Part 1. Spiritual Views of Life: Different Forms of Spirituality for Different Personalities

There are many different definitions for spirituality, but the most common features in practice are that spirituality provides a sense of meaning and purpose in life and includes a belief that after death a person's soul or spirit continues in another realm or is reincarnated in this world. Most spiritual beliefs include supernatural beings or powers, such as a God or a hierarchy of gods, angels, and/or demons. The amount of interaction between the supernatural world and the physical world varies among different spiritual beliefs.

From a spiritual perspective, the primary purpose of human life is to grow spiritually. This typically means being less self-serving and materialistic, and more reverent toward the assumed spiritual realm. The conditions for the soul after death are often believed to depend on the extent to which a person adheres to the spiritual values during life. The exact details for these beliefs vary greatly.

The specific aspects or forms of spirituality that provide meaning and purpose are different for different people. These differences appear to be associated with different personalities of people.

Research indicates that a person's personality depends on the temperament he or she is born with and on his or her experiences during life, particularly during childhood (Carey, 203; Hammer & Copeland, 1998). Both factors are important in determining personality. The differences in personality may influence what types of spiritual or religious interests a person has.

Several forms of spirituality or religion and their relationship with personality are described below. A person may have varying degrees of each of these personality factors and may be drawn to more than one form of spirituality. There are probably other types of spiritual expression and personality that are not described here. In addition, there also appear to be personality factors that are associated with a philosophy of materialism and tend to make a person uninterested in or skeptical of spirituality.

Mystical

Keirsey (1998) stated that people with the "intuitive feeling" personality types according to the Myers-Briggs personality model tend to be mystical in outlook. These people aspire

"to transcend the material world (and thus gain insight into the essence of things), to transcend the senses (and thus gain knowledge of the soul), to transcend the ego (and thus feel united with all creation), [and] to transcend even time (and thus feel the force of past lives and prophesies)." (Keirsey, 1998, p. 145)

People with this mystical personality factor tend to feel an underlying unity in all people and all things, and to seek transcendent experiences that are direct contact with this unity. Their approach to spirituality tends to be based on personal experiences of the transcendent rather than based on institutional authority and doctrine.

Authoritarian

For people with an authoritarian personality, establishing and conforming to authority is the main purpose of life. These people tend to form hierarchical organizations that emphasize setting and following rules. In some cases, authoritarian groups tend to have hostile conflicts with those who do not follow their rules or share their values.

In Eastern approaches to spirituality, the relationships between the gurus or spiritual masters and their disciples often have authoritarian characteristics.

Altemyer (1996) argues that fundamentalist religions are religious manifestations of the authoritarian personality. Fundamentalists exist for most of the worlds major religions and believe that their particular set of beliefs and values are the only true religion. They believe that those who follow the rules of their religion have a special relationship with God and that God will punish those do not follow the rules. The Christian Fundamentalist's firm belief in the inerrant authority of the Bible is a typical expression of the authoritarian personality.

Religious terrorists are an extreme form of fundamentalism. It is a small step from believing that God will punish those who do not follow the rules to believing that God wants the select true believers to punish nonbelievers (Stern, 2003).

Intellectual

Some people are attracted to knowledge in the form of memorizing and analyzing writings, history, and theories. This intellectual approach can result in religious pundits with extensive knowledge of the details of religious beliefs and religious history.

Service

Service to others is a common form of spiritual expression in many religions. This is a central theme in the New Testament. Some people are more attracted to this form of spirituality.

Social

Participation in a religious group or spiritual community is a social activity that has great appeal for some people. Extroversion is a well established personality factor that reflects a person's desire to be involved with groups of people. The scientific study of religion tends to focus on the social aspects. Social support and connections from participation in a religious or spiritual group are frequently discussed as an important aspect of spirituality.

Diversity and Conflicts

The most successful religious organizations will appeal to all these personality factors. The Catholic Church is one of the most conspicuous examples that incorporate mystical, authoritarian, intellectual, service, and social aspects. Many people find that they are drawn to more than one aspect of spirituality.

However, some people place greater emphasis on one form of spirituality and are not attracted to others. In fact, conflicts are common among people with different personality types and different approaches to spirituality.

Conflicts between people with mystical and authoritarian dispositions have occurred throughout history. For example, Christian Fundamentalists often consider the transcendent or miraculous experiences of mystics as delusions or the work of the devil that distracts people from recognizing and obeying the authority of the Bible and church. They consider such experiences to have been necessary in Biblical times to establish the

authority of the Bible, but such experiences are a threat to the established authority in post-Biblical times.

These controversies go back to the beginning of Christianity. The texts selected for inclusion in the New Testament emphasized the authority of the church and its leaders, and were chosen when Christianity was becoming a state religion. Texts that gave greater emphasis to personal spiritual insight and experiences were rejected (Pagels, 2005; Valantasis, 2006). The conflicts between Quakers and Puritans were another example of tensions between those who focused on personal spiritual insight and experience versus those who focused on religion as an external source of authority and rules (Barbour and Frost, 1988).

Tensions between those who focus on transcendent experiences and those who focus on knowledge of and adherence to doctrine are also apparent in the history of Islam and Buddhism (Eliade, 1982; 1985).

As discussed in later sections, spirituality is sometimes distorted by deep-seated human motivations for aggression and to feel superior. These distortions of spirituality can produce evil and extreme violence, but do not indicate the basic nature of spirituality.

The sense of meaning and purpose in life appears to be the common denominator for spirituality. However, the diversity of spiritual perspectives and values makes it difficult to define and describe spirituality.

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Jim Kennedy

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