

Two Parables for Education

Steven Khan

Part 1

On my recent return to Trinidad during the Lenten season, I began to reflect and to articulate a response to questions and concerns posed to me by (Catholic) educators as they struggle to come to terms with the implications and challenges posed by the changing nature of *the relationships* among consumers, commodities, communities, cultures, environment, knowledge, values, spirituality, and education, and the human institutions which facilitate these for better and worse. In private conversations I offered a limited exegesis of two parables: the *parable of the rich young man* (Lk18:18–23) and the *parable of the good Samaritan* (Lk10:25–37), which I believe offer insights for inspiring our educational imagination.

The parable of the rich young man who is obedient to the law and commandments but finds it difficult to sell all that he has, give the money to the poor, and follow the Master teacher because of his attachment to wealth, offers an invitation, an opportunity to examine and learn what it is that we are in love with the most. Below is my retelling, interpretation, and elaboration of this parable in/for our context:

And so it happened that the principals of some “successful” and “prestigious” secondary schools sat at table with a teacher-educator and said, “*What good things do we need to do in our school in order that all our children might experience success?*” He responded, “*You know the theories of curriculum and pedagogy. Do treat yourself, your students, their parents, your colleagues, and other stakeholders with an ethic of respect and care. Do request that they do the same. Do prepare yourself continuously for the mental, physical, and emotional demands and surprises that each day will reveal. Do enable those over whom you have authority and responsibility to share in the processes of negotiation and decision making necessary for the establishment of social norms that enable equitable, meaningful, and respectful participation. Do work to foster a climate which values reciprocity and risk-taking in the respectful exchange and challenging of ideas. Do create time and space for meaningful and sustained engagement with significant ideas both individually and collaboratively. Do listen more and talk less. Do get your community more meaningfully involved. Do establish a culture of learning. Do not be afraid to experiment and try new things. Do follow through on what you have learnt.*”

The group smiled somewhat contentedly, “*We think we are doing all of these things. Yet we are very concerned about rising indiscipline, violence, inequality, and unequal accomplishment. What more must we do to stop the tsunami of terror and escape the kumbas in which we are confined?*” Looking directly at them and speaking slowly and clearly he said, “*Go back to your schools and open them up to difference and diversity. Find new, more just, ways to invite and welcome the poor, the less fortunate, the academically less successful, the disabled, les damnés, and the otherwise abject in this society and in your communities to fuller participation in the reformatting and reconceiving of your Holy institutions. Learn how to create schools and curricula that are **of** the community, not merely **in** the community, or worse, that live **on** and **off**, and contribute only waste for life in the community. Refuse to participate in and profit from the unholy biocidal alliances, the carrion cultures that continue to reproduce anew, historical, material, economic, and discursive enslavements and extinction. Seek and teach the truths about the value of human life that lie beyond SEA and CXC success. Be patient. Compete to outdo each*

other in responsibility, goodness, imagination, virtue and generosity to one another, to the earth and to that which gives Life.” When they heard this they went away confused, angry, sorrowful, and deeply troubled, for while they wished to contribute to a better society they found that as yet they were very much bound *to* and *by* structures, institutions, and patterns of thinking and acting that narrowly defined and confined their beloved identity and ability to imagine what they *might* be through an ‘ill’ logic of success.

In the parable we are never told what happened to the rich young man—perhaps he reconsidered and returned to follow the teacher? Indeed, there are numerous examples of men and women who have taken this parable to heart—founders and members of religious, charitable, and volunteer communities. What is it that we so love that restricts us from seeking anew, paths to Life for all? I wonder, what our own “rich” young people’s responses would be if the question were put to them today.

School of Education, UWI, St. Augustine