



EDITORIAL

Welcome to the 4th issue of *Roots & Wings* for 2020. This publication, sent electronically free of charge to members of the Professional Society, appears quarterly. It contains regular features as indicated in the Contents table alongside.

In this and subsequent issues we will feature some of the theory and practice presented at the Second International Conference on Catholic Religious Education held recently in Melbourne, Australia from 11-14 February 2020. The conference was co-hosted by the Australian Catholic University and Catholic Education Melbourne.



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

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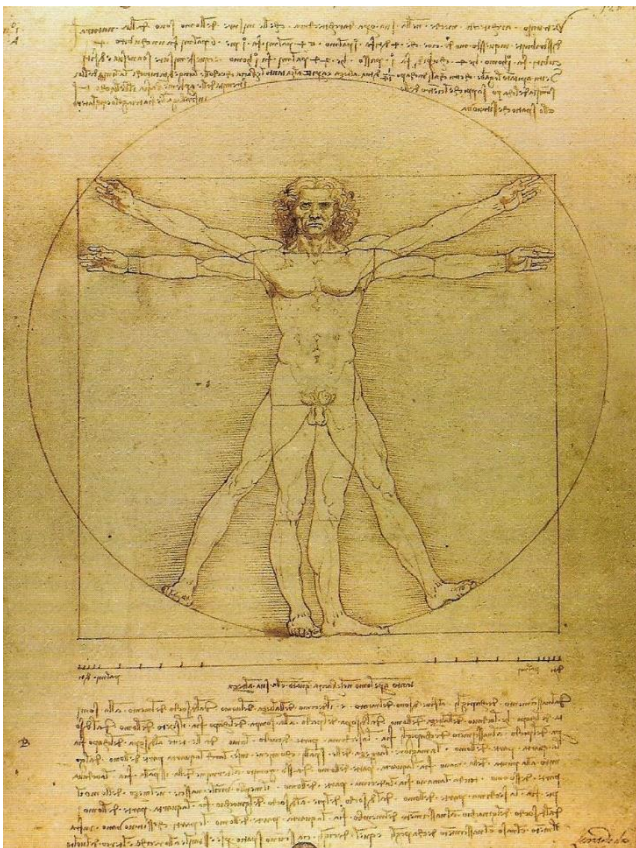
REFLECTION

Truth, Goodness and Beauty

What does it mean to be human? Truth, goodness and beauty are three keys to reach the essence of the mystery of our common humanity

Rev. Prof. Callum D. Scott, Archdiocese of Pretoria and University of South Africa

THE NATURAL UNIQUENESS OF BEING HUMAN.



The proportions of the human body - Leonardo Da Vinci 1490

Eight billion truthful and valid responses may be the result of reflecting on what it is to “be human”. Every conscious person—and sometimes even the unconscious—has an awareness of its embodied self. The complexity of human internal (the cognitive, emotional, spiritual dimensions) and external (basic needs, relational, aesthetic, professional) life, and of each of these facet’s interrelatedness, is simply, mind-bogglingly staggering. Despite the unique human experience of each person, though, there are experiences that—at the most basic level—give the human being a dis-

tinctive and collective sense of being a human being. After all, if a living being has experience of its consciousness, then, “... there is something it is like to be that organism” (Nagel 1974: 436).

In the sometimes exclusionist tradition of the Western intellectual tradition, the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle considered that it was the cognitive ability of the human that separated our species from all others: “... [I]n all other animals other than man [*sic*] there is no thinking or calculation” (*On the soul*, III, 4 & 10). It is not enough to argue that thought separates the human being from non-human animals. Even “lower order” animals, such as rodents and birds, display signs of “minimal rationality”, which must be the product of thought processes (Dretske 2006: 109, 112-114). Further, there is evidence of consequential discernment and deductive logic in some animals (Dennett 2006: 118; Bermúdez 2006: 129, 130). However, as human beings—without conscious experience of what it is to bear the consciousness of any animal apart from ourselves—we cannot extrapolate to the conscious experience of any other animal (Nagel 1974: 438). When it comes to our own species, though, the thinking human can reach beyond itself to the familiarity of other humans’ consciousness which shines through their eyes as they are beheld. Identification with and empathy for the other are essential moral orientations. But, as much as it is difficult to reach the embodied experience of another human (i.e. to fully empathise), it is more impenetrable to guess the conscious experience of a being belonging to a different species.

If thinking does contribute to the “human-ness” of the human, the French Jesuit palaeontologist, Fr Pierre Teilhard de Char-

din, considered an aspect of human cognition as important. Teilhard proposed the singular feature to be *reflection*. Out of the evolutionary paradigm of the development of consciousness through greater organic complexification, Teilhard describes the human being as the pinnacle of self-reflection:

“... [R]eflection... is the power acquired by a consciousness of turning in on itself and taking possession of itself... *[emboldened by the ability]* no longer only to know something—but to know itself; no longer only to know, but to know that it knows” (2003: 110).

In the midst of the diversity of the human population, the foundational common feature between all people rests in our species’ capability to think about thought, to refer back, to muse over memories, to plan, to seek meaning, truth, beauty and goodness. Reflection is the product of billions of years of cosmic evolution. For the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (citing Vatican II’s *Gaudium et Spes*, §356), reflection characterises the human: “Of all visible creatures only man *[sic]* is ‘able to know and love his *[sic]* creator’... he *[sic]* alone is called to share, by knowledge and love, in God’s own life.”

THE INTRICACY OF A HUMAN BEING.

Questioning the manner in which human existence is evident, gives space for the theological argument that the human being shares in the Divine Life. More than any other animal—as far as we are best able to grasp—she is able to be the awareness of her own existence in the world, space and time, to make proposals around her reality, and to discern the most suitable path for her to tread for survival. Even more significantly, the human is reflective, that is, adept at thinking over her thoughts, to seek meaning in life, and to find what is valuable. This innate reflective ability has contributed to the development of an intricate web of complex dimensions, intimately and collectively bound up, that define what it means to be human.

BEING HUMAN AS A RELIGIOUS BEING: TRUTH.

It is the case that some behaviours are shared between human and non-human animals. For example, ritual is performed by non-human animals at significant moments in their lives: magpie birds, gorillas, elephants, foxes, and wolves, all perform predictably when faced with the death of another of their species (Schaefer 2012: s182, s183). Chimpanzees dance in places of profound beauty, for example, at the Kakombe Valley waterfall in Tanzania (2012: s183). It is likely that these acts are responses to stimuli of the inner life of the animals. However, there is no anthropic-like expression made by these animals about the reasons behind their actions. We have no evidence, of say, a theological account of the afterlife or an awareness of a creative agent when faced with the awe of sheer beauty. Non-human animals do not have the ability to reflect upon the milieu within which they find themselves, to question their reason for being, or to contemplate the mystery of being. However, the human animal, due to reflection, is fundamentally a religious animal—a species which could be called “*Homo religiosus*” (i.e. “religious man” *[sic]*), as Mircea Eliade called us:

“... *[H]omo religiosus* always believes that there is an absolute reality, the sacred, which transcends this world but manifests itself in this world, thereby sanctifying it and making it real. He *[sic]* further believes that life has a sacred origin” (Eliade 1957: 202).

The frequency of human organised religion, around 84% of the world’s population, appears to correlate with Eliade’s proposal about our nature (Vasile 2013: 658). Without critiquing the veracity of religious beliefs and experience, there is a biological—thus, natural—argument for this shared dimension of the human experience from those who study the cognitive science of religion: “the natural architecture of the human mind” (Sztajer 2013: 18). Set within the context of the human community, the human being’s cognitive structure coupled with its societal and cultural links,

contribute to the development of a unique experience (Vasile 2013: 661). The inborn human drive is to peer out into the magnitude of the cosmos beholding the Southern Cross or the Morning Star, or to gaze at the wonder of the beauty of a tiny *Erica* flower, and to intensely wonder. Through the senses and the mind, evolutionarily developed under the pressure of survival, the human's being is placed in awe; but more than just peering, the *homo religiosus* glimpses beyond the world seen, to ponder cause, end, life, death, suffering, as it makes every attempt to make sense of its reality.

BEING HUMAN AS A MORAL BEING: GOODNESS.

For many religious believers, faith is the source of their moral codes. From the perspective of Catholic Christianity, this is no different: having being "in the image and likeness of God" bears the consequence that the believer should freely attempt to live up to his divinely created dignity (*Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC]*, §1700). The human being is a "moral being" precisely because of the freedom that he has to act or to respond to any particular stimulus or situation that he finds himself in, for the act—freely chosen—can be measured by the good or harm that it brings about to the self and to others (§1749).

The human being often makes the conscious choice to transcend his evolutionary bounds. For although all animals—human and non-human—are engaged in a natural struggle to remain alive, human animals have the freedom to choose an alternative path, what could be called the "path of morality". The evolutionist Charles Darwin argued that "... each organic being... has to struggle for life" (1861: 76). That the self-reflectively conscious human can choose to struggle whilst affording another being the possibility to flourish—by giving dignity away and in so doing claiming his own dignity back because of his moral action—is a marked difference between non-human and human animals. The German philosopher Martin Heidegger described this self-sacrifice as a moral service that the human being's uniqueness should offer all beings:

"Man [*sic*] is the shepherd of Being. Man [*sic*] loses nothing in this 'less'; rather, he gains in that he attains the truth of Being. He gains the essential poverty of the shepherd, whose dignity consists in being called by Being itself into the preservation of Being's truth" (1993: 167).

By the human being reclaiming his dignity in acting with dignity toward another, so recognizing other humans innate worth, the person acts with freedom "... to love and to do what is good..." (*CCC*, §1776). God urges the human being through his agency—the free ability to act upon stimuli—in consonance with the cognitive ability to consciously reflect upon the potential outcomes of actions and behaviour, and to act in accordance with this reflective discernment (*CCC*, §1776; Kärkkäinen 2015: 249).

BEING HUMAN AS AN AESTHETIC BEING: BEAUTY.

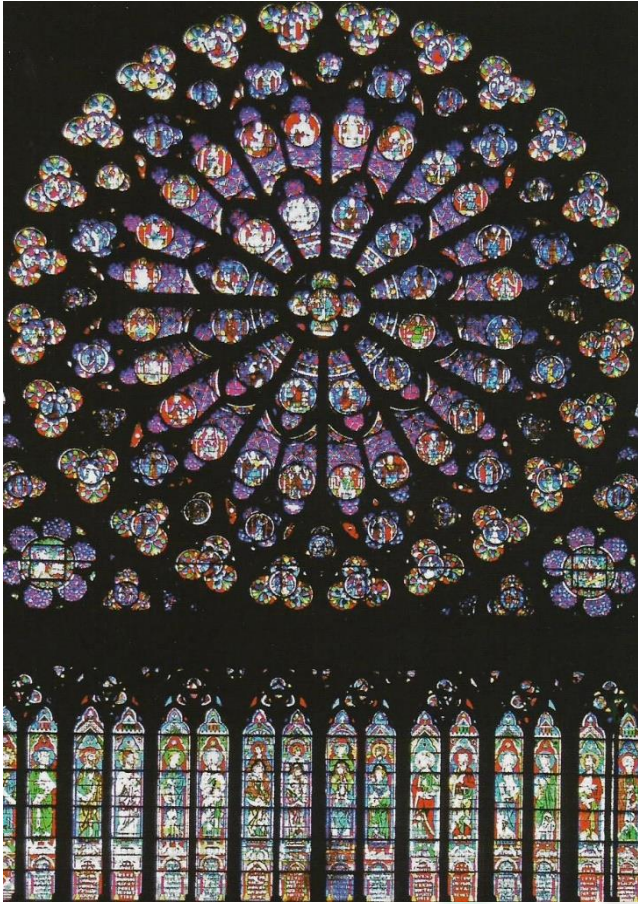
A further way of being particularly human is through the crafting and appreciation of aesthetic beauty. Writing to artists in 1999, Pope St John Paul II compared the feeling of the artist considering his/her artwork to God being caught up in the sheer splendour of His creation. The artist, though, does not create. That which the artist uses to mould his/her creativity is the pure gift of the Creator. In his poem, *Pied beauty*, the Jesuit Fr Gerard Manley Hopkins considers the Source of beauty (as he crafts another beautiful thing by the words given to him by the Creator):

"All things counter, original, spare,
strange;
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows
how?)
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle,
dim;
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past
change: Praise him"

(Hopkins 2004: 30).

As the human reflects upon words, musical notation, paints or wood or stone, the potential for beauty to be crafted out of the

already beautifully created 'raw substance' of the Creator's action is revealed—and then, out of human reflection,



The rose window of Notre Dame Cathedral

more beauty is brought forth. From the earliest rock art paintings, to contemporary compositions that win Grammy Awards, or the preschool child finger-painting and the grandmother knitting a jersey for her grandchild, the crafting spirit of the human nobly stands out as a testament to the interior human desire—brought forth through reflection—for the experience of beauty. Few can express this better than (the surely future Church Father) Pope Benedict XVI (2006):

“The way of beauty replies to the intimate desire for happiness that resides in the heart of every person. Opening infinite horizons, it prompts the human person to push outside of himself *[sic]*,

from the routine of the ephemeral passing instant, to the Transcendent and Mystery, and seek, as the final goal of the ultimate quest for wellbeing and total nostalgia, this original beauty which is God Himself, creator of all created beauty.”

On the evening of 15 April 2019, a terrible fire ravaged the Cathedral of Notre-Dame de Paris. Many people around the world were captivated by newscasts that broadcast live video of the devastation. I would posit that what kept the attention of audiences was not so much that a place of worship was burning or that an eight-hundred-year-old building was being destroyed. Rather, concentration was held because of the ruin to one of the world's most beautiful buildings, a treasure trove of art and architecture, through which an essential part of the human spirit had shone forth for so very long. To walk in Notre-Dame, was to be overwhelmed by magnificence. To gaze up at its rose windows, to experience the splendour of God's creation made real through the skills of master-craftspeople. The human drive to beauty causes the experience of pain when faced with the wreckage of beauty. A world without beauty would lack being human.

A LESSER EXPERIENCE.

It is limiting and short-sighted to define the fullness of what it is to “be human” through the three simple words of “truth”, “goodness”, and “beauty”. The human experience is mottled. There are other aspects of our species' experiences that could be used. It does seem, though, that a world without faith (through which the human seeks the Truth of God), without morality (by means of which the human returns human dignity given by God), and without beauty (by which the human enjoys the grandeur of God), would be a lesser experience of being human for the human being.

(This article was first published in Worldwide Vol 30 No 1 Dec-Jan 2020. It is reprinted here with permission.)



REFLECTION

You are the “now” of God

*Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Christus Vivit of the Holy Father Francis to Young People and to the Entire People of God (Chapter Three -Part 1)*¹

64. After this brief look at the word of God, we cannot just say that young people are the future of our world. They are its present; even now, they are helping to enrich it. Young people are no longer children. They are at a time of life when they begin to assume a number of responsibilities, sharing alongside adults in the growth of the family, society and the Church. Yet the times are changing, leading us to ask: What are today’s young people really like? What is going on in their lives?

In positive terms

65. The Synod recognized that the members of the Church do not always take the approach of Jesus. Rather than listening to young people attentively, “all too often, there is a tendency to provide prepackaged answers and ready-made solutions, without allowing their real questions to emerge and facing the challenges they pose”. Yet once the Church sets aside narrow preconceptions and listens carefully to the young, this empathy enriches her, for “it allows young people to make their own contribution to the community, helping it to appreciate new sensitivities and to consider new questions”.

66. We adults can often be tempted to list all the problems and failings of today’s young people. Perhaps some will find it praiseworthy that we seem so expert in discerning difficulties and dangers. But what would be the result of such an attitude? Greater distance, less closeness, less mutual assistance.

67. Anyone called to be a parent, pastor or guide to young people must have the farsightedness to appreciate the little flame that continues to burn, the fragile reed that is shaken but not broken (cf. Is 42:3). The ability to discern pathways where others only see walls, to recognize potential where others see only peril. That is how God the Father sees things; he knows how to cherish and nurture the seeds of goodness sown in the hearts of the young. Each young person’s heart should thus be considered “holy ground”, a bearer of seeds of divine life, before which we must “take off our shoes” in order to draw near and enter more deeply into the Mystery.

Many ways of being young



68. We might attempt to draw a picture of young people today, but first I would echo the Synod Fathers, who noted that “the makeup of the Synod brought out the presence and contribution of many different regions of the world, and highlighted the beauty of our being a universal Church. In a context of growing globalization, the Synod Fathers wanted the many differences of contexts and cultures, even within individual countries, to be

¹ This, the first part of Chapter 3, is the final installment of *Christus Vivit* that we will publish in *Roots & Wings*. The document has six further chapters. If you would like to read on you can download the document at http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20190325_christus-vivit.html

duly emphasized. The worlds of today's 'youth' are so many that in some countries one tends to speak of 'young people' in the plural. The age group considered by the Synod (16-29 years) does not represent a homogeneous category, but is composed of distinct groups, each with its own life experience".

69. From a demographic standpoint too, some countries have many young people, whereas others have a very low birth rate. "A further differentiating factor is historical: there are countries and continents of ancient Christian tradition, whose culture is indelibly marked by a memory that cannot be lightly dismissed, while other countries and continents are characterized by other religious traditions, where Christianity is a minority presence - and at times a recent one. In other places still, Christian communities, and young people who belong to them, experience persecution". There is also a need to distinguish young people "with access to the growing opportunities offered by globalization from those who live on the fringes of society or in rural areas, and find themselves excluded or discarded".

70. There are many more differences, which it would be difficult to examine here. In any event, I see no need for a detailed analysis of today's young people, their lives and their experiences. At the same time, since I do not want to neglect that reality, I will briefly summarize some contributions received before the Synod and others that I heard in the course of our meetings.

Some experiences of young people

71. Youth is not something to be analyzed in the abstract. Indeed, "youth" does not exist: there exist only young people, each with the reality of his or her own life. In today's rapidly changing world, many of those lives are exposed to suffering and manipulation.

Living in a world in crisis

72. The Synod Fathers acknowledged with sorrow that "many young people today live in war zones and experience violence in countless different forms: kidnapping, extortion, organized crime, human trafficking, slavery and sexual exploitation, wartime rape, and so forth. Other young people, because of their faith, struggle to find their place in society and endure various kinds of persecution, even murder. Many young people, whether by force or lack of alternatives, live by committing crimes and acts of violence: child soldiers, armed criminal gangs, drug trafficking, terrorism, and so on. This violence destroys many young lives. Abuse and addiction, together with violence and wrongdoing, are some of the reasons that send young people to prison, with a higher incidence in certain ethnic and social groups".

73. Many young people are taken in by ideologies, used and exploited as cannon fodder or a strike force to destroy, terrify or ridicule others. Worse yet, many of them end up as individualists, hostile and distrustful of others; in this way, they become an easy target for the brutal and destructive strategies of political groups or economic powers.

74. "Even more numerous in the world are young people who suffer forms of marginalization and social exclusion for religious, ethnic or economic reasons. Let us not forget the difficult situation of adolescents and young people who become pregnant, the scourge of abortion, the spread of HIV, various forms of addiction (drugs, gambling, pornography and so forth), and the plight of street children without homes, families or economic resources". In the case of women, these situations are doubly painful and difficult.

75. As a Church, may we never fail to weep before these tragedies of our young. May we never become inured to them, for anyone incapable of tears cannot be a mother. We want to weep so that society itself can be more of a mother, so that in place of killing it can learn to give birth, to become a promise of life. We weep when we think of all those young people who have already lost their lives due to poverty and violence, and we ask society to learn to be a caring mother. None of this pain goes away; it stays with us, because the harsh reality can no longer be concealed. The worst thing we can do is adopt that worldly spirit

whose solution is simply to anaesthetize young people with other messages, with other distractions, with trivial pursuits.

76. Perhaps “those of us who have a reasonably comfortable life don’t know how to weep. Some realities in life are only seen with eyes cleansed by tears. I would like each of you to ask yourself this question: Can I weep? Can I weep when I see a child who is starving, on drugs or on the street, homeless, abandoned, mistreated or exploited as a slave by society? Or is my weeping only the self-centred whining of those who cry because they want something else?” Try to learn to weep for all those young people less fortunate than yourselves. Weeping is also an expression of mercy and compassion. If tears do not come, ask the Lord to give you the grace to weep for the sufferings of others. Once you can weep, then you will be able to help others from the heart.



77. At times, the hurt felt by some young people is heart-rending, a pain too deep for words. They can only tell God how much they are suffering, and how hard it is for them to keep going, since they no longer believe in anyone. Yet in that sorrowful plea, the words of Jesus make themselves heard: “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted” (Mt 5:4). Some young men and women were able to move forward because they heard that divine promise. May all young people who are suffering feel the closeness of a Christian community that can reflect those words by its actions, its embrace and its concrete help.

78. It is true that people in power offer some assistance, but often it comes at a high price. In many poor countries, economic aid provided by some richer countries or international agencies is usually tied to the acceptance of Western views of sexuality, marriage, life or social justice. This ideological colonization is especially harmful to the young. We also see how a certain kind of advertising teaches young people to be perpetually dissatisfied and contributes to the throwaway culture, in which young people themselves end up being discarded.

79. Our present-day culture exploits the image of the young. Beauty is associated with a youthful appearance, cosmetic treatments that hide the traces of time. Young bodies are constantly advertised as a means of selling products. The ideal of beauty is youth, but we need to realize that this has very little to do with young people. It only means that adults want to snatch youth for themselves, not that they respect, love and care for young people.

80. Some young people “find family traditions oppressive and they flee from them under the impulse of a globalized culture that at times leaves them without points of reference. In other parts of the world, even more than generational conflict between young people and adults, there is mutual estrangement. Sometimes adults fail, or do not even try, to hand on the basic values of life, or they try to imitate young people, thus inverting the relationship between generations. The relationship between young people and adults thus risks remaining on the affective level, leaving its educational and cultural aspects untouched”. What harm this does to young people, even though some do not notice it! Young people themselves have remarked how enormously difficult this makes the transmission of the faith “in some countries without freedom of speech, where young people are prevented from attending Church”.

(If you would like to read on you can download the document at http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20190325_christus-vivit.html)



TALKING ABOUT RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (CPTD) ²



Reclaiming Contemplation: How to enhance inner experience and personal growth in the RE classroom

(Diane du Val d'Epr mesnil, Universit  Catholique de Louvain)

If you were asked, as you begin to read this article, to set it aside, to take one minute to notice your breathing, to take a few deep, slow breaths, allowing them to flow in and out without effort; if you were asked not to fight ideas, impatience, uneasiness, questions, not to get stuck in them and always come back to the sensation of your breathing; if you were asked to simply allow yourself to be silent for a minute, how would you feel? How does a request for silence and a pause in your daily rhythm affect you in a setting of serious reading? Would you comply or brush it aside to read on?

This is an exercise adapted from Tobin Hart, professor of psychology at the University of West Georgia, a short session at the beginning of a class (Hart, 35) which makes a perfect introduction to the theme of contemplative practices as means to enhance inner experience and personal growth in a religious education classroom environment.

To do so is a huge challenge, as we live in a world where a blank space in our agendas and our free time is considered strange, even scary. Every minute must therefore be filled with images, noise, activity, connectivity. This is even more the case for the youngest generations, who grow up fully connected, with the risk that, with attention being scattered most of the time, torn between the device and the task at hand, it becomes more and more difficult to connect in person and take time for a true interaction, with others or with some deeper layers of the self. Relating to the brief exercise presented at the beginning of the article, breathing is the most

direct, most essential experience we encounter, from second to second, all our life. It's so overwhelmingly important that many traditions relate the breath to the spirit by using the same word for both: *ruah* in Hebrew, *pneuma* in Greek, *chi* in Chinese, *prana* in Sanskrit. But our world is one of breathlessness where work and leisure constantly overlap, where we are permanently doing many things at the same time while thinking still of something else (Copenhaver, 217).

As educators, we know that promoting face-to-face encounters and nurturing an ability for dialogue in the safe space of the classroom, are essential in providing the students with a mental playground (Roebben, 51) for experiencing and communicating about values and the writing of meaningful life stories.

As religious educators, we also know that a rich inner life is the ground, soil and fertilizer for meaningful relations with others or the Other, and that a special, sacred space is necessary to shelter it and help it grow. So how can we introduce silence in the classroom, when its very experience can feel so alien to many, teachers included? Physical silence in quieting the mind, mouths and hearts to better listen, inside and out, but also silence as a metaphor, as a space for imagination, as a royal path to a surplus of meaning in our many worlds.

A preliminary question concerns education itself: our objective as educators is to educate, but to what purposes? Are we educating the young for profession, or for personal and intellectual fulfillment (Owen-Smith, 11)? This is not about a binary

² Read this article for CPTD points. See Page 24.
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choice because both can be pursued, but most often concerns about utility prevail over the integral growth of the person herself. A related issue can be phrased as such: do we want more knowledge, or more wisdom? Both, obviously, but it seems that wisdom, personal and intellectual fulfillment, sensibility even, comes second to accumulation of knowledge, efficiency, utility, performance, all investments that seem to have a better rate of return³. The markets and industries trying to dictate their agenda to the world of secondary and higher education is proof enough of that tendency (Boeve). But what are we in dire need of? To take a vivid example, do our governments need more information about climate change and the urgency of preserving what is left of our respective countries' amazing natural heritage, or just a bit more wisdom to better discern what course of action would be more beneficial to the larger world in the long run, to perceive what is more useful in terms of means and ends? The questions are here open to debate.

In the beginning

Most examples of contemplative practices that come to mind when the subject is raised originate in the East: yoga, meditation, chi kung, mantra recitation, visualizations, silent retreats, to name a few. Although the West seems to have lost connection with contemplation, it is deeply rooted in its culture. Philosophical activity in Ancient Greece wasn't purely an intellectual exercise, and was never separated from practice as such. Even though contemplation was considered the highest activity of the mind, belonging to theoretical activities, it was never far from practice as it concerned the life of mind and its quest to happiness, which could include non-discursive activities (Hadot, 2014, 16). Contem-

plation was therefore a *forma vitae*, intimately linked to the philosopher's way of life and path to inner transformation. The antique notion of *skholè* refers to the conscious abstention of worldly activities (Arendt, 2016) that gave rise to philosophical contemplation, allowing some leisure for learning –hence our schools.

Later on, the Desert Fathers and Christian hermits devoted themselves to contemplation, followed by monastic orders, like the Benedictines, the Cistercians or the Carmelites, who dedicated themselves to silence or emphasized its value. The practice of *lectio divina*, the medieval contemplative four-step method⁴ of approaching sacred texts, focuses on the insights granted by the Holy Spirit during the reading (Utterback, 172). We can also refer to the *Cloud of Unknowing*, the 14th century classic on apophatic contemplative prayer, whose aim is to unite the soul with God by letting go of discursive thoughts, dogma and concepts about Him (Grace, 52).

Let us not omit Ignatian contemplation and spiritual exercises, the latter, according to philosopher Pierre Hadot, being a Christian version of an ancient Greco-Roman tradition corresponding to the Greek *askesis*, linked to Greek Christianity and before that, to the Greek philosophical tradition (2002, 21). Those spiritual exercises were very diverse and included various sets of practices ranging from attention, meditation, remembrance of the good things to the intellectual exercises of research, in-depth examination, reading and listening, to the active exercises of accomplishment of duties, therapy of the passions, cultivation of indifference to indifferent things and self-mastery (Hadot,

³ Contemplative practices can impact positively these traits: "Whereas some degree of stress can focus attention, undue emotional stress can inhibit performance, paralyzing a student's ability to write, answer test questions, or make free throws during a heated basketball game. Basic contemplative skills is extremely well documented to shift the immediate state and

therefore potentially affect performance." (Hart, 31).

⁴ "In its taught form, *lectio divina* has four parts: *lectio*, the reading of the text; *meditatio*, listening to what the text has to say; *oratio*, offering the text as a prayer to God; and *contemplatio*, where the individual simply sits and rest in God and/or the text." (Utterback, 172-173)

2002, 26)⁵. As a matter of fact, attention (*prosoché*), which is the fundamental spiritual attitude of the Stoics, consists in a continuous presence and vigilance of the mind, an ongoing and acute state of awareness, which closely resembles the Buddhist definition of the same term.

Prayer is a major contemplative practice *per se*. This is so patently obvious, but it has become, in my very secularized context at least, so foreign, that we could easily forget to mention it here. The Hesychast Prayer, better known as the Jesus Prayer, makes use of the *formula*, which would be the equivalent of today's mantra (Harris, 53), and aims at union with God in the heart of the meditator, at a level devoid of rational discourse. This practice, which met great success in the Eastern Orthodox Church, is eerily similar to the Tibetan Buddhist practice of Guru Yoga.

Finally, if we want to keep strictly to Christian-inspired contemplative practices, we must remember that their goal is not restricted to the expansion of the self but includes awareness and knowledge of the other/Other, as well as our relationship to God and our neighbours (Anderson, 397). Silence is there to help us make room for relating.

Articulation with the curriculum

A major thing to consider is the following: how to introduce contemplative practices in the RE classroom so that they fit the present curriculum? Indeed, religion classes are very much concerned with content and skills. In the Belgian programs⁶, there is much insistence on “savoir, savoir-faire et savoir-être”, which roughly translates as knowledge, skills (or know-how) and soft-skills (or life skills: literally, “to know how to be”). Those terms refer to contents, competences and attitudes, the latter being about communication, cooperation and related issues, but could in my view easily be extended to contemplative skills.

An example comes to mind. Naropa University in Colorado attaches great importance in the training of mind and the development of contemplative practices. Its program emphasizes three major modes of inquiry, all necessary for a complete contemplative education: “traditional academics, or third-person inquiry; experiential learning, or second-person inquiry; and contemplative, or first-person inquiry” (Owen-Smith, 15).

These categories can be explained in relation to several others (du Val d'Eprenmesnil, 2020). What we naturally do in the space of the classroom is communicate knowledge to the pupils, which relates to transmission – typically third-person inquiry. By the use of transmission, we intend to transfer some content from the teacher to the student, in such a way that they can make use of what they receive to give meaning to things obscure or, in the case of religious education, so they can discover more layers of meaning in their lives. If the students get religious education in the form of religious studies, with an approach *about* religion (Roebben, 152-154), the purpose of transmission will be to teach students about their world and how to better deal with the complexity of religious issues.

More and more though, educators are interested in other paths, by which teachers and students endorse different attitudes. The teacher is no longer the one that has the answer nor holds a position of authority, but the whole class is required to participate in the quest. In this case, the aim is to construct meaning together by the way of dialogical practices, like the work of communities of inquiry or diverse methods of philosophy and theology with children. This type of experiential learning, where the group as a whole is engaged in a quest for meaning and knowledge and everyone is expected to participate in the conversation could amount to Naropa's second-person inquiry.

⁵ Philo, *Quis rerum div. eres*, § 253, and *Leg. Alleg.*, III, § 18. Here the two lists are brought together, and concern certain Hellenistic schools, namely the Stoics.

⁶ I am talking about the French-speaking Community's RE programs, as the ones in Flanders are different.

It's interesting to note that the benefits of such practices are very similar to the ones of contemplative practices: pupils learn to listen to one another, they are more compassionate, and they feel more confident. The practice of communities of inquiry develop a capacity for introspection by training the students to reflect on the ideas and suggestions raised by the group in a dialogue⁷. To take the example of Matthew Lipman's philosophical communities of inquiry, a regular practice of dialogical activities should increase participants' discursive and analytic capacities, as well as their level of empathy and their creativity (194). Values investigation is also a domain related to second-person inquiry, which fits perfectly most religious education curricula⁸.

First-person inquiry is the least present in our educational contexts, even though silence and a capacity to stop and reflect are the soil in which the two others grow, and without which no authentic speech can arise (Panikkar, 117). It amounts to the "natural human capacity of knowing through silence, looking inward, pondering, beholding, and witnessing the contents of our consciousness" (Hart, 29). My personal conviction is that for religious education to be effective and bring extra meaning to students' intellectual and personal lives, you need to address all three dimensions: transmission, experiential learning and contemplation.

Another relevant distinction that can help us articulate practices of silence to the ways of the RE classroom comes from Friedrich Schweitzer. The German professor distinguishes between theology *for* children, *with* children and *of* children (181-183). Third-person inquiry would relate to

theology *for* children, as traditionally understood: the teacher transmits theological, religious or spiritual content to the children. Second-person inquiry, or experiential learning, is about the works of communities of inquiry and diverse dialogical practices, which concerns the categories of theology *with* children and theology of children. The first item has the adult entering a conversation with the children and tackling religious questions together, whereas in theology *of* children, the adult steps aside to let the children embark on their own journey of investigation. I would say that first-person inquiry can belong to the same two categories: contemplation "with children", as adult and pupils embark on the same journey, but also "of children" as what will come out of every child's own, sacred space is deeply personal and stems from her own private experience.

These modes of inquiry are not airtight systems that function independently. They all relate to and support one another, by developing similar capabilities, but also by reinforcement of one another. Patricia Owen-Smith, professor at Emory University, notes that allowing students to pause for careful thought is a requisite for deep learning and meaning-making (39), and citing Barbezat and Bush (2014, p.83), claims that:

"Contemplative and introspective methods are complements to traditional teaching methods [...] [offering] a range of extensions and even transformations for traditional lecture and discussion formats. Rather than abandoning and rejecting abstract, analytical thought, contemplative modes can help students more deeply understand material and can integrate third-person views better into

⁷ A study conducted in Quebec in 2012 among 97 teenagers shows three areas in which dialogical practices had a positive impact on the students' relationships. First, a social aspect: the students think that they are more open-minded and respectful of others' opinions, better listeners and less judgmental; they feel uncomfortable with plain debate where what matters is one's ideas; they notice they can defend their ideas and positions without getting angry or upset. Second, an intellectual dimension: an increase in critical thinking and intellectual ca-

pabilities; a finer ethical judgment; an increased capacity for introspection and examination of their own biases. Third, and not the least, the students can apply what they learnt outside of a classroom environment (Gagnon, Yergeau and Couture).

⁸ For an example of these practices, see du Val d'Epr mesnil (2018a), about an Indian method especially designed to this effect and applicable to the context of the classroom.

their own lives through the examination of their own experience of the material.”

Research has been undertaken to verify these affirmations. David Sable, of Saint Mary’s University (Nova Scotia), provides qualitative and quantitative evidence that some specific practices⁹, when implemented for a whole term, strengthened students’ dispositions for critical thinking: “they began to see how their ideas formed, how others’ ideas formed, and how mindfulness can lead to contextual understanding, improved communication, and a sense of connectedness” (Sable, 2014, p.18). They also noticed an increase in the following: being present, engaging with others and with learning, improving self-confidence and applying what they learnt outside the classroom.

First-person inquiry can also be a fertile ground in which to root experiential learning and dialogical practices. Being fully present to what happens in the classroom in terms of relations, learning or exchanging can be cultivated by sitting in silence for a few minutes, as contemplation makes us more aware of our surroundings, helps put things in perspective, develops empathy and compassion (Owen-Smith, 35), all qualities that, if developed in the RE class, can have an impact on other courses as well. First-person and second-person inquiries cultivate the same traits, and my personal experience shows me that practicing the first greatly enhances the results of the second, like having a community of inquiry preceded by a moment of silence. Only three to five minutes were enough to

improve drastically the quality of the ensuing exchanges¹⁰. It enabled the participants to experiment a form of detachment from the content of their thoughts, feelings and usual patterns of reaction (Hart, 33), that opened up a free space for creative thinking.

Grassroots practices

Most often, religious educators in secondary schools feel they don’t have enough time to teach what the curriculum requires or what they feel the children would need, so five minutes of silence can seem like a waste of precious time. This is the case in the French part of Belgium, where the class is allotted two hours per week (which really amount to an hour and a half), in Catholic schools, but one hour in State schools. More so, different disciplines share the floor: philosophy, humanities, religious studies about non-Christian religions and paths of wisdom, with the many ways in which one can approach the vast Christian heritage and tradition.

Another hindrance is that, too often, we consider that more is better, whether that relates to more documents, more content to teach, more time interacting in the classroom, more devices, more technology, and all the better if “more” means “newer” (Anderson, 392-393). But what is a mental obstacle can turn into an advantage, as well as an environment-friendly practice: no need of sophisticated apparatus, of tablets in schools, not even, in most cases, of paper. Just being fully there in body and

⁹ Including mindfulness meditation; structured contemplation (in two steps, holding an object of contemplation without analyzing: question, image or statement; deepening understanding by allowing a deeper awareness to emerge); writing journals after structured contemplation; journal reading in pairs, as contemplative interaction, by reading, listening and reflecting back (comparing what is read from someone else’s journal to what was written in the journal), then exchanging about it (reflective inquiry), dialogue being a “stream of meaning between participants”; finally, facilitated class discussions with the instructor and critical thinking, expanding the dialogue to the whole group (Sable, 4-8). Qualitative research was

conducted by one-to-one interviews and audio transcripts among eight former students (p. 9), when quantitative methods examined measurable indicators for reflective dispositions using the students’ written work: the journals, term papers, anonymous questionnaires, interviews (p. 10-11).

¹⁰ I refer here to a 2017 workshop conducted by a Belgian specialist of communities of inquiry (inspector for the catholic RE course Michel Desmedt), as well as my own experiments in Gihindamuyaga monastery in Rwanda in 2018 (du Val d’Eprenesnil, 2018b).

mind, tuned to the right intent, is what practices of silence require.

Another difficulty is that the teacher herself can feel uncomfortable practicing first-person inquiry with her group, because personal involvement is high and cannot be avoided. Indeed,

“We now know, first, that learning occurs optimally, for all organisms, under conditions of moderate discomfort, when the organism is extended beyond its comfort zone. The challenge for teachers is to create imaginative activities in the broad middle ground –the in-between space– between boredom, on the one hand, and terror, on the other. A skilled teacher opens up this place in a way that is also beyond his or her comfort zone, so that the teacher, too, is engaged in the edgy, challenging space where learning occurs optimally.” (Coburn, 6)

But the benefits are worth the try: by embracing these practices, we can open up a space where effective teaching and learning can occur.

In any case, we must not be discouraged, as what matters primarily is not the amount of time spent in silence, especially if all we do is simply avoid making noise, it's the qualities that silence displays (Gira, 274), its faculty to open our minds to what is happening, or what is about to happen in the classroom, to enhance our ability to listen to the other, be it the teacher, another student or a long-gone author whose wise voice still echoes today. Making silence within ourselves, in the presence of others, to welcome what they are about to say.

I would like to give you a taste of what can be done in those few minutes dedicated to contemplation. Most of the practices I will mention here originate from the field of higher education but they can easily be transferred to the secondary school RE classroom. A recent book by Owen-Smith sheds light on the many practices of contemplative educators. These practices can be seen as transdisciplinary: the academics working with them apply them to varied fields: science, mathematics, poetry, religious studies, or psychology, where they prove to be very beneficial.

A few practical approaches can be undertaken with pupils and students (Owen-Smith, 30-32): establish silence when reading and writing; take time to pause during the class to see what is arising in oneself; show a PowerPoint presentation with no text or words, only images, and let the students ponder over the images; draw ideas then have students exchange about them; start class with a five-minute period of silence then ask students to start writing about a deep existential question; sit in silence as a meaningful epilogue after viewing a movie; sit in silence while contemplative music is being played; tell students that they can ask for a silent pause any time during the course; use a bell at regular intervals and the students have to listen to its sound and echo.

Tobin Hart, in a recent paper, shares some of his own practices that he regards as experiments with knowing (Hart, 34-42). There is the classical exercise in not doing – concentrating on breathing and bringing back the ensuing awareness to the task at hand in the classroom, recalling it when having noticed it fade away. This is a way of expanding the contemplative experience into activity. Another simple practice is asking the pupils: “where are you now?” inviting them to a personal check about what their attention really focuses on. Deep listening is opening oneself to what is being read and letting the images and sensations flow freely without trying to act on them, just taking notice of how the words resonate within oneself, then sharing with the group. This would be very interesting to try out with Bible excerpts or readings from spiritual texts. Pondering big life questions has already been mentioned. Hart specifies further: at a personal, local, ethical or universal level. Then there is the wisdom walk, a visualization using guided imagery to bring in new insights. Focusing on the body can also help open up a space beyond discursive and analytic thought. Lastly, writing can be used effectively in the following ways: free writing, letting words, feelings, sensations, thoughts flow on the paper, and what Hart calls concentrated

language, like composition of haikus¹¹ capturing a moment, a feeling, an event in student' lives.

I personally conducted short contemplative experiments with my older students (junior and senior high) in the six years I worked as a catholic religion teacher. In the course of a period dedicated to spirituality, which is one of ten topics proposed by our RE program, I would explain the significance and value of silence and show the students how foreign stillness can be to our ordinary way of life by having them sit still for 60 to 120 seconds staring at their pen or rubber, before discussing about the experience. Most of them felt very edgy, feeling these were the longest seconds of their life, while some really appreciated the break in the routine. Some students actually asked for such moments afterwards, which were happily granted. Others got accustomed to them.

Note that different profiles need to be addressed with different exercises. Some students are more restless, and some RE classes are scheduled at challenging hours for contemplation, like the last two hours of school on a Friday afternoon. An exercise I devised for these groups, which was a favorite, was to have them stand on their chairs in a complete silence: no sounds of chairs scraping the floor or squeaking when stood upon would be tolerated. It helped them develop attention and concentration, or at least notice that the usual way of doing things lacks awareness of both their movements and the objects around them. A challenge I would suggest if they were interested, was that, at home, they tried to remove all dinnerware from the dishwasher without making a sound, being mindful of every gesture. One of my colleagues came to thank me for the sudden interest of her daughter in emptying the machine.

Our students can bring silence home. Homework given by John Copenhaver to the students in his class on world religions,

is poetically called the Skyscape/Mindscape assignment, for which he invites them to spend thirty minutes in solitude and silence observing the night sky (p. 318-319). While doing that, they must record everything they notice about the sky by writing a thorough description of it (skyscape), then a detailed account of what went through their minds that they would be comfortable to share with the group (mindscape) in a following class. As the Shenandoah professor remarks, there is no way to check if they made up everything, but most students are intrigued and take the homework seriously. The insights the students gain are worth the time taken.

In a 2018 encounter with the students from the Université Catholique de Louvain's Faculty of Theology about interreligious dialogue, Father Pierre-François de Béthune, a Benedictine monk most familiar with Zen practices, made use of a beautiful image. Contrary to using the traditional metaphor of a mountain to be climbed by the participants in dialogue, each on her own path to the summit where they would finally meet, he favored the vision of a volcano, on whose slopes the participants would climb, again following their own path, to arrive at the summit and circle around the edge of the caldera¹². Everyone can see the others from his own standpoint, but they are separated by the abyss, which represents the Ineffable, out of reach and ardently desired by all. This is why, in the eyes of the Benedictine monk, all true spiritual quests are reconcilable. We all meet at the edge of the caldera and long for what's inside that can't be reached. Even more explicitly, Father de Béthune draws a similar image of a great well in the desert (p. 183). All, Christians, Buddhists, Muslims, others still, embark on a journey to Truth and Life, beyond concepts and ideas. What draws us to the well is our common thirst and fascination for the unfathomable. But the well's diameter is also infinite. The well unites us and keeps us separated and free at the same

¹¹ Japanese poems of seventeen syllables, in three lines of five, seven, and five, traditionally evoking images of the natural world (Editor's footnote).

¹² A large volcanic crater, especially one formed by a major eruption leading to the collapse of the mouth of the volcano (Editor's footnote).

time. Both metaphors, the well and the caldera, illustrate an exercise in second-person inquiry, but clearly refer as well to contemplation, showing how closely the two are linked.

A pluralistic classroom, to operate in a harmonious way, cannot count on simply climbing the mountain and meeting at the top. A common experience of staring at the lava down below, from our own standpoint, then bringing back something of great value that we can share with our peers, is essential, especially in an RE setting. If we want to teach children from the inner perspective of religions, we need to expose them to contemplation. "Silence as a pedagogical method in the classroom may be, in fact, a secular form of meditation, an opening into reflection, imagination, creativity, and self-awareness, all of which in the service of learning" (Owen-Smith, 33), but silence in the RE classroom goes way beyond that objective. It's a first-hand experience about what it truly, deeply means to be human.

Opening

With this presentation, I imagine that our religious education classes become, more than a mental playground seen as a safe space where students creatively test new ideas and concepts, a contemplative playground where they experiment with the sacred space inside themselves that urgently needs to be unveiled. Coming before dialogical and intellectual activities, there could be a sheltered time and space where they are invited to come to the edge of the caldera and look down into the abyss. This is a major issue educators need to address, because:

"Theoretical (third-person) knowledge is valuable but actualized (first-person) knowledge transmits certitude. In other words, lived truth transmits a clarifying coherence on the non-verbal level. Indeed, experimental scientific research of the last twenty years suggests that the non-verbal transmission of truth carries well beyond the single listener: perfected coherence within a person has a direct effect on the collective

good and planetary health. The 'personal' inner life may not be, in the end, personal at all." (Grace, 48).

Without appealing to any kind of scientific notions, we can guess what it's about. Have you ever noticed that most often, the general state of the classroom will be affected by your own mood and that if you're nervous, the students will become so, while if you are calm and confident, the group may be quieter? Implication of the teacher in a first-person inquiry process is therefore a necessity, for this reason and another one still. Because, and this is of utmost importance: if we as adults take time on our overbooked schedules and programs for silence and contemplation, we show the students that it's worth the effort, holds great value, is most precious for their lives, as it is for ours. Even a few minutes, two or three at the start of every class, can trigger interest, reactions, a desire to investigate further. A lovely story from the Desert Fathers illustrates this final consideration. Abba Zenon had a disciple, who spent two years by his side. He never even asked the young man's name. He didn't address him either for the whole time, and to teach him how to weave he would simply show him how to do so. In this way the youngster learnt the meaning and value of silence (Lacarrière, 249).

In an age of extreme connectivity and screen-communication without face or voice, MIT professor Sherry Turkle, specializing in the social studies of science and technology, strongly appeals to reclaiming conversation (2015): that once again we meet face to face, without the filter of our devices, to exchange about questions that matter. This is a heartfelt plea for second-person inquiry. I would like to go a step further. I plead for an encounter of one with oneself. I pray we dare investigate this inner sanctum in an age of extreme exteriority and become inspired to act in the world from this deeper standpoint.

In the end, this is a manifesto for reclaiming contemplation.

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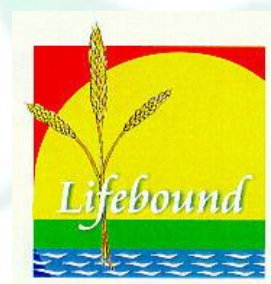
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CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Core Curriculum Lessons

Following the publication of the Draft RE Core Curriculum in 2016, a suggested programme of 32 lessons per grade from *Lifebound* was offered as an addendum to the Draft. These 32 lessons (one per teaching week as a minimum) would ensure coverage of the core curriculum.



The lessons – in batches for each grade, covering roughly a term's work at a time – will appear shortly on the CIE website on the RE Resources page. The following adjustments have been made:

- The lessons have been re-ordered and re-numbered to give them a more logical flow. The original numbering is provided on a Lesson Sequence page for reference back to the *Lifebound* Teacher Handbooks.
- The titles have been changed where necessary to give a better idea of the lesson's focus.
- The numbering of the learning opportunities corresponds with that of the *Lifebound* Curriculum Guide and with the numbering in the Core Curriculum Statement.
- In the lessons themselves the following legend is used:

- ⇒ Materials provided with the lesson
- 📖 Worksheet provided as an appendix to the lesson
- 🎵 Music suggestions

- Music suggestions from the book *Sing for Life* are provided where suitable. (*Sing for Life* is available from the CIE National Office)
- Reference to resources no longer available have been removed.
- Suggestions have been added where necessary to alert teachers to the principle of religious freedom and to ensure inclusion and equity in classes which have a multi-religious composition. This is usually in cases where the lesson includes prayer and/or worship activities.
- Where lessons require a worksheet, these are incorporated into the lesson plan as an appendix.



ARTISTS' CORNER

Coronavirus and creativity: from my window



BY DIANA RIVERA

"I felt fear, confusion and frustration. Being able to create for me has been a tool in times of crisis. Drawing has kept me busy, after finishing academic homework," Diana, 24, Honduras



WEBSITE

Bible Gateway

www.biblegateway.com



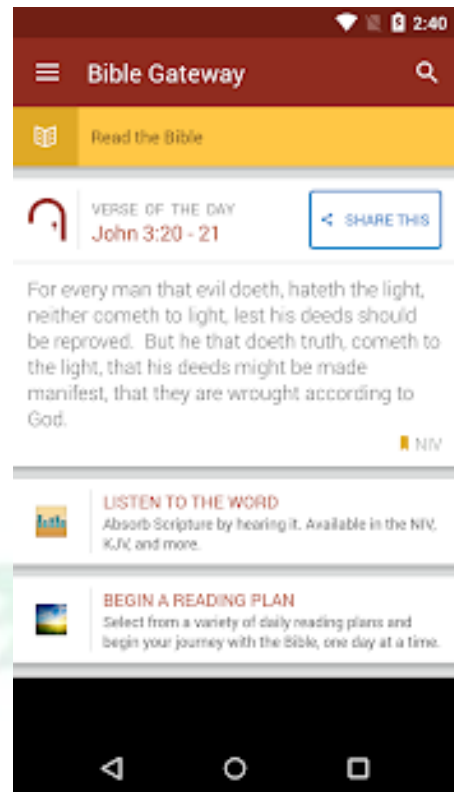
DESCRIPTION

Bible Gateway is a searchable online Bible in more than 200 versions and 70 languages that you can freely read, research, and reference anywhere. With a library of audio Bibles, a mobile app, devotionals, email newsletters, and other free resources, Bible Gateway equips you not only to read the Bible, but to understand it.

HISTORY

The original multilingual searchable Bible website, Bible Gateway was started in 1993 by Nick Hengeveld, a student at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, MI, who had a visionary passion to make the Bible digitally accessible to everyone through the very new technology at the time called the Internet.

In 1995 Nick became the first webmaster of Gospelcom.net, now Gospel.com. He brought Bible Gateway with him, and since then, the service has been the daily favorite online resource for hundreds of millions of people around the world. In 2008 Bible Gateway became a division of Zondervan, and is, today, a member of HarperCollins Christian Publishing. We continue to add new translations, languages, and powerful functionality to Bible Gateway to help you conveniently engage the Bible and make it an integral part of your everyday life.



DOWNLOAD THE BIBLE GATEWAY APP AND TAKE THE BIBLE WITH YOU WHEREVER YOU GO

Your favorite Bible Web experience is now available for iPad, iPhone, Android phones, and Kindle Fire.



BOOK REVIEW

Teaching with fire

Teaching with Fire is a glorious collection of the poetry that has restored the faith of teachers in the highest, most transcendent values of their work with children....Those who want us to believe that teaching is a technocratic and robotic skill devoid of art or joy or beauty need to read this powerful collection. So, for that matter, do we all."

[Jonathan Kozol, author of *Amazing Grace* and *Savage Inequalities*]

"When reasoned argument fails, poetry helps us make sense of life. A few well-chosen images, the spinning together of words creates a way of seeing where we came from and lights up possibilities for where we might be going....Dip in, read, and ponder; share with others. It's inspiration in the very best sense."

[Deborah Meier, co-principal of The Mission Hill School, Boston and founder of a network of schools in East Harlem, New York]

"In the Confucian tradition it is said that the mark of a golden era is that children are the most important members of the society and teaching is the most revered profession. Our journey to that ideal may be a long one, but it is books like this that will sustain us - for who are we all at our best save teachers, and who matters more to us than the children?"

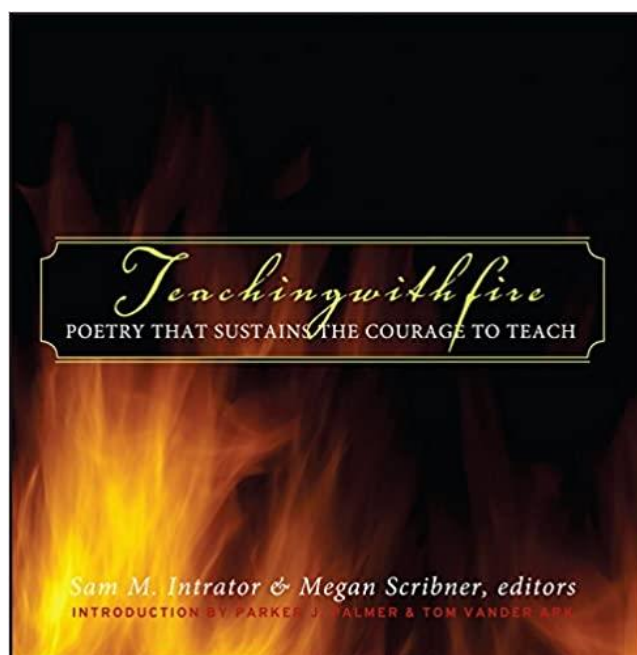
[Peter M. Senge, founding chair, SoL (Society for Organizational Learning) and author of *The Fifth Discipline*]

Those of us who care about the young and their education must find ways to remember what teaching and learning are really about. We must find ways to keep our hearts alive as we serve our students. Poetry has the power to keep us vital and focused on what really matters in life and in schooling. Teaching with Fire is a wonderful collection of eighty-eight poems from such well-loved poets as Walt Whitman, Langston Hughes, Billy Collins, Emily Dickinson, and Pablo Neruda. Each of these evocative poems is accompanied by a brief story from a teacher explaining the significance of the poem in his or her life's work. This beautiful book also includes an essay that describes how poetry can be used to grow both personally and professionally.

Teaching with Fire was written in partnership with the Center for Courage & Renewal and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Royalties from this book will be used to fund scholarship opportunities for teachers to grow and learn.

ISBN-13: 978-0787969707

ISBN-10: 0787969702



Here are two samples from the book/...

I believe in all that has never yet been spoken

(Rainer Maria Rilke)



(English version by Anita Barrows and Joanna Macy)

I believe in all that has never yet been spoken.
I want to free what waits within me
so that what no one has dared to wish for

may for once spring clear
without my contriving.

If this is arrogant, God, forgive me,
but this is what I need to say.
May what I do flow from me like a river,
no forcing and no holding back,
the way it is with children.

Then in these swelling and ebbing currents,
these deepening tides moving out, returning,
I will sing you as no one ever has,

streaming through widening channels
into the open sea.

Mother to Son

(Langston Hughes)

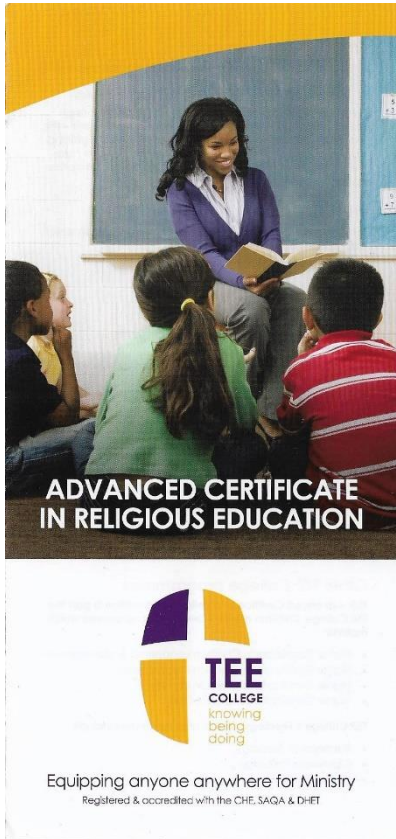


Well, son, I'll tell you:
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
It's had tacks in it,
And splinters,
And boards torn up,
And places with no carpet on the floor—
Bare.
But all the time
I'se been a-climbin' on,
And reachin' landin's,
And turnin' corners,
And sometimes goin' in the dark
Where there ain't been no light.
So boy, don't you turn back.
Don't you set down on the steps
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.
Don't you fall now—
For I'se still goin', honey,
I'se still climbin',
And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.



LOCAL NEWS

Advanced Certificate in Religious Education



These days, the religious educator faces many challenges, not least among which is the disinterest of the young in a world where religion often makes little sense to them. But, if your students see that you love your subject, things will change: you will gain their keen attention.

But how will they see it? To love is to know in the deepest sense. The depth of knowledge we have in our

subject, the enthusiasm and confidence we display in our willingness to share it, and the competence we exercise in opening doors and windows to let our students in to its mysteries (Yes, all subjects have their mysteries) – these and other professional virtues will demonstrate our love.

Do you love RE? Do you want to fall in love with it? Here is an opportunity to get to know it better. The Catholic Institute of Education has collaborated with TEEC (Theological Education by Extension College) – a registered Higher Education provider specialising in distance education – to develop an Advanced Certificate in Religious Education at NQF Level 6. This programme will give you, the religious educator, an opportunity for personal and professional development that is relevant, accessible and financially competitive.

The programme requires the completion of 8 courses over four semesters (two years). The first four courses are compulsory while the remaining four are electives chosen out of a pool of eight pos-

sibilities. In the core component you will gain a wider and deeper knowledge of Scripture, acquire critical theological skills for the classroom, and become familiar with current religious education theory and practice including the essential ability to manage a multireligious student body.

Included among the elective courses are focuses on religion and culture, social justice, morality, liturgy, spirituality, christology, the history of Christianity, and the relationship between science and religion.

Registration for the Certificate is now open for the first two courses – ‘Revelation, Scripture & Tradition’, and ‘Human Existence, God & Human Destiny’. Go to the website of TEEC for further information and for registration purposes.

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(<http://www.tee.co.za/>)



INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Catholic schools and universities struggling with pandemic

Exclusive interview with Archbishop Vincenzo Zani, secretary of the Congregation for Catholic Education



Pope Francis has re-launched a worldwide effort to improve education for all young people around the globe, urging civic and religious leaders to create an educational alliance to meet the urgent challenges facing the Earth and humanity.

"The value of our educational practices will be measured not simply by the results of standardized tests, but by the ability to affect the heart of society and to help give birth to a new culture," the pope said in an October 15 video message to launch the Global Compact on Education.

"A different world is possible, and we are called to learn how to build it," he said in Italian.

Francis is counting on Catholic schools and universities to play a key role in the endeavour. But those institutions, like almost all others around the world, are currently experiencing great difficulties due to the coronavirus pandemic.

La Croix's Vatican correspondent, Loup Besmond de Senneville, discussed the issue with Archbishop Vincenzo Zani, secretary of the Congregation for Catholic Education.

La Croix: Some Catholic schools and universities are going through a very difficult period today because of the COVID-19 crisis. What difficulties are these institutions encountering?

Archbishop Vincenzo Zani: Of the 218,000 Catholic schools and 1,860 Catholic universities around the world, I don't know the details of all the situations. But on a global level, we know that the difficulties are of two kinds: educational and financial.

On the financial level, the situation is very different from one country to another.

First of all, there are countries where Catholic schools are totally subsidized by the state, others where they receive a partial subsidy and a third category in which they do not receive any public aid at all.

This is the case, for example, in Italy, Belgium and Spain, as well as in the United States.

We do not know today how many schools or universities will have to close. But we already know that in some countries, the institutions are on their knees.

If I take the case of the United States, where the schools do not receive any subsidies, elementary schools, for example, are linked to parishes.

In **New York City** alone, 100 Catholic elementary schools will close next year, either because the parishes have not been able to raise the necessary money, or because the economic situation of the schools is insurmountable.

And on the educational level?

Most schools and universities have made admirable use of digital tools. But it is obvious that today we can no longer continue in this way.

Through these means, we can provide information, but to inform is not to educate.

Moreover, it should be remembered that teachers were not prepared for such a digital switchover.

Among the young people, some did not have access to classes because their families did not have the necessary computer resources. As a result, we witnessed a collapse.

Added to the health pandemic has been an intellectual and educational pandemic.

The situation is dramatic.

According to UNICEF, 10 million people no longer have any contact with their teachers...

What is the situation on the African continent?

Paradoxically, in Africa, the situation is perhaps better than elsewhere.

Despite a very acute health crisis and repercussions in some countries on the food situation, schools are resisting better.

This is undoubtedly due to the fact that they depend on smaller structures, with much lower operating costs than elsewhere. It's an agility that makes them more resilient.

And elsewhere?

We are very concerned about the situation in other areas, such as India and Latin America, like Peru and Ecuador.

What response should we bring to this crisis situation?

For several weeks, we have seen remarkable initiatives emerge all over the world.

In Spain, for example, the schools coordinated in an exemplary way, and the directors worked hard among themselves and in conjunction with other professions, such as groups of psychologists, to overcome the crisis.

In Italy, some parishes have opened their doors to allow schools to use their premises, thus ensuring the safe social distancing that is essential for recovery.

But this crisis also prompts us to reflect on the future.

For us, the central question is how to move from information to training.

Training and education consists of carrying out a form of purification in all possible information in order to be able to keep what will contribute to forming a personality.

This can be done by opening it up to transcendence.

As Pope Francis says, without a transcendental character, education collapses.

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/education/catholic-schools-and-universities-struggling-with-pandemic/13182>



The World Food Program and the Nobel Peace Prize

The price of the common good



A community volunteer addresses to women and their children before being attended in a food distribution center in the Rwanda camp for internally displaced people (IDP) in Tawila, North Darfur. (Photo by Albert Gonzalez Farran, UNAMID)

By Guillaume Goubert | France

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/editorials/the-world-food-program-and-the-nobel-peace-prize/13161>

Choosing a winner for the Nobel Peace Prize is not easy. First of all, there is always the risk that a laureate will later disappoint, as we experienced with the Burmese Aung San Suu Kyi.

But above all it is because in this period when the sounds of war are increasing, people who are committed to peace -- they have obviously not disappeared -- stand out in the landscape with greater difficulty.

The Norwegian Nobel Committee justly overcame these two risks by crowning the **United Nations World Food Program** (WFP) as the recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize for 2020.

The WFP certainly has a lot of qualities. But like other parts of the United Nations, it is also weighed down by a bureaucracy that makes it expensive and insufficiently agile.

However, it has the merit of primarily devoting itself to the most obvious of emergencies that of famine, and especially to the food risks in areas where armed conflicts are taking place.

It is significant that the organization has been crowned with the Peace Prize during COVID-19 since the pandemic only aggravates the situation of populations in a state of food insecurity.

During the period in which we find ourselves, the other -- and considerable -- merit of the WFP is to symbolize multilateralism. Today, many great powers no longer hide from putting their own interests before the search for a common good.

"Everyone sees only their own interests," commented the president of the Nobel Peace Prize Committee. "This is a far cry from the idea of shared responsibility that prevailed just 30 years ago."

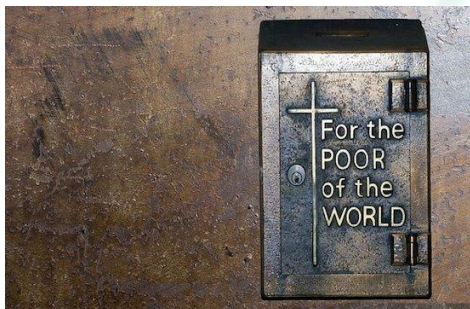
The World Food Program is swimming against the tide. This more than justifies their being selected for the prize.



The world after COVID-19 from the world below

The silence of the outcast is like the silence of Creation. Until we break it, we can't really move on to the next world.

(Isabelle de Gaulmyn, France, June 13, 2020)



It's like the end of the summer holidays. We say goodbye and promise we'll see each other again, but then we go back to our jobs and "real life", and we quickly lose all contact.

But during two and a half months of lockdown, bonds were forged, smiles exchanged, friendships were born, stealthily, every lunchtime, while going to pick up your lunch basket at the food distribution organized by some associations. Some of them quickly became regulars.

There's Jeanne-Marie (first names have been changed) with her crass Parisian humor, who never misses a chance to talk about her chaotic life... her four kids, her divorce ("he only knew how to knock me up") and her years of misery. At now at 86, she gets €400 a month to live on.

Or Auguste, who arrives having just read all of *Le Figaro* from one or two weeks ago, always well-dressed, dignified, with his accordion shoes on. And Emmanuel, a young man with headphones clamped to his ears, alone in his music and his parallel universe of drugs and violence.

Then there's Ahmed, a "chibani" (retired immigrant) who sends every bit of his pension back home and stays here, living by himself at the soup kitchen. And Mary, an American with an improbable background, a former English teacher who has no money left to live on.

Adi is a Tunisian student who, one night, found himself without a job or a place to eat. Nathalie and her dogs... And Annie, who lives in a truck with her boyfriend and suddenly disappeared.

At first, they quickly took their bag, head down, in quiet grief. And then the virus tamed them. Routine set in, we were happy to be together, joking, weighing in on Professor Raoul's latest announcements, speculating on the president's future speech.

Finally, we no longer talked about the virus. Nathalie changed dogs, Yvette got a reprieve from her bank, and Ahmed was relieved to see that in Algeria "they're also getting by".

Every day, everyone waited, laughing, to see if Arsène would come with one shoe or two, or just in socks. You never knew... When they heard that the food distribution was stopping, there was no shouting or protest. Just a shrug.

In this world, the unexpected is a way of life. They'll find other tricks, that's all. It was simply that, while the streets were empty, these invisibles became visible during the time of COVID-19. And we all discovered how many of them were living like that, next to us. We had never seen them before.

What will the world after the coronavirus be like for this world below? No doubt, very much like the world before the pandemic. The same hard times, the same days busy finding the right plan, getting a place in a homeless shelter or a ticket for the cloakroom.

And yet, they could teach us about the vulnerability of nature, they who experience climate change with their flesh and blood, the stifling summers, the increasingly frequent storms and the polluted air that they breathe all day long.

Was it not after shivering in his rags that a certain Francis of Assisi found the words to praise "Brother Sun"? We should listen to those words, let them remind us that, more than a piece of bread, it is bonds that we need first of all -- bonds that they came looking for, to chat for a bit and escape their anguishing solitude.

They could tell us that life is not always climbing upwards, that not everyone lives in a logic of accumulation, but that sometimes all it takes is a helping hand to get out of a jam.

They could tell us that... but they don't.

Or rather, maybe we find it hard to listen to them. The silence of the outcast is like the silence of Creation. And until we break it, we can't really move on to the next world.

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/world/the-world-after-covid-19-from-the-world-below/12551>



Hagia Sophia: A bridge unlike any other

Why the West should care

(George E. Demacopoulos, United States, August 21, 2020)

When the Roman emperor Constantine moved his capital from Rome to Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul) in the early fourth century, he did so because he wanted to position his government more strategically at the crossroads of the known world

Of course, Constantine was more than a mere strategist; he was also the first Christian emperor and he privileged the faith through legislation, favorable tax policies, and the construction of spectacular cathedrals, including the Hagia Sophia.



Hagia Sophia

Perhaps no other building in the world so concretely stands at the intersection of East and West, just as no other building equally symbolizes the populist threat to religious minorities.

This is the third building on the site to be named "Hagia Sophia," literally translated as "Holy Wisdom," but understood by Christians to be a personification of Christ as Wisdom.

The Constantinian church burned in the early fifth century, and the second church, like the first, was destroyed by fire in 532.

But neither of those early structures, with their modest size and wooden roofs, could compare to the civilization-defining building commissioned by the emperor Justinian in 532 and opened in 537.

To say that the Hagia Sophia was the largest church in the world for a thousand years does not really do justice to its size, grandeur, or influence on subsequent Christian architecture.

To say that the Hagia Sophia was the main cathedral of the Byzantine capital does not sufficiently convey the extent to which the church remains the single greatest symbol of an empire that lasted a thousand years,

or a global Orthodox religious community that now exceeds 250 million people.

Hagia Sophia, like the city itself, has shifted hands many times since the Byzantines first worshipped there. From 1204 to 1261 it was under the control of the Crusaders, who installed their own clergy and performed the liturgy exclusively in the Latin Rite.

A Byzantine army retook the city in 1261, but the Crusader colonization of the Christian East left the Byzantine world internally divided and economically devastated. In 1453, an Ottoman army led by Mehmed II conquered what was left of the empire.

Mehmed moved quickly to transform Hagia Sophia into a mosque—removing the altar and plastering the iconography.

Ottoman Istanbul soon became the political center of the Islamic world, and while the Ottomans would build many impressive mosques, none could compare to the Hagia Sophia in size or stature.

When the Ottoman Empire collapsed at the end of World War I, a new, highly secular government emerged in Turkey and its leader, Kemal Atatürk, converted the Hagia Sophia into a museum as part of a

wide-ranging plan to break from the historic authority of Islam in Ottoman society.

Atatürk was pro-West and secular, but he was also highly authoritarian and nationalistic. He advanced the myth of a pure "Turkish" identity that left little room for religious or cultural minorities.

Armenians, Greeks, Jews, and Syrians had little space in Atatürk's Turkey, despite the fact that these communities had been there for centuries before the first Turks had arrived.

In July, a Turkish court ruled that the Turkish government had overstepped its authority when it transformed Hagia Sophia from a mosque into a museum in 1935.

As a consequence, the court ruled, Hagia Sophia should be returned to its "original" status as a mosque—a ruling that only makes sense with the erasure of Turkey's Christian past after a century-long, state-sponsored propaganda campaign.

For most of the citizens of Turkey, the current dispute about the Hagia Sophia has very little to do with Christianity and everything to do with the legacy of Atatürk.

Some Turkish Muslims, like President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, believe that Atatürk's actions *vis-à-vis* the Hagia Sophia constituted a disenfranchisement of the religious rights of Turkey's Muslim majority, and Atatürk's secular agenda was nothing other than Western colonialism designed to deprive Turkey of its authentic Muslim heritage.

To their mind, Hagia Sophia is an Islamic structure rather than a Christian one. In large part, that view is predicated on a political theology that views military conquest as part of God's providence.

Of course, not all Turks approve of Erdoğan's religious populism or the decision to reconstitute Hagia Sophia as a mosque.

Many view it as little more than an effort to shore up political support among religious conservatives in the face of growing political opposition across Turkey.

For Turkey's many secularists, the newest transformation of Hagia Sophia is a worrying development because it points to a gradual decline of secularism within Turkey, and raises the specter of the possibility of an Islamic populism like that of the Muslim Brotherhood.

So while Turkish society is very much divided over the court's decision, very few in Turkey have given much thought as to what this suggests about the declining status of the nation's religious minorities.

To be sure, the forced conversion of the Hagia Sophia into a museum in 1935 may have transgressed the religious rights of some Turks, but it served a greater religious freedom goal by granting tacit recognition of Turkey's Christian roots, as well as the continued presence of Christians in Turkey.

As a museum, the many layers of Hagia Sophia's glorious past were opened to the world.

Art historians and scholars of liturgy have been able to study the many ways in which believers decorated, moved, and worshipped within the largest sacred space in the Christian world for a thousand years.

Imperial historians have gained a better understanding of the ways in which Christian governments both supported and were constrained by religious spaces. And the world was invited to visit one of the true wonders of human ingenuity—a space designed for the meeting of heaven and earth.

What will become of this space, which has served as a bridge between East and West unlike any other? And what will become of Turkey's Christian minorities who, in many ways, play a similar role?

What Turkish leadership comes after Erdoğan, whether allies like the United States continue to enable it, and how billions of people of faith respond will determine the answers.

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/culture/hagia-sophia-a-bridge-unlike-any-other/12900>



The Varanasi Christmas

Ramakrishna Mission, which was founded on a Christmas day, celebrates the Nativity in its own unique way

(La Croix International staff, India, December 7, 2019)



Hinduism has a fascination for the divine in the form of a child (maxppp.com)

In Varanasi, we see the fulfillment of a prophecy on Christmas Day when our Hindu friends come to meditate in our humble oratories.

Bringing incense sticks, they look like new magi who, from the Judean desert, would have continued their journey to the banks of the Ganges in India.

Christmas is lived in a unique way in this holy Indian city because the Christian holiday has become an occasion for celebration for all religions.

Hinduism, in particular, has always had an unquenchable fascination with the manifestation of the divine in the form of the child. Thus, at the beginning of September, Lord Krishna's birth is celebrated at midnight.

Surprisingly for a Christian, the Hindu monks of the Ramakrishna Mission organize magnificent ceremonies on the evening of Dec. 24 and 25.

This order was inspired in the 19th century by Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the great saint of Calcutta, who lived the spiritual experience of Islam and Christianity from within, while remaining Hindu.

In the year of his death, his disciple Swami Vivekananda gathered eight other companions and, after a night of asceticism and prayers, he decided to found a new order by taking the saffron habit of the renunciants. It was Christmas 1886.

Since then, the Ramakrishna Mission has proudly commemorated the birth of Christ. In Varanasi, at the entrance to their hospital for the poor, the monks place on a richly decorated altar a portrait of the Child Jesus and his Holy Mother. They worship him with candles, while singing "Christmas Carols."

I can still hear in India the feelings of my childhood! After this prayer, the monks entertain more than a thousand visitors in a large hall, most of them Hindus.

Before them, they read the Gospel of the Nativity and the Sermon on the Mount. Then, for an hour, they comment on the Scriptures, exalting Jesus as a model of love and sacrifice.

Sitting among the listeners, it seems to me like listening to a well-known melody that would suddenly be played on unexpected instruments... The music here being Christ announced by Hindus to Hindus!

Such a Christmas can be confusing for anyone who thinks that the child in the crib is the strict property of a small group - even the Holy Catholic Church! But if Christ has come among us, it is for all humanity, without any religious restrictions.

The great preaching of the Ramakrishna Mission is a shining example of the Good News once announced by the angels. Just as are the biscuits and sweets that the monks distribute at the end of the celebrations as *prasadam* (religious offering).

https://international.la-croix.com/news/the-varanasi-christmas/11434?utm_source=Newsletter&utm_medium=e-mail&utm_content=07-12-2019&utm_campaign=newsletter_crx_lci&PMID=c846096e5e379ce4c77e681a70eaff9d



CPTD

Reclaiming Contemplation: How to enhance inner experience and personal growth in the RE classroom

Read the article for CPTD points and record your response to the following questions:

- What is the writer's main argument?
- What significance does the argument have in my context?
- What practical action does the argument's conclusion suggest?

Professional Development Points Schedule

<https://www.sace.gov.za/Documentation/PROFESSIONAL%20DEVELOPMENT%20POINTS%20SCHEDULE.pdf>





Have a Blessed Christmas

