fulfills the law (Romans 13:10, Galatians 5:14). Religions comprise rules designed by imperfect humans. In being similar to politics, religions keep people in line, in the place that the rulers of this world want to dominate.

There is only one way to become spiritually alive; not through religious rules, navel gazing, mantra mumbling, partaking of peculiar potions (or poisons), or emptying the mind, being whipped into a frenzy by psychedelic sights, sounds or substances, but through intelligently using the mind and will-power (freedom of choice) to accept that Jesus Christ is The Way, The Truth and The Life and that no-one comes to the Father (God) except through Him (John 14:6). 'In quietness and in trust shall be your strength' (Isaiah 30:15), not emotional excesses of mind-blowing musical mayhem, with primordial beats, stirring the soul while seducing the spirit. God is the fountain of life; drink deeply and be refreshed (Psalm 36:9).

The Spiritual life journey is more than just an event.

Fisher (2022) reported that spirituality is a state or condition possessed by a person when they experience spiritual birth, by entering into a relationship with God, via belief in, leading to salvation through, Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2: 1-10). Spiritual life is a journey that follows from the event of spiritual birth. If there is no growth from the time of salvation, this exemplifies spiritual *still*-birth. Spiritual life can also be limited, unless there is growth, which requires feeding, exercise and removing rubbish (Philippians 3: 7-9). God's Word, Holy Bible, is Holy Spirit food, which presents over 6000 promises for believers. Spiritual exercises include prayer (personal communication with God), fostering Fruit of the Holy Spirit -

love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5: 22-23), and putting faith into action (Philippians 2: 12-13).

Each person must renew their thinking, because as a man thinks in his heart (at his very depth of being – human spirit), so is he (Proverbs 23:7). ‘The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the [Holy] Spirit is life and peace’ (Romans 8:6-11). In following God’s leading, we can stand firm against the wiles/temptations of the evil one (Ephesians 6:11-14).

Growth in the Spirit follows a stepwise progression, as described in 2 Peter 1:3-9, from faith, through goodness and knowledge to self-control, then perseverance, godliness and mutual affection, to love, which is aptly described in 1 Corinthians 13. We are reminded that perfect love casts out all fear (1John 4:18) and that God is the source of that love (1John 4:19). Spiritual life is a continuous process, not just a product. This earthly life is a practice for the heavenly life which is to come, when believers will be taken to be with God in glory (heaven). Spiritual life is eternal life, with God (through Christ) (1John 4:15). The default position for humans is eternal damnation, with Satan. Each person has a choice, while they have breath. Once dead, the decision is final, determined by the choice made when they were living (Hebrews 9:27).

Who is Jesus?

Jesus Christ is so important, because he is much more than just the most influential person who has ever lived. It is only by his direct influence that anyone can defeat death. Therefore, he is worth listening to when he says ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me.’ (John 14:6). Jesus is the source of spiritual life. This notion is reinforced by the writer to the Ephesians (in chapter 2:4-5) ‘God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions’. It takes more than just belief in Jesus to become spiritually alive, as even the devil *believes* that Jesus is the Son of God (Matthew 4:1-11). Living is an ongoing process, that involves feeding, exercise, growth and removal of rubbish.

Full spiritual life

There is much more to life than just birth. Ephesians 2: 1-10, &13 provide a solid account of ‘new life in, and through, Christ’. ‘We are saved for good works, not by, or of, ourselves, lest anyone should boast’. Belief needs to be revealed by action, backed by commitment to God’s ways, which includes repentance, or turning away from old selfish ways of living, to grow in love for God, which is also expressed in love and care for fellow human beings and His creation. How could we say we love God, if we show no care for our neighbour or His creation? Genuine love for God is expressed through service to humanity, in community. There is no point in being so heavenly-minded that we are of no earthly use.

Relationship with God is built through spending quality time with Him, in prayer, studying His Word, The Bible, by sharing with other like-minded people in encouragement and support, and worship of God. As ambassadors of God's Kingdom on Earth, Christians have a holy service to inform, nurture, support, and challenge others so they can also experience the joy and fulfilment of spiritual life through, and in, a loving relationship with God, through Christ, forever.

Physical and spiritual principles have similar characteristics. In order to gauge accurately the health of a plant, we need to know its nature and characteristics of good growth or condition. Just as physical life takes time, commitment, guidance and effort to bear fruit, spiritual growth is similar. The health of a plant is gauged by the quality of its fruit. The spiritual health of each person can be gauged by the quality of fruit of the Spirit displayed in their lives (Galatians 5: 22-23). It is possible to compare this fruit over time to determine their condition, or state of well-being, as either dynamic, dormant, or dead. In order for plants (and people) to grow, they need food (Bible, praise/worship), adequate water (blessings, encouragement) and appropriate pruning (John 15:1-8) and training, in a conducive, rather than a coercive, environment. Living things must also expel refuse. So too, for spiritual life – disposal of garbage (through confession in prayer, repent – rethink, turn away from temptation).

Spirituality, by its very nature, is non-physical. As such, it cannot be seen directly, only by its influence. Evidence is needed to show the existence of spirituality.

In summary, each person's spiritual life is a journey, which begins at spiritual inception, being made alive through Christ. Careful nurture of the spiritual embryo leads through gestation to birth, into a world that is becoming increasingly hostile to, or at least ignorant of, God. Nurture and growth, with appropriate training, including pruning, lead to a mature spiritual person who can regenerate new forms of spiritual life, hopefully maintaining, even possibly improving the quality of the stock in the service of, and for, the Kingdom of God. Spiritual life is not a game. It is a journey, for eternity; not alone, but in community.

Conclusion

The future of humanity depends on individuals being spiritually enlivened and united into the family of God, being built up together, with each member playing their part, fulfilling their role, in accord with their gifting. What has been presented here is not an exhaustive treatise on the issue of spirituality, but it does contain the essential elements focussing on the source, or origin, of the human spirit, contrasting evidence from the Holy Bible, with lack of any convincing evidence from other sources.

Spiritual birth can only be achieved through a relationship with God, in positive response to His love, purchased by Christ's sacrifice on Calvary. Spiritual growth ensues as a 'believer' builds relationship with Father God by walking in faithful obedience to His will and ways, not as a solo enterprise, but as a member of the body of Christ – the Church, empowered by Holy Spirit-God. Spiritual well-being is a reflection of the quality of each person's relationship with God, expressed by the evidence of spiritual fruit, namely love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, as well as spiritual gifting employed in building the body of Christ on Earth. The culmination of a person's spiritual journey is experienced forever in heaven, in glory, with God, in conjunction with other children of God, as a family. Without a relationship with God, any semblance of well-being in each of the nine 'fruit' can only result from human effort, thus reflecting a form of pseudo-spirituality, which is only existential well-being. Satan is a copycat (2 Corinthians 11:14) and the Father of lies (John 8:44) who will do whatever he can to seduce humans away from the source of spiritual life, who is Jesus Christ.

Believers' temporal home is here on Earth, but their eternal home is heaven. Their spiritual journey begins with new birth and, for those who are faithful in Christ, it goes on forever, to the glory of God; bearing fruit of the Spirit, resulting from relationship with God through Christ, as a family, for the survival of humanity.

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ЗАЛЕЖНІСТЬ ВИЖИВАННЯ ЛЮДСТВА ВІД ДУХОВНО ОЖИВЛЕНИХ І ОБ'ЄДНАНИХ БОГОМ ЛЮДЕЙ

Джон В. Фішер

Подібно до того, як міць ланцюга залежить від того, наскільки сильною є його найслабша ланка, сила спільноти залежить від того, наскільки сильним є найслабший або найвразливіший її член. Спільноти складаються з різної кількості членів, причому найкращі з них формують єдність, спільними зусиллями досягаючи мети та результату, щоб об'єднатися розумом (мислячи в гармонії одне з одним) і серцем (поділяючи однакові прагнення). Однак найважливішим аспектом кожної спільноти є основа, на якій вона побудована. Без здорової філософії життя, що лежить в основі кожної спільноти, її можна порівняти з вітрильником без штурвала, який дрейфує в морі життя без напрямку, і його або заспокоює відсутність вітру, або час від часу жбурляють хвилі невизначеності. Яким би складним не було задоволення потреб спільноти, насправді це лише незначне завдання

порівняно з розумінням і подоланням проблем виживання людства в цілому. Задоволення фізичних, соціальних та емоційних потреб людства чинить більший тиск на одні громади та країни, ніж на інші. Однак ці потреби є тимчасовими та підлягають сезонним чи епохальним змінам, не припиняючи існування людства в цілому. Основний чинник виживання людства знаходиться в площині духу. Поки не буде виявлено надійне джерело людського духу, дискусії про духовне благополуччя є недоцільними. Духовність — це термін, який дедалі частіше вживають і яким зловживають у повсякденній мові та багатьох публікаціях. Якщо прийняти, що духовність має різне значення для різних людей, тоді їй бракує авторитету. Є дві очевидні форми духовності. Справжня веде до життя, інша — до смерті. Ісус Христос є ключем до духовності, отже духовного благополуччя. Життя, побудоване на міцному духовному фундаменті у Христі, наріжному камені Церкви, контрастує з життям на плинних пісках гуманізму (форми псевдодуховності), які, ймовірно, змиє буря життя. Відносини з Богом через Ісуса Христа є єдиним способом, а також мірою духовного життя та благополуччя. Людство може бути врятовано лише духовно оживленими людьми, об'єднаними Богом у спільноті.

Ключові слова: духовність, Бог, гуманізм, виживання.

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