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Holy Spirit Attachment: Theologizing and Operationalizing the Third Person of the Trinity as the Immediate Divine Attachment Figure

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Abstract

Divine attachment is an important aspect of religious inquiry, particularly when examining the role of sacred relationships in the lives of people of faith. In this article, we provide some conceptual foundations and a template for measuring the unique attachment relationship between Christian believers and the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, and how this bond transcends conventional representations of the sacred. As an immediate divine attachment figure, the Holy Spirit's immanence and intimate presence within the lives of believers can enhance the believer's spiritual attachment. As such, we first explore the Holy Spirit's centrality within the Christian faith and how the nature of this relationship supports the believer's attachment security. Second, we argue that Christian believers form a distinctive connection to the Holy Spirit, who not only personifies their transcendent God figure (Jehovah, the Father) but also compensates for the physical absence of the incarnate God figure (Jesus Christ, the Son). We contend that a healthy attachment bond with the Holy Spirit fosters a sense of physical immediacy and metaphysical interpenetration of the divine in the believer. This connection can promote meaning during difficult times and may support positive attachment behaviors throughout various developmental phases and spiritual struggles. Finally, we suggest a conceptual template for measuring Holy Spirit

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Attachment (HSA) from an etic lens that considers accessibility, responsiveness, and engagement as important spiritual attachment components, while reiterating the heuristic goal of our model to stimulate further research. Yet, we acknowledge that ongoing research may necessitate revisions as we address limitations and implications of our current approach.

Keywords
attachment theory, Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit Attachment, Christian believers, spiritual attachment, Christian psychology

Throughout history, people have sought to understand the nature of their relationship with the divine. In Christian traditions, an important aspect of this phenomenon has been the desire to understand the role of the Holy Spirit. While theological explanations have predominantly formed the core of the literature, there remains a notable lack of psychological research examining the relationship between Christian believers and the Holy Spirit. In Christian theology, the Holy Trinity implies the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as three distinct persons, or subsistent entities, who share one divine essence or nature (White, 2022). In other words, each person of the triune God has full ontological divinity, although each has distinct functional roles. Of these three, the Holy Spirit is often considered enigmatic and complex, functioning as the presence of the triune God in the world, guiding and sustaining believers on their spiritual journey (Burgess, 1989). Differences in worldviews, cultural background, and denominations within Christianity may impact a believer's understanding and experiences of the Holy Spirit's indwelling and outworking in their life.

In this article, we contend that the Holy Spirit is the initial divine *parental* contact for the Christian. Drawing from the birth analogy, just as we are born of our mothers to become our fathers' children, so Christians are born of God's immediate, immanent Spirit. This understanding positions the Holy Spirit as the relational bridge between the divine and human realms, addressing the reality that God the Father's transcendent nature is beyond full human comprehension (Isaiah 55:8−9). In this way, the Holy Spirit provides an accessible, intimate connection to God, which is consistent with the biblical understanding of divine transcendence and immanence (White, 2022).

Furthermore, the Holy Spirit serves as a vital link between the believer and their relationship with Jesus Christ. Although Jesus offers Divine experience, He is not perpetually and physically present. As such, the Christian attachment to the divine is sustained through metaphysical intimacies with the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28−29). The Holy Spirit's presence in the believer's life corresponds with the intimate relationship Jesus promised to His disciples (John 14). In essence, the Holy Spirit serves as the immediate divine attachment figure to the believer, regenerating (e.g., John 3:8), groaning with (Romans 8:26), guiding (e.g., John 16:13), guarding (2 Timothy 1:14), sealing (Ephesians 1:13), and ultimately glorifying the believer to the point they can ceaselessly access Christ post time (Romans 8:1−17). Given the Holy Spirit's intimate connection with believers at the moment of salvation, the Spirit may constitute the primary divine attachment figure in the life of the Christian believer. When a believer feels lost, the Holy Spirit can provide direction and conviction (John 16:13), much like a caregiver who gently redirects a child. This ongoing relational attunement makes the Holy Spirit not only a source of divine contact or connection but a pivotal figure for cultivating intimacy and trust with God.

Analyzing the Holy Spirit's role as a divine attachment figure will allow for an understanding of the underlying psychological mechanisms that foster Holy Spirit Attachment (HSA) within the Christian faith. Attachment theory highlights the significance of secure relationships in human development (Bowlby, 1969), and has been extensively applied across domains, including religion (Counted et al., 2021; Granqvist, 2020). A key aspect of attachment relationship is attunement—the

dynamic process by which individuals in a relationship are emotionally in sync with one another (Beebe & Lachmann, 2014). This process of attunement, characterized by the three components of accessibility, engagement, and responsiveness (Sandberg et al., 2012), may mirror how a believer experiences the Holy Spirit's presence and attachment.

In the context of faith, attachment theory suggests that one's perceived relationship with God can offer a sense of felt security (Kirkpatrick, 2005). The Holy Spirit, as the third person of the Trinity, is believed to be intimately attuned to believers' lives, guiding, comforting, and empowering them (John 14:16; Zahl, 2020). Spiritual attunement with the Holy Spirit, therefore, may be considered an active, reciprocal interaction between the believer and the Holy Spirit. Hence, the Holy Spirit can be regarded as a means of the believer's attachment to God (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016). This relationship may be especially meaningful and corrective for individuals with insecure attachment in their human relationships, as the Holy Spirit may offer a sense of security and stability they lack (Miner, 2009). Further exploring the relationship with the Holy Spirit through attachment theory may yield unique etic insights into the nature of this spiritual attachment within Christian theology. While theological explanations have often been dominant, this article seeks to explore the complex relationship with the Holy Spirit from an etic psychological perspective to gain deductive knowledge into the mechanisms that underlie spiritual experiences with the Holy Spirit. In this article, we analyze the individual characteristics and normative functions of the relationship with the Holy Spirit that may constitute a distinct attachment relationship. Next, we explore the implications of HSA and constituent components that could be considered for measurement purposes.

The Holy Spirit and Psychology

The Holy Spirit is a core concept within Christianity and often understood as the third person of the Holy Trinity, with God the Father and God the Son (Macchia, 2018). Described as a counselor, helper, or guide, the Holy Spirit is conceived as One who dwells within believers (Romans 8:11), empowering them to live godly lives (John 14:16−17). From a psychological perspective, the Holy Spirit's role may be understood as an orienting internal presence that guides human cognition, emotion, and behavior in accordance with spiritual values and beliefs. Various Christian traditions define the role and work of the Holy Spirit in different ways. Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions often highlight the gifts and manifestations of the Holy Spirit, such as speaking in tongues, prophecy, and healing (Macchia, 2018). In contrast, more traditional liturgical denominations, like the Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox churches, might focus more on the sacraments and the presence of the Holy Spirit within liturgy and the life of the Church (Zizioulas, 1985). Although emphases may differ by theological persuasion, Christian believers experience a sense of union with God through the Holy Spirit's presence (Owen, 1676).

The cultural background of an individual may also influence their relationship to the Holy Spirit. For example, non-Western Christians of African, Latin American, or Asian backgrounds may have a more experiential and communal approach to their relationship with the Holy Spirit that involve expressive forms of worship (e.g., music; Jenkins, 2006). In contrast, Western Christians, particularly those from individualistic cultures, might place greater emphasis on personal experiences of the Holy Spirit, such as personal prayer or contemplative practices (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016). In practical ways, these various expressions of spiritual relationships can have implications for believers' lives (e.g., their spiritual well-being and HSA).

The difficulty in empirically studying such experiences may stem from the intensely personal and often subjective nature of Holy Spirit encounters which vary per denominational background. In a study of the African Pentecostal-Charismatic context, Muindi (2012) collected qualitative data from believers who vividly described their experiences with the Holy Spirit. Common responses included sensations such as feeling "baptized in the Holy Spirit afresh," experiencing "a sudden power coming over," feeling "like translating a message someone was hearing within himself," witnessing "an

explosion of tongues," and sensing "a feeling of compulsion to speak, with words forming inside" (Muindi, 2012, p. 97). These varied descriptions align closely with biblical portrayals of the Holy Spirit as an empowering presence (Acts 1:8), uniquely manifesting within each individual.

Additional evidence of the Holy Spirit's active presence is seen in Asamoah's (2013) research, which examines how the Spirit shapes both individual and corporate Christian life. Asamoah's findings indicate that believers' experiences of the Holy Spirit's work encompass more than personal encounters; they include roles such as baptizing believers, energizing them for service, promoting holy living, and empowering individuals for the mission of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18−20). Together, these studies offer valuable insight into the consistent yet deeply subjective reality of believers' encounters with the Holy Spirit, supporting theological assertions that the Spirit is actively engaged in Christian life, although may be expressed differently per theological tradition or denomination. Such research begins to bridge the gap between theological and empirical perspectives, suggesting that the work of the Holy Spirit is not only doctrinal (i.e., pneumatology) but also experientially recognizable.

Key psychological theories

Understanding the relationship between the Holy Spirit and psychology is crucial for comprehending Christian spirituality. While theological explanations may provide a framework for believers' experiences, psychological research offers valuable insights into the mental and emotional processes that underlie spiritual connections. Psychological mechanisms may explain how a relationship with the Holy Spirit shapes human cognition, emotion, and behavior. Several psychological theories provide insights into the role the Holy Spirit may represent in the lives of Christians.

For instance, the relationship between the Holy Spirit and psychological processes can be examined through Carl Jung's concept of the collective unconscious. Jung (1959) posited that humans share a reservoir of universal archetypes, symbols, and experiences, which can manifest in the individual psyche. The Holy Spirit may be considered one such archetype, representing the divine presence within the human mind. This concept suggests that the Holy Spirit serves as a channel through which believers can access divine wisdom and guidance.

Alternatively, the potential influence of the Holy Spirit on human cognition and behavior may be explored through the lens of cognitive dissonance theory. Festinger (1957) proposed that individuals experience psychological discomfort when they hold conflicting beliefs or engage in actions that are inconsistent with their values. To alleviate dissonance, people adjust their beliefs or behaviors to achieve consistency. The Holy Spirit's guidance toward moral, value, and belief-congruent actions (e.g., mortification of sin) could be understood as a mechanism for reducing cognitive dissonance while aligning the thoughts and actions of believers (Paloutzian, 1996; Spilka et al., 2003).

In the context of spirituality, Christian believers often describe their interaction with the Holy Spirit in terms that resemble flow states. For example, during prayer or worship, individuals may experience a profound sense of connection with the divine, accompanied by a loss of self-awareness and an altered sense of time (also described as flow, see Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1987; Meagher, 2016). Csikszentmihalyi (2008) described flow as a state of complete absorption in an activity, characterized by intense focus, loss of self-consciousness, and a sense of timelessness. These experiences may foster personal growth, self-transcendence, and a deeper understanding of one's spiritual identity (Vaughan, 1991).

Attachment theory posits that from birth humans have a fundamental need for strong emotional bonds with others (Bowlby, 1969, 1988). Winnicott (1964) notes that "a baby alone does not exist" (p. 88), and thus the relational capacities of human beings are bent toward connection and create an inner model for how to view oneself, others, and the world. These attachment bonds, formed during infancy and persistent throughout life, influence an individual's sense of security and emotional well-being. Secure attachment is characterized by deep trust and the ability to regulate powerful emotions in the context of a relationship, whereas insecure attachment relationships often develop amid

inconsistent, unresponsive, or unsupportive relationships (Malekpour, 2007). Research has shown that those who perceive a secure attachment to the divine exhibit increased psychological well-being and reduced anxiety (Kirkpatrick, 2005; Miner, 2009), which suggests that the Holy Spirit may function as a source of emotional support and stability, mirroring the role of human attachment figures.

Attachment and the Holy Spirit

Attachment theory has influenced understanding of interpersonal relationships and emotional bonds between individuals and their caregivers (Bowlby, 1969). In recent years, this theory has been applied to the study of religious/spiritual experiences (see Counted & Zock, 2019; Davis et al., 2013), with a specific focus on attachment to God (Granqvist, 2020). Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1992) pioneered the idea that core aspects of religious experience and behavior can be understood within an attachment framework. Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2016) proposed that believers' perceived relationships with God tend to meet the defining criteria for attachment relationships and function psychologically like other attachments, providing a safe haven in times of threat or distress and serving as a secure base for risky or challenging endeavors.

Phenotypic resemblances between parental attachment and believers' relationships with God can be observed in the centrality of "love" in people's perceived relationships with God (Granqvist, 2020). The "love" experienced by a worshiper in the context of a relationship with God differs from the *eros* experienced in romantic relationships, resembling more closely the prototypical attachment *storge* of a child to an adult attachment figure (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016). This prototypical attachment is exemplified throughout the Bible, with figures like King David frequently turning to God for refuge, describing Him as a source of protection and comfort in times of distress (Psalm 18:2). This foundational relationship of God as a refuge and protector mirrors the attachment dynamics between a child and their earthly father. When Jesus calls God "Abba" or Father (Mark 14:36), He emphasizes this intimate, relational understanding of God, inviting believers into a familial connection (Brumley, 1999).

Similarly, when believers call God "Father," they are invoking an analogy rooted in the characteristics of earthly fathers, who may serve as stabilizing figures within the family unit. Earthly fathers, as co-providers and protectors, contribute to an environment of security that serves as a safe haven for their children and offering sensitivity that fosters secure paternal attachment (Lucassen et al., 2011), although the manner in which a father fulfills his role may be differentially expressed per the cultural context (Palm, 2014). However, a father may also fulfill his paternal role in ways that form an insecure attachment (e.g., being punitive, dismissive, or absent). Therefore, the dual role of earthly fathers as both sensitive stabilizers and protectors may mirror the attachment relationship believers experience with God the Father, who offers emotional refuge, protection, and stability, or offer a corrective way of relating for those with insecure paternal attachment. However, it is possible that insecure parental attachment may mirror a believer's insecure attachment to God the Father. Thus, a believer's attachment to God the Father may reflect a broader family systems impact, wherein the role of the father in creating a safe and secure environment may resonate with or diverge from God's role in the lives of His children.

Spiritual attachment to the Holy Spirit is considered an extension of God's presence and guidance in believers' lives. The Holy Spirit may shape individuals' psychological processes (e.g., cognition, emotion, and behavior) by providing comfort, direction, and strength in times of need like an attachment figure. For example, individuals who develop a low sense of self, often rooted in negative attachment experiences during childhood, may experience transformation through corrective and redemptive attachment with the Holy Spirit. Such experiences can reshape their implicit, experiential understanding of God while also galvanizing their declarative, theological knowledge (Davis et al., 2013), and fostering a stronger sense of self. This process of renewal through attachment with the Holy Spirit can continue to strengthen the believer's identity until Christ's return (McDermott, 2024). In addition, relationships with other believers within a spiritual context can also provide redemptive

attachment experiences by addressing and healing previous emotional wounds and implicit relational memories (Hall & Hall, 2021). These corrective relationships, both with the Holy Spirit and in redemptive human relationships, are important for transforming a low sense of self.

While the above-mentioned experiences can assist in creating a healthy HSA, there are factors within one's autobiographical history that may complicate a secure HSA relationship (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016). For example, someone with a history of trauma or neglect may develop a secure HSA, which can help address and restore unmet attachment needs through their relationship with the Spirit (Davis et al., 2013). However, it is not always the case that the compensatory pathway materializes. While compensation for unmet childhood needs through secure HSA may be a redemptive experience for some individuals, neurobiological factors associated with insecure attachment—such as heightened stress responses, difficulties in emotional regulation, or impaired trust (Thompson, 2010)—can create challenges in perceiving and connecting with God's presence (Noffke & Hall, 2007). For example, a person with hypervigilance due to early relational trauma may struggle to experience the Holy Spirit's comfort, or someone with deep-seated mistrust may find it difficult to sense divine responsiveness. Moreover, research indicates that even if an individual were to hold positive views of the triune God, their negative working models may dominate this positive view of God (Miner, 2009).

Since spiritual attachment (involving the Holy Spirit) may reflect human attachment (Granqvist & Dickie, 2006), insecure child–parent attachment style may frustrate one's spiritual attachment and psychological functioning (Miner, 2009). Although the Holy Spirit can act as a source of security to individuals who have experienced inadequate human relationships, the process of the Holy Spirit compensating for these unsatisfactory relationships appears to be complex. Therefore, for some, insecure interpersonal attachments may complicate how the believer experiences their relationship with the Holy Spirit.

Attachment, Attunement, and the Holy Spirit

Human attachment has been assessed through measures that capture attunement across different salient dimensions. In psychological and attachment literature, attunement refers to the ability to sense, understand, and appropriately respond to another's emotional state, with the goal of fostering a sense of attachment and security (Sandberg et al., 2012). This process includes but is not limited to dimensions of accessibility, responsiveness, and engagement, which are central to secure attachment relationships (Sandberg et al., 2012).

Accessibility refers to the perception that the object of attachment is available and present when needed. For example, a child who knows a caregiver will be there in moments of distress feels secure and confident in exploring the world (Bowlby, 1988). A greater accessibility to an attachment figure is associated with increased stability of the attachment style over time (Etherton, 1999). In the spiritual context, when believers experience the divine as accessible during times of crisis, this attunement may foster a sense of divine presence and security (Granqvist, 2020), creating the perceived ease of connecting with the Holy Spirit.

Second, responsiveness involves the ability to recognize and appropriately meet emotional needs. In parental attachment, a responsive caregiver comforts a crying child or celebrates their successes, reinforcing the child's sense of worth and safety (Ainsworth, 1978). A believer who experiences the Holy Spirit responsiveness as a "Paraclete" (comforter, counselor, guide, etc.) can develop a deeper trust and security with God, enabling the perceived reciprocity of the Holy Spirit to the believer's needs and emotions.

Finally, engagement reflects the active participation in the relationship, providing ongoing emotional connection and support (Johnson, 2008; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002). Parents engage with their children through play, conversation or shared experience, which can help build the child's relational confidence. Believers may experience the Holy Spirit's engagement through moments of inspiration, revelation, and discernment thus reinforcing an intimate relationship with the triune

God. This dimension captures the depth and constancy of the interaction. These dimensions provide conceptual models through which attunement can be understood and evaluated. When these three dimensions operate together, they reflect the quality of communication between the believer and the Holy Spirit. In this way, the Holy Spirit acts as an immediate divine attachment figure, allowing believers to experience the accessibility, responsiveness, and engagement of the Triune God's presence in the absence of the incarnational Son.

Developmental Pathways and Individual Differences

Compensation and correspondence hypotheses are common models used to understand religious attachment dynamics (Counted, 2016a, 2025; Hall et al., 2009; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990). The correspondence model suggests that individuals transfer their previous attachment model onto their relationship with God, making the interaction between two attachment objects possible. On the other hand, the compensation model suggests that individuals seek proximity to God as an attachment figure to compensate for their loss of attachment or unhealthy attachments elsewhere (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990). Research on attachment to God has shown that individuals with insecure avoidant attachment in their human relationships tend to perceive God as distant, unreliable, or unresponsive (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990). They are less likely to seek comfort or security from God and may adopt a more self-reliant stance. Meanwhile individuals with insecure anxious attachment often perceive God as inconsistently responsive and may seek reassurance frequently due to fears of abandonment or rejection (Counted, 2016a, 2016b). In contrast, those with secure attachment typically view God as a dependable source of protection and security (Granqvist, 2020; Hall et al., 2009).

The Holy Spirit as a compensatory attachment figure

The compensation hypothesis has typically been discussed in terms of substituting for unreliable and problematic human attachment figures (Hall et al., 2009). This model of attachment suggests that individuals turn to a divine entity as a surrogate attachment figure when their primary (usually human) attachment relationships are inadequate or unreliable (Hall et al., 2009; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990). While traditional attachment to God literature focuses on how early caregiver relationships contribute to one's relational perception of the Triune God, we extend this framework to examine the relational dynamics within the Trinity itself in relation to the believer. The compensatory relationship with the Holy Spirit, for example, may emerge when the believer senses or perceives their connection to God the Father or to Jesus the Son as distant or perceived as less relationally available. For example, when the image of God as a loving Father feels obscured by grief or trauma or when the relational figure of Jesus seems inaccessible due to feelings of unworthiness, the Holy Spirit—in those circumstances—may provide an immediate and felt sense of peace and assurance for the believer.

The Spirit's role as a "Paraclete" (helper, comforter, and counselor) compensates for these perceived absences by offering inner consolation or a renewed sense of hope (Nel, 2016). We suggest that, just as some turn to God for security in place of inconsistent human attachments, believers may also experience shifts in their attachment based on the perceived immediacy with each divine person of the Trinity. This compensatory role can also be seen in the context of prayer and discernment. When believers struggle to connect with God the Father or cannot discern the person of Christ, the Holy Spirit is often described as the one who intercedes for their "wordless groans" (Romans 8:26). In this sense, the Holy Spirit bridges the relational gap, standing in as the tangible and responsive member of the Godhead who brings clarity, intimacy, and reassurance when other connections feel tenuous or uncertain. It is important to note that the persons of the Trinity maintain the unity of ontological divinity, but particularity in their role and functioning (Balswick et al., 2016), so a believer may experience phenomenological differences in the perceived immediacy of each person without the theological implication of there being three separate Gods or tritheism (Ware, 2005).

Within Christian spirituality, the Holy Spirit can function as a compensation attachment figure. This can manifest in two forms for the believer, either the Holy Spirit in the absence of Christ or the transcendence of God the Father. The absence of Christ's physical presence on earth can lead to a unique attachment dynamic between believers and the Holy Spirit. According to the Gospel of John 16:7, Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to his followers after his ascension into heaven (John 16:7). Believers see this promise as a continuation of Christ's presence and ministry on earth, with the Holy Spirit acting as a source of comfort, guidance, and empowerment for them in the absence of Christ. The transcendence of the triune God is beyond human comprehension and experience, existing apart from creation (Barth, 1958). The indwelling Spirit manifests through spiritual gifts, guidance, and a sense of the triune God's presence (Romans 8:9−11; 1 Corinthians 12:4−11). The Holy Spirit creates a unique dynamic in the believer's attachment relationship as He is perceived as our immanent experience of the transcendent triune God. If the triune God is perceived as transcendent and distant, believers may experience a sense of insecurity in their relationship with Him. The Holy Spirit can serve as a 'compensatory attachment figure', allowing believers to form an intimate, personal connection with God that alleviates feelings of insecurity and attachment-related anxiety (Kirkpatrick, 2005; Romans 8:15−16). While the Holy Spirit connects believers to the transcendent triune God, it is imperative to recognize that the believer's attachment relationship with the Holy Spirit is not an isolated phenomenon but rather an aspect of one's broader relationship with the triune God (Torrance, 1996).

The Holy Spirit as a corresponding attachment figure

Traditionally, the correspondence hypothesis refers to the continuity between the internal working models formed in human relationships and their application to one's relationship with God (Hall et al., 2009). By contrast, we interpret 'correspondence' here to describe the relational and functional parallels among the Trinity's persons (Ware, 2005). Specifically, we suggest that the Holy Spirit serves as a 'corresponding attachment figure' because the Spirit shares similar attributes and ontological status as God the Father and God the Son. As integral to the divine Trinity, the Holy Spirit plays a pivotal role in the Christian faith, acting as a corresponding attachment figure alongside Christ and God the Father. This concept of a corresponding attachment figure suggests that the Holy Spirit, while fulfilling a unique role, also shares similar attributes and functions as Christ and God the Father. As a corresponding attachment figure the Holy Spirit can be seen as the Spirit of Christ and the Spirit of God.

The Holy Spirit is often referred to as the Spirit of Christ (Romans 8:9−10), indicating a strong connection between Christ and the Holy Spirit. This connection essentially provides insight regarding the corresponding attachment of the Holy Spirit, as it highlights the ways in which the Holy Spirit fulfills the role of Christ in the believer's life. Scholars have long debated the nature of this relationship, with some emphasizing the ontological unity between Christ and the Holy Spirit, and others focusing on the functional aspects of their relationship (Fee, 1994; Kärkkäinen, 2002). The functional role of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Christ is particularly relevant when examining attachment theory. In John 14:16–17, Jesus promises the Holy Spirit as a Helper or Comforter, who will be with the believers after His departure. This suggests that the Holy Spirit takes on the role of Christ in guiding and supporting believers in their spiritual journey (Zahl, 2020). However, skepticism exists regarding the extent to which the Holy Spirit can be viewed as a corresponding attachment figure to Christ. Critics argue that the Holy Spirit's role is distinct and should not be conflated with Christ's role (see Macchia, 2018). While the Holy Spirit has unique functions, the overarching theme of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Christ, indicates that the Spirit acts as a corresponding attachment figure in the lives of believers. For example, in moments of distress, many believers report sensing an inner comfort or presence that they associate with the Holy Spirit (Counted, 2025; Gorsuch, 1995). Furthermore, Galatians 4:6 declares that "God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" This verse not only affirms the Spirit's filial role but also points to a psychological mechanism akin

to attachment activation. Just as a child calls out to a caregiver in distress, the indwelling Spirit prompts believers to reach for God in times of emotional need, reinforcing a secure base and safe haven dynamic central to attachment theory. This corresponding attachment function of the Holy Spirit bridges the historical presence of Christ with the ongoing relational life of the believer. The Spirit makes Christ's love experientially available, internalized not just as doctrine but as lived connection. It is in this abiding presence of the Spirit that believers often find a continuing attachment figure who mediates Christ's love, even in the absence of His physical presence.

In addition to being the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit is also referred to as the Spirit of God (Romans 8:9). This identification with God the Father further emphasizes the Holy Spirit's role as a corresponding attachment figure within the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is involved in the regeneration and sanctification of believers, guiding them toward spiritual maturity and holiness (Owen, 1676; Titus 3:5; 2 Thessalonians 2:13). The transformative work of the Holy Spirit reflects the care and concern of God the Father for the spiritual growth of his children. In other words, the corresponding attachment function of the Holy Spirit highlights how the Spirit reflects both Christ's presence and the Father's care. This dual identification supports the idea that the Spirit functions as a consistent attachment figure, embodying the nurturing and formative qualities found in both Christ and the Father, thus facilitating a secure spiritual bond in the believer's life.

Skeptics may argue that the Holy Spirit's role as the Spirit of God does not necessarily imply that a corresponding attachment figure status exists, as the relationship between the Holy Spirit and God the Father might be distinct from interpersonal attachment (McDonnell & Montague, 1991). However, the consistent portrayal of the Holy Spirit as intimately connected to both Christ and God the Father suggests that the Holy Spirit indeed functions as a corresponding attachment figure within the Trinity. The Spirit's involvement in various aspects of believers' lives, such as prayer (Romans 8:26–27) and the bestowal of spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:4–11), further illustrates the active presence of God the Father through the Holy Spirit. These spiritual practices and mysteries mirror the love, protection, and guidance that believers expect from God the Father, contributing to the Holy Spirit's role as a corresponding attachment figure. Acknowledging the Holy Spirit's role as a corresponding attachment figure is not intended to diminish the unique functions of the Holy Spirit within the Trinity. Rather, it highlights the interconnectedness of the Holy Spirit with Christ and God the Father, as well as the multifaceted ways in which the Holy Spirit supports and guides believers. As the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit acts as a counselor and guide for believers, while as the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit instantiates the power and care of God the Father.

Normative Aspects of HSA

In the context of HSA, several normative aspects emerge that are analogous to traditional attachment relationships. First, believers often seek proximity to the Holy Spirit, maintaining a sense of connection with this divine presence. Second, the Holy Spirit can also serve as a safe haven, providing comfort, and security in times of distress. Third, the Holy Spirit can act as a secure base, enabling believers to confidently explore, engage in personal growth, and take risks knowing that they are supported. Finally, believers may experience separation anxiety when they perceive a loss of connection with the Holy Spirit.

Proximity to the Holy Spirit

The concept of proximity maintenance with the Holy Spirit is emphasized by the belief that the Holy Spirit is an ever-present companion and advocate for believers. This idea is rooted in the biblical portrayal of the Holy Spirit as the "Comforter" or "Advocate" (John 14:16, 26; John 15:26), sent by Jesus to be a source of guidance, strength, and solace for believers in their spiritual journey. Moreover, the Holy Spirit's role as a corresponding attachment figure within the Trinity enables believers to form a bond that resembles their attachment to God the Father. This attachment relationship helps

believers internalize the teachings of Christ and rely on the power of God the Father (Romans 8:9). Consequently, the Holy Spirit's function as an attachment figure fosters a sense of Trinitarian proximity, providing believers with an essential foundation for navigating life's challenges.

Although the ways in which believers maintain closeness with the Holy Spirit can be highly individualized, one such method may be through prayer (Counted, 2025; Bradshaw & Kent, 2018). Prayer serves as a direct and meaningful channel for believers to communicate with and experience the presence of the Holy Spirit (Trier & Shupe, 1991). Furthermore, the omnipresent nature of the Holy Spirit, which is always near to the believer, reinforces the concept of proximity maintenance. This ever-present connection allows believers to feel the presence and guidance of their spiritual attachment figure in their daily lives, providing emotional support and stability in times of need (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016). Proximity with the Holy Spirit may also be pursued through other religious practices and rituals such as singing, visiting religious buildings, and corporate readings of Scripture. These activities, combined with the omnipresent nature of the Holy Spirit, enable believers to establish and maintain a close and secure attachment relationship, providing emotional support and guidance in their lives.

The Holy Spirit as a safe haven

An important aspect of attachment is characterized by viewing an attachment figure as reliable and reassuring in times of distress or adversity. In the context of religious belief, the Holy Spirit is often perceived as a source of comfort, guidance, and support that believers can rely on in difficult situations (Zahl, 2020). The Holy Spirit can be identified as a safe haven, based on His functions as an abiding ally and ability to provide freedom from limiting principles of present life (Rom. 8:9, 10−11).

The Holy Spirit is believed to be a steadfast ally for believers in their spiritual journey (John 14:16). In times of distress, Christians are often more likely to seek solace in the Holy Spirit (Granqvist, 2020). This comforting and supportive role of the Holy Spirit aligns with the safe haven criterion of attachment theory, as individuals are drawn to seek refuge in a reliable figure during times of distress (Kirkpatrick, 2005; O'Brien, 1982). The Holy Spirit's role as a safe haven can facilitate religious conversions. Research indicates that sudden religious conversions are most likely to occur during periods of severe emotional distress (Kirkpatrick, 2005). As James (1902) suggested, the turning point of the conversion process often involves individuals surrendering themselves to the triune God and placing their problems in His hands. This surrender to the Holy Spirit can lead to joyful obedience of the natural and moral universal laws.

As a source of freedom from the limiting principles of the present natural and moral universal laws (Rom. 8:9−11), the Holy Spirit can be understood within the context of attachment theory. During times of heightened need, prayer may function as an attachment behavior, as it helps individuals cope with serious physical illnesses, injuries, or other adversities (Kirkpatrick, 2005; O'Brien, 1982). For example, combat soldiers have been found to pray frequently before, during, and after battle (Shai, 2022; Stouffer et al., 1949). This reliance on the Holy Spirit as a source of support and strength empowers believers to transcend the limitations of their human nature and to live in accordance with a higher moral and spiritual standard (Rom. 8:9, 10−11).

The Holy Spirit as a secure base

The Holy Spirit serves as a secure base for believers, guiding them on their spiritual journey toward a proximate union with the triune God. This journey often involves a process of *kenosis*, or self-emptying, in which believers relinquish their ego and inordinate desires, and *theosis*, the ultimate goal of attaining union with the divine (Cole-Turner, 2018). The secure attachment provided by the Holy Spirit facilitates this transformative journey, empowering believers to overcome challenges and grow spiritually. Believers perceive God as omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent

(Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016), and the Holy Spirit as a manifestation of God's strength and wisdom (Counted, 2025). The journey from *kenosis* to *theosis* is thus facilitated by the Holy Spirit's unwavering support and guidance. Perceiving the triune God as a secure base allows believers to rely on divine guidance and support when facing adversity, which in turn fosters resilience and spiritual growth (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1992).

The Holy Spirit also acts as a secure base from which believers can engage in the ongoing struggle against negative forces. Within Christian theology, Satan is often viewed as a malicious spiritual being seeking to hinder believers' spiritual progress and tempt them away from their relationship with the triune God. The Holy Spirit serves as a protective presence, empowering believers to resist Satan's influence and remain steadfast in their faith. Research has shown that individuals who perceive God as a secure base tend to adopt more positive religious coping strategies when facing adversity (Belavich & Pargament, 2002). Furthermore, individuals who perceive God as a reliable secure base are less likely to experience loneliness, depression, anxiety, and physical illness (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1992). The Holy Spirit's role as a secure base may be especially crucial when other attachment relationships are insufficient or unavailable (Brown et al., 2004; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1992). In these instances, believers can draw strength and comfort from their relationship with the Holy Spirit, which in turn helps them to maintain their resilience in the face of Satan's attacks.

Spiritual Struggles and Separation Anxiety

HSA can serve as a powerful spiritual resource that fosters resilience and personal growth. However, experiences of HSA can also be the source of spiritual struggles and separation anxiety as believers navigate the challenges of maintaining a close connection with the triune God. Spiritual struggles might arise when individuals perceive a disruption or disconnection in their attachment to the Holy Spirit (Pargament & Saunders, 2007) and may include feelings of doubt, guilt, and distress, as well as questioning one's faith or experiencing a crisis of belief (Exline, 2013). These struggles can manifest in various ways, such as feeling abandoned by God, experiencing difficulty in prayer or spiritual practice, or grappling with challenging life events that disrupt one's faith (Pargament, 2001). For example, believers may experience greater anxiety and stress by continually seeking the Holy Spirit's presence through prayer, or avoid prayer altogether because they may feel uncomfortable in any practice that involves a close relationship with the Holy Spirit (Byrd & Boe, 2001). Spiritual struggles may profoundly impact an individual's emotional well-being and HSA, contributing to feelings of isolation and anxiety.

Separation anxiety is a common psychological phenomenon (Ainsworth, 1989) that can be exacerbated by disruptions in attachment (Kobak et al., 2016). Although there may be some similarities with interpersonal relationships, attachment within human relationships is different from HSA. This form of separation anxiety with the Holy Spirit may emerge when individuals perceive a threat to their connection with the divine or feel that their faith is being tested (Pargament, 2001). Separation anxiety may manifest in various ways, including intrusive thoughts, excessive worry, and a persistent sense of unease (Bowlby, 1988). These feelings can create a positive feedback loop, making it even more difficult for individuals to maintain a secure HSA. Individuals may be better equipped to cope with spiritual struggles and manage separation anxiety when they maintain a secure HSA.

Consistent spiritual habits are essential for navigating the difficulties of life that may produce spiritual struggle, and maintaining a close, secure sense of the Holy Spirit's presence (Counted et al., 2024). From a virtue ethics perspective, humans are shaped by the practices they engage in over time, so spiritual disciplines are a necessity for believers to increasingly be conformed to Christ's image (Romans 8:29) and inculcate an experiential closeness and attunement to the Holy Spirit. Comer (2024) encourages Christians to become an apprentice of Jesus via practicing "a way of life" (p. 25) that makes them more like Him and enables them to sense the Holy Spirit's presence. It is, therefore, necessary for Christians to emulate Jesus by engaging spiritual disciplines such as submission, sacrifice, obedience, and prayer with the Holy Spirit on a daily basis (Hull, 2006).

Separation anticipation and the promise of the Holy Spirit

One of the most tangible separations from communion with the triune God may be the imminent departure of Jesus Christ from His disciples following his resurrection, which was a source of great distress and confusion (Luke 9:44−45; Wright, 1996). The disciples' sense of inadequacy and failure heightened their discouragement. They witnessed Jesus perform countless miracles and teach with divine authority, yet they consistently fell short in their understanding, faith, and obedience (Matthew 17:14−20). This sense of unworthiness likely contributed to their despair, as they wondered how they could possibly continue Jesus' ministry in His absence (Barth, 1993). In the farewell discourse (John 13−17), Jesus seeks to comfort His disciples by offering reassurance, guidance, and encouragement. He emphasizes the importance of abiding in Him (John 15:1−17) and promises the coming of the Holy Spirit to guide and support them in their mission (John 14:15−27; 16:5−15). These events allow us to gain a sense of appreciation for the emotional and spiritual challenges faced by Jesus' followers as they prepared for His departure and the crucial role of the Holy Spirit in sustaining and empowering them.

The concept of spiritual adoption in the New Testament is a central theme, signifying the believer's transformation into a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 8:14−17). Adoption offers believers a sense of security, identity, and belonging within the divine family. However, believers may commonly struggle with experiencing doubt and uncertainty about their adoption by the triune God, which can impact their spiritual growth and well-being. The apostle Paul acknowledges the reality of doubt in the Christian experience, urging believers to continually examine and test their faith (2 Corinthians 13:5). He also recognizes the role of the Holy Spirit in confirming believer's adoption, writing that the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are indeed children of God (Romans 8:16).

This assurance from the Holy Spirit is crucial in helping believers overcome their doubts and insecurities about their adoption by God (Fee, 1994). Believers' doubts regarding their spiritual adoption may stem from various sources, such as an inadequate understanding of the biblical concept of adoption, personal feelings of unworthiness, or the influence of external circumstances that challenge their faith (Stott, 2020). These doubts can lead to feelings of spiritual instability and insecurity, hindering the believer's confidence to live out their identity as a child of God.

The role of the Holy Spirit in providing assurance of adoption cannot be overstated. The Holy Spirit serves as a constant reminder of the believer's status as a child of God, empowering them to live in accordance with their divine identity and to confidently approach God as their loving Father (Galatians 4:4−7). When the believer rely on the guidance and support of the Holy Spirit, they can assuage their doubts and cultivate a robust assurance of their adoption by the triune God (Ephesians 1:12−13). Doubts about one's adoption by God can be overcome through reliance on the Holy Spirit.

Separation anxiety and the sinning believer's state of distress

The Psalmist's desperation to retain proximity to the Holy Spirit— "Do not take your Holy Spirit from me" (Psalm 51:11)—exemplifies separation anxiety with a divine attachment figure. Traditionally ascribed to King David, this Psalm illustrates the importance of maintaining a close relationship with the Holy Spirit. The plea in Psalm 51:11 highlights the deep understanding of the necessity of the Holy Spirit's presence in his life. David's relationship with the Holy Spirit can be seen as a compensatory attachment figure, as the Holy Spirit provided him with the emotional and spiritual support he needed during challenging times. David's intimate relationship with God enabled him to experience spiritual growth, face adversity, and demonstrate a heart that desired to please God (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22). Experiencing the absence of the Holy Spirit's presence would have been devastating for David, as it would have severed his connection to the divine source of his strength and guidance. This case example shows the importance of cultivating and maintaining a strong attachment to the Holy Spirit for spiritual well-being.

As further illustration, King Saul's life provides a stark contrast to David's, as it demonstrates the consequences of not experiencing union with God through the Holy Spirit. After Saul repeatedly disobeyed God's commands, the Holy Spirit is said to have departed from him, and an evil spirit tormented him (1 Samuel 16:14). The absence of the Holy Spirit in Saul's life led to spiritual andemotional turmoil and destructive behaviors that culminated to a state of distress (1 Samuel 18:10−11; 19:9−10). This example demonstrates the importance of maintaining a close relationship with the Holy Spirit and guarding against spiritual pitfalls that could lead to devastating consequences.

Spirit Attunement, Attachment, and Measurement: A Template

Given the depth and complexity of the spiritual attachment between the believer and the Holy Spirit, assessing such an enduring bond is important. Thus, the development of a measurement template for HSA should be pursued although it would require careful consideration due to its inherently subjective nature. The process of creating such a measure may be deductively guided by the attachment-religion framework, which could help in theorizing spiritual attachment in terms similar to interpersonal relationships but within a religious or spiritual context (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016).

As discussed earlier, attunement reflects a dynamic and reciprocal relationship where the individual experiences a profound alignment with the Holy Spirit, marked by constant interaction and active involvement in spiritual practices (Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002). Such spiritual synchrony implies not only a passive awareness of the Holy Spirit's presence but also an active capacity to sense, interpret, and respond to divine promptings. This engagement is characterized by a continuous and responsive dialogue where the individual feels both guided and supported by the Holy Spirit.

In the context of spiritual attachment, particularly to the Holy Spirit, the concepts of accessibility, responsiveness, and engagement serve as central elements that shape this profound experience (Ainsworth, 1978; Bartholomew, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987, 1990). As discussed earlier, accessibility is the belief in the Holy Spirit's continual availability and presence, which can be exemplified by individuals who engage in regular prayer, viewing these moments as opportunities to connect with the Holy Spirit anywhere and at any time, much like conversing with a close friend. This belief nurtures a sense of ever-present support and guidance, integral to the notion of spiritual availability. Responsiveness extends this concept further by emphasizing the centrality of trust with the Holy Spirit, who is not only available to the believer but also actively responds to their needs. This might manifest in a person's life as recognizing and interpreting various occurrences—be they advice from others, unexpected opportunities, or sudden personal insights—as direct responses from the Holy Spirit to their prayers and concerns. Such experiences reinforce the reciprocal nature of this relationship, where the Holy Spirit is seen as a responsive entity intimately involved in the intricacies of daily life. Engagement involves an awareness of the Holy Spirit's influence and a deliberate effort to involve this divine presence in daily activities. For instance, an individual might constantly seek guidance from the Holy Spirit in everyday decisions, attributing positive outcomes and the strength to overcome challenges to this spiritual influence. This engagement is a conscious acknowledgment of the Holy Spirit's role and its integration into all facets of life, from minor decisions to significant moral and ethical dilemmas.

The quality of communication between a believer and the Holy Spirit is reflected by these three facets of spiritual attunement. They highlight how one can harmonize their thoughts, actions, and intentions with divine guidance. High attunement might be felt during moments of peace and certainty when decisions aligned with the Holy Spirit's guidance are made, or during daily prayer and meditation, when individuals experience a profound sense of being understood and supported by God. Furthermore, attunement reflects how well an individual can align their thoughts, feelings,

and actions with the Holy Spirit, signifying an enduring and more dynamic relationship. Attunement requires a more active, reciprocal, and constant interaction with the Spirit, indicating a heightened spiritual awareness and commitment. It includes the capacity to sense the Holy Spirit's promptings, to understand them, and to act accordingly. Attunement ought to be a central concept informing the formulation of a measure of HSA.

Proposed measurement template

An initial set of items within each dimension was deductively formulated through authors' consensus, grounded in theological and theoretical insights from the attachment-religion framework (Counted, 2025; Granqvist & Hagekull, 1999; Hall et al., 2009; Kirkpatrick, 1997, 1998). The preliminary set of items was reviewed by about a dozen of experts and colleagues (e.g., clinicians, theologians, attachment theory experts, spiritual directors, and psychology of religion scholars) across Christian traditions and further feedback via cognitive interviews was conducted with another dozen of Christian believers across denominations (18−65 years; 64% Men). This process allowed us to assess the clarity, relevance, and interpretability of the items, ensuring they accurately captured the nuances of HSA.

Additional feedback was sought from a broader Christian audience through a Facebook advertisement, with 22,096 people reached by this advertisement. We received 2,969 reactions through the Facebook advertisement, as well as 23 comments in response to the question (directed to Christians): "Which of these statements resonate more with you when you reflect on your relationship with the Holy Spirit?" Comments and direct feedback from Christian believers provided further insights into the clarity, relevance, and resonance of the items. This engagement led to further refinement and iteration of the statements, ensuring they captured the different experiences and perceptions of HSA. The feedback loop was instrumental in identifying areas where wording could be improved, where nuances were missing, or where certain items resonated particularly strongly, thus reinforcing their alignment with people's lived relationship with the Holy Spirit. This process was necessary to accommodate different theological perspectives while also maintaining the measure's broad applicability across Christian traditions (Brennan et al., 1998). The final proposed set of items emerged after several rounds of feedback and iterations. While we recognized that not every item might resonate with every Christian community, the measure is intended to be ecumenical and suitable for broad adoption. As such, measuring HSA signifies an important step toward assessing spiritual attachment in a Christian context, with potential implications for understanding the depth and richness of the main and interactive links between spiritual attachments and well-being (Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002).

The measurement template of HSA is drawn from attachment theory based on pre-existing models within the attachment-religion frameworkwhile complementing and refining the measure through cognitive interviews with experts in the field and practicing believers. Future work will therefore seek to psychometrically validate the measure to test its validity. Moreover, the measure's utility in addressing theoretical questions on HSA, such as the dimensions from which to theorize this phenomenon, further contributes to literature on spiritual attachment.

The measure comprises nine items split evenly across three domains (see Appendix 1). The scoring for these items ranges from 1 to 5, where 1 corresponds to "strongly disagree" and 5 corresponds to "strongly agree." An alternative scoring scheme could be from 0 (completely disagree) to 10 (completely agree), which might be considered based on the space constraints for including various anchors. The decision to use either scoring scheme will be informed by subsequent data collection efforts, assessing the pros and consof each. Depending on the intended use of the measure, responses to individual items might be examined, subscales could be calculated, or an overall score could be computed by combining all items. This preliminary set of items seeks to capture the nature of attunement in HSA, reflecting the core dimensions of accessibility, responsiveness, and engagement that characterize this spiritual attachment.

Clinical, Theological, and Research Implications

Conceptualizing HSA as the immediate divine attachment figure presents a novel area of research that could contribute to the psychology of religion, pastoral care, and clinical practice (Ainsworth, 1978; Bowlby, 1969; Granqvist et al., 2012). Exploring the dimensionality of HSA, specifically through the lenses of accessibility, responsiveness, and engagement, ushers in an exciting new way of exploring the experience. Williams' (2011) renewal theology posits that the Holy Spirit's role is not passive but actively involved in guiding, comforting, and empowering believers, thus suggesting a dynamic attachment characterized by mutual responsiveness and engagement. This perspective, positing the Holy Spirit as an immediate divine attachment figure and how people experience this phenomenon, can illuminate the unique relationships between the psychological and spiritual domains of HSA (McMinn & Campbell, 2009; Williams, 2011). Furthermore, this theoretical framework could offer novel methods for addressing spiritual dilemmas, separation anxiety (John 14:16−18), and existential concerns (Romans 8:15−26).

The concept of the Holy Spirit as an immediate divine attachment figure carries profound implications for both clinical practice and theological understanding. Providers could use these insights to address issues of accessibility, responsiveness, and engagement within the domain of spiritual relationships to better understand and navigate the complexities of spiritual struggles, existential queries, and emotional challenges faced by individuals of Christian background that perceived the Holy Spirit as their immediate divine attachment figure (Granqvist et al., 2012). Moreover, understanding these dimensions of HSA could empower such professionals to help people of faith deepen their bond with the divine, especially during times of distress. Theologically, viewing the Holy Spirit as an attachment figure emphasizes the transformative capacity of the Holy Spirit in believers' lives (Acts 1:8; 2 Corinthians 3:17–18). And assessing how nurturing an intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:16−26) impacts spiritual growth and overall well-being (Ephesians 4:30; Romans 8:26−27) may further enrich the understanding of the Holy Spirit's active presence in people's lives.

The trinitarian view is a core tenet of the Christian faith, and believers often relate to and experience their relationship with each person of the Trinity in different ways. A key differentiation is the potential compartmentalization of attachment experiences within the Christian faith. There may be some utility in identifying and understanding discrepancies in attachment security (e.g.,secure attachment to the Holy Spirit alongside insecure attachment to God the Father), which could provide insight into the believer's Trinitarian attachment patterns. This differentiation is also important because it fosters a more unified and secure attachment to the triune God, which can lead to a resilient spiritual life grounded in a holistic approach to Christian flourishing (Counted et al., 2025). This process aligns closely with the thesis of renewal theology, which is a perspective that highlights the transformative work of the Holy Spirit of the lives of believers (Williams, 2011). In light of Renewal Theology (see Cartledge, 2016; Williams, 2011), this would involve the continuous, dynamic experience of spiritual growth, healing, and integration within the context of the triune God. This process of integrating the discrepancies of spiritual attachment security can serve as a pathway for renewal and flourishing.

Perhaps a more complimentary approach in this work would be an emic approach that considers HSA from a distinctively Christian worldview. An emic understanding of HSA could be rooted within John Owen's (1676) work on 'Pneumatologia', where he argues that the Holy Spirit, as a divine person of the Trinity, regenerates or revivifies Christian believers, enabling them to embrace the gospel and experience a permanent union with God in Christ in the absence of His incarnational presence on earth. According to Owen (1676), the work wrought by the Holy Spirit enlivens Christian believers and confers to them the gift of experiencing God's intimate presence through prayer, and equips them for progressive sanctification by empowering obedience and enabling the mortification of sin. Santification, in this sense, is the lifelong process by which the Holy Spirit transforms believers into the likeness of Christ (Owen, 1676). This perspective becomes key to an emic Christian worldview of Holy Spirit attachment. From this emic perspective, attachment is not merely a psychological metaphor for emotional security but a theological reality grounded in the

Spirit's covenantal presence and sanctifying work. The believer's bond with the Spirit is initiated by God and sustained through a communion that is oriented toward transformation. Rather than reducing HSA to a psychological mechanism, an emic Christian worldview frames it as participation in the redemptive life of God through the Spirit's indwelling and active presence.

Therefore, an emic approach grounded in Owen's Christian theology would highlight the believer's experience of the Holy Spirit as an ever-present and dynamic spiritual attachment figure who fosters relational security and spiritual transformation through the process of sanctification that is only achieved in conformity to Christ's image. This distinctly Christian worldview of HSA offers an alternative understanding that complements our current etic psychological attachment approach, which focuses on universal patterns of attachment behavior and cognition in the context of the relationship between the believer and the Holy Spirit. Future work could explore how these emic and etic approaches intersect to provide a holistic understanding of HSA. This is not a matter of choosing between one or the other; rather, both models have unique merits and, when integrated thoughtfully, can offer a theoretically and theologically richer accounts of the relational dynamics at the heart of Christian spiritual life.

Future research could also explore the dynamics that nurture and sustain an individual's connection with the Holy Spirit. This includes examining the contextual variations of this attachment across different Christian traditions and cultural backgrounds, as well as how these experiences compare and contrast with relationships to other divine attachment figures (God the Father, Allah, Buddha, etc.). In pursuing these studies, it is necessary to integrate the renewal theological perspective on the proactive and transformative engagement of the Holy Spirit's gifts in public and private life.

As HSA is further studied, maintaining a critical perspective is essential. This includes acknowledging the inherent limitations in defining and quantifying the believer's relationship with the Holy Spirit. Distinguishing the specific effects of this relationship from other religious influences, while accounting for other interpretations (e.g., personal, cultural, theological, denominational), requires careful attention. A key limitation to consider is the reliance on self-report measures, which may be shaped by factors such as limited self-awareness, response biases (i.e., social desirability), and the difficulty of capturing implicit spiritual experiences. To address these challenges, future research is necessary to complement self-report approaches with alternative strategies, such as performance-based assessments. These measures can provide insight into automatic or unconscious patterns that may not surface in self-reports on HSA.

Conclusion

We all share the believe that exploring HSA as the immediate divine attachment figure holds tremendous promise for magnifying our understanding of the complex link between spiritual attachment and psychological functioning. This proposed attachment-religion model may offer valuable insights regarding the role of HSA in the believer's spiritual transformation, as well as provide new avenues for addressing spiritual struggles and existential concerns that may arise as a result of spiritual separation distress. Future research should aim to integrate clinical and theological perspectives, foster interdisciplinary collaboration, and explore the implications of HSA across different Christian traditions and cultural backgrounds. As this body of research expands and evolves, it is important that researchers remainopen to new insights, willing to challenge prevailing assumptions, and committed to both empirical rigor and theological integrity. In doing so, they can ensure that the study of HSA remains a vibrant scientific area of inquiry, with the potential to adavanceclinical practice, enrich spiritual formation, and clarify both the psychological and theological understanding of spiritual relationships.

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Appendix 1

Table 1. Holy Spirit Attachment Scale.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Somewhat Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Somewhat Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
OR					
	Completely Disagree (0)				Completely Agree (10)
Dimensions	**Items**				
Accessibility	1. I believe that the Holy Spirit is always available to me.				
	2. I believe that the Holy Spirit is consistently present in my life.				
	3. In moments of confusion, I am still certain that the Holy Spirit is near.				
Responsiveness	4. I believe that the Holy Spirit hears and responds to my prayers.				
	5. I trust that the Holy Spirit provides the support I need in my life.				
	6. I feel that the Holy Spirit cares for my well-being and attends to my needs.				
Engagement	7. I am aware of the Holy Spirit's work in my everyday life.				
	8. I feel a connection to the Holy Spirit in my daily activities.				
	9. My reliance on the Holy Spirit deeply impacts my decisions and actions.				

Items may be scored using either a 5-point scale: 1 = Never true of me, 2 = Rarely true of me, 3 = Sometimes true of me, 4 = Often true of me, 5 = Always true of me; or 11-point scale: 0 = Never true of me to 10 = Always true of me (anchor points only).