The Trinity and religious plurality in mental health care: 
Trinitarian theologies of religion as the theological basis for evaluating and responding to the rise of spirituality in mental health care.

A dissertation submitted to the University of Wales in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Advanced Christian Studies

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January 2013
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This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree:

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Dissertation Summary

Title of Dissertation: The Trinity and religious plurality in mental health care: Trinitarian theologies of religion as the theological basis for evaluating and responding to the rise of spirituality in mental health care.

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Summary:

This thesis highlights the shift in mental health research and mental healthcare practice from a negative view of spirituality and religion to one that affirms spirituality can have a positive impact on a person’s mental health. It outlines the empirical evidence which has driven this shift and notes how the concept of spirituality which is used is generic and pluralistic in nature. Little Christian theological evaluation of this shift towards a positive view of spirituality and mental health has been done. This thesis intends to formulate a Christian response and its argument is that Trinitarian theologies of religion provide a solid basis for a Christian evaluation. After critically evaluating the Trinitarian theologies of Amos Yong, S. Mark Heim and Gavin D’Costa, four Trinitarian principles are suggested to guide a Christian theological response to spirituality in mental health care. This allows the beginning of the process of formulating a Trinitarian understanding of spirituality and mental health. It is found that Trinitarian theologies of religion provide a complementary field of description which mitigates psychological reductionism when it comes to the positive impact of spirituality on mental health. Trinitarian theologies of religion also provide a Christian theological viewpoint for responding to and evaluating the plurality that is very much in evidence in the varying concepts of spirituality which are found in the literature. There are also very real practical implications for Christian ministry based on the theological foundations which are built. Lastly, two responses to possible counterpoints to this thesis are offered.

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Introduction

The current quest for spirituality within and across religious traditions, and outside religions altogether, is only possible in an open, secular society, not in a theocratic and totalitarian one.\(^1\)

The implication of Ursula King’s comment is that with the breaking down of Christendom a more pluralistic concept of spirituality (including other religions and none) is coming to prominence in society.\(^2\) In parallel to this, as society has become more diverse in its approach to spirituality, the concept of spirituality has also risen in the consciousness of the mental health community. Spirituality is now seen as an area of empirical research in regard to mental health and this research has indicated that spirituality can have a positive impact on those who are suffering from mental health problems.

This shift to a more positive view of spirituality in mental health is surprising because for many decades after Sigmund Freud, religion was considered pathological in the mental health establishment. Freud characterised religion from a psychoanalytical perspective as a projection of the father onto a created superior power and this happens as a defence against the helplessness that humans feel.\(^3\) There is therefore a subjective reason for the existence of religion and not an objective one. Religion becomes viewed as pathological. Freud’s view has rightly been criticised on the grounds that although a person’s views about God can be affected by their background, this does not imply necessarily that all religion is simply a projection of psychological needs.\(^4\) Most damning, however, is the reality that the views of Freud and the mental health establishment regarding the pathological nature of religion are based on a handful of case studies and are disproven by modern empirically based

\(^4\) For example see Fraser Watts, *Theology and Psychology*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), p.78.
systematic studies. Further evidence of a shift in an attitude to religion is given by Albert Ellis, one of the influential creators of cognitive therapy, who has recently reversed his original view that religion and good mental health are antithetical. He has done this in response to recent unequivocal research which shows how spirituality can be helpful for mental health.

In the light of this shift to a more positive view regarding the relationship between mental health and spirituality, this thesis investigates a Christian theological response to this shift. The recent literature in the area of mental health and spirituality has tended to focus on two areas. Firstly, quantitative research regarding the connection between mental health and spirituality. Secondly, the praxis of working with people with mental issues such that spirituality is affirmed to be an important part of the person’s recovery. There has been little systematic engagement with this field from a distinctly Christian theological point of view. This thesis attempts to change this by providing a theological foundation which engages with the plurality of concepts of spirituality seen within mental health through Trinitarian theologies of religion. The proposal of this thesis is that Trinitarian theologies of religion provide a theological foundation for a balanced evaluation and engagement with the research on mental health and spirituality from the perspective of Christianity. It is found that Trinitarian theologies enable us to move beyond a reductionist approach (characteristic of Freud) which reduces any positive impact of spirituality on mental health to a psychological explanation. This study also highlights important implications for chaplains and ministers who work in multi-faith environments with those who suffer from mental health problems.

Research Methodology

This study will be carried out using a qualitative literature based form of research. In chapter one through review of the necessary literature and evaluation we will examine the research on spirituality and mental health. Chapter two engages with the theological literature on the Trinitarian theology of religions through three

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representative theologians – Amos Yong, S. Mark Heim and Gavin D’Costa. This will enable the identification of some principles which will guide our thinking. Finally in Chapter three, by entering into a mutual dialogue between the research in mental health and spirituality and the Trinitarian theology of religions, we will seek to develop a Christian theological engagement with spirituality in mental health and explore implications for ministry.

The concentration in this thesis on Trinitarian theologies of religions instead of another area of theological enquiry is for a threefold reason. Firstly, Trinitarian theologies of religion make it possible to affirm (albeit in a qualified way) and give explanation for the spiritual experiences of those who are not Christians. We can then move beyond simple descriptions of subjective experience to an affirmation that the Trinitarian God is objectively at work. Secondly, Trinitarian theologies of religion also help to deal with the issue of plurality which is becoming more prominent in the research on spirituality and mental health. Lastly, a Trinitarian theology makes the theological exploration in this thesis distinctly Christian. It is these three points that make the Trinitarian theologies of religion especially suited to an engagement with spirituality and mental health.
Chapter 1 – Spirituality and Mental Health

This chapter gives a brief overview of the field of spirituality and mental health research, by firstly examining the problems of defining spirituality as it is used in research on mental health and then exploring how spirituality is measured. Following this a summary of the major connections that have been found between mental health and spirituality will be given. After reviewing the ways in which researchers explain this connection an outline of some of the limitations of the field of research will be provided. Lastly some reflections from a more theological perspective on the research into spirituality and mental health will be offered.

The concept of spirituality in mental health research

Before examining any connections between spirituality and mental health it is necessary to consider what is meant by the word ‘spirituality’. Sheldrake finds the origin of the word in the Latin spiritualitas which was derived from the concept of pneuma in the Pauline letters.⁷ Here spirituality is not about a dualist world (the physical against the spiritual) but is about attitudes to life.⁸ A spiritual person lives in the light of the Spirit of God whilst a non-spiritual (fleshly) person lives contrary to the Spirit. The word ‘spirituality’ emerged in its more modern sense in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries at the same time as we begin to see the breakdown of Christendom.⁹ It is in this context that Swinton notes: ‘Spirituality has […] become a slippery concept within Western culture’¹⁰. With the breakdown of institutional religion in the West concepts of spirituality have become fluid compared to the concepts of spirituality found in traditional religions.¹¹

The idea of spirituality being a slippery concept is especially true in the literature on mental health and spirituality. Table 1 outlines the differing descriptions of spirituality in three randomly selected papers.

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⁸ See e.g. 1 Cor. 2:14-15.
¹¹ Sheldrake, A Brief History of Spirituality, p.2.
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<td>Amy G. Weisman de Maman, Naomi Tuchman, Eugenio A. Duarte, ‘Incorporating Religion/Spirituality Into Treatment for Serious Mental Illness’, <em>Cognitive and Behavioral Practice</em>, 17 (2010), 348-357</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dogma Rituals Quest for meaning and belonging Core values Prayer Faith Forgiveness Hope Beliefs about God Morality Purpose Participation in religious groups Scripture reading Meditation Reincarnation</td>
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Table 1 – Comparison of three different descriptions of ‘spirituality’ from the mental health and spirituality literature
From this it can be seen that usage of the term spirituality in the mental health literature can be related to anything from the single concept of worship attendance to more complex descriptions involving issues of meaning and differing religious traditions. In an analysis of understandings of spirituality in the literature on addictions Cook identifies thirteen conceptual themes which undergird descriptions of spirituality: relatedness, transcendence, humanity, core / force / soul, meaning / purpose, authenticity / truth, values, non-materiality, (non) religiousness, wholeness, self-knowledge, creativity and consciousness.\(^\text{12}\) Relatedness, transcendence, core / force / soul and meaning / purpose were most frequent themes in Cook’s survey of definitions.\(^\text{13}\) Swintin in contrast suggests the central features of spirituality can be summed up as: meaning, value, transcendence, connecting and becoming.\(^\text{14}\) In summary, it can be seen that definitions of spirituality in mental health vary greatly.

In the mental health literature there is also a tendency to make a distinction between spirituality and religion. Koenig defines religion as being ‘rooted in an established tradition that arises out of a group of people with common beliefs and practices concerning the sacred’\(^\text{15}\) but in contrast, views spirituality as being more popular, personal and not connected with established religions.\(^\text{16}\) The connection between spirituality and religion is seen as complex. There is recognition that spirituality can be an expression of a person’s religion but it is also considered that spirituality can be expressed by an individual apart from religion.\(^\text{17}\) Problematic for this split between spirituality and religion is the reality that if seeking a universally agreed definition of spirituality is difficult (as has been seen), then seeking a universally agreed definition


\(^{14}\) Swinton, *Spirituality and Mental Health Care*, pp.24-25.


of religion is equally as difficult. Rose ends up commenting that ‘the only real difference between ‘religion’ and ‘spirituality’ seems to be one of breadth’.

The vagueness of the concepts of spirituality and religion in the study of mental health is symptomatic of the wider academic problem of definition. King notes how the concept of spirituality is both a wide category (i.e. used loosely) and a narrow category (i.e. used within a particular religious tradition) and the definition depends on the perspective of the user, which in turn is dependent on the time, place and culture (the particularity) of the user. Others, in the wider academic field agree that definitions of religion and spirituality have changed over time. King argues that in reality it is only possible to speak of ‘spiritualities in the plural rather than spirituality in the singular’. Sociologists of religion take a different tack and either define religiousness functionally (what religions do for people) or substantially (what a religion is in terms of its beliefs and practices). Again in the midst of these sociological definitions there is an acknowledgement of plurality in spirituality and religion.

This brief exploration of concepts of religion and spirituality in the mental health and wider academic fields can only lead to the conclusion that finding universally agreed definitions for spirituality and religion is almost impossible due to a plurality of perspectives. This then forces us to face the question of whether spirituality is a valid concept to examine in the context of mental health. Swinton, whilst acknowledging the problem of definition, takes a positive view arguing that spirituality is a useful concept, but that:

[...] in order to understand spirituality it will be necessary to let go of our positivistic desire for absolute certainty, neat definitions and universally

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24 Swinton, Spirituality and Mental Health Care, p.12.
applicable categories, in order that we can enter into an aspect of human experience which, in many respects, transcends final categorization.25

Following Swinton this thesis takes the view that, although it is necessary to be very clear about the differing definitions of spirituality used in mental health care research, there are comprehensible connections to be made between spirituality (however it is defined) and mental health. These connections will be examined below where we briefly review the research in this area.

For the purposes of this thesis the term spirituality will be used in the widest possible sense which encompasses the variation found in the spirituality and mental health literature, whilst also recognising that spirituality can also refer to specific spiritual expression in a particular religious tradition.

**Measuring relationships between spirituality and mental health**

In order to understand the literature on spirituality and mental health it is also necessary to be aware of the complexities regarding how spirituality is measured by academics. Pargament and Brant suggest there are four distinct ways of measuring religion:26

1. Personal expressions of religion
2. Organisational expressions of religion
3. Measures of religious orientation
4. Mixed measures of personal and organisational expressions of religion

Personal expressions of religion focus on measuring an individual’s subjective manifestation of religion. This would be, for example, through measures of frequency of prayer, specific religious beliefs, intensity of faith, speaking in tongues, frequency of meditation etc. On the other hand organisational expressions of religion focus on measuring participation in the activities of religious communities, for example frequency of attendance at worship or prayer meetings. Measures of religious orientation do not explore specific practices but look at motivation. Intrinsic religious orientation involves the whole of a person’s life and intrinsic religion is motivated internally. Religion is embraced and internalised completely such that it gives

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meaning and defines a person’s way of looking at themselves and the world. Extrinsic orientation involves a person using religion for their own ends such as status or social relationships and religion is only superficially embraced as a way of meeting needs. The motivation for religion is then found outside of the person. Some argue the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic is inadequate and add a third religious orientation ‘quest’ which emphasises measuring people’s movement towards a religious understanding. Pargament and Brant’s fourth category emphasises the fact that measures of religion may be mixed. It is important to note that Pargament and Brant’s four categories of measurement are focused in particular on religious expression and not a more generic spirituality. However, it is possible to suggest that a more generic spirituality (which is distinct from traditional religion) could be included in the first category, if it is redefined as ‘Personal expressions of religion / spirituality’. Spirituality could be measured through subjective expressions of spiritual practice (however this is defined).

Measures like those outlined (for example, frequency of attending religious services) above are used in quantitative research to give a numerical measure of ‘spirituality’ through the use of questionnaires and surveys. When combined with quantitative measures of aspects of mental health this allows investigation into how mental health is affected statistically by spirituality. However there are problems with interpreting information gathered by surveys or questionnaires. Those who respond to questionnaires may interpret questions in unexpected ways; therefore the best studies are those which include questionnaires supplemented with interviews to enable deeper exploration of respondent’s understandings of questions. A further problem with focusing solely on quantitative measures is that correlation does not necessarily imply causality i.e. correlations between measures of spirituality and mental health may be mediated through a third measure. A notable example is found in a paper by Abbots et al which studies the relationships of weekly church

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attendance of eleven year olds in the Catholic Church and the Church of Scotland. It was found that weekly church attendance by Catholics was an advantage for mental health, whereas weekly church attendance in the Church of Scotland was a disadvantage for mental health. It is suggested that the reason for this is that church attendance for Catholic children was normative within the peer group, but for Church of Scotland children it was not and therefore they faced bullying and teasing. A third variable therefore came into play linking spirituality and mental health and this illustrates the problem of identifying quantitative correlations between mental health and spirituality. It is important to be aware that in mental health and spirituality research we may not always be measuring what we think we are measuring (i.e. a relationship between mental health and spirituality).

In addition to quantitative surveys, research may also involve qualitative in-depth interviews which enable us to hear ‘the voices of people with mental health problems’. This provides a way of examining how spirituality actually functions in an individual’s life in relation to their mental health using a phenomenological perspective. This type of study can produce new directions for research and indications of any mediating factors between spirituality and mental health. It is then possible to combine the results of qualitative research with the results of quantitative research to give stronger evidence for links between mental health and spirituality. This combination of qualitative and quantitative research is necessary because of the interplay between the universal and the particular. Swinton (drawing on the work of Lartey) notes that:

[...] every human being is in certain respects:

*Like all other people* (the Universal Human Dimension)

*Like some other people* (the Historical, Cultural, Social and Political Dimensions)

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33 See Swinton, *Spirituality and Mental Health Care*, p.94.

Applying this to spirituality and mental health means that spirituality and mental health both have universal and particular dimensions.\textsuperscript{36} This clearly shows the necessity of both quantitative and qualitative research to enable the capturing of as fuller an understanding of the relationship between spirituality and mental health as is possible. Quantitative research explores the more universal dimensions of human spirituality (like all other people or like some other people), while qualitative research explores the particularity of spirituality (like no other people).

Looking at the literature on mental health and spirituality, in the light of what has been discussed regarding measuring relationships between spirituality and mental health, it is found that some studies are of better quality than others. Not all evidence of a correlation between mental health and spirituality from individual research studies carries the same weight due to questions of methodology regarding measurement. However, there is a combined weight of evidence in the literature that confirms that it is possible to make some positive and some negative connections between spirituality and mental health. We will now go on to review this evidence.

\textbf{Summary of major findings on the connection between spirituality and mental health}

Cook identifies over 3000 papers written between 1922 and 2001 which explicitly mention the topic of spirituality in relation to psychology and medicine.\textsuperscript{37} In this thesis there is not the space to make a thorough review of all the literature and therefore it has been necessary to draw mainly on reviews of the literature. In fact, a thorough review is not essential to the thesis that the Trinitarian theologies of religion help us to understand, evaluate and respond to the rise of spirituality in mental health care. It is acknowledged that in summarising the results we risk hiding the complexity of the different relationships found, but hopefully the rest of this chapter will convince the reader that the situation is more complex than can be presented here. We will first

\textsuperscript{35} Swinton, \textit{Spirituality and Mental Health Care}, p.21.
\textsuperscript{36} Swinton, \textit{Spirituality and Mental Health Care}, p.22.
\textsuperscript{37} Cook, ‘Addiction and spirituality’, p.542.
concentrate on some of the positive connections that have been made between spirituality and mental health, before briefly mentioning negative connections.

**Depression**

In reviewing quantitative studies examining the relationships between religion and depression, Koenig notes how studies show that there are lower rates of depression and the symptoms of depression for those who exhibit greater religiousness. The effect is small but significant. Religious patients recover from depressive symptoms over twice as quickly as other patients and there is an indication that in the longer term religion is associated with less consequent depressive symptoms. Other studies link lower rates of depression to intrinsic religiousness and not extrinsic religiousness. However the picture is muddied by studies which claim to show that religious people are at the same risk of a major episode of depression in a ten year period as other people. Yet the general weight of the literature for Cornah currently is that many expressions and elements of spirituality are helpful in reducing depressive symptoms and/or increasing general wellbeing.

**Anxiety**

Studies show that spiritually active people with chronic or life-threatening illnesses report less anxiety than others. This is true for many different types of illnesses encountered by patients such as heart transplants, breast cancer, cardiac problems, recovery from spinal surgery, medical problems later in life etc. Prayer and meditation are specifically indicated as being linked with improved mental health in relation to anxiety. A further interesting result is that high religiousness is linked with lower death anxiety. However, other studies show that low religiosity does not

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imply higher death anxiety. Differences in experiences in death anxiety are noted between Egyptian Muslims and Americans from a Judeo-Christian culture. For example American males are more anxious about pain in the dying process, whilst Egyptian males are more anxious about what happens to the body in the grave. This implies that different cultures and spiritualities may manifest death anxiety in different ways and therefore death anxiety can only be understood in relation to religious particularity. A source of anxiety in one religion may be insignificant in another.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
Cornah notes that there is not currently a large amount of research into spirituality and PTSD. However, anecdotal evidence and a limited amount of research implies that spirituality is important during crisis or trauma as:

[...] positive religious coping, religious openness, readiness to face existential questions, religious participation, and intrinsic religiousness are typically associated with improved post-traumatic recovery.

Religious meditation has been indicated as of possible use in reducing symptoms of PTSD.

Suicide
Rasic et al. using evidence from quantitative data suggest that ‘religious attendance is possibly an independent protective factor against suicide attempts’. Koenig concurs also finding less suicidal behaviour and greater negative attitudes about suicide for religious people. Coughlan and Ali review studies which show the protective effect of religion against suicide is applicable to Jews, Muslims and

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51 Rasic et. al., ‘Longitudinal Relationships of Religious Worship Attendance and Spirituality with Major Depression, Anxiety Disorders, and Suicidal Ideation and Attempts’, p.848.
Christians. On the reason for the preventative effect of suicide by religion Koenig comments:

While research suggests that religion prevents suicide primarily through religious doctrines that prohibit suicide, there is also evidence that the comfort and meaning derived from religious beliefs may be relevant [...] religious involvement may also help to prevent suicide by surrounding the person at risk with a caring, supportive community.

**Schizophrenia and psychosis**

Mohr et al. have researched the link between religiosity and schizophrenia and have found that higher participation in helpful religiosity improves the outcome of some symptoms of schizophrenia. However, Koenig reports that the picture is mixed for those with schizophrenia which incorporates religious delusions. The research sometimes indicates a worse prognosis and sometimes it does not. Mitchell and Roberts argue that anecdotal evidence implies that spirituality is important in recovery from serious mental illness and therefore it seems as if there are some possible positive effects of spirituality on psychosis. However as Koenig points out there are few studies that have examined this area, so more research would be necessary to define a clearer link. Cornah concludes:

Religion and spirituality are relevant in the lives of many people with schizophrenia and in many cases seem to offer valuable benefits to living with and recovering from the illness. However, the exact nature of those benefits and the mechanisms through which they operate are not fully understood or researched.

**Addiction**

It is impossible to deny that spirituality has had a long history in the treatment of substance abuse, for example, in the twelve-steps of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). Galanter et. al. explored the relationship of spirituality to recovery and found that for

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some people spirituality is important in their recovery from addiction. Booth and Martin in a review of religion and substance abuse identify three positive relationships.

1. Religiousness is inversely related to substance use
2. Religiousness is inversely related to substance abuse
3. The spirituality of AA led to longer periods of abstinence compared to a non-religious alternative.

Cook affirms this general picture of the relationship between spirituality and addiction, but suggests that there are limitations to the evidence and more research is needed.

**Spirituality that harms: Negative connections between spirituality and mental health**

The danger is that the above results only concentrate on the positive effects of spirituality on mental health. Koenig points out the problem of defining spirituality only in positive terms, such as peace, well-being or meaning, leads to definitions of spirituality and good mental health coinciding in a tautological way. We end up defining spirituality in such a way that neglects any harmful effects of spirituality. The other extreme is also problematic where spirituality is only defined in negative terms. Swinton rightly says that ‘to suggest that spirituality is always pathological is to move beyond the evidence’.

However there is evidence that some forms of spirituality can harm mental health. Gall in a paper on spirituality and life stress amongst survivors of childhood sexual abuse comments that ‘religious forgiveness and spiritual support appear to have a positive effect on distress while spiritual discontent is related to greater distress’. Koenig relays the results of one study of women with gynaecological cancer which

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64 Swinton, *Spirituality and Mental Health Care*, p.80.

showed that if the women felt that cancer was punishment from God, that God had left them or God could not help, then they experienced higher levels of anxiety.  

Pargment et al. in designing a tool for measuring ways of religious coping found that coping strategies linked to ideas about punishment from God, God’s powerlessness to change a situation and spiritual discontentment led to poorer mental health. They comment that ‘although the concept of coping has a positive connotation, coping can be ineffective as well as effective. Religion also has its darker side’. Another example of harmful spirituality which affects mental health would be exhibited in cult like groups where coercion leads to issues such as powerlessness and impaired decision making.

From this short review of the connections between spirituality and mental health it can be seen that the picture is mixed. Spirituality can have positive and harmful effects on mental health. The quality of research varies and further research is necessary to elucidate more clearly the links between spirituality and mental health. However, the weight of the research clearly supports the fact that positive connections between spirituality and mental health can be made.

**Explanations for the connection between spirituality and mental health**

In the literature various possible mechanisms for the connection between spirituality and mental health are suggested. These mechanisms seek to explain the reason why spirituality has a positive effect on mental health. There are five main explanations for the benefits and we will outline them here.

Firstly, and the most common explanation in the literature, religion or spirituality is described as a coping strategy. Religious or spiritual activities are seen as resources which can help people cope with psychological pain, persistent mental illness and

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66 Koenig, ‘Research on Religion, Spirituality, and Mental Health’, p.287
the stress of national tragedy.\textsuperscript{71} The explanation of religious coping does not focus on the question of whether God or a spiritual realm exists, but seeks to understand if spiritual beliefs help a person when facing life stresses.\textsuperscript{72} Various forms of religious coping styles have been identified in the literature, with some being helpful and others being harmful:\textsuperscript{73}

1. Collaborative religious coping (partnership with God, guidance from God, the support of God)
2. Benevolent reframing (seeing adversity as the will of a loving God)
3. Discontent with God
4. Negative events as being God’s punishment
5. Use of religious rituals
6. Self-directive coping (emphasises personal responsibility to problem solve based on the resources God has already given)
7. Deferring coping style (emphasises it is God’s responsibility to problem solve)
8. Collaborative coping style (emphasises the joint responsibility of God and the person)

Pargament and Brant suggest that what religion adds to other ways of coping is ‘a response to the problems of human insufficiency’\textsuperscript{74}.

Secondly, the locus of control is seen as a possible mechanism of benefit. Locus of control refers to the way in which we attribute events as being either internally controlled (within our influence) or externally controlled (beyond our influence). Cornah notes that an internal locus of control generally leads to better mental health and using religious beliefs to reinterpret events which cannot be changed can reduce stress and give a greater sense of meaning.\textsuperscript{75}

A third possible mechanism linking mental health and spirituality is found in social support. Research shows that social support is essential for promoting and sustaining mental health. Spiritual communities, through their leaders and

\textsuperscript{72} Pargament and Brant, ‘Religion and Coping’, p.112.
\textsuperscript{73} Pargament and Brant, ‘Religion and Coping’, pp.119-121. See also Swinton, \textit{Spirituality and Mental Health Care}, pp.76-78.
\textsuperscript{74} Pargament and Brant, ‘Religion and Coping’, p.125.
community members, provide spiritual and psychological support during times of distress and this therefore helps to reduce the psychological effect.\textsuperscript{76}

Fourthly, the physiological impact of spiritual activities on neural pathways in the brain is suggested as the mechanism that links health and spirituality.\textsuperscript{77} This theory seeks to explain spirituality solely on the basis of the physical effects it has on our bodies.

The last main reason given for a link between spiritual and mental health is in terms of the built environment (architecture). The symbolism of a church or religious building generates a sense of connection to God or others and therefore affects mental health.\textsuperscript{78}

In addition to these five main suggested mechanisms Levin and Chatters add\textsuperscript{79} providing theodicy (i.e. meaning in suffering), encouraging healthy behaviour (for example avoiding smoking or drinking), and specific worldviews or beliefs which lead to mental health and faith whilst generating optimism. It can therefore be seen that there are a plethora of attempted explanations within the mental health and spirituality literature which attempt to understand the positive relationship between the two.

**Limitations of the spirituality and mental health literature**

This chapter has so far examined the complexity of defining spirituality and issues to do with the measurement of relationships between spirituality and mental health. It is also necessary to briefly acknowledge two general limitations of the mental health and spirituality research field as identified in The Mental Health Foundation’s report ‘The impact of spirituality on mental health’.\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{76} Cornah, *The Impact of Spirituality on Mental Health*, pp.21-22.
\textsuperscript{77} Cornah, *The Impact of Spirituality on Mental Health*, p.22.
\textsuperscript{78} Cornah, *The Impact of Spirituality on Mental Health*, p.23.
\textsuperscript{80} Cornah, *The Impact of Spirituality on Mental Health*, pp.25-27.
Firstly, the research as it stands is too focused on quantitative measures.\textsuperscript{81} There needs to be more of a balance towards qualitative research which would enable greater examination of what spirituality means for individuals (as outlined above).

Secondly, there is a bias in research towards religion over and against spirituality, with measures of religious practice (for example attendance at worship) being the major measures of spirituality.\textsuperscript{82} A further criticism highlighted is that these measures of religious practice also tend to focus primarily on the Judeo-Christian religions. There is less research relating to other traditional religions or non-religious (non-institutionalised) spiritualties.\textsuperscript{83} It is hard to disagree with this observation that the research literature has a narrow focus on Judeo-Christian religions and as this author writes from a Christian commitment, the extensive research from a Judeo-Christian perspective is to be welcomed. The original narrow focus is probably due to the fact that the research field was still in its infancy, being only around twenty to thirty years old,\textsuperscript{84} and the fact that it appeared in the Judeo-Christian west. However, as time progresses the situation is changing and research is beginning to encompass other spiritualities and religions. Appendix one of the Mental Health Foundations ‘Keeping the Faith’ report details various religious mental health initiatives that have focussed on recovery including Buddhist, Sikh, Jewish and Muslim.\textsuperscript{85} The Royal College of Psychiatrists Spirituality and Psychiatry Special Interest Group have produced numerous publications which include religious and spiritual traditions beyond the narrow focus of the Judeo-Christian.\textsuperscript{86} Also the reality of hospital chaplaincy in a multi-faith context makes it necessary to consider spirituality and mental health from a wider perspective. The growing openness to wider expressions of spirituality and religion means that greater plurality of spirituality and religion in mental health research will increasingly become a reality and it will be

\textsuperscript{81} Cornah, \textit{The Impact of Spirituality on Mental Health}, p.25.  
\textsuperscript{82} Cornah, \textit{The Impact of Spirituality on Mental Health}, p.26.  
\textsuperscript{83} Koenig, writing in 1997 says ‘Do all religions have the same effect? It is difficult to say. Systematic research that has examined the associations between religion and mental health has been conducted primarily in countries where Judeo-Christian religion predominates. At this time, then, one can safely apply the conclusions to persons with this particular religion.’ Harold G. Koenig, \textit{Is Religion Good for your Health? The effects of religion on physical and mental health}, (Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press, 1997), p.70.  
\textsuperscript{84} Cornah, \textit{The Impact of Spirituality on Mental Health}, p.2.  
\textsuperscript{85} Lindridge, Andrew, \textit{Keeping the Faith: Spirituality and Recovery from mental health problems.} (London: Mental Health Foundation, 2007).  
\textsuperscript{86} See http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/members/specialinterestgroups/spirituality.aspx [Accessed 8 December 2011].
important to consider a Christian theological response to this. This is what is attempted in this thesis.

**Reflections**

This chapter has tried to give an overview of the mental health and spirituality literature. It has been seen that the weight of the evidence is towards there being measurable links between spirituality and mental health. However, this evidence varies in quality and more research needs to be done to give clearer results. In the last section of this chapter we engage in some further general reflections which lead us back to a theological perspective.

Firstly, the main danger in the literature on mental health and spirituality is falling into reductionism. Following Watts, sometimes a methodological form of reductionism is appropriate which explains phenomena from one perspective only, however this does not rule out different and complementing perspectives. Based on a Christian worldview which emphasises a holistic view of humanity, it is necessary to reject an extreme reductionism which says that phenomena can be adequately explained from only one perspective with other perspectives being insignificant i.e. religious experience is ‘nothing but …’. In seeking mechanisms which explain the link between mental health and spirituality there is the danger of falling into this extreme form of reductionism and see spirituality as nothing but, for example, a coping mechanism which mediates positive mental health. This extreme reductionism dismisses the possibility of actual spiritual phenomena or Divine action and explains it in a completely psychological way. Pannenberg observed that removing the concept of God from the concept of religion led to purely anthropological and functional descriptions of religion. If spirituality is solely explained in terms of social or psychological processes then Pannenberg’s observation becomes relevant to the spirituality and mental health literature. A consequence of this is that it opens up the door to a Feurbachian critique of spirituality and religion as used in the mental health literature by allowing the argument that spirituality is a projection of human longings.

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88 Cornah, *The Impact of Spirituality on Mental Health*, p.27.
for meaning and immortality. The danger of an extreme reductionist approach to spirituality and mental health is that it leads to atheism on the basis that the positive results of the mental health and spirituality literature are explainable as psychological tricks. However as Swinton argues:

While it may be true that spirituality manifests itself through social and psychological processes, there is no evidence to support the assumption that that is all it is.

To avoid the extreme reductionist position it is essential to formulate a theological perspective on the nature of spirituality in mental health which complements the psychological mechanisms of explanation suggested in the literature. This allows us to talk about Divine action and spiritual phenomena in an ontological rather than simply an anthropological or functional way.

Secondly, we cannot help but wonder if in seeking to find a common core which defines spirituality, the literature is working with an enlightenment understanding of a universal rationality. Based on foundationalism there is the tendency to argue that there are certain basic concepts (for example transcendence or meaning) which are foundational to all spiritualities. McGrath comments:

The enlightenment assumption that there was only one ‘rationality’, independent of time, space and culture, has given way to the recognition that there are – and always have been – many different ‘rationalities’.

The struggle in the literature to find a generally agreed definition of spirituality reflects this idea of multiple rationalities. Each religious or spiritual tradition will define what ‘spirituality’ is in a different way. This does not mean that we cannot explore the consequences of these different ‘spiritualities’ for mental health, but does this mean we collapse into a spiritual relativism? Here McGrath is helpful as he argues that a specifically Christian natural theology ‘posits that something of God may be known outside the Christian tradition’ with this awareness of God being rooted in the ordering of nature and in an internal subjective experience of God. He goes on to postulate that:

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91 Swinton, Spirituality and Mental Health Care, p.85.
93 McGrath, A Scientific Theology: Reality, p.76.
a Christian natural theology functions as a meta-traditional device [...] a tradition-specific rationality with an explanatory power allowing it to extend its scope to other traditions so that, for the Christian community it functions as a ‘tradition-transcendent rationality’.\footnote{McGrath, \textit{A Scientific Theology: Reality}, p.86.}

In other words the Christian tradition can transcend its own tradition and has explanatory power over other traditions, even though this explanatory power is not accessible in the form of a universal rationality to other traditions. Therefore it is possible to engage with other spiritualities in the Christian worldview because natural theology allows for and explains the experience of God and the awareness of God in creation outside the Christian tradition. This means that in the Christian worldview it is not necessary to slip into relativism.

Thirdly, a further danger in the encounter with other spiritualities is that we descend into pragmatism and simply say ‘what is true depends on what leads to the best results.’\footnote{Gwen Griffith-Dickson, \textit{Human and Divine: An introduction to the philosophy of religious experience}, (London: Duckworth, 2000), p.85.} Judgements are made on spirituality based on whether it is helpful, harmful or irrelevant to mental health. Whilst the Christian scriptures would agree that religion or spirituality could be harmful, it has specific criteria to judge this. However the pragmatist is left with the question of how to decide what exactly is beneficial, which means that they have to call on some other principles to help.\footnote{Griffith-Dickson, \textit{Human and Divine}, p.86.} Pragmatism in relation to spirituality and mental health only creates more questions than answers. It is equally possible to argue that what is true may not always necessarily be perceived to be beneficial.\footnote{Griffith-Dickson, \textit{Human and Divine}, p.86.} Pragmatism is hardly a final answer to the problem of multiple spiritualities.

Fourthly, this leads us to grapple with the concept of plurality which is endemic in the mental health and spirituality literature and will become an even clearer issue in the future. To avoid reductionism and offer a complementary theological account of spirituality in mental health we must necessarily engage with spiritual and religious plurality. A Christian natural theology lays the foundation for a qualified awareness of God outside of the Christian tradition, but John Drane also discusses non-Christian spirituality in relation to mission of the church through the concept of the missio dei. God is at work in the world (missio dei) and for Drane, gospel values ultimately judge...
the value of a spiritual experience (see Figure 1). The important thing here is that Drane conceives of the *missio dei* such that God can be at work in peoples non-Christian spiritual experiences and he comments that ‘in the case of ‘undefined spiritual experience’ God in Christ may well be at work, but goes unrecognised’. Drane applies this to undefined spiritual experience which for him means spiritual experience not linked to the metanarratives of the traditional religions. Taking his ideas one step further we can ask if God can also be involved in the more defined plurality of spiritual experiences (for example Buddhism or Islam) that we find in the mental health and spirituality literature. Using Christian natural theology or the *missio dei* as a basis for God’s action in the world outside of the Christian tradition and noting the God of the Christian tradition is a Trinitarian God, this leads us in our encounter with plurality in mental health and spirituality to Trinitarian theologies of religion. Trinitarian theologies of religion offer a deeper understanding of God’s work in and amongst the plurality of spiritual traditions. If we are to avoid reductionism by providing a complementary theological perspective to the psychological explanations of links between mental health and the spiritual, and if we are also seeking to understand, evaluate and respond to these connections then it is the thrust of this thesis that Trinitarian theologies of religion provide a way forward.

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99 Drane, *Do Christians Know How to be Spiritual?*, p.85
Figure 1 – From John Drane, *Do Christians Know How to be Spiritual? The rise of new spirituality and the mission of the church*, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2005), p.85
The previous chapter outlined the rise of spirituality in mental healthcare. This ultimately led to the issue of plurality and the question of what resources Christian theology may bring to the discussion. It is important to acknowledge that we could discuss the theology and meaning of religions based on the convictions of various different religions (for example a Buddhist or Islamic theology of religions) and each religion would lead to different conclusions. However, it is the aim of this thesis to reflect solely on the theology of religions from a Christian perspective.

This then forces us to ask what the unique basis for Christian theology is, so we do not end up with a general theology of religions which is no different from that which could have been formulated by, say, Judaism. Karl Barth argued that:

The doctrine of the Trinity is what basically distinguishes the Christian doctrine of God as Christian, and therefore what already distinguishes the Christian concept of revelation, in contrast to all other possible doctrines of God or concepts of revelation.

It is therefore a Trinitarian theology that will make the theology of religions distinctly Christian and so this is where this thesis will focus its attention. It is argued that Trinitarian theologies of religion are the most helpful theological resource in providing a foundation for responding to, reflecting upon and evaluating this rise of spirituality in mental healthcare.

One danger when approaching Trinitarian theologies of religion is focusing on issues of eternal salvation at the expense of salvation history and this lead to neglecting questions regarding the relationship between the religions and the providence of God. Concentrating on the issues of salvation causes us to get stuck in debates regarding inclusivism, exclusivism and pluralism. Whilst these soteriological debates are important, Trinitarian theologies of religion claim to move us beyond solely these

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concerns. Yong rightly argues that limiting the ‘theology of religions to the soteriological question [...] leads to a reductionist view of the phenomena of religions’.\(^\text{104}\) This is especially true when considering mental health and spirituality in the light of Trinitarian theologies of religion. The soteriological questions, although important, fade into the background as the questions of the presence of the Trinitarian God and his purposes in other religions come to the fore.

This chapter outlines the Trinitarian theologies of religion of Yong, Heim and D’Costa. Drawing on these theologies enables the identification of some principles which will guide discussion in chapter three as we relate Trinitarian theologies of religion to the area of spirituality and mental health care.

**Amos Yong: A pneumatological theology of religions**

Yong believes his Pentecostal theology has a unique perspective to bring to the Trinitarian theology of religions. For him a pneumatological theology of religions is a ‘robustly Trinitarian theology’\(^\text{105}\) because we cannot speak of the Spirit without the other two members of the Trinity.\(^\text{106}\) The Spirit is involved in creation, re-creation (redemption) and final creation (eschatology).\(^\text{107}\) The Spirit is also both universal (the Spirit of God) and particular (the Spirit of Christ) which enables us to take the otherness of religions seriously.\(^\text{108}\) For Yong, the Spirit’s wider work (the universal) outside of the church (the particular) allows us to engage with other religions. He suggests three principles to guide thinking: God is universally present and active in the Spirit, the Spirit is the life-breath of the *imago dei* in all humans and enables all human relationships, and religions are providentially sustained by God’s Spirit for his purposes.\(^\text{109}\) This enables us to go beyond seeing other religions as simply ‘failed human efforts to reach God or inspired by the devil and his demons’.\(^\text{110}\) Yong argues for the ambiguity of religions in general, including Christianity in which we see human frailty and demonic activity.\(^\text{111}\) However the universality of the Spirit does not mean abandoning the centrality of Christ because the ‘Word and Spirit provide the poles


\(^{105}\) Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, p.20 cf. p.50.

\(^{106}\) Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, p.42.

\(^{107}\) Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, pp.35-42.

\(^{108}\) Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, p.43.

\(^{109}\) Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, pp.44-46.

\(^{110}\) Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, p.48.

\(^{111}\) Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, p.48.
through which all orthodoxy must pass. Yong clearly wants to affirm that the Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus, but he wants to postpone Christological questions to allow a pneumatological understanding of the religions to develop.

Yong draws on the Irenaean image of the Word and Spirit being the ‘two hands’ through which God works all things in creation. He interprets the two hands as representing two distinct but related economies (missions) of God in salvation history and he criticises attempts at a pneumatological theology of religions which begin with pneumatological perspectives but return too quickly to Christological criteria for discerning the Spirit’s presence in other religions. For him pneumatology provides the best foundation for engaging other religions. He argues that the Filioque clause results in a tendency to subordinate pneumatology to Christology with Christ’s domain determining the Spirit’s domain, therefore leading us to only see other religions as being fulfilled in Christ. Yong comments:

I am certainly not arguing for a view of the economy of the Spirit as completely sovereign or unrelated to that of the Son. I am, however, affirming that the turn to pneumatology may allow for more neutral categories to emerge when attempting to discern the presence and activity of the Spirit in other traditions.

Central to Yong’s theology is the idea of a ‘foundational pneumatology’ and his proposal is that this ultimately enables us to identify ‘non-Christological criteria for discerning the Spirit’s presence’. A foundational pneumatology focuses on the Spirit’s universal relationship to and activity in the world outside the church. Foundational pneumatology is universal in scope in relation to its audience and

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112 Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, p.50.
115 Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, p.103; Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, pp.61-62, 70.
116 Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, p.190.
117 ‘…the Holy Spirit, the Lord, and giver of life, who from the Father and the Son proceeds’. The Latinized version of the Nicene Creed adds the words ‘and the son’ to the original Greek text of the creed formulated at the First council of Constantinople. The added words are known as the Filioque clause.
118 Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, pp.87, 186.
119 Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, p.186.
121 Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, p.57.
identifies those truths of the Spirit which are relevant to all and not just Christians.¹²² For Yong ‘foundational pneumatology is motivated by the idea that God is the ‘Object’ of religious encounter regardless of one’s traditional affiliation¹²³. Twinned with the idea of a ‘foundational pneumatology’ Yong speaks about the need to have a ‘pneumatological imagination’ and by this he means ‘the capacity to apprehend the Spirit, to speak the Spirit’s languages, to experience the Spirit’s reality, and to engage reality spiritually’¹²⁴. In other words, a pneumatological imagination is the ability to creatively discern the Spirit at work, which is itself also a gift of the Spirit, and to embrace the Spirit wherever he blows.¹²⁵ This enables us to engage and dialogue with other religions. A foundational pneumatology could lead to the charge of imperialistically imposing Christian categories on other religions, but Yong argues from the perspective of postmodernity that there is no neutral ground from which to engage other religions.¹²⁶

Yong’s unique contribution to Trinitarian theologies of religion is in the area of discernment. After examining the theologies of Khodr, Samartha, Dupuis and Pinnock, Yong observes that the issue of discernment keeps appearing. For him ‘the overarching goal of a pneumatological theology of religions is the ongoing activity of discerning the Holy Spirit and the diversity of the spirits in the world of religions’¹²⁷. The demonic is a real, concrete and destructive force which is in opposition to God and therefore the Spirit is not the only spiritual reality in the world.¹²⁸ He argues that discernment involves the charismatic gift of discerning the spirits but also encompasses a hermeneutical approach to things.¹²⁹ Summarising the Biblical ideas he observes that discernment, in addition to the charismatic gift, involves human judgement and the testing of ‘the broad observation of the broad range of the phenomenology of human behaviour and experience’¹³⁰. This ability is also an ‘innate human faculty that needs to be developed’¹³¹. The Spirit and the demonic are discerned through their manifestations and appearances (phenomenology) as the

¹²² Yong, Beyond the Impasse, pp.63-64 cf. p.67.
¹²³ Yong, Beyond the Impasse, p.70.
¹²⁴ Yong, Beyond the Impasse, p.73 cf. Yong, Discerning the Spirit(s), p.102.
¹²⁵ 1 Corinthians 2:11b; John 3:8; Yong, Beyond the Impasse, pp.74-75.
¹²⁶ Yong, Beyond the Impasse, pp.53-54 cf. p.18.
¹²⁷ Yong, Beyond the Impasse, p.175.
¹²⁸ Yong, Beyond the Impasse, pp.137-139.
¹²⁹ Yong, Beyond the Impasse, p.129.
¹³⁰ Yong, Beyond the Impasse, p.144.
¹³¹ Yong, Beyond the Impasse, p.148.
outer forms are linked to the inner aspects of things. This leads Yong to argue the necessity of taking the time to understand the world and religions on their own terms (hermeneutics of life).

Yong acknowledges that discernment is complex and it is challenging to identify definitive criteria. Even applying the confession of ‘Jesus is Lord’ needs clarification as can be seen from Jesus’ teaching about those who call him Lord but bear no fruit. Yong claims scriptural formulas for discernment were developed for the specific situations of intra-Christian disputes and are difficult to apply to the religions. He also claims ‘Our norms and criteria can never be exhaustive because foundational pneumatology […] resists conclusive articulation’. The implication is that religious discernment involves charismatic activity and phenomenological and theological comparison i.e. comparative theology. Yong introduces three categories of spiritual experience into his foundational pneumatology to help with discernment of the universal Spirit. Firstly, *Divine presence* (things such as truth and goodness that characterise God) which he links to religious experience. Secondly, *Divine absence* (things that are destructive, demonic or evil) which he links with religious cosmology or understandings of nature of the whole world. Thirdly, *Divine activity* (movement towards an object’s God created reason for being thus enabling it to be authentic to itself) which he links to religious utility and transformation. Divine activity for Yong is not necessarily salvific. Criteria based on these three categories for discernment need to be

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132 Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, pp.150-156.
133 Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, p.159.
134 Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, p.159.
135 1 Cor. 12:3.
136 Matt. 7:15-23.
139 Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, pp.164, 175.
140 Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, p.164; Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, pp.122-136.
141 Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, pp.225-227.
142 Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, pp.223-227.
143 Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, pp.243-245.
144 Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, pp.227-234.
formulated with each new engagement and not in an a priori way. Yong comments:

The goal of a pneumatological approach to religions is to find sufficient analogues in other traditions to the Christian doctrine of Holy Spirit such that we are put in a position to pursue the comparative task and affirm or deny the Spirit’s presence or activity.

In regard to salvation, Yong suggests discernment is not about whether the religions are salvific in themselves but whether they are salvific in the way Christians understand salvation.

Yong’s pneumatological theology of religions although insightful in places can be criticised on various grounds. Firstly, Johnson criticises Yong for having an insufficient Trinitarian framework. By this he means that Yong does not have a Trinitarian framework that encompasses the ad intra Trinitarian relations as the foundation for the missions of the Spirit and the Son. Secondly, Johnson also questions Yong for not discussing the differing ‘missions’ of Spirit and Son from a salvation-historical perspective. Thirdly, Johnson criticises Yong for misunderstanding and severing Irenaeus’s two hands of God. Irenaeus’s metaphor is fundamentally about the unity of the Spirit and the Son in the economy of salvation as the Father acts through them. Taken to its extreme the emphasis on two economies leads to a breakdown of Divine unity and traditional concepts such as perichoresis. Johnson comments that ‘From two ‘sendings’ one should not infer two distinct ‘economies’ or in other words differing roles do not imply different economies of salvation. Yong is not clear what the role of the Father is in relation to the Spirit and Son. Fourthly, Merrick criticises this divorcing of the pneumatological from the Christological and questions Yong’s ignoring of scripture passages that clearly connect the Spirit and redemption (and thereby Christology).
Fifthly, Irvin raises a concern that Yong’s proposals have a tendency to be abstract and vague which could hinder discernment. Yong responds that vagueness is inevitable and is helpful in beginning the process of comparison across religions. We would however agree that we are left wondering how useful Yong’s proposals really are in practice. Lastly, Merrick questions whether religious dialogue can actually be authentic if we bracket out Christological concerns as we are removing the heart of the Christian faith. This points to the weakness in Yong’s theology of religion that although he wants to say that pneumatology and Christology are related he never returns to Christological concerns for us to see how this works out.

**S. Mark Heim: A Trinitarian theology of religious ends**

Heim, an Evangelical Protestant, seeks to present a unique answer to religious pluralism using Trinitarian theology. His hypothesis can be summed up quite succinctly as:

> [...] affirming that other religious traditions truthfully hold out religious ends which their adherents might realize as alternative to communion with God in Christ. These are not salvation, the end Christians long for, but they are real.

Heim wants to be open to religious claims other than Christianity being true, whilst affirming that Christ is the only saviour of the world. He seeks to avoid downplaying the particular claims and aims of religions of individual religions and instead of saying all religions lead to the same point he wants to insist that all religions find fulfilment of the ends they value. Heim defines religious ends as: practices, images, stories or concepts that give a holistic pattern for living, that both form and are the way to an ultimate human fulfilment, and that are exclusive of other religious options. This leads Heim to argue for understanding a religion’s ideas of fulfilment on its own terms without making *a priori* judgements. The issue then becomes

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less about which religious end is true but which religious end is the most ultimate that can be realised.\(^{161}\) This does not imply a polytheistic outlook. Different aspects of an ultimate reality are dominant in experience at different times and for different people which allows us to unify differing religious experiences in one religious ultimate reality.\(^{162}\) It is this idea that Heim uses to protect the possibility of the Trinitarian God as the centre of religious experience without slipping into pluralism or polytheism.

Salvation takes on a particular form for Heim. Salvation is a ‘relation of communion with God and other creatures in Christ’\(^{163}\). Heim notes the development of the concept of salvation in scripture from corporate historical deliverance in the Old Testament to cosmic deliverance in the New.\(^{164}\) Here Christ is the means of salvation and nature of salvation itself.\(^{165}\) The focus of Heim’s soteriology is therefore relational, Christ saves though communion with himself and ultimate salvation results in communion with God.\(^{166}\) Salvation results in the intensification and glorification of relationships and not the elimination of them and it is this that distinguishes salvation from other religious ends.\(^{167}\) Trinitarianly, God is communion himself and therefore the nature of salvation reflects this.\(^{168}\) Salvation encompasses right relationship with God, others and creation and therefore does not eschew the more traditional concepts of salvation: deliverance from sin, death and evil.\(^{169}\) Just as relationships can vary in time and quality, so salvation as communion can be partial in the present. God’s relationship with us is settled but our relationship with God may not be.\(^{170}\) Salvation ultimately is ‘a communion that draws together various types of relation with God’\(^{171}\) that humanity may choose to exhibit. For Heim ‘we can

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\(^{161}\) Heim, *The Depths of the Riches*, p.31.

\(^{162}\) Heim, *The Depths of the Riches*, p.38.


\(^{164}\) Heim, *The Depths of the Riches*, pp.49-51.

\(^{165}\) Heim, *The Depths of the Riches*, p.51.

\(^{166}\) Heim, *The Depths of the Riches*, pp.53-58.

\(^{167}\) Heim, *The Depths of the Riches*, pp.55, 59, 60.

\(^{168}\) Heim, *The Depths of the Riches*, p.62.

\(^{169}\) Heim, *The Depths of the Riches*, p.67; Heim criticises a solely negative view of salvation as absence (salvation from) and wants to see salvation also as positive (salvation to). See Heim, ‘Salvation as Communion’, pp.322-323.

\(^{170}\) Heim, *The Depths of the Riches*, pp.74-75.

\(^{171}\) Heim, *The Depths of the Riches*, p.77.
understand the universal salvific will of God as God’s unconditional openness to all creatures.\textsuperscript{172}

Drawing on scripture Heim argues that the New Testament outlines the two religious ends of salvation and damnation but it is silent on the fate of unevangelised.\textsuperscript{173} The Biblical examples of pagan saints\textsuperscript{174} show the Spirit’s work in human lives where knowledge of Christ is absent.\textsuperscript{175} Heim argues that from a historical theological perspective the church has always recognised a diversity of states within both salvation and damnation, as well as the possibility of moving between the two e.g. limbo, purgatory etc.\textsuperscript{176} This climaxes in Dante’s \textit{Divine Comedy} which for Heim is an example of these ideas. However it is important to note that in the New Testament there is no discussion of the range of possible states that could exist in redemption or damnation.\textsuperscript{177}

Heim sees the different persons of the Trinity as the foundation for affirming the ‘truth and reality of what is different’\textsuperscript{178} which means we do not single out only one appearance of God as real. This leads us beyond a simple pluralism and exclusivism, as there is variety in the ultimate, and suggests that other religious truths could be integrated into a Trinitarian perspective.\textsuperscript{179} He does this through the concept of communion in that other religions are forms of communion with the Triune God, with Trinitarian communion being the best and most complete form of communion.\textsuperscript{180} The Triune God (immanent Trinity) stands at the centre of all religious diversity and allows us to say that religious experiences of God above us, God alongside or among us, God within us (the economic Trinity or other religious experiences) can be united in one reality.\textsuperscript{181}

Human relationships with the Trinity can take many forms and ‘the distinctive religious ends of various traditions correspond to relations with God constituted by

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[172] Heim, \textit{The Depths of the Riches}, p.76.
\item[173] Heim, \textit{The Depths of the Riches}, pp.80-81.
\item[174] e.g. Abel, Noah, Melchizedek, Job, Cornelius etc.
\item[175] Heim, \textit{The Depths of the Riches}, pp.84-85.
\item[176] Heim, \textit{The Depths of the Riches}, p.90.
\item[177] Heim, \textit{The Depths of the Riches}, p.82.
\item[178] Heim, \textit{The Depths of the Riches}, p.127.
\item[179] Heim, \textit{The Depths of the Riches}, p.128.
\item[180] Heim, \textit{The Depths of the Riches}, pp.128-129.
\item[181] Heim, \textit{The Depths of the Riches}, pp.130, 132.
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limitations or intensifications within a particular dimension of the Trinitarian life. In other words alternative religious ends realise specific aspects of the whole eschatological Trinitarian relationship that God holds out to humanity. A relationship with God is not necessarily a saving relationship (salvation as communion) and alternative religious ends speak of valid ways of relating to the Triune God being realised in eternity. The relationships that other religious traditions have with the Divine are therefore affirmed as valid. Heim identifies three dimensions of relationship that we can have with God and are grounded in intra-Trinitarian relationships: impersonal, personal encounter and personal communion. Impersonal relations imply the infinity of God, apophatic theology and impersonal metaphors from scripture such as wind or fire. Personal encounter implies external interpersonal interaction that focus on things like gratitude, duty and worship. There is distance between humanity and the Divine in the midst of genuine encounter. Personal communion involves a deep encounter with the internal depths of the Trinity, a participation in Triune life and the sharing of inner personal lives. However, for Heim these dimensions of relationship ‘do not correspond to the persons of the Father, Son and Spirit’ but ways of relating to the Trinity in totality.

The availability of the alternative religious ends enables Heim to combine concepts of creaturely freedom with God’s universal salvific will through what he calls a theology of plentitude (God’s fulfilment of a variety of religious ends). God allows the real possibility that ‘persons will realize their freedom in something other than

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185 Heim, The Depths of the Riches, p.184 cf. pp.210-212; See also Heim, ‘Salvation as Communion’, pp.323-325.
191 Heim, The Depths of the Riches, pp.245-254.
salvation" and therefore allows people to become what they wish (complete resistance to God leading to annihilation).

For Heim other religions can therefore be interpreted in a Trinitarian framework. Heim acknowledges the Christocentric nature of the Trinity but argues that this ‘rules out a view of Christ as an isolated source of relation to God or knowledge of God’ because of the activity of the Spirit and the Father. Heim sees a providential role for other religions as they can enrich our ability to understand and speak about God.

The uniqueness of Christ is found in Christ’s reconciling nature which enables a relation of communion (salvation) between God and humanity that ‘embraces those dimensions of relation with God found concretely in other religions’.

Heim’s view is helpful as it emphasises the different types of relationships that people may have with the Trinitarian God yet it can be criticised on various grounds, especially the adequacy of his Trinitarian theology. Firstly, Johnson argues that grounding the three relationships (impersonal, personal encounter and personal communion) in the intra-Trinitarian relationships is a speculative account of the immanent Trinity. Johnson is correct in regard to impersonal and personal encounter relationships as there is limited scriptural foundation. However, Johnson’s criticism breaks down because there are clear scriptural foundations for understanding the inner Trinitarian life as one of personal communion. Secondly, Johnson argues that for Heim God’s economic activity is expressed in the above three relations which leads to the postulating of other Divine economies than the economy of salvation. The immanent Trinity, who is the foundation for the sending of Christ and the Spirit in the economy of salvation, is effectively severed from the economic Trinity which allows a wider variety of Divine economies in the world.

193 Heim, *The Depths of the Riches*, p.263.
198 Johnson, ‘Does the Doctrine of the Trinity Hold the Key to a Christian Theology of Religions?’, pp.152-153.
199 In fact Heim draws attention to the Gospel of John and the Pauline Letters in this regard. See Heim, *The Depths of the Riches*, p.196.
Thirdly, Johnson criticises Heim for effectively replacing the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit with a Trinity of three relationships.\textsuperscript{201} It is true that Heim seems to bypass an in depth discussion of the specific immanent and economic roles of the three Divine persons, which leaves the danger of collapsing the Father, Son and Spirit into a generic divinity characterised by three types of relationship and this can lead to the charge of modalism in relation to the doctrine of God.\textsuperscript{202} Lastly, Heim’s proposal attempts to legitimise all human (religious) experience based on a Trinitarian foundation, yet as Flett rightly points out this involves projection on to God and does not follow automatically from a Trinitarian theology.\textsuperscript{203} The most fatal flaw in Heim’s proposal is summed up by Kärkkäinen:

\[\ldots\] while it is no problem to affirm diversity in the Triune God \[\ldots\] it is a completely different thing to say that because of the diversity in God there follows a diversity of religious ends.\textsuperscript{204}

There is no warrant for jumping to this conclusion. Heim’s uniqueness is in his suggestion that Christians and non-Christians can have different types of relationships with the Trinitarian God. Whilst we would not affirm the more problematic aspects of this idea, it is an important insight.

**Gavin D’Costa: The meeting of the Trinity and the religions**

D’Costa, a Catholic theologian, uses various conciliar documents of the Catholic Church to argue for a Trinitarian theology of religions. He seeks to move beyond a typology of pluralism, exclusivism and inclusivism in relation to other religions and argues for a Trinitarian engagement.

D’Costa considers the questions of whether non-Christian religions can be salvific in the light of the conciliar documents and argues for their ambiguity on this issue:

\[\text{While it is true that there is no explicit negative answer, there is certainly no positive answer.}\textsuperscript{205}\]

\textsuperscript{201} Johnson, ‘Does the Doctrine of the Trinity Hold the Key to a Christian Theology of Religions?’, pp.154-155.

\textsuperscript{202} Flett, ‘In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit’, p.82.

\textsuperscript{203} Flett, ‘In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit’, p.81.

\textsuperscript{204} Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Religious Pluralism*, p.147.

D’Costa contends the conciliar documents do not argue for religions being salvific or containing Divine revelation per se. There is no other revelation than Jesus Christ and all truth will simply deepen our understanding of Christ.206 Yet it is clear that:

Supernatural saving grace is operative in other religions and that in those other religions there is much that is true, good, and holy, and much to be admired and learned by the church.207

The Catholic Church is specifically open to the salvation of non-Christians under three conditions.208 Firstly, lack of individual responsibility for not having knowledge of the gospel. Secondly, an individual lives in line with natural law and their conscience. Thirdly, ‘these positive realities are but a preparation (preparatio evangelica) for the full and undiminished truth of the gospel’209. The positive elements of other religions therefore are considered to be ultimately fulfilled in Christianity and are preparations for Jesus Christ.

The conciliar documents specifically recognise that the Spirit is at work outside of the church and attribute the religious questions of humanity as originating in the action of the Holy Spirit.210 Yet the Spirit’s work does not constitute an alternative Divine economy to that of Christ, the Trinity and the church.211 In fact there is no other Divine economy of salvation which can be revealed other than the economy of Christ.212 For D’Costa the Holy Spirit’s active work outside the church is not divorced from the redemption offered by God through Christ and it is this that the Spirit holds out to all humanity.213 God reveals himself in the particularity of Jesus Christ, but he is also continually and universally revealing himself in history by the Spirit.214 A Trinitarian theology dialectically relates the universal and the particular and ‘guards against exclusivism and pluralism’215 because God reveals himself in particular ways...


208 D’Costa, The Meeting of the Trinity in the Religions, pp.103-104.


211 D’Costa, The Meeting of the Trinity in the Religions, pp.107, 114.


(Jesus Christ) but is not limited in this as he also reveals himself universally (the Spirit). D’Costa is clear that God’s revelation is a true self-revelation and his Trinitarian theology holds to the principle that the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity meaning there is not a hidden God behind the God revealed in history. D’Costa also suggests an ecclesiological presence of the Spirit in other religions. God’s presence by his Spirit is always a Trinitarian presence and the Triune God is the foundation of the church, therefore where the Spirit is there is also the ‘ambiguous presence’ of the Trinity, church and kingdom.

Even though the Spirit works outside of the church, this does not imply a per se (or a priori) unqualified affirmation of other religions. Affirmation of any aspect of a non-Christian religion must be an a posteriori i.e. after engagement with a historical occurrence of a religion. Specifically this engagement with other religions should be on the basis of neighbour-love. D’Costa comments:

There is never the question of any wholehearted “yes” or “no,” but rather always both a “yes” and “no,” and the balance of each is in accordance with the subject matter to hand.

For Christians there is an a priori commitment to Christian theology or beliefs, but this cannot lead to an a priori (before engagement) affirmation or negation of other religions. In terms of discernment it is the inchoate reality (beginning signs) of God’s Kingdom that exist within a culture or religion which enable us to discern the presence of God through the Spirit. Specifically D’Costa argues that we should not divorce the activity of the universal Spirit from the activity of the Spirit in the church. The Spirit works in the same way both within and without (even if hindered) the church.

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218 D’Costa, The Meeting of the Trinity in the Religions, pp.110,111.
D’Costa bases his thoughts on the various passages regarding the Spirit from the gospel of John.\textsuperscript{225} Amongst his conclusions are: the Spirit enables Christians to participate in the intra-Trinitarian love and Divine life, whilst also enabling the learning of how to love and forgive\textsuperscript{226}; the Spirit and Christ are unintelligible apart from each other\textsuperscript{227}; the Spirit’s role involves testifying to Jesus and deepening our understanding of the truth that Jesus has already given rather than revealing new truth in other religions\textsuperscript{228}; the Spirit’s witness is solely to Jesus Christ and the Spirit simply recalls, reinterprets, recreates and perpetuates the ministry of Christ; the Spirit convicts of sin but also evokes forgiving love\textsuperscript{229}. Here for D’Costa the work of the Spirit and Christ are affirmed as united. D’Costa is reluctant to speak of the Spirit in other religions in an abstract way as the claim that the Spirit is at work is a discernment of the church.\textsuperscript{230} The Spirit enables us to discern Christ-likeness in others and therefore enables us to celebrate the good and holy found in the lives of followers of other religions.\textsuperscript{231}

D’Costa agrees that non-Christian religions find fulfilment in Christ, but this does not mean we should recast them in Christian terms and not seek to understand them in their own terms.\textsuperscript{232} Encounter with other religions may lead to a deeper understanding of God’s revelation in Christ or a transformation and fulfilment of the church through that which God gives in this encounter.\textsuperscript{233} If the church dismisses the possibility of the Spirit at work in other religions it then can neglect an important source from which God can work in the church. We noted above that the Spirit’s work outside the church is analogous to the Spirit’s work inside the church i.e. ‘helping the church to follow Christ more truthfully, and coming to indwell the Trinity more completely’\textsuperscript{234}. The Trinity provides a foundation for Christianity being open to other religions (dialogue) and the church therefore needs to be open to God’s ‘gift of himself’ through other religions, the implication being the need to understand

\textsuperscript{226} D’Costa, \textit{The Meeting of the Trinity in the Religions}, pp.121, 125.
\textsuperscript{227} D’Costa, \textit{The Meeting of the Trinity in the Religions}, p.121.
\textsuperscript{228} D’Costa, \textit{The Meeting of the Trinity in the Religions}, p.122.
\textsuperscript{229} D’Costa, \textit{The Meeting of the Trinity in the Religions}, p.124.
\textsuperscript{230} D’Costa, \textit{The Meeting of the Trinity in the Religions}, p.128.
\textsuperscript{231} D’Costa, \textit{The Meeting of the Trinity in the Religions}, pp.129-130.
\textsuperscript{232} D’Costa, \textit{The Meeting of the Trinity in the Religions}, pp.111-112,117.
\textsuperscript{233} D’Costa, \textit{The Meeting of the Trinity in the Religions}, pp.112, 114.
\textsuperscript{234} D’Costa, \textit{The Meeting of the Trinity in the Religions}, p.115.
religions on their own terms. Engagement with other religions may cause the church to be challenged and asked questions which lead to its transformation.

D’Costa’s approach to the Trinitarian theology of religions is fairly uncontroversial. It remains within the bounds of traditional Christian theology and has much to commend it. However, D’Costa could be criticised on the undeveloped nature of his proposals. Whilst D’Costa does not claim his proposals are fully worked out, he does limit his theological reflection to the Catholic tradition and neglects other Christian theological traditions. From a scriptural perspective D’Costa only engages with the gospel of John and neglects other relevant scriptural resources. The underdeveloped nature also shows itself in the fact that D’Costa’s Trinitarian theology is far from fully articulated. Further, D’Costa does not explore the possibility of saying the god encountered in religions is the Trinitarian God. Obviously he would not want to make an a priori statement, but it appears he is unwilling to consider this as a possibility. Here perhaps Yong and Heim complement D’Costa.

Trinitarian principles for spirituality in mental healthcare

All of this seems to have led far from the original purpose of this thesis in regard to mental health and spirituality. Yet the previous chapter shows it is difficult to differentiate between religion and spirituality. A theology of religions has relevance for the concept of spirituality in mental healthcare. The last section of this chapter draws on the Trinitarian theologies of religion described above to constructively outline a Trinitarian understanding of plurality. This will be done by identifying four principles which will be used to guide our thinking about spirituality and mental health from within the Trinitarian worldview.

Principle 1: An encounter with Divinity amongst the religions is an encounter with the Trinitarian God however much this encounter is distorted by humanity.

Rahner’s rule states that the economic Trinity (God’s revelation of himself in salvation history) is the immanent Trinity (God in himself). Furthermore, the immanent Trinity is not exhausted by the economic Trinity, but any revelation of the

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immanent Trinity must encompass and not contradict the economic Trinity. The implication is that there is no abstract Divinity in the encounter with other religions, only the Triune God who is revealed in Jesus Christ.²³⁹ Kärkkäinen comments:

[...] even where the presence and immediacy of God is not yet recognized at all, it still is the presence of the Triune God of the Bible.²⁴⁰

The Triune God is seen as being present universally in human history even if denied. From the perspective of Yong it can be argued that there is foundational experience of God through the Spirit. A Trinitarian theology enables us to hold together the universal presence and activity of God in creation with particular experiences of God’s presence and activity. The examples of holy pagans in scripture indicate that the Triune God works outside of the sphere of the church and, from an epistemological point of view, shows that a full understanding of the Triune God is not necessary for encounter.²⁴¹ It is also necessary to accept the Triune God’s working outside of the church, otherwise mission would not happen.²⁴² Yet a universal presence of God does not imply salvation, as Heim’s theology shows it is possible for a person to have varying degrees of relationship with the Triune God. Heim extends this to religious ends which we have explicitly said is unwarranted, but we do not deny Heim’s helpful insight that relationships with the Triune God can be wider than simply relationships of salvation. Any variety of relationship that a person can have is rooted in the finiteness, distortion and fallenness of humanity in encounter with God.²⁴³ This allows for the Triune God to be active amongst the religions without the need to uphold every experience. Arguing that an encounter with Divinity amongst the religions is an encounter with the Trinitarian God however, does not mean that other religions are necessarily salvific. There is a difference between being open to the Triune God working in and through other religions by his grace and seeing other religions as a source of salvation.²⁴⁴

Principle 2: Pneumatology is intimately related to Christology in a Trinitarian theology of religions

Gunton argues that western theology, based on Augustine, has developed a monistic, rather than a pneumatological and Christological, understanding of God’s relationship to the world. He says that:

On an Irenaean account, what holds the creation together [...] are the Son and the Spirit, by whom the world is held in continuing relation to God the Father.

Gunton contends that Irenaeus’ concept of the two hands of God, as the mediators of the Father’s presence in creation, is the best way to secure both God’s distinctiveness from as well as God’s presence in creation. This then lays a pneumatological and Christological foundation for God’s particular presence in the world and amongst the religions.

We have seen that Yong argued from the ‘two hands’ to two Divine economies (missions), the economy of Christ and the economy of the Spirit. Yong was not wrong to highlight the work of the Spirit in the wider world, but problematically we do not find two Divine economies in scripture. Gunton, in relation to the two hands of the Father, comments:

Both, together, do the work of the Father, and in that sense the works of God the Trinity are undivided. We might say here that on an Irenaean conception of the two hands we can expect in this case the left hand to know what the right hand is doing!

Following D’Costa, there is an intimate relationship between Pneumatology and Christology. The Spirit is involved in the annunciation, incarnation and the life and ministry of Christ. Christ is instrumental in the sending of the Spirit upon the disciples at Pentecost which propels them into mission. The Filioque clause has led to a tendency of ‘downgrading the role of the Holy Spirit in comparison with the

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246 Gunton, The One, the Three and the Many, p.55.
248 Gunton, The Promise of Trinitarian Theology, p.xxviii.
250 e.g. John 20:22; Acts 1:5.
Son\textsuperscript{251} and a neglect of the acknowledgement of the work of the Spirit in the world. Smail argues that the creed should better read that the Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son and the Son is eternally begotten of the Father through the Spirit.\textsuperscript{252} This means we cannot speak of pneumatology or Christology apart from each other and the Spirit cannot be doing something independent of Christ.\textsuperscript{253} As Vanhoozer observes, the vaguer the Spirit becomes the less useful it is in a theology of religions.\textsuperscript{254} Therefore, it is important that ‘the mode of the presence of the Spirit in the world is Trinitarian’.\textsuperscript{255} However God is at work amongst the religions it cannot be in a way that divides the work of the Spirit from the work of Christ. The two hands of God are united in the Father.

**Principle 3: Trinitarian discernment is the key to identifying God at work amongst the religions**

Yong argues that discernment is a key issue in the theology of religions and it is necessary to postpone Christological criteria for discernment to allow a pneumatological understanding to develop. In agreement with Yong we would argue that discernment is the key, but it is a Trinitarian discernment that gives weight to each of the persons of the Trinity in discernment and not pneumatological discernment with Christological concerns postponed.

Christologically, the Spirit points to Christ because there is no separation of pneumatology or Christology from each other. This is the Christological criteria of discernment. The scriptures indicate this close relationship between the Spirit and Christ.\textsuperscript{256} However, Yong is right that it is possible to focus too quickly on the Christological criteria for discerning the Spirit’s presence without engaging the wider principles for discerning the Spirit.

\textsuperscript{252} Smail, *The Giving Gift*, p.141.
\textsuperscript{255} Kärkkäinen, ‘How to Speak of the Spirit Among the Religions’, p.123.
\textsuperscript{256} e.g.1 John 4:2-3, John 16:13-14, 1 Corinthians 12:3, John 14:26.
The Spirit is seen as the mediator of Divine encounter (Yong’s concept of Divine presence) and yet discerning the presence of the Spirit is wider than this. The fruit of the Spirit produced inside the church could be applied outside as he is the same Spirit.  

The Spirit as liberator and restorer, and therefore liberation from sin, death, evil and corruption, are important aspects of discerning the presence of the Spirit. As the Spirit of life, the Spirit bestows life and is involved in new creation, which indicates both a creative dimension and an eschatological dimension to discerning the Spirit. Pinnock rightly comments that the ‘Spirit is […] certainly not related to that which deceives and destroys’. Therefore it is important not to dismiss the charismatic gift of the discerning of spirits and the possible presence of the demonic. If the Spirit guides the church in all truth there is the potential for developing a comparative theology which enables us to discern Kingdom truth found in embryonic form in other religions. The work of the Spirit in salvation history gives pointers to help us discern the Spirit at work today. Oleksa argues ‘all that God the Holy Spirit reveals, inspires and institutes was given, once for all, at Pentecost’ and therefore it is right to expect a radical continuity between the Spirit’s work today amongst the religions and the Spirit’s work which was instituted at Pentecost. All this said, it is important not to neglect the Christological at the expense of the pneumatological. Experiences of the Spirit may not be perceived by a person in a Christological way, but for the church discernment must include the Christological.

Even though a Trinitarian discernment is the key to identifying God at work amongst the religions we should not dismiss the complexity and art of such discernment. The Spirit is free to blow where he chooses and therefore ‘it is unwise to limit expectations to any particular locus or modus operandi; on the contrary, we should be prepared to be surprised by the Spirit’. Scriptural criteria for discerning the

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264 John 3:8.
presence and activity of God also need to be balanced with other passages which show the complexity of the task.266

Principle 4: The Trinitarian God providentially uses other religions to transform and challenge the church such that it follows Christ more truthfully.

This is asserted following D’Costa who argues that the Spirit’s work outside of the church leads the church to become more fully what it should be. The danger is that we approach other religions in an imperialistic way making a priori judgements without engaging and understanding them on their own terms.267 In reality it is impossible to approach other religions without a priori judgements, there is no neutral position and we cannot escape the hermeneutical circle, but a phenomenological methodology such as that advocated by Yong can be of help in engaging other religions on their own terms.268 A theology which allows the Trinitarian God to work through other religions to transform the church should be open to engaging with another religion on their own terms in the context of listening to the Spirit. This can lead to:

- The development of fresh practices in the church as a theological response to what is found in other religions.269
- Discernment of Christ-like behaviour, which is enabled by the Spirit, in others.270 The Spirit may then judge the church and call the church to faithfulness through the lives of non-Christians.271
- The realisation that the church may be ‘practicing cultural and religious idolatry’272.

The Spirit’s presence amongst the religions however does not mean that other religions cannot be challenged. Just as the church as the recipient of the Spirit is imperfect and needs to be judged, so other religions whom the Spirit providentially

269 D’Costa, *The Meeting of the Trinity in the Religions*, p.128.
270 D’Costa, *The Meeting of the Trinity in the Religions*, p.129.
271 D’Costa, *The Meeting of the Trinity in the Religions*, p.130.
works through are imperfect and need to be questioned. \(^{273}\) The fulfilment of other religions will always be in the church and in Jesus Christ. \(^{274}\) However a Trinitarian theology lets us move ‘beyond an exclusivism that says *no* to dialogue without engaging the other in dialogue’ \(^{275}\).

\(^{273}\) D’Costa, *The Meeting of the Trinity in the Religions*, p.128.
Chapter 3 - Toward a Trinitarian foundation for spirituality in mental health

So far this thesis has briefly surveyed the literature on spirituality in mental healthcare, which identified the issues of plurality and reductionism as being important. The issue of plurality led to an examination of the Trinitarian theologies of religions of Heim, Yong and D’Costa as a response to this plurality. It will also be found in this chapter that use of Trinitarian theologies of religion also provides a way to overcome the issue of reductionism. Using Trinitarian theologies of religion it was possible to identify four principles which will guide the thinking of the current chapter. Our thesis is that Trinitarian theologies of religion are the most helpful theological resource in providing a foundation for a Christian understanding, response and evaluation of the rise of spirituality in mental healthcare. In drawing together our reflections on the diverse fields of spirituality and mental health and the Trinitarian theology of religions it will be possible to show that a constructive relationship between the two can be made.

The Trinitarian God and the overcoming of reductionism

Chapter one identified the potential danger of reductionism, whereby any positive effect of spirituality on mental health could be attributed to what is essentially a psychological trick. This would mean ontological descriptions of spirituality can be replaced by purely materialistic or functional descriptions. Trinitarian theologies of religion affirm the universal presence of God through his Spirit in creation and the possibility of Divine action amongst the varying expressions of spirituality (Christian and non-Christian) that are researched within the spirituality and mental health field.²⁷⁶ Heim’s insight was that it is possible to have a variety of relationships with God (impersonal, personal encounter and personal communion). Here it is argued that it is possible to have a variety of relationships with the individual members of the Trinity which avoids Heim’s problem of setting up the economic Trinity against a trinity of relationships. This makes it possible to say that an encounter with Divinity in

²⁷⁶ For clarification: In this chapter references to ‘spirituality’ or ‘spiritual’ (not capitalised) mean a generalised spirituality and not necessarily a Christian spirituality. References to ‘Spirit’ (capitalised) refer to the Holy Spirit.
spirituality and mental healthcare will be an encounter with the Trinitarian God even if this encounter is a distorted one (Principle 1). ²⁷⁷ From an epistemological point of view it is not necessary for a person to have a full understanding of who God is before he can be active in their life. A person can encounter the Trinitarian God without knowing who the Father, the Son and the Spirit are. An encounter with Divinity through spiritual practices does not necessarily have to be a salvific one.

God’s universal presence in creation and amongst the religions provides a way to argue that a solely psychological description of the relationship between spirituality and mental health cannot hope to be adequate. There is nowhere that God’s providential action cannot be found, including the area of spiritual expression and its effect on mental health. The Trinitarian theology of religions provides a complementary field of description to the psychological. Although methodologically it is possible to describe the positive effect of spirituality on mental health from a purely psychological perspective, the Trinitarian theology of religions shows that it is impossible to necessarily limit description to the purely psychological because of its affirmation of the presence of God. A psychological description does not make the theological description redundant. ²⁷⁸ Through the Trinitarian theology of religions it is possible to conceive of God as being present in and working through any psychological processes that accompany any spiritual expression e.g. religious coping. ²⁷⁹ Watts when discussing Divine action and the mind argues:

> God’s relationship to us should therefore not be seen as purely spiritual […] When God acts in relation to people, or reveals himself to them, we should expect this to be reflected in, and mediated through, all levels of our personhood, including brain processes, cognitive processes, phenomenal experience and observable behaviour. ²⁸⁰

We would therefore expect any encounter with God amongst the religions or in a generalised spirituality that is described by the Trinitarian theology of religions to impact the human person holistically. This allows us to avoid a reductionist view of those things that promote mental health. Spiritual engagement with God is potentially mental health promoting. The impact of spirituality on mental health cannot be

²⁷⁷ References to Principles 1, 2, 3 and 4 in this chapter refer back to the four principles we identified at the end of chapter two.
²⁸⁰ Watts, Theology and Psychology, p.105 (Italics in original).
reduced to solely psychological processes, but likewise the impact cannot be
reduced to solely spiritual processes. It is important to acknowledge that there are
many determinants of mental health which need to be taken into account.

The Trinity in mental health and spirituality

In Trinitarian theologies of religion we have seen how the Trinitarian God, Father,
Son and Holy Spirit, can be at work in expressions of religion and spirituality. This
provides for every expression of spirituality that promotes mental health to be a
potential mediator of Divine encounter. Our task is to explore what insights
Trinitarian theologies of religion can bring to the discussion.

Irenaeus’ idea of the two hands of the Father, properly understood as emphasising
the unity of the Trinity in Divine action (Principle 2), says that the Father’s presence
and action in the world is mediated through the Spirit and Son. Therefore any
presence or action of the Father through an expression of spirituality which promotes
mental health will be mediated through the Spirit and Son.

Pneumatologically, the Spirit mediates God’s grace universally.\(^{281}\) Yong identifies the
Spirit as involved in creation, re-creation and final creation.\(^ {282}\) In terms of spirituality
in mental healthcare our focus is on the Spirit’s re-creating and final creation roles.
The Spirit is the liberator and the source of freedom and life (Romans 8). Chapter
two quoted Pinnock who noted that the Spirit is not related to that which destroys or
deceives. From a biblical perspective it cannot be denied that the liberating role of
the Spirit encompasses liberation from psychological decay and the bringing of
psychological freedom and vitality. For example the fruit of the Spirit can be seen as
expressions of positive mental health.\(^ {283}\) Spiritual experiences which improve a
person’s well-being can be categorised as ‘regenerative’.\(^ {284}\) D’Costa’s\(^ {285}\) argument
that the Spirit’s role outside of the church would be analogous to the Spirit’s role
inside of the church implies that non-Christian regenerative spiritual experiences,

p.192.
\(^{282}\) Amos Yong, *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a pneumatological theology of religions*, (Carlisle:
Paternoster, 2003), pp.36-42.
\(^{283}\) Galatians 5:16-26. See also e.g. Rom. 8 which implies the Spirit’s impact on what today would be
called mental health.
\(^{284}\) Griffith-Dickson, *Human and Divine*, p.89.
116.
however distorted, could potentially be identified as encounter with the liberating and life giving Spirit who promotes mental health. Yong likewise argues that evidence of the Spirit in non-Christian faiths is found when ‘lives are made whole and communal relationships are continually mended, formed and strengthened’.

Chapter one explored the definition of spirituality and we saw that Cook identified thirteen conceptual themes which undergird descriptions of spirituality: relatedness, transcendence, humanity, core / force / soul, meaning / purpose, authenticity / truth, values, non-materiality, (non) religiousness, wholeness, self-knowledge, creativity and consciousness. It is not too difficult to imagine how an encounter with the Spirit could lead to transforming experiences in any of these areas. An act of worship, or other spiritual practice or belief, can be more than simply a psychological coping mechanism as they promote mental health through an encounter with the life giving Spirit who through this encounter transforms thought processes, grows faith, leads us towards an experience of transcendence, helps us to find greater meaning and purpose in life etc. Chapter one also described the categorisations of intrinsic (internally motivated) and extrinsic (externally motivated) religious orientation. We saw how research points towards an intrinsic religious orientation being related to improved outcomes in depression and PTSD. Scripturally the Spirit is seen as one who can draw people into a more intrinsic form of spirituality. This means that an emerging intrinsic spirituality could be related to encounters with the Spirit. D’Costa in summarising the Catholic conciliar documents notes how the natural religious and existential questing of humanity can be ‘related to the action of the Holy Spirit’. It is possible to develop this to say that questing for religious or spiritual coping by those with mental health problems can also be related and facilitated by the action of the Spirit. This doesn’t deny the psychological benefits of spiritual coping that research shows, but also allows us to say that the desire for some form of spiritual coping in the midst of mental distress can be linked to encountering the Spirit. The discussion so far implies that it is necessary to cultivate what Yong calls a pneumatological imagination. We saw in chapter two that a pneumatological imagination is the ability to creatively discern or apprehend the Spirit at work and to embrace the Spirit

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287 e.g. Romans 2:28-29.
wherever it blows. Therefore as we engage with the non-Christian spiritualities in the area of mental healthcare we need to be open to creatively seeing the Spirit at work.

All that has been said points to how the plurality of spirituality in mental healthcare can be adequately engaged with by pneumatology through the Trinitarian theology of religions. The impact of spirituality on mental health is an expression of the Spirit’s work in bringing liberation, freedom and life. The argument here is based on what D’Costa calls an intra-Christian claim about the Spirit’s presence, which may or may not be received by others.\textsuperscript{289} We are not intending to imply an abstract ‘spirit’ at work in non-Christian spirituality but the Spirit of God.

Having explored how an expression of spirituality which promotes mental health can be mediated through the Spirit, it is necessary to now consider the second of the two hands of God, the Son. Principle 2 in the previous chapter argues that pneumatology and Christology are intimately related. Encounter with the Spirit always draws human spiritual expression in the direction of Christ.\textsuperscript{290} The action of the Father in the particularity of Christ is not reserved for simply the first century AD but as D’Costa observes: ‘Pneumatology allows the particularity of Christ to be related to the universal activity of God in the history of humankind’\textsuperscript{291}. Therefore God’s action through the particularity of the incarnated Christ in history can be related to the whole of human history. The particularity of Christ encompasses things such as what it means to be human, means of relating to others, facing suffering, encountering Divinity etc. The particularity of the incarnated Christ is therefore relevant for all spiritual encounters that positively impact mental health and are mediated by the Spirit. Christology also provides the possibility for Christian discernment (Principle 3) in regard to spiritual experiences and practices. The impact of this shall be examined in the next section.

D’Costa argues that the Christocentric loving communion between the Father and Son should determine the mode of our relationships with our neighbours who express other faiths or other spiritualities.\textsuperscript{292} Loving our neighbour in the manner of

\begin{itemize}
\item D’Costa, \textit{The Meeting of the Trinity in the Religions}, p.128.
\item e.g. John 15:26.
\item D’Costa, ‘Christ, the Trinity and Religious Plurality’, pp.19-20.
\end{itemize}
Christ involves a vulnerable self-giving and suffering love which eschews manipulation and coercion. Neighbour love means that sometimes we may work together with people from other religions or spiritualities to bring liberation through our promotion of the kingdom of God and other times we may stand against them. This gives the Christian the possibility of working with those from other spiritualities or religions who promote mental health in a way that is consistent with the values of God’s kingdom. A Christocentric neighbour love also means being open to relating to others and walking with them as they explore spirituality which helps them promote their own mental health and therefore Christology provides a mode of ministry or being with people in mental health care who have found non-Christian spirituality helpful.

We have seen that through pneumatology and Christology (the ‘two hands of God’) Trinitarian theologies of religion provide for every expression of spirituality that promotes mental health to be a potential mediator of Divine encounter. Heim comments that:

> Those who are convinced they have touched or heard the Divine likely refer to one of these occasions: God above us, God alongside us and among us, God within us. The Trinity is an account of God that says these are experiences of the same reality, not different ones, and yet each has its own irreducible integrity [...] God is known in the midst of these different patterns.

Although an encounter with Divinity in spiritual expression can be varied, an encounter with the Trinitarian God (salvific or not) can be psychologically therapeutic or healing in some way for both non-Christians and Christians. The positive impact of spirituality on mental health in a Christian theological narrative can be linked to a Trinitarian basis in a constructive way. D’Costa speaks of the need for the church to be ‘attentive to the possibility of God’s gift of himself through the prayers, practices, insights and traditions found within other religions’. This call can be applied in the area of spirituality and mental health care where it is necessary be open to the possibility of God’s gift of himself to non-Christians in their expressions of spirituality which have a positive impact on their mental health. The Spirit blows where he wills

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293 D’Costa, ‘Christ, the Trinity and Religious Plurality’, p.21.
296 D’Costa, The Meeting of the Trinity in the Religions, p.115.
and we need to be prepared to discern the Spirit wherever he can be found. This opens up the way for dialogical relationship with those who find that non-Christian spirituality promotes mental health.

**The contribution of the Trinitarian theologies of religion to discernment in spirituality and mental healthcare**

D’Costa states that the ‘doctrine of a Trinitarian God within Christianity allows Christianity to maintain a real openness to God in history’ Till the eschaton we only know the actions of God through a glass darkly and yet the incarnation and the action of the Holy Spirit, the two hands of the Father, allow us to be open to God’s activity outside the boundaries of the church. This is especially true in the area of spirituality and mental healthcare and this leads to consideration of the question of discernment (Principle 3). Discernment is necessary to inform a Christian response to the rise of spirituality in mental healthcare. From a Trinitarian perspective we are not simply focusing on the ‘affirmation of religious otherness. Christians are called, as agents of the gospel, to be catalysts of transformation and harbingers of the kingdom of God’. This realisation of the church being agents of transformation opens the way for Christianity not simply just to affirm the findings of a positive impact of spirituality on mental health, but also to bring a unique perspective and potentially fresh insights to the research.

Yong’s model of discernment, based on an understanding of the Old and New Testament texts, involves a dynamic interplay between both the human faculty of judgement and the charismatic gift of spiritual discernment. Both of these aspects of discernment will come into play in the spirituality and mental healthcare field. Our focus here is on what specific insights into discernment Trinitarian theologies of religions can bring to the area of spirituality in mental health.

In chapter two we saw that D’Costa argues on the basis of the possibility of the presence of the Spirit that a priori judgements about religion should be replaced by a posteriori judgements. This stops prejudgement of those spiritualities that promote

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297 John 3:8.
299 1 Corinthians 13:12; D’Costa, *The Meeting of the Trinity in the Religions*, p.133.
300 Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, p.174.
301 Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, pp.139-149.
mental health before any real engagement with or understanding about them. Following Yong, this suggests an initial phenomenological approach to spirituality in mental healthcare. Before any Christian discernment can take place, adequate space needs to be given to describing accurately the appearances and different aspects (as they manifest themselves) of those spiritualities that affect mental health (positively or negatively) on their own terms. This in turn supports the observation that greater qualitative research is essential in the mental health and spirituality field. It is not just the efficacy of spirituality in promoting mental health that is important but also understanding those expressions of spirituality. A Christian response to the positive impact of spirituality on mental health should not just celebrate the quantitative statistics but should also argue for more qualitative research, which in turn would help promote Christian discernment.

Looking at the spirituality and mental health literature Swinton asks the question ‘where are the voices of people with mental health problems?’ Ultimately spirituality cannot be fully captured or quantified statistically due to its nature and therefore the voices of people with mental health problems become important. Swinton describes a research project which looked at people’s experiences of depression and spirituality. The methodology of this project involved what Swinton describes as a hermeneutic phenomenology based on the hermeneutical theory of Gadamer. This enabled Swinton to interview people regarding spirituality and depression and go through a process of description (phenomenology) and interpretation (hermeneutics) which takes seriously the voices of those with mental health problems. Problematic with Swinton’s approach is the fact that Gadamer’s hermeneutics ‘allows no ‘final answer’ to any question’ or in other words there is a denial of the accessibility of objective truth. Reliance on Gadamer would ultimately leave us not being able to ask questions about the truth of various spiritual expressions. However the Trinitarian theology of religions affirms Swinton’s general

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303 Yong, Beyond the Impasse, pp.150-154.
305 Swinton, Spirituality and Mental Health Care, p.93.
306 Swinton, Spirituality and Mental Health Care, Chapter 4.
approach of a hermeneutical phenomenology in understanding spirituality in mental health, without the use of Gadamer’s hermeneutics. We have seen that the need to not make *a priori* judgements about spirituality due to the possible presence of the Spirit of God leads to an initial phenomenological (descriptive) encounter. Yong rightly argues (consistent with Gadamer) there is no neutral ground from which to engage other spiritualities and we need to be aware of our socio-historical location and subjectivity. Yet it is the Spirit who ‘leads the quest for truth’ so our search does not degenerate into total subjectivity. However, it is also not possible to claim neutrality in our engagement with other spiritualities because of the Spirit who blows where he pleases. Sometimes the Spirit works with our subjective culture and sometimes against. Therefore a phenomenological engagement is necessary at least initially. A Trinitarian perspective on spirituality also emphasises the different relationships we can have with the persons of the Trinity (following Heim) and how these may change or develop in time. The Trinitarian God is one who acts in people’s lives in history and in the flow of history. D’Costa comments:

> The important point is that this acknowledgement of the saving activity of God outside of the church requires that non-Christians must have a narrative space within Christian theology and practice so that their histories and stories can be heard without distortion.

Therefore when considering the interaction of spirituality and mental health it is necessary to be attentive to the narratives that people describe. This in turn leads to interpretation (hermeneutics) of these narratives and with a pneumatological imagination it is possible to see how the Trinitarian God may be at work. There is a dialogical process between description and interpretation which is dynamic and founded on the Trinitarian theology of religions. In fact Yong calls discernment the ‘hermeneutics of life’.

Discernment enables us to identify how Christian concepts such as goodness, peace and truth can be compared to the various concepts described in other spiritualities.

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308 Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, pp.53-54.
309 Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, p.54.
310 "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth…’, John 16:13 (NRSV).
312 Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, pp.149-150.
that promote mental health.\textsuperscript{313} We may potentially find overlap or critique, however as Yong rightly says:

A pneumatological approach […] opens up the Christian to whatever is true, good, beautiful and holy in the other tradition.\textsuperscript{314}

D’Costa in his Trinitarian theology of religions calls for a ‘yes’ and ‘no’ or affirmation and denial approach to other religions and maintains that this approach is useful in concepts of revelation, mission and dialogue and inculturation.\textsuperscript{315} Here we argue that this approach is also useful in discerning between spirituality that helps and spirituality that harms mental health. There is an affirming ‘yes’ to spirituality in mental healthcare in that it is possible to see the inchoate beginnings of the kingdom of God in the development of positive mental health and the drawing of people by the Spirit into a regenerative or healing relationship with Divinity. This is balanced by a ‘no’ in that due to the problem of sin humans may distort spirituality leading to spirituality that in fact harms mental health rather than helps. Trinitarian theologies of religion can therefore help to account for existence of both the spirituality that harms and the spirituality that helps that was discussed in chapter one.

An important area for discernment will be what Kim calls the ethical criterion for discernment.\textsuperscript{316} Heim observes that the ‘Trinitarian dynamic has a profound ethical and moral dimension […] there is Trinitarian practice as well as doctrine’.\textsuperscript{317} Every spirituality will express itself ethically in one way or another. Chapter one noted how various religions have negative views about suicide and addictive substances which lead to preventative effects on mental health. Taking a more general view it is possible to discern the ethical commitments of the various spiritualities which promote mental health and then offer a comparison with Christian ethical commitment which is engendered by the Spirit through reflection on the scriptures and the Trinity. The fruit of the Spirit’s action in non-Christian spiritualities will generate ethical commitments, wherever they are found, that draw humanity towards the values and goals of God’s kingdom. Trinitarian theologies of religion affirm that an ethical commitment which impacts positively on mental health can just as much

\textsuperscript{313} cf. Yong, \textit{Beyond the Impasse}, pp.171-172.
\textsuperscript{314} Yong, \textit{Beyond the Impasse}, p.52.
\textsuperscript{315} D’Costa, ‘Revelation and Revelations’, pp.165-183.
\textsuperscript{317} Heim, \textit{The Depths of the Riches}, p.147.
be linked to an encounter with the Trinitarian God outside the boundaries of Christianity as it can inside the boundaries. Ethics that reflect the kingdom of God in other spiritualities can be interpreted not just as human commitments alone but also as the result of a dynamic relationship with the universal Spirit.

Principle 2 from the previous chapter declares that pneumatology is intimately related to Christology. Encounter with God mediated through the Spirit will always lead to growth in Christ-likeness. There are therefore Christological criteria for discernment (Principle 3). How might these Christological criteria be framed in regard to spirituality and its positive impact on mental health? Christologically, we define what it truly means to be human in Christ and therefore we would want to say that Christ exhibited positive mental health and a positive way of psychologically dealing with life. Traits exhibited by Christ such as self-giving love, forgiveness, trust in the Father in the midst of suffering can have a profoundly positive impact on mental health. Christological reflection on mental health may therefore open up new avenues for research into spirituality and mental health which have yet to be explored in the literature. Christian discernment would affirm those expressions of spirituality which lead to the forming (even in a distorted way) of a Christ-like character, behaviours and mental health traits. Christian discernment would deny the adequacy of those expressions of spirituality which move a person away from Christ-likeness even if they appear to promote mental health as it would question the adequacy of the underlying spiritual foundations for that promotion of mental health. Here we would want to deny the presence of the Spirit at work. All this points to the complexity of discerning the presence of the Trinitarian God in spiritual practices which promote mental health. Kim rightly comments that:

> Discernment is not an easy task: it is a complex process and an inexact science. The ability to discern is the fruit of wisdom; but it is God’s wisdom, not human wisdom.\textsuperscript{318}

This is especially true in the relationship between spirituality and mental health.

The biggest danger in the issue of discernment is that the church presumes that it has all the answers in terms of spirituality and mental health.\textsuperscript{319} Trinitarian theologies of religion allow for the Trinitarian God to challenge the church through other

\textsuperscript{318} Kim, \textit{The Holy Spirit in the World}, p.169.

\textsuperscript{319} cf. Kim, \textit{The Holy Spirit in the World}, p.166.
spiritualities which promote mental health, so that the church deals with mental health issues in a more Christ-like way. This may mean (Principle 4):

- That the church is judged by the Spirit through other spiritualities and challenged that some of its spiritual practices harm rather than promote mental health. As we go through the phenomenological and hermeneutical process of describing other spiritualities and their effect on mental health, through comparison, the Spirit may guide us into the truth that there are areas of practice in the church which need adjusting.
- That through Christian theological reflection on other spiritualities that promote mental health the Spirit enables the church to develop new practices which encourage the development of positive mental health.
- That the church is challenged by the Spirit to open its eyes to see how God may use its existing practices in new ways to promote mental health.
- That the Spirit may encourage the church to recognise the theological resources which it already has that are applicable to the promotion of mental health.

We have seen that Trinitarian theologies of religion are the key to discerning God at work in a positive impact of spirituality on mental health. This allows us to enter into a dialogical process which takes seriously the expressions of spirituality that promote mental health, that enters into a comparative process of identifying ‘points of convergence or divergence between religious traditions’ or non-Christian spiritualities and then listens for the voice of the Spirit to the church on issues of mental health. It has to be acknowledged that the focus of Trinitarian theologies of religion are perhaps more directed to the engagement with Christianity and other religions as a whole, whereas our focus here has also encompassed the engagement of individual Christians with the generalised subjective spiritual experience of others and the impact on mental health. This obviously leads to the implications for ministry.

Implications for ministry

From the beginning of this thesis it has been clear that spirituality and religions can be helpful or harmful to mental health. We have also seen that through the Trinitarian theologies of religion it is possible to conceive of encounters with the Trinitarian God which promote mental health. The implication of this is that encouraging a spirituality that has a positive impact on mental health is part of the mission of the church and ultimately is part of the mission of God. This conceives the doctrine of salvation in a holistic way which sees salvation not just in a negative way (deliverance from sin) but also in a positive way (the transformation of humanity into what God created us to be or in other words a fulfilment of humanity). Mental health promotion through spiritual expression therefore becomes an important ministry in the church. Through the rise of spirituality in mental healthcare we can hear God’s challenge to the church in the way it works with those who have mental health problems. What are the ministry implications of our bringing together of the spirituality in mental healthcare and Trinitarian theologies of religion?

Firstly, we see affirmation of the spirituality of those with mental health problems in the church. Sadly, it is possible to discover prejudice in the church which dismisses the spirituality of those with mental health problems. It is not difficult to find examples of people whose expressions of prayer, interpretations of scripture or whose voices in the church are tacitly looked down upon because of their mental health problems. Whilst we may have disagreements over theological expression with people, our study so far shows how much the church may potentially learn from the spiritual expression of people with mental health issues. We may find the Spirit at work in the lives of the marginalised in the church in unexpected ways. We may even find them leading the way in understanding how a Christian spirituality can help promote a positive mental health. Before seeking to listen to and engage with the voices of those outside of the church in regard to mental health and spirituality, we first must learn to engage with and listen to the voices of those inside of the church. This points to the need for good quality research into how those inside the church find Christian spirituality helpful for their mental wellbeing. In affirming the spirituality of those inside the church that promotes mental health, our eyes may be opened to

322 Heim, The Depths of the Riches, p.67.
begin to see parallels with the spirituality of those outside of the church which does the same.

Secondly, taking into account the phenomenological and hermeneutical implications of engagement with spirituality that flow from a Trinitarian perspective, a chaplain or minister would encourage a person before them to describe as much as they can about their spirituality (Christian or non-Christian) and how it impacts their mental health, only then could they as a minister or chaplain truly begin to hear and make sense of the presence of God in this person’s situation and life. This implies a case by case engagement is necessary in mental health and spirituality. We cannot make assumptions based on previous conversations with other people because Trinitarian theologies of religion imply that God’s relationship with this specific individual through his Holy Spirit is what is important. It is also not possible to make generalisations based on the quantitative statistics of the spirituality and mental health field, for example saying ‘attend weekly worship and your mental health will get better’. The affirmation that spirituality can be positive for mental health needs to be worked through clearly in individual cases such that voices of those mental health issues are heard before we begin to speak.

Thirdly, a minister or chaplain can support the spiritual longings and journey of a person who finds spirituality beneficial for their mental health even if they cannot affirm the content of their beliefs. It is possible to support and encourage the spiritual questing of a person inspired by the Spirit without personally engaging in or affirming their spiritual activities. This is especially relevant for chaplains who work in multi-faith environments. D’Costa when discussing multi-religious prayer talks about the possibility of a ‘respectful witnessing of each other at prayer’ which is not based on a united praying together. The same is true of expressions of spirituality encountered in mental healthcare. The minister or chaplain can stand by as a respectful witness of another’s spiritual expression and even encourage greater exploration of spirituality and the spiritual journey as they discern the Spirit at work. We can accompany people on their spiritual journey and their spiritual questioning inspired by the Spirit as they explore how spirituality may help their mental health. There is no expectation of them getting to or us needing them to get to the Christian

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323 On the concept of spirituality as a quest see chapter one.
destination (Christ) instantly. This does not necessarily lead to syncretism or denial of Christ as the means of salvation. The chaplain or minister is always free to express their experience of how Christian spirituality has helped their own mental health as a witness to non-Christian. There also may be the opportunity for the chaplain or minister to learn something about their own faith as they hear the voice of the Spirit when listening to the spiritual longings and journeys of others.

Finally, this thesis has shown that Trinitarian theologies of religion provide a theological understanding for how spirituality can both help and harm mental health. The minister and chaplain is therefore encouraged to be discerning as they meet with people and to explore with them how their spirituality provides positive benefits for their mental health and how their spirituality provides a negative impact for their mental health. They can explore with people how they can engage with God in more helpful ways which lead to regenerative experiences and a growing positive spirituality.

**Two possible counterpoints: Mission and the mental health of Christian believers**

Thus far we have avoided tackling two possible counterpoints to our thesis and here we provide a brief response. Firstly, there is the question of the place of the mission of the church in regard to mental healthcare and spirituality. Our thesis argues on the basis of Trinitarian theologies of religion that listening to, dialoguing with and learning from others is necessary. However, what place is there for evangelism which draws people from their individually determined spiritual expression to one that is based around Christ? A recent Department of Health report limits proselytising for public sector workers as it could be interpreted as harassment and lead to disciplinary procedures. Therefore the issue of evangelism for public sector chaplains is generally one to avoid. However outside of this area there is greater freedom and what we have outlined in this thesis provides a possible foundation on which the mission of the church can build, yet even then it is important to consider the ethics of

325 Cf. with D’Costa’s four presuppositions when thinking about interreligious prayer in D’Costa, The Meeting of the Trinity in the Religions, p.149.
evangelism with vulnerable people such as some of those with mental health problems. Thiessen argues that evangelism (or proselytizing) in itself is ethical but some of the methods used are unethical. Drawing on Thiessen’s criteria for ethical proselytizing we would want to argue that evangelism in the context of spirituality and mental health needs to take into account: the genuine concern for the dignity and worth of a person (not seeing people as objects to be ‘possessed’ or a means to an end), a care for the whole person and not just their salvation and allowing people to make free and uncoerced decisions regarding their spirituality. Also important for spirituality and mental health is Thiessen’s highlighting of the need to avoid exploitation of the vulnerable by manipulating them for our own means through their desperation to find healing or to feel better. Thiessen argues that religious dialogue and proselytising are two different but valid forms of communication. In terms of what we have said in this thesis about dialoguing with the various forms of spirituality found in mental health, this does not rule out evangelism as another form of communication in regard to those who find spirituality helpful for their mental health but this evangelism must be done ethically. Dialogue and openness to what the Spirit says through another person’s spirituality and its impact on their mental health surely provides a foundation on which mission can build when appropriate. After having issued all these caveats regarding evangelism, it must be acknowledged that conversion and the journey towards faith are ultimately a work of the Trinitarian God through the Spirit even in those whom we would term vulnerable. In places where explicit evangelism is not appropriate (such as in the NHS) it is entirely possible that people may come to faith through a work of the Spirit whilst a chaplain dialogues about their spiritual journey which impacts positively on their mental health.

A second possible counterpoint to the thesis that the Spirit promotes mental health is the question of what this implies about Christians who begin to experience mental health issues, does this imply that the Spirit is no longer at work in their life? Firstly, influenced by Heim we would argue that our relationship with the Spirit is a mutual

one and from the human side, the nature of this relationship can vary in time. Although the Spirit draws us in the direction of a spirituality that promotes good mental health we may not always follow or even be aware of his direction. The fact that relationship with the Spirit is mutual implies that there can be no direct causal link between experiences of the Spirit and mental health. Subjective response must play a part and this also explains the statistical nature of the evidence for a positive impact of spirituality on mental health. The danger is that this leads us into blaming mental illness solely on sin and those who do not face mental health issues can develop attitudes of moral and spiritual superiority.\(^{333}\) However, what is being said here is nothing more than recognition of the widely acknowledged psychological insight that we can have some impact on our mental health by what we do.\(^{334}\)

Secondly, we would want to understand ‘human kind as spiritual beings engaged in a bio-psycho-social experience of life in this world’\(^{335}\). This means that although Christians have a relationship with the Spirit which may be qualitatively different from non-Christians, they still have to cope with the same biological, psychosocial and environmental stresses and the same implications of these stresses for mental health as everyone else.\(^{336}\) It would be wrong to say that the sole determinant of mental health is the Spirit. Christians can and do experience mental health problems. They are not immune from life but through their relationship with the Spirit they find resources that can help them. A dynamic relationship with the liberating Spirit in the midst of life stresses could draw the Christian to not respond to their situations in sinful ways and also provide through Christian spiritual practices the resources to cope with life stresses in different ways. The idea of the Spirit being involved in the promotion of mental health does not therefore necessarily imply that Christians are immune from mental health issues or that if they do experience them the Spirit is no longer at work in their life.


\(^{334}\) Carson, *The Pastoral Care of People with Mental Health Problems*, p.xxi.


This chapter has attempted to show that connections can be made between Trinitarian theologies of religions and the plurality seen in the spirituality and mental health literature. Trinitarian theologies of religion provide us with a response to this plurality of spirituality that both affirms and evaluates. It has also been seen how there are some very real implications for ministry to those who find spirituality (Christian or otherwise) has a positive impact on their mental health. Brief answers to the possible counterpoints to our thesis of mission and the mental health of Christian believers were also provided. Trinitarian theologies of religion enable us to begin to build a solid theological foundation for the work which has begun in terms of mental health and spirituality.
Conclusion

In this thesis it has been shown that a constructive relationship can be made between Trinitarian theologies of religion and the research into spirituality and mental health. This relationship provides a clearer theological foundation for the work that is already being done in the area of spirituality and mental health, and it also provides a way of theologically evaluating and responding to this work. We have seen that:

- Trinitarian theologies of religion mitigate against a reductionist viewpoint that says the effect of spirituality on mental health is reducible to a solely psychological perspective.
- Trinitarian theologies of religion enable an engagement with the plurality of spiritualities which are becoming prominent in the mental health field.
- Pneumatological and Christological discernment is important in regard to spirituality and mental health. This leads to phenomenological, hermeneutical and dialogical processes of engagement which seek to avoid *a priori* judgements. This then affirms a call for more qualitative research.
- Through the Spirit the church may be challenged about its attitudes to spirituality and mental health.
- Important ministry implications flow from the Trinitarian theologies of religion perspective on spirituality in mental health care.

It could be argued that a danger of this thesis is that we impose a Christian understanding on other spiritualities. Hopefully clarity has been provided about the need to understand other spiritualities in their own terms through a phenomenological approach before any Christian discernment can take place. However, in presenting a Christian theological response to the rise in spirituality in mental health this must necessarily involve understanding other spiritualities through the eyes of Christianity. We have stated previously that it is impossible for anyone to stand on neutral ground in terms of spirituality. In fact Sheldrake argues that from the point of view of Christianity it is insufficient to stay with a generalised view of spirituality as it is not possible to separate spirituality from particular beliefs.\(^\text{337}\)

Advocating listening to other spiritualities on their own terms hopefully reduces the danger of illegitimate or prejudicial understanding.

It is also important to acknowledge that this thesis has been heavily influenced by the Trinitarian theologies of Gavin D’Costa and Amos Yong, whilst also being influenced to a lesser extent by the work of S. Mark Heim. Although we eschewed directly dealing with issues to do with the Christian doctrine of salvation in this thesis, our choice of theologians does lead towards a more inclusivist position in this regard. Different conclusions may have been drawn by focusing on theologians who write about the Christian theology of religions from an exclusivist or pluralistic perspective.

This thesis has also been limited by the space available and there are various ways in which the research could be extended:

- There was not space to be able to deal with the issue of the demonic (mentioned by Yong) and the implications of this for spirituality and mental health.
- A major limitation of the research is that it does not address questions about how those in ministry already engage with spirituality in mental health. Quantitative and qualitative research could be undertaken which examines this issue and explores whether a Trinitarian model of spirituality in mental healthcare could bring greater depth of understanding to the work already being done.
- Research in mental health and spirituality tends to be focussed solely on the effect of spirituality on mental health problems (e.g. anxiety or depression) and there is no exploration of how spirituality increases the mental well-being of those without mental health problems. Does spirituality have the same positive effect on a person’s psychology for those who do not have mental health problems? The positive psychology movement studies the psychology of happiness, hope, resilience etc. If we present the Spirit as the source of life (chapter three) what are the possibilities for Trinitarian theologies of religions enabling us to move beyond solely looking at spirituality and mental health to exploring spirituality and positive psychology?

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Finally, this thesis has focused on Trinitarian theologies of religion as a theological foundation for evaluating and responding to spirituality and mental health. Chapter three only touched very briefly on theological anthropology (what it means to be human in the light of the Trinity) because our focus has been on spiritual experiences and practices. Yet it would also be possible to explore the issue of mental health from a Trinitarian theological anthropological perspective. Exploring the issue from this point of view would complement what has been done here. Together Trinitarian theologies of religion and Trinitarian anthropology could give a fuller understanding of mental health from the perspective of Christianity.

Our goal has been to try to make some progress towards an explicit Trinitarian theological foundation for spirituality in mental health which enables both affirmation and critique from a Christian point of view. It is hoped that further research in the areas suggested would only strengthen this argument.
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