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Spiritual Intelligence or Godliness?
Human Being in Relationship with God
Summary

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Research concern

This research started from the ascertainment of the increasing relevance-loss of Christian spirituality in the public life of the Western societies; it has also observed a growing dissipation of the interest toward any Judeo-Christian doctrinal *content*, although the presence of the Christian *ethical and moral values* on the social platform is easily identified. What seems to capture the attention of an honest seeker of God, and at the same time to confuse him, is the plethora of new concepts of spirituality that have surfaced on the metamodern cultural platform. The innovative spirit of these concepts circumscribes a pluralistic religious ethos that has renounced the ultimate Truth, and at whose center resides the Self, in the pursuit of its ultimate fulfilment.

The need for a meticulous analysis of these new concepts from a Judeo-Christian perspective becomes an imperative, due to the connotative synthesis, symbiosis and syncretism attached to this phenomenon, when spirituality is defined from pluri-religious, humanistic, secular and/or scientific platforms. One of the concepts that defines spirituality from a psychological/scientific

point of view, is Spiritual Intelligence, a concept which seeks to satisfy the quest of the existentially fragmented and uprooted Self.

Given that the Christian living is embedded in the public life, this research also seeks to assess the secularized, post-Christian social context, and spiritual subtleties often scientifically clothed and served to the Christian believer in the public settings, where he operates. In this sense, the concept of spiritual intelligence is considered to be a representative prototype for possible versions of spiritual deception, attractively disguised for the well-intentioned but uninformed consumer. Without discrediting the contribution of the scientific achievements, this study suggests that careful evaluation of any new product available on the cultural market that claims to have spiritual origins, can prevent a Christian's uninspired and damaging slide into syncretism.

Moreover, due to the apparent overlap between the ethical behavior, promoted by spiritual intelligence, and the moral-ethical behavior promoted by the Christian godliness/piety, this study aims to elucidate the similarities and differences between a virtuous

experience, psychologically energized and represented by the natural *psychikos* self, and a virtuous life inspired by the Judeo-Christian presuppositions, that is represented by the spiritual, *pneumatikos* self.

Methodological considerations

The present work is a comparative study between the concept of spiritual intelligence and Christian spiritual piety/godliness. The study approaches and examines different theories of spiritual intelligence and spiritual piety/godliness in a descriptive and inductive-comparative manner, from a Christian perspective.

The present research is also a trans-disciplinary study of Christian spirituality, the major disciplines involved being biblical, systematic and historical theology, with conceptual forays into psychology. As a specialization, the work deals with the subject of spirituality from the perspective of Christian anthropology. The retrospective foray into (re)discovering the identity of Judeo-Christian spirituality draws its data of study from the major Christian traditions,

interacting with their basic concepts and with some of the prominent representatives of those traditions.

Therefore, the present research is intended to be an indicator that traces a biblical and theological direction for approaching spiritual phenomena, an indicator anchored in the Scriptures and in the Judeo-Christian tradition. This platform is considered to be a starting and a point of return for every theological, doctrinal and spiritual perspective which aims for Truth and authenticity. In this context, the work also seeks to recover the pneumatological aspect of defining spirituality and interpreting the spiritual aspect of the *pneumatikos* self, an aspect of Christian spirituality considered vital, central and non-negotiable.

The original contribution of this research lies in the theoretical conceptualization of the contrast between the natural self, or the *psychikos* person, and the spiritual self, or the *pneumatikos* person, starting from the concept of spiritual intelligence.

In order to achieve the goal of comparing the two concepts, i.e., spiritual intelligence and Christian godliness/piety, and to clarify the contrast between the

natural self, *psychikos*, and the spiritual self, *pneumatikos*, the present work is structured around five major areas: spirituality, knowledge (epistemology), *hypostases* of the existence of the self (ontology), godliness/piety (*eusebeia*) and virtue (ethics). The research:

1. analyzes the phenomenon of contemporary spirituality (as a religious phenomenon, in general, but also as a humanistic-psychological and scientific phenomenon, in particular) from a Christian perspective, defining the etymology and semantics of the terms and also identifying the characteristics of each phenomenon in particular; in this sense, the concept of spiritual intelligence represents the psychological and scientific humanistic spirituality; spirituality as a religious, pluralistic phenomenon is analyzed in the context of its impact on the Western societies; in the end of the section, the study focuses on Christian spirituality, whose doctrinal elements and unique identity factors are extracted from the historical incursion into the major Christian traditions;

2. studies the possibilities of knowing/encountering the transcendent by means of the

unregenerate psycho-sensory apparatus *versus* knowing/encountering the divine by means of the regenerate psycho-sensory apparatus, i.e., the spiritual senses; in this context, the research converses with several doctrinal-theoretical perspectives of prominent scholars, from different Christian and secular traditions; in this section spirituality is understood as an *anthropological phenomenon*;

3. explores the dynamics between several *hypostases* of the existence of the human person/self, i.e., spiritual or *pneumatikos*, natural or *psychikos*, carnal/sinful or *sarkikos*, and the moral existence of the civilized person – *homo moralis / civilis*; the exploration includes the evaluation of the *hypostases* from the perspective of Pauline biblical theology;

4. traces the origins and development of the concept of *eusebeia* and describes its meaning in the Judeo-Christian context;

5. analyzes the concept of virtues and its origins, also evaluating the justification for classifying virtues into secular virtues and Christian virtues;

6. provides clarification of the operating protocol of spiritual intelligence, contrasted to the operating protocol of Christian godliness/piety (source/cause, purpose, results/effects, mode/means of operation).

Chapter structure

Chapter 1 examines the origins of spiritual intelligence, and clarifies why this concept is associated with both spirituality and a psychological cognitive function, placing it in the humanistic scientific domain. Intersecting with the moral-ethical values of Christianity, spiritual intelligence promotes a virtuous life and addresses topics of an existential nature, such as self-development, the pursuit of existential meaning and significance, the discovery of values, principles and ultimate truths according to which life can be lived with purpose, and so on. As such, spiritual intelligence is perceived as a neutral scientific platform that promotes universal values drawn from various ancient and contemporary philosophies, but also from various religious traditions, including Christianity. Being

spiritually intelligent thus becomes a desirable spiritual option for any seeker of the supernatural, without necessarily and exclusively embracing the Judeo-Christian worldview and life. These characteristics of spiritual intelligence highlight the need for thorough evaluation of the concept before it is integrated into Christian contexts. The chapter also analyzes the relationship between religion, spirituality and science and introduces the most well-known theories of spiritual intelligence, highlighting the areas of application of the concept, but also the neurological bases underlying spiritual experiences.

Chapter 2 places spiritual intelligence in the context of contemporary metamodern, secularized, and spiritually syncretistic society. In order to uncover the reason for the use of a term of Judeo-Christian origin already emptied of its religious content, i.e. of spirituality, in a scientific setting, this section makes a retrospective foray through modernism, post-modernism and post-postmodernism (metamodernism). The section argues that the change of the social, religious, value and scientific climate of Western societies has also affected Christian

doctrines, values and practices, facilitating the shaping of a post-Christian culture and fundamentally redefining the spirituality phenomenon. The diversification of the connotative spectrum attributed to spirituality has resulted in the diminishing attachment to Christianity and the awakening of an increased interest in the new religious symbols on the market, such as various eastern, secular, scientific, gnostic, transcendental spiritualities, and so on. At the center of the new offers was the human Self, spiritually embellished, in search of the scientifically shaped happiness by means of modern technologies, and pursued on subjective, preferential and utilitarian principles.

Chapter 3 is devoted to reclaiming the identity of Christian spirituality, which throughout history has lost the vitality and authenticity of a vibrant Christocentric life. This section highlights the fact that in order to counteract the perpetual propensity of the Church towards static formalism (institutionalization, centralization of power and intellectualization of spirituality at the expense of authentic, passionate community experience), numerous initiatives and extra-ecclesiastical movements,

which appeared throughout Church history, tried to reform the Church and keep it focused on what the Christian community stood for at its origins – an embodied, relationally-transformative and practical spirituality accessible to the masses.

The recovery of the essential elements, responsible for shaping the identity of Christian spirituality, proves that it was not and cannot be a static and boring phenomenon. Furthermore, the complete understanding of Christian spirituality demonstrates that the unique and fundamental aspects of Christian identity – the Christocentric, pneumatological, and communal elements – that provide it with vitality could be dismissed by humanism since they had already been ignored by institutionalized Christianity. In other words, the recovery of the vitality of Christian spirituality consists in the reiteration of what this phenomenon represented at its origins – a *perceptive experience* of divinity that the human being can enjoy, due to her innate ability to experience God and relate to Him; a *participatory experience* of the human being in the divine reality, which involves being in Christ and being shaped in Christ's

image, an experience initiated and supported by the Spirit of Christ, whose role in the process of (re)creation, transformation and conformation of the believer to God, is vital; an experience of spiritual *development and maturation* that requires participation in the *sacraments, spiritual disciplines and Christian practices* such as contemplation of the Word of God, prayer, temperance, etc. (the *virtuous contemplative life*), but also an intentional holistic engagement (cognitive, affective, volitional, and behavioral) by which the human being meets God, is transformed, and lives in accordance with her new identity (*virtuous life of self-denial*). However, the sanctification process is not the result of a dry training exercise and simple imitation of a set of virtues, but involves the connection of the human agent with the regenerative life of the Spirit of Christ, the One who mediates and shares with the child of God all the benefits of salvation - forgiveness, justification, adoption, sanctification, healing, fruitfulness, charisma. Therefore, the presence of Christ in the Christian community through the Spirit, the One who inspires the Word, enlightens the believer and offers guidance to the whole community

through supernatural gifts and miracles, facilitates their growth and empowers them for mission.

Having said that, it is obvious that talking about spirituality in the Christian context exclusively presupposes a vibrant, active and continuous Christocentric community phenomenon of assuming the identity of a child of God, through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, this research states that any spirituality in which Christ is not central, cannot be compatible with Christian spirituality.

Chapter 4 addresses the contrast between a virtuous experience that is the consequence of someone's relationship with God, and a psychologically energized virtuous experience promoted by the concept of spiritual intelligence. The incursion is made from the platform of Christian epistemology and anthropology, and of Pauline biblical theology. In order to clarify how the human beings relate to divinity, namely what are the anthropological elements involved in knowing and experiencing the Judeo-Christian God versus a transcendent experience of any other nature, the first part

of chapter 4 analyzes the means of perception of the human knower. In this sense, the knowledge of divinity is analyzed based on the unregenerate psycho-sensory apparatus *versus* the regenerated psycho-sensory apparatus, also called "spiritual senses". The similarities and differences between the two ways of experiencing divinity are then discussed and the ideal prototype of man, the *Imago Dei*, a person whose ontological purpose is to be in relationship with God, is conceptualized. The conceptual perspectives selected for discussion belong to a few prominent scholars from the patristic, medieval, modern, and post-modern times. While some of them come from lay-scientific backgrounds, most come from Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant and Evangelical Christian traditions.

The apparent overlap between a secular/humanistic virtuous living, promoted by the spiritual intelligence, and a virtuous life, manifested in a Judeo-Christian framework, is further clarified by exploring the dynamics between several *hypostases* of existence of the self, such as the natural self, *psychikos*, the carnal self, *sarkikos*, and the spiritual self,

pneumatikos, resulting in two contrasting ways of existence, i.e., sinful and spiritual. The contrast is due, first of all, to the acceptance or rejection of the Christ event and the activity of the Holy Spirit in individual experiences, respectively to the ignorance and non-assuming of the pneumatic identity that each believer has received at conversion. For discussing the two contrasting ways of life, relevant texts from the Pauline writings are analyzed. In this section is also suggested a subcategory of the *psychikos* self, called *homo moralis/civilis* (virtuous/civilized man), whose identity profile is superimposed on the profile of spiritually intelligent man.

The final part of chapter 4 is focused on spiritual godliness/piety, the central concept that circumscribes a virtuous Christian life. This concept elucidates the specificity of each of the two alternative *modus vivendi*, i.e., the natural virtuous life and the Christian virtuous life, also evaluating the operating protocol of Christian versus secular/pagan virtues. The major objective of this section is to comparatively explore the *secular virtuous life* of the *psychikos* self, connected with spiritual intelligence, and the *Christian virtuous life* of the *pneumatikos* self,

mirrored in the concept of godliness, this time from the perspective of the virtues themselves.

Conclusions

The conclusions of this study are presented in **chapter 5**. After examining both, the humanistic spirituality and Christian spirituality, this study found that the two phenomena are completely opposite to each other, and that any attempt to integrate them produces either dilution or dissolution of the doctrinal and value system of Christian beliefs and practices. The divergence is caused by the fact that humanistic spirituality does not take into account the Christological-soteriological and pneumatological aspects and, in particular, the regenerating and empowering work of the Holy Spirit, specific to a virtuous living *Coram Deo*. Moreover, to embrace spiritual intelligence (as a representative of humanistic spirituality) in the Christian environment, without a prior examination of its origins, content and its impact on the believers, involves dissolving Christ in religious/non-religious humanistic systems (that claim the right to define the assumptions, doctrines, values and

beliefs), thus facilitating a religious syncretism that, under the assumption of supporting social cohesion, abolishes the uniqueness of Christian identity on the altar of coexistence with one's neighbor.

At best, when the spiritual intelligence and Christian piety intersect with each-other in the rational-motivational domain of knowing the deity, and this manner of knowing eventually leads the self towards a virtuous behavior, (especially in Thomas Aquinas' account), the behavioral change that occurs finds its explanation in psychological processes. In other words, the achievement of an ethical-moral lifestyle, i.e., the development of the virtuous natural self (*psychikos*), respectively moral and civilized self (*moralis/civilis*), can be realized by means of the intellectual-volitional adherence to a certain set of values, that is reduced to the psychological experimentation of the divinity. In this case, however, the emerging virtuous life has nothing to do with the ontological renewal of the human being by the Holy Spirit, the One who gives birth to the pneumatic man and actualizes in the Christian his heavenly identity. In

this case, the pure rational-motivational knowing of God has human and not divine origins.

By studying the way the human knower perceives the transcendent, with the help of the psycho-sensory and spiritual means, this study found that the human being is endowed with a native ability to perceive, process and experience the spiritual phenomena, respectively to distinguish the transcendent world, so that his universal spiritual endowment is a dimension that defines him deeply and inalienably. The innate spiritual endowment, which characterizes both the spiritually intelligent person and the follower of the Judeo-Christian faith, is recognized by both lay and religious thinkers, Christians and non-Christians alike, as pre-cognitive intuition (Otto), pre-conceptual consciousness (Rahner), pre-cognitive mental capacity for a priori awareness of the existence of the divinity (Stăniloae), the seed of divinity (Calvin), etc.

However, the nature of spiritual experiences promoted by spiritual intelligence differs from Judeo-Christian spiritual phenomena, due to the content that informs the two categories of experiences. In other words, the content that animates and informs a spiritual

experience may have various origins, i.e., it may belong to any of the world religions, to be of scientific origin, to have a purely psychological or even psychopathological character, or it may draw its source from the occult. Thus, for a spiritual experience to be labeled as Christian, the content that informs it must represent the divine revelation consistent with Judeo-Christian doctrines, values, beliefs, and practices, through which the authenticity and validity of this experience is evaluated. At the same time, in order to perceive the God of Scripture, it is desirable that the psycho-sensory apparatus of the human seeker, apparatus fed with a content of Judeo-Christian origin, be healthy, from a psychological point of view. Consequently, since spiritual intelligence is based on a pluralistic religious ethos that embraces connection with various spiritual entities, while excluding the revelation of the Judeo-Christian God as *the only ultimate source of knowledge/knowing*, this concept cannot be considered intrinsically Christian.

Unlike the humanistic way of knowing God, promoted by spiritual intelligence, the knowing of the Christian divinity is an experience that transcends purely

physiological and psychological knowledge. In order to perceive and experience God, the natural psycho-sensory faculties of the human knower require the revelatory intrusion of the Spirit of Christ into their ontological reality in order to be regenerated and animated. The present study also specifies the fact that the human being created in the image and likeness of God (*Imago Dei*) can experience the Creator and reach his maximum potential only in a divine-human relational context of Judeo-Christian origin. Because the worldview assumed by the promoters of spiritual intelligence eliminates the need for the one, personal, and moral God in whose image human being is created, the unregenerate person cannot derive meaning, significance, and ontological value from the very Source.

In the context of Pauline writings, the earthly existence of the human being sums up a complex dynamic between psyche (psychic), pneuma (spirit), sarx (nature/sin) and soma (flesh), which identifies two general anthropological aspects, specific to the human being – the bodily (mortal) aspect and the soul (immortal) aspect. Within the second, immortal aspect,

the psychic, spiritual and nature/sinful activity intertwine. In Pauline theology, the human being is also perceived to be a unity of *psychikos*, *sarkikos* and *pneumatikos* dimensions that intermingle in a holistic manner and represent different aspects of the same entity.

The *psychikos* dimension represents the natural, soulful or psychological aspect of the human self which, even though still bears the Imago Dei, does not have the Spirit of God and is not regenerated, so it cannot understand the spiritual things specific to the Judeo-Christian world. *Homo psychikos* lives according to his unregenerate wisdom, following the promptings of the earthly nature and producing its fruit, his virtuous life being psychological in nature. The spiritually intelligent person is also a *psychikos*, or unregenerate human being.

Homo pneumatikos is the representative of the regenerated self, guided by the Spirit of Christ, who lives a virtuous life and produces the fruit of the Spirit. In Pauline terminology, to speak of *homo psychikos* and *homo pneumatikos* is to refer to two states/hypostases of the same inner self, i.e. the unregenerate self, subject to the carnality/prompts of the earthly nature, and the

regenerated self, guided by the Spirit of God. The virtuous life of the pneumatic self cannot be detached from the Christ event, nor from walking under the guidance of the Spirit, whose fruit in the believer proves that he has assumed his new pneumatic identity and lives in accordance with it.

Homo sarkikos is the representative of the self that lives according to the fleshly nature compromised by sin, antagonistic to the Judeo-Christian God. In addition to living in the natural pleasures, a *kata sarka* lifestyle involves trusting in one's good deeds and being guided by the unregenerate wisdom of the secular systems of thought, that promote the pursuit of self-centered interests.

Homo civilis/moralis is the unregenerate self, the *psychikos* self, who does not have the Spirit of God and who is absorbed by the humanistic-syncretistic spirituality and means of self-fulfillment. Constructing his existential paradigm by preferentially extracting identity-behavioral standards from the cultural, historical and religious treasury of humanity, the spiritually intelligent person is the hero of the contemporary civilization. *Homo*

moralis/civilis may even connect with the transcendent and live a virtuous life, but without Christ, or with a Christ alongside other spiritual teachers, no matter of what origin or convictions. The values of such a person are syncretistic, and although they may contribute to the ethical and moral perfection of the self, they do not make room for understanding and embracing the paradox of the cross of Christ. Therefore, the spiritually intelligent person or *homo moralis/civilis*, which is implicitly also *psychikos*, is antagonistic to the *homo pneumatikos*.

Moreover, due to the irremediable sinful condition of humankind when living outside the work of the regenerating grace, the spiritually intelligent or the *moralis/civilis* person, operating in *sarx*, cannot free oneself from sin, nor can he choose to do the will of the Christian God by his own strength. While even a natural, psychologically energized life-walk, can produce virtuous behavior, without the Spirit's regenerating work and an ongoing repentance, it is not saving and will ultimately lead to spiritual death. Therefore, from a Christian point of view, the spiritually intelligent, or the

moralis/civilis person, cannot achieve the ontological well-being to which he/she aspires.

The concept of godliness/piety, *eusebeia*, has its origins in a Greco-Roman polytheistic culture, where it was considered both an attitude and a virtue that offered a privileged status in society. In Hebrew literature, *eusebeia* was first considered a disposition toward Yahweh, and then a virtue based on obeying the requirements of the Law. In the New Testament, however, *eusebeia* is the expression of devotion to Christ and of a life transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit. The concept thus developed by Paul, different from the Greco-Roman understanding of *eusebia*, becomes an effective tool for increasing the credibility of Christianity, for debunking false teachers and for explaining Christian identity in public life. Even if the adoption of the Greco-Roman concept, *eusebeia*, in the Christian environment reveals the possibility of embracing secular constructs by Christian thinkers in order to use them strategically, this option becomes viable only after these concepts have been evaluated and redefined, by aligning them with Judeo-Christian doctrines, values, beliefs and practices.

Although from an operative perspective, the secular and the Christian virtues are expressed by the same visible behavioral action (eg, courage, temperance, justice, prudence, etc.), the two sets of virtues differ regarding their cause, purpose, ways of formation, and operating principles. Thus, while the primary cause of the formation of a virtuous Christian character is the love of God and the love of people, as an expression of the divine grace offered in Christ, a secular virtuous character gravitates around self-love and pride (idolatrous virtue), being often the expression of either external adjustment to certain norms, or even of hypocrisy (counterfeit virtue). There is, however, the possibility for an authentic secular virtue to occur, especially when pursuing some good that transcends the self; such secular virtue is recoverable, because it remains open to the possibility of the final orientation towards God. This type of virtue is, however, imperfect, being the product of autonomous human resources (human reason and good deeds) and not of the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit.

While the spiritually intelligent, secular person – the *psychikos* self and the *moralis/civilis* self – can

manifest all three types of secular virtues – *imperfect*, *idolatrous* and *counterfeit*, he cannot practice the Christian virtue, since this is a unique characteristic of the *pneumatikos* self. The only way of acquiring Christian virtue by a virtuous lay human agent is through repentance.

Even in a Christian context there is a possibility for virtuous behavior to only be the result of persistent practice of a set of values informed by Christian doctrines, without being the effect of an authentic relationship with God; thus, whenever the love of God is replaced by the love of self and by selfish calculations, and the pursuit of the good of one's neighbor is replaced by self-interest, the virtues exhibited become idolatrous, or in Augustine's terms, "splendid vices."

Analyzing the identity of the spiritually intelligent person and the godly, spiritual Christian, this research has come to the conclusion that there is a possibility that being spiritually intelligent actually implies possessing a perfected, moral and ethical self that lives in its own righteousness, obtained by good deeds. This kind of spiritual intelligence is reduced to the fleshly effort of the

natural, *psychikos* self, respectively *moralis/civilis* self, whose “natural godliness” stands in direct opposition to the godliness of the *pneumatikos* self, the spiritual person born of God, who walks led by the Holy Spirit, seeking to please God and not self.

A virtuous life, *eusebeia*, can also be found among secular people, but it is an imperfect life which, in the absence of a set of Christian values, beliefs and practices cannot reach its potential of likeness to the Creator nor the holistic ontological well-being at which it aspires. Similarly, a virtuous life, *eusebeia*, can be practiced by Christians who do not walk led by the Spirit of God and who, instead of pleasing God, pursue the self-centered interests of the self. The redemptive solution for both the virtuous secular, spiritually intelligent person, and the Christian driven by his egocentric, sinful nature, is repentance.

This research highlights some implications and suggestions for the promoters of spiritual intelligence, for the beneficiaries of this concept, and for the Christian communities.

a). Used as *statistical instruments* of comparative assessment, the tests of spiritual intelligence can be effective in identifying the differences between various spiritual traditions, since they are focused on strictly visible and scientifically measurable phenomena that can, at the most, be informed by theology.

b). As a *theoretical concept* that commits to personal development and fulfillment, the concept of spiritual intelligence proves to be misleading by failing to fulfill the promise of attaining ultimate happiness, because psychological well-being, *eudamonia*, is unrepresentative and insufficient for the attainment of *shalom*, the ultimate happiness, intended by the Christian God.

c). The defenders of the Judeo-Christian faith should take responsibility for defining and communicating the biblical position regarding the syncretistic spirit embodied in the position of spiritual intelligence *versus* the basic doctrines of the Christian faith, i.e., the primacy and superiority of Christ in relation with all the philosophies and spiritual entities.

d). This study also encourages the creation of a tool to help the Evangelical Christians to evaluate their spiritual piety, in order to draft a personalized spiritual development plan.

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