



Roots & Wings

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to the third issue of *Roots & Wings* for 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 with one small change in this issue. 'Artist's Corner' becomes 'Portraits', the feature broadened to include other prominent figures.



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

God's Sense of Humour

(Ron Rolheiser)



If we genuinely trust scripture, our own experience, and our own sanity, we can only conclude that God has a sense of humour, and a robust and sneaky one at that. Where's the evidence?

A generation ago, Peter Berger wrote a remarkable little book entitled, *A Rumor of Angels*. Unlike Aquinas, Anselm, Descartes, and a number of renowned philosophers, he didn't try to "prove" the existence of God through logic and argumentation. Rather, he simply examined a number of very ordinary human experiences and pointed to what's hidden inside and behind the walls of those experiences. For instance, when a mother soothes and calms a frightened child at night, assuring the child that there is nothing to fear, she does this in good faith only because at some deep level she intuitively feels that ultimately everything is all right. In effect, unconsciously, she is praying a Creed.

Now, one of the experiences Berger highlights is the experience of humour. Here's his thesis: no matter how oppressive and dire the circumstance, human beings always have the capacity to make light of it, to view it through the prism of irony and humour. For example, martyrs have joked with their executioners and no doubt, there was some banter, sarcasm, irony, and bitter humour at times inside extermination camps. The fact that people can do this, and do in fact do it, shows that there is always something transcendent inside us, something over which no human oppression has power, something that sets us above any situation within which we find ourselves. Our sense of irony and humour manifests that something in our soul sets us above anything that can beset us.

And this can have its source in only one place, inside of the Creator who made us. Thus, not only must God have a sense of humour, humour must be something inherent within the nature of God, since humour is good and God is the author of all that is good.

There's a school of classical philosophy that believes God has four transcendental properties. God, it teaches, is *One, True, Good, and Beautiful* – to this we can add, *Humorous*. Moreover, this can be inferred from more than just the fact that sometimes we sense that humour manifests our transcendence within a given situation. More importantly, we can infer that humour has some godliness from examining the component parts of love. God is love, and humour is undeniably an important part of love.

When the classical Greek philosophers defined love, they highlighted a number of components within it, namely, *erotic attraction, obsession, friendship, pragmatic arrangement, and altruism*. However, they also highlighted another component, *playfulness/banter/humour*. How insightful. Humour along with healthy banter and playful teasing are part of the grease that enables us to sustain relationships long term, despite the inevitable over-familiarity, hurt, disappointment, and boredom that beset even the most loving relationships. Humour helps make it all work. Thus, since it is an innate part of love, it is an innate part of God.

Sadly, we don't often picture God that way. Christianity, Judaism, and Islam have this in common. We all picture God as male, celibate, solemn – and humourless. How might we picture God differently?

If you were to draw up a composite face representing God, whose face would you include in this picture? The pious face of the gentle, blond-haired Jesus with a lamb on his shoulder we see in our holy pictures? Images of a serenely composed and quiet Mary that we see depicted in our statues of her? The face of Mother Teresa? The face of Therese of Lisieux?

The face of Dorothy Day? Of Martin Luther King? Of Oscar Romero? Of Billy Graham? Of Henri Nouwen? Of Rachel Held Evans? The face of your mother or father? Would you also include the face of your favourite comedian or favourite wit? Jerry Seinfeld? Bette Midler? Rowan Atkinson? The mischievous face of your colorful uncle telling a joke?

Any picture of God's face needs to manifest an inner soul that is One, True, Good, Beautiful, but also Humorous and Mischievous. Funny, while I believe that God is the author of humour, I've never been enamoured by the various artistic depictions of Jesus as laughing uproariously. Good idea, good intention, good theology, but to my taste, lacking the right nuance. That kind of laughing face has an ephemeral quality that too easily gives way to something else after it's had its moment. God's face, I suspect, has a quieter, sneakier, more permanent mischievousness to it.

If this is true, if God not only has a sense of humour but is also the author of humour itself, then humour is an important quality within sanctity and holiness. What makes for wholeness, maturity, holiness, love, and for the kind of person you want beside you at the table, here and at the eternal one in heaven? Certainly you want someone who manifests the qualities that Jesus asked for in the Sermon on the Mount - along with a warm, playful, and mischievous sense of humour.

June 5th, 2022.

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REFLECTION

Imagined Communities

(Chris Chatteris SJ)



JESUIT
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'Who is my neighbour?' Jesus answered that perennially disturbing question with the parable of the Good Samaritan, thus radically reframing it way beyond the categories of his legalistic questioner's narrow mind. He demands a vast leap of the imagination - that a Samaritan, a Samaritan! might be capable of being a neighbour to a Jew and that therefore it is possible to imagine that Jews could be neighbours to, well, anyone.

'Imagined communities' is the memorable phrase coined by the Anglo-Irish political scientist Benedict Anderson, to explain the basis of the modern nation-state, how it holds together and to explain the mystery

of why its citizens are prepared even to die for it. In the past, citizens would die for 'God, King and Country', but in a Godless secular era in which monarchs were being overthrown, what would keep people loyal to the country?

We use our imagination, according to Anderson, and the modern imagination has been stimulated and directed by 'print capitalism' in which popular works produced in the vernacular rather than in the specialist languages such as Latin. This really took off with Luther who insisted that Germans and all Europeans should be able to read the Bible in their vernacular languages. Anderson theorises that the first European nation states arose from their 'national print languages' which he also calls 'languages of power'.

We may actually be witnessing the emergence of such an imagined political community in Ukraine, where people are dying for a relatively new modern state,

having gained their independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. And those of us who were around in the 1960s will have seen the emergence of the 'imagined communities' of the newly independent states of Africa, in which a mixture of ethnicities coalesced around a new national identity as a result of a common colonial history and the solidarity of the liberation struggle against the colonial masters.

It is extraordinary that people are willing to die for this philosophically very shaky social construct. But it's quite a challenge to Christians who are supposed to be willing to die for something far more glorious and enduring. How might it help us deepen our own sense of Christian solidarity and belonging in the Body of Christ?

First there is the aspect of the imagination. It's a powerful human asset and the Lord challenges the lawyer to use his imagination more generously. I believe that Christians, especially Catholics, as members of a universal body, try to do this all the time but perhaps rather routinely. We cannot know all the one billion plus members of the RC personally, so we use our imagination to remind us of them and of our place among them in our imagination in intercessory prayer.

As for Anderson's reference to the power of the printed word, it strikes me that if a community can be created by secular words, how much more power can the Word of God possess to move our Christian imaginations to see ourselves as part of a universal body at the service of the universal common good?



TALKING ABOUT RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (CPTD) ¹

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

(Harold Horell)

Editor's Notes:

(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.

While this paper addresses a Christian audience, readers of other faiths are invited to apply the arguments to their religious context.]

[Continued from Vol 8 No 2]

Responding to Cultural Postmodernity

The Christian churches have been responding to the emergence of cultural postmodernity for nearly thirty years. Moreover, it is possible to characterize these responses as fitting into three broad categories: 1) the counter-contemporary response, 2) the late modern stance, and 3) stances that embrace postmodernity (Lakeland 1997, 41-4).

1. Counter-contemporary Responses: Some Christians Focus on the Formation of Faith Communities That Assert Christian Beliefs and Practices Over and Against a Contemporary Loss of Meaning and the Limitations of Cultural Postmodernity

Analysis of the tremendous changes taking place in Christian faith communities leads some Christians to outrage as they judge the influence of cultural postmodernity to be negative.

¹ Read this article for CPTD points. See Page 22.

For example, according to Stanley Hauerwas, "Our world and our lives are far too fragmentary and disordered to know where we are" (2000, 37). For counter-contemporary Christians like Hauerwas, modernity's overarching and inclusive frameworks of meaning and value (i.e., metanarratives, including Christian metanarratives) have always been self-deceiving efforts to impose a false order upon the ambiguities of life. The falsity of modernity's metanarratives is shown by the readiness of modern people to resort to violence to defend their worldviews. From Hauerwas's point of view, postmodernity does nothing to address the fragmentation and tendency to violence in our world. Advocates of postmodern perspectives attempt to convince us by a kind of intellectual sleight of hand that the plurality, ambiguity, and complexity of our times are not a result of our failure to make sense of our lives and world, but are, instead, a virtue to be celebrated. From such a perspective, the growing cynicism and despair of our times stem from an increasing ability to see through the illusions of postmodernity. Overall, Hauerwas rejects "modernity and its bastard offspring postmodernity" (2000, 42).

Hauerwas and others link postmodernism to global capitalism (Jameson 1991; Eagleton 1996). Their arguments are based on the claim that advanced capitalism absorbs all aspects of human culture into an endless cycle of economic production and consumption, resulting in a postmodern culture that exaggerates the extent to which we face new, unprecedented life situations that require us to construct (that is, produce and then consume) a never-ending cycle of new understandings of the world, new senses of social and personal identity, and new frameworks of religious meaning and value. From such a perspective, the more spirituality becomes intertwined with popular culture, the more it becomes another consumer commodity subject to the forces of the global market.

Hauerwas argues that we need to re-centre our lives in the church as a community of Christian character. He claims that "Our hope as Christians is in an *altera civitas* of which we believe we already have substantive intimations in the church." From Hauerwas's perspective, the church has the potential to become a world-transforming, political alternative to the alienation and resulting violence of the modern/postmodern world and, as such, can provide us with "a better hope" (see Heb. 7:18-22) than either modernity or postmodernity (2000,10).

The counter-contemporary stance that Hauerwas exemplifies serves as the operative theology of many Christian faith communities today. In such communities faith formation tends to highlight the importance of conversion as a turning to the church and a movement away from the babel of the modern/postmodern world. Quite often the primary virtue is personal and communal discernment of God's word within the church or sometimes, simply, obedience to the truth made known through the wisdom and authority of the church.

Advocates of the counter-contemporary stance are both right and wrong in their critiques of emerging cultural postmodernity. They correctly diagnose some of the ailments that may develop when postmodern trends lead to a trivializing of life or a diminishing of our abilities to make sense of our lives and world. They can also help Christians to recognize the destructive dimensions of our individualistic, consumeristic, postindustrial society. However, the champions of the counter-contemporary view fail to recognize that there is a positive side to emerging cultural postmodernity. Some of the people affected by the currents of postmodernity build upon critiques of established structures of meaning, identity formation, and authority in order to promote imaginative creativity and the construction of new patterns of self-identity and social solidarity that are more appropriate for today. For instance, in the examples given above, Joe and Rita, Jerry, and the counseling psychologists with whom I have worked are all striving to embrace postmodernity in ways that lead to new growth and a fuller life. Generally, while there are aspects of contemporary culture that need to be critiqued, postmodern spiritual yearning can help us to discern God's active presence in contemporary culture, calling us forth to reconstruct our world in

more life-giving ways. Insofar as those who advance a counter-contemporary stance diminish our appreciation for the presence of God in postmodern culture they add to rather than diminish the trivializing tendencies of our times.

Moreover, despite its rhetorical appeal the central counter-contemporary distinction between the church and the world is untenable. First, as Kathryn Tanner points out, if we try to discuss the uniqueness of Christian community "the incredible expanse of Christian practice across differences of time and place, and the diversity of what Christians say and do even in any one of these times and places, makes questionable the status of Christian practices as some sort of whole" (1997, 94). There have always been internal disputes about Christian identity and the significance of Christian faith, and no clear sense of the universal meaning and significance of Christianity has ever emerged from reflection upon the internal logic of Christian faith. Second, in order to sustain the claim that they stand as an alternative to the world, advocates of counter-contemporary stances must blind themselves to the many ways their own perspectives are grounded within and could not exist without the cultural currents they criticize and reject.

2. Late Modern Stances: Some Christians Focus on Adapting Modern Theological Projects So That They Can be Carried into the Postmodern Era and Continue to Provide a Foundation for Fostering Christian Self and Social Identity

Late modern accounts tend to highlight the loss of meaning and value that results from the questioning of foundational and metanarrative accounts of life and the world, and then to try to reformulate such accounts so that they overcome postmodern challenges. For instance, in *Deep Symbols* Edward Farley begins by noting that, "We live in a society quite puzzled about itself." We are "shell-shocked" by the rapid pace of change and societal problems. Farley suggests that our confusions "are partly the result of a loss or diminishment at the very heart of culture ... namely, a loss of society's powerful deep symbols" (1996, ix). According to Farley, a partial disintegration of the "interhuman" (that is, the "primordial sphere of relation") and other features of postmodern society have "like a virus infected and weakened the words of power" and deep symbols of our culture (x). As a result, such deep symbols as tradition, moral obligation, and hope have been "trivialized, dismissed" (25). According to Farley, the weakening of deep symbols has led to a loss of shared cultural meanings and created an environment in which violence and other threats to life are more likely to occur, more difficult to counter.

Farley suggests a three-step process for responding to the loss of deep symbols. He begins by suggesting that the power of deep symbols has eroded but not disappeared. Thus, the initial step is to center our attention on dimensions of life where the deep symbols still appear relevant. As Farley explains with regard to the deep symbol tradition:

Thus, even the most radically subversive social groups, the most now-oriented subcultures, cannot quite accomplish utter traditionlessness. When these members marry, raise their children, struggle with their sufferings and guilt, enjoy the cycles of day and night, winter and spring, and bury their dead, patches of the old wisdom show up in their sensibilities and their rituals. (1996, 39)

The next step involves sorting through and disentangling the various strands of culture to understand the developments that led to the demise of a deep symbol. Finally, we must strive to recover our deep symbols by rethinking and re-embodying them for the present (1996, 40-1).

Farley's method is illustrated by his discussion of the deep symbol "hope." he begins by claiming that "Hope has little place in the way postmodern society confronts problems or understands the world. What makes more sense in such a society is planning, organizing, or predicting" (1996, 96). Still, hope survives. When we disentangle the threads of hope in our world today, however, we find that the meaning of hope as a deep symbol has been bifurcated. On the one hand, the postmodern movement away from encompassing frameworks of meaning and value has led to a sense of subjective hope that gets expressed

as personal preference in the phrase, "I hope...." On the other hand, hope is sometimes idealized as "an external outcome or event" or an "objectified future" that exists as something better beyond the present (1996, 96-7, 109-10). Farley contends that as a result of this bifurcation there has been a diminishment of hope in concrete, everyday relationships among people. This contributes to a loss of meaning and sense of the banality of life in postmodern culture. What is needed, Farley argues, is a recovery of hope as a primary virtue that "embraces both a way of individual existence and a community's ethos" (123). Farley envisions a recovered hope as "a way of existing" that connects persons to one another and ultimately to a transcendent source of meaning and value (106-8).

Pastorally, late modern approaches like Parleys serve as the operative theology in many Christian faith communities today. That is, there is a tendency in many faith communities to focus on common experiences that go beyond differences and open people more fully to the transcendent dimensions of life. In such faith communities, faith formation frequently focuses on exploring and/or reasserting the deep symbols of Christian faith as a foundation for personal and social identity in world that is often marked by fragmentation and the trivializing of meaning and value.

Late modern strategies have served the church well. They have helped many Christian faith communities become or remain places of life-giving nurture. At the same time, they are marked by a significant weakness. Specifically, there are increasing number of people who become marginalized in late-modern Christian communities. For instance, consider the story of a former student of mine named Amy, who recently died at a young age. Amy was an award-winning community organizer. She regarded her work as ministry. However, while Amy remained committed to spiritual practices of prayer, spiritual direction, and conversation with others about faith, near the end of her life she took a "sabbatical from the institutional church." Essentially, Amy was a postmodern spiritual seeker whose life focused on the new opportunities for spiritual growth presented by postmodern culture, and who resisted all efforts to reassert the traditions of the past. In an environment in which late modern approaches dominated, she could not find a parish faith community in which she felt truly at home. Generally, the greater diversity within our culture and the increasing number of postmodern spiritual seekers are rendering late modern approaches to faith formation more difficult to sustain.

3. Stances That Embrace Postmodernity: Increasing Numbers of Christians are Focusing on New Possibilities Offered by the Positive Dimensions of Postmodernity, and Are Open to Discerning the Presence of the Spirit in Postmodern Culture

Among people who strive to embrace postmodernity there is often a refashioning of how Christian faith convictions are understood to allow for greater dialogue. For instance, Paul Lakeland argues that Christian convictions preclude dialogue "with the non-Christian world, religious or secular" when they are presented in a dogmatic way, that is, as "claims about the way the world is or should be," that are "placed *in front* of the person and community, as a blueprint for history or a program for the reform of the world." If we think that the answers to all questions can be found only within Christian faith traditions, there can be no true dialogue with others. In contrast, Lakeland suggests that we think of Christian theological statements as claims "about the ways in which we are as individuals and faith communities within a wider world of which we are inescapably a part. They articulate the difference that we bring to the encounter with the other" (1997, 912, emphasis as in original). (For a similar approach from a religious educator's perspective see Siejk 1999.)²

Reflection about social issues among those who strive to embrace postmodernity is often marked by the dynamics of openness and discernment. On the one hand, there is often openness to exploring the strengths and limitations of how Christians contribute to and are

² See the references at the end of this paper.

in turn shaped by the world. Often times, there is also increasing openness to insights from other religious traditions, popular culture and the various facets of everyday life. On the other hand, among postmodern Christians there is a growing interest in discernment. With increasing ability postmodern Christians are learning to compare and evaluate various and often competing frameworks for understanding the world as they move beyond open receptivity and attempt to respond authentically to what God is enabling and requiring of them in our present era. (For a brief discussion of responding to God's call in our postmodern world see Roebben 2002, 186.)³

Postmodern openness and discernment are illustrated by a growing concern with "economic discipleship." Increasing numbers of postmodern Christians are focusing on the ways contemporary life is affected by advanced capitalist, consumerist society and how Christians should respond to social injustices perpetuated by our market economy (Beaudoin 2001). Beginning with a postmodern awareness of the situatedness of all human knowing and doing, such Christians are likely to focus initially on how our lives and faith communities are linked to the benefits and burdens of our global economy. For instance, they may call us to recognize how the buying practices of Christians and Christian faith communities often support the inequalities of the global economy and how the socioeconomic divisions produced by global capitalism are often replicated, and hence reinforced, in Christian faith communities. (That is, upper-class Christians tend to gather in upper-class congregations while materially poor Christians often have no choice but to join materially poor congregations.) After examining the effects of global capitalism in our own lives we might then be urged to move outward to gain a broader sense of the overall impact of global capitalism in our societies.

Postmodern Christians tend to draw from the resources of Christian traditions as they begin to explore how we can address the realities and injustices of our consumer culture and market economy. As they move outward they often draw insight from various sources of secular insight and the wisdom of other religious traditions. When they are ready to focus on how we might respond to the realities of global capitalism, they frequently return to our faith traditions and weigh every option in terms of how it resonates or fails to resonate with our sense of personal and social identity as Christians. The goal of this process is to discern what God is enabling and requiring of us as Christians in responding to global capitalism. Overall, from a postmodern perspective the church and the world are always intricately intertwined. Openness to the movement of the Spirit is openness to the transformation of the church in the world, and the transformation of the world that includes the church.

The strengths of approaches that strive to embrace postmodernity are their openness to discerning the presence of God in contemporary culture, their ability to present Christian faith in ways that can connect with postmodern spiritual seekers (especially youth and young adults), and the possibilities they suggest for re-envisioning and re-embodying Christian faith in ways that authentically address the realities of postmodern culture and contemporary life. Postmodern approaches also have their limitations. First, there is a tendency among postmodern spiritual seekers to become overly eclectic. In drawing from many sources of wisdom and insight they can at times become internally incoherent and may distort rather than authentically express Christian faith. (The spiritual seeker Jerry, mentioned above, seemed to me to suffer at times from this fault.) Second, postmodern approaches can be unstable. Postmodern spiritual seekers can swing from unrealistic optimism to pessimism if they underestimate the potential of postmodern deconstruction to trigger a slide into nihilism or despair or overestimate our abilities to overcome the trivializing dimensions of postmodern culture. For example, I have seen postmodern Christians striving to practice economic discipleship fall into despair as they have struggled

³ See the references at the end of the paper.

with difficulties in trying to change their lifestyles and personal buying practices and to find realistic ways of working toward structural change in society.

Fostering Hope in a Postmodern Age

I return now to the question raised at the beginning: "Do we (of the Baby Boom and earlier generations) have anything to contribute to the nurturing of youth and young adults (Gen Xers and Millennials) as they face a world of accelerated change, a world that is vastly different than the world of our own youth?" I respond to the question with an unqualified "Yes!" First and foremost, while we were not born into postmodern culture, we must strive along with today's youth and young adults to make sense of our lives and world within emerging cultural postmodernity. As Bert Roebben notes, as educators we are vulnerable because we may often be as perplexed or perhaps even more perplexed by the realities of contemporary life than the people we strive to educate (2001). However, our vulnerability and our sharing of the task of making sense of our lives and world during this time of tremendous change can link us across the generations and at the very least provide a common set of concerns with which we all must grapple.

At the core of this common set of concerns, there is a need to address the trivializing tendencies in postmodernity. From a trivializing postmodern perspective, we live in a world that has lost or is losing a sense of meaning and value. Our hopes and life goals are seen as being diminished by the dissipation of generally accepted structures for personal and social identity formation and an increasing awareness of the limits of established structures of authority. Moreover, those who become skeptical about the possibilities for living truly meaningful lives tend toward nihilism, the parodying of life, and the general feeling that all we have left is to chase after limited and transitory experiences. (For an account of the effects of the trivializing tendencies of postmodernity on today's youth see Feeney 1997.)⁴

To counter the trivializing tendencies within postmodernity religious educators need to be people of hope and to foster hope. That is, we need to be people who point to the positive potential of the present, who are not driven to despair by postmodern critiques, but who are able to affirm and develop those aspects of our lives and world that remain life-giving and life-sustaining. More specifically, I suggest, based on the review provided above of the three ways the Christian churches have already been responding to the emergence of cultural postmodernity, that contemporary Christian religious educators of youth need to foster a belief in four fonts of hope: 1) hope in the church, 2) hope in the continued viability of some of the practices and deep symbols of Christian faith, 3) hope in the youth we educate, and 4) hope in ourselves.

First, the counter-contemporary responses to postmodernity highlight the gathered community of the church as a potential island of hope when the currents of trivializing postmodernity rise. Many if not most of us would not be religious educators if we did not have hope in the church. This is a hope we can share with today's youth and young people. However, given the critical attitude toward the institutional church that is often found today-especially among youth and young adults, we need to be careful not to idealize the church of the past or romanticize the church of the present. We need to be honest about the ways the currents of trivializing postmodernity are affecting the church and that we as church face difficult challenges. And, we need to bring an openness and willingness for church structures to change and develop as we strive to respond to postmodern challenges. We need too to be humble enough to remember (and this is a point about which counter-contemporaries sometimes need to be reminded) that God is present in the world beyond the church as well as within it. Overall, as religious educators we need to foster hope that when we as Christians gather in God's name that God will be present to guide us. While it may not always be clear what God is enabling and requiring of us in our lives and world

⁴ See the references at the end of this paper.

today, our hope is that we can come to a sense of God's guidance if we continue to gather together as the People of God.

Second, late modern responses to postmodernity build upon one of the central insights found within the positive currents of emerging cultural postmodernity. This is the idea that while established structures of meaning and value often have negative dimensions or have lost their relevance and as such need to be critiqued and deconstructed, they do not always need to be discarded. Rather, the deconstructed understandings and practices of the past are the raw materials for making meaning in the present. More fully, we can begin with the conviction that there will always be common experiences such as the birth of children, significant life passages, and the death of loved ones that go beyond differences and that have the potential to open us more fully to the presence of God. However, given the vast changes that have and are continuing to take place in our world and the often-staggering complexities of postmodern life, our hope must move beyond the idea (suggested by Farley and embodied in many late-modern faith communities) of simply "recovering" the deep symbols of the past in order to express these common experiences communally. Rather, we need to be open to having the practices and understandings of the past altered, changed, and even transformed so that they are relevant to the present day. Our hope must be that through careful discernment we can still be led to draw from the resources of Christian traditions to construct or re-construct patterns and practices of life that authentically address the common experiences of life.

Third, disputes within the church often focus on how we can discern and respond to the presence of God in postmodern culture. I believe that we can begin to cut through these disputes by focusing on today's youth and young adults, Millennials and Gen Xers. As Leonard Sweet noted in a class he taught at Boston College in the summer of 2003, today's youth are natives to postmodern culture while those of us from the Baby Boom and earlier generations are immigrants. Those of us who are immigrants may often be the bearers of the resources of the past and the voice of prudence or practical judgment in the present. Yet, I believe that one of our deepest hopes today needs to be that those who are natives to postmodernity, who have never known anything other than postmodern culture, can often be our guides in discerning God's guiding presence in the world today. As religious educators, our goal must be to help youth and young adults view the currents of cultural change within the light of the wisdom of our faith traditions. Yet, we need then to rely upon them to help us to make sense of our postmodern times and guide us in responding.

Finally, I believe that we need to have hope in ourselves, not just individually but collectively. If we take a realistic look at how we as church have begun to respond to emerging cultural postmodernity, I believe that no matter which of the three responses we are drawn to, we must conclude that advocates of the three responses need to be in sustained conversation with one another. More fully, counter-contemporary, prophetic critiques of contemporary culture are more likely to lead to engagement in (rather than sectarian withdrawal from) the world when counter-contemporaries are in dialogue with late modern and postmodern Christians who stress the continued viability of established Christian understandings and the positive dimensions of postmodern spiritual seeking. In their explorations of the continued viability of established structures of meaning and value, late moderns may be more likely to avoid the trap of idealizing the past if they are in conversation with those who advance counter-contemporary critiques of established structures and postmodern openness to new, creative possibilities. Postmoderns may be more likely to avoid the trivializing dimensions of contemporary culture if their critiques of established Christian structures are revised through dialogue with counter-contemporary explorations of the limitations of cultural postmodernity and late modern assertions of the continued value of established patterns of Christian life. Overall, we must strive to sustain critical yet respectful engagement with one another. Only then can we truly hope to invite today's youth into a church that contributes to the positive dimensions of contemporary culture rather than being another sign of the trivializing tendencies found in the world today.

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SEASON OF CREATION 2022

CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Professionalising Religious Education

(Paul Faller)



How do you see the task of the religious educator? Is it a chore? A job? A career? A profession? A call or vocation? Note the progression. There is more heart in the matter as we move from left to right through the various concepts or attitudes. There is consequently a greater sense of responsibility and commitment, and also greater chance of a meaningful relationship with the ones who are served.

Think of the profession made by a person in response to a call to serve. Can we apply this to teaching? Can Religious Education be regarded as a vocation and profession?

PROFESSIONS AND THE PROFESSIONAL

Professions are occupational communities organised within a specific realm of work. Professions are occupations requiring a high degree of knowledge and skill to perform social functions that are most central to the well-being of society. Which professions are recognised as such in our society? Ones that come immediately to mind are the medical, the legal, the engineering and the financial. There are many others, but would you include education in a list of professions? Some would argue that it is an emerging profession, and the South African Council for Educators seems to agree with this description as it encourages teachers to earn Continuing Professional Teacher Development points.

SEVEN CHARACTERISTICS DEFINING AN OCCUPATION AS A PROFESSION

Cook and Hudson (2003)⁵ describe seven characteristics that define an occupation as a profession.

1 Essential service to society

Professions provide services or perform functions that are considered vital to the welfare of society.

2 Motivated by a Call to Serve

Career satisfaction hinges on the ability to pursue the personal values and beliefs that lead one into the profession.

3 Special Knowledge and Skills

An occupation becomes a profession when it assumes responsibility for developing a shared knowledge base for all of its members and for transmitting that knowledge through professional education, licensing, and ongoing peer review.

⁵ Timothy Cook & William Hudson. 2003. 'Professionalisation of Catholic High School Religion Teachers'. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association

4 Specialised, Advanced University Training

Advanced training leads to greater levels of effectiveness. It also convinces clients and the public that members of the profession possess unique knowledge and skills.

5 Public Trust and Status

This follows from the previous characteristic.

6 Code of Ethics and Performance Standards

A declaration of commitment to ideal behaviour provides a source of unity for members of a profession.

7 Professional Organisation

Professional organisations shape licensing procedures, influence credentialing and educational requirements, and enhance the public image of the occupation. They provide a forum for the discussion of common issues, monitoring of agreed-upon standards, and serve as a collective voice to advance the cause of the profession.

THE PROFESSION OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATOR

Let us apply these characteristics to religious education as it is practised in South African Catholic schools.

1 Essential service to society

Catholic schools fulfil a public purpose for society, promoting civil progress and human development without discrimination of any kind. (Congregation for Catholic Education. 1997-8. *The Catholic school on the threshold of the third millennium*, #16.)

The religion programme is central to the educational mission of Catholic schools (Congregation for Catholic Education. 1988. *The religious dimension of education in a Catholic school*, #66.)

The religion teacher is the key, the vital component, if the educational goals of the school are to be achieved. (Congregation for Catholic Education. 1988. *The religious dimension of education in a Catholic school*, #96.)

2 Motivated by a Call to Serve

The Catholic Church regards teaching in a Catholic school to be a vocation or calling.

3 Special Knowledge and Skills

There is no consensus about the specific knowledge and skills that religious educators need in order to be effective. There is, in practice, no agreement on what the outcomes of the Religious Education programme should be. Should the programme focus on an academic study of religion or faith formation of the students, or both? Another pointer to a lack of consensus in South Africa is the wide variety of names used to describe religion programmes in schools.

4 Specialised, Advanced University Training

Specialised training is needed for religious educators in addition to their personal spiritual formation. "In this area, especially, an unprepared teacher can do great deal of harm. Everything possible must be done to ensure that Catholic schools have adequately trained religion teachers; it is a vital necessity, and a legitimate expectation." (Congregation for Catholic Education. 1988. *The religious dimension of education in a Catholic school*, #97.)

5 Public Trust and Status

"It is necessary, therefore, that religious instruction in schools appear as a scholastic discipline with the same systematic demands and the same rigour as other disciplines." (Congregation for the Clergy. 1997. *General Directory for catechesis*, #73.) The perception that anyone can teach religion impacts the profession's credibility. So does the perception of it being expendable.

6 Code of Ethics and Performance Standards

A code of ethics for religious educators does not exist. Because of the autonomy of dioceses and religious congregations, no body has yet been established to develop overarching requirements for certification, licensing, or performance standards.⁶

7 Professional Organisation

Most teaching fields have a professional organisation that reduce teacher isolation and provide a forum where goals can be discussed, strategies shared, and concerns aired. The aim of the Religious Education Association (REA) 1903 was articulated as follows: "To inspire the religious forces of our country with the educational ideal; to inspire the educational forces of our country with the religious ideal; and to keep before the public mind the ideal of moral and religious education and the sense of its need and value."

In May 2008, a Professional Society of Religious Educators was launched at the National RE Conference, *Gathering at the Well*. The need for such a society became evident some 17 years earlier when the 1991 National Congress included in its formal statements:

We propose that a cooperative Catholic Schools RE movement be developed, bearing in mind the following recommendations:

- That if a common starting-point were used for RE in Catholic schools, this would enable all teachers and communities to participate in the project of progressively enriching and developing a dynamic national programme through the sharing of experience and resources.
- That if each school were to appoint a qualified RE coordinator, this would facilitate the full development of a coherent RE thrust.

This was followed by a similar statement at the 2004 National Congress:

- Aware of the needs in RE and other curriculum programmes, including activities which reflect the ethos, we urge that schools commit themselves to appropriate training of Religious Education teachers
- Desiring to ensure uniformity, quality assurance and maintenance of standards in the teaching of Religious Education we recommend the formation of a Professional Society of RE Teachers.

PROFESSIONAL SOCIETY OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATORS

The Society was established with the following purposes and expected benefits in mind:

PURPOSES

- To organise religious educators in Catholic schools in South Africa
- To expose religious educators to the wider perspectives of Religious Education in Africa and the world

⁶ However, see a proposed set of standards at [Professional-standards-for-RE-Self-Test.pdf \(cie.org.za\)](http://Professional-standards-for-RE-Self-Test.pdf(cie.org.za)).

- To enrich religious educators through contact with key persons and developments in the field
- To promote Religious Education as a vocation and as a profession
- To strengthen support for Religious Education as central to the school's overall mission
- To develop Religious Education as an educationally sound and challenging discipline in the curriculum
- To build consensus about the aims and outcomes of Religious Education in the school
- To provide a forum for determining a knowledge base and skill set for the profession, a code of ethics, entry and promotion standards for the profession
- To sponsor a magazine or journal for research and best practice

BENEFITS

- Being a focal point and a voice for Religious Education in South Africa
- Networking with other religious educators on a national basis
- Networking with other national and international bodies involved in RE
- Facilitating placements in Religious Education
- Providing opportunities for sharing personal ideas and resources through contributions to a journal or magazine and through regional and national conferences.
- Having access to an RE Library and other resources

EVALUATION

What is the state of this Society now 14 years since its establishment? On record, the society has 457 members, but there is little evidence that these members form a community of learning in any real sense. Some, perhaps many, may read the quarterly publication of its periodical, *Roots & Wings*, but how many make use of it for CPTD purposes as invited? Another invitation, one that has fallen on deaf ears, is to submit material for inclusion in the periodical.

While there are, no doubt, many ongoing RE-related activities in the various regions, such as the occasional regional conference, the society itself is inactive. This may, in the first place, be attributed to the lack of a formal leadership structure.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Establish a committee or council with regional representation that would meet regularly online to discuss common needs and ways of addressing them, to work towards a common understanding of school-based RE, and to plan themes and events jointly that would be implemented regionally. There would also be opportunities for online seminars with invited local and international speakers. The council could be convened by the CIE National Coordinator for Religious Education or by a chairperson elected from among its members.
2. Conduct a survey of current members through regional offices to
 - raise awareness of the society
 - evaluate the society's current relevance
 - gather ideas to enliven the society so that it fulfils its purpose
 - gauge the current state of RE in Catholic schools
 - establish needs



PORTRAITS

Vehettge Tíkhuie

(J. A. Millard)



Vehettge, or Magdalena, as she was named by the missionary at her baptism, was one of the earliest indigenous church leaders in South Africa. She belonged to the church in Genadendal and when the missionary, George Schmidt, returned to Europe, she continued to hold services under the pear tree that he had planted.

Vehettge was born to Khoisan parents in the early years of the eighteenth century. Her parents were semi-nomadic farmers and moved around in the Rivierzonderend and Sergeant's River area. She first met the Moravian missionary George Schmidt when he settled in Sergeant's River in 1737. In April 1738 the missionary moved inland to Baviaanskloof (which was later called Genadendal) and Vehettge (or Lena) and a number of other people moved with him.

When Schmidt met Vehettge she was already married to Janneke or Jantjie Tikhuie. Her husband helped Schmidt establish the new mission station and performed various tasks like going to the military post for stores and to collect post. Sometimes Vehettge was lucky and was allowed to accompany him. Janneke was also a hunter and helped to keep the community supplied with meat.

One of the first things that Schmidt did was to start a school. He taught in Dutch because he was unable to master the clicks of the Khoi language. Schmidt recorded that four of his best students were Africo (the first convert to be baptised), Kupido, Willem and Vehettge. The numbers of those who wanted to learn continued to grow and by December there were four men, two women and four children in the school.

It was difficult for semi-nomadic people to settle down. Janneke and the others sometimes went off on their own for weeks on end. In February 1739 Vehettge decided that she too would go off alone. She marched up to the missionary and announced: 'I'm not going to stay here any longer!' When he asked 'Why?', she answered, 'All the people are against me.' Schmidt told her that her own behaviour was the cause of the trouble. 'Didn't I warn you that it is your own fault that they are treating you like this?' She slammed down her ABC school book and New Testament and disappeared, only to return five days later seeking forgiveness.

Schmidt was not an ordained minister, but he knew that there were people at the mission who were ready for baptism. He

requested permission to baptise from Count Nicholas Zinzendorf in Hernnuth, Germany, the Moravian headquarters. When a letter of ordination arrived in 1742, he first baptised Willem and Africo, and then it was the turn of Vehettge. Willem was given the baptismal name of Joshua, Africo became Christian, and Vehettge was called Magdalena. Her husband was not baptised at the same time, perhaps because he was not as mature in the Christian faith as his wife was perceived to be.

In 1744 Schmidt returned to Europe. He had intended to return to South Africa but this was not to be. Gradually the community at the mission dispersed. Christian and Joshua (Willem and Africo) remained in Baviaanskloof until 1756, when they died in a smallpox epidemic.

Lena (or Magdalena) returned to her old home in Sergeant's River, half-an-hour's journey to the south of Genadendal (Baviaanskloof). She would gather the people that remained under the pear tree in Schmidt's garden, pray with them and read to them from the New Testament. As the families grew, so people taught their children to pray. Inhabitants of the area testified, saying: 'Every evening we all, men, women and children would go to old Lena. Then she would fall on her knees and pray. When her eyes were better we read the New Testament'. As they ate the pears from Schmidt's tree, they would remember the days when the missionary was among them. There were enough pears for everyone, even the baboons!

Lena became something of a legend. In 1775 and 1776 a traveller from Europe was told of the Khoisan woman who used to pray and read the Bible. She carried on with her teaching even after she heard that Schmidt had died in 1785. When the Moravian missionaries Kühnel, Schwinn and Marsveld arrived to re-establish the mission station at Genadendal, she met

them and showed them her well-used Dutch New Testament. A young woman, Magdalena Fredericks, read from the Book which had been kept safe, wrapped in sheepskins in a leather bag. When they told Lena that they had come to work in Genadendal, her response was 'Thanks be to God.'

By this time Lena's eyesight was bad and she could only get around with difficulty. Marsveld recorded in his journal that Lena visited the missionaries to offer support. She attended the school lessons and helped those who found learning difficult.

Two years later Lena wrote to the mission authorities in Germany. Her eyesight was so bad that someone else had to do the actual writing. The year 1794 was one of illness in the community and Schwimm recorded that 'three of our baptised folk were so ill that we doubted their recovery. One of them was Lena'. Lena was so grateful for her recovery that she wrote to tell the authorities that her 'good and loving God had let her live so long'. She saw her recovery as a sign of God's great love.

Lena enjoyed life to the full. Visitors to Genadendal demanded to be introduced to her. In 1797 Mrs. Matilda Smith, who was renowned for her good works and interest in mission, visited Lena. She wrote in her *Memoir* that the people that she met in Genadendal showed 'traces of His holiness and love'. These were the people whom Lena had kept together as a Christian community. Lady Anne Barnard, the wife of the secretary to the governor of the Cape, said that when she visited Genadendal a year later that she had felt as if she 'was creeping back seventeen hundred years to hear from the rude but inspired lips of evangelists the simple sacred words of wisdom and purity'.

Lena gradually grew weaker until she died on 3 January 1800. For fifty years she had acted as the church leader of Genadendal.

[Tikhuie, Vehettge Magdalena - Dictionary of African Christian Biography \(dacb.org\)](http://dacb.org/Tikhuie,Vehettge%20Magdalena)



WEBSITE

Laudato Si' Action Platform

[Laudato Si' Action \(laudatosiactionplatform.org\)](http://laudatosiactionplatform.org)



The Laudato Si' Action Platform is a unique collaboration between the Vatican, an international coalition of Catholic organizations, and "all men and women of good will." (LS 3) Taking a truly ground-up approach, it is rooted in the strengths and realities of communities around the world, empowering all to take "decisive action, here and now" as we journey towards a better future together. (LS 161)

Action is urgently needed. Our Creator called the human family to be the steward of creation, but

we have neglected that call. Our hotter, dirtier, deader planet is driving up the risk of suffering. The most vulnerable suffer above all.

At this *kairos* moment, we are responding to the call for healing in our relationships with God, our neighbours, and the Earth itself. Through the Laudato Si' Action Platform, we are walking the "path to renewal" together (LS 202).

The platform offers:

- 🌍 Laudato Si' Planning Guides, which your institution, community, or family can use to discern and implement your response to Laudato Si'
- 🌍 A process-oriented approach that responds to the charism of your institution, community, or family
- 🌍 Guidance on actions that help build a better future through the Laudato Si' Goals
- 🌍 Recognition of your progress
- 🌍 A library of resources to provide practical, concrete guidance on ways to take action
- 🌍 Webinars on actions and events
- 🌍 Resources to strengthen your community
- 🌍 Ways to connect directly with other participants
- 🌍 Inspiring stories of people who are taking action



Laudato Si' Action Platform

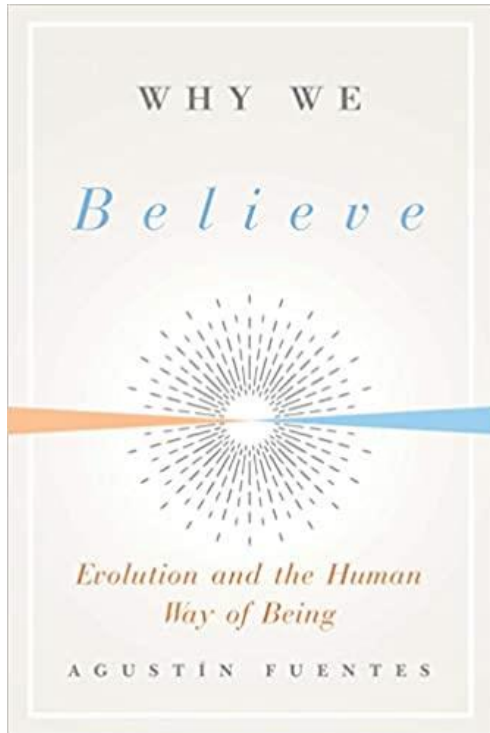


BOOK REVIEW

Evolution & Revelation

Is belief more than just an adaptive strategy?

(Stephen J. Pope)



In *Why We Believe*, the anthropologist Agustín Fuentes has written a clear and concise account of belief in light of his extensive knowledge of human evolution.

Fuentes, who has taught at Notre Dame and is now a professor at Princeton, has written several books and articles that strive to present a biologically informed but non-reductive account of human nature.

While himself religiously unaffiliated, he has frequently worked with theologians and scholars of religion in various collaborative science-and-religion projects.

For an evolutionary thinker, he has a remarkable openness to what can be learned from religious traditions, religious philosophers, and theologians.

His new book is intended to show that, while we are the product of evolutionary processes and belong to the biological world along with countless other organisms, our distinctive capacities for imagining, feeling, and thinking give us special responsibilities to shape our societies more justly than we have in the past.

Fuentes wants to explain "why we believe" partly in order to correct what he calls the duelling "fundamentalisms" of, on the one side, religious people who refuse to allow their view of human nature to be shaped by the impressive and growing body of knowledge about human evolution and, on the other, secular intellectuals whose enthusiasm for scientific methods of investigation has led them to embrace "scientism" — that is, the assumption that science alone provides the kinds of explanations that count as real knowledge.

Fuentes rejects the assertion of scientism that "beliefs" are mere subjective opinions that educated adults should not take seriously.

He argues instead that, while the sciences do yield a vast array of insights into how things work, there are many other paths to knowledge that involve believing claims we cannot justify on scientific grounds.

Publisher : Yale University Press (September 24, 2019)

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Read more at: <https://international.la-croix.com/news/culture/evolution-revelation/16487>



LOCAL & INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Rome Call for AI Ethics



6 ethical principles

.1 Transparency

AI systems must be understandable to all.

.2 Inclusion

these system must not discriminate against anyone because every human being has equal dignity.

.3 Responsibility

there must always be someone who takes responsibility for what a machine does.

.4 Impartiality

AI systems must not follow or create biases.

.5 Reliability

AI must be reliable.

.6 Security and privacy

These systems must be secure and respect the privacy of users.

The Rome Call for AI Ethics is a document signed for the first time on February 28th 2020, in Rome, to promote an ethical approach to artificial intelligence. The idea behind it is to promote a sense of shared responsibility among international organizations, governments, institutions and technology companies in an effort to create a future in which digital innovation and technological progress grant man his centrality. Pointing to a new algorethics, the signatories committed to request the development of an artificial intelligence that serves every person and humanity as a whole; that respects the dignity of the human person, so that every individual can benefit from the advances of technology; and that does not have as its sole goal greater profit or the gradual replacement of people in the workplace.

Ethics

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of fellowship (cf. Art. 1, Univ. Dec. Human Rights). This fundamental condition of freedom and dignity must also be protected and guaranteed when producing and using AI systems. This must be done by safeguarding the rights and the freedom of individuals so that they are not discriminated against by algorithms due to their "race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status" (Art. 2, Univ. Dec. Human Rights). AI systems must be conceived, designed and implemented to serve and protect human beings and the environment in which they live. This fundamental outlook must translate into a commitment to create living conditions (both social and personal) that allow both groups and individual members to strive to fully express themselves where possible.

For more information go to [The call | Rome Call](#)



The Gaia Man, James Lovelock

(Chris McDonnell)



James Lovelock brought to our attention the fragility of our planet Earth and our dependence on careful management of our home.

[James Lovelock, scientist and author best known for the Gaia hypothesis. Photograph taken in 2005 by Bruno Comby of Association of Environmentalists For Nuclear Energy. (Wikimedia Commons)]

With the recent death of James Lovelock, a significant prophetic voice has been lost. His life spanned the last eighty years of the 20th century and reached across the millennium into our present time. He died on his 103rd birthday. (July 1919 - July 2022). In his published writings and through his lectures, he continually brought to our attention the fragility of our planet Earth and our dependence on careful management of our home.

We live in a tenuous balance between survival and self-destruction. Only a few days ago it was reported that the extreme temperatures we experienced in Europe in late July would not have been reached without mankind's mismanagement of our climate.

Lovelock spoke of the Earth as something more than an inert lump of inanimate rock hurtling through space when, in the early 60s he developed his 'Gaia principle' which envisaged the co-operation of the numerous organisms, alongside their competition.

The existence of life on Earth is indeed a complicated story of interdependence. Our planet and the life it sustains, he suggested should be viewed as a single self-regulating system, of which we humans are but a part of the story.

His concern for the understanding of life as it exists on Earth led him to speculate about our two neighbouring planets, Mars and Venus.

He concluded that because the earth's atmosphere was in a continual state of flux due to the many and varied forms of life it hosts this enabled self-regulation.

The voice of the prophet

He was in favour of atomic power as a means of meeting our ever-growing need for energy, realizing the catastrophic damage to our atmosphere caused by burning fossil fuels.

Those voices of concern are on the increase as we come to appreciate the limited time frame that we are faced with if we are to change our ways.

We have a need for creative voices such as Lovelock's, voices that challenge us to think from left field and to look again at currently held perceptions, not being afraid to revise opinions in the light of new data.

Voices of prophecy often get lost in the clamour of confusing noise. Even if the voice of the prophet is heard their message is uncomfortable so they are ignored, often until it is too late.

In Luke's gospel, after his rejection in his own town of Nazareth, Jesus spoke of prophets rejected by their own countrymen. It was his own experience.

We are fortunate that Lovelock has left us his voice through his books to stir our memory. Maybe the witness of his life will move us to some positive action before we

over-reach ourselves and bring the whole beauty of creation to a grinding halt through our ignorance carelessness and neglect.

Our generation is the first to recognize that a problem exists. We may well be the last that has the opportunity to do something about finding a solution.

Read more at: <https://international.la-croix.com/news/environment/the-gaia-man-james-lovelock/16474>



CPTD

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

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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