

# *Embrace the Spirit*

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## A Note from the Editor

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Just as we were wrapping up the content for this issue of *Embrace the Spirit*, Pope Benedict XVI announced his resignation. The Holy Spirit is full of surprises. By the time you read this, we will have a new pope.

This is only the third time in history that a pope has resigned. The most recent one was Pope Gregory XII in 1415 (almost 600 years ago), and before that Pope Celestine V in 1294. There has been much speculation about the implications of the pope's unusual move. Within 48 hours of the announcement, journalists and bloggers were cranking out commentaries on the momentous news. Here are some of the articles I found most helpful in reflecting on this act:

- "His Last Great Act," by Father Raymond J De Souza ([www.catholiceducation.org/articles/facts/fm0169.htm](http://www.catholiceducation.org/articles/facts/fm0169.htm))
- "What Popes Are For," by Stephen P White ([www.catholiceducation.org/articles/apologetics/ap0458.htm](http://www.catholiceducation.org/articles/apologetics/ap0458.htm))—"The pope is not a figurehead; he is an apostle. He is not a manager; he is a messenger. By announcing his resignation yesterday, Pope Benedict XVI has signaled that the Church of the 21st century will not be a Church of business as usual. It will not be a church of institutional maintenance, of isolation, or of longing for the past. The Church exists to spread the Gospel. And those who have inherited that mission by their baptism must be willing to sacrifice a great deal to answer that calling."
- "German Atheists Suddenly Respect the Pope, Says Journalist," by Estefania Aguirre ([www.ncregister.com/daily-news/german-atheists-suddenly-respect-the-pope-says-journalist/](http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/german-atheists-suddenly-respect-the-pope-says-journalist/))

In the next issue of *Embrace the Spirit*, we will review the legacy of Pope Benedict XVI. In the meantime, this issue offers much food for thought.

Carl Fakeley presents us with a unique president's message. It takes the form of a parable, which he wrote for his Religion 25 class. Jesus's parables led to much conversation among those who heard them. What meaning will you take from this parable? It might generate some interesting dialogue in the staff room.

John Friesen's two-part article "Foundations for Inquiry Learning in the Gospels" concludes, with an examination of Jesus's parabolic teaching approach and the implications for teaching.

Evergreen Catholic Schools has responded to the Year of Faith in many creative ways. Karen Koester shares just some of the projects incorporating the theme "Enter Through the Door of Faith."

Our Fides et Ratio columnist Tomás Rochford discusses the preambles of faith. In our current culture, we cannot assume that the students before us believe that God exists. We may need to cultivate the soil at a much more fundamental level to create an openness to the gospel message.

We hope to see you at Conference 2013 in October.

Dorothy Burns



## The Parable of the Airport



A family arrives at the airport, excited about the journey ahead. For months now they have been planning this trip. It has been years since they have gone on vacation together, and it will be more like a family reunion. To keep costs down, however, they have booked flights on various airlines at various times. Arriving together, they plan to check their luggage, go through security and then get started on the many stories that will be shared over the next few days.

Getting through security can be a painful and tedious process. But eventually they make it through with their carry-on luggage. With some eating, some visiting and even some snoozing, they gather together and wait for their flights to be called.

Abruptly, in the middle of a story about life on the farm, the flights for Grandpa and Grandma are announced over the PA system.

Hastily gathering their belongings, they give everyone hugs and kisses. Grandma tells everyone that she will prepare the condo so that it is ready when the others arrive.

A few moments after his grandparents leave, Jonathan comes out of the bathroom. With a bewildered look on his face, he asks, "Where are Grandpa and Grandma?"

"Oh, their flight was called. They had to go," Mother explains.

"But I didn't have a chance to say goodbye."

"Don't worry, honey," Mother says. "You will be able to see them soon enough."

After an hour or so, another of their flights is called, and a couple more members of the family gather their things and head for the long hallway that stretches out to the plane.

This same process continues throughout the day, all leaving on various planes at different times but all heading for the same place.

Finally, Mother and Jonathan are the only ones left waiting.

"Why is this taking so long?" Jonathan asks. "It seems like forever since Grandpa and Grandma left. I wish I could have heard the end of the story."

"I know it seems like a long time while we are here waiting, but once we are there, the time here will seem like it went in the blink of an eye," Mother replies.

Moments later, a friendly woman's voice announces over the loudspeaker the name of the airline and their flight number. After a quick glance at their tickets, Jonathan and Mother know it is time for them to go.

A movie, a meal and a short sleep later, Mother and Jonathan are told that they are about to land and that they need to fasten their seatbelts.

The ride in the taxi from the airport to the condo passes quickly. Before Jonathan knows it, he and Mother are standing at the front door, with their luggage in hand. Just as he is about to ring the doorbell, the door swings open and Grandpa and Grandma welcome him with a breathtaking hug.

"Jonathan, we are so glad to see you!" exclaims Grandma. "Now Grandpa can finish telling you his story."

*Carl Fakeley*



## *Editorial Board 2012/13*

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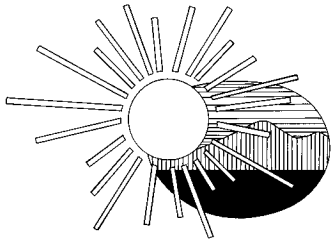
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### **Religious and Moral Education Council of the Alberta Teachers' Association**

#### **Mission Statement**

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

#### **Vision Statement**

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

#### **Values**

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



# Foundations for Inquiry Learning in the Gospels, Part 2

John W Friesen

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As was discussed in Part 1 of this article (Friesen 2012), while new approaches to student learning frequently appear on the educational scene, many of them constitute little more than revised vocabulary. When the presuppositions of the new methods are examined, it is often found that they much resemble or emulate educational thought and practice from way back. This is certainly the case with the much-touted inquiry approach to learning, which can be found in a variety of historical contexts. Part 2 will examine one such context—Jesus’s parabolic teaching approach as portrayed in the New Testament Gospels—and draw out implications for teaching practice.

## Differentiating Approaches to Teaching

Weimer (2002, 25) has aptly described teacher-centred education as a struggle to maintain power in the classroom:

You may be ready to accept that we [teachers] do exercise considerable power over student learning but believe we do so for good reasons. . . . The reason that faculty name first involves the students themselves: they cannot be trusted to make decisions about learning because they lack intellectual maturity, do not have good study skills, are not well prepared, do not like the content area, take courses to get grades, and do not care about learning. . . . Faculty make the decisions about student learning because we always have. It is an assumed, unquestioned part of what it means to be the teacher.

Some teachers today prefer to be in charge of the teaching and learning process, and traditionally they have been in charge. John Locke (1632–1704), for example, promoted the idea that boys should be educated through formal discipline to become gentlemen who exhibit virtue, wisdom, breeding and learning in their repertoire of behaviour. In 1844, Edward Feild (1801–76), a follower of Lockean ideas, became Newfoundland’s bishop for the Church of England, as well as a school inspector. Shortly after being

inducted into office, he set about personally reorganizing the local school of theology (later known as Queen’s College). Students who entered the institution in preparation for church ministry were also to prepare themselves for a life of hardship. While engaged in theological studies, they were to rise at 6 AM and return to their rooms by 10 PM. Their meals consisted of bread and butter, with tea or coffee, occasionally supplemented with the luxury of meal or corn cakes. Supper was more substantial, with the addition of hard bread and fish. Extravagance of any kind was forbidden; therefore, feather beds were ruled out, students were required to dress like gentlemen, and no one was allowed to go into debt (Netton 1974, 84–85). Locke would have been proud.

The shift to student-centred learning was heavily influenced by the existential philosophy movement of the 1960s. In what was sometimes called radical education, the emphasis was on assigning power to students, who were perceived as being entirely responsible for their own learning. The goal of education was to equip students with learning skills so

sophisticated that they would be able to teach themselves (Weimer 2002, 29). After serving as guide or facilitator, teachers were expected to abdicate that role, having enabled students to decide for themselves what was important, to speak with their own voices, to determine for themselves who they were, and to accept responsibility for their being and for their being with others (Vandenberg 1971, 153). Teachers were to awaken in students the desire to pursue truth by becoming aware of their subjective freedom to think for themselves and thus establish their own versions of truth and form their own moral standards. In contemporary terminology, this approach is *inquiry learning*; that is, students are expected to look for truth on their own terms and to interpret encountered meanings on the basis of their own devices (Morris 1966, 153). As one teacher put it, “When one sees one’s own ideas quoted verbatim, one’s heart should sink. But when one sees one’s own ideas thought out anew as for the first time, then he is seeing the beginnings of a free mind” (Harper 1955, 237).

Today, inquiry-based learning is a student-centred strategy in which students inquire into an issue, or seek answers to posed content questions within a clearly outlined procedure and group structure (Kourilsky and Quaranta 1987, 68). In inquiry learning (or discovery learning) students are given opportunities to inquire into topics of interest so they can discover insights for themselves. An effective teacher (acting as facilitator or guide) will challenge students to inquire further on their own (Parkay et al 2009, 254). They may even be challenged to discuss why they have arrived at a particular conclusion. Crisp (2009, 10)

suggests that inquiry learning may be viewed as the process of asking and answering questions with the intent of creating meaningful dialogue. Posner and Rudnitsky (1997, 137) emphasize that a useful objective for inquiry learning is the resolution of problems related to individual functioning—based on the interpretation of available facts and observations.

With interest in inquiry learning mounting, its related group procedures have been formalized into five steps (Eggen and Kauchak 1988, 208):

1. Identifying the question or problem
2. Formulating a hypothesis
3. Gathering data
4. Assessing the hypothesis through data analysis
5. Generalizing to a conclusion

Naturally, the process is less formal when the inquiry learning situation consists of a one-on-one encounter between facilitator and learner.

A survey of educational ideas reveals that writers in the early modern period held to the notion of inquiry learning in some form, albeit not exactly in the form described above. They did concern themselves with helping their protégés in deciding such matters as which career to pursue, how they could contribute to their community and how they would live their lives. Johann Amos Comenius (1592–1670), for example, wanted his students to understand the meaning of lessons, not merely memorize them. He urged that learners should not be assigned any tasks until the nature and processes of the tasks had been thoroughly explained to them (Broudy and Palmer 1965, 99). Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78) placed a great deal of emphasis on

students’ knowing the difference between right and wrong, and on the kinds of behaviour subject to moral judgment (Price 1967, 333). Friedrich Froebel (1782–1852) sensed the whisper of the workings of God in every human activity and urged that the purpose of education was to loose the personality cradled within every child. That way, through the process of self-development, children could involve themselves in their own spiritual quest (Meyer 1965, 371). Finally, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746–1827) must be included, because he aimed to produce in all children a deep sense of personality and dignity by making them aware of their inherent powers—intellectual, spiritual and social (Eby 1952, 437).

## Inquiry Learning in the Gospels

Although educators shy away from referring to Jesus, there is little doubt that he was an effective and a somewhat unusual instructor. Jesus preferred to have his students discover for themselves the truth of his teachings, and they were free to interpret those lessons in accordance with the underlying truth. Frequently using parables or stories to make a point, Jesus did occasionally engage in didactic preaching and lecturing to his audiences, although he seems to have reserved that approach for formal situations, such as when he was addressing religious leaders.

A good example of Jesus’s use of inquiry learning is recorded in Matthew 19:16–30. A rich young man asks Jesus what good thing he should do in order to inherit eternal life. Jesus cites a litany of ethical behaviours, and in response the young man insists that he has played by the rules all his life.



Jesus then suggests that he sell his possessions and give the proceeds to the poor. Naturally, the young man is disappointed, since he has expected to be praised for living a moral life. No doubt the young man leaves the scene in a spirit of further inquiry. Now he must discover on his own why it is necessary for him to fulfill yet another rubric on his way to becoming morally whole—a rubric of an entirely different makeup. It will undoubtedly be a long period of rumination.

Jesus's well-known Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5, appears to be addressed to ordinary folk, who may not be certain about how to behave in such matters as the law, oaths, divorce, murder, adultery, revenge and how to regard enemies. Jesus makes his positions quite clear, although biblical commentators do not necessarily agree. Some interpreters take Jesus's instructions literally, while others argue that these particular mandates belong to another age.

Using parables to impart deeper truths leaves room for hearers to ruminate further and decide for themselves how to apply their new-found insights. Williams (1977, 2) says that only those suffering from sheer moral inability or lazy unwillingness to apply their attention will fail to inquire into the meaning of a parable. Weimer (2002, 156) cautions that hearers may not be ready to engage in reflection or critical analysis, but if they are motivated to listen, rumination will occur rather quickly. If hearers are reluctant to amend their ways in relation to new-found truths, opportunities for them to do so should be presented openly, frequently and explicitly. Hearers should be encouraged in positive

ways, so that they might grasp the opportunity to think for themselves.

Teaching through the use of parables offers many advantages. First, a parable represents everyday interests unique to a specific time and place. Jesus's stories reflect the culture in which he lived; every listener could identify with the location and content of the stories.

Second, telling stories is an effective method of compelling and maintaining the interest of learners. People of every age like to hear a good story, particularly if they do not know where the storyline is headed.

Third, parables have the virtue of letting listeners make up their mind about the truth or lesson implied in the story. The thinking is not done for listeners; rather, they are compelled to draw their own conclusions. This takes interest and energy—fundamental ingredients in the search for truth.

Finally, sharing parables is an oral approach, not written. The impact is immediate, not the result of a long study of commentaries and related sources. Thus, the experience of hearing a parable implies immediate application and immediate inquiry.

Matthew 13 contains seven unique parables: the parable of the sower, the parable of the weeds, the parable of the mustard seed, the parable of the yeast, the parable of the hidden treasure, the parable of the pearl and the parable of the net. Jesus relates the parables and leaves his hearers to pursue their implications. Even Jesus's faithful followers have difficulty understanding the parable of the sower: "The disciples came to him and asked, 'Why do you speak to the people in parables?'" (Matt 13:10). Jesus

explains his choice of method and then elaborates on the meaning of the parable, but only to his disciples. Mark 4:33 records that Jesus explains the meaning of his parables to the disciples "as much as they could understand," implying that they still have homework to do. He asks them if they understand his stories, and they answer in the affirmative. He offers this simile: "Therefore every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storehouse new treasures as well as old" (Matt 13:52). The disciples are left to develop their own interpretations.

Jesus used parabolic teaching not only to arrest attention but also to etch the underlying lesson deep in memory and arouse something deep within (Bowie 1951, 165). His parables were never intended as an end in themselves; rather, their use carried on the telling in the form of further pursuing truth and self-examination.

One of the best known of Jesus's parables is the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25–37. In this case, an expert in the law hopes to trap Jesus on a legal point, so he asks Jesus what he should do to inherit eternal life. Jesus tells him to "love the Lord God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27). This provokes the inquirer's curiosity as to whom Jesus would identify as his neighbour. Quite equal to the occasion, Jesus tells the story of a Samaritan traveller who comes upon a Jewish man, beaten up and lying on the roadside. The compelling historical fact here is that the Jews and Samaritans long held a strong dislike for one another.

The travelling Samaritan is the third person to come upon the scene; the first two were a Jewish priest and a Levite (teacher of the Jewish law). Neither of them helped the victim of foul play. Although it would not have been expected that the Samaritan would show mercy to the fallen Jew, he does just that. He bandages the victim's wounds, puts him on his donkey and takes him to the nearest inn. He then pays the innkeeper for the wounded man's keep and offers to provide additional sums if needed. Undoubtedly, hearers would be surprised by the Samaritan's actions, but they would also be surprised by the behaviour of the priest and the Levite. Why did they walk by an ailing man lying in a ditch? Was their unexpected behaviour motivated by fear of a corpse or by social class contamination? Was Jesus merely differentiating good and bad people regardless of cultural affiliation (Levine 2006, 144)?

After relating the parable, Jesus asks the inquirer which of the three people was a neighbour to the fallen man. The obvious answer, appropriately acknowledged by Jesus's questioner, is the Samaritan. Rather than inculcating the questioner in any way, Jesus simply suggests that he go and be similarly merciful. The implications of the parable are clear, but in keeping with inquiry learning, it is up to the hearer to decide what to do with the newly encountered truth.

## Analysis of Five Scriptural Passages

At this point it is necessary to elaborate on Jesus's use of the inquiry learning approach based on the five scriptural passages quoted in Part 1 of this article

(Friesen 2012, 7). Analysis will show that Jesus afforded his listeners ample opportunity to discover truth for themselves by inquiring further, making inferences, forming generalizations and drawing their own conclusions.

### Passage 1

On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means. I desire mercy, not sacrifice." (Matt 9:12–13)

This statement implies that there are people who think themselves so virtuous that they do not need spiritual advice, support or guidance. Jesus seems to be saying that he is not interested in fellowshiping with those who are spiritually self-satisfied. He is indirectly letting his listeners know that they should be thinking about who is sick and with whom they should be fellowshiping. Which camp do they belong in—self-righteous or spiritually needy? Jesus makes it clear that his ministry is for the needy, the down-and-out. After Jesus makes this statement, the discussion seems to stop, perhaps because his listeners did not want to hear it, or maybe they simply did not get it. Undoubtedly, this conversation would later come back to them and they would think further on what Jesus said.

### Passage 2

Then they [the legalistically inclined Pharisees] looked for a way to arrest him [Jesus] because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd, so they left him and went away. (Mark 12:12)

In this scenario, Jesus's listeners *do* get the message: they understand immediately that the parable

told by Jesus is aimed squarely at them. The storyline involves a man who builds a hedge around his vineyard, within which he constructs a tower and digs a wine vat. He rents out the vineyard to a group of cultivators and goes away. After a while he sends messengers to inquire as to the success of the project, but the renters beat the messengers and send them back to the vineyard owner. After several more tries, the vineyard owner sends his own son as a last resort, thinking, *Surely they will not harm my son*. But, in fact, they do. The vineyard cultivators kill the son and cast him out of the vineyard.

At this point, Jesus becomes more philosophical, well aware that his listeners have caught the meaning of his story. He is referring to God's plan to bring salvation to humankind, first through the message of his prophets and later through the ministry of his Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus's next words cause some of his listeners to become perplexed or even to cringe. He says, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this and it is marvelous in our eyes" (Mark 12:10–11). Evidently, these listeners readily understand the metaphor, and they choose not to think further about the story but, rather, to take legal action against him. Only the presence of an adoring audience stops them.

### Passage 3

His disciples asked him what this parable meant. He said, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand." (Luke 8:9–10)

On this occasion, Jesus has just related the story of the sower, the man who spread seed on various kinds of soil—some on the path, some on rocky ground, some on dry soil and some on good ground. Only seed that fell on fertile soil grew to maturity. When the disciples inquire into the meaning of the parable, Jesus implies that they should have caught the meaning. He makes it clear, however, that the meaning is not intended for outsiders to understand. Here, the principle of further inquiry is well illustrated for Jesus's disciples, a vital step in this approach to learning.

#### Passage 4

"How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asks.

"Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" (John 3:4)

Nicodemus is a wealthy, high-ranking Pharisee who is thoroughly curious about Jesus's theology. Having heard Jesus talk about the new birth, Nicodemus wants to find out for himself what Jesus means. Nicodemus's question represents the second step in inquiry learning: his curiosity whetted, he decides to explore the matter further. Jesus is equal to the occasion, but rather than try to convince Nicodemus with a detailed, plain-spoken explanation, he launches into a philosophical discussion as though to challenge Nicodemus's further cogitation. After expanding on the theme that "flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to Spirit" (John 3:6), Jesus further complicates the conversation: "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). Nicodemus's question, "How can this be?" (John

3:9), is met with a further elaboration of the role of the Son of God in the world. Undoubtedly, after this exchange, Nicodemus has plenty to think about. That is Jesus's plan!

#### Passage 5

You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life. (John 5:39–40)

In this passage, Jesus explains his perceived role in the world to local religious leaders. His message to them is that though they are adroit at reading and analyzing the Scriptures, from time to time they apparently misread them. Jesus clearly sees his role differently than his critics do. In fact, he claims that the very Scriptures his critics are reading affirm his role as the Messiah. He is challenging his critics to investigate further whether he is telling the truth. He is asking them to check out the way he is fulfilling his perceived role. He does not act like an imposter for, unlike them, he does not accept praise from men. Jesus also claims that their esteemed historical leader, Moses, prophesied about the nature of this role. At this point, his listeners have plenty to think about; Jesus has provided them with a volume of claims to investigate.

### Implications for Teaching Practice

The lesson for contemporary educators is clear. Instead of rapidly adopting and endorsing every newly concocted teaching and learning approach that appears on the horizon, educators would do well to familiarize themselves with the history of

pedagogical developments in all contexts, lest they unknowingly be caught repeating history. Does wise King Solomon have to be right? Is there indeed nothing new under the sun (Eccles 1:9)?

A study of Jesus's parabolic method should give rise to a new appreciation of storytelling—a teaching method with a deep historical base in Native North America. Parables, like Indigenous moral legends, are related for the purpose of challenging hearers to examine the spiritual bases of their beliefs and practices. This has an obvious application for teachers who function in Christian institutional settings. We want our students to know not only *what* they believe but also *why* they believe it. Once again, Jesus is the model by which to proceed. He did not present the path to spiritual fulfillment as a concrete formula by which to access God's grace. Instead, he presented the path to God as a personalized pursuit: "Each should be fully convinced in his own mind" (Rom 14:5). This is evident in each of the five scriptural passages presented above.

As with many contemporary verbal revisionist educational theories, the roots of inquiry teaching lie deep in the past—in this case, in the teaching approach of Jesus Christ. Awareness of this could save educators a measure of embarrassment and provide them with time to research and develop truly original teaching methods. As has been shown, the fundamental essence of the much-heralded inquiry approach to learning is at least as old as the New Testament Gospels, and the challenge for future-minded educators is to strive to be originators, not uninformed followers. After all, the education of the next generation is at hand, and they deserve the best.

## Note

All scriptural quotations are from the New International Version.

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# Year of Faith in Evergreen Catholic Schools

*Karen Koester*

*Karen Koester is the coordinator of religious education for Evergreen Catholic Schools.*

**F**or the 2012/13 school year, Evergreen Catholic Schools adopted the theme “Enter Through the Door of Faith.” We are grateful to Bishop Paul Terrio, who suggested the theme when he was pastor of Holy Trinity Catholic Parish, in Spruce Grove, where the school division has its central office. This theme shows our connection with the Catholic Church around the world, which is celebrating the Year of Faith announced by our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, in his apostolic letter *Porta Fidei*.<sup>1</sup> Teachers and students have brought this theme to life in our schools. A few examples of their work are included here.

At St Marguerite Catholic School (K-4), in Spruce Grove, teacher Jocelyn Lamothe asked staff members to give her a word to describe what they wanted students to experience as they walked through the “door of faith” leading into each classroom at the school. Next, she created beautiful hand-crafted artwork to place above each classroom door. She even made an “Inspire” sign for division superintendent Cindi Vaselenak.



*"Belong" sign at St Marguerite Catholic School*

At Gerard Redmond Community Catholic School (5–12), in Hinton, Peter Weidman's Grade 12 religion students created a display for the window of their classroom door. Students learned about the sources of the phrase *door of faith*:

- Pope Benedict's apostolic letter *Porta Fidei*
- Acts 14:23–27, which describes how the Gentiles came to open

the door of faith—with prayer,  
fasting and committing  
themselves to the Lord, in whom  
they had come to believe

At the centre of the display is the Nicene Creed in Latin, in the shape of a cross. Four words are large and in purple (the liturgical colour for Advent and Lent): *prayer, fast, commit* and *believe*. These are the keys to opening the door of faith (as specified in Acts



*Door of a classroom at Gerard Redmond Community Catholic School*



14:23). The other words are from *Porta Fidei*, and were chosen by students as words that are central to our faith and meaningful to them.

At John Paul II Catholic School (K-8), in Stony Plain, Grade 8 students were challenged to choose a school logo to represent the Year of Faith. The logo chosen (through a vote) was designed by student Ryan D. Students interpreted the drawing as follows: God is the key that opens the door to our faith. The logo is being used throughout the school year in newsletters, on the school letter-head and in other school correspondence (including e-mail). Classrooms received a key for the prayer tables as a visual reminder of the theme "Enter Through the Door of Faith."



Logo created by a Grade 8 student at John Paul II Catholic School

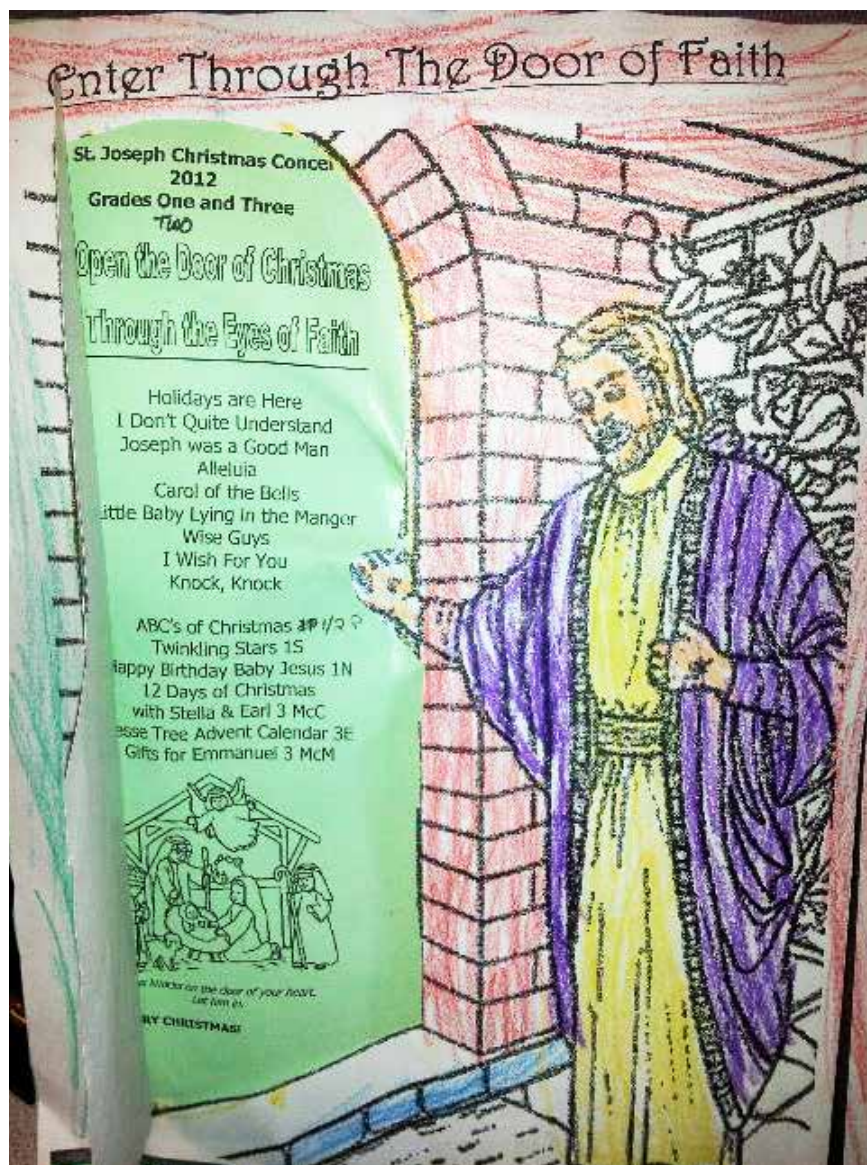
At St Thomas Aquinas Catholic School (5-8), in Spruce Grove, art teacher Marg Considine's Grade 8 students used acrylic paints to design a "flooral" (a mural on the floor) just inside the door of the art room. They brainstormed symbols and ideas from our Catholic faith to fill the panes of the windows in the door of faith. The crucifix and the chalice were popular choices. Students included scriptural verses (such as "I am the vine," "Upon this rock" and "I am the Good Shepherd") to support their symbols. Students passing by stopped to admire the work in progress and to initiate conversations about the meaning of the symbols.



Floor mural at St Thomas Aquinas Catholic School

At St Joseph School (K-4), in Spruce Grove, students coloured programs for the school's Christmas concert. A paper flap served as a door, which opened to display all the songs to be sung at the concert.

A bulletin board in the hallway at St Joseph School featured a photo of the school in the middle of a cut-out of the local parish church, along with a beautiful prayer.



St Joseph School's Christmas concert program

Deputy superintendent of schools Mike Paonessa helped promote the theme. Every staff member in the division received a door hanger with the following prayer for the Year of Faith on one side:

God our Father, the door of faith is always open for us, inviting us

into a life of communion with You, and offering entry into your Church. Give us courage to cross that threshold when your word is proclaimed. Shape our hearts with transforming grace, that we might continue on the journey of faith begun at our baptism, and stay close to You throughout our

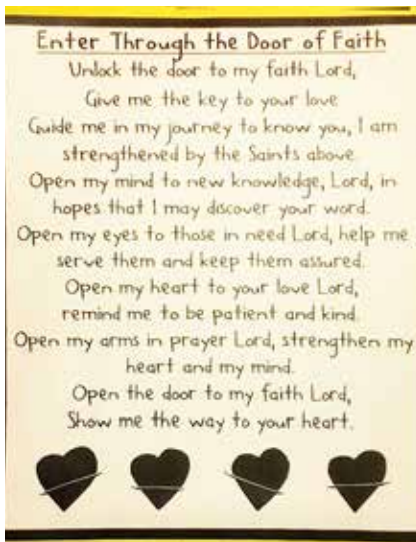
lives. Sustain in us the hope for eternal life, fruit of the resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ, through whom we make this prayer. Amen.

Administrators and trustees each received a carpet with the theme and logo to place inside their doors.

To strengthen the theme, I launched a weekly e-mail series for this Year of Faith. The series (entitled Did You Know?) takes up Pope Benedict XVI's challenge to Catholics to grow more familiar with our *Catechism of the Catholic Church* on the 20th anniversary of its promulgation. Each week, all staff in the district receive a short e-mail describing an aspect of Catholic belief or practice, with a relevant article or two from the catechism to outline Catholic teaching on the topic.



*Bulletin board at St Joseph School*



*Prayer on the bulletin board at St Joseph School*



*Door hanger from central office*

## Note

1. See [www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/motu\\_proprio/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_motu-proprio\\_20111011\\_porta-fidei\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/motu_proprio/documents/hf_ben-xvi_motu-proprio_20111011_porta-fidei_en.html) (accessed February 27, 2013).



*Carpet with division theme*





## Reason and the Preambles of Faith

*Tomás Rochford*

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

The new semester has barely begun, and already I have experienced students' self-assured rebuttals of any and all theological or moral statements. Their dogma is that morality and religion are merely matters of personal opinion. The confidence with which many Religion 35 students proclaim this skeptical "truth" is quite remarkable. So entrenched is their position that any claim that Christianity might teach objective truth is met with grave suspicion, if not derision.

In the previous issue of *Embrace the Spirit*, I launched this column by highlighting the importance of reason in providing fertile soil for belief in the Christian faith. I would argue that these student reactions result from a poor grasp of the nature of human reason, and the failure to respect the full breadth of knowledge it can achieve. What might help our doubting students accept Christian

truths and moral tenets is knowledge of the *praeambula fidei*, or preambles of faith. Essentially, these preambles provide students with a way to God and revealed truth grounded in the exercise of reason. Before defining and explaining the preambles of faith, which demand a fuller conception of the range and limits of human reason than is prevalent in today's marketplace of ideas, it is necessary to comment on the understanding of reason held by most people in contemporary Canadian society. We must know what type of thinking our students are exposed to before beginning the process of correcting it.

*Reason* is popularly understood in two ways: (1) as a calculative faculty whereby we use sense observation and experimentation to discover quantitative relationships in the physical world (*empirical reason*), or (2) as a faculty that enables us to follow our autonomous (self-law) appetites or will effectively, no matter the content or object of our desire (*instrumental reason*).<sup>1</sup> This inadequate idea of bifurcated reason causes our society to fall prey to the errors of scientism and moral relativism.<sup>2</sup> Scientism trusts the calculative faculty to an extreme, limiting truth to scientific findings. Moral

relativism declares that we cannot know what is right or wrong, good or evil, because the will and appetites direct the practical intellect, not vice versa. The Christian world view is anathema to such thinking, as the tradition of the Church<sup>3</sup> and Sacred Scripture both recognize that there is far more to human reason than these popular conceptions suggest.

The more comprehensive view of human reason required by Christianity is assumed by the preambles of faith. The preambles are truths of natural theology that have always been considered by the Church to be knowable by human reason alone, unaided by the revelation of God, but contained within and completed by the revealed truths of the faith. These preambles include the following:

- The existence of God
- The existence of an immortal human soul
- The natural moral law
- The possibility of revelation

It is important to note that these preambles are not only presupposed by Christian life and belief but also attested to by the theological and philosophical tradition of the Church. They are also contained in Scripture,<sup>4</sup> and were



dogmatically defined by the magisterium during the First Vatican Council of 1870.<sup>5</sup> The purpose of the preambles is to bridge the gap between what we can know through reason and what we can know only through God's revelation. Put another way, the preambles serve as a rational foundation upon which the supernatural truths of the faith can be built—a preparation for the gospel through the use of reason.

To see the importance of the preambles in the classroom, consider what happens when an appeal to Scripture rather than to reason is employed to argue the existence of God and moral truth. Some of our students enjoy assuming the increasingly common self-descriptors of *nonreligious* and *atheist*. It is therefore problematic to appeal directly to Scripture to prove God's existence or providential love, or to declare certain activities immoral. Why is this so? An appeal to Scripture assumes that the nonreligious or atheistic listener accepts the authority of the Bible and is therefore persuaded of its truths. However, because the Bible's authority rests on the existence and self-communication of God, any argument attempting to prove God's existence using Scripture is an exercise in circular reasoning (that is, begging the question). If God does not exist, or cannot be known to exist with certainty, why should anyone trust a book that claims to contain at least part of his revelation to the world?<sup>6</sup> Consequently, if the listener refuses to accept the claim that Scripture is the inspired word of God, on the grounds of not believing in God, the Bible can be rejected as mythical literature from ancient Mesopotamia, having no religious or moral significance whatsoever.

Although I am convinced of the vital importance of the preambles of faith in religious education, I must mention certain objections voiced against them. These objections arise from various misunderstandings about the nature of reason and its relationship to Christian faith. *Fideism* underlies the most typical objection from Christians to the preambles. According to the fideists, the preambles detract from the grandeur of faith by attempting to confine God within the finite limits of human intellect. The fideist would assert that instead of reasoning about God and his ways, we should read the Bible or trust the word of some spiritual authority. Others object to the preambles on the basis that we can never know the nature of God (the Trinity) through unaided reason, and that the knowledge of God given to us by reason pales so greatly compared with revelation as to render it essentially worthless. Still others maintain that no one is ever argued into Christian belief; that is, it is not through logical reasoning but, rather, through the gift of grace and a changed heart that we have faith. Finally, those held captive by the error of scientism object to the preambles of faith, stating that we cannot know anything with certainty about nonobservable realities.

While each of these objections offers some important insight—for example, the radical limitations of human reason in comparison to a God who is infinitely perfect—they all neglect the key to interpreting the essential character of the preambles of faith: God's grace does not erase or bypass human nature but, rather, builds upon and perfects it. Therefore, our natural human faculties (intellect and will) have some role to play in providing the

fertile soil in which supernatural grace can be fruitful. No Christian can deny that the understanding of God discovered by reason alone is incomplete.<sup>7</sup> However, without the rational certainty that God exists (that is, as uncaused cause and final end), how could one be prepared to accept the revealed truth that this God is three persons in one divinity, that he loves us and that he sent his only Son to redeem us, so that we might share in his presence and friendship forever?

Thus, it is essential that the preambles be accepted, as they provide the link between what any person (Christian or non-Christian) can know through reason and what is revealed. Since God is truth, the verities of non-Christians may be perceived as a basis for the fullness of truth—a preparation for evangelization. Non-Christians' agreement with Christians on the truths of natural theology may eventually cause the former's acceptance of revealed truth, thus bringing souls to Christ. Likewise, for the growing number of students who are nonreligious, agnostic or atheistic, the preambles of faith may provide a point of contact—based on human reason alone—between what is knowable about God, the human soul and the moral law, and the supernatural truths revealed by our Lord.

So vital is our use of the preambles in teaching the faith to our skeptical students that one cannot but applaud the following observation by Edward Feser, a contemporary Catholic philosopher and convert from atheism:

Preaching Christianity to skeptics without first setting out the *praeambula fidei*, and then complaining when they don't accept it [Christianity], is like yelling in English at someone who only

speaks Chinese, and then dismissing him as a fool when he doesn't understand you. In both cases, while there is certainly a fool in the picture, it isn't the listener.<sup>8</sup>

## Notes

1. This reflects the influence of David Hume's (1739/40) idea that reason is the slave of the passions, found in his *Treatise of Human Nature*.

2. Brad Gregory's (2012) recent book *The Unintended Reformation* tracks the historical genesis of this error of bifurcated reason.

3. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* #31–43 and #355–68.

4. For example, natural knowledge of God's existence is presumed in Romans 1:18–31, and knowledge of the natural moral law is presumed in Romans 2:13–16.

5. *Dei Filius* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith), chapter 2.

6. This is not to dismiss the very real possibility of people being brought to the faith through the Bible, with the miraculous assistance of God's grace.

7. St Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae* (First Part, Question 1, Article 1) discusses the radical inadequacy of human reason in relation to God, and therefore the necessity of revelation in order to gain knowledge of God's nature and the salvation of souls.

8. See <http://edwardfeser.blogspot.ca/2012/01/point-of-contact.html?m=1> (accessed February 1, 2013).

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*Future articles in this column will address each of the preambles of faith: (1) the existence of God, (2) the existence of an immortal human soul, (3) the natural moral law and (4) the possibility of revelation.*



# Conference 2013

**“Debunking the 10 Great Myths About Christianity”  
with Michael Coren**

**October 25 and 26**

**Fairmont Banff Springs Hotel, Banff**

Conference 2013 will take place October 25 and 26 in Banff. The \$295 registration fee includes a wine and cheese event and all meals on Saturday. The conference hotel rate is \$165 per night (which will be honoured for three days prior and three days after the conference).

Stay tuned for more details about the conference and how to register.

## About the Speaker

Michael Coren hosts *The Arena*, a nightly television show on Sun News. *The Arena* stresses international coverage—particularly the Middle East, the US and Europe—

but also takes on social, moral and religious issues, as well as Canadian life and politics. Coren is irreverent, thoughtful and hard-hitting.

For more than a decade, he was host and producer of *The Michael Coren Show* on Crossroads Television, presenting more than 3,000 episodes and winning numerous awards.

Coren is a columnist for various newspapers across Canada and for periodicals such as *The Catholic Register*, *Catholic Insight*, *The Catholic World Report*, *The Landowner* and *The Interim*. He also appears each Wednesday on Newstalk 1010 radio, and is a regular guest on TV networks as

diverse as Russia Today and TVOntario.

The best-selling author of 14 books (including biographies of G K Chesterton, H G Wells, Arthur Conan Doyle, J R R Tolkien and C S Lewis), he has been published in many countries and more than a dozen languages. His last two books were on the best-seller list for more than 10 weeks.

Coren has received several honorary doctorates and awards, including the Archbishop Adam Exner Award for Catholic Excellence in Public Life in 2012. That same year, he was awarded the Queen’s Jubilee Medal for services to media.



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## **Specialist councils' role in promoting diversity, equity and human rights**

Alberta's rapidly changing demographics are creating an exciting cultural diversity that is reflected in the province's urban and rural classrooms. The new landscape of the school provides an ideal context in which to teach students that strength lies in diversity. The challenge that teachers face is to capitalize on the energy of today's intercultural classroom mix to lay the groundwork for all students to succeed. To support teachers in their critical roles as leaders in inclusive education, in 2000 the Alberta Teachers' Association established the Diversity, Equity and Human Rights Committee (DEHRC).

DEHRC aims to assist educators in their legal, professional and ethical responsibilities to protect all students and to maintain safe, caring and inclusive learning environments. Topics of focus for DEHRC include intercultural education, inclusive learning communities, gender equity, UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network, sexual orientation and gender variance.

Here are some activities the DEHR committee undertakes:

- Studying, advising and making recommendations on policies that reflect respect for diversity, equity and human rights
- Offering annual Inclusive Learning Communities Grants (up to \$2,000) to support activities that support inclusion
- Producing *Just in Time*, an electronic newsletter that can be found at [www.teachers.ab.ca](http://www.teachers.ab.ca); Teaching in Alberta; Diversity, Equity and Human Rights.
- Providing and creating print and web-based teacher resources
- Creating a list of presenters on DEHR topics
- Supporting the Association instructor workshops on diversity

Specialist councils are uniquely situated to learn about diversity issues directly from teachers in the field who see how diversity issues play out in subject areas. Specialist council members are encouraged to share the challenges they may be facing in terms of diversity in their own classrooms and to incorporate these discussions into specialist council activities, publications and conferences.

Diversity, equity and human rights affect the work of all members. What are you doing to make a difference?

Further information about the work of the DEHR committee can be found on the Association's website at [www.teachers.ab.ca](http://www.teachers.ab.ca) under Teaching in Alberta, Diversity, Equity and Human Rights.

Alternatively, contact Andrea Berg, executive staff officer, Professional Development, at [andrea.berg@ata.ab.ca](mailto:andrea.berg@ata.ab.ca) for more information.





## Guidelines

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The RMEC newsjournal *Embrace the Spirit* is published to

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

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

The following areas will be addressed in the newsjournal:

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

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

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

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

