

nations as if that were unambiguous evidence of “predatory” economic injustice on the part of North America. Because wealth is not a fixed quantity, however, the wealth of one nation does not necessarily cause the poverty of another. (In fact, mere disparity need not even involve poverty. I live three miles from Bill Gates. The disparity between his wealth and my own is enormous, but that disparity is not obviously the result of an economic injustice.)

Still, given how poor the understanding of economics has been among Christian ethicists, *Kingdom Ethics* is a sign of progress. On this trajectory, perhaps in twenty years there will be a consensus in Christian ethics that the free-market system, undergirded by mediating institutions and a broadly Judeo-Christian rule of law, is the most just economic alternative available.

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## Business, Religion, and Spirituality: A New Synthesis

**Oliver F. Williams, C.S.C. (Editor)**

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(323 pages)

Although the literature on religion and spirituality in business is already substantial, this is a timely and interesting book. It contains an introduction, written by Oliver F. Williams, Academic Director of the University of Notre Dame’s Center for Ethics and Religious Values in Business, and fifteen chapters commissioned by the Center to answer the following highly topical question: What role should religion and spirituality play in the world of business?

The chapters are varied and uneven. Most are theoretical or descriptive in content, but a few contain cases and practical experiences (chaps. 10–12 and 15, among others). Most are based on Christian spirituality, although there are also chapters devoted to Jewish (Edwin M. Epstein, chap. 5), Hindu (Krishna S. Dhir, chap. 6), and Islamic (Jamal A. Badawi, chap. 7) spirituality.

This is obviously not a textbook or systematic exposition of the subject. Yet, the variety of the chapters and the inevitable repetitions and contradictions help to make it an interesting read. Anyone who believes that spirituality can and should have an important place in business will find valuable arguments in support of his view as well as critiques and reasons to look for solid foundations for it. In this review, I shall concentrate on four questions that came to my mind as I read this book and that I believe are important for the future of spirituality in business.

The first question is: What spirituality is appropriate for the business context? To find the answer, it is worth recalling the three risks identified by Stephen Porth, David Steingard, and John McCall (chap. 13):

1. *Management Risk*: the risk that spirituality will be used as a tool to help achieve bottom-line results: “(I)nstrumental spirituality renders employers and managers valuable only insofar as they are efficient and effective tools or agents of corporate financial development” (250; cf. also Lawrence S. Cunningham, 179–80, who adds that this strategy is also reductionist). The goal of spirituality in business should be the person; any other benefits will be, at best, an unintended consequence of the complete integration of people in the organization and the development of their full capabilities (cf. Ian I. Mitroff, 190).
2. *Market Risk*: the risk that spirituality will be converted into a commodity, a consultancy product offering quick-fix solutions to problems, thereby trivializing the job of management.
3. *Employee Risk*: the risk that spirituality will become a euphemism for “the self-glorification and narcissistic narrowness of individualism” (252). In a society dominated by individualism, any meaning that spirituality can give to life is unlikely to go beyond the mere realization of the individual, mainly because religion, which is always a factor of community, has been relegated to the private sphere.

In any case, the realization of the infinite richness of the person allows—or rather, demands—the existence of a variety of spiritualities, as becomes apparent in the course of reading the book. Of course, that is not to say that all spiritualities are equally valid.

That brings us to the second question: On what foundations should spirituality in business be built? Robert G. Kennedy (chap. 3) attempts to develop the bases of a business spirituality on philosophical (not strictly religious) foundations broad enough to be acceptable to many people. Kennedy finds these foundations in the work of Germain Grisez and John Finnis on integral human fulfillment based on the promotion of basic human goods. For their part, Porth, et al. (chap. 13), develop their concept of spirituality not by the philosophical route but by looking for elements that the main spiritualities have in common. “Our working understanding of spirituality identifies it with a deep commitment to the equal humanity of others.... We take this commitment to the dignity and flourishing of the whole person, of both oneself and others, to be emblematic of authentic spirituality” (254). Both of these approaches, which are quite close to one another, offer a conceptual framework that can be used to analyze other proposals for a spirituality of business.

The third question is related to the previous one: What role does religion play in spirituality? On this point, the book displays a clear bias in its composition: Only two authors are openly critical of the role of religion. Laura Nash (chap. 2) appears to lean toward a spirituality based on no religion in particular, much less one with Christian roots. She gives three reasons: (1) the company is not the appropriate place for religious expression, (2) spirituality is associated with settings unrelated to the company, and (3) (Christian) religions have shown a patent hostility to business.

The first two arguments essentially converge in the thesis that religion should not have any public expression—which, paradoxically, has led to a resurgence of spirituality in business (Kennedy, 82). The third argument has a long history but is not entirely in accord with current trends in theology and the spirituality of work and earthly things (signaled, albeit in passing, in James J. McGee and André L. Delbecq, chap. 4). It is worth pointing out that, throughout the book, there are only passing references to that theology, which should be the basis for a spirituality integrated with the reality of work, the professions, and the company.

The other author who is critical of religion is Mitroff (chap. 9), who declares himself opposed to a business spirituality based on religion because religion is a cause of divisions on account of the content of its dogmas and the emphasis it places on formal structures. “Religion is viewed as intolerant, close-minded, and excluding all those who do not believe in a particular point of view” (191)—an opinion that may have been justified in the past but does not reflect the attitude of most religions today, nor the theological developments mentioned previously.

All the other views on the compatibility of religion with a genuine spirituality are more favorable. Kennedy (chap. 3) affirms that the insights of managers’ faith “should give rise to a commitment to create an environment at work that is truly open to the realization of spiritual goods in the lives of employees and actively supports the pursuit of those goods when possible” (89). McGee and Delbecq (chap. 4) point to the role of the person’s calling (though limited, in this case, to the leader) and the practices of spirituality: “(T)he mature organizational leader embodies the esteemed path of holiness: the contemplative in action” (107)—although this idea of holiness in the midst of the world is not taken up anywhere else in the book. Gerald F. Cavanagh (chap. 14) maintains that separating spirituality from religion would mean starting from scratch in the search for religion’s insights, techniques, and riches, with results that would inevitably be superficial. In summary, I think that the argument that a genuine business spirituality can have explicit religious bases finds ample support in this book.

The fourth question that this book raises is this: Is there a spirituality of organizations different from the spirituality of persons? On this subject, too, the book offers some interesting thoughts. Mitroff (chap. 9) argues that personal spirituality is not enough to impregnate the entire organization and that a company with spirituality should be a “different” company in its organization, management, and strategy. This suggestion deserves further exploration. Similarly, Porth, et al. (chap. 13), suggest that introducing spirituality should radically change the management agenda and transform the whole organization. Patricia Vandenberg (chap. 15) suggests how this might be done: “Corporate spirituality mediates the mission or core ideology of the organization throughout the staff in a manner that ensures that the goals of the company will be achieved” (295).

To conclude, despite its biases and unevenness, the book will be helpful to any reader who is looking not so much for a systematic treatise on spirituality in business as a collection of loosely organized but nevertheless stimulating ideas on the subject.

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