

Introduction

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**Manfred L. Pirner / Elisabeth Naurath / Johannes Lähnemann /
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Spiritual Dimensions

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Introduction

*Manfred L. Pirner, Elisabeth Naurath, Johannes Lähnemann
& Werner Haussmann*

This book publication documents the keynotes and papers presented at the 13th International Nuremberg Forum Conference that took place from 30 September to 2 October 2024 in Nuremberg, Germany.

It is a widely shared insight that *sustainability implies spiritual dimensions*. This is so, because issues of sustainability touch on the fundamental questions of who we are as human beings, how our relationship with nature can be understood, how we want to live, what makes life worth living and how a life worth living can be achieved for all humans on our planet. To put it in another way, the global ecological crises that we are facing today are so dramatic that they require in-depth transformations of individual and collective mind-sets in order to bring about those profound changes that are urgently needed to prevent severest catastrophes. Not least, they require a sense of hope, confidence and solidarity that can support the motivation and endurance in addressing the huge challenges. In this situation, it makes sense to use *all cultural sources available that could facilitate such transformations and such motivation* – which brings the spiritual (including indigenous) and religious traditions into view. They seem to be particularly promising, because through the centuries to this very day they have proven their potential to change individual as well as collective mind-sets and patterns of behavior.

Interestingly, spiritual dimensions of sustainability have been discussed, analyzed and researched by diverse scholars, activists, politicians, business managers as well as cultural and religious leaders from a variety of different disciplinary, cultural or worldview backgrounds. In this wide-ranging discourse, *education has repeatedly emerged as another major aspect and important approach* concerning the question of how the widely deplored mind-behavior gap can be overcome. Moreover, “*Quality Education*” is No. 4 of the UN’s 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that are intended to be closely interrelated with each other. At the same time, it seems that in the extensive treatment of ESD in educational science and public discourse *the spiritual dimension has not yet received the attention it deserves*, especially when it comes to public education at schools or institutions of higher education.

Therefore, the 13th International Nuremberg Forum conference was established with the aim *to explore possible intersections between spirituality, sustainability and education*. This implied to promote, on the one hand, the *integration of spiritual dimensions into ESD* as well as, on the other hand, *the integration of sustainability perspectives into diverse forms of religious or spiritual education*. In order to achieve this aim, theoretical perspectives and academic research were brought into conversation with concepts and experiences from good educational practice.

The *subject focus* of the conference was on *ESD with an emphasis on ecological, environmental issues*, also including similar educational approaches such as Climate Change Education, Ecological Education, Environmental Education, Human Rights Education and Global Learning. The *focus area of action* of the conference was on *public education at schools and institutions of higher education*.

The conference was organized and conducted by the *Research Unit for Public Religion and Education (RUPRE)* of the Friedrich-Alexander University Erlangen-Nürnberg (FAU), headed by Professor Manfred L. Pirner, supported by Dr. Werner Haussmann and the RUPRE team, in cooperation with *Religions for Peace International (RfP)*, represented at the conference by Professor Mohinder Singh Ahluwalia (Co-President and International Trustee of RfP), Professor Johannes Lähnemann (Chairman of the Peace Education Standing Commission of RfP International), Professor Joan Hernandez-Serret (Secretary General of RfP Europe), and Professor Elisabeth Naurath (Secretary General of RfP Germany).

More details on the conference can still be found on the website <https://www.evrel.phil.fau.de/nuernberger-forum/nuremberg-forum-2024/>. Also, video-recordings of all the lectures and presentations of the conference are available on the RUPRE YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/@rupre7828>).

For this book publication, the altogether 30 contributions were grouped in four major sections:

- 1) Keynotes and responses
- 2) Papers I – Conceptual and theoretical perspectives
- 3) Papers II – Empirical studies
- 4) Papers III – Practical approaches and experiences

These sections are complemented – right after this introduction – by a foundational contribution by Manfred L. Pirner that outlines in more detail the framework idea that was used as a basis for the conference – the idea of “public spirituality”.

The sections are followed by the documentation of the “Nuremberg Memorandum for Integrating Spiritual Dimensions into Education for Sustainable Development” that was adopted by the conference participants on the last day of the event and confirmed in a post-conference online-meeting.

Finally, there are two prominent authors who agreed to contribute complementary perspectives to the conference papers, namely Professor Azza Karam who served as Secretary General of RfP International for several years, and Professor Ulrich Hemel who, among many other important positions, was director of the Global Ethics Institute in Tübingen.

Neither the conference nor this book publication would have been possible without much support from various sides. First of all, we would like to thank all the contributors and authors. We are also grateful to the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft) for funding the conference. We owe thanks to the TV-Team of the Friedrich-Alexander University Erlangen-Nürnberg (FAU) for streaming and documenting the conference. The New York office of Religions for Peace International provided valuable support in finding speakers for the conference. And finally, special thanks go to the fantastic team of the chair of religious education at FAU who made the conference such a positive experience: Phillip Angelina, Verena Bedruna, Leander Lingen, Alexandra Christl, Feline Friedrich, Jermaine Irebor, Dr. Jasmin Kriesten, Dr. Ursula Leipziger, Benedikt Markert, Nele Orlemann, and Dr. Marcus Penthin. Leander and Feline also did a great job in support of the editorial work on this publication.

We do hope that a bit of the stimulating and communicative spirit of the conference will be conveyed in this book.

The Editors

Manfred L. Pirner, Elisabeth Naurath,
Johannes Lähnemann, and Werner Haussmann