Roots & Wings

The Periodical of the Professional Society of Religious Educators

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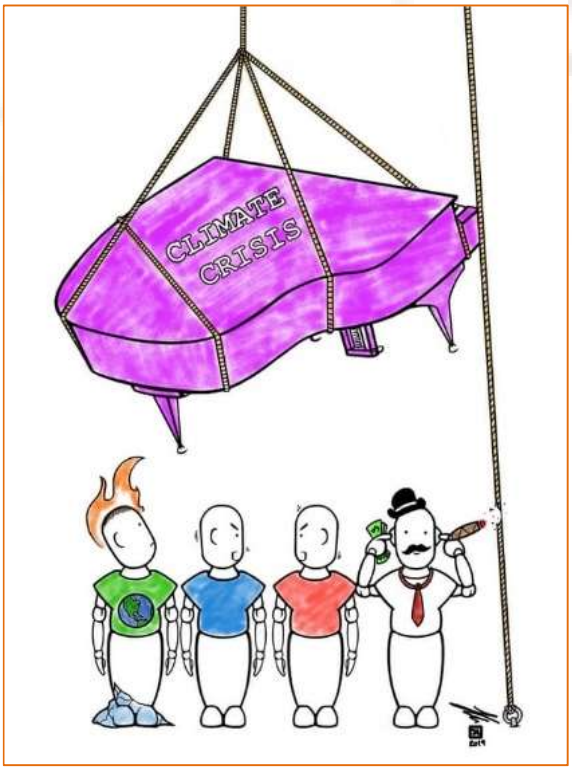

EDITORIAL

Welcome to the third edition of *Roots & Wings* for 2019. This publication, sent electronically free of charge to members of the Professional Society, will appear quarterly. It will contain regular features as indicated in the Contents table alongside.

Members are encouraged to send material for future editions. What might you send? Here are some examples:

- Lesson ideas or plans
- Reviews of useful materials such as books or websites
- News from your school's RE Department
- Short articles of interest to religious educators
- Adverts for RE posts in your school

REMINDER

It is not necessary for CPTD purposes to submit your responses to the chosen article to CIE since this exercise falls under the category of teacher initiated activities also called Type 1 activities: Activities initiated personally by an educator to address his/her identified needs. For example, enrolling for an ACE programme, writing an article for an educational publication, attending a workshop, material development, participating in professional learning communities, engaging in action research in your own classroom.

REFLECTION

The echoes of 1934

(Günther Simmermacher)

The Southern Cross, September 4 to September 10, 2019

Pope Francis last month sounded a warning from history when he noted that much of the current political rhetoric reminded him of the populism applied by Adolf Hitler in 1934, as the Nazis were entrenching their power in Germany.

As we mark the 80th anniversary this month of the start of World War II, and the horror this conflagration created, the pope's remarks serve to warn us not only about today but also to caution us on what such rhetoric can lead to.

The pope's comments in an interview with the Italian daily *La Stampa* are not the first time he has rebuked the populist rhetoric of nationalism, exclusion, division, fear-mongering and selfishness.

In 2017 he recalled the Germans of the early 1930s as "a people who were immersed in a crisis, who were searching for their identity until this charismatic leader came and promised to give their identity back—and he gave them a distorted identity, and we all know what happened".

He obviously sees parallels with current political developments.

The Holocaust started with propaganda which in print, in speeches, on film, in caricatures, portrayed Jews in such a way as to legitimise prejudice against them. That propaganda was used to justify the merciless persecution of Jews, or at least encouraged acquiescence in it.

It is notable that when US President Donald Trump declared his candidacy for the White House, he propagated prejudice against migrants from Latin America in words that came straight out of the textbook for racist propaganda: "They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists."

Four years later we see largescale deportations which are tearing families and communities apart. One priest in Mississippi reported having lost half of his parishioners in deportation round-ups.

We see detention camps where children are separated from their parents, and where conditions are abysmal.

Helping undocumented immigrants is now illegal in the US. Critics have described that as the criminalisation of solidarity.

Large parts of the US public seem to have accepted, or even welcomed, the policies of their president, which even his supporters in the US episcopate have criticised (though without mounting great moral outrage).

Much as Germans stood by as their Jewish neighbours were taken away, so are Americans standing by as their Hispanic neighbours are rounded up.

The populism of Mr Trump is by no means unique. We hear echoes of it in South Africa, too. In Europe, anti-migrant and xenophobic sentiment has empowered right-wing movements in virtually every country; in some, they are governing.

Their rise in legitimacy has been accompanied by an increase in hate crimes against minorities and perceived enemies. That is no coincidence; political incorrectness has gone mad.

One must, of course, blame the populists for the fear and prejudice that they spread with their

divisive rhetoric, but the willing recipients of their hatemongering are likewise to blame, for they have a choice and they have access to alternative information— both liberties which Germans were starting to be deprived of in 1934.

Distressingly, many Christians subscribe to the rhetoric of hate, or at least acquiesce in it. There may be many good reasons for it—agreement with other policy areas, or the illusory promise of stability, or old-fashioned partisanship—but these are not good enough to reject the demands of the Gospel.

The Gospel commands us to stand in solidarity with the weak, the poor, the oppressed, the persecuted, the reviled. When we fail to do so—when we fail to stand with the aborted child or the drowning migrant or the deported mother—we fail Christ.

At this perilous time of brutal rhetoric, racist policies, increasing hate crimes and intolerance, the Church has to take its lead from Pope Francis and give prophetic witness.

The Church has to speak out loudly and with courage against all injustice, wherever in the world, even if that comes at a political cost.

The Church—from the pope to the faithful in the pews—has to bring the Christ of the Beatitudes into the public forum.

And when we hear the echoes of Germany's 1934 in today's political discourse, we must hold up Christ's love for the weak and the persecuted as an antidote to the populists' messages of hate.

REFLECTION

The digital world: A pervasive form of contemporary violence?

(Russell Pollitt SJ)

Electronic devices have become our daily bread. We rely on them more and more. A Jesuit in my community recently joked: "In the past when Jesuits arrived in a new house, they would first ask what time daily mass was. Now the first thing they ask for is the Wi-Fi password!" We all laughed; we know this is true.

There are obvious advantages to the hi-tech world we inhabit. Technology has made the world a smaller place. We live, probably, as the most informed people in history. The internet has levelled the playing field, anyone with a device can literally access the world – from the biggest city or the remotest village. It has connected us with people we would not ever have known two decades ago. Neighbours are no longer only those who live next door. Digital technology has enabled the world to unite and challenge injustice – the #MeToo movement is a good example of this.

Conversely, there is also a dark, often ignored, underbelly to our digital diet. It is more common to worry about access to pornography or privacy issues. But, what might be the less obvious, yet deeply intrusive, effects we don't (or won't) regularly think about – effects that are changing our very human nature and social fabric?

Our children compete with digital devices for our attention – at worst they are the distraction from the device! The effects of screens on children and their well-being, in the face of overwhelming evidence, does not seem to worry us as much as it should. Some educators – and parents continue to pressure for more technology

in the classroom despite the oft-repeated warnings of how this rewires the brain detrimentally. The jury is still out on the long-term effects of technology on children. Many parents and educators, it seems, are willing to risk their children in the biggest social experiment ever with little reflection on the potential consequences and cost.

We spend more time staring at screens than engaging face to face. We talk less and text more. We have many virtual friends on social media, but do we have real friends?

Most worrying, perhaps, is that the digital world has slowly chipped away at our long-honoured tradition of Sabbath. We carry mobile devices with us wherever we go so we can be reached at any time. During work time, family time, recreational time and on holiday we are always connected. We no longer have any *real* time off. We have created a society in which being permanently online, available, is considered virtuous. We assume this is good.

We have lost the God-given rhythm and balance of work and rest.

Thomas Merton wrote: "There is a pervasive form of contemporary violence… activism and overwork. The rush and pressure of modern life are a form, perhaps the most common form, of its innate violence. To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of demands, to commit to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything, is to succumb to violence".

Have our digital devices led us to succumb to this innate violence?

TALKING ABOUT RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Religion and Doubt: Towards a Faith of Your Own

(Richard Creel – an excerpt)

One of the saddest ironies of history is the extent to which adults, intent on passing their religious heritage to children, actually create in the children an intense dislike for the heritage. In my religion courses, I frequently invite students to write a personal statement of their religious beliefs, and the students often begin with an autobiographical account of their religious background.

Frequently they share with me the extent to which they were bored to intense dislike of their religious heritage by their religious education. What a tragedy, especially given the good intentions and many volunteer hours invested by the teachers. Perhaps no religious education would be better than one that is counterproductive? Some people object to religious education not because it is counterproductive but because they believe it unfairly biases a child in favour of one religion and against the others. It would be better, they say, for parents to give their children no religious education at all, so that when they reach maturity they can make an unbiased choice among the established religions or construct a religion of their own. That, of course, assumes a narrower definition of religion than the one with which we are operating. Further, there is a sense in which people must be sensitised to religious matters in order that they can make a mature choice, even as people must be sensitised to music before they can appreciate it fully or make sophisticated decisions about it. Personally, I can think of no adequate way to come to understand what religion is all about other than being a part of a religious tradition. The person who has participated in the Jewish heritage from childhood is, it seems to me, in an infinitely better position to evaluate other religious traditions than is a person who has never participated in any religious tradition but has only read about them. Some of my students have been reared in

isolation from self-conscious religion and with the idea that religion is something "out there" about which they will make a decision when they become adults. Some of these students have expressed their regret to me that their parents had reared them this way, for they felt that a void had been left in their lives. First, they had been misled into thinking that religion is something "out there" and is, therefore, an optional part of human existence. Second they had not been prepared to make an educated choice when the time for choosing did come. And, I must add, religious education, as aesthetic education, must involve the body and emotions as well as the intellect. Hence, it is difficult to see how it can be carried out effectively apart from actual immersion in some religious context-whether it is an ancient and elaborate one, such as Orthodox Christianity or a new and simple one such as an anti-institutional parent might create.

Further, not only should each individual be raised in a self-conscious religious tradition (even if it is a tradition that begins with the individual's parents), but the entire tradition should be passed on to the individual so that the individual can experience the full range of its richness. The older generation *owes* this opportunity to the younger generation. Professor Richard Rubenstein, the Jewish theologian to whom I am indebted for this insight, makes his point in the following words: "Jews are free to accept or reject all or part of the Torah as individuals. Freedom carries with it the responsibility that each generation make its own commitments in the light of its insights, while leaving the inherited corpus of tradition intact for subsequent generations." Liberalism in religious education tends by contrast, to impoverish the student by transmitting to the student only the convictions of the teacher and those portions of the heritage which back up his convictions. This tends to lead to a decrease in what is transmitted. To be sure, it is appropriate for the teacher to share his own insights and convictions with the student, but the student should be provided the entire body of material against which those convictions were arrived at so that he (the student) can discover whether *he* finds the same things or other things more important and convincing. Rubenstein is himself a Jewish atheist. Nonetheless he writes with regard to the 613 commandments in the Torah, "I hope it will be possible for subsequent generations to confront all 613 commandments in the light of the insights of their time in order to decide what sector is meaningful for them. I seriously doubt that they will respond as we have." Rubenstein recommends, then, that each generation should be confronted with the whole heritage, but that each member of that generation should be left free to determine his personal response to that heritage. This seems to me a wise recommendation for every religion, for though it places a burden on the adults who must carry it out, it provides maximal advantages to the young as they enter into their heritage and begin to decide their place in it.

CURRICULUM FOCUS (CPTD)

The Power of Parables for Religious Education

(Elizabeth Dowling - Journal of Religious Education 58(4) 2010)

Abstract

In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus often uses parables to teach about the reign of God, to challenge his audience to think differently about God and themselves in relation to God. Today's religious educators often draw on these parables in their own teaching. Understanding the power of the parable for its original first-century audience allows students to then make parallels within their own context. It is crucial for religious educators to be aware of the confronting nature of parables so that they might assist students to identify the subversive elements in these stories. This paper presupposes a basic knowledge of the parables and at the same time aims to assist educators with their understanding of the potential power of parables.

The Power of Parables for Religious Education

We all know that parables subvert our world view and invite us to look at ourselves and our world differently. Or do we? From my experience of working with secondary and tertiary students as well as with adults in schools and parishes, I have found that some of the gospel parables are well known and treasured. Many can tell the story of the Good Samaritan or the Prodigal Son, for instance, and educators frequently draw on these parables in their teaching. Often, however, I find that there are elements of these and other parables that are not so well known and that the subversive character of parables is rarely appreciated. Drawing on contemporary parable scholarship, this article aims to give an overview of the nature of parables and to provide insights into lesser known aspects of the parables in order to recapture some of their power for religious educators.

Nature of a Parable

In 1961, C. H. Dodd offered a definition of parable that acquired classic status over the subsequent decades and that remains relevant in our times:

> At its simplest the parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought (Dodd, 1961, p. 16).

Dodd's description identifies several features of a parable. First, it may be as simple as a simile, such as comparing the reign of God with a mustard seed (Mark 4:30-31/pars.). Second, the parable will relate to a situation that is well known to its hearers (i.e. "drawn from nature or common life"). Third, the hearers will be struck by an unexpected aspect of the story. Finally, the parable leaves its hearers puzzled and having to tease out the implications of what they have heard.

In the Synoptic Gospels, the notion of God's reign or realm or empire is at the heart of Jesus' teaching. Jesus announces that the reign of God has come near (Mark 1:14-15/par.). God's reign, in contrast to that of the Roman Empire and earlier ruling powers, is a reign of justice and graciousness. God's power is directed towards fullness of life and liberation from burden. The reign of God is good news for those who suffer and yearn for justice and is confronting for those who benefit from the oppression of others. Jesus frequently uses parables as the medium for communicating the good news of God's reign. The parables invite and challenge their hearers to expand their understanding of God and how God operates.

Like any good teacher, Jesus begins with the everyday experience of his audience. That some parables draw on themes from nature reflects the fact that a significant portion of his Galilean audience would have been engaged in agricultural and fishing occupations (Getty-Sullivan, 2007). In the example cited above (Mark 4:30-31/pars.), Jesus is trying to teach his audience about the reign of God by comparing it with something with which they are very familiar, a mustard seed. We are told that this small seed grows into a large shrub that provides shade for birds (Mark 4:32-33).

There is, however, an unexpected element to this comparison. As Reid (2000) explains, mustard is a common weed. So, in effect, Jesus is saying that the reign of God is like a weed, something his hearers certainly know about but also something they might want to eradicate. At the very least, this statement would have been quite confronting and would surely have teased his hearers into trying to make sense of the comparison. It may have been alienating, even threatening. Reid makes this point when she notes the difficulty in removing wild mustard once it has taken hold and argues that the reign of God, similar to mustard, would be considered a threat by some:

The weed-like reign of God poses a challenge to the arrangements of civilization and those who benefit from them. This interpretation poses a disturbing challenge to the hearer: Where is God's reign to be found? With what kind of power is it established? Who brings it? Who stands to gain by its coming? Whose power is threatened by it? (p. 297).

The potential for an informed engagement with this parable in a religious education context will depend largely upon the educator's familiarity with the cultural context encoded in the parable. In other words, we need to know something about what the reference to a mustard seed would have sparked in the mind of a first-century Palestinian audience.

Jesus tells parables to challenge his hearers' thinking about how God operates, to broaden their understanding of God's reign so that they might begin to think in new ways. Sometimes the hearers are left puzzled, sometimes angry at being so challenged. The parables are designed to cause a reaction, to provoke questions in the audience. Parables are confronting rather than comforting stories. They are subversive of predominant worldviews (Crossan, 1975; Reid, 2000).

Another agricultural image forms the basis of Mark 4:1-9, often called the Parable of the Sower. It is the first of the parables in the Gospel of Mark and is followed in 4:13-20 by an allegorical interpretation. The allegory accounts for each element in the story and essentially provides a packaged explanation of the parable. Allegorical explanation tends to reduce the power of the parable and its capacity to tease the audience into active thought: "In some ways allegory operates against parable—closing off thought rather than opening it up, giving the answer rather than a question" (Malbon, 2002, p. 31). This is the only instance in the Markan Gospel where a parable is given such an explanation. Most scholars hold that this allegorical interpretation did not come from Jesus but was rather developed later by the early Church (Malbon 2002; Reid 1999) and retrojected into the teaching of Jesus.

Two of the surprising features of the Parable of the Sower are the manner of sowing and the size of the harvest. The sower allows the seed to fall on all sorts of ground – the path, rocky ground, among thorns and good soil. Given this seemingly random rather than focused scattering of the seed, the hearers would naturally expect an indifferent harvest with limited growth. Since an average harvest was about eight-fold, the resultant harvest of thirty, sixty and a hundredfold (4:8) is utterly beyond comprehension (Malbon, 2002). These surprising features, the manner of sowing and the dimensions of the harvest, would provoke the hearers to reconsider their understanding of how God operates: God invites all and not just a few into relationship, and there are no limits to the overwhelming nature of God's abundance (Reid, 1999). The parable leaves its hearers thinking. It does not attempt to answer all their questions. Having briefly addressed the nature of parables, we now turn to ways of reading the parables that speak to contemporary sensibilities and are, at the same time, congruent with the originating contexts.

Reading Parables

In order to understand the dynamic of any particular parable, it is imperative to identify Jesus' target audience in telling the parable. Sometimes the targeted group is a particular section of a bigger audience. In the Parables of the Lost (Luke 15:1-32), for instance, we learn that tax collectors and sinners come to listen to Jesus (15:1). We also learn that the ensuing grumbling by the Pharisees and scribes is the catalyst for the telling of these parables (15:2-3). So while the audience is wider than the Pharisees and scribes, it is principally these groups who are being targeted by the Lukan Jesus. The reader who identifies with the targeted audience is, I suggest, the one who experiences most deeply the power of the parable. There is a little bit of the Pharisees and the scribes of the gospels in every one of us.

A word of caution is necessary, however, concerning the gospel presentations of the Pharisees. Usually the Pharisees are portrayed in the gospels as opponents of Jesus but this stereotyped characterisation does not accurately reflect the historical situation of Jesus' time or the diversity within Judaism. The gospel presentation of tension between Jesus and the Pharisees may be influenced by the late first-century tension which developed between the nascent Church and Judaism. Thus, religious educators need to deal sensitively and in an informed manner with the gospel presentations of Pharisees and, indeed, Jews in general (Council of Christians and Jews [Victoria], 2007).

Once the target audience of a parable has been identified, the next aspect that might be explored is the nature of the confrontation. What elements of the parable would be confronting for Jesus' audience? What is Jesus trying to get them to see differently? Because we read these parables in very different contexts from Jesus' original audience we may miss some of the challenges within the parable.

Reference to contemporary biblical scholarship is indispensable for educators seeking to understand the nuances that inform this mode of communication. To my mind, one of the most accessible recent contributions to parable scholarship is the three volume work of Barbara Reid OP (1999, 2000, 2001). While this fine scholarship is addressed to preachers, it is equally applicable to religious educators across all levels. It takes account of a wide range of scholarly views and includes Reid's own insights into each

of the synoptic gospel parables. Of particular assistance to teachers is Reid's focus on aspects of contemporary experience that might resonate with or find echoes in Jesus' parabolic teaching.

The limits of this article preclude any attempt to provide a detailed exploration of any one parable or to consider in detail the questions that parables raise for contemporary readers. Rather, my aim is simply to alert educators to some of the surprising and confronting aspects of selected Synoptic parables, mostly from Luke, and thus to open a space for reading them through different lenses, expanding our understanding of God and ourselves in relation to God.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)

Since, as noted above, this is one of the best known parables and is widely used in the classroom, it will be helpful to look again at the dynamic of the parable. Byrne (2000) comments that the modern reader may lose some of the impact of which Jesus' audience could not fail to be aware:

Centuries of holding together the adjective "good" and the noun "Samaritan" have dulled us to the explosive tension of the phrase in the world of Jesus. The hostility between Jews and Samaritans at the time makes the phrase an oxymoron—as phrases like "good terrorist" or "good drug dealer" would be for us (p. 100).

Jesus tells the parable in response to a lawyer's questioning. The lawyer sets out to test Jesus (10:25) and justify himself (10:29), so that his questions lack authenticity. From the perspective of the narrator, he has an ulterior motive.

Much of the parable would cause little surprise to Jesus' audience. The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was notoriously dangerous (Bailey, 1983), so it would not be unexpected for a traveller to be attacked, robbed and left half dead (10:30). The audience would perhaps excuse the priest and the Levite for not helping the wounded man as they would contract ritual impurity if the man happened to be dead or to die while they were giving assistance. For the priest, this would interfere with the performance of his religious duties and would necessitate a time-consuming and costly process to become ritually clean again. While ritual impurity would not have as significant a consequence for the Levite, he could be excused for following the example of the priest in passing by. Since the offering of sacrifice in the Temple was restricted to priests, Levites and Jewish laymen, the audience would be expecting a Jewish layman, someone just like themselves, to be the third character to arrive on the scene and to act differently (Bailey, 1983).

It is therefore the next part of the parable that would cause shock for Jesus' hearers and challenge their established worldview. The third person who comes along and helps the man is not a Jewish layman but a Samaritan. The very word 'Samaritan' was enough to repel a Jewish audience, given the centuries-old enmity between Jews and their Samaritan neighbours to the north. When the Samaritan sees the stricken man, he is described as being moved with compassion (10:33). The Greek word used here (*splanchnizomai)* is a cognate of the word *splanchnon* which refers to 'inner parts of the body'. The use of *splanchnizomai* here informs us that the Samaritan is moved to the very depths of his being. The same word is used elsewhere in Luke's Gospel to describe the response of Jesus to the plight of the widow of Nain (7:13) and that of the father in the Parable of the Prodigal Son when the younger son returns (15:20).

Many educators are aware of the relationship between Samaritans and Jews in Jesus' time and may consider that the main point of this parable is the need to show compassion to all, even to your enemies. Jesus broadens the understanding of "neighbour" from fellow Jew to all. This is certainly one aspect of the parable. There is more, however, to this subversive story. If Jesus were only trying to get his audience to see this one dimension, he could have reversed the roles in the story and had a Jew helping a Samaritan who was in need. This would still have been surprising for a Jewish audience but they would be affirmed by the generosity of the Jew.

Instead, Jesus turns the dynamic on its head. An enemy of his specifically Jewish audience models God's compassion and Jesus invites them to follow the example of this man (10:37). This would be nothing less than shocking for Jesus' audience. They are being challenged to change their whole way of thinking about Samaritans. They were convinced that Samaritans were detestable and worthless, but the one they

label as despicable is the one that models God's action. Jesus tells them to be like the Samaritan. This change of mindset would be far harder to take than doing an act of kindness to an enemy. Jesus challenges the stereotypes that are held by his audience and asks them to see the other differently. This is an important element of the parable to be opened up and discussed with students who might, in their turn, suggest some contemporary parallels.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son /Parable of the Lost Sons (Luke 15:11-32)

The parable traditionally titled the Prodigal Son is perhaps more appropriately titled the Parable of the Lost Sons because it is the third of a series of parables in Luke 15 that deal with finding the lost. The first two of these are the Parable of the Lost Sheep (15:3-7) and the Parable of the Lost Coin (15:8-10). In the Lukan context, as noted earlier, Jesus is targeting the Pharisees and scribes who are complaining that he welcomes sinners (15:1-2).

The first two parables are an example of a gendered pair of stories often found in the Gospel of Luke. Parallel stories feature a man and a woman in matching situations. Here a man celebrates after searching for and finding a lost sheep and a woman celebrates after searching for and finding a lost coin. Both the man and woman are images of God who seeks out the lost and welcomes the sinner. In the third of the parables, the father images God. By using a range of images for God with their classes, religious educators can reflect the wide range of biblical images for God.

According to Deuteronomy 21:17, the firstborn son receives twice the share of the father's possessions than that of each of the other sons. It was usual, however, for the sons to receive their share upon the death of their father. The younger son's request is therefore an offence to the father, yet the older son does not protest about the plan (Reid, 2000). That the father agrees to this scenario (15:12) is one of the surprising elements of the parable because to divide up his property would be tantamount to losing honour. Hence, the father's gracious response comes at a cost to himself, causing him to be shamed in the eyes of others.

Most teachers know well the dynamic in this parable which highlights the father's love and compassion (*splanchnizomai*) for his younger son. My comments here, therefore, will focus on the older son who is sometimes not given as much attention. The older son's resentment of the father's embrace of the returned younger son (15:25-28) is a key element of the parable. He considers himself a model son and is angered that the wasteful other son is reunited with the family. Yet a closer look at the parable indicates that the older son's perceptions of his own behaviour and relationships may not reflect reality.

Far from being the model son, the older son's relationship with his family leaves much to be desired. He describes himself as working like a slave for his father (15:29) rather than like a son. He refers to his brother as "this son of yours" (15:30). Thus, he alienates himself from both his father and brother. He, too, is a lost son. The father's love for the older son is evident in his words: "My son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours" (15:31). Yet there is no indication as to whether this son will respond to the father's invitation to join the celebration. The parable is left open-ended.

Remember that this parable is really being addressed to the Pharisees and scribes, the "older sons", who are grumbling because Jesus is welcoming sinners, the "younger sons." While the Pharisees and scribes might consider themselves as God's faithful ones, the dynamic of the parable invites them to reconsider their relationship with God and to perceive their need to be reconciled with God. Once again, we see that a parable confronts its hearers to think differently and such a message would not be easily received.

It is important that religious educators highlight both the depth of God's compassion portrayed in the parable as well as this challenge that the parable levels at its hearers. God's mercy and graciousness are offered to all, including those considered outsiders. The challenge is to recognise one's own need for God's gracious love. That there is no mention of the mother or any daughters in the parable reflects the patriarchal context within which the story is set.

The Parable of the Widow and the Judge (18:1-8)

Another uniquely Lukan parable is that of the Widow and the Judge (18:1-8) in which we are introduced to two characters: a judge who has no concern for God or people (18:2), and a widow who continually

comes to the judge seeking justice (18:3). The portrayal of the judge presents a contrast with the description of God as judge in Sirach 35:14-22 where we are told that God executes justice and will not ignore the widow and orphan (Schottroff, 2006; Reid, 2000). While the narrator's comment in 18:1 links the parable with persistence in prayer, there is more in the parable than this focus.

Deuteronomy 16:20 instructs the faithful to pursue only justice. We see that it is the widow rather than the judge who pursues justice and thus is the model to be emulated, a key element of the parable that is frequently overlooked. We also see that it is the widow and not the powerful judge who images the God of justice. This is a surprising dynamic for Jesus' audience: "It asks one to leave behind stereotypes and wrestle with unfamiliar notions about what God is like and what justice in the realm of God looks like and how it is achieved" (Reid, 2000, p. 233).

Parables of Reversal

Immediately following the Parable of the Widow and the Judge, Luke presents the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (18:9-14), one of the so-called parables of reversal. Reversal is a prominent theme in the Gospel of Luke. It forms a key element of the passage we generally refer to as the Magnificat (1:46-55) where we hear that God raises the lowly and brings down the powerful, fills the hungry with good things and sends the rich away empty (1:52-53).The theme is continued in the woes that follow the Lukan beatitudes (6:20-26) and also features in a number of Lukan parables.

The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector is addressed to those who regard themselves highly and treat others with contempt (18:9). The parable describes both a Pharisee and a tax collector going to the temple to pray. The Pharisee is self-satisfied, placing himself above others and thinking himself righteous while the tax collector simply acknowledges his need for God's mercy (18:11-13). We are told that it is the tax collector, one from a despised occupation and labelled a sinner, rather than the religious leader who goes home in right relationship with God (18:14).The parable highlights that God's embrace of the outsider is characteristic of the reign of God. Once again, Jesus' target audience, who would align themselves with the Pharisee in the parable, would be challenged to reconsider their own relationship with God.

A similar dynamic is evident in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (16:19-31). This parable is addressed to Pharisees who are described here as lovers of money (16:14).Usually, riches were considered a sign of God's blessing (Reid, 2000), so the descriptions of the two main characters would lead the audience to consider that God's favour lay with the rich man rather than the beggar, Lazarus. The outcome of the parable, however, reverses this understanding. The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus confronts its hearers to reassess their understanding of how God operates and challenges those with wealth to see the needs of others and ensure that all have enough. God's reign is confronting for the comfortable.

The topic of wealth and riches is treated more comprehensively in the Gospel of Luke than in the other Gospels. This may be because the Lukan community is thought to comprise people from a range of social locations, from the wealthy to the poor, even destitute (Esler, 1987). It is no surprise then that some of the Lukan parables draw on the theme of riches.

The Parable of the Rich Fool (12:13-21) also takes up this topic. In response to a request from someone in the crowd to settle an inheritance dispute (12:13-14), Jesus tells the Parable of the Rich Fool on the dangers that an excess of possessions can pose. When his land produces abundantly, a man decides to build larger storage barns so that he can stockpile all his goods, enough for several years. It is pertinent to note that the man engages in a soliloquy (12:17-19). He does not thank God nor celebrate and share the abundance with family and friends. He is totally self-focused. The first person singular pronoun "I' predominates in his self-talk. His obsession with possessions has isolated him and he dies alone (Donahue, 1988).In the Rich Man and Lazarus, the rich man is unaware of the beggar at his gate. Here, the Rich Fool is unaware of God's presence: "God has to interrupt his material musings" (Donahue, 1988, p. 179).God's words, "You fool…" (12:20) provide an ironic twist as the parable comes to a close. We see the dangers that riches can trigger and to which this man, like his counterpart in the Lazarus story, has succumbed.

Elsewhere in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus affirms another rich man, Zacchaeus, for sharing his wealth with those in need (19:1-10).The problem is not having riches but what you decide to do or not to do with your wealth. In 8:1-3, several women who travel with Jesus and the twelve support the group out of their own resources. The women are portrayed as having independent means and as sharing these for the benefit of others. While Zacchaeus and these Lukan women followers of Jesus are characters in the gospel story as a whole rather than in the parables, they provide the model for the appropriate use of possessions. They thus help readers of the gospel to comprehend more fully the teaching of the parables on riches. God's reign is concerned with fullness of life for all. Hence, riches are to be shared so that all may flourish.

Slaves and Day Labourers

Several parables involve slaves or day labourers. It is important for educators to have an insight into the social world of the first century in order to understand the context for these parables. Within the economic climate of the Roman Empire, many peasants operated in desperate situations:

> Famine, lack of rain, over-population, and heavy taxes could put a struggling farmer over the brink. In Palestine of Jesus' day it is estimated that somewhere between one-half and two-thirds of a farmer's income went to taxes that included Roman tribute, payment to Herod and the procurators, and land rent to the large landowners(Reid, 1999, 114).

Those who lost their land had to rely on finding employment as day labourers. Theirs was a precarious existence. The usual daily wage for a male labourer, the equivalent of a Roman denarius, was insufficient to feed a family and had to be supplemented by the labour of women and children who received significantly less than the male wage (Schottroff, 2006). Hence, the day labourers formed an extremely vulnerable group. There is evidence that landowners tended to be more concerned about the health of their slaves than of these labourers (Schottroff, 2006), and there was no certainty that a day labourer would be given employment on any particular day. The landowners were in the positions of power. This is the context for the Parable of the Labourers (Matt 20:1-16) where a landowner gives the same wage to those who worked for a full day and to those who worked only part of the day. Since the fittest labourers would be likely to be selected first by the landowners, those who had not been employed by late in the day (20:6-7) are probably the frailest. Their situation would be the most desperate of all the labourers. The parable highlights yet again that God's ways are not the conventional ways of the Roman world. God's graciousness is particularly concerned for the most vulnerable.

The plight of slaves in the Greco-Roman world varied, depending on the status and temperaments of their masters. While some slaves held important roles in their master's business dealings, others were engaged in physical labour. Either way, the slave's work was used for their owner's benefit. Slaves were considered as property, non-persons, and were commonly subjected to physical and sexual abuse (Dowling, 2007).

Several of the Gospel parables presume a master-slave dynamic and the violence and exploitation of slaves is also evident in some of these stories. Luke 12:41-48 (parallel Matt 24:45-51), for instance, shows that male and female slaves are subject to abuse by anyone in a position of power over them, even another slave(12:45). The master punishes the slave who does not follow the master's instructions by dismembering him (12:46). Even the slave who does not know his master's wishes and displeases the master will receive a light beating (12:48). Physical violence is an expected part of the world of slaves (Dowling, 2008). The exploitation of a slave's work is evident in Luke 17:7-9 where a slave who has been labouring in the field is then expected to prepare and serve the meal for the master. The slave is not thanked for doing what is commanded.

The slave's status as nonperson is relevant to a reading of The Parable of the Great Dinner (Luke 14:15-24). In this story we find the host of a great dinner sending out his slave to tell the invited guests that the dinner is ready. When they find excuses not to come, the master sends the slave out again to invite the poor, crippled, blind and lame (14:21). When there is still more room, the slave is sent out yet again to the roads and lanes to compel others to come (14:23). While the main foci of the parable are the abundant hospitality of the host and the poor and the outsiders coming to the dinner rather than those

originally invited, Glancy (2006) makes an observation that many readers of this parable overlook. The slave is not invited. The poorest and most vulnerable of free persons are invited but the slave is not considered as a guest. The slave is a nonperson.

We have seen that some aspects of the slave parables reflect the offensive social structure which allows slaves to be owned by masters. Within this structure, violence and abuse inflicted on slaves is thought to be acceptable because slaves are considered nonpersons. Though the slave parables are aiming to challenge their hearers in their own way, they presume a context of slavery that needs to be critiqued.

Educators also need to be aware that slavery is not just an issue of the past. While it was common practice in biblical times, slavery remains one of the most urgent human rights issues which our world faces today. Human trafficking, for the purposes of sexual exploitation and forced labour, is one of the forms of slavery in our present world, including Australia. When using slave parables in teaching, it is well to be informed about the biblical and modern slave context so that the violence inflicted on slaves in ancient times and today is critiqued and not glossed over or unconsciously reinforced (Dowling 2008).

While some aspects of the gospel parables reinforce slaves' vulnerability and status as nonpersons, there are other aspects which subvert this to a certain extent. The story of the master who sits his slaves down and serves them (Luke 12:37) counters the usual dynamic of master-slave relationships, disrupting the hierarchical structure. In a previous work, I have argued that some unexpected aspects also occur in the Parable of the Pounds (Luke 19:11-27). Here, the master is depicted as extortionate and the third slave exposes his master's practices and refuses to continue the oppression. That the third slave is portrayed as the hero of the parable and the master as the villain counters general expectation (Dowling 2007). The third slave acts as the Lukan Jesus acts to relieve the burdens of the oppressed, modelling the characteristic values of God's reign.

Conclusion

Jesus taught in parables. He used parables to teach about the reign of God and to challenge people to think about God and themselves in new ways. Understanding parables is therefore an ongoing responsibility for teachers of Religious Education in schools and adult education contexts. It is vital that teachers are aware of the confronting and challenging nature of parables, so that students might come to appreciate the power of the parables. Parables should not leave hearers thinking that they are lovely stories. Rather, hearers should be puzzled and having to think further about the meanings. Hearers are challenged to expand their understanding of God's reign and how God promotes fullness of life for all.

Knowledge of the social and cultural contexts encoded in a particular parable is an essential element in understanding the dynamic of that parable. Contemporary biblical scholarship provides insights into these contexts. Identifying the audience whom Jesus targets by telling the parable is also a key aspect. With this knowledge, educators can assist students to understand how the parable would have been confronting or even shocking for Jesus' original audience. Only then is it possible for students to recognise parallel situations within their own contexts to which the parable might speak. When a parable presumes the context of slavery and reinforces the abuse and exploitation of slaves, however, that context must be critiqued so that it is not unwittingly reinforced. This is particularly relevant given the ongoing existence of slavery in our present world.

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CLASSROOM PRACTICE

The Composite Model...Teaching Scripture

http://lapushkarussians.com/teachscripture.com/

The Composite Model was the fruit of many years of research and academic study into the presentation of Scripture in Religious Education in Catholic Primary Schools. It is an independent process which means it can be used regardless of the religious education programme teachers are using.

This website provides not only the structure of the process, but a range of activities which enable pupils to investigate Scripture themselves and come to an interpretation. It also contains links to our own online Bible Dictionary, The Bible Doctor, http://www.thebibledoctor.com/ which teachers and pupils can access to gain information about the places, people, customs and rituals they meet in Scripture.

1. The Composite Model follows a narrative approach to Scripture so you may see a lot of similarity between the way it teaches Scripture and the way you already teach literacy.
2. While the Composite Model can be used for teaching any passage, the website focuses on the Gospels only, simply to limit the possibilities for those beginning the process.
3. All the activities are aimed at a single outcome: to enable pupils to suggest what the author might have been trying to convey. They are not graded to year levels, however, in each section some activities are easier than others. As a general rule, those activities which investigate the writing style of the author require greater literacy skill than those which investigate the events, setting and characters individually. Remember though: you can adapt activities to suit your class, and study of a passage, through these or other similar activities, always precedes interpretation.

The Composite Model is an educational process which contains three consecutive steps.

STEP 1: Prepare to Hear the Word…

Prepare to Hear the Word aims to prepare both the teacher and the pupil so they are ready to work with the chosen Scripture passage.

Preparation of the teacher

Both theorists and practitioners' alike recognise that those who teach Scripture best are those who both know Scripture well and are clear about what they wish their pupils to learn. Prepare to Hear the Word, therefore, begins with the teacher extending their own knowledge of the passage and making decisions about pupils' learning.

Teaching Scripture is like all teaching: it works best when you are prepared! (You may find it helpful to print off this page to use as a checklist.)

1. Find the Gospel passage in your next topic. Look it up in the Bible or online. Check that the reference that has been cited in your programme includes the whole passage. If it does not, write down the reference for the whole passage: beginning, middle and end.
2. Fill in the reference for the passage on the planning sheet.
3. Read the passage slowly and carefully… with a pen! Underline or note all of the literary and historical features of the passage. This is called a close reading: your pupils will be asked to do one before they study the passage. A close reading is intended to identify historical and literary features which may need explanation.
4. Ask yourself:
   - Can I tell the genre of this passage? (It is most likely to be a narrative or a recount.)
   - Do I know the words, places, roles and customs mentioned in this passage well enough to be able to explain them to my pupils? (If you do not, use The Bible Doctor to look them up.)
5. Decide:
   - What area of study do I want my pupils to focus on before I ask them to suggest what the author might have been trying to say; the character/s, the setting/s, the events, the author's writing style? Indicate the area you select on the planning sheet.
   - How will I introduce this passage to pupils (Bible, IWB or Hard Copy)? Mark this on the planning sheet.
6. Move to *Hear and Encounter the Word*. Choose the activities which match the area you have decided to study. Choose the interpretation activities you wish to use. Print off the activities if you need to and write the names of the activities on the planning sheet.
7. Move to *Respond to the Word*. Choose the way you wish your pupils to respond to their learning: in prayer or in action (or both). Choose the activities you wish to use. Write the names of the activities on the planning sheet.

   One final task:
   How do you need to prepare your pupils before they Hear and Encounter the Word?
   Go back to Prepare to Hear the Word and decide what your pupils need to know or do before they undertake the activities you have chosen.

Preparation of pupils

Just as teachers who know something about a passage teach it better, pupils who know something about a passage understand and interpret it better. Once teachers are themselves prepared, they are asked what preparation their pupils require in order to engage effectively with the selected activities.

At its most basic level preparation of pupils might simply be identifying the genre of the passage for them, or the meaning of difficult words. At a more advanced level, preparation might include providing pupils with an explanation of the cultural or religious practices a passage mentions or inviting them to consider the literary features or techniques the author uses to convey their message to their audience.

You have now prepared yourself by learning about the passage, deciding what area pupils will investigate and choosing activities. You must now decide how you will prepare your pupils.

The question is: What do I need to give my pupils before I give them the passage.

The key word here is enough. Don't give them so much that there is nothing left for them to investigate themselves, don't give them too little so that they won't understand what the author is trying to say.

Your clue will be to leave 'untouched' the area you decided you would focus on. That is; if you want pupils to investigate the characters, think about what they need to know about the language, setting and events. If you want pupils to focus on the events, perhaps alert them to the setting and the characters they will meet.

Make your decision based on what you what you want your pupils to investigate for themselves and then make a professional judgement about what they need.

These questions might help you consider what you could provide to help prepare your pupils.

- Do pupils need to know who wrote this passage? Would it help if you recalled other passages the author had written?
- Do pupils need to know where this passage happens in the context of the author's whole gospel
  - Before Jesus begins his mission?
  - In the north around Galilee?
  - On the road to Jerusalem?
  - In Jerusalem before trial, death and resurrection?
  - After the resurrection?
- Do pupils need to know the genre of the passage or will it be obvious to them?
- Do pupils need to know more about where the passage is set geographically?
- Do pupils need to know about any words, roles or practises they will hear?

After you have decided what information you will give pupils before they even see the passage, write it on the planning sheet in Prepare to Hear the Word.

Your Planning Sheet should now be complete. You are now ready to Teach Scripture!

STEP 2: Hear and Encounter the Word

Hear and Encounter the Word brings pupils into direct contact with the chosen passage so that they can first learn about it and, then, from it.

Pupils may Hear the Word by having it read or told to them, provided on an IWB or by being directed to it in a Bible.

Regardless of how pupils Hear the Word, a close reading of the passage (see example below) is the first of the activities through which pupils encounter the many aspects which make up its whole.

Other activities focus on the characters, setting or events of a passage as well as its writing style.

Once pupils have studied the passage, they are asked to suggest both what the author was trying to convey and what it might mean for us today. Study of a passage **always** precedes interpretation of it.

STEP 3: Respond to the Word

Respond to the Word completes the process by asking pupils 'So what?' This section takes pupils from the realm of education into the realm of invitation, where knowledge of the story of Christian faith transforms and informs our perception of ourselves, the world and the God who is with us.

Pupils may respond to their study of Scripture by:

- Extending their learning
- Bringing the passage to prayer
- Actively doing something.

The Composite Model was designed to addresses the following theological and educational principles.

1. Scripture should be taught and not simply used as the instrument of the curriculum topic or theme. It should be presented in a manner which does not limit its interpretation to the theme of the topic.
2. The presentation of Scripture should enable pupils to make a valid interpretation. It should be in keeping with the principles articulated in Church documents.
   - Passages should be presented whole
   - The genre of the passage should be identified
   - The historical and literary features of a passage should be acknowledged and respected
   - Individual authors works should be kept distinct
   - Fidelity to the passage should be of paramount importance
3. One of the aims of religious education should be to educate and skill pupils about Scripture so that they can access it themselves. Pupils should, therefore, have contact with the actual author's words.
4. Examination of a passage should always precede its interpretation.
5. Teachers who themselves understand the passage they are asked to teach, teach Scripture best.

Close Reading...

Pius XII asked those who work with Scripture to use the fruits of 'history, archaeology, ethnology and the other sciences' to transport themselves back into the world of the Bible so they could understand it better. A close reading (sometimes called a careful reading or more formally exegesis) enables this.

A close reading occurs when you read a passage with the intention of noting the many historical and literary features the passage contains. Some Biblical scholars liken a close reading to examining a crime scene: desire to understand means you search deliberately and carefully to find evidence of both the historical nature of the passage and the literary techniques the author has used. As with a crime scene, a close reading uncovers 'evidence', which can be researched and learned about before decisions are made about meaning.

A close reading requires you to have in front of you a copy of the passage you can write on, and a marker. (You could do one with your class on the IWB)

Read through the passage slowly and carefully, highlighting or underlining all the historical or cultural references it contains (i.e. anything that shows that this passage is set in an ancient place and time: names, places, roles, religious customs, rituals, titles...

Be careful you include terms which have an equivalent now. In the example below, the words 'teacher' and 'priest' do not refer to teachers and priests as we know them now.

Then, read the passage again, this time looking for literary features:

- repetition,
- use of hyperbole (deliberate exaggeration)
- metaphorical language
- literary techniques (simile and metaphor for example)
- contrasting characters
- sandwiching (where one passages is 'sandwiched' between another
- dialogue (who speaks and what they say)
- quotes ...

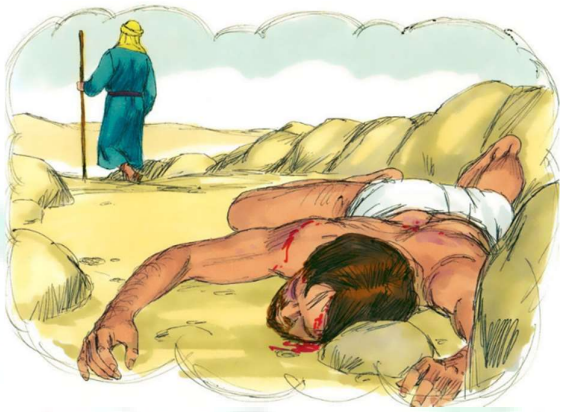
Once your passage is covered in lines or colour, ask yourself:

Do I understand this 'evidence' enough so that I could draw meaning from this passage?

Do I understand it enough so that I could explain it to my pupils so they can find what the author - who lived in an ancient time and place and who spoke to people with very different experiences from us - was trying to say?

If not, what do I (or 'we') need to learn about before we interpret this passage?

Test yourself with the passage below....can you explain the underlined terms in The Good Samaritan? REMEMBER!!! Your best friend in this exercise will be the Bible Doctor, our online Bible dictionary.



The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he said, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' He said to him, 'What is written in the law? What do you read there?' He answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.' And he said to him, 'You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.'

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour?' Jesus replied, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. 31Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend." 36Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?' 37He said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'

ARTISTS' CORNER

Leonardo da Vinci visits 2019

(The Economist, The World in 2019)

A newly discovered volume of Leonardo's journal written a few months before his death on May 2nd 1519, records his visit to the year 2019, as the quest of a mysterious time-traveller

Leonardo da Vinci Renaissance man NEW YORK, PALO ALTO, PARIS AND SHANGHAI

In rivers, the water you touch is the last of what has passed, and the first of that which comes: so with time present. But today a strange visitor appeared suddenly in my studio, as from a large bubble in the air, inhabiting another time, he finds amusement in conveying people to eras distant from their own, but in secret because this is forbidden by his own people. He offered to transport me 500 years into the future provided I preserve his secret. The natural desire of good men being knowledge, I agreed to his proposal.

At my host's suggestion I must wear simple clothing. He will give out that I am a philosopher who, living in seclusion for many years, prefers not to speak. He has given me a rectangle of black glass and a kind of brooch worn on the ear that will render the speech of those around me into my own tongue. If I clutch this glass rectangle closely at all times, I am told, my appearance will not seem unusual.

By strange means that carry men instantaneously to various parts of the world without motion my host has taken me to Shanghai, a city far to the east, in Cathay, and to New York a city far to the west in the lands named after Amerigo Vespucci. There are buildings of enormous height made of glass seemingly unsupported by stone or brick. Some are adorned with moving coloured lights that create the illusion of a window to another place.

Far above these buildings soar many flying machines, conveying people and goods. Unlike the ones I have seen in my dreams, their wings do not move like those of a bird or a butterfly, but are fixed. The motive power is derived from a kind of fluid, similar to naphtha. The machines must be fed with this fluid, as a lamp is fed with oil, when they return to the ground.

In the roads between the buildings of these great cities are armoured carriages in countless numbers that propel themselves without the use of horses. These carriages too must be fed with the naphtha fluid. The parts that are not armoured in metal plate are made of a strange material that is light and flexible yet strong, and maybe formed in any desired shape or colour, and is also used to make many other objects.

The lights adorning the buildings, and many other things besides, are fed not by the naphtha fluid but by a second fluid, invisible to the eye that can be conducted along metal wires coated in the strange material. By means of this fluid ovens can be heated without the need for wood or other fuel, and stairways and metal boxes can be made to move, to convey people within buildings. This fluid can also cause the sound of a lute or another instrument, to be greatly increased, so that its music can be heard even by a great multitude gathered together.

But most mysterious to me is a third fluid that flows invisibly through the air and conveys writing and sounds and pictures between the glass rectangles, allowing them to act as windows to other places, and to capture the sight of things more faithfully than any painting. So wondrous is this power that people gaze constantly at their glass rectangles, and at the images therein. Painting is no longer the sole

imitator of all the visible works of nature, and just as the mirror is the master of painting, so too is this kind of mirror, which fixes images in place.

We visit the land of California, to observe the flight of a machine that lifts objects into the sky on a pillar of fire and then returns to the ground; and those objects it carries are thrown around the Earth so that they stay aloft and circle its globe, as the Moon does. The inventor of these machines has also created self-propelling carriages capable of moving without human supervision. I wish to meet this man but my host fears he would recognise me. For it seems my name and appearance are known even in this time and my works are preserved.

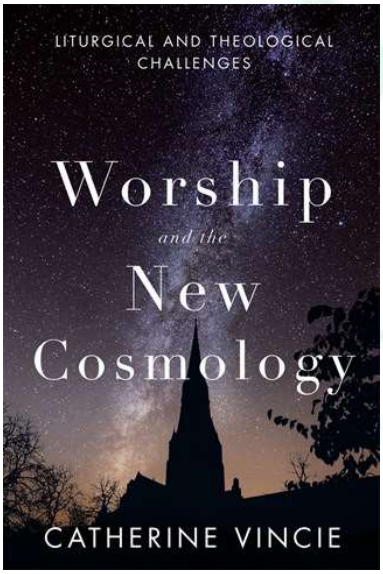
It pleases me that many of my ideas have been brought to completion using materials and methods unknown in my time, including a flying machine held aloft by rotating wings, and an apparatus by which a man can breathe underwater. It pleases me also that my paintings afford much satisfaction to mankind. Before returning me to my own time, my host takes me to Paris, to see my portrait of La Gioconda hanging in a place of honour. That reminds me: I really must finish it.

As transcribed and translated by Tom Standage, deputy editor, The Economist .

BOOK REVIEW

Worship and the New Cosmology

(Catherine Vincie. 2014. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 125 pages)



PRODUCT DETAILS
ISBN: 9780814682722, 8272
eISBN: 9780814682975, E8297

What is the Christian response to developments in the hard sciences? What do discoveries at the macro and micro levels have to say about Christian theology, about a theology of God, Christology, pneumatology, and creation? How do the developments in systematic theology that do take the advances in cosmology and the New Sciences seriously come to bear on our worship life?

These are the questions addressed in *Worship and the New Cosmology*. It endeavors to bring cosmology and the New Sciences into dialogue with developments in systematic and sacramental theology. This book also suggests some ways in which these developments might appear in our worship.

Vincie's study seeks to reduce the cognitive dissonance between our scientifically informed everyday lives and our life of faith.

Catherine Vincie, RSHM, is professor of sacramental and liturgical theology at Aquinas Institute of Theology in St. Louis, Missouri, and past president of the North American Academy of Liturgy. She has published numerous articles on topics including initiation, Eucharist, liturgy and justice, and preaching. She is the author of Celebrating Divine Mystery: A Primer in Liturgical Theology *published by Liturgical Press.*

WEBSITE

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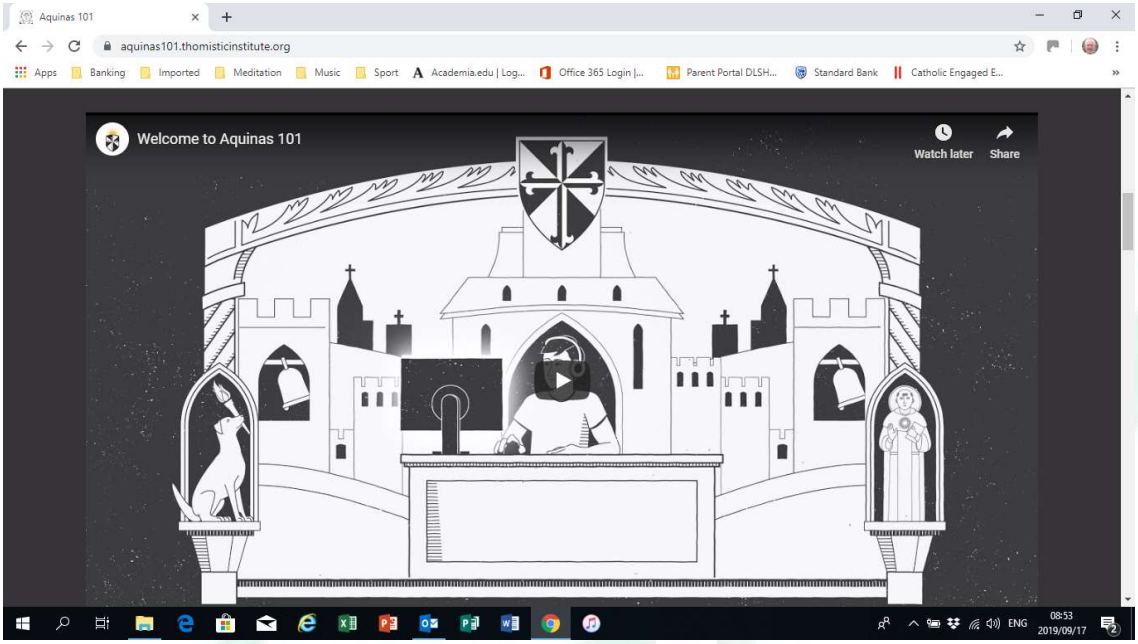


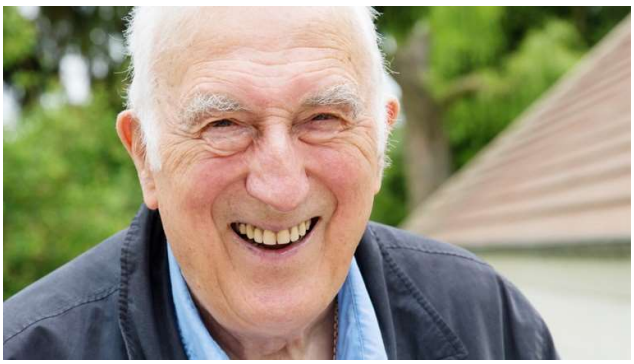
Aquinas 101 is a series of free video courses from the Thomistic Institute that help you to engage life's most urgent philosophical and theological questions with the wisdom of St. Thomas Aquinas. In the end, you'll be able to read Aquinas on his own terms and to master the essentials of his thought.

Enrolling in a video course is easy - and it will always be free! We'll send you two e-mails a week with everything you need. So scroll to enroll, and let's get started!

Aquinas 101 is a project of the Thomistic Institute, located in Washington, DC. The Thomistic Institute exists to promote Catholic truth in our contemporary world by strengthening the intellectual formation of Christians at universities, in the Church, and in the wider public square. The thought of St. Thomas Aquinas, the Universal Doctor of the Church, is our touchstone.

NEWS

Jean Vanier (1928-2019)



Our differences are not a threat but a treasure.

Jean Vanier, the Founder of *L'Arche*, who died in Paris on May 7th, wrote those words; but their truth is far from self-evident. One might question whether those words are simply a nice-sounding poetics or whether they contain an actual truth. Our differences, in fact, are often a threat.

Moreover, it's one thing to mouth those words; it's quite another thing to have the moral

authority to speak them. Few have that authority. Jean Vanier did. His whole life and work testify to the fact that our differences can indeed be a treasure and can, in the end, be that precise element of community that serves up for us the particular grace we need.

Vanier saw differences, whether of faith, religion, culture, language, gender, ideology, or genetic endowment, as graces to enrich a community rather than as threats to its unity. And while he gave witness to this in all aspects of his life, he was of course best known for how he appropriated the differences that have, seemingly since forever, separated people with intellectual disabilities from the rest of the community, isolating them, assigning them second-class status, and depriving the rest of us of the unique grace they bring. Someone once described Vanier as initiating a new Copernican revolution in that, prior to him, we used to think of our service to the poor one-sidedly, we give to them. Now we recognize our former arrogance and naiveté, the poor bring a great service to us.

One of the persons who gave a powerful personal testimony to that was Henri Nouwen, the renowned spiritual writer. Tenured at both Yale and Harvard, an immensely respected speaker, and a man loved and adulated by a large public, Nouwen, nursing his own disabilities, was for most of his life unable to healthily absorb very much from that immense amount of love that was being bestowed on him and remained deeply insecure within himself, unsure he was loved, until he went to live in one of Vanier's communities, where, living with men and women who were completely unaware of his achievements and his fame and who offered him no adulation, he began for the first time in his life to finally sense his own worth and to feel himself as loved. That great grace came from living with those who were different. We have Jean Vanier to thank for teaching that to the rest of us as well.

I first heard Vanier speak when I was a twenty-two year-old seminarian. For many of my colleagues, he was a spiritual rock-star, but that idolization was a negative for me. I went to hear him with a certain bias: Nobody can be that good! But he was!

Admittedly that's ambiguous. Talent and charisma can seduce us towards selfishness just as easily as invite us towards nobility of soul. Someone can be a powerful speaker without that charisma witnessing at all to that person's human and moral integrity and without that seductiveness inviting anyone to what's more-noble inside him or her. But Vanier's person, message, and charisma, through all his years, suffered from no such ambiguity. The transparency, simplicity, depth, wisdom, and faith that were contained in his person and his word beckoned us only in one direction, that is, towards to all that's *one*, *good*, *true*, and *beautiful*, which are the properties of God. Meeting him made you want, like the disciples in the Gospels, to leave your boats and nets behind and set off on a new, more-radical road. Few persons have that power.

Perhaps the best criterion by which to judge Christian discipleship is look at who's moving downwards, who fits this description of Jesus: "Though he was in the form of God, he did not deem equality with God as something to be grasped at. Rather he emptied himself and took the form of a slave." Jean Vanier was born into a world of privilege, blessed with exceptional parents, a gifted intelligence, a handsome body, enviable educational opportunities, financial security, and a famous name. Those are a lot of gifts for a person to carry and that kind of privilege has more often ruined a life than blessed it. For Jean Vanier, however, these gifts were never something to be grasped at. He emptied himself by immersing himself into the lives of the poor, letting his gifts bless them, even as he received a rich blessing in return. He modeled a true discipleship of Jesus, namely, stepping downward into a second-baptism, immersion into the poor, where community and joy are found. And to this he invited us.

In her poem, *The Leaf and the Cloud*, Mary Oliver wrote: "I will sing for the broken doors of the poor, and for the sorrow of the rich, who are mistaken and lonely." Jean Vanier, through all the years of his life, stepped through the broken doors of the poor and found community and joy there. For him, our differences were not a threat but a treasure.

(Ronald Rolheiser, May 26, 2019)

Vatican doc slams 'gender ideology'

(Cindy Wooden - The Southern Cross, June 19 to June 25, 2019, page 5)

Catholic schools must help parents teach young people that biological sex and gender are naturally fixed at birth and part of God's plan for creation, said the Congregation for Catholic Education.

In a document, the congregation said the Catholic Church and those proposing a looser definition of

gender can find common ground in "a laudable desire to combat all expressions of unjust discrimination", in educating children to respect all people "in their peculiarity and difference", in respecting the "equal dignity of men and women", and in promoting respect for "the values of femininity".

And while great care must be taken to respect and provide care for persons who "live situations of sexual indeterminacy", those who teach in the name of the Church must help young people understand that being created male and masculine or female and feminine is part of God's plan for them.

The document, "Male and Female He Created Them: Towards a Path of Dialogue on the Question of Gender Theory in Education", recognised a distinction between "the ideology of gender", which it said tries to present its theories as "absolute and unquestionable", and the whole field of scientific research on gender, which attempts to understand the ways sexual difference is lived out in various cultures.

While claiming to promote individual freedom and respect for the rights of each person, the document said, those who see gender as a personal choice or discovery unconnected to biological sex are, in fact, promoting a vision of the human person that is "opposed to faith and right reason".

"The Christian vision of anthropology sees sexuality as a fundamental component of one's personhood," the document said.

"It is one of its modes of being, of manifesting itself, communicating with others, and of feeling, expressing and living human love."

The document insisted that modern gender ideology and the idea that one chooses or discovers his or her gender go against nature by arguing that "the only thing that matters in personal relationships is the affection between the individuals involved, irrespective of sexual difference or procreation, which would be seen as irrelevant in the formation of families".

The theories, it said, deny "the reciprocity and complementarity of male-female relations" as well as "the procreative end of sexuality".

When the "physiological complementarity of male-female sexual difference" is removed, it said, procreation is no longer a natural process. Instead, recourse must be taken to in vitro fertilisation or surrogacy, with the risk of "the reduction of the baby to an object in the hands of science and technology."

#ClimateStrike: 'You'll die of old age. I'll die of climate change,' SA protesters warn

(Sandisiwe Shoba, Zoë Postman, Thamsanqa Mbovane and Masixole Feni, GroundUp)

In cities across South Africa people protested on Friday to raise awareness of climate change, reports Ground Up.

The Global Climate Strike, or #ClimateStrike, runs until September 27. The global protests come ahead of the UN Climate Action Summit, which is taking place in New York.

According to a website set up to popularise the protests: "This week will be historic. In over 150 countries, people are stepping up to support young climate strikers and demand an end to the age of fossil fuels. The climate crisis won't wait, so neither will we."

Cape Town

More than 1 000 people, mostly school pupils and university students, marched to Parliament in Cape Town. The march was organised by youth-led advocacy group African Climate Alliance (ACA).

Ruby Sampson, 18, the founder and leader of the Youth and Pan African wing of the ACA, said she was disappointed President Cyril Ramaphosa was not attending the UN summit. "We want Ramaphosa to declare a climate emergency."

An energetic crowd of children, some wearing school uniforms, marched from Keizersgracht (Hanover) Street in the city centre to the gates of Parliament, where a programme of speeches and performances were held as well as the handover of a memorandum.

Phindile Maxiti, the City of Cape Town mayco member for energy and climate change who addressed the crowd, said the City supported the strike and was "at the forefront of sustainability".

"As a local council, we will submit your memorandum to the president," added Maxiti who also described Cape Town as a water-wise city, following the drought.

ACA member Ayakha Melithafa, 17, said climate change was not just a white issue. "I see how much it affects people of colour. Our people don't know how to vocalise their issues when it comes to climate change. I'm hoping to be a voice for the voiceless."

"You'll die of old age. I'll die of climate change," read a banner held up by a young person.

People attended from across the city, including Mfuleni, Khayelitsha, Delft and the southern suburbs. Some held up placards that read: "Climate change education in classrooms" and "Go green to breathe clean".

Their list of demands included:

- The government must declare a climate emergency.
- South Africa must end all new coal, gas and oil mining projects.
- The country must be run with 100% renewable energy by 2030.
- Climate change education must become a mandatory part of school curricula.

Johannesburg

"Act now or there will be hell and high water."

This was written on one of the many placards at the climate march in central Johannesburg where hundreds of people, led by the youth, marched from Pieter Roos Park to the Gauteng legislature on Friday morning.

Other placards read: "F**k carbon capitalism", "Corrupt greed = climate crisis", "Eco-socialism now" and "Climate justice is social justice".

The protesters demanded the government should declare a climate emergency and ensure a just transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy that protected workers and communities.

They also demanded that President Cyril Ramaphosa should attend the Global Climate Action Summit in New York and commit to decreasing emissions and transitioning away from coal at the summit.

The march was organised and supported by various civil society organisations, community groups and trade unions.

Sera Farista, 15, said the government does not see the youth as a threat or as powerful and "that's unfortunate because we are the future of this world".

She added the floods in Mozambique, drought in Cape Town and other natural disasters around the world were linked to climate change.

"Our planet is dying and our future is fading with it," said Farista.

Society is facing racism, inequality, poverty and global warming and there was a lack of food and water security, yet people ignored those issues because it was too political, she added. "Taking that stance is exercising your privilege because those issues don't affect you."

Tebogo Mokgope from Extinction Rebellion said: "It is us, the poor, who will be the first ones to suffer [in the climate crisis]." He added once politicians were elected into power, they listened to "corporate greed" instead of the needs of people who put them in power.

He urged the government to put the needs of people before profits.

Priscilla Masepe, a member of the Gauteng legislature, collected and signed the memorandum. She said she would send it to Ramaphosa's office so that he could discuss the issues with his counterparts at the Global Climate Action Summit.

She said she would try to get a response after the summit.

Port Elizabeth

Dozens of people gathered outside the Port Elizabeth City Hall. They called on the government to take decisive action against the accumulation of profits by businesses that pollute the environment.

Participating organisations included Live Green, Cultural Hellenville House of Rastafarians, One Million Jobs, Khanyisa Education Trust, the Rural Women's Assembly and Transition Township Kwazakhele.

They sang, carried placards, and sat on Vuyisile Mini Square.

Protest leader Melikhaya Blani said: "It is of paramount importance that we should gather here to convey a message that industries that are around here stick to emission standards."

"Every day, we witness huge emissions of black smoke from the factories within our city. This is the same air that we breathe, that plants need to use to grow," said Mzikazi Nkata, the secretary of the South African Federation of Trade Unions in Nelson Mandela Bay.

"We are in danger due to climate change. It puts huge pressure on our communities by making it more difficult to grow food, to obtain clean water, to keep livestock," she added.

Another activist, Nicole Collier-Naidoo, said she was representing a small group called Climate Awareness PE.

"The climate crisis is a huge threat to our people, yet we are not seeing it discussed as a crisis in the media. We want our government to treat this as the emergency that it is, and inform its citizens about how we are going to adapt to climate change."

Collier-Naidoo added humans had released a huge amount of carbon dioxide, saying this trapped heat within our atmosphere and had caused rapid heating of our world.

"If we continue at this rate, we humans will eventually go extinct too. We are part of nature and we depend on the work that all these ecosystems do for us. When they are destroyed, our species will eventually follow," she said.

To qualify for CPTD points, answer the following questions.

The Power of Parables for Religious Education

TRUE/FALSE (Tick the correct box) According to the author of this article or those quoted

	STATEMENT	TRUE	FALSE
1	Most people are aware of the subversive character of parables.		
2	The parable leaves its hearers puzzled and having to tease out the implications of what they have heard.		
3	The potential for an informed engagement with a parable in a religious education context will depend largely upon the educator's familiarity with the cultural context encoded in the parable.		
4	Parables are comforting rather than confronting stories.		
5	Jesus challenges the stereotypes that are held by his audience.		
6	Gendered pairs of stories are often found in the Gospel of Luke.		
7	In the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) God's favour lay with the rich man rather than the beggar, Lazarus.		
8	God's graciousness is particularly concerned for the most vulnerable.		
9	Educators need to be aware that slavery is just an issue of the past.		
10	Hearers of the parables should not be puzzled and having to think further about their meanings.		

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