

Essay on the Relationship Between Spirituality and Religion

What is Spirituality?

“Spirituality is the capacity of persons to transcend themselves through knowledge and love, that is, to reach beyond themselves in relationship to others and thus become more than self-enclosed monads.”

Spirituality is a dimension of a human being that is actualized as a life project and practice.

Spirituality is a developed relationality rather than a mere capacity. It is not generic. For example, we can distinguish in a qualitative sense between a healthy and rigid spirituality, even within a religious tradition. A spirituality is as unique as a personality is unique.

Spirituality can be religious or secular. A secular spirituality is still a “relationship between what one truly is and everything that is” (Peter Van Ness). A religious/secular spirituality, according to Schneiders, is “the experience of conscious involvement in the project of life integration through self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives.”

Generally, the term spirituality is the human capacity for self-transcendence, regardless of whether that experience is religious or not. Here, the activity of the human spirit, not Holy Spirit, may be the reference. The fact is that no religion has complete ownership of the term spirituality as it once had with reference to the Holy Spirit, the product of a religious tradition.

There are definite qualities of the word spirituality which are made clear in today’s secular and religious uses of the word. First, it denotes an experience. It is not abstract idea, or theory or movement. It is,

however, a personal-lived reality with both active and passive dimensions. It is something that is experienced.

Secondly, it is an experience of a conscious involvement in a project. It is not temporary, but an ongoing and coherent approach to life, always consciously pursued.

Thirdly, it involves one's whole life as an integrative process. It is not a temporary attitude, but rather an attitude about life that others model. It involves a life-integration, mind and body, emotions and thought, activity and passivity, social and individual aspects of life. Spirituality promotes an integrated synthesis of ongoing growth and development.

Fourthly, spirituality pursues a consistent self-transcendence toward ultimate values. It is positive and not negative in direction. It excludes narcissistic egoism and self-destructive behaviors and thoughts. There must be a self-transcendent quality which is ultimate. This may include personal or social well-being, the good of the earth, justice for all or union with God as an ultimate value. In a culture without a self-transcendent attitude in the form of gratitude, humility, awe and some form of a spiritual outlook, healing personal growth and well-being are often compromised.

What is Religion?

Religion is the fundamental life stance of the person who believes in transcendent reality. Each person assumes a realistic posture before that transcendent, ultimate, reality. It is an admission of one's total dependence as a creature on the source of being and life which is spoken of as reverence, gratitude for being and life. It is a reliance on the transcendent for help in living and dying. It is at the root of any

spiritual quest. The Ultimate Reality, however vaguely described, is involved for most who speak of a spirituality as religious.

Religion denotes a spiritual tradition, even if not practiced, that gives rise to a way of understanding and living in the presence of the numinous. Early formation remains at some level of the person's understanding of the ultimate realities in life.

Religion is embedded in the culture just as political, economic or education. Each of these are dimensions of group life. Each of these are parallel institutions. Religion is identified as an institutionalized system of relating with God or gods, leading to salvation either in this life or another life. Religions are cultural systems for dealing with ultimate reality, however that reality is defined.

Religions are concerned with whatever a society or group considers ultimately important. For example, in Christianity, salvation is ultimately important as a foundation. Religions are culturally institutionalized in the form of a creed.

What is the Relationship between Spirituality and Religion?

In the 21st century America context, spirituality and religion should not be strangers but partners. It is a relationship like spirit is to body. It is based on the recognition that spirituality that lacks the structural and functional resources of an institutionalized religious tradition is rootless for both the individual and society. At the same time, a religion that is uninformed by a personal and corporate spirituality is lifeless. While institutionalized religious traditions have many weaknesses in leadership, religion as a tradition is most appropriate context for the development of a mature spirituality personally and societally. It also fosters inter-religious dialogue which unites the human family. As Dr. Schneider puts it so succinctly, "What we may be learning from the

struggles of our time in this area of the religion and spirituality context, is how to sip lightly to institution even as we drink deeply of our tradition.”

Adapted from Sandra Schneiders’ “Religion and Spirituality: Strangers, Rivals, or Partners?” The Sana Clara Lectures, Feb. 6, 2000, Vol. 6, no. 2.

Related Study of Spirituality and Health

<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/dc63/34d7477e4dbdb37a0831b4c1ea00d6a91a5d.pdf>

Article: Reintroducing Self-Transcendence into Medicine