

RELIGIOUS-SPIRITUAL COUNSELLING & CARE

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Preface

Religion has been a source of inspiration and motivation in the affairs of individuals, communities and institutions in many areas such as solidarity, cooperation and humanitarian aid, in psycho-social, cultural and economic spheres. There are multidimensional aspects of religious, moral and ethical values that transform the lives of individuals and societies. However, the role and importance of religion and spiritual values in the lives of individuals and societies are often overlooked today. In this connection, the Center of Values Education, which focuses on the concepts of religion and values, set out in order to highlight religious, spiritual and moral values, and create awareness about their contributions to the lives of individuals and societies, as well as a sense of religion that touches human life. The idea of organizing the International Congress on Religious-Spiritual Counselling and Care has emerged in line with these aims, and following consultations with dozens of academicians and experts from Turkey and abroad since 2013.

We set work to realize this idea, and prepared a congress outline to enable discussions regarding the place, the role, the functions and the contribution of spiritual counselling and care services in family and couple counselling, combating addiction, preventing domestic violence, coping with old age problems, family deprivation, and in health institutions, various social services, military services, unusual situations such as war and natural disasters, as well as in print, visual and social media. Topics such as sociocultural dimensions of spiritual counselling and care services, their practices in

different societies and traditions, and the theoretical foundations of Islamic counselling and spiritual counselling and care were among the themes of the congress. Following evaluations of submissions made by hundreds of academicians and researchers from all over the world, the 1st International Congress on Religious-Spiritual Counselling and Care was held in Istanbul on April 7-10, 2016, with an under title "the Place and Function of Religious-Spiritual Counselling and Care in Human Life." 140 scholars and researchers from Turkey, and from Europe, the United States, Southeast Asia and Muslim countries, have participated in the Congress.

This newly developing field of expertise in Turkey has been discussed in an international platform, from an interdisciplinary perspective, for the first time. The Congress on Religious-Spiritual Counselling and Care has made a considerable impact, and we have decided to create an edited book from the proceedings of the Congress. We hope that these valuable and comprehensive books, prepared as three volumes, two in Turkish and one in English, will serve as a source book for academicians, experts and practitioners.

We would like to thank all the members of the Organization Committee of the Congress, the partners of this congress, and the staff and volunteers of the Center for Values Education, who have all contributed to the organization of the 1st International Congress on Religious-Spiritual Counselling and Care. We are particularly thankful to the scholars and experts who presented in the Congress, all the professors who served as panel chairs, as well as Prof. Robert Frager and Prof. Harold Koenig for their opening speeches, which were of great value and provided guidance to those working in the field.

We express our gratitude to Prof. Nuri Tınaz, Assoc. Prof. Ali Ayten, Assoc. Prof. Mustafa Koç and Asst. Prof. Mehmet Ali Doğan who have substantially contributed to the emergence of these important, comprehensive volumes, and undertook their editorial work.

The Center for Values Education

Introduction

Religion and spirituality have been a source of inspiration and motivation for organizing individuals, communities and institutions in many areas such as solidarity, cooperation and humanitarian aid, in psycho-social, cultural and economic spheres. Yet, in the modern world, religion is consciously and systematically being tied to, and associated with, extremism, violence and terrorism. This situation has presented itself as an effort to create negative thoughts and perceptions about religion in general, and Islam in particular. It should be noted that the negative perception of Islam, which is triggered by foreign occupation, the international media and the assimilation politics directed at Muslim communities living in diaspora, is reinforced by the efforts of separatist groups and conflict groups that emerged among Muslims and seek to legitimize their own ideologies and objectives using a religious language and religious norms. As a result of this negative image pertaining to religion, in today's world, the contributions and services to the civil society that come from religious, spiritual and moral beliefs and values, as well as the related practices, at individual and societal level, have largely been ignored and not been brought to light, and they have not been duly covered in the media. Positivist and secularist policies and educational programs certainly play a role in this situation.

When we look at the history of studies on spiritual counselling and guidance, which is, in a sense, the touch of religion in the lives of individuals, we see that it is a quite new field in Turkey, although it has a rooted past in Europe and the United States.

The field of spiritual counselling and care, which has a long history of academic studies and practice at the intersection of psychology, theology and psychiatry as part of the tradition of science in the West, has also a wide range of areas of practice from hospitals to prisons. In Turkey, however, it is a considerably new field of research and practice. As the editors of these volumes, we believe that this field, which has the potential to make great contributions to our rapidly developing and changing country, should be liberated from unsettled controversies and ideological concerns in its process of recognition. In this context, it is necessary to underscore the fact that the field of spiritual counselling and care is certainly not an alternative to the field of psychological counselling and guidance, or psychology and psychiatry. On the contrary, it is an interdisciplinary field of study which emphasizes the physical, psychological and spiritual well-being of human beings, in cooperation with the mentioned disciplines.

Religious/spiritual counselling is supporting those individuals who are stuck in challenging conditions and in search of an explanation, in their struggle to gain back the meaning and the control they have lost, by way of religious/spiritual references. More specifically, it is a religion/spirituality-oriented support service for individuals who are trying to make sense of their conditions of illness, old age, disability, exposure to natural disasters or deprivation. The target group for religious/spiritual counselling services are people who are in need of care and protection, and those who take care of them. In other words, the services are intended for the following groups of people: patients in general, and patients in need of constant care in particular, people with disabilities and their families/caregivers, victims of war and natural disasters, people of old age, children staying in nursing homes and in child protection institutions of social services, prisoners and their relatives, women who were abused, people who are in the mourning period, soldiers in the army, and students. Although religious counselling services have a broad target audience, patients confined to bed in hospitals and their relatives, disabled people, those who are under the care of social services and child protection institutions, as well as convicted prisoners, appear to be the first priority groups for initial services of spiritual/religious counselling. Accordingly, the studies and practices in this field in Turkey particularly and primarily involve hospitals and prisons. In order to provide the spiritual/religious counselling services properly, it is necessary that enough theoretical discussions take place, practitioner experts are trained, coordination with

psychologists and psychiatrists is achieved and a system that works properly on legal and scientific bases is established.

"The 1st International Congress on Religious-Spiritual Counselling and Care" was organized in Istanbul on April 7-10, 2016, in collaboration with the Center for Values Education of Ensar Foundation, the Spiritual-Psychological Practice and Research Center at Balıkesir University and the Presidency of Religious Affairs, for the purpose of raising awareness of the field of spiritual counselling and guidance in Turkey and contributing to its literature.

Based on this perspective, our book editorial group has made every effort to include all the works from associated fields that were presented in the congress. The congress presentations will provide an insight to the local contexts of the field in Turkey, and lead the way for subsequent studies related to the practice, as well as for scientific research and projects, in the field.

We hope that for the first time, with these proceedings, this newly developing field of expertise in Turkey will have been discussed in an international platform, from an interdisciplinary perspective, and they will pave the way for subsequent studies. Our efforts to organize congresses, and to publish the proceedings in edited volumes, will continue in the following years. The conceptual framework of the proceedings in this first congress was purposefully kept broad-spectrum. The next congresses, and accordingly their published proceedings, will concentrate on more thematic and specific issues.

This work in your hands, which is designed as two volumes in Turkish and one in English, is the outcome of the project of an edited book that contained the selected congress proceedings mentioned above. It is our hope that these proceedings, which aimed to contribute to the literature in the field, will, first of all, open up horizons by offering a scientific perspective for new research in the field, and make important contributions to the works of the practitioners and theoreticians of the field in Turkey.

We would like to thank all the people individually who have contributed to the success of the Congress in the first place, and those who helped the editing of this book of congress proceedings. We are also thankful to several institutions including the Center for Values Education, the Ensar Foundation, the Spiritual-Psychological Practice and Research Center at Balıkesir University and the Presidency of Religious Affairs, as well as the scholars from Turkey and abroad who honored us with their participation in the Congress.

It is our hope that the works presented in “the 1st International Congress on Religious-Spiritual Counselling and Care” and included in this book project will offer a significant addition to the history of science, and the academia, in this region; and we wish you a productive reading.

Editorial Board

December, 2016

CONTENTS

Preface	5
Introduction	7

The Framework of Religious-Spiritual Counselling: Religion, Spirituality, and Health: Research, Clinical Applications, and Resources	15
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Harold Koenig

CHAPTER I THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO RELIGIOUS-SPIRITUAL COUNSELLING AND CARE

The Modern Concept of Spirituality.....	33
--	-----------

Enzo Pace

The Dynamics of Diversity – Religious and Spiritual Care in Times of Pluralization.....	47
--	-----------

Georg Wenz

Religiously Integrated Psychotherapy with Muslim Clients: From Research to Practice	59
--	-----------

Hisham Abu-Raiya

Interfaith Spiritual Care in Post-Secular Societies.....	79
---	-----------

R. Ruurd Ganzevoort

CHAPTER II

RELIGIOUS-SPIRITUAL COUNSELLING PRACTICES IN DIFFERENT COUNTRIES

**Chaplaincy Public Sector Policy in the UK: International Lessons to be
Learnt for Religious-Spiritual Counselling and Care..... 91**

Andrew Todd

**Islamic Spiritual Care as a New Profession Expectations and
Professional Standards111**

Mohamed Ajouaou

**The Relationship Between State and Church in Contemporary Romania
in Social Services and Care –“Social Partnership” 123**

Laurentiu D. Tănase

Imam or Chaplain? Muslim Chaplaincy in England 133

Selma Baş

CHAPTER III

PRACTICES OF RELIGIOUS-SPIRITUAL COUNSELLING AND CARE IN HEALTH AND HOSPITAL SERVICES

Consumers, Imams, Clinicians

**COPE: A Bridge between Islam and Mental Health Care through
Collaborative Programs for Consumers, Clergy and Clinicians..... 151**

Glen Milstein

**Religious-Spiritual Counseling of Patients: Reflection on the Role of
Social Workers and the Medical Community..... 167**

Wahiba Abu-Ras

**Religious and Spiritual Dimensions of Care for People with
Neurocognitive Disorders and Their Families..... 195**

Beverly K. Lunsford

CHAPTER IV RELIGIOUS-SPIRITUAL COUNSELLING IN FAMILY THERAPY AND RELATIONS

Hope-Focused Approach to Couple Counseling: A Faith-Based Approach to Forgiveness, Reconciliation, Communication, and Conflict in Marriage and Family..... 215

Everett L. Worthington

The Role of Islamic Community In Family Counselling and Psychotherapy in BiH 237

Selvira Draganovic

CHAPTER V RELIGIOUS-SPIRITUAL COUNSELLING AND CARE IN PRISONS SERVICES

Islam in Prison and the Crisis of Mass Incarceration in the United States..... 259

Lawrence H. Mamiya

Types of Religious-Spiritual Counseling and Care in German Prisons 279

Sarah J. Jahn

CHAPTER VI RELIGIOUS-SPIRITUAL COUNSELLING AND CARE IN MILITARY SERVICES

Padre at the Table: The Role of Spirituality in the Treatment of Combat Trauma..... 295

Ian S. Easter

Changing focus on Military Chaplaincy: Religious-Spiritual Counseling and Care in Ukraine 321

Tetiana Kalenychenko

CHAPTER VII
RELIGIOUS-SPIRITUAL COUNSELLING SERVICES IN
DIFFERENT AREAS

**Pastoral Care for Victims of Sexual Abuse: Combining Clerics' and
Confidants' Experiences..... 343**

Lisa Rudolfsson

**Mental Health of Bereaved Muslims in Australia: Religious, Gender,
After Death Communication (Adc) and Grief Issues 361**

Abe Ata