

Towards a Spiritual Integration in K-12 Education

Julian Bull

Prepared for West Coast Methods Institute, LMU

April 2017

Précis

Many American elementary and secondary schools claim to teach to the whole child, but few actually ground their programs in a holistic view of human development. We live at an odd time betwixt and between old religious and philosophical truths and an undefined open future, and so the purposes of education are in question. Secular approaches neglect the child's natural spirituality and ignore the most important factor in meeting our futures, our unrelenting curiosity about who we are and why we are here; that is, our questions about, and natural orientation towards, transcendence. Faith-based schools in turn run the risk of sacrificing rigorous critical thinking and intellectual development on the altar of limiting religious belief. Becoming a whole person is an inquiry that requires discipline and a truly open mind and heart, but most schools slam doors shut in their march towards measurable educational outcomes, college readiness, or guarding the faith.

I am the head of an 1130-student K-12 Episcopal school in Los Angeles. This essay will review how this one school seeks to develop its educational philosophy, curriculum, and co-curriculum with intellectual and spiritual integrity. I will draw upon the work of the Canadian Jesuit philosopher Bernard Lonergan and Lonergan scholars such as Daniel Helminiak, Tad Dunne, Glenn Hughes, and Kenneth Melchin; while there are many philosophical sources to choose from, I find the Lonergan school to offer the clearest understanding about human development, one that offers a way through our particular postmodern, post-classical-religious predicament. I will also discuss the groundbreaking work of Columbia Psychology and Education professor Lisa Miller, who has provided research-based guidance for sound and effective programming (and parenting) in the early childhood and elementary years, ages for which Lonergan's writings offer less specific guidance. My hope is that this account will have relevance for other pluralistic, twenty-first century faith-based schools so that we may collaborate as communities of inquiry, schools of both heart and mind, both science and spirituality. There is much at stake - indeed, the very health of our children and future of our society.

Introduction

Every school implicitly or explicitly grounds its curriculum in some theory (or multiple, even conflicting theories) of human development. There is no way to avoid that broader

context even if one wanted to. For example, even a school that claims to be focused solely on academics must have policies and practices to deal with academic dishonesty. More profoundly, as Lonergan pointed out and every classroom teacher knows, there is purely rational inquiry and then “there stands the native bewilderment of the existential subject, revolted by mere animality, unsure of his way through the maze of philosophies, trying to live without a known purpose, suffering despite an unmotivated will, threatened with inevitable death and, before death, with disease and even insanity.”

¹ Schools that ignore students as existential subjects may succeed in grinding out “academic excellence,” the holy grail of many a school mission statement, but only at great cost to their students’ health and well-being.

Most parents very much want more than an academic forced march for their children; they want schools to help them educate whole students. Non- or meta-academic components in school programming are currently many and varied, including social-emotional learning (SEL), character education, religious studies, cultural sensitivity training, media literacy, advisory, arts, and mindfulness meditation programs. Ohio Congressman Tim Ryan has introduced mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) to all Ohio public schools and co-sponsored the “Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Act” in the U.S. Congress in 2015 (which, of course, died in committee).² Social scientists produce evidence that many of these programs can be quite effective, and I applaud the courage of those who have pioneered them. However, teaching to the whole child - or as Tad Dunne would say, educating spiritually integrated persons³ - is not a matter of layering social-and-emotional learning on top of some standard educational model. Instead, as one Episcopal educator put it, holistic school philosophy is a kind of marinade in which the entire educational program is steeped, rather than a side dish or a thin layer of icing over the standard academic cake.⁴ Furthermore, the marinaders themselves are steeping, called to authentic growth and development; only whole teachers can truly educate whole children.

Standard educational models involve structured sequences of questions and answers, often in a kind of rigidly mindless march of “teaching to the test.”⁵ Bernard Lonergan’s great gift to education was to show that all inquiry “is a *process*...that is both emotional

¹ Bernard Lonergan, *Insight* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1970), p. 385

² <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/850>

³ Tad Dunne, *Lonergan and Spirituality: Towards a Spiritual Integration* (Chicago: Loyola U. Press, 1985), pp. 181ff

⁴ Ann Mellow, “Side Dish or Marinade?”

<http://www.episcopalschools.org/news/blog/archive/blog/2011/11/22/side-dish-or-marinade->

⁵ Stephanie Overman, “Fighting the Stress of Teaching to the Test,” as found at <https://docs.google.com/document/d/131KngfEkS3fg6dFXedXaBlfvB2RHZglQRdrgZ7fEjdE/edit>

and intellectual” and that “aims finally at understanding the ground or ultimate meaning of reality.”⁶ The student sitting at her desk is not a passive blank slate but a dynamic existential subject, wondering in her polymorphous consciousness what it all means. Schools organize their time primarily by academic subjects, yet in every dynamic classroom, inquiry leads deeper into the discipline and also beyond the syllabus. While sometimes a teacher needs to say, “That’s an interesting question that we can’t get to right now,” at other times one needs to honor the teachable moment and follow the inquiry where it leads. Any teacher who has ever done that successfully knows the numinous sense of aliveness and intelligence that permeates such moments of real inquiry. Great teachers develop the alertness and discernment necessary to teach their subject matter well but always in the context of the wholeness of knowledge and human experience.

Schools that genuinely seek to ground their programs in a holistic view of human development cannot help but invite the adults creating, delivering, and supporting those programs into an inquiry of what it means to be fully human themselves. That’s why the school where I work calls itself a “community of inquiry.” We still teach traditional subjects; in fact in many ways, our school looks externally like any other, with the exception of the chapel program, an unusual schedule, and a robust human development curriculum (more on those later). The real difference lies in the insistence on giving questions of ultimate meaning and purpose their complete due, for children and adults alike. The community of inquiry is a school standing always at the intersection of time and eternity - or as a Campbell Hall student put it more colloquially, “It’s a community that doesn’t just stick to what they know, [but rather is] questioning and discovering. We are a community that wants to push the boundaries [of] stuff that we know.”⁷

The History of One Particular Community of Inquiry

Such schools don’t drop out of the sky but develop from particular histories, almost always with their roots in religious or spiritual traditions. In that context, I will give a brief overview of the school where I work and which I know best as a starting point for discussing general principles. Campbell Hall currently occupies a niche in the Los Angeles educational marketplace in which spirituality is broadly valued but organized religion is sometimes viewed with skepticism. It was not always so; sixty years ago the

⁶ Glenn Hughes, *Transcendence and History* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003), pp. 17-19

⁷ Katherine Samuels ‘19 quoted in “Community of Inquiry: Three Words, Many Interpretations” (*The Campbell Hall Piper*, Vol. XVIII Issue III, January 31, 2017)

school's Hollywood Episcopal parents produced a short promotional video called "The Fourth R,"⁸ with religion alongside reading, writing, and arithmetic highlighted in the school's curriculum. Somehow along the way the school started to enroll small, and then more significant numbers of Jewish families who did not want their children to be indoctrinated in the Christian faith. Those families were accommodated by eliminating the requirement of Christian religious education, but retaining chapel, prayer, and the study of world religions, unlike so many formerly faith-based private schools that threw the baby out with the bathwater. Again by grace and by the wise instinct of the head and chaplain at the time, Jewish families applying were told that daily chapel was mandatory and that prayers would be offered, but to God and not more specifically to Christ. The notion developed that the school could maintain and honor its Episcopal identity, but still be inclusive and welcoming to those of other faiths, which now include Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and the growing ranks of the spiritual-but-not-religious, alongside progressive Jews, Episcopalians, other Protestants, and Catholics. Just last month a 170-member gospel choir with students representing the full religious and philosophical diversity of the community offered a rousing, practically Pentecostal evening of Black gospel music, a favorite annual event. Traditionalists continue to deride the school's approach as "Catholic Lite," but overlook the very real and transformative spiritual dynamism that animates this educational community.

Over the decades the school also created a human development program that addressed head-on not just general health and social issues but also the difficult topics of sexuality, bullying, mental health, and addiction, with notable successes alongside the inevitable setbacks in a large and diverse student body. The creator of the program was a lay chaplain, now our ordained director of counseling, who believed that true human development is ultimately a matter of spiritual development, and courageously embedded those ideas in the program's curriculum and hiring practices. The program now encompasses almost every grade at school and has retained an ecumenical spiritual focus through several leadership changes and hiring increasing numbers of teachers into the department. It's radical focus on holistic student health has influenced schoolwide decisions such as the time school starts in the morning and the clothes students wear.

Fourteen years ago I became the third headmaster since the school's founding in 1944.⁹ From the beginning I loved the school's strong college preparatory program, but

⁸ Found at

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/131KngfEkS3fg6dFXedXaBlfvB2RHZglQRdrgZ7fEjdE/edit>

⁹ And the third priest-in-charge, since the school's bylaws require that the head be ordained in the Episcopal Church.

especially its warm sense of community and ecumenical spirituality, which seemed connected to each other and to the school's growing reputation. I marvelled at the courage and widely acknowledged successes of the human development curriculum along with other academic, artistic, and athletic programs. As a philosopher I also know the danger of grounding any practice, however well meaning, in inconsistent or incomplete theory, though schools almost always do so because of the challenge of engaging whole faculties in philosophical dialogue. I wondered, and still wonder, whether there could be a philosophical articulation of the school's approach that connected to and beyond other Episcopal schools to a broader network of holistic, spiritually integrated education, whatever that might mean.

It has therefore been my goal to work with colleagues to ground our program, not just in Episcopal identity, but in sound cognitional and human development theory as best we can. We approach that goal not by having all faculty and administrators read philosophy; we tried that, and while a small minority of administrators and faculty enjoy reading and discussing philosophy, it doesn't work as a primary institutional strategy. Few K-12 educators share an appetite, or have the time, for sustained philosophical reflection, and prefer to spend their continuing education hours in training that directly impacts their teaching and students' learning. Nor do we require a course in religious studies or a declaration of faith, what I would call more classicist or traditional approaches. Instead, I deem it the job of the school's academic and spiritual leaders to model and encourage academic and spiritual inquiry. We craft and solicit coherent position papers and training programs that are both theoretically grounded and as accessible as possible, and then work with others of agile mind, good will, and open heart to fill in and develop the details at each level of program. It is also my job as spiritual leader to preach the gospel, and not always in words. It is an organic, polymorphous, and emergent approach that is non-dogmatic and sometimes chaotic but has often led, by grace and sometimes just dumb luck, to surprisingly powerful results.

Our quest to collaborate beyond the association of Episcopal schools received a quantum boost from the recent publication of *The Spiritual Child* by Columbia psychology and education professor Lisa Miller, and subsequent collaboration with Dr. Miller and like-minded educators. I will outline Miller's research on what she calls "natural spirituality" in the next section, and then turn to Lonergan scholars Dunne and Daniel Helminiak for insights as to how schools can nurture spirituality as the child matures.

Miller: Nurture the Young Child's Natural Spirituality

The Spiritual Child, published in 2015, is a compendium of research from the last twenty years on the role of spirituality in physical and mental health. While pitched towards the broader parenting market, the book's scholarly and clinical background is legitimate and peer-reviewed and -attested.¹⁰ Miller's work thus bridges the gap between popular discussions of spirituality and clinical psychological research.

The research strand which Miller summarizes and to which she contributes uses a working definition of spirituality as "a sense of close personal relationship to God (or nature or the universe or whatever term each person uses for 'higher power') and a vital source of daily guidance." The first instance of clinical research to use that working definition was published in the *American Journal of Psychiatry* in 1997, and "provided evidence of a hugely beneficial dimension of spirituality that was empirically rather than theoretically derived: a personal relationship with the transcendent." That empirically derived dimension of spirituality turns out to correlate moderately with religious affiliation, meaning that "there are highly spiritual people across all denominations," highly spiritual people with no religious affiliation whatsoever, and religious believers who are not particularly spiritual. Since that ground-breaking study, hundreds of others have gone on to demonstrate high statistical correlations between personal spirituality and "good health, mental well-being, fulfillment," and productivity.¹¹ More startlingly, "No other preventative factor known to science and medicine has such a broad-reaching and powerful influence on the daily decisions that make or break health and wellness."¹²

As thus defined and studied in the clinical research reviewed in Miller's work, spirituality:

- Is more genetic and inherent than learned (as determined through twin studies);
- Surges in adolescence, along with capacities for critical thinking; and
- Is closely allied with human bonding and relationships.¹³

While it is somewhat startling to read truth claims such as, "By comparing monozygotic and dizygotic twins, Kendler showed that the variance...in our tendencies around personal devotion are due 29 percent to broad heritability, 24 percent to family environment, and 47 percent to our own personal unique environment,"¹⁴ Miller's

¹⁰ <http://www.tc.columbia.edu/articles/2011/september/lisa-miller-named-apa-fellow/>.

¹¹ Lisa Miller, *The Spiritual Child* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2015), pp. 7-8

¹² Miller, p. 38

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 52

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 58

conclusions make sense intuitively to anyone who works with children in religious or spiritual contexts.

The book goes on to discuss implications for parenting and educating young children in light of the research findings on spirituality. I will list her six primary recommendations:¹⁵

- Immerse children in prayer and ritual, which they naturally love;
- Give ample time and space for young children to exercise their natural mindfulness;
- Provide opportunities and models for children to be helpers, healers, and little beings of service, which comes naturally to them;
- Honor and encourage young children's intuitive and heartfelt sense of connection to others, as family;
- Provide opportunities for children to engage their natural spiritual attunement with nature and the world around them; and
- Treat adolescence, not as a disorder or temporary insanity, but as a time of potentially powerful spiritual awakening.

I agree that those six recommendations, derived from clinical psychological research rather than the experience of any one school or group of schools, may serve as guiding principles for K-12 education that seeks to keep young hearts and minds open to transcendence. I will flesh out Miller's principles with examples from my own experience below.

1. Immerse children in prayer, ritual, and sacred stories

We begin each day in our elementary school with a chapel ritual that includes prayers, singing, simple movement, readings, and honoring people and events in the community. Most faith-based schools include chapel or meeting rituals despite fierce competition for time, in recognition of the vital importance of those rituals for children and for the community. Recently I heard this story from the father of a new kindergartener who also brings his younger daughter to chapel one day a week. In the third or fourth week of that ritual, the three-year-old leaned over to her father and whispered, "This is absolutely perfect!" She doesn't even attend the school yet, but naturally senses the rightness of the sacred space. I acknowledge that by middle and high school, students start to grumble more about the twice-weekly chapels, but most also name the ritual as one of the most important parts of their school experience in retrospect.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 111, 114, 117, 120, 124, 129, & 208

2. Give time for natural mindfulness

Meta-studies show that mindfulness meditation programs delivered in schools increase attentiveness and prosocial behaviors, and ameliorate symptoms of anxiety and depression in children.¹⁶ Spiritually healthy early childhood and elementary programs also avoid over-scheduling, leaving time for children to watch bugs or play in the sand or do nothing at all. Our elementary after-school program coordinator is constantly resisting parental calls to add more structured activities, extolling the simple virtues of unstructured play with friends, apparently a somewhat foreign concept to type A Angelino parents! As children get older, the greatest obstacle to contemplative practice is the cell phone. Adolescents need to be separated from their phones - as they are during our school days, and even for long periods of time on trips and retreats, kicking and screaming - and taught mindfulness as an intentional practice.

3. Provide opportunities for service

Recently I visited a K-12 school on an accrediting team. Every time I walked into any classroom, a student would come over to me explain what they were doing at that particular moment. As in most elementary classrooms I have seen, students here were assigned various helping roles on a daily basis. In first grade the young girl designated as host (reminded by an almost imperceptible nod from the teacher after my entrance) first looked at me with utter terror, then visibly summoned her courage and began to describe to this total stranger what was going on in her classroom. For the rest of my visit, whenever she saw me across campus she would smile and wave warmly. Young children naturally want to help. Robust service programs, particularly those that remind us of the scriptural injunction to care for the marginalized, are vital components of any school concerned with spiritual integration.

4. Honor the field of love

Kindergarteners at our school have “pals” in the sixth grade; on Valentine’s Day, every one of those kindergarten students stands up in chapel and says easily and unabashedly why they love their pal. When people talk about this or any other school as a true community, they are often referring to the genuine warmth that connects friend to friend, student to teacher, parent to parent. When, in a faith-based school, we talk openly about the fact that “We are all children of God, who loves us,” and school is

¹⁶ Miller, p. 115

actually a safe place, a broader sense of family develops deeply and naturally, providing a field of love in which the child can flourish. It remains one of the most endearing qualities of my school that throughout the day, I hear students of all ages yelling happily to their friends across the campus, “I love you!” Not surprisingly, many alumni report remaining close friends for life.

5. Engage with nature

Children naturally love animals, trees, gardens, playing in rain puddles. We are lucky to be able to spend a lot of time outdoors in California, but we are also known for paving paradise over with parking lots! It behooves us to create as many opportunities as possible for children to spend time in nature and remind them of the biblical command that we should be stewards of God’s creation. Our high school “spiritual ecology” club operates on the motto, “You will not work to save what you do not love,” and sponsors camping service trips during which cell phones remain packed away and teenagers reconnect directly with the magical and mysterious natural world.

6. Honor the spiritual surge in adolescence

Many of our teenagers remain faithful church- or temple-goers, but others begin to resent being told what to believe and angrily reject God as a bearded old white guy in the clouds. It takes a special teacher, coach, or adviser to relish working with adolescents in all their distractedness, rebelliousness, and just-plain-silliness. It’s even rarer to find such teachers who can also engage teenagers on an existential and spiritual level to help them learn how to be authentic in the midst of a confusing and often profoundly misguided popular culture. It’s in middle and high school that it becomes most obvious that only spiritually integrated teachers can help foster spiritual integration in students. Such teachers at our school use a full bag of tricks, including:

- Making it safe for teenagers to talk about the health and care of their souls, a favorite topic;
- Beginning every class with “silence to settle,” three minutes of contemplative writing or drawing, or the like;
- taking movement breaks in the middle of class;
- or gearing frequent assignments to the students’ own sense of personal purpose.

The advantage that faith-based schools have in teaching to the whole child is not their correct doctrine; it is their profound respect for the child’s inherent spirituality, and the

ability to create schedules and curricula grounded in that respect. The best teachers in faith-based schools have always known the truths that Miller divined from research. Conversely, spiritually attuned teachers in secular schools usually find themselves swimming against the tide. In the name of separation of Church and State, public schools become mired in lawsuits if they attempt anything with even a whiff of spirituality.¹⁷ Even in private secular schools, spirituality tends to be too controversial a subject, consigned to the purely personal realm. The “mindfulness in education” movement provides an interesting case study, making great inroads into public and private secular schools by pitching mindfulness meditation as a stress-reducing, secular, and non-spiritual activity. I salute the courage and ingenuity of the leaders of that movement, many of them friends, and yet caution that insisting that meditation is non-spiritual activity, while strategically wise, is simply not true. Being truly mindful leads inevitably to the question of God¹⁸, as any honest inquirer can judge firsthand. To claim to teach the whole child, yet dogmatically prescind from any questions regarding the immanent source of transcendence, is profoundly confusing. And the great tragedy of our primary education systems is that most children are socialized out of their natural mindfulness by the end of elementary school,¹⁹ right when they need it most to live into their true selves through the challenges of adolescence.

There are, of course, many possible objections to Miller’s work from both philosophical and religious perspectives; I will review two. The first is that the terms spirituality and spiritual development are too vague to be truly helpful. For example, Glenn Hughes writes, “the words spirit and spirituality in popular speech and writing have become imprecise to the point of irrelevance. As the philosopher Eric Voegelin would say, symbols regarding transcendence tend, in the course of their use...to become cut off from the experiences of transcendence that originally engendered them.”²⁰ This objection is entirely accurate, and is confirmed weekly in conversations about spirituality that involve wild and unverifiable metaphysical claims. But rather than insisting always on the level of precision achieved by philosophers such as Lonergan and Voegelin, I prefer to rescue the word “spirit” from its unverifiable flights of fancy by grounding it in experience and norms of inquiry and insisting in our dialectic on reasonableness and clarity alongside openness. This is also Miller’s approach in insisting that her work is purely scientific. In the next section of this paper I will review Lonergan scholars Tad Dunne and Daniel Helminiak who agree that the notion of spirituality can be rescued

¹⁷ See, for example, <http://www.mindfuleducation.org>

¹⁸ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: U. of Toronto Press, 1971), pp. 101ff

¹⁹ Miller, p. 115

²⁰ Hughes, p. 16

from metaphysical vagueness, and offers advantages over other possible language referring colloquially to the role of the transcendent in everyday life of everyday people.

In a twenty-first century increasingly skeptical about privileged religious claims but still yearning for deeper meaning, broad and responsible conversations about spirituality have the best chance of winning hearts and minds. As Helminiak points out in *Spirituality for our Global Community*, “push[ing] religion in a pluralistic world raises problems of its own. Which religion? What tradition? Whose God? Aren’t religious differences often the very cause of our conflicts?”²¹ Religious people can and must be part of ecumenical conversations about spirituality, although those who are religious-but-not-spiritual will see little point. Many of those who object to the inclusion of spirituality as central in education are not, in fact, open at all to the transcendental implications of the dynamism of human inquiry; they are not actually open to letting God’s love flood their inmost hearts. If that’s the case, it’s just best to get that closed-mindedness and -heartedness out front as soon as possible, and move on. I can very much work with those, including religious folk, who are in fact open, but object to vagueness. The challenges of our century require that we create institutions and events that bring together all those who are truly open, religious or not, and then work out the finer points together in good faith.

A second objection is to follow Lonergan in preferring to speak of religious conversion rather than spiritual development in recognition that conversion generally requires the help of a tradition and a community. After all, churches are God-made as well as man-made institutions; revelation is a part of history, and religions carry forward the transformative power of revelation and the *charisms* of founders and prophets. In the educational world, schools that disaffiliate from their founding churches tend to serve other gods and become less rather than more spiritual. While Miller’s research may have uncovered an important clinical distinction between religion and spirituality, it still seems to support the idea that growing up in a religious tradition offers the best odds for developing a personal spirituality. This is obviously a complicated topic, worthy of further study and debate. Let one quotation suffice here: “Religious solutions from the past cannot meet the spiritual needs of the present.”²² Let the dialectic continue, let it include those from within and those outside of religious traditions (including, increasingly, clinical psychologists), and we will all be better off. My experience in a community of inquiry with real religious and spiritual diversity bears witness to that hope. I write as a priest ordained by my religious community, but I work happily as an

²¹ Daniel Helminiak, *Spirituality for our Global Community* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), p. 17

²² Helminiak, p. 159

educator of children from many faiths as well as those with no formal religious background at all.

Helminiak: Transcendental Method as Mature Spirituality

In the primary grades in particular, schools and families may marinate children in a spiritual culture to help maintain and develop their natural openness to transcendence. In adolescence, the teenager is gradually handed the developmental reins and eased into the challenge of deciding for herself what to make of herself. The shift doesn't happen overnight, but the gulf between a kindergartner and a senior in high school is immense. With the five-year-old, the teacher is trying to support, at least not squelch, natural spirituality as the student begins the long journey towards academic discipline. The eighteen-year-old stands, for better or worse, on his own two feet as he surveys his future, accomplished in certain disciplines yet still trying to figure out what life is about. Parents and teachers dedicated to raising whole persons pray that their children enter their futures as young adults openly, honestly, lovingly, and responsibly.

In middle and high school, the capacity for critical thinking blossoms and may be differentiated in the different academic disciplines. There is a vast body of helpful pedagogical insight on teaching creative, critical, and reflective thinking and empirical method to young people, and every teacher tends to have her favorite approach, geared to her particular discipline and the students' developmental level; this is the red meat of much educational training. Yet educating the whole child involves moving beyond critical thinking skills to overarching questions involving the farthest horizons and most personal depths of meaning; that is, questions that ask, "So what? What does it all mean, anyway?" One of Lonergan's greatest gifts to education was to show how critical thinking and empirical scientific method are subsets of a much larger and integrated cognitional process that includes valuing, choosing, loving, and storytelling²³. That is, schools have to move from teaching critical thinking to teaching what Lonergan calls transcendental method.²⁴

Helminiak defines spirituality as "deliberately lived concern for the transcendent dimension of life,"²⁵ and proposes a "spirituality for our global community" based on dedicating oneself to the four primary precepts that follow from Lonergan's cognitional

²³ "Storytelling" is a helpful addition to the list by Tad Dunne; see *Lonergan and Spirituality*, pp. 151 ff

²⁴ *Method in Theology*, p. 4

²⁵ Helminiak, p. 16

theory: be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, and be responsible.²⁶ Those precepts are transcendental in the sense that, if followed faithfully, they lead us as inquirers both to the best truths of particular academic disciplines, but also *beyond* our current horizons of meaning, to higher viewpoints. Ultimately they lead to what Lonergan calls the question of God²⁷, and what Hughes calls questions about the ground of our being, “the ‘something’ from which each questioner has emerged and which constitutes his or her deepest identity.”²⁸ Helminiak cites questions about “the existence and ongoing functioning of the universe,”²⁹ which lead to some answers but can point to God only as an unknown X. Helminiak goes on to show how spirituality as dedication to the transcendental questions and precepts can help humanity transcend the wars of religion and the vagaries of unverifiable metaphysics; wars are fought over conflicting *answers* and revelations about God, whereas what actually unites us all are the ultimate *questions* we cannot help but ask. In this formulation, true scientific and spiritual inquiry *is* transcendental method. And it is *only* transcendental method - true science and true spirituality - that actually solves the most difficult human problems.

Teachers and students are existential subjects, and teaching critical thinking and transcendental method are not purely intellectual affairs. Schools operate in what Lonergan calls the intellectual pattern of experience, but also the “biological, aesthetic..., dramatic, practical, [and] worshipful patterns.”³⁰ Teachers teach but also model, cajole, preach, connect, entertain, implore, and inspire. Educating whole students requires the whole of the teacher’s spirit, and a whole school program that touches every part of our humanity. In a true community of inquiry, the whole student with all of her existential concerns is welcomed. Being attentive, intelligent, and reasonable will help in any academic subject; being responsible, including to the deepest desires for authentic living and meaning, will round out our education and make us whole.

As Lonergan liked to say, there is then a lower blade and upper blade, in this case in holistic K-12 education. The lower blade is to marinate the student in experiences of worship, ritual, prayer, art, loving community, the awesomeness of nature, and the transformative power of service, while exposing the student to stories of transcendence through the world’s religions and great literature. The upper blade is teaching and modeling transcendental method, which is critical thinking on steroids, critical thinking

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 69

²⁷ *Method in Theology*, p. 39

²⁸ Hughes, p. 34

²⁹ Helminiak, p. 85

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 286

that includes critical valuing, choosing, loving, being responsible, and telling bigger stories. The lower blade predominates in the younger years but remains part even of the twelfth grader's experience; the upper blade appears even in kindergarten but predominates as the final gift to the graduating senior. High school welcomes the teenager's critical spirit and invites the student into dialectical considerations of history, the sciences, literature, the arts, and religion, but insists that the student shares responsibility, not just for criticizing, but also for creating, loving, building, and sustaining.

The great gift of the school as a spiritually integrated community of true inquiry is that it gives the student a taste of what Lonergan called *cosmopolis*, that is, intentional community that "confronts problems of which men are aware; it invites the vast potentialities and pent-up energies of our time to contribute to their solution by developing an art and a literature, a theatre and a broadcasting, a journalism and a history, a school and a university, a personal depth and a public opinion, that through appreciation and criticism give men of common sense the opportunity and help they need and desire to correct the general bias of their common sense."³¹ I warn our students neither to underestimate nor overestimate what we are doing in school. Do not underestimate this school as a mere child's playground divorced from the responsibilities of rough-and-tumble and inevitably disappointing adult world, I warn; this school as a community of inquiry is a model for what true human community can be, and a better model than most because the adult world tends to pay too little attention to the magic and power of the natural spirituality of young children. Nor do I hope that graduates will look back with nostalgia on these years as the best of their lives; if the lessons of the community of inquiry, the lessons of cosmopolis, do not continue to incarnate and develop in the rest of their lives as graduates, then we have not done our work as their teachers.

Discussing transcendental method directly with colleagues and high school students is more challenging than discussing Miller's thoughts on natural spirituality, because of the aforementioned lack of interest in philosophical reflection in our culture. I have written a short white paper based on Dunne's excellent book, *Lonergan and Spirituality*, and also Kenneth Melchin's *Living with Other People*;³² that white paper, entitled "The Inner Dynamism," can be found on my website, and of course I welcome your critical comments.³³ I also urge you to read Lonergan and Lonergan scholars firsthand if you

³¹ *Insight*, p. 241

³² Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1998

³³ <https://www.campbellhall.org/page/about>

are interested in the themes I have outlined here. All faculty at Campbell Hall participate in some training in which we discuss the community of inquiry model, its grounding in transcendental method, and its implications for all aspects of school life. The training oversimplifies cognitional theory but does help begin a dialectic that then may continue through every educational discussion and decision we make as teaching and leadership teams. I sometimes teach elective seminars in philosophy that include some of this material, but I have more faith in the transformative power of our human development and other curricula under the guidance of profoundly spiritual teachers who are all committed to the transcendental method in their own ways, and skillful at creating developmentally appropriate lesson plans. Helminiak describes this work as “having the psyche - and the body - more and more readily support the open-ended dynamism of one’s human spirit.”³⁴ If our culture is not predisposed to philosophy, the best approach may be an enlightened psychology (and of course the two are not mutually exclusive).

We do our best at Campbell Hall to hire teachers who seem committed to spiritual inquiry with integrated bodies, psyches, and spirits, and to admit children and parents who are likewise already open at some level. This is a subtle and inexact science. There is no explicit test of faith. Teachers and families are often drawn to us because we are affiliated with the Episcopal Church, which has vaguely positive associations for them. At the same time they sense correctly that the religious diversity of the school’s population (only 10% or so are Episcopalians, who are outnumbered by Catholics, Jews, and the spiritual-but-not-religious) helps the community and program avoid the dogmatism and classicism of many faith-based schools. We seek teachers and students who seem genuinely open, curious, respectful of the mysteriousness of ultimate truth, and eager to engage in dialogue with other authentic enquirers. Some of them call themselves atheists, but are in fact what Helminiak (quoting Kirk Schneider) calls “enchanted agnostics,”³⁵ open to further horizons but skeptical of those who claim to know the name and structure of transcendent reality. All in all, it’s a community to which I am fortunate and happy to dedicate my career and passion.

Conclusion

Social scientists are not interested in the successes of particular schools unless they “scale,” unless, that is, those successes are based on principles that can be replicated elsewhere. Otherwise the school is just a lucky one-off with no lessons for anyone else.

³⁴ Helminiak, p. 126

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 155

The National Association of Episcopal Schools, I presume like other associations of religious or faith-based schools, seeks to articulate general principles that differentiate its member schools. For whatever historical reasons, Episcopal schools have not been particularly fierce about guarding or preserving the faith, in contrast, for example, to Jewish, Muslim, and Catholic day schools. In some cases, that lack of vigilance has led to disaffiliation from the Episcopal Church in order to attract a larger market. The school where I work, Campbell Hall, has followed a very different path, which is to double down on the school's spiritual identity even as the religious identity broadens and changes. And now I find myself wondering if this model will scale.

I have identified compatible forces of spiritual psychology and spiritually integrated critical thinking that are in theory replicable in any elementary and secondary school. The devil is always in the details, and no school is likely even to care about these questions, or dare to face them, unless it has some religious history; I also suspect there are many religiously affiliated schools that could benefit from a spiritual resurgence. Dr. Miller has convened a national dialogue on the topic of spirituality in schools, and I look forward to participating. I would be especially happy if such a national network became interested in Lonergan's work (bridged by Helminiak, Dunne, and others) for its model of spiritually integrated academic institutions for a global community. I hope this paper will further that likelihood in some small way.