

Religion, Spirituality & Positive Psychology

Lecture 10
Rev. Dr Sahaya G. Selvam
selvam@donbosco.or.tz

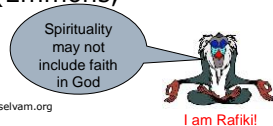


Institute of Youth Studies
Tangaza University College, Nairobi



Religion versus spirituality

- **Religion:** Creed, Code, Cult, Community
- **Spirituality:** "a search for meaning, for unity, for connectedness, for transcendence, and for the highest of human potential" (Emmons, 1999/2003, p. 5).



www.sahayaselvam.org

Religiosity & Spirituality

High Spirituality	1	2
	Spiritual-but-not-religious <i>Quest</i> Sacred or Secular Search for significance	Religious Spirituality <i>Intrinsic Religion</i> Sacred & Secular Search for significance
Low Spirituality	3	4
Neither religious nor spiritual Secular Searching OR no search for significance	'Empty' Religion <i>Extrinsic Religion</i> Sacred No search for significance	
	Low Religiosity	High Religiosity

www.sahayaselvam.org

See Selvam (2013)

Psychology of Religion

- A branch of psychology that uses the theoretical framework and methodology of psychology to examine religious sentiment and behaviour.
- More precisely, it studies the effect of religiosity and spirituality on human mind and behaviour - collective and individual.
- Division 36 in the APA.
- In the past decade psychology of religion has found a viable theoretical framework within positive psychology.

Positive Psychology & Religion

- "Perhaps what is distinctively human about our emotional lives then is our ability to open our minds far enough to fathom or create a connection to God, or another Higher Power. This broadened mindset can in turn provide a wellspring of profoundly experienced emotions, many of them positive. Thus, religious practices may be distinctive human ways of proactively cultivating positive emotions with their attendant adaptive benefits."

Fredrickson, Barbara L. (2002). How does religion benefit health and well-being?: Are positive emotions active ingredients? *Psychological Inquiry*, 13, 212.

05/01/2014

Selvam, Positive Psychology

5

Religion & PP: Points of convergence

- Psychology and Religion Research Programme at Cambridge see positive psychology as a possibility to pursue the dialogue between religious traditions and human qualities like forgiveness, gratitude, and hope (Watts, Dutton, & Gulliford, 2006).
- Happiness and wellbeing are clearly associated with goal, purpose and meaning-making (Emmons, 1999). One reason religious and spiritual traditions have been persistent in human history is that they provide meaning (Park & McNamara, 2006). Damon (2008) points that religion provides a path to purpose – individuals who identify their purpose of life in terms of calling are happier than others.

Religion & PP: Further Points of convergence

- The correlation between [forgiveness and mental health](#) and wellbeing is also abundant (McCullough & Witvliet, 2005). Interventions to facilitate forgiveness also show significant decrease in grief, anger, and anxiety after treatment (Coyle & Enright, 1997).
- Research works on [mindfulness](#) also bring together spirituality and wellbeing. Mindfulness is seen in positive psychology as a means to facilitate novelty, flow and optimal experiences. Its relation to spirituality is duly acknowledged (Snyder & Lopez, 2007, pp. 243-261).

Christianity & Positive Psychology

- Theological Virtues: **Faith, hope and Charity.**
- Four cardinal virtues: **prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude**
- Gal 5:22 – “On the other hand the fruit of the Spirit is **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control...**”

Gratitude and Religion

- Gratitude and religion go hand-in-hand. “Where one finds religion, one finds gratitude” (p. 93).
- “Although gratitude is most at home in monotheistic traditions, there is not a religion on earth that believes that thanksgiving is unimportant” (p. 195).

Emmons, R.A. (2007). *Thanks! How the new science of gratitude can make you happier*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Co.

PP & Religion - Critiques

- Background: Funding by Templeton prize – contributing to the overwhelming researches, and findings be biased by the priorities of the funding foundation!
- Lazarus: “Science cannot support or refute religious ideas because they are matters of faith” (PI 2003, p.176).
- Theological challenge: Integration of the role of Grace and the scientific approach of PP. (Liz Gulliford of Psychology & Religion Research Group, Cambridge, UK.)

PP – a Confucian critique

- “The empirically validated vision of the good life is a happiness donut (sic) with something missing at its very core—the moral map. And along with the moral map, the ability to evaluate moral claims. Seligman sees in empirical evidence a better alternative than authority (the Bible, Confucius, etc.) as possible groundings for our values.”

Sundararajan, L. “Happiness Donut: A Confucian Critique of Positive Psychology” In *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*. Vol. 25, No. 1, 2005, p.54

Positive or/and Negative Psychology

- Needed a passage from an *either/or* dichotomy to an *both/and* integration.
- And religion reminds us of this: sin & grace!

