

Embrace the Spirit

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Religious and Moral Education Council
The Alberta Teachers' Association



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A Note from the Editor



Winter descended upon us rather quickly this year. The snow began to fall on the weekend of October 20, when we were in Banff for our annual conference, and it really hasn't left us since. As the shivering little trick-or-treaters made their way to my door this year, I was thankful that I am past that stage of my life. On more than one occasion, living in Alberta has certainly challenged my creativity to integrate winter wear into Halloween costumes—but what we had to contend with is minor compared to the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy on the east coast. Let us be mindful of the needs of others as we look forward to the Christmas season.

We have two presidents' messages for you—one from our outgoing president, Sharon Malec, and one from our new president, Carl Fakeley. Carl's commitment to religious and moral education is reflected in the fact that he received an award of merit at this year's conference.

Several of the articles in this issue are quite comprehensive—for example, "Foundations for Inquiry Learning in the Gospels." The author has provided this summary:

While new approaches to student learning frequently make appearances on the educational scene, many of them constitute little more than revised vocabularies. When the underlying presuppositions of some of the newly invented methods are closely examined, it will be found that they much resemble or emulate quite ancient educational thought and practice. This is certainly the case with the much-touted *inquiry approach to learning*, which finds its source in a variety of historical contexts. This paper will document one such source in Jesus' parabolic teaching approach portrayed in the New Testament Gospels, and draw out implications for teaching practice.

Part one of this paper, in this issue, will trace the historical foundations of inquiry learning, including Jesus's teaching approach. Part two, in spring 2013, will analyze Jesus's parabolic teaching approach in more detail and "draw out implications for teaching practice."

Mark DeJong, in "From a Voice Among Many to the Voice of Truth," explains a strategy for incorporating Catholic social teaching into the social studies curriculum.

With this issue, we start a new column—"Fides et Ratio." In our current culture, faith is often viewed as anti-intellectual and relegated to the private, subjective sphere, or it is looked at with cynicism. Tomás Rochford intends to demonstrate how faith and reason work together to help us discover truth.

At this year's annual general meeting, we adopted a new awards format. We dug into the archives to learn more about the namesake for the lifetime honorary membership award, William D Hrychuk; this article is on page 19.

Until next spring!

Dorothy Burns



From the Past President



As I pass the gavel to Carl Fakeley, I ponder on the last three years. I was blessed to work with Mark, Dorothy, Carl, Ron, Bob, LeeAnn, Michael, Janice, Elaine, Quinton and Léo in my presidency. Most of all, I would like to thank Cynthia, who has been our rock.

I accomplished my goal of increasing membership. We are now at 115 members, and there are new members from our last conference. We are on track with our awards, especially the awards of merit and the designation of the Dawn Kirvan Award. The RMEC awards of merit have recognized exemplary classroom teaching, leadership and/or service in the field of religious and moral education

while demonstrating the values of faith, dignity, respect and/or collaboration. The Award of Merit for Collaboration is now named the Dawn Kirvan Award—Collaboration, and recognizes a collaborative team whose project demonstrates the values of faith, dignity and respect. This is in honour of Dawn Kirvan, who was the religious education coordinator for Greater St Albert Catholic Schools. Dawn believed in the power of community and was always a strong advocate of honouring team collaboration rather than recognizing individuals.

Carl will pilot us to even greater heights, and his goals are attainable. I fully support Carl—as Dr Seuss would say, “Oh, the places we’ll go.”

Accept your past. Honour your present. Believe in your future.

Sharon Malec

From the President



It is often tragedy that forces us to pause and reflect on what is really important in our lives. In a world filled with instant gratification and the busyness of life, we can easily forget to give thanks for the things that are the most important. When tragedy strikes we are left asking why.

In October 2012, 14-year-old Malala Yousafzai, a student in Pakistan, suffered an attempt on her life by the Taliban simply because she wanted to go to school. She was shot in the neck and is recovering in a hospital in England. Malala, an activist for girls' education, endured threats of violence because of her desire for an education. Her resolve is strong, though—while recovering in the hospital,

she has asked for her textbooks so that she could study and prepare for her tests. I wonder how many teachers or students in Alberta would take such a stand in the face of a mortal threat such as this.

Closer to home, an extremely unfortunate incident occurred in St Paul, Alberta. A van smashed through a large window and plunged into a basement classroom of Racette Junior High School. Students and desks were scattered and, when all came to a stop, three students were pinned under the vehicle. As quickly as possible, the emergency crews freed the youngsters. Sadly, three young girls suffered serious injuries. Even more tragic, one student, 11-year-old Megan Wolitski, died the next day from her injuries. Megan, whose mother is a teacher, aspired to be a teacher herself.

While we are in this world we may never understand why such evil and suffering occur. Whether it is done with malicious intent, as in the first instance, or is seemingly accidental, as in the second, the pain is immense. C S Lewis writes, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

Turning to God during these most difficult times can bring comfort and consolation. Sadly, it is during times of great pain and suffering that some will turn to God, shake an angry fist and ask "Why?" This can lead them to reject God because life hasn't worked out the way they hoped or expected. Peter Kreeft suggests that this world is like a second womb that prepares us for the next world. Our first womb prepared us for this world, and this world, the second womb, prepares us for the next. Our ultimate goal in this world is to be ready or prepared for our entrance into the next, which is our final destination.

When we consider the many times we ask why over our lifetime, we will do well to remember the answer to the question, Why did God make me?

"God made me to know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him in this world and to be happy with him forever in the next."

Carl Fakeley



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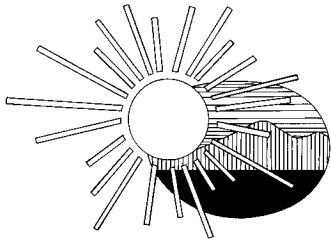
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Religious and Moral Education Council of the Alberta Teachers' Association

Mission Statement

The Religious and Moral Education Council exists to inspire and foster learning communities by providing professional development for teachers to help them nurture the moral, ethical and spiritual lives of students.

Vision Statement

The Religious and Moral Education Council will, in search of peace and the common good, be a principal resource for Alberta teachers.

Values

We are committed to serving teachers of all traditions and cultures, through the values of faith, dignity, respect and collaboration.



Foundations for Inquiry Learning in the Gospels

John W Friesen

John W Friesen, PhD, DRS, DMin, is a professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Calgary, in Calgary, Alberta.

Part One

Educators are sometimes quick to adopt new teaching approaches, never wanting to be left behind in the eternal quest to be relevant. Acting too speedily, however, can sometimes prove to be embarrassing, particularly when it is later discovered that the new approach has really been around for some time, albeit under a different label. Such is the case with the much-touted inquiry learning method that has recently been making headlines in educational circles. As this paper will show, inquiry learning is at least as old as the New Testament and was very ably practised by Jesus of Nazareth.

Clearly, the theological beliefs and practices of Jesus of Nazareth were in many ways quite different from those of the religious leaders

of His time. However, an element of agreement could be identified with regard to Jesus's teaching method—namely, using the parabolic teaching method with which His contemporaries were quite familiar. Jesus's choice of subject matter, however, sometimes stumped both His theological contemporaries and His audiences. Public addresses made by Jesus seemed to appeal to the crowds who heard Him, but the subtle underlying meanings He intended were often missed by His audiences, which included religious legalists, learned theologians and trusted disciples. A case in point was the reference He made to His forthcoming death and resurrection—"Destroy this temple, and I will raise it up again in three days" (John 2:19b).¹ Statements like these greatly vexed the Pharisees and puzzled His disciples.

In modern terms, the parabolic teaching method easily parallels what has been elaborated as a form of student-centred inquiry-based learning. With this approach,

students, having been subjected to new information, are encouraged to inquire further into the matter or seek answers to posed questions within a clearly outlined procedure and learning structure (Kourilsky and Quaranta 1987, 68). There are two conditions essential to adopting an inquiry approach. The first is that students will need to demonstrate a genuine interest in discovering something new or in providing solutions or alternatives to unsolved questions or problems; the second is that they will need to develop the various processes associated with inquiry, including being responsible for planning, conducting and evaluating their own efforts. Students need to accept the fact that not all answers are readily available except through their own cogitation. Undoubtedly, the people who came to Jesus with questions clearly showed genuine interest, so it was particularly the second condition that Jesus required of inquirers; that is, to pursue the direction of His guidance further on their own.

¹ All Scriptural quotations are from the New International Version of the Bible. Colorado Springs, Colo: International Bible Society, 1984.

The following statements identify several contexts in which Jesus used the inquiry approach, thereby challenging His hearers to extend their understandings by further rumination. Each of these statements will be analyzed in its context later on.

1. Matthew 9:12–13a. On hearing this, Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’”
2. Mark 12:12. Then they looked for a way to arrest him [Jesus] because they [the legalistically-inclined Pharisees] knew He had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away.
3. Luke 8:9–10. His disciples asked him what this parable meant. He said, “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that, ‘though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand.’”
4. John 3:4. “How can a man be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!”
5. John 5:39. You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.

Today’s university and college libraries contain myriad books about the nature of learning, many of them featuring special vocabularies about creative ways to increase student achievement. Words and phrases such as *constructivism*, *critical thinking*, *discovery learning*, *experimentalism*,

individualized instruction, *instrumentalism*, *student-centred learning*, *reflective teaching*, *progressivism* and *problem-solving* are bandied about as though these emphases have only recently been born. In reality, these approaches to learning have been around for a long time; however, as is customary in pedagogical circles, old ideas are often revamped in new vocabularies, perhaps as a means of motivating teachers and students to pursue them. What educators need to do when this occurs is study the philosophical underpinnings of these approaches, if only to discover that, “What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9).

Historical Base

Jewish teachers were not necessarily the first to use stories to instruct in both cultural and moral domains. In fact, this approach was quite popular among traditional societies that relied on the oral tradition to transmit valued knowledge. The Indigenous peoples of North America did a great job of perpetuating their cultural and spiritual beliefs through the preservation and telling of legends, and these stories are being revived today in print as well as in other media (Friesen and Friesen 2009). These Aboriginal stories are unique to this continent and provide vivid pictures of many varying Indigenous lifestyles before European contact. Studying these legends can be a very rich source of learning because they were written for a variety of purposes, both formal and informal. Formal storytelling was usually connected to the occasion of deliberate moral, cultural or spiritual instruction. Some legends

were considered so sacred that their telling was restricted to the celebration of spiritual events. Others were told only during special seasons (Clark 1988; Mayo 1990; Montiel 2010). Nearly everyone could engage in informal storytelling, and these legends were usually related for the purpose of entertaining audiences. It was believed that everyone listening to the telling of a cultural, moral or spiritual legend was under obligation to examine its application to his or her own personal situation (Friesen and Friesen 2009, 133–36).

Interestingly, Jesus was part of a highly literate society that included the Old Testament and rabbinical writings in its literature. It should be noted that although He was familiar with these writings, Jesus did not come from the social class that espoused familiarity with these works. Rather, He came from the class that provided most members of the rabbinical movement (Segal 1986, 83). Jesus was, therefore, well schooled in this literature, but He chose to teach by a less polished approach—teaching by relating parables, possibly because He felt that people who were educated in the highest forms of Jewish literature might rely too heavily on more formalized methods. Those armed with more sophisticated backgrounds might have been hindered from examining the personalized spiritual truths that He targeted with the parabolic method. In this context, Jesus would have agreed with St Paul when the latter wrote to the Corinthian church: “He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (II Corinthians 3:6).

Although He was always called “Jesus of Nazareth,” much of Jesus’s ministry occurred around the Sea of Galilee. His close friends, Mary of Magdala and Peter and Andrew, dwelt in this environment (Crossan 2007, 98). Jesus was known to associate freely with sinners, even participating in inclusive table fellowship (Tanner 2010, 251). If this was indeed His preferred neighbourhood, it is possible that Jesus chose His particular teaching method to suit the culture of the neighbourhood.

Analysis will show that Jesus’s use of the parabolic method allowed Him to teach in a style that provided fodder for crowds of regular folk as well as the more theologically enlightened professions. Using this approach allowed Him to draw from familiar, concrete, accessible examples, while incorporating multiple interpretations into the stories He chose (Burbules 2004). What attracted Jesus’s rural listeners was that they could readily identify with His parables; they were human stories about everyday events, such as storms at sea. The underlying purpose, however, was that listeners would be able to test their faith through personal interpretation (Ward 2005, 46).

Selecting a Discipline

When philosophy of education as an area of study reached its peak a half-century ago, it suddenly became popular to differentiate a vast array of teaching approaches accompanied by analytic discourses of underlying presuppositions about such contextual concerns as human nature, how learning takes place, and the nature of truth and values. While engaged in this process, Broudy

and Palmer (1965), for example, discovered significant differences between the teaching approaches adopted by traditionalists, such as Socrates, Peter Abelard, Jesuit teachers, Johann Amos Comenius (Komensky), Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, Friedrich Wilhelm Froebel and Johann Friedrich Herbart, and those of adherents to the progressive education movement of the early 20th century. Educators who numbered themselves within the latter school of thought included such thinkers as Boyd H Bode, John Dewey, William Heard Kilpatrick, Charles McMurry, Henry Clinton Morrison and Harold Rugg (Bayles and Hood 1966, 219–43).

Other thinkers who were immortalized for apparently having formulated innovative theories of learning during the modern period were analyzed by various authors in this manner: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, John Locke, G Stanley Hall (Eby and Arrowood 1952), Isocrates, Zeno, Augustine, Erasmus, Huxley, Johann Bernhardt Basedow, Herbert Spencer (Meyer 1965), Plato, Quintilian and St Thomas Aquinas (Price 1967). Occasional references to Jesus of Nazareth in these writings can be identified with particular reference to His style of teaching using the parabolic method (Eby and Arrowood 1952, 688).

As interest in the history of educational ideas increased during the latter half of the 20th century, the foundational presuppositions for the pedagogical recommendations articulated by historical thinkers were often delineated in the form of propositions, statements, prescriptions, principles and rules, and slogans and definitions (Beck 1974, vii). The practical application of this procedure is still a challenge for classroom teachers,

most of whom may be categorized into two paradigms—*instrumental teachers* and *reflective teachers*.

Instrumental teachers are those who consider their primary function to be one of transmitting knowledge. Reflective teachers, on the other hand, are those who intend that the content and meaning of their teachings be examined inquisitively and critically by their students, thereby conceptualizing practical knowledge for themselves and transforming it into patterns of behaviour (Gross 2010, 265). Reflective teaching, like inquiry learning, puts power into the hands of learners who may by choice accept responsibility for personal meaning making based on their own experience. As will be pointed out, Jesus’s teaching style was of the latter type, and entirely in keeping with His objective of personalizing belief.

It used to be that after having affiliated themselves with a specific philosophical foundation—idealism, realism, scholasticism, progressivism or existentialism—on which to build a pedagogical method, teachers were usually cautioned to follow a specific set of procedures. An illustrative set appears in Broudy and Palmer’s book on exemplars of teaching method (1965, 8–14). The seven steps in their model are

1. preparation for instruction, which consists of gathering materials, creating a lesson plan and reviewing one’s notes for delivery;
2. motivation, which refers to the devices employed to capture the attention of learners;
3. presentation of the learning task, referring to the method by which the lesson is to be carried out;
4. inducement of the trial response, referring to the nature of student response to presented material;

5. correction of the trial response, referring to errors or misconceptions detected in learner response;
6. fixation of response, referring to the method by which learners will be encouraged to remember imparted subject matter; and,
7. test response and evaluation, which refers to the way teachers will elicit from students cues that they have appropriated the truth/content and/or procedure of the lesson.

Eggen and Kauchak (1988, 25ff) elaborated a series of specific thinking skills designed to enable students in their investigation of truth presented to them. These include

1. observation, which simply means to try to be aware of events and happenings that may affect a particular situation;
2. inference, which may be broken down to include generalizing inference (this may be defined as formulating conclusions that summarize a series of observations to suggest a pattern on which explanations and predictions can be based), explanatory inference (which essentially comprises “why”-type inferences) and predictive inference (which represents coming to a conclusion that suggests what a future observation will be, albeit limited to a single occurrence);
3. derived thinking skills, which include comparing (that is, identifying similarities and differences in information), hypothesizing (implying a “what-if” kind of response) and critical thinking (which may be viewed as a derived skill resulting from the ability to form valid generalizations, explanations, predictions, hypotheses and comparisons, or the ability to

assess the validity of existing statements); and

4. inductive and deductive reasoning. Inductive reasoning in this context implies summarizing a series of observations to discover patterns. Deductive reasoning, on the other hand, means using a pattern to explain, interpret or predict a particular event.

Broudy and Palmer (1965, 13) admitted that many theories of education took their departure from one or two phases of method, thereby conceding that individual methodological preferences were not as exclusive as might at first be thought. For our purposes, it might be useful to reduce the various approaches to encouraging learning to three: (1) teacher or subject centred, (2) student centred, and/or (3) a mixture of the two approaches. If the underlying presuppositions guiding the first two methods are clearly differentiated, it follows that the third approach could contain contradictory or at least paradoxical presuppositions. For example, it would be philosophically unjustifiable to view students as self-motivated, then recommend manipulative methods by which to catch their attention. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) committed this logistic error when he suggested that “the only habit that the child should be allowed to contract is that of having no habits” (Bayles and Hood 1966, 88). He went on to say that “as soon as the child begins to take notice, what is shown him *must be carefully chosen*,” (Rousseau 1762, 30 [italics mine]) thereby indicating that the teacher is very much in charge of manipulating the development of desirable habits.

End of part one. Part two will appear in the spring 2013 issue of Embrace the Spirit.

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Moral Formation in a Morally Uncertain World—RMEC Conference 2012

Ron Baier, Conference Chair

The majestic setting of the Banff Springs Hotel was the site for the 2012 Religious and Moral Education Council conference, “Moral Formation in a Morally Uncertain World,” held on October 19 and 20, 2012. Bryan Froehle, from St Thomas University in Miami Gardens, Florida, introduced conference attendees to revolutionary insights. Froehle’s academic work is in practical theology, the theological discipline that brings the social sciences into dialogue with theology, and theology into dialogue with the social sciences.

Topics such as transformations of the religious and moral landscapes, generational cultures, the need to be clear about what we want if we are to lead and educate,

and what connects religious people today were explored to lead us to the realization that “nostalgia does not work in religious and moral education” and if we want to change what we get, we need to change what we do. Our challenge as educators is to “reimagine and recentre” what we do.

The revolutionary approach presented by Froehle revealed that we presently have the order all wrong. “Adults should take care of themselves spiritually and formationally first, just as we are warned on an airplane before takeoff”; otherwise, we won’t be any good to the children we are to form, their parents or their communities. Presently we try to reach adults, even ourselves, through children, rather than children through adults.

Transformative education is the answer. When moral formation starts with adult leadership formation, we build communities of adult disciples who model adult relationships of meaning and fulfilment in a culture of choice. Before we effectively engage children, we must challenge adults, including ourselves, to witness first. This is the revolutionary approach that will require discussion between our bishops and other leaders in religious education. In a morally uncertain world, educational leaders are constantly challenged. A new model with a new vision is required, one that truly cultivates character and transforms believers into disciples.

2012 Awards

Award of Merit—Faith

This award recognizes an individual who exemplifies commitment to faith through

outstanding witness in the classroom, school and community. This year's award was presented to Carl Fakeley, a teacher at Notre Dame High School, in Red Deer.



Left to right: Sharon Malec, Carl Fakeley, Léo Richer



Michael Marien

William Hrychuk Lifetime Achievement Award

Michael Marien is this year's recipient of the William Hrychuk Lifetime Achievement Award. This award, the council's highest, is honorary life membership presented to an individual in recognition of outstanding achievement and distinguished service in religious studies and moral education in the province of Alberta. Michael was nominated by Dorothy Burns, with letters of support from his colleagues at St Thomas Aquinas RCSR No 38—Jamie McNamara, superintendent of schools; Troy A Davies, assistant superintendent; and Pius MacLean, STAR curriculum coordinator.

He has served Catholic education in the province of Alberta with his head, heart and hands for more than 25 years.

—Pius MacLean

Michael was an unabashed and impassioned advocate for the faith at every turn, bringing the Good News with him wherever he went.

—Troy A Davies

Michael's personal faith in our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, as well as his knowledge of theology and scripture paired with his ability to share his knowledge were a gift to our division and Catholic educators across the province.

—Jamie McNamara

A truly deserving recipient of this award, Michael is enjoying his first year of retirement.

From a Voice Among Many to the Voice of Truth

Mark DeJong

Mark DeJong is a graduate of the University of Alberta and serves as a junior high religious studies district department head at Christ the Redeemer Catholic Schools. He is in his fourth year of teaching at Notre Dame Collegiate, in High River, Alberta.

An Argument for Faith Permeation in the Teaching of Social Studies in Alberta Catholic Schools

Within the confines of the ongoing secularization of Canadian society, dwindling space remains for absolute truths. I believe that the most influential manifestation of this trend is the modern model of journalism; however, an equally influential concern, though more demographically limited, is the relativism and moral equivocation currently embedded in the Alberta social studies curricula. It is necessary to view the large-scale circumstance prior to engaging its root issue. Keeping this in mind, look at our current context.

The relativism found in journalism is also found, writ small, in the Alberta social studies programs. Journalism, as a tool for informing and directing public opinion, has a systemic conflict of interest: a mandate to provide objective information versus the desire to make a profit. To be financially successful, news outlets must appeal to the broadest audiences possible. Though the strategies to gain viewers make a great deal of

fiscal sense, the integrity of the product is reduced to the relative whims of spectators. The talking-head model is a useful example. Rather than providing the audience with hard investigative facts, two experts on opposing sides of the spectrum of a given topic are pitted against each other in an attempt to win an argument. Though this approach seems objective, we must ask: what are the motivations behind each person's ranting? And do the espoused messages actually deserve equal audience and respect? The answers to these questions have been assumed for the audience prior to airing. The audience's sole role in this display of "panem et circenses" is merely to decide where on the spectrum they ought to align their subjective belief system. Alberta's social studies programs promote a similar conflict of interest: a mandate to develop citizens with strong moral and ethical foundations versus the directive to produce citizens who examine actions and values through the looking-glass of moral equivalency and situational ethics.

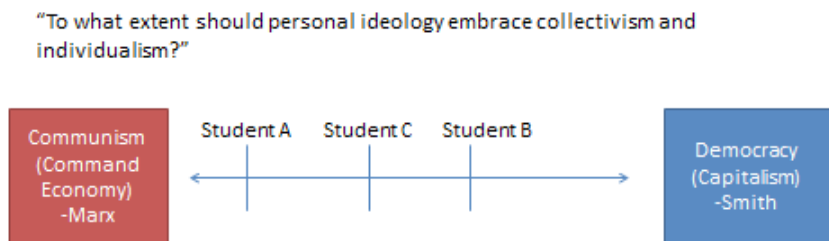
The rationale of Alberta social studies curriculum is a manifestation of growing Canadian secular-

ization. The language is both vague and all-encompassing in an attempt to include all perspectives and values of its stakeholders.

Central to the vision of the Alberta social studies program is the recognition of the diversity of experiences and perspectives and the pluralistic nature of Canadian society. Pluralism builds upon Canada's historical and constitutional foundations, which reflect the country's Aboriginal heritage, bilingual nature and multicultural realities. A pluralistic view recognizes that citizenship and identity are shaped by multiple factors such as culture, language, environment, gender, ideology, religion, spirituality and philosophy." (Alberta Education 2007, 1)

In an attempt to teach its unbiased learning outcomes, educators are often left to pit ideologies against one another and thus leave students to decide where their particular perspective falls on the spectrum. "To what extent should ...?" is the mandatory summative question that is asked to assess the degree of student acceptance of a particular ideology (Alberta Education 2007, 13). Figure 1 provides visual understanding of this teaching process.

Figure 1



It is essential to fully understand the foreseeable results of this regularly used teaching model. Most obvious is that students learn that all ideological principles are equal. This includes all behaviours, cultural practices and political opinions. It is no longer a question of virtue or truth, but a statement of personal preference that rules supreme. Second, underlying this taught relativism is a particularly heinous suspicion of all authority. It is not enough that the average student already questions authority in his or her life, but this model from the social studies classroom suggests that all authority is an oppressor of personal beliefs or a biased peddler of false thinking and that all students' opinions about any issue are infallible, no matter what they are based on.

Permit me, if you will, to tell a "tale of two classrooms."¹ In a Catholic school, a cohort of students attends both social studies and religious studies lessons. In the social studies classroom they are taught the objective intentions of the Alberta program of study, while in the religious studies classroom they are taught the absolutes of the Church. Very quickly a serious contradiction occurs. The consequences of this conflict are clearly seen around the province today. At best, students interpret the teachings of Christ as merely another feel-good ideology from which they can select what beliefs they choose to embrace. At worst, they cynically tear down an institution rife with scandal, which lost its way a very long time ago. The mission of the Church, the identity of the Catholic school and Catholic education in general are

defeated by comparative relativism.

There are two ways to solve this problem. The first is to rid the province of Catholic education. By doing away with one side of the contradiction, the contradiction disappears. Quite realistically, this end can also be achieved by continuing to teach social studies in the method previously stated. The second requires transcending the curricular requirements by piercing them with absolute moral truth.

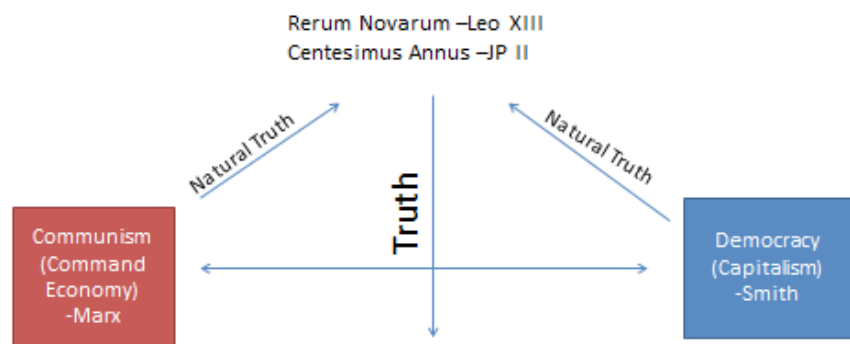
It is only because Catholic schools are, in fact, Catholic that they are able to solve this relativistic teaching model. Without the authority of the Church bestowed upon them, it would be impossible. To solve this issue, a teacher must step beyond the ideological squabbling and provide the actual moral authority of the Church. Rather than students aligning their political ideas based on some whimsical personal preference, they must be faced with the moral truth and proceed with it in mind. For example, a student may consider him- or herself on the left of the spectrum when it comes to

state spending; however, there are moral truths that can inform this decision and set limits to what the state spends its dollars on. Figure 2 visually explains this teaching model.²

The teaching model presented in Figure 2 covers curricular outcomes. It informs students of natural truths that exist on both sides of the spectrum. It also introduces Catholic moral truth as a necessity to the survival of the economic system. In *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Leo XIII presented some of the most profound and attractive social theories ever to be conceived. These are, of course, rooted in absolute moral truths and in the Gospel message.

When confronted with truth, student response differs greatly from student response when confronted with a spectrum. Students either accept truth as an authority or they reject it outright. Using the case of *Rerum Novarum*, such rejection would prove difficult because it would involve justifying the exploitation of workers, disproving inalienable rights to private ownership and supporting injustice for the poor.

Figure 2



¹ With apologies to Charles Dickens.

² Developed from Metaxas 2010, 17.

Those who accept the truth are transformed persons. Rather than cynical relativists, students would necessarily become critical of injustice and imperfection. Rather than opposing all authority, they would become skeptical of illegitimate authority and would recognize natural moral laws. Instead of adopting a culture of morality that puts ego and good feelings above all else, they would aspire to be like Christ, who placed the Father and others above all else.

The opportunities for including Catholic teaching in curricular outcomes are numerous and

invaluable. The biggest challenge to this model and to the success of Catholic education altogether lies in the motivation of educators to learn the Church's teachings as those teachings apply to their discipline. Whether this is achieved through professional development strategies, through comparative analyses of current social studies resources studied concurrently with the moral truths of the Church or through a Catholic textbook for the social studies curriculum, it remains a critically important and formally unaddressed issue.

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Fides et Ratio

Tomás Rochford

Tomás Rochford is the district department head of high school religion for Christ the Redeemer Catholic Schools and teaches high school religion at Holy Cross Collegiate in Strathmore, Alberta. He lives with his family on an acreage outside Strathmore and is pursuing an MA in theology from Christendom College, in Front Royal, Virginia.

Countering Contemporary Idols with Reason and Faith

A few months ago my wife and I wandered into a local bookstore. As an undergraduate I frequented such stores, enjoying hours in the religion, history and philosophy sections. However, after graduation I exchanged bookstore browsing for Internet sites selling specialty publications. Returning a few years later to my old bookstore haunts, I was amazed at the radical changes to my favourite sections. Now, the religion and philosophy shelves bulged with books decrying religion, specifically Christianity. The avenues of attack were legion. Book titles and dust jackets proclaimed the irrationality, bigotry, immorality, antihumanism, and downright evil of Christianity. Such invective so piqued my interest that I began exploring the religion aisle, scanning book covers and indices, and reading a plethora of polemic arguments by

popular gurus. I learned many disconcerting things during this brief trip to the bookstore, for example, that religion “ruins everything,” that catechesis constitutes a form of child abuse, that religious belief is a type of mental illness and that the Church is an enemy of science and progress.¹ Considering the authorship of most of these books—doctors of science and philosophy—one could be excused for thinking that all Christians are ignorant and superstitious. Unfortunately, the liberality of the local bookstore did not extend to giving shelf space to the responses to such attacks from Christian theologians, philosophers and scientists. Therefore, if one had very little intellectual formation in the Faith, one might leave the section thinking that the case against religion, and more specifically, Christianity, is closed. The barque of Peter is sinking fast; the prudent action is to abandon ship immediately.

My experience in the bookstore caused me to think about the situation of many students, parents and teachers in our school communities. The enmity towards the Church found in the religious sections of popular bookstores is but one front in the attack on Christianity that grows in strength as our popular culture becomes more and more antitheistic. There is increased hostility toward any form of authentic Christianity that

follows the doctrine and moral teaching of Christ and His Church. This is the situation currently confronting members of our school communities. Postmodern society deters many from authentically living and spreading the Faith out of fear of persecution or of being branded an extremist. Today, the only accepted religion is a completely subjective one that makes no claims about the nature of reality, but merely reflects individual tastes and private concerns. Providing the foundations for this dominant viewpoint are the twin idols of scientism and relativism. Scientism attacks the speculative (theoretical) intellect, claiming that only science and mathematics can offer real knowledge or truth. The nonempirical claims of Christian doctrine cannot stand up as facts about reality, according to such a view, and therefore one should not waste time reasoning about the Faith because it is essentially nonrational. Relativism, on the other hand, attacks the practical intellect, claiming that because we cannot know what is right or wrong, there is no objective moral (or political/cultural) right and wrong. Therefore morality becomes subjective, and moral reasoning of little value beyond clarifying personal opinions or values. What is essential to note is that these two *isms* are both dangerous for the Faith but also, in a more basic sense, they are attacks

¹ These are some of the infamous claims by the “new atheists” such as Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens.

on human reason itself. Such perspectives reduce reason to the observed and quantifiable; reason becomes the rationalization of subjective moral choices.

How do we respond to these and other contemporary antitheistic arguments? As Christians, we cannot be pleased by a situation in which the Faith is dismissed as nonrational and subjective. We believe in the God of faith and reason, and therefore must be prepared to defend reason as forcefully as we witness to the Faith. As we read in the prologue of St John's Gospel, God is the Logos or Reason Himself,² the One who orders all things in the universe. Therefore all rational activity directed at seeking truth is in some way an endeavour that allows us to know and embrace Him who is "the Way, and the Truth, and the Life."³ In our humanity, we are made in the image and likeness of our Creator, endowed with an intellect that enables us to know and understand reality. Therefore, to allow our contemporary world's flight from the fullness of reason to go unchallenged is to demean ourselves as human persons—we do not live up to the very nature we have been given.

Christians must also avoid the various pseudosolutions to the problem of the relationship between faith and reason that present themselves today: (1) *rationalism*, which accepts the scientism of the

contemporary world and tries to fit the revealed truth of the Faith into its narrow confines; (2) *fideism*, which sees reason as a competitor to the truths of the Faith and ignores the findings of science; (3) *emotivism*, which understands faith as merely a subjective feeling; or (4) *Averroism*, which maintains the illogical belief that there are two different truths, one of faith and one of reason, that are both valid even if contradictory. Instead, following the example of St Catherine of Alexandria, St Thomas Aquinas and our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI,⁴ we must again teach the compatibility and complementarity of faith and reason in the search for truth and the Truth. To accomplish this, Christian educators must have a proper understanding of the human person (philosophical and theological anthropology) and the totality of existence (metaphysics) and an unshakeable conviction that truth exists and can be known. Without these, students will be left to flounder in a sea of confusion and nihilism.

Having offered this brief outline of a major problem confronting Christians, I think it time to reflect more specifically about how the contemporary mentality affects our particular situation as Christian educators. In the Parable of the Sower as related in St Matthew's Gospel⁵ we read that the scattered seeds fell on different types of soil: the walking path, rocky earth and

weed-infested ground. In all these soils the Good News failed to find fertile ground in which to grow and yield fruit. Only in the good soil can the truth take root and yield a hundredfold. My proposal to teachers and catechists is that a major part of our work in tilling and preparing the soil involves giving students the tools to comprehend reality (creation). By defending and supporting reason, we help students know and appreciate created reality, to defend against attacks on the Faith and to be confident in the Truth, who is Jesus Christ. It would seem that in the Church's call to the New Evangelization, the clearing away of errors in reasoning is an essential task. Granted that there are many important works that go into the great project of evangelizing our culture—charitable and social justice works, the healing of families and relationships, and the renewal of beauty and transcendence in art, for example—cultivating a rational mind is a necessary task. Such an education would give students an opportunity to develop a coherent Christian world view that incorporates theological, philosophical and scientific insights. To this end, it would seem that students in our schools need a course of study that includes disciplines such as logic, philosophy of nature and human nature, ethics (including politics and economics), metaphysics and natural theology, all of which complement

² John 1:1–18

³ John 14:6

⁴ Neumayr, G. "The Recovery of Reason," available at www.catholicworldreport.com/Item/966/the_recovery_of_reason.aspx or <http://tinyurl.com/btdl7xs> (accessed November 1, 2012); and Pope Benedict's address to the Bundestag on September 22, 2011, available at www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2011/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20110922_reichstag-berlin_en.html or <http://tinyurl.com/buuunqn> (accessed November 1, 2012).

⁵ Matthew 13:1–9, 18–23

the Christian Faith.⁶ To put it plainly, if we fail to till the soil of reason, our culture will continually create weeds and rocks that prevent the Faith from taking root.

I conclude with a preview of what one will find in subsequent columns in this series. The goal of

the “*Fides et Ratio*” column is to offer Christian teachers and catechists ideas on how to engage students with the intellectual content of the Faith, so that we can assist them in living the Faith and attaining the Beatific Vision. Some topics that I hope to address in

future issues include the preambles of faith (proofs for the existence of God, the Natural Moral Law, the immortal soul), virtue ethics and moral reasoning, the proper relationship between the Faith and reason/science, and apologetics.

⁶ There are numerous Christian thinkers in various schools of philosophical thought that could assist Christian educators providing such an intellectual formation: analytic—G E M Anscombe and Alvin Plantinga; personalist—Dietrich von Hildebrand and John Crosby; scholastic—Ralph McInerney and Edward Feser.



From the Archives

Editor's note: The highest award granted by the Religious and Moral Education Council is named after William D Hrychuk and is given in recognition of distinguished service in religious studies and moral education in the province of Alberta. This tribute to William D Hrychuk was first published in volume 10, no 1 of the Religious Studies and Moral Education Council Newsletter (1983). Minor amendments to spelling and punctuation have been made to conform with current ATA style.

A Tribute to William D Hrychuk

The following tribute to William D Hrychuk (1943–81) was presented at the Religious Studies and Moral Education Council (ATA) Ninth Annual Conference, on March 20, 1982. At the conclusion of the tribute a cheque was presented to Bill's wife, Carol, and their daughters, in appreciation of Bill's work with the council. The cheque was addressed to the "William D. Hrychuk Memorial Fund," and is to be administered by Garneau United Church for world development projects and local educational projects.

"You are the salt of the earth. But if salt becomes tasteless, what can make it salty again? It is good for nothing, and can only be thrown out to be trampled under foot by men" (Matthew 5:13).

I have been asked by the current executive of the Religious Studies and Moral Education Council (ATA) to formulate, on your behalf, a tribute to our deceased colleague and brother, Bill Hrychuk. I do so with considerable trepidation because Bill Hrychuk was a formidable educator in the few years he was granted to serve in the profession.

May I remind all of you that Bill was secretary-treasurer from 1975–77, newsletter editor from 1977–79, and editor of the inaugural edition of *SALT* in 1979–80.

While Bill and I struggled over what to call the planned RSMEC journal, he called me late one night and said, in an incredibly low but confident voice, "I think I have got it!" *SALT* it was. *SALT* because Bill believed that RSMEC, and its journal and newsletter, could be a good, vigorous vehicle for teacher-to-teacher communication about the really vital issues that mattered in education. And this crossed all institutional lines because the vital issues of values, learning, and purpose crossed public, separate, private, college, university, church, parent, and other social groups.

He felt that much consciousness raising (as advocated by Paulo Freire, the South American educator) was needed to help liberate teachers from the humdrum of the everyday. Bill was, in fact, an active disciple of Paulo Freire. Bill believed that teachers need revitalization. He would often say, "Where else are they going to find it?" This was certainly a back-handed compliment to the ATA,

because Bill struggled with the value of this organization, which often seemed to be preoccupied with its own institutional problems and its union activities.

Bill was a "salt" agent in many ways. He was a deeply committed United Church Christian educator working in an almost completely secularized milieu, that of public education. In teacher circles, Bill did not wear his religious convictions on his sleeve. But his beliefs and faith were deep, and when he did discuss his theological perceptions, they were well articulated and exceptional in quality.

Bill was born in Edmonton, took his schooling there, and took his BA (history) at the University of Alberta from 1961–64. He then proceeded to the renowned Union Theological Seminary, in New York, to study theology and scripture in the then-called BD program (now called the MDiv program). He came back to Edmonton to study education, and then returned to New York to finish the BD in 1968. In New York, Bill was influenced by the very strong "ministry of the laity" thrust at Union. Because of this, he consciously refused ordination in

order to exercise his baptismal ministry in education. This he did largely with the Edmonton Public Schools from 1968–79 as a senior high/elementary school teacher and curriculum associate. When he died, Bill was assistant professor of secondary education at the University of Alberta.

Very important people for Bill in his life journey were his wife, Carol, and their daughters. His youngest daughter, Ann Christina, is the one whose picture was published with Bill in both the last issue of *SALT* and the *ATA Magazine* tribute article in 1981. We are very happy and privileged to have all of them with us this afternoon.

Salt adds flavour to our food. Bill certainly did the same for education. He was a citizen of the world. Among his key educational ideas which I encountered and which he helped to implement and/or affirm in Alberta are

1. All education is value laden and reflects profound theological and philosophical choices. The question is, "Which one will you choose to incarnate?" He wanted the RSMEC newsletter and journal to help in this "sorting out" process.
2. All children should have equal access to educational opportunities and basic skills. In this regard, he saw the teaching of humanities and history as being crucial and often neglected. He believed that this teaching should be done in such a manner that students can relate to this sphere of human learning.
3. Education is a community enterprise of consciousness raising. The Christian call to serve your neighbour, and to serve and enter into your community,

seemed to underlie Bill's desire to have the school out into the community and the community into the school. Education had to be more than a "teacher's thing." Bill was, in fact, an early theorist and leading practitioner in what is now called the "community school movement." All in all, this movement should lead to educational reform of both school and society.

4. Schools should not alienate their students and staff by their own structures, rituals and size. In other words, Bill subscribed to the view that the context of learning has a great influence on students and that the hidden curriculum is as important and influential as the overt curriculum. Moreover, he also believed that the school is the primary learning unit.
5. Learning is a highly personal activity by nature. The dialogical or tutor model should be used whenever possible. He seemed to be a disciple of Socrates in this regard, and he was quite opposed to the factory concept of grouping in education that holds sway today.
6. Teacher education has to be dramatically revitalized from a narrow academic concept to include a practitioner dimension. He was high on the "practicum" in this respect. He had a number of misgivings about the RSMEC briefs to the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary in the latter part of the 1970s because they did not adequately address the fundamental problems of personal motivation and of challenging the structures of both the universities and the schools. In other

words, he felt these briefs promoted the status quo. Bill and I debated this latter point more than once.

Salt has a sharp taste. Bill was a radical educator, but ever so gentle, persistent, soft spoken and persuasive. If the medium is the message, then Bill lived out his convictions justly and lovingly, although at a great price for one who felt those issues so deeply. One good medium for him was writing, and he wrote a lot about educational issues in the RSMEC and ATA publications. He had an uncanny way of getting to the bottom of things, of serving as a challenging and prophetic voice, questioning stereotyped educational myths, practices and beliefs.

Bill was a man of his word; he displayed the permanent quality of salt. What he promised he carried out in his own quiet, mysterious way.

I shall always remember Bill's first challenge to me when he spoke to the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' annual conference, in 1974. At that time, he laid his 10 theses on the door of Catholic educators in Alberta. He stressed very much the "Do not try to mimic public education" theme. In the process, he was challenging Catholic school educators in Alberta to continue developing their own unique education and not to participate in the game of always comparing themselves to public school educators.

Bill was a good friend. I do miss him. But he has left us a challenging legacy to live out.

Ric Laplante

Ric Laplante was a past president of the Religious and Moral Education Council.



Guidelines

The RMEC newsjournal *Embrace the Spirit* is published to

- promote professional development of educators in the areas of religious and moral education and
- provide a forum for contributors to share ideas related to religious and moral education.

Submissions are requested that will provide material for personal reflection, theoretical consideration and practical application. Where appropriate, graphics and photographs are welcome.

The following areas will be addressed in the newsjournal:

- Classroom and school projects
- Upcoming events
- Book reviews
- Reflections
- Feature articles and interviews
- Humour in religion
- Liturgies

Manuscripts should be submitted electronically, in Microsoft Word format. The manuscript should include a title page that states the author's name, professional position, address and phone number(s). Submissions should be typed and double-spaced and may be any length to a maximum of 5,000 words. References must appear in full in a list at the end of the article.

Send contributions or enquiries to the editor: Dorothy Burns, 1 McRae Street, Box 1318, Okotoks, AB T1S 1B3; phone 403-938-6051 (res) or 403-938-4265 (bus); fax 403-938-4575; e-mail dburns@redeemer.ab.ca.

The editorial board, which reserves the right to edit for clarity and space, reviews all submissions.

