

EDITORIAL

Welcome to the second issue of *Roots & Wings* for 2017.

We remind you of a new feature this year in the form of two articles chosen for CPTD points. We have not yet received official endorsement from SACE but hope that it will be soon forthcoming.

As in the medical profession, readers will qualify for points by answering and submitting the questions on the two articles that appear at the end of this magazine.

Again we offer a variety of articles, newsbytes and resources as an invitation to reflect on classroom practice and to try out new approaches.

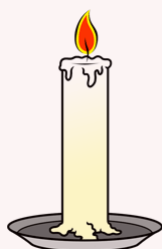
We hope you enjoy the issue.

PAUL FALLER

ABOUT TEACHING

Let us remember: One book, one pen, one child, and one teacher can change the world.

(MALALA YOUSAFZAI)



A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops.

(HENRY ADAMS)

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REFLECTION

The Kiss of God on the Soul

(Ron Rolheiser)



What is the real root of human loneliness? A flaw within our make-up? Inadequacy and sin? Or, does Augustine's famous line, *You have made us for yourself, Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you*, say it all?

Augustine's adage, for all its merit, is not quite enough. We are infinite souls inside finite lives and that alone should be enough to explain our incessant and insatiable aching; except there is something else, that is, our souls enter the world bearing the brand of eternity and this gives all of our aching a particularized coloring.

There are various explanations of this: For example, Bernard Lonergan, the much-esteemed theologian and philosopher, suggests that human soul does not come into the world as a *tabula rasa*, a pure, clean sheet of paper onto which anything can be written. Rather,

for him, *we are born with the brand of the first principles indelibly stamped inside our souls*. What does he mean by this?

Classical theology and philosophy name four things which they call transcendental, meaning that they are somehow true of everything that exists, namely, *oneness, truth, goodness, and beauty*. Everything that exists somehow bears these four qualities. However these qualities are perfect only inside of God. God, alone, is perfect oneness, perfect truth, perfect goodness, and perfect beauty. However, for Lonergan, God brands these four things, in their perfection, into the core of the human soul.

Hence we come into the world already knowing, however dimly, perfect oneness, perfect truth, perfect goodness, and perfect beauty because they already lie inside us like an inerasable brand. Thus we can tell right from wrong because we already know perfect truth and goodness in the core of our souls, just as we also instinctively recognize love and beauty because we already know them in a perfect way, however darkly, inside ourselves. In this life, we don't learn truth, we recognize it; we don't learn love, we recognize it; and we don't learn what is good, we recognize it. We recognize these because we already possess them in the core of our souls.

Some mystics gave this a mythical expression: The taught that the human



soul comes from God and that the last thing that God does before putting a soul into the body is to kiss the soul. The soul then goes through life always dimly remembering that kiss, a kiss of perfect love, and the soul measures all of life's loves and kisses against that primordial perfect kiss.

The ancient Greek Stoics taught something similar. They taught that souls pre-existed inside of God and that God, before putting a soul into a body, would blot out the memory of its pre-existence. But the soul would then be always unconsciously drawn towards God because, having come from God, the soul would always dimly remember its real home, God, and ache to return there.

In one, rather interesting version of this notion they taught that God put the soul into the body only when the baby was already fully formed in its mother's womb. Immediately after putting the soul into the body, God would seal off the memory of its pre-existence by physically shutting the baby's lips against its ever speaking of its pre-existence. That's why we have a little cleft under our noses, just above center of our lips. It's where God's finger sealed our lips. That is why whenever we are struggling to remember something, our index finger instinctually rises to that cleft under our nose. We are trying to retrieve a primordial memory.

Perhaps a metaphor might be helpful here: We commonly speak of things as "ringing true" or "ringing false". But only bells ring. Is there a bell inside us that somehow rings in a certain way when things are true and in another when they are false? In essence, yes!

We nurse an unconscious memory of once having known love, goodness, and beauty perfectly. Hence things will ring true or false, depending upon whether or not they are measuring up to the love, goodness, and beauty that already reside in a perfect form at the core of our souls.



And that core, that center, that place in our souls where we have been branded with the first principles and where we unconsciously remember the kiss of God before we were born, is the real seat of that congenital ache inside us which, in this life, can never be fully assuaged. We bear the dark memory, as Henri Nouwen says, of once having been caressed by hands far gentler than we ever meet in this life.

Our souls dimly remember once having known perfect love and perfect beauty. But, in this life, we never quite encounter that perfection, even as we forever ache for someone or something to meet us at that depth. This creates in us a moral loneliness, a longing for what we term a *soulmate*, namely, a longing for someone who can genuinely recognize, share, and respect what's deepest in us.



REFLECTION

Five Hundred Years of Misunderstanding

(Ron Rolheiser)



The heart has its reasons, says Pascal, and sometimes those reasons have a long history.

Recently I signed a card for a friend, a devout Baptist, who was raised to have a suspicion of

Roman Catholics. It's something he still struggles with; but, don't we all! History eventually infects our DNA. Who of us is entirely free from suspicion of what's religiously different from us? And what's the cure? Personal contact, friendship, and theological dialogue with those of other denominations and other faiths does help open our minds and hearts, but the fruit of centuries of bitter misunderstanding doesn't disappear so easily, especially when it's institutionally entrenched and nurtured as a prophetic protection of God and truth.

And so in regards to Christians of other denominations there remains in most of us an emotional dis-ease, an inability to see the other fully as one of our own. And so in signing this card for my separated Christian friend, I wrote: "To a fellow Christian, a brother in the Body of Christ, a good friend, from whom I'm separated by 500 years of misunderstanding."

Five hundred years of misunderstanding, of separation, of suspicion, of defensiveness, that's not something that's easily overcome, especially when at its core there sit issues about God, truth, and religion. Granted, there has been much positive progress made in the past fifty years and many of the original, more-blatant misunderstandings have been overcome. But the effects of the historical break with Christianity and the reaction to it are present today and are still seen everywhere, from high church offices, to debates within the academy of theology, to suspicions inside the popular mind.

Sad how we've focused so much on our differences, when at the center, at the heart, we share the same essential faith, the same essential beliefs, the same basic moral codes, the same Scriptures, the same belief in afterlife, and the same fundamental tenet that intimacy with Jesus Christ is the aim of our faith. As well, not insignificantly, today we also share the same prejudices and biases against us, whether these come from fundamentalists within other religions or whether these come from over-zealous, over-secularized, post-Christians within our own society. To someone looking at us from the outside we, all the different Christian



denominations, look like a monolith, one faith, one church, a single religion, our differences far overshadowed by our commonality. Sadly we tend not to see ourselves like this from within, where our differences, more often than not based upon a misunderstanding, are seen to dwarf our common discipleship. Yet, the Epistle to the Ephesians tells us that, as Christians, we share *one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God who is Father of all of us*. At its most essential level, that's true of all of us as Christians, despite our denominational differences. We are one at our core.

Granted, there are some real differences among us, mostly though in terms of how we understand certain aspects of the church and certain issues within morality, rather than on how we understand the deeper truths about the nature of God, the divinity of Christ, the gift of God's Word, the gift of the Eucharist, and the inalienable dignity and destiny of all human beings. Within the hierarchy of truth this essential core is what's most important, and on this essential core we essentially agree. That's the real basis of our common discipleship.

Ecclesially, the issues that divide us focus mostly on church authority, on ordination to ministry, on whether to emphasize word or sacrament, on how to understand the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, on the number of sacraments, on the place of sacramentals and devotions within discipleship, and on how scripture and tradition interplay with each other. In terms of moral issues, the issues that divide us are also the "red button" issues within our society as a whole: abortion, gay marriage, birth control, and the place of social justice within discipleship. But, even on these, there's more commonality than difference among the churches.

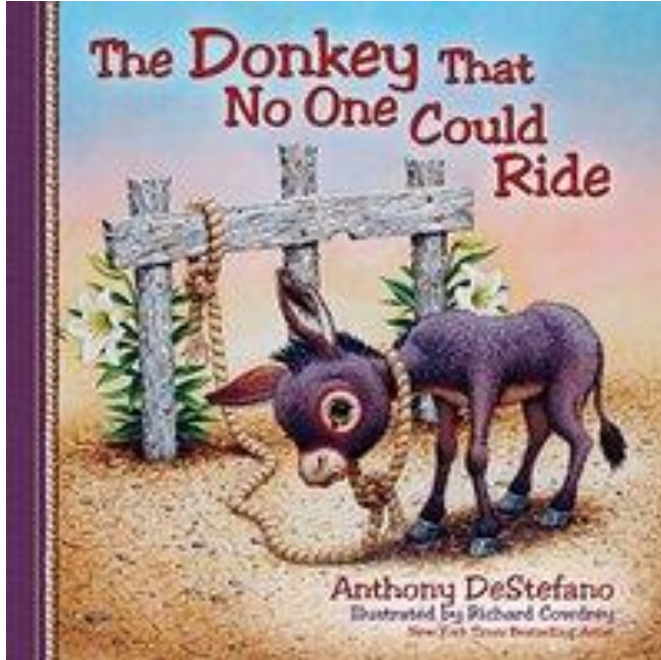
Moreover, today, the differences on how we understand many of the ecclesial and moral issues that divide us are more *temperamental than denominational*, that is, they tend to be more a question of one's theology than of one's denominational affiliation. Granted, classical denominational theology still plays in, but the divisions today regarding how we see certain ecclesial and moral issues, be that ordination, gay marriage, abortion, or social justice, are less a tension between Roman Catholics and Protestants (and Evangelicals) than they are between those who lean temperamentally and theologically in one direction rather than the other. It's perhaps too simplistic to draw this up in terms of liberal versus conservative, but this much at least is true, the fault-line on these issues today is becoming less and less denominational.

The earliest Christian Creed had but a single line: *Jesus is Lord!* All Christians still agree on that and so we remain brothers and sisters, separated only by five hundred years of misunderstanding.



BOOK REVIEW

The Donkey that No One Could Ride



Hardcover, 32 pages
Published February 2012 by Harvest House Publishers
ISBN 0736948511 (ISBN13: 9780736948517)
<http://harvesthousepublishers.com/book/the-donkey-that-no-one-could-ride-2012/>
Other Editions (2)

This delightful piece of children's literature introduces the young reader or listener to the donkey that Jesus rode during his triumphal entry into Jerusalem prior to his crucifixion.

This humble little donkey is portrayed as "young, weak and small," unable to

be ridden by anyone. But then he meets the Man, so kind and wise, who reminds the small beast of burden, "My help is enough." Indeed the Master's help was enough for the frail little donkey who is no longer frail and weak, but carries the King through the gates of the city to shouts and cheers of hosannas and praise.

This book is beautifully illustrated and a delightful retell of the Lord's triumphal entry that will be enjoyed by any reader, whether young or young at heart. It is also a wonderful reminder that Jesus can use and make profitable any of his creatures no matter how frail or useless; even we who are frail humans and in much need of the Master's help.

Anthony DeStefano is the bestselling author of *Ten Prayers God Always Says Yes To*, *A Travel Guide to Heaven*, *This Little Prayer of Mine*, and *Little Star*. He has received prestigious awards from religious organizations worldwide for his efforts to advance Christian beliefs in modern culture.

Richard Cowdrey is the talented and well-known illustrator of numerous children's books, including *Bad Dog*, *Marley!* and *Marley Goes to School*. He has worked with such distinguished clients as Bantam Books, National Football League, and World Wildlife Federation. Desiring to honor God with his work and with his life, Richard lives in Ohio with his wife and children.



WEBSITE

World Religion News

www.worldreligionnews.com

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RELIGION NEWS RELIGIONS FEATURED CONTRIBUTORS VIDEO CULTURE ETHICS ISSUES OPINION

MEET PEOPLE FROM DIFFERENT RELIGIONS

21 MAR 2017 POSTED BY NATHAN GLOVER



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01 MAY 2017



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29 APR 2017

These two sample pages from the website will give you some idea of its contents. There is much general information about the religions of the world, and up to date news about events relating to these different faith communities.

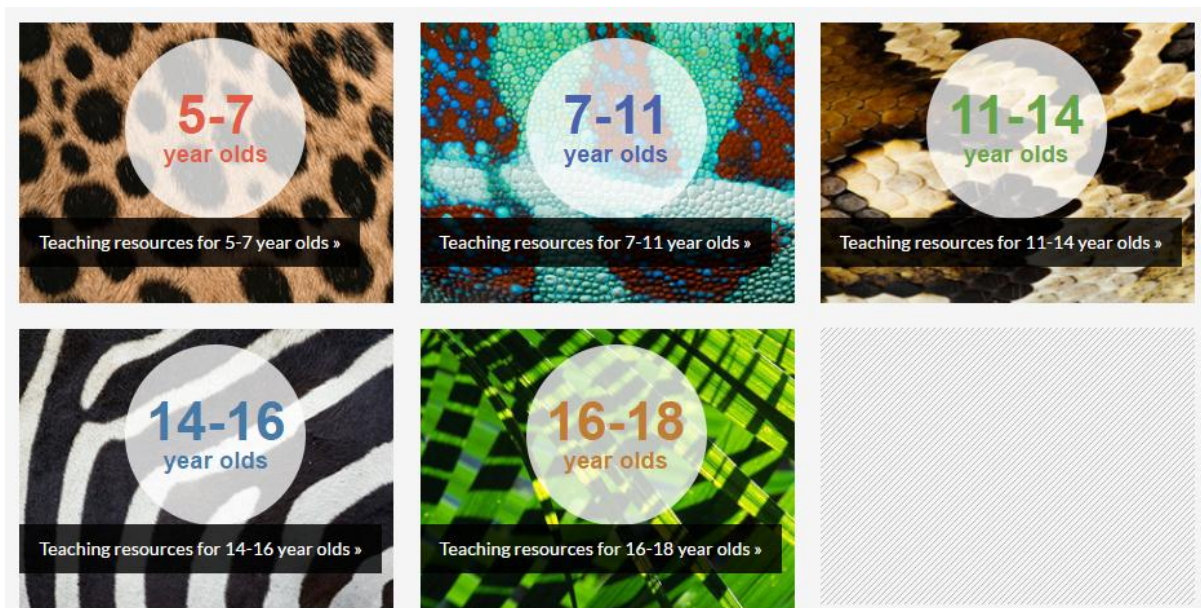


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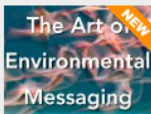
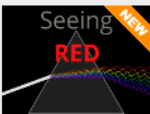


Arkive Education

<http://www.arkive.org/education/>

Bring the wild to your classroom with Arkive Education! Our FREE education resources for 5-18 year olds can be used to teach a range of curriculum subjects including science, geography, English and art. Packed full of links to our amazing wildlife photos, videos and fact files, each education resource includes classroom presentations, activities and teachers' notes.



Much of the material on this site can also be used in Religious Education classes too. Explore, for instance The Art of Environmental Messaging and Climate Change below. Note the different types of resources available at a click!

 The Art of Environmental Messaging Students will learn about how artists use different mediums to express their concerns for the environment, and educate the public through explicit and implicit messaging. Teachers' notes Classroom presentation	 Seeing Red Students will learn about colours, the different frequencies of light and how different coloured light is absorbed or transmitted by coloured filters. They will also discover how some animals use bioluminescence and colour perception to outsmart their prey. Teachers' notes Activity pack
 Persuasive Writing — Invasive Species Students will learn about the applications and techniques of persuasive writing before writing their own persuasive article for a school newsletter on the topic of invasive species. Teachers' notes Classroom presentation Example texts Activity pack	 Climate Change Students will learn about the causes and consequences of climate change, and the ways in which climate change can impact plants and animals. Teachers' notes Classroom presentation Activity cards Factsheet



ARTICLE 1 (CPTD)

Can Christianity Dialogue with African Traditional Religion? (Part 1)

(Peter K. Sarpong)

PREAMBLE

Many things surprise me. But nothing amazes me more than the debate on the question of *inculturation*. I just do not see how the need for inculturation can be questioned. But, of course, I am not immune to error in whatever form.

My conviction in this issue is, however, unshaken. God, in his goodness, has created us social beings. Before we knew of other societies, we had been immersed in our own.

It is true that all human beings are rational and free. We are all subject to the same moods and aspirations. Joy and sadness, gaiety and melancholy, patience and anger, extroversion and introversion are found everywhere on our planet. We all want to be loved. We all dislike lies. Granted that physically there is little to choose between a Kikuyu and a Thai, subject as both are to the laws of nature; it is also admitted that anywhere in the world a human person can be cruel or kind, sinful or virtuous, selfish or generous, hard-hearted or hospitable. In short, we all fall under the species *homo sapiens* we are all *human*.

INFLUENCE OF SOCIETY

But this is only one side of the coin. On the other side is the fact of our being conditioned by our environment. We are the children of our surroundings. We speak different languages. We eat different foods. Our ideas are shaped by what we see around us. Our imagery and metaphors are meaningful only in the context of what we experience constantly. Our concepts of time, space and religion are all tinted by our ecological glasses. It is hardly possible, for example, for the land-locked Burkinabé to owe allegiance to a god of the sea.

It is this social conditioning that forms a people's culture. Culture comprises that complex or sum-total of ideas, behaviour patterns linguistic tradition, legacy of institutions and concepts of life, of the human person and of the world around that have been learned and *passed* on from generation to generation in a given society. The person is born into an existing culture. There is nothing he can do about it. The culture is going to make him what he is: a Maori and not a Navaho. Christian thinking would assert that it *is* the *will* of God the Creator that that person be part of that culture.

INCULTURATION

Inculturation simply means making use of this God-given gift to praise and thank God. Culture determines my being. I am an Asante not a Croatian, not because of my colour or because the Asante and the Croatian are different brands of *homo sapiens*, but because of the



way I behave, think, speak and generally relate; in other words, because of what my culture has made me.

In inculturation, I am giving back to God the most important gift he has given me. In any case I can really know and understand him only through the medium of that gift.

Hence the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) is right in saying: " We recognise as well the challenge of inculturation of Christianity in Africa, an evangelization in depth of the African Christian; which respects and affirms his specific cultural identity and seeks to bridge the gap between faith and culture. In this important and delicate task, we are determined to proceed with courage, faith as well as with due sense of pastoral responsibility". In sum then, inculturation deals with contextualization. It makes relevant the Word of the Lord in a given milieu.

TRADITIONAL RELIGION

For Africa, the role of traditional religion in determining the *modus vivendi* has been vital. African cultures are known for their religious orientation. In fact, African cultures are religious cultures. It is not possible to *study* African culture in isolation from religion. Religion permeates the ideal African from cradle to grave. African traditional religion, therefore, comes into play in the shaping of the African's future. We have to know the past in order to understand the present and be better equipped to plan the future. We cannot know the past of the African if we neglect his religion. Traditional religion is part of the African's ethos and an understanding of it should go hand in hand with Christian evangelization.

MISREPRESENTATION

Unfortunately, African traditional religion which should be employed for its potentially salutary effect has been misunderstood and is still misrepresented. The misconception is amply evident from the many wrong names by which traditional religion has been described. It is difficult to understand the tenacity with which African traditional religion has been termed a *primal religion*. Evidently the use of the term is to distinguish it from the so-called great or world religions. A *primal religion* is supposed to have no founders. It is without a literary source.

One cannot but wonder whether it is the written word and an identifiable founder that make a religion a religion. In any case, it is an assumption of dubious validity that one cannot at least point to a dominant historical figure in the past in relation to African traditional religion. The Asante of Ghana can, without hesitation, indicate *Okomfo Anokye* as the source of most of the religious injunctions of the ancient kingdom.

PILLARS OF RELIGION

Without trying to sound too simplistic, it can be argued that all religions are built on three major pillars: faith, morality and worship. Religion deals with *belief* in some higher power or being who is accepted as having some influence on devotees. This conviction enables or even compels the adherents to comport themselves in their socio-cultural life in a manner they



believe will please the object of their worship. Here we have moral or ethical behaviour. This, in turn, leads to the believers meeting from time to time to express in public their faith in, and dependence on, their spiritual overlord. This is worship or liturgy.

These three elements common to all religions, are not in any way linked to a written word. A religion is not a religion or a high religion because its tenets are written down. On the contrary, the tenets are written down because it is already a religion. To, as it were, insist on the book as the evidence of religion or, worse still, classify religion as great or small on the basis of scripture would appear to be wrong.

Yet we have entered the paper culture. What is written down is glorified. Some take what they read in the newspapers as the Gospel-truth. We need certificates to prove our ability. We require tickets to board a plane. If at the last check-point we do not produce the boarding card, we cannot enter the plane. We insist on receipts.

These pieces of paper are needed for empirical reasons. They may serve as records for the future. They remind us of what has happened. They help to prevent mistakes. But, by and large, they indicate the decadence of the present age. In most cases they are meant to prevent fraud. We are in a world where one could, without any qualms of conscience, pose as a medical doctor when one does not know the first letter of the dictionary of anatomy. Without a ticket or a boarding pass, few would feel obliged to pay for their travels. So in a way, written evidence exhibits the worst in humanity.

Religions with scripture make sure that their teachings are not distorted, and that they are obeyed. This does not make them, therefore, superior to others.

POWER OF THE WORD

In the hey-day of traditional religion in Africa, the word of mouth was considered much more sacred than the written word is now. Written wills are being constantly contested in Asante as elsewhere with a disgraceful frequency. A hundred years ago, there was no way in which the verbal last testament of a dying person would be subtracted from, added to or disputed. Only one person may have heard it, yet it would be honoured. It was certain that that one person would not put into the mouth of the dying person what he had not said.

The word was powerful. I suppose Jesus taught this power of the word clearly. He never wrote down a word of what he said; but he founded a religion. African traditional religion does not tamper with the spoken word. Ceremonies of vital importance such as enstoolment of a chief, the marriage rite, the initiation of a priest or a youth into a secret society, the commissioning of a warrior, are all performed with ritual and words; nothing is written down. To break a verbal oath is one of the greatest felonies in Asante.

In my own life-time, Asante has seen a time when one could take food items from another person's farm without the latter's knowledge or consent. It was sufficient for the one who took the plantain or pepper to inform the rightful owner afterwards that he took it for personal consumption. He was believed, and would not abuse the trust by selling what he had taken.



That is what religion is about. Religion is about fidelity and conviction, not about interpretation and analysis of ideas. African traditional religion has a message for us here. Its lack of scripture has not, in any way, meant lack of effectiveness. Religion is to be practised not just to be talked about. This, of course, does not mean that doctrine and ideology are useless. But doctrine need not be doctrine because it is written, and doctrine devoid of practice is meaningless.

PAGANISM

Besides the negative view of African traditional religion based on its lack of scripture, African traditional religion has suffered other injustices especially in the way it has been named.

It has been called pagan. That this is a misnomer is easily seen *from* the origin of the word 'pagan'. The Latin root suggests that a pagan is originally a rugged, country person. Later on, "paganism" was employed to refer to any religion that was not Islam, Judaism or Christianity. It is an injustice to call West African traditional religion, with a strong belief in a God who is unique, incomparable and a Creator, paganism.

HEATHENISM

The word heathenism too is a misnomer when applied to traditional African religion. A heathen is somebody who is supposed not to know God, one steeped in the worship of idols. Nobody with the least knowledge of Africa can honestly say that Africans do not know God. In any case to designate a whole religion as heathenism is, to say the least, uncharitable.

FETISHISM

Why the word fetishism has caught on as a description of African traditional religion is again one of those mysteries. The word derives from the Portuguese word *feitico* which means an object or an article. Discovering that the West Africans they met on the coast were wearing objects of religious value like charms, talismans and amulets, the Portuguese imagined that the religion of West Africans was a worship of such objects. One need not labour the point that this is a great injustice. What about the wonderful names given to the Supreme Being and the honorific appellations he enjoys among us?

The truth of the matter is that there is no religion in the world that can be called *fetishism*.

And if because sacred objects are found in African traditional religion the religion is fetishistic, then we find ourselves in deep waters. There is no religion in which such objects are not found. In Christianity we respect statues and crucifixes, medals and rosaries. They, too, are objects. But we understand that these are a secondary aspect of the Christian religion. Do they not also use prayer-beads? Do the Muslims not venerate the Kaaba?

ANIMISM

The term *animism* too, appears to be the choice of many. Coined by the great Taylor of Britain, animism is derived from the Latin word *anima*. The thinking behind the use of that



word to describe African traditional Religion is that Africans believe that objects and animals have souls or spirits-*anima*.

While this may be true, it cannot be said that Africans believe that every object and every creature has such a spirit. The Asante do not believe that the cocoa tree, or the plantain tree or for that matter the palm tree or the grasscutter has a spirit. Yet these are all items of the animal and vegetable kingdoms that are of empirical interest to the Asante. In any case, again, the idea that some objects have spirits is not peculiar to Africa. It is simply incorrect to call African traditional religion animism.

IDOLATRY

Idolatry simply means the worship of idols. The ideas found in African traditional religion comprise the belief in a Supreme Being, the ancestors, the lesser gods and powers and potencies.

Why such a religion can be linked with the worship of statues, pictures or images representing divinities which is how the Pan English Dictionary defines the word "idol" - is another of those inexplicable stereotypes. Even if, for the sake of the argument, it is admitted that lesser gods are idols one worshipped, then they form only part of the religion and, therefore, cannot be made to represent the whole religion. It is obnoxious to call African religion idolatry.

PRIMITIVE AND NATIVE

Primitive is a derogatory term. It may mean first in time or it may mean "backward" or "savage". African religion is not backward nor does it precede any other religion. It evolved as human beings came to live in Africa. African religion should not be described as primitive. In the English language, the term native has come to connote uncivilized, somebody from Africa or one of the so-called "primitive" societies. This is an unfortunate understanding of the word native.

The Italian is as native to Italy as the Maori is native to New Zealand. Every religion, therefore, is native to where it is founded. African traditional religion cannot be singled out and "honoured" with the word "native".

ANCESTOR WORSHIP

But probably the worst of the epithets used to describe African traditional religion is *ancestor-worship*. As has been mentioned, ancestors do form part of the religious thought of the African. But the existence and the veneration of saints too form part of the thinking of Christians, of whatever denomination.

No Christian would accept it if Christianity were termed "Saint worship". Christians would rightly protest. The reason would not simply be that there are much more important aspects to Christianity than the Saints. The protestation would be justified on the grounds that indeed Saints are not worshipped, Saints are not deified, Saints are not the ultimate object of our petition and praise or adoration. We honour Saints as having lived our lives and being



worthy of emulation and we pass our petitions through them to the Almighty God. We impose their names on ourselves to remind us of their lives which we would then be urged to imitate.

This is exactly the same idea in the veneration of ancestors in African traditional religion. Ancestors are not divinized. My father who dies and is regarded as an ancestor remains my father and I refer to him as my father. I honour him and I respect him for what he has done for me and others. By reason of the radical change of mode of existence, it is believed ancestors have acquired a power that is higher than human. But neither they nor the lesser gods can act independently from the will of God, the all-powerful, eternal, all-knowing, superlatively great God. African traditional religion is no more ancestor worship than Islam is Muhammad worship or Christianity is Saint-Worship.

POLYTHEISM

What is going to follow about the concept of the Supreme Being should make it clear that the word Polytheism should not be used to describe African traditional religion.

Polytheism, in the classical sense, connotes a situation where two or more divinities are believed to hold an equal status. In a polytheistic situation the pantheon of gods comprises deities none of whom is thought to be greater than others, even though one may be considered as *primus inter pares*¹. This is not the case with African traditional religion where the Supreme Being is the creator of all other divinities and does not form part of the pantheon of divinities but holds a position unique to himself.

TOTEMISM

Totemism is the belief that there is a relationship between human beings or groups of human beings on the one hand and creatures of the animal and vegetable kingdoms on the other.

Totemistic ideas are strong in the African traditional religion. But this does not justify our labeling the whole religion totemistic. Indeed, totemism, in relation to the other concepts, is only an insignificant aspect of African traditional religions.

GOD IS KNOWN

Unfortunately, the foregoing and other misconceptions regarding traditional religion have persisted and caused a lot of confusion. The religion is seen by the skeptics only in terms of what is visible and observable and of worship. Consequently, they come to describe it in the most uncomplimentary terms. They observe only the externals, the slaughtering of sheep and cows, the breaking of eggs, dancing and weird acrobatics, sometimes frightening and "savage" display of sheer physical power. In its Constitution on the Church, even Vatican Council II speaks of "those who in *shadows and images* (emphasis mine) seek the unknown God". Apparently this is in reference to primal religions. But God *is known* in these religions.

¹ First among equals



This is where the mistake lies. Religion is essentially something imperceptible, spiritual. It touches the human person inwardly. It helps to answer fundamental questions in life. This applies to all religions.

INDESTRUCTIBLE ELEMENTS

In African traditional religion, there are certain abiding principles which promote human values and good living. They defy time. These are the values upon which the Creator designed things in such a way that the African could survive. These are principles and values which have seen the African through difficult, sometimes seemingly impossible times in the past. These values do not die. They last forever and they are sublime.

IS DIALOGUE POSSIBLE?

Some have questioned the wisdom or even feasibility of the Catholic Church having a dialogue with African traditional religion. Some have even contended that it is impossible for such a dialogue to take place. They argue that there are no structures, no personalities to deal with. In any case, African traditional religion is a passing phase. Social change will soon sweep it into total oblivion. The religion is simply disappearing, dying. People must be converted to Christianity and not be left in delusion. Some who favour dialogue, however nebulously they perceive it, only think in terms of conversion. African traditional religion must not be pushed aside *because* it is a friendly religion. Most converts from Africa are from it: for the rest it has not much to offer. When they talk about philosophical and religious principles, they do not think of African traditional religion.

The fact is that African traditional religion is not dying. Many of the values it enshrines are lasting values. They are not ephemeral, to be dismissed lightly. Christianity has been the worse for not taking this into account when it first made its appearance on the Black African scene in the 15th century.

African traditional religion still influences people's thinking. Many highly educated men and women in all walks of life, Christians and Muslims, are affected by it, though sometimes unconsciously. It can be said that traditional religion is present in many places in Africa, if at times it is to be found only in a different, sometimes subtle form. This being the case the need for the Church to dialogue with African traditional religion becomes imperative.

<http://www.afrikaworld.net/afrel/sarpong.html>



ARTICLE 2 (CPTD)

The Place of Commitment in Classroom Religious Education

(Marisa Crawford & Graham Rossiter. 1985. *Teaching Religion in Secondary Schools*, Sydney: Christian Brothers Province Resource Group, Chapter 5, pp.53-57 [abridged])

The previous chapter considered the place of faith in religious education. This chapter will look at commitment, a concept that overlaps with faith to some degree. The following questions will be considered: What is the nature of commitment? How can young people be educated in commitment? What is the place for teachers' commitments in the classroom?

Before these questions are examined, it will be useful for readers to identify some of the problems to do with the place of commitment in religious education. Religion teachers in Catholic schools have always thought that commitment is important in religious education; but there is often ambiguity about how to teach for religious commitment and uncertainty about what role the teacher's commitments might have in the classroom. These matters need clarification because the teacher's views on commitment in religious education have a significant influence on what happens in the classroom. Before proceeding further with the text, readers are asked to think about the problems and issues that emerge from each of the following questions raised by religion teachers.

Questions raised by teachers about the place of commitment in religious education

1. Should it be only committed Catholics who are allowed to teach religion in Catholic schools?
2. To what extent should classroom religious education be concerned with the development of religious commitment in pupils?
3. Should religion teachers presume that all pupils in their classes have a religious commitment to Catholicism?²
4. Should religion teachers concentrate on teaching their own personal commitments? Should the teacher's beliefs and commitments become the main content for religious education?
5. Should religion teachers avoid teaching anything that they do not believe in personally? Should they teach only those aspects of Catholicism that they happen to agree with?
6. Should a divorced religion teacher who remarries without annulment, or before annulment comes through, be asked to resign from the religion staff?
7. Should religious education include strong teacher exhortation of pupils to lead more committed, moral lives?
8. Should religion teachers seek responses from pupils which indicate personal faith and commitment?
9. Should classroom religious education be concerned primarily and directly with developing knowledge and understanding of religion and only indirectly with commitment and faith development?

² Or to some other religious community or tradition (editor's note).



The above questions cause concern for religion teachers and parents because they raise sensitive issues. There is often anxiety about determining the precise meaning of the questions. There may be strong differences of opinion about answers. Such responses suggest that there are not enough clear, unambiguous principles in current theory in Catholic circles for sorting out the complicated place for commitment in religious education. What follows is an attempt to overcome this difficulty and to show that the teaching of religion can make a valuable contribution to a young person's education in commitment. It will also suggest that while teachers' own religious commitments should not have a prominent place in their teaching, they can be a valuable content resource if used discreetly and educationally. Above all, the discussion in this chapter should help reduce teachers' anxieties about commitment by showing that its place in religious education is a reasonable one which is not threatening or too demanding.

The nature of religious commitment

The following paragraphs examine the meanings that people give to the words 'religious commitment'. Religious commitment can mean the beliefs and values that a person holds. However, commitment suggests not just beliefs and values, but an attachment to them. Commitments can be regarded as the beliefs and values that make a difference to the person, that flow into action, or are evident in the way the person leads his/her life. Commitment is a disposition to act intentionally in accord with particular beliefs and values.

Commitment is concerned with what people are 'faithful' to in their lives. While in recent years the ideas of personalism³, self-fulfilment and self-actualisation have been popular, there is a need to balance these worthwhile goals with more attention given to the place of commitment. People can discover something valuable about themselves by learning "to whom and to what they can be faithful"! Reflections about commitment can help keep personalism and self-fulfilment in perspective and can help temper any tendency to self-centredness. There is a danger that a preoccupation with developmental theories can promote self-centredness – that the main thing in life is to pursue one's personal fulfilment.

Commitment involves an emotional investment. It also includes rational elements; commitments can be scrutinised and evaluated. Commitment to the Church is not incompatible with criticism of the Church. One would hope that a committed Christian would contribute responsible criticism of the Church and would be motivated to work for the creative renewal of Church structures⁴. Commitment is not inconsistent with some uncertainty and doubt⁵. Commitment is intentional; it needs freedom⁶.

While some elements of commitment will be evident in people's activities, because it is so personal it cannot be measured in an empirical way. Strictly speaking, one cannot

³ Personalism regards personhood (or "personality") as the fundamental notion, as that which gives meaning to all of reality and constitutes its supreme value. (Editor's note)

⁴ See, for example, the way the Synod of Bishops (1977) called on Catholics to take a responsible role in the renewal of the Church (Synodal Message to the People of God, para. 4.)

⁵ That a measure of uncertainty and questioning is not incompatible with genuine Christian faith and commitment is evident in Pope John Paul's writing where he suggests "that faith is not certainty but questioning, not clarity but a leap in the dark". (Catechesi Tradendae. para. 60.)

⁶ See, for example, the reverence for human freedom in the response of faith as shown in General Catechetical Directory, para. 3; Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*; "The Declaration on religious freedom", para. 3 in W.M. Abbot, *The Documents of Vatican II*, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1967).



communicate commitment in the same way one can communicate knowledge. Religious commitment, like faith, grows from within. It requires a free personal response. One can invite, awaken, encourage, and affirm commitments. One cannot prescribe or impose them. Talking about one's own commitments is a personal activity; it cannot be compelled.

As noted in the previous chapters, the development of faith is one of the dominant themes in contemporary thinking about religious education in Catholic schools. There is no need here to duplicate what has been written about the nature of faith⁷. What has been of special interest in the early chapters of this book is the important place of faith as a goal for religious education and the complicated but indirect place for faith in the processes of classroom religious education. What follows will extend this thinking by concentrating on the concept of commitment. There is much overlap between the ideas of religious faith and religious commitment. A particular advantage in using the word commitment is that it can be applied to personal religious commitment and also to the professional educational commitment of the teacher. Teachers need to consider the relationship between their personal and professional commitments and how each should influence the way they teach religion.

Educating young people in commitment

When the potential of the Catholic school and, more particularly, of religious education is considered for the fostering of religious commitment in young people, the school should be regarded as only one of the agencies that will have an influence. When listening to speeches at school functions one can get the false impression that the school's religion program is supposed to be the major influence on the religious development of children. Appreciation of the personal freedom needed in faith and commitment, and of the Christian view that faith is a response to a mysterious invitation of the Spirit should caution teachers not to presume too direct a place for faith and commitment in the teaching process. In religious education, teachers help students explore what it means to have faith and to be committed; their role in the classroom is not one of programming religious experiences, of communicating faith or of inviting commitment decisions. The classroom is a place for an open, educational exploration of commitment; it is not a place for strong exhortation to take up particular commitments. This approach respects the freedom and the consciences of students.

In the classroom, students can consider examples of commitment in the life of Jesus, in the lives of Catholics and in the lives of people from other Christian and non-Christian faiths. While commitment can be inspired and sustained by religious faith, people without religious faith also have worthy commitments. Pupils can explore the potential implications of commitment in their own lives. They can 'try on' commitments to see what they would feel like. As they learn to think critically and as they become more autonomous they should be more capable of appraising religious commitments.

Part of young people's education in commitment, particularly in the senior classes, should be an examination of the problems facing commitment in contemporary society. They should consider that uncertainty and criticism are not incompatible with commitment.

⁷ See, for example: "The development of faith: Some implications for education in faith", chapter 14, in *Religious Education in Australian Schools*; J.W. Fowler, 1981, *Stages of Faith*, Melbourne: Dove Communications.



There is much criticism and cynicism in our society. When people are critical they distance themselves from those they are criticising; in taking a critical, neutral position they suspend their personal ties and commitments, at least temporarily, and they experience a sense of independence, power and judgment over those they are criticising. While such movements are natural enough when people are criticising, there is a danger that an overemphasis of criticism can encourage them to feel that they can remain 'free' and 'critical' by being 'uncommitted'. The 'temporary' quality of society with uncertainty about the future, fear of nuclear war, anxiety about unemployment, instability in marriage and confusion about values and beliefs make it more difficult for people to enter into commitments. Nevertheless, it may be decisions about commitments, no matter how temporary, that give people purpose and satisfaction in their lives. Young people may be able to reflect on some of these issues in religious education.

Other social issues that senior students might explore are moral and religious relativism. The extraordinary capacity for making comparisons in modern Western society, especially through the mass media, makes it inevitable that moral values and religious beliefs will be seen as 'relative', at least to some degree. In addition to the scepticism that may result, there is a 'privatising' of religious beliefs. Beliefs tend to become a purely personal and private matter, like opinions, with little social reinforcement. This places religious commitments under strain.

The pluralism of society and the variety of beliefs and values that are available as commitment options make the question of decision-making a crucial one for young people. They walk down a veritable 'cafeteria line' of commitment options; and decision-making is even more important because traditional 'commitment by convention' has largely given way to 'commitment by intention'. The skills of searching for relevant information, of critical evaluation and of decision-making in relation to potential commitments should thus be given a special priority in religious education. This is particularly relevant for senior classes where, despite superficial confidence, young people may be frightened by a feeling of powerlessness regarding their future. What is involved in religious education in the area of commitment can give them a much needed sense of power over their own lives. No matter what the external circumstances, they can give some positive direction to their lives through valuing themselves and through deciding about and living up to particular values and commitments.

The above paragraphs suggest that religious education can balance its critical, evaluative function with a sensitive treatment of commitment. Thinking about the problematical meaning of commitment in contemporary society should be an essential part of young people's religious education. They can explore issues like relativism and secularisation. They should have an opportunity to consider that holding religious commitments open to rational appraisal is not at odds with being committed; and to consider that an ability to think critically about commitments is a desirable aspect of religious maturity.

The Place of teachers' beliefs and commitments in the classroom

A number of difficult questions arise when the place of teachers' beliefs and commitments in the classroom is considered:

- Is being a 'good, practising' Catholic a sufficient reason for being asked to teach religion in a Catholic school?



- If a Catholic is a good religion teacher but does not attend Sunday Mass, should this teacher be excluded from religious education?
- If being a committed Catholic is not an adequate qualification by itself for teaching religion, then are the religious commitments of the teacher unimportant and irrelevant to religious education?

It is important that questions like these are thought through carefully. It is not uncommon to hear parents or teachers say "Only committed Catholics should teach religion in Catholic schools". The valuable place that committed Catholics have in Catholic schools and the valued places for professionally committed teachers, whether religiously affiliated or not, need not be questioned. What can be questioned is the adequacy of the comment when it is applied to the classroom teaching process. It says something important about the need for committed people in the Catholic school, but this is not enough. More needs to be said about how committed people ought to teach religion and about how their religious commitments might figure in the classroom.

There is a danger that the statement about committed Catholics considers religious education to be a process for the direct communication of religious faith and commitment from teacher to pupils. It also tends to presume that being a 'committed Catholic' is an adequate qualification for a religion teacher – as if any practising Catholic can automatically be recruited to teach religion. The statement can suggest that the teacher's own religious beliefs could become the dominant source of content for religious education. There is also a danger that some teachers, who feel they have a monopoly on the term 'commitment', can be encouraged by such a statement to present their own views in a strong way.

The teacher's personal religious commitments should not occupy a dominant or relatively exclusive place in classroom religious education. Where this happens it may cause serious problems. The content becomes very narrow. It becomes coextensive with the teacher's own particular version of Christianity. Only one point of view is presented. This teacher will tend to omit areas about which he or she is uncertain, while overloading the content with material in which he or she is interested. This teacher may think that religious education means "getting my message across to the pupils". This idea of 'communicating' commitment in the classroom results in an authoritarian style of teaching; pupils perceive it as 'moralising' or 'sermonising' and they find it distasteful.

The situation can be exacerbated where teachers appear to be self-righteous about their Catholic commitment. They can give the impression that they are the only ones who are really committed, and that being committed requires a dogmatic style of teaching that forcefully represents orthodox Catholicism. They consider that their views correspond with the authoritative, official view of the Church, and they do not readily accept the validity of different interpretations. There is a danger that their 'God' and their view of Christianity are presented as the God and the true picture of Christianity. This flawed use of the teacher's commitment was strongly criticised by Pope John Paul II in *Catechesi Tradendae*:

The religion teacher/catechist) will not seek to keep directed towards himself and his personal opinions and attitudes the attention and the consent of the mind and heart of the person he is catechising. Above all, he will not try to inculcate his personal opinions and options as if they expressed Christ's teaching and the lessons of his life. (Paragraph 6)



Earlier, Pope Paul VI had stressed the importance of avoiding any imposition on the consciences of people, making it clear that the Good News of the Gospel should be proposed in a way that respects the freedom of the individual and the essential freedom in the response of faith⁸.

If teachers are not to see their role as an attempt to communicate their own commitments, a question remains about what use they can make of their commitments when teaching. If teachers are hesitant about referring to their own views for fear of indoctrinating the students, they may wonder whether their own beliefs and opinions are irrelevant in religious education. Furthermore, they may wonder whether religion can be taught satisfactorily by any well-informed and enthusiastic teachers, whether or not they are believers. To resolve these issues a distinction must be made between the personal religious life of a teacher (its privacy must be respected and it cannot be unconditionally regarded as appropriate subject matter for the classroom) and aspects of the teacher's own religious views which the teacher consciously decides to refer to as resource material in the classroom. A code of teaching ethics should regulate what is referred to and how it is used in the classroom.

The religion teacher's role is to involve students in an exploration of Catholic religious traditions. It is not to exhort them to reproduce the teacher's particular religious commitments. The teacher should be: knowledgeable about what is taught; fair and respectful in presenting content; able to show alternative points of view where these exist; sensitive in managing students' questions and discussion; and, as will be taken up later, responsible and creative in making reference to his or her own views.

As with all staff in the Catholic school, religion teachers should be expected to uphold the moral and religious values written into the school's philosophy and aims. For example: that religion is important in life; that the school values the religious education and religious development of pupils; that pupils be treated at all times with respect and dignity; that there is opportunity for liturgy, sacraments and prayer. The Catholic school should be a place where the religious thinking and the religious lives of its staff may be enhanced and expressed. However, as for the students, the privacy and the freedom of staff in these matters must be respected.

One could hope that the religious beliefs and moral lives of religion teachers would be in accord with the best traditions of Catholic Christianity. But this could also be said about all staff in the school. It is a very delicate matter to determine how prescriptive a school should be in stating requirements for beliefs, morals and religious practices in the private lives of staff. The school is on surer ground when spelling out the professional standards that can be expected of teachers both in the classroom and in their personal dealings with students. Whether they go to Mass every Sunday is not the most important question the school should be asking of its teachers. Rather, the school should ask teachers to consider a code of ethics which could encourage them: to have respect for students as persons; to teach fairly, creatively and responsibly; to avoid indoctrination; to enhance the self-esteem of students, etc.

⁸ Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, para. 79



NEWS

Experiences and Thoughts about Religious Practices in Taiwan (August 2016 - June 2017)

(Hilary Davis)

My husband, Brian and I have come to live and work in Taiwan for a year. We arrived on 18 August 2016. The first thing we did, after settling into our apartment, was to find our local Catholic Church, which to our delight was less than 1km away, an 8 minute walk. The Assumption of Our Lady is a beautiful big church built alongside the 15 floor Catholic Hospital, approximately 30 years ago. The Catholic Ethos is strongly felt in the hospital with beautiful holy pictures and statues prominently placed in the spacious reception area and in the foyers and corridors. It serves the local community and is subsidised by the National Health Organization.



The church is made up of two lots of parishioners, the local Chinese speaking Taiwanese, with their own Taiwanese priest and an order of Taiwanese Assumption sisters, who run their own kindergarten school, a block away. The other group are the Filipino people who are mostly migrant workers, in their 20's and 30's who have a wonderfully strong faith and who come to celebrate Mass in English every week. They have a vibrant choir accompanied by a guitarist and sing so beautifully. I am one of the readers now so have got to know the people a little better. After Mass the Filipino people take the priest's hand and touch their own forehead as a blessing and sign of respect towards him. Our Mass readings and brochure is produced in the Philippines by Missalette, St Pauls Media pastoral ministry called SAMBUHAY. They alternate the songs and responses in English and Filipino.



Our first Christmas away from home was made special by their warm hospitality. The whole community ate a meal, cooked by volunteers, after the 10h30 service at the back of the church. There was no turkey, no ham, no roasted vegetables or potatoes and gravy. Their traditional food was made up of a pork stew, sticky rice in bamboo leaves, spaghetti with herbs, pork rind with vegetables chopped into it called Misua. Dessert was a treacle rice pudding and fruit. No alcohol was served either, only water or apple juice. There was a present exchange done by numbers. There were games organised for the little children: one was building towers with marshmallows and chop sticks.



The day before Christmas, we joined a group of parishioners at the hospital, dressed with Christmas hats, and sang carols in Chinese – but with the tunes we know – in a few of the wards to the elderly and the mentally ill patients. That was an interesting experience in itself. The nurses that work with these patients must have a special calling.



There was a beautiful nativity scene in the church. A young couple dressed up as Mary and Joseph on Christmas morning. Mary carried the statue of baby Jesus, and placed it in the manger. After Mass, the people came up and kissed the statue of the baby Jesus, like we do on Good Friday with the cross. It was another interesting tradition.

The 3rd Sunday in January was a feast day I had never experienced before. It was the feast of Santo Nino, the Christ Child. The story goes that the image of the Christ child was first brought to the Philippines by Magellan as a christening gift to Hara Amihan, wife of Cebu's Rajah Humabon. 800 natives were baptized together with the rulers of the land. This was the start of Christianity in the Philippines and an annual feast day was proclaimed with Sinulog dances, where the queen held the Santo Nino in her arms and blessed all her people. The statue depicts a dark skinned child dressed as a Spanish King. There was a procession and dancing in the church with the centre girl holding the statue while dancing with it. They dressed in golden satin outfits and held yellow sunflowers. It was very special to be a part of a ceremony that the Filipino people hold so dear to their hearts.



(In researching the main religions of Taiwan I quote the following from <http://go2taiwan.net/religion.php>.)

"Taiwan has 3 major religions – Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism. Other religious practices include Christianity, Mormonism, the Unification Church, Islam, and Hinduism, as well as native sects such as Yiguandao.

Most of the island's traditional places of worship combine all three of the major religious traditions. The Japanese occupation of the island saw widespread persecution of Taoism- seen as the embodiment of Chinese culture- which meant that Taoists had to secretly worship in Buddhist temples, leading to the creation of Taiwan's uniquely united yet divergent faith."

Taoism

"Taoism is China's main native religion, and many of its gods are deified persons and ancestors who made important contributions to society. The religion has its roots in the philosophical teaching of Laotze- a great thinker of the 6th Century BC.



Buddhism

One of the world's oldest religions, Buddhism came to China from India, as it spread far and wide throughout Asia- Taiwan included. Chinese Buddhism varies considerably from the pure Indian version with a number of Chinese sects combining both Buddhist and Taoist beliefs. The best known of these is called Chan- or by its Japanese name- Zen.”

Many of the teachers I work with practice Buddhism. In the holidays some go to the Zen Temple on Buddhists retreats, which are apparently offered free of charge to whoever wants to attend. On our weekend expeditions on the scooter we have seen some enormous statues of different Buddha's, gods & goddesses, generally placed close to a temple and in a place of natural beauty, near the sea or high up in the mountains.



These Buddhist monks were collecting donations on a Saturday morning on a busy street in the centre of town.



The Big Buddha on Lantau Island in Hong Kong. (We hiked up the huge mountain to see it.)

Confucianism

“Although not strictly a religion, the teachings of the great Chinese Philosopher Confucius (551-479 BC) have become an important part of faith and personal beliefs throughout Asia- Taiwan included.

Confucius taught the worship of ancestors and the respect of elders and nobility, but he also believed strongly in a society based on merit and skills rather than privilege and inherited titles. He is widely regarded as the father of civil society and social order, and his teachings and philosophy are highly valued in modern Chinese societies.”

This is so evident in the work ethic of the Taiwanese people. The adults work from early in the morning, depending on what job they do. Farmers bring their meat into the markets at 5am and sell it off meat trucks all around the town. People with their own business, who run them from home, live and work on the same premises. Many of them have a small shrine in the corner of their living room/work space, with two red lanterns, adorned with red paper with Chinese writing on it, a statue of whatever god or deity they worship in the centre, and offerings of fruit and incense on the small altar. Almost every street in our hometown of Hukou has a shrine or temple of some sort.

We often go for walks out of town in the farming area. Every few blocks one will find yet another small shrine or temple structure. On enquiring about this, I was told that they serve





as guards for the fields so that people would never think of taking any produce from that field or vegetable patch because they were being watched by the gods.

In every shrine there is a special place in front where the incense is placed and a separate fireplace where they burn paper money for the ghosts and gods to use in the after- life. Fruit is always placed on the altar

as an offering.

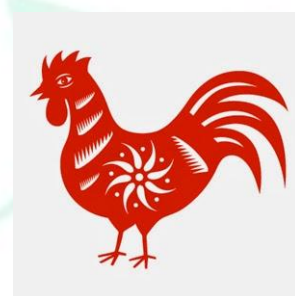
A lot of the traditions practiced by a great majority of the people, especially where we live, have been passed down through generations over 100s of years. It is also a combination of beliefs.

Chinese New Year – 2017 - The Year of the Rooster

We were fortunate to experience the Chinese New Year.

“In ancient times, there was a monster named Nian with a long head and sharp horns. It dwelled deep in the sea all year round and only showed up every New Year’s Eve to eat people and livestock in nearby villages. Therefore, on the day of New Year's Eve, people would flee to remote mountains to avoid being harmed by the monster. People had lived in fear of this monster until an old man with white hair and a ruddy complexion visited the village. He refused to hide in the mountains along with the villagers, but successfully scared away the monster by pasting red papers on doors, burning bamboo to make a loud cracking sound (precursor to firecrackers), lighting candles in the houses, and wearing red clothes. When the villagers came back, they were surprised to discover that the village had not been destroyed. After that, every New Year's Eve, people did as the old man instructed and the monster Nian never showed up again. This tradition has been continued until the present time and has become an important way to celebrate the arrival of the new year”.

<http://www.chinahighlights.com/travelguide/festivals/chinese-new-year-legends.htm>



So everyone decorates their front doors with red paper, and messages of good will and prosperity are written in Chinese script on the red paper. Oranges, mandarins and kumquats are also symbols of wealth, being golden fruit. So many people bought miniature trees and placed them outside their homes and businesses. 2017 is the Chinese Year of the Rooster, so many hung decorative roosters outside their homes too.

Fireworks play a huge role in the celebrations as it is also thought that the evil spirits are afraid of loud noises. So fireworks are set off every night for 15 nights. Flying over Taoyuan City just after sundown, we could see all the fireworks starting up all over the place. It sounded like a war zone outside our apartment. All businesses close for a minimum of 5 days over this time where people go to family reunions. There are very strict rules as to who goes where. On New Year’s Eve and New Year’s night, the family goes to the husband’s family for dinner. Thereafter the family can go to the wife’s family for the rest of the holiday.



Children are given red envelopes with money inside as gifts from all adult members of the family. The amount of money inside the envelope has to be an even number. Once the child has left school, they don't receive any more envelopes.

When people go back to work, on the day they start again, they first set off a whole lot of fire crackers in front of their entrance to ward off any bad luck and evil spirits that may affect their success in the coming year. They also light a small fire and burn paper money for the gods to bring them prosperity for the New Year.

Burials / Funeral Rituals

When someone dies, the family gets a type of freezer coffin and the body is displayed in their home for about five days. Friends and other family will then come to pay their respects. The outside of the home is decorated with two to four tiers of colourful cans and flowers. An awning of rainbow colours is also put up at the entrance of their home. The family fold yellow paper money which they burn on the 5th night. After burning the money, firecrackers are let off to ward off evil spirits then they chant songs and prayers. Thereafter a big bonfire is lit and many items of the deceased are burnt, to send these items to the next world, where they believe the person will use them. The family and relatives dress in white gowns with hoods on. Younger members wear a head band with a white cloak.



They sit around the fire until it burns right down. We witnessed this event from our balcony, with binoculars. I was so intrigued when I heard the singing and clanging of instruments. I saw all these white hooded people around the fire and wondered what on earth was going on. Thank heavens for Google: my mind was put at rest when I learned what they were doing and that they weren't members of the Ku Klux Klan!

The body, I was told, then goes to the crematorium and then on to a family or communal columbarium. Funerals have not always been conducted in this fashion and in the recent past, a family would rent a burial site for 10 years. On the 10th year, the family would have to dig up the bones of the deceased, then get them cremated and the ashes put into the family columbarium. Due to land shortages this practice has now changed. Every family has their own columbarium, as well as a ceremonial hall, similar to a mini temple where the names of the deceased are written on the walls. There are also bigger public burial places for ashes for those families which cannot afford their own private columbarium.

Tomb Sweeping Holiday

28 March was a national holiday called Tomb Sweeping Holiday. On this day families go to the burials sites of the older graves and literally sweep the tombs, weed the area and place fresh flowers on the tomb. They also burn yellow paper money (see right) for the spirits to use in the afterlife. The fires



spread and the whole graveyard eventually burns. We caught a bus from Sun Moon Lake, where we had spent the long weekend, to Taichung station. Along the way we passed quite a few graveyards and managed to take photographs from the bus window.



The fire engine was on standby in case the fires got too big. The following week at school I asked the learners who had gone to sweep their family tombs, and more than half of every class had taken part in this tradition.

Another interesting revered goddess is Mazu. There are many statues of her along the coastline. I have quoted her story from Wikipedia below.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mazu_\(goddess\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mazu_(goddess))

“Mazu, also known by several other names and titles, is a Chinese sea goddess, the deified form of the historical Lin Mo or Lin Moniang, a Fujianese shamaness traditionally dated to c. 960–c. 987. Revered after her death as a patron of seafarers, including fishermen and sailors, her worship spread throughout China's coastal regions and expatriate communities throughout Southeast Asia. She was thought to roam the seas, protecting her believers through miraculous interventions. She is now generally regarded by her believers as a powerful and benevolent Queen of Heaven, a role in which she is sometimes syncretized with similar figures, such as Guanyin and the Virgin Mary. Mazuism is most popular on Taiwan; her temple festival is a major event throughout the country, with the largest celebrations around her temples at Dajia and Beigang. It is a notionally illegal cult in the People's Republic of China but is broadly tolerated and sometimes conflated with approved Taoist beliefs.”



This year has been an amazing experience, where I have been able to see first- hand the practices of these ancient traditions being played out in daily life. Each day I learn something new of a culture I knew very little about before coming here.

NOTE

Hilary Davis is a former teacher at Our Lady Help of Christians, Paarl and St Vincent's, Koelenhof in the Western Cape



World Water Day



*I've known rivers;
I've known rivers ancient as the world
and older than the flow of human blood in human veins.*

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.
Langston Hughes

This year, *World Water Day* (Wednesday 22 March) was celebrated along with two major events in human history.

A week ago, after 140 years of persistence in the courts of New Zealand, the Maori people succeeded in their efforts to grant the Whanganui River the rights of legal personhood. Long considered a sacred ancestor, the river's deeper identity was reclaimed and restored. Te Awa Tupua, the third largest river in the north island of New Zealand was reinstated to her ancient status as a beloved member of the Universe community. Only in the last several centuries of western colonization had she been consigned to the status of a thing, something to be used, owned and managed. <http://www.worldwaterday.org/>

Similarly, this week a court in Northern India granted legal personhood and voices to the sacred Ganges and Yamuna Rivers, two vast powerful rivers of life flowing from the Himalayan Mountains. Long considered spiritual goddesses by the Hindu people who have traditionally depended on them for their physical and spiritual well-being, the two rivers will be given a voice in the courts of human law. As persons, they may speak to protect themselves against the overwhelming industrial assaults and desecration that threatened their very survival as carriers of life. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-39336284>



Pope Francis Meets Catholic-Muslim Delegation from Britain

<https://zenit.org/articles/pope-francis-meets-catholic-muslim-delegation-from-britain/>

‘Among brothers, all of us must speak, listen to one another, and talk slowly, tranquilly, to seek the way together. And when one listens and speaks, one is already on the way.’

Before his weekly General Audience this morning, April 5, 2017, Pope Francis met with a Catholic - Muslim delegation from Britain in the *auletta* of the Vatican’s Paul VI Hall.

Present were: Maulana Ali Raza RIZVI, President of Majlis and Ulama Europe; Maulana Muhammad Shahid RAZA, Chairman of the British Muslim Forum, Great Britain; Shaykh Ibrahim MOGRA, Co-Chair of Christian Muslim Forum; and Maulana Sayed Ali Abbas RAZAWI, Director General of the Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society.

Here is a translation of the Holy Father’s greeting to the participants.

I welcome you with joy. I like to think that the most important work that we must do between us, in humanity, is the work “of the ear”: to listen to one another — to listen to one another without hurrying to give an answer. To receive the word of a brother, of a sister, and then to think of giving my own — but the capacity to listen, this is so important. It is interesting when persons have this capacity to listen, speaking in a low, tranquil tone . . . Instead, when they do not have it, they speak loudly and even shout. Among brothers, all of us must speak, listen to one another, and talk slowly, tranquilly, to seek the way together. And when one listens and speaks, one is already on the way.

I thank you for this path you are undertaking and I ask Almighty and Merciful God to bless you. And I ask you to pray for me.

Thank you very much.





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To qualify for CPTD points, answer the following questions. Use the separately attached Word document and email to paulf@cie.org.za. Please do not forget to supply the personal details requested at the end of the document.

CPTD ARTICLE 1: Can Christianity Dialogue with African Traditional Religion?

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

	STATEMENT	TRUE	FALSE
1	Social conditioning forms a people's culture.		
2	Inculturation seeks to bridge the gap between faith and culture.		
3	It is possible to study African culture in isolation from religion.		
4	All religions are built on three major pillars: faith, morality and worship.		
5	Religions with scripture are superior to others.		
6	African traditional religion can justly be called heathenism or paganism.		
7	Christians would rightly protest if their religion were to be called "saint-worship".		
8	Social change will soon sweep African traditional religion into total oblivion.		
9	Many highly educated men and women in all walks of life, Christians and Muslims, are affected by African traditional religion.		
10	The need for the Church to dialogue with African traditional religion is imperative.		



CPTD ARTICLE 2: The Place of Commitment in Classroom Religious Education

TRUE/FALSE (Tick the correct box)

According to the author of this article

	STATEMENT	TRUE	FALSE
1	Religion teachers in Catholic schools have always thought that commitment is important in religious education.		
2	The teaching of religion cannot make a valuable contribution to a young person's education in commitment.		
3	Commitment is a disposition to act intentionally in accord with particular beliefs and values.		
4	Commitment can be measured in an empirical way.		
5	The role of teachers in the classroom is one of programming religious experiences, of communicating faith and inviting commitment decisions.		
6	The 'temporary' quality of society makes it more difficult for people to enter into commitments.		
7	Traditional 'commitment by convention has largely given way to 'commitment by intention'.		
8	Thinking about the problematical meaning of commitment in contemporary society should be an essential part of young people's religious education.		
9	Being a 'committed Catholic' is an adequate qualification for a religion teacher.		
10	The religion teacher's role is to involve students in an exploration of Catholic religious traditions.		



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