The Routledge International Handbook of Spirituality in Society and the Professions

Edited by Laszlo Zsolnai and Bernadette Flanagan

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Spirituality in Society and the Professions

Abstract

Increasingly it is being recognized that spirituality is an aspect in almost every sphere and aspect of social life, especially in the context of crises and vulnerabilities. It appears in humanity's dealing with nature, home and community, healing, economics and business, knowledge, and education. The Routledge International Handbook of Spirituality and Society summarizes the most important issues, frameworks, discussions and problems regarding spiritually-related activities in different fields of social life.

The Handbook also presents new approaches and models for the professions working in different societal fields, including religion, psychology, philosophy, theology, ecology, agriculture, water, landscape and urban planning, tourism, medicine, psychological counseling, sociological work, nursing, sport, health, economics and business, management, leadership, politics, law, policing, science, architecture, technology and design, fashion, literature, visual arts, music, theatre, film, dancing, martial arts, media, and education. Equally, the Handbook illustrates how spirituality as an academic field of study is emerging and provides evidence for its transdisciplinary character. Arising from these developments it

is our intention to illustrate how professions can gain a good deal in insight and humanity by embracing spirituality in their working models and functioning.

Keywords: spirituality, social praxis, the professions, Routledge International Handbook of Spirituality and Society

In the Routledge International Handbook of Spirituality and Society a working definition of *spirituality* is used as a point of departure: Spirituality is people's multiform search for a transcendent meaning of life that connects them to all living beings and brings them in touch with God or 'Ultimate Reality'. (European SPES Institute 2017) In this definition is clear that spirituality is *not identical* with *religion*. While religion is a delineated institutionalized activity system, spirituality is a personal experience and a value-orientation towards authenticity. It is possible for a person to be religious without being spiritual. Inversely, there are people who are spiritual without belonging to any religion. Also, there may be a considerable overlap between religion and spirituality for people who exercise their spirituality within a specific institutionalized religion. Ultimately, as a recent cross-cultural analysis of the semantics of spirituality has illustrated, there are ever new and evolving meanings for spirituality in its usage in diverse contexts (Streib and Hood 2016).

The essays are set within a context where today, in Western societies in particular, societal activities and the professions related to them are almost completely *laicized*, that is, detached from their religious and spiritual roots. Thus the dominant working model in the professions is based on a *materialistic worldview*. The world is conceptualized as an exclusively material entity governed by the laws of physics and biology. Human beings are considered as body-

mind encapsulated egos having only materialistic desires and motivation. Professions are interested in materially defined utility and measure success mostly in money terms. (Zsolnai 2015)

Materialistic value orientation reflects the priority that individuals and the professions give to goals such as money, possessions, image, and status. Numerous studies document that the more people prioritize materialistic goals, the lower their well-being and the more likely they are to engage in manipulative, competitive, and ecologically degrading behaviors. These findings have been confirmed across different demographic groups, including children (Banerjee and Dittmar 2008; Kasser 2002; Christopher et al. 2007). The basic claim of our Handbook is that professions which want to surpass the ecological, social and ethical "mess" that modernity created are beginning to articulate within their own ranks the need to embrace spirituality and develop practices based on a less materialistic, more holistic worldview.

These non-materialistic models are based on a spiritual conception of human existence. Human persons are increasing being considered as spiritual beings embodied in the physical world who have both materialistic and non-materialistic desires and motivations. Materialistic desires and outcomes are embedded in and evaluated against spiritual convictions and experiences.

As Luk Bouckaert (2011) has argued, *Homo Spiritualis* is not characterized by striving for maximum utility, but by expanding in the awareness of being related to the other. This inter-existence of the self and the other is not reduced to a shared group interest or a collective welfare function. Persons are interconnected on a level of being, prior to acting within and making the world. The spirit in each one is the point of awareness where we feel ourselves

related to all other beings and to the Being itself. This spiritual self-understanding is not a matter of abstract philosophical thinking but is a feeling of universal love and compassion that gives our lives and actions an inner purpose and drive.

Professional associations are growing in order to make spirituality a vital perspective in their functioning. Examples include the British Association for the Study of Spirituality, the European Spirituality Ethics and Society Institute, the Management, Spirituality and Religion Interest Group of the Academy of Management in the USA, the Spirituality, Leadership & Management Network in Australia, the Canadian Society for Spirituality and Social Work and the European Conference on Religion, Spirituality and Health. A growing number of people are also studying for university level awards in the field as instanced, for example, by the unique MA in Applied Spirituality that has been running in Ireland since 2001.

The Routledge International Handbook of Spirituality and Society intends to contribute to the "*spiritualization*" of the professions by indicating how a broader and more humanistic working model can yield much better results than the conventional, narrowly focused, materialistic ones. But you the reader are the ultimate judge of this proposal and so we invite your thoughtful reflection on the initiatives outlined.

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