

Book review

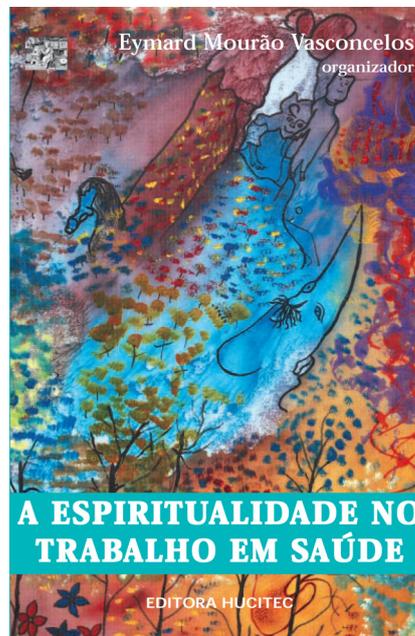
## Spirituality Paths: taking care of others and taking care of ourselves

**Betânia Maria Vilas Bôas Barreto**

PhD student the Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação, Universidade Federal da Paraíba - UFPB (Postgraduate Program in Education, Federal University of Paraíba). Communication Professor at Universidade Estadual de Santa Cruz - UESC, Bahia. bete\_vilas@hotmail.com

VASCONCELOS, Eymard Mourão (ed.) *et al.* *A espiritualidade no trabalho em saúde*. São Paulo: Editora Hucitec, 2006, 391 p.  
ISBN: 85-271-0689-2

DOI: 10.3395/reciis.v4i3.392en



Nowadays we live a reality formed from several views on our multifaceted organization as a collectivity, our concrete and abstract experiences shared or not, and our individual and collective experiences in our social day-to-day life. The ways of perceiving and evaluating the circumstances in which we are living run through the most rationalist and scientific concepts, as well as through the most subjective ones, of the interiority of human beings. This reflexive range of ways on the being and living of man in the present world is the cornerstone of theoretical discussions of various thinkers of our time, concerned with the complex and constantly changing circumstantial configurations which appear in our existence as a part of society.

On this connection between the luminosity of contemporary science and the half-open relationship of our private and collective interiority, the investigative proposal of this book is based. A collective dynamics of critical, reflexive, epistemological, and methodological paths on the necessary interface of scientific assumptions of the current biomedical work, with various guidelines, and the opening to a construction of humanistic subjectivity inspired in the improvement of the notion of taking care and treating people, and of the formation of professionals directed to inner and spiritual representations, propelling a comprehensive, identifying, and active interrelation in the contact and coexistence with suffering and the lack of social welfare.

The theoretical perspective runs through the horizon of the Popular Education in Health, as a delineated input with the historical and political commitment of social transformation, departing from concrete actions in social reality, mainly related to the lowest layers of society. It is a field cultivated essentially by Freire's\* assumptions, rooted in the fabric of popular action, conscious and emancipatory.

The reflexive concern is centered in the rationalizing formation of health systems and its professionals, perceived as dehumanizers, scientific, and biologicist, in the care and treatment of individuals. It is an attempt of finding new alternatives in the search for a new way of thinking the way one practices Medicine, addressed to the humanization, attention to health and care of social groups, in a more integrated view of the human being, as a plural being, who possesses reasoning, emotion, intuition, sensitiveness, and spirituality, and who must be understood in his multiple approaches, putting aside a fragmented view of symptomatology and medicalization. It is an attitude of understanding, shelter and dialogue in the search of solutions for the improvement of the quality of life of the less favored popular layers.

Through the text, various inputs will be designed by argumentations that guide to rejoining with spirituality in individuals, the conditions of life and health of the health professionals themselves as active social actors, intercrossing their spiritual experiences, wishes, frustrations, and actions with their patients/clients. One of the tools presented as comprehensible connectivity is the dialogical notion of this meeting and the problematizing capacity of the inner and outer realities of the people involved, in a Freire-like conception of the world.

In the light of this introduced scenario, the discursive trajectory is undertaken in two parts. The first is based on "The Spirituality in the care and education in health", by Eymard Mourão Vasconcelos, editor of the volume. His argumentation adheres to the perspective of the Phenomenology of Religions, approaching spirituality as experience, and mainly as a religious experience. Subsequently he outlines a scenario of the concept of spirituality and its relation with religiosity and with religions, working Jung's concepts such as transcendence, immanence, and numinosity, perceiving the human being in construction as a being of action and protest, in the process of subjectivity and search for the existential meaning and the motivation for life. The author discusses also the crossings and driftings away from the spirituality in the interiority of beings, through intuition, emotion, and sensitiveness, being directed to the work in health.

In this perspective, a reflection is initiated on the therapeutic power related to spirituality and its connection with the deep ego. Still under the Jungian perspective, he deals with the concept of epidemiology in religion, in the sense of thinking the quality of health associated with a religious experience. Going further, he demonstrates the relationship of meanings between spirituality and the trajectory of the Popular Education and the need of deepening in its meaning the valorization of spiritual paths for educational actions with the popular media. For this, he suggests methodological segments, mainly based on the dialogue, sheltering and hearing of the individuals, in an attempt to integrate education in health with spirituality, with a view to concrete actions in the social reality. Starting from these assumptions, Vasconcelos concentrates on the intention of the formation of health professionals connected with the popular proposal. Finally, he questions the secularization and proposes the valorization of spirituality as an epistemological reference, and as a social-political guideline.

His private paths of spirituality, worries and popular-educational trajectory are also mentioned in prose and verse, reflecting his intimate course of personal experiences as a health professional and popular educator, in an intimist way of exposing his intentions and existential and professional horizons, in which he calls "Paths of spirituality in the author" (p. 136), "The encounter with the great love of my life" (p. 140) and "Walking on the water" (p. 149).

At a second moment in the collection, an invitation is presented to other speeches about the theme called "Different Looks". This course is initiated by the text "Spirituality and Health: the view of a philosopher" by Regis de Moraes. He departs from a discussion on what he calls the Contemporary Scientific Revolution, with scientific discoveries in the fields of energy such as the Theory of Relativity, Quantum Physics, the Subtle Energies Physics, the Theory of Probability, among others, shaking the bedrocks of the Newtonian scientific model, directing the thinking to a new historical energy-centric model, and opening the perspective for the sight of a world and a pluri-dimensional human being.

Moraes highlights this pluri-dimensionality departing from theorists such as C. G. Jung, Abraham Maslow, Viktor Frankl and Roberto Assagioli, among others, in the acknowledgement of man as at least quadri-dimensional: "a) somatic dimension (organismal and physical); b) psychological dimension (mental-cerebral); c) noetic dimension (of the individual spirit); d) pneumatic dimension (dynamization of the Holy Ghost)" (p. 171). In this sense, the author discusses the awakening of spirituality and health, defending the need of

an open therapeutics to perceive such subtle energies, as “dynamized by the lovely will of the spirit which makes itself” (p. 184).

Continuing the discussions and in the interface with Morais, perpetrating a psychological approach, Geraldo José de Paiva and Maria Inês Assumpção Fernandes bring to the theme their article on “Spirituality and Health, a psychological approach”. This time the interest falls on the overlapping of the scientific psychology as a subject directed to the “explanatory and predictive knowledge of the world” (p.187) and the routine psychology, practiced on a day-to-day basis, and regarded as “indigenous, implicit, native, from the ordinary man and of common sense psychology (p. 187).

These authors’ basic concern is the investigation of the organization of this routine psychology and its importance as builder of the meaning of cultural narratives, which are pulverized in the events of people’s lives, especially in the scope of spirituality and health. Paiva and Fernandes refer to the Humanistic Psychology as a string which seeks these references of study, and also give emphasis to the importance, in a Project of education for health, of the religious experiences which take into consideration the meaning which people build in their lives.

One of these meanings built in narratives appears in the following study by Júlio Alberto Wong-Un, “The Blow of Poetry: reveal, create, experiment and do communitarian health”. The text penetrates the encounter of the health professionals with the universe of the communitarian reality. The author’s first observation is the defamiliarization which occurs, on the part of the professionals, when facing the new and unexpected needs, not contemplated by their formation, and for which they are not adequately prepared. Wong-Un’s intention is to reflect about a transmutation of the difficulties and of the feelings through poetry, which is regarded by him as an art of the poetry of the day-to-day, a private perception of the world acquired through an intuitive knowledge deepened in reality, in the radical contact with people, objects, practices, and marked by the amazement and ethics of beauty, in a sense of social commitment, of understanding, and communion. The author works, through the text, with emphasis also on the religiosity, on the mystics, on the expression of the sacred, on life, and on throbbing experiences where the poetic core is revealed.

The next text demonstrates, in its title, “We can be healers. But always... also wounded! Pain, aging, and death and their personal, political, and social implications” its investigative perspective, pointing to the dialectics of the acknowledgement of health professionals who reach and are reached by anguish,

doubts, fears, and insecurities in relation to treat and live with pain, suffering, illness, and the proximity of death itself in themselves and in their patients. In this respect, Eduardo Mourão Vasconcelos goes through the “heroic dimension” (p. 224), which he understands as a commitment of the health professional engaged in the ethical-political project of popular interests, and the personal and social limitations that he faces to pursue his task. His references are searched in the Jungian mythical images to examine the problems of death, portraying mythical figures such as vampires, which he analyses as a representation of an exploiting system of the life and death of the individuals: gods, such as the figures of Hinduism that concentrate death and life in their being; wounded healers, to point the challenges through the paths of individuation on us, human beings.

Subsequently, the author mentions the separation from the idea of death which was historically imposed to us by the Illuminism, taking us far from the notion of finitude of the human being and segregating death distant from the social experiences, relating it to illness and isolation. Under this scenario, he unveils the subjective threats of the confrontation with illness and death, in a proposal of a dialectic renewal of the militancy, making criticism to the limitations of the Marxist approaches on spirituality and proposing the opening towards theorizations that enable transverse dimensions of the contemporary emancipatory struggles. The author also contributes with the existentialist philosophy for facing the anguish of death, seeing it as a key-symbol of the mystery of human transformation, in the sense of a more authentic life.

Continuing the reflections, Victor Vincent Valla discusses a more political and economical view of the issues linked to spirituality and the experience of the popular media, in the chapter “Religious life as a strategy of the popular layers in Latin America to overcome the impasse which marks their lives”. The theorist starts the discussion bringing the foundations of the Popular Education in Health in its historical and conceptual aspects, centering initially in the concept of impasse which permeates the social reality of the Latin American popular layers.

The difficulties, necessities, and limitations faced by the lower communities in their day-to-day life, mainly in the access to public services of health are presented as initiators of a context of suffering which follows their lives, causing emotional unbalance, and diffusing suffering (SAVI, 2003), generator of health problems for which the public services and professionals, organized to render assistance to them, do not find a solution. Valla discusses the Theory of the Social Support as a strategy to face situations of permanent emergency

experimented by the popular layers. He understands that this support is given by a net of associations which get together in the communities to generate assistance and continence to the citizens, in a sense of support, adaptations, and overcoming of their needs, with argumentation based on the conceptions of Goleman's emotional intelligence (1995, 1999).

On this subject, this researcher manages to find an important agglutination between the communitarian social support and popular religiosity, in the understanding of envisaging religious entities, mainly the churches called gospel or Pentecostal, as emotional berths for the strong pressures and anguish lived in the day-to-day life by the poorer population, extending even to an alternative notion of Medicine for these people through religious life. With this, the author's major argument is that that the popular layers find a meaning of existence and of a life together adhering to these organizations, and building a sense of mutual support as an essential element of social organization.

Finally, the author understands the necessity of the mediators who act with these popular layers (intellectuals, teachers, educators, health professionals etc.) generally coming from the middle class, making an effort to understand the way of thinking, acting and speaking of these communities, with the purpose to build up a dialogue for the understanding of the different ways of life chosen by the poor. Continuing in this perspective, Elizabeth de Leone Monteiro Smeke focuses on the Primary Attention to Health. In the article "Spirituality and Primary Attention to Health: contributions for the daily practice" she brings experiences of attendance to the communities in which, more than medicine prescriptions and pre-established diagnosis, the reports of the professionals point to subjective dimensions which intersperse the necessities of those who look for these places seeking help for their problems of suffering and pain.

The author identified in the ethics of care a dissertative input for the humanization, the sheltering, and the responsabilization towards the population assisted. In this respect, one of the angular assumptions of the article goes through the "constructive and constructor" results of this ethics of care. This can be perceived when a genuine and absolute interest for the person under care is observed, through the concentration on the person, and not on the technique." (p. 307). Thus, it is necessary to develop this light technology together with the community "to perceive and receive their state of necessity and anguish and not to intervene based on what it should be, according to any criteria or theory outside the relationship of the scenery" (p. 307). It is the being presently consciously together with the person assisted in the

sense of understanding his/her reaction and the stages of perplexity, denial, assimilation, and facing of the illnesses and the lack of spirituality. "The subtle essence which enables an individual to recognize himself in him, recognizes himself in alterity, with the alterity and for the alterity which composes him and links him to what is still bigger" (p. 322).

Going even deeper in this subjective reading of the reality of the assistance to the patients, the article "The intuition in the clinical practice: construction of links between reasoning and emotion" by Maria Beatriz Guimarães, concentrates in the approach of the intuitive action of the health professional as a tool of diagnosis and follow-up in the treatment. For the author, it is the intuitive development as part of the practical experiences of the professionals that can be developed as an inspiring and delineating mechanism to improve actions of treatment and healing.

Her major assumption is based on the Intuitive Method of the philosopher Henri Bergson (1859-1941), who interprets the spirit as a vital power and an existential impetus in all human beings. As a spiritual constitutive component, intuition is the capacity to perceive "the core and the weavings of the real" (p. 327) at the most interior and subjective level of the human being. It would be the perception/thinking in which reality leans on sensitiveness. It is constituted as a vital manifestation, truly capable of creating new ideas. (p. 327). From the experiences reported in various studies, the author performs a discursive analysis of the proper profile of the health professional, and outlines a direction which is in accordance with the intuitive prerequisites in the sense of attention, care, perception, creativity, and sheltering in his daily work.

In this way, we arrive to the final discussion of the book, dealing with the subjectivity and the spirituality which are revived by the mythical concepts of the world, in the article "The paths of spirituality: a view based on the mystical traditions" by Faustino Teixeira. As the theme itself points out, the author inserts us in intersubjective and transcendental experiences to speak about the dimensions of the human integrality and its liaison with the divine, the mystery and the holy in himself and around him, enlarging openings for the understanding of the other person, in an experimentation of the "dynamics of sheltering, courtesy, and hearing" (p. 360). He tells us of the thirst of spirituality which runs through the contemporary man, due to his instability, insecurity before a world permeated by competition and exploitation.

Basing himself on authors such as Leonardo Boff, Peter Berger, and Abraham Heschel, among others, the author presents paths of spirituality of the human being,

his connection with the deities of various mystical-religious orientations, filled up with texts full of mystical poetry, seeking in thinkers such Ernesto Cardenal, João da Cruz and Ibn al-'Arabî exemplifications of the "view over the world", the "detachment from the ties, and 'the path of the spirituality".

For all that has been mentioned, we can see the encounter of various types of knowledge and assertions on the ways of understanding the experiences and coexistences in the reconstruction of the subject as a social actor, possessing spirituality in its different configurations, in a well-succeeded attempt to discuss seriously what is necessary, in a forward view for the transforming actions in various fields especially that of Popular Education and Health. Transdisciplinary ways by excellence, presented by researchers of various areas of knowledge such as philosophers, theologians, historians, sociologists, doctors, and psychologists, in a mosaic of understandings that harmonizes and completes itself.

More than this, the transdisciplinary component becomes evident in the interconnection of the themes, which go from the labyrinth of the actions, emotions, feelings, expectations, and individual sensations from us, human beings, up to its agglutination in the social and communitarian experience, be it in working groups, in clinics, in hospitals, in communities, in associations etc. It is clear in the text of the authors their concern in analyzing critically and reflexively the various

scenarios found in the scope of the search for human spirituality, be it the mystical, philosophic, anthropologic, sociologic or theological concept, but which is also medical-scientific, in order to, above all, reach an integral understanding of man and his action in the world, the renewing hope linked to the development of spirituality, entrepreneurial, sheltering, understanding, and transformer of the interior world of individuals and their environment.

### Note

\* Paulo Freire was a Brazilian educator and influential theorist of critical pedagogy.

### References

- GOLEMAN, D. **Emotional intelligence**. Nova York: Bantam Books, 1995.
- GOLEMAN, D. (Org.). **Emoções que curam: conversas com o Dalai Lama sobre mente alerta, emoções e saúde**. Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 1999.
- SAVI, E. **Sofrimento difuso das mulheres das classes populares: estudo sobre a experiência de um grupo de convivência**. Projeto de mestrado. Rio de Janeiro: Fiocruz, 2003.