



18<sup>th</sup> IBSC Annual Global Conference  
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Spiritual boys – how can we frame  
spiritual and religious education that  
engages and matters to boys?



# A few caveats ...

- A revised title:
  - ‘The spiritual development of boys as an integral part of school life and education: some reflections on theory and practice.’
- My perspective:
  - Liberal Anglicanism
  - English state education system
- A mile wide, but not always very deep
- ‘He doesn’t know what a PP slide should look like!’
- Enlightening, depressing, unintelligible?



## The Four 'M's -

1. The Many
2. Meaning
3. Modelling
4. Masculinities



# 1. The Many

- Context of 'Western' pluralist liberal democracies
- The 'heretical imperative' (Peter Berger), 'agonies of choice' (Zygmunt Bauman), 'the problem of nihilism' (Nietzsche)
- The end of a shared story, the shift from 'meta'- to 'mini'-narratives
- The 'market-place' of ideas and beliefs



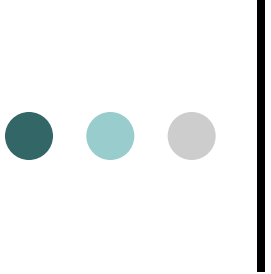
# 1. The Many

- The dominant approach to the self, values and morality:
  - individualistic, private, pluralist, relativist
  - “One truth for you, another for me, and never mind the difference.”
  - ‘Liquid modernity’ (Z. Bauman), all is provisional, ‘ad-hocracy’



# 1. The Many: or the One?

- The ongoing influence of the Judeo-Christian [Greco-Roman/Enlightenment] world-view
- E.M. Forster, 'I Believe', 1940
  - 'My lawgivers are Erasmus and Montaigne, not Moses and St. Paul.'

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- ‘Liberal society ... is one long, unruly eternally inconclusive argument, which is a source of value but also of vulnerability ... Fundamentalism is among other things the faith of those driven into zealotry by a shallow technological rationality which sets all the great spiritual questions cynically to one side, and in doing so leaves those questions open to being monopolized by bigots.’

Terry Eagleton, *Reason, Faith and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate*, (2009)



## 2. Meaning

- Spiritual development – an inclusive approach:
  - ‘The spiritual area is concerned with the awareness a person has of those elements in existence and experience which may be defined in terms of inner feelings and beliefs; they affect the way people see themselves and throw light for them on the purpose and meaning of life itself. Often these feelings and beliefs lead people to claim to know God and glimpse the transcendent; sometimes they represent that striving and longing for perfection which characterises human beings but always they are concerned with matters of the heart and root of existence.’  
(DES/HMI, 1977b)





# But ...

- Excessive individualism, ‘brain in a jar’, the ‘learned monster’, the ‘deep spiritual beliefs’ of Hitler, ceding power to the ‘inner’ over the ‘outer’ life
- Parallel to medieval view of the human ‘soul’ – Rational, Sensitive, Vegetable (belief, imagination/emotion, embodied)
- T. Copley’s trinity: destiny, encounter, vulnerability
- The British educational nexus of SMSC development (spiritual, moral, social and cultural)



# Spiritual development

- A sign-post to human wholeness and flourishing; an approach to ‘personhood’  
[8 areas of personhood: spiritual, physical, emotional, intellectual, social, vocational, environmental, recreational]
- **We can only grow – or choose to become grotesque – *within* traditions and narratives oriented towards a vision of ‘the good/the good life’ (religious and non-religious)**
- Authentic or inauthentic spiritual development



## But ...

- Maintaining a stress on ‘beliefs’: not to shy away from the question ‘What do you believe in?’
- Beliefs and values: the ‘engine’ room of ‘personhood’
- A cultural blindness? – ‘personal beliefs’, something private, almost furtive
- Our pervasive cultural relativism?



# Reflect

Reflect with your neighbour on the subtleties of ‘meaning making’ and constructing ‘a self’ today. Specifically, consider the negotiations we undertake between standing in a ‘community of thought and practice’ (religious and non-religious) and the dominance of the West’s commitment to the ‘sovereignty of the individual’ (autonomous and self-determining)



# 3. Modelling

- Education, in part, is a ‘transaction between the generations’ (Michael Oakeshott)
- The quality of ‘conversation’ between pupil and teacher
- The teacher ‘models’ the ideal learner: what it is to look, listen, think, feel, imagine, believe, understand, choose and wish



## 3. Modelling

- ‘British religious-education professionals are frequently so concerned to present themselves as non-confessional that they may be transmitting the idea that personal beliefs are somehow an impediment to the job, or that an agnostic teacher does not have the ‘baggage’ that the religious teacher has in the classroom. This is like the naïve newspaper or internet dating ads that state that prospective partners must have ‘no baggage’. The reality is that we all have ‘baggage’ in emotional, religious and spiritual terms, whether we are believers or atheists.’

Terence Copley, *Indoctrination, Education and God: The Struggle for the Mind*



# Reflect

How far should a teacher go in giving expression to his or her 'belief baggage' in the classroom?

Do we allow shibboleths such as 'separation of Church and State' and the 'danger of pupil indoctrination' to get in the way of passionate and engaged pedagogy?

How are these issues handled differently (if at all) in a school with a religious foundation?



## 4. Masculinities: our context

- Get specific: free-floating idea of ‘personhood’ or ‘how to become a (good) man’?
- Connection to ‘Modelling’: attention needed to the rules, traditions, stories (‘ethos’) that forms our ‘habits of being’ when at school – staff and pupils





## 4. Masculinities

- Our school ‘habits of being’ – saturnine or sanguine?

‘Most Western education is highly saturnine in tone: we like order, hierarchies, grades, tests, a gloried past, control, deprivation, remoteness of various kinds, and weighty seriousness.’

Thomas Moore ‘Educating for the Soul’



# Reflect

In our narratives and traditions of ‘the good life’ what models of masculinity are present and how do we interpret and communicate these to boys? (Jesus, the Buddha, etc.) How do they relate to our school ‘habits of being’?

Do we feel the loss today of shared myths and stories about the journey from boy to man?



Response & next steps



# The task of education

- ‘At no turning-point in human history did educators face a challenge strictly comparable to the one presented by the current watershed. Simply, we have never been in such a situation before. The art of living in a world oversaturated with information has still to be learned. And so has the yet more mind-bogglingly difficult art of grooming human beings for such a life.’

Zygmunt Bauman, *44 Letters from the Liquid Modern World*