



The Soul of Higher Education: Contemplative Pedagogy, Research, and Institutional Life for the Twenty-First Century (Advances in Workplace Spirituality: Theory, Research, and Application)

Margaret Benefiel and Bo Karen Lee, editors

Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2019

(xvi + 157 pages, ISBN 978-1-64113-696-9, \$30.00)

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Benefiel and Lee assembled this volume to advance a newer thread of conversation in the field of contemplative studies: the attempt to move beyond its privileging of Buddhism and Western science. Their own experience as scholars of Christian spirituality who attended meetings of the Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education and of the Contemplative Studies Unit of the American Academy of Religion confirmed for them the importance of this newer direction of conversation, which they credit Louis Komjathy with initiating. The editors' approach is to "present Eastern and Western perspectives together, to let those with different perspectives inhabit the same territory, and perhaps begin to speak to one another and learn from one another" (xiii). The result is an intriguing collection of essays. Authors write from Buddhist, Christian, and naturalistic perspectives. Chapters variously address university and seminary research, teaching, and organizational process, and key philosophical issues at stake in the contemplative studies movement. The overall result is a provocative collection in which scholars unapologetically acknowledge the value-based assumptions behind all of their work and, by so doing, shed light on the profoundly human character of the entire enterprise of higher education.

The chapters on contemplative pedagogy may be the most immediately relevant to faculty. Barbara Newman's and Stephanie Paulsell's are masterful presentations of pedagogical approaches to reading, thinking, and conversing that are both rooted within the western Christian tradition and embody a deep understanding of the dynamics of learning. Lee describes using explicitly Christian spiritual practices in a seminary classroom. And Dan Barbezat, one of the best-known figures in the field of contemplative pedagogy, details his work with students so that they see the profoundly human stakes in the study of economics.

One of the most provocative chapters is Mary Frohlich's on scholarly method, the "conscious choice of one's grounding assumptions, sources, research techniques, and evaluative criteria for what constitutes good results" (13). She poses the question: "Is it possible that some of the fundamental issues that challenge many disciplines are also questions of spirituality, at least to some degree?" (13-14). Her response roots research in fundamental movements of human consciousness. Even readers allergic to all things spiritual may be intrigued by her project.

Benefiel's opening chapter and Jacob Holsinger Sherman's chapter orient readers to the emergence of contemplative studies as a field and to some of the philosophical issues at its center. Sherman's is a particularly lucid presentation of the critique of western materialistic epistemology that draws on Harold Roth's critique of cognitive imperialism.

Various of the essays in this volume will be of interest to teachers and scholars of religion. Those engaged in the scholarly conversation in contemplative studies will find the collection as a whole stimulating and some of its chapters worthy of sustained engagement. Those in leadership may find the two chapters on contemplative organizational structures thought provoking, though they reveal how much less well developed this dimension of contemplative studies is than others. Andrew Delbecq's chapter on research about how graduate professional students transfer contemplative practices to their workplaces may prove more helpful.

By gathering chapters written from acknowledged and diverse value perspectives, and informed by serious scholarship on teaching and learning, the editors have succeeded in stimulating conversation in a way that only comparison can. Anyone who takes the time to read this slim collection in its entirety will find serious food for thought about teaching, scholarship, and leadership, presented against a backdrop of honesty about the larger purposes of higher education and how much the current enterprise works, largely unconsciously, against achieving those purposes.