

Spirituality as a Dimension of Knowledge Between Reason and Revelation

Cristian Vasile Petcu

*Associate Professor, PhD, Ovidius University of Constanța, Romania
Associate Member, Academy of Romanian Scientists, cv.petcu@yahoo.com*

Abstract: This study proposes a reconceptualization of knowledge as a multimodal phenomenon, in which spirituality functions as an epistemic dimension that cannot be reduced to demonstrative logic or empirical observation. The central argument is that reason and revelation are not mutually exclusive, but operate synergistically in distinct regimes of truth: reason provides criteria of coherence, universality, and public justification, while revelation functions as an opening to ultimate meaning, corresponding to an experience of transcendence mediated by traditions, symbols, and practices. Through an integrative methodology—which includes frameworks from classical and contemporary epistemology, hermeneutics, phenomenology, religious studies, as well as case studies—we show that "knowing" in the spiritual horizon presupposes a grammar of intellectual virtues, an interpretive exercise, and historical verification through fruition in personal and community life. The conclusion supports the possibility of an expanded rationality, capable of including revealed truths without abdicating the demands of criticism, prudence, and interdisciplinary dialogue.

Keywords: Reason, Revelation, Spirituality, Hermeneutics, Religious Experience, Epistemology

1. Introduction

The question of the relationship between reason and revelation has shaped one of the most persistent tensions in European culture. From Greek philosophy to patristic theology (Rotaru, 2005, pp. 165-209), from the Enlightenment to contemporary phenomenology, the question of whether and how the "absolute" can be known has remained open. Mathematical truth seems to be enclosed in demonstration; scientific truth in corroboration and replicability; ethical truth in practical deliberation. But religious or spiritual truth—which claims to be at once personal, transformative, and universal—how can it be legitimized? Must it be subsumed to reason, or does it transcend its usual criteria? Is revelation anything other than a private, incommunicable, and therefore inepistemic event? Or, on the contrary, does it introduce another grammar of knowledge, both demanding and publicly accessible through testimony, tradition, and formative practices? (Vasile, 2014, pp. 837-842).

In this paper, we will work with three related theses. First: spirituality, as a path of meaning oriented toward transcendence, is a practice of knowledge, not just a space of emotions or ethics. Second: reason, in its multiple forms (deductive, inductive, abductive, practical, hermeneutic), provides the criteria necessary for any claim to truth, including in religion. Third: revelation—natural or historical—is a source of knowledge when integrated into its own system of verification: through internal coherence, moral consonance, existential fecundity, plausibility within the horizon of reason, and intersubjective confirmation through tradition and convergent experiences.

Methodologically, the text combines conceptual analysis (sections I-III) with a mapping of dialogical models between science, philosophy, and theology (section IV), the proposal of an "epistemology of spiritual virtues" (section V), the formulation of criteria for discernment (section VI), and the presentation of case studies (section VII). Finally, we discuss the practical implications for education, public life, and moral health (section IX) and conclude with a summary (section X).

2. Epistemological framework: What does "to know" mean?

2.1. Truth, justification, justified true faith

Classical epistemology defined knowledge as “justified true belief” (Shamshiri, 2016, p. 38). Later, Gettier-type criticisms showed that justification and truth can coexist accidentally, without conferring knowledge proper. Beyond technical refinements, the triad remains useful: (a) truth as adequacy to reality, (b) justification as reason to believe, (c) belief as act of the subject. Spirituality becomes relevant precisely here: it proposes particular regimes of justification (experience, tradition, life transformation) and a conception of truth that involves the whole person – intellect, will, affects – without relativizing the requirement of truth.

2.2. Rationality: forms and limits

Reason is not monolithic. It includes demonstrative rationality (mathematics), inductive and statistical inference (natural sciences), abduction or inference to the best explanation (historical and social sciences), as well as practical rationality (ethics, law). In addition, there is a hermeneutic rationality, which operates with the understanding of meaning, not just with the calculation of validity. Each form has criteria for success and limits: deductive guarantees validity, but says nothing about the real except to the extent that the premised propositions are true; inductive brings probabilities, not certainties; hermeneutics does justice to meaning, but requires traditions and contexts of interpretation. Thus, as Mihai Stelian Rusu notes, “this commonality of reason constitutes the basis on which inter-cultural understanding is possible” (Rusu, 2013, p. 63).

2.3. Revelation: source or object of knowledge?

The term “revelation” designates both an event (a self-communication of ultimate meaning) and a content (truths communicated). In monotheistic traditions, revelation has a dual nature: natural (accessible from contemplation of the world) and historical (events, persons, texts). “The central idea is that there is an epistemology of religion as well, an epistemology of revealed religion [...] and that that epistemology as epistemology is by no means secondary to scientific epistemology; rather, the contrary is true” (Szakolczai, 2024, p. 1). Epistemically, revelation can function as a source if it becomes “public” through credible transmission and if it has criteria for discernment (section VI). Otherwise, it remains a private experience, existentially relevant, but cognitively untransferable.

3. Reason: between autonomy and hospitality to transcendence

3.1. The Enlightenment and the Autonomy of Reason

The Enlightenment established the ideal of the autonomy of reason: the critical subject, capable of bracketing traditions, suspending authority, and demanding proof. This legacy is indispensable; without it, any revelatory claim risks becoming symbolic despotism. However, autonomy should not be confused with self-sufficiency. Critical reason can broaden its scope without denying its principles.

3.2. Kant: the limits of knowledge and practical reason

Kant distinguishes between phenomenon and thing-in-itself, limiting theoretical knowledge to possible experience, but maintaining the ideas of reason (God, freedom, immortality) as “postulates” of practical reason. In this framework, spiritual knowledge cannot be “science” in the strict sense, but it can be reasonable as a practical orientation and as a horizon of meaning. Ethics becomes the access path: respect for the moral law indicates freedom, and the idea of the highest good demands an order of meaning that goes beyond the phenomenal. As Kant writes, “The only objects which can be given to us immediately are phenomena [...] not things in themselves, but representations only” (Kant, 1922, pp. 89-90).

3.3. Hermeneutics

Gadamer's hermeneutics emphasizes that understanding takes place in traditions and prejudices (in a positive sense: pre-judgments), and truth is given in the "fusion of horizons." Applied to spirituality, this means that the experience of transcendence is describable without reductionism, but intelligible only in symbolic and communal frameworks. As Gadamer notes, "A horizon is not a rigid boundary, but something that moves with one and invites one to advance further" (Gadamer, 2001, p.189).

3.4. Expanded rationality

We propose the notion of "extended rationality": a set of critical-reflective practices capable of including and evaluating truth claims that cannot be reduced to the measurable. It requires (a) phenomenological openness, (b) conceptual discipline, (c) public criteria of validation (coherence, moral consonance, fecundity, plausibility), and (d) inter-disciplinary dialogue.

4. Revelation: types, language, preliminary criteria

4.1. General and special revelation

Theological traditions distinguish general revelation (the signature of meaning in the created order) from special revelation (events, persons, and texts that focus the transcendental message). In both cases, transmission requires witness, memory, and interpretation. We do not "see" ultimate truth directly; we "hear" it mediated by languages.

4.2. Symbolic language and the "epiphany of the sacred"

Mircea Eliade shows (Eliade, 2000, pp. 13-14) that the sacred manifests itself in "hierophanies" – events, objects, spaces – which become symbols of a reality of another order. The symbol is not an ornament, but a mode of presence. From an epistemic perspective, the symbol requires a grammar: it must be interpreted within tradition, otherwise it becomes arbitrary. Spiritual knowledge therefore requires symbolic literacy.

4.3. Revelation and history

Historical revelation addresses communities, produces texts, institutes rituals and life models. Its credibility is judged historically (coherence of witnesses, transmission of the text), existentially (transformation of life) and theoretically (internal coherence of doctrine).

5. Models of the reason–revelation relationship

5.1. The conflict model

In the conflict paradigm, reason and revelation are seen as rivals: either science or faith. The model is reductive; historically, many moments of epistemic advance have occurred from the cooperation of the two (for example, the birth of modern science in a Christian context). "Scientific materialism is at the opposite end of the theological spectrum from biblical literalism. But they [...] both seek knowledge with a sure foundation—that of logic and sense data, in the one case, that of infallible scripture, in the other. They both claim that science and theology make rival literal statements about the same domain, the history of nature, so that one must choose between them" (Barbour, 1997, p. 78).

5.2. Independence and complementarity

The independence model claims that science and theology have different domains ("non-overlapping magisteria"): science asks "how?", religion asks "why?" Or, more nuanced, complementarity: different visions of the same reality, without canceling each other out. "If science and religion were totally independent, the possibility of conflict would be avoided, but the possibility of constructive dialogue and mutual enrichment would also be ruled out. We do not

experience life as neatly divided into separate compartments; we experience it in wholeness and interconnectedness before we develop particular disciplines to study different aspects of it" (Barbour, 1997, p. 89).

5.3. Dialogue and integration

Dialogue models seek areas of intersection: cosmology and theology (contingency of natural laws), evolutionary biology and teleology (directionality), neuroscience and philosophy of mind (consciousness). Integrative models propose common frameworks (e.g., "levels of the real" or "two paths to truth"). "Dialogue starts from general characteristics of science or of nature rather than from particular scientific theories such as those invoked by proponents of integration" (Barbour, 1997, p. 90).

6. Spiritual knowledge as an "epistemic virtue"

6.1. Intellectual virtues

The epistemology of virtues interprets knowledge as the result of the exercise of stable traits: attention, honesty, intellectual courage, prudence, humility, love of truth. In the spiritual register, virtues also include discernment, patience, inner listening, and memory of tradition (Rotaru, 2024, pp. 301-318).

6.2. Newman: rational ascent

John Henry Newman distinguishes between "assent" and "inference": people adhere to truth not just through syllogisms, but through a "grammar of assent" involving persons, analogies, convergences of probabilities. This paradigm illuminates how belief can be rational without being reducible to demonstration. "Here then we have two modes of thought, both using the same words, both having one origin, yet with nothing in common in their results. The information of sense and sensation is the initial basis of both of them; but in the one we take hold of objects from within them, and in the other we view them from without them" (Newman, 1874, p. 33).

6.3. Practical reason and the love of truth

Love of truth is the cardinal virtue of expanded rationality: it protects against self-deception, spiritual narcissism, and fanaticism. Without it, revelation becomes a pretext for the will to power; with it, it becomes a "peaceful light" that corrects and converts.

7. Integrative Methodology: Criteria For Discerning Revelation

We propose four correlated criteria, not reducible to one another:

1. *Internal coherence*: the logical unity of the message and the compatibility of its elements with well-established truths (without claiming reduction to them).
2. *Moral consonance*: not every "revelation" that justifies the degradation of human dignity can be authentic. Spiritual truth nourishes virtue, not cruelty.
3. *Existential fecundity*: over time, truth proves fruitful: it establishes communion, produces beauty and justice, heals, structures a good life.
4. *Plausibility in the horizon of reason*: without reducing transcendence to immanence, the message is intelligible and can be publicly defended through argument, analogy, and testimony.

These criteria are dynamic: each can correct the excesses of the others. Coherence, without moral consonance, can legitimize ideologies; fecundity, without coherence, can only be a temporary pragmatic effect; Plausibility, without experience, risks remaining empty theory.

8. Case studies

8.1. *Mystical experience: between the ineffable and the intelligible*

Mystical traditions, from the Hesychast Fathers to Meister Eckhart, describe a union-type knowledge ("mystical ideas" Walshe, 2009, p. 8) that is not anti-rational, but trans-rational. The ineffable does not mean absurd; it means that conceptual language is surpassed by the fullness experienced. Hermeneutically, community offers "negative criteria": peace, humility, obedience, charity – signs of authenticity; their opposite indicates slippage. Hesychast discernment: in the Eastern tradition, the enlightenment of the mind (*nous*) is achieved through purification (*katharsis*) and contemplation (*theoria*). Knowledge here is the result of an asceticism of attention, not a chaotic ecstatic state. The "method" is rigorous: rhythm of breathing, prayer, super-vigilance, submission to guidance. In contemporary language, we would say it is a phenomenological discipline of attention.

8.2. *Cosmology and meaning: the Lemaître case*

Georges Lemaître (Lemaître, 1931, p.706), a physicist and priest, formulated the hypothesis of the "primordial atom" (Big Bang). Far from theologically "proving" creation, the model shows that the universe has a finely structured physical history, the source of questions about contingency and the order of laws. Theologically, creation is not an "event in time" reducible to the cosmological beginning, but transcends time; however, the convergence between the mathematical rationality of the cosmos and its intelligibility remains significant in the horizon of meaning.

8.3. *Justification of Faith: From Public Records to Basic Beliefs*

In the analytic tradition, Alvin Plantinga has argued that certain religious beliefs can be "properly basic" when they arise under healthy cognitive conditions and are produced by truth-oriented faculties. The model does not absolve rational responsibility; on the contrary, it invites the evaluation of "defeaters": if serious contrary data emerge, the belief must be reevaluated. Thus, the spiritual space becomes a field of "warrant" and critical dialogue, not an anti-rational refuge. "The basic problem is that, given our actual intellectual and spiritual situation, it simply isn't possible to avoid serious disagreement with others. If some people believe *p* and others believe something *q* incompatible with *p*, there is no way in which we can avoid serious disagreement" (Plantinga, 2000, p.75).

8.4. *The Psychology of Religion: James and Existential Pragmatism*

William James analyzed the "varieties of religious experience", showing that the fruits (consolation, moral energy, life reform) can function as indicators of authenticity. This criterion is not sufficient (ideologies also produce "fruits"), but, correlated with moral coherence and consonance, it becomes relevant: spiritual knowledge is not purely theoretical; it is recognized in the metamorphosis of the person and in the capacity to sustain hope without illusion. As James notes, "the more complex ways of experiencing religion are new manners of producing happiness, wonderful inner paths to a supernatural kind of happiness, when the first gift of natural existence is unhappy, as it so often proves itself to be" (James, 2009, p. 62).

8.5. *Biblical hermeneutics (example of method)*

A textual tradition – for example, the biblical corpus – requires a reading on levels: literal, theological, ethical, symbolic. The historical-critical requirements (author, literary genre, context) do not oppose spiritual reading, but purify it of projections. In addition, the rule of faith (*regula fidei*) functions as a principle of coherence: private interpretation is tested in communion. Again, we find our criteria: coherence, consonance, fecundity, plausibility.

9. Comparative Perspectives: East And West, Apophatic And Cataphatic

9.1. Apophatism

Apophatic theology claims that we can say more about the Absolute “what is not” than “what is”. This protects transcendence and prevents the idolization of concepts. In the epistemic register, apophaticism educates a humble rationality: ultimate truth remains unexhausted; our language is analogical, not univocal. Accordingly, “apophaticism is the name of that theology which is done against the background of human ignorance of the nature of God” (Turner, 1955, p. 19).

9.2. Advaita and non-duality

In the Advaita Vedanta tradition, spiritual knowledge culminates in the realization of non-duality: the identity of Atman and Brahman. The experience is mediated by asceticism, meditation, and the Guru-śāstra-tradition. Interestingly, the justification is twofold: scriptural (*śruti*) and experiential (*anubhava*). Here, the criterion of coherence and fecundity (freedom from attachments, compassion) is central, similar to other traditions.

9.3. Buddhism and the epistemology of compassion

Buddhism proposes a liberating knowledge: the identification of the causes of suffering and the path to its cessation. Validation is pragmatic: “come and see” (*ehipassiko*). The criteria are experiential (*meditation*), intersubjective (*sangha*), ethical (*precepts*). A model is emerging in which contemplative rationality and the revelation of tradition work together. “The teaching of the Buddha is qualified as *ehi-passika*, inviting you to ‘come and see’, but not to come and believe” (Rahula, 1974, p. 9).

9.4. Convergences and tensions

Convergences appear in epistemic virtues (attention, compassion, discipline), tensions in ontology (personal vs. impersonal), soteriology (grace vs. effort), the language of the sacred (historical vs. non-historical). Beyond the differences, the idea remains that spirituality, wherever it appears, is also a practice of knowledge – it orders the mind, shapes perception and intention, and verifies through fruits.

10. Practical implications

10.1. Education

Integral education should include the formation of epistemic virtues: attention, intellectual courage, dialogue, prudence in judgments, symbolic sensitivity. A curriculum of "broad rationality" can integrate sciences, arts, philosophy and religious traditions, without confusion of fields, but in critical interaction.

10.2. Public ethics

Public discourse gains when it recognizes that people operate with “comprehensive doctrines.” Broad rationality allows for the translation of spiritual beliefs into public arguments without completely secularizing or absolutizing them. A culture of epistemic respect reduces polarization.

10.3. Mental and spiritual health

Contemplative practices (prayer, meditation, examination of conscience) have documented effects on attention and affective regulation; integrated into ethical and community frameworks, they function as “hygiene of meaning.” Spiritual knowledge contributes to resilience, avoiding both sentimentality and cynicism. “Contemplative practices emphasize self-awareness, self-regulation, and/or self-inquiry to enact a process of well-being” (Rich et al., 2022, p.2).

10.4. Leadership and institutional discernment

A "contemplative" leadership cultivates the capacity to suspend the reactive impulse, to listen, to judge in light of the common good. In epistemic terms, organizations can learn cognitive virtues (transparency, learning from mistakes, dialogue) that shape a culture of discernment.

11. Conclusions

I have argued that spirituality is a dimension of knowledge when understood as the exercise of intellectual virtues, as a hermeneutics of the symbol and as a historical verification of truth through fruits. Reason, far from being annulled, is broadened: it becomes hospitable to transcendence, without abandoning its critical criteria. Revelation, far from being closed in private, becomes communicable through testimony, tradition and formative practices. The proposed criteria – coherence, moral consonance, fecundity, plausibility – configure a method of discernment capable of avoiding both credulity and reductionism. In this horizon, spiritual knowledge is not an annex of the affects, but a mode of truth that engages our whole person and orients us towards the common good.

12. Major objections and responses

12.1. Scientism (or hard naturalism)

Scientism asserts that only natural science produces authentic knowledge. This thesis is self-contradictory, since it is not itself a result of experimental science, but a philosophical choice. Furthermore, the history of science attests to the role of pre-theoretical beliefs (e.g., intelligibility and order of the world) as premises of inquiry—beliefs that are not "results" of science, but conditions of its possibility.

12.2. Fideism

At the opposite pole of scientism, fideism claims that revelation nullifies reason. In the major traditions, faith is not a diversion of reason, but a broadening of its horizons through trust in a personal Truth. Even in strongly existential authors, faith implies a discipline of discernment and responsibility.

12.3. Relativism and religious pluralism

Religious pluralism (Vasile, 2017, pp. 67-77), correct in its sociological observation of diversity, becomes relativism when it concludes that all claims to truth are equivalent. Our model of "extended rationality" does not postulate a homogenization of traditions, but proposes public criteria—coherence, moral consonance, fecundity, plausibility—by which claims can be evaluated without suppressing difference.

12.4. Evolutionary arguments and trust in reason

If our cognitive faculties arose through natural selection, does it follow that they are only survival-oriented, not truth-oriented? An evolutionary objection "against" religious knowledge strikes, in fact, at all beliefs; in its strong form, it is self-refuting. There is a family of responses that show the compatibility of evolution and truth-orientedness, as well as the fact that strict naturalism has difficulty guaranteeing global trust in reason.

12.5. Neuroscientific reductionisms

Neuroscience data on the neural correlates of religious experiences do not exhaustively "explain" their content, just as identifying the neural correlates of logic does not invalidate mathematics. A mature epistemology distinguishes between lower-level explanation and higher-level normative justification of truth.

12.6. The problem of evil

The presence of evil constitutes the classic objection to the revelation of a good God. Serious responses combine (a) a philosophical theodicy, (b) a hermeneutics of suffering that seeks meaning without denying tragedy, and (c) a practice of compassion as an existential "verification" of truth.

13. Methods and metrics for validating spiritual knowledge

13.1. Methodological triangulation

We propose a triangulation between (a) phenomenological description of experiences, (b) hermeneutic analysis within the framework of tradition, and (c) pragmatic-ethical evaluation of the "fruits." This approach, also common in the social sciences, reduces biases and allows for mutual corrections.

13.2. Existential pragmatism

The validity of a spiritual path is also investigated through its effects on life: clarification of intention, increased compassion, inner order, courage for the truth. A well-tempered pragmatism does not confuse "what works" with "what is true", but treats fecundity as a significant epistemic clue.

13.3. Inter-subjective validation

Contemplative practices can be subject to intersubjective validation: common protocols, convergent descriptions, negative criteria (e.g., avoidance of self-deception, verification with mentors). Initiatives such as neurophenomenology show the potential for a fine-grained dialogue between first-person data and third-person measurements. "Perception is not simply embedded within and constrained by the surrounding world; it also contributes to the enactment of this surrounding world" (Varela, 1991/2017, p. 174).

13.4. Public transparency

Spiritual claims that have social implications must be articulated in public language, understandable to those who do not share the presuppositions of the tradition (Vasile, 2016, pp. 258-262). The deliberative model requires responsible translation of motivations, without loss of identity.

14. Additional case studies

14.1. Contemplative neuroscience and "disciplined attention"

Contemporary research indicates measurable changes in attention and self-regulation in practitioners of meditation and contemplative prayer. Interpretation of these results should be done with caution: the effects do not "prove" theological content, but they support the thesis that spirituality operates as a cognitive discipline with replicable benefits. Important critics warn against the neuro-hype, calling for robust methodologies and replicability. "Most of the findings have not yet been replicated. Many researchers are enthusiastic meditators themselves. Although their insider perspective may be valuable for a deep understanding of meditation, these researchers must ensure that they take a critical view of study outcomes" (Tang, Hölzel, Posner, 2015, p.1).

14.2. Spiritual discernment in the ethics of technologies (AI)

In the design of algorithmic systems, notions such as prudence, epistemic humility, and love of truth can be translated into practices: documentation of datasets, independent audits, anti-hallucination protocols, the right to challenge. A "virtue ethic" complements rule-based frameworks and technical metrics. "Compliance is necessary but insufficient to steer society in

the right direction. Because digital regulation indicates what the legal and illegal moves in the game are, so to speak, but it says nothing about what the good and best moves could be to win the game—that is, to have a better society” (Floridi, 2018, p. 4).

14.3. Person-centered care

Integrating chaplaincy and spiritual practices into healthcare shows benefits for resilience, meaning, and quality of life, when autonomy and plurality of beliefs are respected.

14.4. Contemplative pedagogy

Introducing mindfulness exercises into education—reflective journaling, slow reading, moments of silence—improves concentration and respectful dialogue. These practices can be assessed with standard educational tools and integrated into a secular curriculum.

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