

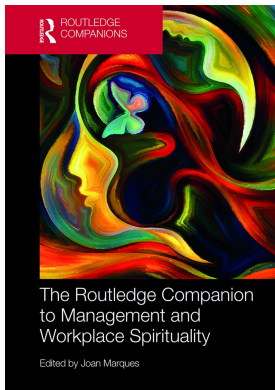
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Publisher: *Routledge*

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The Routledge Companion to Management and Workplace Spirituality

Joan Marques

Linking Spirituality to Religion

Publication details

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781351015110-8>

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Published online on: 11 Mar 2019

How to cite :- Timothy Ewest, David W. Miller. 11 Mar 2019, *Linking Spirituality to Religion from: The Routledge Companion to Management and Workplace Spirituality* Routledge

Accessed on: 22 Mar 2023

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781351015110-8>

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7

LINKING SPIRITUALITY TO RELIGION

Timothy Ewest and David W. Miller

Introduction

The ability to forsake the sacred/spiritual life was not always an option, nor was the presumed bifurcation between spirituality and religion. Sheldrake (1992) suggested that religion and spirituality may not always need to be deliberately linked and the schism that developed between the two was a result of advances in human knowledge, guided by historical-cultural events that changed perceptions of the transcendent.

This chapter reviews the historical origins, mainly Occidental, that created the divide between the sacred-spiritual and the empirical world as depicted by Taylor (2008). The goal of this chapter is to provide a meta perspective of how historical collective cultural assumptions and the ensuing social forces they create have led to the assumed bifurcation of the sacred-spiritual from the material world. This has resulted in a perceived separation between the sacred-spiritual and empirical world, which has affected the ways in which individuals, and specifically scholars, have theoretically separated religion and spirituality. The chapter challenges this distinction, drawing on social science research that suggests a connection and broad interdimensionality between religion and spirituality.

Origins of the Divide between the Sacred-Spiritual

Social forces, “that being an element of society that has the capability of causing change or influencing people” (Dominelli, 2004, p. 15), often provide a larger meta meaning and provide a theoretical context for analysis. Specific phenomena are frequently driven by large scale social events, values, and processes; although not typically acknowledged or detected by societies, organizations, and individuals (Rosenberg, 2015). Social forces frequently act as a motivational impetus for organizations and individuals, even if these individuals and organizations are alienated from each other. Social forces are also detected after the fact, when considering historical movements and ideals, and are believed to be factual understandings since they are based on historical events and accepted values (Eliade, 2013). While not every single individual participates in or is engaged by the social force, when societies, organizations, and individuals are driven by social forces they collectively act as a group mind (Durkheim, 1994). To detect social forces and the meta meaning which is directing and motivating societal action, one needs to trace significant historical events and corresponding values.

Charles Taylor (2008) traces the three historical developments that led to the bifurcation between the sacred-spiritual and the material world, thus creating or legitimizing a divide between religion and spirituality. Taylor's research considered the historical record and found that earlier worldviews did not recognize any separation between the sacred-spiritual and the material worlds, nor the nuancing of religion and spirituality. Rather, it is only in our modern or present worldview when humans began viewing the world with a different framework, creating deep divides within human perception regarding the sacred-spiritual and material world.

Taylor (2008) argues that the understanding of the sacred-spiritual for the classic or medieval individual did not have any consideration of not believing in the transcendent or God(s), which today is the denotation of secular. For the medieval individual the material world was traced by the divine, where angels moved the forces of nature and physical illness was a curse from God (or the gods) (Smith, 2014). Something was only considered secular when a person ascribed or made attributions to an event within the material world to a god who was not believed to have caused the event, or to a divinity that was not the most recognized dominate deity. But, generally, no one believed there was not a direct connection between the sacred-spiritual and the material world; it simply was not an option.

In this era individuals could have either a nascent or mature belief and practice system, but regardless of religious adherence to what was acknowledged as the most commonly accepted belief(s), they did had have high levels of religiosity regarding practices and the institution (Taylor, 2008; Conybeare, 2014). Some have suggested that ancient religions, including during the medieval era, had little if any awareness regarding creeds, or systemized beliefs and thus the focus was mostly on practices and institutions (Howe, 2004). The result, Taylor suggests, is that no one saw a division between the sacred-spiritual and the material world; it simply was not an option as a worldview for individuals until the Enlightenment.

Taylor (2008) notes the second perspective came from Enlightenment era thinking which promoted rationality and reason as a means to understand reality, and challenged existing largely unsystemized beliefs and church-inspired traditional practices. In doing so a neutral space or areligious space was created that was rationally oriented and thus "disenchanted" the world (Taylor, 2008; Inglehart & Norris, 2004). This occurred because considerations of the sacred-spiritual are difficult and in some cases impossible to validate empirically having their own logics. The preference then during this era, was for an areligious space as a means to avoid enchanted notions which interfere with a rational understanding of the material world and corresponding modernization (Berger, 1969). As Enlightenment thought progressed, other scientific contributors to the Enlightenment questioned the preeminence of reason, such as Freud who suggested the ego as primary or inceptive (Mack, 2010). The theoretical assumptions coming out of this period were that reason is ultimate and only it can provide a practical and accurate understanding of the world, whereas religion is reframed as myth. Yet, when reason was applied to understand the human condition it was problematic: the human dynamic may be more enigmatic. Clifford Geertz (1973, p. 111) refers to this perspective as the "scientific perspective," echoing Taylor's observation that the Enlightenment placed reason above other forms of knowledge.

Finally, Taylor (2008) suggests the emerging modern trend emerging out the Enlightenment, and holding to many of the same assumptions, adds an additional nuance wherein not believing in any transcendent elements to life is not contested, and is but one option among many choices. Here, the perspective harkens back to Feuerbach (2004) who suggested all of humanity's sacred-spiritual beliefs and practices are only a projection of human need onto the heavens, and should be demythologized to be understood as human values. This perspective is the natural extension of the Enlightenment emphasis on creating an areligious space,

extending the idea to a preferable worldview devoid of the sacred-spiritual and places this as an acceptable personal rational perspective.

The result is that today there is a continued emphasis on and prioritization of reason and the belief of the enigmatic human, and acceptance of no need for transcendent beliefs. These assumptions have created a theoretical context with a plethora of definitions and research regarding the sacred-spiritual. For the individual, these present conditions have delegitimized the sacred-spiritual space, and created a crisis for those who associate with the sacred-spiritual space and use it for forming their personal values and identity (Emmons, 2003). Further, there is no academic consensus within existing scholarship regarding the definitions of spirituality or religion (Nongbri, 2013), making any suggestion of finding connections between the two appear untenable. Moreover, definitions regarding the sacred-spiritual have a tendency to relate to a presupposition which articulates one of the aforementioned historical perspectives. The primary intent of this chapter is to use Taylor's (2008) distinctions to provide a historically based narrative to explain at a meta level the theoretical presumptions that are in use and a social force within each era.

Taylor's First Definition of Sacred

Theoretical perspectives and ensuing definitions regarding the sacred-spiritual, specifically referring to religion and spirituality, suggest that segregation of life from the sacred-spiritual to be impossible. Thus any definition for spirituality or religion must integrate aspects of spirituality and religion which have no (secular or non-religious?) alternative. Moreover, any definition would be suggestive of using religion or spirituality as an interpretive lens to provide the material world with sacred-spiritual personal or community meanings, with no avenue to provide meaning without informing the sacred-spiritual. The beliefs may or may not be systematized, and refer largely to organizational edicts and practices. Moreover, there is a subtle or overt belief that communities, organizations, and individuals are flourishing or ethical when they adhere to, are confined by, or follow traditional community beliefs and practices.

For example, scholars have identified this space by suggesting it is "a God-oriented spirituality where thought and practice are premised in theologies, either broadly or narrowly conceived" (Spilka, 1993). This view suggests that religion is not a single individual's perspective, but is shared by a community, and thus spirituality is the individual expression of the individual's adherence to the transcendent as represented by the group.

Taylor's Second Definition of Sacred

Theoretical perspectives and ensuing definitions regarding the sacred-spiritual, specifically referring to religion and spirituality, suggest the possibility of separation of the material world from the sacred-spiritual. Here, reason is championed because it disenchants the material world of unexamined practices and unsystemized beliefs. Therefore, definitions regarding religion and spirituality are sensitive to the separation between the sacred-spiritual and the "real" or material world. These theoretical perspectives take positions which are apologetic, arguing one is justified over and against the other, clearly segregating the sacred-spiritual from the material.

In this perspective there are two interpretive lenses, the sacred-spiritual and the material world (secular), with the latter being relegated as an areligious space. Finally, there is a belief that communities and organizations must intentionally choose for themselves one of the two perspectives, with publicly held and government organizations primarily being in the areligious (secular) space (Meyer & Moors, 2005). Within designated secular or areligious spaces, individuals who adhere to the sacred-spiritual are asked to bifurcate themselves, practicing and

processing their sacred-spiritual self in the proper context, that being outside designated areligious spaces. Yet, individual's values are subjective and enigmatic, and they are given a special dispensation from the scientific perspective.

For example, Inglehart and Norris, (2004) trace the sacred-spiritual and secular as two social forces that have corresponding human and national values which drive and determine behaviors. Weick (1995) observed that people who adhere to the sacred-spiritual have their own sense making regarding the person. Emmons (2003) posits that individuals are affected by the enlightenment period in contemporary society, wherein those who seek identity from the sacred-spiritual realm may struggle with having part of their identity marginalized. And, while religion and spirituality is still recognized to be a steady, if not increasing, force in most global communities (Casanova, 2011; Nandy, 2007), organizations and some government public entities endorse and demand the areligious space, indicating that while the spiritual life may not be retreating from society, it can be marginalized in organizational life (Wilson, 1982; Ashforth & Vaidyanath, 2002; King 2007). Berger (1969) observes that there is a preference for an areligious space in societies and organizations to avoid enchanted notions, which interfere with modernization which is driven by rational thought on the material world.

Taylor's Third Definition of Sacred

Here theoretical perspectives and ensuing definitions regarding the sacred-spiritual, referring to religion and spirituality, are much like the above, except with more emphasis on apologetics. The areligious space is understood as humane, or the ultimate teleological expression of human biology and these corresponding human values can be explained through the sciences (e.g., neuroscience). Therefore, definitions regarding the sacred-spiritual are either suggestive of illuminating how sacred-spiritual beliefs and practices should actually be understood as human values or biological proclivities. Sacred-spiritual communities or individuals which hold beliefs and practices that are not clearly reasonable and/or use myth or religious sense-making to explain the material world, are regarded as being locked in mythology, or not relevant to the furthering of the real human potential.

For example, arguably the best known popular advocate of this position is Sam Harris (2005), who argues

Clearly, it is time we learned to meet our emotional needs without embracing those transitions in every human life that demand profundity—birth, marriage, death—without lying to ourselves about the nature of reality. Only then will the practice of raising our children to believe that they are Christian, Muslim, or Jesus be widely recognized as the ludicrous obscenity that it is. And, only then will we stand a chance of healing the deepest and most dangerous fractures of our world.

(p. 88)

Harris's (2005) dogmatic position against all religion is one logical complement of a new scientific culture, which considers reality to be confined to the observable. However, religious individuals use their belief in God, and not just reason alone, to make sense of the world around them (Weick, 1995).

The result is that people who hold sacred-spiritual beliefs are left with an alternative way to interpret or make sense of the world around, specifically using the teaching, revelatory insights, and traditions which outline expectations of the sacred-spiritual on their lives, and provide meaning in everyday events (Geertz, 1973).

Multidimensionality of Religion and Spirituality

Three contextual considerations are central to linking spirituality to religion, although largely concerning Occidental religion. The first is the existence of the present social force, dictating bifurcation of the sacred-spiritual from the material world. This acts as the generally accepted modern scientific perspective or paradigm. Specifically, coming out of the Enlightenment, is the assumption that the material world may be objective, but the individual is subjective and amorphous. Academic disciplines align research methodologies and operationalize definitions to fit these specific theoretical assumptions determined the present social force, or apologetically if the assumptions are based on a bygone era.

Second, Schmidt-Wilk, Heaton, and Steingard (2000) posit the struggle over operational consensus is partially due to the amorphous nature of spirituality; the definition is owned by various disciplines. But the final and primary challenge in tracing the connections or linkages between religion and spirituality is that both terms are attempting to delineate and codify a phenomenon that is existential (Vess, Arndt, Cox, Routledge, & Goldenberg, 2009), phenomenological (James, 1995), and, most importantly, multidimensional (Masters et al., 2009).

For example, The Brief Multidimensional Measure of Religiousness/Spirituality (BMMRS), exploratory factor analysis has seven factors. The first of which accounts for 42.08% of the variance, the next two factors each account for 6% and 6.53% of the variance, and the remaining four variables account for 2.95%, 3.19%, 3.78%, and 3.19% of the variance respectively (Masters et al., 2009). Another example comes from, Ashmos and Duchon (2000) who reported similar results with the Spirituality at Work Scale (SWS). The first two factors contribute 36.40% of the variance and the remaining five factors contribute only 5.86%, 5.37%, 4.40%, 3.38%, and 3.14% of the variance. Masters et al. (2009) citing Piedmont, Mapa, and Williams (2006) suggest that shared variance in variables within social science research concerning the sacred-spiritual is suggestive of multidimensionality, indicating the nature of religion and spirituality has overlapping facets, thus also appearing to have underlying a unified construct.

Therefore, finding commonalities between the religion and spirituality should not come as a revelation. Hill and colleagues (2000), took an exhaustive survey of vetted psychological research in the field of psychology of religion, an academic field that is robust, unlike the nascent, although emerging field of Management Spirituality and Religion interest group within the Academy of Management. Hill et al.'s survey of extant research found five connections between religion and spirituality. See Table 7.1.

Table 7.1 Research Connections Between Religion and Spirituality

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1. Religion and spirituality (R/S) develop across a lifespan, occurring at every age throughout a person's life, wherein a person's religious and spiritual concerns are evident, within various cultures and within persons who have no religious training (p. 53).
 2. R/S are inherently social-psychological phenomena, which means that they are expressed or are influenced by groups, and the groups' codes and norms which can be rooted in religious expectations (p. 54).
 3. R/S are related to cognitive phenomena, involving commitments and different and complex thoughts. R/S thinking can be unique, having its own sets of reason and sense making.
 4. R/S are related to affect and emotion, both the fervent commitment in ritual, and aspects of mindfulness.
 5. R/S are tied to biological or endemic aspects of our humanity, either in evolutionary biological or theistic teleological perspectives, suggesting R/S are endemic to what it means to be human.
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Source: Adapted from Hill et al. (2000, pp. 53–54).

The bifurcation of the sacred-spiritual and the material world as traced by Taylor (2008), suggests that the bifurcation is an accommodation to theoretical positions, social forces, which changed the existing assumptions or meta narrative within each era. The modern theoretical position has created a bifurcation between religion and spirituality, which social science research suggests is a false dichotomy.

Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the historical origins, mainly Occidental, that created the divide of the sacred-spiritual, with the empirical world as depicted by Taylor (2008). The goal of this chapter was to provide a meta perspective of how historical collective cultural assumptions and social forces, have led to the bifurcation of the sacred-spiritual from the material world and has resulted in a perceived separation between the sacred-spiritual and empirical world. This perceived separation has affected the ways in which individuals, and specifically scholars have separated religion and spirituality. The chapter concludes by delineating how social science research suggests a connection and broad interdimensionality between religion and spirituality.

The present theoretical context development, which has championed reason, but allowed for the human to remain enigmatic, may not be scientifically accurate. Ironically, research has suggested that reason does not play a central role for humans; however, there are a number of other motivators, including, emotions (Eisenberg, 1986) intuitions (Haidt, 2001), spirituality (Cowan, 2005), and religion (Ewest, 2015; Vitell, 2009). Research is suggesting that the human condition may be multivariate steaming from various experiences, but other research also challenges the researcher to consider the role of the transcendent.

Mark Chaves (1994) suggests religiosity may not be created by experiences, but instead it is possible that religion can be an inseparable aspect of our humanity and this is awakened within us when we experience the transcendent (God). For most, the tension between the scientific perspective and religious perspective means people of faith have to struggle with a gradual shift from a world where religion was central, to one that values disinterested secular observation.

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