

Spirit, Character and Intellect at Washington and Lee

September 26, 2022

Accompanying the University's announcement this summer of the limited reopening of Lee Chapel, there was an encouraging note of its promised and varied use during this fall. Among these is the inaugural Mock Convention – 2024 Kick-Off. Laura Bush and daughter Barbara will visit the campus and provide a key program to be held in the chapel. How good it is for the campus, Lexington/Rockbridge and alumni communities to see its historic landmark returned to highly profiled public and University event purposes.

One can only wish this was the chapel's current destiny. For the past 15 months, these pages have provided extensive reporting on the ultimate plans for and actual step-by-step process of chapel reconfiguration and namesake legacy desecration, with a stated goal of providing a small gathering space for "mandatory" student events. A few months ago, a high-ranking administration official pleaded such a case to me and a colleague. The current acclaimed aim is to return the chapel to a state highly resonant with when it was first opened in the late 1860's during Robert E. Lee's presidency. At that time, the chapel was actually used for voluntary religious services 6 days a week (Sunday's excepted), with President Lee attending daily. More on this is found in the accompanying document briefly introduced next.

This week's offering was recently researched and written by alumnus M. Neely Young '64, an accomplished and published historian, educational administrator and Co-Founder of The Generals Redoubt. It is entitled *Spirit, Character and Intellect at Washington and Lee*. His piece is a highly readable and informative review of the deeply religious roots of this ancient enterprise in its academy, college and university phases of life. This includes a patient retracing of the on-campus experience as the

sectarian world began to unravel in the 20th century and took an even firmer hold in the 21st century.

Dr. Young makes a highly plausible case for the growing opportunity to provide a more fully balanced educational and life experience for students, faculty, administrators and staff through an emerging movement in higher education known as Spiritual Intelligence. I believe you will find the journey he offers as worthy of investment, not so much in a financial sense, but in a spiritual sense that currently feels as woefully depleted as the more practical matters of global energy availability and philosophy in these times.

He opens his piece with a poignant quote from Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, published in *The Heart of Matter*. It states: “*We are not humans on earth seeking to have a spiritual experience; we are spirits having a human experience.*” Such a perspective is a fine place to start your day or week. We are hopeful you will give some thought about how you might individually assess and contribute to helping boost such a movement in the days, months and years ahead. Dreams, emotional commitment, daily focus and action can change the world.

Please donate to The Generals Redoubt to pay for professional research related to defending Lee Chapel as a National Historic Landmark, for future funding to educate students about the rich history and legacy of Robert E. Lee, and to help bring back diversity of thought. We need your help if we are to save Lee Chapel as a campus and national treasure. Thank you in advance for your support. Information on how to contribute is found at <https://www.thegeneralsredoubt.us/support>

Thomas P. Rideout ‘63

For The Generals Redoubt

Spirit, Character, And Intellect At Washington And Lee

*Academic Fundamentalism . . . [is] the stubborn refusal of the academy to acknowledge any truth that does not conform to the professional dogma. . . Certain ideas are simply excluded and woe to those who espouse them- Page Smith, *Killing the Spirit: Higher Education in America*.*

*We are not humans on this earth seeking to have a spiritual experience; we are spirits having a human experience- Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Heart of the Matter*.*

All Western colleges and universities were founded under religious auspices and promoted spiritual, ethical, and intellectual goals. The same was true in America where, for example, all of the Ivy League schools were established as religious enterprises. What is now Washington and Lee was no exception. Founded as a predominately Presbyterian institution, it remained a Protestant school with strong Presbyterian influence until the Civil War (see Neely Young, "Religion and Culture at Liberty Hall and Washington College, 1776-1861: A Protestant, Liberal Arts Education," unpublished essay). When Robert E. Lee became President of the college in 1865, a new influence was introduced. Lee was an Episcopalian who attracted many students of different denominational affiliations. The school became more non-sectarian but remained a Christian institution. As Lee commented to a local clergyman, "I shall be disappointed, Sir, I shall fail in the leading object that brought me here, unless these young men become real Christians." Lee also made religious life voluntary. He expected the students to behave in a Christian manner

and led by his own example (On religious life under Lee, see Kenneth G. Everett, "The Vision: Lee and His Chapel," published by The Generals Redoubt; on the connection between moral and religious development under Lee, see Neely Young "The Evolution of the Honor System at Washington and Lee University," published by The Generals Redoubt).

Following Robert E. Lee's presidency, Washington and Lee remained a Christian university into the early 20th century. Beginning in the 1920's, there was a conscious effort to attract Jewish students, and Washington and Lee can be said to have evolved into a Judeo-Christian school. Still, the Christian element remained quite strong. In the *Washington and Lee University Bulletin*, October 1961, former President Francis Pendleton Gaines is quoted as saying, "The other enduring adherence of this University is . . . that, while sectarian domination of the school is prohibited, 'The obligation to inculcate the Christian ideal is hereby acknowledged.' " Here, Gaines is merely quoting from the following Board By Laws section:

Freedom of Worship

Freedom of Worship, as guaranteed by the laws of the state, shall be enjoyed by all connected with the University and all sectarian influence in its government is hereby prohibited; but the obligations of the Christian religion are nevertheless to be acknowledged and inculcated.

The last section of this statement was not removed from the Board By Laws until 1986. The question then became what responsibility did the University bear for the spiritual and religious life of the students. In 1987 an ad hoc committee on chaplaincy was formed under the leadership of Minor Rogers of the Religion Department. In a paper on "Washington and Lee, A non-sectarian Religious Heritage" of September 11, 1987, Rogers asked what should be done to "make explicit the University's obligation religiously and spiritually for our students, faculty, and staff consistent with our rich religious heritage." Having perused numerous resources for the period since 1987, including Board minutes, faculty

minutes, *The Calyx*, and *The University Catalogue*, I have concluded that this question has not been adequately addressed.

A faculty position listed variously as University Chaplain, Director of Christian Education, Director of Religious Life, and Coordinator of Religious Life existed from at least 1939 until 2012. In 2006, under the Presidency of Tom Burrish, Burr Datz, who previously served as University Chaplain, was listed as Coordinator of Religious Life. In the section of the *University Catalogue* on *Religious Life* there was a rather extensive section on the responsibilities of the University with regard to spiritual and religious life including the following: *Washington and Lee maintains its commitment to moral and spiritual values, values in an atmosphere free of sectarian favoritism, inviting and serving individuals of all faiths.*

This was a good start in addressing not only the ethical and intellectual needs of the students but their spiritual needs as well. Unfortunately, it was short lived. In 2012, under the presidency of Kenneth Ruscio, the position of Coordinator of Religious Life was eliminated as was public prayer. The extensive section in the Catalogue on the University's obligation to promote spiritual development was also greatly reduced. For the last ten years, the University has taken a sort of laissez-faire approach to spiritual life. The Board, administration, and faculty have allowed its existence, but have done little to support or promote it. Nor have they attempted to connect the spiritual life with that of the ethical and intellectual.

There is an alternative. In the last 20 years or so, a new term has been developed in education called "Spiritual Intelligence" or SI. This movement recognized that beginning over 100 years ago, with the rise of Positivism and Objectivism, there have been efforts in higher education to ignore, reduce, or even eradicate the role of spirituality in colleges and universities. Supporters of the SI concept call for a renewed reconciliation between spirituality and intellectuality in order to develop the whole person. They also say that this focus can support religious diversity on campus.

SI advocates trace the roots of the concept to a couple of sources. The first is Victor Frankel's *Man's Search for Meaning*, 1984, in which he states that if humans have an answer to the "Why" question, they can deal with any "What" or "How" ones. Another source is H. Gardner's *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, 1983, in which he discusses the various ways of knowing in addition to the purely intellectual. Finally, there is the work by D. Mohar and I. Marshall, *Spiritual Intelligence: The Ultimate Intelligence*, 2001.

The concept of Spiritual Intelligence requires a different understanding of the connection of one's mind, inner life, and spirit to the external world. It focuses on the macro-level problem solving potential of learners, particularly problems pertaining to meaning and value. Several scholars have argued that SI can establish a learning atmosphere in which students can reach their full potential as it capitalizes on their ability to make personal meaning out of life experiences, consciousness, and critical thinking. Recent research on SI draws the following conclusions:

- Multiple Intelligences, including Spiritual Intelligence, support learners' diversity and satisfy individuals' unique needs and styles
- SI helps students/ teachers make sense of their world and construct aims and values
- SI helps maintain inner and outer harmony
- SI can promote exploration, creativity, cooperation, self-mastery, and a sense of vocation
- SI has a strong positive influence on student engagement and performance

Current university and college students are searching for deeper meaning in their lives. They are looking for ways to cultivate their inner selves and seeking ways to be compassionate and charitable. What can be done? First, the Washington and Lee Board, administration, and faculty must take the leadership in reintegrating spiritual/religious, ethical, and intellectual development. This cannot be left solely

to the students, but they should certainly be a part of the conversation. For purposes of this discussion, I do not make a distinction between the terms "spiritual" and "religious", although some writers and scholars do. In both cases, we are referring to the development of the inner life or spirit. Second, the effort must be interfaith and non-sectarian. Speaking to the Interfaith Chapel at Princeton in 2012, future President Christopher Eisgruber, who identifies himself as a "non-theist", said "Moral growth requires the unity of the spiritual and intellectual life." The following are suggestions as to how Washington and Lee might address this challenge and opportunity:

- In the curricular area, develop courses which foster mind and body connections, for example a course in "Spirituality across College Disciplines: Exploring Spiritual Intelligence Dispositions." The course should be interdisciplinary and might involve psychology, philosophy, religion, arts, literature, etc.
- Interfaith chaplains coordinated perhaps by a Director of Religious/Spiritual Life. There are various examples of this in private, non-sectarian colleges and universities across the country.
- As spiritual reflection needs to become a habitual part of university life, regular, interfaith chapel services should be instituted. In building the chapel, Robert E. Lee intended that it should be used for regular religious gatherings, including chapel services. It is still used for such purposes, when the service of Holy Matrimony is performed. The Trustees have stated that in making changes to the interior of the chapel, they wished to return it to its original form. Why not return it to its original purpose as well?
- Re-establish the connection between the honor system and its spiritual roots. It is no coincidence that Robert E. Lee supported both spiritual development, student self-governance, and the honor system.
- Promote interfaith community service activities.

- Restore public prayer in its broadest, interfaith context at Baccalaureate and other appropriate occasions. These are just some suggestions; other individuals may have ideas of their own. The important thing is to recognize that there is an important connection between spiritual, ethical, and intellectual development and to consciously cultivate that connection. There are sources available to help Washington and Lee do this. The Institute on Teaching and Learning for Campus-Wide Interfaith Excellence works with administration, faculty, and staff leaders to transform their campuses into model environments for interfaith cooperation. A number of schools across the country have participated in this training including many non-sectarian schools such as Middlebury, Washington and Jefferson, University of Miami, University of Denver, and University of Portland. The University of Rochester has a model interfaith program which might be emulated.

Finally, as the University cultivates greater diversity, it should consider all forms of diversity. We have previously emphasized the importance of cultural, political, and intellectual viewpoint diversity. For too long, the leadership of the University has followed a policy of benign neglect toward the religious and spiritual life, to the extent that it no longer has any real significance in the University's mission. We can restore the spiritual role and promote religious and spiritual diversity at Washington and Lee by embracing Spiritual Intelligence and its benefits.

Neely Young