

# To Live Is Not Enough: Integration – The Task of the Authentically Human

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## Abstract

In today's world of mechanization, unbridled intellectualism, and a focus on rational knowing, there is a need to recapture the primordial sense of what it means to be human – that is, the worth of the totality of the individual and not just his or her function or role within some complex structure that does not recognize each person's uniqueness or individuality. This article suggests that the movement toward this rediscovery of the primordial worth of the human individual would be helped by a rediscovery that the human person is called to be alive as a unified whole, a being who needs to be integrated with all aspects of his or her self, and not just those parts which are functional in the interests of a production-oriented culture.

*Keywords:* Self-integration, Authenticity, Transactional Communities, Transformational Communities

## Introduction

Twenty-first-century humanity has suffered deeply from the focus on functionalism, abstraction, and scientific objectification of the human person and, as such, there is a need to address this critical issue (Kavanaugh 1990:23-25). The truth of the human self is his or her integrated self. The integrated self takes seriously all levels of what it means to be human. Thus human integration is concerned with the spiritual, the psychic/mind and the physical components of the self such that they are all functioning together in a harmonious whole

(Helminiak, 1996, 204). The rediscovery of this truth would help counterbalance the excesses mentioned above.

My proposal is to set forth some reflections concerning various aspects of the integrative process. The presentation is not meant to be an exhaustive or technical exposition of the subject, but rather a critical practical reflection on experience-*as*-experience – the object of study in several of the subject areas in the human sciences but, in particular, Christian spirituality (Perrin, 2007, 47-48).

The point of departure for my reflection is the following: a person's greatest obligation as an individual is to travel the pathway of authenticity, to be dynamically alive and present to the totality of who one is, and to live this out within the environment within which one finds oneself. Of necessity, this environment will engage multiple communities – some more significant than others – since the journey of integration is never achieved alone, but always with others.

Some of these communities might be faith-based, while others may not. The hoped-for outcome with the engagement of any community is the pathway of authenticity achieved in and through self-integration. Being attentive in one's life to the knowledge gained, being intelligent in the use of ideas, being reasonable in the way knowledge is used, and being responsible with the values you embrace all lead to self-integration in the interaction with others in community (Lonergan, 1977).

The individual is called to integrate all levels of one's person to achieve the fullness one is called to in interpersonal relationships, but the converse is also true: interpersonal relationships contribute to and build self-integration. One's relationships with others and the quality of those relationships will appropriately reflect an interdependence which calls the other into life at all levels of his or her being in a similar way. This dialectic exposes the necessity of a dynamic relationship with the transcendent elements of one's existence, that is, a call to something more beyond one's personal horizon of desiring and acting (Perrin 2021:7-14). Ultimately, for the Christian, God is the transcendent horizon against which all being, acting, and loving takes place (Lonergan, 1971, 104-105).

### **Integration: Various Factors and Aspects**

The possibility for integration at all levels of one's person is spiritual and developmental: we are continually faced with the task of bringing into fullness who we are called to be or who we envision ourselves to

be (Jastrzębski, 2023, 123). This journey takes place at the intersection of our intellectual, spiritual, affective, sexual, conscious, unconscious, social, religious, cultural, corporal, and other levels. This is a continuous process of maturation – of integration and self-acceptance (Helminiak, 1987, 29-43). The process is not linear. It may have setbacks or even stall. This process affects all areas of our life: intrapersonal as well as interpersonal and therefore the importance of attending to this aspect of what it means to be human.

This process of integration is existential. We are free human beings, but we are also accountable and responsible. For example, it takes place within the context of time, where I live, who I live with, my socio-economic status, and my ethnicity. All these factors play out against the backdrop of responsibilities and accountabilities of life and its propensity to throw the unexpected and the unwanted into our carefully made plans. This provokes questions of meaning and “What’s life all about?”

This process of integration is heavily affected by what kind of parents I had and what kind of influence they exerted upon me when I was a child. Did I have brothers and sisters with whom I could safely try out different aspects of me and experiment with who I was/am becoming? Did I have loving parents who accepted me when I made mistakes and rejoiced with me when there was reason to celebrate? Was there an environment outside the home where I could experience a multiplicity of behaviors and people that was perhaps radically different from a homogeneous home environment, such that my horizons were stretched and expanded?

The process of integration depends on what one already must work with. There is a givenness at work in the journey of integration. I cannot go back and change my past or wish away what was for a more idyllic story. Given my history and all the factors which were or were not under my control, I am still left with what was. Although new interpretations and meanings are discerned from the past, my past is what is informing my current reality (Ricoeur, 1984, 33, 45, 53). I am left with who I am naturally – my gifts and strengths, as well as my limitations and weaknesses. I have a certain level of intelligence, capacity for imagination, and creativity. I am capable, or not, because of my height, weight, physical strength, and health; I can do some things better than others; or perhaps I am excluded from some activities and

pathways because of these factors. I know myself sexually with all the components of being human that human sexuality engages.

This is not to deny the need for people to stretch themselves, dream into the future, or meet the desire for challenge. However, the possibility for integration calls for an honest and truthful appraisal of all areas of my humanity. It calls for an open and conscious attempt to see the real me. If I know a bit more about the real me, I can begin to integrate that same me a little better. Once I know and embrace more of the real me, I can exploit and grow in those areas that I find life-giving and maybe even exhilarating. But it is crucial as well to admit to ourselves our human limitations and then move beyond these as best we can. Truth is the goal. I am called to personal transparency through the dynamics of interpersonal relationships (Levinas, 1969, 163). Authenticity to oneself and others is the goal of the journey. One cannot love what one does not know – and we are called to love ourselves.

This is perhaps one of the more difficult things to do in life – with all our shortcomings and failures (which we seem to be more aware of than our gifts and blessings), we must hold ourselves gently and lovingly. True authenticity reveals that God’s creation is good – each human being is part of the Good God has created (Wallenfang, 2021, 24-25). I must be able to see what I do and am as having a positive role in the whole of God’s plan for the world. All of me is good – it’s just that some of it has yet to be transformed under the impulse of God’s grace. Biblical revelation affirms that God created the whole human person in God’s image. Notwithstanding the reality of failure, of missing the mark of our innermost desires, God embraces us as worthy, accepted, and loved. And thus, we too are called to do the same.

Integration takes place through the embracing of all my personal and collective history. This is my story (Navone, 1979). One is called to wholeness (holiness) through respecting, accepting, searching for, and bringing home all of what happened in the past. Integration takes place within my broken relationships with others and God – as well as my more graced moments of wholeness in those relationships. As mentioned, I cannot change my past experiences, nor is there of necessity a desire to do so since these very experiences – even of failure – have brought me to my present state of integration. In faith I trust that God has been journeying with me through all these experiences and will carry me through the remainder of the journey.

Perhaps, during my journey, I need to let go of who I think I am to discover what is more authentically me. This doesn't happen all at once. Continual integration calls for *little* discoveries of truth. Here and there, I may get a glimpse of this or that aspect of myself, this or that aspect of my self-image which doesn't seem to jive with reality. Our friends can help us a lot in these areas. The real presence of another person in my life always challenges me to wholeness, to integration, to growth. Integration means having the courage to share my life story with another person. Telling my story is part of the integration of that story and a way of knitting the disparate and at times seemingly unconnected events in life into a meaningful whole. Trusted friends, spiritual directors, or counselors are among the set of individuals who can be of great assistance in this regard (Blythe, 2018, 1-10; Perrin, 2007, 282-285).

To live is not enough. To have experiences – even though they may be intense at times, full of emotion, and reach to the depth of my soul – is not enough. I need to confront my life consciously. Only in critical reflection upon my lived experience do I find the richness in the raw experience (O'Collins, 1982, 44). The need for critical reflection, the need to reshape the story when necessary to deal with misconceptions, and the need to introduce new data into my self-understanding are all imperative in the maturation process. This growth takes time, even a lifetime, but it must be done if I am to bring to fruition the fullness that I am called to before others and God.

However, that growth is not easy. Becoming painfully aware of the need for my growth, for integration, is perhaps one of the first steps in doing something about it. Otherwise, there is a risk that potentially significant problematic issues will never surface in life and allow me to bring them to conscious critical assessment. Integration is not something that can be pulled out of a hat. It comes from the conscious confrontation of my life story within the network of relationships which sustain me. Integration has a painfully incarnational flavor to it, but it also has its return of human flourishing in joy, peace, and hope.

At times, integration of myself might need to get some distance from the various networks of relationships – personal, group, or community – to which I belong. Although these experiences help and support the process of integration, I can never identify myself totally with that person, that group, or that community. A critical distance needs to be maintained such that the collective does not consume me, whereby

I lose self-identity (Helminiak, 1996, 19-20, 171, 172). Individuals, groups, and communities help define who I am, but they cannot define me totally. This is felt especially in the later years of life, when friends, relationships with groups, and involvement with different communities dwindle. There needs to be something more beyond these transient relationships as friends move on or die, work and career is no longer center stage in life, and community engagement is not the same as it once was.

This is especially true with respect to work and career – job function. I am not what I do. I cannot afford to overidentify with my work and career if I have hopes of ongoingly integrating all levels of myself. Any work or career, task or project cannot embrace the all of who I am. To think this would already be an impediment to openness to the ongoing emergence of new aspects of my person, especially in the later years in life when I am forced to leave altogether a particular job or role, even if I have identified myself with that role for the greater part of my life. Interests also change in life. How one uses recreation time can be a strong indication of what aspect of one's person is being called into a greater fullness at any one point during life.

### **Christian Integration: Wholeness in the Person of Jesus**

As Christians, we believe that Jesus is the image of God (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15) and that the human being bears God's image within (Gen. 1:26-28). Jesus is the way through which the invisible God is and has been revealed, the divine person in which we place our hope and the hope of the entire world. The final destiny of the human person is that of being conformed to Jesus' image (Romans 8:28-30) and being in relationship with Jesus as Jesus is in relationship with the fullness of God, the Trinity. Our final destiny is union with God through redemption in Christ (Matt. 1:21). This union is the restoration of the original human "created in the image and likeness of God," our original state of holiness (wholeness). The Christian must strive to achieve a more concrete expression of his or her wholeness that is closer to the incarnated condition of human reality as shown in Jesus and blessed in the original human at the time of creation.

Due to our poor decisions, at times narcissistic attitudes, or failures for whatever reasons – what we refer to theologically as "sin" – we separate ourselves from God, others, and creation. These broken relationships are reflected in the disorientation and fragmentation of our lives at the

intrapersonal, interpersonal, communitarian, and cosmic levels. Sinful behavior is manifest in our actions and conduct because our entire being is not oriented toward God; that is, we are not completely whole (holy) or integrated persons at the various levels we are called to be. Just as the God-image is within, so is sin – the broken God-image, the disoriented, unintegrated confusion of the human and the divine. Integration of all levels of the self through God’s grace restores the God-image of original creation, which in turn is reflected in wholesome (holy) relationships and the fullness of life between God and all of creation.

Therefore, inasmuch as I move toward the fullness of my integrated self I will reflect a fullness in my interior God-image and consequently in my human-divine relationship and my relationships with created reality, generally speaking. All of these are interrelated and depend on one another. Indeed, to become fully human is to be divinized, to grow into the fullness of the God-image nascent in our being.

We see the fullness of our interior God-image reflected in the Incarnation. Jesus of Nazareth, through his earthly journey, through his relationship with others, and through his relationship with God, expresses an integration and wholeness (holiness) at all levels of his self. Just as Jesus in his own self united perfectly the human and the divine, so also does he express in a unique way what it means to be whole (holy). Through the Incarnation, we have a perfect example of what it means to be fully alive, fully human, and fully integrated such that the face of God shines forth. Through the human Jesus, we gaze upon the face of God (John 14:7). We are called to reflect the journey of Jesus, this same fullness of life such that we come to reflect the same image of God in our lives as Jesus did. Jesus, who suffered and died on the cross and then rose again on the third day, remains the paradigm, the example of *the possibility* of full human integration in this life, that is, in history.

This integration we can refer to as redemption, human wholeness (holiness) through relationship to the triune God through Jesus and the Spirit (Hastings, 2022, 25-36). There is the possibility of “redeeming” all parts of myself or bringing together in holiness all of who I am through relationship with God, as Jesus did. This redemption has a “not yet” quality about it. Only in the eschaton will the fullness of Jesus’ redeeming action overtake all of creation, bringing us into the wholeness of the God-image reflected in original creation (Wallenfang, 2021, 30).

In faith, the possibility for integration does not stop at the mercy of historical circumstances. We cannot blame our past and thus shirk the current responsibility to self-integration. Nor does blaming our current circumstances on fate move us hopefully into the future. In faith and grace, everyone is invited toward wholeness in a unique way, but this invitation needs to be responded to, embraced, and made one's own despite what difficulties we have had. Everyone is "capable of God" through grace and the power of the Holy Spirit (Kennedy, 2012, 157-164). "Capable of God" is the capability of human wholeness in God.

### **Signs of the Integrated "Me"**

Here I use the term "integrated person" to mean a "*basically* integrated person." As already mentioned, human wholeness is a lifelong journey; nonetheless, there are signs that this journey is unfolding in one's life. Presented here are some points of reference to know that this is the case. The list is not exhaustive. Many more could be added, depending on from what perspective one is examining one's life.

My integrated and authentic self does not repress my fears and my broken places, but neither does it repress my joys, blessings, and accomplishments. Rather, I will allow all of these to inspire me into real presence before another and be with those same places in the other. Therefore, I can truly "forget" about myself. I become attentive and present before the other as the other becomes the focus in my life.

This is *the* sign of an integrated individual – one who can lose his or her preoccupation with image and mask and stand before another in truth, such that the truth of the other radiates forth as well. My capacity to move beyond my restricted vision, my prejudices and jealousies, to a different frontier, one of self-giving and self-forgetfulness, allows the other to come to the fore as the focus of my life (Peperzak et al., 1996, 142-143). I can "throw myself away" because, in a manner of speaking, I own myself through an integrated and whole self.

As an integrated person, I am effectively alive to the gift of myself, conscious of my feelings, and therefore present and conscious to and of the other in my life. I can receive the other because first I have received myself. I am able to feel with the other because I am "feeling alive," that is, I am in touch with a sense of the sense of life. In faith, life makes sense to me, and I am present to it. I hope for the fullness of what is yet to come. It is this presence of my integrated self which calls forth the other, the presence that speaks, saying, "I care for you. I love you."



There is no deception about this kind of integrated presence with another individual. Authentic integration is precisely that. The other will “know” in his or her heart, whether consciously or unconsciously, if I am really “presenting” – making a present, a gift of myself in unrestricted freedom, without expectation of return on any level. One cannot love what one is not “presented” with freely.

This truth of my integrated self before another is not a sharing with every individual I meet of all the darkest secrets of my soul, all the hurting places, all the intimate places of myself. To do this indiscriminately would be a burden to the other. Rather, I move along slowly: my story is told in the breath of the moment, in the bud of a relationship that is unfolding in mutual trust and confidence.

I do not tell my story only through words. The deeper and more precious parts of my history are lived out within the dynamics of interpersonal relationships (Perrin, 2007, 46, 81, 138). The telling is in the showing. I tell the story of my integrated self, the story of faith, hope, and love, through living out of those places in my self that have revealed to me the value and gift that I am in the eyes of God.

The integrated self is not governed by rules “from the outside” but rather by a sense of responsibility and moral accountability through the internalization and personal appropriation of them. The integrated self can evaluate and discern the current moment such that the right decisions are made in freedom for the benefit of all. The integrated self believes in the core of their being that they have a choice in life and are not subject to the “pawns of fate” (Helminiak, 1987, 67).

### **Transactional and Transformative Communities of Belonging**

Above it was indicated that, at times, there may be a need to distance myself from groups or communities to which I have become attached. This is not a negative critique of those groups or communities but rather alerts me to the reality of becoming my own self, owning my own perspectives, and appropriating the values and beliefs on a personal level that have been shaped by the group or community.

But what communities do I belong to that are *authentically* life-giving? We need to know where our *authentic* self comes from in its communitarian moorings. We all long to belong – whether that is expressed, for example, in family settings, where we go to school, the workplace, or volunteer experiences. All these groups or settings have

the potential to shape “communities of belonging” that generate a sense of meaning in our lives.

Knowing and being conscious of “how” we belong is crucial to growth in the integration of the self – whether our belonging is a temporary fix that scratches the moment or one that endures for a long time. To help us in this part of the reflection, let’s divide “communities of belonging” into two broad expressions, both which are purposeful and part of routine interaction with others that we can readily recognize. The first is *transactional* communities of belong. The second is *transformational* communities of belong.

Transactional communities of belonging have as their main purpose the accomplishment of clear tasks or goals. The member contributes to the accomplishment of these tasks or goals and is rewarded in some way for doing so – for example, through financial compensation, praise, or a sense of pride felt from within. In transactional communities, a near-balance reciprocal flow of goods is maintained: members contribute their talents to the group, and the community recognizes these efforts with a reward, such as public recognition or financial compensation.

When the member is no longer contributing to the tasks or goals as needed, the transactional community moves on to another person who can do so. And that is fine – the primary purpose of a transactional community is not necessarily to contribute to the well-being and deep purpose of the individual member, although it may do so in some temporary fashion. Integration and meaning-making in transactional communities are therefore tied to transitory contributions and may not endure beyond the dynamics surrounding that contribution. This is understandable; the goals of the transactional community are not tied intrinsically to the integration or personal needs of its members, although there may be some overlap.

Transformative communities of belonging have as their main purpose a *mutual*, but not necessarily equal, exchange between the member and the community. This exchange is not tied directly to the level of the member’s contribution. There is no balance sheet keeping track of who has contributed what and there is always a concern for the individual in his or her uniqueness. In transformative communities, there is a direct concern for the individual *as an individual* within the community. Belonging to transformative communities is not tied to what I can give, provide, or accomplish for the community; rather, it is tied – as all are

able – to a deeply felt mission of mutual care, justice, and abiding love – even, at times, to the point of self-giving sacrificial love.

Transformative communities are, well, transformative – they lead to and deepen personal integration. They make space for the personal journey of the members – a journey that depends on the ebb and flow of the exchange of care among all members. Both the individual and the community are transformed in this process. Transformative communities are thus communal and personal, structural, and virtuous; they engage a higher purpose that is sustained through the authentic interaction and relationship of the members. Integration and meaning-making in transformative communities are intentional, deep, and lasting. Belonging endures over a very long period, even though the nature of that belonging changes over time.

Our interest in both transactional communities of belonging and transformative communities of belonging is grounded in the possibility that we may mistake one kind of belonging for the other. Perhaps we should ask ourselves: What kinds of meaning-making communities do I belong to which sustain self-esteem, meaning-making, and integration in the long term? Do I expect a deep sense of belonging and care from transactional communities? Do I belong to any transformative communities? That is, do I belong to any communities that are unconditional in their relationship to me, whereby I am not, or do not become, an *object to meet their goals*?

Being fully aware of where and how “I belong” is foundational to human integration and growth, mental health, meaning-making, and a sense of purpose in life when that belonging is unconditional, free, intentional, and abiding. It won’t be time lost if we take a few moments to reflect on the sources of authentic belonging in our lives which build our self-integration, self-esteem, and meaning making.

## **Conclusion**

What has been presented in this brief reflection is the need for human beings to be aware of all parts of themselves. To be able to have wholesome and lifegiving relationships with others, we need to have a self to give to others. Without a certain level of integration of one’s entire self – at all levels – there is the risk of unfulfilled and disappointing relationships in life, including one’s relationship with God.

Most importantly, in the journey of integration is the conscious confrontation of the transcendent elements of my life: the awareness of the God who created me in God's own image and who desires to bring me into wholeness through *this* life in faith, hope, and love. Jesus Christ, image and Son of God, is the Christian model, the way, to this wholeness through faith and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Mindful that I belong to a range of communities, favoring transformational communities of belonging enhances the prospects of meaning-making, happiness, and personal integration. The mutual dynamics of care and self-giving sacrificial love allow me to "present" myself in a way that is healing, joy-filled, and graced.

Through the process of integration, I move closer to the state of wholeness (holiness) of original creation; I come to reflect more perfectly the God-image which is integrally a part of myself from the first moment I was created. The human person, created in the image and likeness of God, moves closer to the original blessing through the lifelong process of human integration.

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