



Roots & Wings

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The Periodical of the Professional Society of Religious Educators

EDITORIAL

Welcome to the first issue of *Roots & Wings* for the new year, 2022. 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.



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

The Death of Chastity in our Culture

(Ron Rolheiser – 13 February 2022)



The concept of chastity has fallen on hard times.

Several years ago, I was invited to speak to a group of students at a Catholic university. The invitation came with a request and a caveat. I was to speak on chastity, but ideally, I was to avoid using the word. The Dean of Theology, who had invited me, had appraised the situation this way: perhaps more than anything else, the students need a challenge to chastity, but they are so turned off by the word that if we mention it in the title, very few will show up.

His hunch was right on both scores, the need for chastity in their lives and their aversion to the word. That's also true for our culture.

For many today, the word chastity has negative connotations. Outside of a constantly shrinking number of select church circles, the word chastity sets off mostly negative alarms. Within our highly secularized and sophisticated world, for the most part chastity is identified with naiveté, with sexual timidity, with religious fundamentalism, with a toxic over-emphasis on sexual purity, with a lack of sophistication, and with something that perhaps made more sense in another age. Commonly, the notion is ridiculed, even in some religious circles. Very few people today dare talk about saving sex for marriage or about chastity as virtue.

What's behind this? Why this negativity and disdain towards the word chastity?

Partly this is based on a number of popular perceptions. Chastity is often seen as grounded in a religious fundamentalism, which our culture today either disdains or pities ("Chastity for Jesus"). As well, the notion of chastity is seen as a product of the church's long-standing, one-sided emphasis on virginity and celibacy and its failure to articulate a healthy, robust spirituality of sex. It's hard to argue with perceptions, except to say that the reasons for the demise of the concept of chastity in our culture are much more complex than this.

Admittedly, our catechesis about chastity is part of the problem. My suspicion is that a good number of people are negative vis-à-vis the notion because of how the concept has been presented to them. Our churches and moral teachers have to assume some of the blame and admit that far too often the concept of chastity has been presented, however unintentionally, precisely as a naiveté, a repression, and as an over-emphasis on sexual purity. There's a parallel here to how atheism finds its ground. Just as so much atheism is a parasite feeding off bad religion, so too much of the negativity towards the concept of chastity is a parasite feeding off unhealthy religious teaching.

However, our culture's negativity towards the notion of chastity feeds off more than a less-than-healthy catechesis. The culprit? Sophistication as a virtue that is an end in itself. In short, our culture prizes personal sophistication above most everything else, and when sophistication is so highly prized, chastity easily looks like naïveté and ignorance.

Is it? Is chastity a naïveté, an ignorance? At the end of the day, is the notion of chastity a sexual repression, an unhealthy timidity, a toxic over-emphasis on sexual purity, a religious fundamentalism, a pitiable pre-sophistication? Admittedly, that can sometimes be the case. However, here's the case for chastity.

In 2013, Donna Freitas, the author of a number of books on sexuality and consent, published a study entitled, *The End of Sex: How Hookup Culture is Leaving a Generation Unhappy, Sexually Unfulfilled, and Confused about Intimacy*. That title is the book in caption. Nowhere in the book (and for this she has been unjustly criticized by some church

groups) does she ever say that what is happening in our culture today in terms of soulless sex is wrong or sinful. She doesn't have to. She simply spells out the consequences – unhappiness, confusion, sexual depression.

A generation earlier, the renowned educator Allan Bloom, writing out of a purely secular perspective, came to the same conclusion. Looking at the bright, very-sophisticated young students he was teaching, he concluded that the very unbridled sophistication they so prided themselves in (which he termed “the absence of chastity in their lives”) had this effect in their lives: it left them “erotically lame”.

And so I submit that chastity merits another look from our culture. There's first-naïveté (childishness) and there's second-naïveté (childlikeness). There's hook-up sex and there's soul-sex. There's religious fundamentalism and there's the wisdom of divine revelation. There's the over- emphasis on sexual purity and there's the dehumanizing disrespect for others (that the #Me Too is standing up to). There's a certain ennui and fatigue in an ultra-sophistication that believes all taboos may be broken, and there's a vibrancy and happiness that's felt in keeping your shoes off before the burning bush. Note, in every one of these dualisms, chastity speaks for soul, for wisdom, for respect, and for happiness.



REFLECTION

7 Commitments for the Global Compact on Education



**GLOBAL COMPACT
ON EDUCATION**

In his video message of 15-10-2020 Pope Francis calls for a new era of educational commitment involving all members of society. For this reason, he invites families, communities, schools, universities, institutions, religions, rulers, men and women of culture, science, sport, artists, media professionals, i.e. the whole of humanity to sign a compact on education by committing themselves personally to take up the following seven commitments:

1 To make human persons the centre

To make human persons the centre of every educational programme, in order to foster their distinctiveness and their capacity for relationship with others against the spread of the

throwaway culture.

2 To listen to the voices of children and young people

To listen to the voices of children and young people in order to build together a future of justice, peace and a dignified life for every person.

3 To advance the women

To encourage the full participation of girls and young women in education.

4 To empower the family

To consider the family as the first and essential place of education.

5 To welcome

To educate and be educated on the need for acceptance and in particular, openness to the most vulnerable and marginalized.

6 To find new ways of understanding economy and politics

To be committed to finding new ways of understanding the economy, politics, growth, and progress that can truly stand at the service of the human person and the entire human family, within the context of an integral ecology.

7 To safeguard our common home

To safeguard and cultivate our common home, protecting it from the exploitation of its resources and to adopt a more sober lifestyle marked by the use of renewable energy sources and respect for the natural and human environment.

(For detailed information go to <https://www.educationglobalcompact.org/en/>)



REFLECTION

A Supplement, Not a Substitute

The thrill and peril of the Metaverse

A handout photo made available by Meta showing a frame grab from the keynote speech about the new company brand announced by Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg during the virtual Connect 2021 Conference in Menlo Park, California, USA, 28 October 2021. Zuckerberg stated Meta brings all their company apps and technologies under one new brand. EPA-EFE/META HANDOUT/MaxPPP)

(Santiago Ramos | United States)

Here is my pitch for a futuristic sci-fi thriller.



In the near future—always, the most terrifying hour—the world has become a techno-hellhole. The terrain is empty, sterile, and hot. The few people above ground are labouring under brutal conditions to operate a fleet of mysterious machines.

Meanwhile, the rest of humanity lives in a vast network of underground dwellings, sheltered from the oppressive climate. This privileged non-working class is hooked up to virtual-reality consoles and live out their lives within a fake universe of junk entertainment.

But fear not: we have a hero, and he has a plan. He believes in a better world, one that isn't founded on exploitation and hollow fantasies. But he knows that the machines are too strong to be defeated directly. It's too late to pull the plug; you must somehow make it so that there is no plug to begin with.

So our hero time-travels to the year 375 BC. His plan is to seed human history with something—call it a meme, an idea, or a myth—that will provide immunity to the coming dystopia by conditioning human beings to always be on guard against its source.

He invents a story and plants it in the middle of one of the most beautiful books ever written. In this tale human beings live in "an underground cave-like dwelling with its entrance, a long one, open to the light across the whole width of the cave. They are in it

Home of Hollywood and the "personal brand," the United States seems to have learned how to do this faster, and on a greater scale, than any other country. Yet a love for imaginary worlds is simply part of being human, and it's not always a bad thing. Images can be beautiful and good for us, as prehistoric cave drawings and medieval cathedrals both attest. And when they aren't good for us, we have a pretty good track record of checking ourselves.

The enduring relevance of Plato's Republic suggests that, however new the Metaverse itself might be, the concerns it raises are not new. Those concerns can be summed up in a few basic questions: What is imagination, and what is truth? Why seek an elusive truth beyond appearances if the appearances themselves are more pleasant?

These questions seem academic until you realize just how easy it is to spend your life dwelling in appearances. You can live within your self-conceit. You can live protected by wealth. You can live apart from others. You can believe your own résumé. TVs, smartphones, and social media can make the temptation to dwell in appearances worse, and so could the Metaverse.

In a culture dominated by the Metaverse, the idea of self-knowledge as we currently understand it could disappear. Even before the Romantics, self-knowledge has always implied a degree of self-creation: we (partially) invent who we are.

But self-knowledge also involves self-discovery, an encounter with truths about ourselves that we cannot avoid and must embrace.

In the mystical tradition, the path of self-discovery finally takes us beyond ourselves and culminates in a meeting with Another—God. The Metaverse would make it easier than ever to focus only on self-creation and neglect self-discovery.

Yet escaping into the Metaverse might also awaken a longing for things that cannot be found within it—things only the real world can provide: love and sexual intimacy, raising a family, visiting a foreign city, a hamburger, the warmth of the sun.

The Metaverse will never be inexhaustible the way reality is; it will always be derivative of reality, based on a programmer's particular perspective, and therefore—despite claims to the contrary—never as rich as the genuine article.

To wonder about the mysterious workings of nature is not the same as marvelling at an intricate piece of man-made engineering.

Some might argue that engineering is often preferable to nature. Not everyone is in a good position to appreciate all that nature has to offer: many suffer limited mobility or freedom due to illness or injustice. For such people, the Metaverse might be a welcome respite from the real world.

But even those who suffer from such debilities and disadvantages would probably prefer, if they had the choice, to improve their reality rather than to escape from it. We may settle for fantasy, but it isn't what we aspire to.

In the 1980s, Jaron Lanier was a pioneer in the development of virtual reality. Since the late 1990s, he has written essays and books about the cultural impact of technology.

In a recent interview he told Lex Fridman that "I have always found the very most valuable moment in virtual reality to be the moment when you take off the headset. Your senses are refreshed, and you perceive physicality afresh as if you were a newborn baby."



Even when virtual reality is renamed "augmented reality" and aims to supplement reality rather than to replace it—as we saw during the 2016 Pokémon Go craze—the virtual bits of the game remind us that real stuff is better.

"One of my favourite things is to augment a forest, not because I think a forest needs augmentation," Lanier says. "But when you look at the augmentation next to a real tree, the real tree pops out as being astounding.... It's hard to pay attention to that, but when you compare it to virtual reality, all of a sudden you do."

In his 2017 memoir, *Dawn of the New Everything: Encounters with Reality and Virtual Reality*, Lanier concludes that virtual reality "should be enjoyed as one of life's treats, but not as an alternative to life."

If Lanier is right—if reality is truly so attractive, so pregnant with wonder—we won't be able to resist it for long.

I doubt that a simulation could bring me as much joy as the real-life trip to Yosemite I took with my friends last summer. Several apps helped us along the way, but the majestic valleys and peaks were our motivating interest.

All of us are connected to Earth by a tether of desire, and suppressing desire is never a viable long-term proposition.

The Metaverse will pose challenges that will be met, in turn, by political, pedagogical, religious, and cultural responses. But whatever the future holds, we already have the antibodies.

Read more at: <https://international.la-croix.com/news/ethics/a-supplement-not-a-substitute/15554>



TALKING ABOUT RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (CPTD) ¹

Ministry, Catechesis and Religious Education: Implications for Youth Ministry and Catholic Schools

(Michael Warren)

The material in this article is an edited extract from Professor Warren's address "The Catechumen in the Kitchen: Reflections on Ministry and Catechesis in Ireland" delivered at Mater Dei Institute of Education, Dublin, in 1985. The original address included many references to the particular situation of youth ministry in Ireland.

Understanding the place of Catechesis in Pastoral Ministry

I presume there are still some who limit catechesis to instruction in doctrinal formulations and who tend to see it as something that passes between teachers and students in classrooms. I, however, prefer to view catechesis within pastoral ministry, rather than within education. As a form of the ministry of the word, catechesis cannot function properly unless it is integrated into a total work of the church that includes the three other ministries: the ministry of worship, the ministry of guidance and counsel and the ministry of healing. In ministry there is a kind of balance of nature, a symbiosis, with the various forms in harmony with one another.

¹ Read this article for CPTD points. See Page 24.

The ministry of guidance and counsel and the ministry of healing are action-oriented but rooted in the primal action of noticing, of listening, of trying to discern. It is the ministry of those who are wise enough to be literally dumb. If they will know we are Christians by our love, one of the sure signs of love is attentiveness.

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Perhaps we could call these two basic ministries: guidance/ counsel and healing, the ministries of credibility. At least for those who stand outside the circle of faith, these are the works that make the community's life believable. They cannot be feigned, because they either make the good news seem like good news or they do not. When people inquire in response to their experience of ministries of credibility, the person ministering moves into the ministry of the word, which is a ministry of accountability, in the sense that it gives an account of the roots of one's action.

Because evangelization is an aspect of the ministry of the word, its chief form might seem to be the verbal, but its foundation is in deeds; and those deeds begin not so much in an attempt to influence another as in an attempt to be true to one's call to discipleship. The first form of evangelization is not a verbal announcement at all, but a commitment to justice and to solidarity with the oppressed, to the point of being with them in their efforts to have their injustices redressed.

Evangelization does not begin by "talking the way" with young people but by "walking the way" with them. Eventually the whole process may reach the point of words, talk about the realities of Christian faith. Gradually those who presume those realities mean nothing to them may come to judge that they mean everything to them. If they come to see that they eventually stand inside the circle of faith or want to stand there, they will have crossed over into the zone of catechesis, which always presumes faith. From there they may proceed to worship, which itself continues their catechesis because it is in the context of worship that they struggle to understand further what faith is calling them to, what it means to them.

Catechesis and worship, then, are not the first steps in the journey of ministry; they are the final but continuing steps. A youth minister presumes little (except the possibilities) and starts where the young people are; together they may take a kind of exodus journey out of alienation to the Eucharist. I would like to stress, however, that this journey is one that youth enter into themselves and then progress a step at a time. They are not to be marched along to an alien beat like prisoners of war. Evangelization and catechesis can only take place in an ambience of freedom and choice.

Two Catechetical Dilemmas

The church in its ministries of credibility needs to be present on the side of the most disadvantaged or marginalized in society. If the church in its organized life is on the side of young people, it is not always apparent to them, nor is it apparent to many youth ministers. For example, among the followers of Jesus, systemic unemployment which denies any persons their fundamental human rights must not be met with either the silence of words or the silence of deeds. If there are structural inequities present in society, then colluding in them are managerial-class and investment class persons who name themselves as followers of Jesus and on whom has been lavished the best talent and the best facilities the church has to offer. These persons have a special responsibility to be on the side of the have-nots, though they may not all have heard the gospel preached as good news of justice.

Evangelization and catechesis can only take place in an ambience of freedom and choice.

Could it be that adult catechesis in general has been ignored in the church? Have catechetical leaders fully accepted the fact that the days are gone when Christian faith could be passed on through family traditions and through socialisation in village or neighbourhood values? In the age of television, could it be that expressions of robust faith can only be continued through deliberate nurturing, which will need careful catechesis?

I now wish to comment on the proper relationship between catechesis and ministry. In its ministry, the church, while on the side of the victims must also be at their side, as a guiding, healing presence among the people. Establishing such a presence may be a particular problem where some might expect certain of the church's ministries to be institutionalised in services provided by the state. Still, the parish that gives the impression that its one and only ministry is that of worship has already begun to die, because it has ignored its wider mission.

A good example of a ministry that can function properly only in the local believing community is the ministry of catechesis. As an ecclesial activity, catechesis cannot, of its very nature, be relegated to the schools. The General Catechetical Directory makes it clear that the chief catechiser is not a teacher, even one called a catechist, but the believing community itself. "Within the scope of pastoral activity, catechesis is the term to be used for that form of ecclesial action which leads both communities and individual members of the faithful to maturity of faith. With the aid of catechesis, communities of Christians acquire a more profound living knowledge of God and of his plan of salvation centred in Christ" (Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, General Catechetical Directory, Washington: USCC, 1971), Par 21, p 21).

Notice the communal stress here. Catechesis is not for children only; in fact it is not even mainly for children. It is primarily adult activity, that is, a lifelong struggle to make sense of death, evil, injustice, and suffering, a struggle that emerges with something to celebrate.

If catechesis is mainly done apart from the local community of faith and mainly in schools, what happens to a young person who leaves school at age fifteen or sixteen? Is that person, who is apt statistically to be from the poorest sectors of society, to live the rest of his/ her life with a primary school understanding of faith? Are there not understandings of faith appropriate or even accessible only at later moments of life, including some of the more complex issues of justice and peace? Who then will be the catechist for this fifteen-year-old no longer in school? Or who for example will catechise the business executive whose decisions may worsen economic injustice? If the local church does not face up to catechesis as its own work, then we leave our people with the "catechesis of the tube", with the catechesis of Dallas and Kojak, a religion geared to the ever-greater fulfilment of consumer fantasies. We no longer have a choice in this matter. We either, like the third world churches, ground our work of religious transformation in slow and careful catechetical ministry or we abandon our people to oppressive systems, in this case to the marketeers.

Religious Education in the Schools

I have stressed the catechetical importance of the church's being on the side of the most marginalized and of placing catechesis within ministry. In this concluding section, I wish to comment explicitly on the role of the school in dealing with religious understandings. To be blunt, I have great doubts about the possibilities of catechesis in the schools. In my view, schools should be doing religious education and leaving catechesis to be done by and within the local church community. There needs to be an extended discussion of this matter here, such as is currently underway in the United States and Canada. I suggest the following three points be included in that discussion.

1. A fundamental question, often overlooked by teachers but fundamental to understanding the social reality of a school, is the following: Under what circumstances and auspices do those who assemble in schools come together there? And what sort of institution is it in which they assemble?

1 would love to believe, as one whose profession involves teaching in a school, that the young who assemble there do so willingly because of my skill as a performing artist and because of the luminous quality of my reflections. Yet I know students do not assemble in a university for the reasons people assemble in a theatre. The forces in the university are complex and even contradictory.

In a primary or secondary school, however, the forces are much more direct and compulsory. Those who assemble in those places do so because not to do so would mean the intervention of the state in their lives. Since civil law mandates schooling up to a certain age, those who assemble in schools do not do so out of a full choice on their part. To admit this fact is not to deny that many children and youth actually enjoy various aspects of life at school. In fact, youth often rank teachers highly in the list of those who understand them, just after parents, a wonderful tribute to the teaching profession. Still, the primary and secondary school does not exist as a zone of full choice, as becomes clear when we contrast the school with the worshipping community.

The worshipping community is meant to be the place of free assembly. Why? Because it is in the nature of human beings that celebration can only be proposed; it can never be imposed. At the moment of imposition, celebration ceases to be true celebration and becomes something else. It might superficially look like celebration, but the heart has been cut out of it. Celebration works from the inside out; compulsion works from the outside and never fully gets in. Not all in the church like to face the implications of this fact, i.e., that obligation subverts the act of worship.

Catechesis is a cousin of celebration. In the early church, full catechesis could only take place after the ecstasy of both having gone down into the water of baptism and shared in the broken bread of the body. This fullest form of catechesis was mystagogic catechesis, a pondering of the wonderful things that had happened. Mystagogic catechesis was the final step in the catechumenate, a process every step of which the community insisted be free.

If freedom and choice is a central aspect of catechesis, then that aspect is masked somewhat when catechesis is done in the zone of obligatory attendance, i.e., the school. In catechesis the person is actively pursuing his or her own understanding. The catechist presumes that the person has already embraced Jesus' way and stands inside the circle of faith. In a school that presumption of choice is not so possible as it was, say in a voluntary group. Voluntary presence at a Eucharist indicates people actively seeking an enrichment of their faith life. This illustrates for me choices so central to catechesis, but not necessarily central to a school.

2. Religious education, on the other hand, falls not within ministry as does catechesis, nor is it a cousin to celebration. It rather falls within education and involves not a way of walking like catechesis but a way of studying. It is a kind of inquiry and is more similar to the study of science and literature than it is to catechesis. If I could play with my words 'impose' and 'propose', I am not even sure one can propose literature. The study of literature is a process of exposing it rather than proposing it, that is, of looking at the history of various literary forms and of the ideas and emotions contained in them. To be educated does not mean having come to adopt any of those forms oneself but to understand them as part of the legacy of human expression. The possibility of such understanding is of course itself a great gift.

If freedom and choice is an essential aspect of catechesis, then that aspect is masked somewhat when catechesis is done in the zone of obligatory attendance, i.e. the school.

Similarly, religious education is also a great gift, which examines religious questions, including Christian ones, not so much from the point of commitment, which is the perspective of catechesis, but from that of intellectual inquiry. What seems especially important about religious education is that it can dispel multiple illusions young people can develop about religious matters: that the religious is limited to the Christian; that the

religious is something imposed on them by an institution called the church, rather than an area of human achievement pursued in all cultures of all time; that other religious forms are 'wrong' in the face of our 'right' way. Religious education seeks religious literacy that is, a broad understanding about how religious forms work, especially about how religious language works.

In doing religious education, we need not exclude the examination of Christian and Roman Catholic matters, but we examine them from a much more objective stance than that used in catechesis. Catechesis presumes conversion; religious education presumes some willingness for disciplined inquiry. Its goal is not growth in commitment so much as growth in understanding. The fulfilment of catechesis is worship and action for justice. The fulfilment of religious education is mastery in an intellectual sense. I claim that such an approach to religion is especially important after about age 14-15, when many young people need a chance to re-think their own religious commitments.

One of the reasons I stress the value of religious education is my commitment to catechesis. We will never move to religious education until catechesis is more properly situated in the local church, as a lifetime pursuit of fidelity to discipleship. The pursuit of fidelity certainly has its ups and downs, which is one reason we have a sacrament of reconciliation at all. If we knew that the catechesis necessary for a lifelong pursuit of discipleship was going on in our local churches, we would then be able to broaden our approach to religious matters in schools, where intellectual inquiry is the appropriate mode. However, where there is little lifelong catechesis going on, I can see how persons in the schools might be reluctant to move toward religious education.

3. A further aspect of schools deserves a word: the issue of freedom. If Christian faith cannot be imposed, neither can education, because in its deepest sense education also comes from inside out. A key problem schools have to grapple with is that of establishing a consensual climate. When a person reaches the age for secondary school, there must be sensitive attention to the establishment of such a climate. In schools there is an educational triangle among whose parts must be developed a harmonious balance: the faculty, the students, and the subject matter. The relation among these parts needs to be negotiated between students and teachers. One does not establish consensus by incessantly asking students, "What would you like to do today". Yet if students have not agreed to a particular line of disciplined inquiry, there will be little learning. In modern societies with ready access to information via television, young people are more and more resisting the imposition of education forms in which they have no say. At all levels of education, dialogue is the appropriate form, not communiques from on high. Communiques undermine education, though they are the death of catechesis. In dealing with religious issues, schools need to be especially open places.

Catechesis presumes conversion; religious education presumes some willingness for disciplined inquiry.

Conclusion

In this presentation I focused attention on the marginals in our society. I did so out of a conviction that the option for youth should be fused with the option for the poor. If our entire program of ministry, including catechesis, begins among the marginals, at their side and on their side, that position provides us with the radical questions for discipleship in our time. I have highlighted the catechetical questions of choice and readiness. This draws attention to the lifegiving but tolerant posture of those who gather in faith, who are secure enough in their own continuing search for fidelity to allow time and space for the one who does not quite fit.



CLASSROOM PRACTICE

The Language of Religious Education Teachers

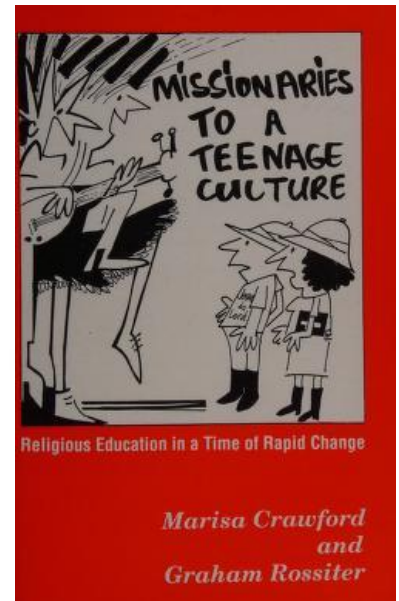
(Marisa Crawford & Graham Rossiter. *Missionaries to a Teenage Culture* - excerpt from chapter 10)

Both their choice of words and the patterns of their sentences are of crucial importance if teachers want to communicate effectively in religious education. These principles apply to the writing of curriculum materials and to classroom teaching.

The first of these is reasonably obvious, even though it is often forgotten. This has to do with using words that are meaningful to the students. For example, it is not really helpful to use technical religious terms unless their meaning is explained, or to use terms which are beyond the present experience level of the students.

Similarly there may be problems if terms have multiple meanings, or if they have different associations. Words like 'meek' and 'father' can be understood in very different ways depending on the experiences that students have had. Terms which arouse positive feelings in some people may have negative meanings for others.

As well as noting this general caution, religious education teachers are urged to listen to their students, whether through discussion or through written responses. This can give evidence of the stage of language development and can help to identify points of misunderstanding or confusion.



Facts or Beliefs

Not so easily recognised, and perhaps more fundamental to effective communication is the way in which teachers speak about beliefs, whether their own or those of others. Belief statements are those about which differences of outlook are found within the community. Particularly in religious education, these include statements about God, claims about Jesus or other religious leaders, interpretations of the Bible and views on the authority of the Bible.

In speaking about Jesus a distinction may be made between saying that he was crucified at a particular time or place and saying that he was the Christ who died for the sins of the whole world in accordance with God's plan. The first statement could be the factual reporting of any observer and is potentially open to historical research. The latter statement presumes a belief about who Jesus was and thus is of a different kind.

Students from religious education classes often express two seemingly contradictory criticisms about their teachers: (i) Some are seen as pushing one view and being unwilling to listen to what the students think, feel or believe; and (ii) other teachers are seen as failing to give a clear indication of what they themselves believe or what they are trying to achieve.

There is a simple but effective way out of this dilemma. It is a method that is already used by most teachers in general social interaction and yet its use in the classroom seems to take practice. When adults talk to other adults who may have a different point of view, there are simple social protocols or manners which avoid any appearance of 'pushing ideas

down someone else's throat'. This is a way of showing respect for others and allowing them the freedom to share their views in return.

However, even those teachers who see students as deserving of the same respect as adults can still find it hard to change their way of talking in religious education. They may acknowledge that they do not like it when others are 'pushy' with them about religion, yet they find themselves either doing that with their students or becoming 'non-committal' when they try to be more open.

The problem seems to arise partly from the way most people have experienced religious education themselves in the past, which leads to the assumption that 'that's the way it's meant to be done'. This seems to be happening when staff teachers who teach very creatively in other subject areas become 'preachy' when they teach religious education. The style used in printed religious education curriculum materials often helps to maintain this same problematical tradition.

The Problem of Presumption

In essence, the problem has to do with teachers speaking presumptively, in that their way of talking presumes that their hearers are believers who necessarily agree with them. This may be done by talking about issues of belief as if they are simple matters of fact to which no alternative view can be offered.

The use of such pronouns as 'we', 'us' and 'our' to create an appearance of shared belief between the speaker and listeners may be another form of presumption. Of course, there are times when the use of 'we' is a valid expression of having reached agreement or having shared experiences. At other times these language patterns represent an attempt by one person to speak for others when there is no acknowledged consensus. Such presumption tends to create resentment in those who do not share the view expressed.

Among the more obvious forms of this language problem are such statements as "We go to church". "Because we love Jesus we don't do things like that, do we?" and "We should care for our bodies because they are God's gift to us". Teachers would do well to pause and ask themselves who it is that 'we' represents. If it is meant to be those present, it is possible to check whether the views expressed are shared by all.

Some teachers seem to be hoping that beliefs will somehow 'rub off' onto students if they are said with great conviction and without any recognition that they are beliefs. In other cases religious words seem to be 'dropped' into sentences to make it sound like a religious education lesson. One result is that some students answer 'God' or 'Jesus' to almost any question because that seems to be what the teacher wants to hear.

Some religious education curriculum materials tend to be heavy in presumptive language and this has come to be expected by many teachers. Their style implies that teachers and students hold the same beliefs, which is usually not the case even in church schools. Hence, the language of religious education teachers is often inappropriate when dealing with belief issues.

Teachers' Notes can be written without resort to this presumptive language. In them, teachers are invited to talk about their beliefs, but the materials do not presume to make faith statements on their behalf. Once they become aware of the reasons for this change, most teachers appreciate the greater freedom that it gives.

Further, Teachers' Notes are not limited by some 'agreement' to deal only with areas in which no major disagreements arise. Points of difference need to be acknowledged as well as points of similarity within the religious traditions.

Owning and Grounding

The problem of presumption is overcome by altering the patterns of the sentences used by teachers. It is possible to find a way of speaking which leaves them free to state clearly what they believe, what this or that tradition believes and does, or what the Bible says, without denying to students the freedom to respond from their perspective. As noted, adults have this skill in other areas of life, but they seem to find it hard to apply in religious education.

This process is described here as the owning and grounding of belief statements. These terms sum up the ways adults qualify their belief statements in everyday conversation:

- (i) sometimes they own the belief as theirs, by the use of such terms as "I believe ...", "It seems to me that ...", "I feel ...", "I think ..." and "In my experience ...".
- (ii) alternatively they ground the belief by attaching it to some group of people who hold it or to some source from which it comes, such as "Christians believe ...", "The ... church teaches ..." or "Genesis 1:1 says ..."

Owning or grounding a belief does not prove that it is true or that it is authoritative for others. However, because it does not presume upon their agreement the students are more likely to be able to hear and to discuss what is being presented.

When beliefs are owned or grounded they sound less dogmatic, and some may fear they will sound less authoritative. However, when the source of their authority, whether in personal experience or in the tradition, is made clear, this provides important data for those who are being asked to consider where they stand in relation to those beliefs. This is in keeping with the custom, in both academic writing and preaching, of acknowledging the authority on which a statement is based.

A quick way to check the authority or source of a belief statement is to ask "Who says it?" or "Who believes it?" This assists teachers to either own the statement or to ground it by indicating who believes it to be true.

Open Communication

The careful use of language in the classroom provides a simple and practical solution to these potential problems. Several benefits can be seen to follow when teachers either own or ground belief statements.

1. It gives teachers greater freedom to deal with their own beliefs in class.
2. It makes conversation about beliefs more open and easier to develop, in that once teachers and students learn either to own or to ground statements of belief, it is easier for others to respond with their beliefs, whether these are the same or different.
3. By this approach speakers do not presume upon the beliefs of their hearers, helping avoid the negative reactions and 'discipline problems' that such presumption can generate.
4. Most denominations acknowledge the importance of faith decisions as part of the development of religious maturity. However, when beliefs are referred to as if everyone thinks that way, the role of decision is hidden. In contrast, if beliefs are owned or grounded, the issue is brought into the open for consideration. In this way students can become aware of the importance of such decisions, without any implication of an attempt to enforce or require commitment to a particular belief.
5. Some students are placed in a situation of tension in that they receive contradictory views on belief issues from various significant adults. The language of religious education teachers can heighten this tension or can support and encourage the students in working out their own patterns of belief. If this is done by teachers from the earliest primary school

years, students may be better prepared to work through the faith struggles which often characterise the teenage years.

6. One of the difficulties facing religious education teachers is to make the content as concrete as possible. When beliefs are owned or grounded they are linked to individuals or groups who hold them. This will help to make them more concrete in that the beliefs are seen as having implications for people's lives.

7. When referring to the Bible, care in owning and grounding can help clarify the way in which it is being used. This will involve distinguishing between (i) quotes from the Bible; (ii) interpretations or summary statements based on someone's reading of the Bible; and (iii) implicit claims concerning the authority of the Bible in people's lives. The statement "The Bible says ..." is a form of grounding if it can be followed by the question "Where does it say it?"

These issues relating to the language of religious education teachers may be seen to apply in any teaching context and with whichever curriculum is being used.

Owning or grounding their references to beliefs can help teachers communicate more easily. It enables them to speak in a way that is inclusive of all students, without making assumptions about prior commitments. It also provides an example which can assist the students in giving clearer expression to their own beliefs and attitudes.



ARTISTS' CORNER

Babylon & Boogie Street

Leonard Cohen's exploration of covenants broken and kept

(Marcia Pally)



Since Leonard Cohen's death in 2016, a great many things have been written about the "poet laureate of despair," as the journalist Simon Worrall called him. His every song, every drink, and every affair has been inspected. But while there is a growing literature on Cohen's religious imagery, relatively little has been written about the distinctive way Jesus figures in his work or, more generally, about how that work addresses our relationship with God and with each other.

From the beginning of his career to its end, covenant and its breaches were among Cohen's major themes. A passage from Augustine's *On Christian Belief* could serve as an introduction to Cohen's work: "If you love only what cannot be snatched out of its lover's hand, you undoubtedly remain unbeaten." If one directs one's love to what cannot be "snatched" away—that is, to God—one will suffer neither unfulfilled longing nor loss.

Cohen's images of inner disunity and loss—of desires not only unsatisfied but also unsatisfiable—illuminate the challenges of human intimacy with God and our fellow creatures, our fears of vulnerability and dependence. Contrary to Augustine's wisdom, Cohen was unable to stay constant to God and so find peace with himself. Nor could he stay constant to the women he loved. This double restlessness was his persistent wound, investigated in more than sixty years of song and poetry that provide an inventory of his soul.

Cohen grew up in what he called the "Catholic city" of Montreal. His Catholic nanny took him with her to church. The power of the Gospel's imagery and its weight in our cultural-emotional repertoire was, in Cohen's view, unavoidable, regardless of one's religious beliefs. "Any guy," Cohen told writer Alan Hustak, who says blessed are the poor, blessed are the meek, has got to be a figure of unparalleled generosity and insight and madness. A man who declared himself to stand among the thieves, the prostitutes and the homeless. He was a man of inhuman generosity, a generosity that would overthrow the world if it was embraced.

Jesus captured Cohen's imagination because he lived out the Hebrew Bible covenant as Cohen himself could not. Cohen also studied Buddhism and other wisdom traditions, yet, as he told Stina Lundberg Dabrowski in 1997, his religious views were Judaic: "I was never looking for a new religion. I have a very good religion, which is called Judaism." But Cohen's inquiries into Judaism took him also to Jesus. "As a Jew," philosopher Babette Babich notes, "Cohen reminds us to feel for Christ, not to be a Christian necessarily but to get the point about Christ." Cohen got "the point about Christ"—his lesson of loving and giving for the sake of others—but found it hard to sustain.

Cohen ran through commitments like water. "Rinse and repeat, again and again," as Babich put it. What is this covenant that Cohen was trying to uphold, as he believed Jesus did? If God is the source of all that is, humanity must partake of that source in order to exist. In Genesis, God breathes the breath of life into Adam. "In all things," Aquinas wrote, "God works intimately." But while we are in "intimate" relation with God, we are also radically different from God. We are material; God is immaterial. We are finite; God is infinite. So all creatures are in intimate relation with a God from whom they are radically different.

We become who we are through networks of relation with those who have had an impact on our lives. This is how Cohen wrote about it in "Love Itself" (2001, with Sharon Robinson): "In streams of light I clearly saw / The dust you seldom see / Out of which the nameless makes / A name for one like me." In the Kabbalist tradition of Isaac Luria (1534-1572), sacred vessels that originally contained God's light shattered under God's brilliant power. In the stream of divine luminescence, the song's narrator sees the dust we seldom see, the dust from which God makes us in an act more intimate than any other: creation.

Cohen then plays with "name" and "nameless." In Jewish tradition, God is often referred to as The Name, because the Tetragrammaton, YHWH, is unpronounceable. In this lyric, the infinite, incorporeal, unnameable God creates from dust a finite, material, nameable person. This is how we come to be. Because the cosmos is created as a network of relations among different beings, not only are we in intimate relation with God (despite the radical differences between God and us) but we are also in necessary relation with one another. We are not separate and complete persons who may choose to enter into relationships. Rather, we become who we are through networks of relation with all those, near and far, who have had an impact on our lives. Thus, our flourishing requires that we see, and see to, these relations. Thriving means attending to the well-being of the persons and networks that form us. As Cohen puts it in "Please Don't Pass Me By" (1973):

I brushed up against the man in front of me.

I felt a cardboard placard on his back....

It said "Please don't pass me by—

I am blind, but you can see—

I've been blinded totally—

Please don't pass me by."

Passing others by means failing to see them and failing to see to them. And that failure precludes flourishing, theirs and our own. One name for this seeing and seeing to others is "covenant." Because of our relational nature, attending to others in reciprocal commitment is the way we flourish. Princeton theologian Max Stackhouse explains covenant among persons as "an ethical outworking of the divine-human relationship." In a kind of a spiritual Möbius strip, covenantal concern for others builds our covenant with God, even as covenant with God sustains us in giving covenantally to others. Cohen explains it thus: "The Heart beneath is teaching / To the broken Heart above... / Come healing of the Altar / Come healing of the Name" ("Come Healing," Old Ideas, 2012, with Patrick Leonard).

Covenant is bottom-up as well as top-down. Cohen notes both the healing at the human altar as it reaches "up" to God and the healing that comes from the Name, God, as it reaches "down" to the world. And yet, we break covenants almost every day. We bolt from the bonds we need, from the covenantal commitments that make us who we are, that allow for peace and thriving. What gets in the way? Everything human. We follow the call of Babylon and Boogie Street, two themes in Cohen's work: the hustle for lucre, self-interest, another (sexual) adventure, and the comfort of intactness, of not being dependent on another—not even on God.

Biographer Sylvie Simmons describes two of Cohen's "favorite things" as "no strings" and "an escape clause" from commitment. But who made human nature to be this way? God. And there is the nub of Cohen's theodicy, his argument with God about the suffering in his creation. We are created for covenantal commitment, yet we are also made to be able to breach it. But Jesus, who was also fully human, subject to the same temptations as Cohen and the rest of us, did not breach his covenant. Cohen returned to Jesus often in his work to make this point: despite our fears and covenantal breaches, we may yet choose covenantal commitment to God and to other persons. This, despite the fact that Cohen knew himself to be a habitual breaker of covenants, a man always disappointing himself and others.

With women, he was the kind of guy who finds even serial monogamy constraining. He feared being entrapped, by women or by God. In "Lover Lover Lover" (1974) Cohen wrote: "I [God] locked you in this body / I meant it as a kind of trial." The same God who made us for committed love also locks us in bodies whose urgent desires betray them. What kind of rigged "trial" is that? What kind of God?

Still, Cohen understood his frustration to be his own failing, and he kept returning to this God throughout his life. Rage and reconciliation, rinse and repeat. In his last song collection he wrote, "I've seen you change the water into wine / I've seen you change it back to water too / I sit at your table every night / I try but I just don't get high with you." Yet in the same collection, Cohen ends the title song, "You Want It Darker," with a declaration to God: "Hineni," the Hebrew vow of commitment, "Here, I am; I am here for you." Cohen's despair at human inconstancy was directed not only at himself but at all of us—covenant breachers every one. Among his most potent jeremiads is "Israel," where he writes,

Israel, and you who call yourself Israel, the Church that calls itself Israel.... To every people the land is given on condition. Perceived or not, there is a Covenant, beyond the constitution, beyond sovereign guarantee, beyond the nation's sweetest dreams of itself. The Covenant is broken, the condition is dishonored, have you not noticed that the world has been taken away? You have no place, you will wander through yourselves from generation to generation without a thread. The covenant is for "every people," and every people has broken it.

So we wander "through" ourselves, in a world filled with other wanderers, all of us disconnected from one another. We no longer struggle to live with God; we think we've won a modern, "sovereign" independence from the transcendent and no longer tolerate the marks of bondedness.

What is God's response? Grief, but not foreclosure. God holds the door open. This, like covenantal giving, is also the point about Jesus. In "Avalanche" (1971), Cohen writes that God, in the body of Jesus, steps into the avalanche of human life. He is rejected, abandoned, yet hopes for humanity's return. "You say you've gone away from me / But I can feel you when you breathe... / It is your turn, beloved / It is your flesh that I wear."

Having assumed human flesh to be with humanity, to love and secure us, God still hopes for our return to covenant. Cohen was especially moved by Jesus' love for humanity even in the midst of betrayal. This brings together Cohen's two "points" about Jesus: his lesson of covenantal love and his lesson of what befalls us when we betray such love. Among other horrors, we crucify God. "Jesus," Cohen wrote, "was nailed to a human predicament, summoning the heart to comprehend its own suffering by dissolving itself in a radical confession of hospitality"—a hospitality that extended to his persecutors. Jesus forgave. We can learn from that, but we often don't. As Doron Cohen (no relation) quoted Leonard as saying in 2001:

Into the heart of every Christian, Christ comes, and Christ goes. When, by his Grace, the landscape of the heart becomes vast and deep and limitless, then Christ makes His abode in that graceful heart, and His Will prevails. The experience is recognized as Peace. In the absence of this experience much activity arises, divisions of every sort.

These divisions are our slavery in Egypt, our exile in Babylon, our Boogie Street, and our cross. By breaching commitment, we sadden the God of Israel and Jesus, who nevertheless shows us grace. In "The Window" (1979), Cohen writes, "Why do you stand by the window / Abandoned to beauty and pride / The thorn of the night in your bosom / The spear of the age in your side?"

Why, Jesus, do you bother to stand at the window, exposed to all, while humanity in every age abandons you to beauty and pride? How, why, do you love us, we who betray you? Cohen asked that question throughout his six decades of writing. He knew there could be no real flourishing until we commit ourselves to others in a way that echoes, however imperfectly, Jesus' love. Cohen caught moments of it in his life, lost it, missed it, and sought it again. At the age of seventy-eight, he wrote of Jesus' love-amid-crucifixion as what restores humanity: "The splinters that you carry / The cross you left behind / Come healing of the body / Come healing of the mind" ("Come Healing," 2012, with Patrick Leonard). It is from the splinters of the cross "left behind" for us that our self-inflicted wounds of body and mind are healed. In the refrain of "The Window," Cohen seeks his "chosen" love, he who was once human ("matter") and now is grace ("holy" "ghost"). Cohen asks that this love "gentle this soul" from the suffering we cause ourselves.

Oh chosen love, Oh frozen love

Oh tangle of matter and ghost

Oh darling of angels, demons and saints

And the whole broken-hearted host

Gentle this soul.

On the fifth anniversary of his death, we may hope that this prayer was answered.



WEBSITE

World Community for Christian Meditation (WCCM)

www.wccm.org



About the WCCM

The WCCM is a global spiritual community united in the practice of meditation in the Christian tradition. It shares the fruits of this practice widely and inclusively, serving the unity of all and building understanding between faiths and cultures. Members of WCCM span more than a hundred countries. There are about sixty-seven national coordinators. Its international centre is Bonnevaux – an ancient monastic site now dedicated to global peace and dialogue around the daily practice of meditation – near Poitiers in France

WCCM Mission Statement

To communicate and nurture meditation as passed on through the teaching of John Main in the Christian tradition in the spirit of serving the unity of all.

The Two Doves



The two doves on a chalice is the WCCM's symbol. It is a universal expression of the union of contemplation and action. A very ancient text describes them as 'two sweet friends' and the same idea is found in the story of Martha and Mary in the Gospel. Meditation in daily life is the heart of the WCCM Community: the experience of Being as the foundation of all Action.

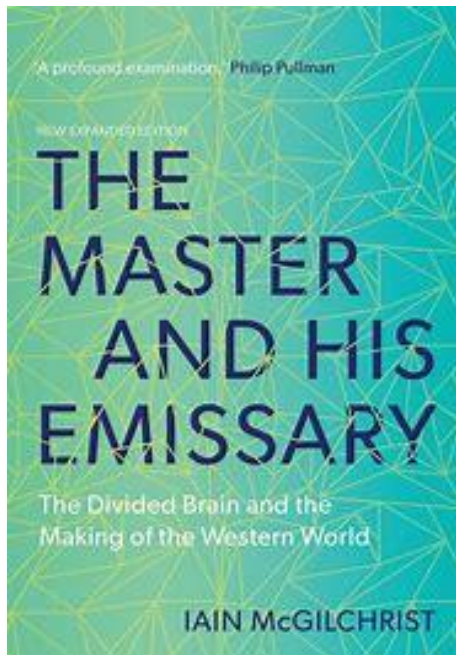
The website is rich in downloadable resources for meditation and for teaching, and it carries news of events both in person and online.



BOOK REVIEW

The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World

(Iain McGilchrist)



Mary Midgley enjoys an exploration of the left-brain/right-brain divide

This is a very remarkable book. It is not (as some reviewers seem to think) just one more glorification of feeling at the expense of thought. Rather, it points out the complexity, the divided nature of thought itself and asks about its connection with the structure of the brain.

McGilchrist, who is both an experienced psychiatrist and a shrewd philosopher, looks at the relation between our two brain-hemispheres in a new light, not just as an interesting neurological problem but as a crucial shaping factor in our culture. He questions the accepted doctrine that the left hemisphere (Left henceforward) is necessarily dominant, the practical partner, while the right more or less sits around writing poetry. He points out that this "left-hemisphere chauvinism" cannot be correct because it is always Right's business to envisage what is going on as a whole, while Left provides precision on particular issues.

Moreover, it is Right that is responsible for surveying the whole scene and channelling incoming data, so it is more directly in touch with the world. This means that Right usually knows what Left is doing but Left may know nothing about concerns outside its own enclave and may even refuse to admit their existence.

Thus patients with right-brain strokes – but not with left-brain ones – tend to deny flatly that there is anything wrong with them. And even over language, which is Left's speciality, Right is not helpless. It usually has quite adequate understanding of what is said but Left (on its own) misses many crucial aspects of linguistic meaning. It cannot, for instance, grasp metaphors, jokes or unspoken implications, all of which are Right's business. In fact, in today's parlance, Left is decidedly autistic. And, since Left's characteristics are increasingly encouraged in our culture, this (he suggests) is something that really calls for our attention.

The book's title comes from the legend of a wise ruler whose domains grew so large that he had to train emissaries to visit them instead of going himself. One of these, however, grew so cocky that he thought he was wiser than his master, and eventually deposed him. And this, says McGilchrist, is what the Left hemisphere tends to do. In fact, the balance between these two halves is, like so many things in evolution, a somewhat rough, practical arrangement, quite capable of going wrong. The bifurcation seems to have become necessary in the first place because these two main functions – comprehensiveness and precision – are both necessary but are too distinct to be combined. The normal sequence, then, is that the comprehensive partner first sees the whole prospect – picks out something that needs investigating – and hands it over to the specialist, who processes it. Thus the thrush's Left is called in to deal with the snail-shell; the banker's Left calculates the percentage. But, once those pieces of work are done, it is necessary for the wider vision to take over again and decide what to do next.

Much of the time this is indeed what happens, and it is what has enabled brains of this kind to work so well, both for us and for other animals. But sometimes there is difficulty about the second transaction. Since it is the nature of precision not to look outward – not to bother about what is around it – the specialist partner does not always know when it ought to hand its project back to headquarters for further processing. Being something of a success-junkie, it often prefers to hang on to it itself. And since we do have some control over this shift between detailed and general thinking, that tendency can be helped or hindered by the ethic that prevails in the culture around it.

McGilchrist's suggestion is that the encouragement of precise, categorical thinking at the expense of background vision and experience – an encouragement which, from Plato's time on, has flourished to such impressive effect in European thought – has now reached a point where it is seriously distorting both our lives and our thought. Our whole idea of what counts as scientific or professional has shifted towards literal precision – towards elevating quantity over quality and theory over experience – in a way that would have astonished even the 17th-century founders of modern science, though they were already far advanced on that path. (Thus, as a shocked nurse lately told me, it is proposed that all nurses must have university degrees. Who, she asked, will actually do the nursing?) And the ideal of objectivity has developed in a way that would have surprised those sages still more.

This notion, which now involves seeing everything natural as an object, inert, senseless and detached from us, arose as part of the dualist vision of a split between body and soul. It was designed to glorify God by removing all competing spiritual forces from the realm of nature. It therefore showed matter itself as dead, a mere set of billiard-ball particles bouncing mechanically off each other, always best represented by the imagery of machines. For that age, life and all the ideals relevant to humanity lay elsewhere, in our real home – in the zone of spirit. (That, of course, was why Newton, to the disgust of later scholars, was far more interested in theology than he was in physics.) But the survival of this approach today, when physicists have told us that matter does not actually consist of billiard balls, when we all supposedly believe that we are parts of the natural biosphere, not colonists from spiritual realms – when indeed many of us deny that such realms even exist – seems rather surprising.

Why do we still think like this? Why can't we be more realistic? McGilchrist's explanation of such oddities in terms of our divided nature is clear, penetrating, lively, thorough and fascinating. Though neurologists may well not welcome it because it asks them new questions, the rest of us will surely find it splendidly thought-provoking. And I do have to say that, fat though it is, I couldn't put it down.

[The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World by Iain McGilchrist | Books | The Guardian](#)

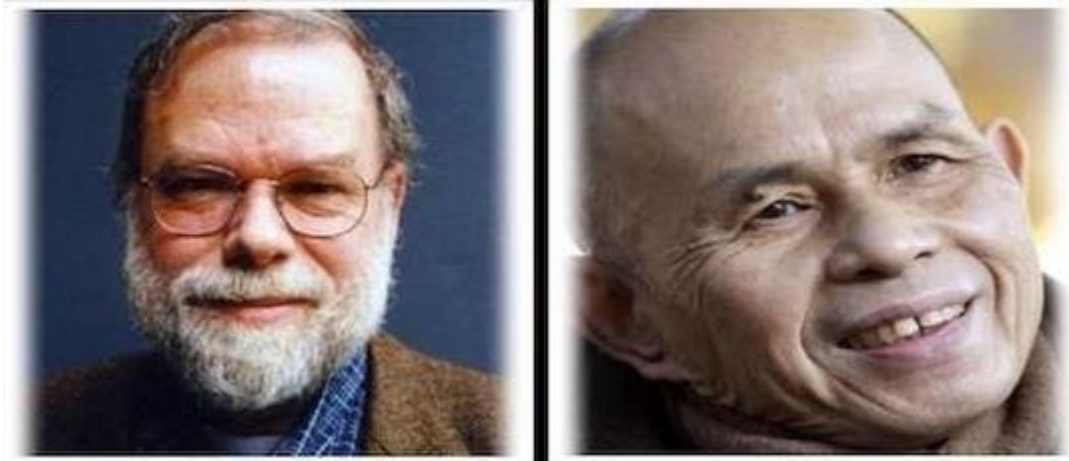


LOCAL & INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Two Lost Voices

(Chris McDonnell)

Remembering the American author-theologian who waged peace and the Vietnamese Buddhist monk who taught "mindfulness"



Jim Forest (1941-2022)

Thich Nhat Hanh (1926-2022)

Within a few days of each other two resonant voices have been lost -- that of Christian writer Jim Forest, who died this past January 13, and that of the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh, who died on January 22.

I first met Jim Forest through a second-hand bookshop in Brighton, England.

Running back to the car late on a Saturday afternoon in a bitter cold January dusk, I came to the bookshop. Opening the door, I called out to the owner "Have you any books about the American monk, Thomas Merton?"

His hand went to the bottom of a stack of books on a nearby table and pulled out a book. "Will this do?"

For £2 he sold me Forest's book, A pictorial biography of Thomas Merton.

When I got back to the car, I found it had been signed by the author. Later, I e-mailed Jim via his US publisher and he responded. Little did I know then that we were starting a corresponding friendship that would span nearly 30 years.

Jim had a widespread audience through his many books and lecture tours.

Following his reception into the Catholic Church in 1960, he worked with the Catholic Worker Movement in New York City alongside the redoubtable Dorothy Day, editing the movement's news sheet *The Catholic Worker*. He would later write an acclaimed biography of Dorothy Day, *All Is Grace*.

With the growing impact of the war in Vietnam, he became active in the US peace movement. Late in the 60s he would serve 13 months in jail for burning draft records in Milwaukee.

Friends of Jim

Four years ago he published a memoir of another peace activist -- the Jesuit, Daniel Berrigan -- called, *At Play in the Lion's Den*.

Jim's writing was invigorated and informed by his own participation in the events of his time and by the people he knew.

Another correspondent of his was Thomas Merton.

One day whilst he was working with Dorothy Day, she received a letter from Merton which she passed on to Jim for reply. In Merton's *Collected Correspondence* there are included a number of letters exchanged with Jim.

I have often wished that we could read Jim's side of the story. He would later write about Merton's attitude towards the peace movement in his book *The Root of War is fear*.

A while back Jim collected his own thoughts of his life and published *Writing straight with crooked lines*. He wrote it for his grandchildren so that they might know something of their grandfather. It is a marvellous record of a turbulent period of time.

Being within the Orthodox community in Alkmaar, Jim was very attached to icons. When we met at a conference in Oxford in the late 90s, I gave Jim an icon I had made. Before thanking me he reverentially kissed the image.

He gathered his reflections on the place of icons in his Christian life in his book *Praying with Icons*.

Thay, the teacher of "mindfulness"

His final publication, *Eyes of Compassion: Living with Thich Nhat Hanh*, is an illustrated memoir of the Buddhist monk. It came out only a few months ago.

That Thay (or "teacher", as Thich Nhat Hanh was called) should pass on his journey just a few days after Jim Forest is the closing of yet another door.

Jim has left us all a written record that will stand the test of time and an example of faith for all to see.

Thich Nhat Hanh died in the city of Hue in central Vietnam in the same Buddhist temple where he had become a monk so many years ago.

He had no idea then where his life path would lead him, for he was to become an internationally known figure for peace and reconciliation. That was recognized in the widespread press coverage of his death.

Fluent in seven languages, he lectured at Princeton and Columbia Universities in the early 1960s, developing his teaching of "mindfulness".

"A bowl of rice"

In "A bowl of rice", published last March, I recounted the story of Jim and Thay washing up after supper. It bears repeating.

After supper one night, Thay held an empty rice bowl and said, "Jim, think of all the threads that are passing through this bowl. Think of the people who made it.

Think of those who taught them their craft. Think of the people who played a part in learning to make a bowl that could last through many meals. Think of the people who dug the clay. Think of the fire that making this dish required. Think of the wood cutters. Think of all the meals that have been served in it.

Think of the people who made the meals and of those who taught them their skills. Think of the farmers who grew the food we eat from this bowl. Think of all the light that has brightened this bowl.

Think of the water that has washed this bowl, water that has fallen as rain and disappeared into rivers and oceans and risen into the air as clouds and then fallen again

as rain. In such thinking you are only beginning to see this bowl. The whole universe is present in this bowl.

Thay returned to Vietnam after his long exile in the West. During his many years of teaching and writing, he had offered us a glimpse of Buddhist teaching and had been a constant voice for peace in the country of his birth.

Martin Luther King nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1967, but award was not given to anyone that year. What a pity that an opportunity to recognize him was lost.

Thich Nhat Hanh suffered a severe stroke in November 2014. It robbed him of his speech, but his gentle presence remained within his community. He advocated "walking meditation", urging people to "walk as if you are kissing the earth with your feet".

Lives lived in the company of these two men have been touched by the experience and we should be grateful for it.

May Jim Forest and Thich Nhat Hanh rest in the peace of the Lord as we continue on our journey in faith.

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/religion/two-lost-voices/15556>



CPTD

Ministry, Catechesis and Religious Education: Implications for Youth Ministry and Catholic Schools

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>

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