



(REVIEW ARTICLE)



## The erosion of the spiritual dimension: A challenge for humanity's survival

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### Abstract

Spirituality, as an intrinsic dimension of the human being, is essential for the construction of a just and peaceful society. This article examines the erosion of spirituality in contemporary contexts, identifying its consequences for humanity from anthropological and theological perspectives. Starting from the conception of the human being as a multidimensional entity, it explores how disconnection from the transcendent leads to existential and social impoverishment, manifested in attitudes of individualism, materialism, and the loss of ethical values. Through an analysis of sacred texts — such as the Christian Gospels, the Quran, the Torah, and the Vedas — and the reflections of authors like Clifford Geertz, Raimon Panikkar, and Émile Durkheim, this study underscores the need to restore spirituality as an essential component for humanity's survival. Finally, spirituality is proposed not as a functional tool but as an end in itself, fostering connection with others, universal love, and transcendence — indispensable elements for overcoming the ethical and social crises of modernity.

**Keywords:** Spirituality; Culture of peace; Ethics and transcendence; Theological context; Anthropological perspective

### 1. Introduction

The human being is considered a multidimensional entity, "a spiritualized body or a corporeal spirit," as Ítalo Gastaldi (2003) argued. A being that cannot live without the inclination to something that transcends it (Durkheim, 2013). An ontological space where religious ceremonies serve as the language societies use to articulate their need to connect with something greater than themselves; a point where the sacred and transcendence converge (Turner, 2017). A system of conceptions of a general order of existence (Geertz, 2010).

In this context, Philosophical-Theological Anthropology studies this human being as an integral, historical, cultural being, and, therefore, a self-constructing entity. From the philosophy perspective, a being of human nature, with rationality and purpose, the "zoon logikon" of Aristotle, and from theology, a being with a transcendent dimension and a relationship with the divine; with intrinsic dignity and an end in itself from Thomas Aquinas's view, "Imago Dei" from Genesis (1:26-27). A being different from others in the cosmos, who, in the case of the Christian theophany, presents Jesus as a model of dignity and ethical and political commitment in the construction of societies. However, humans forget their multidimensionality, their essential unity, their dignity as an existential purpose, and become a one-dimensional being, as John Dewey (1964) argued, a being of habits. Consequently, they easily get accustomed to this mutilation, often directly related to their spiritual dimension, becoming a biological, material being, without soul, without sobriety, without love for others, and probably, not even for themselves.

The human being, deprived of their multidimensionality, presents themselves as a current challenge for humanity, since, isolated from their spiritual dimension, they are diminished in their ability to build a culture of peace, or simply, a more humane society. Becoming both the agent and victim of a merciless society, without justice or charity. How can we

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contribute to restoring the spiritual multidimensionality of the human being? From our perspective, we propose a contribution through this social diagnostic sketch, aiming to spread and promote the hypothesis that the erosion of the spiritual dimension is a challenge for humanity's survival. Linking the importance of asserting this with Jean Baudrillard's (2024) assumption that what is not shown in the media or lacks symbolic representation may lack existence in the collective consciousness, or more radically, Guy Debord (1990), who argued that in the society of the spectacle, what is not named or publicized does not exist.

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## 2. The Loss of the Spiritual Dimension in Contemporary Human Beings

Thinkers of all kinds and specialties have attempted to define the human being, each perceiving it from a different angle, sometimes contradictory but complementary. Hans Georg Gadamer (1992) considered that the being was primarily linguistic, a being of dialogue. For John Dewey (1964), the human multidimensionality was expressed in the thread of experience that wove together dimensions like human impulse or nature, habit, sociability, creativity, temporality, freedom, reflection, and excellence. Consequently, dialogue and experience are elements of encounter in the self-constructed human being. On the contrary, if we isolate the human from experience, if we limit their life to a single point of view, they become one-dimensional; they suffer mutilation, isolation, impoverishment. From this starting analysis arises the need to propose spirituality as an element that strengthens human survival, a category that, with the advent of relativist philosophy and the deep crisis of ethics, has split the divine reality from the human being. In our case, we have lost the image of God as inquiry, revelation, and horizon for humanity. We have lost spirituality and, consequently, disconnected from transcendence.

From the Christian gospels, there are indications about what we can do in these circumstances: "These are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Mark 3:31-35). That is, fulfilling the divine will makes you part of the multidimensional human family. Vicente Plasencia Llanos (2017) leads us toward the concretion of the liberation of vulnerable people: "Jesus of Nazareth, who from the concrete history, outlines the path of emancipation and liberation from the victims." Spiritual poverty has a domino effect that reproduces anguish, pain, and suffering in others, regardless of their social or economic composition. Jesus, nonetheless, expresses the importance of the impact of resources on people's behavior: "Woe to you, the rich, those who are satisfied" (Luke 6:24-26).

A similar profile of spirituality is outlined in the Quran. From the purity of intention, it warns that neither wealth nor children will be of any use except for those who come to Allah with a pure heart (26:88-89). Or, from the purification of the soul, when it declares that the one who purifies their soul has triumphed, and the one who corrupts it has failed (91:9-10). Concerning the connection with the community and creation, the Quran predicts the need to be kind, as Allah has been with you (28:77).

In the Jewish Torah, human spirituality is the path to connecting with God through the obedience of commandments and faithfulness to the covenant. In the Tanakh, introspection, repentance, and union with God form the foundation of spirituality. "For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings," declares Hosea 6:6. This profound vision of Jewish spirituality is even reaffirmed in the text: "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. This is the entire Torah; the rest is commentary." (Talmud, Shabbat 31a).

Beyond the spiritual conceptions of the main monotheistic religions, we can even find links in the Vedas, ancient sacred texts of Hinduism: "May peace be in the heavens, on earth, and in the water. May peace be in the plants and trees. May peace be in all of the universe." (Atharvaveda 19:9:14). Here, spirituality exceeds the relationship between humans and includes the non-human, aligning with Philippe Descola's experience with the Achuar people of the Amazon, who described their cosmology as displaying a hierarchy of beings in which the differences between humans, plants, and animals are of degree, not nature, with all possessing a soul (2004).

However, spirituality is not essentially religion. Raimon Panikkar (1990) probably accurately expressed the importance of undermining the prejudices we have when confronting the study of religions; religions are called to become themselves, not merely propagators of conversion. Humanity needs to engage in the search for truth and love for others, not only as a theological paradigm but as the humanization of the survival of the species. Evans-Pritchard (1951), from early anthropology studies on African societies, warned that spirituality cannot be separated from social and cultural institutions, as it is through these that meaning is acquired. While the proposed meaning was to understand society, his vision is particularly pertinent. Malinowski (1985) also argued that religion and magic served similar functions as human responses to uncertainty and fear, but also helped to order chaos. Nonetheless, my proposal is not to configure spirituality as a useful tool but as a significant end for humanity. Spirituality is individual, a personal search for meaning, for connection with the transcendent or divine, without necessarily adhering to a specific institutional framework or

structured belief system, which is what limits the religious phenomenon. However, humanity needs the spirit as an expression of love for oneself and others, with or without institutionalization, because the body alone, elevated to divinity, is prematurely corruptible and counterproductive to human survival, where there is no humble abandonment to God that allows for the rejoicing of peace (Larrañaga, 1993).

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### 3. Conclusion

The human being is considered a multidimensional entity, a biological body with a divine spirit, essence, and communication with God. However, contemporary relativist imaginaries of self-consumption and partial, ideologized knowledge have separated us from within. We have called each other against one another, making us believe in the imaginary of ambition and death without hope; perceiving conflict as inevitable. And yet, as we return to the knowledge of humanity's deepest spiritual essence, it is possible to recognize that we must transform ourselves if we hope for collective peace.

Spirituality is not an end tool of the market or society but rather a divine essence that should govern us in truth and love for others. It is from this that humanity should emerge and abandon its one-dimensional behavior in an increasingly technological world that would drive us away from ourselves.

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### Compliance with ethical standards

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