

Preface

It is our pleasure to present the first European SPES Cahier. It contains a selection of papers presented at the foundational meetings of the European SPES Forum, which took place in Leuven (Belgium) in 2004 and 2005. The first meeting dealt with 'spirituality as a public good', while the second focused on 'spirituality in the context of globalization'. By this and other forthcoming publications of SPES, we want to give a voice to a new, spiritually-based way of looking at business and economics.

But where does the SPES initiative come from?

The idea of SPES originated in the Centre for Economics and Ethics of the Catholic University of Leuven (Belgium) in the late 1990s. Inspired by the writings of the French 'personalist' philosopher *Emmanuel Mounier* and his project of *Esprit*, a group of friends of the Centre initiated a study group for a personalist economy and society. In 2000, at the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Emmanuel Mounier's death, the enlarged study group decided to consolidate its activities in a more organized form under the name of SPES-forum, SPES being an acronym for SPirituality in Economics and Society. The initiative was successful and resulted in setting up the *SPES Academy* (2004), the *European SPES Forum* (2004) and the *Student SPES Forum* (2005). The aim of all these SPES activities is to make spirituality accessible to as many people as possible. Its background philosophy is a pluralist, spiritually-based humanism bringing together people from different spiritual traditions and different intellectual and cultural backgrounds. Its main target groups are academic centers, value-driven organizations (companies, non-profit organizations and public services) and interested individuals, especially young people preparing for their professional and social lives. The SPES initiative is mainly financed by CERA, a Belgian cooperative financial company.

Another source of inspiration in setting up the European SPES Forum was the international conference on 'Spirituality and Management' organized by the Business Ethics Center of the Corvinus University of Budapest in 2001 in Szeged (Hungary). It was one of the first meetings in Europe where business ethicists and business practitioners reflected on the meaning of spirituality in a systematic way. This initiative resulted in the publication of a Kluwer Academic Book entitled 'Spirituality and Ethics in Management' (edited by Laszlo Zsolnai, Dordrecht, 2004).

The interest in spiritually-based business and economics is linked to the process of globalization deconstructing the existing national, ideological and religious borderlines. This ongoing deconstruction of our familiar social identities and institutional settings makes it necessary to find a new and deeper source of self-orientation and creativity within ourselves. Therefore, spirituality as a way to explore our deeper self and the ultimate purpose of life becomes part of the processes of discernment, choice and decision-making. Formal rational ethics does not suffice. Ethics needs spirituality as a driver to find its inner purpose and meaning. From different angles the papers in this Cahier explore this fascinating relation between spirituality, ethics and economics in the context of globalization.

Enjoy your reading and do not hesitate to contact us if you want to share your reflection or to become involved in the SPES movement.

Luk Bouckaert,
Professor Emeritus, Catholic University of Leuven and President of the European
SPES Forum

Laszlo Zsolnai,
Professor, Corvinus University of Budapest and Co-founder of the European SPES
Forum