



# The periodical of the Professional Society of Religious Educators

VOLUME 2 NUMBER 2 (April 2016)

---

## EDITORIAL

Welcome to the second issue of *Roots & Wings* for 2016. Again we offer a variety of articles, newsbytes and resources as an invitation to reflect on classroom practice and to try out new approaches. In this issue, we introduce a much neglected emphasis - RE for special needs - which comes in the form of an article in two parts in Numbers 2 and 3 of this Volume.

We hope you enjoy the issue.

PAUL FALLER

---

## CONTENTS

REFLECTION	What Teachers Might Learn from Jesus the Educator (Thomas Groome).....	1
REFLECTION	How large is your heaven? (Ron Rolheiser) .....	4
REFLECTION	The gentle powerless power of God (Ron Rolheiser).....	6
WEBSITE	REQuest .....	7
BOOK REVIEW	Born Contemplative (Madeleine Simon) .....	8
HUMOUR	Peter's Faith .....	8
ARTICLE	Speak from the Heart - Part 1 (Anne Krisman).....	9
ACTIVITY	Responding to Controversy .....	15
.....	NEWS	
LOCAL	Church must build bridge to traditional healing .....	18
	Fundamentalism isn't Muslim (Christopher Clohessy).....	20
INTERNATIONAL	Charlie Charlie Challenge: Can You Really Summon a Demon? (Elizabeth Palermo) .....	21

---

## REFLECTION

### What Teachers Might Learn from Jesus the Educator

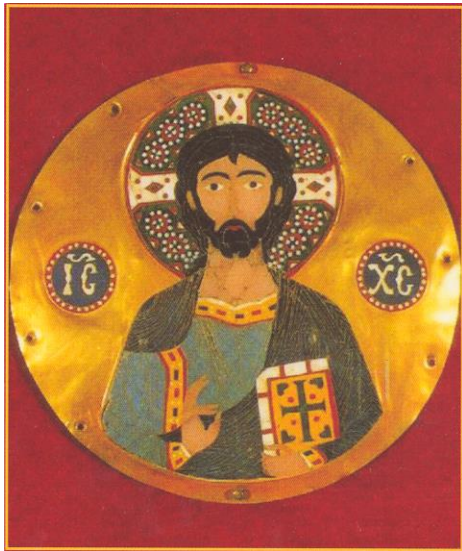
(Thomas Groome)

Maria Montessori claimed that her whole approach, and particularly its commitment to treat students with “reverent love,” was inspired by the image of Jesus the Good Shepherd. In John’s Gospel, Jesus first states his life purpose as that all “might have life and have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). Then, he declares, “I am the good shepherd” and adds, “A good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep” (10:11). And he reiterates, “I

am the good shepherd,” adding “I know mine and mine know me” (10: 14). The word for “know” there is *ginosko*; it reflects a loving relationship rather than just being acquainted.

Like all metaphors, the teacher as *good shepherd* has its limitations; no true educator wants students to follow like a bunch of sheep (Jesus’ invite “come follow me” can be heard as an invitation to become *shepherds* - like Jesus - not sheep). Whether one finds the shepherd image helpful or not (and there are other Gospel images to choose from), I propose that the historical Jesus, both *who* he was and *how* he taught, should define the vocation of Catholic educators.

### So Who Was Jesus?



It is surely a truism that Catholic education should reflect the deep truths and values of Catholic faith. But then, what defines such faith - at its core?. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* responds, “At the heart . . . we find a Person, the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, the only Son from the Father” (#426, CCC). Note that the *Catechism* emphasizes both the *Jesus of history* and the *Christ of faith*, or “Jesus of Nazareth,” and “the only Son from the Father.” Of course, they are one and the same person, yet with two natures, fully human and fully divine. God’s saving work through the “only Son” (John 3:16) assures us that “abundant grace” (St. Paul) is now available for every good human enterprise - and surely for the work of educators. Yet it is that Carpenter from Nazareth who should inspire what we actually do as Catholic educators. This prompts us to ask, who was Jesus - the historical figure?

If truth be told, the historical Jesus is still a bit new to Catholic Christians. One reason is that our traditional catechisms based their doctrinal catechesis on the *Apostles Creed*, teaching each of its articles. But, recall that “born of the virgin Mary” is followed by “suffered under Pontius Pilate.” As a result, the catechisms skipped Jesus’ public ministry, going immediately from his birth to his death. So there’s not a word in the Maynooth Catechism about Jesus’s extraordinary compassion for feeding the hungry; yet, with six accounts in the four Gospels, it must have been central to his ministry. Likewise, they has none of the great stories he told like the good Samaritan or the prodigal Son. So it was possible to grow up Catholic and not know much of the historical Jesus - though Vatican II’s encouragement to read the scriptures and now Pope Francis’ example are helping to right this in our time.

So, reflect as an educator on a few of the obvious commitments that reflect who Jesus was. First recognize his central teaching of the in-breaking of God’s reign of justice and peace, and his revelation of God’s unconditional love for all, inviting disciples to radical love in response - even of enemies. Note his extraordinary compassion and favor for those most in need. See him building up community that welcomes all to the table and reaching out to sinners with unbounded mercy. Note well him working miracles to feed the hungry, cure the sick, and expel evil. Reflect on his claim to fulfill Isaiah’s radical prophecy of an Anointed One (*Messiah* in Hebrew) who would bring good news to the poor, liberty to

captives, sight to the blind, freedom to the oppressed, and to proclaim God's time of special favor, especially for the least, the lost, and the last (check out Luke 4: 16-21).

Push on now and imagine how these commitments of Jesus can inspire your vocation. Every day in your school and classroom, you have opportunity to teach your students to become good people who live good lives - the ultimate "intended learning outcome" of Catholic education. You are daily invited to love your students, encouraging them to love themselves and their neighbors. Every day you can practice compassion and show care for them, at times even "going the extra mile." You can help to build up community in your classroom and school, being inclusive of every student and showing respect for their human dignity. With the help of God's grace, your teaching can work its own small miracles in students lives, feeding their minds, healing their hearts, and helping to deliver them from evil. Like Jesus, your favorites should be those who need the favor most - the "poor" of whatever kind. No matter what you are teaching, you can help prepare students to go out into the world as agents of God's reign of justice and peace, of liberation and freedom for all, committed to doing what God wills "on earth as in heaven." Grounded in Jesus, Catholic education can do no less.

*For Reflection:*

- \* What else emerges if we make the historical Jesus the core of Catholic education?
- \* What commitments might this encourage toward students? Toward colleagues?

*The Pedagogy of Jesus*

While we center who Jesus was and his values at the *heart* of Catholic education, I believe we also have much to learn from his actual pedagogy - from not only *what* but *how* he taught. Some 150 times, the Gospels describe his public ministry as "teaching"; he was, then, most eminently *an educator*.

I propose that in Jesus' actual teaching we can detect some pedagogical moves that are well worth emulating and this regardless of what subjects we may be teaching. First, he almost invariably began with something familiar and of interest to people's own lives; as Freire might say, with their own *realidad*. So fisher-folk sorting fish, farmers sowing seed, women baking bread, vineyard owners hiring workers, the birds of the air, the lilies of the field - the list goes on - are all examples of how he connected with people's ordinary lives, rousing their interest (Dewey said we teach nothing of significance unless we get people interested.)

Second, while Jesus began with people's own lives, he also invited them to reflect on them critically, often in a whole new way. So the Samaritan is neighbor, the Prodigal is welcomed home, Lazarus is rewarded, and so on. He was turning people's taken for granted world-views upside-down. Though we might think of Jesus' teaching style as "telling" - in a didactic way - in fact he asked questions over three hundred times in the Gospels, and typically ones that prompted people to think for themselves. Clearly, Jesus encouraged critical thinking.

Third, Jesus the Teacher was not simply a catalyst to get people to reflect on their lives in the world, he also had a powerful message to teach - the good news (Gospel) of the in-breaking of God's reign. Indeed, Jesus taught the greatest story ever told and did so "with authority" (Mark 1:27).

Fourth, we never find Jesus teaching knowledge in an abstract and value free kind of way - simply as a transferal of information. Instead, he was ever trying to shape the identity

of his students, to entice them to follow *the way* he was teaching. He wanted them to see for themselves and make personal decisions to embrace his spiritual wisdom for life, to choose and commit to living for the reign of God.

Now, think about whatever *you* teach - not just religion but math, languages, science, social studies. Imagine how to get your student's interested in the topic as important to their lives and then to think critically for themselves about it. How can you access whatever you're teaching to integrate with and enrich students' everyday lives, and in ways that are value-laden. And beyond knowing about - whatever - can you teach in ways that promote spiritual wisdom for life, shaping students' values and their commitments to follow *the way* of Jesus?

#### *For Reflection*

\* What might *you* learn from the pedagogy of Jesus?

\* Imagine how to shape your students' values, regardless of what you are teaching?

---

## REFLECTION

### How Large is your Heaven?

(Ron Rolheiser)



One of the marks of a Christian heart is the desire for inclusivity, the desire to ultimately be in communion with as many people as possible, to have everyone in heaven with you without demanding that they become just like you to get there.

Sadly, we tend to harbor the opposite attitude, though we are slow to admit this.

We all like to think of ourselves as big-hearted, as having wide compassion, and as loving like Jesus did, but too much within both our attitudes and our actions belies this. Our own love, truth, and worship are often unconsciously predicated on making ourselves right by making others wrong. Too often we have an unconscious mantra which says: I can only be good, if someone else is bad. I can only be right, if someone else is wrong. My dogma can only be true, if someone else's is false. My religion can only be right, if someone else's is wrong. My Eucharist can only be valid, if someone else's is invalid. And I can only be in heaven, if someone else is in hell.

We justify this attitude of separation and moral-religious superiority by appealing to various things: correct dogma, the need for justice, proper morality, right

ecclesiology, and correct liturgical practice, among other things. And there's some truth in this. To have your heaven include everyone does not mean that truth, morality, and church practice all become relative, that it's of no ultimate consequence what one believes or how one acts and worships. Our Christian scriptures and our subsequent tradition warn clearly that there are certain rights and wrongs and that certain attitudes and actions can exclude us from the God's Kingdom, heaven. But those same scriptures make it equally clear that God's salvific will is universal and that God's deep, constant, passionate longing is that everyone, absolutely everyone, regardless of their attitude and actions, be somehow brought into the house. God, it seems, does not want to rest until everyone is home, eating at the same table.

Jesus, uncompromisingly, teaches the same thing. For example, in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 15, he weaves together three stories to make this point: The shepherd who leaves the 99 sheep in order to search for the one stray; the woman who has ten coins, loses one, and cannot rest until she has found her lost coin; and the father who loses two sons, one to weakness and one to anger, and will not rest until he has both back in the house.

I particularly like the middle story, the one about the woman with the lost coins, because it is the most clear in making this point: A woman has ten coins (each worth about dime), she loses one, frantically searches for it, puts on extra lights and sweeps her house, and finally she finds it, is overjoyed, calls in her neighbors, and has a celebration that clearly costs more than what the coin itself was worth. Why her frantic pursuit of one small coin? And why her great joy in finding it?

What's really at issue is not the value of the coin but the loss of wholeness: For a Hebrew at the time, 10 was a number of wholeness, 9 was not. Hence we might recast the story this way: A woman is the mother of ten children. Nine come to visit her regularly and share their lives with her, but one is alienated and refuses to come home or ever talk to her. The woman cannot rest and tries everything imaginable to try to reconcile with her daughter and eventually her daughter comes round. They reconcile. She is overjoyed, phones her friends, and throws a party. Her family is whole again!

The same dynamic holds true for the shepherd who leaves the 99 sheep to search for the lost sheep. For a Hebrew at that time, the number 99 did not designate wholeness, but the number 100 did. The shepherd is like the mother with the alienated daughter, he cannot rest until his family is once again made whole. We see the same longing, passion, and sadness in the Father of the prodigal son and older brother. He cannot rest, nor be at peace, until both his sons are back in the house. He is overjoyed when his wayward son returns but the story ends with him still outside the house, trying to coax his other son, outside because of anger, to also come inside. His heaven includes both his sons.

Our heaven too must be a wide one. Like the woman who lost a coin, like the shepherd who has lost a sheep, and like the father of the prodigal son and older brother, we too shouldn't rest easy when others are separated from us. The family is only happy when everyone is home.

What ultimately characterizes a genuine faith and a big heart is not how pure our churches, doctrines, and morals might be, but how wide is the embrace of our hearts.



# REFLECTION

## The Gentle Powerless Power of God

(Ron Rolheiser)

Daniel Berrigan was once asked to give a conference at a university gathering. The topic given him was something to the effect of “God’s Presence in Today’s World”. His talk, I suspect, surprised a number of people in his audience, both in brevity and content.

He simply told the audience how he, working in a hospice for the terminally ill, goes each week to spend some time sitting by the bed of a young boy who is totally incapacitated, physically and mentally.

The young boy can only lie there. He cannot speak or communicate with his body nor in any other way, it would seem, express himself to those who come into his room. He lies mute, helpless, by all outward appearance cut off from any possible communication.

Berrigan then described how he goes regularly to sit by this young boy’s bed to try to hear what he is saying in his silence and helplessness.

After sharing this, Berrigan added a further point: The way this young man lies in our world, silent and helpless, is the way God lies in our world. To hear what God is saying we must learn to hear what this young boy is saying.

This is an extremely useful image in helping us understand how the power of God manifests itself in our world. God’s power is in the world like that young boy. It does not overpower with muscle, or attractiveness, or brilliance, or grace, as does the speed and muscle of an Olympic athlete, the physical beauty of a young film star, or the gifted speech or rhetoric of the brilliant orator or author.

These latter things—muscle, swiftness, beauty, brilliance, grace—do reflect God’s glory, but they are not the primary way God shows power in this world. No. God’s power in the world has a very different look and a very different feel to it.

What does God’s power look like? How does it feel to feel as God must often feel in this world?

If you have ever been overpowered physically and been helpless in that, if you have ever been hit or slapped by someone and been powerless to defend yourself or fight back, then you have felt how God is in this world.

If you have ever dreamed a dream and found that every effort you made was hopeless and that your dream could never be realized, if you have cried tears and felt shame at your own inadequacy, then you have felt how God is in this world.

If you have ever been sick and there was no doctor or medicine that could cure you, if you have ever felt the mortality of your own body and been hopeless at its weakness, then you have felt how God is in the world.

If you have ever been shamed in your enthusiasm and not given a chance to explain yourself, if you have ever been cursed for your goodness by people who misunderstood you and were powerless to make them see things in your way, then you have felt how God is in this world.

If you have ever tried to make yourself attractive to someone and were incapable of it, if you have ever loved someone and wanted desperately to somehow make him or her notice you and

found yourself hopelessly unable to do so, then you have felt how God is in this world.

If you have ever felt yourself aging and losing both the health and tautness of a young body and the opportunities that come with that and been powerless to turn back the clock, if you have ever felt the world slipping away from you as you grow older and ever more marginalized, then you have felt how God is in this world.

And if you have ever felt like a minority of one before the group hysteria of a crowd gone mad, if you have ever felt, first-hand, the sick evil of a gang rape, then you have felt how God is in this

world . . . and how Jesus felt on Good Friday.

God never overpowers. God's power is never the power of a muscle, a speed, a physical attractiveness, a brilliance or a grace which (as the contemporary expression has it) blows you away and makes you say: "Yes, there is a God!" The world's power tries to work that way.

God's power though is more muted, more helpless, more shamed and more marginalized. But it lies at a deeper level, at the ultimate base of things, and will, in the end, gently have the final say.

## WEBSITE

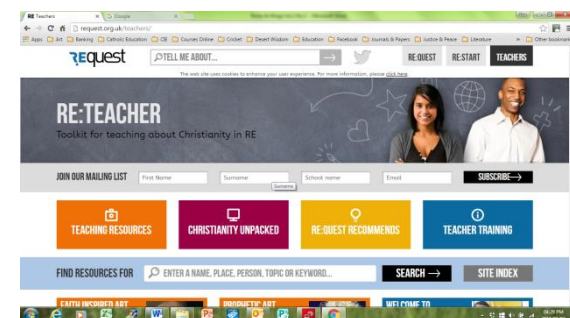
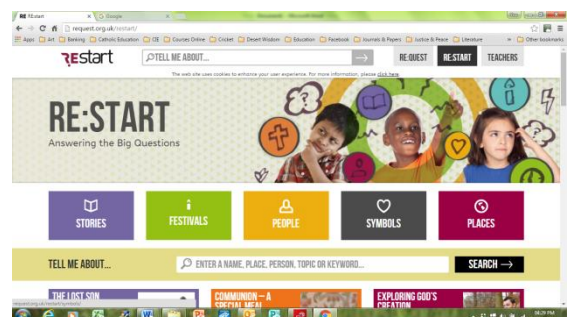
**RE:quest**  
[www.request.org.uk](http://www.request.org.uk)



This site has three main sections:

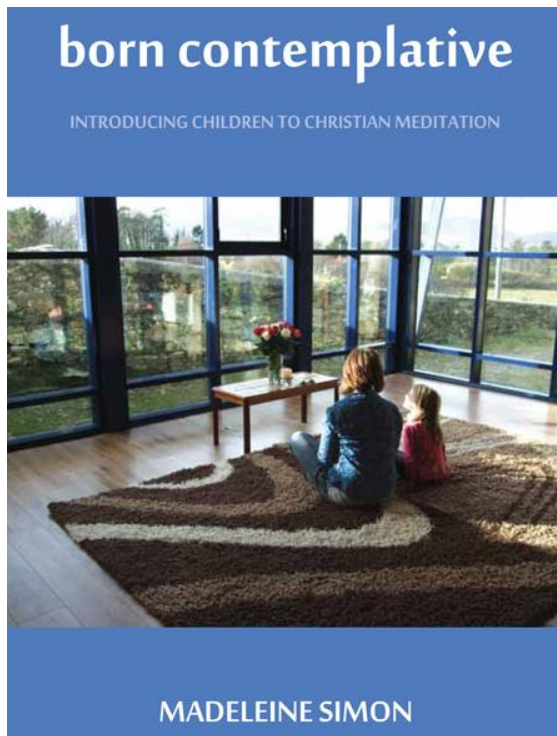
- RE: QUEST Resources for secondary aged students and older
- RE: START Resources for primary aged students
- TEACHERS Tools for teaching RE to all ages

You will get an indication of the richness of the site from the images of these three pages alongside. Take time to explore them and note what will be useful for your RE lessons.



# BOOK REVIEW

## Born Contemplative



Madeleine Simon had an intuitive understanding that children are ‘born contemplative’. This book helps adults who care for children to share in their openness and longing for God in the silence, stillness and simplicity of Christian meditation. This new edition brings an experiential dimension to her enduring message. An invitation at the end of each chapter encourages the reader to respond not only to the content but, more importantly, to the experience of sharing the prayer of silence with children. The book will help practising meditators who are looking for a way to introduce meditation to children. It will also encourage those who have not practised meditation to begin in the interest of children.

MADELEINE SIMON (1912-2003) was a Religious of the Society of the Sacred Heart (RSCJ). A chance meeting with John Main OSB in 1975 revealed to her “that this way of prayer was meant for me” and in 1982 she established the first Christian Meditation Centre in London in the Society of the Sacred Heart’s Community in Hammersmith. At the time of writing *Born Contemplative* and aged 80, she was Director of the Christian Meditation Retreat Centre in England.

The book is available from The Contemplative Life Bookstore at \$11.95

<http://www.contemplative-life.org/teaching-meditation-to-children/>

## HUMOUR

### Peter’s Faith?





# ARTICLE

## Speak from the Heart: Exploring and Responding to RE in the Special School (Part 1)

(Anne Krisman)

*'He comes to the thought of those who know him beyond thought, not to those who imagine He can be attained by thought; He is unknown to the learned and known to the simple.'* (Kena Upanishad.)

*In essence the religious outlook is that knowledge and understanding have a conversive or life-transforming quality, and, that in the end they yield pride of place to holiness. And although holiness often seems to embrace a supreme kind of wisdom, you do not have to be clever to be holy.* (Dennis Starkings, 1993, 135.)

### Introduction

It is time for another Year 11 RE lesson. Howard, who is Jewish, comes into the class shouting, "I hate this lesson!" When he calms down, he explains that his friend's mother has died, he has to go to the shiva (visiting bereaved relatives to pray and give comfort during the week of mourning) and he doesn't know what to say when he gets there.

Slowly, every pupil in the class takes turns to give Howard advice. Some children say it's best to say nothing to his friend that it's impossible to say what you feel in words. Some feel saying "sorry" is a good idea.

When a Muslim boy suggests that Howard should talk to his friend about the Paradise after Death, he gets angry again. "I don't think there is a God! If God is such a nice man, why does he let wars happen? Why did God let so many Jews die in the concentration camps? It's just like stories about aliens,

someone tells a story and passes it on to someone else. God's just a story." "And another thing," says Darren, the comic of the class, butting into the heated discussion, "Why doesn't God build more lanes on the M25?" The class erupts into healing laughter. And when the laughter stops, we begin to talk about whether God should be responsible for everything. I tell them something that Rabbi Hugo

Gryn said. When people ask "Where was God?" in the concentration camps, the real question should be, "Where was Man?...."

This lesson took place in a secondary special school, for pupils with moderate learning difficulties. All the pupils in the class had problems reading and writing. Several had speech and communication difficulties. Yet, we were able to move from the personal to the universal and to grapple with issues of life and death. The pupils were able to share advice from their own religious tradition or personal experience, however much they struggled with words. This demanding and emotional form of RE lesson had been an everyday part of my experience since I started teaching in a special school. No lesson seemed ordinary; each pupil was willing to share his or her deeply felt experience, through discussion, or when speech was limited, through luminous art work. This is why I used the phrase, "Speak from the Heart," on my RE handbook, and later for the exhibition for the Farmington Award 1997.

However, when I began to research the area of RE and special needs, I realised that my belief in the power of RE was not reflected in the literature. Writers dwell on the difficulties special needs pupils face, their concrete way of thinking, their inability to understand symbolism, their failure to empathise with others'

points of view. As a result, suggested RE teaching materials were low level and undemanding, often seeing literacy as a focus, rather than the development of religious understanding.

However, this deficit model had never been a part of my thinking. Instead, I saw pupils responding to RE in a deep and profound way, expressing their beliefs with honesty and pride, and often achieving an understanding that should have been impossible for 'concrete thinkers.' This study is a way of valuing the distinct contribution special needs pupils can make to RE. Although it is based on secondary pupils with moderate learning difficulties within the special school, I would like to feel the study has relevance beyond this setting.

### Exploring the literature of Special Needs RE

In this first section, I would like to survey some common themes that surface in the literature of special needs RE. I would like to explore the assumptions that arise in the writing, based on an image of the special needs child and also the nature of RE. I will also analyse the aims of RE in the special school and consider whether they should differ from mainstream aims.

#### READY FOR RELIGION?

In his book *Readiness for Religion*, Ronald Goldman tells the story of a young child who, after hearing the parable of the Prodigal Son, comments, "I do think his Daddy might have gone with him!" For Goldman, this reveals distorted thinking, 'instead of hearing the story of a loving father, he had heard the story of a neglectful one.' The message is clear; the child does not yet have the 'readiness' to understand the meaning of religious themes (1965, 44). This example supports Ronald Goldman's claim, based in the realm of Christian education and Bible study, that a change from concrete to abstract modes of thought happens at about the age of thirteen, and therefore to introduce religious ideas at a too early

stage, will 'impede religious growth' (44). His work is firmly rooted in the child development theories of Jean Piaget.

The perception of children with learning difficulties as developmentally delayed, and therefore stuck in a concrete model of thinking and limited in their understanding of religion and human experience, still remains a theme in the literature of special needs RE. This model has a strong influence on the way in which RE is taught in the classroom, the resources that have been developed and the expectations of the teacher. There is an assumption that materials and methods appropriate for primary children in mainstream can be transferred over to secondary pupils with learning difficulties.

This developmental model is reflected in a research report on RE and children with learning difficulties. The special needs child is described as having 'poor cognitive functioning' and typified as having difficulty with forming abstract concepts, the generalisation and transfer of learning, dealing with alternative viewpoints, concentrating, remembering, imagining and creativity. As a result, the report sees special needs pupils as lacking key processes in RE; the identification and use of religious language, the understanding of others' religious insights, beliefs and practices, and the ability to respect others' beliefs and to express their own beliefs and commitments (Huddleston, 1989).

The report expresses a view that special needs pupils will never be able to 'participate in a mature version of the subject,' (38-39) and suggests that a replacement for real RE could be the development of 'sub-skills', which are a prerequisite to the study of religion at a later stage (38). This would include, 'a sense of right and wrong' and 'a sense of continual change'. (Cox, 1983). This model sees pupils with learning difficulties kept away from real RE because it is seemingly out of their reach. They are sitting on the edge of the

swimming pool, practising strokes for some time in the future when the teacher judges that they are ready to jump in. In a classroom context, the sub-skills would be seen in helping tidy the classroom, or in caring for the class hamster, or noticing when the autumn leaves fall off the tree.

This model, of the special needs child as a concrete thinker, developmentally delayed and unable to cope with abstract ideas, or to understand the views of others or to be creative, is based on deficit. It judges the pupil against a norm, and only sees failure to achieve. It also sees explicit RE as 'intellectually demanding' and therefore beyond the reach of special needs pupils (Huddleston, 1989).

How realistic is this model? If we return to Ronald Goldman's story of the young child and the Prodigal Son, we see the child's response used as an example of a lack of 'readiness for religion.' Yet perhaps the problem is the writer's assertion that there is one way of reading biblical texts, a 'mature version', to use an earlier phrase. The child is concerned that the son is separated from his father, drawn from his own experience of parental love. He is beginning to grasp the essence of the parable, to consider what it is to be lost, and what it is to be found. The child is on the journey to deeper understanding.

### Real RE?

More recently, the importance of RE provision for special school pupils has been stressed. There is a legal requirement for these pupils to receive RE, unless withdrawn by parents, 'as far as is practicable'. (DFE Circular 3/94, The Development of Special Schools). The Agreed Syllabus for Redbridge, for example, states that 'it is important that the spiritual, moral, social, cultural and intellectual development of all children is addressed and that the broad aim of RE is seen to apply equally to pupils in special

schools and units' (1993). However, is the aim on paper reflected in the quality of RE provision for pupils with learning difficulties?

The RE - Tell Stories project (Lewisham, 1997) has produced materials based on religious stories for special school pupils. The project aims to 'develop knowledge of a central value or belief of a faith and (for pupils) to then develop a deeper knowledge of themselves, others and the world about them.' The writers use the SCAA (School Curriculum and Assessment Authority) attainment targets of learning about and learning from religion. One of the stories included in the anthology, The King's Elephant, is from the Buddhist tradition. The story tells how the elephant behaves badly, after listening to bandits discussing their wicked plans. It is used to develop the idea that 'actions have consequences' and that 'being in good company matters'.

However, the perceived need to make the story concrete for the pupils, before going on to draw out deeper messages, leads to a diversion from explicit RE. The opportunity to explore the symbolic power of the story is lost. The activities suggest that children visit the zoo to see elephants, and make a class diary about a pet. The same problem occurs with the project's treatment of the Lost Sheep, in which pupils are encouraged to feel wool, visit a farm and make sheep masks, and in the story of David and Goliath, where a suggested activity for pupils with moderate learning difficulties is 'extended throwing skills - how far can members of the class throw?' The slow pace of work in a special school can lead to these marginal practical activities taking over, so that pupils become increasingly distanced from the original story. Through the type of activities outlined above, pupils may be developing a deeper knowledge of themselves and the world around them, but their interaction with the values and beliefs of a faith is minimal. Learning about the life of elephants is a long way from understanding what the elephant

represents in this story in the context of Buddhism. This is reflected in Alan Brown's comments on the way in which some RE curriculum materials deal with symbolism, starting with level crossing signs and moving to religious symbols. He observes that 'there is little evidence to support the often practised theory...that the pupil makes the transference to recognising the potent power of symbol' (1987, 28).

In this model of RE in the special school, pupils are given religious material, yet the emphasis on making the themes accessible to pupils with learning difficulties leads to very little explicit RE being experienced. Once a religious story is treated in this way, with several lessons taken up with looking at pictures of sheep, visiting a farm and carding wool, it is almost impossible to go back to the source and to suggest that the sheep in the story may represent something else.

Is it possible for special school pupils to look beyond the concrete, and to understand the symbolic power of a religious story? As I was crossing the playground in my special school, I noticed a Year 7 girl alone and confused, trying to remember where her next lesson was taking place. "I'm so lost," she said, "it's like the story of the sheep that you told us." This comment was closer to the core of the parable, as it was based on her understanding of what it was to be lost. The potential is there; what is needed is an approach which values the experience that special needs pupils can bring to RE. I will return to these ideas later in my work.

#### IMPROVING SKILLS?

Pupils arrive in special school with a statement of special educational needs, a document that clarifies their difficulties and specifies targets to address them. For pupils with moderate learning difficulties, there will be targets for literacy and numeracy. Some will have speech and communication difficulties, or difficulties with physical disability or

behaviour. To what extent should Religious Education be used as a vehicle for improving literacy or personal skills? Teachers questioned in a research report on RE and special needs stated that 'poor literacy skills' posed a major problem for pupils with learning difficulties (Huddleston, 1989). The concern about the low reading ages of pupils can give rise to very basic activities in RE, such as elementary cloze procedure passages, where pupils are asked to copy and complete sentences, e.g. 'Hanukah is a festival of .....celebrated by the.....' (Brown, 1987, 40). These assume a conceptual understanding at the level of the child's reading, which may not be the case. The child is not given the opportunity to express creativity or understanding, or to explore poetic or religious language, it is simply a matter of fitting the right word in the right slot. This limited view of language can lead teachers away from a more open-ended, responsive approach to RE, to a style of teaching that works towards a rigid outcome.

There are ways to both develop literacy and extend pupils' knowledge and understanding of religion. In a theme on the life of Jesus, I gave my Year 9 pupils the Golden Rules - 'Love God with all your heart' and 'Love your neighbour as yourself' on cards, with each word on a separate card. The task was to discover the Golden Rules from the mystery of the jumbled cards. Children worked in pairs making their own sentences. They were able to read and learn the words while they discussed the type of rules that Jesus would have made. The sentences they constructed, including 'Love your neighbour with your heart' and 'Love your heart', reflected a sensitivity and understanding of Christianity that would not be reflected in a word-search or cloze procedure.

Special school teachers will see their work as helping develop pupils' self-awareness and emotional needs, and a review of RE work in Devon reflects this



personal skills approach. The county's Agreed Syllabus suggests that each teaching activity is seen through the perspective of 'Myself', 'Others', 'The World' and 'Religion.' Teachers of children with learning difficulties are expected to consider their own 'professional assessment of the physical, emotional and intellectual needs' of the pupils, although the aim of the syllabus, 'to help children develop as persons through their experience of religion', is considered appropriate for all (Huddleston, 1988). The report describes a topic on Daniel carried out in a Devonshire primary school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties. The children begin by discussing the feelings of Daniel in the lions' den, and then concentrate on the things that frighten them. They finally move on to talking about prayer, to link with the way in which Daniel prayed in the den.

This work is intended to link with the themes of the Devon Agreed Syllabus, where each teaching activity is seen through the perspective of 'Myself', 'Others', 'The World' and 'Religion'. Within this topic, the teachers see the 'Myself' strand reflected in the aim, 'To help children to understand what makes them feel afraid' and 'to help overcome fears'. The 'Others' strand involves 'understanding others' fears'. The 'Religion' element is described in the aim 'knowing more about the concept and practice of prayer'.

It is clear that this activity does involve an element of personal development. The topic highlights the idea of fear and this is explored in several different ways; through pupils singing songs about fears, drawing things that frighten them and talking about being brave. However, to a great extent, the story is seen as a springboard, and the religious concepts are sidelined. The teacher suggests that pupils write 'Thank you', 'I am sorry' and 'Please help me' prayers as an activity, rather than exploring the idea of prayer and its meaning to the pupils. The activity has drifted into work on 'doing

feelings', which can be a more comfortable focus for teachers than explicit religious input.

A festivals approach, with the emphasis on the expectation and celebration of a special event, is common in special needs RE. The practical nature of the preparation for a festival sets clear activities and means that everyone is busy, cooking, colouring and decorating the room. Pupils are encouraged to 'make the decorations, to sing the songs, to hear the stories, and to cook and eat the foods' (Musty, 1992, 70). The joy, colour and excitement of a festival can lift pupils away from everyday routine and can create a sense of togetherness.

However, this approach can lead to a low level form of RE, where the emphasis on practical tasks can divert attention away from the meaning of the festival to believers. Pupils may be colouring in a Diwali picture of Lakshmi, carefully trying not to go over the lines, but unaware of the significance of the figure to Hindus. Ted Huddleston even states that it is not necessary for pupils with severe learning difficulties to celebrate religious festivals, and that a birthday party will include similar features: 'It is the child's experience that is important, not the minutiae of religious tradition' (1992, 171).

Erica Musty, in her observations about school assemblies and worship, suggests that 'there should be time to explore the harsher realities of life with its paradoxes and tensions' and this is also relevant for classroom RE (1992, 70). An RE curriculum over-weighted with festivals can encourage pupils' social skills and show that everyone is valued, but an over-emphasis on the celebratory can lead pupils away from thinking about deeper, often painful issues in their lives. Pupils with learning difficulties are often drawn to themes of personal search; to give an impression that RE is always about happiness and excitement is to deny them access to a rich source of religious understanding about, for

example, the nature of suffering. I will develop these ideas later in this study.

RE in the special school can be used to develop pupils' personal skills and has an important contribution to make in a setting where there can be an emphasis on the acquisition of basic knowledge and skills rather than cultural and spiritual development (Musty, 1992, 66). However, the form of RE provided can fail to promote the understanding of 'the language and wider symbolic patterns' of religions (Jackson, 1997, 123), and can therefore fall short of addressing pupils' deeper needs.

### Spiritual RE?

A view suggested in Ted Huddleston's research report on RE and special needs is that the subject should 'leave room for learning which does not entirely rely on intellectual functioning' with the RE curriculum based on the 'affective', 'personal' or 'inward' aspects of religion (1989, 39). The report questions whether it is possible to see spirituality in isolation from the practice of a religion. There are also issues here about the role of spirituality in special school RE, and whether the notion of fostering 'awe, wonder, delight, joy and mystery' (Davies, 1992, 216) can be seen as a release from delivering explicit RE. There is also an assumption that promoting spirituality is 'easier' than learning about religions.

On the subject of spiritual experiences, Jill Davies has stated, 'If a project includes an activity like hatching out chickens, the awe and delight which follows can only be part of a religious education programme if the teacher intends it to be so and does some follow up work to make the intention explicit' (1992). Isolated moments of insight happen throughout the school year, but what is important is a teacher response that shapes these experiences and places them in a clear educational context.

My work on St Francis of Assisi always takes place during Spring. The lessons

begin with pupils looking for natural objects outside. They take rubbings from trees and then make a collage. This activity could stand alone, and could be seen as 'implicit RE' with pupils responding personally to the environment around them. Erica Brown has described work with pupils with profound learning difficulties, where the texture of bark is felt, the perfume of carnations sniffed, and dead leaves scrunched in the hand (1996, 10). However, I use this personal exploration as preparation for looking at St Francis' writing, which expresses love for the natural world and the power of God within it. This relationship between the individual, the environment and the faith of a believer, leads to great insight from pupils. One boy, for example, after painting a picture called 'Brother Fire' made a leap of understanding and subtitled it, 'The Creation of the World'.

Mainstream teachers often find difficulties in promoting the spiritual within their work, based in a setting where the pressure to achieve examination results, with its inherent tensions, can have a negative effect on the quality of learning and relationships. The special school teacher is constantly dealing with the searching questions of individual pupils, their deep responses to the world around them and their anxieties about life.

Ade, aged 15, who has difficulties in comprehension and communication, suddenly asked in my RE lesson, "Is it true? Is it true that we are born and then we die? Is it true?" He put his head in his hands, in a moment of clarity and understanding. Everyone in the class gently assured him that it was true. "That's bad," he said, shaking his head, "that's really bad." His inner turmoil was genuine and distressing. A spiritual approach should not be seen as an easy option, or as something that can be offered instead of 'real RE'. It is a way of valuing the individual's inner life and a way of linking that individual with a wider meaning. At times, it will mean an approach that some may find

uncomfortable, as it will take RE away from stroking sheep, the colourful celebrations and the undemanding word searches into an RE that acknowledges the pain and pressures of being a child within a special school.

Responding to RE in the special school - singing a new song:

- "How can something come from nothing?" Viqar, Year 11, on creation
- "God is like a babysitter, he never leaves you alone." Stuart, Year 8
- "Why do holy people say to their children 'You have to share' and then they have a war about land?" Angela, Year 10
- "A soul is a part of remembering what you are." Rashpal, Year 8
- "God comes in all shapes and sizes." Terry, Year 7

(This paper will be continued in Vol 2 No 3)

In the first section of this study, I have surveyed some common approaches to RE for pupils with special needs. When I read the literature of special needs RE, I see a mismatch between the limitations that are described, and the reality of my experience. The deep and profound comments my pupils make do not fit a deficit model.

I feel it is time to 'sing a new song' for RE in the special school (Psalms, 96.1, 98.1) and to place the focus solidly on the history and struggle of our special school pupils and the impact that this has on the study of religion and human experience. I would like to move away from a deficit model, to the notion of special school pupils bringing a distinctive understanding to RE, shaped by their school environment and the story of their lives.

---

## RESPONDING TO CONTROVERSY



“I SAW IT ON THE NEWS...”

3FF's TIPS & TOOLS FOR RESPONDING TO CONTROVERSY

From the Woolwich murder to tensions in the Middle East, when speaking in schools 3FF are often asked questions about crisis situations which affect communities. When young people are disturbed, confused and personally affected by events in the press, 3FF speakers and facilitators have a unique opportunity and responsibility to create a positive space for dialogue.

Here are some tips for teachers and educators to help get the best from discussions about current controversy and emotive topics.

### Safe Space

You will probably have classroom rules or agreements in your class. These are all the more important to reiterate when controversial or sensitive topics arise, since differing views and heightened emotions can derail discussions. 3FF's Safe Space Suggestions which you may want to provide for your students to add to existing frameworks:

- Seize the opportunity
- Listen carefully to whoever is speaking
- Show respect to the opinions, feelings and beliefs of others
- Step Up, Step Back
- Use ‘I statements’, don’t speak for others
- Dialogue not Debate
- ‘Oops!’/ ‘Ouch!’

## FIVE TOP TIPS & ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS

### 1. Dialogue not debate

We always encourage dialogue. We do not recommend creating debate-style discussions about controversial or emotional issues as they create conflict.

**Activity suggestion:** “The opposite of listening is preparing to speak”. Active Listening: Discussion around how we know someone is listening - body language, eye contact, ‘agreeing noises’, summarising what someone has said. In pairs, students to assign themselves as A & B: A speaks while B, who cannot talk, listens, and who must show that they are listening. A & B to switch, concluding with each summarising what the other has said.



### 2. Create safe space to share feelings

The Woolwich murder has thrown up a great many issues, and is an incredibly emotive subject, whether students relate to it through their own identities, personal relationships or issues of justice. Sharing feelings and fears is very important, so we recommend agreeing on ground rules or a ‘safe space’ (see above) for discussion before people share their feelings.

**Activity suggestion:** Think Pair Share. Students write down three words that they associate with their feelings, followed by an opportunity to explain why this event makes them feel this way (this could be done in pairs, and then shared out to the class if students feel comfortable). Students can also write each feeling on post-its to stick on the board or wall. Arrange all the similar post-its together to create a live Wordle. Use this as a springboard for discussion. Why did so many people say they were feeling ‘Proud’ or ‘Scared’ or ‘Upset’?



### 3. No simple questions

Most questions are loaded with assumptions and misunderstandings. At 3FF we often spend more time examining questions than giving answers, which can provide students with invaluable skills.

**Activity suggestion:** Write up a controversial or loaded question from a student on the board to pause the discussion, e.g. “Don’t you think it’s stupid to follow books that were written hundreds of years ago by uncivilised people”? Ask the class to break it down into



several questions to demonstrate the complexity of the issue for example, use the prompt questions below to de-code the controversial question above.

Either as a class or in small groups ask:

- What reasons do we have for asking questions?
- Can they give an example of a statement disguised as a question?
- What makes a good/bad question?
- What makes a good/bad answer?
- How can we ask questions more sensitively/openly?
- How can we respond more kindly and patiently to challenging questions?

#### 4. Narratives not histories

There are many different (and often conflicting) narratives, which lead to a variety of different truths; all of which may be valid to different people. There are no short answers, and we should seriously consider the intentions of anyone who wants to suggest a simple response.



**Activity suggestion:** Jack & Jill. Write the ‘Jack and Jill’ nursery rhyme on the board:

*Jack and Jill went up the hill  
To fetch a pail of water.  
Jack fell down and broke his crown,  
And Jill came tumbling after.*

In secret give students/groups different roles, such as: historian, news reporter, feminist thinker, health and safety officer, person from the developing world. Ask them to give a brief analysis of their understanding of the narrative. Over-acting helps! Ask the rest of the group to identify each person’s persona, and explain why they came to that conclusion. Consider exploring (and perhaps deconstructing) different images, accounts, or personal testimonies of the conflict and asking students to consider the different narratives their stories show.

#### 5. Watch the time

Keep an eye on the time available throughout the lesson, and judge whether there is time to do the issue justice. It is unfair on students to start a deeper discussion and have to leave it halfway through, but acknowledging their questions and saving them for later can be helpful.

**Activity suggestion:** Question Parking Lot. This can be a useful way to ‘park’ questions that you may not have sufficient time to answer fully during a lesson. Create a ‘Question Parking Lot’ in your classroom to encourage curiosity, questions and discussion amongst your students. This could be a wall, part of a display board or a section of the whiteboard.

*For more information on 3FF’s educational programmes please visit our website and contact our Schools Team to learn more about our Interfaith Education Workshops.*

## LOCAL NEWS

### Church must build bridge to traditional healing

*Healing through Christ and traditional African healing are not mutually exclusive but can be integrated, argues TSHIAMO TAKONGWA*



SICKNESS and suffering are an integral part of human existence. No human being goes through life without going through this experience. As we go through sickness we desire health and experience a need for healing.

We suffer not only because of physical problems, but even more because of lack of harmony in our relationships, because of misunderstandings, betrayals, hatred and even lack of love. Every human being is faced at some point with this suffering, too. That is why people, rich or poor, people take long journeys looking for healing, even travelling as far as Nigeria.

Health and wholeness are our basic conditions for our happiness. Many African Christians live by a double standard because their questions have not been answered by the Christian world.

In the religious world amid the African traditions—where there is an interaction between God, mysterious powers, the spirits and ancestors—when someone gets sick the questions mostly asked are “Why?” and “Who did that?” In Africa, sickness is viewed as something negative. Sickness is not purely something biological or physiological. As these questions come and

when the sickness is not “ordinary”, a medicine man is consulted to answer their questions.

The coming of Christianity and so-called “European civilisation” made a lot of Africans “hypocrites”. The people of my country, the Batswana, shun *dingaka* during the day, but at night become their patients. Despite all the knowledge Batswana have when it comes to serious matters that threaten their welfare, they go back to their roots. They consult the *ngaka*. This is not due to psychological nor social pressures. Rather it is because other specialists like psychotherapists, medical doctors, and even priests would have failed to help them overcome their concrete problems. They put aside the knowledge that seems to provide answers to what people go through and put their trust and faith in the *ngaka*. From their needs and experience these people believe that there is more to “real life” than philosophy, theology and psychology.

The Church in Africa is called upon to be one which understands African fears and aspirations. We live on a continent full of pain and suffering and despair. It is also a continent of beauty, culture and inner strength. We must be a Church which journeys with people in their own experience and offers Christ as the answer to these experiences.

Christ is the ultimate source of healing. We must pray for that faith. Since faith is first of all a gift, we should pray that we and the person in need of healing will be blessed with this gift. The Church reminds us to seek not only gifts from God, but also to actually seek God, the giver of gifts. It is an unhealthy spirituality that shops around for signs and miracles. Our faith is not in these; it is in the living God.



Healing through our Christian faith is not concerned with mere physical healing, but that of the whole person. Jesus was not only the physical but also the mental, spiritual and emotional healer. In Luke 5:17-26 he forgave the paralytic his sins before curing him. The *ngaka* too focuses on these aspects. Before he or she heals the patient the *ngaka* inquires about the social, psychological and spiritual problems of the patients, and all this forms part of the treatment.

Jesus also healed people to reintegrate them. He healed lepers who were social rejects (Mk 1:44; Lk 17:14), the possessed (Mk 5:19), the blind and lame. He tells the lepers to show themselves to the priests so that they be confirmed for reintegration in the society. Through emotional healing they are able to feel that love which seemed to be lacking, being appreciated, at peace with themselves, and so on. Hence Jesus told his patients "Go in peace..." (Mk 5:34).

Holistic healing bridges the gap that exists between Jesus and the *ngaka*. This gap is bridged by their perception of some

diseases. Jesus did it for the glory of God and the *ngaka* offers healing because it is a gift from God. Nevertheless their patients are ultimately brought closer to God through healing.

However, we should understand the integral healing analogically, that is, Jesus healed at a much higher level than the *ngaka*. Collaboration between the Church and the African traditional healers is of paramount importance. This collaboration will help the African people who find themselves divided between the two religions which are pointing fingers at each other. The collaboration of the Church with traditional healers would help the Church also to enter a dialogue which might help those responsible in the Church to understand fully what the traditional healers are doing, instead of passing wrong judgments in what they are doing, based on biased ideas of the first missionaries.

Inculturation in the rites of healing is very important. Without inculturation, Christ will remain an outsider or a foreigner to the culture of the African Christian community and not a citizen. We need to break that dualism and parallelism between Christianity and African Traditional religion. The Christian community has to live in one holistic world, rather than trying to balance the two worlds. Inculturation will make Christianity feel at home so that sacraments of healing become more understandable and relevant to the Christian community in various parts of Africa. Through inculturation the Church affirms what is good in a culture, purifies what is false and evil, enlightens what is ignorant. So the Church would do well to learn and adopt some practices of the *ngaka*. We have to remember that Christ came not to abolish African traditional healing but to perfect what is good within it and abolish what is wrong.

## Fundamentalism isn't Muslim

(Fr. Chris Clohessy)

The word 'fundamentalism' isn't a Muslim word, though now, in the press, it almost always refers to a type of Islam (or Muslim). It's a Christian word, first used in the early 1900s, when there was an increasing attack on traditional biblical teachings by science and rationalism. The word described a specific Christianity that returned to the texts and read them and their meaning them in a more particular but often very literal way. But the word fundamentalist is less frequently used for that historical moment and more often for a particular expression of Islam.

In terms of Islam and fundamentalism, some believe that Islam is inseparably connected with violence (an opinion fueled by the media), while others believe that violence is un-Islamic (a fact which ignores that Islam does allow for the use of violence under certain conditions). The *via media* would be the belief that there are some in Islam who endorse violence. Under what conditions? That's the real problem. A real handicap for worldwide Islam is that there is no single Islamic figure or body that can definitively declare on whether violence can be used in a particular situation, or not. The possibility of a 'holy war', violence legitimized by religion, isn't something new. It was already being worked out by St Thomas Aquinas in the medieval period, with all its specific conditions. Catholic Christianity, following Aquinas, believes that warfare could be justified under very specific conditions, as a last resort. But whereas in Catholic Christianity there is a central authority to interpret and enforce the conditions, Islam lacks such a body. It's one of the reasons we are witnessing such massive disagreements among Muslims over current issues, as well as serious Muslim-on-Muslim violence. There are other reasons too: my friend Imam Rashied Omar regularly points out that all sacred texts display the 'ambivalence of the sacred' and can be read in such a way as to justify violence. The meaning of the text is often as moral as the reader. If the reader is violent, so will be the interpretation of the text. Here's a simple definition of fundamentalism: when you are reading an ancient religious text, there are three steps. You read it then you interpret the meaning, then you live it. If you miss the second step, moving directly from reading to living out, you hit fundamentalism. Skipping the interpretation is part of religious fundamentalism. Another is the inability to differentiate between what God meant for a particular moment in history, in a localised place, and what he meant to be done forever, through every generation, and perhaps universally. There are exhortations to violence in the Qur'an (as in the Old Testament). That's not the issue. Nascent Islam met much violent opposition. The issue is: were those universal commands for all time, or local commands for a specific period of time? On that issue, the scholars of Islam seem unable to disagree.

In the last twenty years there has been a steady rise in angry religious groups and individuals who sometimes resort to violence, either physical or verbal. This religious anger is caused by a number of elements: mostly a sense of failure or defeat by religious people in an increasingly materialistic and atheistic society.



This sense of defeat leads some to believe that they are under ‘attack’ and must defend their values against society, even using violence if this is necessary.

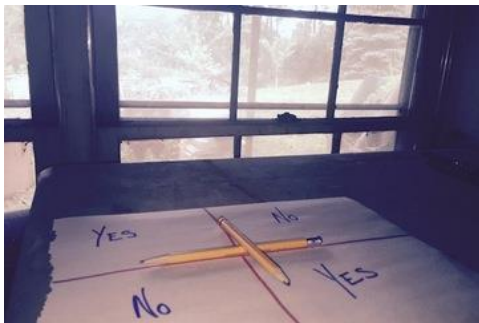
*Fr. Clohessy is an Islamic Scholar and Parish Priest of St. Bernard’s in Cape Town*

---

## INTERNATIONAL NEWS

### Charlie Charlie Challenge: Can You Really Summon a Demon?

(Elizabeth Palermo)



"Charlie, Charlie, can we play?"

That is the seemingly innocent question that begins a new "spirit-summoning" game that is taking the Internet by storm. The so-called Charlie Charlie Challenge is based on shaky science (the objective is to summon a malignant spirit from beyond the grave), but there are some real and powerful forces behind this parlor game, according to one expert.

Here's how the Charlie Charlie Challenge works: players balance one horizontally aligned pencil on top of a vertically aligned pencil (essentially, in the shape of a cross). Both writing utensils sit atop a piece of paper divided into four quadrants. Two of the quadrants are labeled "yes" and two are labeled "no." Players then invite a spirit, Charlie, to play with them. If the spirit is feeling playful, the top most pencil will allegedly spin until it points to "yes." Then the players can ask Charlie other yes or no questions and wait for the pencil to move again. [The Surprising Origins of 9 Common Superstitions]

So what causes the pencils to spin of their own accord? Only one of the most powerful forces on Earth: gravity. In order to balance one object on top of another, the topmost object's center of gravity (a point where an object's mass is said to be concentrated) must be positioned precisely over the supporting object. In the case of the Charlie Charlie Challenge, players balance two long objects with rounded edges on top of one another. Naturally, these hard-to-balance objects have a tendency to roll around.

"Trying to balance one pencil upon another results in a very unstable system," said Christopher French, head of the anomalistic psychology research unit at the University of London in the United Kingdom. "Even the slightest [draft] or someone's breath will cause the top pencil to move."

And the precariously placed pencils will move around regardless of whether you summon a demon after balancing them, French told Live Science. This proves that there's no demonic force necessary for the pencil-moving effect to occur, he said.

Of course, pencils that move without anyone touching them might seem spooky in the right setting (i.e., in a candlelit room in the middle of the night), but as French pointed out, the situation is really no more threatening than a curtain blowing in the breeze.

## Mind games

To be fair, gravity is not the only force at work in the Charlie Charlie Challenge. It's also possible that another formidable power, the power of suggestion, has a role to play.

A 2012 study published in the journal *Current Directions in Psychological Science* found that people often employ a "response expectancy" in certain situations. In other words, by anticipating that something will occur, a person's thoughts and behaviors will help bring that anticipated outcome to fruition. In the case of this spirit-summoning game, it could be that players expect a certain result and their actions during the game help bring it about (for instance, a well-timed breath or a subtle wave of the hand).

This hypothesis is similar to one suggested by French, who pointed out that many forms of recreational divination – like Ouija (the board game where you put your hands on a piece of plastic that allegedly moves of its own accord to answer your questions) or table turning (an old-school parlor game where people put their hands on a table and wait for the table to turn of its own volition) – involve the subconscious actions of participants. [Really? The World's Greatest Hoaxes]

The "magic" behind the Ouija board and turning tables, along with pendulums and dowsing rods (two other popular forms of divination), has been scientifically explained through something known as the "ideomotor effect," French said.

The ideometer effect was first described in the 19th century by the English doctor and physiologist William Carpenter. It suggests that it's the involuntarily muscular movements of the people using the plastic planchette in Ouija, or the people sitting around the table in table turning, that causes these objects to move. The ideometer effect doesn't completely explain the Charlie Charlie phenomenon, because players don't touch the pencils used in the game. However, the game is similar to these other examples because it involves what French calls "magical thinking," or the belief that a random event (the spinning of a pencil) is related to some unconnected, and in some cases imaginary, force or energy (a spirit).

"Often the 'answers' received [in divination games] might be vague and ambiguous, but our inherent ability to find meaning – even when it isn't there – ensures that we will perceive significance in those responses and be convinced that an intelligence of some kind lay behind them," French said.

The Charlie Charlie Challenge is magical thinking at its finest, according to French, who explained that this sort of thinking may have played an important role in human evolution. It made sense for our human ancestors to see "sentience and intention" in unexplained everyday events, he said, because these events may have represented real threats that needed to be avoided.

"The cost of avoiding a threat that wasn't really there was far less than that of missing a threat that was really there," French said.

This tendency to attribute a deeper meaning to meaningless or unrelated events persists in modern brains, French said. He added that this innate tendency could help explain why so many people believe that the random responses in the Charlie Charlie Challenge really are coming from an intelligence that is trying to send them a message.

<http://www.livescience.com/51069-charlie-charlie-challenge-explained.html>



Professional Society of Religious Educators