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# Everyday parables: learnings from life

Eduard R. Riegert

Ladona Riegert

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## Everyday Parables: Learnings from Life

James Taylor

Winfield, BC: Wood Lake Books Inc., 1995

127 pp.

When his own daughter, during a rainy drive in Ireland, failed to recognize huddling sheep and took them to be “fuzzy rocks”, Taylor realized as never before how meaningless a prime biblical image—and indeed, most of the Bible—must be to her and to an entire generation and more of contemporary secularized people. Pondering the fact that only 14% of persons between 18 and 34 attend church weekly (as overagainst 37% of persons 55 and over), he concluded that “the more technologically complex the world into which people are born, the less likely they are to go to church” (7), because they are unable to discern God in about 90% of their lives. So God is irrelevant. And what we do in church, Taylor argues, doesn’t help, because the stories we tell there “reveal that God is not present in this world”, however much God may have been present in the biblical world and perhaps in the world of our grandparents.

One way of meeting this troublous situation, he decided, is to begin to learn how to discern God in our world, too, and the place to start doing that was by contemplating the insignificant daily stuff of our daily world. This is what Jesus did as he spun parables about yeast, salt, lamps, vines, and, yes, sheep. There was nothing “religious” about these items, yet under his touch they became media for God’s presence.

So Taylor conducted workshops in which he invited participants to create parables around ordinary things like potato peelers, felt pens, garlic, sandpaper, combs, waterfalls, staplers, casters, garbage, etc. He discovered that the parables created by these lay people focused on certain themes, and so the parables included in this collection are grouped into four sections: (1) having faith; (2) the Bible; (3) the church community; and (4) the deceptiveness of outward appearance, or, “the treasure in earthen vessels”. There was always, he found, great excitement and surprise as people began to “reflect theologically” on shoe laces and fences and pine cones and made surprisingly insightful and significant discoveries.

“Parables” is too strong a word for these sometimes delightful, sometimes humorous, sometimes dry meditations because most often they lead to instructional insights. For example, as a rope cannot be pushed but must be pulled, so “the best way to move people is from out in front, pulling” (91). Nevertheless, insights inspired by an ordinary object frequently take us too by surprise and point us in new directions, e.g., doorknobs exist only to open doors; all that really matters for Christians “is that we open doors—to life, to faith, to God—through which others may pass” (87). And occasionally a genuine parable appears in that it moves beyond analogy and sacramentalizes an object, that is, makes it redolent with the presence of God. An example: The coffee mug symbolizes socialization both at truck

stops and in church parlors after worship. (Now comes the line which makes this a genuine parable:) "If Jesus had lived in the 1990s, he would probably have raised a coffee mug, and said, 'Each time you do this, remember me'" (125).

I believe Jim Taylor is right. We need to be about the task of helping people be aware of the presence of God in all aspects of life, not just in esoteric "spiritual" moments. Starting with shoe laces and fire extinguishers is basic to that task. But the art of making these into media for God's presence is not very visible here.

Taylor is editor of Wood Lake Books and of the ministerial journal, *PMC: The Practice of Ministry in Canada*.

Eduard and Ladona Riegert  
Waterloo, Ontario

### **"Liturgy in a Multicultural Community." American Essays in Liturgy**

Mark B. Francis, C.S.V.

Edited by Edward Foley

Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1991

78 pp. \$8.05

Another in the Collegeville Benedictines' series of essays on liturgy, the focus of the monograph is on multicultural worship, specifically as it grew out of studies and experiments conducted by the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. The writer, who has served parishes in Latin America, is presently on the faculty of CTU.

The initial thrust of this essay takes us beyond the familiar theology of the "cultural adaptation of the liturgy", as expressed in the work of Anscar Chupungco, to fundamental anthropological issues. He adopts Geertz's definition of culture as "a system of inherited concepts expressed in symbolic forms by means of which human beings communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about, and their attitudes toward life" (p. 11). He then points out the dangers and challenges of planning and leading liturgy in multicultural communities. His focus is on non-anglo North American communities which are required to use the Roman rite. However, as we will see, the application of his research can be taken beyond this narrow focus.

There is a very helpful chapter on cultural diversity in New Testament times and the challenges this presented to the early church, the problem presented by the great variety of languages in use; the Hebrew/Hellenist tension; and the issues of food. Subsequent chapters deal with the treatment of multicultural issues up to the time of the Council of Trent, and the Second Vatican Council.