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Susan Marie Norman

December 4, 2003

Title of Thesis: Jesus of Nazareth: Portrait of a Teacher

Degree: Master of Arts

Year: 2003
This study looks at a teacher from the past to answer four questions: What made Jesus of Nazareth an effective educator? Looked at through the lens of educational theory, how did he teach? What characterized the learning environment he created? Can he be a role model for teachers today? To answer these questions, this study begins by briefly examining the components in Jesus’ teaching situation: the context, the learners, the ideals or teaching goals, the content, and the teacher himself.

Jesus used a variety of teaching techniques. Frequently, he used parables, questions, and poetry to achieve his teaching goals: critical thinking, internal change, and harmonious living. While he had constant interaction with individuals and small groups, he also lectured large crowds. Although he rarely employed re-enactment as a technique, he used it to such great effect that it remains an essential teaching tool for his followers today. Throughout his teaching career, he taught learners how to live. His private and public use of prayer gave his learners content, but also an example to follow. For learning in the affective domain, he used apprenticeship. Through his use of humour and silence, he modeled both how to teach and how to live. His teaching encouraged learning in both the cognitive and affective domains.

The learning environment Jesus created was characterized by accessibility. By going where his learners lived and by warmly welcoming those on the margins of society, he made his teaching physically accessible. By using a wide variety of techniques, he made his teaching intellectually accessible, even for learners not physically present. By using hospitality to care for his learners’ needs, he made his teaching emotionally accessible. In setting the tone of the learning environment, he exercised humility, courage, compassion, and integrity.

For three groups of teachers, Jesus is a particularly appropriate role model because they share similar goals: religious educators, especially Christian ones; non-religious moral teachers; and those seeking to provide holistic education. However, Jesus exemplified characteristics that make him an inspiring role model for all teachers: flexibility, creativity, sensitivity, and consistency.
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Soli Deo Gloria.
CHAPTER 1
WHY JESUS?

Introduction

The end of the twentieth century inspired a flurry of speculation about the people who most influenced the world during the second millennium of the Common Era. *Time* magazine declared: “It would require much exotic calculation . . . to deny that the single most powerful figure—not merely in these two millenniums but in all human history—has been Jesus of Nazareth” (December 6, 1999). While many would dispute this conclusion, few would refuse Jesus a place among the great teachers of the world. As the founder of Christianity, he has profoundly affected, and continues to affect, global historical, political, intellectual, cultural, and spiritual thought. His life and teaching have been scrutinized, analyzed, dismissed, accepted, and depicted for almost two thousand years. While almost everything about him, including his very existence as a historical person, is subject to scholarly, and not so scholarly debate, his reputation as an effective teacher remains. Even those who seek to discredit his message often begin by praising his teaching ability. However, researchers in the field of adult education, who should be especially interested in a world-renowned adult educator, rarely mention him or examine the way he taught. This study addresses that gap by asking the question, What made Jesus an effective educator? Under this overall question are three further ones: How did he teach? What characterized the learning environment he created? Can he be considered a role model for teachers today? Cultural historian Pelikan claims: “Jesus is far too important a figure to be left only to the theologians and the church” (1985, xv). He is also too important a teacher to be ignored by adult educators.

The need for more information about teachers and how they teach comes as a result of a gap in adult education research. The two prominent strands in
the academic field of adult education—the learner-centered emphasis of pedagogy and the society-centered emphasis of emancipatory education—stress the learner's needs and situation, keeping the focus of research away from the teacher. However, many practitioners are asking for more information about how they can become better teachers. One of the models for teaching adults, which is a traditional and time-honoured approach, is apprenticeship, following a master teacher who acts as a role model for the learner. Can one of the great teachers from the past be a role model for today?

By examining a teacher from long ago, this study explores another gap in adult education research, which rarely focuses on how educators in other times and cultures taught. Discussing a figure from ancient history, in this case Jesus of Nazareth, creates an interesting set of problems and, possibly, the feeling of stumbling around in a morass of historical debate and disagreement about matters that seem far removed from the concerns of adult education. However, the issues cannot be ignored. Does the historical debate surrounding Jesus of Nazareth invalidate a study of the way he taught? Has the picture of Jesus the teacher been totally obscured by religious controversy? Included in the discussion of historicity is a section justifying the use of the four gospel accounts as primary sources of information about how Jesus taught. The underlying supposition of this study is that Jesus was an effective teacher of adults. There are three types of evidence for this perspective: the witness of his contemporary learners, the evidence in western culture of Jesus' teaching twenty centuries after he taught, and the opinions of people today, including those who have rejected his teaching but attest to his effectiveness as an educator.

**Putting the Spotlight on Teachers**

In the field of adult education, the emphasis placed on learners and their needs tends to put discussion about teachers in the background. As an academic discipline, adult education emerged during the second half of the twentieth century. In an effort to set boundaries for discussing it, scholars
subjected the words “adult” and “education” to rigorous examination. From the beginning, the focus was on how it differed from the education of children. Even the word “teacher” was omitted from the early definitions because of possible negative associations with childhood schooling. However, the definitions recognized that the word “education” implies structure. Such phrases as “deliberate structuring” (Courtney 1989, 15), “systematic and sustained activities” (Darkenwald and Merriam 1982, 9) and “sequential and organized” (Liveright and Haygood 1969, 8) all suggest that, even if the organizer is also the learner, a purposeful designer—an “educational agent” (Verner 1964, 32)—is part of the process. However, by whatever name s/he is called, the teacher has often remained in the background of research and discussion in the field of adult education. As a result, two views of the teacher have emerged: the teacher as facilitator and the teacher as liberator. Meanwhile, many practitioners in the field simply want to learn how to become better teachers.

Learner-centered Facilitators

In his seminal book, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education*, Knowles (1970) wrote extensively about the ways in which adult learners differ from children, the priority of the learners’ needs, the role of the facilitator (a term he used to replace “teacher”), program planning and evaluation. His emphasis on the characteristics of learners and their needs resonated with educators in diverse settings and fields and launched an avalanche of research and academic discourse on adult learning. In his concern to separate andragogy—the teaching of adults—from pedagogy, he focused on learners. Adult education set out on a course that emphasized the learner to such an extent that the teacher retreated into the background. In summarizing this approach, Taylor and Tisdell have noted: “The individual is seen as central . . . the emphasis . . . is on meeting the needs of the individual adult learner . . . helping others to reach self-fulfillment” (1999, 3). Where the centrality of the learner is emphasized, discussion focuses on the mechanics of teaching: methods, techniques, and devices. As Nesbit has observed: “Research on
teaching adults is often atheoretical, focuses more on learning than teaching, and regards teaching primarily as techniques removed from subject matter or social contexts” (1998, 157).

**Society-centered emancipators**

Partly in reaction to the learner-centered approach, another strand of adult education emerged: the use of education for social transformation which has its roots in the great social and political movements of radical change. Exploring the potential for education as an agent of change, researchers and practitioners have focused on society’s problems such as illiteracy, poverty, and oppression, and vigorously attacked these problems with education (Selman 1985).

In both these areas of concern—the individual learner with needs to be met and a society in need of social and political change—the focus has been noticeably turned away from the teacher. Where society’s need is the focus, the goal becomes “helping each learner become an autonomous critical thinker. . . . promoting collective change through a process of fostering ‘conscientizacoa’—that of helping the oppressed recognize the socio-political and economic contradictions of their work” (Taylor and Tisdell 1999, 4). In this context the teacher is a liberator. Those who believe that the purpose of education is entirely emancipatory consider Knowles’ idea of the teacher as facilitator inadequate. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire warns that the educator may simply reinforce the existing power imbalance. Unless the division between the educator and the learner is completely eradicated, no true dialogue and no genuine critical thinking will be possible (1971, 75-81). In this perspective, teachers ought to be “advocates for social justice through the use of problem-posing and dialogical means in a collective and horizontal relationship” (Tisdell and Taylor 1999, 4). Research focuses on issues of power, power within the structures of society and power between groups and individuals within that society. In this way of thinking, the primary concern of educators should be the reduction of the power imbalance inherent in the
teacher-learner dynamic and in the removal of the social inequalities resulting from race, gender, class, and all forms of political and social oppression.

“Just Teach Me how to Teach”

In both the frameworks which dominate the field of adult education—Knowles’ concept of andragogy, with its emphasis on the learner, and the critical socio-political emphasis of those who believe in emancipation through political reform—the role of the teacher/facilitator is very much in the background. However, many practitioners are primarily concerned with how they can become better teachers. They find that teaching has become part of their job and, untrained for this role, they seek help to become more effective teachers and to obtain official credentials for what they are already doing. A proponent of practitioner research has found “that teachers want practical knowledge . . . and that they want these [teaching] tips without any theory” (Cockley 2003). On taking up adult education as a formal study, practitioners frequently find little information about the art and science of teaching.

However the subject of what makes teaching effective has not been completely neglected and valuable research has moved the debate about good teaching beyond a focus on the technicalities. Pratt (1992, 1998) has examined the relationship between a teacher’s “actions, intentions and beliefs” (1992, 203) and how he or she teaches. Along with Collins, he has developed a useful tool, the TPI, for teachers to examine the “philosophical orientations” (2000), which form their teaching perspectives. His work on teaching in other cultures has raised awareness of issues implicit in teaching within different cultural settings (1992), (Pratt, Kelly, and Wong 1999.) Both of these areas—teaching perspectives and cultural sensitivity—offer intriguing possibilities for looking at Jesus through different lens. For example, did Jesus’ teaching techniques and attitude to learners differ according to which culture they came from? Based on the TPI, what was his perspective and how did it affect the way he taught?

Although these are interesting questions, they represent a departure from the main thrust of this study. They suggest possibilities for further research. Apps has addressed both the external technicalities of teaching (1991) as well as the
internal emotional and spiritual life of the teacher (1996). Like Apps, Palmer
(1983, 1998) writes about need for balance between a teacher's intellectual,
emotional, and spiritual paths. Their work suggests a holistic approach to
conceptualizing teaching. With these ideas as a backdrop, this study looks at
Jesus of Nazareth, considering the context in which he taught, the learning
environment he created, and most importantly, looking at how he conveyed his
content within that context.

Several studies, such as Macrorie's (1984) Twenty Teachers, have
addressed the gap in the literature on teaching adults by publishing portraits
of successful teachers. A more recent book, Extraordinary Teachers: The
Essence of Excellent Teaching (Stephenson 2001), contains reflections by
award-winning teachers on their experiences and philosophy of teaching.
Neither of these, however, is solely concerned with adult education. This study
of Jesus is a portrait of a teacher, set in the context of current adult education
theory. At the same time, it offers more information in another area where
there has been only limited research: the practice of adult education
throughout recorded history before the theory of adult education became a
subject of academic scrutiny in the twentieth century.

**Great Teachers from the Past**

Research in adult education in ancient history has concentrated mainly
on two teachers: Socrates and Confucius. Based on questioning, the Socratic
method of teaching has been widely used in the study of developing critical
thinking both in young people and in adults. For example, Richard Paul,
Director of the Foundation for Critical Thinking and the Center for Teaching
Excellence, has created widespread interest in Socratic teaching methods
(2003). Confucius' philosophy laid the foundations for social values as well as
the educational system of a huge segment of the globe. Research by Watkins
and Biggs (1996), Pratt (1993), Guo (1996), Pratt, Kelly, and Wong (1999) has
demonstrated the integration of Confucian thought with the structure and
mores of many Asian societies and shown its affect on teaching and learning.
Scholarly inquiry has combined interest in both these great teachers from history, as in Beck's *Confucius and Socrates: The Teaching of Wisdom* (1996). However, adult education as a discipline has been somewhat shortsighted when it looks over its shoulder at the past, neglecting many great teachers. For example, Buddha and Mohammed have both influenced millions of the world's people throughout history by their teaching. To choose to study Jesus is not to suggest that others are less worthy of a similar investigation, but to make a beginning exploration of an area of research that has been neglected. This study focuses on Jesus of Nazareth and suggests that examining such teachers provides two important ingredients for today's teacher: practical information, by showing how such people taught, and inspiration which comes from seeing an effective teacher at work. Although he was speaking of the more recent past, Welton has aptly described the value of knowing history:

> The Canadian adult education community is suffering from a severe case of historical amnesia. This is a serious situation because knowledge of our past lays the foundation for its use by those living in the present . . . History provides a vantage point on the present. If we want to know where we want to go, we must know where we have been. (Welton 1987, 12)

Despite the value of historical retrospectives, however, complications arise when looking to the past to find portraits of effective teachers. The question of reliable evidence and historicity reveals a minefield of scholarly debate and diverging opinions. In the case of religious leaders like Jesus, Mohammed, and Buddha, the information about them as adult educators is obscured by religious controversy and concern with epistemology. In discussion of their words, the meaning and implication of what they said has taken priority over how they taught. The scholars who have extensively looked at these teachers have often operated within the paradigm of that particular religion's worldview and without regard to the field of adult education. For example, Horne's work (1920) on the way Jesus taught, which has been recently revised and updated by Gunn (1998), seems to be largely unknown outside of Christian circles. The marginalization of religion within mainstream
secular universities and the retreat of some religious scholars into insularity have further widened the gap. Both of these issues—historical reliability and religious coloration of ideas—require consideration in justifying the choice of Jesus as a subject for a study examining the role of teacher.

**The Problem of Historicity: A Morass of Opinions**

An examination of teachers from the distant past is in danger of becoming embroiled in the debate that has recently gripped historical research over the reliability of sources. In the field of biblical studies, the debate about the historicity of the gospel accounts began long before the current epistemological concerns of post-modernity. The Enlightenment, which bridged European thought from the Middle Ages into the Modern Age, opened the way for questioning the historicity of the biblical record. It also sent scholars in pursuit of the “truth” about the man in history known as Jesus of Nazareth:

The same rationalism that spurred the Enlightenment also gave birth to the “historical Jesus.” This particular Jesus was unknown before the Age of Reason brought him to light. Its desire to subject all authorities, ancient and modern, to the scrutiny of the rational process led to the search for the human Jesus underlying all the centuries of faith concession to him. (Charlesworth and Weaver 2000, 3)

From the late seventeenth century, the debate has continued. Early in the twentieth century, it became known as “the quest for the historical Jesus”, taking this name from the influential book by Albert Schweitzer (1910). The end result has been a “seemingly interminable stream of lives of Jesus, written by Christians and Jews, scholars and novelists, believers and agnostics” (Crossan, Johnston and Werner 1999, 76). In its current manifestation, the quest is more divided and opinions more diverse than ever. It includes a group of scholars, the Jesus Seminar, who believe that most of the material in the four gospels is fabrication (Ludemann 2001); conservative scholars who believe that the gospel records are essentially reliable (Wright 1993); and theologians who have abandoned the quest because, they assert along with Bultmann, spiritual truth lies outside the realm of history (Wright 1992, 21) and has no
relevance for spiritual understanding. Given the uncertainty surrounding the reliability of the sources, how can anyone hope to examine the life of Jesus for information about his way of teaching? Using the title of a recent book on the subject, one is tempted to ask, *Will the real Jesus please stand up?* (Copan 1999).

When the scholars have had their say, one glimmer of agreement emerges: Jesus of Nazareth was a teacher who had great influence and whose teaching set in motion a series of historical events which changed the world. Even after removing any part of the biblical story that involves the miraculous and paring down or eliminating many familiar passages, all but the most radical scholars recognize a core of teaching material in the gospels considered to be genuine. One scholar has summed up the two hundred years of rigorous and lively debate: "The Jesus discovered in the quest was above all a teacher" (Keck 2000, 65). Looking at Jesus the teacher thus becomes far less problematic than looking at Jesus the Messiah or Jesus the Lord.

Since the earliest continuously accepted written accounts of Jesus' life are found in the first four books of the New Testament, these gospels are the primary traditional sources for all information about how he taught. Not until the second century are there other historical references to Jesus. The dates in which the gospels were written, or assembled if they were made up of pre-existing accounts, are important. Again the arguments for and against various dates are multitudinous. However, the consensus emerging from the field of biblical studies offers a range of likelihood for dating the gospels. A summary of the generally accepted dating given in a conservative, but widely respected publication, *The New Bible Dictionary*, suggests the following:

All four of our canonical Gospels are probably to be dated within the four decades AD 60-100 [as the eyewitnesses of the events of Jesus' life died]. We need not suppose that the transmission of the apostolic witness had been exclusively oral before AD 60 - some at least of the "many" who, according to Lk 1:2 had undertaken to draw up an orderly account of the evangelic events may have done so in writing before AD 60 — but no document of an earlier date has survived. (Bruce 1996, 485)
From outside the church comes a similar, though less conservative perspective. In summing up the “general scholarly dating of the Synoptic Gospels”, Oxford’s foremost Jewish scholar puts the latest possible date between AD 80 and 100” (Vermes 2001, 161). What emerges from the conflicting arguments is the widely held consensus that the gospel accounts were all put in their present written form by CE100, within approximately seventy years of the death of Jesus. A strong oral tradition, based on many eyewitness accounts, is thought to have existed prior to that time. In arguing for the reliability of the gospel accounts, Bruce concludes: “The historicity of Christ is as axiomatic for an unbiased historian as the historicity of Julius Caesar. It is not historians who propagate the ‘Christ-myth’ theories” (1960, 119). However, for every scholar who agrees with him, one could find another who does not. How does this controversy about the sources affect a study of how Jesus taught?

While the quest for the historical Jesus and the debate about the historicity of the sources is fascinating and of great importance to those concerned with the spiritual implications of what Jesus taught (Bruce 1960), it is not a concern of this study. Jesus, the teacher so vividly portrayed in the gospel accounts, may have been a historical figure much as described; he may represent a composite picture of several influential teachers, real or imagined; he may be a purely fictional figure creatively fashioned from the imagination(s) of writer(s) with political or religious motives. In the end, it is unlikely that any argument will prove to everyone’s satisfaction which of these views has the greatest historical validity. What can be convincingly argued is that the picture of Jesus in the gospels is that of a teacher who had a powerful effect on his learners, both those who were taught by him in the first century of the Common Era and those who have subsequently heard his teaching. Whether that picture is historical, complete, composite, or fictional is irrelevant to this study. Either the Jesus of history or the Jesus of invention was a remarkable teacher. If Jesus were a fictionalized, or partially fictionalized teacher, someone created a character who was enough like a “real” teacher to be creditable. Therefore, even such a fictionalized teacher would make a worthwhile study. Just as one might discuss leadership qualities of Shakespeare’s Macbeth, so
might one examine the pedagogical characteristics of the Jesus described in the New Testament.

Among academics, this position can be found across the spectrum of religious belief. For example, David Flusser, described by a fellow Jewish scholar as "Israel's foremost scholar on Jesus and nascent Christianity" (Notley 1997, 11) begins his remarkable book, Jesus, by posing the question, "Is it indeed credible that when the Synoptic gospels are studied scientifically they present a reliable portrayal of the historical Jesus?" (Flusser 1992, 21). His entire book is a resounding affirmative answer to this important question. In it, he pays "close attention to philology and textual analysis [and] cuts against the grain of New Testament scholarship's penchant for 'trendiness', in which Jesus is recreated in the mould of whichever psychological or political trend is in vogue" (11).

Because this study is concerned with the picture of Jesus found in the biblical accounts historically accepted by the Christian Church, the four New Testament gospels translated into English from the original Greek are the primary sources. While other early accounts, such as the Gospel of Thomas, are valuable for certain scholarly pursuits, they do not form part of this particular study because they have not helped to create the picture of Jesus as he has been seen by scholars, churchmen, and people of other beliefs during the last two thousand years. The Bible has been translated into more languages than any other book in history. Currently, the number of languages into which at least one book of the Bible has been translated stands at 2,303 (Reed 2003). On one web site on the Internet (http://bible.crosswalk.com) viewers can look at any passage in the Bible in fourteen different English translations. The church's concern for an accurate Bible translation has resulted in unprecedented scrutiny of the original texts by some of the world's most eminent scholars. Unless otherwise noted, the quotations in this thesis are from the New International Version, widely recognized as a thorough and scholarly translation.
The Question of Religion: Shifting the Focus

As founder of one of the world’s great religions, Jesus is a figure of interest in many disciplines. However, the primary focus of research and debate has been on the spiritual and religious implications of his teaching. This study represents a shift in focus away from these as it examines Jesus’ life and teaching from an adult education perspective. For example, the incident of the adulterous woman brought before Jesus is given as an example of Jesus’ use of silence as a teaching technique. The moral and spiritual considerations are not at the forefront of the discussion. However, a teacher cannot be easily separated from the beliefs that form the central part of the teacher’s context and character. Pratt claims that “actions, intentions and beliefs” form a dynamic and interdependent trilogy (1992, 206). The “what” and “how” of teaching are inseparable from the “who.” Even the “when” and “where—the historical period and the geographical location—contribute to the overall picture. Jesus’ teaching ideal—his goals and motivation for teaching—stem directly from his understanding of his identity and role. In their turn, his goals are significant in any discussion of his teaching methods. In short, no description of Jesus can be excluded: his spirituality, his entire understanding of the world and his place in it. His religion must form part of the picture, even though it becomes a complicating factor.

The miracles reportedly performed by Jesus are an example of the complications inherent in examining a religious leader from a pedagogical perspective. The gospels report Jesus performing miraculous acts: healing the sick, walking on water, raising the dead to life. In at least some of these incidents, Jesus uses the opportunity to teach lessons based on the miracle (Mk 1:1-12). Are these miracles teaching aids? Is it necessary to believe in miracles in general, or Jesus’ miracles in particular, to consider Jesus as a role model for effective teaching? Should a non-theological perspective, such as this exploration of Jesus the teacher, ignore such events? In this study, miracles are rarely discussed because performing miracles, at least supernatural ones, lies outside the range of most educators’ abilities. The purpose of looking at a teacher from the past is to find an example of effective teaching, to examine
what made it effective, and to consider whether such teaching might serve as a role model for today’s teacher. A discussion of miracles might hamper the achievement of this goal. Religion is definitely a complicating factor, but it is an inescapable component in every aspect of Jesus’ teaching.

**Positionality: Looking from the Inside Out**

In recent years, researchers have begun to acknowledge their biases as they offer their work to the academic community. Perhaps, in the midst of examining how religion can complicate research, I should state my position. As a practising Christian, I am a follower of Jesus. I come to this discussion with an insider’s perspective and bias. In her work on church architecture, Margaret Visser writes from the viewpoint of her Catholic faith, noting that the insider’s position is not necessarily an undesirable one:

> It is much more likely to be helpful—not the reverse—to investigate a subject when you know it from the “inside.” Such knowledge is not scholarship, of course—but then, neither is being an outsider any guarantee of either accuracy or insight. Surprisingly many people have insisted that in order to understand something you are always better off not participating in it. This attitude has, fortunately, begun to arouse suspicion in recent years, notably among anthropologists: it is no longer thought *de rigueur* to discount what the “natives” are telling you is going on. (2000, 2-3)

I hope my status as a “native” will not be detrimental to this study of Jesus’ teaching.

**Who will hear?**

In presenting a focus on how Jesus taught and what kind of learning environment he created, study offers a portrait rather than a “how to” manual. It does not develop a comprehensive theory on what makes Jesus or any teacher effective, but instead shows one effective teacher in action. Readers are free to discern whether the information has relevance to their teaching situations. However, Christian educators—those who consider that they should pattern their behaviour on that of Jesus—may be particularly interested in
observing how Jesus taught. Teaching in Christian churches has tended to follow a pattern of teaching that Pratt describes as coming from a "transmission perspective . . . [which is] primarily 'teacher-centered' with a heavy emphasis on the transmission of information" (1992, 210). Christians have often relied on sermons and catechisms, both of which fit Pratt's description. Jesus, however, modeled a different way of teaching.

Teachers of faiths other than Christianity, as well as those who teach ethics and morals from a non-religious background, may find it helpful to examine the teaching techniques that encouraged learning at a life-changing level. Teaching others how to live out beliefs, how to achieve the praxis that indicates deep learning, presents special challenges. Seeing how Jesus dealt with such challenges may be useful to others involved in moral or religious education. Those concerned with holistic education can observe a teacher who emphasized spirituality as an important component in human life. Regardless of what they teach, other adult educators may draw inspiration from seeing an effective teacher at work. The teaching techniques Jesus used are still used today. Even twenty centuries later, teachers can recognize the characteristics of the learning environment that he encouraged.

This portrait of Jesus viewed through the lens of adult education offers readers three learning opportunities. The first is to learn about teaching in a particular time, place, and cultural milieu. For example, how did Jesus hold his learners' attention without technological aids? How did his use of poetry help learners? What educational purpose did his stories have? The second opportunity is for readers to compare their teaching situations to that of Jesus and search for practical ideas about teaching. For example, would re-enactment be a more appropriate technique than a lecture for teaching an important historical event? Finally, adult educators may derive inspiration from observing another teacher, albeit in a strikingly different context, dealing with issues which educators still face: how to make the excluded feel included, how to change deeply entrenched attitudes towards others, how to dissipate violent emotions through the creative use of silence. Effective teachers are inspiring. They serve as reminders of the powerful possibilities of education.
They challenge all educators to re-kindle their own vision for what their own teaching can achieve and to re-examine their own practices for areas that need improvement or re-evaluation. A portrait is not a theory that sets out general principles that can be applied in different situations. It is not the proof for a theory. Rather, it offers the opportunity to explore another person’s way of teaching and reflect on one’s own.

**Jesus’ Teaching: Effective or Over-rated?**

The primary research questions guiding this study are, What made Jesus an effective teacher? How did he teach? What characterized the learning environment that he shaped? Can he be a role model for teachers today? The underlying assumption is that he was an effective educator, an assumption that requires some explanation, lest it be considered a shaky foundation on which to build an argument. Evidence for Jesus’ effectiveness can be found in three places: in the response to his teaching among those who heard him, even those who did not believe him or become his followers; in the remnants of his teaching in contemporary western culture; and in the lives of people today who claim to have learned from Jesus, again including those who are not his followers. There remains the problem of religious coloration, the process by which everything associated with a religious leader becomes encrusted by layers of beliefs, practices, and controversies. It lies outside the scope of this paper to separate that which has been conjoined for centuries: the teacher Jesus and the man-God Jesus Christ, founder of Christianity. However, the evidence suggests his teaching was effective during his life and remains effective. It has spread beyond the confines of the church, which encompasses his followers, to a far wider audience.

**Listener Response: An Indicator of Effectiveness?**

The first indications of the popularity, if not the effectiveness, of Jesus’ teaching came with the crowds of people who followed him. After listing the many times the gospel narrators mention crowds—“Mark and John,
independent of each other use ochlos (crowd) 38 and 20 times respectively”—Meier (2001, 25), notes that “various sayings in the Gospels affirm or presuppose a large crowd around Jesus” (22). However, Jesus was not the only teacher attracting followers in first-century Palestine. A parade of religious preachers and political revolutionaries of various stripes wandered throughout the land. Basing his observations on the writings of Josephus, who was one of the first Jewish writers to mention Jesus, Meier claims that Jesus did not have “a monopoly on the dangerous activity of attracting large crowds of enthusiastic followers” (25). At a time which one scholar describes as “a setting of social unrest . . . [and] mounting expectation” (Wright 1993, 94) for the arrival of a long expected liberator, the presence of crowds indicated excitement and interest in Jesus’ teaching, but not necessarily its effectiveness.

A closer look at the crowds’ reactions shows that the buzz of interest was based on more than superficial appeal. At the beginning of its description of Jesus’ teaching, Mark notes the reaction of the crowd: “When the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law” (Mk 1:21-22). Both the content and the delivery of his teaching brought a strong reaction: “From the beginning, Jesus’ audience was stunned by his manner of teaching” (Vermes 2001, 167). An analysis of the situation is complicated because the descriptions of the teaching are interspersed with depictions of miracles of healing. The account of the listeners’ reactions continues: “The people were all so amazed that they asked each other ‘What is this? A new teaching—and with authority. He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him’” (Mk 1:27-28). Clearly the crowds came as much for the healing as for the words. Although the presence of crowds cannot be taken as an indication that Jesus’ teaching was effective, other indications suggest that it had a profound impact.

While the belief that Jesus was performing miracles obviously drew people, his actual words, so well crafted in various forms of presentation, had great power: they were remembered long after Jesus died and told to others (Beasley and others 2001, 345). According to Bruce (1960), only after the
eyewitnesses began to die did Jesus' followers finally put them in written form. Bruce also argues that the gospel accounts were probably not put in their current form until sometime between AD 60 and 100 (1962, 485). The remarkable consistency and detail in the sayings of Jesus attest to their effective delivery.

Perhaps more forceful evidence of Jesus' teaching comes, not from his learners remembering his words, but from what they did, and from the changes they made in their lives as a result of his teaching. Several of them left their daily occupations and families to follow Jesus around the countryside (Mk 1:18). Many others spent days at a time listening to him teach, completely ignoring their commitments (Lk 9:12). His closest disciples permanently abandoned their occupations and became full-time teachers in order to follow him from place to place and, eventually, to become teachers of his message. They faced persecution and, ultimately, execution because of their refusal to stop living and acting as they believed Jesus wanted them to. Of course, others have often matched their fervor and died for many kinds of beliefs. What is of concern here is not their belief system, but the changes that took place in their thinking, actions and beliefs as a result of learning from Jesus. Bloom's taxonomy (Clark 2000), which measures levels of learning, states that the highest level of learning in the affective domain occurs when learners' lives and world perspectives change. Cranton describes this level:

The fifth and final level in the affective domain is characterization by a value, or alternatively, value complex. As the label implies, at this stage, the learner has adopted a belief system to such an extent that the individual is characterized by that value; for example, “She is a feminist”; “He is a Communist.” This level of learning can also be described as a philosophy of life or worldview. (1989, 39)

Perhaps, an even higher level should be added to this taxonomy: one at which the learners are willing to die for the worldview they have adopted. Many of Jesus' followers as well as those of other religious leaders have displayed commitment at such a level. Figure 1 on page 18 shows how one of Jesus'
learners, Peter, reached the highest level of learning in the affective domain, according to Bloom's taxonomy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bloom's levels of learning in the affective domain.</th>
<th>Peter's response to Jesus' teaching.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Receiving phenomena: Awareness, willingness to hear.</td>
<td>1. Peter listens to Jesus’ call (Mk 1:17).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Responding to phenomena: Active participation on the part of the learner.</td>
<td>2. Peter begins to follow Jesus (Mk 1:18).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Valuing: The worth or value of a person attaches to a particular behaviour.</td>
<td>3. Peter declares that Jesus’ message is the only one which offers eternal life (Jn 6: 68).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Organization: Organizing values into priorities by contrasting values.</td>
<td>4. Peter says that he has left everything to follow Jesus (Mk 10:27-31).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Internalizing values: Has a value system that controls behaviour.</td>
<td>5. Peter preaches boldly even when imprisoned for doing so (Acts 3:1-4:22).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 1.** Peter’s learning in the affective domain. Bloom’s taxonomy suggests five levels of growth. Peter demonstrated learning at each of these levels.

Effective teaching includes a measure of praxis, which Groome describes as the attempt “to avoid the traditional dichotomy between theory and practice” (1980, 137). Praxis consists of reflection on what has been learned and appropriate action based on that learning. To the Christians of the first century, the apostle James expressed the praxis inherent in the Christian message: “Faith, by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead” (Jas 2:17). In Jesus’ disciples, the dramatic changes that encompassed all aspects of their lives became testimony to the praxis that Jesus’ teaching encouraged.
Further evidence for the effectiveness of Jesus’ teaching comes, not from his followers, but from his enemies. Many of the powerful Jewish religious leaders known as the Pharisees were constantly in “adversarial” (Meier 2001, 339) interaction with Jesus. They were concerned about the power of his teaching and his widening influence. The teaching of Jesus posed a potential threat to the Roman rule in Palestine. When questioned, Jesus appeared to sidestep the question of secular political authority (Mt: 22). However, the ferment that his teaching stirred up eventually led to his arrest and execution at the behest of the religious and secular authorities, who formed an unlikely alliance to bring about his death. Had Jesus been an ineffective teacher, neither he nor his disciples would have been a threat to the political and religious status quo. The powerful animosity of his enemies is a testimony to his teaching ability. Thus, from his contemporaries - both his friends and his enemies - come clear indications that Jesus was a teacher who made a profound impact on his listeners.

**Effective Teaching: The Barrage of Cultural Evidence**

For the past two millennia, western culture has been shaped more by the Christian faith and the church that proclaims its allegiance to Jesus than by any other single influence. While the current age is often called “post-Christian” because of the decline of the power of the church, the evidence for the widespread acceptance of Jesus’ teaching in the West, and all over the world, is still strong. A secular web site, *The Contextual Guide and Internet Index to Western Civilisation*, notes:

Jesus Christ is arguably the most significant personality to have walked the earth. His life and death have divided history itself into B.C. (before Christ) and A.D. (anno Domini - in the year of our Lord). His sermons, prayers, sayings, teachings and parables have provided the richest source of spiritual advice ever given and have become essential knowledge for anyone wanting to understand the genius of Western Civilization and the monumental influence of the Christian Church. (www.culturalresources.com/jesus.html)
The fact that Jesus' teaching began a religion that became a foundational force in world history does not, in itself, prove his ability as an educator. For example, the art depicting his life frequently has more to do with its significant events (birth, miracles, death, resurrection) than with his teaching. However, the actual teaching - the stories, aphorisms, the way he related spiritual ideals to everyday living - is still a vital component in the Jesus story. His words have entered into Western thinking and culture so completely that they can stand alone, unsupported by religious belief, as worthy of attention.

Many examples come to mind. One is the story of the prodigal son, which has been described as "the world's greatest short story" (Gunn 1998, 80). Often used in the church as a call to sinners to repent and experience God's embracing love, this parable offers insight into many other situations in life. It speaks to sibling rivalry, to the desire for home, to the problems of intermingling old and new religious forces, and to the permanence and power of the parent-child bond. Rich in connotation, it has been an enduring source of inspiration. Told baldly as a simple story, even outside a religious context, it conveys and arouses strong emotions. Like scores of other expressions and ideas of Jesus, "prodigal son" has entered the language to represent certain situations and to capture certain emotional responses. The story has come down through the centuries from the mind and heart of an effective teacher, a superbly effective teacher, with no loss of power to touch the depths of human thought and emotion.

**The Witness to Effectiveness in Non-Western Culture**

While much has been written about the influence of Jesus in the Western world, the spread of Christianity has taken the teaching of Jesus into other cultures, often by means and with results that have led to serious allegations against the church for its cultural and political imperialism. While that debate continues, the growth in the number of people from non-Western countries who now identify themselves as followers of Jesus is mounting. In a recent article in the *Atlantic Monthly*, Jenkins notes the explosive growth in
Christianity in Africa, Latin America, and China:

For obvious reasons, news reports today are filled with material about the influence of a resurgent . . . Islam. But in its variety and vitality, in its global reach, in its association with the world's fastest growing societies, in its shifting centres of gravity, in the way its values and practices vary from place to place — in these and other ways it is Christianity that will leave the deepest mark on the twenty-first century. (Jenkins 2002)

Various factors with little to do with Jesus can create such growth. However, despite enormous differences and shades of opinions about almost every subject imaginable, millions of Christians claim to gain spiritual understanding from Jesus' teaching.

The Witness to Effectiveness from Outside the Church

Those who identify themselves as followers of Jesus cannot provide unbiased evaluation of Jesus' teaching. Beyond the circle of disciples, however, are people from other perspectives who acknowledge his teaching ability. For example, Klausner was one of the first Jewish scholars to write about Jesus and his impact on Judaism. He concluded that, while Jews could not accept Jesus as "God . . . the Son of God . . . Messiah . . . [or] prophet", Jesus was "a great teacher of morality and an artist in parable" (Klausner 1926, 414). Vermes agrees, even while he argues that Christianity, as it emerged from the first century, had little to do with the teaching of its founder: "Jesus was unquestionably an influential teacher" (Vermes 1993, 46). Three leading Buddhists have recently published books about Jesus: the Dalai Lama (1996), Thich (1997) and Leong (1995). According to one reviewer, all three "recognize Jesus as a great teacher" (Muck 1999, 1). In the post-Christian world of Western culture, Jesus is still known as a superb teacher.

The Silence of the Early Church

In the midst of wide-ranging praise for the teaching skill of Jesus, one group of people remains surprisingly quiet: the Christians of the early church. The four gospel accounts are full of descriptions of Jesus being
addressed as teacher (56 times). However, in his book, *Rabbi Jesus*, Jones notes that "Jesus as teacher is never compellingly articulated by the early church's original correspondence [the epistles, rather than the gospels]" (1997, Introduction). Pelikan points out that Paul, author of many of the epistles, never mentions "a single event in the life of Jesus--again except for the institution of the Last Supper--between his birth and his death on the cross. From the writings of Paul, we would not be able to know that Jesus taught in parables and proverbs" (1985, 10). One explanation comes from outside the church. It suggests that the early Christians, particularly Paul and John (writer of a gospel, three letters, and the final book in the Bible, The Revelation of John), created a new religion, entirely different from the teaching of Jesus: "The religion of Jesus and Christianity are so basically different in form, purpose, and orientation that it would be historically unsafe to derive the latter directly from the former" (Vermes 1993, 214). From within the traditional understanding that Christianity is founded on the teaching of Jesus comes another explanation for this strange silence: "Earliest followers [after Jesus' death] were awestruck and captivated by Jesus as crucified and resurrected Lord" (Jones 1997). This explanation suggests that the picture of Jesus the teacher faded into lesser significance beside the brighter vision of Jesus as Saviour and Lord of the universe. Christians want others to look beyond the picture of a teacher to see him as God.

**The Church Rediscovers Rabbi Jesus**

In their anxiety to deny that Jesus is merely a good teacher and to assert that he is God incarnate, Christians run the risk of ignoring the teaching techniques and attitude that made Jesus' teaching so memorable. However, there are many exceptions to this general trend. As adult education became a subject of academic interest in the twentieth century, educators within the church recognized Jesus as an exemplary teacher and encouraged fellow-Christians to follow his example in teaching, as well as in other areas. As early as 1920, Horne wrote a comprehensive study, *Teaching Techniques of Jesus*, describing the way Jesus conveyed his message. In the 1950s, as adult
education was emerging as a separate entity within the field of general education, Bergevin and McKinley acknowledged that "one task of the church—its teaching function—had been neglected in the adult area. Most activities . . . were an extension of the method's used in children's work" (1958). They urged educators to follow adult education principles in teaching (50). Since then several other Christian books have been published on teaching as Jesus taught (Wilson 1973), (Phipps 1993), (Bryan 1993), (Gangel and Hendricks 1998), (Tolbert 2000), and one with the intriguing title: Why nobody learns much of anything at church: And how to fix it (Schultz and Schultz 1993). Especially if they offer helpful material to educators beyond the confines of the church, studies of how Jesus taught can enrich all adult educators who are willing to look to the past to find wisdom for today.

Overview of Thesis

This study explores three questions: How did Jesus teach? What was the learning environment he created like? Can Jesus be a role model for teachers today? However, teachers do not appear in a vacuum and suddenly begin to teach. The backdrop to these questions is Jesus' teaching situation with its various interrelated components: the context of political, social, religious, educational and physical aspects; his learners and their different backgrounds, needs, and expectations; the content, which, in Jesus' case, is a highly contentious issue; his teaching goals; and, finally, information about the teacher himself, his background and the Judaism which was the dominant influence in his life. In chapter two, this study presents a brief look at each of these aspects of Jesus' teaching.

The material presented in chapter three details the teaching techniques Jesus used to convey his message. Contemporary educators are still using each of these techniques. Therefore, general observations about their use and effectiveness today frame each discussion of how Jesus used them to further his teaching goals. The list of techniques shows an impressive variety:
parables, questions, poetry, lectures, re-enactment, prayer, apprenticeship, humour, and silence.

The learning environment Jesus created was characterized by accessibility: he made his teaching and his life available to learners physically, intellectually, and emotionally. Because the identity and the character of the teacher are dominant influences in the learning environment, this study looks in chapter four at how he forged a unique learning experience through his humility, compassion, conviviality, courage, and integrity.

The picture of Jesus in the gospels reveals a remarkable teacher, but is it helpful to educators today? In chapter five, this study concludes by suggesting that Jesus can provide an exemplary model for teachers of religion, not just in a Christian context, but also in other faiths. His teaching goals are similar to those of moral and holistic educators. His techniques and his establishment of a learning environment are examples of how to achieve those goals. However, he gives to all educators an inspiring picture of a teacher effectively teaching with flexibility, creativity, sensitivity, and consistency.

**Summary of Chapter 1**

Adult education researchers have placed less emphasis on the role of the teacher than on meeting the learners’ needs and on emancipating society through education. They have also tended to be shortsighted while looking at the past in neglecting one of the world’s most renowned teachers—Jesus of Nazareth. Although controversy surrounds the issue of the historical record of Jesus, biblical scholarship today widely acknowledges the prominence of the teacher Jesus in the gospel accounts. After two hundred years of intensive research and scholarly scrutiny, the quest for the historical Jesus has reached the conclusion that a good teacher remains even after everything historically suspect has been stripped away. Whether historically accurate or not, the picture of Jesus in the four gospels is a compelling portrait of an effective teacher going about the business of teaching a variety of different people in various circumstances. Christian educators are rediscovering the pedagogical
tradition in which Jesus was proficient; other scholars have tried to find the essential teacher without the “wrappings of miracles and mysticism” (Klausner 1926, 414) because they believe that he was a master teacher. If the Christian emphasis on Jesus the Christ, the Son of God, has obscured the picture of Jesus the teacher during the last two thousand years, that picture is nevertheless re-emerging. It demands the attention of adult educators as well as theologians and historians.
CHAPTER 2
EXAMINING THE WEB: JESUS’ TEACHING SITUATION

Introduction

No teacher teaches and no learner learns in a vacuum. Arendt uses the metaphor of the “web of human relationships” (1958, 183) to describe the arena in which every human being lives and interacts. In the realm of education, Pratt’s “general model of teaching” (1992, 205) is a useful way to describe this place of interaction. His diagram is reproduced as Figure 2.

![Diagram of Pratt's general model of teaching](image)

Figure 2. Pratt’s general model of teaching. Reprinted by permission, from Daniel D. Pratt, Conceptions of Teaching. Adult Education Quarterly 42, 1992, no. 2.

The learners and teacher are all influenced by the context—the complicated blend of social, political, and environmental, and, in some cases, religious, influences—under which humans exist. Other components include “the content—what is to be learned [and] the ideals (purposes of the adult education)” (Pratt 1992, 205). These components are interrelated and
interactive; they must be included in any assessment of teacher effectiveness. In an examination of a teacher in a distant time and a different culture, both context and learners are especially important. A discussion of the teaching methods he used makes sense only with reference to the content. Similarly, the ideals, or goals, of the teaching environment contribute to the overall picture of a teacher. As Pratt notes, "Some or all of these interrelated elements are acknowledged as the basis for understanding what it means to teach" (206). Both Apps (1991) and Gunn (1998) include these same aspects in their discussions of teaching. For understanding the overall impact of Jesus as teacher, all of these elements—context, learners, ideals, content, and the teacher—are relevant.

The order in which they are placed suggests a movement from the outside (context and learners) to the inside of the teacher (content and ideals) where they intermingle before moving outward again in the teaching. The first two, the context and the learners, are external to the teacher; they are what the teacher must work with in order to teach. The ideals (goals) and content come from within the teacher. Usually a teacher considers the context and the learners in presenting the content, with the aim of reaching the goals. Although the teacher comes last in this discussion, the teacher is the point at which all the other components come together and are interwoven in the teaching that emerges.

Teaching context: Political, Religious, Social, Physical, and Educational

For many years, scholars have studied the complex society of first century Palestine in which Jesus lived. The vast amount of material available increases yearly as new archaeological discoveries, such as the information coming from the Dead Sea Scrolls, change or confirm previously held ideas. The material presented here shows aspects of the society particularly relevant to understanding how Jesus taught. For example, the explosive political situation may have influenced Jesus' use of parables (Herzog 1994). Likewise, the social stature of Jesus' learners is a crucial component in understanding his unusual attitude towards them. Therefore, the teaching context described
here includes political life under the rule of Rome, the social structures from which Jesus’ learners came, the religious milieu with its various factions, the physical environment, and the existing educational system with its influence on Jesus.

**Politics in Palestine: Today’s Problems in an Ancient Setting**

Like the other countries around the eastern Mediterranean during the first century CE, Palestine was ruled by the Romans and paid tribute to Caesar. For many reasons, both religious and political, the situation was galling to the Jews as the Romans continued “ruling (so it seemed to the Jews) with an insensitive arrogance that constantly bordered on provocation to rebellion” (Wright 1992, 160). The Roman army had brutally repressed several rebellions and uprisings. However, during Jesus’ lifetime, the Romans continued to allow Jews to maintain their religious worship and traditions, to be subject to the Jewish court (the Sanhedrin), and to enjoy many benefits, even citizenship for a few individuals, which the *Pax Romana* brought to that part of the world (Stambaugh and Balch 1986, 31).

However, Jesus’ teaching about the Kingdom of God challenged the ultimate authority of Caesar. He was accused of “inciting the people to rebellion” (Lk 23:14), although Pilate, the Roman procurator acknowledged, “I... have found no basis for your charges against him” (Lk 23:14). His final arrest and trial was not the first time his teaching had come to the unwelcome attention of the authorities. From early in his teaching career, his words and actions stirred controversy (Lk 4: 28). The volatility of the political situation may have affected the teaching style of Jesus and definitely shortened his teaching career, which was ended by his execution. Herzog (1994) claims that Jesus' extensive use of parables was directly related to the need for a hidden message to avoid being silenced by the powerful ruling elite. Whether or not the possibility of an authoritarian crackdown on his teaching affected Jesus’ choice of vehicle for his teaching, it certainly did not stop him. Despite the threat, and ultimately the reality, of opposition and danger, Jesus spoke his controversial
message with courage and determination in a climate of political and religious oppressiveness.

**Social Structures: Multiculturalism in First Century Palestine**

As with the political climate, certain features of the social situation are relevant to an examination of Jesus the teacher. Both money and religious affiliation formed the basis of the prevailing class structure. In the upper echelons of that society, the priestly aristocracy was born to wealth, privilege, and coveted jobs in the temple. At the other end of the spectrum were the poor, including labourers and those who could not work:

In terms of power, influence, money, and the perceptions of the time, we can divide the population of the Roman world into two main categories, those with influence and those without it, the “honourable” and the “humble,” those who governed and those who were governed, those who had property and those who did not. The upper category was very small, the lower one very large. (Stambaugh and Balch 1986, 110)

However, grouped along with the poor and outcasts were those who were considered socially undesirable regardless of wealth: “tax collectors and sinners” (Mt 11:19), among whom Jesus willingly moved. The “sinners” in this group were despised:

They were not ordinary sinners . . . the sinners associated with the tax collectors were in a special class . . . Included in the group would be money lenders and prostitutes . . . individuals profiting by disobeying the commands of God and betraying their own people. (Tashjian 2002, 1)

For the Jews, religious affiliation was even more important than money or occupation in determining social status. The world was strictly divided into the Jews, the chosen people of God, and the Gentiles, a group which included everyone else regardless of race, religion, wealth or political power:

By the time of Christ, for a Jew to stigmatize his fellow as ‘Gentile’ was a term of scorn equal in opprobrium to ‘tax collector’ and they earned for themselves from Tacitus the censure that “they regard the rest of the world with all the hatred of enemies.” (Blair 1962, 462-463)
The great divide between Jew and Gentile made the inclusiveness of Jesus’ teaching unusual and significant.

Although Jews made up the majority of the population, the society in Palestine at that time was neither mono-cultural nor unilingual:

Jesus . . . was born into a Jewish Kingdom ruled by an Idumaean king with a Greek name, installed and sponsored by the Romans. Jesus grew up in Galilee, near Greek cities where the Greek language was as commonly spoken as his native Aramaic. And when, after his death in Jerusalem, his disciples told his story to others, they spoke and wrote mainly in Greek to take their message to the whole cosmopolitan world ruled by the Romans. (Stambaugh and Balch 1986, 13)

The convergence of cultures created a world where passionate loyalties resulted in conflicts and barriers between the various groups. Wright claims that, as the Greek culture, by now “overlaid with the Roman” interacted with the Jewish one, clashes were inevitable as they “met, fought, arranged truces, lived uneasily with one another, learnt to speak parts of each others’ languages, tried to dominate or convert or escape from each other” (1996, 104). Jesus lived and taught within the confines of his Jewish culture, yet interacted with those outside of it. The way he did this reveals a teacher willing to push the boundaries of accepted social interaction to reach learners coming to him for help.

**Religious Climate: A Potent Mix**

Because the entire context of Jesus’ teaching was infused with religious thought, which he directly and specifically addressed, it forms an unusually strong component in Jesus’ teaching situation. Although united in their opinion of the Gentiles, the religious Jews of first-century Palestine were not a homogeneous group. The two main factions, the Sadducees and the Pharisees, appear prominently in the New Testament gospels; a third party, the Zealots, is briefly mentioned. Other religious groups included the Samaritans, who practiced a variation of Judaism, the monastic Essenes, and those who adhered to the religious beliefs of the Greeks and Romans.
The most influential group, the Sadducees, "comprised the priesthood and the landed aristocracy, constituting the centre of Jewish wealth and power" (Marsh 1981, 72), which was concentrated around the temple in Jerusalem. They were the most Hellenized of the Jews; their political stance was one of compromise, if not collaboration, in order to gain "useful measures of autonomy from Rome" (72). Despite the present day reputation of the New Testament Pharisees, the Sadducees were actually more "literalist, inflexible, and conservative" (72) in personal piety than were the Pharisees.

By contrast, the Pharisees were mostly from the middle class and more powerful in the rural areas further removed from the powerful temple influence. They concentrated on education rather than politics. They "controlled the synagogues in each town, where weekly services were held, and the scriptures were read and expounded, and where Jewish children were educated" (Marsh 1981, 73). The Pharisees appear in the gospels as opposing Jesus and bearing the brunt of his most devastating criticism, which many scholars believe contributed to the "long-surviving anti-Pharisee and anti-Jewish attitude in the Christian Church" (74). However, Jesus also had friends and followers who were Pharisees (Jn 3:1). Their emphasis on education and personal piety won them great respect. Interestingly, the Pharisees, unlike the Sadducees, survived the devastating war of 70 CE: "Despite the power and influence of the Sadducees, not a single text of theirs survives" (Stambaugh and Balch 1986, 97). Perhaps, after all, investing in education rather than politics created a legacy more "far-reaching and more durable" (Marsh 1981, 73).

The third religious faction was the Zealots. In many ways, they could be classified as political rather than religious, except for the fact that their political activities flowed from, and were completely dependent upon, their religious convictions. They believed that the Romans had usurped power that belonged to God and they, as God's people, must wrest it back again. Therefore, the Zealots were political activists who were willing to resort to violence and armed resistance. By the time of Jesus, the Zealots had become more like modern guerrillas: "The name 'Zealot' indicates the true religious
fervor which inspired Zealot activity, while the term 'robber' or 'brigand' [used by Josephus] . . . suggests the form of activity which the Zealots followed” (Marsh 1981, 76). Jesus was briefly thought to be a Zealot, but he clearly believed that he was teaching about something much more comprehensive than political change. “My Kingdom is not of this world,” (Jn 18:36) he claimed in answer to Pilate’s questions about his political intentions. The presence of the Zealots strengthened the feelings of expectation and longing, of political unrest and dissatisfaction that characterized the time. Possibly, the political situation made people more open to the new teaching that Jesus brought (Wright 1993, 95).

The Physical Environment: Here, There, and Everywhere

Observing the physical surroundings in which Jesus taught contributes significant information about his attitude to teaching and to his learners. Known at that time as Palestine, the land itself has long been contested territory. J. B. Phillips, who is well known for his paraphrase of the New Testament, describes it as “a small but varied land, often harsh in character and with a long and complicated history” (2003, 5). Jesus did not teach in any one place but roamed over the whole area. He taught in many towns and villages (Mt 9:35), as well as in the capital city, Jerusalem, the religious and political centre of the country. Like other teachers, Jesus taught in the synagogues (Mt 9:35), which were the educational centres for both children and adults. Usually, however, he taught outdoors in front of large groups (Jn 18:20), but he also taught in private homes, including those of society’s outcasts (Mk 14:3) and of respected religious leaders (Lk 7:26). He taught as he walked through grain fields (Mt 12) and traveled along the road (Lk 9:57). Sometimes he sat on a hillside and at least once got into a boat and taught the crowds on the shore. In dangerous and demoralizing situations, he continued to teach: as he was on trial for his life he made his most inflammatory statements (Jn 18:11) and as he was walking through the streets carrying his execution cross, he paused to teach the people lining the street (Lk 23). He taught large groups, small groups, and individuals. As one writer points out:
“Jesus [brought his message] . . . to the marginalized of society in their own environment. Jesus was a pilgrimage who came to you [the learners]” (Copan and Evans 2001, 17). Considering that his teaching career probably lasted only three years, the variety of places and situations in which he taught speaks of a teacher who strongly desired to reach out to his learners with his message.

**Education: A High Priority**

In the complicated cultural and political milieu of first-century Palestine, the Jews struggled to keep from being assimilated by the Hellenizing culture of the Greeks and the Emperor worship of the Romans. They saw education, specifically the study of Torah, as a primary tool to maintain their own identity and intertwined it with daily life:

They [the various Jewish factions] all accepted the Torah as the fundamental law of existence and as a teacher and guide of the Jewish nation for all times. The Torah was the basis of the entire social and legal system and the way of life of the community and of the individual. The Torah . . . established the rules for everyday life and provided the ideal to strive after. (Safrai and Stern 1976, 945)

Jewish boys began their formal education at age five in the synagogue, where they were first taught to read and write, and then studied the law. Girls learned at home, instructed by their mothers; however, the desire to maintain the strict dietary laws meant that females were also well versed in the law. If a boy showed academic ability, and his family could afford to lose a wage earner, he could study in Jerusalem with the scribes (lawyers), who were experts in the law. A renowned teacher such as Hillel or Shammai, who taught in the first century BC, attracted many students. Some teachers had their students living in their homes; others, like Jesus, moved from place to place.

In many ways, Jesus fit into the traditional mould of a peripatetic rabbi, one of the many who participated in the wide-ranging educational structures of the day. Like other teachers, especially those influenced by the Greek concept of education, Jesus established a fellowship of learners that “shared a lifestyle together, traveled together, and lived in community” (Jones 1997, 17). The
pedagogical purpose was to help learners interpret their experience of reality (18), to be part of their everyday lives and use opportunities within that experience to teach important lessons. Jesus’ method of gathering together a group of disciples was, therefore, not unusual.

However, while the pattern of living with the teacher was common, Jesus’ choice of disciples was highly unusual. Normally a teacher chose the most promising and brightest young students he could attract knowing his reputation depended on the caliber of his learners. Instead of following this practice, Jesus went out among people already in established jobs, including the distinctly non-academic profession of fisherman, and called a group into being. He, himself, had not been specially trained in the law beyond an ordinary boy’s education, and his closest followers were not the highly educated students who joined the schools of eminent teachers.

The most startling difference between Jesus and the other rabbis of his time was the authoritative tone that characterized his teaching and interpretation of the Jewish law. In commenting on this unique approach, Vermes, a Jewish expert on Jesus, described it as “spiritual authority explicitly or implicitly” (1991, 118) used by Jesus in his teaching on the law. Vermes goes on to point out that Jesus was not in “fundamental disagreement” (118) with the Pharisees, but “felt free to overemphasize the ethical as compared to the ritual” (118). However, Jesus’ tone did contrast with that of the Pharisees. He claimed to have insight beyond that of other teachers, many of whom considered his claims to be blasphemous (Jn 10:25-33). Despite his differences with the other Jewish teachers of the time, Jesus’ pattern of teaching fit within the tradition of pedagogy that was prevalent in his society.

**Jesus’ Learners: An Eclectic Group**

The learners who flocked to hear Jesus teach in the streets and throughout the countryside, as well as those who heard him speak in formal settings, were a diverse group by any standard. They came from every level of society, from the top of the religious and political establishment to the very
lowest strata. They ranged in age from babies in their mothers’ arms to the elderly. Their educational levels varied; they included the revered teachers of the law as well as those who were manual labourers. Men, who would have been expected to take an interest in religious discussion, and women, who would not, became his learners. The mix included religious leaders, even the High Priest of the temple, and the irreligious Jews who were scorned by their fellow countrymen for collaborating with the Roman occupiers. Unlike conventional religious teachers, Jesus talked with and taught people outside of the Jewish community: a Roman centurion, a Samaritan woman, and a Caananite, whose people were historic enemies of the Jews. Each of these groups represented vastly different backgrounds, expectations, and needs. Looking more closely at these learners helps put into perspective Jesus’ attitude and his teaching methods.

The Apostles: “A Motley Crew”

One group of learners was the recipient of all his teaching: twelve men lived and traveled constantly with Jesus during the three years of his public ministry. Like the crowds that swarmed around Jesus, they were not a homogeneous group. They differed in their occupations, which suggests varying levels of education; they had different political and religious opinions. At least four of them were fishermen, engaged in their trade when Jesus asked them to join him (Mt. 4:18). One was a tax collector (Mt. 9:9). Another was a “Zealot”, a member of a group fiercely loyal to the rigorous observance and radically opposed to Roman rule (Bruce 1971, 93-100). Although none of the writers mentions his occupation, Judas Iscariot probably had some expertise with money handling, as he was designated treasurer of the group. These disciples were different from similar groups of students. Normally, a student chose a particular teacher, attaching himself—students were never female—to a man under whom he would learn. Jesus’ disciples did not choose him; he chose them and they left established professions to follow him. According to Mark’s gospel, Jesus chose the twelve “that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach” (Mk 3: 14). By living with him as apprentices, they
would learn a new trade and become, themselves, teachers and leaders. Despite their non-academic backgrounds and their remarkable diversity, which has earned them the description of "a motley crew" (Wright 1996, 18), they became a world-changing force in the first century.

**Women: A Warm Welcome**

Unlike the other religious teachers of the day, Jesus was completely comfortable with women as his learners. Women came to him freely with questions, appeals, and emotional demonstrations of affection and gratitude (Lk 7:37-38). In one instance, he even approached a woman directly, engaging her in a theological conversation. In a society where women were not educated, he accepted women's interest in his teaching, including women outside the Jewish faith (Mt 15:21). Perhaps one of the most interesting pictures of Jesus is of his visit to the home of his friends in Bethany. One of the women "sat at the Lord's [Jesus'] feet listening to what he said" (Lk 10:39). The phrase "sat at his feet" is significant; it was the one used to describe a disciple's posture and demeanor towards his master/teacher. One scholar of the rabbinic tradition describes the impact of this scene:

For women to listen while a rabbi taught the men of a crowd was likely not all that unusual. But for a Jewish rabbi to allow a woman to sit at his feet, as his entire audience, was a shocking and even degrading scene . . . Had this rabbi gone mad? . . . Woman as learner? Woman sitting alone at the feet of a rabbi? Woman as a disciple of a rabbi? (Jones 1997, 21-22)

In recent years, with the increased interest in women's role in historical events, biblical scholars have considered the question of whether Jesus included women in his inner circle of closest learners, the apostles. In a book by several feminist scholars, *Transformative Encounters: Jesus and Women Re-visited* (2000), Phillips puts forward a detailed argument in support of her conclusion that "the women who followed Jesus are his female disciples" (17).
Stopping short of this conclusion, Perkins states a more traditional view:

Jesus’ women followers are present at the cross (Lk 23:49), discover the empty tomb (Lk 24:10), and are with the twelve and Jesus’ relatives at the group awaiting the spirit in Jerusalem (Acts 1:14). The picture of women disciples should not be limited to the “service” they provided. As “hearers of God’s word”, they too receive the teaching of Jesus. (Perkins 1990, 34)

Whether or not Jesus chose women to be among his apostles, he certainly broke through the cultural and religious barriers when he welcomed women, even seeking them out, to be his learners. Bultmann describes his behaviour, as “alien to the practices of a rabbi” (1958, 61). He adds that Jesus’ attention to women certainly made his teaching ministry “more complex, one might say richer” (61).

The Religious and Political Establishment: A Guarded Reaction

Like other popular teachers, Jesus met with great opposition from the religious establishment of the day. The Pharisees and the Sadducees, who were opposed to each other’s theological position, were united in their dislike of Jesus, who was attracting so much attention. While some became his followers (Mt 8:19), most were in the position of “reluctant learners”. They observed him in order to condemn his unorthodox behaviour or they asked him questions in order “to trap him in his own words” (Mt 22:15). Eventually, as his popularity grew, the two factions joined together to get rid of the troublesome teacher: “The chief priests and elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest . . . and they plotted to arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill him” (Mt 26: 3-4). The Sanhedrin, the highest court in the land, consisted of the same people who were plotting to kill him: “They were looking for false evidence so they could put him to death” (Mt 26:59). Under these desperate circumstances, Jesus continued to teach (Mt 26:64), even though his words led to his condemnation and death.

The dominant political establishment, represented by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Jerusalem, may have been slightly more receptive to learning
from Jesus than the religious establishment that had already decided not to
listen to him. As Jesus stood on trial before Pilate, the highest political power
in the land, Pilate asked a question which lies at the heart of the educational
enterprise: “What is truth?” (Jn 18:38). The accounts of this incident do not
describe how he asked the question. Was it with a genuine desire to learn? Was
it a cynical dismissal of the possibility of truth? Was it a delaying tactic so that
he did not have to condemn a man he believed to be innocent? Whatever the
reason, the question at least suggests that Pilate, with less reluctance than the
religious leaders, became briefly one of Jesus’ learners.

The Gentiles: Breaking down the Walls

The strict Jewish-Gentile separation meant that religious Jews did not
physically interact or communicate with Gentiles. While Jesus clearly believed
that his teaching was for the Jews (Mt 15:24), he did not turn away any of the
Gentiles who came to him: the Roman centurion or the Caananite woman. With
the Samaritan woman, he initiated the discussion, to the woman’s surprise:
“You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a
drink?” (Jn 4:9). The writer adds, “[For Jews do not associate with
Samaritans.]” With his willingness to interact with Gentiles, he crossed a
barrier of great age and strength.

The Outcasts: Coming in from the Cold

In Jesus’ encounters, one group stands out: the outcasts of society. One
writer describes them as “the abandoned, the unwanted of his time” (Grassi
1973, 28). He also points out that their condition frequently did not stem from
their actions or choices:

These people were those who for various reasons felt ostracized socially
and religiously from the community: the sick, especially those mentally
ill who were considered to be obsessed by devils and carrying the burden
of hidden sins, those with notable deformities, such as lepers, the lame,
and blind could not take part in religious worship in the temple and were
often socially ostracized as well. (28)
Along with the physically and mentally damaged, Jesus accepted as his learners others who lived outside the boundaries of respectable society, including prostitutes and tax collectors whom he welcomed as friends and companions. To the dismay of the Pharisees, he taught anyone willing to listen. Unlike other religious teachers, Jesus "did not call the elite, the privileged, the respected . . . Jesus broke through the rigidly enforced barriers between the clean and the unclean in his society" (Jones 1997, 24).

**Ideals: Think Critically; Change Internally; Live Harmoniously**

Jesus' learners did not receive from their teacher a detailed plan for thinking and living; he did not write a "Seven Easy Steps to the Good Life" booklet. Instead the people who listened to him encountered parables, which even his closest followers sometimes failed to understand (Mk 4:10); constant questions in answer to their questions (Mk 10:3); and epigrammatic comments which seemed to turn commonsense observations upside-down: "'For he who is the least among you all—he is the greatest'" (Lk 9:48). While it is somewhat problematic to discern a teacher's educational purposes without talking to him or her, Jesus' words constantly challenged his learners to think critically, to revisit accepted ideas. He expected internal change, which would affect every aspect of learners' lives, including their worldview and their actions. Jesus taught a completely new perspective, that of the Kingdom of God. He wanted his learners to experience a new life style: living in a dynamic, loving relationship with God and other people. Jesus wanted radical change in his learners' feeling, thinking, believing, and doing: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart [emotions] and with all your soul [beliefs] and with all your mind [thoughts] and with all your and strength [actions] . . . Love your neighbour as yourself'" (Mk 12:30-31). Jones sums up Jesus' teaching ideal: "The goal of learning in Jesus' discipling community was not informational but transformational" (1997, 24).
Critical Thinking: Opening up to New Possibilities

Two prominent features of Jesus' teaching reveal the way he encouraged critical thinking: his use of questions and his personal challenge, by words and actions, to the religious and political status quo. In both these ways, he encouraged his learners to examine their society and their lives.

A fascinating example of his questioning method comes as he is about to be stoned by an angry crowd who believe he is blaspheming by claiming to be the Son of God. Jesus is in a life-threatening situation. The crowd has picked up stones and is about to launch a deadly attack. The practice of stoning was not simply a way of getting someone to leave; the intention was ritual death. Instead of running away or defending himself, Jesus asks a question: "I have shown you a great many miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?" (Jn 10:31). His question arrests their action. On the surface, Jesus is asking them to examine the miracles and choose which one has made them so angry. On a deeper level, Jesus’ question calls on them to step back and look at their behaviour (killing Jesus because he was healing people), to re-examine their presuppositions (that Jesus was not God’s son), and to be open to another, more radical possibility (that Jesus’ healing power came from God).

Jesus’ use of questioning is consistent with a recognized way of developing critical thinking skills. Apps notes:

Being able to ask probing questions is one of the most powerful teaching tools. Asking can help participants dig more deeply into a topic or idea, explore various perspectives, and make thoughtful judgments about the accuracy and applications of information. Learners can examine in depth their own feelings and perspectives on a topic or issue. (1991, 67)

Jesus had enormous confidence in his learners and risked misunderstanding in order to promote thoughtful critique of the status quo.

In Bloom’s taxonomy (Clark 2000), the development of critical thinking lies in the cognitive domain. His six categories describe learning as development from simple comprehension, the first category, to the more complex skill of evaluation. Figure 3 on page 42 charts the learning development of Jesus' disciple, Simon Peter, in all six
categories. Peter began his working life as a fisherman (Mk 1:16). After learning from Jesus for three years, he became an effective teacher of Jesus' message. His sermon recorded in the book of Acts is a carefully reasoned and convincing argument. The religious leaders believed that Peter's ability and courage as a teacher came from his association with Jesus: "When they [the leaders] realized that they [Peter and John] were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus" (Ac 4:13). This incident highlights the effectiveness of Jesus' teaching in both the cognitive domains (Figure 3, page 42) and the effective domains (Figure 1 on page 18).

Along with careful use of questioning, Jesus encouraged his learners in critical thinking by acting as a role model for thoughtful challenge of accepted beliefs and actions. His entire teaching ministry was a serious challenge to both the religious and political establishment of the day. He questioned the religious leaders' interpretation of the law, which had made the commandments of God burdensome to ordinary people. By including women among his learners and socializing with "outcasts and sinners", he challenged the rigid structures of society. He railed against religious hypocrisy and superficiality. While acknowledging that Rome held power, he rejected Caesar's claim to be God. In words and actions, Jesus created a powerful challenge to the establishment. Many scholars cite Jesus' execution as a proof of the effectiveness of his unremitting attack on the abuse of power by religious and political leaders:

It appears that Jerusalem elites collaborating with their Roman overlords executed Jesus because he was a threat to the economic and political interests. Unless they perceived him to be a threat, they would not have publicly degraded and humiliated him before executing him in as ignominious a way as possible. (Herzog 1994, 6)

As a teacher, Jesus provided an enduring role model of critical thinking and courageous action. The praxis that is the goal of educators came at great cost; his life was cut off after only three years of public teaching.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning in the cognitive domain</th>
<th>Peter’s growth in learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Knowledge: Recalls data</td>
<td>1. Under pressure, Peter denied knowing Jesus. However, he remembered that Jesus had predicted his failure (Lk 22: 59-62).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Comprehension:</td>
<td>2. Jesus told Peter, a professional fisherman, how he could catch more fish. When Peter followed Jesus’ advice and caught an abnormal amount of fish, Peter realized that was a unique and holy person (Lk 5: 4-11).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Application: Uses a concept in a new situation.</td>
<td>3. Jesus sent his disciples, including Peter, to preach and teach his message. They were able to follow Jesus’ example and teach others (Lk 9:3-6).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Analysis: Separates material into component parts. Distinguishes between facts and inferences.</td>
<td>4. After observing Jesus’ actions and listening to his teaching, Peter realized that Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah (Lk 9:19-20).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Example: 5. Synthesis: Builds a structure or pattern from diverse elements. Puts parts together to form a new whole.</td>
<td>5. Peter preached a sermon that showed his comprehension of who Jesus was and what he did. He wove Scripture passages and incidents from Jesus’ life into a convincing theological argument (Acts 2:11-16).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Evaluation. Makes judgments about the value of ideas or materials.</td>
<td>6. Even though he had previously failed to stand up for his belief in Jesus, Peter decided that he would now follow Jesus’ commands, even when he was threatened with imprisonment (Acts 4:1-20).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: Peter’s learning in the cognitive domain, according to Bloom’s taxonomy. Peter showed increased levels of learning in the cognitive domain as a result of Jesus’ teaching.
Along with careful use of questioning, Jesus encouraged his learners in critical thinking by acting as a role model for thoughtful challenge of accepted beliefs and actions. His entire teaching ministry was a serious challenge to both the religious and political establishment of the day. He questioned the religious leaders' interpretation of the law, which had made the commandments of God burdensome to ordinary people. By including women among his learners and socializing with "outcasts and sinners", he challenged the rigid structures of society. He railed against religious hypocrisy and superficiality. While acknowledging that Rome held power, he rejected Caesar's claim to be God. In words and actions, Jesus created a powerful challenge to the establishment. Many scholars cite Jesus' execution as a proof of the effectiveness of his unremitting attack on the abuse of power by religious and political leaders:

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**Internal Change: From the Inside Out**

From the beginning of his ministry, Jesus called on his learners to change, not in minor or behavioural ways, but in major transformative ways. His first public statement set the tone for the kind of message he was bringing: "'Repent and believe the good news'" (Mk 1:15). The word, which is translated into English as "repent", is *metanoeo*. It suggests dramatic change: "The Greek word means literally 'to have second thoughts', 'to change one's mind', but in the New Testament it is always strongly coloured by the Hebrew idea which is 'to turn'" (Charley 1971, 50). Throughout his teaching runs the urgent message
of re-orientation away from self and towards God. On accepting the arrival of the Kingdom of God, learners must express a new way of being through their beliefs, feelings, and actions. Jesus' expression for the place where this new existence is lived out is the "Kingdom of God" (or the "Kingdom of Heaven", as Matthew called it to respect the Jewish disinclination to speak God’s name). To live in the Kingdom is to put oneself under the rule of God the King, to live in accordance with his desires and in the knowledge of his love and forgiveness. Jesus offered the possibility of an entirely new worldview, not by following a blueprint, but by entering into a relationship of loving subservience to a fatherly God, entered through faith in Jesus, his son. Radical change in his learners was clearly one of his teaching goals.

**Harmonious Living: A New Kind of Love**

Jesus intertwined teaching about the Kingdom of God with an emphasis on love, best expressed by his summary of the Law: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind . . . Love your neighbour as yourself” (Mt 22:37-39). Scholars frequently point out that this was not a new or unique teaching (Flusser 1997), (Chilton and McDonald 1987). Nevertheless, he taught about love and forgiveness in new and startling ways: “Love your enemies and do good to those who hate you”(Lk 6:27). He urged a kind of love that was to be universally applied and personally costly. When one listener asked about the neighbour in the summary of the Law, Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan, which suggested that loving one’s neighbour may involve physical danger and personal cost in time and money. Love, in Jesus’ teaching, is not a simple feeling, but a daring activity reaching out to others.

The purposes of Jesus’ teaching, as suggested by both his words and actions, were radical and far-reaching. He encouraged learners to re-examine everything about their lives, to change both internally and externally into citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven and to live in a loving and harmonious relationship with God and with other people. These ideals were nothing short of revolutionary. However, to use such a word, with its political connotation, is to
undervalue the distinctiveness of Jesus’ challenge to radical change encompassing social, political, and personal transformation.

**Content: Teaching How to Be**

Putting a label on the content of Jesus’ teaching is difficult. For centuries, descriptions of it have filled libraries, occupied scholars, and preoccupied people from all walks of life. The emphasis on the “what” of Jesus’ teaching has far outstripped other areas of investigation and has been a source of great controversy. Condensing a discussion of content to a few paragraphs appears more problematic than ignoring it altogether. However, the content and the methods, as well as all the other elements in the teaching situation “are interrelated and internally consistent” (Pratt 1992, 205). Content is inextricably part of the picture of a teacher.

From the debate through the years emerges the consensus that two prominent themes dominate Jesus’ teaching: the existential concept of the Kingdom of God and the practical application of theological concepts in ethical living based on love of God and of one’s neighbour. While the themes are widely recognized, the way they interact and their relative position of dominance within the canon of teaching is a source of academic and ecclesiastical disagreement.

**Theology or Ethics?**

New Testament scholar Wright begins his discussion of the Kingdom theme by acknowledging: “The great majority of scholars down through the years have agreed that the Kingdom of God was central to Jesus’ message; but there has been no agreement on what precisely that phrase and the cognate ideas that go with it actually meant” (1999, 34). In their book *Jesus and the Ethics of the Kingdom*, Chilton and MacDonald (1987) begin with the theme of ethics governed by love before examining the book’s main thesis - the theological implications of the Kingdom. They are concerned to point out the danger of overemphasizing the theme of ethics at the expense of the theological content in the teaching on the Kingdom. They claim that it is a mistake to
think of Jesus as “simply the teacher of morality” (2) because “even in what may seem as utterly humanitarian or commonsensical precept, his thought is theological root and branch” (2). Both of these books are representative of recent scholarship, which rejects the either/or mentality of earlier days and favours the recognition of both themes, rather than highlighting one over the other (Wright 1999). From an educational perspective, both themes are important: the Kingdom idea provides the theoretical framework, the ethics component provides the practical outworking, the “how to” of living in the reality that Jesus called the Kingdom of God. Jesus encouraged the understanding of both theory and praxis.

The Abstract Made Concrete

With his first words as a teacher, Jesus announced, “The Kingdom of God is near” (Mk 1:15). He followed this proclamation with extensive teaching about the Kingdom: what it is like and how to live in it. His goal was to help people to change, to completely reorient themselves towards God. His teaching contained both abstract concepts and practical suggestions. As a teacher, his challenge was to translate the abstract into the concrete and to clothe the concrete in language that would make it memorable. For example, he presented the nebulous idea of God’s forgiveness, a central feature of the Kingdom, in the parable of the Prodigal Son. In this timeless story, the outstretched arms of a loving father welcome home a wayward son. The parable gives a human shape to the invisible mercy of God. Similarly, the ethical stance involved in loving one’s neighbour took graphic and memorable form in the sacrificial love of a Samaritan man for a wounded Jew. Practical advice, such as how to cope with worry about money and financial security, was given in the simple and earthy analogy with his description of the lilies growing along the side of the road.

Jesus clothed the abstract ideals of the Kingdom in the everyday garb of ethical living based on love. The division of life into “theology” and “ethics” would appear ridiculous to a first century Jew. Jesus taught life; he taught people how to be in relationship to themselves, to the people around them, and to God. He called the state of existence where harmony and love existed “the
Kingdom or God”. To help people live in the Kingdom, he did not set out a detailed program. He presented an eclectic mix of stories, analogies, poems, and powerful imagery, offering his learners a relationship with himself that would enable them to live freely and lovingly in the Kingdom.

**The Teacher: Rabbi Jesus**

Since the focus of this study is Jesus the teacher, information about him is not confined to one section. For example, chapter four has a section on his character as it related to the learning environment. In this chapter, the emphasis is on Jesus’ background, particularly the religious and educational environment that profoundly influenced his way of teaching. Biographical details are few. However, general information about the culture, which scholars have studied extensively, contributes to the overall picture of his life. Within the Jewish pedagogical tradition of that time, three main schools of teaching existed: the teachers of the law, the sages, and the prophets. Jesus’ teaching exhibited characteristics from each of these groups.

**Background Information: Scarce and Tantalizing**

Many scholars bemoan the lack of information in the gospels about Jesus’ early life. Becker blames the shortcoming on the historians of the day:

> The restriction of our knowledge is rooted primarily in Antiquity’s general historical attitude . . . In order to understand historical figures as personalities, we [in the modern age] put them in social, political, and actual contexts . . . Antiquity had no interest in this kind of developmental approach. (1998, 20)

Others are inclined to blame the gospel writers: “The authors of the Gospels were creative theologians attempting to share their faith in Jesus as the bearer of God’s salvation, rather than mere recorders of historical information” (Beasley and others 2001, 345). Still others suggest that no one can know a historical person, or even any other person: “The total reality of a person is in principle unknowable — despite the fact that no one would deny that such a total reality did exist” (Meier 1991, 24).
For whatever reason, the gospel accounts are largely silent about Jesus' life before he began to teach publicly. Only two of them, Matthew and Luke, give the birth narratives. The paucity of information has not hindered the production of thousands of volumes of speculation, debate, and sheer fantasy. Based on the gospel accounts, Jesus grew up in the small town of Nazareth in the province of Galilee. His father was a carpenter and Jesus worked with him. The social status of his family has been much debated. Most scholars agree with Meier's description:

Since he was a craftsman plying his trade in Nazareth . . . he was not strictly speaking a “peasant” (i.e. a person who learns his or her living through tilling the soil and raising livestock) . . . he was not among “the poorest of the poor”, a category that would have included day labourers, tenant farmers, beggars, and slaves at the lowest end of the pecking order. (1991, 626)

Jesus' educational background is not specifically mentioned in the gospels. According to Luke, his parents took him to the temple in Jerusalem, when he was twelve years old. He was sufficiently familiar with the Scriptures to be found “in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions” (Lk 2:46). As an adult, he could read and find his way around the complicated scrolls in the synagogue (Lk 4:16-20). Although only one passage in the gospels shows him writing (Jn 8:7), most scholars agree that he was literate, but “with no particular credentials as a highly educated Jew . . . he had never formally studied Torah under some esteemed teacher in Jerusalem” (Meier 1991, 621). He did not leave any body of written work. His teaching survived in the minds of his learners. In later years, they provided new converts with written accounts of Jesus' life and teaching.

The gospel accounts relate Jesus' words in the Greek commonly used throughout the region at that time. However, the texts contain scattered Aramaic words, which suggest that Jesus was bilingual; which languages he spoke is a matter of controversy. Meier notes, “The ambiguity of the data explains why scholars can be so divided on whether Jesus spoke Greek . . . Aramaic . . . or Hebrew” (1991, 255). He then provides thirteen pages of argument to support his conclusion: “In a quadrilingual country, Jesus may
indeed have been a trilingual Jew; but he was probably not a trilingual teacher" (268). Whatever language he used and whether he taught in two, three, or four different languages, he spoke with extraordinary facility and power. His education was more than sufficient for the work he chose to do.

**Jesus’ Jewish legacy**

One aspect of Jesus’ life is not in doubt: Jesus was a Jew and the Jewishness of his background profoundly affected his teaching. In a book subtitled *A Jewish-Christian Dialogue* (Copan and Evans 2001) that explores the question “Who was Jesus?” from various scholarly perspectives, Claussen states the common view held by the contributors: “Christianity was born in the middle of Judaism. Jesus was born as a Jewish child into a Jewish family and society. His early followers were Jews” (97). Evans agrees and goes on to claim that “there is substantial evidence that Jesus accepted all of the major tenets of the Jewish faith” (2001, 61). For a period of time, biblical scholars questioned whether Galilee, where Jesus spent his childhood, was more Hellenized and, therefore, less Jewish than the rest of Palestine. However, recent excavations in Galilee, including the ancient site of Nazareth, strongly support the region’s “distinctive Jewish character” (Reed 2003, 117).

How did the undisputed Jewishness of Jesus affect his teaching? The high value placed on education in that society meant that Jesus and his male contemporaries had learned to read and write and discuss theological ideas. While females did not share this educational advantage, they also learned about the Law and its domestic implications. Because the Jewish religion was taught extensively in the home, female children did not entirely miss out on the remnants of basic education. The entire society esteemed teachers and saw education as an essential ingredient of life among all classes and types of people.

The influence of Judaism upon Jesus went much deeper than the creation of a favourable climate for learning. For example, Young has linked both the style and the content of Jesus’ parables with the Jewish culture in which he grew up: “The parables of Jesus are intimately related to the religious
heritage, culture, language, agricultural life, and social concerns of the Jewish people of the Second Temple Period” (1989, 2). In his book *Rabbi Jesus*, Jones observes:

> Many scholars today argue that we will not understand Jesus until we see him as a first-century Jew. This is not because admitting his Jewishness is suddenly politically correct, but because Jesus was a Jewish rabbi in a thoroughly Jewish context. (1997, 14)

He then describes Jesus’ teaching methods—proverbs, parallel statements, and questioning—as typical of the Jewish teachers of the day. Phipps (1993, 80-87) examines Jesus’ use of humour in terms of the traditional Jewish approach: “Given Jesus’ Hebrew heritage, it is not surprising to find that he often spoke with a dry and restrained wit” (Phipps 1993, 87). In titling his book *The Wisdom and Wit of Rabbi Jesus*, Phipps places Jesus’ style of teaching solidly within the Jewish tradition.

Three types of teachers were prominent within the pedagogical tradition that formed Jesus’ heritage: sages (wisdom teachers), teachers of the law (scribes, Pharisees, and rabbis), and prophets. Several scholars have discussed Jesus’ indebtedness to these three schools of teaching. For example, Stein notes: “The evidence in the Gospels that Jesus taught as a wise man . . . is impressive. His abundant use of proverbs, parables, paradox, metaphor, etc., witnesses to a similarity between the form of his teachings and that of the wise men” (1978, 2). Stein traces parallels in content as well as form between the Old Testament wisdom literature and Jesus’ teaching (3).

In Jesus’ debates with the teachers of the law, he showed that he was conversant with the particular mode of argument practiced by this group. For example, his debate with the Sadducees over marriage (Mat 22:23-33) reveals his familiarity with the style of theological discussion they were used to. However, he was significantly different from the other teachers of the law. According to the gospel of Matthew, “The crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law” (Mt 7:28-29). Perkins claims that Jesus’ interpretation was unique
because he “had not been taught how to interpret the Scriptures according to the principles of some school” (Perkins 1990, 23). In describing Jesus’ way of teaching as “charismatic” (24) rather than derived, Perkins declares that Jesus’ style fits this description because “he does not have the normal status, authority or power systems to back up what he says, . . . and he is able to convey his message to groups of people through his personal appeal” (24). However, Jesus’ responses also suggest that he recognized the value of the debating style of the teachers of the law, even though he often taught a different way.

Although Jesus was familiar with the pedagogical tradition of the teachers of the law, he also showed an affinity to the prophetic teachers in the Jewish tradition. Stein claims that the prophets differed from the teachers of the law in that the prophet’s message was “immediate” (1978, 4), an urgent message from God rather than a debatable interpretation of the law. Jesus represented this school of teaching by both the tone and the content of his teaching:

Like Jeremiah he could warn of the destruction of Jerusalem . . . like Micah he could castigate those who concentrated upon the externals of religion and lost sight of love and justice both toward God and man . . . and like Amos he could become angry at the hypocrisy of the leaders of the nation. (Stein 1978, 4)

Jesus’ prophetic teaching style was intermingled with the theological debate favoured by the teachers of the law, and the tradition of wise sayings characteristic of the sages. He was familiar with, and indebted to each of these traditions, but he avoided being tied exclusively to any one of them. At any given time, his teaching style was determined by the needs and expectations of his learners, rather than by the constraints of a particular style. Although he did not follow the normal pattern of training to become a teacher of the law or fit exactly into the pattern of sage or prophet, he used elements from the rich and varied teaching traditions that formed his Jewish pedagogical inheritance, but he shaped them to his own unique blend of teaching.
Summary of Chapter 2

Jesus' teaching context is more than a multi-coloured backdrop—interesting but essentially external to the teaching process. The context is in an interactive relationship with the various other components in the teaching situation. To speak of a teacher in a meaningful way, that person's teaching context requires consideration. In Jesus' case, the context includes his socio-political and religious environment, the physical space he used, the content of his teaching, his purposes as a teacher, his learners and their backgrounds, as well as some information about his own background.

The world of first-century Palestine was a complicated one: Rome occupied and ruled it, but the religious officials held significant power and influence. Jesus traveled constantly throughout the country, encountering learners from a wide variety of backgrounds. Wherever he went, he broke down socially constructed barriers between himself and his learners, especially the marginalized of society. His teaching had two interconnected themes - the reality and immanence of the Kingdom of God, a place where God's rule was acknowledged and welcomed, and the ethical principles by which women and men should live in that Kingdom, with love and compassion, mirroring God's love. In all of his teaching, Jesus encouraged critical thinking, internal change which would result in external behaviour, and harmonious living under the loving rule of God. Jesus' religious background gave him access to a long and honoured pedagogical tradition. In his brief public teaching career, he astonished people by his authoritative teaching, which was unlike the style of other teachers. While there is continuing debate about whether or not his teaching was new, there is no contesting the fact that it was effective and powerful, setting off a train of events that transformed individuals and changed the world.
CHAPTER 3:
“WHAT KIND OF TEACHING IS THIS?”

Introduction

Either consciously or unconsciously, every teacher makes decisions about how to teach. Some may follow carefully worked out lesson plans; some may open their mouths and start talking; some teach by doing; others tell stories or recite poetry. Today, a teacher may post a lesson on a website or use Power Point technology to convey material to learners present in the room or across the globe. The variety of possibilities seems as vast as the number of teachers in the past, present, and future. The act of teaching is extremely individual. However, usually teachers are influenced by the way they have been taught and the way they have seen others teach, as well as by deliberate decisions about how to teach what they want their students to learn. Watching another teacher in action can be inspiring, either because the teacher observed is effective or, occasionally, because he or she is so abysmal that the observer longs to do a better job.

In the case of Jesus of Nazareth, the picture is a startling one: a teacher with a wide variety of teaching techniques at his command; a teacher who seems to run away from crowds and fame, but never misses an opportunity to talk with individuals and teach small groups of learners; a distance educator who sets up a participatory re-enactment as a teaching tool for future learners. Here is a teacher who has such a way with words that he silences his critics but often asks questions instead of answering them. Here is a teacher whose effective teaching is worth a closer look.

How did Jesus teach? What techniques did he use? Pratt defines teaching techniques as "activities that are meant to help people learn—a means of helping them do something with the content" (1998, 17). Jesus used a wide variety of such techniques: parables, questions, poetry, lectures, reenactment,
prayer, apprenticeship, humour, and silence. The first five are common ways to present material. They are appropriate for a range of teaching goals. The list is arranged in a descending order: Jesus used parables and questions most often and reenactment least often. For today's educators, this study shows a teacher effectively using certain tools for certain goals. The last three techniques—humour, apprenticeship, and silence—are less about "doing" and more about "being." In the hands of an effective teacher, these tools help learners with attitudes, feelings, and perspective. The entire time Jesus taught, he used apprenticeship as a primary teaching tool with his close followers. In the accounts in the four gospels, he used humour less often and silence only three times. Prayer is a bridge between the two groups of techniques. In one sense, Jesus used it to draw people together to encourage his goal of harmonious living. However, his own intense prayer life was also a model to them about how to be. His constant use of prayer in his personal life, not just when he taught, blends into his use of apprenticeship as a technique.

The various sections of this chapter detail ways in which Jesus furthered his teaching goals by his choice and use of techniques. Each is prefaced by observations about the way educators view each of Jesus' tools. The aim is to look first at the externals or the mechanics of Jesus' teaching. The learning environment he created with those teaching techniques is discussed in chapter four.

**Parables: Truth in a Nutshell**

The parables of Jesus are justifiably famous, widely recognized as powerful, succinct, and profound. In the academic inquiry into Jesus' teaching methods, their centrality is unquestioned: "The parables have been for scholars of every stripe the royal road, the easiest path, the surest access to the historical Jesus" (Meier 2001, 645). Jesus' parables were not merely decorative embellishments of his philosophical and theological statements. His parables were a critical part of his entire educational enterprise: "Jesus not only spoke in parables, and regularly insisted that what he was proclaiming could not be
set forth in any way other than parables. He was practically an ambulatory parable in and of himself” (Capon 2002, 1).

This section begins with a definition of a parable and its basic component, which is a combination of an obvious, simple story and the hidden, metaphorical possibilities. Jesus did not use parables to entertain the crowds, although his stories must have done so. Their use was tied to his teaching goals. The parables encouraged critical thinking by their reversal of the predictable order. They created active learners who had to think more deeply in order to make the connections that Jesus was making. They stimulated internal change by providing new ways to look at the world. Even the drawbacks inherent in the use of parables—the possibility of confusion or misunderstanding—do not diminish the power of parables in Jesus’ teaching.

**Defining the Parable: Complexity Clothed in Simplicity**

Despite the parables’ prominent place in Jesus’ teaching, the term itself is not easily defined. For example, Stein claims that the familiar explanation of parable—“an earthly story with a heavenly meaning” (1981, 18)—is much too simplistic. Scholars have described parables as related to the mascha in Hebrew literature, with “the basic meaning of resemblance or comparison” (Young 1989, 5), and to the Greek word *parabole* which means “to place alongside of” (Donahue 1988, 5). Both of these words can be used to describe literary forms other than the story parables that Jesus frequently used. The Gospel writers were struggling to describe a literary form that was just emerging (Young 1989, 10). They used the Greek word with an infusion of thought from the Hebrew. Stein (1981) notes that the term “parabole” includes “a much wider variety of concepts than simply stories that contained moral or spiritual truths” (18). He includes metaphors, similes, similitudes, and allegories among the literary devices called parables. New Testament scholar Dodd wrote a definition specifically referring to Jesus’ parables which has proved useful to subsequent scholars such as Donahue, who quotes it extensively: “At its simplest the parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness and
leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought" (Donahue 1988, 5). Dodd’s definition is a good place to begin an exploration of the parable in Jesus’ teaching, which includes its nature, its purpose, the problems it creates, and its power as a pedagogical tool for achieving Jesus’ goals as a teacher.

The Nature of the Parable: The Extraordinary in the Ordinary

At the heart of parables lies a basic comparison, usually in the form of a metaphor or a simile. Jesus’ parables use everyday realities to paint a word picture of an abstract theological concept. When he placed the two ideas side by side, the concrete illuminated the abstract:

The parables of Jesus point to an order of reality other than that described in the parables . . . [and] lead into another way of thinking about life. Jesus spoke a language of the familiar and concrete which touched people in their everyday lives but which pointed beyond itself and summoned people to see everyday life as the carrier of transcendence. (Donahue 1988, 10)

The simplicity of the stories lulls the listener into thinking only of the mundane until transcendence breaks through: “At first it seems so familiar, and then a shift develops in the plot of the story. The ordinariness of the parable is transformed by a sudden twist” (Young 1998, 5).

The parables of Jesus are more than simple comparisons of the physical and metaphysical worlds. He clothed his comparisons in a story form that has wide appeal across ages and cultures. For example, the parable of the lost sheep is a tale of the lost being found, of worry and sadness being changed into rejoicing (Mt 18:13). A modern city-dweller has probably never experienced the loss of a sheep; the experience of losing something precious is universal. Both the desolation of loss and the joy of finding resonate with all people. The story transcends the cultural barriers between a poor rural shepherd in Palestine in the first century and the sophisticated urban dweller in the twenty-first century. According to Young, the appeal of Jesus’ stories “helps to account for
his phenomenal popularity and success . . . Jesus’ parabolic teachings captured the imagination and the heart of the people” (1989, 3).

On the surface, the parables are simple stories about everyday affairs appealing to ordinary folk. However, to describe them as such, without additional explanation, would be to diminish their power. Always below the surface lies another layer of meaning, another possibility to explore. In the parable of the lost sheep, the subterranean meaning explores profound theological concepts: the reality of human estrangement from God, the unconditional love of God, his desire for a relationship, the possibility of forgiveness and reestablishment of a close relationship, and the cosmic nature of that relationship. Young comments on the parables’ “wide appeal that could speak to the less educated and yet would also engage the mind of the scholar on a deeper level” (1989, 4). Perhaps Jesus would express it another way and say that a parable hides “these things from the wise and learned and reveals them to little children” (Mt 11: 25). Nevertheless, simplicity belies complexity: “If a picture can express a thousand words, then a parable can express a thousand expositions” (Young 1989, 4).

The Purpose of the Parable: Moving towards the Light

No matter how layered and complex, stories are not useful pedagogical tools unless they assist the teacher in achieving his or her educational goals. The parables of Jesus were a significant factor in achieving his goals. They enabled him to create an environment conducive to learning at a deep level. The stories immediately caught the attention of the learners; they fostered critical thinking skills by challenging the accepted view of reality; they encouraged the active participation of the learners; they facilitated internal and external change; they built on the learners’ previous experience, allowing for learning to continue long after the teaching time was over. In short, they were ideal teaching tools for Jesus’ purposes.

Arresting the attention of the learner is a fundamental concern of any educator. Since most of Jesus’ teaching took place outdoors, outside of a structured learning situation, he needed to attract people’s interest
immediately and then hold their attention long enough to engage their thinking. The parables were attractive as stories, especially given the imagery and poetic language Jesus used. The learners could easily identify with the people and activities in them: a lost coin, a wedding feast, and a farmer sowing his seed. They also presented listeners with a puzzle: How does the story relate to the idea Jesus has been talking about or the question he has been asked? Once the attention of the crowd had been captured, Jesus used the parable to put forward the idea or information that he wanted them to know or to think about. Sometimes he explained the message; sometimes he left it to bear fruit in the learners' thoughts.

One of the goals of Jesus’ teaching was to help learners develop the critical thinking skills needed to see in new ways. Jesus was adept at using parables to question accepted ideas:

With Jesus, however, the device of parabolic utterance is not used to explain things to people's satisfaction but to call attention to the unsatisfactoriness of all previous explanations and understandings. (Capon 2002, 5)

In many parables, the established order is called into question: “The structure of worldly wisdom and expected behaviour are challenged and turned upside down . . . [as the stories] shatter and reverse expectations” (Thompson 1978, 260). In the parable of the Good Samaritan, for example, the religious men do not do what is good and the despised outsider acts in a way that is pleasing to God. In parables, new ideas and fresh possibilities enter the learners' minds as old thought patterns and beliefs are swept away.

Parables require the active participation of the learner. Gower considers that parables are actually a form of dialogue, even though the response occurs in the listeners' mind:

Communication in parable does not allow a passive role; the interlocutor participates in the formation of meaning . . . There is never a ready-made message that is transmitted from one to another; it is a construction . . . Parables, therefore, are profoundly dialogic and do not intend to be the
last word because, in parable, the last word is continually granted to others. (2000, 103)

Meier also sees parables as conducive to critical thinking: “The parables were meant to tease the mind of his audience into active thought, to pose uncomfortable questions instead of supplying pat answers” (Meier 2001, 646). Parables prepare the listener to entertain new concepts of reality and to see with new eyes.

After the development of critical thinking skills, Jesus’ second educational goal was internal change — the reorientation of the learner towards God. Parables encouraged the achievement of this goal by pointing to a new perspective of reality:

Parables not only challenge and loosen the grip of established norms and relations in a dominant culture, but they contain and engender a criticism (and sometimes a mockery) of the official social order and ideology, and . . . offer up instead another alternative: Jesus’ view of reality. (Gower 2000, 102)

This is particularly true of the group of stories called the parables of the Kingdom, in which Jesus was teaching about the nature of the realm where God’s rule was recognized. Before change can happen, the accepted order must be challenged and an alternative suggested.

For any teacher, helping learners remember what has been taught is a constant goal. If the lesson is in the theological or philosophical sphere, the problem of memory is more acute—abstract ideas are more easily forgotten. Therefore, the abstract is often given a more concrete form: “Wisdom for the practice of life has among all nations taken a figurative shape . . . It [the image or the comparison in a parable] is primitive, interesting, and easily remembered; and its various applications give it a continual freshness” (Barry 2003, 1). Arresting stories with graphic details—the prodigal son is working in a pigpen when he decides to return home—take a concept like unconditional love and “present it in a language . . . listeners could ‘see’, that connected with the lives of his [Jesus’] hearers” (Friedeman 1990, 168). Philosophical and religious ideas are particularly in need of the connection to the physical world, to the
everyday lives of learners, lest they fail to be relevant in the place where
learners live out their lives. Donahue explains the connection:

Metaphor [the core of the parable] is especially suited to express two
necessary qualities of religious experience: immediacy and
transcendence. A religious experience... is always immediate and
individual... At the same time, religious experience involves a sense of
being drawn out of oneself to the transcendent... Jesus thus spoke the
language of the familiar and concrete which touched people in their daily
lives but which pointed beyond itself and summoned people to see
everyday life as the carrier of self-transcendence. (1988, 10)

The parables of Jesus make use of earthly reality to reveal the Kingdom of God;
at the same time, the things of the earth become symbols pointing to heaven.
The lamp held high is a reminder of the need for transparent faith; the yeast
added to the bread dough speaks of faith transforming society; the
outstretched arms of a loving parent are the arms of a forgiving God.

In using stories of everyday reality, Jesus was exemplifying a widely
recognized principle of effective education: building on the learners' previous
experience and knowledge. By beginning with the familiar, a teacher can more
readily move to the unfamiliar. In his parables, "Jesus used objects and story
subjects that were familiar to his learners. Boats. Fish. Sheep. Water. Wine.
Bread. Fig trees. Seeds. Grain. He started where they were" (Schultz and
Schultz 1993, 33). By using familiar images, a teacher makes learners more
comfortable, more ready to listen to the unfamiliar message behind the
ordinary story.

The Problem with Parables

The parables of Jesus are arresting, thought provoking, and memorable.
However, they were not consistently clear in their meaning. Stein points out
that "even for the disciples the parables were not always 'self-evident'" (1981,
27). The potential for misunderstanding could be considered a mark against
parables as a teaching method. However, Jesus may have deliberately chosen
to make part of his teaching more challenging. In fact, the barriers created by
the use of parables may have whetted the appetite for learning among those
who listened. According to Gunn, a further reason for using this method was "to cancel truth from the unreceptive and to reveal truth to the receptive. The parable was a way of separating the indifferent from the genuine seeker" (1998, 75).

Another possible reason for the parables' obscurity is put forward by Hertzog who claims that Jesus' teaching was so radical that he needed to hide his message in seemingly innocuous stories so that the religious and political establishment would leave him alone long enough to complete his teaching mission (1994, 6). Horne agrees: "He adopted this method of teaching rather suddenly in the middle of his public ministry when the tide of opposition was rising against him, perhaps as a mode of self-protection in his teaching, enabling him to survive until his time should come (Quoted by Gunn 1998, 75).

The hidden meanings of many parables may be problematic for those seeking black-and-white clarity. Jesus' disciples sometimes asked him for explanation (Mt 13:10). They seemed relieved when his language grew more prosaic: "Now you are speaking clearly and without figures of speech" (Jn 16:29). Even the great parabolists, it seems, can challenge their learners too much for their comfort level. Chesterton, himself described as "a master of the apt illustration" (Capon 2002, 7), wrote about the problems inherent in parabolic communication:

He [Chesterton] said that if you gave people an analogy that they claim they do not understand, you should graciously offer them another. If they say they don't understand that either, you should oblige them with a third. But from there on, Chesterton said, if they still insist they do not understand, the only thing left is to praise them for the one truth they do have a grip on: "Yes," you tell them, "that is quite correct. You do not understand." (7)

At least once, Jesus did use a second parable when asked to explain (Lk 2:35-48). However, according to Capon, "his main point was that any understanding of the Kingdom his hearers could come up with would be a misunderstanding" (7). Was Jesus deliberately obtuse at times? He certainly told parables of remarkable clarity, such as the Good Samaritan, which his learners readily
understood. Other parables have been a source of debate and controversy through the centuries. Parables have in role in creating an optimal climate for deep learning. However, this advantage may be offset by the fact that they can be accidentally or deliberately misconstrued. One single interpretation is perhaps not what Jesus intended. The parables have certainly prodded minds into thought, hearts into feelings, and bodies into action for nearly two thousand years.

**The Power of Parable in Jesus' Teaching**

The mark of a successful teaching device is that it furthers the teacher's goals and illuminates his or her content. The goals of Jesus were to help learners think critically about their lives and the accepted beliefs of their society; to facilitate internal change as learners saw God and his Kingdom in new ways and align their lives with the radical ethics of love; and to assist them in living harmoniously within themselves, with one another, and with God. The content of his teaching—the theological concept of the Kingdom and the ethical ideals of radical love—are abstract concepts that he wanted his learners to experience and live out in their everyday lives. For teaching abstract content, parables are an effective tool: they open up new areas of thought. How is the Kingdom of God like a mustard seed and who are the birds resting in the branches of the shrub (Mk 4:30-32)? Parables subtly call for radical change beginning on the inside. For example, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, the new understanding of neighbour demands a change in the learner's behaviour towards those outside ethnic and religious boundaries. Many of Jesus' parables offer the possibility of peaceful coexistence when the Kingdom of God is lived out. The unmerciful servant (Mt 18:21-32) becomes the person Jesus' followers should not be like. In the parables, Jesus presents the theological and the ethical content of his message in the context of everyday life in startling, vivid, and, if the learner accepts Jesus' perspective, in life-changing ways.
Teachers discussed and practised the art of asking appropriate questions to encourage learning long before Jesus began to teach in Palestine. The Greek philosopher Socrates is the best-known teacher in antiquity to develop the use of questions for pedagogical purposes. The Socratic method is widely respected and used today, particularly by educators who recognize the need for developing critical thinkers. Richard Paul, director of the Centre for Critical Thinking, describes the Socratic method as “the oldest and still the most powerful teaching tactic for fostering critical thinking” (2003, 1).

Like Socrates, Jesus made extensive use of questions. According to Gunn, “The four Gospels record more than one hundred different ones” (1998, 51). Socrates and Jesus had more in common than the use of questions. Both had enormous impact on their students. In a report of George Steiner’s Norton Lecture series entitled “Lessons from the Masters on the Art of Teaching”, Gewertz describes Jesus and Socrates as “teachers whose influence has been phenomenally powerful and far-reaching despite the fact that neither of them ever bothered to write down his words” (2001, 1). Given such examples of effective teaching, the use of questioning as a tool to encourage learning is clearly worth investigating.

The Socratic Method Updated

The basis of the Socratic method is questioning: “In Socratic teaching we focus on giving students questions, not answers. We model an inquiring, probing mind by continually probing the mind with questions” (Paul 2003, 2). According to a university professor at Allison College, the goal of using the Socratic method is “a penetrating and rigorous mind” (http://alison.org/socratic.htm). The emphasis is on developing a learner equipped and eager for discovering more, rather than on helping them to acquire a body of information about a certain subject. However, learners do also gain essential factual information. A doctor using this method to teach anaemia-pallor fatigue notes that students both learn and enjoy the process of
learning; “It is extremely active and extremely meaningful . . . Adults love it” (www.pathologyguy.com/socratic.htm). A brief search on the Internet shows that the Socratic questioning method is currently being used to teach at all levels of education and in many fields: law, medicine, agriculture, theology, writing, mathematics, philosophy, and chemistry. Teachers write enthusiastically, often mentioning in particular two benefits for the learner. From Allison College comes this recommendation: “Socratic teaching methods may be ancient but they remain unsurpassed. It [sic] compels students to become active participants in their own learning and improves their critical thinking skills enormously” (http://alison.org/socratic.htm).

**Jesus’ Questions: Prodding and Provoking**

In *Jesus the Teacher*, Gunn devotes an entire chapter to Jesus’ use of questions, appropriately written mainly as a series of questions. He begins with the comment: “In this chapter I sense that we are near the heart of the teaching method of Jesus” (1998, 51). He suggests a list of characteristics of at least one of Jesus’ questions and asks his readers to supply an example: original, practical, personal, rhetorical, stimulating, definite, searching, adapted to the individual, silencing, clear, and brief. For example, Jesus asked a searching question when he said to the scribes: “Why are you thinking these things?” (Mk 2:8). However, the exercise of trying to determine the nature of Jesus’ questions exposes the complex and multi-layered nature of his questioning technique. Jesus asked what appears to be a practical question when two men, disciples of John the Baptist, began to follow him. The gospel of John describes the incident:

Turning around Jesus saw them [two of John’s disciples] following and asked, “What do you want?”

They said, “Rabbi” (which means Teacher), “Where are you staying?”

“Come,” he replied, “and you will see.”

So they went and saw where he was staying, and spent the day with him. (Jn 1:37-39)
On one level, Jesus asked a straightforward, practical question and the men replied with a practical, if evasive, answer. In fact, Jesus' apparently simple question may have penetrated beyond the superficial to another level of understanding: "What to you want from life? What do you want that you do not get from your current teacher? What do you think that I can give you that you want?" His invitation to come and see suggests more than a chance to see where he was living. It offers the possibility of a deeper relationship. This possibility was borne out by the fact that they spent the rest of the day with him. Throughout the next three years as Jesus' learners, they came to see, both physically and spiritually, much more than his temporary place of residence.

Another example of Jesus' questioning technique comes in an incident recorded in Luke's gospel:

Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping; she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner." (Lk 7:36-39)

After telling his host a story, Jesus asks him, "Do you see this woman?" (v.44). Ostensibly, the question was purely rhetorical: the woman had just made a dramatic and unwelcome entrance and an extravagant gesture of devotion. Who at this party could miss seeing her? A prostitute at a Pharisee's party could not go unnoticed. Simon, the host, would have been vividly aware of the gatecrasher who was making a spectacle of herself, probably to his great dismay and embarrassment. Of all the people at the party, none could answer Jesus' rhetorical question more emphatically than Simon. However, Jesus is challenging Simon to see the woman in a new way, not as a despised outcast, but as someone who had done what Simon had not — treated Jesus as an honoured and welcome guest (v 44-47). On one level, Jesus' question was mere
rhetoric; on another level, he was urging Simon to new insight and personal change in his attitude towards the woman and, by implication, towards all the people Simon considered outsiders.

Besides suggesting the types of questions Jesus asked, Gunn urges his readers to examine the purposes behind Jesus' questions. Again he suggests a wide range of reasons: "To make one think. To express an emotion. To introduce a story. To follow up a story. To recall the known. To awaken conscience. To elicit faith. To clarify the situation. To rebuke criticism. To create a dilemma" (1998, 53-54). For example, Gunn uses an incident in Mark's gospel as a description of a question provoking his learners and creating a dilemma for them:

Another time he went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal on the Sabbath. Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Stand up in front of everyone."

Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent. (Mk 3:14)

Jesus wanted his learners to rethink how they were interpreting the law. He challenged them with the possibility that they had misunderstood God's intention in giving the law: "The Sabbath was made for man; not man for the Sabbath" (Mk 4:27). His question was probing, reaching into their presuppositions and urging them to sort out their beliefs and their actions. Gunn summarizes Jesus' educational goals through the use of questions:

His aim, as the great teacher, was . . . not to relieve the reason and conscience of mankind, not to lighten the burden of thought and study, but rather to make people more eager, more active in mind and moral sense. He came not to answer questions but to ask them; not to settle men's souls but to provoke them: not to save men from problems but to save them from indolence; not to make life easier but to make it more educative. (1998, 55)

Questioning was an effective tool in achieving Jesus' goal to help people think critically. By their personal probing nature, his questions encouraged
internal change. Gunn notes: “Socrates regularly used a long series of leading questions to bring an idea to birth” (1998, 53) and then asks the question: “Did Jesus do this?” (53) Jesus questions were different. They were short, sometimes unanswerable, always challenging the learner to think more deeply, to see anew, rather than to come to a particular conclusion. To answer Gunn’s question, one could rephrase his comment on Socrates: Jesus regularly used one or two short questions to bring his learners to rebirth. Innovative thinking and complete attitudinal and behavioural change were Jesus’ goals. His questions helped him to achieve these ends.

Poetry: An Ancient Form with Pedagogical Intent

Poetry is an art form with a long tradition as a pedagogical tool. However, it is frequently overlooked in contemporary Western education that emphasizes a science-based knowledge and tends to relegate the arts to “entertainment” or “extras”. Those who advocate the use of poetry for learning recognize its power to assist memorization, to convey abstract thought and emotional intensity, to sharpen creative thinking, to heighten intellectual understanding of difficult situations, and to provide the means to deal with emotions arising from them. Thus, poetry is particularly suited to conveying transcendent ideas and religious convictions.

Beyond Memorization

In pre-literate cultures, or those in which reading and writing are restricted to certain elite classes, poetry functions as a memory aid:

In its most ancient form, the now-familiar features of rhyme, meter, repetition, alliteration and the like were simply mnemonic devices - tricks to facilitate the storage and retrieval of information . . . In an oral culture, before it was possible to write anything down or look it up, knowledge had only one mode of the archival: the human memory. The history of one’s people, one’s family genealogy, survival facts about hunting, fishing and farming - all were saved from oblivion by what we now call poetic devices. (Bhgwat 2001, 1)
In the modern world, memorization is often considered an outmoded way of learning. However, ESL teachers (Gasparro and Falleta, 1994) (Saricoban and Metin 2000) recognize that memorization is important for their learners and are exploring the possibilities of using poetry as part of that process. An article in *The Internet TESL Journal* notes that poems “stay in the minds of the students for the rest of their lives, with all the rhythms, grammatical features and vocabulary” (Saricoban and Metin 2000, 1). British Poet Laureate, Andrew Motion, agrees that poetry can create a “wonderful piece of luggage” (2000, 2) which people can take through life. He also addresses the issue of rote learning, which may well have been “dismal” (2) in certain learning environments, but which can also be a joyous experience: “I’m wanting to argue for a place to be retained for learning poems by heart—a phrase which I much prefer to ‘learning by rote’ because it quite rightly emphasizes how precious and inward the business of learning can be” (Motion 2000, 1).

Memorization can be used for more than learning facts. Special educator Bhagwat utilizes poetry for a deeper purpose: “To memorize is not only to possess something, whether it be a poem or a succession of historical facts but also to make what is memorized an inherent part of us, to turn it into a companion” (2001, 1). This concept of poetry as a capsule of learning that can be carried through life’s changes and trials shows the value of poetry for religious education. It fits in with Jesus’ goal of learning for internal, lifelong change.

**Connecting the Dots: Joining the Heart and the Mind**

Religious education is also concerned with conveying abstract ideas, which Jesus wanted his learners to incorporate in their daily lives. Poetry can bridge the gap between the world of ideas and their practical outworking because, as several educationalists claim, it links minds and hearts (McNair, 2003, 1). A former poet laureate in the Unites States is quoted in a recent article as saying, “It helps to have our feelings put into words. Poetry helps to clarify our feelings, give them a kind of form” (Hamlin, 2001). In response to the book *Poem for the Day - 366 poems, Old and New, Worth Learning by Heart,*
one enthusiastic reader wrote to the editor: “The poetry helps me to make an
infinite number of new connections in my daily living, in my discourse with
others and to the natural environment” (McOstrich 2003, 1). Peterson speaks
of poetry as an invitation to participation: “Poetry is not a language of objective
explanation but the language of invitation. It makes an image of reality in such
a way as to invite our participation in it” (1998, 5). Connectedness between the
life of the mind and the spirit and the world of everyday life is a challenge for
all those who teach how to live.

Just as poetry enhances the ability to make connections, especially
between thoughts and feelings and actions, it can connect people to sources of
comfort outside of themselves. Several recent newspaper articles have
highlighted the power of poetry to offer solace during times of national or
personal crisis. In “Turning to poetry: Verse speaks to feelings of grief, anger
and bewilderment”, poet Bob Holman observes: “The poems pasted on
buildings all over New York [after the terrorist attack in 2001] attest to poetry’s
power to communicate the essential, to ease the pain, to ask questions, and to
bring comfort” (2001). Quoted in a *New York Times* article, the current
American poet laureate Billie Collins uses a striking illustration of poetry’s
value in times of crisis:

> Mr. Collins compared the status of the poet in contemporary life to
that of a goalie in hockey. “The goalie in hockey stands apart from
others, marginalized,” he said. “When all the skating and sliding around
on the ice begins to fail us, the goalie is the poet.” (Smith, 2001, 1)

A similar article, “Poetry in Times Like These”, suggests that, for some
people, poetry holds out more comfort than does religious faith: “It was Sunday
[just after the beginning of a war] and while many . . . hied themselves to
church to find solace, I found myself, unsurprisingly, at a poetry reading”
(Infante, 2003,1). In Jesus’ teaching, the learners did not have to choose
between faith and poetry.
The Power and Potential of Jesus' Poetry

In Jesus' day, poetry was an integral part of religious literature and of teaching. In recent years, scholars of literary criticism have identified poetic forms in large sections of Jewish biblical literature, which had been obscured by a lack of understanding of the nature of Hebrew poetry:

It has never been a secret that the Old Testament contains poetry, but until comparatively recent times no one suspected how much. (In fact about a third of it is poetry and few of its books contain no poetry at all.) . . . The problem came about because Hebrew poetry had no formal device like our rhyme to mark the ends of poetic lines . . . Separated by years from its authors, readers and translators had no way of recognizing it for what it was. (Gabel, Wheeler, and York 2000, 34)

Poetry in the sayings of Jesus was first described by Burney (1925), who took the English translations of the Greek texts and retranslated them into the Aramaic that Jesus almost certainly used. He discovered the parallelism which has attracted significant comment (Wilson 1993), (Stein 1978), but also the rhythm and rhyme which require considerable understanding of Hebrew and Aramaic to appreciate. However, parallelism survives translation into English, and its use by Jesus is significant. In discussing parallelism in biblical poetry, Gabel, Wheeler, and York note that the basic principle of Hebraic poetry is repetition, which is a significant memory enhancer (2000, 34).

Form critics Burney (1925), Thompson (1978), and Stein (1978) recognize several types of parallelism in Jesus' teaching. In synonymous parallelism, “there is a correspondence between the various lines or strophes, and the following lines are essentially synonymous repetitions of the first” (Stein 1978, 27). An example is found in the gospel of Matthew: “If a Kingdom is divided against itself, that Kingdom cannot stand. / If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand ” (Mk 3:23-2). Having repeated a truism, Jesus then adds new material in the same parallel form: “And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand” (v 26). Gabel, Wheeler, and York note a significance difference with modern poetry: “Our own literary forms do not encourage repetition” (2000, 35).
A second form of parallelism is more widely used by Jesus than the synonymous form. It is termed antithetical because, after the first line makes a statement, “succeeding lines express opposite truths” (Wilson 1973, 95): “Whoever can be trusted with very little, can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will be dishonest with much” (Lk 16:10).

In synthetic parallelism, also called constructive parallelism, “the thought of the second line neither repeats nor contrasts the thought of the first line, but rather supplements and brings it to completion” (Stein 1978, 29): “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God” (Mk 10:27).

Some scholars (Burney, Stein) add another category: step or climatic parallelism, while others (Gabel, Wheeler, and York 2000) consider this a variation of the three basic forms (37). Stein describes the form:

In step parallelism the second strobe takes up the thought of the first strobe and advances the thought one additional step. As a result, the second line is not simply a synonymous repetition of the first but is an additional, although related statement that brings the entire saying to its climax and completion. (1978, 29)

He gives as an example: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Mat 5:17).

Chiasmic parallelism is slightly more complicated. It presents contrasting ideas. According to Stein, “A chiasmus is an inversion of parallel statements in a pattern of ab/AB” (1978, 30). He offers as an example a passage in the eighth chapter of Matthew:

“Do not give dogs what is sacred; (a) and do not throw your pearls to pigs. (b) If you do, they may trample them under their feet, (A) and then turn and tear you to pieces.” (B)

This poetic form shows greater complexity than the simple reversal of an idea, such as, “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted”’ (Lk 14:11). In the chiasmic form, the word “dogs” is not repeated, but alluded to in the second part of the parallelism by the words “turn and tear you”, which is descriptive of the semi-wild dogs that
wandered the countryside. The image of the pig is reinforced by the word "trample" and by the depiction of the pigs crushing the pearls into the dirt. In four lines of poetry, Jesus presented two memorable images encapsulated in four memorable lines of chiasmic parallelism.

By putting some of his teaching into poetic form, Jesus created a strong memory aid for his learners. Trueblood notes that "sober prose, as everyone knows, is hard to memorize or to repeat with any accuracy, whereas poetry, or the scintillating epigram, can be repeated with remarkable ease and faithfulness" (1964, 27). The value of poetry in teaching goes far beyond this feature. It creates empathy and understanding at a deep level; it expresses the inexpressible and gives words to the inarticulate. Jesus’ words, commonly known as the Beatitudes, fit this description:

“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God.
Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied.
Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.” (Lk 6:20-1)

Jesus’ poetry cemented his teaching in the hearts, as well as the minds, of his learners. It helped to bring about the internal change that was one of the goals of his teaching.

**Lectures: The Tool of Last Resort?**

Lectures have a bad reputation among adult educators. Apps notes that "some teachers of adults argue that the lecture should never be used ever" (1991, 45). However, lectures continue to be "the mainstay of educational practice" (Renner 1993, 34). Do effective adult educators ever use lectures? Is the term "good lecture" an oxymoron? When speaking to large groups of learners, Jesus used lectures, but they were noteworthy for their unconventional informality. His lectures were entertaining and varied; he used them when the press of crowds made individual encounters a public event. He managed to make a questionable teaching technique into an event that allowed
large numbers of people to experience his teaching without neglecting the individuals who made up the crowd.

**Learning and Lectures: Do They Ever Come Together?**

Among researchers, debate has gone on for many years over the effectiveness of the lecture method as compared to inquiry-based and experiential learning. For example, a study in 1991, a replica of earlier studies, measured the effectiveness of different methods for different learning goals (Schoenfelt and others 1991, 1). It found that “the lecture method was reported as the most frequently used method, yet its relative effectiveness was low” (1).

Two studies in 1996 compared lecture-based learning with a problem-based approach at a medical school (Richards and others 1996) and lectures versus a collaborative learning approach in a university geography class (Herzog and Lieble 1996). Both studies found no appreciable difference between the two methods in learning facts. However, Richard’s study found that, while standardized licensing test scores measuring factual learning showed no difference, “students in the problem-based curriculum received significantly higher ratings . . . on four clinical ratings scores [which measured non-factual learning]” (1996, 187). In other words, problem-based learning was more effective for teaching practical and personal relationship skills, but not more effective than lectures for factual learning.

Several studies have focussed on the effectiveness of combining a lecture method with more participatory ways of learning. A 1992 study suggests that “traditional didactic lectures, although perceived as least effective, were regarded as highly effective when enhanced by active student involvement” (Butler 1992, 11). A later study concludes that “the traditional lecture format of college courses can be enhanced by including active learning designed to further course goals of learning knowledge, developing skills, or fostering attitudes” (Bonwell 1996, 31). Of course, a lecture thus enhanced may no longer fit within the definition of a lecture.

One study, which is particularly pertinent to a discussion of Jesus’ teaching methods and goals, was published in 1994. “The Importance of
Teaching Methodology in Moral Education of Sport Populations" (Stoll and others 1994) compared outcomes using three different teaching models, one of which was lecture-based. The study concluded that “interaction teaching based on theory, dialogue, and argumentation is preferred in increasing cognitive moral learning” (1994, 1). Moral or ethical education is different from fact-based learning since it requires learning beyond the cognitive domain. Bloom’s taxonomy, which has been recently revised by Clark (2000), suggests that, for behaviour to change, learning must occur in the affective domain of “feelings, value, appreciation, enthusiasms, motivations and attitudes” (3). At the highest level—“internalizing values” (3)—the learner’s way of being changes. This type of learning is exactly what Jesus wanted for his hearers. Figure 1 on page 18 shows how one of them progressed in this kind of learning. An advocate of active learning describes the difference in results between the passive learning accomplished by lectures and active learning:

Passive learning places a premium on producing ‘right answers’ or test questions, but often without real learning. Passive learning thus encourages ‘veneers of accomplishment’ — changes in ways of talking but not in behavior. (Berryman 2003, 2)

Despite the general view among adult educators that active participation by learners is desirable, most agree that lectures can still be useful under certain circumstances for teaching certain kinds of material and for teaching large groups:

There is a place for lectures, particularly short, succinct presentations used in conjunction with other teaching tools. Lectures continue to be one of the most effective tools for presenting information. (Apps 1991, 46)

The way in which teachers deliver their lectures is obviously an important factor in their effectiveness, as are the size of the audience, and the content of the teaching. An effective teacher seeks to engage the learners regardless of the methods or the format used.
Jesus’ Lectures: Lively and Learner-centered

In religious education, the lecture format is the sermon. According to Gunn, “the difference probably between an academic lecture and a sermon is that the former appeals mainly to the intellect, while the latter appeals mainly to the emotions” (Gunn 1998, 63-64). While some would dispute this categorization, few would disagree that this is the most common form of adult Christian education in churches. In the teaching ministry of Jesus, however, it is difficult to separate his public addresses into categories, to distinguish what might be considered a sermon and what was more like a conversation held in a public place. His speeches in synagogues were more definitely lectures or sermons. When he taught outdoors, the format varied, but at least sometimes took the form of a lecture. At one point, for example, Jesus got into a fishing boat, asked to be rowed away from the shore, “sat down and taught the people from the boat” (Lk 5:3). Jesus used formal teaching sessions when crowds of people came to hear him. They were anything but dull occasions. Once a paralytic man appeared at his feet, lowered from the rooftop by friend, who had removed the roof tiles (Mk 2:1-5). Frequently, people interrupted his teaching by asking questions or requesting healing. On several occasions he stopped teaching in order to feed hungry learners (Mk 6:30-44). At other times, the Pharisees arrived during a lecture to ask hostile questions designed to trap him (Mk 10:1-2). His lectures soon became a dialogues or small group discussions. Sometimes Jesus responded to learners’ needs by abandoning his lecture and going with them to meet their request. The ebb and flow of people interrupting, demanding, and questioning gave a dynamic and lively dimension to the situation. Some descriptions leave the reader unclear as to whether Jesus was addressing a large crowd that had gathered, or whether he simply spoke to his disciples gathered around him (Mt 5:1). Jesus’ occasional use of the lecture method fits Apps’ description of appropriate use of this technique: “short, succinct presentations used in conjunction with other teaching tools” (46). Even lengthy public discourses were enlivened by Jesus’ constant interaction with individuals and smaller groups within the crowd. His discourses were sprinkled with stories, poetry, humour, and probing questions. His approach to
teaching encouraged the active involvement of learners even when he was speaking to large groups. In fact, some scholars believe that Jesus only used lectures when no other method seemed feasible and actually preferred to teach small groups and individuals. In what he calls "a personal conclusion", Gunn (1998) notes:

Jesus began with individuals, continued with crowds, and ended with individuals, during the three successive main periods of his ministry. He worked by preference and most successfully with individuals because of the very nature of crowds. In fact, he did not trust crowds. (107)

Whether or not he trusted crowds, he certainly did not seek to enlarge his audience and often tried to escape from the large number of people trying to hear him. He also put a low priority on lecturing: individual needs and individual dialogue took priority in his public discourses. Perhaps he could best be described as a reluctant lecturer, preaching to large groups when they came to him, but always willing to stop his speeches to meet with individuals. In his style of teaching, lectures were the teaching tool of last resort.

Re-enactment: Learning by Immersion

The use of re-enactment for teaching purposes is not a new idea. For example, in oral cultures the young learned useful techniques by watching and participating in re-enactments of successful hunts. Warriors relived battles in ritual dance and actions, and the young and inexperienced learned to imitate the experts. However, a re-enactment is much more than a means to teach technique. A strong element of identity formation is also present. The participant enters into a simulated real-life situation and the result is a potent mixture of emotional involvement and psychological adjustment. If, as adult educators believe, participation by learners fosters deep learning, re-enactment is a powerful teaching tool, since it demands the complete involvement of the learner in every aspect of the experience.
Re-enactment in Education: “A slice of life”

As a teaching tool, re-enactment is a variation of the more commonly used role-playing technique. Whereas role-playing is usually spontaneous, at least on the part of the learners, re-enactment requires preparation and a more intense identification with a particular character. According to Renner, educators can best use role-playing to “insert a slice of life into the classroom, connect theory with everyday practices, practice unfamiliar skills in a safe setting, learn to appreciate contradictory viewpoints” (1993, 64). He notes that “we need only turn to reading and television to see how deeply felt vicarious experiences can be” (64). Re-enactment also allows participants to enter into the feelings of the original situation in a powerful way through involvement of the whole person. For example, in the Order of Good Cheer, a historical re-enactment of life in the first European settlement in Canada, participants dress in period costume, eat food and drink wine similar to that used by the settlers. They use dishes and cutlery from that era and listen to the music the settlers would have heard. Participants with imagination soon begin to understand the historical situation with nuanced emotional responses. Re-enactment creates a deep-learning experience: all the senses — seeing, hearing, tasting, feeling, touching — are involved. From this total immersion experience, two important changes often follow: inner change in the individuals involved and external change in the personal relationships between members of the group as it bonds together.

Religious educators in many different faiths have tapped the potential for inner transformation through re-enactment. Coming from a Jewish perspective, Kula describes the power of re-enactment in the celebration of the Passover meal:

Ritual is actually a drama or re-enactment. When ritual functions well it literally transforms us, transporting us into an alternative world that helps us understand more deeply who we are. When ritual is fully engaging, participants have what is called ‘a spiritual experience.’ What that really means is that the boundaries of self, which defines who we are day in and day out, are loosened, enabling us to intuit or gain insight or illumination into who we really are. This intuition . . . is wisdom.
which ultimately does not flow from the outside in, but rather from the inside out. (2000, 1)

The power of re-enactment is such that, as an educational tool, it can facilitate learning at the highest level.

Another example of transformation through re-enactment comes in a case study of a child preparing for a historical re-enactment (Polmon 2000, 340). It suggests that re-enactment helped to create attitudinal change:

Bobby did not have the opportunity in the relatively few hours he spent on historical analysis to master skills directly transferable to social studies class. What Bobby was clearly able to do was appropriate a positive stance toward social studies' content. (341)

Polman uses this case study to discuss the difference between “mastery” and “appropriation”: Mastery is characterized as “traditional considerations of ‘knowing how to do’ particular actions, whereas appropriation is characterized as ‘making something one’s own’” (340). For transformational learning, appropriation is a necessary ingredient and may actually occur without the mastery. Polman gives the example of “a child who visits a science museum, and returns from the trip fascinated with frogs—the child probably has not mastered a deep understanding of a frog’s biology, but they may have ‘opened a file folder’ into which they will later put information “leading to a more traditional mastery over time” (340). Participation in re-enactment can bring about the internal change which Polman calls “identity development” (340) and Kula describes as the ability “to intuit . . . who we really are” 2000, 1).

As well as facilitating personal change, participation in re-enactment usually results in a strong community bonding. The experience of working together to create a common artistic product strengthens the bonds that are created through the relationships within the role. Religious ritual, with its re-enactment component, is a well-known way to deepen relationships among the group’s members:

People who light candles or participate in any of the other traditional rituals for Friday night often tell me that the act makes them feel connected to Jews throughout the world . . . . Indeed, creating a sense of
belonging to a greater community is one of the most important benefits of participating in any ritual. (Reuben 1992, 25)

Descriptions of the Seder supper show how re-enactments bind people together through time as well as distance. Jews in the Seder re-enactment are connected in new ways to their ancestors from the time of the Exodus, and to all those in the intervening centuries who have participated in the re-enactment meal. The ritual celebrating freedom from oppression unites the community, past and present, and invites people to change their behaviour in accordance with the principles inherent in the historical event:

Our challenge is to take up the Seder's invitation to become those characters in the story that stretch us . . . and, by transforming ourselves into the story's characters, learn how best to become a people that acts in the world in a manner that can bring the Exodus to all people. (Kula 2000, 3)

The re-enactment becomes both a means of individual transformation and a positive force for change in the greater community.

**Jesus' Use of Re-enactment: Building on Tradition**

The Seder meal is the re-enactment of the first Passover meal. As such, it was an integral part of Jesus' religious practice. As he celebrated the Passover just before his death, Jesus used the re-enactment to create a new, symbolic re-enactment for his disciples. He infused the Seder with additional meaning, creating another layer of memory through the symbols of bread and wine. The Lord's Supper, as the re-enactment became known, became a central feature of Christian gatherings in the early days of the church's formation: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread [an alternative phrase for the Lord's Supper]" (Ac 3:42). In churches throughout the world, it remains a pivotal point of Christian belonging: a communion for Jesus' learners that has overcome barriers of time, geography, ethnicity and culture.

Symbolic re-enactment is a particularly apt teaching tool for achieving Jesus' teaching goals because it can be instrumental in creating the type of
transformative change that Jesus hoped his learners would experience. By identifying with Jesus in his death, believers could experience anew the forgiveness of sins and the inner transformation required to live in the Kingdom of God. By using the two most common ingredients in a meal in that society—bread and wine—as symbols of his death and its consequences, Jesus took ordinary elements and created a sense of the supernatural aspect of his sacrificial death. He built on the original theme of the Seder re-enactment—redemptive freedom from oppression—to create a whole new understanding of freedom, without destroying the original experiential learning through the Passover re-enactment.

Because of its re-enactment aspect, ritual helps to create community feelings. The celebration of the Lord’s Supper becomes a focal point of commonality among followers of Jesus. One of his goals was that his learners would live in harmony with one another and with all others. Harmony often proves to be an elusive goal. Nevertheless, a community meal re-enacting two central events in the faith history of the group has the potential for lessening the divisions which so easily destroy unity. Jesus’ teaching about living harmoniously is reinforced every time his learners participate in the Lord’s Supper, removing barriers of time and space and providing distant learners with a community experience.

Prayer: The Cosmic Shift from Earth to Heaven

While recognizing the enormous variety among and within religions, the head of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community observes that prayer "is common to all religions. What differs is only the manner and style" (Ahmad 2003, 1). Prayer has been defined as “the solemn request or thanksgiving to God or an object of worship” (Canadian Oxford Dictionary, s.v. “prayer”). This definition highlights two aspects of prayer: it is a type of communication, and it involves someone or something beyond the one who prays.

The subject of prayer in education is currently a topic of vigorous controversy, particularly in the United States. However, for teachers of religion,
it is both appropriate and relevant to use prayer as a way of teaching and a way of setting the tone for certain learning experiences.

Throughout the gospel accounts of Jesus' life, frequent references to prayer highlight its importance in Jesus' life and thinking. In his busy days, he tried to find a time and place to pray. In the last days before his death, he begged his disciples to pray with him, as he sought strength for the ordeal he knew was coming. On the cross, his last words included a compassionate prayer for those who had engineered his death: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34). At his learners' request, Jesus taught a prayer for daily use, which is still widely used both as a liturgical prayer and as a pattern for the appropriate way to pray. Jesus used prayer as a way to remember his teaching, as a way to encourage unity among disciples, and as a hands-on demonstration of a practical aspect of living in the Kingdom.

**Prayer for Remembering**

For religious adherents, prayer is a way of repeating beliefs and, thus, committing them to memory and making them part of daily life. A web site, which explains the basic tenets of Islam, describes the place of prayer in a Muslim's day:

Prayer is a means to make mankind remember that there is a supreme power that we must not ignore. By having the prayer spread throughout the day, one is always involved in remembering God. You start your day remembering God and you end your day remembering God. And in the short period of the day, you remember God three other times.

(http://www.icgt.org/Pillar2.htm)

In every expression of religious faith, prayer continues to act as a refresher course keeping beliefs in the forefront of consciousness.

In the only recorded instance of Jesus teaching his learners a prayer, he gave them a short, easily memorized prayer, which introduces several themes and ideas that were pivotal in Jesus' teaching:

"Our Father, in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your Kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us each day our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
as we also have forgiven everyone who sins against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.” (Mt 6:9-13)

The theme of God’s Kingdom is prominent, a reminder to learners of Jesus’ extensive teaching on that subject. As well, this prayer includes three important ingredients in living harmoniously: dependence on God for basic needs (daily bread), thus reducing greed in the present and anxiety about the future; forgiving others and accepting the forgiveness of God, thus eliminating the desire for revenge; and resisting temptation through reliance on God’s power to protect from evil. The prayer is permeated with an understanding of the fatherly care of God, which was a theological concept present in the Jewish faith but one that Jesus brought into greater prominence.

The explicit purpose of the Lord’s Prayer was to teach a pattern of prayer. However, the gospels record other prayers of Jesus that reinforce the same themes. For example, Jesus urged his learners to forgive their enemies and pray for them, as he himself so powerfully did at his execution. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt points out the “radical” nature of Jesus’ understanding and practice of forgiveness:

The discoverer of the role of forgiveness in the realm of human affairs was Jesus of Nazareth. The fact that he made this discovery in a religious context and articulated it in religious language is no reason to take it less seriously in a secular sense... Jesus’ formulation is even more radical [than the idea that human beings must forgive one another]. Man in the gospel is not supposed to forgive because God forgives and must do “likewise”, but “if ye from your hearts forgive,” God shall do likewise. (1958, 238-239)

In the same way, Jesus’ understanding of the need to submit to God was part of the prayer he taught his disciples: “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt 6:10). It was also part of his own prayer in the garden of Gethsemane: “Your Kingdom come, your will be done.” He was “deeply
distressed and troubled" (Mk 14:33). He prayed: “Take this cup [his death] from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will” (Mk 14:36). Again, the intertwining of themes in the formal prayer for learners and the echoing of those ideas in Jesus’ personal prayers created a strong memory. The words were enhanced and reinforced by the actions of the teacher.

**Prayer for Creating Unity and Belonging**

Like other shared rituals such as liturgical re-enactment, prayer acts as a binding force that promotes a feeling of community. Prayer does not have the same visual and kinesthetic component as some other rituals; however, it has the advantage of being independent of circumstances and physical limitations. A learner can bring to mind the basic beliefs of his teacher expressed through a formal prayer in prison cells and hospital rooms: in any place, at any time, and in any circumstances. Jesus heightened the sense of community by beginning his prayer with “our.” By using the first person plural, he made the recitation of the prayer a community event, not just an individual plea. It unites learners with their teacher and with each other, thus shifting the focus away from purely personal concerns to a greater reality—the Kingdom of God. By teaching only one prayer, Jesus ensured its widespread use among his followers through time. Today it is used all over the world:

The Lord’s Prayer is a basic Christian prayer. As a model of prayer, every Christian learns it by heart. It appears everywhere in the church’s life: in its liturgy and sacraments, in public and private prayer.

(www.christusrex.org/wwwl/pater/-28k)

This web site provides the Lord’s Prayer in 1221 languages and dialects. It is used in all Christian denominations—a rare point of unanimity and one that demonstrates its effectiveness as a teaching tool.

Jesus’ personal prayers carried on the theme of unity that the Lord’s Prayer introduced. Just before he was arrested, Jesus prayed for his all his disciples, present and future: “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message that all of them may be one” (Jn 17:20). The unity that Jesus hoped for has proved elusive in the
history of the church, but the prayer he taught does offer his followers the opportunity to join with the community and to experience the harmonious living that was one of his teaching goals.

“This, then, is how you should pray.”

In giving his learners a formal prayer, Jesus was responding to a direct request: “Lord, teach us to pray” (Mt6: 9). As a result, disciples consider the prayer a template that sets out a basic pattern for other prayers. In his book With Christ in the School of Prayer, Murray calls it “a form of prayer that becomes the model and inspiration of all other prayer” (1965, 27). In his role as master to a group of apprentices, Jesus taught a technique and modeled that technique.

However, prayer was too important to Jesus to be confined to a lecture delivered in answer to a request. He prayed frequently and his own prayers were not formulaic. They modeled an attitude of humility and dependence on God and of love and forgiveness towards others. He reiterated the themes but not the specific format of the prayer he had given his disciples. In prayer, his words, his attitude and his actions formed a seamless unity. For Jesus, teaching techniques were more than instructions for “how to do”; they were about “how to be.” Prayer reinforced his teaching. It provided a model but, most importantly, it embodied the teaching itself at the deepest level.

Apprenticeship: An Age-old Model for Learning

Jesus’ teaching goals were the same for all his learners: a new way of thinking, acting, feeling, and being. However, he had an inner circle of disciples whom he had gathered together to live with him and to continue to teach his message after his death. His purpose with this group was twofold: first to ensure their understanding of his message, and secondly to turn them into teachers: “He appointed them—designating them as apostles—that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach” (Mk 3:14). In doing so Jesus was following the ancient tradition of teaching by apprenticeship. His
choice of this model for teaching how to teach was justified by the results: eleven adult learners, already established in other professions, became such effective teachers that they helped to change the world.

**An Old Model Gets a New Look**

The apprenticeship model has its roots in antiquity. In a natural and unorganized fashion, it has been the mainstay of teaching all manner of skills and professions: "For many centuries most people learned by working alongside an expert who modeled skilled practice and guided novices" (Institute for Learning 2003, 1). However, among educational theorists in the western world, apprenticeship has frequently been relegated to situations requiring manual skills. It has been downplayed as a way to learn complex cognitive skills. Recently this situation has begun to change:

The apprenticeship model of learning was ubiquitous across cultures. Western schooling, with its de-emphasis on apprenticeship learning, is an exception. In recent years, however, there has been a renewed interest in it by many researchers and practitioners in cognitive science and education. (CAST 2003, 1)

One of the reasons for this trend is the recognition that learning to do a particular job involves much more than acquiring a set of manual skills. For all aspects of living, not just holding a job, training should include problem-solving, critical thinking, and personal relationship skills. For this type of learning, apprentices observe their teachers in real life situations, coping with the multi-layered requirements of a job. Such teaching has a dimension impossible to replicate in artificial learning situations.

Researchers now consider that skill acquisition is only a small part of what an apprentice learns. The more important component is a type of identity formation. In an article urging the re-conceptualization of this way of learning, Fuller and Unwin call apprenticeship "an international concept which provides a structure within which young people can learn and, most importantly, demonstrate their abilities and potential whilst, at the same time, discovering their identity" (1998, 153). They claim that "work-based learning should be
recognized as a transforming as well as a functional process” (153) and emphasize the intrinsic unity in learning skills and acquiring a new identity (159). Learning how to be is a vital component in apprenticeship.

**Jesus and his Apprentices**

Jesus offered his disciples the opportunity to become his disciples by calling to them, “Come, follow me” (Mk 1:17). Their apprenticeship was to be informal — Jesus did not set up a school for students — but comprehensive and life-changing. For the next few years after they joined Jesus’ group, they lived with him as he moved from place to place; they observed his interactions with all manner of people; they heard all of his teaching, including explanations that he gave to them and not to the larger crowd. In teaching everyone how to be in the Kingdom of God, Jesus was teaching his disciples how to change their identity to be workers in the Kingdom. By allowing them to live with him, Jesus was fulfilling the criteria laid down by Fuller and Unwin for apprenticeship learning, which included “ensuring that individuals have access to theoretical and experiential knowledge” (1998, 161). He also sent them off in groups of two for a teaching practicum (Lk 10:1-23), thus giving them “the chance to develop their critical and intellectual capacities through the application of concepts and theories in practice” (161). As they watched his interaction with learners and experienced the learning atmosphere he created, they learned people skills. They saw in real situations a teacher who was compassionate, challenging, and compelling even in difficult circumstances.

**The Humour of Jesus: More than Jokes**

Provided it is not used to hurt or humiliate other people, a sense of humour is a winsome quality. In teaching, it is an antidote to boredom and a way to create a congenial atmosphere. However, it also helps learners to look at familiar ideas with new eyes—a necessary ingredient in developing critical thinking skills. It is a teaching tool with great potential. Until recently Jesus’ extensive use of humour has been a neglected aspect of his teaching, partly
because it is often obscured by translation from the original languages into modern ones, and partly because of a fear of irreverence. However, Jesus used puns, hyperbole, and irony to convey important teaching. His humour had a pedagogical intent and furthered his teaching goals.

The discovery of humour by academics

The academic world has discovered humour: its power and effectiveness, its subtlety and subversiveness. The medical profession offers this list of the benefits of laughter for physical well-being:

Laughter, like exercise, increases the normal breathing rhythm. As muscular tension, blood pressure, and heart rate increase, so does the amount of oxygen in the blood. When laughter subsides, the resulting sense of relaxation helps combat depression, high blood pressure and heart disease. Laughter also releases endomorphins, which act to reduce pain. Finally, laughing increases the immunoglobulin A in saliva which helps the immune system fight off disease. (Morain 2001, 116)

Psychologists contribute information about “the positive psychological effects of laughter [which] include reduced anxiety and stress, greater self esteem, and increased self motivation” (Deiter 1998, 2). Not all humour results in laughter, but a humorous approach to life is conducive to laughter and all the attendant benefits.

Educators are also investigating humour as an important ingredient in establishing a helpful learning environment. In his article “Why Use Humour in the Classroom”, Deiter notes that humour can contribute to “breaking barriers to communication between professors and students . . . Humour can help students retain subject matter . . . create a more positive, fun, interesting environment that promotes class attendance and student learning” (1998, 1). In a book entitled Extraordinary Teachers: The Essence of Excellent Teaching (Stephenson 2001), two of the award-winning contributors detail the benefits of humour in teaching. Morain, whose article is subtitled “Humour as a Welcome Guest in the Classroom”, claims that “humour helps us control our feelings of aggression . . . [and] provides a defensive mechanism that helps us deal with our worst anxieties: fear of failure, tragedy, and death” (117). She also suggests
that humour is a “cognitive as well as a social skill” because “humour smoothes social encounters, develops a tolerance for ambiguity and change, and reduces stress. It also fosters creative problem-solving, divergent thinking, and risk-taking” (118). Another article in the same book, “Creating an Environment for Teaching and Learning” points out that humour “goes beyond telling an occasional joke” and is “a powerful teaching tool when used to present conflicting points of view” (Broder, 2001, 63).

Humour benefits teachers as well as learners. Kaufman, who presents workshops on humour for educators, has noticed that humour “gives us [educators] a different perspective on our problems, and with an attitude of detachment, we feel a sense of self-protection and control” (2002, 2).

Given all the evidence for humour’s effectiveness, it is not surprising to find that a sense of humour is often mentioned as a desirable quality in a teacher. The contributors to Extraordinary Teachers (Stephenson 2001) mention it again and again (41, 63, 84, 87, 104, 115-123, 205, 221, 235). However, humour needs to be carefully used. It can actually be counterproductive, especially if directed at others in a derogatory way. Apps cautions teachers:

Humor is not humor when it demeans someone . . . Humor is a very personal thing. How you use it is very much a part of you . . . Some people are probably not meant to be funny. But I think most of us have a humorous streak within us, and I believe most learners do too. (1991,78)

As a tool for teaching, humour must be authentic and kindly.

The Rediscovery of Jesus’ Humour

Like effective teachers today, Jesus not only used humour as a teaching tool, but also looked humorously at life around him. Until recently, this concept was jarring to many, particularly within the church. Using her own brand of humour, Sayers describes this tendency to deny aspects of Jesus’ personality as part of a bigger trend to remake Jesus into a more socially acceptable figure:
The people who hanged Christ never, to do them justice, accused him of being a bore—on the contrary, they thought Him too dynamic to be safe. It has been left for later generations to muffle up that shattering personality and surround Him with an atmosphere of tedium... He displayed a paradoxical sense of humour that affronted serious-minded people. (1949, 5)

Trueblood attributes the church’s failure to notice Jesus’ sense of humour to two factors: an over-familiarity with the text which makes it difficult to come to the accounts with freshness and an “overriding interest” (1964, 19) in the sobering events of the week leading up to the crucifixion. Friedeman also mentions the problem of familiarity, combined with the presence of preconceived ideas:

We have often developed a false pattern of Christ’s character... if we sit down before the facts as a little child, with a minimum of presupposition we come out with a radically different conception. Learning with Jesus reads like a playful adventure story. (1990, 178)

Several theologians have observed that recognizing Jesus’ sense of humour makes it much easier to understand troubling parts of his teaching: “The amount of self-torture Christian scholars could have saved themselves by the mere willingness to contemplate the possibility of Christ’s banter is phenomenal” (Trueblood 1964, 109). Since the publication of Trueblood’s book, *The Humor of Christ*, other writers have recognized the reality of Jesus’ humour and the light it casts on his teaching (Cormier 1977), (Gangel and Hendricks 1988), (Stein 1978), (Phipps 1993), (Gabel, Wheeler, and York 2000). The application of literary analysis to the New Testament has heightened awareness of the need to read the accounts of Jesus’ teaching through more than one lens in order to appreciate the complexity of his sayings and the variety of approaches he used, including humour, to convey his message. According to Trueblood, Jesus did not lose sight of the primary purpose of teaching, even when using humorous illustrations or raising a chuckle with wry irony: “The evident purpose of Christ’s humor is to clarify and increase understanding” (1965, 51).
Jesus' sense of humour showed through the seriousness of his subject material in various ways: puns, hyperbole, and irony. These devices were part of the arsenal with which Jesus encouraged his learners to look afresh at their attitudes and behaviour. His goal of helping his learners to think critically and change internally was well served by the use of humour. A look at each of these devices helps to show how their use contributed to teaching certain concepts and to the general learning atmosphere that Jesus created.

**Puns: Wordplay with a Purpose**

For many years, neither biblical scholars nor ordinary readers of the gospels understood that some of the sayings of Jesus are puns. The problem arose because puns are notoriously difficult to translate from one language to another, since they are based on homonyms. One scholar describes the problem:

*The use of puns by Jesus is frequently not evident in an English, or for that matter, any other translation of the Bible. In fact, such puns are usually not evident in the Greek New Testament in the case of homonyms, since the pun was originally uttered by Jesus in Aramaic and the corresponding homonyms in Aramaic rarely remain homonyms in translation. (Stein 1978, 13)*

An example of Jesus' punning is found in the new name, Peter, which he gives to his new disciple, Simon. Jesus said that Peter would be the rock on which he [Jesus] would build his church (Mt 16:18). The pun works in both Greek and Aramaic, which would have enhanced its impact on Jesus' learners:

*The play on words in this saying is evident also in Greek, where the terms “petros” and “petra” are used respectively for “Peter” and “rock.” In Aramaic, however, the play on words is even more pronounced, since the same term “kepha” served as both the proper name and the word. (Stein 1978,13-4)*

Another pun is found in Jesus condemnation of religious hypocrisy in the gospel of Matthew. He tells the Pharisees that they have observed the law strictly but without the more important qualities of “justice, mercy, and
truthfulness” (Mt 23: 23). Referring to the ceremonial straining of their drinks lest they accidentally swallow a ritually unclean insect, he says, “You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel” (Mc 23: 24). Stein points out the pun: “Jesus’ use of the term ‘camel’ is due to the fact that in Aramaic ‘camel’ and ‘gnat’ look alike and sound alike. In Aramaic the word for gnat is ‘galma’ and the word for camel is ‘gamla’” (1978, 13). This quotation also illustrates the fragility of puns; they rarely survive translation or academic explanation. About this particular pun, Trueblood claims: “We lose in translation some of the intended wit, but it does not follow that we miss the deeper humour when it appears . . . The swallowing of a camel is funny in any language” (1964, 34).

In this example, the juxtaposition of a camel and a gnat reinforces Broder’s claim that humour can effectively shatter preconceived ideas and allow new ideas to take root (2001, 63). Jesus confronted the Pharisees with the discrepancy between their meticulous law-keeping and the spirit of the law, which they seemed to miss entirely. He needed to jolt their complacency and help them to see themselves in a new way, which is exactly what humour can achieve: “Humour enables us to view ourselves with great objectivity and to think about things from other people’s perspectives” (Morain 2001, 118).

**Hyperbole: Derailing the Humdrum Train of Thought**

As a literary device, hyperbole serves several purposes: it paints a highly exaggerated picture in order to surprise and amuse the listener; it allows the listener to believe a reality by depicting a greater falsehood; and it lets the listener into the world of the narrator through a sympathetic appreciation of the narrator’s perspective. For example, a hyperbolic statement—“The bear which came towards me was three stories tall”—arrests the listeners’ attention by its absurdity. It allows the listener to believe that the bear was extremely large, even while recognizing that the “three stories” is patently false. Hyperbole helps the listener to feel and see from the narrator’s perspective, to sympathetically enter into the world where bears appear three stories tall, both visually and by the emotion they create. Carefully used, hyperbole moves the listener from a state of disbelief to a state of sympathy and identification with
the narrator. The listener has been taken out of one groove of thinking and placed in another.

According to Stein, Jesus’ use of hyperbole is “characteristic of Semitic speech” (1978, 8). It certainly produces some startling images: a lustful man plucking out his eye (Mk 9:47), a camel struggling to go through the eye of a needle (Mt 19:24), a person tossing valuable pearls to a herd of pigs (Mt 7:6). One memorable use of hyperbole came as Jesus admonished those with a judgmental spirit. He asked, “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, “Let me take the speck out of your eye?” when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?” (Mt 7:3-4). The hyperbole creates a cartoon-like image of a large piece of lumber sticking out of someone’s face. The discrepancy between the self-righteous do-gooder and his less handicapped brother amuses the listener but also creates new ways of thinking about attitudes and actions.

Another example from Mark’s gospel demonstrates both the drawbacks and the advantages of using hyperbole as a teaching tool: “But Jesus said again, ‘Children, how hard it is to enter the Kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God’” (Mk 10:24b-25). Taken literally, this saying suggests that no rich person can enter God’s Kingdom. However, Jesus next words allow for the possibility of rich people being included: “With God nothing is impossible.” Jesus welcomed rich people such as Zaccheus, the tax collector. When Bible interpreters have been unwilling or unable to consider the saying as a humorous exaggeration, they have had difficulty with the contradiction. After discussing two extreme interpretations, Stein concludes: “Jesus is clearly using hyperbolic language, for while it is simply impossible for a large animal to go through the eye of a needle, it is not altogether for a rich man to be saved” (Stein, 1978, 12). Once learners recognize the presence of hyperbole, the meaning is clear; the images are memorable; the teaching sticks in the minds of the learner; the hyperbole has been successful as a teaching tool.
Irony: A Study in Contrasts

Irony is usually classified as humour, although it may also contain a dark or tragic side to it. Stein defines irony as “the subtle use of contrast between what is actually stated and what is more or less wryly stated” (1978, 22). He distinguishes between two types of irony and finds examples of both in Jesus’ teaching. In the story of the rich fool (Lk 12:16-20), for example, the irony results from “an event or result that is opposite to what one would normally expect: [the] unexpected and surprising conclusion to the elaborately made plans of the rich man” (Stein 1978, 22). A certain element of black humour comes from the contrast between the complacency of the greedy man and his swift demise. The irony of the unexpected also creates a humorous twist in the parable of the Good Samaritan: “The irony here is the reversal of roles—the devout of Israel [the Levite and the priest] are the villains and the despicable half-breed and rebel [the Samaritan] is the hero” (23).

A second type of irony exists when “the intended meaning [of a statement] is opposite of the literal meaning” (22). An example is found in Luke 7: 34-35. Jesus’ critics are complaining that he is associating with “sinners”, even enjoying their company. He describes these self-righteous critics as “wisdom’s children” (v 35), even though he had just pointed out their folly. Such humour depends, at least in part, on the tone of voice and the context. In a written account much of the impact is lost. However, the end result remains, as Trueblood says, “the unmasking of error and, thereby, the emergence of truth” (1964, 53).

As a teacher, Jesus also used irony to point out the possibility of change and of reversing the irony so that what is not true becomes true. As well as using a pun, Jesus’ renaming of Peter is an example of using irony to encourage change. Trueblood describes the ironic nature of the pun:

Jesus gave Simon the fisherman the most improbable of nicknames. In our terminology, he called the fellow “Rocky” . . . The paradox is obvious, for Simon was anything but stable or durable, which is what rocky things are supposed to be. (1964, 63)
However, the name was more than a pun; it was also a hint to Peter about what he could become:

The humorous nickname “Rocky” was a prediction of future stability, even though, at the time, it was patently absurd. At the moment it must have seemed like our practice of calling the fat man ‘slim’ and the tall man ‘shorty.’ But it was more than that. The very irony served a redemptive purpose, in that the power of expectancy was demonstrated by the revolutionary result. (Trueblood 1964, 64)

Eventually, Peter became a foundational member of the early church and was a source of strength to others. Like the other ironic words of Jesus, this change of name had a purpose beyond eliciting a smile or chuckle from his learners. His use of irony created puzzles for the learner. Through the questions it raised, it led the learner to think, to probe, and, in the case of Peter, to change internally to become what he had not been before.

“Silence is Golden”

As it is usually practiced in Western cultures, the teaching of adults is a word-based and sound-filled profession. The proliferation of the lecture method ensures that learning situations are filled with the sound of the teacher. Where learners are more actively participating, they generate even more sound. Frequently, little time is left for quiet reflection. Because most learners live in a sound-saturated environment, the concept of silence in the learning situation may be foreign. Even for those who recognized the need for silence, the reality of silence may prove disconcerting. Both learners and teachers may view silence as failure, either through the lack of skill in the teacher or lack of enthusiasm in the learners. However, carefully used, silence is a powerful tool: it encourages listening, removes barriers between teacher and learner, and creates space for ways of knowing beyond word-based cognition.

Teaching in the Spaces

Teachers who fear a repressive silence may equate noise with active learning. However, sometimes educators need to step back from activity and
reconsider the possibilities of silence. In her article, “Silence, Listening, Teaching and the Space that is Not”, Mosher suggests the danger of too little silence:

There are many times in teaching when it seems that we live in the midst of a din we ourselves have created and can no longer hear, a constant noise that may interfere with our hearing what it is we talk about, what it is we wish to understand. (Mosher 2001, 368)

The noise of busyness may distract a teacher from remembering the original goals of the learning experience and inhibit the learning that was intended.

Silence has acquired a taint of negativity, the suggestion of failure. Palmer describes the way teachers often experience it:

When I ask faculty to name the biggest obstacle to good teaching, they often say “bad students.” The hallmark of bad students, known to all who teach, is silence: that vast, stupefying, terrifying silence that comes over our classes whenever we ask a question. (1997, 3)

He suggests that such silence is not due to “indifference, cynicism, or hostility” (3), but “is a silence born of fear” (3), the fear that arises from the relative powerlessness of students.

Whatever its root causes, silence can be intimidating to both teachers and learners. However, looking at silence more positively offers teachers interesting possibilities. Mosher discusses silence as a tool to enhance listening to learners: “It is not just in the absence of talk we hear in silence, but the presence of listening” (2001, 366). Of course, silence alone cannot create a receptive listener. Listening can be a negative activity. Looking at her own need to extract certain information from students for the purposes of evaluation, Mosher expresses the fear that she is “listening in a way that narrows the world for my students, that makes it a more difficult place in which to live” (366). She suggests that, along with silence, the teacher needs to offer a relinquishment of self that allows the other to speak freely: “When we create a listening we de-center our concerns and ourselves. We give ourselves over to what may take place in the silence. We yield to it. We become players in an
event of understanding” (368). In a learning situation, silence is like a blank space in an academic thesis:

The reader is left wondering, Is it a mistake? Am I supposed to do something, feel something, or think something? The end result for the learner may be discomfort, embarrassment, surprise, disapproval, or the excitement born of possibility. Misunderstanding is possible, but so is a new understanding. As Mosher documents, the results are encouraging, especially in helping the vulnerable, the outsiders who “most need the spaciousness of silence . . . who don’t easily fit the normally available spaces” (2001, 366).

Silence can begin to break down the barriers that exist between teacher and learner. It suggests that the teacher does not have all the answers, that some questions may have no answers expressible in words. A teacher who refrains from jumping in with answers or comments, even though they are erudite and profound comments, relinquishes some of the power he or she holds and gives to the learners the possibility of discovering and understanding without spoken words. Even a hint of such a possibility, a brief span of minutes, can open the doors for both teachers and learners to enter “into the space differently, to welcome what else may come forth” (Mosher 2001, 369).

The Startling Silence of Jesus

From the gospels’ description, the learning environment in New Testament times was a word-based one. Boisterous argument, comments from the crowds, spirited debate, and clever verbal exchange marked the intellectual encounters between Jesus and his learners. Jesus’ sparring with the Pharisees
and the teachers of the law reveals the emphasis on logic, verbal dexterity, and one-upmanship characteristic of the time. In this environment, Jesus’ silences are striking, especially considering that he never appeared at a loss for words or lacked the verbal skills to interact with the most learned scholars of the day.

The first recorded incident describes a scene of explosive emotions and life-and-death urgency:

At dawn he [Jesus] appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.” Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left. (Jn 8:2-9)

Jesus was a renowned religious teacher; everyone expected him to have a clear, moral answer. He had taught about sexual morality, setting a high standard for thought and behaviour. How would he answer their question? His silence was deliberate. By ignoring the questions, he handed back to them the decision about the woman’s fate. However, his comment transformed their decision into a reflection of their own morality. His silence gave an opportunity for self-reflection and analysis. His comment gave direction to their thoughts. Jesus wanted them to put aside their outrage at the woman’s immorality. His silence forced them to examine their own lives and their own behaviour. No one can teach the process that Jesus wanted his learners to experience: self-examination, recognition of their own shortcomings, and compassion for others. However, a teacher can provide the opportunity and the space for such learning. In this incident, each of Jesus’ learners recognized his own hypocrisy
and went away. Each had experienced a unique opportunity for profound learning—the gift of Jesus’ silence.

Summary of Chapter 3

Teachers cannot ignore the question of which techniques to use to facilitate learning. In every context, they must decide how to teach. Whether they lecture, ask questions, or create space for silent listening, teachers are promoting learning by one means or another. Jesus used a wide range of teaching techniques, each of which furthered some aspects of his teaching goals. Parables, questioning, and poetry all helped to develop critical thinking skills, enabling learners to think in new ways. Poetry and parables also provided strong memory aids. Similarly, re-enactment encouraged remembering and, along with parables, allowed learners to step into the minds and hearts of other people, increasing empathy and breaking down barriers between different groups of people, thus encouraging the harmonious living which was another of Jesus’ teaching goals. Jesus made use of humour, which also created unity as people laughed together, but which challenged them to think creatively. Even Jesus’ lectures were filled with educational encounters outside the ordinary, as he put the needs of individual learners ahead of the sanctity of the lecture format. In using apprenticeship as a teaching technique, Jesus opened his life to the scrutiny of his disciples, turning them into teachers who carried his message to the far reaches of the known world. He used prayer to emphasize unity and to model humility. For Jesus, even silence became a powerful tool to create an unforgettable learning experience. Although techniques tell only part of the story of a teacher’s effectiveness, their use by Jesus suggests that they can help achieve teaching goals, particularly when those goals include change in the affective domain. Figure 4 on page 99 provides biblical references for examples of how Jesus’ use of techniques furthered his teaching goals.
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Figure 4. Different techniques for different goals.
CHAPTER 4
CREATION OF A LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Introduction

Teaching techniques represent different ways to offer material to learners. Although they can make a significant contribution to the creation of the learning environment, they remain merely tools, dependent upon the one who uses them. A fork can be used to dig deeply into the soil in preparation for planting, or it can be misused as a weapon to inflict pain. Whatever tool a teacher chooses to use, the teaching environment depends on the attitude and the character of the teacher. In looking at a teacher from the past, especially one who left no written record of his opinions of teaching, the perspective can only be shown by describing the teacher’s interaction with learners.

A remarkable feature of Jesus’ teaching was its accessibility. He taught everyone who came to hear him; he taught under adverse circumstances; he even fed his learners so that they could stay and hear more. He actively worked to remove barriers to participation. To promote intellectual accessibility and an atmosphere of inquiry, Jesus both asked and answered questions. His array of teaching techniques encouraged learning in those with different abilities and learning styles. Jesus made his teaching emotionally accessible for learners by creating an encouraging and hospitable environment where learners’ needs were met. As the primary facilitator, Jesus used his authority humbly. He shaped the environment through his courage, compassion, and conviviality. Above all, he lived a life of integrity, convincing many that he was the Son of God, as he claimed.

Physical Accessibility: Teaching Everyone, Everywhere, All the Time

The description of Jesus in the New Testament gospels shows a teacher who made himself available to his learners to an extraordinary extent. By
calling his disciples to follow him and travel with him while he taught, he gave them complete access to his public teaching, as well as many opportunities to learn privately. Even some of those who were not among his closest followers traveled with him for at least part of the time (Mt 27:55). Beyond this wider circle were thousands of others who flocked to hear his teaching. He seemed to put no restrictions on his learners, except for certain times when he tried to find rest and quiet. Even then, he often taught when he was tired because he felt his learners' needs were so great (Mt 9:26). By not having a school in a fixed location and by taking advantage of “teachable moments” (Gunn 1998, 93-95) he taught everywhere he went. It was “learning en route—not with paper and pencil but through the application of lessons in the real world” (Friedeman 1990, 79).

The wide range of people who became his learners included people of different ages, professions, classes, and religious/ethnic groups. Some were eager and enthusiastic: Zaccheus climbed a tree in order to see him better and responded wholeheartedly to his message (Lk 19: 1-9). Others came in secret, afraid to be identified as his learners (Jn 3:2). Some came to mock and entrap him into making unwise and politically dangerous statements (Jn 8:48). Jesus’ commitment to teach everyone who wanted to learn often meant that he put learners’ needs before his own (Mk 6:31-34). Nowhere do the gospels record that he turned away people who wanted to learn, although some left of their own accord. The crowds who followed him pressed him constantly with demands. Several times his disciples urged him to ignore people who, in their view, did not matter—children and Gentiles—but Jesus made no such distinction. He refused to stay in one place, even when pressed to do so. The tension between his own need for rest and recuperation and the overwhelming needs of learners is expressed in the incident described by Luke’s gospel:

At daybreak Jesus went out to a solitary place. The people were looking for him and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them. But he said, “I must preach the good news of the Kingdom of God to the other towns also.” (Lk 4:42-44)
Jesus evidenced urgency about teaching which was conveyed to his listeners by his words and actions, and which was a hallmark of his teaching.

Jesus demonstrated how a determined teacher can help remove the barriers to participation in educational experiences. When the crowds grew so large that people would have difficulty seeing and hearing him, he got into a boat and taught from an offshore position. He cared for the physical needs of his learners, showing more concern for their hunger than they did themselves (Mk 8:1-3). He deliberately reached out to the marginalized in society, including those who were shunned and despised by respectable people. In doing so, he endured criticism and slander as other people misunderstood or disapproved of his actions. He overcame geographical barriers by taking his teaching to those who lived in other places. In a society that barred women from formal education, he included women among his learners, sometimes deliberately seeking them out (Jn 4:1-7). He ignored the strong prohibition against having contact with Gentiles, again initiating relationships with non-Jews. In all his actions, he tried to be “present” to his learners. Geographically and socially, he took his message to where people were, deliberately crossing boundaries to encourage participation.

Intellectual Accessibility: Something for Everyone

Teachers like Jesus try to remove physical and social barriers to learning, but they also create a good learning climate by their intellectual accessibility. While this quality is difficult to define, those who possess it are attractive as teachers. Learners are eager to experience such teaching and enthusiastic in urging others, as Jesus’ learners did, to “come and see” (Jn 1:46). In Jesus, this quality showed itself in three ways: in his willingness to listen to his learners’ questions and address them, in his use of widely varied teaching techniques, and in his acknowledgment that not everyone would agree with him—giving his learners the freedom to digest what he said and reject it if they wished. In each of these ways, he encouraged learners with different learning styles while respecting their freedom of choice.
Questions: An Essential Ingredient

Jesus' use of questions to prod his learners into new ways of thinking is a striking characteristic of his teaching. His openness to learners' questions is equally remarkable. According to Stimson, "One half of the teaching incidents were initiated by the learners themselves (1993, 77). The questions include theological concerns—"What must I do to get eternal life?" (Mt 19:18), questions about Jesus' personal life style—"Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" (Lk 5:30), and queries about his educational decisions—"Why do you speak to the people in parables?" (Mt 13:10). The questions were sometimes belligerent, designed to trap him into saying something politically inflammatory—"Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" (Mt 22:17). Often they were critical—"Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat?" (Mt 15:2). The disciples asked questions about everyday living—"Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? (Mt 18:21) and about their relationship with him—"Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" (Mk 4:38). Everywhere he went, people questioned Jesus.

Except for the occasions when he used silence as a teaching tool, Jesus addressed all of the questions which people asked. Sometimes, he asked questions in response in order to stimulate further thinking (Lk 2:49). At other times, he addressed a deeper issue beyond what the question appeared to be about (Jn 5:6). Usually, however, he answered their questions with careful, thought-provoking replies. Although he was sometimes surprised and perhaps annoyed by learners' lack of understanding (Mk 7:18), he was patient in explaining his teaching, especially with those who expressed a genuine desire to learn. To those with less worthy motives, he was sometimes curt, and more likely to present an argumentative reply (Mk 7:6-8). His mode of answer depended on the learner. Manson notes that, when he was expounding in the synagogue, "he certainly used the exegetical methods and terminology of the Rabbinical schools" (1963, 50). However, with ordinary people, his answers
expressed kindliness and compassion (Mk 1:41) and he taught in ways that were more accessible to everyone.

The numbers of learners who flocked around Jesus and asked him questions suggest that he was extremely approachable. However, at times, his learners hesitated to question him. Luke records one such incident:

While everyone was marveling at all that Jesus did, he said to his disciples, “Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you: The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men.” But they did not understand what he meant. It was hidden from them, so that they did not grasp it, and they were afraid to ask him about it. (Lk 9:43-45)

The gospel writer does not explain why the disciples were afraid. Perhaps they did not want to face the terrible possibility that Jesus would be killed. Perhaps, as the phrase “it was hidden from them” suggests that the writer felt that a spiritual blindness kept them from understanding, but that their fear was connected to coming events. Possibly, the preceding incident made them hesitate. Jesus had cried out as he was yet again misunderstood, “O unbelieving and perverse generation . . . how long shall I stay with you and put up with you?” (Lk 9:41). If his followers were daunted into silence by his comment, their hesitation was uncharacteristic. Normally, his willingness to answer their questions gave them every encouragement to approach him with the expectation that he would listen and respond.

**Variety: The Spice of Intellectual Accessibility**

Jesus’ accessibility as a teacher is nowhere more evident than in the variety of teaching tools he used to convey his message. Each of these tools furthered his teaching goals. However, many of them also contributed to the learning climate he created. Just as his receptivity to learners’ questions increased his accessibility, his ability to ask appropriate questions helped to create an atmosphere of intellectual inquiry. His humour reduced the inevitable barriers that exist between teacher and learner. Through parables and metaphors, Jesus encouraged his learners to look at ideas from different perspectives, building an atmosphere of cooperative learning. Parables open
the way for different interpretations and multi-layered meaning. Learners, in puzzling over the meaning, become active pursuers of knowledge and understanding. Re-enactment enhances a feeling of unity and purpose among learners. In using the apprenticeship model for some of his teaching, Jesus empowered them to follow his example and gave them encouragement when they returned from their practicum (Lk 9:10). Through his choice of teaching tools, Jesus crafted a learning environment in which active, eager learners had wide scope for different avenues of learning.

A New Theory, an Old Idea, and an Effective Teacher

In using such variety of teaching tools, Jesus made his ideas available to people who learn best in an environment that is not entirely dominated by lectures or any single strategy. In recent years, educators have become more aware of the need to recognize and accommodate the wide variety of ways by which people access information and acquire skills. Since Howard Gardner first published his research on the theory of multiple intelligences in 1983, many educators have used his ideas as a framework for discussing different ways of learning. According to Gardner each type of intelligence responds best to a particular kind of teaching. His first list of intelligences included visual/spatial, verbal/linguistic, logical/ mathematical, bodily/kinesthetic, musical/rhythmic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal (1983). Later, Gardner added naturalist and existentialist intelligences to his list (1999). Looking at Jesus’ teaching in light of this theory helps to explain how the different tools he used allowed him to create an optimal learning climate.

According to Gardner’s theory, those with visual/spatial intelligence “tend to think in pictures and need to create vivid mental images to retain information . . . their skills include creating visual metaphors and analogies” (Learning Disabilities Pride 2003, 5). These learners would find reenactment an aid to learning because of its strong visual component. Jesus’ use of metaphors and parables is ideally suited to this kind of learner. For example, in the series of metaphors recorded in the gospel of John— “I am the good shepherd” (Jn 10:14), “I am the light of the world” (Jn 8:12), “I am the bread of life” (Jn
6:35)—each metaphor presents a single memorable, visual image from which meaning and insight can be elicited over time. For those who “think in word pictures” (5), Jesus’ teaching is a treasure trove of possibilities.

On the other hand, those with verbal/linguistic intelligence “have highly developed auditory skills . . . They think in words rather than pictures . . . Their skills include . . . using humour, understanding the syntax and meaning of words” (Learning Disabilities Pride 2003, 5). Such learners would learn more easily in a setting where puns and hyperbole were part of the learning environment. They would be able to appreciate the complexity of Jesus’ theological debates with the Pharisees. For example, Jesus told Nicodemus, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again” (Jn 2:24). He then offers an explanation that involves analogies based on physical realities (the water of physical birth, the invisible wind which people cannot control) and spiritual truth. He uses biblical allusions—Moses lifting a snake in the desert (v14)—and vivid contrasts—“Light has come into the world, but men love darkness instead of light” (v 19). Jesus’ clever use of epigrams and poetry would give verbal/linguistic learners scope for absorbing his teaching and passing it along to others. The list of professions suitable for people with this kind of intelligence includes “poet, journalist, writer, teacher, lawyer, politician, and translator” (Learning Disabilities Pride 2003, 5). Jesus’ learners included people from each of these categories. For example, the apostle John started out as a fisherman, became a disciple of Jesus, and ended up writing Revelations, a book of great poetic beauty. Farrar describes it as “the one great poem which the first Christian age produced” (1949, 16). Jesus’ finely crafted way of speaking would have appealed to the “highly developed auditory skills” (Learning Disabilities Pride 2003, 5) of those with verbal and linguistic intelligence.

Learners with logical/mathematical intelligence are skilled at “making connections between pieces of information. Always curious about the world around them, these learners ask lots of questions” (5). Jesus’ willingness to answer questions, as well as posing his own questions, would be attractive to these learners. For example, Mark describes an incident when Jesus spoke in
metaphoric language which the disciples did not understand: “‘Be careful,’ Jesus warned them. Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod” (Mk 8:14). The disciples thought he was talking about their negligence. Instead of explaining, Jesus asked a series of questions leading them to think on a different plane—“Why are you thinking about having no bread?” (v 17). He reminded them that he was talking about spiritual issues and spiritual understanding—“‘Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see and ears but fail to hear?’” (v 17-18). The open-ended nature of Jesus’ discourse—parables left unexplained and metaphors leaving room for ideas to grow—would allow such learners to exercise their skills in “working with abstract concepts to figure out the relationship of each to the other” (Learning Disabilities Pride 2003, 5).

Bodily/kinesthetic intelligence makes its possessors more likely to be short-changed by teaching that is word-based and abstract: “These learners express themselves through movement . . . Through interacting with the space around them, they are able to remember and process information” (6). An appropriate teaching tool for learners in this group is apprenticeship. Jesus gave his disciples the “hands on experimentation” (6) that works well for these learners. His use of re-enactment would also be helpful because it encourages “expressing emotions through the body” (6), one of these skills possessed by those with bodily/kinesthetic intelligence. The liturgical re-enactment of the Passover meal involves eating and drinking, physical activities that are imbued with spiritual meaning. The whole body and all the senses are involved: the hearing of the words that Jesus gave his disciples to repeat, the speaking of words in response, touching the bread and feeling the weight of the drinking cup, smelling and tasting the bread and wine. The inescapable physicality of this re-enactment would provide a profound learning experience for those who learn through the actions of their bodies.

Jesus’ teaching also provided a rich learning experience for those with musical/rhythmic intelligence who “think in sounds, rhythms and patterns” (6). With its dual nature as poetry and pattern, the Lord’s Prayer would be an appropriate learning technique for this group. The parallel construction of all
his poetry would satisfy their musical instincts and provide a unique avenue of learning. An example of a richly textured poetic saying is found in the gospel of Luke:

“Do not judge and you will not be judged.  
Do not condemn and you will not be condemned.  
Forgive and you will be forgiven.  
Give and it will be given to you.  
A good measure  
Pressed down  
Shaken together  
And running over  
Will be poured in your lap.  
For with the measure you use,  
It will be measured to you.” (Lk 6:37-38)

This poem has parallel construction both within the lines and between the lines. It has an interesting shift of verb mood and tense: from present imperative (“Do not judge”) to future passive (“You will not be judged”). Emotionally, it moves from negative to positive. It contains a metaphor likening the generosity experienced by the generous to an abundant supply of food, such as wheat or oil—staples of the diet in that region. The metaphor has rich connotative power of harvest time, a joyful and celebratory event if the harvest were plentiful. This small poem has powerful teaching about spiritual and social behaviour and attitude; it is easily remembered; its images are evocative. For learners with musical/rhythmic intelligence, it is an effective avenue for learning.

People with interpersonal intelligence “try to see things from other people’s points of view in order to understand how they think and feel” (Learning Disabilities Pride 2003, 6). For such learners, Jesus’ use of parables would provide ample opportunity to develop their “dual perspective listening” (6) skills. Parables encourage listeners to enter into another person’s experience and learn from it. Re-enactment would also create a learning environment in which they could thrive because it invites learners to live temporarily in an alternative perspective. In their communal life of apprenticeship, these learners would value interacting with other disciples.
While those with interpersonal intelligence look outwardly towards others, those with intrapersonal intelligence are inward looking. These learners have the "ability to self-reflect and be aware of . . . [their] inner state of being" (7). Jesus taught in such a way as to encourage this kind of intelligence, which is crucial to the inner transformation that was one of his teaching goals. He used questions to challenge assumptions, which marks the beginning of self-analysis. Poetry, parables, humour, and re-enactment all help learners to think in new ways. Prayer would be compatible with these learners' way of thinking.

For people with intrapersonal intelligence, Jesus' use of silence would be a profound experience. Silence calls forth self-reflection. When Jesus used silence to teach those accusing a woman who had been found in adultery, he was calling on them to look at their own lives. Jesus was asking them to use skills that come naturally to those with intrapersonal intelligence: "recognizing their own strengths and weaknesses, reflecting and analyzing themselves, aware of their inner feelings, desires, and dreams, evaluating their thinking patterns, reasoning with themselves" (Learning Disabilities Pride 2003, 57). In the highly charged minutes of silence, Jesus gave all those present the opportunity to exercise and to grow in this type of intelligence.

In *Intelligence Reframed*, a book that further develops his theory, Gardener distinguishes between naturalist intelligence and existential intelligence (1999, 2). Those with the former are adept at observing the natural world, while those with the latter have "sensitivity and capacity to tackle deep questions about human existence" (2). Jesus' use of metaphors from nature would appeal to those with naturalist intelligence. They would appreciate the implications of his call to discipleship: "I will make you fishers of men." Prayer would be a natural learning technique for those with existential intelligence. Paradoxically, Jesus' parables reach those with both kinds of intelligence, moving as they do from the earthly to the heavenly. Jesus took images from nature—mustard seeds, sheep, vines, fish, and water—to discuss existential ideas. He challenged those interested in the material world to look at spiritual issues and people with a metaphysical bent to examine how they lived out their ideals in their physical lives. The rich young man knew the correct religious
answers to his own question—"What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Lk 10:25). Jesus urged him to live that out by giving up his wealth and privilege in a society that highly valued those advantages. In another incident, the disciples could see the fig tree, probably thought they knew about fig trees, but had difficulty with the spiritual message Jesus was trying to teach them (Mt 21:18-22). For those with naturalistic intelligence as well as those with existential intelligence, Jesus provided opportunities to learn. He also challenged both groups to grow into new ways of understanding. Figure 5 on page 111 and Figure 6 on page 112 list incidents in the four gospels that show Jesus using various techniques to reach out to learners with different intelligences.

The multiple intelligence theory is only one of the many ways in which educators look at the complex process of learning. While this theory has its critics, it does emphasize the undeniable reality—known by perceptive teachers long before it was articulated as a theory—that learners are all individuals with different strengths and weaknesses and different ways of learning. Their strengths need to be honoured and their weaknesses strengthened. Gardner notes:

In fact most places [educational institutions] either for ideological reasons or for financial reasons, or because they have never thought about it, treat everyone in the same way, teach them in the same way, measure them in the same way and they think they've treated everyone fairly, but in fact it's exactly the opposite, because if school is directed by one kind of mind, but in fact there are hundreds of different kinds of minds, then in fact it's prejudiced in favor of the one kind of "scholastic mind." (1994, 1)
### Techniques

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Figure 5. Techniques for different intelligences. Jesus' techniques reached a range of learners with different ways of learning, as specified by Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences.
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Figure 6. Techniques for different intelligences. Jesus' techniques reached a range of learners with different ways of learning, as specified by Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences.
A corollary of Gardner's theory is that teachers need to use different approaches to a subject to be most effective and to give learners scope to learn in ways most suited to their particular blend of intelligences. Few would dispute this conclusion, yet critics continue to view a multifaceted approach to learning as impractical. In the gospels' description of Jesus is a picture of a teacher using a remarkable range of teaching tools, many of which are ideally suited to individuals who learn less well with the lecture format. Long before Gardner identified different ways of learning, Jesus created a varied and dynamic learning environment that gave opportunities for people to learn in different ways, but also challenged every learner to explore ideas by new approaches to the subject. By doing so, Jesus made intellectual accessibility a hallmark of his learning environment.

**Accessibility through Freedom, Time, and Space**

In creating a learning climate of accessibility, Jesus recognized that not everyone would want to participate in the learning he offered. At times he even discouraged people from becoming learners until they recognized the implications and the hardships involved. In giving learners intellectual space—freedom to learn and freedom to not learn—Jesus actually made his teaching more accessible. An unwise teacher might be tempted to use every means of persuasion, leaving no opening for learners to back away. Jesus gave the gift of choice to those who were interested in learning from him. They were free to come, free to go.

As part of the gift of intellectual freedom, Jesus made his learners aware that they could continue to learn after the educational experience was over. To one of his learners he said, "Go and learn what this means" (Mt 9:10-13). Learning takes time, especially if it has inner transformation as one of its goals. Jesus left the door open for future learning. Some of his teaching tools were particularly suited to on-going learning. Poetry and epigrams have a way of returning to the consciousness of the learner long after they are committed to memory. Metaphors and parables create vivid images that are etched in the
learners’ imagination. By using images from everyday life, Jesus ensured that his learners would encounter reminders of his teaching day after day. The common sparrow and the lilies growing in the fields were recurring reinforcements of Jesus’ words about God’s care of them. The multifaceted construction of parables meant that learners found new insight and meaning in Jesus’ stories as they remembered and repeated them in different contexts and at different times. By incorporating the central core of his teaching in a re-enactment, Jesus provided for long-term learning. Jesus clearly expected that his learners would continue to learn throughout their lives (Jn 16:12-13) and that people who had never heard him teach would become his learners in the future. His teaching methods made it easier for distant learners—distant in space and time—to hear the message that he brought.

**Emotional Accessibility: Meeting Learners’ Needs**

To be physically and intellectually accessible to learners creates a dynamic learning environment. However, Jesus displayed a further quality in his interaction with his learners, which could be called emotional accessibility. He achieved an environment of receptivity, of being ready to be involved at a deep, emotional level. He created a space that was hospitable and welcoming.

**Being There: Closing the Gaps**

In explaining her concept of emotional accessibility, Mosher uses the expression “being personable” (369) and explores the possibilities of this phrase:

“Being personable” could be dismissed as a superficial or insubstantial attempt to make students “feel good”, but . . . “being personable” could mean more than being pleasant and amiable, being congenial in its most limiting sense . . . being a person, being able to be present with [learners] in a way that surpasses the role incumbency of “teacher.” (369)
Using the metaphor of midwifery, Mosher says that “the presence of ‘being personable’ . . . can be understood as a maieutic [midwife’s] presence that brings new understandings of life” (369).

Mosher’s image of a teacher bringing new life by his or her emotional accessibility echoes Jesus’ words to express the radical change necessary for learners to understand what he was teaching: “No one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again” (Jn 3:3). Jesus encouraged this process of reorientation and renewal by the way he was “personable” to his learners. In his encounter with a group of children described by Luke, Jesus exemplified this quality. Jesus was attracting large crowds of people as eager to hear him as he was to teach them. The demands on his time, energy, and wisdom were great. His disciples were aware of his emotional and physical exhaustion as the crowds increased. At one point, people began bringing their young children and babies to Jesus, asking him to bless them (Lk 18:15-17). Jesus was not primarily a teacher of children, although they were present among the crowds who came to hear him (Mk 9:36). The disciples were annoyed with the interruption of Jesus’ teaching. The children were probably noisy; in the disciples’ eyes they were unimportant. They were hampering Jesus in what the disciples were coming to recognize (and perhaps enjoy) his fame-creating work. They tried to keep the children from bothering the rabbi. Jesus, however, did not seem to share their dismissive opinion of the children. In an action that surely won the hearts of their parents, Jesus welcomed the children, demonstrably accepting them as worthy of his time and affection. He bestowed on them strong verbal and non-verbal recognition of their place of importance in his world: “The Kingdom of God belongs to such as these” (Lk 18:16). In return, he accepted the honour and esteem the parents gave him. He was not just another politician kissing babies as he worked the crowds to drum up support. He did not need votes, or even new learners. His receptivity to giving and receiving affection was an integral part of who he was.
Hospitality for the Learning Environment

In adult education, the importance of the learning environment is often discussed in terms of learner comfort: the arrangement of chairs, the availability of washrooms, the need for food and drink. For example, Knowles stresses that the environment be appropriate for adults: the facilities "should 'smell' adult" (1970, 174) and discusses the ideal arrangement of equipment. Renner (1993) gets even more explicit, suggesting what type of tape to use for hanging sheets of paper on the wall and what colour and kind of pens work best—"water-based, flat-tipped (chisel-tip)" (121). Creating a welcoming environment is a teacher's responsibility, both from a practical and a psychological perspective. Palmer uses the word "hospitality" to describe a teacher's concern to anticipate and meet the needs of learners:

This [using the word hospitality] may suggest a classroom lacking essential rigor, a place in which questions of true and false, right and wrong, are subordinated to making sure that everyone "has a nice day." But that would be a false understanding of hospitality. Hospitality is not an end in itself. It is offered for the sake of what it can allow, permit, encourage, and yield. A learning space needs to be hospitable not to make learning painless but to make painful things possible. (1983, 74)

As Palmer indicates, hospitality extends well beyond concern for the physical environment. In welcoming guests, a good host provides an emotional space where gifts of food, conversation, and shelter are offered as part of a bigger gift: the inestimable gift of unconditional listening and acceptance.

Jesus managed to extend hospitality to his learners in such a way that they felt loved and cared for. He did this despite being an itinerant teacher without classroom or servants or house, without a "place to lay his head" (Mt 8:20). In a gesture that was both practically and spiritually significant, he washed his disciples’ feet when they arrived for a meal (Jn 13:5). When he realised that his learners must be getting hungry, he stopped his teaching and provided them with food. Perhaps the most striking example of Jesus' hospitality occurred on the shore of a lake as he was about to leave his disciples for the last time, having entrusted them with the message he wanted them to give the world (Jn 21:1-14). Instead of final instructions or a crash
course in leadership, he barbequed fish for them around a campfire. Cold and hungry from a night of fishing, they needed food and companionship more than formal teaching. Understanding beyond words came to his learners as they accepted his gift of hospitality. His emotional accessibility facilitated learning in ways that cannot be measured.

The Teacher and the Music

In the end, the most influential component in the learning environment is the teacher. Even a teacher who stays well in the background sets a distinctive tone. How can one describe a teacher? A person is more than the sum of his or her parts; a teacher is more than the techniques used and the environment created. According to Palmer, “Good teaching does not come from technique. It comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher” (1997, 1). What was Jesus like? Did he show the integrity that makes for effective teaching? Who was he? Teachers are like orchestral conductors. Whether they like it or not, they have authority as the one who wields the baton; they set the tone, creating the atmosphere by what they do and say. With the active participation of the other musicians, they bring the music into existence by who they are. In their bodies, by their minds, through their emotional interpretation, they are part of the music that is created. Jesus used a teacher’s natural authority and certain personal characteristics—courage, compassion, and conviviality—to set the tone of the learning environment. His integrity reinforced his sense of identity as God’s Son.

Wielding the Baton: Authority Tempered with Humility

From the very beginning of his public ministry, Jesus’ learners remarked on his teaching with authority, which marked him out from other teachers. To anyone versed in contemporary adult education theory, authority is something to be handled very carefully, as it may be coupled with intellectual arrogance, with escalating rather than reducing the power imbalance between learner and teacher. Jesus claimed that God had given him his authority, and he did not
use it to overpower either his enemies or his learners. In fact, he went out of
his way to clothe it with humility, taking on the role of a servant and, for
example, washing his disciples’ feet (Jn 13:5). He taught and lived leadership
through servanthood: “The greatest among you will be your servant. For
whoever exalts himself will be humbled and whoever humbles himself will be
exalted” (Mt 23:11-12). He submitted to the political authorities even when
they arranged false witnesses to accuse and condemn him to death. He
addressed his disciples as “friends” and “brothers” and lived among them while
constantly caring for the needs of others. The picture of Jesus as servant
contrasts vividly with his tone of authority. His sense of servanthood is not
confined to one or two incidents—it fills all the gospels. In their attempt to find
common ground in the quest for the historical Jesus debate, Crossan,
Johnston, and Kelber contend that scholars “show remarkable unanimity
[about] Jesus’ character” (1999, 70), a central feature of which was his
humility:

Since the gospels were written from the perspective of faith in Jesus as
the resurrected Son of God, we might expect to find him consistently
portrayed in the gospels as a triumphant, glorious figure. But the
opposite is the case: Jesus is portrayed in the gospel narratives as the
obedient one who gives his life in service for the sake of others, and who
calls others to follow him in the same path of obedient service. So much
is this portrayal common to the four gospels that in other respects differ
so greatly—even the gospel of John, in which the resurrection perspective
is all persuasive—that literary critics have no difficulty in discerning the
“Christ figure” in works of literature. (1999, 71)

The exercise of authority in teaching need not be accompanied by
condescension. Jesus’ attitude and demeanor gave new dignity and meaning to
serving others, even when teaching authoritatively. For Jesus, to wield the
baton was to invite participation in the glorious music of the heavens.

Setting the Tone: Courage, Compassion, and Conviviality

The character of Jesus has been microscopically examined by some of
the greatest thinkers of the last two millennia. How can one describe a person
whose life is depicted in four, short, overlapping accounts and yet who has had
an inestimable effect on world history? Confining the discussion to his teaching is not much help in narrowing the scope; to a large extent, most of what was written about him in the gospels concerns his teaching. However, three characteristics of special interest to teachers stand out: courage, conviviality, and compassion. Permeating all of them and linking each of them to his identity is a transparent integrity that both his enemies and his friends found remarkable.

Teaching does not always require courage. In many situations, teachers are respected and honoured for who they are and what they bring to their learners. Novice teachers may well experience anxiety as they struggle to find their way and to grow into being a teacher. Occasionally, however, teachers know that the material they wish to present will be controversial, possibly offensive. These situations call for courage, although silence looks safe and attractive. The content of Jesus' teaching was revolutionary. He challenged his learners to internal, radical change; he desired to establish a "Kingdom" in the midst of the powerful Roman Empire. Caesar readily eliminated anyone who challenged his absolute rule. Jesus did not want to die a painful death as a convicted criminal; his struggle for acceptance of its inevitability is a poignant testimony to his feelings (Mk 14:35-6). However, he consistently showed courage and commitment to accomplish what he had set out to do. Even at his trial, when he could have soft-pedaled his message, he refused to compromise. Not only did he teach in the face of opposition, he also associated with the outcasts of society in order to make his teaching accessible to everyone. Kraft claims that Jesus' teaching and his whole life were marked by "a kind of fearlessness concerning what people might say about him when he went to even disreputable places and associated with even disreputable people" (1999, 44). Jesus exhibited another kind of fearlessness: he opened himself up to his learners, unafraid to let them see every aspect of his life. Palmer says that teachers often experience "fear of subjectivity and fear of the demands that relational knowing might make on our lives" (1997, 2). Even when pressed by the vast needs of his learners, Jesus took time to know others and allowed himself to be known. He took the risk of emotional vulnerability. His courage
was contagious, although it grew slowly in his disciples. Eventually, the disciples Jesus left behind became a bold group of teachers who bravely faced persecution and death.

Jesus established his reputation for conviviality early in his teaching career. Just as he was beginning to be known as a religious teacher, he produced wine—and it was remarkably good wine—for a bridal party (Jn 2:1-11). Subsequently, his followers have sometimes tried to disguise or ignore his reputation for attending parties, for eating and drinking with people who were considered sinners. Quoting an unknown source, Wood claims, "Some Christians have been trying for years to change the wine into water" (2003). However, he did not switch from being a teacher of righteousness because he was at a party. He continued to take every opportunity to bring his message into the lives of the people with whom he came into contact.

At the time when the urgency of his message was greatest, just as he was preparing to leave his disciples to carry on without him, Jesus put the needs of his learners above his need to teach verbally (JN 21:1-14). In cooking food for them, lighting a fire to warm them after a night of fishing, he was creating an atmosphere of conviviality that strengthened the community. He made the central teaching tool for future and distant learners a shared meal, a party in which he promised to be somehow present with them. His conviviality was not debauchery, but a celebration of life and joyful fellowship.

Jesus' conviviality was not contrived, nor was it a denial of the reality of sadness and death. He openly expressed his emotions: weeping at his friend's tomb, even though he believed the death would be shortly reversed. He celebrated the joy of a wedding feast, but appreciated the pain of those who suffered. He was emotionally "transparent" (Stimson 1993, 95), and his conviviality was a part of his transparency. It strengthened and enhanced the learning community he created.

Even more than courage and conviviality, Jesus was known for his compassion. In him, loving compassion was not just a feeling to be verbally expressed: it consistently found expression in actions. He fed the hungry, cared for the sick, taught those he considered to be "sheep without a shepherd" (Mt
9:36). He literally and figuratively walked alongside learners, sharing their lives and inviting them to share his. Mark describes an incident that reveals this aspect of his character. A man with leprosy came to Jesus and begged for help. Lepers were outcasts, considered untouchables, forced to leave their families and communities to live outside the town walls. They were physically, socially, and spiritually excluded. When the leper sought his help, Jesus was “filled with compassion” (Mk 1:41). Not only did he want to heal the man, he also wanted to restore him to a place of acceptance and dignity in the community. Jesus “reached out his hand and touched the man” (Mk 1:41). By this rash and loving gesture, Jesus offered wholeness beyond physical healing. He put aside concern for his own health to touch the untouchable. Jesus taught about love, mercy, and compassion. He lived love, mercy, and compassion, filling the learning environment with the reality his words described.

**Bringing the Music into Being: Character Wrapped in Integrity**

The congruency between words and deeds that Jesus showed was a powerful component in his teaching environment. Just as incongruence between a teacher’s words and actions creates barriers to learning, so integrity acts both to exemplify and reinforce teaching. Palmer expresses this inescapable aspect of teaching, which is sometimes lost in the barrage of information about the externals of teaching: “Good teaching does not come from techniques. It comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher” (1998, 1). Siger, former dean of Harvard University College of Education, lists integrity a basic ingredient in “brilliant teaching” (2001,1). However, in Jesus, this integrity was even more important: “Congruence between the *what* and the *how* (context and method) is pedagogically striking in Jesus’ teaching and in the gospel text” (Melchert 1998, 264).

Not everyone accepted that Jesus’ was the medium through which knowledge and truth would come. Jones notes: “In his teaching, Jesus became more than an interpreter of the law. Jesus’ personal embodiment of his own message, his blending of messenger and message was blasphemous to many other rabbis” (1997, 23). Jesus’ words and deeds made implicit claims about
his identity as God's Son. For example, he forgave the sins of the paralytic man and healed his body. Jesus told the astonished onlookers that he did this "that you might know that the Son of Man [his title for himself] has authority on earth to forgive sins" (Mk 2:10). By using the title Son of Man and by performing miracles, Jesus was claiming to be in a unique relationship to God, to be the promised Messiah. When he stood before the Sanhedrin court, he made his implicit claim explicit:

Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?"

"I am," said Jesus . . .
The high priest tore his clothes [a sign of extreme approbation].
"Why do we need any more witnesses?" he asked. "You have heard the blasphemy." (Mk 14: 61-64)

Many religious leaders did not believe Jesus' claim and resented his growing popularity. The political establishment saw him as a threat to Roman rule, although at least some Romans (Mk 15:39, Lk 7: 1-10) accepted Jesus' claims to be the message he proclaimed.

Despite the disapproval of the educational and religious establishment, Jesus' integration of his life and teaching had a powerful influence on his learners. For example, he taught a revolutionary concept about attitude towards one's enemies: "Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you" (Lk 6:27). This teaching contradicted all previously received wisdom and the natural inclination of the human heart. However, Jesus lived it as he hung, dying, on the cross of execution. He had had a trial filled with the false accusations of paid witnesses. One of his own disciples had betrayed him for money. In the midst of pain and failure, he called out to God to forgive those who had put him in that place, who had schemed and lied to bring about his death. Even in the hour of his death, the integrity of his life and teaching was so evident that one of the Roman soldiers involved in the execution said, "Surely this was a righteous man" (Lk 23:47). Many believed the message because of the man.
Identity: “Who do you say I am?”

The problem with an analysis of a teacher is that, after various aspects have been separated out and discussed, the end result is a series of observations that risk destroying the whole. In stressing the essential inseparability of actions and words from character in human beings, Arendt declares:

The moment we want to say who somebody is, our very vocabulary leads us astray into saying what he is; we get entangled in a description of qualities he necessarily shares with others like him; we begin to describe a type or a “character” in the old meaning of the word, with the result that his specific uniqueness escapes us. (1958, 181)

Jesus used certain techniques to further his teaching goals and meet his learners' needs. He created a stimulating and welcoming learning environment by his accessibility, his humble use of authority, his courage, compassion, and conviviality. In everything that he did, he lived out his message with unshakeable integrity. However, all of this information about him fails to convey more than superficial aspects of his teaching. In discussing the importance of a teacher's perspective, Pratt notes the danger of leaving out the central core of beliefs. His research suggests that “for most people, beliefs informed their intentions, which in turn directed the process of teaching (actions)” (1992, 208). Without a sense of the inner person, “teaching will continue to be seen as a mechanistic activity devoid of the most essential ingredient . . . [the teacher’s] professional identity” (Pratt 1998, 279).

For Jesus, there was no separation of professional and personal identity. He believed himself to be the message he taught: the love and mercy of God given to humankind, a sacrifice of himself for the sins of the world. In using as his title “the son of God” and “the son of Man”, Jesus claimed a unique relationship with the God he called “Father”, much to the outrage of many Jewish clerics. He reinforced his title with a series of vivid metaphors: “I am the light of the world” (Jn 9:4). “I am the bread of life” (Jn 6:48). “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:6). He taught about sacrificial, selfless love
and he lived out that love. He offered his learners a way to participate in that love through a relationship with him. He was the message and the medium. The “how” he taught and the “what” he taught were inseparably bound up with the “why” he taught and “who” he believed himself to be: Jesus the Christ, son of the living God.

**Summary of Chapter 4**

Participation in learning opportunities is directly related to their accessibility for potential learners. Teachers cannot ignore the physical environment and its appropriateness for meeting learners’ needs. Jesus overcame physical barriers by his peripatetic style of teaching—going to the learners instead of waiting for them to come to him. He overcame psychological barriers created by social strictures. He welcomed learners from diverse social, ethnic, and religious groups. He showed concern for the physical comfort and needs of learners. To promote an intellectually accessible learning environment, Jesus asked and answered a constant stream of questions. The freedom with which learners approached him with their questions and concerns is a measure of his accessibility. In order to reach those who learn in different ways, Jesus used an amazing variety of teaching techniques. Reviewing his techniques through Gordon’s multiple intelligence theory underscores the power of different techniques to help each learner access material in appropriate ways. Jesus’ emotional accessibility was evident in the openness with which he expressed his emotions. He created an atmosphere that was hospitable for all learners, including those distant in time and space.

Jesus displayed his character by the way he used his authority and in his courage, conviviality, and compassion. Jesus based his life and teaching on his belief that he had a unique relationship with God, a belief that was shared by many, though not all, of his learners. In his teaching, in the way he lived, and in his death, he displayed a profound integrity between what he believed and how he lived and taught. He created a learning environment that was
accessible in every way; within that environment, he lived out the love that formed the basis of the Kingdom he proclaimed.
CHAPTER 5
SO WHAT?

Introduction

Jesus was a remarkable teacher. From a remote corner of the Roman Empire, the influence of his teaching has spread through time and space, permanently changing the course of history. This study has concentrated on two questions: How did Jesus teach? What characterized the learning environment he shaped? A third question remains: Can Jesus be a role model for teachers today? Jesus’ way of teaching has particular relevance for at least three specific areas of research and practice: religious education in general and Christian education in particular, non-religious moral education, and holistic education. In each of these fields, educators have goals similar to those of Jesus and face challenges that he, too, needed to overcome.

Regardless of the particular belief system, the desired goal of religious education within all faiths is to convey content and encourage praxis. Jesus showed how this can be done effectively. Already a role model for Christian teachers, Jesus can be an example to others as well. In the field of moral education, teachers want to help people learn how to live and act in appropriate ways. The debate about how to achieve this goal is lively. Looking at how Jesus taught can contribute valuable insight to this discussion. His teaching resulted in internal change in learners that led to dramatic external changes. Holistic education recognizes that spirituality is part of human existence. Education that acknowledges and addresses the spiritual component enriches the whole person. Jesus demonstrated a concern for all aspects of learners’ lives: mind, body, heart, and spirit.

Jesus is a role model for religious, moral, and holistic educators because their goals are similar to his. However, Jesus’ teaching exhibited four characteristics that are helpful for all educators to consider: flexibility,
creativity, sensitivity, and integrity. A teacher, like Jesus, who demonstrates each of these traits, provides both practical information as well as inspiration for others.

**Christian Educators: A Clear Call**

For Christians, who consider themselves followers of Jesus, doing what Jesus would have done has always been an ideal for all aspects of life. The current manifestation, much discussed in the media under the acronym “WWJD” (What would Jesus do?), is part of a much older tradition, going back to the apostle Paul, who urged the early Christians to be “imitators of Jesus” (Eph 5:1). Stott notes: “This theme has been more familiar to Christians throughout the world during the last half of the millennium because of the publication at the beginning of the fifteenth century of Thomas à Kempis’ spiritual classic *The Imitation of Christ* (1979, 139). The question of what Jesus would do in any particular situation is remarkably relevant for Christian educators. In the recent Internet discussion, the focus has been on such issues as transportation and the environment (What would Jesus drive?) and personal dietary choices (What would Jesus eat?). However, while there is no record of Jesus driving an SUV or anything other than a donkey, there is a comprehensive account of the way he taught. His last recorded words to his disciples included an injunction to teach others what they had learned: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations . . . teaching them . . .” (Mt 28:19-20). Clearly, for Christian educators Jesus should already be a role model. Examining how he taught is more than an academic exercise of historic interest: it is a relevant, even an essential, task.

**Religious Educators: Looking Closer at a Great Teacher**

Education is a vital component in any organized religion that hopes to survive for more than one generation. The belief system needs to be passed on to the children (or young adherents if the group does not have children) and to adult converts. For example, throughout its history Judaism has placed enormous emphasis on formal religious instruction, an emphasis that appears
in the Scriptures, in the traditional interpretation of Scripture, and in the
general culture. While each faith tradition has its own aims and methods,
religious education of all sorts has two components: a belief system, the
equivalent to theology in Christianity, and a practice or way of life based on
those beliefs. In Jesus’ teaching, these two aspects take the form of the
theology of the Kingdom and the praxis—reflection and action—based on that
theology. The general framework, though not the specific teaching, is thus
similar to that of other religions. The means by which Jesus achieved his
teaching goals may well prove helpful for religious instruction in other faith
systems.

**Opening Other Areas of Research**

The scope of this thesis is limited to Jesus of Nazareth. However,
examining other great teachers of religion from an adult education perspective
would offer further insights into the way religious concepts, both theoretical
and practical, might best be taught. Further studies about the effects of
different cultural settings on religious teaching are needed. For example, does
teaching in a Jewish context depend on a biblical model? Does it vary
dramatically in different geographical regions? Do Muslim teachers pattern
themselves after the Prophet Mohammed? Is one way of teaching religion more
effective than another? What is the measure of effectiveness in religious
instruction?

Questions surrounding the teaching of religion have recently taken on a
new sense of urgency as religiously motivated violence and hatred continue to
make headline news. A recent article in the *Financial Times* highlights the
misuse of religious education by a radical group in India that has attacked
Muslims and Christians. Such news is not unusual. However, the authors
quote educator Ajon Div making an interesting observation: “They teach pupils
about Islam and Christianity in the form of a catechism. There is no room for
question, debate or reflection” (*Financial Times* [New York], 21 February 2003).
No religious group has a monopoly on teaching intolerance. However, the
connection between the teaching methods used and the intolerance that
results is significant. Do “question, debate or reflection” help to teach a kind of religion which respects human life and tolerance for different perspectives? Jesus’ use of questions and debate, as well as the freedom he gave his learners to accept or reject his teaching, suggests that these models are appropriate for effective religious instruction. The absence of any trace of catechism in Jesus’ teaching is remarkable. The only “set” learning Jesus used, the Lord’s Prayer, was given at the request of his learners. It stresses forgiveness of others and humble dependence on God, without any trace of intolerance. However, Christians throughout the years have been as guilty as any other religious group in promoting hatred. They also have relied heavily on teaching by catechism. Is there a connection between the growth of the catechism as a method of teaching Christian doctrine and the spread of religious intolerance within churches? Many such questions need further investigation. A thorough understanding of the manner of teaching by leading religious educators would be a valuable first step towards greater understanding of religious education.

**Moral Education: A New Urgency**

Religious education, with its component of praxis, has traditionally included moral education. However, the diminishing influence of Christianity in the Western world has left a vacuum in the public teaching of morality that few dispute (Kohn, 1997). An old debate has resurfaced: can morality be separated from religion? Nucci raises this question in *Education in the Moral Domain* and reminds his readers: “One index of the complexity of questions regarding the relation between morality and religion is the fact that this has been an enduring area of controversy debated by philosophers since Plato’s time” (2001, 1).

The question is even more complicated in multicultural, pluralistic democracies, in which people with different religious beliefs live beside those who have no religious convictions. Some moral educators work towards a broad-based philosophy that can encompass a range of educational beliefs, regardless of religious practice. For example, the Association for Moral Education “supports self-reflective educational practices that value the worth
and dignity of each individual as a moral agent in a pluralistic society" (1999, 1). The web site lists "religious educators" (1) among its members.

On the other hand, other moral educators wish to separate religion from moral education completely. In an article reviewing the current interest in moral education, authors Helwig, Turiel, and Nucci express their concern that "the current fascination with character [moral] education will serve as a political cover for the imposition of a particular cultural agenda" (1997, 1). The fear that religious fundamentalists (of whatever faith) will subvert the broader goals of moral education continues to be a foundational issue in the debate. However, even the severest critics of traditional, religious-based moral education acknowledge the need for education that, in the words of one such critic, is "transforming the environments" (Kohn 1997, 11) in which people learn in order to promote "intrinsic motivation" (3) for acceptable moral behaviour. No one is denying the necessity of moral education; few people agree about how it should be taught.

Given the controversial role of religion in contemporary moral education, can Jesus be a role model for teachers in this field? Those who fear the appearance of religion in public life are concerned with the way religion has often been taught. However, Jesus' techniques encouraged inquiry and discussion. He gave people freedom to choose or to reject his teaching. He created an environment that welcomed and respected people who were marginalized by his society; he encouraged growth and change rather than dogmatic learning of creeds. In other words, he modeled the kind of teaching favoured by the moral educationalists who are most concerned about the narrowness and intolerance ascribed to religious teachers. For such educators, a look at Jesus could provide insight into successful techniques for teaching morality. For religious moral educators in a setting where the discussion of religion is appropriate, looking at how Jesus taught could open new avenues for teaching, reducing the need to depend on the "indoctrination" (Kohn 1997, 1) despised by the critics of much traditional religious education. A discussion of Jesus as teacher could begin to build bridges between the two groups of people, to the benefit of teachers and learners alike. Where the goal is
learning to help others "become decent human beings" (Kohn, 1997, 1), every teacher can find in Jesus techniques and attitudes that clearly help learners to learn in the moral realm.

**Holistic Education: Recovering the Unity**

Holistic education is a term that describes a collection of ideas about teaching and learning. A web-site dedicated to this approach claims that "holistic education is not about one technique or curriculum" (http://www.neat.tas.edu.au/HENT/intro3.htm#multintel) and lists areas of intellectual inquiry which explore "the development of the whole person: whole-brain learning, multiple intelligences, cooperative learning, knowledge of whole systems, emotional literacy, meta-cognition, individual learning styles, and making the ordinary meaningful" (1). A relatively new movement under this name, holistic education "has been emerging as a coherent movement since the 1970s" (http://www.greatideas.org/forbes.htm). By its very nature, holistic education defies socially constructed boundaries, making concrete definitions impossible. However, one of its educational websites offers this description:

Holistic education centers on the understanding that we as humans need to learn much more than simply how to earn a living or conform to a culture if we are to have meaningful lives . . . therefore, at the heart of Holistic Education, one may see the goal of what has been described as the quality, process, inquiry, and/or engagement of what it means to be human. For some cultural perspectives this has been a religious objective . . . while for other perspectives this has been a psychological objective. (http://www.pathsoflearning.net/library/research2002.cfm)

Proponents of holistic education recognize spirituality as an aspect of humanity, although many wish to downplay religion. A review of *Nurturing Our Wholeness: Perspectives on Spirituality in Education* (Miller and Nakaga 2002) describes the authors who contributed to the book:

They agree, however, that infusing education with spiritual wisdom does not, and should not, involve the adoption of sectarian religious approaches. Education understood in the light of spirituality is an education for meaning, wholeness, compassion and justice. (http://www.greatideas.org/jmiller.htm)
However, within the holistic education movement, some scholars retain a specifically Christian perspective and relate their ideas in more traditionally religious language. For example, Palmer discusses his holistic approach to teaching in *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life:*

To chart that landscape fully, three important paths must be taken: intellectual, emotional, and spiritual—and none can be ignored. Reduce teaching to intellect, and it becomes a cold abstraction; reduce it to emotions, and it becomes narcissistic, reduce it to the spiritual and it loses its anchor to the world. Intellect, emotion, and spirit depend on one another for wholeness. They are interwoven in the human self and in education at its best. (1998, 4)

Teaching for the whole person requires a wide range of skills and a deep commitment to learners' needs. According to Dodson, the end result of such teaching is an educational experience marked "not only by productivity, linearity, novelty, and seriousness but also their countervalues: depth, circularity, timelessness, and levity" (2003, 1). With remarkable accuracy, this description fits Jesus' teaching. A brief look at each of these qualities demonstrates the similarities. In the three years that he taught publicly, Jesus was highly productive in terms of the number of learners he reached and the range of material he taught. His clearly recognizable teaching goals are evidence of linearity—he varied the form of his teaching, but the basic content did not change. While his teaching style was influenced by the pedagogical tradition of his Jewish culture, he introduced new ideas about the Kingdom of God and how to live in that reality. His way of teaching utilized novel approaches. For example, his inclusion of women and those marginalized by society represented a radical change from the usual religious teachers. The seriousness of his subject matter—life and death, judgment and forgiveness—was undeniable, but his use of humour could well be described as "levity." Two thousand years of intensive scholarly debate bear witness to the depth of Jesus' teaching; few have felt that they have understood it all completely. Jesus' use of parables and open-ended questioning encouraged learners to return again and again to ideas and possibilities, creating the
circularity that enhances deep learning. Jesus' teachings have withstood the test of time. His parables are as fresh and relevant as they were when he told stories beside the Lake of Galilee. His puns are still amusing, even if they need to be explained with reference to an ancient language. His timeless message has left his homeland and traversed time and space to affect learners today. Holistic education is exactly what Jesus practiced. If they can stop associating Jesus with "sectarian religious approaches" (http://www.greatideas.org/jmiller.htm), holistic educators may find it encouraging and inspiring to look at Jesus of Nazareth as a role model for the kind of teaching they espouse.

A ROLE MODEL FOR ALL?

Teachers in religious, moral, and holistic education share common goals with Jesus. Their concern is in transferring intellectual and emotional understanding into life-transforming action. Not all fields of teaching have such comprehensive goals. A teacher of geometry may be more concerned with formulae for solving mathematical problems than with moral dilemmas. However, whatever their subject area, most teachers are interested in effective teaching. The picture of Jesus is a compelling one, a model of effectiveness. Four characteristics stand out: flexibility, creativity, sensitivity, and consistency. Each of these represents a reason to consider Jesus as a role model for all teachers of adults.

Flexibility

As a peripatetic teacher, Jesus offered his learners unusual flexibility of opportunity and place. When he had taught in one village, he went on to the next. When the crowd was too big, he climbed a hill or got into a boat so that more people could hear. He switched from one method of teaching to another with apparent ease. To the Pharisees, he spoke the language of religious debate; for the less educated, he told stories and put his essential teaching into easily remembered poetry. His flexibility meant that every incident provided
opportunities to teach. He allowed his lectures to be interrupted by individuals needing help; he switched his attention from person to person. He did not allow the urgency of his message to dictate his teaching style. Using questions might take longer than giving answers, but he used questions extensively. Through the techniques of re-enactment and prayer, he reached learners who were not physically present. His flexibility resulted in a wide-ranging accessibility for learners.

**Creativity**

Along with flexibility, Jesus modeled a creativity that made his teaching attractive and helpful. He took common elements in his pedagogical tradition, but he reshaped and refined them to fit his particular context and to ensure that his learners could access the material in a way that suited their learning styles. He used words and silence, poetry and prose, stories and lectures, apprenticeship for present learners and re-enactment for future ones. He creatively provided something for everyone.

**Sensitivity**

In his one-on-one encounters with learners, Jesus displayed concern and sympathy for their emotional needs. Sometimes they needed encouragement; sometimes they needed the opportunity to confess a wrongdoing and to experience the possibility of forgiveness. Moving easily from priest to prostitute, Jesus showed concern for learning at the level of the heart, not just for intellectual mastery: to the Samaritan woman despised for her lifestyle, he offered conversation on the level of social equality; to the leper, he gave the gift of physical and emotional acceptance; to the hated tax collector, he offered friendship. He was unashamed of open displays of affection from learners. By allowing himself and others to express the full range of emotions, he created an openness conducive to “heart” learning.
Consistency

As a teacher, Jesus modeled a unity of words and actions that was striking and powerful. His life was not of the ‘Do-as-I-say, not-as-I-do’ school. He taught forgiveness and he practised it; he taught sacrificial love and he lived it; he counseled humility and he walked humbly. Friend and foe recognized his integrity. He urged his learners to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mk 13:30). These words could equally be used of his teaching: he taught with his whole heart, soul, mind and strength. In doing so, he became a role model for all who want to teach effectively and lovingly.

A teacher for all seasons

The *Time* article that describes Jesus as “the single most powerful figure . . . in all human history” (Time, December 6, 1999) also argues that “a serious argument can be made that no one else’s life has proved remotely as powerful and enduring as that of Jesus”. An adult educator who changed the world makes a worthwhile study for those who want to revolutionize society. A teacher who has learners two thousand years after his death can still be an example to those who preach accessibility and meeting learners’ needs. A teacher whose techniques have been successful across cultures and centuries can provide inspiration for those who just want to learn how to teach better. Jesus still has much to say to educators everywhere.
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