

Evelyn Underhill on Spiritual Transformation: A Trinitarian Structure?

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Abstract: *There is a trinitarian structure underlying Evelyn Underhill's understanding of spiritual transformation as the presence and action of the Holy. After briefly outlining her spiritual vision, this article will discuss Underhill's foundations by tapping the philosophical psychology within the spiritual heritage, namely its cognitive, affective and conative dimensions. We then examine, in three phases, how she uses these resources, combined with other influences, in adapting the schema of Adoration/ Adherence/ Cooperation from the French School of Spirituality. This becomes the dominant lens through which she interprets the pattern of human responsiveness to the divine and the role of the trinitarian relations in the process of spiritual transformation. It will emerge that her method is descriptive and existential, with a focus on experience of the divine as distinctively ecstatic and self-transcending. Finally, there will be some evaluative comments on her significance within the tradition, both past and present.*

Key Words: Evelyn Underhill; Trinity – spirituality; philosophical psychology; French School of Spirituality; spiritual transformation; Holy Spirit – mission

We are approaching the centenary of the first publication in 1911 of *Mysticism*, the work for which Evelyn Underhill is most remembered.¹ Her spiritual moral vision, developed over thirty years, is much broader than this one publication would suggest. Archbishop Michael Ramsey and John Macquarrie, for instance, recognize her profound impact on the Church of England and on theology and religious studies in the twentieth century. Underhill's spiritual way revolves around human experience and response to the divine through the Spirit of God present and active in creation. This approach transcends particular faiths or religious institutions. The scope of Underhill's mature spirituality is arguably as expansive as humanity itself.

The past fifteen years have brought substantial critical evaluation of Underhill's work and the influences that shaped it.² It is generally agreed that Underhill, influenced by Baron von Hügel, drew on the French School of Spirituality, in particular Cardinal de Bérulle, in describing the three complementary and interrelated movements of human response to the divine as Adoration, Adherence (Communion) and Cooperation. In reading Underhill's work, particularly at certain points of transition, one can detect a dimension that merits further investigation. She appears to bring to the Bérullian schema a

¹ Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Developments of Man's Spiritual Consciousness*, 12th ed. (New York: Meridian, 1955).

² A good introduction to Underhill is Dana Greene, *Evelyn Underhill, Artist of the Infinite Life* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), first published in 1990.

distinctive perspective on the trinitarian nature of the spiritual life. I would like to explore the way in which this perspective develops in her writing and its distinguishing qualities.

I will proceed in three stages: first, after a brief outline of Underhill's spiritual vision, to examine her initial explorations within the spiritual heritage (foundations); second, to uncover in three phases the trinitarian pattern of human responsiveness to the divine (building on the foundations); third, some observations will conclude the article.

1. SPIRIT OF GOD AT WORK IN THE WORLD

For Underhill, the Spirit is the self-giving presence of God that permeates and sustains creation. The Spirit is the bridge between eternity and time, between the transcendent 'wholly Other' (a Barthian phrase used in her work) and the immanent, dependent and limited world of creation. God's essential quality, embodied in Christ, is of one who 'stoops to the human level.'³ Christ embodies simultaneously God's self-gift and humanity and creation's response to his Father. For Underhill, the Christian life as living in the Spirit, is a share in the life of the sacrifice, surrender and self-giving of Christ to God his Father.⁴

The human being, special and unique in creation, is open to receiving God. Underhill consistently uses the phrase *capax dei* or its equivalent. She sees the religious urge to have a relationship with the Real, with mystery, with the transcendent, as a universal phenomenon.⁵ It is marked by two forms of desire: human yearning for Reality (God) and, more importantly, God's desire to reach out to us.⁶ The divine purpose (Absolute Will and love) revolves around this double movement. The divine Spirit draws us to the Real, as a magnet, in sustaining our desire to engage and respond to mystery. The driving force of the spiritual journey is not human effort. It is rather God who first seeks us out and desires to have a relationship with us. In all her writing, desire is central for Underhill (and the spiritual tradition).⁷ The magnet seems, for her, to be a root metaphor for desire working in creation and especially between the Spirit and the human being.⁸

It is the Spirit that is the innate spark inviting the human spirit to open itself to the Real, be receptive to God and the divine purposes.⁹ Beneath the Spirit's presence and action one can detect a trinitarian structure that shapes Underhill's theological anthropology and her account of the dynamics of spiritual transformation. That is now our task.

³ Evelyn Underhill, *The Spiritual Life* (Homebush, NSW: Society of St. Paul, 1976), 66. This book, with an introduction by David Walker, is a printed version of four talks delivered by her on BBC radio in 1936.

⁴ Todd E. Johnson, 'Pneumatological Oblation: Evelyn Underhill's Theology of the Eucharist,' *Worship* 68.4 (1994): 317.

⁵ Underhill, *The Spiritual Life*, 45.

⁶ 'The deep desire to reach out for "the Perfect" and, most importantly, the fact of the living Reality over against man, who stoops towards him, and first incites and then supports and responds to his seeking,' Underhill, *The Spiritual Life*, 48.

⁷ In 1911 she writes 'Desire is everything in nature; does everything' (Underhill, *Mysticism*, 117 citing Bernard Holland and his introduction to Boehme's dialogues). Towards the end of her life she remarks that we are 'drawn, almost in spite of ourselves, 'to the real end of our being, the place where we are ordained to be.' Underhill, *The Spiritual Life*, 34-35.

⁸ The Perfection which is the object of the awakened soul's gaze is a 'magnet drawing him (sic) towards itself.' Underhill, *The Spiritual Life*, 76.

⁹ Johnson, 'Pneumatological Oblation,' 316.

2. FOUNDATIONS

At the outset, it may help to outline key elements in Underhill's life when *Mysticism* was first published. In 1907, she had undergone a religious conversion. While drawn to Roman Catholicism, her stance was more theocentric than Christian. She will struggle over some time to see the place of Christ in religious experience. At this stage she was guided by W.R. Inge, an Anglican with neo-Platonic leanings. Underhill herself acknowledges its influence in her early work prior to her transition to a more incarnational view of spirituality through her contact with von Hügel, especially as her spiritual director (from 1921).

While *Mysticism* is primarily a descriptive and synthetic work which she later moves beyond, it nevertheless shapes both Underhill's experience and her subsequent articulation of the phenomenology and development of the spiritual life. Specifically, we can trace her evolving understanding of the trinitarian nature of the psychic life from this first major study. At the outset, she acknowledges that once mysticism starts '(a) to analyze its own psychological conditions, or (b) to philosophize upon its intuitive experience of God', there arises an essential place for some form of Trinitarian dogma.¹⁰

As Underhill sets out to 'analyze' and 'philosophize' in understanding God, she starts with human experience and human personality. This approach can be traced back to Augustine for whom intelligence, memory and will reveal the nature of a triune God in the human being. She acknowledges the principle of analogy as the human mind's best way of interpreting reality in trinitarian terms. Building on Aquinas' statement that 'a likeness of the Divine Trinity is observable in the human mind' she notes that we generally tend to analyze 'our psychic life into emotional, volitional and intellectual elements.'¹¹ She later expresses this in terms of faculty psychology. While the modern sensibility may find this psychological model inadequate,¹² for Underhill this tripartite approach to the human psyche will be a crucial element in her approach to the divine-human relationship. As we shall see, she adapts it to her purposes principally by locating it firmly in religious experience and its dynamic processes rather than in theoretical analysis.

While Underhill sees awakened consciousness as a quality of the whole person, she consistently distinguishes three aspects of that awareness of the transcendent realm in the 'Trinity in Unity of feeling, thought, and will.' She argues that, in the mystical tradition, 'feeling' or the 'heart' has primacy in that it activates 'the machinery of thought and will.' Conscious life finds expression in two complementary forms, one passive and one active: the *cognitive* found in the indwelling knowledge of the intellect and the *conative* in which the will, stimulated by the emotions, moves to outgoing action.¹³

She points to a further 'faculty' in the mystical experience. Openness to the transcendent world entails a deeper 'self' that she describes in terms of religious psychology. There is the surface self (Animus) and the deeper self (Anima). The former involves rational or discursive knowledge, the latter embraces mystical or poetic knowing, where it is knowledge through union with the object of awareness.¹⁴ Elsewhere, drawing

¹⁰ Underhill, *Mysticism*, 107.

¹¹ Underhill, *Mysticism*, 111.

¹² See Neil Ormerod, *The Trinity: Retrieving the Western Tradition* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2005), 17-18; Anne Hunt, *Trinity: Nexus of the Mysteries of Christian Faith*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005), 35-36, 215-216.

¹³ Underhill, *Mysticism*, 67 (emphasis in original).

¹⁴ Underhill, *Mysticism*, 67.

on various authors, she is more specific about its immediacy.¹⁵ Underhill is explaining a form of contemplative awareness, an act of the whole person under the impulse of love, in which the humanly “made Trinity” of thought, love, and will, become a Unity.’ Here, feeling and perception ‘are fused’, as in all our experiences of Beauty.¹⁶

While Underhill sees consciousness in the mystical tradition in terms of a binary pattern (conative and cognitive), her interpretation, in fact, involves a triadic model. She suggests three modes of consciousness: discursive reason, deliberative will and desiring will that overlap with the ‘deeper self’ with its affective dimension in feelings and specific form of knowing. Like Augustine, Aquinas and others who use variations of the psychological analogy, she sees a person in terms of cognitional, volitional and affective intentionality.

3. BUILDING ON FOUNDATIONS

For Underhill, this three-fold pattern characterizes all human response to the Spirit’s urgings (it is not confined to great mystics). We can identify its evolving modulations in her work between *Mysticism* (1911) and *The Spiritual Life* (1937). In its developed form, she adopts the schema of Adoration, Adherence (Communion) and Cooperation to articulate one’s encounter with the Divine.¹⁷ Rather than a convenient recycling of Bérulle, Underhill offers a rationale grounded in the philosophical anthropology of the person outlined above. Further, it offers an interpretative window on what happens when consciousness is altered and expanded by the divine action. In seeing how Underhill moves to her mature approach, we will chart her gradual appropriation and use of ‘the Trinity in Unity of feeling, thought, will.’

Phase 1: Beginnings

First, in an article of 1913 we can detect in her less the observer and commentator and more a participant and guide in the spiritual journey.¹⁸ She notes that the human response to God in the various forms of prayer (e.g., adoration, petition, contemplation) engages thinking, feeling and willing (as action), each with its own role. Consciousness is prepared by the intellect, the will is aroused by feeling, but it is ‘the will, the most dynamic and important faculty, one of desire and intention, that explores the Infinite.’¹⁹ The implications of the will’s role are explored below. In this article Underhill shows her ability to reinterpret and enliven traditional faculty psychology which tended to put intellect, emotions and will into separate compartments.²⁰

¹⁵ ‘It is, says Al Ghazzali a Persian mystic of the eleventh century, “like an immediate perception as if one touched the object with one’s hand.” In the words of his great Christian successor, St. Bernard, “it may be defined as the soul’s true unerring intuition, an unhesitating apprehension of truth”: which “simple vision of truth” says St. Thomas Aquinas, “ends in a movement of desire” (Underhill, *Mysticism*, 50).

¹⁶ Underhill, *Mysticism*, 329.

¹⁷ Underhill alternates Bérulle’s schema with that of Jean-Jacques Olier (‘Communion’ for ‘Adherence,’ ‘Intercession’ for ‘Cooperation’) as the basic structure of *The Spiritual Life* and a chapter of *The Golden Sequence*.

¹⁸ Evelyn Underhill, ‘The Place of Will, Intellect, and Feeling in Prayer,’ *The Interpreter* 9.3 (1913): 241-256, reprinted in *The Essentials of Mysticism*, cited in Greene, *Evelyn Underhill, Artist*, 66.

¹⁹ Greene, *Evelyn Underhill, Artist*, 99. Johnson notes that her emphasis on the will is also found in the writings of William Temple around the same time. See Johnson, *In Spirit and Truth*, 110.

²⁰ Annice Callahan, *Evelyn Underhill: Spirituality for Daily Living* (Lanham, MD: Oxford, UK: University of America Press, 1997), 195.

Phase 2: Initial Explorations

By the second stage, Underhill has taken three important steps in her life in 1921: she makes her commitment to the Anglican Church, becomes a spiritual directee of Baron von Hügel and delivers the Upton Lectures at Oxford University. Her personal engagement with Anglicanism, her involvement with the poor under von Hügel's guidance, her openness to psychology, her expanding role as a spiritual guide, the public recognition for her writings - all these converge in these lectures. Her learning starts to be personally appropriated. Rather than depending on external authorities in an academic mode, she finds her own authority and voice and helps others to do the same.²¹ She moves towards an integrated spiritual vision.

By 1922, in her published Upton lectures²² Underhill appears to go beyond her 1913 article with its focus on prayer. She uses a universally applicable pattern as a characteristic of religious experience itself. She describes three principal and complementary ways of engaging in the spiritual journey, namely of realizing a relationship with the transcendent realm: first, a sense of unity with a cosmos that is ultimately gracious ('not inimical to our interests') resulting in feelings of deep security and peace; second, awareness of a relationship and union with a Person who brings a 'prevenient and answering love' that prompts surrender and personal response; third, the arousal of energy and creative powers.²³ These three zones of experience overlap and are interfused. A careful reading indicates that Underhill has not, at this stage, adopted the Bérullian model. She does not use its three-fold terminology even though she speaks of a) communion leading to an affective response of surrender and b) Spirit as a life-giving energy. There is no reference to the movements of awe, adoration, self-abasement (*anéantissement* of Bérulle) or cooperation with God.

Underhill suggests that this ternary schema builds on the structure of human experience as made in the image of God. Its foundation [in the first or cosmic mode] is by way of intuitive contact with what Ruysbroeck called "'the world that is unwall'd.'" The truth is both 'found and felt, satisfying both heart and mind.'²⁴ She says that they entail 'complementary apprehensions, giving objectives to intellect feeling and will.'²⁵ In other words, each of the three forms of religious awareness has its own intentionality.

These three moments in awareness of the divine, she concludes, are traces of the Trinity's presence and action. '[It] seems to me that what we have in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, is above all the crystallization and mind's interpretation of these three ways in which our simple contact with God is actualized by us.'²⁶

This not only refers to the conscious operations at the cognitive, affective and conative levels as expressions of the divine image in human life. More importantly, it points to the object and symbolic expression of each moment that is found in a person of the Trinity: the Father, for the sense of peace and security in the presence of the transcendent; the Son for the immanent moment of communion and love; the Spirit as the creative energy leading individuals and groups to response by moving outwards in life-giving activity.

²¹ Callahan, *Evelyn Underhill*, 49.

²² Evelyn Underhill, *The Life of the Spirit and the Life of Today* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1949).

²³ Underhill, *Life of the Spirit*, 5-10.

²⁴ Underhill, *Life of the Spirit*, 6, 11.

²⁵ Underhill, *Life of the Spirit*, 10.

²⁶ Underhill, *Life of the Spirit*, 11.

One must not see Underhill's trinitarian understanding of religious experience as a subjective projection onto reality. Even as early as *Mysticism* and her neo-Platonic and exploratory phase concerning Christianity, she considers John Scotus Erigena's view along these lines to be 'a stimulating statement of dubious orthodoxy.'²⁷ There is, then, some continuity between this attitude and that manifest later when she has an active involvement with the Anglican Church and her thought crystallizes about the communal, liturgical aspects of the tradition (Creed, Trinity, etc). This will be pursued in the next section.

Phase 3: Consolidating the Structure

We need to return to key influences shaping Underhill's thought at this stage of her life. Firstly, with the influence of von Hügel, Underhill has moved from a Platonic view to a more integrated appreciation of the spirit/matter relationship. For her, the visible mediates the invisible. The spiritual life engages not only the deepest recesses of the self but the whole person – the senses, psyche, emotions, mind, heart, will. In many ways, her spiritual moral teaching is embodied in images and a cluster of controlling metaphors through which she attempts to integrate the data of sense experience and consciousness with the realm of meaning.²⁸

Secondly, the spiritual journey is no longer the result of human effort but is a search initiated by a God who desires to be found. Trust in God who can reach humanity was to become for Underhill the basis of her understanding of the sacraments.²⁹ Communal worship, ritual and sacramental life become integral to her life and spirituality (coloured by her brief contact with magic and the rituals of the Golden Dawn society). Her spiritual vision is embodied, relational and ethically responsible. However, as Johnson points out, in the 1920's, and particularly from *Man and the Supernatural* (1927) onwards, Underhill starts to appreciate that, beyond faith community, worship and symbols, 'the starting point of individual experience [is] one's experience with creation.'³⁰

Thirdly, given the contentious theological situation in the inter-war period in England, especially in the light of Modernism, in 1922 the Archbishop of Canterbury Randall Davidson appointed a doctrinal commission which finally issued its report in 1938. This period, before and after the report, reveals in Anglican theology emphasis on

- a) the revelation of the Trinity 'through history and experience';
- b) a tendency towards the social analogy of the Trinity; and
- c) a stress on God as creator and the goodness of creation.'³¹

This brings us, then, to the process of consolidation.

In this final phase, the given, revealed nature of the triune God as the foundation of the structure of spiritual experience is explicitly acknowledged by Underhill in 1930 in

²⁷ The context is that of n.11 above on analogical knowing. John Scotus Erigena says 'The three Persons of the Trinity are less modes of the Divine Substance than modes under which our mind conceives the Divine Substance' (Underhill, *Mysticism*, 111, n.2).

²⁸ See David Walker, *God is a Sea: The Dynamics of Christian Living* (Homebush, NSW: St Paul's, 1977). The author gives a commentary on thirty images from the Christian spiritual tradition. Nine are images drawn from Underhill's writings.

²⁹ Johnson, *In Spirit and Truth*, 177.

³⁰ Johnson, *In Spirit and Truth*, 176.

³¹ Arthur Michael Ramsey, *An Era in Anglican Theology, From Gore to Temple: The Development of Anglican Theology between Lux Mundi and the Second World War, 1889-1939* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), 2, 183. See also Kevin Hogan, 'The Proximity of Doctrine: Underhill and Sayers on the Trinity,' *Anglican Theological Review* 78.2 (1996): 275-289.

reference to the Creed. She is concerned with Christian theology holding together the transcendence and immanence of God.³² Her fullest treatment of the Trinity as God's self-gift and personal revelation is found in her meditations on the Creed.³³ She desires to convey the close connection between the great doctrines of Christianity and that 'inner life' which is too often seen as a type of spiritual alternative to orthodox belief. The Christian creed, then, is not a cluster of concepts which are abstracted from human existence, but rather an account of reality itself. While it has various levels of truth its fullest meaning is disclosed when the believer goes beyond the statements to the Reality itself, and that Reality's 'mysterious self-giving to us.'³⁴

As the book's title suggests, for Underhill, the definitive quality of the Trinitarian God guiding any understanding of the Trinity is 'generous, out-flowing, self-giving love, Agape.'³⁵ God is fatherly, loving creator, creation and humankind are dependent yet essentially good, and creation is 'ongoing' especially in the journey towards holiness. The Incarnation is divine love disclosed in its redeeming and transforming action within creation and history.³⁶ The Spirit is seen less in historical terms and more as the 'here and now experience of an all-penetrating Divine Spirit' of the 'Absolute God acting, and bringing the whole Trinity into the soul'³⁷ guiding a person to continue the pattern of self-giving love.

This provides the template for Underhill's explicit use de Bérulle's schema in her spiritual teaching. It is within this framework that she explores the connection between the doctrine of the Trinity and the 'inner life.' By 1932 and later in 1937, Underhill seems to encapsulate in the pattern (Adoration, Adherence/ Communion, Cooperation) a trinitarian dynamic of Agape as *ecstasis* and does so in terms of three forms of intentionality (cognitive, affective, and conative). Unlike 1922, she does not make an explicit link with the three persons of the Godhead. That is assumed from her discussion in *The School of Charity*.

The first and instinctive response to God's self-revelation (God as transcendent and the Truth) is of 'dim and delighted wonder', leading to self-oblivious reverence before the beauty, cosmic splendor and otherness of God.³⁸ Allied to this is a sense of profound 'abasement', the feeling of 'utter difference in kind' between the creature and Creator.³⁹ This is her rendering of Bérulle's *anéantissement*. It is not a sense of self-loathing but a realization of our nothingness before God. It can be understood as receptivity to mystery in a form of ecstatic response. It is '[a] theocentric or Christocentric self-transcendence into the mystery of God, a kenotic movement of consciousness or of affectivity in which

³² She speaks of the three 'moments' in terms of solemn awe before the *numen*, loving response to the 'Divine Nature incarnate in Christ' and their completion in the experience of a 'Spirit of Love and Will' as a 'source of energy and also a personal influence.' She alludes to the immanent and economic Trinity when she speaks of '[T]he Spirit as it proceeds "from the unmanifest and manifest Godhead, the Father and the Son."' See 'God and Spirit' published in *Theology* in 1930 and included in Dana Greene (ed.), *Evelyn Underhill: Modern Guide to the Ancient Quest for the Holy* (Albany, NY: State University of NY Press, 1988), 182.

³³ Evelyn Underhill, *The School of Charity: Meditations on the Christian Creed* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1934)

³⁴ Underhill, *School of Charity*, 13, 15. See also Hogan, 'The Proximity of Doctrine,' 3.

³⁵ Underhill, *School of Charity*, 17.

³⁶ Underhill, *School of Charity*, 22.

³⁷ Underhill, *School of Charity*, 27, 29.

³⁸ Evelyn Underhill, *The Golden Sequence: A Fourfold Study of the Spiritual Life* (London: Methuen and Co., 1932), 160. This book offers a more developed treatment than is found in *Man and the Supernatural* in 1927.

³⁹ Underhill, *Golden Sequence*, 161.

one realizes God as the truth of one's being.⁴⁰ The affective momentum is self-transcending where adoration can never 'remain long a private ecstasy.'⁴¹ It enters into a new relation with creation with a sense of '(t)he breathless worship which creation offers its God.'⁴² It brings profound peace and tranquillity.

In the second moment, she reminds us that both thought and feeling must be touched by God and become transformed 'into great awe and great love.' Prayer of adoration passes 'almost insensibly into prayer of communion and self-offering.'⁴³ The God wholly 'Other' is simultaneously the God immanent and Love. Hence, the movement of adoration in turning toward God Infinite, 'deepens to the sacred wonder of communion, when it turns towards the God Intimate.'⁴⁴ Communion and love arouse us to personal response.

Thirdly, the soul animated by love and possessed by the Spirit, responds in a creative, expansive way. This is the presence of God Creative. The centrifugal thrust moves towards action such that the Divine will and purposes find a sympathetic response in a person's deliberative will. Through its prayer the soul 'enters, and is absorbed into, that ceaseless Divine action by which the created order is maintained and transformed.'⁴⁵

Within the Adoration/Communion/Cooperation schema, then, we find compressed a trinitarian understanding of the divine-human exchange. Like Bérulle, she sees its foundation as participation in the divine nature and its outcomes in the gradual transforming of mind, heart and will. Fully realized in Jesus, the perfect adorer, its complete expression is in praise which is essentially ecstatic and the 'final linguistic expression of selfless adoration.'⁴⁶ Communal worship is the most potent expression of our share in Jesus' adoration. The sacraments are central to the transforming process in the individual and in relationships.⁴⁷ Underhill's doxological spirituality continues that of Augustine and Bérulle. It is captured when she says that worship reaches a point of 'something so absolute, that the creature is lost in an act of praise which possesses, engulfs, transcends its very life.'⁴⁸

The ecstatic dynamic is personalized by attribution in one particular aspect of the Spirit's action underlined by Underhill, namely its outward-movement. She sees this expressed in the Gifts and Fruits of the Spirit. For Underhill, increasing identification with God entails a corresponding sensitivity to how the triune God sees, judges, responds and loves, through virtues – habits that must gradually develop (or rather be developed, given the increasing role of the Spirit).⁴⁹ They bring the impulse to be responsible as agents of the Spirit in domains that interact with each other.⁵⁰ This drive is at work in individuals but its primary context is creation then the Church (aspects very muted in traditional theology of the Gifts and the Fruits). In *Mysticism*, it is seen as the call to be 'an agent of the

⁴⁰ Michael J. Buckley, 'Seventeenth French Spirituality: Three Figures' in Louis Dupré & Don E. Saliers, *Christian Spirituality: Post-Reformation and Modern* (London: SCM, 1989), 66.

⁴¹ Underhill, *Golden Sequence*, 163.

⁴² Underhill, *Golden Sequence*, 163.

⁴³ Underhill, *Golden Sequence*, 170.

⁴⁴ Underhill, *Golden Sequence*, 170.

⁴⁵ Underhill, *Golden Sequence*, 183.

⁴⁶ Buckley, 'Seventeenth Century French Spirituality,' 49.

⁴⁷ Underhill fully investigates this in *Worship* (London: Nisbet, 1936).

⁴⁸ Underhill, *Golden Sequence*, 167.

⁴⁹ She explicitly uses the words '*habitus*,' 'permanent dispositions,' 'inclinations' (*Golden Sequence*, 79).

⁵⁰ Greene, *Evelyn Underhill: Modern Guide*, 188.

divine fecundity.⁵¹ In 1922, Underhill goes further. The soul's vitality is marked not by personal happiness or delight from union with God (e.g., in the spiritual marriage). What matters is the creative thrust, the centrifugal impetus of love, a 'divine fecundity' which is the 'goal of human transcendence.'⁵²

What is noteworthy is that, in both discussions, Underhill explicitly draws on the same text of Aquinas, namely, that in seeking the divine likeness, 'the last perfection to supervene upon a thing is its becoming the cause of other things' and, in 1936, its variant from Pascal.⁵³ This helps us appreciate Underhill's distinctive emphasis on the will (as conative) in the interaction of the Spirit and the responsive human spirit. Underhill's use of this text brings together three aspects. There is the creative impulse to love. Secondly, goodness has an inbuilt thrust to spread itself to other beings. Finally, sharing in the divine creative power and goodness is to be a cause of other expressions of goodness and love. Realizing the divine likeness, then, culminates in collaboration with God. Underhill finds two ways of expressing this. There is intercession in prayer, especially in the context of corporate worship. This is her focus of Cooperation in *The Golden Sequence*. Alternatively, in *The Spiritual Life* she underlines ethical responsibilities in social and political life.

Underhill does not offer a theology of the divine processions understood as the dynamic activities of knowing and loving, of divine self-understanding (Father) emanating in the Word (Son) and in turn this understanding overflows into delight and love (Spirit). Yet, at the experiential level she presents the same process in another form. In Underhill's three 'moments' of Adoration /Adherence/ Cooperation we can trace the trajectory of ecstasy and associated *kenosis* (self-emptying) from truth (cognitive), to love (affective), to action (conative) – namely a movement of self-transcendence.⁵⁴ In reality, she describes not only the divine engagement with and within us but the inner life of the Trinity. It may be expressed in terms of excess of energy (spilling over in *ecstasis*) or the auditory /sensate metaphor of harmonic reverberation. What binds these moments is affective knowing and responsiveness to the trinitarian presence and action prompting an overflowing resonance in the subject: in awe, delight, love, all under the direction of desire, finding their apogee in adoring praise.

Again, for Underhill, truth is 'found and felt, satisfying both heart and mind.'⁵⁵ Knowing and willing (as affective and deliberative) converge in so far as they entail being receptive and responsive to God as true (knowing), as loving and loveable (will as desire) as good (will as deliberative and acting). The emphasis here is on the object of these operations, namely God seen under a different aspect. This is in continuity with the tradition's understanding of *intellectus* found distilled, for instance, in Aquinas.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Underhill, *Mysticism*, 428.

⁵² Underhill, *The Life of the Spirit*, 44. Again, she is continuing an emphasis found also in Bérulle of the Spirit's unique mark as the movement towards fertility outside the inner life of the triune God. For a contemporary discussion of *ecstasis* and the Holy Spirit see Helen Bergin, 'The Holy Spirit as the "Ecstatic" God,' *Pacifica* 17.3 (2004): 268-281.

⁵³ *Summa contra Gentiles*, Bk 2, ch. 21 cited in Underhill, *Mysticism*, 428 and *The Life of the Spirit*, 44 (correctly as Bk 3, ch. 21). Also 'God, says Pascal, has established prayer, in order to communicate to His creatures the dignity of causality.' *The Golden Sequence*, 178.

⁵⁴ In which 'adoration is the root, communion the flower, intercessory action the fruit, of that divine-human love which binds in one the total life of prayer' (*The Golden Sequence*, 175).

⁵⁵ Underhill, *Life of the Spirit*, 6, 11.

⁵⁶ Commenting on contemplation as an act in which converge the affective or loving impulse and the intellectual or knowing impulse, Mark McIntosh cites Richard of St. Victor's definition of contemplation as a "free and clear vision of the mind fixed upon the manifestation of wisdom in suspended wonder." See Mark A. McIntosh, *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology* (Malden: Mass., 1998), 11. See also the

Finally, Greene notes that Underhill's work is characterized by "an at-oneness" with the subject, "a loving sight" which led to 'a discovery of the real secret of the thing.'⁵⁷ For her, the experience of God touches and changes thought, feeling and will. At times, Underhill emphasizes one or the other, either as a movement of the heart infused with love, or an intense focus on the 'most sublime object of thought' or a resolute, unflinching will despite doubts and forms of selfishness.⁵⁸ It prompts a chosen correspondence of the human spirit with the Infinite Spirit from which emerges an increasing attunement with the real, with the true, beautiful and the good.⁵⁹ This suggests an affective connaturality or an apprehension of values that has become habitual in one who possesses an instinctive appreciation of the truly good. Rather than 'faculties' or mental operations achieving and engaging with their object, it is rather a global awareness, the felt resonance of one's being, a blend of knowing and appreciation that is pervasive rather than precise.⁶⁰

Overall, Underhill uses her sources to highlight the interweaving threads making up this immediate knowledge. Her approach is consonant with the understanding of the 'heart' in the French school (and Scripture) as the core of the person or one's interiority. Knowing God, especially as revealed in Jesus, is to know his heart. It involves the whole person – intellect, affectivity and will.

4. OBSERVATIONS

Is there a Trinitarian structure underlying Underhill's view of spiritual transformation? The evidence suggests that the answer is a qualified 'yes.'

Underhill's intent is not to provide a comprehensive analytical explanation of the Trinity through the psychological model. She presents some basic theological markers and, like an impressionist artist, uses a cluster of images that serve as a theological backdrop to her work.⁶¹ Her concern is the process by which the Trinitarian presence shapes our knowing, affections and willing such that one grows in the divine likeness, namely, is spiritually transformed. In other words, she wants to probe the depths of meaning in Reality's 'mysterious self-giving to us'⁶² through its reverberations in the cognitive, affective and conative dimensions of consciousness.

Ironically, the more the three 'moments' of Adoration /Communion/ Cooperation are pondered by Underhill, the more their trinitarian substructure recedes into the background. This is mainly due to the way Underhill uses the psychological analogy. Her experiential, descriptive mode of discourse aligns her more with the intuitive, subjective, interior approach of Augustine. Her recourse to philosophical concepts or psychological

discussion of Aquinas on ecstasy and understanding in Rowan Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge: Christian Spirituality from the New Testament to St. John of the Cross* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1979), 122-130.

⁵⁷ Evelyn Underhill, 'Education and the Spirit of Worship,' *The Mount of Purification* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1960), 320-1, cited in Greene, *Evelyn Underhill, Artist*, 121.

⁵⁸ Underhill, *Mysticism*, 50.

⁵⁹ Underhill, *The Spiritual Life*, 43, 29, 34.

⁶⁰ Egan describes it as 'a trans-conceptual loving knowledge engendered by God at the fine point of the human spirit, prior to its division into intellect and will.' Harvey D. Egan, SJ, 'Negative Way' in Michael Downey (Ed.), *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 704.

⁶¹ For instance, the Triune God as Light/Love/Life or the human person made in the divine 'image' who is called to actualize this capacity and to grow into the divine 'likeness' is captured in two images: the two story house and the chalet in the mountains.

⁶² Underhill, *School of Charity*, 13, 15.

models is to support and consolidate her main task. Concentrating on constitutive and existential meaning has its own limits. It is at the expense of the cognitive and explicative realm. When Underhill draws on someone like Aquinas whose historical context and philosophical concerns are in such contrast with hers, Johnson, notes, she is still able to so use the intuitive and poetic mode to 'inform the rational, logical and doctrinal.'⁶³

Three significant reservations emerge from our considerations. We have noted that the trinitarian structure of her spirituality approached experientially by Underhill in order to gain its 'fullest meaning', is not fully explained in terms of a theoretical framework. Consequently, in terms of Ecclesiology she fails to integrate adequately the relationship of the Spirit and Christ. Again, while Christ embodies the Spirit of love, one is left with the impression that Christ is more an external model than the one who mediates the Spirit's presence primarily in the Church. Finally, her a-historical approach to the basic unity of all mystical experience overlooks the socio-historical context of individual mystics and of their various articulations of the mystical experience.

From a positive angle, her understanding of the Spirit as the Spirit of God has its roots more in Eastern Christian thought rather than in the Western tradition's approach to the Spirit as the Spirit of Christ.⁶⁴ Her over-arching model of gift/response implies the triune God who is a transforming presence rather than a distant object of belief and theological analysis. She is insistent that the mystic way and spirituality are not just knowledge but a life-long transformation of the whole person. More importantly, *theosis* or divinization for Underhill embraces not just the human creature but creation itself. Again, with Bernard Häring she continues Bérulle's work in giving priority to adoration as the radical experience of the spiritual life and of Christianity. Finally, she anticipates later theological explorations of the experience of grace in other religious traditions and even amongst those without religious faith who seek what is true and good in sincerity of heart.

Even though Underhill's uses an artistic, intuitive and interior methodology, overall her focus appears to be less on the subject and more on the object of spiritual awareness. Attention is fixed on God and the experience of mystery rather than on the self and the mystery of experience. Rather than the self understood as a self-gazing 'inwardness,' it is the self in interactive relationship with the 'Other' and others. Interiority is most properly realized, as her mediaeval forebears certainly appreciated, in the context of relationship.⁶⁵ This is evident in her careful calibrations of the effects of the trinitarian presence on consciousness in two ways.

Firstly, the contemplative act is one of being grasped by a divine self-disclosure, a wisdom that shapes consciousness, most particularly through the affective responses and reverberations that are evoked. It brings about a personal unity through conversion that transforms and widens our horizon about life, values and responsibilities.⁶⁶ For Underhill, 'the experience of Holiness itself demands and brings forth conversion, the felt-need to be like what was experienced.'⁶⁷ The human person as *capax dei* is both the point of

⁶³ Johnson, *In Spirit and Truth*, 176.

⁶⁴ Johnson, *In Spirit and Truth*, 257.

⁶⁵ McIntosh, *Mystical Theology*, 69.

⁶⁶ Underhill, *The Spiritual Life*, 44.

⁶⁷ Harvey D. Egan, *What are They Saying about Mysticism* (NJ: Ramsey, 1982), 41.

departure and the goal of the spiritual life.⁶⁸ Growth in wisdom is an increasing availability to God, not so much in knowing and loving God but in “being *known and loved* by God.”⁶⁹

Secondly, Underhill’s sensitivity to intra-psychic processes and to the variations in, and interconnections between, specific mental activities enables her to bring a level of freshness to the ‘faculty’ model she adopts. She anticipates contemporary probing of emotional intelligence and religious experience by authors such as Mark Wynn.⁷⁰ Underhill’s blend of knowing, feeling and willing and her adumbrations of affective connaturality suggest a natural and continuous relationship between the ethical and mystical dimensions of Christian life. Tallon reminds us that [T]he mystical can fail to make an ethical difference if there is no change of heart; this could not be true were the ethical and mystical but operations of head and heart as separate faculties rather than degrees of actualization of one continuum. Affective connaturality applies to both the ethical and mystical because of their deeper unity.⁷¹

While these operations complete and interpenetrate each other, their basic thrust is centrifugal. Consistently, in Underhill, there is a passive and active pole. It is captured in prepositions. In each moment the subject is affected *by* and responds *to* an aspect of God: knowledge of God as true and beautiful leads to awe and adoration; communion with God prompts love and surrender; cooperation impels action about or for something good. Underhill reminds us that, as Williams observes, the human subject, in its contemplative understanding, is both receptive and responsive.⁷² The responsive nature of consciousness points both to its basic intentionality and its underlying relationality in the subject and in one’s world.

In some ways, Underhill’s spotlight on existential states of consciousness, looks towards Raimon Panikkar’s attempt to relate three different forms of spirituality in world religions to three concepts of the divine in the light of the Trinity (transcendent [Father], personal [Word], immanent [Spirit]). Hence, he suggests a dimension of spirituality that is silent, self-emptying and apophatic (as in Buddhist experience of nirvana); a personal dimension, as expressed in the person of the Son in the Christian tradition with its roots in Judaism; the immanent aspect found in Hinduism of undifferentiated union with the Absolute.⁷³ While there is both overlap and difference between Panikkar and Underhill, they share an approach to world religions and interfaith dialogue by relating their understanding of the divine and their associated spirituality to ‘the Christian experience of the three persons of the Trinity.’⁷⁴ Is Underhill’s preoccupation with the dynamics of affective, immediate cognition as primordial in universal spiritual experience a groping for what is, for Panikkar, the ‘translogical realm of the heart’, that space of human interconnection beyond concepts and language?

⁶⁸ “For growth in the spiritual life consists solely in an increase of God and decrease of self; becoming at its term a pure capacity for Him’ Underhill, *The Golden Sequence*, 82.

⁶⁹ McIntosh, *Mystical Theology*, 71, emphasis in original text.

⁷⁰ Mark R. Wynn, *Emotional Experience and Religious Understanding: Integrating Perception, Conception and Feeling* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁷¹ Andrew Tallon, ‘The Heart in Rahner’s Philosophy of Mysticism,’ *Theological Studies* 52 (1992): 708.

⁷² Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge*, 122-130.

⁷³ Hunt, *Trinity*, 151. Apophaticism is related to the Father, to that aspect of God that is truly transcendent, infinite and before who we are reduced to silence. Personalism is embodied in the Son who is the expression of the Father, characterized by speech rather than silence. Divine immanence is realized in the Spirit who brings a consciousness that one is ‘enveloped in, known and loved by the mystery of reality’ Hunt, *Trinity*, 152-153.

⁷⁴ Hunt, *Trinity*, 152.

Finally, Underhill's approach to the Spirit with its suggestion of a trinitarian context and as the impulse towards creative action has three implications. It anticipates recent theology's recovery of the doctrine of the Trinity as an underpinning not solely for God discourse but also for the 'desire for God.'⁷⁵

Second, relationality has a larger place in our contemporary thinking about God. Like any concept, it can imprison rather than free us to explore the depths of trinitarian theology. Sheldrake points to authors such as Jean-Luc Marion who remind us that God, who is Love, is a God of 'ecstasy' for whom love is essentially 'an outpouring that is pure gift.'⁷⁶ The spiritual vision of Underhill is built on this process and its spiritual and psychic outcomes.

Finally, Underhill is a conduit of the French school's effort to retrieve the unity between spirituality and theology if one is to do justice to the divine-human relationship. The creative, responsive and other-directed impulse of the Spirit captured, for Underhill, in Cooperation places her in a better position to integrate moral responsibility with her spirituality. It is inherently a spiritual-moral vision.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that, carefully understood, there is truth in the statement that beneath the Spirit's animation and guidance of the spiritual life in Evelyn Underhill's work we can detect a trinitarian pulse. Growth into the divine likeness through being receptive and responsive to God as Spirit is realized through the interplay of the cognitive, affective and conative dimensions of human existence. For Underhill, everything is driven by the pull and tug of desire. She starts not with the God of friendship but the God of wonder. We are caught up in a tantalizing dance with a God now distant, now close, a God now inscrutable, now intimate. In completing this article I stumbled across a review of Sirl Hustvedt's *A Plea for Eros*. Through one of her characters, she suggests that there is a kind of 'awed separateness' necessary to maintain desire. It resonates with what Evelyn Underhill is trying to say about God and humanity in the spiritual quest.

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⁷⁵ Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality and Theology: Christian Living and the Doctrine of God* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1998), 82. Emphasis in original.

⁷⁶ Sheldrake, *Spirituality and Theology*, 80.