

## Mission and Education: a model from a parable

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- Ignatian Network introduces the eleventh in a series of briefing papers entitled *Living Competence, Conscience and Compassion* that highlight different aspects of the Ignatian School Renewal. The briefing papers will appear from time to time as a stimulus to principals and teachers.

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There are many places in the gospel which deal with mission and with education. But one privileged place in which Jesus talks about mission and education together is in the tenth chapter of Luke's gospel, the parable of the Good Samaritan.

- *The lawyer, wanting to justify himself, asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" Jesus replied., "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half-dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with compassion. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." (Lk 10:29-37)*

You know the story well: that a man travelling a lonely road was set upon by robbers, beaten, stripped,

and left bloodied and half dead — an anonymous victim of violence on the side of the road. A Levite passes and a priest passes. Each one of them moves aside, moving to the other edge of the road to avoid any contact that would render them ritually unclean, and perhaps also make them victims of robbers. They hasten on their way.

These are the religious "professionals". They are into ritual and they are into law. But they are not into being a neighbour. And then Jesus takes the least likely of heroes, a Samaritan, who had deep down residual anger towards the Jew, who considered the Jew not only his enemy, but one who would belittle him every chance he could. Yet unlike the other two, the Samaritan does four things: he sees; he allows himself to feel deeply; he enters into the work of healing and takes responsibility; and he creates a network that sustains his own care, even when he is absent.

Jesus is talking about the educated heart. And when at the end of the parable he says, "Go and do likewise," he is saying "Go and teach people how to see, how to feel compassion, how to use their skills in a practical way that serves another person, and how to create a network of communion and collaboration where that good will endure, where it will keep on going, even in their absence."

The scene that Jesus talks about, for those of you who are Jesuits, is very close to what St Ignatius talks about in the Constitutions:

- *In all things [the novices] should try and desire to give the advantage to the others, esteeming them all in their hearts as if they were their superiors [Phil 2;3] and showing outwardly, in an unassuming religious manner, the respect and reverence appropriate to each one's state, so that by consideration of one another they may thus grow in devotion and praise God our Lord, whom each one should strive to recognise in the other as in his image. (Cons. Part III, n 250)*

Ignatius is speaking about the ability to be attentive to a reality, to reverence what you find, and to see how God is there.

The way of the Samaritan is to look and see. He sees not an intrusion, not a Jew, but a human being from whom everything that marks the human has been taken — he is not conscious, he is not dressed, he is not mobile, and he has no resources. The only claim he has (if you really see) is that underneath the wounds, beyond the blood, beyond the anonymity, there is a person. And to see the person, not the colour, not the caste, not the economic status, but to see the *person*, to really see that reality, is what you do and teach as an educator. No matter what you teach, if you are a good teacher, you teach attentiveness, and you teach your students reverence for what they find, and in that you say there is something of God shining through.

The second movement of compassion is that movement within the deepest part of the person. The word "compassion", as Jesus used it, shares its root with the word for "womb". The womb is the part that gives life. It gives life in sympathy, and care and extension for another. Our English word compassion derives from "pati cum" (to suffer with). It is to undergo what that person has undergone, it is the heart of every religious experience, Christian, Buddhist, Hindu. Different words, same reality. It is the ability to identify and care for those whose only claim on us is their need. As an educator, you not only teach the mind, but you teach the heart. You teach people to respond to a poem, to be excited by a scientific experiment, to have wisdom and insight into an historical sequence, to see in sociology the people behind the statistics. Each of these processes is a process of compassion. You are moulding a whole sense of sensitivity, so that people are morally and ethically refined to be in harmony with what they learn.

Thirdly, you teach the practical skills. What that Samaritan did was to pour on the disinfectant of wine, to pour on the oil of balm, to put this person on his feet, to detour his journey, to spend his money, and to put his prestige on the line, and say, "This person is mine. You take care of him. And when I come back, I will ask for an account." As teachers, you teach your students how to make their way in this world in a way that they will give life, not death, where they give love and not enmity. They will make a contribution. They will use their skills for service in some way or other.

And finally, the great lesson that we also teach them is this: The deepest part of experience is when you give it up and let another generation take over — another teacher to take your class or another administrator to run the school in the way she or he wants. That "giving up" is so that there can be a *network* of those who see, and feel and do. That's teaching. That is what you do in school. The "grad at grad" (the young woman or young man at graduation) whom you send forth, is someone that you feel you have taught to see; someone whose heart you have touched so that they might feel; and someone to whom you have given skills, so that you can say, "I've given you freedom to be an adult; to do it your way."

There's no greater gift an adult can give than to relinquish that control, and to let your student become your teacher, and your friend.

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