

# Cultivating Spiritual Reflectivity in Teachers

By Clifford Mayes

## Introduction

There are probably few subjects that are so inadequately explored in teacher education as our students' spiritual beliefs and practices—whether or not those beliefs and practices are grounded in a formal religious commitment. In this article, I would like to discuss why we need to address this fairly widespread neglect of spiritual commitments in our teacher education programs (Nord, 1990).

First, I will argue that because the spiritual impulse is psychologically, socially, and ontologically primary for many people, it is existentially inauthentic to avoid such issues in the education of teachers, at least those for whom spiritual commitments are important. Second, since many of our students are largely motivated by spiritual reasons to become teachers (Serow, Eaker, & Ciechalski, 1992), we must

find ways to recognize, honor, and cultivate that fact in order to foster profound forms of reflectivity. And third, we need to do a much better job than we are presently doing of educating our intending teachers about what they and their students can legally discuss in the classroom regarding personal spiritual commitments and formal religious doctrines. For as matters now stand, too many intending teachers leave colleges of education with the misconception

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that they are essentially forbidden to mention spiritual or religious topics in their classes and that they must keep their students from expressing personal religious convictions (Kniker, 1990).

### **The Spiritual Impulse as Foundational**

Over the last century, sociologists of religion have helped us see how spiritual commitments are often not only socially but also personally foundational. I would like to look at a few of the most important sociological statements along these lines, and then discuss the relevance of this to teacher education. First, however, I want to make it clear that I do not consider all formal religion as necessarily spiritual. Nor do I believe that one must necessarily have an institutional religious allegiance in order to be vitally involved in the pursuit of spirituality—whatever that term may mean to a particular person. For the purposes of this paper, I would like to suggest the following as a working definition of spirituality, to which sociological insights can add further dimensions: Spirituality is the pursuit of a trans-personal and trans-temporal reality that serves as the ontological ground for an ethic of compassion and service. Or as one of the most famous lines from my religious tradition puts it, “When ye are in the service of your fellow beings, ye are only in the service of your God” (*The Book of Mormon, Mosiah 2: 17*).

#### ***What Sociology Has to Tell Us about the the Spiritual Impulse***

In his classic essay “The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life” (1898/1975), Durkheim characterized religion as “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things...which unite into one single moral community called a church all those who adhere to them” (p. 123). A century later, Wuthnow (1994) defined religion as our apprehension of “the sacred, that is, the symbolic frameworks that set apart from everyday life, giving a sense of transcendent, holistic meaning” (p. 3). Both Durkheim’s institutional focus on a “church” and Wuthnow’s phenomenological focus on symbolic systems highlight the evolution of spiritual commitment over the last century from the collective and formal to the personal and idiosyncratic (Giddens, 1991; Johnstone, 1997). Nevertheless, both theorists focused on the notion of “the sacred”—or “the space of wonder and awe, of the noumenal which remains a mystery and the numinous which is its aura” (Bell, 1977, p. 447; see also Eliade, 1959).

It is a commonplace to assert that (post)modern life is “profane” or “desacralized”—an argument known as “secularization theory” (Berger, 1983/1995, p. 636; Wallis & Bruce, 1992/1995). Yet, it is quite arguable that spirituality, in both its institutional and idiosyncratic forms, is as important now to most people as it ever was—and perhaps even more so (Johnstone, 1997). In the United States, for instance, about 95 percent of the people believe in God, 70 percent believe in life after death, 60 percent have a formal religious affiliation, and 40 percent attend a religious service on any given week (Marty, 1987).

It would seem that the perennial need to connect with the transcendent and to live in its light is a universal urge; for “our individual experiences of the sacred... provide us with reference points, both emotionally and intellectually, telling us that our lives have meaning and purpose” (Wuthnow, 1994, p. 3). As long as we must face what T.S. Eliot called “the overwhelming question” of our own morality and mortality, then spiritual expression is bound to be a burning issue for most people.

The spiritual impulse is not only psychologically and ontologically primary, it is also essential in the formation and maintenance of society. Paul Tillich—perhaps the greatest theologian of the 20th Century—argued that “religion is the substance of culture, and culture is the form of religion” (1956/1983, p. 103). Indeed, societies typically overcome the “legitimation crises” which they periodically face (Habermas, 1981) by an appeal to and elaboration of the ontological assumptions upon which they usually rest (Berger, 1963/1995). There is thus a perpetual interaction between society and religion as they refine and redefine each other in an ongoing historical dialectic (Pals, 1996). “Throughout human history,” declared Berger and Luckman (1963/1995), “religion has played a decisive part in the construction and maintenance of universes” (p. 422). If we socially construct our reality, it is equally true that we spiritually/religiously construct our society. At the bottom of every social *nomos* is a religious *theodicy* (Berger, 1967).

### **Foundational Commitments and the “Call” to Teach— *Past and Present***

Given the importance of axiological and ontological commitments in shaping individuals and societies, it is not surprising that the same kinds of commitments should play a role in shaping many people’s decision to become a teacher (Serow et al., 1992; Bullough & Gitlin, 1995). Mattingly’s (1975) study of teachers in the 19th Century concluded that the American teacher’s sense of calling typically “possessed quasi-spiritual properties” in the teacher’s desire to inculcate moral and civic virtues (p. 63). Particularly in the first half of the nineteenth century, many American teachers saw themselves—and were often seen by society—in a clearly “ministerial” light (ibid). Mattingly (1975) has called attention to “the evangelical origins of teaching” in the United States (ibid). Indeed, Gladden’s socially proactive vision of Christ’s teachings, embodied in his promulgation of the “Social Gospel,” led many 19th-Century teachers into various social causes. These causes ranged from teaching the newly arrived immigrant in Jane Addams’s Settlement Houses to braving the perils of the highly volatile, post-bellum South to educate the recently “liberated” slave (Cremin, 1988; Jones, 1980). In fact, the socially transformative power of public education and the social implications of the gospel were tightly intertwined in Gladden’s scenario, in which teachers would instill in children those virtues and visions that would lead to “a Christianizing of the social order... [and the establishment] of the Kingdom of God on earth” (Cremin, 1988, p. 22).

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Such educational luminaries of the mid- to late-19th Century as Emma Willard, Mother Mary Seton, and, above all, Catherine Beecher, insisted that teaching was primarily a religious “vocation” and a moral act (Sklar, 1973). Teaching even had chiliastic implications. This is perhaps most evident in Catherine Beecher’s insistence that it was the teacher who would raise the moral and intellectual level of the nation’s youth so as to prepare the nation for the return of Christ and the establishment of His millennial kingdom in the United States (Sklar, 1973). Tyack (1989) thus concluded that “throughout most of the 19th Century . . . , for many teachers a powerful Protestant-republican ideology of service gave resonance to [their]work” (p. 417)

However, under the influence of America’s burgeoning industrial capitalism in the last part of the 19th Century—with its relentless pursuit of the “scientific management” of people and organizations—public schools came increasingly to serve corporate interests and take on bureaucratic contours (Cremin, 1988; Tyack, 1974). In his analysis of public school administration from 1910 to 1930, Callahan (1962) lamented “the extent, not only of the power of the business-industrial groups, but of the strength of the business ideology in the American culture, on the one hand, and the extreme weakness and vulnerability of schoolmen . . . on the other” (p. viii). Callahan’s analysis examines how teachers and especially school administrators were either co-opted, cajoled, or forced into pledging their allegiance to the capitalist “cult of efficiency,” which provided little room for the teacher’s personal, political, or spiritual commitments (ibid).

In this unfortunate yet persistent model, the teacher is essentially seen as a delivery mechanism for a curriculum which sorts students into their appropriate social roles, where, as obedient “worker-citizens” (Spring, 1976), they can yield maximum economic return on society’s financial investment in public education (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). By this view, the purpose of teacher education is the training and acculturation of teachers into what B.F. Skinner (1956) called “the technology of teaching” and into what Schon (1987) has termed the ethos of “technical rationality.” Such behavioristically-based approaches to teaching still prevail in many U.S. departments, schools, and colleges of education in the form of competency-based teacher education curricula (Valli, 1990, 1993).

In most of these curricula, one is trained to perform a prefabricated set of teacherly skills and functions. Such programs tend to pay very little attention (if any!) to the psychological, political, ethical, or spiritual contexts of teaching. They thereby not only ignore but can even do violence to both the intending and practicing teacher’s deeper motivations and purposes (Huberman, 1993). In short, the efficiency-based, depersonalized vision of teachers and teaching is as alive today in postmodern, corporate-capitalist America as it was in industrial-capitalist America, perhaps even more so—as is all too clear in Bill Clinton’s view of the student as “human capital” in whom we can invest in order to reestablish U.S. geopolitical hegemony (Spring, 2000).

Nevertheless, the view of teachers as moral agents whose commitment to

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teaching rests on foundational spiritual commitments has not disappeared. For, whatever the top-down rhetoric of such corporate reform agendas as *A Nation at Risk* and *Goals 2000*, many teachers persist in seeing their role as primarily the emotional and moral nurturance of children (Goodlad et al., 1990; Noddings, 1992, 1994; Stokes, 1997). It is this role which provides those psychic rewards that Lortie (1975) discussed and which, in some measure, compensate for the lack of financial rewards in teaching. Joseph and Burnaford (1994) have found that images of teachers as ministers, priests, counselors, mothers, fathers, artists, guides, Zen masters, liberators, visionaries, saviors, and saints abound in the literature on teacher reflectivity. I suspect that for a good many of these teachers, these images rest on the individual teacher's deeper spiritual commitments.

For instance, Serow et al. (1992) studied teacher education students at five public universities in the southern and midwestern sections of the United States and found that over 90 percent of the respondents had chosen to be teachers because of a desire to serve and nurture others. Similarly, Pajak and Blaise (1989), in a study of 200 teachers, concluded that:

...teachers identified their own spiritual beliefs as having a beneficial effect on their professional lives. Most spoke generally of religious values or a belief in God without naming any religion in particular. Many specified Christianity, but Zen, Yoga, and a belief in the inherent dignity of man were also mentioned as sources of stability, meaning, and direction.... (pp. 299-300)

Teachers generally portrayed their relationship with students as caring, understanding, accepting, patient, and trusting and said that this was the result of their spiritual commitments.

Unfortunately, there have been very few studies that look at the spiritual dimension of teacher reflectivity and practice. We need such research to give us a clearer understanding of how certain teachers ground their practice in axiological and spiritual concerns and convictions. I am presently engaged in a study of how veteran teachers in the graduate program in educational administration at my university have been shaped by their spiritual beliefs. We also need studies of how intending teachers' spiritual commitments manifest themselves in the teacher's daily classroom practice. For instance, in a recent article, I examined how my Mormon/Buddhist commitments have helped shape my teaching. The examination of how one's spirituality affects one's teaching a fascinating topic which needs to be much more visible in the literature on teacher reflectivity (Palmer, 1997).

Still, despite the paucity of current research in this field, it seems safe to draw the tentative conclusion that spirituality is a salient factor in how some teachers envision and practice their craft. The observations of Capper et al. (1998) about school leaders may well apply to teachers—namely, that they see their work “as an extension of and intertwined with their spiritual beliefs” (p. 2). For these reasons, I am arguing for what I shall call spiritual reflectivity in teacher education programs.

## **Spiritual Reflectivity in Teacher Education**

Over the last decade or so, we have seen a growing movement away from the kinds of competency-based teacher education which I briefly discussed above, although it is still the primary form of teacher education in U.S. departments, schools, and colleges of education (Richardson, 1990; Stallings & Kowalski, 1990). We have also seen a movement toward teacher education that takes a more personal and existentially rich view of both intending and practicing teachers (Elbaz, 1990). This has manifested itself in a focus on teacher reflectivity (Richardson, 1990).

In teacher reflectivity, the intending or practicing teacher reflects on the deeper pedagogical, political, and biographical forces that she has internalized and which both consciously and unconsciously shape her practice. In order to clarify the conscious assumptions and make the unconscious ones explicit, reflective teacher education typically employs journal-keeping, seminars, dialogues, and action research projects (Valli, 1993). Through these dialogic and empirical tools, the student is able to uncover her hidden assumptions about teaching and, when appropriate, change them. The goal is for her practice to become more pedagogically effective, personally satisfying, and politically sensitive (Bullough & Gitlin, 1995).

Not wishing at all to minimize the importance of these forms of reflectivity which have done so much to liberate and humanize teacher education over the last decade, I believe that our present forms of reflectivity often do not go deep enough. As important as the pedagogical, political, and personal dynamics of our practice are, they must be understood in a larger context—one that addresses the *whole person sub specie aeternitatis*, one that dares to explore the person's "trans-biographical" (Wilber 1980) motivations for becoming a teacher (Clift & Houston, 1990). Only by fostering such "ontological self awareness" in our students (Van Manen, 1990) can we as teacher educators begin to help them explore and refine that "ultimate concern," which, as the essence of true religiosity (Tillich, 1959), is so often the basis of our students' decision to become teachers. In short, not a few intending and practicing teachers will probably need to engage in spiritual reflectivity in order to better understand their desire to teach and elaborate on their images of good practice.

By shying away from frank discussion and development of spirituality in our intending teachers (discussions that in some students will inevitably center around quite specific commitments to particular religious figures and doctrines), we do not fully serve those students and seriously compromise the depth and effectiveness of their reflectivity. In fact, I would argue that we actually do moral violence to such students by requiring that they "bracket off" the spiritual dimension of their existence as intellectually irrelevant or even institutionally unacceptable when, in fact, it does not have to be (Carter, 1993; Nord, 1995).

Even at the religious university where I teach (the largest religious university in the United States), students are sometimes reluctant to speak of their faith in and

understanding of Jesus as central to themselves as teachers; for, I have learned over the years from my students' classroom comments as well as our discussions during office hours or at social functions that most of them labor under the illusion that there can be no relationship between spiritual commitment and public education in modern America. *A fortiori*, intending teachers at secular universities may have even more serious misconceptions along these lines. Surprisingly, it seems that non-religiously affiliated private universities take the most open approach to spiritual reflectivity in teacher education programs (Kniker, 1990; Sheridan, Wilmer, & Atcheson, 1994; Warshaw, 1986). This is a subject that clearly merits further study (Kniker, 1990; Sheridan, Wilmer, & Atcheson, 1994; Warshaw, 1986).

At any rate, biographical reflectivity that does not include spiritual reflectivity will often produce only a pallid picture of the teacher—one that lacks the nuances of her personal connection with divinity as she understands it. Such a partial picture (a caricature, really) will not render the teacher's existential complexity and will thus have only a limited value in refining her reflectivity and honing her practice (Watson & Watson-Franke, 1985).

In another field, various researchers and practitioners in the psychological social sciences are coming to similar conclusions about the need for spiritual reflectivity in their professional programs (Richards & Bergin, 1998; Sheridan et al., 1994). Cornett (1998), for example, has said that in order to "recapture the spiritual dimension in the therapeutic encounter" therapists should explore in themselves and their clients the following six intrinsic aspects of religiosity: (1) The meaning of life, (2) values, (3) mortality, (4) the organization and guidance of the universe, (5) suffering, and (6) transcendence. These are rubrics that might also serve as springboards for teachers' spiritual reflectivity.

I would also like to suggest that critical reflectivity, which aims at sensitizing the teacher to the political implications and applications of his practice (Gitlin, 1992), will often be incomplete if it does not take his spiritual commitments into account. Working out of the Jewish tradition, for example, Wexler (1996) and Purpel and Shapiro (1995) contend that educational research and discourse must incorporate spiritual matters since one's understanding of and relationship to the transcendent frequently underlies political vision and action. The lives (and deaths) of such figures as Mahatma Gandhi, Reverend King, Archbishop Romero, and Malcolm X poignantly demonstrate that political action born of a spiritual vision is passionate and productive. Spirituality is the basis of "justice-making" (Lepage, 1991, p. 73), as both the theory and practice of Liberation Theology vividly show (Schipani, 1988). I would even contend that a spirituality devoid of political dimensions or consequence is vacuous. I would also hasten to add that a political vision that has no spiritual grounding runs the terrible risk of becoming mechanical, totalizing, and inhumane.

Thus, to be genuine, political reflectivity in teachers will sometimes have to involve spiritual reflectivity. Far from discouraging discourse that centers around

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our students' spiritual commitments, then—or even just handling such discussion with kid gloves—we would do well to actively encourage it in our students' journal work, group processing, and action research. In addition to standard forms of reflectivity, there are also meditative and archetypal exercises from the transpersonal psychologies of Jung (1959), Assagioli (1965, 1973), Ajaya (1985), and Wilber (1980) which I have used to help students spiritually reflect on themselves as teachers (Mayes, 1998, 1999a, 1999b). *A crucial caveat, of course, is that such reflectivity must never be forced on a student who does not wish to engage in it, and that such students who do choose to engage in it may never use it as a pretext for proselytizing.*

We need not fear in all of this that we will be swamped with boring litanies and catechisms dutifully recited by our students along ecclesiastical party lines, for what we want to encourage is spiritual reflectivity that is existentially authentic—not ideologically slavish. Moreover, what particularly marks modern spirituality is its tendency toward individual interpretation and idiosyncratic experience instead of institutional loyalty and doctrinal correctness. Luckmann (1979) has called this “the privatization of the sacred cosmos” (p. 123; see also Johnstone, 1997, and Bocock & Thompson, 1985).

Ammerman and Roof (1995) hold that this spiritual individualism is particularly evident in the United States because of its radical Protestant heritage and its emphasis on the individual's unique relationship with God. On the other hand, Giddens (1991) sees the privatization of religion as a general characteristic of late modernity in the West. At any rate, as we encourage those of our students who want to do so to develop the spiritual narratives of their own identity as teachers, we are bound to discover a broad array of unique and compelling stories that are very much a part of their own personal mythologies (Feinstein & Krippner, 1988; Houston, 1996).

### **Religion and Spirituality in The Classroom**

At this juncture, it is necessary to reintroduce the topic of formal religion. I do so because religion is often salient in Supreme Court pronouncements on the spiritual commitments of public school teachers and students.

As I have already mentioned, various teacher educators as well as intending and practicing teachers labor under a variety of untruths or half-truths about what is legally and institutionally acceptable in the study and expression of spiritual/religious commitments in the classroom. They feel that it is illegal to act in the schools on some of the ideas that I have discussed in this paper, even if they might agree with them. Indeed, a few studies have concluded that most students leave colleges of education with quite distorted ideas about the putative exclusion of religion from the public school classroom (Kniker, 1990; Warshaw, 1986). However, a great deal more research needs to be done to identify what these misconceptions are. I am presently engaged in a study involving preservice school adminis-



trators' (mis)understandings of what is and is not acceptable regarding religion in the schools. The few studies that have been done in this area do suggest, however, that, not infrequently, students leave colleges of education convinced that any mention of religious and/or spiritual material is inappropriate in the public school classroom—and possibly even actionable—especially if that material has a Christian text or subtext.

Of course, some teachers choose not to deal with religiously related topics because they fear parental misunderstanding, do not feel competent to discuss such matters, or do not see the possible relevance of such things to their subject matter. These can obviously be legitimate, or at least emotionally compelling, reasons for teachers to decide that they do not want to wrestle with spiritual/religious issues in their classrooms. However, for teachers who do not perceive these difficulties or for those who choose to face them because they think the spiritual dimension of education is important enough to do so, the following information may prove helpful.

In this section, then, I would like to discuss a few of the most common misconceptions about spirituality/religion in the classroom by looking at certain court decisions which show that, for both teacher educators, public school teachers, and public school students, there is more latitude than is generally believed (Strike, 1998; Wuthnow, 1994). Fortunately for all of us, there are clear limitations on what teachers can say and espouse in both the public-school and university classroom (*Palmer v. Board of Education of City of Chicago*, 603 F.2d 1271 [7<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1979]). Yet, it is equally true that “neither teachers nor students lose their constitutional rights to freedom of expression when they enter the public schools” or the university (Fischer et al., 1999, p. 147; see also *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent School District*, 393 US 503 [1969]).

#### ***Spirituality in the University Classroom***

The university professor has a great deal more latitude regarding the exploration of religious themes in the classroom than does the public school teacher. The scope of academic freedom is much greater in colleges and universities than in the public schools because of the higher level of academic credentialing of university teachers, the greater maturity of university students, and the optional nature of university attendance (*Mailloux v. Kiley*, 1971; *Tilton v. Richardson*, 1971). This is true whether the college or university is religious, independent, or state-supported (Warshaw, 1986). As noted above, however, in actual practice, private, non-religious universities tend to offer the greatest latitude, with private religious universities following, and state universities coming in last (Warshaw, 1986).

The favorable Supreme Court attitude regarding religious expression in the colleges and universities is appropriate because religious liberty is implied by the very concept of intellectual freedom and the very mission of the university, in which scholars should be free “to pursue the truth where they will. To limit free inquiry and teaching... is to risk losing the truth” (Warshaw, 1986, p. 280).

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There is good reason to believe the Court will continue to protect the freedom of relevant, scholarly religious expression in higher education—and perhaps even more so than in the past. For example, one notes the distinctly accommodationist view of Chief Justice Rehnquist, who is quite friendly to the expression of religious opinions in certain public formats (see his dissenting opinion in *Wallace v. Jaffrey*, 1985). Also, Justice O’Connor and several other justices in their dissenting opinions in a controversial case (*Employment Division v. Smith*, 1990) have shown renewed vigor in defending the principles outlined in *Sherbert v. Verner* (1963), which created very high hurdles for a university to clear before it can attempt to limit the religious expression of instructors. This is the direction that the Court has generally been taking regarding religion in higher education for at least the last 47 years—although it has admittedly been far from a clear or straight path.

The defense of religious liberty in academia is all the more important when we consider that a 1985 Carnegie Foundation Survey found that 61 percent of faculty members of U.S. colleges and universities had moderate or deep religious convictions and only 6.8 percent were opposed to religion (cited in Nord, 1995). Marsden (1997) and Nord (1995) have noted that, despite this rather high degree of religious commitment among American scholars, many of them find that academic culture has constructed a variety of explicit and also tacit constraints against including these commitments in their scholarship. If Marsden and Nord are correct in this claim, then we are looking at a violation of academic freedom and basic, constitutionally guaranteed liberties. Such practices would, indeed, constitute a violation of the very concept of pluralism, which so many of us hold so dear in academic culture.

Now, if religion is an important issue for many American academics generally, it is probably safe to assume that teachers in colleges of education have similar levels of spiritual commitment and similar needs to fold it into their work. Given the service-orientation that characterizes many instructors in colleges of education, I suspect that spiritual commitments may be even more pronounced for education professors than it is for instructors in many other departments. It is imperative, then, that colleges of education be places where students and teachers alike feel free to reflect on the spiritual dimensions of their calling and practice if they wish to do so.

As both teacher educators and intending teachers, therefore, we may include our spiritual commitments in our research, reflectivity, and practice so long as we adhere to the commonsense guidelines discussed above. I would go so far as to argue that, for those of us for whom spirituality affects our educational thinking and practice, we have both a professional and ethical duty to include it in our work in a way that is intellectually sound, academically relevant, genuinely open to critique, and never meant to proselytize.

There are some preliminary hints that spiritual reflectivity is beginning to take root in the study of educational administration with such courses as Colleen Capper’s “Leadership and Spirituality” seminar at the University of Wisconsin,

Madison (1999). This is a direction that we need to begin to explore in teacher education with the kind of tolerance and courage that Capper has shown.

As I hinted above, an added benefit of taking such a generous approach to spirituality in teacher education is that we are furthering the cause of pluralism (Randall, 1994). For, spiritual commitments are surely as crucial as cultural, ethnic, and political factors in shaping one's worldview and in determining the existential spaces in which we live—and teach! (Johnstone, 1997). In fact, spiritual commitments are often an integral part of our cultural, ethnic, and political allegiances. Thus, as teacher educators and educational scholars in both public and private universities, we are on sound legal, cultural, and pedagogical grounds in including our spiritual commitments in our educational theory and practice.

### ***Spirituality in the Public School Classroom***

If so many intending and practicing teachers are working on the assumption that spiritual commitment is a subject that must be avoided in the schools, then we are clearly falling short as teacher educators in informing our students about what is legally permissible in their classrooms (Kniker, 1990). Much of this misunderstanding stems from a lopsided interpretation of the First Amendment that, I suspect, too often prevails in colleges of education. Recall that the First Amendment begins with the injunction that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” The two parts of this pronouncement are called the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause.

Several studies suggest that as teacher educators we certainly do a thorough job of warning our prospective teachers against *establishing*. We very correctly warn them about the inappropriateness of preaching or sanctioning a particular religion with their students (Kniker, 1990; Nord, 1990; Warshaw, 1986). However, the same studies indicate that we do a rather poor job of letting our intending teachers know: (a) what they *can* do regarding teaching about religion in the classroom and (b) what their students can say given their limited but nevertheless *free exercise* of religious expression in the classroom (ibid). This ideological lopsidedness in many colleges of education leads to a grievous imbalance in our students' practice once they enter the public schools, where, consciously or not, they are closely observing the Establishment clause by avoiding virtually any mention of spiritual commitment in the classroom, but may be acting in a manner quite contrary to the Free Exercise clause by prohibiting reasonable, appropriate and relevant inclusions of spirituality/religion in the classroom.

How, precisely, may a teacher be violating the Free Exercise clause? In two ways: first, if he or she excludes or even just minimizes the study of religion in his or her classrooms when such study would appropriately enrich the class; and second, if he or she over-anxiously guards against any expression of spiritual/religious commitment from his or her students. All of this is tantamount to favoring non-religious perspectives over religious ones. This was manifestly never the intention

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of the Founding Fathers, whose intention was to give equal latitude to both religious and non-religious perspectives and not to privilege one over the other (Carter, 1993; Nord, 1995; Randall, 1994). Ironically, then, classroom practice that categorically avoids religion may itself represent a violation of the Establishment Clause. As many educational and legal scholars point out, to exclude spiritually oriented material from the curriculum and spiritually-oriented student expression in the classroom, when such material and expression are germane, constitutes a state establishment of a quasi-religion of secularism—especially if religion is defined as any overarching world view that addresses fundamental ontological and axiological questions.

In a case that is particularly relevant in this connection—*School District of Abington Township, Pennsylvania et al. v. Schempp et al.* (1963)—the Supreme Court ruled that it is not only permissible but desirable to include material and instruction about religion in public school classrooms so long as it is presented in an even-handed and academically pertinent manner. Writing for the majority, Justice Clark said in an oft-cited opinion:

It might well be said that one's education is not complete without a study of comparative religion or the history of religion and its relationship to the advancement of civilization. It certainly may be said that the Bible is worth of study for its literary and historic qualities. Nothing we have said here indicates that such study of the Bible or religion, when presented objectively as part of a secular program of education, may not be effected consistently with the First Amendment.

In that same decision, Justice Goldberg asserted:

Neither the State nor this Court can or should ignore the significance of the fact that a vast portion of our people believe in and worship God and that many of our legal, political and personal values derive historically from religious teachings.... [I]t seems clear to me from the opinions in the present and past cases that the Court would recognize the propriety of...the teaching about religion, as distinguished from the teaching of religion, in the public schools.

As Nord (1994) has declared, “religion is important; a central purpose of liberal education is to teach students about the place of religion in history and culture” (p. 7.9)—a view, by the way, that most parents of public school students seem to share (Nord, 1995).

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has put it succinctly: “Students may be taught about religion, but public schools may not teach religion” (ACLU, 1999). The ACLU has also made it clear that a student may voice spiritual commitments in classroom discussion so long as the teacher does not personally sanction those opinions in front of the classroom, allows other opinions to be expressed, and uses common sense to check the expression of spiritual opinions if they begin to wander out of the realm of discussion and into the realm of proselytizing (ibid). This is consistent with criteria developed in *Lemon v. Kurtzman*

(403 US 602 [1971]), which held that the state may neither advance *nor prohibit* religion. In educational matters, as Warshaw (1986) has stated, “*separation* of ‘church and state’ must be balanced against *accommodation* of government to religion...” (see also *Zorach v. Clausen*, 343 US 306 [1952]). As scholars and teachers, therefore, we need to give more attention to the *accommodation* of spiritual commitment. But how can we go about doing a better job than we are presently doing of educating our teachers about how to teach spiritually-based material in the classroom?

***Teaching Our Teachers How To Teach  
about Religion and Spirituality in the Classroom***

Because religion has been so important historically and ideologically, Kniker (1990) argues that we need to go much farther than we presently do in incorporating into our foundations classes the religious aspects of educational history, philosophy, and sociology. Warshaw (1986) has called for separate required courses to sensitize intending teachers to various religious issues and dogmas. He has said that we need to do this not only to prepare teachers to sensitively and intelligently discuss the religious aspects of the material they are teaching but also so that they can become aware of whatever biases about religion they themselves may hold. In this way, they will be less likely to unconsciously project their own religious attitudes on their classes. Nord (1990) has written about his successful experiences offering preservice and inservice seminars to teachers on legally permissible and pedagogically effective ways to teach about religion in the public schools.

There are also various sets of thoughtful guidelines for teaching about religion in the public schools that could easily be included in foundations or methods classes. Nord (1994) has offered “Ten Suggestions for Teaching About Religion.” Among those suggestions are the following: (1) “Many events, movements, and texts are open to conflicting interpretations (both secular and religious). Teachers should be sensitive to religious ways of understanding them.” (2) “Teachers...are neither to promote nor denigrate religion.” (3) “There should be no official conclusions. Students should not be required to agree with the teacher in class or on tests.” (4) “That there are no official conclusions does not mean that there are no right answers. Neither fairness nor the First Amendment require us to embrace relativism.” (5) “If matters are very controversial, parents should be informed and teachers should consider instituting an excusal policy.” (6) “Particular sensitivity must be shown to children who come from minority faiths, ethnic backgrounds, etc.” (p. 7.9). If teachers follow these simple guidelines, they will be on safe legal grounds.

Warshaw (1986) observed that “the teacher must be aware of, and adapt to, what the students bring with them to class [in terms of] levels of maturity and intelligence; their home backgrounds and biases; their religious information, misinformation, or simple ignorance...” Also, “the teacher must...be conscious of his or her own assumptions” (a very healthy consequence, by the way, of the kind of religious

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reflectivity that I advocated above!). And finally, “the teacher must set and maintain some ground rules: at the very least, no ridiculing of other people’s religious beliefs, practices, or teachings—nor [any ridiculing] of pure secularism” (pp. 84-86).

The ACLU provides two simple standards that encapsulate those given above. “Schools can teach about the roles and influences of religion in history, literature, and philosophy, but they cannot promote religious beliefs or practices as part of the curriculum.” And “students are free to pray on their own or otherwise express their religious beliefs in school, so long as they don’t cause a disruption in class” (ACLU, 1999). Furthermore, I maintain that teachers need to learn more about case law regarding religion in the public schools than they typically do. Such texts as Fischer, Schimmel, & Kelly’s (1999) *Teachers and the Law* clearly explain in lay terms the most recent judicial decisions regarding most aspects of religion in the public schools.

In sum, far from the prevailing misconception that one’s spiritual commitments must be checked at the door of both the college and public school classrooms, those classrooms can, each in their own way, be sites of lively discussions and explorations of spirituality/religion and its place in our collective and individual lives. Moreover, if we do a better job of exploring spirituality and education during teacher education programs, then our intending teachers will be able to handle such issues in their own classrooms in a way that is more personally satisfying to them and their students, more culturally sensitive, and more intellectually balanced and engaging.

### **“Educating for Intelligent Belief or Unbelief”**

Spiritual commitments matter. They infuse much of our social and political life. They help shape the conceptual and emotional landscapes of our (sub)cultures. For many of us, they are the rock upon which our very lives rest. As such, spirituality is inevitably a vital part of education. To be sure, the Constitution makes it quite clear that government may not sanction any particular religion. However, far from being meant to prohibit spiritual expression, this injunction was designed primarily to protect the expression of diverse religious (and non-religious) perspectives by not officially privileging any particular worldview—even a strictly secular one (Carter, 1993).

I have argued that both formal and idiosyncratic spiritual commitments are psychologically, socially, and ontologically primary for most people. Hence, those commitments must be part of many teachers’ reflectivity in order for that reflectivity to be existentially valid. Furthermore, I have suggested that we in colleges of education must dispel various illusions about the expression and exploration of spiritual commitments in the schools. To be sure, teachers must never officially sanction any particular spiritual ideology in the classroom. Yet, we are obliged to let our intending teachers know: (a) when it is appropriate to include and discuss

religious issues in their own future classrooms, (b) ways to do so that honor a diversity of formal and idiosyncratic spiritual beliefs, and (c) how to frame classroom discourse in such a way that students can express their spiritual or non-spiritual views and learn from those of others. Thus, we will be meeting Noddings' (1993) call to educate our students—in both the universities and public schools—for intelligent belief *or* unbelief, and we will do so in a way that is open, engaging, and fair.

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