

Spiritual Counseling Experiences and the Meaning Making of Universal Religious Values among the Zilenial Generation

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Abstract: The zilenial generation encounters diverse personal, social, and spiritual challenges that shape their spiritual needs and meaning-making processes. While they receive spiritual counseling within their respective religious traditions, they also internalize spiritual practices that are universally present across religions, including self-reflection, mindfulness, gratitude, forgiveness, compassion, and the search for meaning in life. These practices function as shared spiritual resources that strengthen personal well-being without diminishing individual religious identity. This study aims to explore the lived experiences of spiritual counseling and the meaning-making of universal religious values among the zilenial generation. Employing a qualitative phenomenological approach within a constructivist paradigm, the study investigates how participants interpret their spiritual counseling experiences and construct meanings from universal religious values encountered in everyday life. Data are collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and reflective narrative analysis involving zilenial participants from diverse religious backgrounds. The data are analyzed using thematic analysis to identify the essence of participants' spiritual experiences and spiritual needs. This study is expected to contribute to the advancement of spiritual counseling by identifying universally shared spiritual practices as common ground across religious traditions while respecting the uniqueness of each faith. Furthermore, the findings are expected to provide a conceptual foundation for developing an interfaith spiritual counseling framework that promotes spiritual resilience, mutual understanding, and inclusive spiritual care among the zilenial generation.

Keywords: Spiritual Counseling; Universal Religious Values; Zilenial Generation; Spiritual Resilience.

Introduction

Generation Zilenial, referring to individuals born approximately between the late 1995s and early 2010s, has emerged as a generation navigating rapid social, cultural, and technological transformations. Unlike previous generations, they are characterized by openness to diversity, critical thinking, and a tendency to construct beliefs through personal experience rather than unquestioningly accepting institutional authority. These characteristics have significantly influenced how they perceive religion, spirituality, identity, and the meaning of life. While religion remains an important aspect of their lives, many members of Generation Zilenial increasingly emphasize spirituality as a lived experience rather than merely adherence to formal religious doctrines.

Recent studies suggest that younger generations continue to demonstrate a strong interest in spirituality despite living in increasingly secular and pluralistic societies. Rather than rejecting religion altogether, they tend to seek spiritual values that are authentic, inclusive, and relevant to contemporary life. Universal religious values—including compassion, gratitude, forgiveness, empathy, honesty, responsibility, respect for human dignity, and peaceful coexistence—are perceived as values that transcend religious boundaries and provide practical guidance for everyday life. Consequently, spirituality among Generation Zilenial is often expressed through personal reflection, meaningful relationships, social engagement, and moral responsibility rather than exclusively through ritual practices.

Indonesia provides a particularly important context for examining this phenomenon because it is one of the world's most religiously and culturally diverse societies. Growing up within a multicultural environment enables Generation Zilenial to interact with individuals from various religious traditions on a daily basis. Such interactions encourage them to appreciate common ethical principles shared across religions while simultaneously negotiating their own spiritual identities. As a result, universal religious values become an important foundation for fostering social harmony and individual well-being in pluralistic societies.

At the same time, Generation Zilenial faces numerous existential challenges associated with identity formation, uncertainty about the future, social comparison, loneliness, and the search for life purpose. These challenges often extend beyond psychological distress and enter the domain of existential meaning. Viktor Frankl (1985) argued that the fundamental human motivation is the "will to meaning," suggesting that psychological well-being depends largely on one's ability to discover meaning in life experiences. In this regard, spirituality offers an important resource through which individuals interpret adversity, reconstruct life narratives, and develop a meaningful sense of existence.

Spiritual counseling represents one approach capable of facilitating this meaning-making process. Rather than functioning solely as a problem-solving intervention, spiritual counseling encourages individuals to reflect upon their lived experiences, reconnect with their deepest values, and integrate spiritual resources into their

understanding of themselves and their relationships with others. Kenneth Pargament's Theory of Religious and Spiritual Coping (1997, 2007) explains that spirituality serves as a significant coping resource by enabling individuals to interpret stressful life events through transcendent beliefs, practices, and values. Through spiritual reflection, forgiveness, gratitude, hope, and compassion, individuals are able to reconstruct meaning and strengthen their psychological adaptation.

The present study is primarily grounded in Crystal L. Park's Meaning Making Theory (2010), which explains how individuals construct meaning by reconciling situational experiences with their broader belief systems, goals, and values. According to Park, psychological and spiritual adjustment occurs when individuals successfully integrate challenging experiences into their global meaning system. Within the context of spiritual counseling, this process allows individuals to reinterpret life experiences through universal religious values, thereby transforming personal struggles into meaningful sources of growth.

Despite the growing body of literature on spirituality and mental health among young adults, several important research gaps remain. First, previous studies have predominantly employed quantitative approaches examining the relationships between religiosity, spirituality, resilience, and psychological well-being. While these studies demonstrate significant statistical associations, they provide limited understanding of how young people personally experience spiritual counseling and how those experiences influence their construction of meaning.

Second, existing research on spiritual counseling has largely focused on religion-specific interventions grounded in particular theological traditions. Consequently, relatively little is known about how universal religious values that transcend specific religious affiliations are experienced, interpreted, and internalized by young adults living within multicultural and multireligious societies.

Third, although the concept of meaning making has become increasingly prominent in psychology and counseling research, few studies have explored how meaning making emerges through spiritual counseling experiences among Generation Zilenial. Existing literature tends to emphasize intervention outcomes or therapeutic effectiveness rather than the subjective processes through which participants reconstruct meaning, identity, and purpose.

Finally, studies involving Generation Z have generally concentrated on psychological well-being, digital behavior, or religious commitment, whereas their lived experiences of receiving spiritual counseling and interpreting universal religious values remain underexplored. Understanding these experiences is particularly important because Generation Zilenial represents a generation that actively negotiates spirituality within increasingly diverse social and cultural environments.

Addressing these gaps, this study seeks to explore the lived experiences of spiritual counseling among Generation Zilenial and to understand how they construct meaning from universal religious values through those experiences. Employing a phenomenological approach, this research contributes to the development of spiritual counseling literature by shifting the focus from intervention effectiveness toward subjective experience and meaning making. Furthermore, it offers a more inclusive understanding of spirituality by emphasizing universal religious values that can serve as common ethical foundations across different religious traditions in contemporary multicultural societies.

Method

This study employed a qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of spiritual counseling among the Zilenial Generation and to understand how they construct meaning from universal religious values. Phenomenology was chosen because it enables researchers to examine participants' subjective experiences and the meanings they attribute to those experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

The study involved participants from the six officially recognized religions in Indonesia: Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. A total of 18 participants were recruited, consisting of 12 members of the Zilenial Generation (two participants from each religion) and six spiritual counselors (one representative from each religion). Participants were selected using purposive sampling, followed by snowball sampling to identify key informants with substantial experience in spiritual counseling. The number of participants was determined based on information richness and data saturation, consistent with phenomenological research principles.

Data were collected through participant observation and in-depth semi-structured interviews. Interviews with the Zilenial Generation explored their experiences of spiritual counseling and how they interpreted universal religious values such as compassion, gratitude, forgiveness, empathy, honesty, responsibility, peace, and respect for human dignity. Interviews with spiritual counselors focused on counseling approaches, spiritual values emphasized during the counseling process, and their perspectives on the spiritual needs of the younger generation.

Differences were identified in the educational backgrounds of spiritual counselors across religious traditions. In Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism, spiritual counseling is predominantly provided by religious leaders whose expertise is primarily derived from informal religious education, spiritual formation, and pastoral experience rather than formal qualifications in psychology or counseling. In contrast, Catholic and Protestant spiritual counselors include priests, pastors, monks, and nuns, some of whom also possess formal education in psychology, counseling, pastoral counseling, or

psychiatry, allowing them to integrate theological and psychological approaches in spiritual care.

Data were analyzed using the phenomenological procedures proposed by Moustakas (1994), including horizontalization, meaning unit identification, thematic clustering, and synthesis of the essence of participants' lived experiences. To strengthen the comparative dimension of this cross-religious study, a cross-case thematic analysis was subsequently conducted to identify both shared themes representing universal religious values and distinctive themes reflecting the unique spiritual traditions of each religion.

The trustworthiness of the findings was ensured through source triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. Ethical principles were maintained by obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring confidentiality through pseudonyms, and informing participants of their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Results and Discussion

1. Spiritual Experiences of the Zilenial Generation in Islamic Spiritual Counseling

a. Experiencing Inner Peace through *Dhikr*, *Shalawat*, and *Nadhom*

The in-depth interviews revealed that the most frequently reported experience among Zilenial participants after engaging in Islamic spiritual counseling was the emergence of inner peace. Participants explained that spiritual counseling was not limited to verbal interaction between counselor and counselee but also involved various spiritual practices, including *dhikr* (remembrance of God), *shalawat* (invocations upon the Prophet Muhammad), recitation of *nadhom* (religious poetic verses), prayer, and *muhasabah* (self-reflection). These practices were perceived as integral components of the counseling process because they redirected participants' attention from anxiety and uncertainty toward a deeper awareness of God's presence. Interestingly, most participants admitted that they did not always understand the linguistic meaning of the Arabic recitations. Nevertheless, they consistently reported emotional changes, including reduced anxiety, increased tranquility, renewed hope, and a stronger belief that every life challenge could be faced with greater confidence after engaging regularly in these spiritual practices.

From a phenomenological perspective, these experiences suggest that spiritual meaning is not constructed solely through cognitive comprehension of language but through direct lived experience. Participants interpreted the repetitive practice of *dhikr*, *shalawat*, and *nadhom* as a process of cultivating awareness of God's presence, which fostered feelings of security, peace, and emotional stability. Spiritual counselors further described these practices as forms of *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the soul), whereby remembrance of God (*dhikrullah*) purifies the heart and strengthens one's spiritual consciousness. For the participants, these experiences extended beyond psychological comfort and contributed to the internalization of universal values such as patience, gratitude, hope, and compassion, which subsequently influenced their relationships with others.

b. Interpreting *Dhikr* as a Source of Spiritual Strength

Spiritual counselors explained that the effectiveness of *dhikr*, *shalawat*, and *nadhom* was understood not merely through the semantic meaning of the recitations but also through the sincerity of intention (*niyyah*), concentration, repetition, and spiritual conviction accompanying the practice. According to the counselors, every utterance containing remembrance of God and words of goodness possesses the potential to calm the heart, reshape one's thoughts, and encourage positive behavior. Several counselors referred to the widely known popular interpretation of Masaru Emoto's work on water crystals responding to positive words as an analogy to illustrate their belief that positive speech, prayer, and *dhikr* carry beneficial spiritual influence. Although most participants were unfamiliar with Emoto's work, they found this analogy helpful in understanding why maintaining positive speech and engaging in continuous remembrance of God formed an important part of their spiritual healing journey.

For the participants, this analogy was not regarded as scientific proof but rather as a meaningful explanation that resonated with their lived experiences. They perceived repeated recitation of sacred words as gradually transforming their patterns of thinking, reducing emotional distress, and strengthening their trust in God's guidance. Consequently, participants understood that the transformative power of *dhikr* did not depend solely on intellectual comprehension of the recited words but also on the continual internalization of goodness through repeated spiritual practice. This experience fostered universal values such as optimism, inner peace, self-control, and an appreciation of the constructive power of positive words.

c. Experiencing *Ruqyah* as a Holistic Healing Process

Another prominent theme emerging from the interviews concerned participants' experiences of *ruqyah syar'iyah* as part of Islamic spiritual counseling. Initially, many participants perceived *ruqyah* merely as a method for addressing spiritual disturbances. However, after experiencing the practice, they described it as a broader

process of strengthening their relationship with Allah, deepening faith, and developing resilience when confronting life's challenges. Several participants reported reduced fear and anxiety, improved emotional well-being, greater optimism, and, in some cases, perceived improvements in physical health. These experiences were interpreted as manifestations of spiritual effort (*ikhtiar*) accompanied by divine assistance, rather than as purely therapeutic interventions.

Phenomenologically, participants understood healing as a holistic experience encompassing spiritual, psychological, and, for some individuals, physical dimensions. Spiritual counselors emphasized that *ruqyah* should not be viewed as a substitute for medical treatment but as a complementary spiritual practice that strengthens inner resilience and prepares individuals to cope more effectively with illness and adversity. Within this experiential framework, healing was not defined solely by the disappearance of symptoms but by the emergence of faith, tranquility, hope, and a renewed sense of closeness to God. Universal values reflected in these experiences included perseverance, surrender to God (*tawakkul*), hope, and appreciation for the sanctity of life.

d. Discovering Spiritual Independence through *Konseling Nafsiyah*

Interviews with spiritual counselors also highlighted the concept of *konseling nafsiyah*, a counseling approach designed to help individuals recognize, regulate, and strengthen themselves through spiritual development. Participants explained that counseling involved not only receiving guidance from religious leaders but also learning to practice *muhasabah*, engage in regular *dhikr*, recite the Qur'an, pray consistently, and improve the quality of their worship independently. Gradually, they realized that overcoming life's difficulties depended not exclusively on external guidance but also on maintaining an ongoing relationship with Allah through personal spiritual discipline.

From a phenomenological standpoint, these experiences reflected the emergence of spiritual independence. Participants came to view counselors as facilitators who helped them rediscover their own spiritual capacities rather than as permanent sources of dependence. This awareness fostered a process of *self-healing*, understood not as self-reliance apart from God but as an active effort to restore oneself through worship, reflection, repentance, and strengthened faith. As a result, participants developed universal values such as personal responsibility, self-discipline, perseverance, emotional regulation, and resilience in responding to life's challenges.

e. Constructing Universal Religious Values through Spiritual Experience

The overall analysis demonstrated that *dhikr*, *shalawat*, *nadhom*, *ruqyah*, and *konseling nafsiyah* were experienced as interconnected practices that enabled participants to construct deeper meaning in their lives. Rather than perceiving these practices merely as religious obligations, participants understood them as pathways for knowing themselves, strengthening their relationship with Allah, and cultivating healthier relationships with others. Through these experiences, they reported becoming more forgiving, patient, emotionally regulated, respectful of others, and optimistic about the future.

The phenomenological essence emerging from participants' narratives indicates that Islamic spiritual counseling functions as a meaningful process through which universal religious values are internalized. Values such as compassion (*rahmah*), sincerity, patience, gratitude, honesty, forgiveness, responsibility, and care for others were no longer understood as values belonging exclusively to Muslims but as universal ethical principles applicable within multicultural and multireligious societies. Accordingly, participants' lived experiences illustrate that Islamic spiritual counseling serves as a process of meaning making, enabling individuals to integrate life experiences, religious beliefs, and universal values into a renewed worldview characterized by peace, inclusivity, and existential purpose.

2. Spiritual Experiences of the Zilenial Generation in Catholic Spiritual Counseling

a. Experiencing God's Presence through the Sacraments and Spiritual Accompaniment

The in-depth interviews revealed that Zilenial Catholics perceived spiritual counseling as a process of accompaniment that not only helped them cope with psychological struggles but also deepened their relationship with God through the sacramental life of the Church. Participants explained that when facing academic pressure, family conflicts, uncertainty about the future, or existential anxiety, they sought guidance from priests, religious brothers, religious sisters, or pastoral counselors. Spiritual accompaniment generally took place through reflective conversations integrated with prayer, Scripture reading, and participation in the Church's sacramental life. For the participants, the sacraments were not understood merely as liturgical obligations but as lived spiritual experiences that brought peace, acceptance, and the assurance of God's unconditional love.

From a phenomenological perspective, these experiences represented an encounter with God's presence that enabled participants to reconstruct the meaning of suffering and life's challenges. Rather than viewing difficult experiences as signs of failure or abandonment, participants came to understand them as opportunities for spiritual

growth and personal transformation. Through these lived experiences, they internalized universal values such as hope, compassion, self-acceptance, and respect for human dignity, which subsequently shaped their relationships with family members, friends, and the wider community.

b. Interpreting the Sacrament of Reconciliation as an Experience of Forgiveness and Restoration

The Sacrament of Reconciliation emerged as the most frequently described spiritual experience among the participants. They explained that confessing their mistakes, engaging in self-examination, and receiving absolution brought profound emotional relief and liberated them from feelings of guilt that had burdened them for long periods. Several participants stated that this experience enabled them to reconcile with themselves, repair broken family relationships, and become more willing to forgive others. Priests described the sacrament not merely as the confession of sins but as a process of restoring one's relationship with God, oneself, and other people.

Participants understood forgiveness not simply as a theological doctrine but as a transformative lived experience that reshaped their perspectives on life. They described forgiveness as a process of releasing resentment, anger, shame, and regret, thereby allowing them to move forward with renewed peace and emotional freedom. The phenomenological analysis indicated that the experience of reconciliation fostered universal values including mercy, humility, forgiveness, reconciliation, and respect for the dignity of every human being regardless of religious or social background.

c. Experiencing the Eucharist as a Source of Solidarity and Compassion

Another prominent spiritual experience described by participants was their participation in the Eucharist. They perceived the celebration of the Eucharist as more than an act of worship; it was experienced as an encounter with Christ's self-giving love that inspired them to become more attentive to the needs of others. Several participants explained that after participating in Mass they felt encouraged to engage in acts of service, assist friends facing personal difficulties, participate in charitable activities, and strengthen relationships within their families and communities. Pastoral counselors emphasized that the Eucharist serves as a spiritual source that empowers believers to embody God's love through concrete actions.

Phenomenologically, the Eucharist was experienced as a process through which personal spirituality became social responsibility. Receiving the Body and Blood of Christ was understood not as an end in itself but as an invitation to practice compassion in everyday life. Participants consequently interpreted solidarity, empathy, generosity, service, and respect for human dignity as universal values that extend beyond denominational boundaries and contribute to harmonious coexistence in a pluralistic society.

d. Discovering Psychological and Spiritual Strength through Pastoral Accompaniment

Interviews with priests and pastoral counselors revealed that Catholic spiritual counseling integrates spiritual formation with psychological understanding. Several priests, religious brothers, and religious sisters had formal education in psychology, counseling, pastoral counseling, or psychiatry, enabling them to address not only spiritual concerns but also emotional well-being, interpersonal relationships, and mental health. Participants consistently reported feeling accepted without judgment and appreciated as whole persons whose psychological struggles were treated with compassion rather than stigma.

These experiences led participants to interpret pastoral accompaniment as a tangible expression of God's love mediated through human relationships. Rather than emphasizing advice alone, participants highlighted the importance of being listened to, understood, and accepted unconditionally. Such experiences strengthened their awareness that every individual possesses inherent dignity and deserves respect. The phenomenological analysis therefore identified empathy, unconditional acceptance, care, and respect for human dignity as universal values emerging from the lived experience of Catholic spiritual counseling.

e. Constructing Universal Religious Values through the Sacramental Life

The overall findings indicate that the sacramental life and pastoral accompaniment function as a process of meaning making for the Zilenial Generation. Participants no longer perceived the sacraments merely as religious obligations but as transformative spiritual experiences through which they encountered God's love in everyday life. Participation in the Eucharist, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, prayer, and pastoral accompaniment enabled them to reinterpret personal struggles, appreciate the value of others, and cultivate healthier relationships within their families and communities.

The phenomenological essence emerging from participants' narratives demonstrates that Catholic spiritual counseling facilitates the internalization of universal religious values through lived spiritual experience. Compassion, forgiveness, hope, solidarity, service, and respect for human dignity were not understood as values

belonging exclusively to Catholicism but as universal ethical principles capable of fostering peaceful coexistence within multicultural and multireligious societies. Accordingly, participants' experiences illustrate that the sacramental life functions as a meaning-making process through which faith is translated into everyday practices that promote personal transformation, social responsibility, and the common good.

3. Spiritual Experiences of the Zilenial Generation in Protestant Spiritual Counseling

a. Experiencing God's Presence through Scripture and Prayer

The in-depth interviews revealed that members of the Protestant Zilenial Generation perceived spiritual counseling as an experience of rediscovering God's presence amid life's challenges. Participants explained that when facing academic pressure, family conflicts, uncertainty about the future, or existential anxiety, they sought guidance from pastors, church elders, and pastoral counselors. Spiritual counseling generally took the form of pastoral conversations integrated with Scripture reading, prayer, faith reflection, and worship. Participants consistently reported that biblical messages shared during the counseling sessions brought inner peace, renewed hope, and a deeper confidence that God continued to accompany them throughout their struggles.

From a phenomenological perspective, these experiences were interpreted as encounters with God through His Word. Rather than viewing Scripture as merely a religious text, participants experienced it as a living source of comfort, wisdom, and direction. Biblical reflection enabled them to reinterpret difficult life events not as evidence of failure or divine abandonment but as opportunities for spiritual growth and personal transformation. These lived experiences fostered universal values such as hope, perseverance, trust, and optimism, which subsequently shaped their responses to life's challenges and strengthened their relationships with others.

b. Interpreting Grace as an Experience of Acceptance and Forgiveness

Another recurring theme emerging from the interviews was the experience of understanding God's grace as unconditional acceptance and forgiveness. Participants explained that during spiritual counseling they were frequently encouraged to reflect on the belief that every human being possesses weaknesses and imperfections yet remains fully loved and accepted through the grace of Jesus Christ. This realization helped them release feelings of guilt, accept their personal limitations, rebuild self-confidence, and recover from failure or interpersonal conflict. Pastors emphasized that grace should not remain merely a theological doctrine but should become a transformative personal experience that reshapes the way individuals understand themselves and relate to others.

For the participants, experiencing grace extended beyond receiving God's forgiveness to developing the capacity to forgive themselves and others. The phenomenological analysis revealed that grace became a foundation for cultivating universal values such as compassion, humility, unconditional acceptance, forgiveness, and respect for the dignity of every person. These values were understood not only as expressions of Christian faith but also as ethical principles capable of fostering reconciliation, peaceful relationships, and mutual respect within Indonesia's multicultural and multireligious society.

c. Experiencing Transformation through Worship and Christian Fellowship

Participants also described worship services, Bible study groups, prayer fellowships, and discipleship communities as essential components of their spiritual counseling experiences. They explained that participating in communal worship, singing praise, praying together, and sharing personal testimonies fostered a profound sense of belonging and emotional support. Rather than confronting life's struggles in isolation, participants experienced themselves as members of a caring faith community where they could openly express their concerns, receive encouragement, and pray for one another.

Phenomenologically, these communal experiences were understood as processes of spiritual transformation extending beyond the individual's relationship with God into relationships with others. Participants recognized that spiritual maturity develops through mutual support, shared faith, and active participation in the life of the Christian community. Consequently, they internalized universal values including solidarity, empathy, mutual care, brotherhood, and service. These values motivated participants to become more attentive to the needs of others and to contribute positively to their families, churches, and wider communities.

d. Discovering Psychological and Spiritual Strength through Pastoral Counseling

Interviews with pastors revealed that Protestant spiritual counseling adopts a pastoral approach integrating theological understanding with psychological perspectives. Several pastors had formal academic training in theology, pastoral counseling, psychology, or related disciplines, enabling them to address participants' spiritual concerns while simultaneously considering their emotional well-being, interpersonal relationships, and mental

health. Participants consistently emphasized that they felt genuinely listened to, accepted without judgment, and supported throughout the counseling process. This environment of trust encouraged them to disclose personal struggles that they had previously been reluctant to share with others.

Participants interpreted these experiences as tangible expressions of God's love manifested through caring human relationships. They emphasized that the greatest source of healing was not merely the advice provided by counselors but the experience of being heard, understood, and valued as unique individuals created in God's image. From a phenomenological perspective, these experiences generated universal values such as empathy, respect for human dignity, honesty, responsibility, and compassionate care. These values became practical foundations for developing healthier interpersonal relationships and promoting psychological and spiritual well-being.

e. Constructing Universal Religious Values through Lived Faith

The overall findings demonstrate that Scripture reading, prayer, worship, Christian fellowship, and pastoral counseling were experienced as interconnected spiritual practices through which members of the Protestant Zilenial Generation constructed meaning in their lives. Participants no longer perceived these practices solely as religious obligations but as transformative encounters with God's love that influenced their daily attitudes and behaviors. Through these experiences, they reported becoming more accepting of themselves, more respectful of others, better able to regulate their emotions, and increasingly committed to serving those around them.

The phenomenological essence emerging from participants' narratives indicates that Protestant spiritual counseling functions as a process of meaning making in which life experiences are integrated with Christian faith, resulting in the internalization of universal religious values. Compassion, forgiveness, hope, service, solidarity, honesty, and respect for human dignity were understood not as values exclusive to Protestant Christianity but as universal ethical principles that transcend religious boundaries. Accordingly, participants' lived experiences demonstrate that Protestant spiritual counseling contributes not only to personal spiritual growth but also to the development of an inclusive, compassionate, and socially responsible worldview that supports harmonious coexistence within a pluralistic society.

4. Spiritual Experiences of the Zilenial Generation in Buddhist Spiritual Counseling

a. Experiencing Inner Peace through Mindfulness and Meditation

The in-depth interviews revealed that members of the Buddhist Zilenial Generation perceived spiritual counseling as a process of cultivating awareness and inner peace through mindfulness and meditation. Participants explained that when facing academic pressure, interpersonal conflicts, emotional distress, or uncertainty about the future, they sought guidance from monks (*bhikkhu*), nuns (*bhikkhuni*), or Buddhist spiritual mentors. Spiritual counseling generally involved meditation practice, mindful breathing, chanting of *paritta* (protective suttas), Dhamma reflection, and personal dialogue with spiritual teachers. Participants consistently reported experiencing greater emotional calmness, improved self-awareness, and a heightened ability to observe their thoughts and emotions without becoming overwhelmed by them.

From a phenomenological perspective, these experiences were interpreted as a process of becoming fully aware of one's inner condition rather than escaping life's difficulties. Participants described meditation as creating a reflective space that enabled them to recognize the impermanent nature of suffering and to respond with greater emotional balance. Instead of reacting impulsively to stressful situations, they gradually learned to cultivate patience, acceptance, and equanimity. These lived experiences contributed to the internalization of universal values such as inner peace, self-awareness, patience, and emotional balance, which subsequently shaped their relationships with others.

b. Interpreting Compassion through the Practice of Loving-Kindness

Another dominant theme emerging from the interviews was the cultivation of compassion through the practice of *mettā* (loving-kindness) and *karuṇā* (compassion). Participants explained that spiritual counseling encouraged them to develop goodwill not only toward family members and friends but also toward people with whom they experienced conflict. Through guided meditation, Dhamma teachings, and personal reflection, they learned to reduce feelings of anger, resentment, and hostility while nurturing empathy and kindness toward all living beings. Monastic counselors emphasized that compassion should be practiced universally without discrimination based on religion, ethnicity, social status, or personal background.

Participants understood compassion not merely as an emotional response but as a conscious way of living that transformed how they perceived themselves and others. The phenomenological analysis indicated that practicing *mettā* and *karuṇā* enabled participants to reconstruct the meaning of interpersonal relationships by replacing judgment with understanding and hostility with empathy. Consequently, universal values such as compassion, forgiveness, kindness, non-violence, and respect for all forms of life became central components of

their everyday behavior and social interactions.

c. Experiencing Healing through Acceptance of Suffering

Participants also described spiritual counseling as a process of understanding and accepting suffering rather than avoiding or denying it. Many explained that they initially viewed suffering as a negative experience that had to be eliminated immediately. However, through meditation, Dhamma reflection, and counseling conversations with monastic teachers, they gradually came to understand suffering as an inevitable aspect of human existence that could become a source of wisdom and personal growth. This shift in perspective reduced feelings of anxiety, frustration, and hopelessness while strengthening their capacity to face life's uncertainties with greater resilience.

Phenomenologically, these experiences reflected a transformation in the meaning participants attributed to suffering. Rather than interpreting adversity as punishment or failure, they came to perceive it as an opportunity to cultivate wisdom, mindfulness, and emotional maturity. Participants emphasized that genuine healing emerged not from eliminating external problems but from transforming their internal responses to those problems. Universal values identified through these experiences included resilience, gratitude, acceptance, wisdom, and hope, all of which supported greater psychological and spiritual well-being.

d. Discovering Self-Transformation through Dhamma Practice

Interviews with Buddhist spiritual counselors revealed that counseling emphasizes personal transformation through continuous Dhamma practice. Participants explained that they were encouraged to engage consistently in meditation, ethical living (*sīla*), mindfulness, and self-reflection as practical means of cultivating inner discipline. Rather than relying solely on external guidance, they learned to observe their own thoughts, emotions, and behaviors with greater awareness and responsibility. This gradual process enabled them to become more emotionally stable and better prepared to respond constructively to life's challenges.

Participants interpreted these experiences as a journey of self-transformation grounded in personal responsibility and continuous self-cultivation. Monastic counselors emphasized that spiritual counseling aims to empower individuals to develop wisdom from within rather than creating dependence on religious leaders. The phenomenological analysis demonstrated that these experiences fostered universal values such as self-discipline, responsibility, honesty, perseverance, and emotional regulation, enabling participants to live more consciously and compassionately in everyday life.

e. Constructing Universal Religious Values through Buddhist Spiritual Experience

The overall findings indicate that meditation, mindfulness, Dhamma reflection, loving-kindness practice, and spiritual counseling function collectively as a meaning-making process for members of the Buddhist Zilenial Generation. Participants no longer perceived these practices merely as religious rituals but as transformative experiences that reshaped their understanding of themselves, other people, and life's challenges. Through these experiences, they reported becoming more compassionate, emotionally balanced, accepting of differences, and committed to promoting peace within their families and communities.

The phenomenological essence emerging from participants' narratives demonstrates that Buddhist spiritual counseling facilitates the internalization of universal religious values through lived spiritual experience. Compassion (*karuṇā*), loving-kindness (*mettā*), wisdom (*paññā*), mindfulness (*sati*), gratitude, non-violence, and respect for all living beings were understood not as values exclusive to Buddhism but as universal ethical principles that contribute to peaceful coexistence in multicultural and multireligious societies. Accordingly, participants' experiences illustrate that Buddhist spiritual counseling serves as a process of meaning making through which spiritual practice is translated into personal transformation, social harmony, and the cultivation of universal human values.

5. Spiritual Experiences of the Zilenial Generation in Hindu Spiritual Counseling

a. Experiencing Inner Harmony through Prayer, Mantra, and Meditation

The in-depth interviews revealed that members of the Hindu Zilenial Generation perceived spiritual counseling as a process of restoring harmony between the self, God (*Ida Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa*), fellow human beings, and nature. Participants explained that when encountering academic stress, family conflicts, uncertainty about the future, or emotional distress, they sought guidance from *Pandita*, *Pinandita*, or Hindu spiritual counselors. Spiritual counseling was generally integrated with daily prayer (*sembahyang*), mantra recitation, meditation, scriptural reflection, and personal dialogue with religious leaders. Participants consistently described these practices as experiences that fostered inner calmness, emotional stability, and greater self-awareness while helping them regain balance amid life's challenges.

From a phenomenological perspective, these experiences represented more than religious observances; they were lived encounters with spiritual harmony. Participants understood prayer and meditation as opportunities to reconnect with their inner selves and with the Divine, enabling them to reinterpret personal difficulties from a broader spiritual perspective. Rather than perceiving problems as obstacles alone, they came to regard them as opportunities for self-improvement and spiritual growth. These lived experiences nurtured universal values such as inner peace, balance, gratitude, and self-awareness, which influenced both personal well-being and interpersonal relationships.

b. Interpreting *Dharma* as Personal Responsibility and Moral Integrity

A recurring theme emerging from the interviews was the understanding of *Dharma* as the foundation of ethical living and personal responsibility. Participants explained that spiritual counseling encouraged them to reflect on their duties toward God, family, society, and the natural environment. Counselors frequently emphasized that living according to *Dharma* means making responsible decisions, acting honestly, fulfilling one's obligations, and maintaining integrity in everyday life. This understanding helped participants navigate moral dilemmas while strengthening their sense of purpose and direction.

Phenomenologically, *Dharma* was experienced not merely as a religious obligation but as a meaningful guide for daily life. Participants described their growing awareness that every action carries consequences and contributes to the formation of personal character. Through spiritual counseling, they reconstructed the meaning of responsibility as an expression of devotion rather than external obligation. Consequently, universal values such as honesty, integrity, responsibility, discipline, and respect for others emerged as practical principles that transcended religious boundaries and guided their interactions within a multicultural society.

c. Experiencing Compassion through *Tri Hita Karana* and *Ahimsa*

Participants also highlighted the importance of *Tri Hita Karana*, the Hindu philosophy emphasizing harmony among humanity, the Divine, and nature, as a central element of spiritual counseling. Counselors encouraged participants to cultivate balanced relationships not only with God but also with other people and the natural environment. Many participants explained that they became more attentive to environmental stewardship, community service, and peaceful interpersonal relationships after participating in spiritual guidance. In addition, the principle of *Ahimsa* (non-violence) encouraged them to resolve conflicts peacefully and avoid actions that could harm others physically, emotionally, or verbally.

From a phenomenological perspective, participants experienced compassion as a way of living rather than merely an ethical concept. They described developing greater sensitivity toward the suffering of others, increased empathy, and a stronger commitment to promoting harmony in their communities. These experiences fostered universal values including compassion, non-violence, mutual respect, environmental responsibility, and social harmony. Participants regarded these values as applicable not only within the Hindu community but also as shared human values capable of strengthening peaceful coexistence in Indonesia's pluralistic society.

d. Discovering Self-Transformation through Spiritual Discipline

Interviews with Hindu spiritual counselors revealed that counseling emphasizes continuous self-transformation through disciplined spiritual practice. Participants were encouraged to engage consistently in prayer, meditation, self-reflection, and the application of Hindu ethical teachings in everyday life. Counselors emphasized that spiritual growth requires continuous effort to regulate thoughts, emotions, and behaviors while maintaining balance between material responsibilities and spiritual development. Participants explained that this process gradually strengthened their emotional resilience and enabled them to respond to life's challenges with greater wisdom and composure.

These experiences were interpreted as a journey of self-transformation grounded in personal discipline and spiritual awareness. Participants no longer viewed spiritual counseling as dependence on religious leaders but as a process of discovering their own capacity for inner growth through sustained spiritual practice. The phenomenological analysis demonstrated that this experience fostered universal values such as perseverance, self-discipline, emotional maturity, responsibility, and resilience. These values became important resources in helping participants navigate the complexities of contemporary life while maintaining spiritual balance.

e. Constructing Universal Religious Values through Hindu Spiritual Experience

The overall findings demonstrate that prayer, mantra recitation, meditation, reflection on *Dharma*, and the practice of *Tri Hita Karana* collectively function as a meaning-making process for members of the Hindu Zilenial Generation. Participants no longer perceived these practices merely as religious rituals but as transformative spiritual experiences that shaped their understanding of themselves, their relationships with others, and their

responsibilities toward the natural world. Through these experiences, they reported becoming more compassionate, emotionally balanced, responsible, and committed to promoting harmony within their families and communities.

The phenomenological essence emerging from participants' narratives indicates that Hindu spiritual counseling facilitates the internalization of universal religious values through lived spiritual experience. Values such as harmony, compassion, non-violence (*Ahimsa*), responsibility (*Dharma*), gratitude, integrity, and respect for all forms of life were understood not as values exclusive to Hinduism but as universal ethical principles that contribute to peaceful coexistence within multicultural and multireligious societies. Accordingly, participants' experiences illustrate that Hindu spiritual counseling serves as a process of meaning making through which spiritual practice becomes a foundation for personal transformation, social responsibility, and the cultivation of universal human values.

6. Spiritual Experiences of the Zilenial Generation in Confucian Spiritual Counseling

a. Experiencing Inner Harmony through Self-Cultivation and Reflection

The in-depth interviews revealed that members of the Confucian Zilenial Generation perceived spiritual counseling as a process of self-cultivation aimed at achieving harmony within oneself and in relationships with others. When experiencing academic pressure, family conflicts, uncertainty about the future, or emotional distress, participants sought guidance from Confucian religious leaders (*Rohaniawan Khonghucu*) and community elders. Spiritual counseling generally involved reflective dialogue, moral instruction, prayer, classical scripture study, and self-examination based on Confucian ethical teachings. Participants described these practices as helping them attain emotional calmness, develop self-awareness, and restore inner balance while navigating life's challenges.

From a phenomenological perspective, these experiences were understood as a journey toward becoming a morally mature person rather than merely solving immediate problems. Participants explained that spiritual reflection enabled them to recognize both their strengths and limitations while encouraging continuous personal improvement. Rather than focusing solely on external circumstances, they learned to cultivate their character through daily ethical practice. These lived experiences nurtured universal values such as self-awareness, inner peace, humility, and emotional balance, which subsequently shaped their interactions with family members, friends, and society.

b. Interpreting *Ren* as Compassion and Humaneness

A dominant theme emerging from the interviews was the experience of practicing *Ren* (仁), the Confucian virtue of benevolence or humaneness. Participants explained that spiritual counseling consistently emphasized treating others with kindness, empathy, sincerity, and respect regardless of differences in religion, ethnicity, or social status. Religious leaders encouraged participants to cultivate compassion through everyday actions, including listening attentively, helping those in need, maintaining harmonious relationships, and resolving conflicts peacefully. Participants regarded *Ren* as the moral foundation for building healthy interpersonal relationships and contributing positively to society.

Phenomenologically, participants experienced *Ren* not merely as an ethical principle but as a lived expression of humanity. They described becoming more aware of the importance of understanding others before making judgments and of responding to conflict with empathy rather than hostility. These experiences enabled them to internalize universal values such as compassion, kindness, empathy, respect, and peaceful coexistence. Participants emphasized that these values are relevant not only within the Confucian tradition but also as universal principles capable of strengthening harmony in multicultural societies.

c. Experiencing Moral Responsibility through *Li* and *Yi*

Participants also described spiritual counseling as a process of learning to practice *Li* (禮), referring to propriety and appropriate conduct, and *Yi* (義), referring to righteousness and moral integrity. Counselors emphasized that ethical behavior should be reflected in everyday interactions with family, educational institutions, workplaces, and society. Through discussions, scriptural reflection, and practical guidance, participants learned that responsible conduct begins with self-discipline and respect for others. They reported becoming more mindful of their words, attitudes, and actions in daily life after participating in spiritual counseling.

From a phenomenological perspective, participants interpreted *Li* and *Yi* as guiding principles that fostered personal integrity and social responsibility. Rather than viewing ethical conduct as external rules imposed by religion, they experienced these virtues as internal commitments shaping their character and decision-making. Consequently, universal values such as honesty, responsibility, justice, integrity, and mutual respect became increasingly integrated into their daily lives and relationships with others.

d. Discovering Self-Transformation through Continuous Moral Cultivation

Interviews with Confucian spiritual leaders revealed that spiritual counseling emphasizes lifelong moral cultivation rather than dependence on religious authorities. Participants were encouraged to engage in continuous self-reflection, evaluate their behavior, and strive for moral excellence through consistent practice of Confucian virtues. Counselors emphasized that genuine spiritual development occurs when individuals willingly improve themselves while maintaining harmonious relationships with family, society, and the broader community.

Participants interpreted these experiences as a process of ongoing self-transformation rooted in personal responsibility. They explained that spiritual counseling helped them recognize that lasting personal change begins with the willingness to cultivate one's own character before attempting to change others. The phenomenological analysis demonstrated that this process fostered universal values such as perseverance, self-discipline, responsibility, honesty, and emotional maturity. These values became essential resources for navigating the challenges of contemporary life while maintaining ethical integrity.

e. Constructing Universal Religious Values through Confucian Spiritual Experience

The overall findings demonstrate that reflective dialogue, scriptural study, self-cultivation, and the practice of *Ren*, *Li*, and *Yi* collectively function as a meaning-making process for members of the Confucian Zilenial Generation. Participants no longer perceived these practices merely as religious or cultural traditions but as transformative experiences that shaped their understanding of themselves, their responsibilities toward others, and their role within society. Through these experiences, they reported becoming more compassionate, responsible, respectful, and committed to promoting harmony in both family and community life.

The phenomenological essence emerging from participants' narratives indicates that Confucian spiritual counseling facilitates the internalization of universal religious values through lived spiritual experience. Compassion (*Ren*), righteousness (*Yi*), propriety (*Li*), trustworthiness (*Xin*), responsibility, honesty, respect, and social harmony were understood not as values exclusive to Confucianism but as universal ethical principles that support peaceful coexistence in multicultural and multireligious societies. Accordingly, participants' experiences demonstrate that Confucian spiritual counseling serves as a process of meaning making through which moral cultivation becomes the foundation for personal transformation, responsible citizenship, and the development of universal human values.

Conclusion

This phenomenological study demonstrates that although spiritual counseling is practiced through different theological traditions, rituals, and counseling approaches across Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, members of the Zilenial Generation consistently construct similar meanings from their lived spiritual experiences. Spiritual counseling is experienced not merely as a religious practice for resolving personal problems but as a transformative process that fosters self-reflection, emotional healing, spiritual growth, and the reconstruction of life's meaning. Across the six religious traditions, participants internalized shared universal religious values, including compassion, forgiveness, gratitude, hope, honesty, responsibility, humility, respect for human dignity, solidarity, and peaceful coexistence. These findings indicate that the essence of spiritual counseling lies not in doctrinal differences but in its capacity to facilitate meaning making through universal ethical values that transcend religious boundaries while strengthening personal well-being, social harmony, and interreligious understanding within Indonesia's multicultural society. This study contributes to the literature on spiritual counseling by proposing that universal religious values constitute a common foundation for inclusive and culturally responsive spiritual counseling practices among the Zilenial Generation.

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