

The Faithzone : EDUCATION

This PDF version contains all the material relating to this section of the Video formatted for easy printing and comprising:

- Summary
- Transcript
- All questions/activities listed together
- Each question/activity listed on a separate page with pointers for discussion
- A collective worship

Summary

Presenter: Vicki Hackett, Actor, Riding Lights Theatre Company

Bringing the Bible alive.

How the Bible was first translated in to English in the 15th century.

William Tyndale: scholar, priest and martyr – his life and work.

The impact of the Bible in English.

Education for all – setting up church schools.

Today one in five primary school children attend church schools.

Discussion

What meaning or relevance can a 2000-year-old book have for today?

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Transcript

I'm Vicki Hackett. I'm an actor and I often work with Riding Lights Theatre Company.

Riding Lights takes theatre with a spiritual heart to all sorts of communities all over the UK. One of our aims is to bring the Bible alive to people in a way that they can understand, wherever they are.

[Words from Riding Lights play extract:

"I'm reading the holy prophets!"

"Doesn't it make you sick?"

"This is the holy word of God!"

"I meant reading in a chariot..."

"No, I just wish I understood it more."]

Until this appeared, almost nobody could understand the Bible. What makes this book so special is that it's one of the first copies of the New Testament printed in English and it dates from 1525. Believe it or not, this book provoked such an uproar that the man who translated it ended up in prison.

He was William Tyndale, a priest and a scholar. He lived during the reign of Henry VIII. Back then, the Bible was only available in Latin but Tyndale believed passionately that everyone should be able to hear and understand the message of Jesus for themselves. Not everyone agreed. The Church knew knowledge was power and Tyndale's work was very threatening to many people in the establishment. But he was determined to continue, so he left for the continent. Pages of his translation were printed abroad and smuggled home. As soon as they arrived they were seized upon, either by those who were desperate to read them, or by those who were just as desperate to destroy them.

Out of the first print run of 6,000 copies, only two survive today and this, the Tyndale Bible, is one of them. Now it is priceless. In 1535 it cost Tyndale everything: he was arrested, and after a year in prison, he was burnt at the stake as a heretic.

Tyndale knew how dangerous his work was, so why did he do it? Before he fled England, he said to a critic that "If God spare my life, ere many years pass, I will cause a boy that driveth a plough shall know more of the Scriptures than thou dost."

Tyndale can't have known how close his vision was to being realized. Within a year of his death, the first complete English Bible was licensed. The impact was massive. Anyone who could read English could now read the Bible for themselves, so now the task for Christians was to teach everyone to read.

For centuries the Church had taught the elite, but now it started to bring education to people from all backgrounds, not just through schools run by the established church but growing non-conformist groups like Methodists and Quakers and movements like Sunday School, founded to educate children on their day off from factory work. In communities up and down the country we can still see that link between church and

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education. In fact, one out of every five primary school children still attend a church school.

I doubt Tyndale could have guessed the effect an English Bible would have on our country but he clearly knew the difference it would make to people like me.

[Words from Riding Lights play:

“ ‘*Mundum*’ – that means ‘world’

“Oh Mr Tyndale, we thought you had given up on us!”

“Never!”]

The desire to make the Bible’s message of hope and challenge accessible drove Tyndale to publish this book. To me keeping that same message alive is just as important today as it was for Tyndale five hundred years ago.

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Activities

1. Many people think 'education' is important. What do you understand by 'education'? Do you think it is important? Why?
2. Did Jesus value people by how clever they were? Why does our society place such a stress on 'educational success'?
3. For many centuries, the Church was the main provider of education in Britain. What is the situation today? What role does the Church have to play in mainstream education?
4. Why was William Tyndale perceived as a threat by the Roman Catholic Church of his time? Should we always be allowed to express our ideas and opinions?
5. What makes a good teacher? Jesus was sometimes called 'Rabbi' (teacher). What sort of role model does he provide?

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Activity 1

Many people think 'education' is important. What do you understand by 'education'? Do you think it is important? Why?

- In the 'Freedom' section, we reflect on what could happen in a 'free' school – a place where no learning is compulsory. Why not extend the thought-experiment even further? What would it be like if society banned education altogether? How would the pupils spend the days/weeks/years of their childhood? Would they regret not having the possibility? What would be the implications for society? Would the world descend into a state of savagery? Or would a different set of values come into play?
- In the Middle Ages there was speculation about whether children, if left without nurture, would revert to the 'natural' language of Adam and Eve – i.e. Hebrew! No-one carried out the experiment. However, there are several examples of feral children. None of these could speak Hebrew or any other language. Younger pupils are fascinated by their stories, particularly on Victor the wild boy of Aveyron, and Kamala and Amala, the two young girls found living with wolves in the 1920s. Information can be found at http://www.btinternet.com/~neuronaut/webtwo_features_feral_kids.htm Their stories could be used as the basis for some first-person creative writing on what it might be like to have no education at all.

Extension

Who do students think should be responsible for deciding what is taught in schools? What criteria should be used to guide this choice?

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Activity 2

Did Jesus value people by how clever they were? Why does our society place such a stress on 'educational success'?

- Jesus' first disciples came almost exclusively from the lower, uneducated levels of society. For Jesus, what seemed important in a person was not how much they knew, but how aware they were of their need to know. As the New English Bible puts it, 'How blest are those who know their need of God; the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.' (Matthew 5:3).

St Paul also emphasized that the first Christians would not necessarily match up to traditional views of learning and that God's way was not necessarily the way of the world: "For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom." (see 1 Corinthians 1:18-25). It would seem that cleverness is not an important measure of worth within Christianity! Yet many parents are obsessed with their children 'doing well' in school tests and exams. Why is this? What are the students' own experiences? For example, have they been promised financial or other rewards if they pass their GCSEs?

- Younger students might like to imagine how they could 'measure' kindness or generosity. Could they design some sort of x-ray machine – or even a ruler! – that would measure such intangible, but essential, qualities? Or what about designing a weekly timetable, sample exams and certificates for a school which placed such values at the centre of its life?
- In many folk tales, the foolish/simple (but kind) character triumphs over clever (but nasty) rivals. Why not write a story based on this model? Hans Christian Andersen's *The Emperor's New Clothes* provides a variation on this theme – the child exposes the hypocrisy of the adults. A funny version of this story, *Twigmuntus, Cowbellianus and Perchnosius*, in which a simple farm boy confounds a collection of learned pedants, can be found at <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type1641c.html#twigmuntus> This also gives links to similar tales.

Extension

The idea that there are many different types of intelligence is becoming better known. What sort of intelligence can students identify (e.g. physical, numerical, verbal, emotional...)? What are their characteristics, strengths and drawbacks? What would happen to the world if there were only one sort? Christians believe that each person is created and loved by God. What implications does that have for the way we view different intelligences?

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Activity 3

For many centuries, the Church was the main provider of education in Britain. What is the situation today? What role does the Church have to play in mainstream education?

- The church, as the film makes clear, has played a crucial and honorable role in providing education over the past 1000 years. Recently, the Government has expressed a wish to see more 'faith' schools in Britain. However, riots in inner cities and the events outside the Holy Cross school in Belfast have been cited by others as a reason not to divide and separate young children in this way as it will encourage a sense of 'us' and 'them'

Students could research this subject using recent press cuttings from a variety of different types of newspaper, making a list of the reasons for and against keeping/extending church schools. What do students think? Do they think a church school should be there to teach people who belong to that faith, or that the churches have a duty to everybody (If the latter, what might people 'owe' the church in return?)

(N.B. approximately 25% of primary schools are church schools. Many of these are small schools, the only educational presence in rural communities, run by the Church of England or the Roman Catholic Church. For more information about the Church of England's role in education, see the National Society's website (www.natsoc.org.uk)

Extension

Extend the discussion about whether Church schools. Are all 'faith' schools the same? (e.g. is a small church primary school which has been the only school in a village for 150 years, the same as a new secondary 'faith' school in an urban area in terms of how it sees its mission?). How can cultures retain their identity and, at the same time, be open to alternative ways of thinking and believing.

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Activity 4

Why was William Tyndale perceived as a threat by the Roman Catholic Church of his time? Should we always be allowed to express our ideas and opinions?

The medieval Roman Catholic Church in Britain felt itself under threat from the 'Lollards' well before Tyndale's time. Lollards called into question many church practices – devotion to saints, pilgrimages, etc – and encouraged scriptural translation and debate of theological ideas by lay people. Tyndale's unauthorized translation openly called in question many Catholic practices ('penance', for example, which was thought of as a sacrament, was translated as 'forgiveness').

- Tyndale was unquestionably a learned and devout Christian and it is almost impossible not to respect his historic role as a truth-teller. Yet most societies, including our own, have their taboos and restrictions on 'free expression.' Britain has blasphemy laws (though they only apply to the Church of England) and laws against incitement to racial hatred. Other countries legislated against Holocaust denial, while some states in America insist that 'Creation Science' is taught alongside Darwinian theories. Why is total freedom of expression seldom practiced? The Tyndale Society website can be found at <http://www.tyndale.org/>

Extension

Is 'Truth' always desirable? It certainly might prove uncomfortable for most of us. In the film *Liar Liar*, Jim Carey plays a lawyer who, for one day, is utterly unable to lie. Whatever he is asked, he is compelled to tell the truth. The idea has potential for creative use. What would the world be like if everyone behaved like this? As the students write their own story or script following through the implications of this scenario.

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Activity 5

What makes a good teacher? Jesus was sometimes called 'Rabbi' (teacher). What sort of role model does he provide?

Jesus had the advantage of disciples who wanted to learn from him – although there were others who challenged him and made his life difficult. He did not have the constraints of a classroom, but on the other hand he could not put everything behind him at the end of the school day!

- Jesus seldom answers a question in a straightforward way. Frequently he uses parables, which have the effect of throwing the question back and making the questioners work out their own answer. Does this provide a working model for most teachers today? Discuss what the students think makes a good teacher. Would they want to do the job? If so, how would they do things differently?
- Perhaps Jesus is best thought of as a 'guru', a teacher who deals with wisdom rather than practical lessons and facts. Here, though are some of the questions he was asked:
 - 'Why do you speak to the people in parables? (Matthew 13:10)
 - 'How many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me?' (Matthew 18:21)
 - 'Teacher, what good things must I do to get eternal life?' (Matthew 19:16/Luke 10:25)
 - 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' (Matthew 18:1)
 - 'By what authority are you doing these things?' (Mark 11:28)
 - 'Of all the commandments, which is the most important?' (Mark 12:28)
 - 'What is truth?' (John 18:38)

Do the students know how Jesus answered these questions? What would their answer have been to those questions? Could they embody their answer in the form of a parable?

Extension

Building on the thoughts about how Jesus answered questions, could students give an answer to such questions in a non-verbal form – an abstract picture or collage for example? Is it possible?

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Collective Worship - *YOUR* EDUCATION

Four students move forward to begin...

SPEAKER 1: This morning we are going to see a short video.

SPEAKER 2: Then we'll ask some questions about it afterwards to find out if you agree with everything said in the video.

Show the video, which lasts about 4 minutes, then play the music as the four students begin addressing the students.

Speaker 3 holds up a bible.

SPEAKER 3: *In the video, Vicki Hackett said "The desire to make the Bible's message accessible drove Tyndale to publish this book in English."*

SPEAKER 4: As we've seen in the video: five hundred years ago William Tyndale was having a few hassles with the authorities who didn't want to give people the chance to educate themselves by reading the bible in English.

SPEAKER 1: Imagine what it was like having priests or monks tell you what everything in the bible meant – what was right and what was wrong - but not being able to check it out for yourself because you had never learned Latin like they had.

SPEAKER 2: I wouldn't have liked that all and I'll tell you why.

SPEAKER 3: Why?

SPEAKER 2: Because "information is power". And power is good. Useful. Makes you rich. I read in some magazine... we're living in the information age now and without information you're nothing.

SPEAKER 4: Information is good but knowledge is better.

SPEAKER 2: What's the difference?

Speaker 4 has their trusty dictionary with them.

SPEAKER 4: Information: "A collection of facts from which conclusions may be drawn" - if you've got the knowledge to do so. And knowledge is (*consulting the dictionary again*) "The result of perception and learning from information". So, knowledge is more important than information. Knowledge is power. Get it?

SPEAKER 2: Sort of.

SPEAKER 4: To give you a really simple example: You could get the information that 200 plus 200 equals 400. But that's not real mathematical knowledge until you know why that is the right answer. You have to understand the principles of maths.

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Speaker 3 turns to the gathered students and addresses them directly...

SPEAKER 3: You might want to think about that. Or another example: If you're typing something on a computer – it doesn't mean you know how the computer works, does it?

SPEAKER 2: No.

SPEAKER 3: But the real power lies in knowing how the computer works.

SPEAKER 1: I get it. You could train a chimpanzee to add 2 and 2 together and come up with 4 but the chimp can't explain why that is the right answer.

SPEAKER 4: Exactly. And even better than knowledge is wisdom. Wisdom is better than knowledge and information. Wisdom is the real power.

SPEAKER 2: And do I hear a dictionary definition coming up?

SPEAKER 4: (*reading from dictionary*) Wisdom is "The ability to apply knowledge" - with a bit of common sense and insight chucked in to make it even better. Wisdom is the real power.

SPEAKER 3: That magazine you were reading is well out of date. We were living in the information age last century but now we're living in the knowledge age. And tomorrow we'll be living in the age of wisdom – so it's going to be important to learn how to manipulate information.

Speaker 3 turns to the gathered students and addresses them directly...

SPEAKER 3: You might want to think about that too. Schools and colleges are not here to stuff you full of information – but to teach you how to handle that information. To give you knowledge and – if you're especially tuned in – wisdom too. But just being good at school doesn't make you wise. Some very wise people aren't even good at exams.

SPEAKER 4: Let's take a couple of minutes to think about what we've been talking about. How are you going to get from having information to having knowledge? Think about it.

The speakers wait 10-15 seconds before proceeding.

SPEAKER 1: How are you going to get from having knowledge to having wisdom? Think about it.

The speakers wait 10-15 seconds before proceeding.

SPEAKER 2: Maybe the trick is this... to gain power from knowledge you've got to take the information you get from the world and from teachers here and start using it - for yourself – in your own way. Think about it.

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The speakers wait 10-15 seconds before proceeding.

SPEAKER 4: Five days a week you come into this building called a school and you go to classes and get information from the teachers. But there's only one person who can turn that information into wisdom. That's you. Think about it.