

Three Poles of Spiritual Orientation

- Mono-polar spirituality awakens self discovery, self development, exploration of depth (“Know thyself,” “Find the truth that is within you,” “To thine own self be true”).
- Bi-polar spirituality encounters a Transcendent Other, seeks to know God as the path to true self knowledge (I know my self through knowing God, the “*I AM who I AM*”).
- Tri-polar spirituality realizes that love of God cannot be split from love of other--in love of God and other I come to know self (YHWH means “*You will come to know Me as you follow Me*”).

Mono-polar, Bi-polar, Tri-polar Spirituality

1	1.5	2	2.5	3.
Mono-polar Spirituality	Mirror of Self “My own god.”	Bi-polar Spirituality	Benevolent self that serves God	Tri-polar Spirituality
Know Thyself	My god and I	God alone is God	Serve Sovereign God	Love of God & other
Spirituality of In-search and self discovery.	Spirituality of wish-fulfillment and projection.	Spirituality of God-encounter. God as Other.	Spirituality of gratitude, service, and neighbor love.	Spirituality of radical agape and enemy love.
I am a church of one, of me	God is on my side, our side.	I know true self as I know God.	As I love God I care for others.	I love God only as I love enemy.
Self as primary locus of the holy	Creation of gods who fulfill and aid	Death and rebirth: god becomes God	Worship the provident God	Follow the God of Jesus Christ
Me, Us	My, Our, We/They	Thou	They	We

Mono-polar spirituality takes the first steps of opening the soul, the beginning of soul-making. It seeks a spirituality that discovers the sacred within, the holy in nature, the numinous mysteries of one’s inner depths and their connection to the universe. It is, to quote best sellers that introduce a new age of spirituality, “getting back in touch with your soul,” “Journeying to the best and highest place within,” “Living in your sweet spot.”

Mirror of self spirituality reaches upward for the transcendent, and finds “the Beyond” a source of safety and security, comfort and companionship in fulfillment of one’s deepest desires and highest goals. It speaks familiarly, possessively of “my god” and looks to this god to bless self, family, nation. “God Bless America” can be prayed in fear or confident certainty of God is on our side, “Gott mit uns”, the security of a tribal or national diety

Bi-polar spirituality lies on the other side of a life-death experience. God dies—the god of our own creation and celebration—and a part of our self dies with it. We encounter a sovereign God, a God who is truly other, who stands above all human manipulation, beyond our strategies of control. It is frightening to experience the death of one’s private, individualized magical protector-provider who rescues, me and mine as special cases, and even more frightening to meet the God who is beyond all the stand-ins we create.

Benevolent spirituality is consequential—having encountered God the Other who loves all others, it reaches outward in pity and compassion for others. It is motivated by gratitude for grace received, and seeks the well-being of others in thankful response to the generosity of God. It sees love for others as the agape of benevolence, it seeks to fulfill the divine intentions for humanity, in as far as it fits with common sense, the right to survival and self defense and rational self protection

Tri-polar spirituality dawns with the realization of the inseparable unity of love for God and love of neighbor, unfolds in the recognition of the presence of God in the other. Love for God and neighbor, two aspects of one and the same love, are inextricably united. (“The greatest commandment is to love God, the second is its likeness, to love the other, who images God to us”) It begins in the radical, subversive walk of living out love without conditions, exceptions, exemptions; it ends in following the ultimate dissident exemplar, Jesus who said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another as I have loved you.”

See d.augsburger, *Dissident Discipleship*, Brazos Press, 2006

When God Dies

The death that occurs at the boundary of the second pole results in the shattering of the “mirror of self” faith that smiles graciously as one “forgives oneself;” initiates the slow death of one’s “wish-fulfillment” faith that projected its sacred ideal self on the heavens. The death of narcissism, of a nationalism of “God’s chosen people”, of an ownership of the God who guarantees my inviolate existence happens with the collapse of spiritual self-strategies.

“If the thought comes to you that everything that you have thought about God is mistaken and that there is no God, do not be dismayed. It happens to many people. But do not think that the source of your unbelief is that there is no God. If you no longer believe in God in whom you believed before, this comes from the fact that there is something wrong with your belief, and you must strive to grasp better that which you call God. When a savage ceases to believe in his wooden God, this does not mean that there is no God, but only that the true God is not made of wood.”

—Leo Tolstoy

“My God is my own,” counselees often say in defense of their independence from the church, or their flight from community and its inevitable accountability demands. Or they protest, “I have my own God,” in response to another’s challenge or in protest to another’s affirmation of faith.

Writing his own spiritual autobiography in third person, Bernard Martin confesses: “How many times, in the course of his ministry, had he encountered men who, wanting clearly to define the distance between them and the church, spoke of God by saying: “My God is my own!” Each time he had tried to show that one could not speak of God as his own, for God does not depend on the personal idea that one forms of him. And that evening, the minister discovered with painful acuity, that he himself had “His own God.” To be sure, he had tried to understand God according to the teaching of Christ and the Bible. But his very way of understanding Christ and the Bible was still a personal matter. It was the result of the collective thinking of his age, of the church in which he served, of those around him, and, above all, of his own temperament. Little by little, he had made all this his own, in his own way . . . in the final analysis, he had created a God in his own image, just like all the others.” (Martin 1964,18-19)

When God dies, *God* appears. When hope is lost, true hope appears. The hopes of our immature years—the confident optimism, the naïve positivism, the superficial assurance of youth—are laid aside.. The future is not a golden path to the sapphire stairs leading to the lavender clouds of serene safety and success. Life is not the guaranteed perfection of our dreams. This world (pace Voltaire and *Candide*) is not the best of all possible worlds. We have known this yet we do not *know* it as long as we follow the will o’ the wisp of our emotional gods who lure us onward with the promise of fulfilling our desires.

People want to be like God—secure, self sufficient, superior to all others, immortal-- and hate God when they discover they cannot. This is the fundamental deep dark secret of the human heart, argues Rene Girard. When the secret is disclosed, people become enraged. The exposure of the human secret—that we want the ultimate power which we cannot have because we are finite, so we act out our rage in making ultimate power decisions (death) for others and claim the lordship over life (by killing others) in rebellion against our natural state. The most despicable horror of all time is the raw exposure of his cherished myth.

Our secret life of the unconscious was baldly exposed by the contemptible One named Jesus. He embodied, acted out, fulfilled all our secret fantasies, our unconscious claims of exceptionality but he did it in the insulting reverse of our dreams. He disavowed power, status, hierarchy, right to life, safety, security, God-like privilege and entitlement. Such an outrageous insult must be answered with an equally egregious assault. He had to be eliminated to maintain our strategies of security. (Wink 1992,147; Schwager 1987,170)