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Spiritual Formation Goes to College: Class-Related "Soul Projects" in Christian Higher Education

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Abstract: Spiritual formation is both an opportunity and a challenge for educators in Christian colleges and seminaries. How can students be nurtured and guided in developing spiritually within the curriculum? Drawing on a number of educators, studies, and arguments, this article develops a rationale for engaging in spiritual formation and for the use of practical assignments or "soul projects." A selection of such projects is grouped into genres, followed by a brief exploration of best practices and an evaluation of such assignments.

The college years represent a potential-laden opportunity for spiritual formation. In an ongoing study on the spirituality of collegians, for example, the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA discovered that students across diverse institutions have "very high levels of spiritual interest" and desire to spend ample time "exploring the meaning and purpose of life" (HERI, 2006). While the definition of spirituality used in the HERI study is quite broad—more akin to seeking answers to life's "big questions" and living lives of tolerance, compassion, service, and equanimity—these results do point to a longing within students for spiritual growth and an expectation that institutions of higher education will facilitate development in this arena.

The HERI study claims that student spiritual growth is best facilitated when students are actively engaged in "inner work" involving self-reflection and contemplation. They also suggest that development is closely related to faculty encouragement of the processes of spiritual transformation (HERI, 2009). In our work with students, likewise, we have discovered that growth toward Christlikeness is most likely to occur when we create assignments that allow students to engage in classroom-related "inner work" that fosters student engagement with God. These "soul projects," as we have called them, are designed to integrate spiritual formation into students' academic vocation, bringing a posture of spiritual attentiveness into the curricular sphere. In this article, we seek to (a) define some of the key personal and cultural challenges

to collegiate spiritual formation, (b) articulate a philosophical framework and rationale for the use of soul projects, and (c) provide a typology and illustrations of actual soul projects that we have used in our classrooms. We are convinced that when students are given a clear vision and careful instruction, they can enter into the academic life in a spiritually transformative manner. In collegiate settings where creating space for the Holy Spirit seems more challenging than ever, soul projects have the potential to create contexts in which students are directed to "pay attention" to their subjects, to their peers, to their souls, and, ultimately, to Christ and His call upon their lives.

The Challenge of Collegiate Spiritual Formation

While the HERI study speaks optimistically about the spiritual proclivities of collegians, scholarship related to a distinctly Christian spiritual formation is a bit more troubling. By measures of both belief and practice, 18- to 25-year-olds are less religious than all other age groups. Christian Smith, Robert Wuthnow, and others contend that these "emerging adults" often lack purposeful engagement with Christian formation (Smith, 2009; Wuthnow, 2007). Disrupted by the many transitions in their lives—geographical, familial, and vocational—many in this age group sever ties to faith commitments that defined their childhood and adolescent years. In fact, some see the rejection of Christian practice as one means of promoting individuation, differentiating themselves from their parents so as to carve out their own unique identities. Furthermore, many emerging adults are simply distracted by a host of new life challenges and opportunities. Consumed by the normal (but novel) tasks of independent living and by the technological and entertainment-oriented options around them, collegians often fail to cultivate open spaces for the Holy Spirit within which Christian growth can flourish.

When faith is embraced, these scholars seem to imply that it often takes the form of a vague moralism, concerned more with tolerance and kindness than with the particularities of Christian belief and practice. What Smith has labeled a "moralistic therapeutic deism" (2009, p. 154), is indicative of a faith stance that views God as a distant creator who gets involved in human lives only when needed to solve problems. Otherwise, the goal of life is to be happy and fulfilled while also demonstrating a capacity to be good, nice, and fair to others. Christianity, therefore, is envisioned as an adherence to basic (and often behavioral) moral norms rather than as a relational connection to God through the Holy Spirit. In addition, scholars concur that the spirituality of collegians is highly individualistic, placing ultimate authority within the sphere of the "sovereign self" (Smith, 2009, p. 49). On the whole, evidence points to a generation that is drifting and "tinkering," moving from place to place and forging life values from an eclectic mix of childhood morals, cul-

tural norms, and school lessons on diversity and relativism (Wuthnow, 2007, p. 13; cf. Arnett, 2004). Devoid of firm convictions regarding faith and purpose, the emerging adult identity vacuum is filled with consumerism, entertainment, and the maintenance of technologically savvy social networks.

Of course, such an assessment is not completely new. For decades, in fact, scholars have identified a lack of intentionality among collegians in areas of personal formation. James Marcia (1966), for example, highlighted the fact that students often settle for an unreflective "identity foreclosure," a "borrowed" identity from one or more authority figures (often parents or teachers), or "identity diffusion," a generalized failure to engage the process of identity exploration. In the last decade, various authors have pointed to students' diminished capacity for focused attention on their own identity and spiritual development. Sociologist Tim Clydesdale (2007), for example, speaks of how freshmen reflect in only cursory ways on their own personal formation, choosing instead to place their identities in a "lockbox" while they focus on managing relationships, money, and personal gratification (p. 4). As Sharon Parks (2000) similarly contends, young adults are "increasingly distracted by the lures of an entertained, consumerist, and anxious society, making their way as best they can, enjoying what life has to offer, and keeping up" (p. 71). As these and many others suggest, student spiritual formation is often subverted by the distractions, both real and self-generated, of campus culture.

This "distractedness" has, of course, only been heightened through recent cultural changes. Because of the widespread availability of computers and mobile communication devices, students live in worlds defined by multitasking (performing multiple tasks simultaneously) and multilocationality (inhabiting multiple worlds simultaneously). Increasingly, students seem to lack the ability (or the desire) to be fully present in any one context, preferring virtual dispersion to embodied and situated connections with God, people, and texts (Bauerlein, 2008; Edmundson, 2008; Jackson, 2008). Along with other critics who have addressed these themes, we believe that such realities make spiritual formation more challenging in today's collegiate environment. Since students are "always connected," they are more likely to lack the solitude and silence that can encourage the development of spiritual depth. Students live in cultures, as William Deresiewicz (2009) argues, where there is little opportunity for introspection, deep reading, and solitary encounters with God that refresh the ability to live well in community. As Cornelius Plantinga (2002) suggests, college students cannot expect to grow in virtue without "attempting to open spaces at the depths where the Spirit of God may descend and dwell" (p. 125). If we desire the formation of deep students, we must carefully consider means of creating such spaces within the entire world of the college campus.

Yet there are institutional challenges here as well. Historical inertia works against proposals for spiritual formation involving the academic sphere. As many scholars have argued, the growth of the university model in the late 19th and early 20th centuries generated a divide between the tasks deemed appropriate for collegiate curricular and co-curricular activities (Marsden, 1994; Reuben, 1996; Roberts & Turner, 2000; Setran, 2007). Many faculty members, driven by visions of specialization and the positivist ideal of the separation of facts and values, began to view spiritual formation as outside the ken of scholarly pursuits, more appropriate to the context of campus life than the collegiate classroom. In an era characterized by division of labor, it was quite natural for faculty members to embrace their roles as "pure" scholars while leaving spiritual influence to co-curricular campus ministries. In addition, as the student development profession emerged in the early 1900s to assume responsibility for the personal lives of undergraduates, such divisions became structured and institutionalized in increasingly entrenched forms.

This historical legacy is still with us, and the Christian college is certainly not immune to its effects. Faculty members frequently view themselves as objective disseminators of factual information, communicating data dispassionately so as to retain an appropriate scholarly distance. Value-laden Christian practices and soul formation are thought to take place in other settings, such as chapel, discipleship small groups, dormitory discussions, and specialized programs implemented by student development professionals. As Christians, faculty members often desire to play a role in student spiritual growth. Yet they often believe that such influence should be placed in co-curricular settings or in one-on-one mentoring conversations.

Specialization has obvious advantages, but such divisions can generate troubling long-term ramifications. Students can begin to see their lives compartmentalized into academic (factual) and personal (value-laden) domains, thereby missing out on the potent interpenetration of these dimensions of the Christian life. They can read the Bible in a dualistic fashion, studying it analytically for classes and reflectively for heart transformation in their dorm small groups, never imagining that the two might be intertwined. They can develop a Christian "worldview" in their classes while attempting to develop a Christian "spirituality" outside of class (Garber, 1996). In other words, while faith and learning may be integrated at high levels, there is a disconnect between faith, learning, and the spiritual life generated by this public/private split. As Nicholas Wolterstorff (1980) comments,

> It used to be said that the goal is to impart to the student a Christian 'world and life view. . . .' But this formulation is inadequate, for it puts too much emphasis on a 'view,' that is, on what we have called cognition.

> To be identified with the people of God and to share in its work does indeed require that one have a system of belief. But it requires more than that. It requires the Christian way of life. Christian education is education aimed at training for the Christian way of life, not just education aimed at inculcating the Christian world and life view. (pp. 13–14)

As Christian educators, there is a palpable irony here. We stand within a disciplinary tradition that has long upheld the importance of such connections. Lois LeBar (1995) repeatedly addressed the profound disconnect between theory and practice, learning and personal response. Larry Richards (1975) spoke about the fact that content was often "intellectualized, divorced from body and emotion, and divorced from doing" because of school-based paradigms of teaching and learning (p. 71). The issue is this: we are quite capable of teaching our students about spiritually formative educational theories and practices while neglecting these elements in our own classrooms. At times, we seem to envision the college classroom as a vehicle for disseminating educational "best practices" while failing to incorporate these practices in our own teaching. Perhaps we have been enculturated to the specialized and dualistic norms of higher education mentioned above. Perhaps the physical space and time structures of our institutions blunt our capacity to implement creative ideas for spiritually informed pedagogy. Perhaps we feel that the incorporation of spiritual formation into the college classroom will necessitate a diminished academic rigor (or proper professional distance). Whatever the case, we may practically work against the very principles we communicate to our students, failing to take full advantage of the formational potential of the academic sphere.

The Rationale for Soul Projects

Our sense of the importance of class-related soul projects emerges from the conviction that professorial exhortation is rarely sufficient to furnish a fruitful context for spiritual formation. In order to understand the importance of spiritual practices in college classes, we need to recognize the critical role of what Wolterstorff (1980) has called "tendency learning." Wolterstorff argues that cognitive learning (the acquisition of information) and ability learning (the acquisition of skills) are unable, in and of themselves, to develop within students the "tendencies" needed to commit to and live out their Christian worldview. Tendencies, he contends, are rooted in emerging desires, wishes, and habits, factors that shape one's proclivity to commit to particular truths and ways of living. While much education enables students to "know that" something is true and to have the "ability to" perform certain tasks, only when they also develop an "affection for" and a "commitment to" something

will they be prepared to organize their lives around these realities (pp. 3–6). Tendencies are obviously formed in many ways. Classroom environments, teacher modeling, reward structures, and socialization within the campus community all play significant roles in shaping student commitments, values, and desires. However, tendencies can also be powerfully shaped by engagement with various practices purposefully connected to course subject matter.

Along these lines, it is quite helpful, as James K. A. Smith (2009) proposes, to embrace an Augustinian conception of our students as "lovers" (pp. 46–63). If we are about the process of shaping collegians' ultimate loves (their "worship"), we must be attentive to how these desires are formed and expanded. These loves, Smith contends, are oriented toward whatever vision of the good life they develop—a self-generated picture of human flourishing. This orientation, however, is directed not only by cognitive information and conscious reflection but also by the formation of habits and dispositions inscribed within them as a kind of pre-cognitive "second nature." These dispositions are formed largely (though not exclusively) through practices, rituals, and liturgies that train the heart to desire certain ends. We often overestimate, Smith suggests, the capacity for "worldviews" to shape our heart's desires and worship. Embodied practices play a significant role in shaping our "pursuit of" (rather than our mere "knowledge about") the kingdom of God. From an educational standpoint, therefore, tendency learning through spiritual practices becomes an important means of holistically orienting our students in the direction of kingdom life.

Other educators reinforce this concept. For example, John Dewey (1938) comments upon the "interactive" and "cumulative" nature of experiences, both of which are critical for spiritual formation. First, he notes that experiences always involve an interaction between external/environmental factors and inner desires, feelings, and commitments. When a teacher is concerned only with external content, this interaction still occurs but takes place in a haphazard fashion. Attentiveness to the purposeful interaction between the inner desires of the student and external content/environment is the most effective means, Dewey argues, by which a teacher can establish a context for a truly educative and formational experience. Soul projects provide key settings for such purposeful interaction.

Second, Dewey contends that learning is never isolated but rather is cumulative in nature. Elements from each educational experience "live on" in future experiences, expanding or constricting the ways in which growth occurs in subsequent learning experiences. What lives on in this "experiential continuum" is not so much the content itself but rather the attitudes, purposes, desires, and commitments formed in the midst of learning. Such "collateral learning," as Dewey terms it, is critical because it gradually develops—and increasingly solidifies—a posture towards life in general (pp. 33–50).

Collegians often speak in terms of future goals, noting that they desire to be spiritually deep "some day" in their adult lives. However, Dewey's notion of the continuum would imply that the most effective means of securing future spiritual depth is through engaging purposefully in spiritually formative activities in the midst of present experiences. If students do not engage the spiritual life in relation to their academic work—which surely constitutes a significant amount of time during college—they will develop attitudes and dispositions that view spirituality as a secondary theme appropriate only for private life and leisure. However, if learning is enacted, reflected upon, prayed out, and spoken to others, it begins shaping tendencies so that desires, habits, and long-term commitments are progressively developed. Educators must be deliberate, not only about the transmission and assimilation of content, but also about the lasting attitudes and desires that are generated through the learning process—the cumulative affective dimensions that have long-term consequences for spiritual formation.

It should be noted that such educational philosophies speak to both the content and the processes of Christian higher learning. A salient opportunity for spiritual formation, in fact, comes in helping students pay attention to how the *methods* of educational engagement are influencing their spiritual lives. The academic process can promote within students postures of pride, despair, self-reliance, perfectionism, sloth, and "work hard, play hard" rhythms. It can foster particular patterns of reading that will influence students' interaction with Scripture and patterns of prioritizing certain values over others. Because these activities consume so much time and energy, students need to reflect consciously on the spiritually formative power of these processes. Spiritual practices open up helpful opportunities for students to take these largely unconscious activities and make them a subject of careful reflection so that they can begin to discern the soul trajectory emerging from these seemingly mundane events (Anderson & Reese, 1999).

In this sense, spiritual practices open up a potentially rich pathway for what Chris Argyris (1991) calls "double-loop learning" (p. 4). Single-loop learning is present when goals, values, paradigms, and significant practices are taken for granted. In the personal and academic realm, students with a single-loop approach focus on what techniques and procedures will make them more effective within the system. Double-loop learning, in contrast, involves stepping back and questioning the intellectual frame and disposition one brings to learning. Argyris recommends that standard reflection (single-loop learning) may need to give way to systemic reflection (double-loop learning), an approach that shifts the attention from the *content* of thinking to the *way* people think and learn. When soul projects are placed in the context of a course, they can become vehicles for double-loop learning in which students pay careful spiritual attention to the structures of learning. Such

meta-analyses provide important pathways for students to continue this form of reflective living in the future.

Ultimately, judicious incorporation of spiritual practices points to a powerful means of integrating a mentoring component into classroom activities. As many recent authors have established, mentoring is, at its core, a process of helping others "pay attention" to the already-present work of God in their lives and in the world around them (Barry & Connolly, 1983; Anderson & Reese, 1999). The college classroom provides a fruitful context for such attentiveness, encouraging students to see God's work in the academic vocation and to nurture receptivity to the work of the Holy Spirit in their own souls as they interact with class material. Spiritual practices related to classroom content can provide opportunities for students to link course content to the emerging affections of their souls, to their growing vocational and life commitments, and to the larger purposes of God. Parker Palmer (1983) argues that teaching is in part marked by its capacity to "create a space in which obedience to truth is practiced" (p. 69). Among many other things, spiritual practices provide such a space for students to (a) respond to God and communicate with Him about course content; (b) speak to God about the personal spiritual implications of course material; (c) personally commit to certain causes, truths, or patterns of living; (d) speak to God about the recognition of personal and corporate sin and brokenness; (e) worship God in response to new revelations about His character and global work; and (f) speak and listen to others to provide wisdom and accountability for emerging commitments.

Engaging in spiritual practices—reflecting, listening, speaking, acting, praying, worshipping, confessing, forgiving, committing—involves recognition of the truth that spiritual formation and knowledge acquisition are linked in powerful ways. As Craig Dykstra (1999) contends, "It is not because we know that we trust or because we trust that we know. Rather we know in trust, in love, in gratitude, in adoration. The attitudes and the knowing come together; they are parts of one another" (p. 22). Practices, in short, can be an important means of helping to "set one's heart" with regard to the content of Christian higher education.

Soul Projects in Christian Higher Education

Soul projects, as described here, build upon the more foundational concept of "spiritual practices." Philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre (1981) famously defines a "practice" as

> any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity,

> with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conception of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended. (p. 175)

Christian spiritual practices fit MacIntyre's definition because, as Dykstra (1999) notes, they are forms of activity "through which powerful internal goods are realized and through the pursuit of which our capacities as human beings to do and to be and to conceive of what God is calling us to become are systematically extended" (p. 70). Soul projects involve a variety of adaptations of Christian practices to higher education contexts, sometimes within the classroom, but at least as often assigned and described in that context but carried out in solitude or occasionally in a small group setting with others (Coe, 2000).

We chose the "typology" as a means to frame the various kinds of soul projects we have created and discovered through our work. A typological framework is based upon examples that illustrate the major differences between ideal types. Unlike the taxonomy, a typology does not imply the listing is exhaustive—additional categories are indeed likely, particularly as soul projects become better known and understood. Also in contrast with the taxonomy, typologies do not possess mutually exclusive categories—the "types" are likely to overlap to some extent (Patton, 2002). What a typology clearly underscores is that there are multiple approaches to soul projects, even though some kinds could legitimately be located in more than one category. We encourage, in fact, the use of soul projects that fit more than one of the categories provided, as doing so may increase the likelihood that a given project will resonate spiritually with a variety of students.

We have identified a number of class projects that support spiritual and integrative outcomes in higher education. The assignments are classified below in broad categories based on the learning strategies they employ. Following each of the brief definitions are one or more actual examples of projects we have used in our classes. The descriptions are distinctively worded to maintain the language of the original author to the degree possible, while explanations have been added to provide necessary context. We are not seeking to be exhaustive in this summary. Rather, the intent is for the reader to consider his or her own educational context and to determine how these types relate to each unique setting. It is our hope that this will encourage others to explore intentional and explicit ways to help students grow spiritually within academic settings.

1. Reflective exercises

These structured experiences are designed to encourage students to reflect on the spiritual significance of the course material and to promote the

development of wisdom through integrating academic material into the student's values and belief structures. These projects are very personal, often reflective, and thus require an ability to self-evaluate.

Small group conversation. All of you participated in a field-learning project this semester. Meet in a small group three times (at least one hour) to reflect on your experience. Build reflection around the following questions: What is going on? Why is it going on? What ought to be going on? What will I/we do?

> ***Product (individual):*** Submit a two-page paper that addresses each of the four questions and indicates your level of participation in the group process.
>
> ***Product (group):*** Complete the "Group Process Form." Bring a poster to class that summarizes the experience.

Pilgrimage and* Pilgrim's Progress *Paper. Students will reflect upon the spiritual pilgrimage of Christian in *Pilgrim's Progress*. What parallels exist between you and Bunyan's account? And what do you see as places where your journeys differ? How adequately does the "Hagberg and Guelcih" model describe Christian's spiritual development in *Pilgrim's Progress*? What are the lessons you take away from reading Bunyan and reflecting on your own spiritual journey?

Leading Lives That Matter Essay. What did you see as the general themes of Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Illyich* and how have these impacted your understanding of what you should do and who you should be? (i.e., what have you taken from your experiences and this book and how will it be applied in your life?)

2. Statements of personal intention

In these experiences, students are asked to state their intention to embark or continue on a beneficial path. Students are invited to use a basic strategy of positive change—making a clear commitment to a beneficial pattern. Through stating a clear intention, students indicate to themselves and others they are going to do something different or continue a healthy pattern with renewed intentionality—simply put, they make a "pledge." Some professors opt to write a "Course Ethos Statement" to intentionalize their desire for cultivating a positive class atmosphere and to emphasize the importance of a prosocial orientation. Students may also pledge to engage spiritual practices, church involvement, or patterns of social justice in deeper or more consistent

ways. Making a personal intention is a powerful device in promoting change. A significant way to signal this intention is to create a simple ceremony or pledge that marks the commitment.

Course Ethos Statements. I agree to: a. Show respect for class members and support their learning even when disagreements arise; b. Come on time to all seminars, workshops, field assignments, and lectures. I understand that tardiness and lack of preparation indicates lack of planning on my part and disrespect for fellow classmates; c. Come to seminars, labs, and workshops with readings and written work thoughtfully prepared, and actively participate; d. Complete assigned work carefully and by the due date; e. Complete a self-evaluation and faculty evaluation by the end the term.

Accountability Groups. Accountability groups help Christians stay faithful in their walk with Christ and help them overcome patterns of sinning. It provides a context to live out James 5:16, "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed."

Guidelines: The emphasis in these groups should be on grace-based accountability. Holding members accountable is the first priority, but this must be done with a clear realization that this is not a "spiritual self-improvement program" because the gospel tells us that not only are we dearly loved by God but that we will never be "good enough" and while "we're sinners, and we'll always sin" we are to be of good cheer because grace can heal and transform. These groups must be "safe containers" for honest confession and need to be judicious in including both support and challenge.

Process: Small Group Participation. Form a small group (same gender) for the explicit purpose of encouraging faithfulness in the practice of a spiritual discipline or avoiding defeating patterns of disobedience. The group should appoint an informal moderator who is the contact person and keeps the group on track. The small group meeting time should be approximately 50% prayer and 50% discussion/accountability on the "contracted issue." You should meet once each week for 60 minutes.

Product: Record your meeting times and have each member complete the "Commitment and Personal Engagement Evaluation Form."

3. Spiritual practices

Spiritual practices and disciplines are a central part of the Christian devotional and community life. These sacred rhythms provide a context for receiving spiritual sustenance and learning to imitate Jesus. When fostering these practices, we need to remember Jesus' words on the necessity of new wineskins (Luke 5:37–8); when spiritual disciplines are practiced from a legalistic framework, then a legalistic lifestyle will ensue, but when they are placed in a context of faith and love, then a spiritually vital lifestyle is fostered. These assignments are intended to encourage students to learn to practice spiritual disciplines in an intentional and reflective manner. These may be related directly to the course content (e.g., practicing fixed-hour prayer in a history class when monasticism is studied) or support a learning outcome (e.g., keeping a gratitude journal in a class seeking to engender compassion for the oppressed). Often these will be carefully designed individual projects, but sometimes students are guided through a group spiritual experience.

Lectio Divina. A structured process of reading and meditating (literally "divine reading") on a sacred text. The students are encouraged to establish a pattern of meditating on Scripture or a spiritually enriching text that includes slow and thoughtful reading, meditative pauses to mull over the text, times of prayer based on the text and a quiet waiting before God. Some highly structured patterns of practicing lectio divina have been developed. For the first time meditator we suggest something less structured to keep the focus on the joy of being before God and His truth rather than on mere technique.

Holy Leisure/Sabbath keeping. Observe the Sabbath by refraining from labor (studying, housekeeping that can be done another day), distracting entertainment, and by positively using this time for hospitality, service, and leisurely spiritual activities. Seek to keep the Sabbath by grace and not legalistic rationalizations. Use Eugene Peterson's (2005) guidance to inform your choices of activities: "We could do anything, but nothing that was necessary. We would play and we would pray. Anything under the category of play was legitimate; anything in the category of pray was legitimate." Record the activities of each Sabbath and compare your energy level and restfulness with previous experiences of non-Holy Leisure Sunday life.

4. Prayer projects

These projects are intended to encourage students to incorporate prayer into their study of the classroom subject. The Bible calls believers to "pray always," and prayer should permeate the Christian student's academic life. One might even consider structuring time through class celebrations of the church year or Old Testament calendar (McGrath, 1999). With some of these projects, the aim is not so much to cultivate new patterns of prayer as much as it is to foster a new dimension in one's prayers.

Formational prayer. Spend 30 minutes praying over your notes from the readings. Reflect on the readings; talk to God about them. Then listen to what God says to you about what you've read. What "nudgings" or impressions do you get from the Holy Spirit about the relevance of what you've read for your life? Report on what God reveals to you about Himself in this regard, the content of the reading, and about your own growth, teaching, and professional identity. Hand in 2-page prayer reports on specified due dates.

Fixed Hour Prayer. For one week (five days out of seven) follow a pattern of morning and evening prayer. Select a prayer book and stay with it for the week. The most accessible ones are the *Book of Common Prayer* ("Daily Devotions for Individuals and Families" p. 137ff), *A Diary of Private Prayer* by John Baillie, *The Divine Hours* (book or on-line at explorefaith.org/prayer). Keep a log of when you prayed and write a 1-page reflection.

5. Journaling and discernment

These assignments encourage students to keep a journal related to the course material. We have found that journaling is one of the most common integrative assignments. Desired outcomes include fostering self-reflection, documenting student engagement, relating spiritual formation to academic content and processes, providing the grist for discernment activities, providing space for worship related to new discoveries, and encouraging the development of intellectual virtues like gratitude and epistemological humility.

Gratitude journal. Every evening for three weeks write five things you are grateful for each night before bedtime. Look for things during the

day for which you are grateful and give particular attention to those things that are "gifts"—good things that you received and enjoyed but did not cause. Submit this journal with all entries dated and with a brief reflection on what you learned from doing this.

Wounded Healer Exercise. After reading *The Wounded Healer* by Henri Nouwen aloud as a group, do the following exercise. Nouwen uses the descriptor "wounded healer" to describe the minister of Christ and in a sense the ministry of Christ to this world. How is this descriptor further unveiled when looking at the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus? How does this impact your understanding of what it means to be His apprentice, His disciple?

Read the following passage out loud as a group: Philippians 2:1–11 (everyone should have the passage in front of them as it is read). Take ten minutes and quietly sit with this passage allowing your time of meditation to be guided by this question: "How is Christ the model of a wounded healer?" After your time of meditation, dialogue together considering, "What are the sufferings/wounds of your time (personally and globally) and what does it involve to serve as Christ in this world?" or "How is it that in your own woundedness you become a source of life for others?"

6. Awe-evoking Experiences

These projects are intended to encourage students to be open to "awe-inspiring" dimensions of their academic work. The experience of awe can occur at any point in the curriculum. In some cases, it will be evoked through the study of Christian themes; for others, the grandeur and mystery of nature will be the precipitating factor, while still others will come to experience awe through beauty and aesthetics. These experiences are designed to help students process these experiences and see their formative value as they contribute to an appropriate diminishing of the ego.

Search for Convergence. A daily "God Hunt" to encourage sightings of God's activity (Mains, 2003). Keep a journal in which you record unusual convergences (e.g., a check in the mail when funds are most needed, seeing an old acquaintance when reconciliation is needed). Convergence of events (and events and recurrent thoughts) may reflect

God's movement in a person's life. We will discuss what we have found in class.

Overcome by awe. Our studies and subject matter should lead us to times of being overcome by awe or mystery. Make note of times when the course material (this could be a reading, a lab experience, or a new perspective provided in the class) has given you an awe experience. An awe experience often has two sides: (a) an emotional element that variously combines amazement, deep respect, dread, veneration, and wonder; and (b) a feeling of personal insignificance or powerlessness in the face of this awesome person/object/theme. Be prepared to give a brief oral account in class of your being "awe struck."

7. Identity formation

In college, students begin to take on a professional and adult Christian identity. These projects are intended to help students reflect on their priorities and values, probing for what the students are coming to love, for the presence of gospel virtues in their lives, and for the identity of their mentors and heroes.

Sacred Stories. Telling your story with an eye on discerning how God has been at work in your life. A large portion of our class is given to telling and listening to our stories.

I want you to practice the art of telling a story (you will be able to use your journey paper "theme" as a foundation and guide). Do not simply read your journey paper. Each student will have 20 minutes to share. Due to the size of the class I will have to be strict with time so please plan your sharing appropriately. Weave your own personal story through your internship experience. Viewing your internship as your most recent bookend, share also your prior life history, struggles, discoveries, growth, as well as future plans. I want you to practice the art of listening—a time of questions and prayer will be offered for each student after they have shared. I want you to view this as a creative experience in storytelling. The use of props, power point, video, music, overheads, etc. is suggested as tools to draw us into the story you are telling. I want you to view this experience as an act of worship (both as presenter and as listener).

Best Practices

In asking faculty members who regularly employ soul projects about lessons learned, we were told to be clear in your directions, tie them directly to course content, and suggest a venue. Students have been well socialized to know what it means to "write a paper," but they are not as certain when it comes to something like a soul project. Consequently, they will benefit from clear directions. We have found it helpful to present the project to the student with these three headings: project (title and brief description); process (what the students need to do, including time and venue); and product (what the student needs to turn in as evidence of having done this). Soul projects are about fostering time before God and others, so it is critical that the experiential component is exceptionally clear. As part of incorporating spiritual activities into a class, students need to be directed to make connections between the class materials and these activities. In other words, do not take for granted that a prayer assignment will lead the student to pray about what she is learning in the course. Make your expectations clear. The connection may be explicitly tied to a reading or assignment, or one may ask the student to make the connection between his/her spiritual life and the course materials.

Perhaps the most important variable that students bring to these projects is intentionality. Do they intend to just check off a task? Do they intend to make themselves better through focused self-discipline? Do they want to use their participation to impress the teacher? Participants in these projects need to be reminded that they should affirm their intention of meeting before God and being open to His grace at the beginning of every project. There are a myriad of ways to do this. Some instructors provide a prayer of intention suggested for use by students before they begin a project. Others suggest a pattern of quiet and watchful breathing during which they become more attentive to God. In this light, teachers should not neglect the critical importance of venue. Helping students understand the connection between setting and reflective practice is actually an important aspect of these projects. Sometimes it is important to suggest a venue for a given assignment (e.g., "for this assignment find a spot where you can comfortably journal without interruptions for 90 minutes. In seeking to foster awe-receptivity, you will need to do this assignment in a natural setting that you have found to be 'awe-inspiring' "). Asking students to report the location of their projects helps make them aware that they are expected to show intentionality in their choice. The appendix includes a sample report form that includes an evaluation of intentionality.

One of the tough judgment calls in using soul projects is balancing support and challenge. Students will not benefit significantly if all the projects are practices with which they are familiar and experience with some regularity. On the other hand, if students are expected to take on unfamiliar prac-

tices without directions and clear expectations they may feel challenged to the point that they become defensive or withdrawn. A scale we have found helpful is "comfort, stretch or stress" (Ryan, 2006, p. 109; Vygotsky, 1962). We want participants to feel stretched by the assignment (appropriate challenge in a supportive environment), but not so much that they become stressed and non-engaged (too much challenge). Personal communication and feedback from students provides one of the best ways of fine-tuning the degree of support and challenge appropriate to these assignments.

Finally, it is helpful—perhaps essential—to find points of connection between class-related soul projects and the students' local church communities. Perhaps instructors can state that soul projects are not a substitute for the church and that the individual spiritual experience emphasized in many soul projects has its necessary counterpart in community expressions of worship. Additionally, special services could provide a distinctive context for soul projects, such as a Taizé service, special church year services, or a midweek prayer meeting. The local church connection to soul projects deserves further exploration, as students could share their spiritual experiences with pastors or mature parishioners.

Evaluating Soul Projects

While spiritual development is affirmed as a goal of soul projects, this is not defined exclusively in terms of tangible outcomes that can be precisely measured. This is in part because any such outcome may be accomplished with the wrong motivation and apart from a genuine relationship with the divine, and thus can be a substitute—or worse yet, a fabrication—of the connection with God that is desired. Fixed outcomes are also questionable because the presence of God is often marked by surprising and unpredictable results. To ask only that instructor-made objectives be accomplished is to limit God to the teacher's plans and imagination. Soul projects, after all, are as likely to involve experiments in listening as they are performance of activities (Kent, 2006).

Evaluation can, however, take place in several ways, using both quantitative measures and qualitative analysis. Students are not well served by merely giving them "an A for effort." Careful attention to the context and outcomes of the project can make evaluation more effective. Students should be asked to report on the time spent, date, time of day, location, and ambiance of the setting, and how they construed their time (i.e., "began with a prayer of intention"). They may self-report on the degree to which they believe they followed the assignment, their preparation for the project (i.e., suggest practical items like adequate sleep to prevent drowsiness, having all needed material at hand), and their perceived sense of engagement with the assignment (we

suggest using a Likert scale where students mark their engagement level). John Coe (2000) adds that effort and proficiency in relation to other developmental indicators should also be assessed.

Student allegations of subjectivity in grading are likely to be diminished with clear standards. Here is an example of expectations for one specific soul project of a written nature:

> For each class after the first week you are to bring a written description of your participation in a soul project. The instructions for each activity tell you what to do and then how to write this up. The reports are graded on quality. A high-quality report provides thoughtful, sincere, complete responses to the assignment according to the instructions. A low-quality report gives brief, less thoughtful, sketchy, incomplete, irrelevant, trite, or phony responses to the assigned activity, or does not conform to the instructions. The key to writing high-quality reports is to approach the activity with informed enthusiasm, to give yourself time to reflect on the assignment prior to writing it up, and to really put your heart into writing about it. Reports should be typed, but need not follow a particular, formal writing style.

Evaluation in the form of a number or a letter grade is always an oversimplification of what a student accomplishes, and that seems particularly acute when it comes to evaluating an aspect of spirituality. Summative evaluations of this sort reflect product more than process, and clearly the latter is more crucial in soul projects. Students should be encouraged to describe the experience, not just the results, and explore the multidimensionality of soul projects in their narratives. Again, describing rich spiritual experiences in the form of narrative is admittedly reductionistic, yet that description in itself can be valuable as the student attempts to label components of what is—hopefully—an encounter with divinity that is beyond words. Reducing the experience to accurate theological designations cannot be said to be adequately isomorphic to what was experienced—indeed this is its own kind of reductionism—but it can be beneficial to attempt such a representation. Rather than a comprehensive description, perhaps a tentative, partial convergence between event and the linguistic description should be the goal.

The appendix includes an extended sample report form. The sample is more detailed than the typical report form, so that a number of possible components can be explored here that might not be relevant to every soul project. Of the 16 questions listed (some of them involving more than one answer), 10 can potentially contribute to the grade given to the student (items 1–7, 10, 13, and 16). Responses to many of the items, but particularly the first five, attempt to determine if the student followed the instructions provided. The length of time for the experience and subsequent reflection (item 4) may be

another way of getting at the degree of engagement (items 11 and 13). It should be noted that multiple measures—in this case fixed options as well as open-ended questions—may reveal consistency in student response, and thus at least some degree of reliability. One might question whether item 6 should be included in determining a grade. The assumption made is that the internal experience might be positive or negative; while a positive experience is desired by the instructor, a negative reaction might indicate a high level of authentic involvement as much as a positive reaction. Depending upon the instructor's inclination, it may be that item 16 would carry a disproportionate amount of weight in assigning a final grade for the project. Yet that item carries with it—as indeed does the entire report—the assumption that the student actually carries out the project, and does so in the manner described. Some items that do not directly contribute to a grade may provide insight that will help in evaluating other items, and thus indirectly contribute to the grade. To say, for example, that the experience was "very much a stretch" (item 14) may imply that effort (item 10) be considered to a greater extent than personal ownership (item 13) for a given student.

Conclusion

The work of soul projects is ongoing and feedback would be most welcome. Because the vision is to have soul projects used within all disciplines across the college campus, tested examples of soul projects used in other departments (i.e., law, science, history, engineering, medicine, mathematics, etc.) would expand the ongoing discussions. A forum for continuing discussions of soul projects is available at www.soulprojects.ning.com. Additionally, questions have been raised as to how soul projects might be adapted for the teaching ministry of the church. There may eventually be other contexts into which these general ideas could be exported, as a desire to promote the spiritual and character formation of learners grows beyond the formal realms of Christian higher education. Such work would most effectively and naturally evolve through the ministry of graduates who have, during their years as students, been spiritually transformed though the incorporation of soul projects in their learning experiences.

We are convinced that a broader incorporation of soul projects in Christian higher education has the potential to enhance both our learning objectives and the spiritual formation of our students. In other words, soul projects can be beneficial both for spirituality and for learning that will be woven into the very fabric of students' lives. By linking the content elements of the Christian worldview with the inner purposes, desires, and commitments of our pupils, we seek an immersive learning experience—one that will connect academic learning to the development of an adult Christian identity. If the integration of faith and learning can include spirituality as an integral

component, we hope to see a Christian education that will foster not only the Christian worldview but also the Christian way of life.

Appendix: Sample Student Project Report Form

Sample Student Project Report Form

1. Where did you do this? To what extent did this space work for you?
2. What did you do to structure your space and time so that it would be beneficial to you?
3. What other things did you do to prepare for this experience?
4. How long were you engaged in the experience? How much additional time did you spend reflecting before doing this report?
5. Outline specifically, in your own words, what you did during the time (one paragraph)
6. Describe the internal, personal experience that resulted from this activity (one paragraph)
7. What do you feel you learned through the experience? (one paragraph)
8. If someone not taking this class expressed an interest in doing this activity, would you recommend they do so? What adjustments to the instructions—if any—would you recommend?
9. I think I would:
   ( ) like to do this activity again in the near future
   ( ) possibly repeat this activity at some point in the future
   ( ) probably not consider doing this activity again
10. How much effort did you give this activity? ( ) a great deal ( ) a moderate amount ( ) minimal
11. What was the level of authentic involvement in the activity? ( ) highly engaged ( ) generally engaged ( ) somewhat distracted ( ) very distracted
12. I feel the intensity of the experience was: ( ) high ( ) moderate ( ) low
13. The degree of personal ownership of the experience was: ( ) high ( ) moderate ( ) low
14. The experience was: ( ) comfortable ( ) a bit of a stretch ( ) very much a stretch ( ) stressful
15. How valuable was this experience? ( ) very enriching ( ) somewhat helpful ( ) uncertain ( ) not helpful
16. Reflecting upon the above criteria, pray for two minutes, asking God to show you what grade you deserve for this soul project. At the conclusion of your prayer and reflection, what grade do you believe should be given?

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