

# The Reconvergence of Theology and Spirituality<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*Bahá'í scripture often anticipates or throws light on either current or classical questions in philosophical theology, or both. The present example of this pattern is the consonance of the Bahá'í writings with the advocacy of several modern day theologians for a wider convergence of theology and spirituality. These new forms of emerging spirituality lie in the borderlands between theological truth, cognitive operations and the dynamics of psycho-spiritual growth. Spirituality, however, cannot be reduced merely to psychotherapeutic remediation. Spirituality must also reflect the insights of the theological truths contained in prophetic teaching and mysticism. This paper discusses the reasons for the current interest in spirituality, deplores any separation of theology from spirituality, and argues in favour of the current interest in reestablishing a common ground of the two domains.*

## Reconvergence

There is a growing realisation among some modern scholars of religion that something has gone seriously wrong in the theological state of Denmark. Theologians, after centuries of having staked out their own entrenched territory from the more "pastoral" concerns of spirituality, are beginning to realise that the partition between the two domains is no longer tenable. Because of the [negative?] connotations of professional ministry, institutionalised religion, salaried concern and care-giving, "pastoral" may not be precisely the right word. But if we understand "pastoral" to mean both the understanding and "care of the soul",<sup>2</sup> and light to the mind, one that does not do away with analysis and insight, we come closer to a useful definition.

In an article rooted in the Jewish tradition, Samuel J.B. Wolk captured a generation ago the capital importance of spirituality as the *summum bonum* of the religious life:

Spirituality occupies the highest rank in the hierarchy of religious and ethical values. It subsumes all the great ethical ideals and religious aspirations which mankind has developed in the course of

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<sup>1</sup>. This paper is a slightly revised section of "Promises to Keep: Thoughts on an Emerging Bahá'í Theology" which has been published at my website [www.Jack-McLean.com](http://www.Jack-McLean.com)

<sup>2</sup>. I borrow the phrase "care of the soul" from the title of Thomas Moore's instructive book *Care of the Soul. A Guide for Cultivating Depth and Sacredness in Everyday Life*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 309 pages.

its cultural history. Spirituality is the all-embracing virtue, and is so far distinguished from all the other value words of religion and ethics that if a man lack any one virtue he may still be said to have other virtues, but yet lacking one he cannot truly be held spiritual.<sup>3</sup>

Action-oriented Hebrew religious life was, moreover, so embedded in the concrete ethical deed in contradistinction to insights or speculation on the meaning of virtue, that the Talmud had no word for spiritual. It was only through contact with Islam that the term *ruhani*, an Arabic loan word, was assimilated into Hebrew.<sup>4</sup>

The separation between theology and spirituality began a millennium ago when individual scholastics began to zealously apply a newfound but sometimes amateurish understanding of Aristotelian logic<sup>5</sup> to engage in the sometimes fierce *Questiones Disputatae* and *Questiones Quodlibetales* that raged among the contending religious orders or within them.<sup>6</sup> Aristotle's logic in the hands of the religious, which curiously went on to make its own contribution to the development of scientific method in the hands of non-clerics<sup>7</sup>, went off on its own tangent, and developed its own separate "harder" mode of discourse. The rest, as they say, is history. In postmodernity, we have reached a paradoxical situation in which a good many professional scholars have become the "secular" experts in religion, and the spiritual aspirant has either remained in orders working through religious offices and the manuals on spirituality, or feels intellectually deprived, dichotomised, or alienated from his/her religious community of origin or sadly disappointed by the detached, analytical theology that one reads in so many modern studies of religion.

I know that I risk something of a caricature in this depiction, for all generalisations by nature distort the particular. Yet, to mix metaphors, there is also something in the picture that basically "rings" true. Many, it seems, have become "scientists" of religion in our time. For them, hard logic is the order of the day, the unwritten rule of academic protocol, and any talk of spirituality smacks of vagary and rings effete, and is viewed as being either less than serious, or

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<sup>3</sup>. Samuel J.B. Wolk, "Spirituality", *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol 10, p. 10. 1969. Wolk's statement is a trifle uncompromising in the perfect standard that it would impose on men and women who aspire to be spiritual, but his point well underscores the value of spirituality in ethical life.

<sup>4</sup>. Samuel J.B. Wolk, "Spirituality", p. 10.

<sup>5</sup>. In "The Controversy Over Universals", pp. 287-301, in his classic *A History of Philosophy* (vol. 1), Wilhelm Windelband wrote that when scholasticism made its "timorous beginnings" with Porphyry's Introduction to the categories of Aristotle, the schoolmen possessed only fragments of the discussion of "class-concepts" or "generic conceptions" (universals) that had produced Plato's doctrine of the Ideas and Aristotle's logic. Windelband wrote that the "naive minds of the Middle Ages, untrained in thought", and lacking the formal Greek science to act as "counterpoise" to their discussions, often engaged in circuitous logic as they attempted to construct their metaphysics "out of purely logical considerations" (pp. 288-89).

<sup>6</sup>. Anthony Kenny in his little book *Aquinas* writes that anti-Dominican sentiment from the Benedictines ran so high in the University of Paris that when the friar Thomas Aquinas took the Dominican chair of theology there in the academic year 1255-1256 "that the priory needed a guard of royal troops twenty four hours a day." (p.5)

<sup>7</sup>. Aristotle's logic which contributed greatly to the development of scientific method consisted of a number of investigative techniques such as: inquiry and analysis, theory-making, the principle of cause and effect, deduction of the particular from the general, the deduction of the particular from the general=the syllogism, and the notion of proof. For a concise account of Aristotle's logic, see "The Aristotelian Logic" in Wilhelm Windelband, *A History of Philosophy*, trans. James H. Tufts (1901), vol. 1, pp. 132-138. (Harper Torchbooks, New York. Reprint 1958).

lacking the requisite hard edge. John Macquarrie makes the point that the mention of spirituality may repel because of a perceived double danger of self-preoccupation and pseudo-piety: "To some it suggests a kind of hot-house atmosphere in which people are unduly concerned with their own inward condition. ...To others again, the word has connotations of unctuousness and pseudo-piety."<sup>8</sup>

Yet spirituality continues to fascinate and to persist in attracting intellectual interest because thoughtful individuals recognize at its core something authentic that will lead to the emergence of full and genuine personhood, and the fulfilment of the potential of all the individual's faculties. As such, the new forms of spirituality that are emerging lie in the borderlands between theological truth and the dynamics of psycho-spiritual growth. Spirituality means above all growth and transformation, and therein lies its great appeal. Individuals bent on exploring dimensions in spirituality have realised that the spiritual person is simply the more fully realised human being. And while theologians could not agree with the scepticism of Kant who in the spirit of Hume denied the possibility of transcendent theology or metaphysical knowledge, they do agree with him that realities such as God, the soul, human will and freedom — *even if* it is admitted that in Carnap's ultra-positivistic fashion such things are "nonsense"<sup>9</sup> — have an immense practical value for the orientation of human conduct.<sup>10</sup> The view sustaining the primacy of the ethical and the value of *praxis* is fully consonant with `Abdu'l-Bahá's affirmation that "the ordinances which concern the realm of moral and ethics" constitute "the fundamental aspect of the religion of God".<sup>11</sup> This search for the ethical also partially explains spirituality's continuing influential pull. For that 50 per cent other half of the binary relationship with theory is practice. Spirituality is practice, or *practice* as was said in its more archaic usage.

### **Synthesizing the Cognitive With the Spiritual**

This should be a consolation rather than an alienation to those of a scientific bent. The true scientist of religion knows that only through the practical demonstration can the theoretical be proven. As Aldous Huxley reminds us in homely "barnyard metaphors" attributed to Buddha and Muhammad; the theologian whose metaphysics is self-unrealised can be compared to a herdsman of

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<sup>8</sup>. John Macquarrie, *Paths in Spirituality*, p. 40. (SCM Press, London, 1972)

<sup>9</sup>. Carnap, one of the "Vienna Circle" of philosophers of the 1930's who came to be strongly influenced by the ascending scientific method, argued that metaphysical statements should be disqualified and entirely eliminated as a form of knowledge, by restricting the meaning of statements only to those which are logically true or false or those which could be empirically tested. Since the 1950's logical positivism came under criticism by other linguistic philosophers for its restrictive theories. Aside from this, we must ask ourselves, how a statement can be *meaningful* once it is proven false; indeed, how is a statement meaningful even once it is proven to be logically true? See Rudolf Carnap, "The Elimination of Metaphysics Through the Logical Analysis of Language" in A.J. Ayer, ed. *Logical Positivism*, The Free Press, Macmillan, New York, 1959, pp. 60-81.

<sup>10</sup>. This is the main point made in Kant's *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1794). [German]. As a corollary of the point made above, it follows that Kant also denied the possibility of mystical knowledge. In addition to his well-known disposition to duty (*Pflicht*) as a categorical imperative, Kant was very prone to the virtue of integrity as manifested in the life of principle. He did not believe that morality should be gauged by the trappings of outward, everyday success. To be effective and real, morality had to be the embodiment of principle. This is one of the key points of Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788).

<sup>11</sup>. *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 403.

other men's cows (Buddha), and just an ass bearing a load of books (Muhammad).<sup>12</sup>

In light of these considerations, one might present a modern equation of reality as a synthesis of theory and practice as follows:

Reality = theory (cognitive knowledge) + *praxis* (spirituality).

From the same academies of religion that have been devoted to theories of religion and religious issues, voices are now being heard that have seriously begun to question this sundering of personal spiritual beliefs from the objective question.<sup>13</sup> One good indicator of this trend is the conference "Encounter: The Place of Knowledge, Insight, and Transformation" held under the auspices of The Association for Religion and Intellectual Life this past August at Scripps College in Claremont, California which featured Hindu scholar Diana Eck, author of *Encountering God*. The scholars who attended this conference were invited to deliberately articulate their religious and spiritual beliefs in relation to their scholarly endeavors. Such voices alert us to the necessity of a much needed synthesis of the cognitive operations of the mind with the spiritual dynamics of the soul. Conferences of this nature bode well for a return to more mystical or personal disclosures of the dynamics of faith or may even find expression in the ongoing fora of interreligious dialogue and in new, untried creative forms of worship.

This recent realisation by scholars in religion that the infinite dimensions in the spirituality of the believer must become integrated with the performative aspects of the scholarly intellect is, of course, a clear move toward the panacea of wholeness. Holism takes as its premise the whole human being or system as one indivisible mode of being or operation. An imbalance in the part, according to this view, does violence to the whole. When any one member suffers, all are in pain. Put differently, the modern move to reconcile spirituality with scholarship is a recent manifestation of some old and unresolved questions that now, in the form of acute crisis, beg resolution: a unity of theory with praxis, the discovery of true self,<sup>14</sup> overcoming subject-object dichotomies, uniting the heart with the head (this latter reality Bahá'u'lláh has called "the seat of the revelation of the inner mysteries of God"<sup>15</sup>), distinguishing the eternal from the ephemeral, and the counterfeit piece from the genuine, unveiling the wisdom involved in the dynamic tension between self-affirmation and submission to God — to name but a few. The drive toward the new synthesis — and it will be *new* because the synthesis will be achieved in the light of the wisdom traditions of both East and West — is a search for that much used but nonetheless truly meaningful existential word: *authenticity*.

This age-old sundering of what must be in the grand design of things and "the great chain of

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<sup>12</sup>. Aldous Huxley, introduction to the *Bhagavad-Gita*, p. 15.

<sup>13</sup>. I am thinking here mainly of the work of David Tracy, Diana Eck and Bernard J.F. Lonergan. Others authors who pursue this avenue are the Britons, Sebastian Moore, author of *The Crucified Jesus is No Stranger* and *The Fire and the Rose are One*, and Rowan Williams. We should also mention in this context liberation theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez and Jean Leclercq's famous book *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*.

<sup>14</sup>. Socrates is reported to have said: "The unexamined life is not worth living." The Greek saying "Know thyself" (*gnothi sauton*), also attributed to Socrates, was written over the portico at Apollo's shrine at Delphi.

<sup>15</sup>. Bahá'u'lláh, the *Kitáb-i-Iqán*, p. 192.

being" indivisible mirror images, or interrelated parts of the whole, is really no longer tenable. The cognitive exercise of theology and the life-oriented practice of spirituality must become one again. Happily, spiritual scholars are now beginning to work out the implications of the devotional aspects of spirituality and the principles of theology as an expression of one manifold.

Bahá'í scholars of religion, particularly, could render a great service to the discipline of theology were they to begin to restore the consciousness and practice of spirituality to the study of theology. Purely theoretical approaches to the study of religion would appear to fall into the trap of `Abdu'l-Bahá's pointed critique of religion as "the noise, the clamor, the hollowness of religious doctrine."<sup>16</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, moreover, contrasted mere "beliefs" or "customs", that is, intellectual doctrinal constructs and religious rites, with the more noble and dynamic character of religion as "the teachings of the Lord God":

Religion, moreover, is not a series of beliefs, a set of customs; religion is the teachings of the Lord God, teachings which constitute the very life of humankind, which urge high thoughts upon the mind, refine the character, and lay the groundwork for man's everlasting honour.<sup>17</sup>

Also Bahá'u'lláh's short but telling phrase inextricably links the deed with knowledge: "An act, however infinitesimal, is, when viewed in the mirror of the knowledge of God, mightier than a mountain."<sup>18</sup> It would seem then, in the Bahá'í view at least, that a symbiotic effect is at work between the spiritual life and the knowledge of God. The one feeds the other. Such a unitive view of the intimate relationship between theology and spirituality, between the love of God and the thirst for knowledge, was one well-known to segments of the medieval church and their contemporaries among Islamic scholars and mystics. Spiritual transformation is, after all, one of the prime purposes of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation, a purpose which has received little attention in scholarly writing, and should receive greater attention as one of the primary concerns of an emergent Bahá'í theology.<sup>19</sup>

A Bahá'í perspective of spirituality, with a solid grounding in existential theism, offers to the Bahá'í scholar the possibility of exploring a much needed alternative or complementary study which rounds off the objective content approach of critically analyzing and resolving abstract questions or of exposing or elucidating scholarly data. More often than not, the questions which preoccupy scholars remain purely academic and detached from concrete situations and lifeways. And while there is a certain fascination, and perhaps even a form of empowerment or aesthetic appeal in the

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<sup>16</sup>. `Abdu'l-Bahá said: "Wherefore it is incumbent upon all Bahá'ís to ponder this very delicate and vital matter in their hearts, that, unlike other religions, they may not content themselves with the noise, the clamor, the hollowness of religious doctrine. Nay, rather, they should exemplify in every aspect of their lives those attributes and virtues that are born of God and should arise to distinguish themselves by their goodly behavior." *The Divine Art of Living*, p. 25 (first edition)

<sup>17</sup>. *Selections From the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá*, no. 23, pp. 52-53.

<sup>18</sup>. *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 65.

<sup>19</sup>. To account for the process of spiritual transformation was one of the purposes I had in mind in writing *Dimensions in Spirituality. Reflections on the Meaning of Spiritual Life and Transformation in Light of the Bahá'í Faith*. The other was to clarify the meaning of spirituality, (George Ronald, Oxford: 1994).

cool, detached independence of objectivism, we must remind ourselves that the prophetic office and mission, from whose roots we sever ourselves at our own peril, was and remains dedicated to the transformation of both individual lives and societies. As Christ declared of his own mission so clearly and emphatically: "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10: 10). It must be to life, then, that theology, at least in some of its variations, address itself.

Roman Catholic priest and professor of theology at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, David Tracy, one of North America's preeminent theologians, has outlined some of the benefits to the performative aspects of theology in its recovery of spirituality. Tracy declares the present necessity of a much-needed collaboration:

I think that theology will be better off the more theologians attempt to recover a relationship to traditions of spirituality and thus undo the separation of theology and spirituality that developed after medieval scholasticism, which made a distinction between the two without separating them.<sup>20</sup>

Tracy further maintains that "...an absolutely crucial part of the undoing of that separation would be, in theology, spiritual attentiveness to the presence of God in all of life, including [and perhaps especially] theology".<sup>21</sup> Postmodern thinking on God, continues Tracy, in its search for the correct "ism" in the forms of deism, theism, pantheism, and even in "the most successful naming" of panentheism, do not seem to possess "any clear way of articulating that relationship" [with the presence of God].<sup>22</sup>

For David Tracy, the "crucial part" of a synthesis of the spiritual and theological dimensions would be a recovery of both the mystical and prophetic traditions.<sup>23</sup> To address Tracy's point on mysticism, his comment should excite the imagination of any Bahá'í who has carefully read Bahá'u'lláh's preeminent mystical treatise *The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys* and His other mystical works currently available in translation such as [references]. Tracy's interlocutor Thomas Levergood's explanation of the value of the recovery of mysticism for the theologian contains an allusion to detachment, that spiritual attribute to which Bahá'u'lláh has given absolute preeminence in the search for God. In the prologue to *The Book of Certitude*, Bahá'u'lláh declares: "No man shall attain the shores of the ocean of true understanding except he be detached from all that is in heaven and on earth".<sup>24</sup> Levergood names detachment as one of the multiple functions in the mystical search for truth:

The mystical tradition calls for disciplines of detachment, conversion, and self-

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<sup>20</sup>. "Conversation with David Tracy", *Cross Currents. The Journal of the Association for Religion and Intellectual Life*, p. 293, hereafter "Conversation".

<sup>21</sup>. *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup>. "Conversation", p. 294.

<sup>23</sup>. Todd Breyfogle's attribution in "Conversation", p. 294.

<sup>24</sup>. The *Kitáb-i-Iqán*, p. 4.

examination so that the mystic-theologian has a kind of *grasping* of truth. In a sense, mysticism suggests a participatory model of knowledge and makes an important claim for considering transformation as a subjective condition of knowledge, something that modern thought has difficulty accounting for.<sup>25</sup>

Unlike, for example, the Buddhist philosophers of Kyoto who "clearly engage in meditative practices"..., Tracy observes that modern day western theologians have all but lost the meditative art.<sup>26</sup> He further makes the point that "One of the most important things to do may be to recover the *classical* forms of spiritual practice and spiritual exercise."<sup>27</sup> Tracy cites two Britons, Sebastian Moore, author of *The Crucified Jesus is No Stranger* and *The Fire and the Rose are One*, and Rowan Williams, along with Gustavo Gutiérrez and Jean Leclercq and his famous book *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God* as contemporary authors who have been for him "enormously fruitful for having integrated these two traditions [theology and spirituality] in intellectually rigorous and spiritually enriching ways."<sup>28</sup>

As one might expect, prayer still has a place in David Tracy's call for modern day theology to recover its spiritual traditions. He speaks of "a prayerful reading of the Scriptures of the church — —"<sup>29</sup> In the understanding of Bahá'í spirituality, there can be nothing more important than prayer:

In all the worlds of existence there is nothing more important than prayer. Prayer confers spirituality on the heart. Spirituality is the greatest of God's gifts and life everlasting. It means turning to God.<sup>30</sup>

There are some, however, like Donald Wiebe, who insist that the scholar of religion must remain — ironically — detached from spiritual concerns, and outside the circle of experiential knowledge as the objective and detached "scholar-scientist" who "ought to set the agenda for, and therefore to control, such a study" [of religion], rather than the "scholar-devotee."<sup>31</sup> For scholar-scientists such as Wiebe, even God is problematic: "As a truly scientific enterprise, theology must hold God (the Ultimate) as problematic..."<sup>32</sup> Charles Davis, however, clearly sees through much of Wiebe's contorted logic when he says simply:

The student of religion is unavoidably concerned with the experience of faith. Those with no taste for the divine are not in a position to analyze the ingredients of religious

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<sup>25</sup>. "Conversation", p. 294.

<sup>26</sup>. "Conversation", p. 295.

<sup>27</sup>. *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup>. "Conversation", p. 295.

<sup>29</sup>. "Conversation", p. 300.

<sup>30</sup>. `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Star of the West* XIV, p. 165.

<sup>31</sup>. Donald Wiebe, "The failure of nerve in the academic study of religion", *Religious Studies/Sciences religieuses*, 13: 4, pp. 401-22, Fall, 1984. (p.401)

<sup>32</sup>. *Ibid*, p. 403.

experience nor to distinguish good religion from bad.<sup>33</sup>

Davis, moreover, has characterised Wiebe's position as "nihilistic neutrality which is fundamentalism in another guise."<sup>34</sup> The views of those who still hold to the pseudo-scientific practitioner's view of religious studies increasingly are judged to be inadequate by those advocating more personal, experiential, small "c" confessional,<sup>35</sup> constructive theology, or advocacy theology; theology that is exercised as an integral part of the practice of the love of God and other forms of spirituality.

Writing very much from within the framework of the traditional academic study of religion, Huston Smith and M. Darrol Bryant, have brought into serious question the views of those who so strongly advocate the pseudo-scientific methods that reportedly still rule the departments of religion today. On-going discussion continues to question the old style non-engaged approach to the academic study of religion, the objective methodology of *Religionswissenschaft*, once so strongly advocated since the time of Max Müller, which did not attempt to determine the truth or falsity of the religious phenomena being studied.

As one of the foremost living authorities in comparative studies of religion, Huston Smith critiques the notion of *epoché* which has for so long been the stand-by of the "distancing act" of the phenomenologist, an act calculated to create objectivity.

The phenomenological *epoché* that was earlier mentioned has abetted this distancing act [of subject and object]. As phenomenologists of religion we neither affirm nor deny; we merely table the question of whether the gods our students study exist. Our rationale for this move is that bracketing our beliefs enables us to enter more fully into their beliefs, but I am not confident that it works that way.<sup>36</sup>

M. Darrol Bryant makes an even more pointed comment in the same vein:

The problem with the modern study of religion is that it unfolds with a *modern* view of reality that is, in principle, hostile to the truth known in religion. For in the modern view,

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<sup>33</sup>. Charles Davis, "'Wherein there is no ecstasy'", *Studies in Religion/Sciences religieuses*, 13: 4, pp. 393-400, Fall, 1984 (p. 394).

<sup>34</sup>. *Ibid*, p. 395.

<sup>35</sup>. Large "C" confessional theology would be the official dogmatic theology of a particular religion. Small "c" confessional theology means that the study of theology is an expression of some identification of the theologian with the religious phenomena under study or even more openly with the spirituality of the theologian. The large "C"-small "c" distinction belongs to "scholar-scientist" Donald Wiebe in *ibid* p. 403. Wiebe also distinguishes "non-confessional theologies" which recognize "the cultural reality of 'the gods'" (i.e. some Transcendent Reality) and attempt rationally to account for it but without presuming that such an account is possible on the supposition that 'the Ultimate' *exists*." (p.403) Obviously Wiebe does not embrace either large "C" or small "c" confessional approaches to his hard-core scientific study of religion. He is decidedly a non-confessionalist.

<sup>36</sup>. Huston Smith, "Postmodernism's Impact on the Study of Religion", M. Darrol Bryant ed., in *Huston Smith Essays on World Religion* (New York.: Paragon House, 1992), p. 267.



reality is wholly explicable from within. There is no Beyond that must be appealed to in order to understand what is. Nor is there any Beyond that is mediated in the religious life of humankind. How then can we understand religion when the implicit ontology or view of things that we bring to the study of religion rules out *a priori* the ontologies of the religious traditions within which religions unfold? In such a situation, the implicit ontology of a given religion is not only cast into radical doubt — an ever present possibility — but is rendered nonsensical.<sup>37</sup>

It was actually only in part the bracketing of one's own beliefs that allowed for the development of the modern study of religion. This bracketing came to be accompanied by a sympathetic identification with the religion of another — curiously also part of phenomenology's complex method<sup>38</sup> — which allowed religious studies to evolve beyond the old utilitarian strictured theologies that gave nothing more than a partisan and distorted view of another's faith. This observance has become a *de facto* unwritten law of comparative studies, as close as we might come to an undisputed article in a "canon" of method: that the other is able to recognize his own belief system in our objectivisation of it.<sup>39</sup>

Theologians should continue to endeavour to go beyond the mere accumulation of the data of the world's great religions, the performative aspect of theology accomplished by the description and analysis of *Religionswissenschaft*. Insofar as they are conscientiously able, theologians should not only identify with the other's view of the Transcendent, but also promote it. Robert Wilken, the current (?) president of the American Academy of Religion, appeals to his colleagues to speak more *for* religious traditions instead of only *about* them.<sup>40</sup>

There are other dissenters than Donald Wiebe to the view that the study of theology should be a reflection of spirituality. Buddhologist James Burnell Robinson writes, for example, that while the history of religions has the potential for furthering "creative dialogue", it is not in itself religious:

The history of religions is not in itself religious; it is a scholarly discipline which can be of

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<sup>37</sup>. M. Darrol Bryant, "To Hear the Stars Speak: Ontology in the Study of Religion(s)" in Arvind Sharma ed., *Fragments of Infinity. Essays in Religion and Philosophy, A Festschrift in Honour of Professor Huston Smith* (Bridport, Great Britain.: Prism Press, 1991) p. 49.

<sup>38</sup>. Curiously phenomenology not only further a detached contemplation of the *éidós*, the essence of a thing, but also a sympathetic identification with it. Comparative religionists used phenomenology to create a sympathetic identification with the subject matter. Phenomenology also lead to an inquiry into the nature of religious consciousness and produced such works as Rudolf Otto's classic *Das Heilige (The Idea of the Holy)*, 1917) For a worthwhile introduction into the phenomenological method as it applies to theology and comparative religion see Joseph Dabney Bettis, ed., *Phenomenology of Religion* (SCM Press, 1969).

<sup>39</sup>. Dialogue theologian Leonard Swidler makes this principle the "Fifth Rule" of his "Ground Rules for Interreligious and Interideological Dialogue". Swidler writes that "Each participant must define her-or himself...Conversely, the side interpreted must be able to recognize itself in the interpretation." *After the Absolute. The Dialogical Future of Religious Reflection*, (Fortress Press, Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis, 1990), p. 44.

<sup>40</sup>. This is the main point in Robert Wilken, "Who Will Speak for the Religious Traditions," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 57 (1989): pp. 699-717.

use to those within specific religious traditions, just as in the same way the study of political science is non-partisan but may be used by Democrats, Republicans, Socialists, etc., to better understand what they are about.<sup>41</sup>

But surely faith to be actualised must go beyond narrow cognitive understanding, and perhaps even Burrell would agree that those who know the truth must also act, and that knowing is doing as loving is doing.

## Conclusion

The modern trend among theologians who are now calling for a closer collaboration between theology and spirituality was surely foreseen in the writings of the Bahá'í Faith over a century ago. In order that religion be effective and real — in a word, credible — it must demonstrate not only soundness of theory, but the concrete expression of theory in a life devoted to the principles of spirituality and spiritual virtue. Scholars are becoming increasingly sensitised to the necessity of articulating their own spiritual beliefs in the pursuit of the objective question. The pedagogical act (teaching) whether formal or informal, or the encounter with other (meeting and dialogue), cannot but help reflect one's beliefs or spiritual foundations. The convergence of the domains of theology and spirituality will bring both authenticity and integrity to the study of theology and furnish the study of spirituality with greater intellectual rigour.

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<sup>41</sup>. James Burrell Robinson, "The History of Religions and the Primordial Tradition" in Arvind Sharma ed., *Fragments of Infinity. Essays in Religion and Philosophy, A Festschrift in Honour of Professor Huston Smith* (Bridport, Great Britain.: Prism Press, 1991) p. 231

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