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## Understanding spirituality as experienced by catholic entrepreneurs

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this paper is to find out the meaning of spirituality as described by catholic entrepreneurs based on their daily experiences. The data were collected through open ended interviews. Eight entrepreneurs were interviewed. Data analysis and interpretation used phenomenological approach to get the essential meaning of their experiences. The findings of the study revealed that spirituality was understood as divine power and inner-self driving force that affects the entrepreneurs' attitude and behaviour toward their business activities. This study is limited to catholic entrepreneurs. This research has implication to the study of entrepreneurship to offer insight that inner factors have strong influence. For researchers, this study deepens the understanding of entrepreneurs. This research contributes to the theory of entrepreneurship and spirituality since there are still very few studies on this topic.

**Keywords:** spirituality; phenomenology; understanding; experience; catholic; entrepreneur; Indonesia.

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## **1 Introduction**

Entrepreneur is a person who organises and operates a business or businesses. They take their own risks running their enterprises and eager to work without any regulations or control by other people. They want to be totally responsible over their business.

Many studies have been conducted on this issue, but very few researches discussed about the role of spirituality. Kauanui (2008) wrote that a number of researchers and academicians on entrepreneurship are speechless concerning spirituality. De Klerk (2005) mentioned some reasons. First, it was considered as a non-materialistic concept and had no direct practical implication for workplace. Second, it was an absurd construct and not easy to do research on such construct since there was no clear definition. Third, it was lack of specific conceptual relationship between spirituality and work. Spirituality sounds too much like church. If someone started talking about spirit, people could start thinking about religion or God. He added that the language was too airy-fairy, too spooky, not scientific enough, too difficult to control; too unpredictable and sounds too much like 'jock-talk'.

Some researchers tried to discover the connection between entrepreneurship and spirituality but most of them failed. They were unsuccessful to provide a suitable explanation of the impact of spirituality on entrepreneurs' decision to start business enterprise.

## **2 Definition of spirituality**

The attention toward spirituality has been growing. Many articles, books and online materials have been discussing about spirituality. According to Drucker (1984) that spirituality was considered as an important element for organisational improvement, social and economic development. It was believed that spirituality made people more ethical in business and improved teamwork. It made people having greater kindness and fairness and increased awareness of other employees' needs.

In addition, according to Biberman and Tischler (2008), that there were more people focused on values-driven consumers. People were looking for spirituality solution in respond to the social and business changes. Brandt (1996) added that the uncertainties made people had interest in contemplating life's meaning.

But, what is spirituality? When researchers looked for its meaning and definition in internet, there were a lot of entries on spirituality. It showed the level of diversity and complex definitions. Spirituality was defined as "the quality or fact of being spiritual;

“incorporeal or immaterial nature”; “predominantly spiritual character as shown in thought and life”. Spirituality was thought to be an ultimate or an alleged immaterial reality, an inner path enabling a person to discover the essence of his or her being. It was being considered as the deepest values and meaning by which people lived. Spirituality was often experienced as a source of inspiration or orientation of life. It could encompass belief in immaterial realities or experience of the immanent or transcendent nature of the world. It has multitude of meanings and difficult to define.

Krishnakumar and Neck (2002) stressed that a single definition of spirituality was not appropriate to describe its fullness. De Klerk (2005) mention that reducing spirituality into variables would degrade its richness and at the end losing its meaning.

The inclusion of spiritual concepts on entrepreneurship, as stated by Kauanui (2008), would enable deeper values of business owners to surface and new models to emerge.

Fox (1994) added that spirituality referred to living in depth, living with meaning, purpose, joy and a sense of contribution to the greater community. If we applied spirituality into our work, the work itself would have soul and considered as a vocation, a calling and sense of purpose. Novak (1996) revealed that work should not only be meaningful, it should be a calling. Moore (1992) stated that it was originated from the inside of an individual, our inner consciousness and something which was beyond the rules of religion. Krishnakumar and Neck (2002) wrote that spirituality was non-denominational, non-hierarchical and non-ecclesiastical. Guillory (2001) said that it implied an inner search for meaning or fulfilment that may be undertaken by anyone regardless of religion.

### **3 Growing interest in spiritual entrepreneurship**

There has been a growing interest in spirituality due to the inability of secular society to provide life meaning. Tacey (2005) cited that life was getting empty meaning and needed to be restored by spiritual life. As emphasised by Biberman and Tischler (2008) that in entrepreneurship the role of spirituality was getting more important and becoming a greatest megatrend and effecting personal lives, spreading into organisations and transformed them morally. They added that spirituality was assisting society to look for solution amid the greatest social and business changes. Furthermore, disregarding spirituality at work would uproot the meaning of becoming human being. Conger (1994) wrote that the growing uncertainty in life and business required people to embrace spirituality to look for a life’s meaning. Ashmos and Duchon (2000) added that spirituality emerged as a sense of calling and sense of purpose on business.

There were some studies conducted on spiritual entrepreneurship, but did not specifically research on the role of religion. There was no research yet that discussing about the meaning of spirituality from the perspective of catholic entrepreneur. Even though spirituality considered as important but it had received little empirical attention from scholars.

### **4 Research objective**

This paper aims to understand spirituality from the catholic entrepreneurs’ point of view. What is the essence of spirituality as described by those entrepreneurs? How it affects

their behaviour and attitude toward their business? What are the similarities and differences of those findings to the previous studies?

This study tries to following up the recommendation of Kauanui (2008) for a research to find out the meaning of spirituality by entrepreneurs who practice specific religion.

## **5 Previous studies**

Webster (2002) expressed the importance of spirituality in human life. He wrote that spirituality brought about interconnectedness and relationship, self transcendence, meaning and purpose in life, personal fulfilment, belief and faith in self and other and tools for coping with insecurity, vulnerability and the vicissitudes of life. Cavanagh (1999) wrote that spirituality would bring optimism about the perfectibility of human nature and business culture.

Kauanui (2008) reveal added that spirituality should be considered as an important element to understand entrepreneurship. People lived as entrepreneurs because they were being inspired, motivated and pushed by inner force which we called 'spirit'. Spirituality would make a person lived a fullest life with ultimate value. A person's spirit was the vital principle of animating force. Spirituality became the brand label for the search of meaning, values, transcendence hope and connectedness in modern societies. The more spiritual a person, the more he or she would have a sense of connection, joy and completeness.

Kauanui and Thomas (2004) on her research found out that spirituality was a driving force for their success. She added that many entrepreneurs regarded their business ventures as an accomplishment of their self actualisation and a sense of spiritual wholeness. Spirituality became foundation for their business.

Kauanui's research findings were in line with the research of Mitroff and Denton (1999a) who wrote that spirituality was a basic desire for people to find meaning and purpose of their life and to pursue and integrated living. Individual with spiritual life would consider their work as a vocation and found it meaningful. Then, as cited by Moore (1992), work became a vocation or a calling rather than a job. Vail (1998) added that people who experienced work as a calling would enjoy a sense of wholeness and felt connected with others. Furthermore, Ashmos and Duchon (2000) wrote that they will build a sense of fellowship and created community within the workplace.

Nandram (2009) wrote that spirituality would bring about satisfaction and well being and better working performances. A spiritual entrepreneur would focus on principles, virtues, ethics, values, emotions, wisdom and intuition. Harrington et al. (2001) stated that those qualities were expressed in their behaviour and policies. Embracing spirituality in entrepreneurship study, according to Kauanui (2008), will make us to understanding better about the value of business owners.

From those previous studies many researchers identified spiritual themes such as finding meaning and purpose in life. When individual find meaning and purpose through their life's work, it becomes a calling. The sense of calling originated from within the self. It is the expression of personal essence, the inner core, the voice within that must surface, a deep self, calling out for actualisation and integration.

Another theme from previous research on spirituality was living an integrated life. King and Nicols (1999) reveal that living an integrated life meant reaching full potential

Ability to fully utilise full potential was the first choice by the participants in their study when explaining the source of meaning and purpose in life.

An additional element of spirituality was being in community with others, especially in an entrepreneurial context and setting. It meant that finding one's purpose at work produces an alignment of personal inner being with the organisation's vision and mission. It creates a deep connection to co-workers and an understanding that an individual's inner life must be nourished and lived out at work. According to Depree (1989), Marcic (1997) and Morris (1997) that people who experienced work as a calling seemed to enjoy a personal sense of wholeness and are energised by a spiritual connection with others.

## **6 Research objectives**

This research aimed to get the meaning of spirituality as understood and experienced by catholic entrepreneurship. Specifically, this research wanted to recognise how catholic entrepreneur meant about spirituality and whether their religious belief had any impact to their business activities. The findings later would be confronted to the previous researches to see the similarities and differences.

Previous researches and studies did not include the role of religion because of theories limitation. It is because people thought that religious belief was other element which did not have any connection with entrepreneurship.

This research will significantly enrich and advance entrepreneurship understanding and literature. By this study deeper and truer sense of the entrepreneurship phenomenon can be realised and understood well. Research in this kind can significantly enrich and advance entrepreneurship literature. It would enhance the level of comprehension and understanding of complex perspectives that entrepreneurs bring to their business.

## **7 Methodology**

This research was based upon the phenomenological method. Basically phenomenology studied the structure of various types of experience ranging from perception, thought, memory, imagination, emotion, desire, and volition to bodily awareness, embodied action, and social activity, including linguistic activity. Phenomenology is actually a branch in philosophy. As a methodology, phenomenology aims to reveal the essential meaning of a certain phenomena as shared by participants during the interview.

Giorgi (2003) and Moustakas (1994) wrote that phenomenology was an appropriate choice to aid in the understanding of the lived experience of entrepreneurs. It studies phenomena and uses philosophy to gain a better understanding of how people perceive situations or phenomena, how they understand them and their general knowledge of them. Bann (2009) added that it placed the individual as the expert of his or her own experience and by applying qualitative exploration allows the individual to describe his or her experience. Phenomenology is the study of experience as it is lived.

Phenomenology is part of qualitative research. Creswell indicated that qualitative method was a suitable mode of social and human science especially a research that attempted to uncover the nature of the person's experiences within a phenomenon. He added that qualitative research also useful to gain new perspectives from the things which

were already known or to get more in-depth information which might be difficult to convey quantitatively.

Why this method was appropriate? Entrepreneurs should be understood from the perspectives of the entrepreneurs themselves. People became entrepreneur because there was something that pushed him from within (intrinsic). People became entrepreneur because there was something he wanted to pursue (pull theory). Intrinsic factor and pull theory were more successful than extrinsic factor or push theory. Since this study focused on understanding the experience of entrepreneur, the phenomenological approach was more appropriate. This method had some characteristics such as emphasised on human experiences which could not be approached using quantitative one since human experiences could not be reduced into figures. This method emphasised on searching for meaning, constructivism and using purposive sampling.

## **8 Data collection**

Like other qualitative approach, phenomenological method collects data through open ended interview. The form of data is words rather than figure. Data gathered using interview, observation and survey. Participants of this research were chosen in advance using purposive sampling. According to Patton (2002), criteria for choosing the participants were credibility, information rich and willing to active participate on this study. Information rich means that that the participants have knowledge, awareness and information needed by researchers. They were ready to voluntarily join the research. Credibility means that having knowledge, able to deliver the information and they are the actors of the phenomena being studied. All participants have been active entrepreneur and very active in Catholic Parish Church programmes. All of them are currently members of the catholic parish council. They are the business owner, founder or part of a founding group. They have been working in the same business for more than five years and having a lot of experience in business ventures. Their business performances are quite profitable. They allowed the researchers to tape recording the interview. The place of interviews was mostly in their house and at their convenience time. All the interviews conducted in Indonesian language.

The researchers identified 20 people as candidates but only eight of them were willing to join this research. Researchers know them very well since researchers are active members in parish council as well. The researchers use to work together with them in social and religious activities. The researchers contacted them by phone to ask for their participation. The researchers explained them the background and objectives of this research.

The interview lasted for about 90 minutes. Rather than being confined to a question and answer, each interview was conducted in a conversational manner so that important topics which was not specifically addressed in the interview-guided could materialise for exploration. Conversation made the interview ran relax, convenient and not stressful. Key areas of investigation during interviews were the meaning of spirituality, start-up/session, motivation; work/life experience; spiritual belief; demography; company performance; future challenges. Researchers made follow up interview to clarify expressions which were not quite clear in the previous interview. All the interviews were tape recorded acknowledged by the participant. The researchers guaranteed participants that all

information would be treated as sacred and only used for this research. Researchers also would not reveal the participants' identity except for this research.

Out of eight participants, one of them was a woman. Most of the participants were between 45 to 55 years old. They were in their business for more than ten years. Some of them were having employees more than 100 workers.

Although the researchers were interested in the answers to these questions, every participant was encouraged to speak openly about their entire life experience so that other areas of similarities among the participants could be uncovered

## **9 Data analysis**

The data analysis started from describing the stories shared by the participants during interviews. In the transcribing process the researchers eliminated the repetition of statements. When the researchers found an unclear statement, he contacted the participants for clarification and probably asking for further explanations. After transcriptions and summarising finished, the researchers started coding and categorisation to find the main themes. The main themes are considered as the essence meaning.

## **10 Findings**

The goal of this inquiry was to get the essential meaning of spirituality as experienced by catholic entrepreneurs. This study aimed to find out how spirituality was understood and how it affected their business activities. This research is also tried to following up recommendation of Kauanui (2008) who asked whether there are significant behaviours, attitudes, concepts and practices of entrepreneurs with a religious-based form of spirituality.

To accomplish the research goal, an open-ended interview was conducted to collect the data. Participants in this study recalled and related intimate stories that told of many ways about spirituality which they experienced as catholic entrepreneurs. The narratives of these individuals have been used as text in phenomenological inquiry which has the main objective was to uncover meanings embedded in descriptions of everyday lived experience.

Central themes of the entrepreneurial experience were identified through detailed analysis of the descriptions from in-depth interview. Although many elements were common across the experience of all participants, some may have been expressed only by a few.

From the interviews, the researches discovered that most of the participants found it difficult to define spirituality. Spirituality was expressed in form of some indicators such as divine power, inner-self driving force, deepest values, networking, confidence, hard working, keep on learning. Those factors have positive impact to their behaviour and attitude toward their business.

The first essential meaning of spirituality was a divine power. All participants acknowledged that the divine power, which they identified as God, played a very important role in their business activities. Mr. Marcel said:

“I do believe that God helps me and get me out from scratch. I lost everything, no money, no job and powerless at that time. I was in a great pressure to save my family. I did have a single penny just to take my new born child from Midwives clinic. Then I started praying asking for God’s help. God reformatted me. And then, through a certain process, I got enlighten and started building relationship then led me to engage in business activities. I was not used to an entrepreneur before. I was an employee in one company. Because of internal problem with my boss I quitted. I really start from zero, from nothing. Now I control 3 companies and hundreds of workers. It is possible because of God’s will. All my properties are God entrusted.”

Mr. Bullie added that God gave him everything. He added that his business can sustain because God guaranteed. Furthermore he expressed that if God will, everything can happen.

According to Mr. Rubin, God protected him.

“God helps me. I was working in one big company but then I quitted because of internal problem with management. I then pray to God asking Him to accompany me in my new business venture. I do convince myself that God will not leave me alone. Whatever problems I encounter, I will get the solution because of Him. God will be happy if through my business I can help others. Everything I own is actually gift from God. What I have to do now with my business is to help people. I will become a channel of God’s grace to others. Fortunes are not only used for ourselves.”

Other participants also acknowledged the strong God’s intervention to their business activities. They found out that it was impossible to ignore God in their lives. They said that business was full of uncertainties. There was no guarantee that business always prosper. Mr. Paulus spoke that if God wants everything can happen. My business can exist or collapse, it could happen.

Spirituality as a divine power led the participants to have certain perceptions about their business. It led them to have certain attitudes as well.

Mr. Marcel and Rubin said that what they are doing is to actualise God’s will that is to help people. It is a kind of calling for them to work even hard because a number of families entrusted their lives in their business. They also feel that they are acting as God’s agent to help others. They have to keep, develop and expand their business not only for their own benefit but for the benefit of many other people. The participants said that God has special purpose through their business. They acknowledged that they should serve others.

They are quite active in community development and parish activities. Dealing with people of other religion, particularly Muslims are not a problem. They said that their religion motivate them to be more open and care to others whatever religion they are.

The second essential meaning of spirituality was inner self driving force. Some of the participants starting their business because they were being forced internally to look for money after resigned and quitted from their former company. Other participants wanted to maximise their potentials by setting up their own enterprise. They wanted to fully dependent on their capabilities. Mr. Bullie and Mr. Ace, who worked in a company, decided to make their own business after getting inspired by their friends who were successful in their business. Mr. Bullie said,

“since my younger age I was eager to have my own company. The dreams could not materialized since I realize that I did not have enough resources especially money. I got inspired by looking at my friends who were successful



in their own business. At that time I realized that I had networking, I know the market and I had capabilities. But it took me sometimes to finally decide starting my new enterprise. If they can successful, I can also.”

Mr. Paulus shared his story by saying that he wanted to stop working as a worker. He wanted to be a boss in his own company. He said,

“before I got paid as an employee, but now I have to give salary to my workers. I have to perform better since I do not only taking care of my self and may family, but my employees and ehtir families. I have to think harder because I am fully responsible for this company. Every day there is a business opportunity but I have to be creative and open minded to those chances.”

This understanding leads the participants to have certain perceptions about business. They have certain behaviour and attitudes toward their enterprise. Business opportunities were considered as self-created element. Opportunities were not found. It was created by entrepreneurs.

“I have a markating agency that selling and distributing furnitures and home appliances, since found out that housing complex were being built and of course furnitures were badly needed.”

Mr. Rubin spoke that he was living in the industrial area. There are many factories and industries. Those companies and industries are using machines.

“All the machines needed to be fixed from time to time because it is getting warn out. So I set up my repairing shop which can fix those machines with competitive price. So I create a new market. Now I have already 3 reaping shops. I have to expand my business since the demand is still quite good.”

The participants were working harder, having self confidence and love more their current business rather than before.

The third essential element of spirituality as shared by the participants was deepest values. Spirituality was expressed in the form of respecting others. Mr. Theo said that business was not a single people job. It was the work of a team. Every people has potentials who might not owned by others. He added that we will know their capabilities if we emerged with them.

Mr. Ace shared that every employee means business opportunity. He added that the manager could not do everything by himself. He has to share his or her responsibilities.

Mr. Marcel added that we have to respect every single human being. He considered employees as partner. He said that because of the workers, his business is running.

The perception about other people lead them to have certain values such as: honesty, ethical behaviour, walking the talk, supple and flexible, self discipline, not emotional, make people happy and self control.

## **11 Discussions**

Braybrooke (2008) stated that religion and spirituality could not be separated. All the participants understood spirituality as something related to the religion. The divine force had some elements such as: sense of calling, believe, patience, surrender, loyalty, devotion. The divine force was the one essential theme concluded from their understanding of spirituality. The presence of God, as the divine force, was considered as

real, helping them, living with them and always doing good things for them. They personalise God. God lives, exists and behave like human being.

This kind of perception should be understood by looking at the cultural, social, political and economic context of Indonesia. Having religion is a must. Catholic is a minority denomination of the country. Being minority in terms of religion, those participants have to strive harder to compete and to maintain their business.

The inner self driving force as the second essential theme came out when they shared their stories on spirituality. This finding is in line with the statement of Fox (1994) who referred spirituality to living in depth. The inner driving force was realised by reflecting on their friends' success. Some of them were aware of their potentials when they were in difficult position after resigned or quitted from their job. It went to trial and error. The inner driving force manifested through their hobbies. Mr. Theo, for example, keeps on doing his hobbies in modifying cars which later becomes his business. Through the interview the researchers found out that once the participants identified their potentials, start practicing it and applied it as a business endeavour, they do enjoy it. They materialise and actualise their potentials on their business. Business becomes a process of self actualisation. Novak (1996) wrote that working considered as a vocation, a calling and sense of purpose. Some elements that came out from the inner self driving force were search for significance in their life, meaningful work and personal fulfilment.

The deepest values as indicated by being honest, respect others, flexible, self discipline, self control, non-emotional, self fulfilment and belief. It is in line with Webster (2002) who expressed that spirituality will strengthen interconnectedness and relationship, belief and faith in others. Mr. Ace said greedy should be taken out from business. He added that greedy close to money and business motivated by money oriented lasted only for short time. Mr. Rubin added that fortune, luck and wealth are not for personal benefit. He added that dishonest is the beginning of business ending. Furthermore he said that doing good for others is like long term investment and the benefit will be yielded probably not by us but our children.

Money is important for business but it is not the only and single purpose of doing business. Having a good relationship and being connected with others are important factors. Like Mr. Theo said that his main purpose for doing business is not merely for accumulating wealth but to have a decent life and has as many friends as possible.

## **12 Conclusions**

There are three essential meaning of spirituality that came out from this study. Spirituality is understood as a divine force, inner self driving force and deepest values. The function of religion is quite strong amongst the participants. Divine force was understood by the catholic entrepreneurs as God. God wants them to be an entrepreneur. God even, in one way or another, leads and forces them to do business. God is considered like a fatherly good old man who protecting and ready all the time to help His children are in trouble. God is believed to know everything done by people. God is identical with good things. So doing good things is a way to peace God.

Spirituality was also understood as an Inner self driving force that moved them to do business. There was energy from their inner self that drove them to do something particularly when they found themselves having financial problems after resigned or quitted from their company. They were forced to do something to protect their family. It

also came out by observing the experiences of other friends' business success. The inner self driving force manifested also in hobbies.

Deepest values specified in forms of respect to others, revere human beings more than money. Business should promote the welfare of others. Profit and benefit that is the outcome of business activities should help people.

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