Catholic Institute of Education

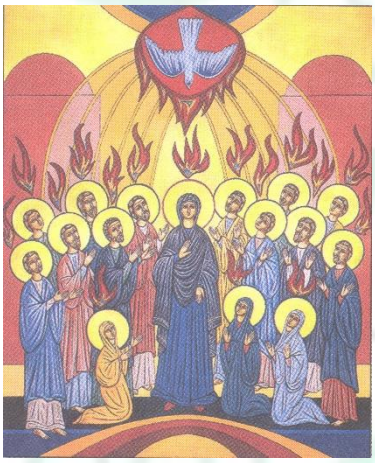
Roots & Wings

VOLUME 8 NO. 2 JUNE 2022

The Periodical of the Professional Society of Religious Educators

EDITORIAL

Welcome to the second 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?

- 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 Cosmic Dimension of The Resurrection

(Ron Rolheiser)

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was once asked by a critic: "What are you trying to do? Why all this talk about atoms and molecules when you are speaking about Jesus Christ?" His answer: I am trying to formulate a Christology large enough to incorporate Christ because Christ is not just an anthropological event but a cosmic phenomenon as well.

In essence, what he is saying is that Christ did not come just to save human beings; he came to save the earth as well.

That insight is particularly relevant when we try to understand all that is implied in the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus was raised from death to life. A body is a physical reality so when it raised up as a body (and not just as a soul) there is something in that which is more than merely spiritual and psychological. There is something radically physical in this. When a dead body is raised to new life, atoms and molecules are being rearranged. The resurrection is about more than something changing inside of human consciousness.

The resurrection is the basis for human hope, surely; without it, we could not hope for any future that includes anything beyond the rather asphyxiating limits of this life. In the resurrection of Jesus, we are given a new future, one beyond our life here. However, the resurrection also gives a new future to the earth, our physical planet. Christ came to save the earth, not just the persons living on it. His resurrection ensures a new future for the earth as well as for its inhabitants.

The earth, like ourselves, needs saving. From what? For what? In a proper Christian understanding of things, the earth is not just a stage for human beings, a thing with no value in itself, apart from us. Like humanity, it too is God's work of art, God's child. Indeed, the physical earth is our mother, the matrix from which we all spring. In the end, we are not apart from the natural world; rather we are that part of the natural world that has become conscious of itself. We do not stand apart from the earth and it does not exist simply for our benefit, like a stage for the actor, to be abandoned once the play is over. Physical creation has value in itself, independent of us. We need to recognize that, and not only to practice better eco-ethics so that the earth can continue to provide air, water, and food for future generations of human beings. We need to recognize the intrinsic value of the earth. It is also God's work of art, is our biological mother, and it is destined to share eternity with us.

Moreover, like us, it is also subject to decay. It too is time-bound, mortal, and dying. Outside of an intervention from the outside, it has no future. Science has long taught the law of entropy. Put simply, that law states that the energy in our universe is running down, the sun is burning out. The years our earth has before it, like our own days, are numbered, counted, finite. It will take millions of years, but finitude is finitude. There will be an end to the earth, as we know it, just as there will be an end to each of us as we live now. Outside of some re-creation from the outside, both the earth and the humans living on it have no future.

St. Paul teaches this explicitly in the Epistle to the Romans where he tells us that creation, the physical cosmos, is subject to futility, and that it is groaning and longing to be set free to enjoy the glorious liberty of the children of God. St. Paul assures us that the earth will enjoy the same future as human beings, resurrection, transformation beyond our present imagination, an eternal future.

How will the earth be transformed? It will be transformed in the same way we are, through resurrection. The resurrection brings into our world, spiritually and physically, a new power, a new arrangement of things, a new hope, something so radical (and physical) that it can only be compared to what happened at the initial creation when the atoms and the molecules of this universe were created out of nothingness by God. In that initial creation, nature was formed, and its reality and laws shaped everything from then until the resurrection of Jesus.

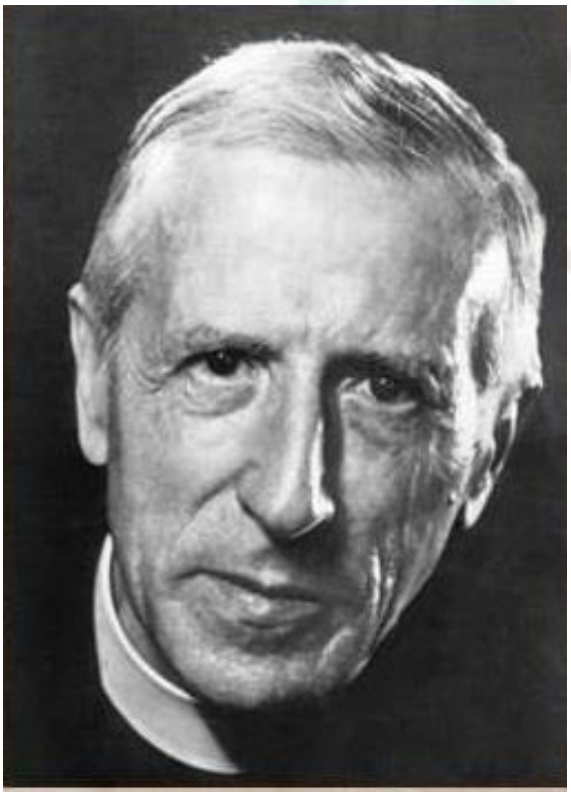
However, in the resurrection, something new happened that touched every aspect of the universe, from the soul and psyche inside every man and woman to the inner core of every atom and molecule. It is no accident that the world measures time by that event. We are in the year 2021 since that radical recreation happened.

The resurrection was not only spiritual. In it, the physical atoms of the universe were rearranged. Teilhard was right. We need a vision wide enough to incorporate the cosmic dimension of Christ. The resurrection is about people, and the planet.

REFLECTION

A prophet of our time

(Chris McDonnell)



Hoping Pope Francis will one day publicly recognise and proclaim the value of Teilhard's life of faith, his prophetic writings and the bridge he built between science and belief.

May 1st was the birthday in 1881 of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, that is 141 years ago.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's life sparkles with the mixture of scholarship and faith.

Ordained in 1930 as a priest in the Society of Jesus, his life experience spanned the scientific world and his Christian belief.

He was named to the French Academy of Sciences in 1950 for his ground-breaking work in palaeontology whilst at the same time his writings incurred the displeasure of Rome.

For many years, up to his death in 1955, Teilhard was forbidden to publish his writings or lecture in Catholic institutes. He was effectively silenced. But he continued to write.

During one of his expeditions in the Ordos desert in China, he found himself without the means to offer Mass. Instead, he wrote the famous meditation, *La Messe sur le Monde* ("The Mass on the World"), a faith-filled statement of his Christian belief. That was in 1923.The opening paragraph sets the tone of the whole essay.

Since once again, Lord- though this time not in the forests of the Aisne but in the

steppes of Asia- I have neither bread, nor wine, nor altar, I will raise myself beyond these symbols, up to the pure majesty of the real itself; I, your priest, will make the whole earth my altar and on it will offer you all the labours and sufferings of the world.

The book in which it was included, the *Hymn of the Universe*, was refused the imprimatur by Rome. That restriction on his publishing lasted through to his death in New York City on Easter Sunday in 1955.His great work, the *Phenomenon of Man*, was submitted to Rome in 1941. That was also refused and in subsequent years, the restrictions on him were increased.

Yet through it all, Teilhard remained faithful to God, his priesthood and to the Society of Jesus.

In more recent years, there have been signs of a slow accommodation to his thought, beginning in the years of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) where his privately circulated thoughts are said to have had a considerable influence.

Back in the 1980s, I was visiting Lindisfarne, often known as Holy Island, off the North Eastern English Northumberland coast. Centuries ago, it had been the monastic home of Saint Cuthbert, the great Celtic saint. It is a remote place linked to the mainland by a causeway, passable only at low tide.

After wandering round the few narrow streets, I knocked on the door of the local Anglican chaplain who generously invited me in. Together over tea and cake we talked for more than hour, much of it about Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

He had never read *Le Messe sur le Monde,* so, when I got home, I typed out a copy and sent it to him. This was in pre-lap top days and my typing was far from perfect.

I will always remember the letter he sent me on receipt of the text in which he wrote, "We may never meet again, but thanks for a lift on the way." We did in fact meet a few years later when, on returning to Lindisfarne, I again knocked on his door and received the same hospitality.

Too many theologians of the 20th Century received similar treatment that Teilhard did from Rome, as do others -- priests, sisters and layfolk -- in our present time. Somehow, we must understand that restrictions such as those experienced by thoughtful men like him will not stand the test of time.

Now we have Pope Frances, Bishop of Rome, himself a member of the Society of Jesus.

It would be good if, at some time before he is called to the Lord, he could publicly recognise and proclaim the value of Teilhard's life of faith, his prophetic writings and the bridge he built between science and belief.

https://international.la-croix.com/news/religion/a-prophet-of-our-time/16082

REFLECTION

Pope Francis proposes Dante as a "prophet of hope"

(Sabine Audrerie)

On the 700th anniversary of the death of Dante Alighieri, the pope holds up the great Italian poet and philosopher as a man for our own times

(Dante - Sandro Botticelli 1495)

Pope Francis' affection for the work of Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) is well known. The pope has frequently quoted the great Italian poet and philosopher since becoming Bishop of Rome. Last fall when he met with a delegation from the Archdiocese of Ravenna, where Dante spent the last years of his life and is buried, Francis said he intended to return to the writings and experience of the 14th century luminary at some point. He said he was especially interested in exploring Dante's experience of being exiled from his native Florence, saying this could help us shed light on "crossing the many dark forests of our land" even today. The Italo-Argentine pope surprised and delighted many this past week when he fulfilled that promise by issuing an apostolic letter to launch celebrations for the 700th anniversary of Dante's death. He did so at noon on March 25, the hour of the Angelus on the Feast of the Annunciation. The timing was not by chance. The new document is called *Candor lucis aeternae* ("Splendour of Eternal Light") and it invites readers to meditate on the Incarnation. It evokes the memory of the Virgin Mary with words that Dante puts in the mouth of Saint Bernard:

Thou Virgin Mother, daughter of thy Son,
Humble and high beyond all other creature,
The limit fixed of the eternal counsel,
Thou art the one who such nobility to human nature gave,
that its Creator did not disdain to make himself its creature
Within thy womb rekindled was the love,
By heat of which in the eternal peace
After such wise this flower has germinated.

The new apostolic letter is beautiful and literary. Profound and enlightened by the voice of the poet, it welcomes from the outset the power of literature to recount the depth of love. It also strives to show the relevance of Dante's work, "to appreciate the enduring warnings and insights it contains for humanity as a whole, not simply believers".

A call to fraternity

Francis is not the first pope to extol the writings of Dante. In the new letter he recalls that, at the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), Paul VI gave all the bishops an artistic copy of the poet's most famous work, The Divine Comedy. The current pope -- who's latest encyclical, *Fratelli tutti*, is a summons to create a more fraternal world -- invites us to contemplate the living heritage constituted by this medieval Italian work as also a call to fraternity. Francis notes that Dante has something to say to all of today's exiles through his own experience of being banished from Florence in 1302 during the political unrest between the White and Black Guelphs. The pope emphasizes the creativity and vitality that Dante drew from this. "Pondering his life of exile, radical uncertainty, fragility, and constant moving from place to place, sublimated and transformed his personal experience, making it a paradigm of the human condition, viewed as a journey – spiritual and physical,"

Francis writes. Like Paul VI, who insisted on the transformative finality of *The Divine Comedy*, the Jesuit pope also finds a strong call to conversion in this reading. He calls Dante a "prophet of hope", a messenger of mercy and free will. The poet demonstrates this in the way he describes the ardour of human desire in the first canto of the Inferno:

But thou, why goest thou back to such annoyance?
Why climb'st thou not the Mount Delectable,
Which is the source and cause of every joy?

A contemporary story

Francis thus proposes Dante as a model to imitate in order to reach "the right path to live a fully human life", especially in our time "over-clouded by situations of profound inhumanity and a lack of confidence and prospects for the future". He insists on the relevance of the Dantean narrative even for today, especially as the poet was the first to compose his works in Italian, rather than Latin. "If Dante tells his tale admirably, using the language of the people, it is because he has an important message to convey, one meant to touch our hearts and minds, to transform and change us even now, in this present life," the pope writes. Finally, Francis obviously delights in commenting with a very fresh eye on the brief appearance of Francis of Assisi among the many saints mentioned by Dante, indicating their closeness. "Francis, with his followers, left the cloister and went out among the people, in small towns and the streets of the cities, preaching to them and visiting their homes," the pope writes. "Dante made the choice, unusual for that age, to compose his great poem on the afterlife in the vernacular, and to populate his tale with characters both famous and obscure, yet equal in dignity to the rulers of this world," Francis observes. "Another feature common to the two (Dante and St. Francis) was their sensitivity to the beauty and worth of creation as the reflection and imprint of its Creator."

https://international.la-croix.com/news/religion/pope-francis-proposes-dante-as-a-prophet-of-hope/14033

TALKING ABOUT RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (CPTD) [1]

Fostering Hope: Christian Religious Education in a Postmodern Age (Part One)

(Harold Horell)

Editor's Notes:

1. While the reader and the writer may not be of the same generation, the observations and arguments put forth in this paper are still relevant today.
2. While this paper addresses a Christian audience, readers of other faiths are invited to apply the arguments to their religious context.]

Abstract

How should Christians address our often ambiguous and increasingly postmodern world? The article explores some of the ways cultural postmodernity is affecting Christian communities. The tendency to trivialize understandings of meaning and value is highlighted as one of the greatest challenges posed by the negative aspects of postmodernity. It is argued that religious educators can help to overcome this trivializing tendency by fostering hope in the continuing viability of the church and Christian traditions

[1] Read this article for CPTD points. See Page 20.

and practices, turning to youth as natives of postmodern culture to guide us in addressing contemporary trends, and focusing on a common commitment to Christian discipleship.

A mother and daughter stood in a local shopping mall. With her finger wagging in the air for emphasis, the mother lectured the daughter: "When I was your age. . . When I was your age…" The daughter waited. Finally, she interrupted, saying, "Ma, you were never my age." The mother, stunned by the response, was silent, (story courtesy of Thomas Groome).

Those of us who have reached the generative stage of life and who spend a great deal of energy nurturing, teaching, and mentoring today's youth and young adults may be able to identify with this mother. Most of us were born during or before the early 1960s. We are from the Baby Boom and earlier generations. Most of us were formed within and have internalized one or another version of the modern worldviews that have dominated from the Enlightenment to the recent past. Our outlooks on life tend to be grounded in the conviction that we as human beings can come to know our world and order our lives with reasonable clarity and confidence. We are inclined to embrace the power of human reason, objective thinking, and faith in progress.

As mentors of today's youth and young adults we may at times be somewhat at a loss. Contemporary youth and young adults are from Generation X and the Millennial Generation. Gen Xers were born between the early 1960s and early 1980s, while Millennials include those born from the early 1980s to the present (Howe and Strauss 1993, 2000). These two age cohorts have grown up within the era of the cultural shift from modernity to postmodernity. That is, the ebb and flow of our multifaceted, often ambiguous, and increasingly postmodern world of today provides the baseline of experience for Gen Xers and Millennials. They are often acutely aware that there are multiple modes of rationality and that all knowledge is grounded in specific times and places. Rather than learning to think in terms of linear progression, Gen Xers and Millennials are challenged to become sophisticated at processing the multiple images and perspectives available on every topic in our contemporary communication and computer age (see Lakeland 1997).

When those of us from the Baby Boom or earlier generations are honest with ourselves we may find ourselves asking: "Do we have anything to contribute to the nurturing of youth and young adults as they face a world of accelerated change, a world that is vastly different than the world of our own youth?"

In this article I begin by reviewing some of the ways the currents of cultural change are affecting faith formation in the church today. Then, I outline and evaluate three paradigms for responding to those changes. Finally, I consider what those of us who are mature Christians might have to contribute to nurturing youth and young adults in a world that is very different from the world we knew as youths. In brief, I argue in the final section that our best contribution can be to foster hope in the continuing promise and presence of God in our communities of faith and our lives and world today.

Signs of a Shift toward Cultural Postmodernity in Christian Faith Communities

1. Within Many Christian Faith Communities, there is a Re-Thinking and Re-Imagining of the Dynamics of Educating for the Development of a Sense of Christian Identity

The dynamics of fostering a sense of Christian identity are understood frequently as involving "nurture" and/or "conversion." Within many Christian faith communities the commonly accepted practice is for children and adult neophytes to be nurtured gradually in faith. The goal of such nurturing is to enable people to come to understand the doctrines and practices of a faith community as a foundation for developing a relationship with God and forming a sense of personal and communal identity as a Christian. There is also often a sense that while nurture may lead a person to learn about Christian faith, people do not truly embrace Christian faith until they experience conversion, that is, have an encounter with the Divine that leads to a decisive faith commitment. Conversion is envisioned in some

traditions as a dramatic, perhaps once-in-a-lifetime experience of turning from sin in order to be open to God. In other traditions significant life passages or events (such as emerging from adolescence, giving birth to a child, experiencing God profoundly in nature or working through a mid-life transition) are viewed as having the potential to trigger conversion experiences that can lead to or renew a commitment to God and a life of Christian discipleship. While there are debates about how the dynamics of nurture or conversion relate to one another, understandings of these dynamics tend to be based on the conviction that in order to develop a sense of Christian identity believers must embrace established Christian understandings of meaning and value. That is, either established understandings are transmitted to a person or a person learns to correlate his or her life with Christian Faith.

In our increasingly postmodern world the dyad of "nurture" and/or "conversion" is being transformed and in some cases superseded by a sense of Christian identity as "constructed." Consider the story of a couple I met when working as a pastoral minister. I will refer to the couple by the pseudonyms Rita and Joe. Joe grew up in a German-American Catholic community in the northeastern U.S. Rita grew up in a Mexican-American Catholic community in southern Texas and northern Mexico. During her teen years Rita was among a large number of Mexican-Americans who moved into Joe's parish. Joe and Rita met, fell in love, and married. They believed that their faith perspectives would eventually meld together into a unified and comprehensive Christian vision of life.

Today, as they raise their three children, Rita and Joe approach issues oi faith in a new way. First, they have come to value their religious differences. Indeed, Joe and Rita want to preserve these differences insofar as they feel that each of them brings uniquely valuable religious traditions and customs from their respective backgrounds. Second, together with their children, Joe and Rita are trying actively to construct a sense of Christian identity that is appropriate for them. Rita and Joe draw from various strands of their religious backgrounds and are open to exploring other faith traditions as well. They are not just nurturing their children from a font of established Christian wisdom or inviting them to be open to profound conversion experiences. They have a new awareness of how the Christian perspectives they grew up thinking were normative and universal for all Christians, if not all people, are rooted in the specific outlooks, concerns, histories, and social contexts of their respective German-American and Mexican-American Catholic faith communities. Moreover, they are teaching their children to weave together strands of meaning from our pluralistic, multicultural world into a framework of faith that provides a sense of personal centeredness and enables them to make meaningful connections with God and others.

Generally, contact among ethnic groups within Christian denominations, life situations that create connections across Christian denominations or between Christians and people of other faiths, the realities of single-parent and blended families, and a host of other postmodern complexities create situations in which established structures of meaning and value no longer prove to be adequate. A radical awareness of the historical and bodily situatedness of all human knowing and doing gives rise to a sense that the resources and traditions of the past are not trans-historical or universal structures of meaning and value, but can be taken as historical examples, raw materials, or even as fragments that need to be selectively and creatively combined in constructing a sense of faith identity that can guide thought and practice in the present.

2. There Has Been a Shift from a Focus on Religious Belief and Developing a Religious Worldview Toward Greater Emphasis on the Importance of Spiritual Experiences and Religious Practices, and Connecting Spiritually with God, Others, the World, and One's "Inner Self"

In the past, education in faith often focused on learning the doctrines, prayers, and rituals that expressed a particular Christian understanding of the world. Faith formation moved toward the embracing of a framework of meaning and value that was applicable to all life

situations. Adherence to this Christian worldview provided security and offered a foundational framework for approaching most if not all dimensions of life. Moreover, we often grew up with the sense that the core aspects of a Christian worldview were held in common by the members of our family, faith community, neighborhood, nation, and perhaps even by all people of good will.

Today, growing diversity, pluralism, multiculturalism, and rapid rates of change have led many religious educators to focus less on Christian worldviews. On the one hand, there is postmodern sense that we must increasingly face new, unprecedented situations, and that the established truths of Christian worldviews are less and less helpful as guides for our lives and faith communities. As a result, we find a greater focus today on cultivating spiritual experiences and developing religious practices that lead us beyond anxieties and discomforts with our life situations and that foster a sense of connecting with an inner self, the world, others, and God. There is also a greater openness to drawing from a variety of religious traditions to foster a sense of spiritual vibrancy. On the other hand, in our postmodern age we begin to expect difference rather than a shared worldview when we approach a colleague, a neighbor, and sometimes even a member of our own family. Consequently, religious education has come to place greater emphasis on navigating difference and connecting spiritually with others despite the diversity of beliefs found among the various communities of which we are a part.

A postmodern focus on spiritual experience and religious practices that enable us to connect spiritually with others can be illustrated by an encounter with a Catholic I met about six years ago. Jerry (again, a pseudonym) is an active volunteer and leader in his parish whose spirituality is marked by a religious eclecticism: a drawing together of spiritual resources from various Christian denominations and a combining of Christianity with insights and practices from other faith traditions. While Jerry attends mass at his parish, he is also involved in a Bible-study group at an evangelical Lutheran church. In addition, he practices yoga and Buddhist meditation. Jerry claims that all of these things help him to connect with God and other people, and to remain personally centered. Jerry is not interested in finding a way of bringing together the various strands of his spiritual life into some overarching and comprehensive religious understanding of life. Jerry is content to explore connections between his numerous spiritual practices, note incompatibilities and even inconsistencies among them, and to continue to explore a variety of spiritual paths in terms of what "works for me," that is, what provides him with a sense of centeredness and the meaningfulness of life. Additionally, Jerry continually seeks out others who also value spiritual openness and with whom he can share a search for meaning and value in a complex and ambiguous world. (For another example of postmodern spiritual questing see Hampl 2000.)

3. Many Christians and Christian Faith Communities Are Re-Thinking Their Understandings of Authority, Including Religious Authority

Within the cultural paradigm of Western modernity, large institutions supported broad frameworks of meaning and value. Churches, schools, business corporations, political parties, branches of the military, and other major institutional structures provided authoritative and comprehensive accounts of what life can and should be like. These comprehensive accounts and the authorities that represent them are being questioned more frequently today. First, the representatives of large institutions are perceived less often as speaking with complementary voices. It is increasingly common for us to feel stretched by conflicting visions of life presented in our faith communities, jobs, and local communities. As we are caught in the midst of increasing social fragmentation we more frequently raise critically reflective questions about these authorities. Second, there is a growing awareness that the interests pursued by large institutions are always rooted in specific, limited and at times even sinful perspectives, and are, even at their best, never fully reflective of a universal worldview. (This awareness is often fueled by the exposing of

corruption such as in the crises of sexual abuse and institutional authority in the ETL Club/Jim Bakker organization in 1987 and the Catholic Archdiocese of Boston in 2002.)

The questioning of established institutions and authorities is clearing the way for the acceptance of new sources of religious authority in the lives of many Christians. To begin, more of us are turning to popular culture for religious guidance. For example, in *Virtual Faith* Tom Beaudoin discusses how some Gen Xers experience the play "Rent"[2] as capturing the spiritual struggles of their generation, taking on the authority of a spiritual classic for them (1998, xiii).

A renewed sense of the importance of Christian witness in the world is one among many other factors also contributing to the development of new sources of religious authority. Greater emphasis is often placed today on the need for Christians to make meaningful and morally responsible connections between faith and everyday life. We are challenged to ask how our faith affects the way we parent our children, do our jobs, interact with our neighbours, vote, are involved in the civic life of our communities, and participate in the marketplace. As we embrace a theological understanding of the Christian vocation in the world, we sometimes develop a sense of being able to speak with a unique religious or spiritual authority. Consider as an example my experience with a group of counseling psychologists who are exploring how their faith convictions affect their professional practice. As they draw upon both their professional competence and their deep religious commitments, the counselors have an increasing awareness of their unique competence to address religious and spiritual issues when such issues are raised by their clients.

The waning of established structures of authority and the development of new sources of authority is leading to a redefining of the nature of authority in our lives and world. For instance, the counseling psychologists with whom I have worked have sometimes found themselves in tension with established authority structures in both their professional and faith communities. The counselors' openness to addressing spiritual issues in their professional practice has been challenged within their profession because of deep-rooted suspicions of religion in mental health counseling. They also report feeling that efforts to live their faith in their everyday lives are sometimes applauded on a theoretical level but are not authentically acknowledged and encouraged in their faith communities. As a result, these counselors have come to believe that we can rarely if ever take the perspectives presented by established authorities as unquestioned "givens." They contend that we need always to be ready to cope with competing sources of authority. They hold that that we must be able to balance sources of authority based on life experience, personal and professional competence, and the wisdom that may come from a small group or a basic Christian community with the authority of professional guilds, other social institutions and Christian denominational leadership. Moreover, I think these counselors' outlook is not idiosyncratic. Rather it is expressive of a growing cultural trend that is especially prominent in today's youth and young adults. (Harry Lee Foe offers an-albeit overly pessimistic-analysis of the shift from a modem to postmodern senses of authority in *Christian Witness in a Postmodern World*, 2000, 77-92).

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[To be continued in Vol 8 No 3]

[2] *Rent* is a rock musical with music, lyrics, and book by Jonathan Larson, loosely based on Giacomo Puccini's 1896 opera La Bohème. It tells the story of a group of impoverished young artists struggling to survive and create a life in Lower Manhattan's East Village in the thriving days of bohemian Alphabet City, under the shadow of HIV/AIDS (Wikipedia – Editor's footnote).

CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Advice to Beginners—And to Myself

(Thomas Groome)

I walked into my first formal setting as a religious educator—a boys' Catholic high school with a class of sophomores[3]—at the age of 21, now some 40 years ago. It seems only like yesterday; make the most of every day, they pass so quickly. But there I go, already advising you, when in fact I am hesitant about this whole exercise. For I am keenly conscious that in many ways, I was never your age. You have grown up in and now work with people from a very different world than my original one—an old Irish village. Can you even imagine a time and place where there was no television or telephones, and only snail mail—some days?

Yet, there are enduring features to the human condition and to Christian faith, my focus here, and thus to the challenge of integrating the two. So, perhaps I have come by a little wisdom from the heat of the day that you might find helpful in your morning time. But instead of addressing it only to you, let me address it to myself as well. Truth is that I often forget to practice the wisdom I have learned, and, in a sense, I am starting over—in you—and should begin again tomorrow, myself. I will limit to seven points.

First, let us attend to our own growth toward holiness of life—in whatever our tradition may be. For me this means becoming ever more faithful in discipleship to Jesus Christ. Meanwhile, over the years, I have personally verified that old scholastic adage, *nemo dat quod non habet*—you cannot share with others what you do not have yourself. I note, too, that all three Synoptics, using the analogy of salt for discipleship, warn that salt that loses its savour is useless. Luke says that it's not even fit "for the manure pile" (Lk 14:34).

Personally, I have not been entirely negligent, and I have benefited spiritually from what I have tried to teach. However, I have learned the hard way that I do far better religious education when I am active in a vibrant Christian community, take time for good personal prayer and communal worship, see a wise spiritual companion regularly, engage in works of compassion and justice, have regular retreats, and take the kind of amusement time that prompts me to glimpse again God's presence and abiding love.

Saint Augustine, writing in his First Catechetical Instruction (circa 400 CE), urged religious educators to have *hilaritas* about their work. This is usually translated as joy or enthusiasm, although I like the hint of "hilarity." I have had the most *hilaritas* when what I was teaching engaged and nurtured my own spirituality as well. It's imperative that we at least try to practice what we teach and do so with enthusiasm.

This requires our own "care of soul"; with the help of God's grace, we must keep our salt salty.

Second, I encourage you and remind myself to be clear about our purposes as religious educators. Now this may surprise a little; shouldn't our primary concern be with what to teach and how to teach it. I suggest that we first get clear about why—the purposes that prompt us. For if we are clear about what we hope to achieve in people's lives and the world by educating religiously, this will—and should—guide our what and how.

I do best when I remember my "blue sky" purposes, the grandiose vision that nevertheless sustains my work and especially in difficult times. My best sense is that my religious educating should ultimately help bring about the reign of

[3] A second-year student

God, that God's will of fullness of life for all may be "done on earth as it is in heaven." God's reign was Jesus' sense of purpose; it should be the meta-criterion[4] that guides what and how I teach as well. You need to choose your ultimate best hopes and perhaps a summary symbol for them—like God's reign—and then let this ever sustain and disturb you.

We also need to choose more immediate purposes. I say that I am educating for Christian faith, but then must remember its holistic nature if what and how I teach is to promote it. Like its great commandment, Christian faith demands all of one's "mind, heart, and strength," or, as the Baltimore Catechism stated, "to know, love, and serve" as people of God. In other words, we must educate in ways that inform, form, and transform people's lives, enabling them, by God's grace, to become disciples to Jesus as "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6) and "for the life of the world" (John 6:51).

I can state my most immediate purpose as that people might come to know their faith. But then what do I intend by know and is my approach likely to promote such knowledge? At least on good days, I try to honour the biblical sense of knowledge and knowing. Again, this is a deeply holistic and relational affair that engages the heart as much as the head, that reaches beyond understanding to encourage personal conviction and commitment.

Third, and by way of what to teach, let us be true to the constitutive faith of our community but avoiding even the hint of sectarianism. I am thinking in my context of religious educators in the United States where there is little religious education in public schools and most of us are commissioned to educate religiously in the name of a particular faith community—typically our own chosen one.

Now, I personally know of no religious educator who agrees entirely with every jot and tittle of their faith tradition; all of our faiths have a "hierarchy of truths" and the ones lower down are more negotiable; indeed, coming to maturity of faith requires as much. However, every religion makes truth claims that constitute its core; these, I believe, must be re-presented faithfully and persuasively by its religious educators. Otherwise, we fail in our commission and do little to secure the faith identity of those we educate.

On the other hand, as Jesus himself reminded, "in my Father's house there are many dwelling places" (John 14:3). While everyone needs a home within God's family, we must never present our particular faith in ways that disparage other traditions or as if God loves only "our" people. The challenge for religious educators is to ground people in the particular while opening them to the universal—to learn from the universality of God's love and self-disclosure. For Christians, every version of our Story must turn us toward the neighbour in love, including the neighbour who is "other" rather than "the same"; otherwise, we are not sharing Christian Story.

Fourth, I advise that we get to know as well as possible the people with whom we educate. All the great religious educators back to Augustine have advised that effective communication is "according to the mode of the receiver." To begin with, we need to be well informed in the daily news, local and national, to hold, as Barth advised, the Bible in one hand and the morning paper in the other. We need to know the culture of the people with whom we work and get to know them personally, including their names.

Beyond this, we should regularly revisit our theological understanding of this human condition. When I remember that the people I teach are made in the divine image and likeness, that there is a "God-shaped hollow in the human heart that nothing else can fill" (Pascal), then I educate more effectively. This requires me to treat them with respect, encourage them to speak their own word, be open to learn from them and encourage them to learn from each other. On the other hand, if I have a negative attitude toward them, they seem to live down to my expectations.

[4] The most important guiding principle

Fifth, we must encourage a religious education consciousness in our faith communities and families, proactively engaging their shared life as curriculum. I have been gradually drawn beyond the schooling paradigm to a community-based one. Of course, if we only want people to "learn about" religious traditions, then schooling is enough. But if we want them to "learn from" a tradition, perhaps to ground their spiritual identity in it, then schools and formal programs, although vital, will not be sufficient. We must forge coalitions between congregations, families, and schools/programs, whereby all members constantly review every aspect of their shared life for what it teaches, and intentionally craft an ethos that nurtures and sustains people in their faith. It still "takes a village" to nurture a particular identity, including identity in faith.

Sixth, we need to constantly reflect upon and try to improve our approach to doing religious education. Over the years, I have found it imperative to reflect on my own praxis of educating. In fact, whatever competence I have, I attribute to taking time after teaching/learning events to reflect discerningly on what we did and how things went.

John Dewey is often cited as saying that we learn from our experience, but Dewey said that we learn from experience if we reconstruct it, in other words reflect on the why and wherefore of it, what transpired and how we might improve on it next time.

By way of a generic approach—educators must find their own style of doing it—I have long proposed a pedagogy that enables people to bring their lives to a faith tradition, and to bring a faith tradition to their lives. I have written about this under the awkward title of a shared praxis approach, but it is, quite simply, a pedagogy that enables people to integrate their lives with their chosen faith into "lived faith."

Although I have tried to practice such a "life to Faith to life" approach for almost 40 years, oftentimes I do not do it very well. So, I continue to reflect on my praxis to learn to do it better.

Lest we burden ourselves as responsible for the outcomes, **my last counsel** is that we balance our own best efforts with the memory of God's grace. Of course, we must prepare well, be intentional throughout, and reflect back on every teaching/learning event, yet it is always God who "gives the growth" (1 Cor 3:6). On our side of the covenant, we must do the best we can, and then leave the rest in God's hands.

I love the story about John the Baptist (John 1:19–28) when the "big people" in Jerusalem send messengers to inquire if he might be the awaited Messiah. I imagine John being tempted; he would have had good grounds—the extraordinary circumstances of his birth to his aged parents, and so on. In fact, the text hints at some hesitancy on his part. One of the words used, and repeated twice, to describe John's response is *homologeo*; this is usually translated as "to confess" but it also had the meaning to "submit with resistance." So, after a struggle, John finally said, "I am not the Messiah." (Jn 1: 20).

Every religious educator should make John's statement an oft repeated prayer. So, when you are not as good as you could be or should be, or when things do not go as planned (they never do), put your feet up and say, "Well, I'm not the messiah"; leave the rest in God's hands.

I wish you God's best blessings on your vocational path as a religious educator; there is none more strategic. Indeed the very future of our world may well depend on the great religions doing religious education in ways that bring peace and justice for all people and for God's creation. Welcome to this noble work.

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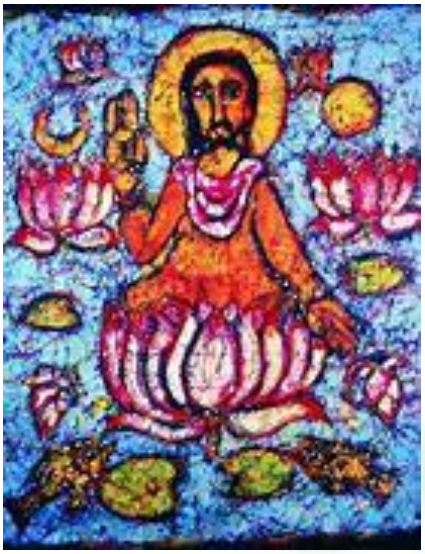
Religious Education Vol. 102 No. 4 Fall 2007, Religious Education, 102: 4, 362 — 366

ARTISTS' CORNER

Solomon Raj



While Jesus is depicted as suffering in much of Christian art, it is almost exactly the opposite in Indian art where Jesus is more often seen at peace. An example of this is Solomon Raj's 1998 batik, *Jesus on the Lotus Flower* – left.

Resurrection (Solomon Raj)

Another of Raj's works depicted here is his *Resurrection*. At the top of this batik there is a bright sun with a lotus blossom below. This symbolizes Jesus' movement from darkness to light and from death into life. The lotus is strategically placed at the foot of the water and rises toward the sun. The lotus flower which emerges from the depths of the water and into the light serves as a symbol of resurrection. At the bottom of the batik, there is the demon of death being trampled by Jesus. Raj made use of the message behind an ancient Hindu prayer to interpret the meaning of the Resurrection: "Lord, lead me from untruth into Truth; from darkness into Light; and from death into Life."

Dr. P. Solomon RAJ was born son of a village mission schoolteacher in the West Godavary district of Andhra Pradesh. He is a Lutheran Theologian from India who wrote his Ph.D. thesis on an indigenous church in India. Solomon Raj is not only a theologian but also an artist. His outstanding batiks and wood-cuts have been shown in numerous exhibitions in Germany, Britain and the USA.

WEBSITE

The LASAR Project

Our Project - Never Off Topic (faradayschools.com)

LASAR (Learning about Science and Religion) was set up in 2009 as a collaborative project between the Institute of Education, Reading University and the Faraday Institute for Science and Religion (based at St. Edmund's College, Cambridge) and is now based at Canterbury Christ Church University.

The LASAR Project was motivated by a concern that there is a strong public

perception (reinforced by some popular media) that science and religion are in some sense opposites, that is that science is an atheistic activity.

In particular, we were concerned that school pupils may come to accept this as a normative standard: something that is both incorrect, and which could deter students who hold a religious faith from considering science as a suitable basis of future study and career.

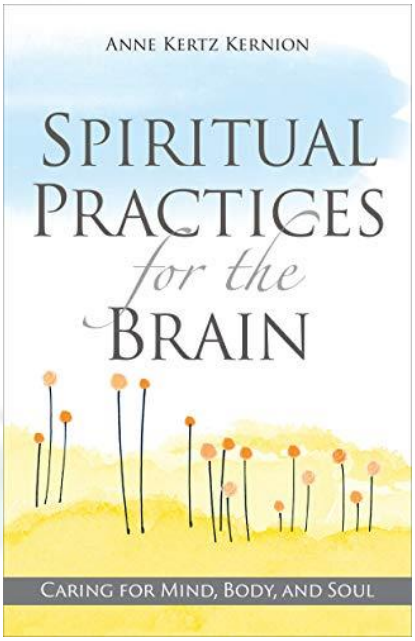
Such an effect would not only be unfortunate when there is widespread concern about the limited numbers of young people seriously considering science careers, but in principle could set up a self-fulfilling prophecy. If people of faith are significantly deterred from science, this runs the risk of them missing out on interesting and fulfilling careers as well as science to be denied great scientific minds!

To see the resources that the project offers go to Site map - Never Off Topic.

BOOK REVIEW

Spiritual Practices for the Brain

(Anne Kertz Kernion)



In *Spiritual Practices for the Brain*, Anne Kertz Kernion relies on the most current research to link spiritual practices to improved health. Relying on her education and experience in brain development, positive psychology, and theology, Anne is able to relate seemingly simple practices such as focused breathing, gardening, practicing kindness, or going for a walk with powerful results for your mind, body, and soul. Her presentation is friendly and readable, and each chapter explores a specific topic such as the Breath, Gratitude, and Self-Compassion, and includes simple practices for readers to try. As an artist and an exercise instructor, she exudes encouragement and hope for the person learning a new practice or revisiting an old one (Amazon.com).

Topics covered in the book are:

1. Taking a Breath, Paying Attention
2. Understanding Meditation
3. Living with Gratitude
4. Learning Compassion and Service
5. Nurturing Community and Relationships
6. Developing Empathy and Kindness
7. Discovering Self-Compassion
8. Enjoying nature and Awe
9. Engaging Creativity and Solitude
10. Dealing with Distraction and Technology
11. Allowing Leisure and Play
12. Exercises for Brain Health

LOCAL & INTERNATIONAL NEWS

The Vatican issues text on schools and "Catholic identity"

(Loup Besmond de Senneville)

A new instruction tries to present a balanced vision of what Church-run institutions should look like.

The Congregation for Catholic Education explained in its report that a school's administration is always "required to inform prospective recruits of the Catholic identity of the school and its implications".

"It is *a school for all*, especially the weakest."

That's how the Vatican defines the identity of the Catholic school, in a new "instruction" from the Congregation for Catholic Education.

The 20-page document – "The Identity of the Catholic School for a Culture of Dialogue" – was signed in January, but only made public this past Tuesday.

It tries to offer a balanced vision of what "Catholic identity" should mean for Church-run educational institutions in societies that are facing an "advanced process of secularization".

On the one hand, the document says this cannot be reduced to "liturgical, spiritual or social occasions, or to the function of the school chaplain".

In other words, the mere presence of a chaplaincy within the walls is not enough to qualify a school as "Catholic".

Do not "confine ourselves on an island"

the contrary, the instruction continues, Catholic schools must not correspond to a "'narrow' Catholic school model".

"In such schools there is no room for those who are not 'totally' Catholic," the Vatican document laments.

"This approach contradicts the vision of an 'open' Catholic school that intends to apply to the educational sphere the model of a 'Church which goes forth', in dialogue with everyone," it says.

"We must not lose our missionary impetus to confine ourselves on an island, and at the same time we need the courage to bear witness to a Catholic 'culture', that is, universal, cultivating a healthy awareness of our own Christian identity," the Vatican insists.

"This text is in line with what the Church has been developing since Vatican II but takes into account the evolution of a secularized society," said Philippe Delorme, secretary general of the department of Catholic education in France.

"This confirms for us that we can only educate for dialogue if we know in whose name we are acting," he said.

Promoting Catholic identity

"It is no novelty to affirm that Catholic schools have their origin in a deep concern for the education of children and young people left to their own devices and deprived of any form of schooling," the Vatican insists in the new document.

Catholic schools also have the mission of preparing students "to exercise their freedom responsibly, forming an attitude of openness and solidarity".

While Rome does not explicitly require that teachers and other school employees be Catholic, the Congregation's instruction explains that school administrators are always "required to inform prospective recruits of the Catholic identity of the school and its implications".

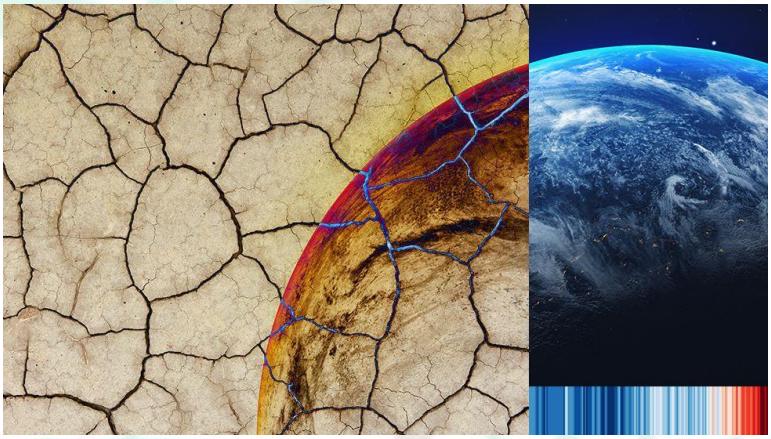
Teachers must also agree to "promote" this identity and show their "adherence to the Church's doctrine".

"If the person being recruited does not comply with the requirements of the Catholic school and its belonging to the Church community, the school is responsible for taking the necessary steps," the document points out.

It explains that "dismissal may also be resorted to, taking into account all circumstances on a case-by-case basis".

Read more at: https://international.la-croix.com/news/education/the-vatican-issues-text-on-schools-and-catholic-identity/15872

COP26: What was agreed at the Glasgow climate conference?



A new global agreement - the Glasgow Climate Pact - was reached at the COP26 summit.

It aims to reduce the worst impacts of climate change - but some leaders and campaigners say it does not go far enough.

What was in the COP26 agreement?

The agreement - although not legally binding - will set the global agenda on climate change for the next decade:

Emissions

It was agreed countries will meet next year to pledge further cuts to emissions of carbon dioxide (CO2) - a greenhouse gas which causes climate change.

This is to try to keep temperature rises within 1.5C - which scientists say is required to prevent a "climate catastrophe". Current pledges, if met, will only limit global warming to about 2.4C.

Coal

For the first time at a COP conference, there was an explicit plan to reduce use of coal - which is responsible for 40% of annual CO2 emissions.

However, countries only agreed a weaker commitment to "phase down" rather than "phase out" coal after a late intervention by China and India.

Developing countries

The agreement pledged to significantly increase money to help poor countries cope with the effects of climate change and make the switch to clean energy.

There's also the prospect of a trillion dollar a year fund from 2025 - after a previous pledge for richer countries to provide $100bn (£72bn) a year by 2020 was missed.

While some observers say the COP26 agreement represented the "start of a breakthrough", some African and Latin American countries felt not enough progress was made.

Fossil fuel subsidies

World leaders agreed to phase-out subsidies that artificially lower the price of coal, oil, or natural gas. However, no firm dates have been set.

What else was agreed in Glasgow?

A flurry of other announcements were made:

US-China agreement

The world's biggest CO2 emitters, the US and China, pledged to cooperate more over the next decade in areas including methane emissions and the switch to clean energy.

China has previously been reluctant to tackle domestic coal emissions - so this was seen as recognising the need for urgent action.

Trees

Leaders from more than 100 countries - with about 85% of the world's forests - promised to stop deforestation by 2030.

This is seen as vital, as tress absorb vast amounts of CO2.

Similar initiatives haven't stopped deforestation, but this one's better funded. However, it's unclear how the pledge will be policed.

Methane

A scheme to cut 30% of methane emissions by 2030 was agreed by more than 100 countries. Methane is currently responsible for a third of human-generated warming. The big emitters China, Russia and India haven't joined - but it's hoped they will later.

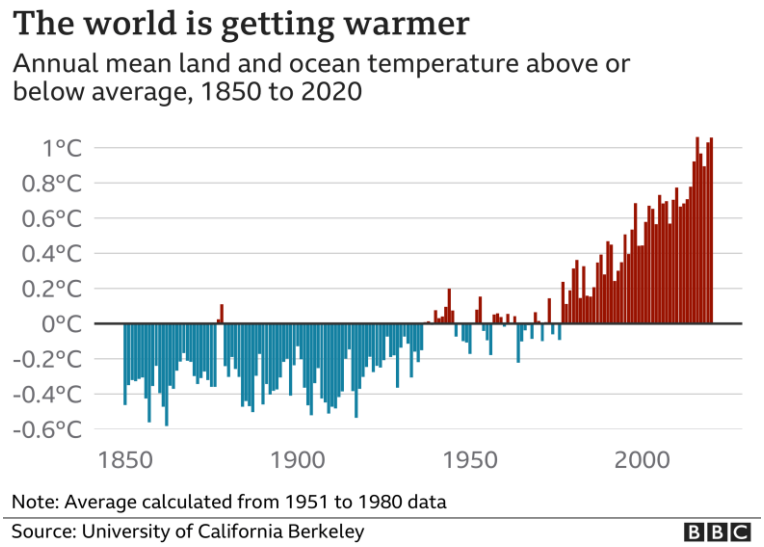
Money

Financial organisations controlling $130tn agreed to back "clean" technology, such as renewable energy, and direct finance away from fossil fuel-burning industries.

The initiative is an attempt to involve private companies in meeting net zero targets. However, some environmental organisations have said without a greater commitment to ending support for fossil-fuels, this could be little more than a PR exercise.

How will countries be made to meet their pledges?

Most commitments made at COP will have to be self-policed. Only a few countries are making their pledges legally binding.



What was COP26 and why was it necessary?

COP26 was the moment countries revisited climate pledges made under the 2015 Paris Agreement. Six years ago, countries were asked to make changes to keep global warming "well below" 2C - and to try to aim for 1.5C.

COP stands for "Conference of the Parties", and the one in Glasgow was the 26th annual summit. Ahead of it, 200 countries were asked for their plans to cut emissions by 2030. The goal is to keep cutting emissions until they reach net zero by mid-century.

Next year's COP27 summit is in Egypt.

https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-56901261

CPTD

Fostering Hope: Christian Religious Education in a Postmodern Age (Part One)

Read the article for CPTD points and record you 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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