

B. de Muynck, **Een goddelijk beroep. Spiritualiteit in de beroepspraktijk van leraren in het orthodox-protestantse basisonderwijs**, Heerenveen 2008 (uitg. Groen van Uitgeversgroep Jongbloed).

Dutch dissertation of 488 pages, published in Dutch, with summary's in Dutch, English, and German, of 8 pages each, about **A Godly Vocation. Spirituality in the practice of education of teachers in the orthodox-Protestant schools**.

Summary & Review by Lia van Aalsum, University of Professional Education, 'Pabo Groenewoud Nijmegen', in cooperation with SPIRIN, project of www.titusbrandsmainstituut.nl (Radboud University Nijmegen), the Netherlands, April 2009.

The *numbers* are referring to the pages in the text and in the Dutch and English summary. Remarks between *square brackets* are a short expression of my personal and at that moment useful questions or objections, apart from the Review later on.

Summary

Research question, target group of research, (religious) spirituality

An important reason for this research is the fact [the author is not clear in this, is it a fact or a wish or a conclusion of other research, see 24 and compare 423/432] that the teacher "has at least as great an influence on the process of formation of the learner as does the learning content" (423/432). The Dutch teaching practice of religious education in Christian primary schools indeed expects a personal involvement of the teacher in the religious matters and identity of the school. "However, there is a lack of scientific knowledge concerning the manner whereby the teacher's personally experienced identity and experience of faith are manifested in practice" (423/432). To gather knowledge of this teacher's quality of being a 'bearer' of identity is necessary for the teacher education, for the post-graduate education and for the identity-formation of school teams. By this, the quality of the teaching profession can be enhanced, what seems especially important for the [partly Dutch?] situation of secularisation and the renewed attention for the pedagogical dimension of the process and profession of teaching.

In order to investigate the relation between the personal convictions of teachers in Christian schools and the formal identity of the school, and the influence of this personal lived identity on the daily practice of education as well, De Muynck focuses his research on two types of orthodox-Protestant schools: 1) the Experiential Reformed or Pietistic schools [for the Dutch reader, de reformatorsche of bevindelijke school] and 2) the Reformed Church of the Netherlands (Liberated) schools [for the Dutch reader, de gereformeerd-vrijgemaakte school]. (For a quick overview of the Dutch school system, see 431.)

In order to investigate the mentioned relation and influence, De Muynck introduces the notion of spirituality. It does justice to the aspect of motivation and has an integrating quality that complements the current research on biography and career development.

Research on literature concerning spirituality, also in relation to faith – religion – meaning

De Muynck is of the opinion that there are no studies in spirituality that offer clear definitions that can be made operational in empirical research. He discusses about ten Dutch publications of the last 30 years, varying from more thematic works (like spiritual direction, spirituality of the Roman Catholic Pastors) and collections with diverse contributions, to his only English study on Christian spirituality (McGrath 2000) and the (Dutch) foundational research of Waaijman 2000. Two studies are used (Immink 2003 on the object of practical theology and Feige 2000 with an empirical sociological research on the religion of teachers in religion) in order to clarify that religion and faith or belief [the Dutch language is a bit

Bram de Muynck, *Een goddelijk beroep. Spiritualiteit in de beroepspraktijk van leraren in het orthodox-protestantse basisonderwijs*, 2008, (A Godly Vocation. Spirituality in the practice of education of teachers in the orthodox-Protestant Schools).

Summary and Review by © Lia van Aalsum, Nijmegen 2008, in: Spirituality International (SPIRIN), www.titusbrandsmainstituut.nl Nijmegen, the Netherlands.

Reproduction without modification is granted, on condition that the sources are quoted.

problematic here and De Muynck could have made better distinctions here] are dynamically interrelated. Other studies clarify the relation between [the maybe typical Dutch items of] giving meaning, philosophy of life and religion. [62-70; De Muynck has not integrated these pages in his summary.] He concludes that spirituality, giving meaning, belief/faith and religion agree with one another on three aspects (concerning transcendence, process, method; see below). However, spirituality adds the element of inspiration (see below) and of the personal involvement, and is therefore adequate as the central notion in this research. Also the element of inspirational sources must be taken into account [at this point the argumentation is not clear, 73]. He concludes that for the conceptualization of spirituality four elements must be taken into regard: 1) transcendence (“experiences that transcend commonplace reality”); 2) inspiration (“bringing zest and courage into one’s vocation); 3) a process of searching (“to bring the experiences of inspiration and transcendence into relation with commonplace practice (in this study: the vocational practice of teachers”); 4) methodical aspects (“that connect with the regular attention one gives to that searching process (for instance in prayer and scripture reading)” (424/432 and 48-73). These four aspects are integrated in the working definition: spirituality is “the manner in which one – by orienting oneself on sources – relates experiences of inspiration and/or transcendence, more or less methodically, to the actual practice of life” (423/431 and 73). In a conceptual framework is explained how the four aspects are connected together [again, the argumentation and procedure are not clear on this point, 73-80]. The theory of ‘Gestalt’ formation is used to clarify the various elements (categories like “needs, feelings, values, significant experiences, knowledge and behavioural tendencies”), and is related to several levels of reflection (in, on and about the performance; 80-87).

The (religious) spirituality of the two target groups: the Experiential Reformed community and the Reformed Church of the Netherlands (Liberated)

With this chapter (88-123) De Muynck gives the necessary background for a proper understanding and valuation of the qualitative research he has carried out on a sample of twenty teachers of these schools. [Even for the general Dutch reader, and interested in religion, these orthodox-Protestant communities are quite special. By the way, he does not explain why he speaks of the “(religious) spirituality” of the two target groups. In fact it is more like a general, though very interesting survey of their theology and lifestyle. I give or quote the most important elements, relevant for what follows.]

We are looking at two orthodox, relatively small groups of Protestantism, to position in contrast with the more liberal mainstream, with their own teacher training faculties and school advisory services. To hold on to the pure doctrine is crucial to them, with the Bible as the divine authority and the classic Reformed Confessional Creeds having a derived authority (The Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dordt). However, both groups have their differences.

“The first faith community, the Experiential Reformed (Reformatorisch) community is rooted in the tradition of the Second Reformation or Dutch Pietism (16th – 19th century), where much emphasis is placed on the personal and experiential knowledge of one’s path of faith as this is drawn from the Bible. The spirituality of this community is characterized by a distinction between having an objective and subjective (or experiential) experience of faith (if one experiences something cognitively, that does not say that one also experiences it authentically), a sharp distinction between the converted and non-converted and a shunning of modern culture.” (425/433) However, there is a wide range of Pietistic churches, what results in a great diversity of church membership amongst the teachers and the pupils.

“The second faith community, the Reformed Church of the Netherlands (Liberated) originated because members of the former Reformed Churches in the Netherlands ‘liberated’ themselves (i.e. seceded) in the year 1944 of the binding synodical views regarding covenant and baptism binding on all ministers and members. Characteristic for the spirituality of this

Bram de Muynck, *Een goddelijk beroep. Spiritualiteit in de beroepspraktijk van leraren in het orthodox-protestantse basisonderwijs*, 2008, (A Godly Vocation. Spirituality in the practice of education of teachers in the orthodox-Protestant Schools).

Summary and Review by © Lia van Aalsum, Nijmegen 2008, in: Spirituality International (SPIRIN), www.titusbrandsmainstituut.nl Nijmegen, the Netherlands.

Reproduction without modification is granted, on condition that the sources are quoted.

faith community is the emphasis on the assurance of faith. The belief of 'belonging to the covenant' is taken to mean 'faithfully affirming' it and there is no explicit 'special' requirement of experiential faith. The spirituality of the Reformed Church of Netherlands (Liberated) is qualified by historians as being 'activist'. Believers aim at the unity of faith and life and they may display an open attitude towards modern culture." (425/433) Teachers and pupils belong mainly to the same church, the Reformed Church of the Netherlands (Liberated).

Tentative statements

Based on the theoretical knowledge about related research, spirituality and these orthodox groups in the first three chapters, De Muynck formulates a number of tentative statements or assumptions, which function as a start for the qualitative research. Central is the idea of professionalism (chapter 1), subdivided in the aspects of identity (Klaassen, Beijaard & Kelchtermans 1999, et al), development (Fessler 1995, Kelchtermans 1994; et al.), and acting (SBL 2004; et al.). De Muynck expects to find some specific facts about these elements of the orthodox-protestant teacher, in relation to spirituality and its elements of inspiration, searching, method and transcendence (chapter 2). These statements will be corrected when the process and result of the interviews make this necessary.

[Be aware that he makes already a choice in these elements: he expects specific connections between the professional identity and the four elements of spirituality, but in the professional development there is no attention for the spiritual methodical aspects, and in the professional acting he is not looking for the element of transcendence.]

The empirical part: qualitative research and analytical induction; the respondents; additional activities

"The primary goal is to gain insight in the possible function of spirituality in the practice of education" (425/434). Qualitative research is less interested in numbers and explanations (quantitative research) and more in possibilities, understanding and interpretations. It gives the opportunity to focus on the conduct and the searching process as well, and is combined with the method of "analytical induction" (Maso & Smaling 1998). This method starts with the exploring of existing theories, what leads to the formulation of some central concepts and statements. Then the phenomenon is studied, on the strength of these ideas. During this process, the theory and statements are slightly corrected and modified when necessary, based on the results of the qualitative research. This has also consequences for the procedure of enlisting the respondents. Based on insights of experts and on demographic and statistic information as well, six representative schools are chosen, and 104 teachers do fill in a survey. This material leads to the choice of some respondents, whom are interviewed three times for one hour time. There are three main questions. What inspires you in your vocation? Why did you choose to become a teacher? How does your inspiration show in your professional performance? Based on these results, again three teachers are chosen and interviewed, and so on, in interaction with the aforementioned theoretical adjustments. In total ten teachers from the 'pietistic' schools and ten from the 'liberated' schools are interviewed. These activities are accompanied by interviews of De Muynck with the principals of the six chosen schools, his study of school documents, and his visits to the school ground and the classroom.

[Concerning the more practical aspect of his research in general, De Muynck seems to operate very thoroughly and conscientiously. He also keeps, for instance, a journal and tries to get as much relevant information as possible, see also chapter 6.]

The results of the research

The results of the interviews (20 persons, three times each) are presented in five chapters, in a descriptive way, with a lot of quotations, and organized around the main clusters of themes that De Muynck is interested in and that the analysis has generated as well. Each chapter

Bram de Muynck, *Een goddelijk beroep. Spiritualiteit in de beroepspraktijk van leraren in het orthodox-protestantse basisonderwijs*, 2008, (A Godly Vocation. Spirituality in the practice of education of teachers in the orthodox-Protestant Schools).

Summary and Review by © Lia van Aalsum, Nijmegen 2008, in: Spirituality International (SPIRIN), www.titusbrandsmainstituut.nl Nijmegen, the Netherlands.

Reproduction without modification is granted, on condition that the sources are quoted.

results in a list of concluding statements (in total 81), correcting or affirming the original assumptions (in total 17).

[One should really make the effort and read these chapters. The content and the quality of the interviews are impressive, even in (or is it, thanks to) this mixture of objective report and personal quotes. However, for now I will only summarize the main lines as De Muynck is presenting them, and react on it in my Review.]

Spirituality in the professional identity

[On forehand, in my opinion De Muynck is not clear enough about his idea of identity. In fact he distinguishes between the formal identity of the school, the lived or actually practised identity of a school and the personal or individual identity of a teacher. The lived and the personal identity are sometimes mixed up.]

The professional beliefs and reflection patterns of these teachers are closely related to their religious convictions, and influence especially the pedagogical view and the relation with the child. Both stand similarly in their relation to God, subjected to His authority, as sinful and vulnerable human beings. The orthodox teacher is fully aware that he can not act autonomously (without God) towards the child. In contrast with earlier research (Van Hardeveld 2003), it shows that the beliefs of orthodox teachers are not necessarily individually determined, but connected to the 'community of values' in which they work. Though they are good representatives of the formal school identity, their relation with the encompassing tradition has a more personal colouring, with its unique balance between loyalty and critique. The Pietistic teachers are more mentally or cognitive involved, and more reserved and diverse as well in their critique. The Reformed teachers are more active involved, and participating in the more open atmosphere.

The 20 respondents show 6 main motives (the desires and ultimately goal of their education), in different patterns: 1) ensuring security; 2) providing care; 3) (learning) to know God, 4) bringing about an awareness of God; 5) prompting inquisitiveness, 6) wanting to help in development (see also 428/436). Especially the experienced teachers are concerned about the future of their students in our secularized society.

Spirituality in the professional development

It appears that the personal experiences of childhood (for instance, with their personal temper or restrictions, or with a teacher) are quite influential on the own teaching practice. In their training not the curriculum (in particular the modules religion or worldview) was important, but the intensive contact with fellow students. Negative internship experiences throw a negative shed on the formal study as a whole. Of great and lasting influence are the internships and field experiences with a special character, like being abroad or in special needs schools.

Spirituality in the performance of the teacher

"Spirituality is recognizable not only in rituals such as singing, praying and Bible story telling, certainly also in narratives, the views on pupils, the physical contact and the creativity in handling situations" (428/437), difficulties and diversity in the classroom included. Noticeable are their experiences of transcendence in this respect. They can be more pedagogical (for instance, in the interaction with a child) or more religious (for instance, in the interaction during communal prayer, singing or Bible story telling, or because of the content of a religious text). These experiences are of great value and lead to joy and wonderment, though one is not aiming for it.

Important sources of inspiration are: "the relationship with children, the problems with children, the results achieved together with children, one's personal conduct, one's personal faith, the colleagues and the parents." (429/437) Notice that when these sources are not handled well, they become to function as barriers. Also notice that experiences of inspiration and transcendence need some conditions, namely [shortly said] a general atmosphere and a personal attitude as well of dedication and professionalism (expertise).

A supplement to the working definition

Bram de Muynck, *Een goddelijk beroep. Spiritualiteit in de beroepspraktijk van leraren in het orthodox-protestantse basisonderwijs*, 2008, (A Godly Vocation. Spirituality in the practice of education of teachers in the orthodox-Protestant Schools).

Summary and Review by © Lia van Aalsum, Nijmegen 2008, in: Spirituality International (SPIRIN), www.titusbrandsmainstituut.nl Nijmegen, the Netherlands.

Reproduction without modification is granted, on condition that the sources are quoted.

The several answers to the three research questions (about professional identity, professional development and professional action of performing) make it necessary to differentiate between the vocational spirituality (“in which sources of inspiration and conditions hold generically for teachers”; Dutch reader, De Muynck is talking about “beroepsspiritualiteit” here), and the religious spirituality (“as nourished by religious beliefs”). Sometimes there is a clear overlap, and often the religious spirituality enforces the vocational spirituality. As a result the working definition has to be enriched with the concept of ‘beliefs’ [in Dutch: overtuigingen]. The final definition of spirituality is: “the manner in which one – by orienting oneself on sources – relates beliefs and experiences of inspiration and/or transcendence, more or less methodically, to the actual practice of life” (429/438). [Please note, in the conclusions of the report itself, page 408, De Muynck adds a formulation more focused on the professional practice, by formulating “(religieuze en pedagogische) overtuigingen en ervaringen van (religieuze en pedagogische) inspiratie”, this is: (religious and pedagogical) beliefs and experiences of (religious and pedagogical) inspiration.]

Important elements for the theory of spirituality in vocational practice

The following elements are of great importance for the theory: “*the motives and the beliefs on the basis of which one conducts oneself, the experiences of pedagogical and religious inspiration and transcendence, the sources of inspiration and its barriers, and the conditions holding for the rise of inspiration.*” (429/438) The final chapter presents the expected relevance of this research for other Christian schools and teachers (the secondary school included), and gives some recommendations for the teacher training colleges and the post-graduate courses, in fact a plea for the promoting of the aforementioned elements.

The publication of this research is closed off with the summary’s in three languages, a bibliography (mainly Dutch publications) and appendices.

Review

First of all, it is a commendable initiative of the author Bram de Muynck to put spirituality in relation to education on the academic agenda of research. With his focus on spirituality and the professionalism of the teacher he asks attention for a topic that until now received not much attention. In my opinion, this topic is of essential importance for the academical and practical reflection on the professionalism of the teacher and on the identity of the Christian (Roman Catholic and Protestant) school and its teachers as well. (See also my other Reviews in SPIRIN on publications of Parker Palmer and Hanan Alexander.) Also, it is to his credit that he puts spirituality on the agenda of the Protestant schools, in particular the orthodox denominations. History has shown that the item of spirituality in those circles has often been neglected, denied or even condemned, though Maarten Luther with his plea for the freedom of the Christian (“de vrijheid van een christenmens”, 1520) referred to the fundamental way of life we nowadays call ‘spirituality’ (compare for example the approach of spirituality in the works of Bernard McGinn, Kees Waaijman, Alister McGrath). However, the orthodox target group of De Muynck on the one hand, and his (procedure to develop a) working definition of spirituality on the other hand, cause some problems that have their impact on the whole research. These and other items I shall discuss now.

1. The working definition of spirituality Important is the fact that De Muynck makes an effort to develop a clear and applicable concept of spirituality. More than once studies on spirituality – either of a academical, professional or popular character – seem to forget this or spend only a few lines to this topic. However, the attempt of De Muynck illustrates some of the difficulties of this endeavour. Firstly, the studies he compares are incommensurable and some of them are not of a level one may aspect in a

Bram de Muynck, *Een goddelijk beroep. Spiritualiteit in de beroepspraktijk van leraren in het orthodox-protestantse basisonderwijs*, 2008, (A Godly Vocation. Spirituality in the practice of education of teachers in the orthodox-Protestant Schools).

Summary and Review by © Lia van Aalsum, Nijmegen 2008, in: Spirituality International (SPIRIN), www.titusbrandsmainstituut.nl Nijmegen, the Netherlands.

Reproduction without modification is granted, on condition that the sources are quoted.

academic research. I mentioned some of them in the summary. Instead of these unlike and mainly Dutch publications he should have used international renowned studies on theory development on spirituality in general and on Christian spirituality in particular, of P. Sheldrake, B. McGinn, S. Schneiders and others. Concerning Christian spirituality, he is using A. McGrath, a good choice but not fundamental enough. Nevertheless, his choice of K. Waaijman (*Spirituality. Forms, Foundations, and Methods*, 2003 4th edition, printed in several languages; 1000 pages) is above all discussion and would even have been enough for this purpose. Therefore, it is twice as sad, that he does not honour the core of this work. Spirituality is presented as the core of our human existence: our relation to the Absolute, that sometimes forces its way into our consciousness, a living Presence “which demands shaping and thorough reflection” and can be academically studied from the perspective of the transformation. “Materially, spirituality is the jointed process of the divine-human relation which is, formally, a layered process of transformation” (see Waaijman). De Muynck pays quite some attention to this study and mentions the transformation, but it is clear that he does not really see the crucial importance of it. On the basis of very different and non-equivalent studies he concludes to the four central aspects: transcendence (the focus on this, but how about the experience of it?); process (the transformation has disappeared); method (different meanings are used here, of experiencing, thinking, acting, ritual practice) and inspiration (what does that mean in this context, after all, a neo-fascist is also very much inspired...).

Positive – especially in the Netherlands it is an important issue – is his attempt to make the connection with faith, religion and meaning. But again, he should have used other literature, like theoretical studies in the field of religious studies and of the philosophy of religion. Even the study of Waaijman could have offered him enough material to make clear that spirituality has to do with the core business of the religious institute. (That study also could have clarified that spirituality refers to the essence of religious or spiritual life in general, and that ‘a’ religion can offer a useful framework, but even can do without it. See for example the biblical figures of Abraham and Sara or the period of exile in Babylonia. By the way, the Dutch terminology can cause some problems in this. We can make a difference between religion like the German “Religion”, or being religious in a broad sense, not necessarily connected to “a” religion. Often Dutch authors neglect to clarify their position in this. In the same context, the notions of belief and faith can be confusing.)

Finally, his working definition needs some attention. With it, De Muynck tries to acknowledge the process character of spirituality. More than once he refers to it. However, though he concludes that the dialogical aspect (“something of an occurrence that withdraws itself from the nameable”) is important, he also states that it is not really visible and nameable. “The reciprocity as such is not visible, however, it plays a role in the reproduced experiences of the interviewed people” (circa p.72). It is really a missed opportunity to bring in the factor of transformation, not only as an important aspect, but as the main principle of the spiritual growth. As a result, his working definition makes the human being to the central actor of the spiritual process, making the divine Presence passive, in a way disappearing behind “sources” (this element just jumped in by the exploration of religion and meaning) and “experiences of inspiration and/of transcendence”. Maybe I’m a bit harsh in this, but I think we have to make clear what happens here, on the one hand because it has consequences for his research, and on the other hand because we all, academics and professionals dedicated to the development of a theory on spirituality in education, need to develop an eye for these things. Spirituality is not just about inspiration and specific performances, but, as international studies do show and as concisely formulated by Waaijman, about the human-divine relation as an ongoing transformational process.

Bram de Muynck, *Een goddelijk beroep. Spiritualiteit in de beroepspraktijk van leraren in het orthodox-protestantse basisonderwijs*, 2008, (A Godly Vocation. Spirituality in the practice of education of teachers in the orthodox-Protestant Schools).

Summary and Review by © Lia van Aalsum, Nijmegen 2008, in: Spirituality International (SPIRIN), www.titusbrandsmainstituut.nl Nijmegen, the Netherlands.

Reproduction without modification is granted, on condition that the sources are quoted.

2. His target group: 1) the Experiential Reformed or Pietistic schools; 2) the Reformed Church of the Netherlands (Liberated) schools.

As I mentioned already in the summary, the presentation of the “(religious) spirituality” of these two orthodox-Protestant communities is by its content interesting and necessary as well, because of the background information. However, it is confusing because it is not at all clear why he is using these notions. In fact, it is more like a global presentation of the theology and daily practice of these communities. Here we see the notion spirituality used in a more overarching way, and also the use of the notions belief and faith are confusing. De Muynck could have used the study of K. Waaijman to describe the spirituality of this form (Part III), but maybe it would have been more wise to avoid this notion for this aspect of his research.

Concerning the twofold target group, there is another problem, connected to their theology. We are dealing here with members of two orthodox-protestant groups, with a way of life directed by quite strict biblical and theological notions. A modest lifestyle, with prayer, bible reading, attendance at church twice on Sundays, ethically against abortion and euthanasia. In general the members of the Reformed schools are a bit more open to the social environment and the different developments of our time, and different kinds of biblical and theological education are encouraged. The problem now is the notion and valuation of spirituality itself in these circles. In general, history shows that they display some hesitation or even aversion to spirituality, because they suspect it of claiming the divine grace. Looking at their theology and faith practice, these two groups show a problem with the lived relationship with God, let alone with this relationship as a transformation. For the “Experiential Christians” faith is a struggle, at one hand based on the (more) objective knowledge of God, the Bible, the Creeds and his way to convert the sinful human being. On the other hand it is focused on the subjective and immediate experience of the divine presence and guidance. The complicated thing now is that at the same time this experience is under suspicion. The human being is self-deceiving and therefore an experience must be distrusted on forehand. Only a few chosen one’s can be reborn, structured by a specific code that can be recognizable in the story one can tell about it. Children are supposed to expect “a new heart”. So, being touched by the divine presence, let alone being taken along in a process of transformation, is a very difficult thing for these experiential Christians. Even if we don’t focus on the fundamental notion of transformation and if we follow De Muynck in his working definition about spirituality as “the manner in which one – by orienting oneself on sources – relates experiences of inspiration and/or transcendence, more or less methodically, to the actual practice of life”, it is clear we have some problems here. The “Reformed (Liberated) Christians” also confront us with a problem. Their base is the assurance of faith: baptism means the confirmation of belonging to the covenant, and the faith practice is the endorsement of these promises of God. Living faith as a searching process is not really an issue. It is important to hold on to the purity of the creed, what also results in a more cognitive, rational and activity oriented religious lifestyle. Children are the children of the covenant, a notion that they are to keep in mind and that gives an optimistic attitude to life. So, here again we see that, even if the notion of transformation is a step to far, the notion of process is complicated as well. Religious life seems to be a life of confirmation, not of searching, let alone of going untrodden paths under the divine guidance.

However, despite these difficulties with the target groups and the notion of spirituality, the actual material presented by De Muynck shows something really interesting for our understanding of spirituality. I will finish this Review with this third point.

3. Spirituality in the actual material presented

Let me start to say again that the thematic presentation of the results of the interviews

Bram de Muynck, *Een goddelijk beroep. Spiritualiteit in de beroepspraktijk van leraren in het orthodox-protestantse basisonderwijs*, 2008, (A Godly Vocation. Spirituality in the practice of education of teachers in the orthodox-Protestant Schools).

Summary and Review by © Lia van Aalsum, Nijmegen 2008, in: Spirituality International (SPIRIN), www.titusbrandsmainstituut.nl Nijmegen, the Netherlands.

Reproduction without modification is granted, on condition that the sources are quoted.

are really worthwhile to read. All in all they give the impression of thoroughness and integrity. It is an objective report with a lot of quotes, in a way that brings you in contact with the attitude of these teachers and the atmosphere in their classroom. Though their orthodox mentality will put off more than one Dutch teacher or researcher, the actual results do show very inspired and inspiring teachers. It seems to me that this inspiration is twofold: both the religious and the pedagogical motives are doing their job, looking for the best development of the child, based on the idea of the value of each child, as a child or creature of God, with his unique disposition of character and with his unique talents and impossibilities. Sadly enough you only get a vague impression of this when you only read the concluding paragraphs. Those paragraphs are directed by the tentative statements, whom, for their part, are driven by the threefold question about identity. One can ask oneself if that was the good focus. The summary shows more of the actual spirituality, however, it still stays a bit on the surface, as a result of the genre of overview. Anyway, let me try to give some examples of the most intriguing outcome of this research: though the researcher did not head for “transformation” and though the target groups did not really were to appreciate “spirituality”, the results seem to show that spirituality, as a human-divine transformation process in the actual practice of teaching, is a fact. The lived practice seems to exceed the borders of the dogma! Some examples now.

In relation to the 6 main motives for providing education (part of the professional identity)

By reading these pages 212-232, and of course with the knowledge of their religious backgrounds, one wonders how these six motives are interfering with each other. That would give some information about the spiritual transformation process. For instance, one gets the impression that bringing about an awareness of God, and learning to know God (the ‘experientialist’ teachers) or learning to live with God (the ‘liberated’ Christian teachers) are the fundamental drives in this complexity of motives, because it has to do with the existence itself (like being aware of – more liberated – the intrinsic goodness of life, in general and personal, or – more experientialist – of the mystery of Gods call to your heart). Seen in that way, the other motives of ensuring security, providing care, prompting inquisitiveness, and encourage development are secondarily, and not just four of the six central motives. Some examples: teacher Christien finds it very important to tell the children that they have to search for God all the time. To herself it is an absolute necessity, and she gets very emotional about it: being conversed is crucial, however, in her opinion she has not experienced that herself. With Claudia she states that of course language, mathematics and so on are important, but they don’t really last. In fact knowing God is the only thing that counts (225). Also Bertha is very much aware of the necessity of being conversed. This longing in herself goes along with the careful attempts to awake this desire in the children. These examples also show something of the process these teachers are in themselves. No wonder that “authenticity” is an important value for these twenty teachers. However, from the spiritual point of view, one would like to get a sharper view of the dynamics of this complexity of authenticity, self-knowledge etcetera (232-243).

Chapter 8, about spirituality in the biography of these teachers

In the way De Muynck presents this, a lot of this information could have done without the notion of spirituality. It is about the moments, youth experiences, choices for education and jobs that have influenced the character, the way of thinking and the own teacher practice. However, these stories also show that new and unusual experiences “can yield experiences of transcendence with a long-time effect” (283). In his Conclusions De Muynck interprets the value of this mainly in a cognitive way: the connection of the old with the new brings insight on a higher level, puts in perspective

Bram de Muynck, *Een goddelijk beroep. Spiritualiteit in de beroepspraktijk van leraren in het orthodox-protestantse basisonderwijs*, 2008, (A Godly Vocation. Spirituality in the practice of education of teachers in the orthodox-Protestant Schools).

Summary and Review by © Lia van Aalsum, Nijmegen 2008, in: Spirituality International (SPIRIN), www.titusbrandsmainstituut.nl Nijmegen, the Netherlands.

Reproduction without modification is granted, on condition that the sources are quoted.

aspects of the existing frame of thinking, and influences the acting (283). But when you read the material itself, it is clear that these experiences have a much deeper impact. Though the word "God" is not mentioned, special moments and subtle movements bring this person in contact with a level of existence that we can describe as divine, and that influences this person fundamentally for the rest of his life. The atmosphere and moral influence at the grandparents house; project weeks, conferences or even jobs abroad; study, certain topics (Kierkegaard) or practices (Bible study); the daily teaching practice; personal crises (illness, burn out). In these situations one senses something of essential values for life, of being lifted up en freed, of been awoken to a new kind of responsibility. Here we see how De Muynck lacks the notion of transformation and the vocabulary to let his respondents deepen this out. At the same time we see that these teachers, despite the dogma's of their religion, are touched by the divine atmosphere. It seems to me that they don't recognize it. Maybe this is the result of a more massive and static idea of "God".

Chapter 10, about spirituality as a searching process

Here we see again how the dogma puts the 'experientialist' teacher in a difficult position: he is longing for the grace of the authentic experience of the divine Presence, he also presents this as the ideal to the children, and at the same time he is told that this is reserved for the chosen one's. It makes him constantly aware of his failures. Impressive are their abilities to reflect and to distinguish in this. Also the 'reformed liberated' teachers show these abilities and also are constantly aware of the shortcomings of their 'servitude'. However, thrust is more their motto, and the examples show how they daily try 'to live with God', also in the practice of the class room. Both teacher groups are oriented on the divine guidance. The few examples show a growth in the relation with God. Remarkable is that several "experientialist" teachers long for a more concrete guidance (333). What do they express with this: their human inability, as they have been told, or as they experience it, or maybe the will to overcome this driven by the fundamental desire of their soul?

Partly based on this, it seems strange to me that De Muynck concludes that the ethics of the profession mainly are formed by pedagogical motives or intentions, like caring, being together, sharing, relation, doing justice, creativity, and not by religious contents (345-346). Every teacher, he says, is driven by an unique combination of "Gestalts" (a concept that was not clear to me in his presentation, 84-86). However, once De Muynck asked if one should not look for the integrating drive in this variety (85). Does his material not show that the basic drive is the religious one, not in the dogmatic sense, but in the spiritual sense, as the ongoing force of transformation in the reciprocity of the human being and the divine Presence? See also the description of feelings, connected to the item of inspiration, in chapter 9 (310-314). De Muynck makes a distinction between the religious and the pedagogical transcendence (see also chapter 12). Though he states that they are interconnected, one can ask if this is a useful distinction. Those feelings, for example, show how the daily practice is transparent of the divine atmosphere around and in one's soul. Feelings like gratitude, pleasure and enjoyment, rest, wonder, togetherness and harmony are the result of a mixture of religious and pedagogical motivated activities and observations. They all refer to the one transcendent presence that can become immanent, present in that moment and fulfilling in a way that enhances your fundamental thrust in God and influences the totality of your acting and being. Exactly this multifaceted and dynamic process is what we call spirituality.

Chapter 11, spirituality in acting

This chapter makes clear what we saw already in chapter 10: in the daily practice of the class room and in specific activities the pedagogical and the religious drive are connected en mutually fertile. Remarkable is the formative working of the bible: its

Bram de Muynck, *Een goddelijk beroep. Spiritualiteit in de beroepspraktijk van leraren in het orthodox-protestantse basisonderwijs*, 2008, (A Godly Vocation. Spirituality in the practice of education of teachers in the orthodox-Protestant Schools).

Summary and Review by © Lia van Aalsum, Nijmegen 2008, in: Spirituality International (SPIRIN), www.titusbrandsmainstituut.nl Nijmegen, the Netherlands.

Reproduction without modification is granted, on condition that the sources are quoted.

content, the study as a preparation, the story in the class room, etcetera. Impressive are the subtle experiences of transcendence who are going along with it. Again it shows how the human soul and the divine Presence don't let themselves be restricted by human theology. This chapter also shows the importance of spiritual forms, of practices and exercises that create a space of a specific quality and concentration.

Maybe, by way of conclusion, we can state that these twenty teachers of these specific streams of orthodox-Protestant education show more than once signs of a spiritual transformation, though the researcher was not looking for it and though their theological traditions keep quite a distance in this.

Bram de Muynck, *Een goddelijk beroep. Spiritualiteit in de beroepspraktijk van leraren in het orthodox-protestantse basisonderwijs*, 2008, (A Godly Vocation. Spirituality in the practice of education of teachers in the orthodox-Protestant Schools).

Summary and Review by © Lia van Aalsum, Nijmegen 2008, in: Spirituality International (SPIRIN), www.titusbrandsmainstituut.nl Nijmegen, the Netherlands.

Reproduction without modification is granted, on condition that the sources are quoted.