

Preface

In December 2011, the University Centre Saint Ignatius Antwerp (UCSIA) organized an international interdisciplinary academic workshop on the topic of volunteering, religion and social capital. UCSIA convened a select group of researchers and practitioners to investigate how the idea of volunteering in religious, faith-based and secular organizations changed over time and what were and are people's motives in putting themselves forward as volunteers. Now, two years later, and thanks to the academic commitment of Lesley Hustinx and Johan von Essen, we are happy to present this collection: *Religion and volunteering: Complex, contested and ambiguous relationships*. We wish to thank all the authors who contributed; without their dedication and expertise, this volume would not exist.

The contributors examine the relationship between religion and volunteering in its complexity and depth. They add to the current discussions between academics and practitioners about the 'religious' dynamics of volunteering as well as the role of religion in contemporary society. They critically analyse the so-called 'default position' that expects a harmonious causal relationship between religion and volunteering. In this way, readers are led to a more varied and more contextual understanding of the role of religion in contemporary society, taking into account processes of secularization and pluralization.

This anthology explores the maze of religion and volunteering in great detail. The interactions between religion and volunteering require a variety of research perspectives. Therefore, we attempt to cover a wide range of theoretical and methodological approaches and include a variety of disciplinary accounts, including theology, philosophy, sociology, political science, anthropology and architecture.

What readers will not find here is an all-embracing theory or a conclusive synthesis. On the contrary, we hope to provoke discussion. The book is intended for scholars and students in the field of civil society and third sector research, focusing on the topics of volunteering and religion and its importance for social capital, politics and identity formation. It also contributes to the ongoing interdisciplinary discussion about the post-secular society and will appeal to sociologists, political scientists, anthropologists and theologians. The approaches offered here may also tempt practitioners since they allow for a reinterpretation of existing realities and for the introduction of fresh perspectives in concrete situations where volunteers

play an important role. They may provide ideas and tools to decision-makers in the field of volunteering. Additional non-academic interest in this book may come from the governmental policymakers and those in leadership positions in religious communities, since it studies and discusses religion in its relationship to social capital, societal order and political realities.

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Religion and Volunteering

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