

Published 10. November 2015, 10:22 h

Bielefeld theologian publishes findings of study

Was does spirituality mean? Each individual has his or her own answer to this question. Theologian and psychologist of religion at Bielefeld University, Professor Dr. Heinz Streib, has just published the results of a long-term study in German on the semantics and psychology of spirituality with the psychologist and psychoanalyst Dr. Barbara Keller. The title of the book is "Was bedeutet Spiritualität?" (What does spirituality mean?). The findings make clear that self-labelling as a "spiritual person" always occurs within a certain semantic context. For some individuals this expresses their experience of transcendence whereas for others it distances them from religion. In addition, personal biography is closely connected to how an individual perceives and understands spirituality. In parallel, Streib and his colleague Ralph Hood in Chattanooga (USA) have published a more comprehensive book in English. The title is "Semantics and the Psychology of Spirituality" and is published by Springer. Both books came out in October 2015.

For the study, Streib and his teams in Chattanooga and Bielefeld questioned approximately 2,000 people of all age groups. A majority of them wrote down their own definition of spirituality and religion in the questionnaire. A linguistic comparison showed that the following words were used most often to define spirituality: spirit, meditation, nature, soul, as well as the afterlife. With religion, in contrast, the terms: rules, church, religious community and dogma were most prevalent. The researchers discovered that "spirituality" can have a variety of meanings. For those who see themselves as "more spiritual than religious", spirituality is especially connected with the meanings of "experience of truth, purpose and wisdom beyond rational understanding", with "(all)connectedness and harmony with the universe, nature and the whole", and with an "inner search for (higher) self, meaning, peace and enlightenment". Heinz Streib emphasises that these are meanings, however, not connected to ideas of God, gods or heaven. From a psychologist's viewpoint, it is especially of interest that for the "more spiritual than religious" openness to experience is significantly higher than the standard values for Germany. Even more open are those who describe themselves as "neither religious or spiritual". In addition "spirituality" and mysticism are connected to psychological well-being, generativity and emotional stability.

The analysis of interviews shows how personal biography influences the definition of spirituality. People with a Christian worldview connect "spirituality" with God, belief and community. Others, however, understand spirituality as a search for symbolisation of mystical experiences that are not always easy to grasp and are difficult to describe. "Quilt-spirituality" is a term the researchers use to describe a kind of spirituality in which people combine various spiritual traditions, like a patchwork.

Further information available on the Internet:

www.springer.com/jp/book/9783319212449

www.v-r.de/de/was_bedeutet_spiritualitaet/t-624/1037751/

www.uni-bielefeld.de/spirituality-research

Contact:

Professor Dr. Heinz Streib, Bielefeld University

Research Center for Biographical Studies in Contemporary Religion

Telephone: +49(0)521 106 3377

Email: heinz.streib@uni-bielefeld.de

Dr. Barbara Keller, Bielefeld University
Research Center for Biographical Studies in Contemporary Religion
Telephone: +49(0)521 106 3261
Email: barbara.keller@uni-bielefeld.de
Gesendet von UPrange in **General**

http://ekvv.uni-bielefeld.de/blog/uninews/entry/people_live_their_own_form