Reading the Christian Scriptures:
A Critical Pedagogical Approach

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The issue for cultural workers is ... to address how representations are constructed and taken up through social memories that are taught, learned, mediated, and appropriated within particular institutional and discursive formations of power (Giroux, 1994, p. 45).

Abstract

Because religious beliefs and practices develop within an ongoing and dynamic religious traditioning process that is socio-culturally and historically conditioned, religious representations – being shaped by culture – are open to cultural critique. This raises challenging implications for teachers in Catholic schools who are charged with the transmission of institutionally-endorsed church teachings. This paper identifies some relevant insights and analytical frameworks, from the work of contemporary theorists institution in responding to this challenge. Specifically, the paper focuses on a critical pedagogical approach to reading the Christian Scriptures; an approach which encourages students to participate actively in the ongoing Catholic religious traditioning process.

Introduction

These words by Henry Giroux draw attention to a task that cultural workers need to address; it is a task that calls for *critical political analysis* of the ways particular discourses gain prominence within specific socio-cultural contexts and

institutions. Giroux sees this type of activity being undertaken within *critical public cultures* which he defines as 'those spheres of daily life where people can debate the meaning and consequences of public truths, inject a notion of moral responsibility into representational practices, and collectively struggle to change dominating relations of power' (1994, p. 22). By this definition educational sites, especially secondary and tertiary institutions, are or have the potential to be ideal 'critical public cultures' in which to raise students' awareness of 'how representations are constructed and ... taught'. And because teachers are engaged in the transmission of culture, it is appropriate to acknowledge them as 'cultural workers' and to recognise the need for teachers to respond to the above challenge issued by Giroux.

However, Giroux's challenge to cultural workers (including teachers) may be an especially difficult one for teachers of religion operating within the tradition of Catholic religious schooling, for there is an expectation that these teachers pass on to students knowledge of the dominant and institutionally-authorised beliefs and practices of the Catholic religious tradition/culture. Yet because religion *is* an integral part of culture, and religious traditions and institutions are important 'discursive formations of power', religious representations also need to be subject to cultural critique. This presents teachers of religion with at least two additional tasks: firstly of addressing *how* religious representations are constructed and passed on in an ongoing traditioning process shaped by and within particular socio-cultural and historical contexts; and secondly, of critiquing the *consequences* of this process.

Tools that help teachers of religion achieve these two goals are found in analytical frameworks being developed by contemporary theologians, and many of these are easily appropriated in developing critical pedagogical approaches towards secondary and tertiary religion studies. For example,

the tertiary course *Religious Experience and Texts* (2000) – which I first taught as a pilot programme in 1998 and which students may now elect to study within teacher education programmes at Central Queensland University – makes use of critical analytical insights and pedagogical strategies that I have gained from the work of contemporary biblical scholars.[1] Specifically, the course focuses on the reading of Christianity's scriptural texts, has been developed in an Australian cultural context, and is designed to meet the needs of future and current teachers of religion in Catholic schools.

In *Religious Experience and Texts*, the course challenges students to appreciate the ongoing Christian traditioning process as one in which some voices dominate institutional appropriations of religious representations, while other voices – from within the Christian tradition – are suppressed and marginalised. Feedback from students indicates that most have responded well to this challenge, hence this paper presents insights into the critical pedagogical approach employed in that course.

I begin the paper by contextualising religion within culture and stressing the need for those involved in religious education to respect difference as heard in the multiplicity of voices present in the Christian tradition. I then focus on a number of key issues relevant to reading Christian scriptural texts, with attention given to some pertinent questions being raised by contemporary biblical scholarship. By way of example, a feminist interrogation of two stories from the closing section of Mark's Gospel (14:3-9 and 16:1-8) is presented. Finally, concluding comments highlight a number of challenges that this work holds for teachers of religion.

Religious traditioning and culture

Human persons interpret experiences and texts differently because each person looks at things through a unique 'lens', a lens which develops with time in response

to different life experiences. As the popular Australian sociologist and author, Hugh Mackay, says:

> *We are all prisoners of our experience, which is another way of saying that we bring all our yesterdays into today to try to make sense of what is happening to us. Our discoveries, our learnings, our decisions gradually evolve into a recognisable pattern, a framework, or a 'worldview'. Once that framework has begun to develop, we tend to see the world in a highly subjective and selective way, because we see it through the filter of our convictions, our own prejudices, our own point of view* (1993, p. 294).

Using the language of poststructural discourse analysis, Mary McClintock Fulkerson talks about this meaning making process in terms of 'intertextuality' which 'in its simplest sense has been used to indicate that the only way readers can make sense of texts is by virtue of the other texts they have read' (1994, p. 165). But, changing our perspectives and readings is possible, as Mackay acknowledges, 'because life never stops bringing us new experiences to incorporate into the patterns created by the old' (1993, p. 294).

For example, do you remember your personal circumstances and reactions when you heard that Princess Diana had died? What kinds of responses did Diana's death evoke in you and in others? Did Diana's death alter or modify opinions of her? Significant events or experiences sometimes change people's perspectives of previous happenings: these are then reinterpreted. In turn, this gives rise to new stories and new understandings of old stories.

The same process occurs in relation to religious experience. People tend to compare their religious experiences and reactions/responses to these with others. While some understandings or interpretations may be supported widely, others quickly become issues for discussion and debate. Different readings emerge from different groups, and stories are shared among groups and passed on from one generation to another. Influenced by the

perspectives and worldviews of different people and cultures from different times and places, *the stories are created anew.* The development of religious storying is a dynamic and ongoing traditioning process that is culturally, socially and historically conditioned; that is, religious beliefs and practices are shaped by/within contexts that are socio-culturally and historically specific.

Giroux points out that the way 'reality' is represented is not natural or innocent: it is informed by politically motivated ideological perspectives. Giroux says, '[T]he politics of representation ... has become indispensable for understanding how politics reaches into everyday life to mobilize particular lived experiences, desires, and forms of agency' (1994, p. 3). Religious representations, including the Christian Scriptures (New Testament) and the interpretations and reinterpretations of them since the first century, do not escape the influence of politically motivated ideological discourses, therefore they are neither politically innocent or 'natural'. Many different communities of people have contributed to this religious traditioning process, and changing historical/social/cultural conditions, including new knowledges and worldviews, have led to different experiences, interpretations and understandably, different theologies (cf Giroux, 1994, p. 17). In other words, within Christianity a spiral of contextually-specific and ideologically-underpinned stories, understandings, customs, beliefs, rituals, teachings, structures, traditions, laws and theologies continues to evolve.

For example, today there are groups of people living in poverty in under-developed countries who have formed Small Christian Communities in order to reflect upon their situation and life experiences in conversation with the Christian religious tradition. They read the Christian Scriptures from a social justice perspective and are developing their own theologies of liberation from poverty

and political oppression (Gutiérrez, 1973; Boff, 1986; O'Halloran, 1991). Similarly, other theologies of liberation are being developed by feminist Christians in response to their experiences of patriarchal societies. With subordinate groups such as these invoking 'collective memories of resistance' in the struggle to 'reclaim their histories and collective voices' (Giroux, 1994, p. 14), the ongoing religious traditioning process is both ensured and challenged.

One thing that becomes evident from such an understanding of the religious traditioning process is that readings of religious experience and the development of religious beliefs/practices do not take place outside of culture: they emerge within given socio-cultural and historical contexts. Streng says, '[R]eligion, like any other human expression, is conditioned by historical, social, economic and political forces' (1985, p. 5). It is, in other words, a part of culture: it has an effect on culture and is affected by culture. Hence it is not helpful for teachers of religion to dismiss the Christian religious tradition as being beyond the bounds of cultural critique: 'too "innocent" to be worthy of political analyses' (Giroux: speaking about the Disney Company, 1994, p. 28). Nor is it helpful for teachers of religion to ignore *difference* as heard in the multiplicity of voices/perspectives found within the Christian tradition.

Difference: Hearing and respecting multiple voices

In today's Western societies individualism and difference are somewhat accepted and respected at the level of a person's right to be who they want to be. But, as Giroux notes: 'difference ... is also about social movements, collective memories of resistance, and the struggle on the part of subordinate groups to reclaim their histories and collective voices' (1994, p. 14). At this level, there is often reluctance to acknowledge that mainstream representations and dominant narratives advantage those with racial, social, cultural and

religious power/privilege at the expense of the hierarchically subordinated whose counter-narratives are silenced and rendered invisible.

Rather than accept the dominant voice as the only voice, there is a need to seek out and value the multiple voices of interpretation present within the ongoing Christian religious traditioning process. Over time, some Christian narratives have become dominant, displacing and silencing other stories or counter-narratives present within the tradition. This has made it increasingly difficult to hear and respect *difference*.

An illustration of this is that over thousands of years people have used different language and multiple images to describe/ represent their experiences of God. Within the Judeo-Christian tradition, many of these different representations of God are to be found in scriptural texts. However, some of these (for instance: lord, king, mighty warrior, rock) are more familiar to today's Christians than others which have been suppressed and marginalised by dominant Christian discourses. These include: God as birth-mother (Deuteronomy 32:18b); God as mid-wife (Psalm 22:9); God as a woman in labour (Isaiah 42:14b); God as woman of wisdom (Proverbs 9:1-2); Jesus as mother hen (Matthew 23:37).

When Moses asked to be told God's name, the reply was *EHYH* which means 'I am who I am' or 'I will be who I will be' (Exodus 3:14. The third person form of this word – *YHWH* – became the enduring and unutterable name for God within the Jewish tradition). This name signifies a God who cannot be fully understood or accurately represented by human language and imaging. Teachers of religion need to alert students to the mystery that is God and to the limitations of human language and metaphors for God. Teachers also have opportunities to raise students' critical awareness of both the *multiple God images* found within the tradition and of the *political motivations and consequences* of focusing, for example, only on male representations of God (cf Giroux, 1994, pp. 3-6).

However, it is not only in relation to representations of God that work is being done to reclaim lost voices from within the Christian tradition (McFague, 1987; Johnson, 1986, 1992), for contemporary biblical scholarship is very active in addressing this need in relation to reading/interpreting scriptural texts (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1983, 1992, 1996; Wainwright, 1991; Segovia and Tolbert, 1995). Teachers need to be aware of recent insights from this scholarship and to encourage students to ask different questions of scriptural texts.

Reading scriptural texts

Giroux points out that 'shifting contexts give an image different meanings' and he explains how dehistoricizing and decontextualizing a text may cause it to appear ideologically innocent and lead to depoliticized readings (1994, p. 17). Moreover, meanings are produced by the reader and 'are, in part, formed within wider social and cultural determinations that propose a range of reading practices that are privileged within power relations of dominance and subordination' (1994, p.19). Readers' experiences—historical and social—shape their readings of a text. Hence, rather than accept a text and authoritative or popular readings of it at face value, the text's context and the reader's context need to be identified as shaping meanings given to the text.

For a long time the key objective of biblical scholarship was to discover a text's 'true meaning'. For instance, Wainwright and Monro note:

> *The biblical scholarship of post-Enlightenment modernity was characterised by a search for the meaning of a text. In mainstream biblical scholarship for at least a century and a half, the method to yield the meaning of the text was historical criticism* (1999, p. 80).

Historical-critical studies are author-centred, focusing on aspects of the production phase of the text including the text's preliterary oral traditioning. Historical criticism explores issues such as the possible date and place of a text's origin,

whether or not there are different literary styles in use, and what the words may have meant in their original context. These methods sought an answer to the question: what did the text mean? However, other pressing questions have surfaced within biblical scholarship more recently.

Asking different questions

Over the last fifteen to twenty years, additional methods of biblical scholarship have developed. These include:

- socio-cultural methods which also focus on the author or production phase of the text but draw on models/ methods from cultural anthopology and sociology (Rhoads, 1992; Elliot, 1993; Osiek, 1992; Malina, 1993a, 1993b; Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1992; Pilch and Malina, 1993)
- narrative or literary critical methods which focus on the product – the text itself as a literary unit (Malbon, 1992, 1994; Powell, 1990; Rhoads & Michie, 1982; Anderson, 1985, 1994)
- reader-response methods which, as Yee (1995, p. 110) says: 'locate meaning in the experience of the reader and his or her *consumption* of the text' (Fowler, 1992; Cavalcanti, 1995).

Along with these new methods that focus not only on the production phase of the text and its original first-century context, but on the actual text itself and the reader, there has developed an awareness and acknowledgment of *perspective*. This has seen an acknowledgment that all methods involve readers making meaning of a text from a particular point of view, using a specific *hermeneutic* (interpretative lens). Every text and interpretation of a text involves a reader and is an act of meaning-making from that person's perspective. In Segovia's words: 'Meaning emerges ... as the result of an encounter between a socially and historically conditioned text and a socially and historically conditioned reader' (1995, p. 8; see also Giroux, 1994, p. 17).

Narrative and reader-response biblical criticisms in particular have posed questions directed towards discovery of the underlying perspectives present in the text/reading and the effects of these on the reader. As well as seeking meaning/understanding by asking 'what does the text mean?', scholars are now seeking meaning/effect by asking 'how does the text mean? (Malbon, 1992). Rhetorical issues and questions are raised about the sorts of discourses being used, the reasons for these, the effects of employing certain narrative techniques in particular ways, the underlying ideologies implicit in the text, the power relations evoked and endorsed by the text, and so forth. Some specific questions that might be asked are: How does the text draw the reader into identifying with certain characters? Whose point of view is being presented here? Who is being silenced by the text; how and why?

These questions raise the issue of the text's political motivations and repercussions. Since, as Giroux says, 'specific contexts privilege some readings over others' (1994, p. 19), it is important to examine the political dynamics of scriptural texts and raise awareness of who/what is being privileged at whose/what expense. Hence, as Yee indicates, it is necessary to frame the question of meaning within relations of discourse and power, and to pose the question: 'What are the social locations of power that make meaning possible in the *production of meaning* in the text itself and in the *consumption of meaning* by the reader' (1995, p. 117, author's emphasis).

In concluding her article Yee offers a challenge to biblical scholars which is worthy of consideration by teachers of religion in relation to pedagogical strategies:

> *A critical task in biblical exegesis is developing a theoretical framework that encompasses all three components, author, text, and reader, as they bridge the fissures among the author (broadly defined to include everyone and everything involved in the production of the text), the autonomous text, and the specific reader, all three in their historical specificities of gender, race, class, and religion. 'Meaning' and 'truth' in the biblical*

> *text involve a dynamic interplay among these three, with power as the pivotal variable. 'Meaning' and 'truth' must be critically analyzed to determine the answer to the question: Whose meaning and whose truth?* (Yee, 1995, p. 118).

Multiple readings of scriptural texts

Mostly, individual biblical scholars/readers do not attempt to offer readings which cover all methods and perspectives: they choose a method of enquiry as well as a hermeneutical perspective. It is important then that scholars/ readers acknowledge their choices and recognise that these choices set limits.

One reader may combine a text-focused narrative/literary method with a social justice hermeneutic as Beck (1996) does. Another reader might use an author-centred historical-critical method together with a male-centred outlook as a large number of biblical scholars have done over the years. Others may choose to combine narrative and reader-response methods in conjunction with a feminist hermeneutic as I have done below. The choices are wide-ranging, and with new methods, perspectives and questions emerging all the time, multiple meanings/interpretations of sriptural texts co-exist. Consequently, it is no longer relevant to speak of *the* meaning of a text:

> *There is no longer a reader who uses the method of reading the text to find the meaning of that text. The multiplicities, complexities and ambiguities of text, reader, history and method are exposed for all interpretative communities. Such a development may provide a less stable place for biblical scholarship. But perhaps such unstable places are more 'truthful' positions for interpretative communities concerned with the faithful reading of their sacred text* (Wainwright & Monro, 1999, p. 92).

Ambiguities and multiple meanings may also bring uncertainty and insecurity to some teachers and students, but it is an honest uncertainty that recognises the plurality

of voices constituting the tradition and the plurality of perspectives from which the tradition continues to be interpreted. Hence, in working with students on scriptural texts, it is important for teachers of religion to make sure that the more commonly asked question 'what does the text mean?' is positioned alongside the equally significant questions 'how does the text mean?' and 'whose meaning and whose truth?'

In the course *Religious experience and texts* (2000), three different readings of the last chapters of the *Gospel according to Mark* are offered as illustrations of how scriptural texts can be read from different perspectives and interrogated using different questions. One of these is included here. It is a feminist reading which models the type of analysis that students could undertake if they chose to employ narrative and reader-response methods together with a feminist hermeneutic.

A feminist interrogation of the *Gospel according to Mark*

Because it is vital to acknowledge one's perspective, I begin this section by declaring the key elements of my own hermeneutic.

Acknowledging my perspective

My readings are undoubtedly influenced by a bias of religious faith. I was brought up in the Catholic tradition of the Christian faith, attended Catholic schools, and as an adult I have taken a keen interest in religious/theological teachings and practices. In addition, my readings are influenced by the position of privilege that I occupy because I am white, middle-class, from a European/Australian background. I also enjoy the privilege of a good education and of being an academic employee of Central Queensland University. However, I have experienced the disadvantage

of being a woman in a society and in a church whose ideologies and structures have favoured men over women. These factors all contribute to the feminist hermeneutical perspective that shapes my reading of scriptural texts. In the readings of Mark's Gospel that I present forthwith, I draw on elements of both narrative critical and reader-response methods of biblical scholarship.

Reading Mark's Gospel through a feminist hermeneutical lens

In the Marcan narrative something extraordinary is recounted near the gospel's completion. It is narrated immediately after the story of the death of the main character, Jesus, and is a totally unexpected twist in the storyline. I am not talking about the discovery of the empty tomb which the author most likely intended as an unexpected twist. I am talking about a probably *unintended*, unexpected twist: more of an afterthought really. The story says:

> *There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem* (Mark 15:40-41.).[2]

The Marcan story has nearly ended before we read:

- that there were women – many women,
- who *followed* Jesus – the same Greek word is used when Simon, Andrew, James and John *follow* Jesus (Mk 1:18 & 20, see also 8:34),
- who *provided for* Jesus – this Greek word is usually translated as 'serve' and is what Jesus asks of his followers (Mk 9:35) and does himself (10:43),
- and who travelled with Jesus to Jerusalem.

These actions of *following* and *serving* Jesus are the actions required of disciples, and women had been doing these actions, for very early in the Marcan story the reader is told that Simon's mother-in-law *served* Jesus. This prompts me to consider if

there were politically motivated ideological reasons for the Marcan author not overtly identifying these women as *disciples* throughout the whole story (cf Giroux, 1994, pp. 3-6).

Feminist biblical scholars have argued convincingly that this occurred because of the androcentric worldview and patriarchal structures that predominated at the time when the Marcan story was being told and retold. Those with more influence in first-century Mediterranean cultures were men, and their interests were substantially reflected in what was retained in the story's written form. Male worldviews came to be accepted as universal and natural: the norm. This masked the fact that women's perspectives existed and were not being valued. However, feminist readings of biblical texts value the silenced voices of women in the text, as is demonstrated in the following readings of Mark 14:3-9 and 16:1-8 which begin with a look at the literary context of these gospel stories.

Mark 14:3-9 and 16:1-8

Literary context

The two selected stories (Mk 14:3-9 and 16:1-8) are found at the beginning and end of the concluding section of Mark's Gospel (chs 14-16).[3] The setting for these chapters is Jerusalem. The plot centres on the arrest, trial and death of Jesus. These main events are not entirely unexpected given that the story prepares the reader for them with three passion predictions which Jesus announces to the disciples (8:31, 9:30, 10:33-34).

It is possible that present-day readers might not imagine women being members of this discipleship group, for the first thirteen Marcan chapters do not explicitly name women as disciples. Simon's mother-in-law (1:29-31) gives a service to Jesus that justifiably can be claimed as discipleship service and was probably recognised as such by a first-century audience. However, this is not as obvious to contemporary audiences. Just as 'shifting contexts give an image different meanings' (Giroux, 1994, p. 17), in translation and over an

extended time frame, words may lose their full range of possible connotations. The translation of the verb, *diakonein*, as 'served' is an example of this loss, because it is no longer obviously recognisable as a signifier of discipleship.

Apart from the story of Simon's mother-in-law, the first thirteen chapters of Mark's Gospel tell about a woman with a hemorrhage who is healed by Jesus (5:25-34), a young woman who is restored to life by Jesus (5:21-24 and 35-43), a woman who demands the death of John the baptizer (6:14-29), a Syrophoenician woman who challenges Jesus' bias against Gentiles (7:24-30), and a widow who contributes all she has to live on to the temple treasury (12:41-44). The only woman named in the first thirteen chapters of the Marcan text is Herodias, and the only women who are given speech are the woman with the hemorrhage and the Syrophoenician woman. It is also worth noting here that the mother of Jesus is mentioned briefly only twice in the whole of the Marcan text, and that Mark's story gives no account of the birth of Jesus.

Mark 14:3-9

Early in these last chapters of Mark's story the reader meets a woman who anoints Jesus in readiness for burial (14:3-9). The woman has access to expensive items so it is likely that she is financially secure. She is given no name and does not speak. However, the woman displays initiative and pours expensive ointment on the head of Jesus. Her action sparks anger in some people who scold her, but she is defended by Jesus who not only commends her gesture but reassures those present that '*what she has done will be told in memory of her*' (14:9b). Nowhere else in this story does Jesus offer a similar reassurance about anyone, male or female.

This text raises two issues for me. Firstly, I am left wondering why this action was considered to be worthy of remembrance by Jesus. Was it a special anointing like the

anointings that set people apart to perform special roles (as happened with priests, prophets and kings)? Indeed kings were anointed by prophets. No other anointing of Jesus is reported, yet Jesus has been recognised as the Messiah (8:29) and he admits that he is the Messiah (14:62). Messiah (Hebrew), like the word Christ (Greek), means the anointed one. Is this woman a prophet? Does the action of a nameless woman-prophet confirm that Jesus is the Messiah?

Secondly, I am prompted to ask why it is that I had never noticed this text's existence before feminist biblical scholars drew my attention to it. It is a truly significant text: a story that needs to be told *in memory of her*. A review of the Catholic Church's lectionary[4] shows that this story is read at Sunday Mass only once every three years. It is not read as a story on its own but is included as part of the long Gospel read on Passion (Palm) Sunday every third year. Consequently, this text is not usually the focus of homilies. Moreover, a similar story told in Matthew's Gospel (26: 6-13) is not included in the Catholic lectionary at all. So it appears that this story is *not* being told in Catholic churches in memory of this woman.

Mark 16:1-8

A little later in Mark's story, three women attempt the ritual anointing of Jesus' body: the type of anointing usually performed by women. They are named: Mary Magdalene, Mary (mother of James) and Salome. Earlier, the story tells us that these women were there with other women when Jesus was crucified (15:40-41), and that the two Marys had seen where Jesus' body was laid (15:47). The story does not mention that any of the male disciples were at any of these events. Only the women disciples were with Jesus when he most needed the support and courage of friends.

However, the story ends with the women disciples failing to do what was asked of them by the 'young man' in a 'white robe' (Mk 16:5-8). The Marcan author has these

courageous women fail in the end. But was this the same type of failure as the male disciples displayed? The women did all they could for Jesus while he was living among them: they followed his teachings, served/provided for him, and travelled with him. They did not abandon Jesus when the situation became life-threatening. Their commitment to the person, Jesus, did not fail. But they were unprepared for a meeting with a white-robed stranger whose announcement to them about the resurrection of Jesus (Mk 16:6-7) was totally unexpected and awesome.

This leaves me asking another question: why this ending? It may have been a rhetorical device to stir the audience into action themselves. Since both the women and the men failed, it was now up to the first-century listeners to go out and tell others the 'good news' about Jesus (see, for example, Dewey, 1994, p.507; Myers et al, 1996, p. 208; Rhoads and Michie, 1982, p. 140; Tolbert, 1992, p. 274). Or, as Dewey (1994, p. 507) also points out, this ending may have been used to reinforce Mark's theology that, while disciples of Jesus do fail, failure does not prevent one from being a disciple. Yet I cannot help but wonder if it may not have been a Marcan device to soften bruised male egos. And there is another related question that I keep in mind here: if the women had failed to say anything to anyone, how would the members of the Marcan community, including the author of the text, know about these events? I leave you to consider your responses to these questions, and to identify other issues that these questions and the Marcan text itself raise for you.

Conclusion

The critical pedagogical approach I adopted in *Religious Experience and Texts* (2000) and have drawn on in this paper highlights *Christian religious traditioning as an ongoing process* that is socio-culturally and historically coded: therefore it is

not ideologically and politically innocent or neutral. This course critiques ideologies underpinning the production of scriptural texts and the institutionally endorsed readings/ interpretations given to these texts throughout Christianity's history.

Moreover, the course invites students to hear and value the multiplicity of voices found within the Christian tradition. Recently, the importance of recognising multiple perspectives within religious traditions has been highlighted on a global scale in wake of the September 11 (2001) attacks on America. At this global level, the dangers and injustices associated with interpreting religious traditions monolithically are becoming increasingly apparent. However, full appreciation of the nuanced differences that are and have always been present within the Christian religious tradition still needs to be achieved.

The critical pedagogical approach I have employed challenges teachers and students to *respect difference* by listening for the suppressed voices present within the Christian tradition and by acknowledging the hermeneutical perspective which shapes their readings of scriptural texts. By encouraging students to ask different questions of the Christian Scriptures, this critical pedagogical approach facilitates the exposition of political agendas and power relations assumed and evoked by/within them.

The employment of similar critical pedagogies in secondary and tertiary religious education sites will *raise critical awareness* – among students and teachers – of the Christian traditioning process as being both *ongoing* and *contextually-constructed*. Moreover, being critically aware of these insights, teachers, students and those with whom they interact are likely to be better positioned to welcome the challenge of being/becoming active and just contributors to a Christian traditioning process that is still evolving.

Endnotes

1 I gratefully acknowledge significant contributions to the course by Dr Elaine Wainwright and Mr Jim Hanley.
2 Biblical translations are from the New Revised Standard Version.
3 I agree with most biblical scholars who accept verse 8 of chapter 16 as the original ending of the Gospel.
4 The lectionary contains the scriptural texts proclaimed at Catholic liturgies.

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