

## **The Power of Parables for Religious Education**

### **Abstract**

In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus often uses parables to teach about the reign of God, to challenge his audience to think differently about God and themselves in relation to God. Today's religious educators often draw on these parables in their own teaching. Understanding the power of the parable for its original first-century audience allows students to then make parallels within their own context. It is crucial for religious educators to be aware of the confronting nature of parables so that they might assist students to identify the subversive elements in these stories. This paper presupposes a basic knowledge of the parables and at the same time aims to assist educators with their understanding of the potential power of parables.

### **The Power of Parables for Religious Education**

We all know that parables subvert our world view and invite us to look at ourselves and our world differently. Or do we? From my experience of working with secondary and tertiary students as well as with adults in schools and parishes, I have found that some of the gospel parables are well known and treasured. Many can tell the story of the Good Samaritan or the Prodigal Son, for instance, and educators frequently draw on these parables in their teaching. Often, however, I find that there are elements of these and other parables that are not so well known and that the subversive character of parables is rarely appreciated. Drawing on contemporary parable scholarship, this article aims to give an overview of the nature of parables and to provide insights into lesser known aspects of the parables in order to recapture some of their power for religious educators.

### **Nature of a Parable**

In 1961, C. H. Dodd offered a definition of parable that acquired classic status over the subsequent decades and that remains relevant in our times:

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 (Dodd, 1961, p. 16).

Dodd's description identifies several features of a parable. First, it may be as simple as a simile, such as comparing the reign of God with a mustard seed (Mark 4:30-31/par.). Second, the parable will relate to a situation that is well known to its hearers (i.e. "drawn from nature or common life"). Third, the hearers will be struck by an unexpected aspect of the story. Finally, the parable leaves its hearers puzzled and having to tease out the implications of what they have heard.

In the Synoptic Gospels, the notion of God's reign or realm or empire is at the heart of Jesus' teaching. Jesus announces that the reign of God has come near (Mark 1:14-15/par.). God's reign, in contrast to that of the Roman Empire and earlier ruling powers, is a reign of justice and graciousness. God's power is directed towards fullness of life and liberation from burden. The reign of God is good news for those who suffer and yearn for justice and is confronting for those who benefit from the oppression of others. Jesus frequently uses parables as the medium for communicating the good news of God's reign. The parables invite and challenge their hearers to expand their understanding of God and how God operates.

Like any good teacher, Jesus begins with the everyday experience of his audience. That some parables draw on themes from nature reflects the fact that a significant portion of his Galilean audience would have been engaged in agricultural and fishing occupations (Getty-Sullivan, 2007). In the example cited above (Mark 4:30-31/par.), Jesus is trying to teach his audience about the reign of God by comparing it with something with which they are very familiar, a mustard seed. We are told that this small seed grows into a large shrub

that provides shade for birds (Mark 4:32-33).

There is, however, an unexpected element to this comparison. As Reid (2000) explains, mustard is a common weed. So, in effect, Jesus is saying that the reign of God is like a weed, something his hearers certainly know about but also something they might want to eradicate. At the very least, this statement would have been quite confronting and would surely have teased his hearers into trying to make sense of the comparison. It may have been alienating, even threatening. Reid makes this point when she notes the difficulty in removing wild mustard once it has taken hold and argues that the reign of God, similar to mustard, would be considered a threat by some:

The weed-like reign of God poses a challenge to the arrangements of civilization and those who benefit from them. This interpretation poses a disturbing challenge to the hearer: Where is God's reign to be found? With what kind of power is it established? Who brings it? Who stands to gain by its coming? Whose power is threatened by it? (p. 297).

The potential for an informed engagement with this parable in a religious education context will depend largely upon the educator's familiarity with the cultural context encoded in the parable. In other words, we need to know something about what the reference to a mustard seed would have sparked in the mind of a first-century Palestinian audience.

Jesus tells parables to challenge his hearers' thinking about how God operates, to broaden their understanding of God's reign so that they might begin to think in new ways. Sometimes the hearers are left puzzled, sometimes angry at being so challenged. The parables are designed to cause a reaction, to provoke questions in the audience. Parables are confronting rather than comforting stories. They are subversive of predominant worldviews (Crossan, 1975; Reid, 2000).

Another agricultural image forms the basis of Mark 4:1-9, often called the Parable of the Sower. It is the first of the parables in the Gospel of Mark and is followed in 4:13-20 by an allegorical interpretation. The allegory accounts for each element in the story and essentially provides a packaged explanation of the parable. Allegorical explanation tends to reduce the power of the parable and its capacity to tease the audience into active thought: "In some ways allegory operates against parable—closing off thought rather than opening it up, giving the answer rather than a question" (Malbon, 2002, p. 31). This is the only instance in the Markan Gospel where a parable is given such an explanation. Most scholars hold that this allegorical interpretation did not come from Jesus but was rather developed later by the early Church (Malbon 2002; Reid 1999) and retrojected into the teaching of Jesus.

Two of the surprising features of the Parable of the Sower are the manner of sowing and the size of the harvest. The sower allows the seed to fall on all sorts of ground – the path, rocky ground, among thorns and good soil. Given this seemingly random rather than focussed scattering of the seed, the hearers would naturally expect an indifferent harvest with limited growth. Since an average harvest was about eight-fold, the resultant harvest of thirty, sixty and a hundredfold (4:8) is utterly beyond comprehension (Malbon, 2002). These surprising features, the manner of sowing and the dimensions of the harvest, would provoke the hearers to reconsider their understanding of how God operates: God invites all and not just a few into relationship, and there are no limits to the overwhelming nature of God's abundance (Reid, 1999). The parable leaves its hearers thinking. It does not attempt to answer all their questions. Having briefly addressed the nature of parables, we now turn to ways of reading the parables that speak to contemporary sensibilities and are, at the same time, congruent with the originating contexts.

### **Reading Parables**

In order to understand the dynamic of any particular parable, it is imperative to identify Jesus' target audience in telling the parable. Sometimes the targeted group is a particular section of a bigger audience. In the Parables of the Lost (Luke 15:1-32), for instance, we learn that tax collectors and sinners come to listen to Jesus (15:1). We also learn that the ensuing grumbling by the Pharisees and scribes is the catalyst for the telling of these parables (15:2-3). So while the audience is wider than the Pharisees and scribes, it is

principally these groups who are being targeted by the Lukan Jesus. The reader who identifies with the targeted audience is, I suggest, the one who experiences most deeply the power of the parable. There is a little bit of the Pharisees and the scribes of the gospels in every one of us.

A word of caution is necessary, however, concerning the gospel presentations of the Pharisees. Usually the Pharisees are portrayed in the gospels as opponents of Jesus but this stereotyped characterisation does not accurately reflect the historical situation of Jesus' time or the diversity within Judaism. The gospel presentation of tension between Jesus and the Pharisees may be influenced by the late first-century tension which developed between the nascent Church and Judaism. Thus, religious educators need to deal sensitively and in an informed manner with the gospel presentations of Pharisees and, indeed, Jews in general (Council of Christians and Jews [Victoria], 2007).

Once the target audience of a parable has been identified, the next aspect that might be explored is the nature of the confrontation. What elements of the parable would be confronting for Jesus' audience? What is Jesus trying to get them to see differently? Because we read these parables in very different contexts from Jesus' original audience we may miss some of the challenges within the parable.

Reference to contemporary biblical scholarship is indispensable for educators seeking to understand the nuances that inform this mode of communication. To my mind, one of the most accessible recent contributions to parable scholarship is the three volume work of Barbara Reid OP (1999, 2000, 2001). While this fine scholarship is addressed to preachers, it is equally applicable to religious educators across all levels. It takes account of a wide range of scholarly views and includes Reid's own insights into each of the synoptic gospel parables. Of particular assistance to teachers is Reid's focus on aspects of contemporary experience that might resonate with or find echoes in Jesus' parabolic teaching.

The limits of this article preclude any attempt to provide a detailed exploration of any one parable or to consider in detail the questions that parables raise for contemporary readers. Rather, my aim is simply to alert educators to some of the surprising and confronting aspects of selected Synoptic parables, mostly from Luke, and thus to open a space for reading them through different lenses, expanding our understanding of God and ourselves in relation to God.

### **The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)**

Since, as noted above, this is one of the best known parables and is widely used in the classroom, it will be helpful to look again at the dynamic of the parable. Byrne (2000) comments that the modern reader may lose some of the impact of which Jesus' audience could not fail to be aware:

Centuries of holding together the adjective "good" and the noun "Samaritan" have dulled us to the explosive tension of the phrase in the world of Jesus. The hostility between Jews and Samaritans at the time makes the phrase an oxymoron—as phrases like "good terrorist" or "good drug dealer" would be for us (p. 100).

Jesus tells the parable in response to a lawyer's questioning. The lawyer sets out to test Jesus (10:25) and justify himself (10:29), so that his questions lack authenticity. From the perspective of the narrator, he has an ulterior motive.

Much of the parable would cause little surprise to Jesus' audience. The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was notoriously dangerous (Bailey, 1983), so it would not be unexpected for a traveller to be attacked, robbed and left half dead (10:30). The audience would perhaps excuse the priest and the Levite for not helping the wounded man as they would contract ritual impurity if the man happened to be dead or to die while they were giving assistance. For the priest, this would interfere with the performance of his religious duties and would necessitate a time-consuming and costly process to become ritually clean again. While ritual impurity would not have as significant a consequence for the Levite, he could be excused for following the example of the priest in passing by. Since the offering of sacrifice in the Temple was restricted to priests,

Levites and Jewish laymen, the audience would be expecting a Jewish layman, someone just like themselves, to be the third character to arrive on the scene and to act differently (Bailey, 1983). It is therefore the next part of the parable that would cause shock for Jesus' hearers and challenge their established worldview. The third person who comes along and helps the man is not a Jewish layman but a Samaritan. The very word 'Samaritan' was enough to repel a Jewish audience, given the centuries-old enmity between Jews and their Samaritan neighbours to the north. When the Samaritan sees the stricken man, he is described as being moved with compassion (10:33). The Greek word used here (*splanchnizomai*) is a cognate of the word *splanchnon* which refers to 'inner parts of the body'. The use of *splanchnizomai* here informs us that the Samaritan is moved to the very depths of his being. The same word is used elsewhere in Luke's Gospel to describe the response of Jesus to the plight of the widow of Nain (7:13) and that of the father in the Parable of the Prodigal Son when the younger son returns (15:20).

Many educators are aware of the relationship between Samaritans and Jews in Jesus' time and may consider that the main point of this parable is the need to show compassion to all, even to your enemies. Jesus broadens the understanding of "neighbour" from fellow Jew to all. This is certainly one aspect of the parable. There is more, however, to this subversive story. If Jesus were only trying to get his audience to see this one dimension, he could have reversed the roles in the story and had a Jew helping a Samaritan who was in need. This would still have been surprising for a Jewish audience but they would be affirmed by the generosity of the Jew.

Instead, Jesus turns the dynamic on its head. An enemy of his specifically Jewish audience models God's compassion and Jesus invites them to follow the example of this man (10:37). This would be nothing less than shocking for Jesus' audience. They are being challenged to change their whole way of thinking about Samaritans. They were convinced that Samaritans were detestable and worthless, but the one they label as despicable is the one that models God's action. Jesus tells them to be like the Samaritan. This change of mindset would be far harder to take than doing an act of kindness to an enemy. Jesus challenges the stereotypes that are held by his audience and asks them to see the other differently. This is an important element of the parable to be opened up and discussed with students who might, in their turn, suggest some contemporary parallels.

### **The Parable of the Prodigal Son /Parable of the Lost Sons (Luke 15:11-32)**

The parable traditionally titled the Prodigal Son is perhaps more appropriately titled the Parable of the Lost Sons because it is the third of a series of parables in Luke 15 that deal with finding the lost. The first two of these are the Parable of the Lost Sheep (15:3-7) and the Parable of the Lost Coin (15:8-10). In the Lukan context, as noted earlier, Jesus is targeting the Pharisees and scribes who are complaining that he welcomes sinners (15:1-2).

The first two parables are an example of a gendered pair of stories often found in the Gospel of Luke. Parallel stories feature a man and a woman in matching situations. Here a man celebrates after searching for and finding a lost sheep and a woman celebrates after searching for and finding a lost coin. Both the man and woman are images of God who seeks out the lost and welcomes the sinner. In the third of the parables, the father images God. By using a range of images for God with their classes, religious educators can reflect the wide range of biblical images for God.

According to Deuteronomy 21:17, the firstborn son receives twice the share of the father's possessions than that of each of the other sons. It was usual, however, for the sons to receive their share upon the death of their father. The younger son's request is therefore an offence to the father, yet the older son does not protest about the plan (Reid, 2000). That the father agrees to this scenario (15:12) is one of the surprising elements of the parable because to divide up his property would be tantamount to losing honour. Hence, the father's gracious response comes at a cost to himself, causing him to be shamed in the eyes of others.

Most teachers know well the dynamic in this parable which highlights the father's love and compassion (*splanchnizomai*) for his younger son. My comments here, therefore, will focus on the older son who is sometimes not given as much attention. The older son's resentment of the father's embrace of the returned younger son (15:25-28) is a key element of the parable. He considers himself a model son and is angered that the wasteful other son is reunited with the family. Yet a closer look at the parable indicates that the older son's perceptions of his own behaviour and relationships may not reflect reality.

Far from being the model son, the older son's relationship with his family leaves much to be desired. He describes himself as working like a slave for his father (15:29) rather than like a son. He refers to his brother as "this son of yours" (15:30). Thus, he alienates himself from both his father and brother. He, too, is a lost son. The father's love for the older son is evident in his words: "My son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours" (15:31). Yet there is no indication as to whether this son will respond to the father's invitation to join the celebration. The parable is left open-ended.

Remember that this parable is really being addressed to the Pharisees and scribes, the "older sons", who are grumbling because Jesus is welcoming sinners, the "younger sons." While the Pharisees and scribes might consider themselves as God's faithful ones, the dynamic of the parable invites them to reconsider their relationship with God and to perceive their need to be reconciled with God. Once again, we see that a parable confronts its hearers to think differently and such a message would not be easily received.

It is important that religious educators highlight both the depth of God's compassion portrayed in the parable as well as this challenge that the parable levels at its hearers. God's mercy and graciousness are offered to all, including those considered outsiders. The challenge is to recognise one's own need for God's gracious love. That there is no mention of the mother or any daughters in the parable reflects the patriarchal context within which the story is set.

### **The Parable of the Widow and the Judge (18:1-8)**

Another uniquely Lukan parable is that of the Widow and the Judge (18:1-8) in which we are introduced to two characters: a judge who has no concern for God or people (18:2), and a widow who continually comes to the judge seeking justice (18:3). The portrayal of the judge presents a contrast with the description of God as judge in Sirach 35:14-22 where we are told that God executes justice and will not ignore the widow and orphan (Schottroff, 2006; Reid, 2000). While the narrator's comment in 18:1 links the parable with persistence in prayer, there is more in the parable than this focus.

Deuteronomy 16:20 instructs the faithful to pursue only justice. We see that it is the widow rather than the judge who pursues justice and thus is the model to be emulated, a key element of the parable that is frequently overlooked. We also see that it is the widow and not the powerful judge who images the God of justice. This is a surprising dynamic for Jesus' audience: "It asks one to leave behind stereotypes and wrestle with unfamiliar notions about what God is like and what justice in the realm of God looks like and how it is achieved" (Reid, 2000, p. 233).

### **Parables of Reversal**

Immediately following the Parable of the Widow and the Judge, Luke presents the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (18:9-14), one of the so-called parables of reversal. Reversal is a prominent theme in the Gospel of Luke. It forms a key element of the passage we generally refer to as the Magnificat (1:46-55) where we hear that God raises the lowly and brings down the powerful, fills the hungry with good things and sends the rich away empty (1:52-53). The theme is continued in the woes that follow the Lukan beatitudes (6:20-26) and also features in a number of Lukan parables.

The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector is addressed to those who regard themselves highly and treat others with contempt (18:9). The parable describes both a Pharisee and a tax collector going to the temple to pray. The Pharisee is self-satisfied, placing himself above others and thinking himself righteous while the tax collector simply acknowledges his need for God's mercy (18:11-13). We are told that it is the

tax collector, one from a despised occupation and labelled a sinner, rather than the religious leader who goes home in right relationship with God (18:14). The parable highlights that God's embrace of the outsider is characteristic of the reign of God. Once again, Jesus' target audience, who would align themselves with the Pharisee in the parable, would be challenged to reconsider their own relationship with God.

A similar dynamic is evident in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (16:19-31). This parable is addressed to Pharisees who are described here as lovers of money (16:14). Usually, riches were considered a sign of God's blessing (Reid, 2000), so the descriptions of the two main characters would lead the audience to consider that God's favour lay with the rich man rather than the beggar, Lazarus. The outcome of the parable, however, reverses this understanding. The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus confronts its hearers to reassess their understanding of how God operates and challenges those with wealth to see the needs of others and ensure that all have enough. God's reign is confronting for the comfortable.

The topic of wealth and riches is treated more comprehensively in the Gospel of Luke than in the other Gospels. This may be because the Lukan community is thought to comprise people from a range of social locations, from the wealthy to the poor, even destitute (Esler, 1987). It is no surprise then that some of the Lukan parables draw on the theme of riches.

The Parable of the Rich Fool (12:13-21) also takes up this topic. In response to a request from someone in the crowd to settle an inheritance dispute (12:13-14), Jesus tells the Parable of the Rich Fool on the dangers that an excess of possessions can pose. When his land produces abundantly, a man decides to build larger storage barns so that he can stockpile all his goods, enough for several years. It is pertinent to note that the man engages in a soliloquy (12:17-19). He does not thank God nor celebrate and share the abundance with family and friends. He is totally self-focussed. The first person singular pronoun "I" predominates in his self-talk. His obsession with possessions has isolated him and he dies alone (Donahue, 1988). In the Rich Man and Lazarus, the rich man is unaware of the beggar at his gate. Here, the Rich Fool is unaware of God's presence: "God has to interrupt his material musings" (Donahue, 1988, p. 179). God's words, "You fool..." (12:20) provide an ironic twist as the parable comes to a close. We see the dangers that riches can trigger and to which this man, like his counterpart in the Lazarus story, has succumbed.

Elsewhere in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus affirms another rich man, Zacchaeus, for sharing his wealth with those in need (19:1-10). The problem is not having riches but what you decide to do or not to do with your wealth. In 8:1-3, several women who travel with Jesus and the twelve support the group out of their own resources. The women are portrayed as having independent means and as sharing these for the benefit of others. While Zacchaeus and these Lukan women followers of Jesus are characters in the gospel story as a whole rather than in the parables, they provide the model for the appropriate use of possessions. They thus help readers of the gospel to comprehend more fully the teaching of the parables on riches. God's reign is concerned with fullness of life for all. Hence, riches are to be shared so that all may flourish.

### **Slaves and Day Labourers**

Several parables involve slaves or day labourers. It is important for educators to have an insight into the social world of the first century in order to understand the context for these parables. Within the economic climate of the Roman Empire, many peasants operated in desperate situations:

Famine, lack of rain, over-population, and heavy taxes could put a struggling farmer over the brink. In Palestine of Jesus' day it is estimated that somewhere between one-half and two-thirds of a farmer's income went to taxes that included Roman tribute, payment to Herod and the procurators, and land rent to the large landowners (Reid, 1999, 114).

Those who lost their land had to rely on finding employment as day labourers. Theirs was a precarious existence. The usual daily wage for a male labourer, the equivalent of a Roman denarius, was insufficient to feed a family and had to be supplemented by the labour of women and children who received significantly less than the male wage (Schottroff, 2006).

Hence, the day labourers formed an extremely vulnerable group. There is evidence that landowners tended to be more concerned about the health of their slaves than of these labourers (Schottroff, 2006), and there was no certainty that a day labourer would be given employment on any particular day. The landowners were in the positions of power. This is the context for the Parable of the Labourers (Matt 20:1-16) where a landowner gives the same wage to those who worked for a full day and to those who worked only part of the day. Since the fittest labourers would be likely to be selected first by the landowners, those who had not been employed by late in the day (20:6-7) are probably the frailest. Their situation would be the most desperate of all the labourers. The parable highlights yet again that God's ways are not the conventional ways of the Roman world. God's graciousness is particularly concerned for the most vulnerable.

The plight of slaves in the Greco-Roman world varied, depending on the status and temperaments of their masters. While some slaves held important roles in their master's business dealings, others were engaged in physical labour. Either way, the slave's work was used for their owner's benefit. Slaves were considered as property, non-persons, and were commonly subjected to physical and sexual abuse (Dowling, 2007).

Several of the Gospel parables presume a master-slave dynamic and the violence and exploitation of slaves is also evident in some of these stories. Luke 12:41-48 (parallel Matt 24:45-51), for instance, shows that male and female slaves are subject to abuse by anyone in a position of power over them, even another slave (12:45). The master punishes the slave who does not follow the master's instructions by dismembering him (12:46). Even the slave who does not know his master's wishes and displeases the master will receive a light beating (12:48). Physical violence is an expected part of the world of slaves (Dowling, 2008). The exploitation of a slave's work is evident in Luke 17:7-9 where a slave who has been labouring in the field is then expected to prepare and serve the meal for the master. The slave is not thanked for doing what is commanded.

The slave's status as nonperson is relevant to a reading of The Parable of the Great Dinner (Luke 14:15-24). In this story we find the host of a great dinner sending out his slave to tell the invited guests that the dinner is ready. When they find excuses not to come, the master sends the slave out again to invite the poor, crippled, blind and lame (14:21). When there is still more room, the slave is sent out yet again to the roads and lanes to compel others to come (14:23). While the main foci of the parable are the abundant hospitality of the host and the poor and the outsiders coming to the dinner rather than those originally invited, Glancy (2006) makes an observation that many readers of this parable overlook. The slave is not invited. The poorest and most vulnerable of free persons are invited but the slave is not considered as a guest. The slave is a nonperson.

We have seen that some aspects of the slave parables reflect the offensive social structure which allows slaves to be owned by masters. Within this structure, violence and abuse inflicted on slaves is thought to be acceptable because slaves are considered nonpersons. Though the slave parables are aiming to challenge their hearers in their own way, they presume a context of slavery that needs to be critiqued.

Educators also need to be aware that slavery is not just an issue of the past. While it was common practice in biblical times, slavery remains one of the most urgent human rights issues which our world faces today. Human trafficking, for the purposes of sexual exploitation and forced labour, is one of the forms of slavery in our present world, including Australia. When using slave parables in teaching, it is well to be informed about the biblical and modern slave context so that the violence inflicted on slaves in ancient times and today is critiqued and not glossed over or unconsciously reinforced (Dowling 2008).

While some aspects of the gospel parables reinforce slaves' vulnerability and status as nonpersons, there are other aspects which subvert this to a certain extent. The story of the master who sits his slaves down and serves them (Luke 12:37) counters the usual dynamic of master-slave relationships, disrupting the hierarchical structure. In a previous work, I have argued that some unexpected aspects also occur in the Parable of the Pounds (Luke 19:11-27). Here, the master is depicted as extortionate and the third slave exposes his master's practices and refuses to continue the oppression. That the third slave is portrayed as

the hero of the parable and the master as the villain counters general expectation (Dowling 2007). The third slave acts as the Lukan Jesus acts to relieve the burdens of the oppressed, modelling the characteristic values of God's reign.

### Conclusion

Jesus taught in parables. He used parables to teach about the reign of God and to challenge people to think about God and themselves in new ways. Understanding parables is therefore an ongoing responsibility for teachers of Religious Education in schools and adult education contexts. It is vital that teachers are aware of the confronting and challenging nature of parables, so that students might come to appreciate the power of the parables. Parables should not leave hearers thinking that they are lovely stories. Rather, hearers should be puzzled and having to think further about the meanings. Hearers are challenged to expand their understanding of God's reign and how God promotes fullness of life for all.

Knowledge of the social and cultural contexts encoded in a particular parable is an essential element in understanding the dynamic of that parable. Contemporary biblical scholarship provides insights into these contexts. Identifying the audience whom Jesus targets by telling the parable is also a key aspect. With this knowledge, educators can assist students to understand how the parable would have been confronting or even shocking for Jesus' original audience. Only then is it possible for students to recognise parallel situations within their own contexts to which the parable might speak. When a parable presumes the context of slavery and reinforces the abuse and exploitation of slaves, however, that context must be critiqued so that it is not unwittingly reinforced. This is particularly relevant given the ongoing existence of slavery in our present world.

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