

Roger Haight, SJ. *Spiritual and Religious: Explorations for Seekers*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2016. xviii, 203 pp. \$25.00. Paperback. ISBN: 9781626981614.

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In *Spiritual and Religious: Explorations for Seekers*, the eminent Jesuit theologian Roger Haight offers a collection of fourteen essays that highlight “the primacy of the spiritual over the religious” (1). Spirituality, argues Haight, is more fundamental to our human constitution than is religion, a secondary development that arises through the institutionalization of certain spiritual practices, beliefs, and worldviews. Similarly, spirituality enjoys a certain methodological primacy over theology, which must orient itself toward spirituality if it is to remain relevant. In this book, Haight ventures to “remain on the plane of spirituality” (xv). But rather than create a chasm between spirituality and religion, or between spirituality and theology, Haight repeatedly underscores their alliances. As the title of the book indicates, the pressing question is not so much “What does it mean to be spiritual and *not* religious?,” a position that so many hold today, but instead “How can one be authentically spiritual *and* religious?”

Given Haight’s ongoing commitments to his own religious tradition and to theological inquiry at large, the book will likely resonate more with those who find at least some potentially redeeming qualities in religion than for those who do not. While the book is not likely to win over aggressive atheists, Haight certainly has much to offer to those who are trying to square their spirituality with their religion. As Haight explains, ten of the book’s essays address spirituality, while four focus more directly on the Christian life. An alternative way of configuring the book’s contents might go something like this: the book deals with several noticeable themes — spirituality (chap. 1-2), the spirituality of Jesus (chap. 3,4,6), the spirituality of the church (chap. 5,7,10), liberation spirituality (chap. 8-9), and spirituality and pluralism (chap. 11, 12, 13). The book finishes with a chapter on the narrative character of the trinity (chap. 14). This last chapter may sound like a bit of an outlier given that there is little attention given to spirituality per se, but it is in fact quite in line with the definition of spirituality that Haight establishes in the book’s first two core chapters. Drawing on the work of Paul Tillich, Paul Ricouer, and Stephen Crites, Haight defines spirituality as the “logic, or character, or consistent quality of a person’s or a group’s pattern of living insofar as it is measured before some ultimate reality” (2). And as Haight makes clear, spirituality also has a narrative structure, pointing simultaneously toward the past and future. All of this is true for both individuals as well as communities: both individuals and groups participate in patterns of living, and both individuals and groups embody narrative structures that are oriented, in some way, toward ultimate concerns. Haight maintains that the true test of spirituality is how authentically one can correlate the narrative world of public spirituality with one’s own existential narrative. Thus, the connection between the spiritual and religious is for Haight not merely a formal one, wherein spirituality is a necessary precondition for religion. Rather, the connection suggests a qualitative, dynamic, and ever-changing relationship wherein the interpreter must continually venture to correlate the narratives of public spirituality (most often passed down through “religion”) with one’s own existential narrative and ultimate concern.

Considering how important the idea of ultimacy is to Haight’s argument, I would have liked to see just a little more discussion of this central topic. What if one’s ultimate concern is fame or fortune, or self or group preservation?

Haight does acknowledge a difference between an ultimate concern and an idol, as suggested by a passing footnote to Tillich, but the point, I believe, is worthy of further discussion, especially for those who are seeking the kind of authentic and liberating spirituality to which Haight is so committed. This suggestion notwithstanding, Haight amply succeeds in widening the concept of spirituality beyond the confines of individual psychology, connecting it to modes of behavior and underlying values that are shaped, explicitly and implicitly, over time.

Pluralistic in scope and practical in its intent, *Spiritual and Religious* invites seekers into an honest and open conversation about spirituality and religion. While squarely acknowledging the inevitable discomfort that seekers of varying stripes may feel toward religion, the book demonstrates that spirituality and religion, when critically and authentically retrieved, need not be anathema to each other but may instead jointly lead to new forms of freedom.