



Religious Education Support  
*Second Level Support Service*

# TEACHING

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

STUDENTS' REFLECTIONS ON LEAVING CERTIFICATE  
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

TEACHING SOCRATES

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION: SCHOOLS PROFILE  
KINSALE COMMUNITY COLLEGE, VILLIERS SCHOOL,  
OUR LADY'S GROVE



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# TEACHING RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The inspirational professor of Theology and Religious Education, Thomas Groome, describes religious education activity as 'a deliberate attending to the transcendent dimension of life by which a conscious relationship to an ultimate ground of being is promoted and enabled to come to expression. Religious education focuses specific attention on empowering people in their quest for the transcendent and ultimate ground of being. It leads people to consciousness of what is found, relationship with it, and expression of that relationship.'<sup>1</sup> He explains that it is both specific in its own right, yet shares a commonality with all education – like all education, it is about the human person developing and reaching for transcendence.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle believed that wonder was the source of all human learning. Perhaps this is a worthy point of departure for all that constitutes Religious Education. Since our last issue of 'Teaching Religious Education' (December 2008) life has certainly provided ample experiences at which to wonder, on various levels: globally, nationally, communally and personally. Recent months have seen events such as the inauguration of President Barack Obama in the US, Ireland's historic rugby Grand Slam victory, the untimely death of both Jade Goody and Michael Jackson, the horrors revealed through the Ryan Report, the G8 summit in Italy and of course the harsh economic downturn which has inflicted unemployment and hardship on so many. These are only some of the key events which have made headlines in recent times. Our young people are exposed to an unprecedented series of events which reveal a narrative of (predominantly) struggle, interspersed with glimmers of joy and happiness. The challenge before R.E. teachers at this time is immense. Yet it is a challenge that gets to the heart of all worthwhile Religious Education: that of awakening ever-increasing depths of human development among our students, and accompanying them through the quest for meaning and transcendence in it all – the good, the bad and the ugly! Sources of wonder are plentiful, as events such as those mentioned above indicate. Those of us who remember our lives as secondary school students in the unemployment and depression of the 1980s may be particularly well placed to remind students that economic recessions are survivable, and that

we need to touch base with our innate sense of hope and purpose.

I am confident that our Junior and Leaving Certificate Religious Education courses offer a magnificent educational framework in which students are afforded the opportunity to really engage with the substance of life, and to realise that the religious and non-religious traditions have provided a rich means of attending to that existential longing, and the desire for relationship to an ultimate ground of being. Even a cursory glance at the findings of my recent questionnaire to some Leaving Certificate R.E. students suggests that there is genuine engagement and education happening at a rich and deep level in our R.E. classrooms. In all the challenges that lie ahead this year in our schools and beyond, let us not lose sight of the importance of empowering people in their quest for transcendence. Let us continue to find opportunities that will spark wonder among our students, and teach students not just knowledge, but the understanding and wisdom that are born from engagement with life itself.

Issue 4 contains a mix of academic articles designed to support teachers and students of Leaving and Junior Certificate R.E., as well as a closer look at what is happening at grass-roots level in some of our R.E. classrooms. I'm hoping that further explorations of teachers' classroom experience, and students' perceptions of how their learning is being shaped, will move us in the direction of increasing collegial support in the enterprise of Religious Education. I welcome your feedback on any aspect of Issue 4 and also welcome your suggestions for Issue 5, which is planned for Spring 2010. I look forward also to meeting many of you at our upcoming professional development courses, which will be supported and facilitated for the most part by our new local facilitators.



**Lorraine Gillespie**  
*National Support Officer*  
*Religious Education*

<sup>1</sup> Groome, T.H. 'Christian Religious Education, Sharing Our Story and Vision', Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 1980, p22.

# TEACHING SOCRATES

## Memorable One-Liners

By Dr Eoin G. Cassidy



Completing the trilogy of the Greek philosophers Dr Cassidy offers here an insightful exploration of Socrates. Eoin is Head of Philosophy at the School of Humanities, Mater Dei Institute, author and editor of many books, and is a regular contributor to 'Teaching Religious Education'. Eoin has served in executive positions in the Irish Philosophy Society, the Irish Theological Association and the Royal Irish Academy (philosophy committee). He was also executive secretary of the Irish Centre for Faith and Culture (St. Patrick's College, Maynooth). Currently, he is a member of the sector-based group in Political Science of the International Federation of Catholic Universities (IFCU) I am delighted and honoured once again to publish Eoin's contribution, and know that it will be a rich and welcome resource to teachers and students of Leaving Certificate R.E. in particular. Many thanks, Eoin.

Socrates was the master of the pithy one-liners – all the more memorable because they touch a chord – yes, they remind us of what it is to be a human being. Not surprising really, considering it was to this ideal that Socrates dedicated his life. As he says, 'I set myself to take the path where I could do the most good to each of you, individually, by persuading you to be less concerned with that you have and more concerned with what you are ...' (Apology). By the way, The Apology is reputed to be a transcript of Socrates' defence / apologia at his trial – a trial which would lead to his death.

Philosophising in Athens, Socrates (470-399BCE) was the first of the great Greek philosophers, the teacher and mentor of Plato and unquestionably one of the most influential philosophers of all time. His philosophical contribution to ethical reasoning has few parallels in the history of philosophy and is only matched by his life commitment to these ideals that was to result in his death. He believed that the ultimate challenge facing each one of us in life is to come to know ourselves, and in striking contrast with the emotivism that shapes much of today's culture, he believed in the power of reason. Yes, he actually believed that we are rational beings and that we need to act on the basis of our heads as well as our hearts – feeling that something is right does not necessarily make it so.

Remarkably, for a philosopher of such eminence, Socrates left us no written record of his philosophy and we are dependent upon the early dialogues of Plato to give us a sense of the richness of his philosophical discourse. We are also indebted to Plato for our knowledge of the life and death of Socrates, a death that was to become immortalized in a dialogue entitled the Crito. Socrates' death arose directly as a result of the challenge that his ethical philosophy posed to the newly established democracy in Athens. Accused falsely of introducing new gods and corrupting the youth, Socrates was found guilty by an Athenian court and sentenced to death. He could have saved his life by appealing for leniency and agreeing to go into exile or by escaping from prison but his conscience would not allow him to follow this course of action. In a memorable line that addresses the purpose of life, Socrates says, 'the really important thing is not to live but to live well' (Crito 48b). What he means by living well is to live honourable or rightly even if it means accepting the inevitability of death.

Arguably the most famous of all the Socratic dialogues is the Gorgias. In this dialogue one comes face to face with the core ethical teaching of Socrates. As Socrates himself said of this dialogue, 'The subject we are discussing is one which cannot fail to engage the earnest attention even of someone of small intelligence; it is nothing less than how one should live.' (Gorgias 500c). The background to the dialogue is Socrates' criticism of the high value placed on the art of rhetoric or the skills of persuasion by those aspiring to public office at the expense of a commitment to truth. The dialogue sees Socrates in conversation with three of the most well known Sophists or teachers of rhetoric in Athens: Gorgias, Polus and Callicles.

### SYLLABUS LINK

LEAVING CERTIFICATE

SECTION A

TOPIC 1.2

*The tradition of search*

*'The unexamined life is not worth living' (Apology)*

*'The really important thing is not to live but to live well' (Crito)*

*'It is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong' (Gorgias)*

In his conversation with Polus, Socrates puts forward the view that the orator / rhetorician is more to be pitied than envied because the one who does not will the good has no real power. Polus disagrees, and boasts that orators have the power in society to wield tremendous influence; they can have people put in prison, have their property confiscated, and even have them put to death. Socrates wonders why we might want to exercise this ability. Power for its own sake is not a legitimate goal. Polus is incredulous that Socrates would not envy a person with such power. Here Socrates replies that he definitely does not envy people who have other people put to death, and if they do it unjustly they are miserable and are to be pitied. He concludes with the memorable response that, *'it is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong'* (Gorgias 469d). This is the idea that virtue is necessary and sufficient for happiness. It means that you cannot be happy without being virtuous, and if you are virtuous you are bound to be happy. This does not mean that other things besides virtue – e.g., physical health or wealth have no contribution to make a happy life but it does mean that, on their own, such things cannot transform an unhappy person into a happy person; conversely, taking away riches or health cannot make a happy person unhappy. Polus regards this as nonsense because it would imply that the man who expires among torturers is happier than the successful tyrant. Nevertheless, Socrates pursues his line of thought and argues that happiest of all is he who is just. Happy in the second degree is he who is delivered from injustice by punishment and the most deluded and unhappiest of all is he who lives on, enjoying the fruit of his crimes.

The third interlocutor Callicles proclaims that the esteem in which virtue and justice are supposed to be held can be easily explained as the pathetic efforts of the weak to conceal their weakness. The thesis of Callicles is that might is right and that, according to this logic of power / strength, the truly virtuous life consists in pleasure and passion – no one who has the power to enjoy himself / herself practises self-control. He concludes with the following ringing endorsement of his position. *'Luxury and excess and licence, provided that they can obtain sufficient backing, are virtue and happiness; all the rest is mere flummery, unnatural conventions of society, worthless cant.'* (Gorgias, 492b). Socrates' response to Callicles focuses on a discussion of the question of what should people aim for in life, i.e., pleasure or goodness, an argument whose contemporary relevance is not difficult to discern.

This dialogue comes to a conclusion with a reflection on the fact that worse things could befall a person than to die in the cause of righteousness; *'Renouncing the honours at which the world aims. I desire only to know the truth and to live as well as I can and when I die, to die as well as I can.'* (Gorgias 526e).

By any standards the Gorgias is a masterful dialogue but in terms of the questions that it poses for our contemporary culture it is peerless. It is hard to believe that it was written almost two and a half thousand years ago, something that reflects the timelessness of core issues that define human existence. For Socrates, how we live is the crucial question, the big issue behind all his philosophy. He was convinced that we should not just live according to appetite, pleasure, appearance or 'mere persuasion' because we have reason, a rational capacity that allows us to discern essences and to define that nature of concepts such as truth, goodness and justice. It is this rational capacity to discern the essence of things which makes us human and should set the standards for us rather than an overreliance on appearance and / or the emotions.

Ultimately, Socrates' interest seems to be in getting us to question ourselves, our values, our assumptions, our opinions, to become aware of our own contradictions and our half-baked understanding with a view to putting ourselves in question – to be less concerned with what we have and more concerned with who we are. As he said himself, the purpose of life is not just to live but to love well and to do all things in moderation (the Greek word here is *sophrosyne*), something reflected in the sharp criticisms of his accusers at his trial: *'Are you not ashamed that you give your attention to acquiring as much money as possible, and similarly as much reputation and glory as possible; meanwhile, you give no attention to truth and understanding and the care and perfection of your soul'* (Apology). It is a vision of life that is in sharp contrast to the consumerist and celebratory ethos of contemporary culture.

# INTERFAITH DIALOGUE AS PRESENCE, GIFT & OBLIGATION



By Dr. Peter Admirand

The Irish School of Ecumenics, Trinity College Dublin

*I am delighted to publish Dr Peter Admirand's informative and thought-provoking article on Inter-faith dialogue in 'Teaching Religious Education'. Dr Admirand is a lecturer and acting programme co-ordinator in Ecumenics at Trinity College, Dublin. Before moving to Ireland in 2004, he was a lecturer at various colleges and universities in the United States, including York College (CUNY), Queens College (CUNY), St. John's University, and Pratt Institute. For his teaching and multidisciplinary background, he was named a Who's Who Among American Teachers in 2007. Author of many highly respected publications, his rich contribution here to the exploration of this important topic is highly welcomed.*

## I. Interfaith Dialogue Amidst Soccer Passes

I'll begin with a story: I was about ten years of age playing various games with my neighbour and friend, Yuri. At some point between kicking a soccer ball, Yuri mentioned Jesus as a prophet. I do not remember why and if it seems unlikely to you, it does to me as well. But that is why I remember it. Yuri was Jewish, originally from Israel, and though I did not know it at the time, he would soon be going back to Israel after briefly living on the same block as I did in Port Washington, New York.

*After Yuri mentioned Jesus, I momentarily paused, confused. I knew I was Catholic and I knew he was Jewish and knew that Jesus was something I believed in whom he did not. Having the familiarity of being friends and the innocence of youth, I immediately said: "Jesus? But you don't believe in Jesus."*

*"We don't believe in him the way you do," he said, "but we think he was a great teacher and holy person." He passed me the ball.*

*"Oh," I said, passing the ball back to him. "Really? I thought you didn't even think he existed." "No we do. We just don't believe he was the Messiah like Christians do."*

The conversation soon changed to the latest toys or comic books, but I felt a sense of happiness, though I couldn't explain why. As I thought all Jewish people denied that Jesus ever lived, it felt comforting to know that wasn't true. While only the beginnings of an interfaith dialogue, there is perhaps more in that little story than even I am aware of. Perhaps it even played a role in why I later chose to study theology and especially Jewish-Christian relations, and the issues of interfaith – or interreligious – dialogue<sup>1</sup> which this essay will be about.

Specifically, I will make a case for the need and obligation for interfaith learning and dialogue. Here I will situate interfaith dialogue in terms of what I consider five essential areas that all religions need to embrace today. After examining some key characteristics for fruitful interfaith dialogue, I will then turn to three texts written by Jewish thinkers addressing some of their interpretations of Christianity and Jewish-Christian dialogue. As a Catholic theologian, I will briefly reflect upon these statements and show why allowing oneself to be challenged in this way is ultimately beneficial to the integrity and spirit of one's faith position.

### [SYLLABUS LINK](#)

#### LEAVING CERTIFICATE

##### SECTION C

##### TOPIC 2.5

Inter-Faith Dialogue

##### SECTION B

##### TOPIC 2.4

Jesus as Messiah

##### TOPIC 5.1

Interpreting the Message

Today

##### TOPIC 5.2

Trends in Christianity

## II. Rejoicing in a Fractured, Humbled, Uncertain Faith

I began with a private, personal story because in many ways it is these face-to-face moments of contact, no matter where they are, that form the lifeblood of interfaith learning and dialogue. However, before one speaks of the possible merits of interfaith dialogue, there must be a clear sense of our need for such encounters. Interreligious dialogue is not something extra that one does in one's spare time. If one is truly attuned to the history, spirit, and hopes of one's religious tradition and texts – and the current state of our world today – interfaith dialogue and interfaith learning will be an obligation for all of us.

While religions are often unjustly blamed for many of our world's conflicts, no one can deny that often so-called religious people are key participants in such tragedies. It hardly needs repeating that Germany was a Christian country amidst the rise of Hitler to power in 1933 and a census taken in 1993 in Rwanda (three years before a genocide there would claim more than 800,000 deaths), "found 89.9 percent of the population claim[ed] membership in the Christian Church, including 62 percent identified as Roman Catholics".<sup>ii</sup>

Especially in regards to my own faith tradition, I remain suspicious of any faith position that claims to have sole

ownership of the Truth and acts as if it has had little or no role in any unjust actions ever committed. A truly liberating and sincere faith commitment is one that is grounded in humility, frailty, and a deep sense of hope, penance and mystery.<sup>iii</sup>

In light of this awareness, openness to the following five areas are a means to remain committed to one's faith while making it difficult to slip into a sense of false superiority, malicious judging, or slandering of those different to me. The five areas are:

**Religious pluralism<sup>iv</sup>**

**Postmodernity<sup>v</sup>**

**Interreligious dialogue<sup>vi</sup>**

**Testimonies of mass atrocities<sup>vii</sup>**

**History (including alternative and subaltern accounts)<sup>viii</sup>**

While each of these areas needs a more sustained and nuanced analysis, I will focus below on interfaith dialogue (see the endnotes for brief details of the other areas). What is important is to note that all five of these areas will force silence – if not shame – upon religious believers and will likely remove any sense of religious hubris (often disguised as piety or faithfulness to a tradition), a false sense of superiority, and an unequivocal reliance upon one tradition's exclusive, 'infallible' judgment. Taken together, these five areas can help to balance and purify one's deep religious commitment that also responds with love and a sense of mutual need to all those around us.

### III. Dialogue as Presence

Interfaith dialogue and learning involve presence and gift. Ideally, interfaith dialogue should be a sacred, trusting environment where individuals of different faiths and cultural backgrounds allow themselves and their beliefs to be as exposed and transparent as possible. One is thus both offering the values, hopes, and beliefs to an Other while also sharing and being present to that person's related, but distinct story, values, and language. As Joseph Salihu writes, "Interreligious Dialogue takes many forms and processes, but it has one basic objection: transformation".<sup>ix</sup>

In *The Im-possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, Catherine Cornille structures her work around the argument that conditions of humility, commitment, interconnection, empathy, and hospitality are interrelated and necessary for genuine interreligious dialogue. For Cornille, the virtue of humility in Christian circles needs to be honed so that what is promoted is the "development of a less absolute attitude towards its own conception of the truth and a more open attitude towards the possible truth of other religious traditions."<sup>x</sup> Crucially, this practice of humility does not entail a weak conception of commitment to one's faith.<sup>xi</sup> On the contrary, interreligious dialogue is only truly possible when both people are knowledgeable about and committed to the truth claims and beliefs of their respected faiths. In addition, this commitment is not blind or closed to how other paths could be a means of rejuvenating or enlightening certain neglected or underdeveloped aspects of one's tradition.

Cornille also rightly emphasises the requirement of an empathetic stance when engaged in dialogue as one attempts to try to understand the positions and views of another from that person's vantage point.<sup>xii</sup> Here empathy is sustained by a striving for interconnectedness that does not deny legitimate differences between religions, but draws upon those moments and areas for connection and solidarity. Lastly, she focuses on hospitality, particularly as a virtue which can maintain and embrace a "still greater openness to truth in difference".<sup>xiii</sup> It is easy to be welcoming to those we know or who are like us; less so towards strangers and those whose views we may not share.

To illustrate some of these characteristics, let me briefly turn to three texts written by Jewish theologians who address areas of importance to Jewish-Christian dialogue, such as the issue of dual covenants, the role of Biblical texts, Christology, the sins of supersessionism, and pervasive Christian anti-Semitism that culminated in the Shoah.<sup>xiv</sup>

### IV. Words One Does Not Want to Hear

Few of us like to have our beliefs questioned or our religious faith shown to be only possibly or partially true. Most of us like to live in a sanctuary of certitude, definitiveness, and unquestionable doctrines. While true interfaith dialogue and learning are not intended to convert or "out-debate" the Other; if one is actively attuned to the words and presence of the Other, one may likely hear painful and challenging words.<sup>xv</sup>



I cannot do justice in so short a space to the three important texts I will now turn to, but hopefully I can give a hint to the great depth within them. In a collection of Orthodox Rabbi Irving Greenberg's essays, *For the Sake of Heaven and Earth: The New Encounter Between Judaism and Christianity*, Greenberg writes that Jesus was a 'failed', but not a 'false' Messiah. For Greenberg, such a distinction is ultimately complementary as he is clear that all the great figures within Judaism failed in some way: Moses, for example, was not allowed to enter the Promised Land because of an apparent moment of infidelity towards God. While a false Messiah is someone who strives against God and speaks falsely in God's name, a failed Messiah is one who honestly sought to establish the kingdom of God on earth, but like many before him, did not fully succeed.

After genocides, wars, mass poverty, starvation, disease and ethnic cleansing, it is difficult to argue that Jesus' life has ushered in a new age of peace, joy, and connection with God – as would be expected in most Jewish messianic expectations. For the sake of the integrity of Christianity and the marginalised and victims of horror and suffering, it is reasonable to assert with Didier Pollefeyt that: "Christians need to learn to live with the Jewish belief in the 'No' to Jesus for the sake of their own Christology. The way Jesus will come as the Christ and the Redeemer of the World will depend on the way Christians represent him in the present".<sup>xvi</sup> Thus, as Greenberg writes: "[Jesus] has not finished the job, but his work is not in vain".<sup>xvii</sup> He calls everyone to continue this liberating and prophetic work. While the actual term of "failed Messiah" is not one most Christians would embrace, elements of truth behind the phrase cannot be ignored.

In *Opening the Covenant: A Jewish Theology of Christianity*, Michael Kogan affirms the revelatory nature of the Christ event – for Christians – and praises the Jewish Yeshua for bringing the message of the biblical God to the Gentiles. Kogan's work is a tour de force in Jewish-Christian relations for his fair and at times, laudatory message for a post-Holocaust Christianity that is striving to face and repent for the sins committed against Jews. For those Christians who oppose evangelising Jews and accept the eternal covenant of the Jewish faith, Kogan writes: "As long as they recognise the truth of our faith for us, we may feel free to recognise the truth of their faith for them. . . One God, two revelations, two true religions".<sup>xviii</sup>

Lastly, in *Jewish Christian Dialogue: Drawing Honey from the Rock*, Jewish scholars Alan Berger and David Patterson examine an array of issues and problems within Jewish-Christian dialogue and then invite three Christian scholars to respond. As David Gushee, one of the Christian participants noted, "[This book] is the most direct and no-holds barred critique of Christians and Christianity that I have read from a Jewish perspective".<sup>xix</sup> A Christian reading this book will struggle with difficult accusations, comments, and truths. Here is one telling passage: "Crouched in the Christian creeds is a theology that is unintelligible to Jewish teaching. The primary concepts that define the creeds – Incarnation, virgin birth, Son of God, the Trinity, and so on – are not contrary to Jewish teaching; they are unintelligible."<sup>xx</sup> Although many Christians use the phrase Judeo-Christian as if the two religions are connected and united, Patterson and Berger are adamant that fundamental truths of Christianity have no clear relationship to Judaism and Jewish belief. While many Christians would rightly (in my estimate) counter this assertion with the undeniable Jewishness of Jesus and the importance of the Hebrew Bible in Christian liturgy, theology, and prayer life, they may also need to take a second look – or do a more convincing job – of explaining those contested terms above to their Jewish partners and their fellow Christians.

One last comment on this very interesting material: building upon similar quotes from Pollefeyt and Kogan, Patterson and Berger write: "For the Christians, it seems, are faced with a theological reformulation of their own identity, in such a way as to allow the Jews room for salvation through Torah, and not through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In short, Christian theologians can avoid the blasphemy of anti-Semitism only by committing what until now would be viewed as another blasphemy, namely by adapting the view that for the Jews, Jesus is *superfluous to salvation*."<sup>xxi</sup>

We have indeed come a long way from my talk with Yuri amidst the passing of a soccer ball.

## V. Conclusion: Full Circle

Even in the difficult words spoken above by the Jewish theologians to Christians there is a sense of presence and gift, as the thinkers unveil their true and unsheltered thoughts that are meant as a sign of respect for the Christian listener. This does not mean, of course, that the gift may also be initially burdensome and even unwelcome. It would be wonderful if we lived in a world where deep religious truths could be spoken amidst friendship and the passing of soccer balls; and that such differences, although noted and not diluted, would always strengthen and not dissolve or cause tension in the relationship. Sadly, however that is not often the case.

Interfaith dialogue that is grounded in the five qualities highlighted by Catherine Cornille and attempted with an embracing of the five areas I sketched further above are a means to grow deeper in one's knowledge and love of the Other, one's self, and the Divine. It can be a demanding, exhausting, and mind-rattling exercise as one's seemingly firm grasp of the world and its truths suddenly feel exposed and brittle. But again, it is in that sense of uncertainty, humility, and frailty that the gift of faith can best nurture oneself and one another as it demands that we reach out and acknowledge our need for each other. And in that sacred space, amidst uncertainty and fear, there is a hope that two strangers from different faith traditions and backgrounds may even reach the point, where as adults, they can be present to one another with the familiarity of being friends and the innocence of youth.



## End Notes

<sup>i</sup> While I will use the terms "interfaith" and "interreligious" interchangeably in this essay, it should be noted that certain authors, religious institutions, or institutional documents differ in how they define or use these terms and some maintain clear distinctions between them. See, for example, the discussion in Pim Valkenberg, *Sharing Lights on the Way to God: Muslim-Christian Dialogue and Theology in the Context of Abrahamic Partnership* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 113-6. If forced to choose between the two, I would side with "interfaith" as the word "faith" can be a more inclusive, fluid term that prevents one from getting bogged down in defining whether X (be it Buddhism or secular humanism) is a religion.

<sup>ii</sup> John K. Roth, "A Small Country No More," in Carol Rittner, John K. Roth, and Wendy Whitworth, eds., *Genocide in Rwanda: Complicity of the Churches?* (St. Paul: Paragon House, 2004), 81.

<sup>iii</sup> I am Catholic while fully aware of the horrific injustice committed by Catholics, for example, against the Jewish people, Muslims, and the indigenous peoples of the Americas. I am Catholic while painfully cognizant of the systemic paedophile scandals in the Catholic Church that still have not been fully addressed. It is my contention that only by facing and addressing these failures will there be any hope of a genuine Catholicism that truly reaches out and embraces the marginalised and desperate, as Jesus advocated.

<sup>iv</sup> Religious Pluralism is often unfairly linked with a radical relativism that claims all truths or paths can be equally valid and no one path can unequivocally claim and prove to be the sole or highest path. At its best, an advocate of religious pluralism maintains the viability and power of his or her own faith position and tradition (as otherwise such belonging or commitment would be a farce, or meaningless); but leaves open the possibility that another religious path or tradition may be more or equally relevant or salvific. Such an openness need not remove the passion one has for one's faith but should, in theory, prevent the type of slanderous and pride-filled judgments levelled at other faith traditions and paths, especially without a deep and enduring grasp of those other traditions. See the chapter "Ten Years Later: Surveying the Scene," in Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in Christian Theology of Religions*, London: SCS Press Ltd, 1993, 149-167 or Irving Greenberg's argument for a "principled pluralism" in *For the Sake of Heaven and Earth: The New Encounter Between Judaism and Christianity* (Philadelphia: the Jewish Publication Society, 2004), 207.

<sup>v</sup> Briefly, I advocate a type of postmodernity that promotes the real possibility of Divine absence and the messiness of possibly legitimate, but competing and conflicting truth claims. Postmodernity's irresolute questioning of Divine truth, revelation, systems, and so forth, may or may not be correct, but it demands a shedding of one's self and ego that does not mean one renounces faith claims but always makes those claims in the presence of the suffering other and to those good people for whom my beliefs seem inferior, inapplicable, or merely 'personal'. Here I am exposed: transparent, fragile, porous. As an exercise in humility and grounding, there may be no better dialogue than postmodernity and theology. For a dense, but helpful overview see the essay, "Postmodern Theology," Graham Ward, in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology Since 1918*, 3rd Ed., eds. David F. Ford with Rachel Myers (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 322-338.

<sup>vi</sup> Interfaith Dialogue will be addressed below and some useful works are included in the Bibliography.

<sup>vii</sup> This is my term for those accounts of witness to traumatic and horrific events that often put all theological arguments, beliefs, and language, into question. See, for example my "Testimonies of Mass Atrocity and the Search for a Viable Theology," *Bulletin ET*, Vol. 18 (2007): 88-99.

<sup>viii</sup> In trying to learn and assess the events of the present and past, one should seek as wide a range of sources as possible. While one's attempts can never be exhaustive, the purpose here is to help to reveal and uncover the questionable if not immoral actions committed by – or in the name of – one's religion and or religious institution.

<sup>ix</sup> Joseph Saliu, "The Preservation of Uniqueness and Interreligious Dialogue in Northern Nigeria", in *Ecumenics From the Rim: Explorations in Honour of John D'Arcy May*, eds., John O'Grady and Peter Scherle (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2007), 290.

<sup>x</sup> Catherine Cornille, *The Im-possibility of Interreligious Dialogue* (New York: Crossroads, 2008), 56.

<sup>xi</sup> While the Vatican document *Dominus Iesus* was rightly rebuked in many circles for a rather unannounced presentation of a post-Vatican II view of what should be a Catholic's position of other faith traditions, it correctly (even if bluntly) asserted many of the core theological views of Catholics that if dismissed or refuted could inevitably hamper, if not annul, one's Catholic identity. As Francis Clooney writes: "Some conservatives will be bothered by some parts of the declaration and some progressives by other parts, but it ably brings to the fore some key elements of Christian faith in a plausible fashion that will ring true for most Catholics. For this we can be grateful to the authors" ["Implications for the Practice of Inter-religious Learning," in *Sic Et Non: Encountering Dominus Iesus*, eds. Stephen L. Pope and Charles Heffling (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002), 157]. In a brilliant essay, he then questions why the document fails to embrace the benefits of dialogue (especially as a means of strengthening aspects of one's own tradition) while offering no concrete,

fruitful examples as to how to implement the document's views in actual interreligious dialogue. As Clooney writes: "it is imperative that the Congregation itself... speak directly to the people of other religious traditions, explain things to them in a convincing fashion, and engage them in an honest back-and-forth conversation where authors of the declaration show themselves willing to listen. Otherwise, the declaration might appear persuasive and beyond criticism only when buttressed by the disciplinary authority of the Congregation" (167).

<sup>xii</sup> Cornille writes: "... the experience of profound empathetic resonance with the religious other may point to similarities or compatibilities between religions and may open the way to religious growth and change" (*Im-possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, 176).

<sup>xiii</sup> Cornille, *The Im-possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, 210.

<sup>xiv</sup> Supersessionism is the wrong and fatuous belief that Christianity had replaced or superseded the Jewish covenant and the Jewish people. For relevant works on post-Holocaust Christologies examining the issues of the Jewishness of Jesus; the question of a single, double, or alternative covenant model; the moral errors of supersessionist theology (also known as the theology of substitution); the important and clear distinctions between "Christologies of Discontinuity" as opposed to "Christologies of Continuity"; the "end of christological salvation triumphalism" [Didier Pollefeyt, "Christology After Auschwitz: A Catholic Perspective", in *Jesus Then & Now: Images of Jesus in History and Christology*, eds. Marvin Meyer and Charles Hughes (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2001), 233]; the moral, historical and theological errors (and repercussion) of the deicide charge against the Jewish people, the expectations and fulfillment of the Messiah, and the "newness" and uniqueness of Christ in light of the on-going Jewish covenant, see John Pawlikowski, "The Search for a New Paradigm for the Christian-Jewish Relationship: A Response to Michael Singer" in *Reinterpreting Revelation and Tradition: Jews and Christians in Conversation*, eds. John T. Pawlikowski and Hayim Goren Perelmuter (Franklin: Sheed & Ward, 2000), 25-48; John Pawlikowski, *Jesus and the Theology of Israel* (Wilmington: Michael Glazer, Inc.) 1989; John Pawlikowski, *Christ in the Light of the Christian-Jewish Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982); Didier Pollefeyt, "The Church and the Jews: Unsolvable Paradox or Unfinished Story?", in *Nostra Aetate: Origins, Promulgation, Impact on Jewish-Christian Relations* (Christianity and History. Series of the John XXIII Foundation for Religious Studies in Bologna 5), eds. Neville Laman and Alberto Melloni (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2007), 131-144; Didier Pollefeyt, "Christology After Auschwitz: A Catholic Perspective", in *Jesus Then & Now: Images of Jesus in History and Christology*, eds. Marvin Meyer and Charles Hughes (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2001), 229-248; *Jews and Christians: Rivals or Partners for the Kingdom of God? In Search of An Alternative for the Theology of Substitution*, ed. Didier Pollefeyt (Louvain: Peeters, 1997); *Jesus Through Jewish Eyes: Rabbis and Scholars Engage an Ancient Brother in a New Conversation*, ed. Bruteau, Beatrice (New York: Orbis, 2003); Elena Procaro Foley, "Heir or Orphan: Theological Evolution and Devolution before and after *Nostra Aetate*" in *Vatican II Forty Years Later*, ed. William Madges (New York: Orbis, 2006), 308-339; Peter J. Haas, "Judaism in Protestant Encounters With the Shoah" [With Critiques and Response], in *Fire in the Ashes: God, Evil, and the Holocaust*, eds. David Patterson and John K. Roth (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 59-83; Michael S. Kogan, *Opening the Covenant: A Jewish Theology of Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); *The Catholic Church and the Jewish People: Recent Reflections From Rome*, eds. Philip A. Cunningham, Norbert J. Hofmann, and Joseph Sievers (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007); *Jewish-Christian Dialogue: Drawing Honey from the Rock*, eds. Alan L. Berger and David Patterson (St. Paul: Paragon House, 2008), 74-81 and 184-245.

<sup>xv</sup> These words may be said or unsaid, both from the mouth of the other and in the simultaneous dialogue within one's conscience. But at some level they are heard and in the presence of this Other, one is invited and obligated to respond. Such a response may need time for further reflection, reading, or praying – and may never actually be resolved. That is ok. In the presence of another person, abstract labels (like Muslim or Hindu) are shed and the particular eyes that look at you and the distinctive voice that speaks inevitably connects and joins the two of you as human beings sharing interrelated hopes, fears, and dreams.

<sup>xvi</sup> Didier Pollefeyt, "Christology After Auschwitz: A Catholic Perspective" in *Jesus Then & Now: Images of Jesus in History and Christology*, eds. Marvin Meyer and Charles Hughes (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2001), 246.

<sup>xvii</sup> Irving Greenberg, "The Respective Roles of the Two Faiths in the Strategy of Redemption" in *For the Sake of Heaven and Earth*, 177.

<sup>xviii</sup> Michael S. Kogan, *Opening the Covenant: A Jewish Theology of Christianity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 34-5.

<sup>xix</sup> Comment of David Gushee, in the chapter "Dialogue in Action" in *Jewish-Christian Dialogue: Drawing Honey from the Rock*, eds. Alan L. Berger and David Patterson (St. Paul: Paragon House, 2008), 188.

<sup>xx</sup> David Patterson and Alan Berger, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, 92.

<sup>xxi</sup> *Ibid.*, David Patterson and Alan Berger, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, 124.

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# PAUL: a companion on life's journey

By Fr. Martin Hogan

*Sincere thanks to Fr. Martin Hogan, PC for this discerning article on St. Paul. Fr. Martin is a lecturer in Scripture in Mater Dei Institute of Education, a well-known scripture scholar and is a priest in the Dublin diocese. I welcome the breadth of understanding which he demonstrates here in relation to St. Paul.*

We all need companions. We need people to walk with us on our journey through life. I am sure most of us could think of people whose companionship has made a tremendous difference to our lives. They may have been there when we needed advice or direction, or when we needed someone just to listen to us. They may have been there to rejoice with us in good times and to receive our pain in difficult times. They shared something of their lives with us and allowed us to share something of our lives with them.

Barnabas was a companion of Paul, especially in the very early years of Paul's life as a believer in Christ. Barnabas was known as someone who had a great gift for giving encouragement to others. It is wonderful to meet people in life who encourage us, people who support and build up what is best in us, who open up doors for us and help us to use our gifts and abilities to the full. These are people who are interested in us for our own sakes, not for what we can give them. Barnabas was that kind of a person. He gave great encouragement to Paul. At a time when Paul was somewhat isolated in the early church, Barnabas opened a door for him. Early on in Paul's life as a believer, Barnabas brought him from Tarsus, his native city, to the city of Antioch, where the church was just beginning to take off (Acts 11:25-26). Barnabas could see that the church in Antioch would be the perfect place for Paul to use his gifts. Paul would be good for the church in Antioch, and the church there would be good for Paul. Barnabas turned out to be absolutely right. Paul went on to become an important teacher in the church of

Antioch, and the church of Antioch became a spiritual home to Paul for many years. The church of Antioch came to regard Paul so highly that they sent him out on mission, along with Barnabas, to bring the gospel to places where it had not yet been preached (Acts 13:1-3). This was the beginning of Paul's missionary work, the first of his great missionary travels. As a result of these travels, he brought the gospel to Cyprus, and, eventually, throughout modern day Turkey and Greece. It was Barnabas who took that first step which made all this possible, bringing Paul from Tarsus to Antioch. Barnabas was indeed a wonderful companion to Paul, creating that initial opening for him that turned out to be life-giving for so many other people.

If Barnabas was Paul's companion in the first few years of Paul's missionary work, Paul had other companions in subsequent years. One of Paul's great companions in the years after his initial companionship with Barnabas was Timothy. In one of his letters, his letter to the Philippians, Paul shares how much Timothy meant to him. He tells the church in Philippi, 'I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon... I have no one like him... like a son with a father he has served with me in the work of the gospel' (Phil 2:20-22). Timothy was a companion, a co-worker, of Paul, for much of Paul's missionary travels. He was clearly someone that Paul cherished greatly. Paul had several other companions and co-workers whom he greatly valued. A Christian married couple called Priscilla and Aquila were a great support to Paul. He met them for the first time when he arrived in the city of Corinth to preach the gospel. They had recently

come from Rome to Corinth, where they gave Paul hospitality in their home (Acts 18:1-3). From then on they supported him in all kinds of ways. This married couple subsequently returned to the church in Rome. When Paul was writing his letter to the Romans towards the end of his life, he makes reference to them. He says to the church in Rome, 'Greet Priscilla and Aquila, who work with me in Christ Jesus, and who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles' (Rom 16:3). Here were companions who were prepared to lay down their lives for Paul. In his letter to the Philippians Paul mentions two women who, he says, 'have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel' (Phil 4:2-3). Paul valued and appreciated men and women who joined him as companions and co-workers in the preaching and living of the gospel.

When Paul was denied such companionship, he felt it deeply. Towards the end of his life, as he waited in a Roman prison, he sent a letter back to his co-worker Timothy. In that letter Paul writes, 'Do your best to come to me soon, for Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me' (2 Tim 4:9-11). A few verses later he says, 'At my first defence no one came to my support, but all deserted me. May it not be counted against them!' (2 Tim 4:16). We can almost feel the emotional pain in Paul's words here. It seems that just as Jesus was deserted by his closest associates as he faced into his passion and death, so too Paul was deserted by many

## SYLLABUS LINK

### LEAVING CERTIFICATE

#### SECTION B

#### TOPIC 4.1

The first Christian communities as seen through one of the writings of Paul.

### JUNIOR CERTIFICATE

#### SECTION A

#### PART 3

Communities of Faith.

#### PART 5

Faith in Christ.



of those who had become important to him as he faced into his own passion and death. He felt the absence of his companions so deeply because he appreciated their companionship and their support so greatly.

If Paul valued his companions, we can be equally sure that many people in the early church valued him as a companion. They looked to him as a spiritual father and brother; as a companion in the Lord. There is one little scene in the Acts of the Apostles which bears that out in a very moving way. Paul was on his way to Jerusalem for the last time; he realized that this would be a dangerous mission and that he might not leave Jerusalem alive because he had many enemies there. On his way to Jerusalem, his boat stopped off at a port called Miletus, near the great city of Ephesus, and the leaders of the church in Ephesus went there to meet him. Paul addressed them in very moving terms. Luke tells us that 'when he had finished speaking, he knelt down with them all and prayed. There was much weeping among them all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, grieving especially because of what he had said, that they would not see him again' (Acts 20:36-38). Here were people who deeply cherished Paul's companionship and guidance and who grieved at the prospect of being deprived of that valuable gift.

Paul had many companions in the course of his missionary life and work, and he himself was a companion to many people. Is there any sense in which Paul could be a companion to us today on our life's journey? I think there is. It is probably fair to say that not many people have

a devotion to Saint Paul or see him as a spiritual companion on their pilgrimage of faith. Many people's impression of Paul is of someone who is austere and complicated. Yet, there is so much more to him than that. We are very fortunate that so many of the letters he wrote to the first Christian communities have come down to us. In and through these letters, we meet Paul the missionary, Paul the pastor, Paul the theologian, but, first and foremost, we meet Paul the human being. We know more about Paul than about any other member of the first generation of believers, because of his letters that are now part of our New Testament. The person we meet in those letters is someone we can look to as a companion on our faith journey. Speaking personally, he has always been an inspiration to me. The letters that he wrote have always nourished my faith. His teasing out of what it means to live the gospel in the decades after the death and resurrection of Jesus have been of great assistance in me as I try to tease out what it means to be a believer in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. So much of what Paul writes seems to come from some place deep inside himself, and, because of that, it can speak to what is deepest in all of us. His relationship with Christ is so alive and vivid that it has the power to revive our own relationship with Christ when that relationship might be flagging and weakening. Paul remains a wonderful gift to the church in every generation. Even though almost two thousand years separate Paul and ourselves and he was immersed in a very different culture to our own, he has the potential to be an enriching companion to all of us as we struggle to live the gospel in our own

particular time and place.

Paul, through his letters, has the power to nurture our faith, our hope and our love. Paul clearly believed that at the heart of the Christian life is to be found those three qualities or virtues, of faith, hope and love. The earliest letter of Paul to his churches that has been preserved is his first letter to the Thessalonians. It may have been the first letter he ever wrote to a church. It is perhaps significant that he begins and ends this earliest letter with a reference to the triad of faith, hope and love, or, as Paul orders them in this letter; faith, love and hope. At the beginning of his letter to the Thessalonians, he tells the church that he always gives thanks to God for them, remembering before God, 'your work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Thess 1:3). Towards the end of that same letter he calls on this church to 'put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation' (1 Thess 5:8). Paul thanks God for the faith, love and hope present in the members of the church, and he encourages them to persevere in those fundamental virtues. In all the letters Paul wrote to 'the saints in Christ Jesus' (Phil 1:2), he was always seeking to deepen faith, to strengthen hope and to help love to grow. The living Paul, the Paul who is now with the risen Lord, continues to speak to us today through his letters, with a view to deepening our faith, strengthening our hope and making us more loving.

What does Paul mean by faith? By faith Paul means believing the gospel, believing the good news. What is the good news, the gospel, according to

Paul? In his letter to the Romans Paul sums up the gospel in four little words, 'God is for us'. For Paul, that is what the life, death and resurrection of Jesus tells us. It tells us that God is for us, that God loves us. That is why in that same letter to the Romans Paul refers to 'the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Rom 8:39). It is above all the death of Jesus, according to Paul, that shows us that God is for us, that God is always moving towards us in love. In his letter to the Romans, Paul expresses this conviction very simply but very powerfully, 'God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us' (Rom 5:8). Paul sums up the gospel he preaches as 'Jesus Christ, and him crucified' (1 Cor 2:2). It is Christ crucified who speaks to us of God for us; it is Christ crucified who reveals God's love to be stronger than sin, stronger than death, stronger than any power that might be opposed to us. That is why, again in his letter to the Romans, Paul can say, 'I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Rom 8:38-39). That, for Paul, is the gospel we are invited and called upon to believe. We can be slow to believe such good news. We can be tempted to think, 'God may be for us, but how can God be for me?'. Yet, the gospel for Paul is that God in Christ is for each of us individually. The death of Christ on the cross reveals the love of God, the love of Christ, for all humanity and for each of us individually. In his letter to the Galatians Paul says, 'I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me' (Gal 2:20). He encourages each of us to believe the good news that the Son of God loved 'me' and gave himself for 'me'.

For Paul, faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave himself for us generates hope. God has done something wonderful for us in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus; God has embraced us in his love. God has gone further, according to Paul. The love of God that Jesus expressed on the cross has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. It is that, for Paul, which makes us hopeful, 'Hope does not disappoint us because God's love has been poured into our hearts

through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us' (Rom 5:5). If God has already done so much for us, we can be full of hope that God will do even more. What is the 'even more' that God will do for us? The Holy Spirit is what Paul calls the 'first fruit' of the final harvest. The final harvest is eternal life, a communal sharing in the Lord's own risen life. Using another image, Paul speaks of the Holy Spirit as a 'first instalment' (2 Cor 1:22). The full instalment is eternal life. What God has already done for us is the basis of Paul's hope in what God has yet to do for us. Having said in his letter to the Romans, 'God is for us... He did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up to benefit us all' (Rom 8:32), he immediately goes on to ask, 'Will he (God) not with him (his Son) also give us everything else?' 'Everything else' is the final harvest, the full instalment, of eternal life. For Paul, to believe in the gospel is to be full of hope, even, and, indeed, especially, in the face of death. Paul uses many images to express what we hope for, what we are waiting for. In his second letter to the Corinthians, for example, he says, 'We know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens' (2 Cor 5:1). In his letter to the Philippians, Paul expresses this hope in different terms, declaring that the Lord Jesus Christ 'will transform our humble body so that it may be conformed to Christ's glorious body' (Phil 3:21). Our ultimate destiny is to become like the risen Christ. The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God's love, has been poured into our hearts to empower us to become like Christ in this life. However, it is only beyond death that we will be fully conformed to the image of God's Son. At the very beginning of his letter to the Philippians, Paul declares, 'I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ' (Phil 1:6). God has done a good work among us through the life, death and resurrection of his Son and by sending the Spirit into our hearts. Believers can be assured that God will bring that good work to completion in eternity. Believing the gospel fills us with hope.

If for Paul, faith and hope are inseparable, faith and love are equally inseparable. In his letter to the Galatians he declares, 'the only thing

that counts is faith working through love' (Gal 5:6). The gospel of 'God for us' impels us to be for each other. Believing the good news that God 'did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us' inspires us to give ourselves up for others, for all those for whom God gave up his Son. Opening our hearts in faith to the Spirit of God's love requires that we allow that Spirit to bear fruit in our lives and, for Paul, the primary fruit of the Spirit is love. In chapter 13 of his first letter to the Corinthians, perhaps the best known passage in all of Paul's letters, Paul paints a portrait of what he means by love. 'Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends' (1 Cor 13:4-8). Paul could be said to be painting a portrait of Christ, of God's love in Christ. It is also a portrait of the believer who, through the power of the Spirit, is being conformed to Christ. Paul goes on to say in that same chapter, 'faith, hope and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love' (1 Cor 13:13). Faith, hope and love are of abiding value, but of the three 'love' is the greatest. We might have expected Paul to say that 'faith' is the greatest. After all, faith is the foundation of hope and love. Yet, for Paul, love is the greatest because it is only love that will continue into eternity. When 'we see face to face', faith will no longer be necessary because it will have given way to vision; hope will no longer be necessary because it will have given way to possession. Only love will endure, because love is the very life of God, and eternal life is a sharing in God's own life. 'Love', the fruit of the Spirit, is the presence of eternity in time.

Paul was a man of faith, hope and love. Allowing him to accompany us on our life's journey through the living word of his letters will help to keep us faithful, hopeful and loving members of Christ's body and, thereby, enable us to be faithful to our calling to 'shine like stars in the world' (Phil 2:15).



# BUDDHISM: THE WAY OF THE BUDDHA

By Tony Kenny

Tony Kenny teaches RE at Coláiste Chiaráin secondary school, Croom Co. Limerick. He is a graduate of MICIUL. He is currently working on PhD research in the area of world religions.

I welcome Tony's personal insights into Buddhism and thank him for this rich, informative article.

Throughout my life people have asked me to summarise the essence of Buddhism; well the heart of the matter comes down to its soteriology.<sup>2</sup> In Buddhism you are not saved through faith in the Buddha, you must become a Buddha. This is made perfectly clear in the Buddhist scripture known as the *Dhammapada*:

*Atta hi attano natho ko hi natho paro si* (verse, 160)

One is the refuge for oneself, who else could be the refuge for others.

*Tumhehi kiccam atappam akkhataro Tathagata.* (Verse 276)

You should make efforts for yourself. The Tathagata (Lord) points out the way only.

Self-dependence and self-effort are the two keynotes of Buddhist ethics. In contrast Christian soteriology says that we are saved through grace and not by self effort.<sup>3</sup> Remember Jesus' question to Peter in Mk8:29?<sup>4</sup> It is the response to this question that is the essence of Christian soteriology. Indeed, Luther proclaimed *sola fide* or salvation through faith alone. However, Buddhists believe that we are not saved through faith in the Buddha rather we must walk the path he walked and have the realisations that he had; he is simply a teacher who points out the Way. He shows us the medicine that we must take, namely the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path,<sup>5</sup> but we must open the medicine bottle and actually take the medicine that the great physician Lord Buddha has prescribed. Thomas Merton the great Christian mystic appreciated the experiential nature of Buddhism and regarded the Buddha as the great existentialist, proclaiming that:

His doctrine was not a doctrine but a way of being in the world. His religion was not a set of beliefs and convictions or of rites and sacrifices but an opening to love. His philosophy was not a world view but a significant silence, in which the fracture implied by conceptual knowledge was allowed to heal and reality appeared again in its mysterious "suchness".<sup>6</sup>

To employ a Zen Buddhist analogy, to Buddhists the different religions are simply different fingers pointing at the same moon. We must "experience" the moon (the Truth) and not get preoccupied with the fingers (the Paths)!<sup>7</sup> If you are going to a Chilli Peppers gig in Dublin, it doesn't matter how you get there – you can get the train, take a motorbike, fly in a helicopter or thumb all the way – once you get there! This utilitarian approach is the essence of Buddhism and the *Sutta Pitaka*<sup>8</sup> constantly refers to the *Dharma* or Buddhist teachings as a raft. We are trapped on an island with unfavourable conditions and we spy a beautiful tropical paradise in the distance. We build a raft to travel to this paradise but we don't carry the raft around on our heads when we reach the other side! All religions are rafts to help us sail to the far shore and truth is truth no matter what the source whether it be Pope Benedict XVI, the XIV Dalai Lama or a tramp on the side of the street. Truth is never sectarian.

So who is this Buddha? Well there have been many Buddhas throughout the ages but when people commonly refer to the Buddha they are usually referring to an Indian *Kshatriya*<sup>9</sup> by the name of Siddhartha Gautama. Prince Siddhartha was born around 566 BCE into one of the small tribal republics that had sprung up on northern India and he led a princely life of material splendour. *The Legend of the Passing Sights* tells us that during his drives to the local village he encountered a sick man, an old man and a corpse. After reflection upon these profound realities, namely sickness, old age and death, his cocooned princely existence was shattered from that moment forth and he had a deep realisation of the existential realities of life that face all beings trapped in *Samsara*.<sup>10</sup> Birth and death are two sides of the same coin, to be born is one day to die! It was this deep spiritual realisation of the suffering that ultimately characterises all human life which led to the formulation of the First Noble Truth of Buddhism – *Dukkha*: the Truth of the suffering or unsatisfactory-ness of existence. This realisation of the suffering that is inherent in all human existence made the young prince question his priorities in life. From that moment forth, he renounced his princely life, left his family and friends, his wealth and privilege and wandered off into the world to discover magga: the path that would lead to the end of this suffering and continued rebirth in *Samsara*. Upon ultimate realisation Siddhartha

## [SYLLABUS LINK](#)

### LEAVING CERTIFICATE

#### SECTION C

World Religions

### JUNIOR CERTIFICATE

#### SECTION C

Foundations of Religion  
Major World Religions

became the Buddha, one who is “awake” and who has experienced the Ultimate Truth of the universe directly for himself. Only this experience leads to Nirvana and just as St. Paul constantly refers to the *mysterion*<sup>11</sup> of the Holy Spirit which is beyond words or thought, Nirvana as a spiritual experience is similarly epistemologically inexpressible. As the Mahayana *Astahasrika Sutta* says:

Sabhuti: ‘Deep, O Lord, is the perfection of wisdom!’

The Buddha: ‘Through a depth like that of space.’

Sabhuti: ‘Hard to understand, O Lord, is the perfection of wisdom!’

The Buddha: ‘Because nothing is fully known by the enlightened.’

Sabhuti: ‘Unthinkable, O Lord, is the perfection of wisdom!’

The Buddha: ‘Because the perfection of wisdom is not something that ought to know, or that thought has access to.’<sup>12</sup>

Buddhist cosmology like its soteriology too, is also in stark contrast with the Abrahamic religions. To summarise, the religions of the Book have a linear cosmology, i.e., a beginning (creation) and an end (Judgement Day).<sup>13</sup> Time in this linear cosmology is punctuated with prophets and humans enter into covenant relationships with God. “Sin” is a key concept – venial sins damage one’s relationship with God and mortal sins decisively break it off. Humans have one life in this realm and will go “up” to heaven or “down” to hell! In Eastern cosmologies such as one would find in Hinduism and Buddhism, there is no beginning or end as we are on a circle, the Wheel of Life, known as *Samsara*. We have many lives as opposed to one and the law of karma, not sin, determines future rebirths. Buddhism is non-theistic and karma is not controlled by a God or gods! In the law of karma our actions in body, speech and thoughts have future repercussions. Our thoughts, words and deeds are like seeds that must come to fruition, but to take karma personally would be akin to getting upset at the law of gravity! It is the Universal Law that cannot be controlled by anyone, not even by the Buddhas. Buddhism also engages in no abstract speculation, be it metaphysical or otherwise, as to a creation event or why we’re here. The fact is, we are here and we must deal with reality as we find it. The Buddha was a pragmatist and he summed up the standpoint of philosophers who are concerned with the desire for knowledge for its own sake thus:

...as if a man had been wounded by an arrow thickly smeared with poison, and his friends and companions, his relatives or kinsmen, were to procure for him a physician or surgeon, and the sick man were to say, “I will not have this arrow taken out until I have learnt whether or not the man who wounded me belongs to the Warrior Caste, or to the Priest caste, or to the agricultural caste, or to the menial caste.” That man would die without ever having learnt this. In exactly the same way, Malunkyaputta, anyone who should say, “I will not lead the religious life under the Buddha unless he shall explain to me that the world is eternal or that the world is not eternal ... such a person would die, Malunkyaputta, before the accomplished One has ever explained this to him ... This religious life, Malunkyaputta, does not depend on the dogma that the world is eternal, nor on the dogma that the world is not eternal. Whether the dogma obtains that the world is eternal or the world is not eternal, there still remains birth, old age, death, sorrow, lamentation, misery, grief and despair, for the extinction of which in the present life I am prescribing.”<sup>14</sup>

So, how do I get off this Wheel of Life once and for all? We must follow the path of morality (*sila*), meditation (*samadhi*) and wisdom (*panna*) to achieve Nirvana. The first level is right action. By doing good, speaking good and thinking good, we purify the mind as action and the mind are mutual and reciprocal. St. Paul says that we know a tree by its fruit. A good tree produces good fruit and a bad tree produces bad fruit. TV shows like “Supernanny” or “Nanny 911” show us that by correcting bad behaviour in ‘bold’ children we will eventually correct the bad mindset in the child and good behaviour will naturally flow! The path of meditation (*samadhi*) which focuses the attention on the breath calms the weary mind which is so outward looking. Our mind is like a glass of muddy water that we constantly stir up. In meditation we learn to settle it so the sediment falls to the bottom and we can see through the now clear water. This is the heart of Buddhist soteriology for it is in this open clarity that we directly become aware of our own negative tendencies of body, speech and mind and directly perceive the truth for ourselves (*panna*). The Truth is simply waiting for you to experience it! When one truly understands the Four Noble Truths, 1. *Dukkha* 2. *Samudaya*, the Truth of the cause of suffering 3. *Nirodha*, the truth of the end of suffering, and 4. *Marga*, the truth of the Path leading to the end of suffering – then one can truly be said to have Right Understanding, the first step in the Eightfold Path. The Noble Eightfold Path is the medicine that we must take if we are to realise Nirvana for ourselves.

In conclusion, Buddhism is radically different from the Abrahamic religions in its cosmological and soteriological approaches, but nevertheless like all religions its emphasis is on walking the walk and not just talking the talk. For this reason, the First Noble Truth of Buddhism – *dukkha* or suffering – starts not with an intellectual postulation but with an emotional experience. Does that mean that Buddhists are a shower of world-weary hypochondriacs? Au contraire! Because this moment is the only one we have it makes it all the more precious. The past is the past and the future is not yet realised. All we have is now! *Carpe Diem* – seize the day! Grab on to life and seize every opportunity that comes your way. Be the woman who disgraces herself at the karaoke night, be the man who asks the beautiful stranger on the bus to go for a coffee. Don’t wonder what could have been. Enjoy your time on this stage and be ever mindful of your limitless potential for spiritual realisation and perfection. I wish you all happiness and the causes of happiness.

Yours in Religious Education,

Tony Kenny BA;MA;H.Dip

www.dhammadayo.org to see the Temple of Luang Phor Sodh, Ratchaburi Thailand.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this article Buddhist terms are stated in the Pali language which is used by the oldest Buddhist tradition, i.e., the Theravadin tradition. The language of the Mahayana tradition is Sanskrit. Sanskrit is also the language of Hindu scripture.

<sup>2</sup> Soteriology: the how of salvation. Every religion has a different soteriological approach. Can you list the correct soteriology for each of the major world religions?

<sup>3</sup> De Silva, L., ‘79 “The Biblical View of Man”, in: *The Problem of the Self in Buddhism and Christianity*, London: Macmillan Press, p.85

<sup>4</sup> “Who do you say I am?” ...

<sup>5</sup> The Four Noble Truths are taught by the Buddha in the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* (Setting in Motion the Wheel of Dharma teaching) in the second basket (*Sutta Pitaka*) of the Buddhist Canon.

<sup>6</sup> Merton, T., ‘68 “Nirvana” in *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*, Gethsemani: New Directions, p.79

<sup>7</sup> Eg., “My finger is longer, sleeker, cuter, better than yours” etc. This only leads to sectarian divisions as opposed to spiritual realisation. In Vatican II, the encyclical *Nostra Aetate* recognises that there is a ray of truth in all religions. This is a principle of dialogue that resonates with the heart of Buddhism.

<sup>8</sup> The second basket of Buddhist scripture containing the discourses of the Buddha. The other two are the *Vinaya Pitaka* which contains rules for ordained Buddhists and the *Abhidhamma Pitaka* which contains profound and esoteric Buddhist psychology in addition to metaphysical teachings.

<sup>9</sup> Member of the Warrior caste in Hinduism. See the *Code of Manu* for the principal divisions within the Caste system, namely *Brahmin*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishyas* & *Shudras*.

<sup>10</sup> *Samsara*: the wheel of life. In Buddhist cosmology we are stuck in this mechanism of constant birth and rebirth until we eventually achieve Nirvana.

<sup>11</sup> *Mysterion* (Greek): mystery

<sup>12</sup> Conze, W.E., ‘55, *Selected Sayings from the Perfection of Wisdom*, London: The Buddhist Society, p.51

<sup>13</sup> The theology that deals with the final things in the Abrahamic religions is called eschatology. The Abrahamic religions have a similar soteriology, cosmology and eschatology. Discuss this in class.

<sup>14</sup> Onkom, S., ‘92, “Concept of Man in Theravada Buddhism”, in *The Concept of Man in Buddhism and Existentialism*, Bodhi Gaya: Magadh University, Dr. of philosophy thesis, p.199



# The Hindu Religion and Women

By Sudhansh Verma – Hindu Cultural Centre Ireland

Thank you very much to Sudhansh Verma for this informative article on the status of women in Hinduism. Sudhansh is the Director and General Secretary of the Hindu Cultural Centre Ireland (HCCI). His article highlights the significant respect accorded to women in the Hindu religion, and the importance of motherhood and the feminine in relation to Hindu deities.

According to the Hindu religion, a woman is a **form of energy** or an aspect of *Shakti* (Power). She is *mata*, the **Mother Goddess**, or *devi* the auspicious one. As a young child she is *kanya*, the **Goddess Durga**. As a wife she is *saha dharma charini*, a **partner** in her husband's religious duties. As a **mother** she is worthy of worship (*matrudevobhava*).

The Hindu religion has been occasionally criticised as encouraging inequality between men and women, to the detriment of Hindu women. This presumption is inaccurate.

In religious matters, Hindus have elevated women to the level of divinity. One of the things most misconstrued about India and Hinduism is that it's a male dominated society and religion - and the truth is that this is not so.

It is a religion that has attributed the words for strength and power to the feminine. '**Sakthi**' means 'power' and 'strength'. All male power comes from the feminine. The *Trimurti* (Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva) are all-powerless without their female counterparts.

**Devi** is the Great Goddess. This echoes the *Devi-Mahatmyam* prayer: *Devis* refers to women.

*By you this universe is borne, by you this world is created;  
By you it is protected,  
By you it is consumed at the end,  
O Devi! You are the Supreme Knowledge, as well as intellect and contemplation...*

Women were held in higher respect in India than in other ancient countries, and the Epics and old literature of India assign a higher position to them than the epics and literature of other religions.

Hindu women enjoyed rights of property from the Vedic Age, took a share in social and religious rites, and were sometimes distinguished by their learning. There was no seclusion of women in India in ancient times.

Professor H. H. Wilson says: '*And it may be confidently asserted that in no nation of antiquity were women held in so much esteem as amongst the Hindus.*' (source: Wilson's Works)

In Ancient India, however, Hindu women not only possessed equality of opportunities with men, but enjoyed certain rights and privileges not claimed by the male sex. The chivalrous treatment of women by Hindus is well known to all who know anything of Hindu society.

Knowledge, intelligence, rhythm and harmony are all essential ingredients for any creative activity. It is the Hindu tradition which provides, even at the conceptual level, the picture of the male and female principles working together, hand in hand, as equal partners in the universe. This concept is carried further to its logical climax in the form of *Ardhanareeswara*, formed by the fusion of Siva and Sakthi in one body, each occupying one half of the body, denoting that one is incomplete without the other.

It is significant to note that only Hindus worship God in the form of Divine Mother. In Hinduism the deities for knowledge, learning and material wealth are female and not male. The historical and social inconsistencies and injustices did not arise from Hindu scriptures, but from humans who failed to correctly incorporate the teachings of the scriptures, such as the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita*, into their social philosophy.

This concept of the spiritual equality of souls naturally influenced the status of women on an individual and social level.

"Where women are honoured, there the gods are pleased; but where they are not honoured no sacred rite yields rewards," declares *Manu Smriti* (III.56), a text on social conduct.

"Women must be honoured and adorned by their fathers, brothers, husbands and brothers-in-law, who desire their own welfare." (*Manu Smriti* III, 55).

"Where the female relations live in grief, the family soon wholly perishes; but that family where they are not unhappy ever prospers." (*Manu Smriti* III, 57).

"The houses, on which female relations, not being duly honoured, pronounce a curse, perish completely as if destroyed by magic." (*Manu Smriti* III, 58).

"Hence men, who seek their own welfare, should always honour women on holidays and festivals with gifts of ornaments, clothes, and dainty food." (*Manu Smriti* III, 59).

In an old *Shakti* hymn it is said - *Striyah devah, Striyah pranah* – 'Women are Devas, women are life itself.'

"A woman's body," says *Manu* the lawgiver, "must not be struck hard, even with a flower, because it is sacred." It is for this reason that the Hindus do not allow capital punishment for women.

The idea of equality was most forcibly expressed in the *Rig Veda* (Book 5, hymn 61. verse 8). The commentator

## SYLLABUS LINK

### LEAVING CERTIFICATE

#### SECTION E

Religion and Gender

#### TOPIC 1.2 and 2.4

### JUNIOR CERTIFICATE

#### SECTION C

#### PART 3

Foundations of Religion - Major World Religions

explains this passage thus: 'The wife and husband, being the equal halves of one substance, are equal in every respect; therefore both should join and take equal parts in all work, religious and secular.' The Vedas of the Hindus clearly acknowledges the equality of women with men.

When *Sankaracharya*, the great commentator of the Vedanta, was discussing philosophy with another philosopher, a Hindu lady, well versed in all the Scriptures, she was requested to act as a judge.

It is the special injunction of the Vedas that no married man shall perform any religious rite, ceremony, or sacrifice without it being joined in by his wife; the wife is considered a partaker and partner in the spiritual life of her husband; she is called, in Sanskrit, *Sahadharmini*, 'spiritual helpmate.'

As in religion, Hindu woman of ancient times enjoyed equal rights and privileges with men, so in secular matters she had equal share and equal power with them. From the Vedic age women in India have had the same rights as men and they could go to the courts of justice, plead their own cases, and ask for the protection of the law.

Regarded as the highest dharma of all four castes husbands, though weak, must strive to protect their wives. The man protects his own offspring, character, family, self, and dharma when he protects his wife scrupulously. The husband should engage his wife in dharma, the collection and expenditure of his wealth, in cooking food for the family, and in looking after the necessities of the household.

Motherhood is considered the greatest glory of Hindu women – 'Let your mother be the god to you.'

The Hindu tradition recognises 'mother' and motherhood as even superior to heaven. The epic *Mahabharata* says, 'While a father is superior to ten learned priests well-versed in the Vedas, a mother is superior to ten such fathers.'

Hinduism offers some intriguing and unique examples of strong women in the form of Goddesses. Two thousand years ago Saint Tiruvalluvar observed: "What does a man lack if his wife is worthy? And what does he possess if she is lacking worth?" There is great respect in Hinduism for women and for their role in society.

In many philosophical texts God is referred to as a *Tat*, meaning 'it' - and that God is beyond gender. One would find a comparable Goddess for each God. Further, we know for a fact that ancient India was permissive; women could have multiple husbands, widows could remarry, divorce was permitted for incompatibility or when estranged.

Lord Siva appears united in a single body with Sakthi, his spouse; he at the right side and she at the left, in a manifestation known as *Ardhnanariswara*, the half-man, half-woman incarnation of God. Each of the three principal Gods in the Hindu pantheon - Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Protector and Siva the destroyer; is accompanied by a Sakthi, which is both his female double and his power of manifestation.



Temple Pooja

The Rig Veda too places woman on a high pedestal of sublimity: *Yatr nariyastu poojayante ramante tatr devah* - where woman is worshipped, Gods preside there.

Women must be honoured and adorned by their father, brothers, husbands, and brother-in-law who desire good fortune. Where women are truly honoured, there the gods rejoice. Where, however, they are not honoured - there all sacred rites prove fruitless. Where the female relations live in grief, that family soon perishes completely. Where, however, they do not suffer from any grievance, that family always prospers.

Women enjoy an honoured position and are found in the Upanishads conversing freely with men, contributing an active role in society. Young girls led free lives and had a decisive voice in the selection of their husbands. On festive occasions and at tournaments (*samana*) girls appeared in all their gaiety. In certain Hindu castes the line of inheritance is from mother to (eldest) daughter, and marriage is a 'visiting' relationship. Naturally, women were more independent and free in every respect.

It is, therefore, no wonder that the wife enjoys with her husband full religious rights and regularly participates in religious ceremonies with him. In fact, the performance of such ceremonies would be invalid without the wife joining her husband as his full partner. Some grammatical passages show that women had other careers open to them apart from a mere literary career.

In Hinduism the four Vedas, the Bhagvad Gita and the two Puranas - *Ramayan* and *Mahabharata* are considered to be the supreme Scriptures. All others are just commentaries, explanatory notes or stories written by individuals. As commentaries written on the Constitution of India cannot override the articles of the Constitution of India, similarly, commentaries or explanations on Vedas by individuals cannot supersede the riches of the Vedas or the *Ramayana* or *Gita*.

In the *Ramayana*, everyone knows that after the death of King Dasharatha his wives were never asked to step into the pyre of Dasharatha. Rather, they lived as a family with full honour and Rama always bowed his head before his widowed mothers with full respect. In the *Mahabharata*, Kunti, mother of the Pandavas did not commit sati. Thus, there is no command in the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* or in *Gita* to commit sati.

## Conclusion

In ancient India, Hindu women enjoyed great respect and freedom in society. But repeated attacks on Hindus in India by Muslims and the British through centuries changed the situation. During such aggressions the honour and chastity of women often became the casualties. There have been numerous cases when Hindu women killed themselves rather than yield to the indignities inflicted by the aggressors. Political instability and successive foreign invasions further made it difficult for women to take up formal learning, which made it impossible for them to undertake Vedic studies and conduct Vedic rites.

As a result, Hindu society became more protective about its women. The freedom of women was restricted. To protect themselves, Hindu women started to avoid public appearance and started to stay home. Their participation in public life and their social contribution was greatly restricted.

Now that we are no longer under aggression or invasion, we should allow women to regain their power, fame and name. Religion places the Mother before the Father in priority for reverence. *Matr devo bhava* was the first Upanishad exhortation to the young. (*Mother is a form of GOD*). In Hindu symbolism the Feminine is placed on a par with the Masculine in the profound concept of Siva-Sakthi culminating in the image of *Ardhnanari-Isvara*. People have honoured India as Motherland - '*Bharat Mata*', and nationalism has grown up from the seed Mantra '*Vande Mataram*'. (*Bharat Mata refers to India the Motherland and Vande Matram means 'Salutation to Mother'*.)

Misconceptions have to be cleared. Deep religious knowledge, respect for other religions and tolerance are the tools. Spirituality is the theme and I have no doubts that the 21st century is the century of women.



# In the name of Allah Most Gracious Most Merciful

# Hajj

By Ali Selim

*Thanks to Ali Selim for this informative article on the theme of hajj, the Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca. Known to many R.E. teachers and students who have visited the Islamic Cultural Centre and mosque in Clonskeagh, Ali is the Imam's secretary.*

Hajj is an obligatory duty incumbent on every Muslim who can make his/her way to Mecca once in the lifetime. Hajj can be performed within the five days of the second week of the 12<sup>th</sup> month of the Muslim calendar, Dhul-Hijjah. Allah said: "Pilgrimage to the House is a duty people owe to Allah, - those who can afford the journey, but if any denies faith, Allah stands not in need of His creature." (Trans. 3:97) Hajj is the fifth pillar of Islam. Prophet Muhammad – peace be upon him - reiterated this in a hadith by Ibn 'Umar in which he – peace be upon him - said: "Islam has been built upon five pillars: Testifying that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is His messenger, establishing Salah<sup>1</sup>, paying Zakat<sup>2</sup>, Fasting Ramadan<sup>3</sup>, and performing hajj to the House for those who can make their way thereto."

## SYLLABUS LINK

### LEAVING CERTIFICATE

#### SECTION C

World Religions

#### TOPIC 2.1

A vision of salvation

#### TOPIC 2.3

A celebrating tradition

### JUNIOR CERTIFICATE

#### SECTION C

#### PART 3

Rites of passage and other rituals

#### Exhortation

Due to the paramount importance of hajj and its magnificent merit, Muslims are encouraged to perform hajj. Prophet Muhammad – peace be upon him – said: "Hasten to hajj since none knows what may occur to him."<sup>4</sup> The early Muslim predecessors discerned this meaning. Consequently 'Umar was reported to say: "I was about to commission some men to disperse to find out whoever can afford hajj, but have not performed it yet. I would impose Jiziah<sup>5</sup> on them."<sup>6</sup> Today the number of Muslim pilgrims reaches up to 2.5 million.

Hajj is categorically described as one of the best deeds. Prophet Muhammad – peace be upon him - as reported by Abu Huraira, was asked: "What are the best deeds?" The prophet – peace be upon him - replied: "To have faith in Allah and his messenger." The enquirer asked: "What is next?" The prophet said: "To strive in the cause of Allah." The enquirer asked: "What is next?" The prophet said: "Hajj Mabru:<sup>7</sup>"<sup>8</sup>

Jihad is one of the best deeds in Islam and hajj is one of its categories.<sup>9</sup> Abu Hurairah reported that the prophet –peace be upon him-said: "Hajj is the Jihad for the old, the weak and the women."<sup>10</sup>

Hajj wipes off past sins. In Islam there are many gates to attain Allah's forgiveness. However, hajj is one of the main gates. Abu Hurairah reported that the prophet – peace be upon him - said: "He/she who performs hajj for Allah's pleasure and avoids all lewdness and sins will return from hajj free from all sins as the day his/her mother gave birth to him/her."<sup>11</sup> Amr Ibn Al-'Aas said: "When I was guided to Islam I went to the prophet – peace be upon him - and said to him: 'O prophet of Allah! Stretch out your hand so that I may pledge my allegiance to you.' So the prophet – peace be upon him - stretched out his hand to me, but I withdrew my hand. The prophet –peace be upon him - asked: 'O Amr! What is the matter with you? I

said: 'I would like to stipulate a condition.' The prophet – peace be upon him - asked: 'What is it?' I said: 'That all my past sins be forgiven.' The prophet – peace be upon him - said: 'O Amr! Do not you know that Islam wipes off all past sins and Hijrah wipes off all past sins and similarly hajj wipes off all past sins.'<sup>12</sup>

The Muslim pilgrims gain a significant title. The prophet – peace be upon him - was reported by Abu Hurairah to say: "The pilgrims and those performing 'Umrah<sup>13</sup> are Allah's guests; their prayers are answered and their supplications for forgiveness are granted."<sup>14</sup> Such a title gets them entitled to the generosity of the most Generous, Allah. His generosity is unimaginably limitless. Consequently his reward for hajj is beyond the utmost human reach. His reward is what no eyes have ever seen, what no ears have ever heard and what no hearts have ever thought of. It is paradise. The prophet – peace be upon him- said: "This house of Allah (The Ka'ba) is the pillar of Islam. Whoever heads to it with the intention of performing hajj or 'Umra is under Allah's security. Should he/she dies during his/her trip, he/she will be granted paradise and if he/she returns home safely he/she will return with reward and gain."

#### Historical background Adam and Eve

The history of hajj dates back to the time of the coming of the first man,

Adam, to the earth. Adam and Eve were told to leave paradise and descend to the earth, whereupon they were commanded to establish a shrine similar to the one in heaven. The Shrine in heaven is known as *Al-Bait-ul-Ma'mour*, around which the angels circumambulate and worship Allah. The site of the first holy shrine on earth was chosen to be in Mecca, and Adam in cooperation with the angel Gabriel erected it: the Ka'ba. Upon the culmination of the process of building, the angel Gabriel taught Adam the ceremonies of hajj. Adam and Eve were separated in the beginning, but Allah's mercy was invoked by Adam's entreaties, so Adam and Eve were reunited at a top of a hill in the valley of 'Arafat meaning 'recognition' or 'knowledge'. This valley, since then, has been known as *Jabal-ur-Rahmah*, the mount of mercy. Today in following the example of Adam, Muslim pilgrims stop in the same valley and invoke Allah's mercy. Adam and Eve spent the whole day stopping in 'Arafat in a state of ultimate humility, devotion and gratitude and did nothing but worship their Creator. This is exactly what the Muslim pilgrims do when they stop in 'Arafat. Then Adam and Eve moved to *Muzdalifah* where they spent the night in remembrance of Allah. Then they went to Mena and then to Mecca where they performed circumambulation. Later on the K'bah was destroyed by a storm and only a heap remained.

#### Prophet Abraham

The Prophet Abraham was brought up in an environment dominated by idolatry. Nonetheless, he firmly believed in the oneness and the unity of the Creator. Abraham was married to Sara for many years and they had no children. He married Hagar who, at Abraham's sincere request, gave birth to a son named Ishmael. Much later Sara gave birth to a son named Isaac. By the command of Allah, the prophet



*Imam lecturing a group of Muslim men during hajj*

Abraham in the company of his son Ishmael and his wife Hagar set out to Mecca where he left them in such an arid land offering the following appeal:

*"O our Lord! I have made some of my offspring to dwell in a valley without cultivation by Your Sacred House; in order, o our Lord! That they may establish regular prayer. So fill the hearts of some among men with love towards them, and feed them with fruits so that they may give thanks."* (Trans. 14:37)

This was an act of great faith and trust in this Creator. This was expressed in parallel with Hagar's faith and trust in her Creator: Hagar was left with her son in such an arid land without any provisions.

#### Safaa and Marwa

Upon the departure of the father, leaving her infant close to the heaped sign of the Holy House, the faithful mother Hagar commenced her journey of search for water for her baby. She ran to the top of the hill known as *Safaa* entreating Allah's mercy on them. From the top of the hill she thought she saw a lake in the valley. She ran there with restless steps and when she reached there she found it was only a mirage. Then in her search for water Hagar climbed the top of the neighbouring hill known as *Marwa* but she did not find any water. Anxiety for her child drove her back to the valley. Hagar's search for water was made of seven journeys between *Safaa* and *Marwa*. Millions of Muslim pilgrims on an annual basis recall and revive the story of Hagar when they perform *Sa'i* (*Sa'i* is one of the Hajj rituals and it consists of walking between a small hill called *Al-Safa* and another

small hill called *Al-Marwa*, seven times). What a recall and what a revival!

#### The Well of Zamzam

While she was consumed with worry about her infant, Hagar saw water oozing out of a hole near her child. Seeing the precious water escaping into the surrounding sand, she cried "*Zumi, Ya Mubarak!*" "*Stop there, O blessed water!*" That became the well of Zamzam that turned the arid land into the inhabited land. In this area tribes settled and thrived and drank from Zamzam. Muslim pilgrims also drink from this ever flowing well that will never cease.

#### Rebuilding the Ka'ba

When the prophet Ishmael grew up into manhood, his father, prophet Abraham, returned and found that his prayers had been answered. But he returned to fulfil the divine command of rebuilding the House of Allah. "*Behold! When We give the site to Abraham of the Sacred House. Associate none with Me in worship and sanctify My House to perform circumambulation in it or stand up or bow or prostrate themselves therein in prayer.*" (Tran. 22:26)

#### Lessons drawn from Hajj

First: Legally earned provision: Islam lays great stress on the paramount importance of the legally earned provision and strictly prohibits all types of illegal earnings. Allah said: "*And eat not up your property among yourselves for vanity.*" (Tran.) This meaning has been reiterated by a hadith in which the prophet – P.U.H.- mentioned the case of a man who, having journeyed far, is dishevelled and dusty and who

spreads out his hands to the heaven saying: 'O Lord! O Lord!' while his food is unlawful and his drink is unlawful and his clothing is unlawful and he is nourished unlawfully, so how can his supplication be answered."

From an Islamic point of view, acceptance of worship is dependent on the legal provision. In a unique way, the prophet Muhammad portrayed this meaning in a hadith in which he stated that when a pilgrim whose provision is illegally earned makes his Talbiah, it will be said to him: "Your call is not answered and you are a wretched person. Your provision has been illegally earned and your hajj is not accepted and will not be rewarded." To the contrary, for the pilgrim whose provision is legally earned, it will be said: "Your call is answered and you are a happy person. Your hajj is accepted."

Second: Righteousness and performance of the acts of worship do not mean non-observance of the rule of cause and effect. For instance, a righteous Muslim is supposed to work to earn his livelihood. Thus we will diminish unemployment and there will be no people living on the expenses of others. The Prophet Muhammad illustrated this meaning when he entered the mosque and saw a man that he – P.U.H.- frequently saw in the mosque. So he – P.U.H.- asked: "Who covers his financial needs?" The Companions said: "His brother." The prophet – P.U.H.- said: "His brother is a better worshipper." The prophet – P.U.H.- stressed this meaning in another hadith in which he said: "That any of you would go collect wood is better than begging people whether they give or withhold."

On Friday, which is the best of the Muslim weekdays, Muslims are exhorted to work. Allah said: "And when the prayer is finished, then may ye disperse through the land and seek of the bounty of Allah." In another place in the context of hajj, Allah said: "It is no crime in you if you seek

of the bounty of your Lord (during pilgrimage)."

Thirdly equality: The prophet – P.U.H.- explained that people are equal like the teeth of a comb. This meaning was reiterated in many hadith. Nonetheless, the various Muslim acts of worship stress this meaning. The Muslim Salah reflects equality. Thus all people stand in Salah in straight lines. In hajj Islam strikes the highest practical example of equality when all the pilgrims wear the same Ihram white garb and set out in congregations chanting the same formula: "O Allah! Here I'm in response to Your call." They are dressed in the same garments, the Ihram garb. For men, it is made of two white sheets; Izar is to be wrapped upon the lower part of the body and Rida' is to be wrapped on

my community the person who does not show mercy to the children and portray respect to the elderly people and recognize the rights of the scholars." The Qur'an teaches us how to address the prophet. Allah said: "Deem not the summon of the messenger among yourselves like the summon of one of you to another." Muslim Caliphs set the highest example in equality and we will elaborate on examples from the life of 'Umar Ibn Al-Khattab, the leader who, by Allah's favour, achieved the major part of the Muslim conquest. During his era occurred the famine. However, he never favoured himself with certain food or drink. He ate the same type of food the lay people ate. Whenever he had suffered hunger or a stomach-ache resulting from hunger, he would say to his stomach: "How can I feed you



Muslim men during hajj wearing the Ihram (2 piece white seamless garment)

the upper part of the body. The Izar and Rida' are for all, the rich and the poor, the rulers and the subjects. This garb serves also as a reminder of death when man will be shrouded, when virtuous deeds matter rather than wealth or offspring. Amidst this equality given rights granted to certain people do not fade away. For instance, the prophet – P.U.H.- said: "It is not from

when others are hungry. Whether you rumble or not I will not feed you with other than that." Umar did not live in a palace. A Roman man, when seeing 'Umar sleeping unattended and unguarded, said: "You have ruled with justice so you enjoyed safety and so you slept."

When 'Umar travelled to Jerusalem to receive the keys, he and his servant Maysarah had one camel

which they rode alternatively. When they reached Jerusalem it was Maysarah's turn to ride the camel.

When he saw the conquerors and the priests awaiting 'Umar, Maysarah said: "O Commander of the believers! Should I dismount as we have arrived?" 'Umar asked: "Is it your turn or mine."

Fourth, the Continuity of the divine revelation and the continuous positive communication between the Muslim predecessors and followers: All the divine revelations have one and the same aim. Hence the followers recognize the place of the predecessors and make du'aa for them. "And those who came after them say: 'Our Lord! Forgive us and our brethren who came before us into the faith.'" And in another place Allah said: "Those were (the prophets) who received Allah's guidance. Follow the guidance they received."

For Muslims the coming of the prophet Muhammad and his community is an answer to a Du'aa made by the prophet Ibraheem and Ismail – P.U.them -. The Qur'an states: "And remember Ibrahim and Ismail raised the foundations of the house (with this prayer): 'Our Lord! Accept (this service) from us, for You are the All-hearing, the All-knowing. Our Lord! Make of us Muslims bowing to Your (Will), and of our progeny a community Muslim, bowing to Your (Will) and show us our places of the celebration of (due) rites and turn unto us in (mercy) for You are the Oft-Relenting Most Merciful. Our Lord! Send among them a messenger of their own who shall rehearse Your signs to them and instruct them in Scripture and Wisdom and purify them, for You

are the Exalted in Might - the Wise.'" Upon completing the journey of hajj, the pilgrims return home as clean from their sins as the day their mothers gave birth to them. This is very significant as they, upon attaining such forgiveness, become eager to maintain this purity and diminish evil.

The early Muslim predecessors used to welcome the pilgrims kissing their forehead and asking them to make Du'aa.

### The Day of 'Arafat

The Day of 'Arafat, which is the ninth of Dhul-Hijjah, is one of the holy days in Islam. It is called the Witnessed Day. It is the Day by which Allah swears. Allah said: "And by the Promised Day and by that witnesses and the Witnessed Day." Abu Hurairah reported that the Witness is Friday and the Witnessed is the Day of 'Arafat and the Promised is the Day of Judgment.

Due to the great graces that Allah bestows abundantly on Muslims on it, the Day of 'Arafat has been granted the title "The Witnessed Day". A Jewish man said to 'Umar Ibn Al-Khattab: "O Commander of the believers! A verse in your Book. Had it been revealed to us we would have taken the day on which it was revealed a festival. Allah said: "This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed My favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion." 'Umar said: "I know the day on which it was revealed and the place in which it was revealed. It was revealed while the prophet – peace be upon him – was stopping in 'Arafat on Friday."<sup>15</sup> It is a Muslim festival. The prophet – peace be upon him- said: "The Day of 'Arafat and the Day of

Slaughtering and the Days of Tashriq are festivals for Muslims."<sup>16</sup>

On the Day of 'Arafat Allah saves a great number of people from hell. 'Aisha –may Allah be pleased with her- reported that the prophet – peace be upon him- said: "On the Day of 'Arafah Allah saves from hell a number of people greater than a number that He saves on any other day."<sup>17</sup>

Islam urges Muslims to fast for the Day of 'Arafat and promises a great reward therefore. When the prophet – peace be upon him- was asked about fasting the Day of 'Arafat, he said: "It wipes off the sins of the past year and the coming year."<sup>18</sup> However, it is forbidden for the pilgrims to fast on that day.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Prayer

<sup>2</sup> Alms giving

<sup>3</sup> The ninth month of the Muslim calendar

<sup>4</sup> Bukhari and Muslim. Bukhari is one of the authentic Muslim Books.

<sup>5</sup> Poll tax

<sup>6</sup> Al-Baihaqi

<sup>7</sup> A faultless hajj that is free from sin and is graced with the Divine acceptance

<sup>8</sup> Al-Bukhari

<sup>9</sup> Jihad is such a broad term that literally means to struggle. People struggle to learn, teach and have a subtle level of morality. They also struggle to defend their rights. In Islam there is nothing called 'holy war'.

<sup>10</sup> An-nisa'i. An-Nisa'i is one of the authentic Muslim books.

<sup>11</sup> Bukhari and Muslim.

<sup>12</sup> Muslim

<sup>13</sup> Minor hajj

<sup>14</sup> An-Nisa'i

<sup>15</sup> Bukhari & Muslim

<sup>16</sup> Narrated by the five

<sup>17</sup> Abu Dawood and An-Nisaa'i

<sup>18</sup> Muslim

# WHY CARE? *New Student-Friendly Jesuit website for Social Justice*

By Eoin Carroll



*Eoin Carroll is the Advocacy and Social Policy Research Officer in the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice. The Centre undertakes social analysis and theological reflection in relation to issues of social justice, including housing and homelessness, penal policy, asylum and migration, health policy and international development. Thanks to Eoin for letting us know about this excellent website, which will be of great help to teachers and students alike.*

## SYLLABUS LINK

### LEAVING CERTIFICATE

#### SECTION F

##### TOPIC 1.1

Social analysis

##### TOPIC 1.2

Social analysis in action

### JUNIOR CERTIFICATE

#### SECTION F

##### PART 4

Religious morality in action

## SOCIAL JUSTICE – WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Social Justice is about fair distribution of advantages across society, but what do we mean by “advantages”? Is it *economic advantage*, the distribution of wealth and income; *social advantage*, access to healthcare, education, employment, or housing; or is it about *access to fair trial and humane conditions in prison*? Simply put, it is about all of these.

It is a concept that moves beyond the notion of “justice” as the administration of law and order, Gardaí arresting someone for stealing, or the judge handing down sentence for wrongdoing, but where justice is achieved in all aspects of society. Social Justice can also be seen as *distributive*, for example: nation states receive taxes from its members. This is then redistributed for the provision of social services – schools, hospitals, for the benefit of all in society.

However, it gets somewhat more complicated when society tries to figure out what is “just” and what is “unjust”. We all, as individuals, institutions and Governments make judgements about what is just and what is unjust. This varies across cultures and over time – for example, access to free education or child labour – the major difficulty is agreeing on ‘definitions of right and wrong, good and bad, just and unjust’<sup>2</sup>. This is often a moral question. Whose responsibility is it? Why should we care?

## “WHY CARE?” – SOCIAL JUSTICE UNIT FOR SCHOOLS

“Why Care?” is a new web-based initiative of the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice. It has been developed to promote exploration by second level students of some aspects of ‘what is social justice?’ Focusing on housing and homelessness, and crime and prison, the unit provides a useful step-by-step introduction to these subject areas.

The first section of the unit, ‘Social Justice’, introduces students to the various meanings, and the historical origins, of the term ‘justice’, a term which focuses on the relationships between society and individuals and individuals themselves. From this a question is posed: ‘what if the society itself is unjust?’ Where there are high levels of inequality, for example access to healthcare based on ability to pay rather than on need, or where human rights are being eroded by the state; and where the fruits of society are not being distributed fairly. It is the concept of Social Justice which challenges structures in society where individuals and groups experience unfair treatment and an unjust share of the benefits of society. This section also brings in references to Social Justice in religion - giving examples from Judeo-Christian, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Also included are references from prominent historical figures such as, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King. This section should begin students asking questions: ‘Is social justice relevant to Ireland?’, ‘are there social injustices in Ireland?’



## ‘HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING’

The subsequent sections are designed to put the concept of ‘Social Justice’ into context. Section Two, ‘Homelessness and Housing’, starts with the premise that access to housing is a fundamental right, where individuals and households have safe and secure housing that they can call home. Housing policy in Ireland is also outlined as too is the progression of housing, historically perceived as a social need, toward a commodity, an asset to be bought and sold. The section describes the multi-faceted reasons why people become homeless, for example, poverty, unemployment, relationship breakdown, and drug dependency. Case studies are provided for students to work in groups to discuss the reasons why people become homeless. The various housing tenures (local authority, housing organisations, private rented, and owner occupied) are outlined as too is the accommodation available for people who are homeless. The section ends with suggestions of how homelessness in Ireland can be overcome, arguing that it is structural problems (at State level) such as access to safe and secure appropriate housing, dramatic reduction since the 1980s in the building of social housing, poverty, and unemployment, as the root causes of homelessness.

## ‘UNDERSTANDING CRIME’

Section Three ‘Understanding Crime’ introduces pupils to the crime rates in Ireland and those most at risk of being a victim of crime. It highlights that the number of indictable offences (more serious offences) has not increased significantly over the past number of years despite public perception. This section asks the question, ‘What are the causes of, and potential responses to, crime?’ Again, using case studies of young people who have committed an offence, students are presented with a number of sociological and psychological theories so they can make an informed and rational judgment on why the young person committed the offence. There is a brief outline of Ireland’s responses to crime which primarily focuses on social control. The second part of this section looks at the profile of people in prison, in particular young men who make up a substantial proportion of the prison. Prison condition, the number of people sent to prison and the purpose of imprisonment is also outlined. This section ends by presenting a number of approaches to targeting the causes of crime, for example, provision of training and employment, drug rehabilitation and increased support on post-release from prison.

The “Why Care?” – *Social Justice Unit for Schools* has a final section which contains descriptions of ‘People Working for Justice’, where students can read about ordinary people working in extraordinary jobs. The unit also has a number of distinctive features; firstly, audio and video files of social activities, people who are homeless, and ex-offenders describe experiences of prison and homelessness. Secondly, each page of the site has a print function. Thirdly, a password protected teachers’ section which includes quizzes, ‘points for reflection’ and ‘possibilities for action’.

The promotion of Social Justice and the protection of human dignity is the responsibility of all citizens and in particular our elected representatives. It is people at the margins of society, for example those who are homeless, that are most disadvantaged economically and socially. The “Why Care?” Unit is designed for students to learn about homelessness and the causes of crime, to have an informed debate, and to challenge our own perceptions of what is just and unjust, good and bad. All major religions challenge injustices in society. The call to promote Social Justice is succinctly described by Fr Pedro Arrupe SJ, former Superior General of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits):

*‘Let there be men and women who will bend their energies not to strengthen positions of privilege, but, to the extent possible, reduce privilege in favour of the underprivileged. . . evil is overcome only by good, hate by love, egoism by generosity. It is thus that we must sow justice in our world. To be just, it is not enough to refrain from injustice. One must go further and refuse to play its game, substituting love for self-interest as the driving force of society’<sup>3</sup>*

“Why Care?” ([www.jcfj.ie/whycare](http://www.jcfj.ie/whycare)) can be used as a once-off resource, as source material for classroom debates and school programmes, or structured as a six-week classroom module.

Queries and requests for further information can be directed to:

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*Nobody should have to sleep rough'*  
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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Miller, David (2004) presentation at the Institute for Public Policy Reform Social Justice Project 2004: Opening discussion: ([http://ippr.nvisage.uk.com/uploadedFiles/research/events/Directors'\\_Support\\_Team/RTS\\_seminar\\_two\\_summary.pdf](http://ippr.nvisage.uk.com/uploadedFiles/research/events/Directors'_Support_Team/RTS_seminar_two_summary.pdf))

<sup>2</sup> The Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations (2006) Social Justice in an Open World: The Role of the United Nations, United Nations: New York, p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> From the address of Pedro Arrupe SJ to the “Tenth International Congress of Jesuit Alumni of Europe,” in Valencia, Spain, on July 31, 1973

# GLOBALISATION: Between Religion and Politics

By Peadar King

*Sincere thanks to Peadar King for this thought-provoking article on the theme of globalisation. Peadar King, KMF Productions is presenter producer of the What in the World? RTE television series. He would like to thank his colleague Liam Ashe for his comments on this article but the usual conventions apply, the views are those of Peadar only. I would like to thank Peadar for supplying Religious Education Support with copies of the DVD 'Keeping your head above water in Tuvalu' from the 'What in the World?' series, which we will distribute to schools in the near future.*

With the exception of advertisements for breast-feeding and other public health issues, the revolutionary Sandinista government in Nicaragua actively discouraged all advertising when they came to power in 1979. It was a signal that they were going to do things differently. And for a while they did. Literacy levels soared, health care was transformed and the deadened downtrodden spirits of the majority of the hitherto impoverished were reawakened. And then it all came crashing down thanks to that "ole Gipper" Ronald Reagan, President of the United States from 1981 – 1989.

By my first visit to Nicaragua in 1999 over a decade after the end of the Sandinista dream, the advertising billboards had returned. Huge things - advertising products that were not just at odds with what the vast majority of people could afford but also at odds with the culture and very identity of the country. Ever-beaming, pale-skinned-scantly clad women selling every conceivable item under the southern sun – everything that is except for the advantages of breast-feeding babies and safe sexual practices in an HIV / AIDS-ridden age.

And so it is with advertising, and its dominant master consumerism. In this globalised age, both are ubiquitous. In my travels as part of the *What in the World?* television series in Asia, Africa and Latin America, it's the same products that dominate. With some exceptions of course, communist Laos being the most noteworthy. And the scale of the advertising is mind blowing. Forty foot high hoardings as if the message might escape us. As always the promise is illusory. Whether it is Coca-Cola, Nike, Boss, Marlboro or any of the other top-twenty brands that have become global household names, it's the same message in English, Spanish, Portuguese or any of the other big colonial languages that have spread like a giant octopus across the globe: consumerism is good and advertising shows you the way. Even if we wanted to

there is no escape from their ever-pervasive presence. This computer on which I write is a product of globalisation as is the cup of coffee on my desk, the mobile phone by its side and most probably the paper on which this will be printed.

It is often presumed of course that globalisation is a recent phenomenon, that our grandparents' generation if not our parents were untouched by globalisation. Not so. Globalisation is as old as the world itself. There was always a movement of people, ideas and products even if that movement was limited to more confined spheres. This year we travelled to Mongolia to do a story about the threats to nomadic herders' way of life in Mongolia. The Mongolians are enormously proud of what they perceive as the extraordinary achievements of their once-great colonialists Genghis Khan. And if size matters, nobody did it better than he did. Forget about the Romans, forget about the British, forget about the United States. Nothing compares to the size of the medieval Mongol empire. China, Korea, Iran, Russia, Indochina, Burma, India, Iraq, Syria, Turkey Hungary, Poland Belarus, Japan Egypt and even Western Europe were all affected in one way or another by the arguably greatest empire of them all. That all started in the 13th century. Of course there were other efforts at rolling out the empire - the Romans spring to mind but so too do the Iranians who had their own nowadays less remembered empire dating from 247 – 224BCE.

Here I am conflating the terms 'colonialism' and 'globalisation' and of course some of the purists might have issues with this. Maybe that is a subject for staffroom lunchtime discussion. But even if they cannot be used interchangeably, they are certainly related. When it comes to agreeing definitions opinions differ widely. Jan Aart Scholte in his book *Globalization a critical introduction*<sup>1</sup> identifies five key components of

[SYLLABUS LINK](#)

LEAVING CERTIFICATE

SECTION A

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globalization and these are *internationalization, liberalization, universalization, westernization and modernization*. While we may not be familiar with these terms in the abstract, we certainly know them when we meet them. No one doubts that Coca-Cola is an international brand. No one doubts that trade laws have been liberalised in such a way that accommodates the free movement of Coca-Cola across all borders. No one disbelieves that Coca-Cola has succeeded in marketing itself as a universal brand. No one challenges the notion that Coca-Cola has come to represent dominant western cultural values. And more than likely no one contests the assumption that Coca-Cola likes to portray itself as the epitome of the modern.



*Sugar harvesting Philippines*

So far, so much agreement. And while there is, if not broad agreement, at least there is some agreement when it comes to describing globalization but there is absolutely no agreement when it comes to defining the impact of globalisation. There are the two polar opposite views. Simply put: one that says that globalisation is all bad and the other that says that globalisation is all good. In the DVD *Partners not Masters*<sup>2</sup> which your Geography teacher might have, I have attempted to very briefly summarise the two opposing views. There are others of course who straddle both camps but for the most part the debate is highly polarised. Former President Mary Robinson is one of those who argue that there is a mid-way point. In a lecture in Yale University in the United States, (funded by the Coca-Cola World Fund Lecture, no less) Mary Robinson held out the tantalizing possibility of a more ethical globalization: “Essentially, the argument is that the binding human rights framework is part of the rules of the road of globalization, a way of ensuring a more value-led, ethical globalization”.<sup>3</sup> I remain deeply skeptical. Multinationals have very cleverly incorporated the language of human rights into their corporate-speak rhetoric but have done nothing to make that a reality. Corporate social responsibility has become nothing more than a transparent fig-leaf intended to conceal the rampant greed of its shareholders.

What is interesting of course from a global perspective is that there appears to be a strong co-relation between one’s wealth, one’s liquid assets and one favourable view of globalisation and while it might be uncomfortable to mention it, that includes Mrs Robinson. And that too applies to all the leaders in the Western world including Brian Cowen (the fourth highest paid political leader in the world), Gordon Brown, Nicolas Sarkozy and Angela Merkel. And while Barack Obama may be making isolationist soundings, he too is an apologist for globalisation. However, where there are few liquid assets but where there are much more hard assets in terms of underground mineral deposits, good fishing grounds or highly productive agricultural land, the people in these places are much less likely to look favourably on globalisation. This is particularly true for people living in the Global South. For people like Bolivian President Evo Morales, and Paraguay President Ferdinand Lugo, they might be stuck with globalisation but they don’t necessarily like it.

What relevance or dare we ask interest has all of this for students of Religious Education in Ireland? Relevance it certainly has, interest we cannot guarantee. But Religious Education is about making sense of this world. While some people might regard this as too secularist a view of religion it does at least provide a lens whereby people can reflect on the world around them. (And yes religion does have an eschatological dimension too but that is not necessarily my sphere of interest) Of course some lenses can provide greater clarity than others and some even more distortion. Somewhat to my surprise, the very first sentence (p.3) of the Leaving Certificate Religious Education Syllabus<sup>4</sup> would seem to bear this out.

*Human development is the development of awareness of self as separate and unique, with the capacity for reflection, imagination and creativity; open to ideas of truth, goodness and beauty.*



*Girl Miner Bolivia*

Now that’s clarity. If this is what the RE syllabus wants then who can not want it? What did strike me though was the absence of God in the opening sentence. In a



peculiar way it reminds me of a report from one of the first conferences of (the now defunct) Progressive Democrats held in Cork city in the party's heydays during the 1980s. The reporter began by saying "as the bells of Shandon pealed across the city of Cork, the PDs voted to take God out of the constitution". The reaction was such that they ran for political cover and quickly re-instated God. But I digress.

But back to the RE syllabus. As you would expect, it would be a distortion to judge a whole (104-page) text on one sentence but interesting nonetheless. Religion is about meaning or the search for meaning and while that is not solely the function or indeed the preserve of religion it is certainly a feature of religion. The search for meaning is fundamentally a function of society and culture whether or not that society or culture is imbued with formalised religion. And if that search for meaning is to be in any way real, it must extend beyond the personal, beyond a narrow fixation with salvation and encompass more political issues like current economic (dis)order; society and the nature of power relations. And much to the credit of the RE syllabus it does allow for discussion of these complex difficult issues. While you are no doubt more familiar with the document than I am, the syllabus challenges the accumulation of wealth and the dominance of elites (e.g. Section B Topic 2.3 page 25). It provides a space for students to question the meaning of authority (e.g. Section C Topic 2.3 page 37); the common good (e.g. Section D Topic 1.3 page 43); structural injustice (e.g. Section F Topic 2.3 page 45) and provides students with the tools for social analysis (e.g. Section F, page 61) to mention just some.

I have always however had deep reservations about the extent and capacity of state-sponsored political and social awareness to effect change as ultimately the state always sets limits on what it regards as acceptable political action. The most successful campaigns have been organic in origin and have never been staged-managed by agents of the state. The current Shell-to sea controversy, the summing of all the forces of the state to protect US President George W. Bush on his 2004 visit to Ireland and the use of state forces against the *Re-claim the Street* demonstrations in 2002 are just three cases in point. That said, anything that gets young people to think, to search for meaning has to be good and in that context the syllabus is a welcome addition to the school curriculum. But again I digress.

However, the search for meaning that is so much a part of the RE syllabus cannot be confined to neat intellectual categorisation. Inevitably that search draws on philosophical, theological, sociological and political thought to name but four. While in Paraguay this year covering a story about the adverse effects of intensive commercial soya production, we asked former Catholic Bishop and now President of the country Ferninand

Lugo if politics and religion had any points of convergence and what, if anything, religion has to offer in terms of understanding or critically analysing issues like globalisation. This is what Lugo had to say:



Miner Bolivia

*I always considered them (religion and politics) as two sides of the same coin. The political and the religious are not mutually exclusive; during the campaign we have always used that great expression, the wise expression of Pius XI, wasn't it, that politics is the most sublime expression of love. Politics is the sublime expression of charity and that is a great conviction of mine: there is also political charity. That is why I think that our attempt to conserve the faith within the Catholic Church that we love so much, that we have served for thirty years as priests, as missionaries. We can't say that overnight I lost my faith and I became a politician. I think that I have to be a leader who is inspired and also sustained by the faith that I proclaim, profess and live.*

*(Religion) is the great spiritual and mystical sustenance of our political tasks and decisions. Although, as I said at the beginning, there are no 'chemically pure' processes, but there are processes that are intermingled; faith and politics are not mutually exclusive—in fact they complement each other. That is why I believe that this process, even though in some aspects it has been traumatic, we have sought the most harmonious and peaceful way to go from being a religious leader to a political leader and as president of Paraguay.<sup>5</sup>*

Lugo comes from a long line of politicised clergy the most prominent of whom have very well-defined left-wing political views. These were and are arch critics of the current model of globalisation framed as it is in a neo-liberal agenda that has emanated from the Chicago School of Economics under the tutelage of the late Milton Friedman<sup>6</sup> intellectual mentor to amongst others the aforementioned Gipper and former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

Francis Fukuyama, the darling of the neo-conservatives in the United States and elsewhere and another acolyte of Friedman, stunned the world in the early 1990s with his

audacious claim that we had reached the end of history<sup>7</sup>. Highlighting the failures of socialism, Fukuyama says that its weakness lay in over-recognition of what he refers to as “second and third generation rights, such as the right to employment, housing or health care. The problem with this over-concentration is that they are clearly not compatible with other rights like those of property or free economic exchange” (my Italics)<sup>8</sup>. And in measuring its success, man is the ultimate yardstick. Women scarcely get a mention notwithstanding what he pejoratively regards as recent historical trends. His comments on fashions in history are particularly revealing.

*In the past couple of generations, for example, there has been a movement away from diplomatic and military history toward social history, the history of women and minority groups, or the history of everyday life. The fact that the objects of historical attention have shifted from the rich and powerful to those lower down the scale...<sup>9</sup>*

And interestingly the first great clash (in the latest round that is) between the proponents of a neoliberal model of globalisation and Catholic Church leaders was in Nicaragua. The Cardinal brothers - both priests - were to the fore in the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua in the 1980s as were Father Miguel D'Escoto, appointed Foreign Affairs Minister of Nicaragua in 1979 and Father Edgard Parrales, Social Affairs Minister. They are among a whole generation of Catholic spokespersons, who have helped transform South American politics by building an alternative model of globalization to that of Friedman and Fukuyama. And they were not alone. There were numerous others who held similar views right across Latin America. Of course there were others too who were pro-establishment. Those of you who have seen the wonderful documentary film *The revolution will not be televised*<sup>10</sup> will remember the archbishop sitting with members of the coup all drawn from the wealthy

establishment of Venezuelan society.

However, in the case of Nicaragua, victory went to the Reagan, Friedman and Fukuyama triumvirate. Their model of unrestrained capitalism swept away the idealism and selflessness of the Sandinista revolution leaving the leaders including the clergy that were so much part of the struggle divided, dismayed and in disarray. And despite all the upheavals of the last year, where capitalism was on the brink of collapse, rumours of its long-term decline have been greatly exaggerated. The current model of globalisation will remain. So too will organised religion despite its own upheavals. But if religion is to have a role through its capacity to offer meaning, it must continue to actively challenge in the streets as well as in the pulpit this monolithic structure of capitalistic globalisation in the highly secularised political arena. Otherwise we will just be left with hoards of globalised images and we may never get back to supporting the important work of breast-feeding.



*Fishing Senegal*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Aart Scholte, Jan Globalization a critical introduction. Macmillan Press London. 2000.

<sup>2</sup> King, Peadar: Partners not Masters. KMF Productions. 2008.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.realizingrights.org/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=106>

<sup>4</sup> Department of Education and Science. Leaving Certificate Religious Education Syllabus. The Stationary Office 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Transcript of interview with President Lugo for What in the World? 2009

<sup>6</sup> YouTube has a number of really good debates where Friedman outlines his thesis but one worth checking out is the debate between him and Naomi Klein on <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g2kTy7gZ9s>

<sup>7</sup> Fukuyama, Francis. (1992). The End of History and the Last Man. Penguin London.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 43

<sup>9</sup> Ibid p. 72

<sup>10</sup> Bartley, Kim and Donnacha O'Brian. The Revolution will not be televised. 2006.

# RELIGION AND THE environment

By Helen and Alan Sheil

As the UN Climate Change Summit approaches later in 2009 (In Copenhagen), churches and faith communities are becoming increasingly involved in the move to preserve and cherish Creation and to show leadership in promoting sustainable lifestyles. 'Churches Together in Britain and Ireland' are co-ordinating the work of Christian churches in promoting greater visible unity. Visit their website at <http://www.ctbi.org.uk/> where you can access information and downloadable programme resources for 'Creation Time 2009'. The four nations (England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland) are represented in CTBI, with a member of the Eco-Congregations Committee representing Ireland.

Care and respect for the environment, and protecting creation for all, is seen by many communities of faith as an intrinsic part of their faith and religious tradition. Thanks to Helen and Alan Shiel for sharing with us some insights into this important issue from the perspective of the Methodist community. They offer here an overview of some of the work of Eco-Congregation Ireland and the support programme it offers for various Christian communities in Ireland and the UK.

## SYLLABUS LINK

### LEAVING CERTIFICATE

#### SECTION F

#### TOPIC 3.2

Religious traditions and the environment

### JUNIOR CERTIFICATE

#### SECTION F

#### PART 4

Religious Morality in action (key concept: stewardship)

## ECO-CONGREGATION IRELAND

Eco-Congregation is an environmental programme for churches, available to all Christian denominations throughout Britain and Ireland. It developed through a partnership between the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) and the environmental awareness charity "Going for Green" (now ENCAMS).

Eco-Congregation aims to encourage churches to celebrate the gift of God's creation, to recognise the interdependence of all creation, and to care for it in their life and mission and through the members' personal lifestyles.

Eco-Congregation Ireland has been developed in co-operation with four churches – the Church of Ireland, the Methodist Church in Ireland, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and the Roman Catholic Church – whose ecological representatives are in touch with the many groups operating in Britain and Europe. The programme is available to all parishes with a keen interest in environmental issues and offers resources and support to help them to take practical action in the context of their Christian faith.

See <http://www.ecocongregationireland.org>.

*"We have falsely separated the economy from the environment in which it is rooted and sustained. We need to rebuild the link...we face a stark choice between a political economy, based on greed, acquisition and consumption and one based on sustainable and just relationships with our neighbour and reverence for life." (Michael Bartlet, Parliamentary Liaison Secretary for the Quakers at the CTBI conference "The Economic Crisis", Jan 09)*

As the depth of the global and national economic crises and associated banking scandals reach new lows (with, no doubt, more to be revealed), we focus here on the personal, community and global responses an environmentally aware church can make.

In addition to our responsibilities as citizens of the planet we are also encouraged to celebrate the wonder of Creation; its interconnectedness and interdependence and the discovery that all of creation is important to the Creator – not just human beings.

Celebration at the moment may seem unattainable, but may we encourage you to engage with it and notice the uplifting (and healing) effect in your attitude to your neighbour and your environment?

Ensuing insights and discoveries should hopefully nudge us in the direction of positive lifestyle changes – to care for and respect the environment. One buzz phrase that is sometimes used is to 'live more simply than others may simply live'.

## SOME OF THE MODULES ON OFFER FROM ECO - CONGREGATION IRELAND INCLUDE:

**Green Choices** (module 10): helps individuals to think about their personal lifestyle and to make choices that reflect a care for the earth and respect for their neighbours around the world. Some of these choices will save money too e.g., practising the three "R's" of reduce, reuse, recycle; while some may require a look at our priorities and result in some difficult decisions e.g., choosing to walk, cycle or use public transport to work rather than driving; buying slightly more expensive fairly traded and environmentally friendly products; investing ethically with less likelihood of getting a quick return – a lesson for us all, surely!

**Community Matters** (module 11): Churches have a long and honourable tradition of working for, with and in the local community. Through the centuries, churches have played a leading role in:

- the provision of education and other children's work
- the establishment, provision and continuing support of healthcare

- working in the public and private sectors including industry and prisons challenging the causes of poverty and providing relief from its impact
- abolishing slavery from the time of Wilberforce through to Jubilee 2000
- providing sustenance and shelter from soup kitchens to housing associations

Today this missionary role continues through national organisations and, most importantly, through the mission and ministry of local churches who seek to promote social inclusion and wellbeing in their local community.

The main part of the Module consists of stories about local initiatives in different places. These are retold in the hope that they will inspire churches to seek out the problems and opportunities in their own communities and develop their own partnerships and initiatives in response.

The stories also illustrate the mission opportunities of working on environmental issues with local authorities and other statutory and faith groups. In many instances the churches are able to share Christian values through their words and deeds and achieve recognition as a valued and vital part of the community.

As we write, increasing numbers of our church members and local communities are being laid off, with little hope of finding immediate work. Low morale, anxiety and depression are on the rise. Quite likely your church is already looking at ways of being an even brighter beacon of hope and instigator of action within the community. As the number of unemployed rises in your neighbourhood, could your church operate a daily café? (with fairly trade tea and coffee, of course!) Perhaps you could run a swap shop – a brilliant way to practice the 3 R's and great fun also!

Or could you link in with your local environment officer and run morning classes/lectures on a sustainable subject like vegetable growing / composting? (it is possible to have a square foot garden/vegetable plot if you only have a back yard or balcony!)

Would the local council permit you and a group of interested folk to take over some waste ground, either to tidy and provide a local feature, or to turn it into a community garden? (see the "eco examples" on the Eco Congregation Ireland website). This might also be done in church grounds, as we have heard was the case in Carnalea.

Maybe you could embark on a tree planting project in the local graveyard, as a Quaker eco congregation in Co. Cork has started. Working with the earth is healing, and when money and jobs are becoming increasingly scarce this might also be one way of connecting meaningfully with the community.

Three Rock Churches' Environment Group (an ecumenical offshoot of Dundrum Methodist Eco Congregation in south Dublin) – has worked on several issues with the local Environment Officer and at the moment is waiting for word on what area of waste ground they might start clearing.

One of the other small projects this group is involved in is lobbying for feeder buses and more frequent public transport to reduce the number of cars on the road - perhaps your area requires a similar service?



**Global Neighbours** (module 12): looks at our increasingly global society. A stone cast in a pond in one place can cause ripples in places far and wide. A hiccup in a commodity market can spell hunger for a farmer in a developing nation. An environmental accident in one nation can quickly spread down wind and down stream to other nations.

Neither economics nor environmental issues/incidents obey international, political or geographical boundaries. This linkage applies to our lifestyles. The way that we choose to live can have an impact, for good or for ill, on people in developing nations and the environment across the world, today and for future generations. This module is designed to help churches and individuals identify those areas where they can make a positive impact on the well-being of the environment and the poorest people in developing nations. It features information about issues and campaigns together with ideas for action.

The work of the development agencies like Christian Aid, Cafod, SCIAF, Trócaire and Tearfund has its origins in offering Christian care to the most needy. The organisations undertake a wide variety of work including:

- long-term development work, often in partnership with the world's poorest communities e.g., Fair Trade initiatives
- disaster/emergency relief in times of need
- research and analysis of poverty issues
- campaigning issues affecting the world's poorest
- educational work to raise awareness of poverty issues and how to bring about change

Through their work several of the agencies have identified the environment as a key issue in development work and the alleviation of poverty. In terms of development work, environmental considerations are usually considered in project work because ultimately taking care of the environment benefits people too. For example, working to conserve forests and trees can reduce soil loss and help to maintain sustainable agriculture, so enabling people to provide sufficient food. In terms of disaster/emergency relief, Christian Aid have identified that 9 of the last 11 so-called natural disasters that they have responded to were caused by climate change with a strong link to global warming. It suggests that many of the victims are literally paying the price of other people's profligate lifestyle.

Understanding these issues will hopefully encourage us to respond not just with donations for self help programmes in developing countries, or to the urgent disaster appeals, but also to query and modify our life style choices so that we may be agents of change and at the same time reconnect with Biblical imperatives.

Using the Christian Aid and Tearfund Lenten material is a simple way to continue or even start this road to restoring the balance we believe our lifestyles have distorted. To quote Archbishop Desmond Tutu "Justice and ecology are linked indissolubly".

In conclusion, we hope that this introduction to the Eco Congregation Programme will have encouraged readers to see environmental awareness and care as an integral expression of their faith and also a means of involving and including all ages and personalities of the church family in relevant witness.

(Whether you enrol or not, we urge you to visit the site [www.ecocongregationireland.org](http://www.ecocongregationireland.org); use the resources and make and live the link between environment and faith.)

[Much of the material used in this article comes directly from the website [www.ecocongregationireland.org](http://www.ecocongregationireland.org) and from Helen and Alan's Shiel's contribution to the April 2009 newsletter. Our thanks to the editors and to Helen and Alan Shiel.]

## THE FOLLOWING EXCERPTS ARE TAKEN FROM THE MINUTES OF CONFERENCE (OF THE METHODIST CHURCH IN IRELAND).

Conference, recognising with increased urgency the magnitude and seriousness of the ecological crisis affecting the earth, stresses the need to rediscover a theology of creation and stewardship of the finite resources of the Earth, and urges the active reflection of this as appropriate within worship. Conference further directs that, in keeping with its previously agreed position, all Methodist property be examined to ensure its efficient eco- management and especially to ensure the minimum energy consumption of fossil fuels (Motion passed at Methodist Conference, June 2007)

The Conference, following on from the decisions made in earlier Conferences, recognises the responsibility of the Methodist people in Ireland, as Christians in this community of faith

- To accept that concern for the environment is a responsibility that is inherent in our understanding of our faith, and arising directly from our theology
- To act responsibly as Christians in our care of the environment, acknowledging the interdependence of all the created order.
- To seek to minimise the negative impact of our activities on the environment, working with statutory and community bodies where appropriate in so doing.
- To seek specifically to
  - i. Monitor and minimise energy usage, and maximise recycling and the reduction of waste
  - ii. Seek to incorporate and integrate a full understanding of our theology of creation and incarnation into our worship and other church activities.
  - iii. Inform and educate our people on this policy, and encourage a similar approach by our members individually (Motion passed at Conference 2006)
- Conference commends the Earth Charter ([www.earthcharter.org](http://www.earthcharter.org)) for study, prayerful reflection and appropriate working out within the life of the Church. (2003 Conference)

## REPORT: ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES ARE CENTRAL TO OUR THEOLOGY (2003)

The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world and all who live in it. (Psalm 24 v 1). The Creator God, with infinite grace and bounty extends love to all the created order.

Yet it is predicted that by the year 2030, 70% of the natural environment of that same world will have been destroyed.<sup>1</sup> The future of our planet is at stake.<sup>2</sup> Global warming, depleting resources, deforestation, pollution, toxic and nuclear waste, the threat of war, poverty and the frequent homelessness inextricably linked with trans-national "development" and agribusiness are all powerful manifestations of this crisis. There is an urgent need for an encompassing, environmental awareness within the church.

As Christians we have more than just a civic or global obligation to respond to the escalating crises of environmental destruction. We believe that the whole of creation is the object of God's continuous, creative, loving and nurturing care. As followers of Christ, conscious of being part of that awesome and wonderful creation, we are called to treat all of creation, and all people, with the same loving, nurturing care and respect.

This calling requires a committed response to the "challenge to live responsibly and in harmony with the world"<sup>3</sup> allowing the Biblical values of "justice, peace and the integrity of creation" to reshape our life styles and our attitudes. We also believe in the Christian hope that the Holy Spirit will renew the whole creation, and that God will establish a new heaven and new earth.

Biblical references and imperatives to care for the environment go beyond the creation stories of Genesis.<sup>4</sup> From Genesis to Revelation, allusions to the environment abound.<sup>5</sup> Sadly, for historical reasons, those Biblical values of the integrity of creation (the Biblical concept of the wholeness of creation) have been somewhat distorted, often resulting in a physical and intellectual detachment from the natural world.<sup>6</sup> This has led to a misconception that the earth is there solely for the use of humankind, and acquiescence to the concept that wealth and expansion are progress, whatever the physical or environmental cost. Thus, it could be argued that the church itself has contributed to the actual problem.

Rampant consumerism, global mass production, and the technology associated with political and economic power have the effect of dulling relationships with the rest of creation and we are spiritually the poorer as a result. Ironically, as the world has become smaller, so the connection between us and the rest of creation has become more tenuous, and the sanctity within creation has frequently been ignored. The environmental crisis goes hand in hand with a spiritual one.

The (re) discovery and understanding of the vital interconnection and interdependence of all of God's creation (i.e. the ecosystem) and the relationship of all creation with God, should deepen our commitment to restoring broken human relationships (local and global), our broken relationship with an increasingly desecrated and exploited environment and, of course, with our Creator.

A recognition of the place of the human race within creation, and an ensuing respect for how it sustains us, should infuse and colour our lives. This awareness of our interconnectedness, and how our choices and actions impact on all of creation, should transform complacency, ignorance or guilt into a joyful, active and meaningful celebration of God-given life itself.

Conference (1990) received the recommendations of the Council's last statement on the environment and directed that it should be used as a study guide. This was duly produced at the time but is now no longer available. In its Mission Statement (1993) the Church stated that "God's creative purpose and active compassion inspire concern for the whole of human life and the environment" and committed itself to "the healing of broken persons, broken communities and an exploited environment".

Accordingly we urge all Irish Methodists to celebrate this God-given life by re-evaluating our personal lifestyles and engaging in a Church programme of environmental action, e.g. Eco -Congregation. (This programme has been ratified and promoted by CTBI.)

Environmental awareness should no longer be seen as an optional extra for a busy church, but should be an integral, practical expression of our loving and grateful relationship with God. We believe there is solid theology to support this.

We are convinced that the training and in-training of ordained and lay preachers, youth leaders and others should include vibrant, relevant material so that a positive message of wonder, respect and care for creation is imparted by them to those to whom they minister.

Finally we note the existence of the Earth Charter ([www.earthcharter.org](http://www.earthcharter.org)), which is an important and valuable statement and standard. While not written from a specifically Christian perspective, it is profoundly and deeply Christian in its approach.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The Global Environment Outlook, (UN Environment Programme 2000)

<sup>2</sup> Did you know.....

- That each year 20,000 additional cases of cancer occur in the US because the average consumer is exposed to pesticide residues in nearly every food product?
- That the WHO has estimated that 25 million agricultural workers in developing countries (i.e. farmers producing fresh vegetables for our dinner tables) endure an incident of acute pesticide poisoning annually?
- That over 12 million children worldwide die each year from water related diseases?
- That air pollution causes 2.7 million deaths a year, with 80% of the victims in rural poor areas of developing countries?
- That every day the world wide economy burns an amount of energy that took the earth 27 years to process and store from the heat of the sun?
- That the average citizen in one of the world's 40 richest countries consumes 18 times as much commercial energy as a person in a low consumption country and causes a correspondingly greater degree of pollution?
- That seven of the hottest years on record occurred in the 1990s?
- That 4000 lakes in Sweden are biologically dead?
- That a child born in London or New York will consume, pollute and waste more in their lifetime than 50 children in a developing country, but it is the poorer children who are likely to die from air and water pollution.
- That globally 12 million hectares of indigenous forest are destroyed annually. One square mile of rainforest is destroyed every minute (its human and animal dwellers cleared out also). An area the size of Australia is cut down each year. At this rate all the remaining tropical forests will be destroyed by the year 2035.  
[Renewing the Face of the Earth, Dept. of Social Development and World Peace 1990; Beyond Poverty and Affluence, Goudzwaard and de Lange, Threshold 2000; Critical Issues and Spiritual Values for a global age, Gerald O Barney; The Global Environment Outlook, UN Environment Outlook 2000]

<sup>3</sup> World Council of Churches, Vancouver 1983.

<sup>4</sup> Gen 1; Gen 2

<sup>5</sup> Gen 9 v17; Exodus 23:10-11 & Lev:25 The health of the land was provided for by the laws for sabbatical years.

Lev:19:23-25 & Deut 20:19-20 Specific laws provided for the care of plants.

Deut:22:19-20 Animals were also to be cared for.

Lev:26:14-45 the people were warned that failure to keep these laws would result in them being thrown out of the land.

The Pentateuch describes a covenant relationship that unites God, the people of Israel and the land.

Kings, Jeremiah, Ezekial, Amos all portray a dynamic interrelationship between human society, the natural world and God.

Job and the Psalms reflect on the great human imponderables of life, death, love, suffering and social existence. In these books nature is often used as an instrument through which wisdom is manifested and taught.

The Gospels where Jesus finds wisdom and solace in nature, confirming God's care for creation.

The Letters of Paul where several passages are set within a cosmic understanding of God's salvation in Christ e.g. Rom 8:18-23; 1 Cor 15; Eph 1.

Gospel of St. John and Revelation portray the purpose of God in salvation as including all creation

<sup>6</sup> Following the discovery that the world was indeed round, religious thinkers, theologians and philosophers withdrew from the arena of the scientific and physical world and concentrated on matters of the soul, ignoring and eventually robbing the earth of its mystery and sanctity. The advent of the industrial revolution and increasing scientific discovery encouraged mankind to assume it could control nature, to the extent that it was frequently believed that nature served no other purpose apart from that of humanity. Actual Biblical interpretation was carried out in a patriarchal, ecclesiastical context, where the narrow frame of reference was elitist and alien to most of contemporary society.

# The Bible:

# THE MUSIC OF GOD

By Louise O'Sullivan, IBVM



*Sincere thanks to Louise O'Sullivan for her continued support of 'Teaching Religious Education'. In previous issues Louise has included articles to support students' understanding of various topics from Inter-faith dialogue, the Kingdom of God, The Search for Meaning in Music and the Marking of Time in Judaism. She presents here a comprehensive exploration of some composers whose work has been influenced by the Bible. This article will be of particular relevance for those students who are researching the LCRE 2010 Prescribed Title requiring them to conduct a case study on the influence of the Bible on a piece of work in either art, literature or music. Louise has included here a generous array of notes and suggestions for further reading in this vast area. I very much appreciate her careful attention to detail and the breadth of scholarship included.*

If one were to look from the beginning of time, music has constituted part of our self-understanding. Even our being is bound up with the rhythm of life; our heartbeat pulsates with the rhythm of our very existence. The essence of our lives being connected to that of God is not a new concept and provides the basis of fruitful dialogue between the arts and theology. More specifically, in the dialogue between music and theology, there is a concept of music encapsulating something of the transcendent, of the mystery of God, in ways that words alone could never do. One hears of the concept of music as 'theophany' (a revelation of God), music as an 'icon of sound' revealing something of God, and music as 'theosony' (the sound of God).<sup>1</sup> Music is a language capable of communicating meaning and mystery. Therefore, it stands to reason that music should be influenced by the Bible in its subject matter and that music should endeavour to communicate that in some way.

In Scripture, David sang songs before the Lord and to soothe Saul's petulant temperament. Miriam played her tambourine as she and the Israelites escaped the clutches of the Egyptians crossing the Red Sea. The Psalms, prayers of the heart of the people of God, were composed in order to be sung. In the Gospels, there are accounts of the disciples singing on their way to the Mount of Olives. In the letters of St. Paul, singing was recommended when one's spirit was troubled or depressed.

From the first book of the Bible, the Book of Genesis, to the last, the Book of Revelation, it is possible to trace certain texts in each book and to find their resonance in the music of composers dating from the ninth century. I am keeping my focus to the western art music repertoire, but this is not to say that examples are not to be found in popular or ethnic music.<sup>2</sup> The composers who wrote this music based on scripture were not necessarily themselves considered to be religious people. Some were strongly influenced by their own faith tradition, e.g. J.S. Bach, Lutheran; James MacMillan, Roman Catholic; others would profess to be atheist, e.g. John Rutter.<sup>3</sup> There is music which is based directly on the texts of Scripture, and there is music which is loosely based on it or reflecting the essence of a text, but not the actual texts themselves. And there is music which is purely instrumental, and some which is vocal and instrumental. There is a vast scripturally-based repertoire of Music which is used for liturgical settings in the Christian traditions, or in the religious services in the Jewish tradition which is not my focus here.<sup>4</sup> What I propose to do is to give a flavour of some of what is on offer if one were to explore the above outcome and make some suggestions using the works of composers right through the ages of all religious denominations and none. Below is a chart of some themes in which I name the work, the composer, the musical setting, and I also give some information about the scriptural background of the work itself. I have taken all these from the Old Testament since it is common to both Christians and Jews.

[SYLLABUS LINK](#)

LEAVING CERTIFICATE

SECTION H

TOPIC 1.1

The Bible as Living Classic

## CREATION

*In the Beginning*, for soloists, choir and orchestra

**Theme:** Describes the creation accounts in music  
**Composer:** Aaron Copland (America, 1900-1990)

*Genesis Suite*, for narrator, orchestra, chorus (1945)

**Themes:** Depicts earliest Bible stories, including the Creation, Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah's Ark and the Flood, The Covenant and the Tower of Babel, narrated by distinguished actors accompanied by full orchestra and chorus.

**Composer:** It is a musical collaboration between Arnold Schoenberg (Austria, 1864-1951, Jewish/Protestant), Nathaniel Shilkret (US, 1889-1982), Darius Milhaud (France, 1892-1974, Jewish), Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco (Italy, 1895-1968, Jewish), Ernst Toch (Germany, 1887-1964, Jewish), Igor Stravinsky (Russia, 1882-1971)

*Creation*, an oratorio for choir, soloists and orchestra, (1798)

**Theme:** Creation – going through each of the days and describing same musically.  
**Composer:** Franz Joseph Haydn (Austria, 1732-1809)

## EXODUS

*Israel in Egypt*, an oratorio for choir, soloists and orchestra (1739)

**Theme:** Themes taken from the Book of Exodus include the plagues and the Exodus  
**Composer:** George Frederick Handel (Germany, 1685-1759)

## PROPHETS and SIGNIFICANT OTHERS

*Elijah*, oratorio for choir, soloists and orchestra (1846)

**Theme:** Events from the life of Elijah from the 1 and 2 Kings; his call; his despair; the battle on Mt. Carmel with the prophets of Baal; the cure of the widow's son;  
**Composer:** Felix Mendelssohn (Germany, 1808-1847)

*Moses und Aron*, an opera/oratorio for choir, soloists and orchestra (1930-1932)

**Theme:** The conflict between Moses, the philosopher and mystic as mediator of the word of God, and Aron, the statesman-educator, as Moses' interpreter to the people. Moses is unable to communicate his vision while Aron, who can communicate, does not rightly understand it. Symbolic connection between the music and dramatic ideas.  
**Composer:** Arnold Schoenberg (Austria, 1864-1951)

*David and Absalom*, a motet for unaccompanied chorus

**Theme:** The lament which David sang when he heard that Absalom had been killed. Text is from 2 Samuel 19  
**Composer:** Thomas Tomkins (1572-1656)

*Esther*, an oratorio for choir, soloists and orchestra (1720 as a masque – a theatrical musical piece- and later revised in 1732)

**Theme:** The deliverance of Israel from the hands of persecutors by a woman named Esther. Also recalls the festival of Purim for Jewish tradition. The text is derived from the Book of Esther in the Old Testament.  
**Composer:** George Frederick Handel (Germany, 1685-1759)

*Jephtha*, an oratorio for soloists, choir and orchestra

**Theme:** Based on the Book of Judges 11:29-40. Jephtha promises that if he is granted victory in battle that he will sacrifice whatever being first comes out to greet him when he returns home. The first to greet her is his daughter so he must sacrifice her.  
**Composer:** George Frederick Handel (Germany, 1685-1759) and an earlier composer who wrote an oratorio of the same name dating from the 16th century was the Italian, Carissimi.

*Saul; Judas Maccabaeus (1747); Joshua ; Susanna (1748); Joseph and His Brethren (1743)*

**Themes:** Heroes of Israelites. All of these are for derived from scriptural inspiration.  
**Composer** of all of these oratorios and small operas: George Frederick Handel (Germany, 1685-1759)

## LAMENTATIONS

*Lamentations*, for choir in Latin and English for unaccompanied voices (1500s)

**Theme:** The Lamentations of Jeremiah in the Old Testament.  
**Composer:** Thomas Tallis (England, 1505-1585)

## PSALMS

There are so many psalm settings that it's impossible to list them all. I suggest a few possibilities:

**Settings of Psalm 23, The Lord is my shepherd:**

*The Lord is my shepherd* by Franz Schubert;  
*The Chichester Psalms* by Leonard Bernstein;  
*S'é an Tiarna m'aoire* by Tom Egan;  
*Shepherd me, O God* by Michael Joncas;  
*The Lord's my shepherd* by Liam Lawton

**Settings of Psalm, Out of the depths:**

*De profundis* by John Tavener  
*Out of the Deep* by John Rutter

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The whole concept of music, meaning and mystery is beautifully discussed in an article by Anne Murphy, former Head of Music in Mater Dei Institute of Education, in *Neglected Wells: Spirituality and the Arts*, edited by Anne M. Murphy and Eoin Cassidy (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997). The concept of 'music as an icon of sound' of God is a concept of the English contemporary composer, John Tavener. He was influenced by the Eastern Orthodox tradition of painted icons, where one is drawn into the mystery expressed within it and conceived of music as an aural equivalent. For further information on Tavener's philosophy/theology, have a look at *The Music of Silence, A Composer's Testament*: John Tavener, edited by Brian Keeble, (New York & London: Faber & Faber, 1999). 'Theosony' is a word coined by Níóirín Ní Riain, to refer to the sound of God. It is explored in detail in a chapter entitled 'The Sound of God' in *Anáil Dé: The Breath of God: Music, Ritual and Spirituality*, edited by Helen Phelan (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2001). For more reading on theology and music, check out *Jeremy Begbie Theology, Music and Time*, (Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine, 4), *Voicing Creation's Praise: Towards a Theology of the Arts* (Scotland: T&T Clarke, 1991), *Beholding the Glory: Incarnation through the Arts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001). Look at *Richard Viladesau Theology and the Arts: Encountering God through Music, Art and Rhetoric* (NY: Paulist Press, 2000).
- <sup>2</sup> Consider settings of Negro/White Spirituals, Shaker Songs; Sinead O'Connor's songs; Black-Eyed Peas etc.
- <sup>3</sup> Look up further information about the following composers who have scripturally-based works: Arvo Pärt (Estonia), James Mac Millan (Scotland), John Tavener (England), Mortem Lauridsen (America), Maurice Duruflé (France), John Rutter (England).
- <sup>4</sup> Look at the music of the following composers to find scriptural texts for liturgical music usage: Liam Lawton, David Haas, Michael Joncas, Stephen Dean, Paul Inwood, Carey Landry, Margaret Rizza, Taizé Community, Iona Community, Lucien Deiss, Bernadette Farrell, Bernard Sexton, John O'Keeffe, Ronan McDonagh, Ephrem Feely, John McCann, Donal Hurley. Look at Wilma Ann Bailey's book *Music in Christian Worship: At the Service of the Liturgy* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2005), or Michael Joncas *From Sacred Song to Ritual Music: Twentieth-century Understandings of Roman Catholic Worship Music* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1997). Also, a very good resource pertaining to liturgical music is [www.adoremus.org](http://www.adoremus.org).



# USING VIDEO

IN

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION



By Brendan O'Regan, Arklow CBS

*Brendan O'Regan is a regular contributor to 'Teaching Religious Education' and has joined the team of local facilitators in R.E. Support. I thank Brendan for his continued support of R.E. teachers and for this publication. He offers here some practical and useful hints for using digital video from the internet in your R.E. classes.*

Many of us have been using video in RE for years, and now it has never been easier. Internet video provides so many opportunities to use video clips to illustrate or back up the content of our lesson plans.

Finding a suitable video clip can seem easy, but a lot of patience is required as you may have to wade through a lot of unsuitable material before you find the one to suit your needs. Don't give up on your old stock of clips and programmes on VHS quite yet!

YouTube is the usually the first port of call. The more specific you are in your search terms the quicker you're likely to find the clip you want. As schools generally have YouTube blocked (centrally through the schools' broadband network) you'll need to download the videos elsewhere and bring them in on laptop, disc or memory stick. GodTube and TeacherTube are also useful and may not be blocked in school. You can also just do a search on your topic with the word video added – e.g. search "pilgrimage video". There are many ways to download the videos. I generally use *Realplayer*, which is likely to be on most computers anyway. If not search for "Free Realplayer" and install it, preferably using the "run" option rather than "save" when given the choice. Then, whenever you're watching a video clip right click it and choose "Download this video". Or, depending on how you've set it up you may have a "Download this video" button. If this doesn't work at all, open *Realplayer*, go to Tools/Preferences/Download and Recording and make sure to tick the box beside "Enable Web Download". Downloaded video clips appear in the Realplayer playlist, but they're actually stored in a "Realplayer Downloads" folder, within the "My Videos" or "Videos" folder. Other ways of downloading include *YouTube Downloader*, *Freecorder Toolbar* (latest version), and some web based methods like [www.savevid.com](http://www.savevid.com) or [www.ripzor.com](http://www.ripzor.com). These files come in "flv" format, and so will need an flv player like VLC (free). Alternatively you can convert the file to a more PC friendly format, like wmv, mov or avi. I've found *Quick Media Converter* the best free software for this. *Windows Media Player* will now play the file. Another advantage of converting to wmv is that you can now include the clips in a *Powerpoint* presentation, or you can import them into *Windows Movie Maker* (Convert to mov format for Macs). In *Moviemaker* you can join clips together, edit clips, add titles etc. If *Moviemaker* gives trouble you could try *VideoSpin 2*, also free, while *Moyea FLV Editor Lite* (free version with some limitations) will edit the raw flv files without having to go through a conversion process (you can always convert the finished project).

The conversion and editing process is fraught with frustration, mainly caused by the way clips are created using "codecs". If it's made with a codec you don't have you're in trouble! One codec you'll need is "xvid" (esp if you have avi files) – do a search for this, download it and install it. For PCs *Windows Media Encoder* should help also, while *K-Lite Codec pack* is a whole bunch of these gathered together.

To include video clips in *Powerpoint*, just open a new slide, use the insert menu to insert "movie from file", and browse to where your clips are stored (probably in "My Videos", "Videos" or equivalent). If you're bringing your presentation on a disc or memory stick, make sure to include the original video files as well, as what you've inserted into the presentation is actually a *link* to the video file rather than the video itself. It would be a good idea to have a presentations folder, where you include the presentation and its related videos.

Keep in mind that using, and especially editing, video files is a memory hogger – both for storage space (an external hard drive will help if you're running out of space), and working space (RAM memory – 2 GB for XP and 3 GB for Vista will help). If you're using an older computer upgrading the RAM memory will help greatly, but you may still be lumbered with a slow processor. If you're considering changing your machine prices are good now, but it might be better to wait for the new operating system Windows 7, which is due in October. This will have an "XP mode", in case some of your older software and hardware are incompatible with the new system.

Finally, be aware that there may be copyright issues with video files. You can always create your own of course – with your own digital video camera, or the video facility in most digital still cameras. For example if you're visiting Glendalough, film the sites! You can use the raw clips or edit them (e.g. adding narration) later.

Anyone trying to come to grips with this kind of work is welcome to use the email link below if you run into difficulties or if you want any further advice.

[boregan@hotmail.com](mailto:boregan@hotmail.com)

## Note

Religious Education Support is offering an evening course in learning how to download video clips and use them as part of Powerpoint presentations or as part of a sequence of clips, using Moviemaker. It would be time well spent to come along and learn the nuts and bolts of this at in service in November/December. See <http://www.ress.ie> homepage 'Latest Notices' for details and registration form, or go to <http://www.slss.ie> and click on 'Course schedules' on the left side of the screen.

# WANTED: LOCAL FACILITATORS!

*One of the great things about working under the umbrella of the SLSS is that it encourages the development of various courses for teachers at local level through the Education Centre Network. If you visit the SLSS website you will see an open invitation to teachers to become involved as local facilitators. What this means is that if you have a particular interest in an area relevant to LCRE, or a particular competence such as ICT, methodologies etc, you can offer to become involved in SLSS as a local facilitator, subject to the approval of your Board of Management. You would consult with the National Support Officer and avail of a short training session, after which time you would deliver your course over one or two days/evenings in your local Education Centre. Details of remuneration etc will be available from SLSS should you express an interest in running a short course for R.E. teachers. This initiative is a great way of involving teachers around the country in their local areas, and allows those who feel they have something in particular that they would like to share with others a chance to do so. It also builds capacity within the system and ensures that the strengths and expertise of a group of teachers are maximised in the design and implementation of future in services. Additionally, SLSS is hoping to commission a small group of teachers to write / create new teaching resources for LCRE. If you are interested in this type of part-time work please let me know by email.*

# Religious Education at **KINSALE** Community School



By Diarmaid O'Donovan

## HISTORY, ETHOS & PHILOSOPHY

Kinsale Community School officially began on August 1st 1996, following the amalgamation of Our Lady of the Rosary Secondary School and Kinsale Vocational School. It embodies the best traditions of both of these schools. The school was originally built to cater for 450 students, but in recent years that number has swelled to just over 700 students. As the only school in the town we cater for all secondary school students from Kinsale Town and surrounding districts.

The school motto, "Omnes Communiter Discendo" adopted by the first Board of Management, states that we are 'All Together in Learning' and stresses our commitment to the education of all the students in our care.

Kinsale Community School aims to cater for the curricular, personal and physical needs of each individual student. We try to create a positive atmosphere, where the emphasis is on personal achievement, moral development and character formation. All students are encouraged to find their own strengths in order to grow into self-confident and responsible adults. With a firmly established programme of pastoral care, we seek also to enhance the spiritual aspects of the lives of our students through a programme of religious and moral instruction in keeping with family traditions.

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AT KINSALE COMMUNITY SCHOOL

While Kinsale Community School has enjoyed unprecedented national success in science by winning the *BT Young Scientist's Competition* twice in the past four years (2006 and 2009), Religious Education has always been a priority for management, staff and parents. The school management have been hugely supportive in creating a favourable climate for the delivery of both non-exam and exam Religious Education.

Religious Education is compulsory for both Junior and Senior Cycle and is delivered by a dedicated team of seven qualified RE educators. The RE team is comprised of an RE co-ordinator, Chaplain, and five RE teachers. The RE department meet regularly throughout the year to plan the delivery and assessment of courses, organise liturgical celebrations in the school, and to connect with the Pastoral Care structure in the school. Recently we have had our Religious Education Policy accepted by the

school's board of management, which will secure the status of the subject for many years to come.

Our RE team was involved in phase one of the introduction of Religious Education as a Junior Cert exam subject back in 2001. Junior Cert exam RE is now compulsory for all Junior Cert students at the school. Building on the success of this course at the school, we introduced Leaving Cert exam RE as a subject option in 2005. The uptake by Leaving Cert students has been consistently strong (for instance in 2010 twenty five students are due to take the exam), and student feedback has been very encouraging. As an exam subject Leaving Cert RE has been a major success for students who have achieved consistently high grades in the subject. In 2008 for example, six students received an A grade with the rest achieving a B or C grade – all at honours level.

Leaving Cert exam RE holds many cross-curricular opportunities and resonates well with other Humanities subjects such as English and History. Many students find these connections beneficial and the skill-sets required are transferable. There is no doubt that Leaving Cert exam RE can present challenges for the teacher due to some perceived inadequacies in the textbooks and the academic nature of the course content. However, once these initial obstacles are overcome the benefits for students, RE teachers, and indeed for the status of the subject generally are incalculable. Here at Kinsale Community School both management and staff are committed to the continued development of Religious Education as both a non-exam and exam subject that permeates our entire culture of learning and experience into the future.

The best way to illustrate the merits of Leaving Cert exam RE for the educational culture of a school is to consult with the students themselves. What follows are the experiences of some Leaving Cert exam RE students, both past and present at Kinsale Community School:

### Nicholas Croke (AI student, LCRE class of 2008):

"As a student who typically prefers the sciences to the humanities I set out to study Religious Education as purely a means to an end. I could never have realised that by the end of the course it would grow to be not only my favourite subject but also the one whose knowledge has resided longest in my mind.

*Diarmaid O'Donovan, teacher of Religious Education at Kinsale Community School, shares with us a profile of Religious Education in his school. Famous as winners of the BT Young Scientist's Competition, Kinsale Community School also has cause to be proud of the excellence of their Religious Education tradition; the dedication, skill and enthusiasm of members of the R.E. department and the undeniable learning and wisdom which emanates from its students and past pupils of Religious Education. Sincere thanks to Diarmaid for supplying this article, and to the students and past pupils who share here their experience of Leaving Certificate R.E.*

The typical criticism levelled at the Leaving Cert is that it is a rote-learning based system and as such fails to prepare students for 3rd level education where they must engage rather than regurgitate knowledge. RE differed in this regard as, particularly through the project, one was able to engage the knowledge and form an independent opinion. One was not punished for, where appropriate, offering an opinion as opposed to reciting a passage from a textbook. Through this emphasis on learning as opposed to recollection it was the subject most akin to 3rd level and eschewed the rote learning which makes the Leaving Cert such a stressful and tedious exam for many students.

A criticism I would have is that while the project was a good experience I believe it more appropriate to submit the actual project as opposed to a booklet upon it. The stressed Leaving Cert student loathes nothing more than unnecessary work. In my opinion, preparing a project before being forced to invest yet more time in retelling it in booklet form counts as unnecessary work. The project should stand on its own merits and not need explanation through a booklet. This is the way projects in all other walks of life are judged so I fail to see the benefit of the current approach.

The section of the course that I particularly enjoyed was Section I: Religion: The Irish Experience. This section is not only relevant but the information is appreciable and observable in everyday experience. It also enlightened me as to Ireland's interesting role in the development of Christianity as a whole. It stunned me that no one had ever informed me in 14 years of religion classes that one of the core Catholic sacraments has its roots in Ireland!"

**Fiona O'Brien (AI student, LCRE class of 2008):**

"Leaving Cert RE is a relatively new subject and so is one that is not well known and quite limited to certain schools. However, I feel very fortunate to have chosen it as one of my exam subjects. The subject itself is examined in essay form that ranges from short, detailed paragraphs worth 20 marks to 3-4 page essays worth 80 marks. These paragraphs/essays can be prepared as the course is covered and so this exam may be very well suited to those who are good at learning.

As Junior Cert exam RE is being taught in many schools at present, it provides a basis upon which the Leaving Cert subject builds. The subject is divided into various sections and between some sections there is an overlap of material which cuts down on learning. However, as the course is quite newly established, the books accompanying it can sometimes be lacking in places and in my opinion they sometimes do not provide enough information to base an answer on, and so the onus falls to the teacher to provide suitable material. It is thus very important to have a copy of the curriculum outline when studying RE to ensure all aspects and objectives are covered for the exam.

The exam itself is worth 80% with the remaining 20% coming from coursework in the form of a project which is submitted prior to the exam, generally in April. This project offers a good opportunity to gain some valuable marks prior to the exam in June.

I found the subject itself to be very interesting as it addresses topics such as world faiths, philosophy, morality and religion within society, to mention a few. I am currently studying primary school teaching in university which requires students to study an Arts



(L-R) Diarmaid O' Donovan, Honor O' Brien (Chaplain), Bríd Kearney, Tracy Fleming, Ita O' Donovan, Anne Kelly. Missing from photo: Orla Prendergast

subject together with education. The Arts subject I have chosen to study is Theology and I find that I already have a good understanding of, and basis for, the material being covered from my Leaving Cert study of RE.

Leaving Cert RE is quite approachable to study and does not require any prior faith or religious beliefs. I feel it should be promoted more vigorously and made more available to students nationwide by their teachers."

**Darren Kiely (LCRE class of 2009):**

"I decided to study Religious Education as an option in fifth year and I can honestly say that I am glad I did so. My initial impression of the subject was that there was a vast difference between the Leaving Cert course and the Junior Cert course, and so it took some time to adapt.

RE at Leaving Cert is the subject that allows you to keep a connection with God and indeed share in the practices and lifestyles of other believers, whether they are Jews, Christians or Muslims. It is the subject that draws you back to basics, away from the overwhelming materialism of the modern world in order to experience a sense of the sacred. It allows for a personal dimension to aid learning. It urges you to think upon the trials and tribulations of your own life and helps you to make sense of them in a spiritual context. One learns many things about life through studying RE. Students in my class could each connect in some way to the issues on the syllabus – whether it is 'returning to origins' which is very topical in the light of a shrinking economy, or learning about the benefits of prayer and meditation which help to free oneself from the secularised world which prefers to worship materialism rather than the transcendent.

Nearing the end of my RE course and firmly on the road to preparing for the exam, I feel confident, hopeful and optimistic about the future knowing that I have completed a good coursework booklet. I have no regrets at all about choosing RE as one of my optional Leaving Cert subjects. While there is no doubt that the workload is significant and some topics can be quite heavy, it is the subject that gave me the 'feel good factor' throughout my Leaving Cert. During the stressful years of the Leaving Cert I found that there was no better way of relieving the stress of school than putting pen to paper and writing an essay for RE."

**Amy McCarthy (LCRE class of 2009):**

"As I approach the end of the Leaving Certificate Religious Education course I have found it to be a worthwhile, fulfilling and insightful subject choice. This is due to the broad syllabus which covers an array of topics including philosophy, Christianity and world religions.

Part of the course involves undertaking a research study worth 20%, which is advantageous as the work is pre-prepared. The course builds on Junior Cert RE topics but involves far more essay writing, so a good standard of English and literacy is necessary. It is a highly academic subject which requires a large amount of learning as well as the ability to give a personal response to subject areas. The course by its dynamic nature is very interesting but demands self-discipline, commitment and hard work which with a genuine interest in the subject will prove very rewarding for the student."

**Billy McCarthy (LCRE class of 2010):**

"When I first decided to study RE for my Leaving Cert I did so mainly because of a previous interest in philosophy. In our school, RE is compulsory for the Junior Cert and during that course I really enjoyed the morality section. My teacher told me that morality and philosophy would be significant elements of the Leaving Cert course so I decided to try it. I didn't know what to expect but I had a fair idea I would like it.

In our first class our teacher told us what we could expect – the essays we would have to write – and he handed us out the syllabus containing a daunting array of topics. At this stage I was unsure whether this subject was for me. Then in the next class we began studying Socrates, and I was hooked. I really enjoyed the freedom of thought that was encouraged.

The main reason why I like RE is the discussions in class where we are encouraged to think for ourselves and form our own opinions, instead of just reading from the textbook. Aside from the liberating experience of talking about ancient myths and legends after maths class, I really enjoy the topics we cover in the course. Learning about other religions and religious traditions, learning about Greek philosophy and modern scientific cosmologies is really interesting and enjoyable.

Studying RE has definitely taught me a lot – but more than just the course – it really develops independent thought and helps you to mature as a person."

**Hattie O'Connell (LCRE class of 2010):**

"When I decided to study RE for the Leaving Cert I had no idea that it would affect my outlook on the world, but it has had a profound effect on me.

Before studying RE I did believe in God. I also knew that humans are social and spiritual beings, and as such have a psychological need to worship – it is intrinsic to our being. However, I never grasped how important this is. Leaving Cert RE not only teaches us about the conventional world religions, but what happens if religion is taken out of society and replaced completely by secular values. It has opened my eyes to the way secular society fills the void by worshipping profane things such as money and celebrities, with little or no meaning or values beyond material wealth and personal greed. Now, almost every time I walk down the street or watch advertisements on television, I see an image or a slogan that makes me reflect on the human search for meaning and how it is being hindered by crass consumerism.

Studying RE, especially philosophy, has made me think more and I think has made me a better person. I look forward to studying world religions too, because I think that in today's multicultural society we need to do more to understand other people's faiths. Learning more about all kinds of belief systems can make a big difference to our communities and help us to accept people who might not have the same faith as ourselves.

Leaving Cert RE is not just a subject that you study, write essays on, and forget. It teaches lessons about life and people which I am sure will stay with me long after I have left school."

# Religious Education at

# VILLIERS School, Limerick



By Emily Sexton and Elton Good

*Thanks to Emily Sexton and Elton Good, teachers of Religious Education at Villiers School, Limerick, for this insightful overview of Religious Education in their school. This article offers a clear and engaging exploration of how the school's characteristic spirit permeates the activities of the R.E. department and the education of the students. This article includes mature and balanced perspectives from students on their experience of Junior and Leaving Certificate Religious Education. It is enlightening and refreshing to hear about the positive effects of Junior and Leaving Certificate R.E. on the students and the wisdom they employ in realising the relevance of this course for their lives in a multi-faith culture.*

Villiers School is a privately endowed, co-educational, Protestant boarding and day school, founded under the will of Hannah Villiers in 1821. The ethos of Villiers school is to create a very caring and highly academic environment. The mission statement states:

*'Villiers provides a broad and balanced education within a caring community. Our aim is to develop life and learning skills in order to face the challenges ahead with awareness and integrity.'*

The Religious Education department instills a profound sense of faith and moral guidance in the students under its care. As a result, the students, staff and parents develop a rich caring and generous giving spirit which shows itself in the strong tradition of students being involved in charitable works and projects that give back to their community and parish. Pastoral care is a central element in Villiers school - looking after the students, parents, and staff. This is demonstrated through the atmosphere of care and respect that prevails in Villiers. Pastoral care within Villiers is a responsibility of everyone, as we educate within academic, social and religious dimensions in the school.

The R.E. department in Villiers consists of Emily Sexton and Elton Good. The Chaplain, Jonathan Lawes, is currently on a career break. The teachers are from



Elton Good and Emily Sexton,  
Villiers R.E. Department

different Christian backgrounds which adds diversity, balance and the ability to relate to students from a wide variety of religious traditions. Villiers has traditionally always been a hub of religious diversity and it is exciting to have such a mixture of religious beliefs in the school - such beliefs including Church of Ireland, Roman Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, Evangelical, Muslim, Bahá'í etc. As an R.E department, this is both a blessing and a challenge. Having students with different faith backgrounds has allowed students to share their beliefs, rituals and celebrations with their classmates. This is a very important part of faith development, as it encourages students to learn about and respect each others beliefs. The academic year 2008-2009 has been a challenging, yet fulfilling year. This has been a fascinating journey, allowing all to delve into how students, parents and teachers relate to their faith and how we collectively communicate those understandings.

## Junior Certificate Religious Education

R.E. is taken by all students for the Junior Certificate exam. It is sampled in Transition Year by students. There are general R.E. classes in 5th and 6th Year for all students and an option to study R.E. as a Leaving Certificate subject. R.E. is seen as a dynamic, worthwhile and interesting subject because a lot of what the students study is covered in the media, discussed at home or in their Churches or amongst their peers. Ireland is becoming such a multi-cultural country, that it is important to learn about people's beliefs from different religious traditions.

Religious Education as a Junior Certificate subject was first introduced in Villiers School in 2003 and has been going from strength to strength each year. The syllabus is the guiding light for the teachers in understanding the course and the aims, objectives and description of content are always close at hand. The textbook offers a comprehensive understanding of the topics for the

students, supplemented with handouts, power-point presentations, discussion, etc. Coupled with this, we try to instill in the students a lived experience of R.E. through many different levels - for example guest speakers, charity work, Christian Union group, liturgical services, increased use of multi-media, for example videos from Youtube and many other areas.

Guest speakers are an important part of the R.E. courses because they give the students an opportunity to engage with people from their local communities. As we are based in Limerick City, we are very fortunate to have a wide variety of guest speakers at our disposal, for example the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, the Gideon's Bible, Operation Christmas Child, Buddhist Centre, Limerick Mosque etc. Villiers students and staff each year choose many different charities to raise money for and the students are very eager to get involved. Eighty seven students signed up for the Trócaire fast this year and raised €3,200. During Villiers musical 'Anything Goes' raffle tickets were sold and €750 was raised for Bóthar and €750 for the Church of Ireland Bishops' Appeal. The school disco raised €1,000 for the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul and €1,100 for Self-Help. The true spirit of charity in Villiers was shown when students paid the cover charge for the disco and donated extra money for the two charities. It has been very encouraging to see the growth of the Christian Union group in Villiers. Meeting on Friday lunchtimes the "CU" has been a great success, with its numbers growing yearly, attracting students from a wide variety of faith backgrounds, to explore and share their faith understanding.

Liturgical services are an important way that students celebrate their faith. We hold ecumenical services where the student involvement is central in singing, reading and organising the services, for example Advent service, Christmas Carol service, Assemblies and Graduation ceremony. The most recent example of this is the Graduation ceremony which was very meaningful and emotional for all, as students, parents and teachers celebrated their six years in the school. This gave students an opportunity to celebrate their gifts and talents by performing the music and singing for the graduation ceremony. The Carol service and "Grads" were particular highpoints; well attended and greatly appreciated and enjoyed by students, parents and staff.

The Christian Churches tour is a highlight of the year for many Junior students because it is an opportunity for them to visit Churches which they have previously never attended. We are fortunate to have so many Christian Churches only a short drive from Villiers in Limerick City. We have been to the Church of Ireland, Roman Catholic Church, Methodist Church, Evangelical meeting place and Quaker meeting place. The students are fascinated by the similarities and differences in the Churches and they fill out a handout on each which they refer to during Section E of the R.E. course. These experiences build bridges between local faith communities and the school.

We are also fortunate to have a Mosque near the school which we visit annually. This is one of the most beneficial and exciting aspects of the course because it has been

a real eye-opener for both staff and students to explore and experience the rich religious culture and tradition in the Islamic tradition. It is pleasing to watch students engage with what the Imam says. Students have remarked that going to the Mosque really brings Islam alive for them and they get to see the rituals which they have previously learned about in a classroom put into action. Elton also organised a Hajj for all the classes to part take in. They found it an enriching experience to perform the stages of the Hajj because it made the students appreciate more all the rituals that are involved. It also raised a few eyebrows on the corridors! Thanks to a very generous grant from the Parent - Teacher Association, we have invested in various religious artefacts. These include the Passover meal set, Hindu Puja set, Muslim Burkha, and Buddhist prayer flags. We look forward to utilising these objects and thus bringing religious culture alive for our students



*This is a photograph of 3rd year students performing the Rak'ah, being lead by a 4th year Muslim student:*



*Walking between Safa and Marwa*

## Comments from the students about Junior Certificate R.E.

*'I found the way the course was taught was very good - chapter by chapter with frequent assessments made sure we knew most of the material on the course.'*

*'I found the Religious Education course a very informative and interesting experience; the homework assignments and projects were varied and interesting; and the class work ranged from watching 'Bruce Almighty' on DVD, visiting our local mosque and studying different world religions.'*

*'The Junior Certificate R.E. course is very broad with a wide variety of topics must be learned. This is both positive and negative because it meant that I had to spend a lot of time keeping on top of the R.E. topics, journal work, exam questions etc.'*

*'I enjoyed studying R.E. for the Junior Certificate - it was one of my favourite subjects. As a Muslim it was interesting to see how Islam was taught. I was given the opportunity to talk to my fellow students about my faith and I demonstrated the wudu, the rak'ah and other important Muslim rituals. The students really responded to what I was showing them and they asked many questions. I liked the journal work and how it was approached because it allowed me to be confident that I had a portion of the marks before I entered an exam situation.'*

## Concerns from the students about Junior Certificate R.E.

*'Things that I did not like were that we only got to study one of the major world religion in detail along with Christianity. There is a lot of writing in the exam and the text book was very big.'*

*'The textbook was quite large, and I found that, though it featured immense quantities of information regarding Christianity, the sections regarding other world faiths were shorter by comparison.'*

## Leaving Certificate Religious Education

General Religion for 5th Years and 6th Year is timetabled once a week and includes topics / discussions on the Travelling community, what Church means to students, priorities in their lives, faith today in Ireland, meditation, cults etc. Various teaching methodologies include guest speakers, DVDs, discussion, debates etc. The students find it enjoyable to talk and debate about current affairs, the impact they have on the world around them but also in their lives as teenagers. General Religion in 5th and 6th Year is seen as a subject that engages students, fosters discussion, deals with current affairs and encourages students to voice their opinion on matters that are important to them.

R.E. as a Leaving Certificate examination subject was introduced into Villiers School in 2006. It was an exciting time for Villiers and the popularity of the subject continues to grow. After completing the Junior Certificate exam in R.E., many students asked about the Leaving Certificate exam. They wished to progress onto Leaving Certificate level because they were very interested in the many topics that are covered. The Chaplain Jonathan Lawes started with 9 students and now we have

13 in 6th year in 2010. The overall results in the Leaving Certificate in 2008 were higher than the national average, with one student gaining an A1. In Transition Year R.E. is sampled by students. While the TY programme does not cover Leaving Certificate R.E. course work, it can however help students decide if they wish to pursue R.E. as an exam subject to the Leaving Certificate.

The coursework is seen by students and teachers alike as a challenging aspect of the course. There are discussions around the titles, focusing on which topics would be easiest to gain information on from a variety of sources, but also which topics the students would enjoy doing. The students feel that it is an important element of the coursework that they have been involved in the process of choosing which coursework to do. In the past 3 years, as part of their coursework, students have gone on pilgrimage to Knock, interviewed a Buddhist about their beliefs on non-violence and spoken to various clergy and academics about Jesus' treatment of women.

## Comments about R.E. as a Leaving Certificate subject

*'It is a lot of work as it covers many different topics and it is really enjoyable and worthwhile to do. You learn things you would not learn anywhere else like Philosophy, Ethics, Issues of Justice and Peace and about the World Religions. If there is discussion and debate in the classes then these can be some of the best classes and the ones you leave the Leaving Cert programme really remembering. The classes can be for anyone, not just for those who profess a religion, and the Leaving Cert course is structured so that it does not have a feeling of promoting one religion above any other. It helps broaden your mind as you learn and it promotes tolerance and acceptance. Religion has been part of society since the earliest people and so to understand humanity and the world today you really need to understand religious backgrounds. Unlike some subjects, RE is the one that no one can say of it 'When will I ever use all of this outside school', because you know you will use it, especially as Ireland becomes more diverse.'*

## Concerns from a student about R.E. as a Leaving Certificate subject

*'The course is way too broad and because of this there is too much information to learn off. In the exam, there is not enough time to complete the exam satisfactorily, and the lack of choice in the exam is a major worry for students. If students are not able to answer one question in the exam, they automatically lose 20% of the overall mark. The vagueness of the marking scheme is another real worry for teachers and students because, unlike other subjects where the amount of points required for each answer is outlined, the R.E. marking scheme does not do this as clearly.'*

Religious Education within Villiers School is a very exciting and all inclusive experience, which offers students, parents and staff the opportunity to express their faith in a variety of ways, ranging from liturgical services, charity events etc. The Religious Education department is very lucky because of the on-going support we receive from the Head Master, Deputy Principal, Board of Governors, Board of Management, P.T.A. and the local community. The R.E. department would like to thank the students, staff and parents of Villiers School for their continued support and participation in ensuring the success of Religious Education as both a living tradition and an academic subject within Villiers.



# RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN Our Lady's Grove Secondary School Goatstown, Dublin 14



By Karen O'Donovan

*Thanks to Karen O'Donovan, teacher of Religious Education at Our Lady's Grove Secondary School, for contributing this article to 'Teaching Religious Education'. In this perceptive profile of her school's commitment to RE, Karen offers a sensitive exploration of the potential for RE to permeate the life and daily activities of a Catholic school. Our Lady's Grove presents an interesting and enlightening example of how it is possible to include Leaving Certificate RE in a school while Junior Certificate RE is not taught as a subject for State examination.*

Our Lady's Grove is an all-girls secondary school in South Dublin. At present we have approximately 390 students from the surrounding area. Our catchment area would be Goatstown, Clonskeagh, Dundrum, Ballinteer, Churchtown, Leopardstown and Sandyford. For the academic year 2008-2009, we had two RE teachers in the department, Brian Culleton, a recent graduate of Mater Dei and myself, Karen O'Donovan, a not so recent graduate of St. Patrick's College Maynooth and Trinity College Dublin. I have acted as RE Co-ordinator for the last two years and have a special interest in the area of liturgy and sacred music.

Our foundress is St. Claudine Thevenet. Claudine witnessed the death of her brothers during the French Revolution. Instead of focusing on her grief, she opened her heart. She first welcomed two orphans and from this her community continues to grow. She wanted to make God, Jesus and Mary known to all through Christian education. She gave her students the skills and tools to become independent women. She wanted these women to live out the Gospel values, but also to bear witness and teach others of these values. Her philosophy promoted human dignity and full active participation of all members of the community.

Guided by the philosophy of St. Claudine Thevenet, our mission statement is:

*The Jesus and Mary Secondary School, Our Lady's Grove, is a Catholic Community in keeping with the educational philosophy of St. Claudine Thevenet.  
We are committed to an education which fosters personal growth, self worth, an openness to the spiritual dimension of life for all its members.  
We aspire to educate, and to be educated and to promote personal responsibility.  
We aim to work together in a respectful, caring and just environment.*

Our Lady's Grove has students from different religious and cultural backgrounds. For example, we have students from the Muslim faith, the Protestant faith, as well as others.

Religious Education is fostered and promoted throughout our whole school community. As we state in our RE policy, 'It is our hope to transmit the values of faith and social responsibility while harnessing the religious development of our students and providing opportunities for them to know their God. We strive to be faithful to the founding intention of St. Claudine Thevenet and the implications of what it means to be a Catholic School in the third millennium.'

And so our vision, as a Jesus and Mary school is to:

- Recognise the human dignity of each person
- Appreciate different cultures
- Seek to live by Gospel values
- Develop an awareness leading to reflection, self-knowledge and a strong sense of personal identity
- Have a concern for the poor and the underprivileged
- Be challenged to develop a curriculum which promotes the harmonious growth of the whole person
- Celebrate the liturgical year during the academic year

Each day we strive towards achieving and living out this vision. The entire staff of Our Lady's Grove embraces and safeguards the ethos of the school and supports the cross-curricular nature of Religious Education. One example of this would be a cross-curricular link between Leaving Certificate Geography and Religious Education. When exploring the topic of India for Leaving Certificate Geography, the Geography and RE teacher share resources so that the religious context can be supported in RE class and the cultural and geographical context can be supported in Geography class. Both subjects give an all-encompassing view of India.

First, second, third year non-examination classes have three RE periods per week. Fourth, fifth and sixth year students have two RE periods per week and exam classes have four RE periods per week. Senior Cycle RE students are block timetabled and those who choose RE as an exam subject go into one group. The fourth period a week comes from a study period that is on the fifth year timetable. This means that Leaving Certificate Religious Education students do not also study non-examination RE.

In accordance with our RE policy, RE is taught by trained RE teachers. Therefore, RE is seen as a high priority in our school. Apart from the classroom and the timetable, RE pervades our entire school life. For example, we have an opening of the academic year mass in September, a Remembrance Service to remember our loved ones who are no longer with us in November, an Advent and Carol Service in December, an event to remember St Claudine on February 3rd, the distribution of Ashes on Ash Wednesday and our sixth year students celebrate the Eucharist to mark and celebrate their graduation from Our Lady's Grove.

As well as these very important whole school, or at least whole year liturgical celebrations, we also have regular and consistent celebrations of our faith. Each Monday morning, a class takes responsibility for a morning prayer which is broadcast over the intercom. This prayer is inspired by the liturgical year, social issues, or issues of particular relevance to the school. In the front hall of our school, we have a liturgical space. Each month the space is decorated according to the liturgical season. For example,

Academic Year	Liturgical Year
<i>September</i>	<b>Theme:</b> New Beginnings & Welcome
<i>October</i>	<b>Theme:</b> Mary
<i>November</i>	<b>Theme:</b> Our Remembrance Book is on display for students to enter names of their loved ones and then we place the book in a special place during the November Service
<i>December</i>	<b>Theme:</b> Advent Jesse Tree & Advent Wreath
	<b>Theme:</b> Christmas Christmas Tree & Crib
<i>January</i>	<b>Theme:</b> Catholic Education Week Symbols of Catholicism (Posters and Displays) Daily announcements over the intercom
<i>February</i>	<b>Theme:</b> Saints Display for the Saints Celebration for St Claudine (3rd)
<i>March</i>	<b>Theme:</b> Lent Symbols and Readings associated with Lent Ashes on Ash Wednesday
<i>April</i>	<b>Theme:</b> Easter Display of posters for the Tridium Decorated Easter Eggs
<i>May</i>	<b>Theme:</b> Mary May Altar

All of this shows the prevalent role that Religious Education plays within our school community. In addition to the usual resources available to RE teachers, Our Lady's Grove provides interactive rooms, where possible. Therefore the internet, the use of a data projector and interactive whiteboards aids and supports the teaching of Religious Education.

Earlier in the article I stated the vision of Religious Education in our school. These, along with the aims of RE, form the value system from which we draw all our beliefs and motivation for what we wish to impart to the entire school community. The aims of Religious Education as laid out by the RE syllabus are as follows:

- To foster an awareness that the human search for meaning is common to all peoples, of all ages and at all times

- To explore how this search for meaning has found, and continues to find, expression in religion
- To identify how understandings of God, religious traditions, and in particular the Christian tradition, have contributed to the culture in which we live, and continue to have an impact on personal life-style, inter-personal relationships and relationships between individuals and their communities and contexts
- To appreciate the richness of religious traditions and to acknowledge the non-religious interpretation of life

### Specific Aims for Our Lady's Grove

- To contribute to the spiritual and moral development of the student
- To develop care for the weak, co-operation between students, justice and fair play towards all, respect for truth, a passion for the environment, a love of learning and other Gospel values
- To provide opportunities to deepen sacramental awareness and the spiritual life
- To encourage our students to ask and seek answers to important questions

Even though RE is not presently examined at Junior Cycle in Our Lady's Grove, the Junior Certificate programme is the State Examination Syllabus with further supplementary materials used where appropriate. Based on the JC syllabus the course we teach is structured as follows:

- Communities of Faith
- Christianity
- World Religions
- Development of Faith
- The World of Ritual
- The Moral Question

At Senior Cycle, the programme in use for the non-examination programme is the non-examination curriculum framework with further supplementary materials used where appropriate. The sections covered are:

- Section A: The Search for Meaning
- Section B: Christianity
- Section C: Morality
- Section D: Celebrating Faith
- Section E: God-Talk
- Section F: A Living Faith – Doing Justice
- Section G: Story

Our Lady's Grove offer Religious Education as a Leaving Certificate examination subject. The sections covered are:

<b>Section A:</b> Search for Meaning and Values	Coursework
<b>Section B:</b> Christianity: origins & contemporary expressions	<b>Section D:</b> Moral Decision - Making
<b>Or</b>	<b>Or</b>
<b>Section C:</b> World Religions	<b>Section C:</b> World Religions
<b>Coursework</b>	<b>Any one section from Unit 3</b>
Coursework is given based on two titles, prescribed by the SEC, based on two sections from Unit 3 of the syllabus. These two sections will not be examined in the terminal exam for that year.	<b>Section E:</b> Religion and Gender
	<b>Section F:</b> Issues of Peace and Justice
	<b>Section G:</b> Worship, Prayer and Ritual
	<b>Section H:</b> The Bible: Literature and Sacred Text
	<b>Section I:</b> Religion: The Irish Experience
	<b>Section J:</b> Religion and Science

In deciding the titles for the coursework, students are introduced to all four titles prescribed. They are then given a two-week input on each of the titles and then students are invited to pick the title that is of most interest to them. Students are invited to meet the teacher on a one-to-one basis if they need further help to choose a title or support while the project is in progress.

The reason we chose to offer RE as a Leaving Certificate examination subject was to allow students who are interested in Religious Education and Philosophy to explore these areas and develop skills for life such as 'inquiry, critical thinking, problem solving, self-reliance, initiative and enterprise' (Leaving Certificate Syllabus, p. 4). Also, we are able to offer Religious Education as an eighth subject, giving students every chance to achieve optimum results in the Leaving Certificate. Religious Education as an examination subject has been a very different experience for our students. A fifth year student describes the experience of fifth year: *'I chose RE as an exam subject because I*



Cross and Candles

*thought it would be very interesting to learn more about different aspects of religion, from philosophy to religion in different cultures. Some parts were challenging at first but made more sense as we moved through the course. Overall I thoroughly enjoyed RE this year as it was very interesting and rewarding'*

I find the main disadvantage of taking LC Religious Education is that time for prayer, meditation and preparation for school liturgies can sometimes be limited. At present we have four periods of RE per week for LCRE. However it is our goal to give the time allocation for RE which is comparable to all other Leaving Certificate examination subjects. However, the skills that students develop, the knowledge that they are opened up to, and of course the disciplines that they encounter allow us to continue our aim of fostering 'personal growth, self-worth, an openness to the spiritual dimension of life for all [our] members.' (Mission Statement). For these reasons, we are proud to offer Leaving Certificate Religious Education on the timetable for those students who wish to develop and deepen such understandings and skills.



Ash Wednesday

In addition to the liturgical events listed above, the following aspects of Religious Education are alive in Our Lady's Grove.

### Team Meetings

We have both official and non-official meetings within the RE department. Last year we have seven minuted meetings where we discussed curriculum content and planning, booklists, resources, in-service and liturgical events. Unofficially, meetings were casually had over lunch, discussing the progress of preparation for liturgical events and also monitoring the implementation of the curriculum.

### Retreats

Retreats are organised each year for the Sixth year students. There is flexibility around inviting retreat teams to the school and attending retreat centres, depending on what is possible. This decision is made by the RE team in consultation with the school Principal. The retreat for the academic year 2009-2010 will be in St. Benilda's Pastoral Centre.



November

### Guest Speakers

At present we are trying to organise some guest visits to the school for the in-coming academic year. Previously we have had guest speakers from Milltown Institute on the area of the Church's teaching on abortion. We have also had a speaker from Aware discussing the area of depression.

### Catholic Education Week

This year we celebrated Catholic Education Week by praying the decades of the Glorious Mysteries of the Rosary together every morning. We also had displays around the school of posters with Catholic Symbols. For example, we had a Rosary display and also a display of symbols associated with Catholicism, e.g. water and fire. The fifth and sixth year students wrote statements about what Catholic education means to them. The following is an example.

*From when I was in Junior Infants, I have been going to a school with a strong Catholic spirit. I went to school masses and masses with my family in the Church beside my school. This meant going to mass and practicing my religion were normal as I knew both the priests and the parishioners there. This helped me because when I got to the stage of questioning my faith, I could recall these experiences with ease because I have experienced them somewhere I was comfortable. I believe any child who has experienced Catholicism from a young age finds that going to mass is not such a big deal, it becomes routine and you share it with your family and friends. It has also meant that I was brought up with good moral values that I still carry today. I am so glad I was sent to a Catholic school as I feel it has influenced my moral values and my respect for others.*

### Open Night



Claudine



Eucharist

This year for open night, we turned the RE room into a celebration of the liturgical year. Each station represented a month from the academic year, beginning with September, and each station had a liturgical display appropriate to that month. There was also a corner for people to offer prayers, and lots of candles!

### Emmanuel 2009

For the second year running, the School Choir participated in the Emmanuel Project, organised by the Dublin Diocese. This is another example of how we embrace the cross-curricular nature of Religious Education. This year 30 students participated in the celebration in the Helix in March. Approximately 600 students from around the Diocese of Dublin took part in this event. Three of our students were soloists on the night. Because of our participation in this event, we have recently been asked to partake in an event for Culture Night 2009 in the Pro-Cathedral. One of the priests that comes to the school occasionally was at the event in the Helix and said 'Your wonderful performance of faith music and song with such enthusiasm brought great joy to my heart... Ultimately, it was all a prayer of praise and thanks to God.'

### Maynooth

The School Choir also visited Maynooth in early May and led a liturgy for the National Centre for Liturgy. The students sang to a selection of appropriate music learned through Emmanuel 2009 and also proclaimed the readings, the prayers of the faithful and brought forward the gifts in the procession at the preparation of the gifts.

No other subject on the curriculum, it could be argued, has the same degree of visibility in the school. Religious Education permeates and pervades our entire school community. Therefore, the management of Our Lady's Grove supports teachers of Religious Education through attendance at in-service, allocating sufficient funds for resources and also through support of Religious events both within and outside the school. Attendance at in-service is encouraged and facilitated as far as possible.

Outside Support Services include:

- An annual visit from the Diocesan Advisor
- Religious Education Support, SLSS
- RTAI
- Interschool contact with teachers met at in-service
- Contact with the National Centre for Liturgy, Maynooth
- Contact with St. Patrick's College, Maynooth
- Contact with Milltown Institute
- Emmanuel Project (Dublin Diocese)
- Cluster Meetings organised by the Diocesan Advisor
- Dundrum Parish

Dundrum Parish produce the 'Celebration Magazine' to which we regularly contribute, to let parishioners know what is happening in Our Lady's Grove.

And so, that is Religious Education in Our Lady's Grove, Goatstown. We are still a 'work in progress' and we will continue to strive for our vision through these dark times. I hope that having read this article, you will have a sense of the good work that is happening in your own school. May all Religious Educators stay the course and find hope in the daily expressions of faith in our schools. *'With all humility and gentleness, and with patience, support each other in love. Take every care to preserve the unity of the Spirit by the peace that binds you together. There is one Body, one Spirit, just as one hope is the goal of your calling by God. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all, over all, through all and within all. On each one of us God's favour has been bestowed in whatever way Christ allotted it.'* (Ephesians 4: 2-6)

# TOWARDS A SPIRITUALITY THAT LETS GO AND LETS GOD!

By Paul Montgomery

*Thank you to Paul Montgomery, R.E. teacher and chaplain at Causeway Comprehensive School, Kerry, for contributing this parable on the theme of spirituality. Paul is also an occasional lecturer in Pastoral Ministry, Scripture & Theology, as well as Digital & Multi-Media in Education. You can visit his websites at <http://www.paulmontgomery.ie> or <http://www.teachnet.ie/pmontgomery>*

If 'spirituality has to do with the inner world, the indefinable, the ineffable, the intangible, the mystical, with individual and personal experience', then to 'define' such a concept as illusive as spirituality is an extraordinary task. However a parable might serve as a good starting point.

'There once lived a peasant in Crete who deeply loved his life. He enjoyed tilling the soil, feeling the warm sun on his naked back as he worked the fields, and feeling the soil under his feet. He loved the planting, the harvesting, and the very smell of nature. He loved his wife and his family and his friends, and he enjoyed being with them. Eating together, drinking wine, talking, and making love. And he loved especially Crete, his, beautiful island! The earth, the sky, the sea, it was his! This was his home.

One day he sensed that death was near. What he feared was not what lay beyond, for he knew God's goodness and had lived a good life. No, he feared leaving Crete, his wife, his children, his friends, his home, and his land. Thus, as he prepared to die, he grasped in his right hand a few grains of soil from his beloved Crete and he told his loved ones to bury him with it.

He died, awoke, and found himself at heaven's gates, the soil still in his hand, and heaven's gate firmly barred

against him. Eventually St Peter emerged through the gates and spoke to him: 'You've lived a good life, and we've a place for you inside, but you cannot enter unless you drop that handful of soil. You cannot enter as you are now!' The man was reluctant to drop the soil and protested: 'Why? Why must I let go of this soil? Indeed, I cannot! What ever is inside those gates I have no knowledge of. But this soil, I know ... it's my life, my work, my wife and kids, it's what I know and love, it's Crete! Why should I let it go for something I know nothing about?'

Peter answered: 'When you get to heaven you will know why. It's too difficult to explain. I am asking you to trust, trust that God can give you something better than a few grains of soil.' But the man refused. In the end, silent and seemingly defeated, Peter left him, closing the large gates behind.

Several minutes later, the gates opened a second time and this time, from them, emerged a young child. She did not try to coax the man into letting go of the soil in his hand. She simply took his hand and, as she did, it opened and the soil of Crete spilled to the ground. She then led him through the gates. A shock awaited him as he entered heaven .....there, before him, lay all of Crete!<sup>2</sup>

## SYLLABUS LINK

### LEAVING CERTIFICATE

#### SECTION H

The Bible: Literature and Sacred Text

#### TOPIC 3.1

The language of story

### JUNIOR CERTIFICATE

#### SECTION B

Foundations of Religion: Christianity

#### PART 3

The person and preaching of Jesus

What is spirituality? If anything it is the love the Cretan farmer had for family, for work and for life. And it is more. It is the realization that we are more than just physical realities. It is the realization of the 'insufficiency of things attainable'.<sup>3</sup> Ultimately spirituality is the letting go of our soil, whatever that might be, and with trust, it is the embracing of God, or rather yielding to God embracing us.

When preaching to people about the kingdom of God, Jesus adopted a parabolic style, using parables to communicate many layers of meaning to a complex concept. From a theological / scriptural, hermeneutical point of view parables are more than just nice stories which point to something else. They typically point to themselves – that is to say, that biblical parables point to their own theology. Like the story of the man from Crete, there are layers of meaning other than the literal and this is what intrigued and perplexed Jesus' disciples, and perhaps continue to do so!

### Complete the following:

A parable is ....

One parable which Jesus is told is called ....

This parable tells us about ....

One meaning that we can take from this parable is ....

My favourite parable is .... because ....

One challenge put to us in a parable is ....

Write a modern day version of one of Jesus' parables.

Here's my modern day version of one of Jesus' parables: ....

### Questions:

1. From your reading of the text explain what is meant by the word 'spirituality'
2. Where did the peasant live?
3. Would you say that he was close to nature? Give an example from the story to support your answer.
4. Why was the man afraid of death?
5. What did the man hold in his hand as he died?
6. Do you think there was anything symbolic about this action? Explain your answer.
7. Why do you think the man was reluctant to let go of the soil at heaven's gate?
8. Why do you think St Peter wouldn't allow him pass through the gates?
9. What is the significance of the child's action in this story?
10. Imagine you were that peasant. Tell the story from your own perspective after the child led you through the gates.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> David Smith, 'Spirituality and teaching methods: uneasy bedfellows' in Best, Ron *Education for Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development*, London and New York: Continuum 2000.
- <sup>2</sup> Quoted in Ronald Rolheiser, *Against an Infinite Horizon*, pp.50-51., (Great Britain, 1995).
- <sup>3</sup> Ronald Rolheiser; *op cit.*, pp 31-33.

# CONGRATULATIONS!

*To all students on their Junior and Leaving Certificate R.E. results, and well done to all teachers who supported them.*

# YOU AND YOUR ANCESTORS

By Paul Behan

Ever thought of cross curricular links between RE and Maths? Well Paul Behan, former co ordinator of Maths with Second Level Support Service, has provided us with this intriguing example of such a link. The concept outlined below may be familiar to your LC students from their Maths class. See if they can make a link between this and their LCRE course, particularly Section A (The Search for Meaning and Values) and Section J (Religion and Science). The concept basically outlines how mathematically the world should have been over populated as far back as we can count, but evolution seems to have had a hand in the arrival of each of us. This concept also reminds us about the inter-relatedness and connection among human beings and with all of created life. While Maths and Science go a long way towards explaining the verifiable causes of these great events – the ‘How’ question, R.E., particularly LCRE Sections A and J explore the ‘Why’ question which underpins it all, and how religion and science are actually complementary fields in furthering our understanding of human origins. Thanks to Paul for allowing us some insight into the Maths classroom. Why not try this out with your students and explore the fascinating ‘Why’ question in the process?



In a world in which nobody mates with a relative, and with the births of parents and children separated by twenty to thirty years, each reader of these pages could have had, at the time of Charles Darwin's birth seven generations ago in 1809, a hundred and twenty-eight different ancestors – two multiplied by itself seven times. For almost everyone that figure is too high.

- from 'DARWIN'S ISLAND' by Steve Jones

## SYLLABUS LINK

### LEAVING CERTIFICATE

#### SECTION A

the Search for Meaning and Values

#### SECTION J

Religion and Science

### JUNIOR CERTIFICATE

#### SECTION D

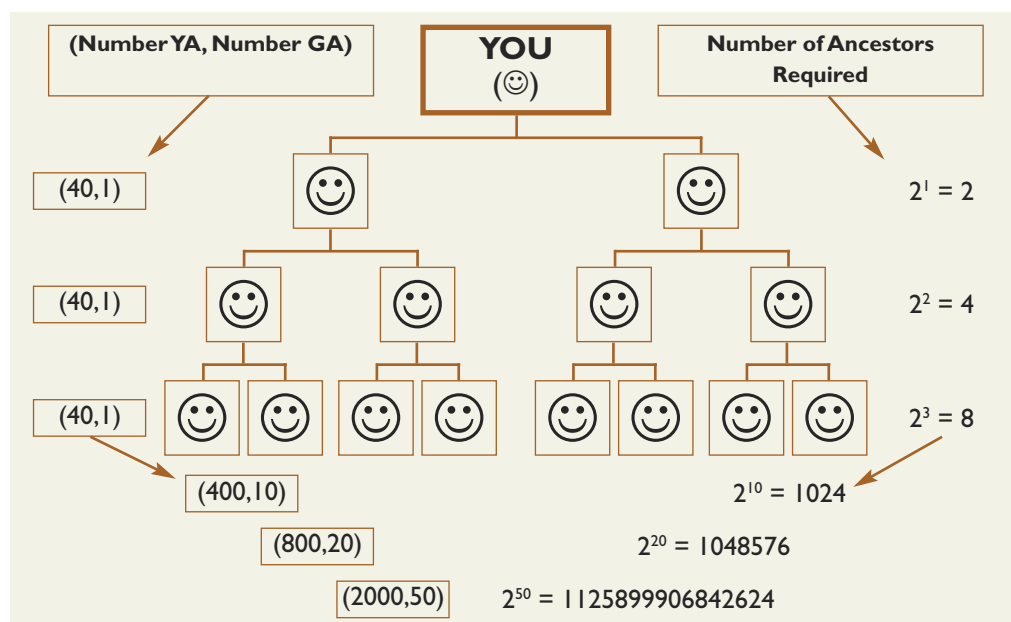
#### PART 5

Challenges to Faith

A highly thought-provoking way to introduce geometric progression for any class from 1st to 6th Year, but particularly Transition Years, is to calculate the number of people that needed to be alive x number of years ago in order for you to be alive today. In his wonderful book exploring Charles Darwin's less publicised work, Steve Jones used 20 to 30 years for an average inter-generational period. We'll go with 40 years, which will ensure our final numbers are only slightly less mind boggling.

### It Takes This Many Ancestors to Make You

- ✓ 2 people had to be born in the previous generation. Your parents.
- ✓ For your parents to be born, their parents had to be born in the previous generation. So 2 Generations Ago (GA) or 80 years ago, 4 people had to be alive, to ensure that you are around today. They are your Grandparents. And so on.
- ✓ 3 GA, or 120 Years Ago (YA), 8 people had to be born. 4 GA, you needed 16 ancestors.



400 YA (Years Ago), you had to have 1024 ancestors alive. Let's round that off to 1000.

800 YA, the year 1209, you had to have  $2^{20}$  ancestors alive. That is  $2^{10}$  by  $2^{10} = 1000$  by  $1000 = 1$  million people, just to ensure you are sitting here today.

Go back to the time of Jesus' birth, 2000 YA, you needed  $2^{50}$  ancestors, or 1000 trillion people needed to be born around that time. These figures put credit crunch numbers in the ha'penny place.



## Are We Missing Something Here?

1000 million million people is more people than have ever existed in the entire history of the human race. And we haven't even looked at the person sitting beside you! 2000 years ago, there were only 300 million people estimated to be alive. Could we all be related this closely? The answer is yes. What brings the Maths back in line with the historical reality is that you only need to go back 8 to 20 generations to find a common ancestor with anybody in your native country. Unless of course, you are of a certain noble stock. Steve Jones again, on aristocratic family trees.

*Alfonso, the Infante of Spain, who died in the 1960s, had just twelve – rather than more than a hundred – ancestors seven generations back. King Alfonso XII, a contemporary of Darwin, had sixteen, while plenty of others in that noble line had between fifteen and twenty great-great-great-great-grandparents.*

It is truly a revelation for the vast majority of students to discover these truths, and to uncover them with the help of some simple calculations. It can then be readily extended into formulae and terminology.

- You are the first person (term), and this is denoted as  $a = 1$
- Each previous generation requires a doubling of the population ( $r = 2$ )
- Formulae:  $T_n = ar^{n-1}$  and  $S_n = \frac{a(r^n - 1)}{r - 1}$
- Get students to make their own questions by choosing a value for  $a$  and  $r$  and finding the values for, say  $T_2$  and  $T_6$ . They then give these terms to their partner and vice versa. (Go to our Homepage and scroll down to Students Creating Questions on *Senior Cycle Topics*).
- Now tell them about the Fibonacci Sequence of Numbers (1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, ...) and his thought experiment regarding the growth in the population of rabbits. It's only a short leap from Fibonacci to the Golden Mean.

## Some related Outcomes from the LCRE syllabus:

- Give 2 examples from contemporary culture that illustrate the human search for meaning. Examples may be taken from music, art, literature, or youth culture. (Section A, p 13)
- Briefly outline 2 cosmologies of modern science (Section A, p 15)
- Outline the relationship between the understanding of the transcendent/God and the concept of the person in 2 religious traditions (Section A, p 19)
- Explain the human drive to question and to ask why (Section J, p97)
- Give examples of the questions common to religion and science (Section J, p97)
- Outline Darwin's theory of evolution, and highlight the major areas of conflict with religion (Section J, p 99)
- Describe the reaction of one major world religion to Darwin's theory at the time of its development (Section J, p99)
- Explain the importance of reflecting on and studying origins (Section J, p102)
- Give a summary of the main features of current debate on origins (Section J, p102)

# STUDENTS REFLECTIONS ON LEAVING CERTIFICATE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION *A Snapshot!*

By Lorraine Gillespie

If you have any interest in students' perceptions and experiences of Leaving Certificate Religious Education, then read on! I decided in May to ask some students about their perceptions of LCRE so that we might have a sense of the extent to which it measures up to the objectives and goals outlined in the syllabus, and in particular the syllabus rationale. Analysis of the results would seem to indicate a predominantly positive experience.

Forty six students of Leaving Certificate Religious Education (LCRE) in nine schools kindly agreed to answer a questionnaire which I sent to their teachers in May 2009. The schools were randomly selected and consisted of a broad mix of co-educational, all-girls, all-boys, boarding/day schools. Of the forty six students who returned the completed questionnaire, 28 were female, 16 were male and 2 did not state their gender. (For the purposes of analysis, I have presumed here that these two questionnaire results represent one male and one female.) Fifteen questions were asked in total. The first five questions used the Leikhart scale (students circled a number on a scale of 1 to 5). There was one closed question (Yes/No answer), and 9 open-ended questions. In all cases students were afforded an opportunity to explain, justify or expand on their answers.

Firstly, I would like to say a huge 'thank you' to those students who kindly completed the questionnaire at such a stressful time of year. Their contribution here is highly valued and I am delighted to be in a position to share some of the highly interesting findings with the reader. I have no doubt that the voices of such students will continue to impact on curriculum and educational policy in Ireland in future. I hope therefore that they will realise that their contribution is both enlightening and powerful, not least for the awareness it raises about the experience of our students of Leaving Certificate Religious Education.

Secondly, I wish to thank their teachers for agreeing to facilitate my enquiry through the questionnaire. May, as we all know, is a demanding and tiring time of year for many, particularly when helping students prepare for Leaving Certificate examinations. I thank them for their participation in this investigation.

Thirdly, it is important that the reader understands this article in the context of a small-scale enquiry. It is intended only as a 'snap-shot' view of some reflections by students of LCRE. It does not constitute a large-scale research project and one must therefore exercise caution when forming judgments or conclusions based on the evidence presented here. There are many variable factors which can help shape how a student or group of students answer on any day (or at any time of the year!). Nevertheless, the questionnaire results present many interesting findings and I expect that the reader will be

interested to learn about this particular educational experience from the perspective of these forty six students.

In this article therefore I will include each question asked on the questionnaire, indicate the range of answers given, and give examples of some of the most commonly held opinion types, and indeed some of the interesting comments which students wished to share. The reader is free to form his/her own conclusions on the basis of this enquiry, and of course I will include my own personal analysis and comment towards the end of the article.

**Q1: On a scale of 1 to 5 please rate how much you enjoyed your Leaving Certificate R.E. by circling the appropriate number (1 = I didn't really enjoy it much ..... 5 = I really enjoyed it very much). Please outline the main reason(s) for this rating.**

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

#### Findings:

- 15 students (11 female, 4 male) rated LCRE as 5 out of 5 (I really enjoyed it very much).
- 18 students (10 female, 8 male) rated LCRE at 4.
- 13 students (9 female, 4 male) rated LCRE at 3.

#### Comments:

- I really do feel that I have developed as a person. It has given me a new outlook on art, politics and opinion. I have really enjoyed continuing to look at the topics outside of books and the course itself.
- It was very enjoyable to learn about different sections in R.E. which were new to me such as philosophy. I also enjoyed the Coursework which enabled us to visit Clonskeagh mosque and Mater Dei library.
- I really enjoyed the course as I found the topics really interesting and relevant to the world at present. I find it to be quite a practical, personal subject.
- The wide range of topics on the course from philosophy to Buddhism to religion & science was very appealing to me. The course is very interesting and helps with general conversation and essay writing. It also helps develop other important skills like contrasting and reflection.
- I gave it a 3 because I think there is a lot of learning to be done. It is very different to JCRE and I think most people are unaware of this.
- It annoys me that you can't learn the answers off by heart. Lack of time in the exam kills me. I find it hard to get good results in exams which makes me hate it, although I'd find the course itself very interesting.

**Q2: On a scale of 1 to 5 please rate how effective the LCRE was in helping you to live in a multi-cultural society (1 = It didn't really help me much ... 5 = It really helped me a lot).**

**Please outline the main reasons for this rating.**

**Findings:**

- 9 students (6F, 3M) circled 5. (F = female; M = male)
- 16 students (12F, 4M) rated 4.
- 15 students (9F, 6M) rated 3.
- 4 students (2 F, 3M) rated 2.
- 1 student (F) rated 1.
- 1 student – no response.

**Comments:**

- Learning about different religions was very beneficial in making me feel open-minded about people of other religions.
- I think that in the present age it is vital to know more about other peoples' cultures and beliefs. It is necessary for us to respect their religion and not be as ignorant to think that our beliefs are the only beliefs.
- From looking at some of the 'big questions' in philosophy I have developed a new interest and respect for how individuals tackle and interpret them for themselves.
- I helped me to understand the background of others, look at both sides, especially morality section – how my opinion may not be right for others – relativism etc.
- It gave me a greater understanding of various religions.

**Q3: On a scale of 1 to 5 please rate how effective the LCRE course was in helping you to develop tolerance and understanding of others. (1 = It hasn't helped me much ... 5 = It has helped me a lot)**

**Findings:**

- 14 students (10F, 4M) circled 5.
- 19 students (14F, 5M) circled 4.
- 10 students (4F, 6M) circled 3.
- 0 students circled 2.
- 2 students (1F, 1M) circled 1.
- 1 student – no response.

**Comments:**

- The course really helped me to understand others. We looked at issues and faiths that I would never have understood or learnt about otherwise and I think this has strengthened my understanding of others.
- It has made me think more of how foreign students feel in the class and putting myself in other peoples' shoes before making decisions.
- Balanced views on everything discussed – for and against.
- I feel I am more understanding of different people. I think I don't judge people before I get to know them as I might have done before.
- It didn't help me much as I already understand others.

**Q4: On a scale of 1 to 5 please rate how effective Coursework was in helping you to personally engage with an issue of interest or concern. (1 = It didn't help me much ... 5 = It helped me a lot).**

**Findings:**

- 11 students (9F, 2M) circled 5.
- 20 students (10F, 10M) circled 4.
- 7 students (6F, 1M) circled 3.
- 4 students (2F, 2M) circled 2.
- 0 students circled 1.

- 4 students – no response.

**Comments:**

- The coursework allowed me to engage personally with different interests in the world but it also helped me understand more and gave me scope to do so in my own religion.
- I got to learn more about Christianity by doing Coursework. I found out things that weren't even in the book.
- Religion and gender: the ways in which women of different religions were treated upset me.
- Helped me consider both sides to each issue. My opinion isn't always right in certain instances.
- It was a struggle to find links in the Coursework but through research I found a lot of useful information that has made me consider broader views.
- I didn't feel that the Prescribed Titled piqued my interest.

**Q5: How would you rate your critical thinking skills as a result of studying LCRE? (1 = Poor ... 5 = Excellent).**

**Findings:**

- 11 students (8F, 3M) circled 5.
- 20 students ((15F, 5M) circled 4.
- 12 students (9F, 3M) circled 3.
- 1 student (F) circled 2.
- 1 student (M) circled 1.
- 1 student – no response.

**Comments:**

- Far better than before. I am no longer as rigid or judgemental. I think the subject really lends itself to developing tolerance for subjects and developing them further beyond the obvious.
- You have to ask a lot of questions in this course and I feel it helped me to question different things I may not have asked questions about.
- It helps develop a lateral, rational thinking.
- It definitely made me think for myself instead of learning materials off by heart like my other subjects. I love how it allows me to express my opinion.
- I have learned to question everything to come to a critical conclusion.
- Personally I will take my own side of an argument as I am stubborn so I will stick by my own word.
- I think I could do better because in other subjects I am doing I just have to read and learn from the book whereas in R.E. it is all about your own opinion and what you think.

**Q6: What was your favourite part of the course / topic? Please give reasons.**

**Findings:**

- 23 students (13F, 10M) selected Section A: The Search for Meaning and Values. 11 of these (2F, 9M) referred to the topic on the philosophers.
- 0 students selected Section B: Christianity: Origins and Contemporary Expressions.
- 5 students (4F, 1M) selected Section C: World Religions.
- 10 students (8F, 2M) selected Section D: Moral Decision-Making.
- 3 students (2F, 1M) selected Section E: Religion and Gender.
- 0 students selected Section F: Issues of Justice and Peace; Section G: Worship, Prayer and Ritual; Section H: The Bible: Literature and Sacred Text; Section I: Religion: The Irish Experience.
- 1 student (M) selected Section J: Religion and Science.
- 3 students (2F, 1M) selected Coursework.
- 1 student – no response.

**Comments:**

- The Search for Meaning – I have always been interested in the great questions of life and enjoyed reading and learning about philosophy before starting this course. This course gave me a further outlet to explore these questions.
- My favourite part of the course has been philosophy. It has made me look at things more objectively and gave me a great foundation for studying other topics.
- Morality was my favourite as it made me think about my own beliefs as well as hearing about other peoples' beliefs.
- Morality – topical issues. Contemporary and relevant to me.
- Religion and Science: because it allows one to engage with both sides of the argument. In addition it covers many of the topics which young people should know about such as evolution, stem cell research etc.
- My favourite part of the course was the Coursework as it allowed me to take my own slant on issues and research.

**Q7: What kind of approaches / methodologies helped you to learn best, e.g. reading from the textbook or any other type of approach? Please give reasons why the approaches you name were useful.**

**Comments:**

- Reading from the book. However, it did not develop the topic fully and was very time consuming to look for other sources.
- Textbook gave me the basics but relevant handouts made me expand and broaden my answers.
- Textbook has been useful for core ideas but I have enjoyed reading poetry, literature and studying media to broaden my opinion.
- I found having discussions in class were most helpful.
- Reading the book and taking notes down and learning the notes... doing questions for homework. We also summarised parts of the course onto big sheets and put them on the wall in class.
- I found reading stories the most helpful as they were easier to remember, such as the stories from 'Sophie's World'.
- Book work, class discussion and good teacher.
- Looking up the internet – going to the library looking up books and talking to people from Islam and also talking to my teacher.
- Pictures.
- Spider diagrams helped make the information clear and understandable, and notes.
- Library, doing my own research, textbooks.
- Power Point, as it was clearer and more effective.
- Power Point, note-taking, class discussions, sharing opinions.
- From my teacher thoroughly explaining it to me – he made it very clear.
- Learning, understanding and practicing questions.
- Reading the text and then practising answers. It helped me to remember material.
- Answering questions in class and reading them out.
- Constant reviewing and interlinking sections of the course.

**Q8: If you had the power to change anything about the LCRE course what might it be? Why?**

**Comments:**

**Comments from females include:**

- The length! There are way too many topics to learn that most of the time we don't get to go into detail – we just learn the essay and don't discuss it between us which can take away from the fun e.g. The Search for Meaning and Values is the same amount of marks for Religion and Gender yet takes twice as long and it should be a three hour exam.
- I don't like the myths and symbols section. I think it's boring.
- I find some of the information a bit repetitive.

- A lot more time in the exam. It's impossible to do an 80 mark question in 30 minutes especially when it's a course you cannot learn off by heart.
- I would make the course shorter as there is a lot in each section.
- A short question section, not just essay style answers. No coursework – which would leave more time to study the course in detail.
- I would change the Coursework and make it more about the other aspects of R.E. such as philosophy or morality.
- Making the Coursework book longer and worth more as a huge amount of effort goes into it.
- More choice in the exam for it. There are no short paragraphs. We should have more choice.

**Comments from males include:**

- I wouldn't change anything.
- Add a short question section to the exam. I feel it's too essay based.
- I would like more focus on discussions, especially on the meaning of life and everyday relevant problems (drugs etc).
- Morality section – I felt it was quite long compared to the rest and didn't really need to be so long.
- Marking scheme – I don't think it's accurate enough.
- I find there is very little choice in the LC exam.
- The whole course because it's very hard.
- I'm completely comfortable with the course as it is.

**Q9: Please comment on how your beliefs / faith, spiritual or moral development have been affected by studying this course, if at all.**

**Findings:**

- 14 students (11F, 3M) indicated improvement in their faith / spiritual development.
- 10 students (8F, 2M) indicated that they had a better understanding of issues / believers.
- 13 students (3F, 10M) indicated no change in their faith / spiritual development.
- 4 students – no response.
- 5 students – other response.

**Comments:**

**Comments from females include:**

- I have never been particularly religious (Catholic) but I have acquired a new interest in the beliefs of religions, communities and individuals.
- My beliefs haven't really changed at all but I have learned more about Christianity that I didn't know before.
- I have learned a lot more about my religion and in this I think it has made my faith stronger.
- Before, I didn't believe in God/s but now I do.
- For me, my beliefs were questioned as was my faith. I enjoyed hearing so many theories and beliefs. My own beliefs became stronger as a result.
- It has made me more spiritual I suppose and I have started to attend Mass more, maybe because I saw from my course that Muslims devoted some time to their religion and so should I.
- Helped me to ask more questions and think more about my religion but also to appreciate it.
- It really showed me how to think about other people and their beliefs.
- Balanced views to all faiths/beliefs.
- I have always been an atheist in my teenage years. This course has certainly strengthened my belief, but has also given me a more spiritual aspect to my life with respect to people, nature and within myself. It has also changed my perspective on organised religions. I have more respect for other peoples' beliefs. I have huge respect

for devout followers as 'belief without an if' is simply something I cannot have. This course made me ask myself a lot of hard questions about my faith and developing ideas which made me an atheist.

**Comments from males include:**

- My belief or faith have not been affected.
- I thought I was an atheist before studying religion but now I consider myself an agnostic from what I've learned.
- I'm a non-believer and while the LCRE course hasn't changed this it has given me the scope to accept more ideas and also to engage with who I am and what my own life is about. It taught me to value and to cherish things.

**Q10: What was the most important thing you learned from this course? Why?**

**Comments:**

**Comments from females include:**

- That every civilization has searched for meaning in life as we continue to.
- That I should treat people the way I want to be treated because it's right.
- To question many different things and not to just accept what is given to me.
- What I learned from my Coursework about Islam.
- How to research, how to communicate and how to decide on something.
- I found that there is more to meet the eye than I perceived. I found myself engaging with subjects that I would never have thought about before.
- Human dignity is the most valuable concept on this earth and should be protected.

**Comments from males include**

- To be more outspoken. Since I did this I have become more confident.
- World Religions, because you learn about other religions and you can't be called ignorant of them.
- A history behind my religion.
- Morality, as it's a very important section as its teachings apply to all belief systems – either secular or religious.

**Q11: If you were to offer one important piece of advice to future LCRE students that would help them understand and learn about LCRE, what would that be?**

**Comments:**

**Comments from females include:**

- This is a serious LC subject and should be taken very seriously but don't be afraid to develop your own ideas and own opinions and work them into your essays (where appropriate). Don't just learn essays off by heart – take the time to understand them.
- A lot of work, but worth it if you have an interest – not as easy as I thought it would be.
- Don't just keep to the book – always research and work hard.
- Figure out what you believe in first and then learn about other religions...and get started on your Coursework: it's a valuable 20%.
- Do outside reading: don't leave it to the teacher. Do research. Work.
- Go into each class with an open mind so that you can fully understand what you learn.
- To definitely pick it up as a 6th year subject as it helps you look deeper.
- Do essays and mind them for study!
- Concentrate on your Coursework in 5th year and get it done and

out of the way for 6th year and put all you can into it.

- Read different articles and watch the news because it helps you get in tune with the course.
- It's not a guaranteed 'A'. Talk to people who have done the course before you do it.

**Comments from males include:**

- I would tell them that it is completely different to the JC course. The standard of work is almost university standard so a student would need a mature attitude for studying this.
- Start studying from the start of 5th year.
- Embrace the subject and enjoy it.
- LCRE was the subject which most required me to personally engage with subject matter.
- Homework is a vital part of the course.
- Do your homework. Ask questions if you don't understand.
- Try and debate all the issues and get all the information you can.
- Revise a lot.
- Outside work and reading is needed – but don't get too bogged down in the dynamics. With a little bit extra it will go a long way.

**Q12: How does your experience of LCRE compare with other subjects?**

**Comments:**

**Comments from females include:**

- It's an amazing subject – should have been introduced years ago. Always, always was interesting and stimulating.
- It's my favourite subject – a hobby.
- It's one of the most interesting subjects but it's my hardest one – very time consuming. Not a subject you can cram the night before.
- Religion has a lot more learning and studying involved and you have to come up with your own answers as some of them aren't in the book.
- It is much more interesting as it deals with real life issues and topics.
- I enjoyed Religion the most as it gives me the chance to give my own opinion and to hear others which I don't get a chance to do in other subjects.
- LCRE is a great subject for bettering yourself as well as making you think.
- LCRE is much more personal and lighter and relates to life instead of numbers or languages.
- It's totally different and makes you think differently in a different part of your mind.
- The diversity makes it enjoyable.

**Comments from males include:**

- Far more interesting and fun.
- Religion would have been different to most of my subjects as it was mostly essays, but compared to my other subjects it was easier to take in.
- I found it more difficult than Biology or Maths as I am not great at writing essays.
- There was a lot more analytical thinking in Religion than in other subjects.
- I found my experiences in Religion far more enlightening than in the others.

**Q13: Are you glad you studied LCRE? Yes / No?**

**Findings:**

- 44 students (27F, 17 M) replied 'yes'. (i.e., 99% females, and 100% males replied 'yes').
- 1 student (F) replied 'no'.
- 1 student – no response.

**Comments:**

**Comments from females include:**

- I feel I have a broader understanding in many issues and have sufficient information to back up an argument.
- Oh yes! It's interesting in every aspect. No course has every topic as intriguing as Religion.
- Helped me to engage with my life and also I found it extremely enjoyable.
- It brought me closer to the Church – it helps us in life.
- I'm glad I studied LCRE because it kept me engaged in the topics all the time. I never lost interest in the subject.
- It has been an experience and will help me to critically think about situations in the future.

**Comments from males include:**

- Yes, because I can apply a lot of everyday examples that I already know to my answers.
- It was beneficial to me as it was a good subject and very insightful.
- Very interesting and a challenge.
- Because it got me to know more about God.

**Q14: How might the LCRE course help you in your future (e.g. in future studies, in your career, in your life etc)?**

**Comments:**

**Comments from females include:**

- LCRE I think will help me a lot in later life as in the course there was a lot of emphasis on being a good and moral person.
- I am thinking of teaching religion now and doing a course that involves religion.
- More objective – greater knowledge of other cultures.
- Hopefully I will study Arts or something like that and I think Philosophy or Religion will definitely be a choice I wish to pursue.
- Very helpful in one's daily life. It's a subject you won't forget when you go on after school.
- It has made me more aware of people around me and this will help me in the world of work.
- I want to study Chemistry in college, and with that comes a lot of moral issues so this course helps me develop this outlook.
- I'm going into Social Care, which is an area which needs great understanding skills. LCRE really helped build on these skills.

**Comments from males include:**

- Work and live better in a multi-cultural society.
- To appreciate other cultures and religions: acceptance.
- I have more tolerance and understanding for those of different backgrounds.
- I think it will help me in many ways in regards to studying and also looking back it made me value what I have more.
- It has increased my perspective and understanding of religions, life, and why people are religious.
- I hope to study Theology in university after doing this course.

**Q15: Any other comments:**

**Comments from females include:**

- We need more choice of questions on the paper.
- More time for the exam.
- I think that the course should be broken down into easier-to-learn and more accessible language used as we are only LC students.
- Course was amazing. I really enjoyed it.
- Thank you for a great subject that was both interesting and enjoyable to study.

**Comments from males include:**

- It was brilliant and my favourite subject.
- Seriously – it's way too long of a course!
- Life is hard – as well as this subject!
- I really enjoyed my Religion experience and would recommend it to anyone.

**Conclusion:**

While this questionnaire is a small-scale 'snapshot' look at how LCRE is experienced by students, an analysis of the findings would seem to indicate that overall it is perceived in a highly positive and worthwhile manner by senior cycle students. It is a subject that seems to have great appeal in that it relates very much to students' own lives and one where active learning methodologies are to be encouraged. The results of question 13 are very telling. All of the boys, and all but one of the girls, were glad that they had studied this subject. The student who regretted it made mention of the fact that it was a lot more difficult than she had anticipated! Most students made reference to how well the course helped them in terms of skill development, and helped them understand different perspectives. Most mentioned that they felt that it was a great course to help equip them to live in a more pluralist / multi-cultural society. Section A (The Search for Meaning and Values) would appear to be the most popular section of the course – while some welcomed the depth of insight offered by the Greek and humanist philosophers, others liked the way in which this section probed key questions of the meaning of life in a way that students could relate to. Most of the comments that reflected students' concerns related to matters to do with the terminal examination. (We would expect students of any subject to have concerns in this regard, of course). Most students seemed to feel that reading beyond the textbook was necessary to deepen their understanding of topics. (Good to see students moving towards independent and self-directed learning). They also felt that studying the textbook, note-making, discussions, Power Point presentations, visual diagrams and use of the library & internet were teaching approaches that helped them.

One thing is abundantly clear from this questionnaire analysis. Students really like, engage with and find great educational value in the LCRE course. In itself, this is great news. What is of immeasurable importance, of course, is the excellence of R.E. teachers who continue to work diligently in order to make this experience a worthwhile one for students. The work and steadfast dedication of R.E. teachers to their students in this regard deserves the highest praise. Apart from our students' grades in the terminal examination, some are rarely aware of the educational impact they are having on students. It is immensely encouraging therefore to see students respond so favourably to LCRE and to clearly recognise the wealth of learning this subject brings them in their lives and in their future careers. Those who designed, agreed, structured and wrote the syllabus and guidelines are to be credited as are those who got teachers off to a great start in supporting them through in service. It goes without saying, of course, that students' incalculable learning doesn't happen by chance, and that R.E. teachers deserve the highest of praise and thanks for the manner in which they have brought this subject to life so successfully. Be assured that your work is of immense importance and that the knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes you help to draw out of your students through this enterprise, are clearly having positive effects at many levels on the students with whom you have engaged. Whether you are a teacher of JCRE, LCRE, or both, the findings of this simple questionnaire would certainly testify to the value and importance of what you impart as well as how you impart it. Thanks to all of you for your continued hard work.

# BUILDING CAPACITY

By Lorraine Gillespie

## IN R.E. SUPPORT

**Front Row (L-R):**

Ray McHugh,  
Sinéad Mannion,  
Fr Gerard Cryan,  
Marianne O'Reilly,  
John Mangan,  
Sr Ena Quinlan.

**Back Row:**

Aisling Reigh,  
Mary O'Sullivan,  
Ann Aungier,  
Mary Burke,  
Caitríona Smith,  
Brendan O'Regan,  
Eimear O'Connor,  
Mícheál de Barra,  
Ailish Hayes,  
Sheila Zietsman,  
Maura Gray and  
Lorraine Gillespie (NSO).



You may remember that in Issue 3 of *Teaching Religious Education* I invited any R.E. teacher interested in working with Religious Education Support as a local facilitator / resource writer to contact me. I am pleased to announce that a number of teachers came forward with a willingness to become involved in R.E. Support. Their involvement is crucial for the continuation of support to R.E. teachers, and I am delighted to welcome them into this new initiative in which their teaching experience and their particular skills will be given a creative outlet.

In March 2009 the new team of seventeen participants attended a two-day meeting in Athlone. Each teacher had prepared a short presentation on an aspect of the JCRE or LCRE course and explained how they felt they could contribute to this project. After further input on the philosophy and practicalities of facilitating Continuing Professional Development (CPD) courses in R.E. the team soon set about the task of examining current and future R.E. Support needs. Based predominantly on the evidence gathered from last years' evaluation forms some key areas emerged as reflecting teachers' perceived needs. These included:

- Input on LCRE Section D, Coursework and Part 3 of the syllabus
- Training / up-skilling in ICT as a follow-on from last years' in service on using Digital Media (in LCRE Sections B and C) with reference to JCRE and LCRE
- Junior Certificate Journal Work
- Further input on World Religions and on LCRE Section A

These needs of course reflect only the key priority areas for R.E. teachers – other support needs are plentiful, and it is my intention to address these needs in a coherent and systematic way, resources permitting.

The team organised themselves into sub groups and offered to liaise with one another in relation to the many of the topics listed above. The design of the 2009 – 2010 suite of CPD courses soon began to emerge, as did the plan for designing support materials.

There was a strong sense of purpose and enthusiasm among the new team as the 2009 – 2010 plan began to unfold. Participants displayed a really positive sense of direction as we discussed ways in which support materials could be offered which would help enhance the quality of teaching and learning. We discussed the importance of offering courses and curricular materials which were designed to assist the R.E. teacher and the student as learner, rather than exam candidate. While not overlooking the issue of the terminal exam, the focus of our work is very clearly on the wholistic educational experience for the student. Efforts are made to create some new support materials which will encompass the framework of the syllabus context for both Junior and Leaving Certificate RE: knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes. There is sometimes the danger in any examination subject that we unintentionally end up 'teaching to the exam', while missing out on a whole range of educational opportunities that could help make R.E. meaningful and real for our students, not just at a cognitive level but at an affective, attitudinal and spiritual level also.

The new team of local facilitators / resource writers are to be commended for their willingness to share their expertise in this new departure. Although I monitor drafts of work from many of the group, there is still a high level

of independence and initiative afforded to the team both individually and collectively in terms of designing suitable support materials to match the intended course objectives. My own role has changed somewhat from designing and writing materials to monitoring drafts and making suggestions / recommendations, keeping the project on track and encouraging open and helpful communication among the group. It is wonderful to see new people contribute to the highly specialized field of Religious Education in this way.

Some of the team have put their names forward for facilitating and presenting this year's CPD courses in R.E. Some have opted to work on preparing materials but not for presenting / facilitating. Many of the group will be involved at both levels. This reflects a practice which is strongly encouraged in SLSS. Indeed it is true to say that other subjects have benefitted enormously from the wealth of expertise at local level from teachers around the country who have become involved with SLSS as local facilitators. It is my hope and expectation that, in time, this will also happen in R.E. In fact, since last years' unpalatable cutbacks in support services to teachers, the value of having a team of experienced local facilitators has proven to be of vital importance. No system or subject should be dependent on one person for all its support needs. Therefore it is entirely appropriate at this time that teachers who feel that they have something to offer through their experience of teaching JCRE or LCRE would be afforded an opportunity to do so. This will no doubt prove to be the way forward in terms of support, as has happened in other subjects, particularly in a climate of continued economic cutbacks. On a positive note, this is the core of capacity building in the system.

I have a great sense of optimism and excitement about the potential for such a group of dedicated and creative R.E. teachers. It is a great privilege to work with such people, almost all of whom are at the cold face of JCRE or LCRE in terms of their teaching. I realise too that I must be patient and realistic in my expectations of each one. Almost everyone in the group is in full time teaching and is therefore under the usual pressures and demands of busy timetables, planning, marking homework etc – not to mention family and other commitments. One or two people who started with the group in March have had to drop out of the initiative. It is increasingly difficult for all to find time to devote to such a service. And yet the collegiality and willingness to support each other on this venture is most encouraging. I doubt if anyone on the team is in it for the money – they certainly won't get rich on their earnings! Instead, there is a sense of a shared vision and a collegial enterprise, one that will hopefully bear fruit in the kind of support that is offered to R.E. teachers in the years ahead.

The new support materials appropriate to each course on offer this year will be distributed on CD only to those teachers who attend our CPD courses. Additional copies will not be created, so it is important that you attend the appropriate CPD course in order to avail of your free copy of the resources.

I hope that many of you will come along to our CPD courses this year and offer your encouragement to some of the new facilitators who you will probably meet. They offer a freshness and sense of innovation in R.E. Support and their work will prove to be of enormous importance as the months and years progress. I thank them for the time and effort they invest in this initiative and for contributing to that wider vision of R.E. Support.

**The new team of local facilitators / resource writers consists of the following members:**

Ailish Hayes – St. Ailbe's Secondary School, Tipperary Town  
Ann Aungier – Glenstal Abbey, Limerick  
Aisling Reigh – Tallaght Community School, Dublin 22  
Brendan O' Regan – St. Kevin' CBS, Arklow, Co. Wicklow  
Caitríona Smith – Franciscan College, Gormanstown College, Co. Meath  
Ena Quinlan (Sr) – Shannon, Co. Clare  
Eimear O' Connor – St Peter's College, Dunboyne, Co. Meath  
Gary Carley – St Angelas' Secondary School, Waterford  
Gerard Cryan (Fr) – Summerhill College, Sligo  
Mary Burke – St. Kevin's College, Dunlavin, Co. Wicklow  
Mary O' Sullivan – Tallaght Community School, Dublin 22  
Marianne O' Reilly – Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School, Beaumont, Dublin 9  
Mícheál de Barra – Scoil Críost Rí, Cork  
Maura Gray – Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School, Beaumont, Dublin 9  
Ray Mc Hugh – St. Finian's College, Mullingar, Co/ Westmeath  
Sinéad Mannion – Moate Community School, Co. Westmeath  
Sheila Zietsman – East Glendalough School, Wicklow



# RELIGIOUS EDUCATION SUPPORT

## Second Level Support Service

Religious Education Support continues to offer a range of professional development courses for teachers of both Junior and Leaving Certificate Religious Education. Seven courses are offered in Term 1 of 2009 – 2010. All courses are designed in response to needs as expressed by teachers. New local facilitators will be involved in the delivery of many courses, and some have also been involved in the design of new support materials.

In addition to professional development courses, Religious Education Support offers support on the teaching of both Junior and Leaving Certificate R.E. through our website <http://www.ress.ie>, our online forum, individual support by phone, email and in person, limited school visits, provision of support materials, and provision of support journal 'Teaching Religious Education'.

The National Support Officer is also happy to advise principals, R.E. Co Ordinators, other educational partners and teachers of Junior and Leaving Certificate R.E. on matters relating to the introduction of Junior Certificate Religious Education (JCRE) and Leaving Certificate Religious Education (LCRE) as subjects for examination onto the school curriculum.

### **Courses and Dates for Term 1, 2009 - 2010**

#### **Leaving Certificate Religious Education: Section D: Moral Decision - Making**

**Target audience:** Teachers of Leaving Certificate Religious Education

**Course outline:** This course will explore aspects of the content of Moral Decision Making as well as some useful teaching approaches. Support materials will be distributed to participating teachers. Suggestions for planning this section of work and for assessing students' homework, using Assessment for Learning, will also be included.

**Course dates:**

Tuesday 6th October 2009	Blackrock Education Centre	7.00 – 9.30pm
Wednesday 7th October 2009	Athlone Education Centre,	7.00 – 9.30pm
Thursday 8th October 2009	Tralee Education Centre	7.00 – 9.30pm
Tuesday 13th October 2009	Limerick Education Centre,	7.00 – 9.30pm
Wednesday 14th October 2009	Dublin West Education Centre	7.00 – 9.30pm
Thursday 15th October 2009	Cork Education Support Centre	7.00 – 9.30pm
Tuesday 20th October 2009	Sligo Education Centre	7.00 – 9.30pm

#### **Junior Certificate Religious Education: Journal Work – Reflective Engagement**

**Target audience:** Teachers of Junior Certificate Religious Education

**Course outline:** Journal Work provides an excellent opportunity for JCRE students to personally engage with the lived reality of religion. This course will explore good practice in developing opportunities for that personal engagement as well as enhancing the quality of students' reflections on their engagement and their learning. Support materials will be distributed to participating teachers and particular reference will be made to engagement opportunities in the 2010 Prescribed Journal Work Titles.

**Course dates:**

Tuesday 3rd November 2009	Athlone Education Centre	7.00 – 9.30pm
Wednesday 4th November 2009	Dublin West Education Centre	7.00 – 9.30pm
Thursday 5th November 2009	Sligo Education Centre	7.00 – 9.30pm
Tuesday 10th November 2009	Blackrock Education Centre	7.00 – 9.30pm
Wednesday 11th November 2009	Limerick Education Centre	7.00 – 9.30pm
Thursday 12th November 2009	Cork Education Support Centre	7.00 – 9.30pm
Tuesday 17th November 2009	Tralee Education Centre	7.00 – 9.30pm

#### **Religious Education and ICT: Using digital video in Power Point and in Moviemaker**

**Target audience:** Teachers of Religious Education

**Course outline:** Following the success of our Leaving Certificate R.E. Coursework 2010 professional development course, this course aims to equip R.E. teachers with the skills of downloading suitable video images for use in teaching various sections of the R.E. syllabuses, and integrating those video images in Power Point presentations and in Moviemaker. The course is designed to support teachers in providing creative educational engagement in R.E. through the use of video. Suitable for all ranges of ability, and for teachers of both JCRE and LCRE, this course offers an opportunity for development of ICT skills in the context of R.E., in response to many requests from LCRE teachers.

**Course dates:**

Wednesday 18th November 2009	Kildare Education Centre	7.00 – 9.30pm
Wednesday 25th November 2009	Dublin West Education Centre	7.00 – 9.30pm
Tuesday 1st December 2009	Blackrock Education Centre	7.00 – 9.30pm
Wednesday 2nd December 2009	Athlone Education Centre	7.00 – 9.30pm
Thursday 3rd December 2009	Co. Wexford Education Centre,	7.00 – 9.30pm
Wednesday 9th December 2009	Limerick Education Centre	7.00 – 9.30pm
Thursday 10th December 2009	Navan Education Centre	7.00 – 9.30pm

### Teaching Islam

**Target audience:** Teachers of Junior and Leaving Certificate Religious Education**Course outline:** This course will explore various aspects of Islam that are drawn from both the JCRE and LCRE syllabuses. Guest speaker: Ali Selim, secretary to the Imam at the Islamic Cultural Centre, Dublin. Support materials will be distributed to participating teachers. Opportunities will be provided for raising questions and sharing of experience on approaches to the teaching of Islam.**Course dates:**

Monday 19th October 2009	Co. Wexford Education Centre	4.30 – 7.30pm
Wednesday 21st October 2009	Drumcondra Education Centre	4.30 – 7.30pm
Thursday 22nd October 2009	Blackrock Education Centre	4.30 – 7.30pm

### Teaching Hinduism

**Target audience:** Teachers of Junior and Leaving Certificate Religious Education**Course outline:** This course will explore various aspects of Hinduism that are drawn from both the JCRE and LCRE syllabuses. Guest speaker is Sudhansh Verma, Director and General Secretary of the Hindu Cultural Centre, Ireland. Support materials will be distributed to participating teachers. Opportunities will be provided for raising questions and sharing of experience in approaches to the teaching of Hinduism.**Course dates:**

Thursday 1st October 2009	Cork Education Support Centre	4.30 – 7.30pm
Monday 5th October 2009	Dublin West Education Centre	4.30 – 7.30pm
Monday 12th October 2009	Co. Wexford Education Centre	4.30 – 7.30pm
Wednesday 14th October 2009	Athlone Education Centre	4.30 – 7.30pm

### Co operative Learning in Religious Education, CSPE and SPHE

**Target audience:** Teachers of R.E. (exam and non-exam), CSPE and SPHE**Course outline:** Co operative learning employs the philosophy that individuals must work together to achieve shared goals and to maximize their own and each other's learning. It is a particularly useful approach to the teaching and learning of R.E. in that it moves away from competitive and individualistic styles of learning, and develops instead the individual's responsibilities for group learning and vice versa. It fosters positive interdependence in the classroom, individual accountability, interpersonal and small group skills. This course is offered as part of the modular programme of SLSS and will be recognised for credits in the TDC post graduate educational studies diploma conducted through SLSS (see modular courses). It will be of relevance to all teachers of R.E. whether or not they are pursuing post graduate studies. Participants attend two evening sessions for this modular course. A choice of two venues applies:**Course dates:**

Tuesday 29th September 2009	Sligo Education Centre	7.00 – 9.00pm
Monday 9th November, 2009	Sligo Education Centre	7.00 – 9.00pm
Monday 28th September 2009	Kilkenny Education Centre	4.30 – 6.30pm
Monday 23rd November 2009	Kilkenny Education Centre	4.30 – 6.30pm

### Reflective Practice and Action Research: Integrating ICTs in Religious Education

**Target audience:** Teachers of Junior and Leaving Certificate R.E.**Course outline:** This course aims to introduce teachers of JCRE and LCRE (exam R.E.) to free downloadable software packages that can enhance the experience of teaching and learning R.E. Participants will select from a range of free software including mind mapping, quizzes, photo story and other packages, with emphasis on how this can be integrated into the teaching of R.E. Participants practice including the software in their teaching with a specific class, for a specific topic for a short period of time. Reflective practice and action research is suitable to open minded teachers who would like to improve their teaching of JCRE or LCRE using ICTs and who will report back their findings. Participants are encouraged to select just one software package to integrate in their teaching.

Students and teachers alike reflect on the activities, and both students and teachers offer reflections and feedback in a short report. Opportunities for presenting the outcomes of the action research will be provided at National level for participating teachers. Suitable for all ranges of ability in ICT, especially beginners and improvers. This modular course will take place over two evenings:

**Course dates:**

Wednesday 30th September, 2009	Athlone Education Centre	7.00 – 9.00pm
Wednesday 10th February, 2009	Athlone Education Centre	7.00 – 9.00pm

### **COURSE REGISTRATION**

Please note that attendance at any of our courses requires the completion of a Registration Form, which can be downloaded from the homepage of <http://www.ress.ie> under 'Latest Notices'. Completed Registration Forms should be returned by email, fax or post to the R.E. Administrator, Angela Thompson, in Co. Wexford Education Centre; [angela@ecwexford.ie](mailto:angela@ecwexford.ie); fax: 053 9239 132. Please register at least two weeks before the commencement of each course.

Notification of these courses has been posted to R.E. co-ordinators in all post primary schools in early September.

Once your Registration Form has been received by the Administrator on time you are registered unless you hear from us (in the event of over-subscription or cancellation). All of our courses are designed to meet the professional development needs of current teachers of JCRE and LCRE (exam R.E.). A limited number of places may be available on our courses for prospective teachers of JCRE and LCRE and those teaching R.E. from a non-examination framework (e.g. Co-operative learning course, R.E. and ICT course). Please contact the National Support Officer if you have any queries in this regard.

### **CONTACT DETAILS**

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*Religious Education Support  
Second Level Support Service*

**Course Registration form**

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**PHOTOCOPY AS NECESSARY**

One applicant per form

Closing date for application is two weeks before  
the commencement of each course

Name::

Mobile number:

E mail address:

School:

School Address:

School Phone:

Fax:

School Email:

School Roll No:

Title of Course:

Venue: (Education Centre)

Date of Course:

Applicant's Signature:

Date of application:

Please indicate below whether or not you are teaching Junior Certificate Religious Education and Leaving Certificate Religious Education for State examination:

I teach Junior Certificate Religious Education for examination      Yes No

I teach Leaving Certificate Religious Education for examination      Yes No

*Please return to Angela Thompson (R.E. Administrator), Co. Wexford Education Centre,  
Milehouse Road, Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford or email to [angela@ecwexford.ie](mailto:angela@ecwexford.ie) or  
fax to 053 9239132*

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# God's Music

*'Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.'*  
- Matthew 18:3

The child was young enough to know that speaking to God was the most natural thing in all the world, to know that God laughed and cried, to know that God's house was not a grand place, but small and intimate, warm, comfortable and very safe, and that God had carpet slippers on her feet. She had not yet been taught to be afraid of God, or that she was not good enough for her, or that she always had to be on her best behaviour with her and keep as many secrets from her as she could. She liked God and liked her company. It was as simple for her as that.

But the child grew up, and learned she had to be more sophisticated. Adults told her it was much more complicated. Adults spoke of guilt, confession and praise. Adults taught her to be polite with God, to doff her cap, bend the knee, touch her forehead and watch her step. Adults filled her silences with words to say and songs to sing, and those put God on such a high pedestal that she could not see her any more, let alone reach to kiss her: In fact, God was no longer for kissing. Adults taught her that, too. They turned her God into a 'He' with a large capital 'H', removed His carpet slippers, and clothed Him with High Dignity.

For a long time the growing child, moving inexorably towards adulthood and then arriving there, believed what she was told. She learned that it was not proper to *like* God. She was to *love* God instead, so long as underneath she was secretly afraid.

Yet the memories of childhood, by the mercy of God, did not leave her entirely. Deep in her mind and soul they still talked softly, producing in her an unease, a holy doubt, a sense of something precious that was lost, and a longing to find it again.

One day she packed her spiritual bags and left. She left behind the people who were content to remain where they were. She left those who were sure they had already arrived, and spoke as if they owned the Promised Land. She abandoned her terrifying certainties, and went out into what they told her was no-man's land, no-woman's land, no-god's land. She tried also, as far as she could, to leave behind those people's fear of God, the fear that lurked beneath their talk of love and praise. A new fear came upon her, the fear of the unknown, the fear of loneliness. She packed that in her bag, along with her unease, her yearning, her holy doubt, and a new sense of adventure and a large exhilaration.

She passed many on the road going in the opposite direction, to the patches of ground she had left behind, to the familiar pieces of territory where all was known and no surprises were to be had.

Yet soon she was not alone. Others came and joined her:

'Don't look so serious!' someone said. 'Can you play anything?'

'A musical instrument, do you mean?'

'Yes'

'I don't think so.'

'That's a funny answer. Try this.' He put a hand inside his coat and produced a tuba.

'But I can't, I mean, I've never... How do you blow? I can't read music.'

'Try.'

'But this is ridiculous!'

'Yes, it is. Try.'

She picked up the tuba, cradled it awkwardly in her arms, put it to her lips and blew. She produced a singularly rude noise, and her companions fell about laughing.

'Wonderful!' they cried. 'That'll do. Come on!'

'But I can't do it properly at all!'

'You will. Come on!'

Lugging along the tuba as best she could, she started off again with her companions. They were still laughing. She noticed most of them had musical instruments of one kind or another. One poor man was pushing a piano.

The tuba was very big, and very heavy. 'Some of you aren't carrying anything,' she complained.

'Yes we are,' they replied. 'Our voices.'

'You mean you're the choir?'

'Exactly. You're beginning to understand. We travel light. The adults taught you too well, back there. That's why you're having to drag that great thing along. But we haven't far to go now.'

At the top of the next hill, the ones in the front of the group suddenly stopped.

'Listen to that!' they said.

Beneath them stretched a wide plain, and in the middle of it was the God the woman had set out to find, the God of her childhood. She, her God, out there, in the middle of the plain, was playing a saxophone. Its sound made bright the air; soft, lilting, inviting, sensuous, ethereal, a single instrument weaving together the sounds of heaven and earth and in-between. The woman had never heard anything so wonderful in all her life, nor so beautiful.

She put her lips to the mouthpiece of the tuba. Without hesitation or restraint she began to play a love-song, soft, lilting, inviting, sensuous, ethereal. It filled the plain and wove itself together with the sound of the saxophone.

Her companions took up their own instruments. Slowly they played or sang their way down the long slope onto the plain and out to its centre. By the time they reached God their music had become a romp, enough to wake the angels in their beds. Eventually it subsided again, fell back to a gentle pianissimo, rocked heaven back to sleep, and then, miraculously, became a single thread. All the notes became as one, sound merged with sound and made a single beauty.

In the midst of them God put down her saxophone, listened for a spell, and began to dance.

Extract from © *'The Three Faces of Christ'* by Trevor Dennis.

Printed here with kind permission of SPCK (Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge) publishing, London; first published in 1999, reprinted in 2009, pp 81-84.

### Questions for the teacher:

1. In what parts of the Junior / Leaving Certificate course might you consider using this kind of resource?
2. How might you use a resource such as this? Stimulus material to introduce a topic such as images of God? A focus for class discussion? An exercise in interpretation of data?
3. How might you draw out key syllabus elements such as the religious and non-religious interpretation of life, from this kind of resource?
4. Would you consider using this type of resource as a means of allowing students to construct possible questions and discussion points to the character in the story?
5. What kind of follow-on activity might suit your students after hearing this story read aloud?

### Questions / discussion points for the student:

1. Describe the child's image / understanding of God, as outlined in the first paragraph.
2. Was there anything particularly surprising about the child's image of God? Why do you think you may have found it surprising?
3. How was your image of God as a child similar to / different from the child in this story?
4. In what ways did adults make the child change her image of God?
5. Do you think the changes in her image of God were good changes or not? Give reasons for your answer.
6. In your own words describe how she felt about God just before she set out on her journey as an adult.
7. Have you ever felt anything like this? Try to recall what your thoughts and feelings were.
8. As an adult the woman 'packed her spiritual bags and left.' What do you think the author really means by this phrase?
9. The woman seems to have abandoned all that she had been certain of about God, but she also felt a new sense of fear as an adult. Describe what you think this fear was like for her.
10. Can you relate to anything that the woman felt as she left behind her certainties?
11. On her journey she encounters a number of people who are also on a journey, and are singing or playing instruments. The woman is encouraged to play the tuba. What do you think this possible sense of community / belonging might have done for the woman? What lesson might we learn from this?
12. The woman re-discovers the God of her childhood playing the saxophone. Describe how she might have felt? Use the evidence in the extract to support your answer.
13. The woman plays the tuba, which sounded inviting, sensuous and ethereal. What is meant by 'ethereal?' Can you recall / describe any experience you may have had that you would describe as 'ethereal?' Why do you think humans occasionally have such experiences? What might be the significance of such experiences? What questions arise from such experiences?
14. 'All the notes became as one, sound merged with sound and made a single beauty.' What do you think the author means by this sentence? What might it suggest about the connection between human beings and God?
15. At the end of the story we are treated to another surprise – God listens to the people's music and then begins to dance! What image / understanding of God do you think is conveyed through this sentence? How do you feel about this understanding of God?
16. Reflect on understandings / images of God which you may know about from parents / friends / school / religious traditions / media. Try to express which understanding of God may be true for you, if you have one.
17. Explore images of God in two religious traditions, including Christianity. Find out where these images of God came from.
18. Imagine you had an opportunity to meet with the woman in this story. Outline the discussion you would like to have with her about understandings of God.
19. Having read and explored the story 'God's Music', what do you think is the real meaning of the quote from Matthew's gospel above?
20. Conclusion: Identify one thing that you have considered more deeply as a result of reading / hearing this story, and identify one question which you are left with in relation to the theme of the story.



*Astrophotograph of the Helix Nebula, closest of the planetary nebula to Earth and commonly known as the Eye of God.  
Photo credit: NASA, ESA, C.R. O'Dell (Vanderbilt University), M. Meixner and P. McCullough (STScI)*

# CLOZE TEST

## Key concepts in *JCRE Section D: The Question of Faith*

Fill in the missing words:

1. Activities in which God is honoured are referred to as \_\_\_\_\_.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ is a human characteristic that involves a person thinking and becoming aware of his or her own feelings and actions.
3. The origins of life are referred to as \_\_\_\_\_.
4. An \_\_\_\_\_ holds the view that we know nothing of things beyond material, observable fact and therefore is unsure about the existence of God.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ refers to the idea that when people look for meaning in life they should not turn to the supernatural or belief in God.
6. When we say that something has \_\_\_\_\_ it implies that it has importance or significance.
7. An \_\_\_\_\_ is a person who believes that there is no God.
8. Belief in one God is called \_\_\_\_\_.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ means to look through or explore thoroughly in order to find answers.
10. The development of belief from simple human trust to religious commitment is known as \_\_\_\_\_.
11. A set of assumptions which a person holds about the basic make-up of the world is called a \_\_\_\_\_.
12. \_\_\_\_\_ means communication with God/gods.
13. The decline in the influence of religion, or the reduction in active membership of a religion could be called \_\_\_\_\_.
14. To \_\_\_\_\_ is to have confidence in the truth of something.

15. Belief in many gods is called \_\_\_\_\_.
16. A state of mind produced by something new, unexpected or extraordinary / to be amazed / to speculate, could be referred to as \_\_\_\_\_.
17. Respectful fear of wonder is called \_\_\_\_\_.
18. If something is without meaning we refer to this as \_\_\_\_\_.
19. A world-view that includes only physical and measurable things and rules out the possibility of anything spiritual or invisible is called \_\_\_\_\_.
20. \_\_\_\_\_ is the idea that whatever a sacred text or religious teaching states is always literally and factually true.

Which key concepts from the list have not been included in this cloze test? List them and explain what they mean.

### Key concepts:

- |                    |                  |
|--------------------|------------------|
| Religious belief   | Prayer           |
| Religious practice | Worship          |
| Question           | Monotheism       |
| Questioner         | Polytheism       |
| Search             | Reflection       |
| Meaning            | Worldview        |
| Meaninglessness    | Experiencing God |
| Reflection         | Atheism          |
| Awe and wonder     | Agnosticism      |
| Humanism           | Secularism       |
| Trust              | Materialism      |
| Faith              | Fundamentalism   |
| Personal faith     | Creation         |
| Childhood faith    |                  |
| Mature faith       |                  |
| Stages of faith    |                  |

*Suggestion: Go to [www.wordle.net](http://www.wordle.net) and enter these key concepts in a Word Cloud. Print the collage, laminate it and display it on the classroom wall. Then refer to it and include it in student activities when teaching Section D The Question of Faith.*

- Answers:
- 1 = Worship
  - 2 = Reflection
  - 3 = Creation
  - 4 = Agnostic
  - 5 = Humanism
  - 6 = Meaning
  - 7 = Atheist
  - 8 = Monotheism
  - 9 = Search
  - 10 = Stages of faith
  - 11 = Wordview
  - 12 = Prayer
  - 13 = Secularism
  - 14 = Trust
  - 15 = Polytheism
  - 16 = Wonder
  - 17 = Awe
  - 18 = Meaninglessness
  - 19 = Materialism
  - 20 = Fundamentalism



# Religious Education Support

## *Second Level Support Service*

### RELIGIOUS EDUCATION SUPPORT

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Co.Wexford Education Centre

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Second Level Support Service

*Director: Michael Garvey*



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Photo on page 29 © Lorraine Gillespie