

The Role of the Holy Spirit in Personality Growth and Change*

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II International Congress on Christian Counseling
Atlanta Georgia
November 11-15, 1992

*Dissertation Title
(Available through University Microfilms, Int.)
The Perception and Experience of Supernatural
Spiritual Power for Personality Growth and Change:
An Analysis of Twelve Life Histories
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
Santa Barbara



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About the Presenter:

Lois Dodds is President and Director of Heartstream Resources, a ministry serving cross-cultural workers. She and her husband Lawrence served for 23 years with Wycliffe Bible Translators and the Summer Institute of Linguistics, including thirteen years in the Amazon jungle of Peru. During these years Lois served in various support roles, including human resources and personnel, as the school and community counselor, as a high school teacher, and as a writer in anthropology and linguistics. Larry served as physician for the members of SIL and WBT and other missions, as well as caring for the indigenous peoples of Peru and overseeing health training programs.

Lois, a graduate of Westmont College, earned an M.A. in education, with an emphasis in human development, from Azusa Pacific University, an M.A. in confluent education at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and the Ph.D. in psychology and education at UCSB. She is the author of ten books and about 100 articles. She served in WBT's candidate selection and training program, Quest, for several years, and in this program and others counseled and taught nearly a thousand mission candidates.

Both Lois and Larry are adjunct professors in the summers with Azusa Pacific University's overseas extension Masters Program, Operation Impact. They teach a variety of courses and subjects related to leadership, including human development, whole person studies, spiritual formation, ethics, creative leadership, and counseling. They have taught cross-cultural workers from dozens of organizations in more than twenty countries.

The Dodds have three children and seven grandchildren. Their daughter and her husband are missionaries in Peru. Their son David is an anthropologist, and son Michael is a Ph.D. candidate in musicology at Eastman School of Music.

Heartstream Resources is a non-profit organization serving the needs of cross-cultural workers around the world. The four purposes are to provide programs of restoration and renewal for cross-cultural workers wounded or depleted in service, to provide education/prevention programs, to assist mission agency leaders through education and consultation, and to research matters related to cross-cultural ministry.

Heartstream Resources was incorporated in 1992 by a group of missionaries from several countries. Planning is underway for the development of a residential center in central rural Pennsylvania.

ABSTRACT

The Role of The Holy Spirit in Personality Growth and Change

Lois Anita Dodds

This paper reports on doctoral research done at UCSB, consisting of an exploratory investigation of supernatural, spiritual power (SSP) in personality growth and change. The study describes what typifies persons who best exemplify wholeness and who believe they perceive and experience SSP (what Christians would call the power of the Holy Spirit). It relates transferable concepts and practices (processes) identified in the study and suggests applications in the fields of human development, education, spiritual life and counseling.

Participants were selected through written nomination, based on criteria comparing “empowered” Christians with “usual” mature Christians. Data were collected via in-depth life history interviews, in three phases. Audiotapes were transcribed, studied, coded and analyzed.

The data reveal four parallel and two paradoxical themes in the lives of those studied. These are highly interactive and developmental processes; a seventh appears to be the major cumulative outcome of SSP.

“Questing” themes are (1), **acknowledgment of vulnerability**, and (2), **taking initiative towards God**. “Quester” describes the participants, whose lives are typified by life-long pursuit of truth and learning, especially towards God; they manifest great initiative in cultivating the spiritual through dialogue with God, the Scriptures, and highly personal processing. Awareness of vulnerability spurs them to be open to and to seek the supernatural.

Questers may begin with an “if” about the supernatural, but as they choose to respond (“Choosing” themes) they gradually develop a **profound consciousness of God** (Theme 3) as personal and as present; they come to **experience God as the source** of self, others, purpose, meaning and all else (Theme 4). (Over 80 resources for self-actualization emerged from the data.)

As Questers make choices towards God and fulfilling potential, the outcomes are paradoxically beyond their own resources (“Bonding” themes); they see themselves as **partnering with God** (Theme 5). Questers **perceive of themselves as weak yet paradoxically experiencing power** when they fulfill God’s purposes for them in the world (Theme 6). These six processes are interdependent and dynamic, intertwined like a braid; various strands predominate at differing stages.

The Primacy of Personhood (Theme 7) is the outcome of all the on-going processes of SSP. Knowing God as a person becomes the basis for one’s own and others’ personhood. Perceptual and value changes lead to increasingly richer experience in relationships, which gain primary importance in life. Knowing, loving and serving God, self and others is one integrated process of becoming.

Questers believe they experience something supernatural, an energy or power imparted to them from God. They see themselves as ordinarily, or humanly-speaking, lacking power to achieve all that they wish in terms of change and growth, but as having that power available to them through God’s loving relationship with them; they believe he empowers them for growth and change. They believe they experience this power in a variety of ways, which though subjective are yet very real to them: as an energy for living, as an unnatural assurance, intuitions, nudgings, ideas planted within them, creative insights, wisdom, the

DoddsHoly Spirit/Personality - 4

ability to relate and to love. They consider that the power is often operating unconsciously, so that in retrospect they see the consequences of it--things which they could not have achieved alone. They say that at times they are conscious of the energy or power in them.

Questers say they invite or invoke God's power to be present and active in their lives. They particularly do this in prayer, in dialogue with God while reading the Scriptures, or during meditation.

Such invitations take many forms, such as petition, acknowledging God's generosity, or claiming his promises offered to them. Sometimes their invitation is on the spur of the moment, when they are suddenly faced with a situation that requires wisdom or insight or something else they feel is beyond them. Because they are convinced that God is lovingly present with them they perceive him to be constantly available to support and empower them.

Questers attach profound meanings to their perceptions of God's power in their personal lives. What they experience they interpret to be a direct indication of their relationship to God; as they interpret it, it means that he values and loves them and is present with them, that he delights to gift and empower them. They also attribute their experience of God to his sharing with them his own purposes and allowing them to be part of his creative and redemptive work in the world--which means they are partners with him in creation and redemption. They attribute to God their ability to live lives very different from what they might naturally expect, particularly in overcoming trauma and its usual consequences and in moving towards fulfillment of their potential in ways they would not otherwise expect to do. They attribute that they find meaning for life itself by relating to God.

Questers believe they experience many outcomes in their lives because they are supernaturally empowered. These include finding purpose and meaning through relating to God; being gifted and talented, and being able to discover and develop their gifts; receiving opportunities, challenges, and "visions" (dreams for vocation, for the future, etc.) and finding courage and strength to pursue them. They attribute their growth towards maturity and their ability to create and sustain loving relationships to their experiencing of spiritual power. They attribute certain outcomes external to themselves to God's power.

A mini-study on anti-modeling in family socialization is included.

INTRODUCTION

Hans' first memories are of his city being "bombed to bits" as he and his mother and brother fled their Eastern European city to take refuge in the superstitious village where his grandmother lived, of his "violent, vicious" father, a Nazi officer, beating his mother and brother, of his grandmother's involvement in the occult. As a communist youth he longed for truth and to know people of integrity rather than communist hypocrites. Who would have predicted that a boy who underwent the devastations of war, sexual abuse and family hostilities would become a gifted pastor to missionaries around the world, and a world-class scientist?

Grace's early memories are of being raped, gun to her head, by her own father, many times, and of her drunken mother, prostrate on the kitchen floor calling out to Jesus. Her deep depression over such traumas almost led to her death. Who would have predicted that she would become an evangelist who has led hundreds to faith in Christ as well as one of the most outstanding leaders in her city?

Roger's severe isolation as an only child, going blind in adolescence due to his parent's neglect of his congenital eye disease, and becoming half deaf because of the cruelty of other children, led him to think no one could ever love him. Who could have predicted that he would become a loving Christian counselor, with three graduate degrees?

Emily remembers her loathing of women, generated by her mother's drunkenness, and her constant desire and attempts to escape the confines of a family shattered by her father's alcoholism. Who would have predicted that she would become a beautiful wife, mother, dancer and business woman, and would develop a love for women so profound it has become her way of life?

We would have predicted success for Mary, for whom growing up Christian was "like breathing," and perhaps for Jerry, who as a young child longed so much for God that he wept before him and begged for wisdom. We might have had high hopes for Andrew, who at 30

Dodds Holy Spirit/Personality - 6

tossed aside his goal of becoming a millionaire and his promising career as an aerospace engineer to become a youth pastor. But for Nancy, daughter of a mother married multiple times and herself pregnant and unmarried at 17?

We know from myriad studies in the psychology and sociology of religion that the greatest predictor of religious affiliation is the religious life of the parents. We know that the most common predictors of the child's concept of God are his concepts of and affections for mom and dad. What my in-depth study of the lives of twelve contemporary, extra-ordinary Christians reveals are some of the powerful influences which cause children and young persons to develop contrary to these norms. The persons in my study are mostly the exception to the rule, defying the expected.

WHY INVESTIGATE SUPERNATURAL, SPIRITUAL POWER? CAN THE HOLY SPIRIT MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

The disciplines of education, religion and psychology share a common goal: the transformation or full and positive development of individuals and society. Naranjo (1969) has provided an excellent overview of one hundred and fifty "ways" by which humankind has endeavored to change, to grow up to or into full human potential. Though these means may appear different, and are often expressed in different ways, they share in common the underlying philosophy that people can become more fully human, that they can be self-actualizing--that is, to be engaged in the process of actualizing the ideal self.¹

The work of Abraham Maslow stands out as a landmark in the journey towards understanding human potential (1950). He studied healthy individuals to discover what made them healthy, in contrast to those who followed the medical model of investigating mental illness and the pathological "patients" upon which that model focused. Maslow sought to supply the other half of the picture: "the brighter better half, and to give a portrait of the whole person" (Hall and Lindzey, 1978). He believed that study of the two different groups, the pathological and the healthy, generated different types of theory (Maslow, 1968).

Maslow called the healthiest people he studied "self-actualized," after the terminology of Goldstein, to indicate that their growth and development had been maximized, or at least had progressed notably towards the achievement of their ideal selves (Maslow, 1968). They were individuals who best exemplified, in his opinion, positive fulfillment of their potential as

¹ The [ERIC Thesaurus](#) defines "self-actualization" as "the belief in or the process of developing the actuality of one's idealized image."

Dodds Holy Spirit/Personality - 7 humans.

Inquiry which seeks to discover the motivation for and means by which individuals grow, change and develop is a focus of much research within the disciplines of education, religion and psychology. In all three fields, as well as in others seeking social reform, the most compelling questions are the same: What motivates people to grow and develop? Where do they get the energy or power for it? Some of us as Christians also ask: In what ways is spiritual power part of this process? How is it experienced? What role might it have in creating motivation and energy and in promoting personal change? What do people experience who believe they use spiritual, supernatural power in some way? What characterizes the lives of such people?

I believe that one way to answer these questions is to study the lives and experience of mature, healthy persons who believe that they experience the power of the Holy Spirit for change and growth. In this I am following Maslow's model and method of learning about health by studying healthy persons and their perceptual phenomena (Maslow, 1954, 1968a).

My hope in this study was to discover, describe and identify the process and experience of spiritual power in order to understand the dynamics of empowerment of individuals for change and growth.² I hoped that in so doing I might discover dynamics which are transferable to others. I believe that any discoveries about how people experience growth, further their development, and make positive changes away from detrimental and destructive life attitudes, habits and practices offer hope for a qualitatively improved personal life, as well as for more wholesome group and community life and a saner society. This study examines a key phenomenon which intersects the psychological, the spiritual and the educational domains.

Since childhood I have been fascinated with observing people's lives and growth; I have seen that some people profess to believe in supernatural power and its availability to them, yet evidence little growth or forward movement in their lives and psyches. They seem to get "stuck" and not overcome obstacles or life crises in just the same ways as many people who profess no belief. Others manifest different life outcomes, marked by growth, development and positive change so that they become mature, effective and productive persons, like those whom Maslow labels "self-actualizing." This "puzzlement," as John Lofland (1971) calls such a perplexity, has stayed with me through the years and has

² For an interesting comparison and contrast of how a culture with a radically different phenomenological field defines empowerment, growth and change see my ethnography of the Aguaruna of the Peruvian Amazon, for whom the "supernatural world" is the "real world." (Larson and Dodds, 1985) For them, empowerment comes through *ajutap*, the "helping spirit."

DoddsHoly Spirit/Personality - 8

motivated much of my inquiry and learning in the field of personality/human development.

A conceptual paradigm for personal change can help us to locate this study within the domain of growth and change, and to identify the particular area of interest within it. The paradigm which I proposed has three crucial elements: 1) Motivation, which involves a discontent with what is, an awareness of and/or a desire for something better than or different from what is. I use motivation in this sense, though it is sometimes used in the general psychological literature to mean the energy for change. 2) Model, which involves some different ideology, image, behavior or pattern which the individual identifies as a superior way of knowing, being, behaving--that is, it provides a seemingly positive alternative to the current state of awareness, knowledge or behavior of the individual. 3) Means, which involves the power, force, strength or energy which the individual mobilizes to overcome the inertia or impasse of the "as is" in order to implement change in the direction of the new model. This power is sometimes referred to as psychological energy, inner discipline, drive, strength of personality, and various other terms. This third element is the focus of this study, though the other two are also relevant.

THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

This research was an open-ended, exploratory field study using the qualitative methods of naturalistic inquiry to identify and investigate the mentalistic phenomena of supernatural and/or spiritual empowerment for personality growth and change--what we as Christians would call the empowering of the Holy Spirit. I sought to understand the phenomena from an emic (internal or native) perspective, to describe the subjective experience of individuals who believe that they use God's power in their process of growth towards self-actualization (that is, in reaching toward the ideal persons whom they envision becoming). In addition to describing and defining experiences and perceptions³ participants reported, the study examined how individuals **interpret** the phenomena and what **meanings** they ascribe to them (Spinelli, 1989), to **what cause or source** they attribute the phenomena (Shaver, 1975), and what **explanations** they provide for their perception and experience (Achinstein, 1983).

Individuals who share such a belief in supernatural empowerment range across a wide area of spiritual and religious explanations. For practical reasons, given the limits of dissertation research, this study was limited to one such group of individuals--to persons of the Christian faith who believe that they experience the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

³ Bock (1980) states, "the term perception refers to all the processes by which an organism acquires information about its environment and about its own internal state."

DoddsHoly Spirit/Personality - 9

The study did not focus on the phenomena of “miraculous” supernatural power or the conversion experience, but rather examined growth from a longitudinal perspective.

The ethnographic means of inquiry is the process of discovery following the natural lines of experience and meaning without placing prior constraints on what will be uncovered. Because meaning is always embedded in the context of language, life experience and one’s social and cultural milieus (Trueba, 1979), it is crucial to investigate the mentalistic phenomena under study from the emic perspective--from the inside view of those who believe in and experience them (Harris [1976], Pike [1967]). From this perspective, in the context of the individual’s life history and the social and historical context in which he or she lives or has lived, we can best examine and come to understand the person’s internal experience and its meaning to him or her (Trueba, 1979). The specific ethnographic method I used was face-to-face participant interviewing, including life histories⁴ and questions relating to the phenomena under study.

Selection of Participants

I used as my “selection pool” individuals within my personal network, which extends worldwide and into many Christian groups from various ethnic, racial and national origins. To make the specific selections, I enlisted the assistance of “consultants” or “judges” who also know persons in the same network, which includes persons from various countries and Christian denominations, various international agencies and service communities, etc. to broaden the selection across the Christian faith. These judges are experienced in assessing or evaluating the growth/lives/personalities of others by virtue of their professional roles.

I asked my judges to use two sets of characteristics representing two type of individuals. Set “A” lists the characteristics of the sort of person whom I intuitively believed would be the **best source** of information about the phenomena of supernatural/spiritual power because of certain outstanding qualities. These were my target group of participants. Set “B” lists the characteristics of a person from whom I would expect to learn less in regards to the phenomena. Please note that the “B” list is not comprised of opposite characteristics; it is meant to match the more “usual” or “ordinary” Christian.

⁴ “One major difference between the life history...and the case history is as follows. In a case history, one tries to explain why a person fell to pieces; in a life history, one tries to explain how a person manages to stay together in spite of conflicts, complexes, and crises.” (Hall and Lindzey, p. 105).

DoddsHoly Spirit/Personality - 10

Set A:

MATURITY: knows self well; lives very wisely; highly integrated; reflects wholeness; growth oriented.

FULFILLMENT: highly productive; significant, fruitful work; gives self freely; joyful, finds life very meaningful and satisfying.

RELATIONSHIPS: warm, loving, caring to many; open; mutual high respect and regard; attracts others.

SPIRITUALITY: vibrant, warm, loving relationship with God; contagious faith; manifests spiritual power in his/her life; enthusiastic.

Set B:

MATURITY: usual degree of maturity; well ordered life; responsible; endurance oriented.

FULFILLMENT: accepts life as is; content with contribution he/she makes; satisfied with self and things as they are.

RELATIONSHIPS: conventional commitments; responsible; affectionate and caring to small circle.

SPIRITUALITY: conventionally religious; dutiful, faithful service and devotion to God.

I asked each consultant to nominate three to six persons. Their nominations yielded about 80 names in each category. From those I chose the highest scorers of the “A”s and the highest one of “B” for a comparison study. (See table of participants next page.)

A Brief Description of The Participants

I believe it is helpful to look at some generalities regarding the backgrounds and lives of the participants before looking specifically at the themes revealed by analysis of their lives. Half of those selected are men; half women. They range in age from 39 to 72. Participants are highly educated, with most having one or more graduate degrees. They are characterized by a high level of academic and other achievements.

The childhoods and early lives can be arranged along a continuum from extremely harsh and hurtful to ideal. Only one person (I call her Mary) described her life as very nurturing and “optimum” in allowing her to develop. Many had very unfavorable upbringing,

DoddsHoly Spirit/Personality - 11

with severe disturbances in family functions. These included family violence and other kinds of abuse, alcoholism, addictions, neglect, incest and rape. Some thought as children that their families were “normal,” but have learned as adults that they were in fact in dysfunctional homes.

All are very self-aware; they are able to identify formative influences. They are highly articulate persons and express with deep feeling their commitments to God, to themselves, to others. These participants focus on the here and now in talking about their life with God. Only one reference is made to the future, i.e., to eternity.

The college years, or equivalent period, were extremely formative. As Erikson postulated, both adolescence and young adulthood shows up as a crucial life stage in terms of forming identity and life commitments, searching out truth and God, and establishing the direction of professional life and service. Most are involved in international work, specifically the teaching and training of persons from many countries and the design and direction of intercultural training programs.

Overall these participants manifest an exuberant and prolific generativity (using Erikson’s term). “Call to mission” or a sense of desire to serve God and people is characteristic in their lives. This emerged very early (even in childhood) for the two who experienced God positively as children, and early on in their spiritual journey after conversion.

When I interviewed “Sam,” the top Set B person, I found a marked qualitative and quantitative difference in his references to God and to spiritual matters. He used passive terms, such as that his spiritual life “was moving along,” and that during college he “drifted away.” He said he “experienced a lot of spiritual growth... under duress... (as a church leader)”. He volunteered much less percentage of his open-ended, unstructured interview on spiritually related topics, and more on other matters of life. “Sam” did not express the same degree of awareness of God or of spiritual issues, or even of himself. He evidenced less reflection, less self-awareness, less self-disclosure, and was more focused on the activities of life.

INTRODUCTION TO THE LIFE THEMES

Seven major themes characterize the lives of the persons I studied. Six of these themes operate in pairs (called arch-themes), as either complementary (parallel) processes or paradoxical (opposing) processes. They operate simultaneously. They are developmental in nature, in that they increase over time as well as contributing to the development of the

DoddsHoly Spirit/Personality - 12

person. They are mutually reinforcing and are highly interdependent. The chart on the next page shows one way to visualize the interdependence of these themes.

ARCH-THEME OF QUESTING: The most outstanding and most readily identifiable characteristic of those studied is what I have called **Questing**. I have chosen to call my participants “Questers” because of the predominance of their practice of Questing after God, truth, learning, knowledge. Questers describe themselves as having a “hunger,” “thirst,” or “quest,” both for God and for truth and learning.

Theme 1--Vulnerability/openness: This has to do with an attitude and approach throughout life of being (or becoming) unusually aware of and acknowledging personal limits, weaknesses, struggles, etc. This awareness and acknowledgment results in the easy and frequent admission of one’s personal vulnerability, and is accompanied by a receptivity and responsiveness to the supernatural, the spiritual, God. It includes a recognition that one can and must invite God into one’s life (in order for him to be involved with one) and one must respond to his responses. It also involves an element of openness to self and to receiving from others. (This is in contrast to being defensive and closed, and to wearing a mask.)

Theme 2--Taking initiative towards God and the spiritual: Questers actively and aggressively seek after God and the spiritual through three major activities:

- (1) The Scriptures--Questers perceive of the Scriptures as very instrumental in their growth. They develop a great love for “the Word,” which becomes internalized and serves as a source for guidance, truth, relationship to God, and many other things. Questers actively seek to study and know the Scriptures and reveal and reflect a high degree of internalization of them.
- (2) Dialogue with God--This kind of prayer is a spontaneous combustion process which begins at conversion (without being taught) and develops into a continuous stream of dialogue with God, about all affairs of life. It is experienced as very relational, not formal or ritual. No aspect of life or experience seems to be excluded.
- (3) “Processing”--What Questers learn and experience, such as in the Scriptures, they process cognitively and affectively through meditating or some other process of mulling over and reflecting.

ARCH-THEME OF CHOOSING: This second pair of themes have as a bridge or connecting point the act of **Choosing**.

Theme 3--Consciousness of God: Questers develop an all-pervasive awareness of God as very present and very personal. For them reality is that God is and that he responds. This consciousness is developmental in nature; it may begin with an “if God exists” quest, but

DoddsHoly Spirit/Personality - 13

with response or action on the part of the Quester it soon becomes a steady assurance that God is there.

Theme 4--Experiencing God as the source: Questers choose to act and respond as though God is present and personal and thus they experience him increasingly as the giver of resources. They eventually develop the belief, feeling and perception that God is the source of everything for them, and that he is benevolent and caring towards them personally and towards mankind in general. (See the list of resources identified by Questers, shown on the next two pages.)

ARCH-THEME OF BONDING: Bonding illustrates the paradoxes of supernatural, spiritual power in the dynamic which takes place within the “mysterious boundary” Questers feel and see between themselves and God.

Theme 5--Partnering with God: Questers experience a paradoxical relationship of “I act, I do” and “God does it.” They experience that even when they lack strength or power they can make a choice to do the right thing or to be the right person and God empowers them in the process.

Theme 6--Weakness/strength bonding paradox: Questers are very conscious of their own weakness (“I am weak”), of not having what is needed in a situation or role, of being limited; yet they experience power or strength. They perceive that God does for them what they cannot do alone. Questers are aware of how “**God uses them**” in spite of their own limitations or weakness. (See the illustration for bonding, next page.)

OVER-ARCHING THEME: Theme 7--Loving: the primacy of personhood: This theme reveals the evolution and elevation of the person, or personhood, to primary significance in Questers’ perception and experience of supernatural, spiritual power and in their life development. **Personhood, the actualizing, valuing and promoting of it, is the outcome of the longitudinal and total experience of relationship with God (or, we could say, of power derived from him).** Elements of it emerge immediately, as Questers’ accounts reveal, when one becomes conscious of God and begins to respond to him, but the whole comes together over time, through interaction of all the other processes (themes).

Questers put heavy emphasis on the importance of relationship, and often commented on the ways in which relationship with God is the foundation for relating to oneself and to others. They often made statements such as “God is the ultimate person,” “the beauty of each person,” “a person is like a rose,” “I began to love people,” “I love who I am,” “my ministry is to nurture people.”

Questers perceive of gifts, talents, opportunities and other benefits as being given for

Dodds Holy Spirit/Personality - 14

serving others as expressions of love; love and power are connected. “Breaking chains” and “changing (negative) patterns” are primarily related to relationships. They express that being “used of God” and “serving God” are primarily expressed through one’s loving people.

This culminating theme emerges from the gestalt as the **figure**, with the other themes forming the **ground**. An analogy which illustrates the gestalt in its complexity and richness is the weaving of a tapestry, in which the parallel processes are like the **warp** of the fabric, the paradoxical processes like the **woof** of the weaving, and “Loving: The Primacy of Personhood” like the **design or pattern** which emerges on the face of the whole tapestry--as the figure on the ground. The pattern is created and conveyed through the interweaving of the strands, multi-colored and textured, structured by the warp and woof; the design is comprised of all other elements, yet is something more than the elements alone.

Questers perceive of personhood as being rooted in God, the “ultimate” or “original” person, from whom the personhood of all others is derived. Relationships is at “the heart of his nature,” and because God seeks to relate he draws people to himself. Hans talked about relationships “springing directly from his relationship with God.”

Relationship, as David expressed it, is at “the heart,” “the core” of God, because he is triune. As Father, Son and Holy Spirit, interpersonal relating is inherent in God’s nature. Because relationship is central to God, it is also central to the experience of supernatural, spiritual power; relationship and the cultivation and experience of supernatural power of God are inseparable.

Questers see themselves and others as **being drawn to God or by God**. This is another paradox, for they are questing after him as well. God draws some people primarily through their intensive felt needs; others he prompts to seek him primarily out of their desire for truth or wisdom. I’d like to quote some statements which illustrate the importance and relevance of this to us as counselors and spiritual leaders. Emily’s sense of need developed precipitously in crisis. She says she had a “yearning” and “longing” for God even as a child:

E1 “...but instead of **pursuing** God earlier I took control of my life. That totally crumbled with the birth of the baby.” (Emily)

Her baby was born with severe evidence of a rare genetic disease. She could see on doctors’ faces the moment of delivery their horror in his appearance; the anesthesiologist “put her out” immediately. Later she too found it devastating to look at her newborn son. She says:

E7 “[everyone] expected the baby to die within 24 hours. I was numb at this point. But God was **very** active in this particular time--I guess it took this to

DoddsHoly Spirit/Personality - 15

break down those barriers I had put up--but I remember a conversation I had with God in that room with God by myself. I was devastated at first--a lot of tears and crying and sense of loss, but after that in this room I was not angry or bitter. What came into my mind was the diary I had written to this baby. I absolutely **knew** that God was in control, and I remember having the conversation--I think it was out loud-- saying, 'You are right. I was wrong. I thought I was in control, and I was not, and you are. And I was wrong, and if you take this baby I'll understand.'" (Emily)

Grace knew her need for "something transhuman," "something reliable" early on, during childhood. Growing up as the child of horribly abusive and alcoholic parents she suffered profoundly. She says:

G12 "... the suffering of my childhood, which included **multiple rapes and the betrayal** of my mother and my father and my older brother. They were **the** people in my life that I should have been able to depend on....so [I had] a **terrible feeling of separation from something**--but I didn't know what it was...so I think that what that really meant for me was that I had to have **something to hang onto that was going to be reliable**. And I mean that's a key in my life." (Grace)

G8 [as a young adult] "...so I had this feeling of powerlessness and fear. And I had a feeling of being unloved...and I felt terribly alone, unconnected. And so you see there was this sense **I had to have something--transhuman.**" (Grace)

G41 "... as a result of deep depression I became a Christian because I learned the Christian life was to be lived by the power of the Holy Spirit, and grace, not law." (Grace)

G9 "I became a Christian through the influence of my friend Ann (she loved me as I had never been loved) and because **I needed strength to do what I needed to do**--which was to be able **to forgive my parents** and to honor them, most specifically my mother. ... **God had prepared me (to want the Holy Spirit) through these needs--this powerlessness, fear, and aloneness**. She told me to ask the Holy Spirit into my life, and I did, and from that time I have had profound peace.....and God's peace has never left me." (Grace)

One of the many significant aspects of personhood is developing a **new appreciation for and attitude towards others**. For example, Emily, as a young professional and partner in

Dodds Holy Spirit/Personality - 16

a firm, prided herself on being a “woman who had conquered a man’s world.” She felt disgust for women (partly due to her alcoholic mother), whom she stereotyped very negatively. To her amazement, soon after “God pursued her,” she found her attitude had changed (bold is her emphasis):

E23 “I saw a different side of women and I began to really love them. ... A part of my growth as a leader is that God gave me a **great** love for women and that was a whole new part of my growth. Eventually it extended into people-- children, men, women, young people, part of the work the Holy Spirit does in one because that was **not** a natural thing for me.” (Emily)

Grace too saw the same pattern in herself. She says about herself as a new Christian:

G23 “...**I begin to feel a great love for the world** (I stop seeing the world as the enemy), and for the **diversity in the world**--and then this verse becomes so important to me, ‘God so loved that he **gave**,’ and that became the theme of my life--to give...” (Grace)

For Questers the primacy of personhood includes many rich and significant aspects, too numerous to describe fully here. These include (1) valuing each person as unique and special, as the expression of God’s creativity and His love for variety, (2) the ability to embrace both the human and divine aspects of themselves, (3) being genuine and authentic, (4) being honest, open and transparent, and giving free and creative expression to the self, (5) being possibility and potentiality oriented, (6) having a strong sense of personal responsibility, (7) finding that true community is only possible based in the “love-power connection” of the Holy Spirit, (8) taking risks for growth, (9) being open to their own unconscious selves, (10) developing a great sense of integration of the self, and of life in general.

OUTCOMES HIGHLY RELEVANT TO COUNSELING AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Other significant findings in the lives of the Questers relate to their relationship to the church and to religion, and to their “call to mission.” For most, church or religion was present to some degree and yet was mostly a negative influence which created more obstacles to God than not; it seems they came to believe in God and to know him in spite of the organized church rather than because of it. The redeeming feature, for several, was that **one person** in the church setting impressed them as **different** (“fragrance about her life,” “unity between preaching and living”) and was a positive influence. They were able to differentiate between the negatives in the religious environment (e.g., hypocritical people) and who God is. Only

DoddsHoly Spirit/Personality - 17

Mary had a very positive religious (church) experience in which she learned to relate to God as naturally as “breathing” and had many positive models and teachings. As adults, all of them choose to participate in leadership roles within churches, yet express discontent (sometimes vehemently) with the organizational aspects or other failures of the church, primarily because the emphasis is not on fostering personhood.

Significantly, Questers felt some kind of “call to mission” either immediately upon conversion or, in the case of Mary with her very positive upbringing, “very early” in life. They responded to their strong inner sense of needing to and wanting to serve God. They continue to put great emphasis on the concept of being “used” by God to accomplish his purpose in the world.

Questers also emphasize the difference between religiosity and spirituality. This first stood out to me because Sam (the Set B person) used different language and content in his freely chosen, unsolicited flow of expression about his life and his experience of SSP. He talked about religious activity; Questers focused on relationship with God.

Several outcomes of the Questers’ experience of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in their lives are highly relevant to our own work as counselors and spiritual leaders.

(1) **Questers experienced profound changes in self-perception, self-esteem.** They came to see themselves realistically, to value themselves, and learned what they have to offer to the world through God-given gifts, talents, etc. **Acceptance by God became the basis for self-acceptance and for acceptance by other people.** For Roger, blind because of his parents’ neglect, acceptance by God included learning to accept his weakness or limitation in blindness as being “okay” because it is okay with God, just as Moses’ limitations were accepted by God.

(2) **Questers experienced profound changes in their perception and valuing of other persons. God’s acceptance became the basis for accepting others.**

(3) **Questers found a way to channel their discontent and their dreams into positive changes by finding new models of ideology and behavior.**

(4) **Questers experienced power to overcome great traumas and obstacles and to change life patterns involving attitudes, behaviors and values.**

DISCUSSION

Three aspects or outcomes of the Holy Spirit's power in the lives of Questers merit discussion here: the model for change, the comprehensive set of resources for growth which they identified, and the question of spirituality and God concepts, as related to two theorists whose works are particularly relevant.

Quester outcomes match up to the paradigm for personal change which I proposed. This paradigm incorporates the affective (discontent), the cognitive (ideal), and the volitional (will, power leading to behavior). According to at least one theorist of personality, for change to be lasting it must permeate these three aspects of self (Johnson, 1985). We can see more of this in the "application" section.

We can learn a great deal about the process of change experienced by Questers through examining the comprehensive set of resources for growth and change which the Questers identified. If we look at the total of experiences included in the categories of the "God as the source" theme, in which Questers attribute various resources to God, we find a comprehensive set of benefits or resources. We can match these to the lists or schemes describing human needs and the requisites for optimal growth and development which are proposed by four major theorists in the field of personality and human development: Abraham Maslow, Gordon Allport, Eric Fromm and Henry Murray. The resources Questers identify easily fit into Maslow's hierarchy of human needs, Allport's aspects of integration, Fromm's set of needs "arising from the condition of human existence," and Murray's comprehensive (dialectical) needs list.

We can gain insight into and appreciation of the relationship between spirituality and religiosity and spirituality and personhood by looking at the writings of two theorists of the psychology of religion. They address the centrality of personhood in the Christian faith and illustrate the critical importance of it in various ways.

Questers appear to be the persons of whom Harvard psychiatrist Robert Coles, researcher of moral and spiritual development, writes, "...the people for whom the phrase God's presence has an utter, rock-bottom psychological reality... In such people, I have felt, spirituality makes up the very warp and woof of psychology; the integration is...complete...[they] feel God's parenthood so deeply and continuously that their every emotional moment seems God-connected, if not God-haunted" (p. 127).

Ana-Maria Rizzuto, another contemporary psychoanalyst, also furthers our

Heartstream Resources

DoddsHoly Spirit/Personality - 19

understanding of the intrapsychic role of religion and God in personality formation. The central message of her book, *The Birth of The Living God*, is that believing in God is a means by which one achieves psychic integration.¹

Rizzuto relates the developmental process of personality formation and uses of “God representations” from the perspective of object relations theory. She says, “The child’s and adult’s sense of self is affected by the representational traits of the individual’s private God.” Rizzuto does not venture whether God might actually exist, but stresses the crucial function of belief that he exists.

Rizzuto also attends to the discovery of the true self, saying, “I... propose that the private God of each man has the potential to provide ‘silent communication,’ thus increasing our sense of being real.”

Through her clients, Rizzuto describes the ordinary, expected connections between a child’s parental experience, concepts and affect and his or her relation to God. For the most part, Questers manifest a deviation from Rizzuto’s norm. Many of the Questers grew up with negative parental images, experience and feelings, which should have predisposed them to negative God relationships, yet they managed to develop very positive and healthy concepts of and affections for God. What explains the difference with this group? Rizzuto does not consider exceptions; perhaps she does not encounter such anomalies in that she specializes with individuals who are in deep psychic difficulty. One difference with Questers is perhaps those rare positive models some of them encountered who embodied a new image/concept of God. The persons or life styles of these individuals challenged the Questers (even years later) to give up their old, childhood concepts. Such models may have enabled the Questers as children to modify God concepts during the formation of them.

HOW CAN WE APPLY THE INSIGHTS GAINED?

The church at large, and especially those of us representing roles involving spiritual formation, can benefit from this research in several ways: (1) change the affective and spiritual climate of the church, emphasizing true spirituality rather than religious activity, (2) intensify evangelism and discipleship efforts with adolescents and young parents, (3) teach parents their critical role is influencing children’s concepts of and feelings for God, (4) learn how to identify Questers, and (5) use the paradigm for change as a teaching tool.

¹ In Rizzuto’s meaning, she is referring to God “as a representational object.” She theorizes that each person creates by conceptualization and through affective sensibilities their own “private God.”

Changing the affective and spiritual environment of the church: James Olthuis, of the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto, has already addressed the “communities of faith” regarding the same kinds of needs and deficits as Questers identify (1985, 1989). He calls for a variety of “modes of support” to enable people to become whole and to flourish within the family of faith. Because the nature of human life, in all domains, is developmental, so must be the resources offered by the church to persons in their growth. Rizzuto says of her many client’s with distorted God concepts and disturbed lives: “If official religion had been able to help them, it would have had to offer them something other than the official God they could not handle. It would have listened to their fears, attended to their predicaments, and helped them tease out an acceptable God representation from the official God that (religion) offered them.” (p. 199). Ideally the church should work toward the full development of persons as the highest value, as that reflects God’s heart.

Intensifying evangelism and discipleship in the adolescent and young parenthood years. In that the adolescent years are so critical in the formation of identity, finding life direction and making personal commitments, they are a key time to intersect the spiritual life. Rizzuto says, “The developmental crisis, with its intense self-searching and reshuffling of self-images in the context of trying to find a niche in the world for oneself, brings about new encounters with both old and new God representations. They may or may not lend themselves to belief” (p. 201). “It is during these strenuous years that most people who cease to believe drop their God” (p. 203).

Teach parents their critical role in shaping a child’s concepts of and feelings about God, since the majority of children are most strongly influenced by them. Rizzuto writes forcefully of the awesome task of parenting and enabling (for good or ill) the child to come to a sense of God. One key in this is how the child comes to understand his or her own origins.

Creating a way to identify “Questers” would be ideal for designing training programs and for the selection of teachers and other persons most likely to have the capacity to love and give to others. Some kind of questionnaire or other measurement/identification instrument might be devised using the attributes of the Questers as indicators of a type. These could possibly be contrasted or paired with attributes of the more conventional type. More investigation of more ordinary type is obviously needed to verify the distinctions and their implications.

By enumerating the specific attitudes and actions which characterize Questers we can arrive at a comprehensive set of attributes which can be intentionally fostered. Doing this is crucial because, though many persons call for change and growth, there is actually little

DoddsHoly Spirit/Personality - 21

written specifically about **HOW** we can bring it about. Most “how to’s” offered in psychology are rather vague and general: gaining insight, getting in touch with oneself, becoming more real, resolving inner conflicts, becoming more aware, and so on. Very little emphasis is placed on actions, activities, doing--that is applying, working out or living out the things gained inwardly. Most suggestions for change and growth coming from the domain of psychology do not go outside the self very much. We can encourage the “for others” lifestyle which Questers live.

Here are twenty-one means of achieving self-actualization and personhood, practiced by the Questers, which we can use as transferable concepts and habits of life. We could label these “**Becoming Twenty-One**” to emphasize their role in bringing us to maturity:

- 1) maintain an attitude of openness, of receptivity to God and others.
- 2) pursue true learning; risk the change that learning implies.
- 3) pursue contact with God; take initiative; cultivate the spiritual life.
- 4) choose to continue to quest for God after once encountering him.
- 5) choose to risk dialogue with God, about all matters of life.
- 6) dialogue with God in prayer and the “inter-active reading” of Scriptures.
- 7) process mentally what you read, hear, understand, experience, so it becomes your own, rather than “swallowing whole” or projecting or rejecting.
- 8) choose to do what you understand God wants you to do (vocation, using gifts, acting for others), and to become (qualities) whole persons living out his love.
- 9) confess to God, self and others your shortcomings, limits, vulnerabilities, sins.
- 10) take opportunities to discover and develop your gifts.
- 11) practice gratitude, believing that God desires to give and that he provides good for you and is the source of all.
- 12) endure hardship believing God can make something good come out of it.
- 13) “practice the presence” of God, living with the consciousness that he is here every moment, available and loving.
- 14) act on insights or guidance once gained and expect God to empower you to carry out the change.
- 15) risk to act or achieve beyond your comfort zone or normal expectations in order to reach toward what you perceive God wants of you. Trust his power to sustain, strengthen, enable and empower you in your partnership with him.
- 16) risk action based on belief that God provides resources in all dimensions of life.
- 17) be willing to risk self-giving, commitment, relationship, and loving, even though relationships and community are flawed and do not meet your needs perfectly.
- 18) participate in and contribute to a “community of faith” even though these do not fully meet your own needs.
- 19) be devoted to others in love; delight in others’ individuality and personhood.

DoddsHoly Spirit/Personality - 22

20) allow your vocation to be a means to actualize your God-given potential.

21) consider your vocation an avenue of service to God and others.

Use the paradigm for change as a teaching tool, perhaps with a catchy title like “**3 M & M’s for Change.**” The model for change can provide a framework for transferable concepts.

1) **Motivation:** We can teach (especially children and youth) this: your vague discontent (your “wistfulness for good,” Pike) and your ability to discern a better way (in attitude, principle or behavior) is a reflection of your origin, of having been made by God. Because he made you, you have this yearning to become whole and for your true self to become actualized. (This is the most affective aspect of change.)

2) **Model:** We can use all manner of methods to teach the good, the better, the best in all areas of life and growth, taking into account the developmental stages of growth in all dimensions. We can present ideals, ideas, images and persons to serve as models. We can make sure to choose model persons, who have a “fragrance” of life to which children and others are drawn, to become teachers and leaders. We can, as parents, teachers, church and other leaders, be of vital importance in developing the personhood of children and influencing their relationships with God. We can point to heroes who are lovers of humanity instead of those who are the quickest with the gun or the comic put-down. We can provide, in the Biblical literature and other religious sources, stories which teach principles of conduct as well as providing heroes. We can listen as persons to those who inquire, and instill curiosity and a love of learning. We can help children discuss problems and moral quandaries, as suggested by Coles, Kohlberg, Licklona and others. In all of these we can impart to the child the knowledge that it is good to aspire, and that growth and good are within his or her reach. (This is the most cognitive element of the model for change.)

3) **Means:** We can teach and model that God exists without teaching a specific religion or denomination; we can focus on the “inner core” of spirituality rather than on religious externals. We can teach that God made us and the world, that he gifts us with all that is good, and that he makes available to us, if we ask for it, power and energy for living a loving and productive life. We can teach that he is love, the source of love, and the source of ourselves. (Both Coles and Rizzuto emphasize how important is the child’s understanding of his or her own origins.) We can teach that he responds to us in love when we quest after him.

Allport points out that we must also acknowledge the problem of evil and help persons come to terms with that reality. Acknowledging supernatural evil power makes more sense when one also acknowledges supernatural good power (that which emanates from God).

DoddsHoly Spirit/Personality - 23

Teaching this duality allows some comprehension of the reasons for the magnitude of evil, a critical need for children crushed by the sins of others. Being able to transcend the evil, both individually and societally, dictates a change of will, which God's Spirit can empower. (This is the behavioral and volitional element of the change model.)

These three elements of the paradigm or model, though profound in implication, can be simply stated, in words any child can grasp: 1) It's my right to want a better life, 2) I can do something to create it, 3) God can give me power to help me grow. If we impart these principles to our children and youth, as well as to adults who seek to grow and change, we will be offering an incredible gift--the pathway and process for their full and joyful development. We will enable them, as the catechism of old reminds us, to love God and to **enjoy** him forever.

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Dodds Holy Spirit/Personality - 25

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