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Spirituality in College Students' Lives: Translating Research into Practice

Alyssa Bryant Rockenbach and Matthew J. Mayhew (Eds.)

New York, NY: Routledge Publishing, 2013

218 pages, \$46.95 (paperback) or \$155.00 (hardcover)

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Spirituality in College Students' Lives: Translating Research into Practice is an edited volume thoughtfully organized by editors Alyssa Bryant Rockenbach and Matthew J. Mayhew. The 25 chapters contained in the book address a diversity of themes related to spirituality in higher education. The compilation is divided into four sections: (a) introduction and methodological overview; (b) student characteristics and group differences; (c) college contexts; and (d) outcomes. Each section presents empirically based studies and practical implications to examine how best to facilitate undergraduate student needs pertinent to spirituality, religiosity, and identity formation. The viewpoints represented in the text may benefit Catholic institutions of higher education by supporting efforts to better prepare students to navigate through today's institutional contexts while also leading lives aligned with the core beliefs of Catholicism. The authors discuss how encouraging spirituality in higher education can promote human interconnectedness and compassionate citizenship, which support student learning and future professional development.

The social theoretical framework promoted in the volume helps readers understand some of the challenges institutions of higher education face in the postmodern era. Editors Bryant Rockenbach and Mayhew strategically introduce the text by examining Western society's value of knowledge and how it is influenced by different epistemic ideologies. In the past century, United States colleges and universities, both secular and non-secular, have relied heavily on a modernist epistemology. Such a school of thought values empirical and evidence-based ways of knowing. In the 21st century academy,

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the concept of knowledge has shifted to a broader notion of intelligence. As contributor P. Jesse Rine writes, today, “knowledge can no longer be viewed as an external, pre-existing entity waiting to be discovered by an objective observer but must be understood instead to be the subjective product of individuals who operate within social, cultural, historical, and ideological contexts” (p. 70). Understanding the postmodernist turn and the emphasis placed on a relativistic worldview poses a challenge for religious-based institutions committed to specific truth-claims.

Authors in the second section of the book articulate specific characteristics applicable to spirituality for assessment and analysis purposes. Through the use of empirical research methodologies, the chapters included in this section operationalize spirituality in a manner that is applicable across higher education disciplines. Contributor Jennifer A. Lindholm’s chapter offers an extensive methodological overview of the UCLA Spirituality in Higher Education Project. Results from this study indicate that traditional college-aged students at a baccalaureate-granting institution view spirituality as

a multifaceted quality that involves an active quest for answers to life’s *big questions* ... a global worldview that transcends ethnocentrism and egocentrism ... a sense of caring and compassion for others ... a lifestyle that includes service to others ... and a capacity to maintain one’s sense of calm and centeredness. (p. 13)

Catholic educators may find this definition of spirituality useful as they work to understand the roles that spirituality and religiosity play in the lives of college students in Catholic colleges and universities.

A third influential force emphasizes a positive connection between college student self-development and multicultural competencies when safe spaces related to spirituality are created for the purpose of discussion and self-exploration. The authors in the third section of the book accentuate student characteristics as they inform the quality of spiritually related discussions and deepens students understanding of the world. Exposure to such spiritual diversity may enhance students’ abilities to deal with spiritually and religiously sensitive issues at a professional and personal level, while also building a greater sense of campus community. Introducing emotional aptitudes with respect to multiculturalism may transcend academic excellence in undergraduate instruction and promote leadership in graduate education.

Finally, there is a strong consensus among the authors in the fourth part of the book, who theorize the college experience to be influential in shaping

social attitudes and worldviews. Outcomes from this section describe a correlation between spirituality and prosocial behaviors. One of many Catholic education core values emphasizes the practice of reflexivity to aid students in understanding how they relate to the world. Catholic institutions that continue to provide opportunities for students to practice an ethic of care may simultaneously encourage accountability and responsibility toward an ethical and civic lifestyle.

A strength of the text is the intentional representation of diverse voices (e.g., religionists, religious minority students, secular constituents) throughout the work. In the 21st century academy, statistical enrollment trends have indicated a rise in international students and a more diverse racial/ethnic student demographic. With consideration to minority religious students, Catholic institutions should consider student support programs, co-curricular activities, and/or pedagogical strategies for introducing diverse worldviews in order to sustain their viability within a multicultural society. Likewise, Catholic institutions should also consider how secular students might develop Catholic worldviews or how to assess secular students' worldviews in alignment with the Catholicity of the institution. Students may be better prepared to lead their profession forward having developed a more robust understanding of multicultural components within a multidimensional world.

Ultimately, *Spirituality in College Students' Lives: Translating Research into Practice* is an inspirational read highly recommended to a wide range of educators across disciplines at the post-secondary level. The practical, theoretical, and research oriented approaches to understanding students' spirituality represented in the book will appeal to readers in education, theology, and other social science disciplines. Educators will find such a text inspiring and relevant in today's educational world where students in the United States have been consumed by standardized knowledge and subjected to an industrial model of education. A more integrative approach to education unionizing the mind, body, and spirit has great potential to reinforce student wellness and wholeness for a more meaningful professional and personal future.

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