

**The Place of Spirituality in the Search for Balance
in the Whirlwind of Law School**

**Professors Thomas L. Shaffer (Notre Dame), Reginald Leamon Robinson (Howard)
and Calvin Pang (Hawaii)**

AALS Annual Meeting, Washington, D.C.

This panel will consider the place of spirituality in today's workshop on maintaining, seeking and even enhancing "balance" in law school.

We expect that those who attend our session will come with some notion of what "Spirituality" means to them. However they may articulate their notion, and define and experience spirituality in their lives, we expect that all have identified spirituality as somehow central to dealing with the "whirlwind" of law school. Our hope is to engage participants in a conversation on the questions of how we view spirituality, how it occupies its central place, and what we do with it to enrich our students as they make their way through law school and life.

To set the foundation, Professor Shaffer will present a short essay which draws richly from journal entries that law students wrote and gave him permission to share. Many of these describe the journey through law school, and the perception that one must separate from important parts of oneself to become an effective lawyer. There is despair in some of these passages. That law teachers and institutions contribute to this despair, this *dis-spiriting*, should concern us deeply.

At the start of his essay, Professor Shaffer uses the whirlwind metaphor to evoke the cyclone that transported Dorothy to Frank Baum's magical land of Oz. He describes how Dorothy's spirit was ultimately touched by her experiences in Oz so that when she returned to Kansas, she is somehow better, more whole.

Do we also have a responsibility to encourage our students to hold on to and cultivate their spirit so that when they turn to their outside work and world - their "Kansas," sort of speak - they can engage in a more vibrant, less lonely way? Professor Shaffer suggests that we do, and he shares some of the ways he has woven essentially spiritual practices into his many years of teaching.

Professors Robinson and Pang will provide responses to the essay, and together with Professor Shaffer will engage the audience in a shared conversation. On matters of spirituality, there are no experts, only fellow sojourners who offer what they have and gladly receive what others offer.

To spark dialogue, we offer several questions posed by Professor Lucia Ann Silecchia in her highly recommended article *Integrating Spiritual Perspectives with the Law School Experience: An Essay and an Invitation*, 37 San Diego L. Rev. 167, 183-85

(2000):

Is spirituality a private or public matter, or both? If not purely private, what elements of spirituality properly belongs in the public realm of a lawyer's work? If purely private, why should there be concern about integrating it with law practice at all?

Are there elements of spirituality that appear inconsistent with the common perception of law practice as an adversarial endeavor? If so, how can potential conflicts be reconciled without undermining professional competency?

How well suited is the modern legal workplace to accommodating the spiritual life of employees and/or clients?

Given the general silence toward spirituality in the modern legal workplace, how might the spirituality of lawyers be discussed and fostered?

How can and should lawyers respond when their sense of spirituality conflicts with the mission, environment, substance, or philosophy of their place of employment, or with the wishes or desires of their clients or colleagues?

In what way might spiritual perspectives lead a lawyer to a deeper sense of the big picture issues involved in the quest for justice, and what challenges might this raise?