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Parables, Pedagogies, and Purpose: A Comparison of the Use of Parables Within Godly Play and Examples of UK Evangelical Children's Ministry

Robin Barfield[a,b]

[a]Cheshire, UK; [b]Lecturer in Practical Theology, Oak Hill College, London, UK

ABSTRACT
A comparison of the use of parables within children's ministry practice reveals two very different approaches: Jerome Berryman's Godly Play elevates the role of parables and is open-ended for the child to interpret. Examples of UK evangelical processes are then observed and are seen to make much less use of parables but mediate the intent of those parables through adult interpretation. Evangelical theologies of parables are consulted to determine the coherence of each approach before a comparison and analysis are made.

Introduction

Churches face many choices in children's ministry. One key choice is the pedagogical model they employ. Traditionally, evangelical churches have tended toward an approach that has been termed "Instructional-Analytic," which features "cognitive thought processing" and an adult directing and determining the goal of the session (Anthony, 2006, p. 38). Increasingly, Jerome Berryman's Godly Play has been seen as an alternative option for evangelical churches and has spread through the UK (Berryman, 2009; Donoghue, 2015; Steinhäuser & Øystese, 2018). Michael Anthony has described this as a key way of employing the Contemplative Reflective approach, "characterized by periods of quiet reflection, introspective prayer, and storytelling" (Anthony, 2006, p. 36; see particularly May, 2006). Other evangelicals have included Godly Play in their recommended approach (Beckwith, 2009, p. 137; Csinos & Beckwith, 2013, p. 96; May et al., 2005, pp. 233–234; Stonehouse & May, 2010, p. 2).

Several questions arise from the evangelical adoption of Godly Play regarding the inherent theology of Jerome Berryman and its consistency with key evangelical convictions concerning the place and function of

CONTACT Robin Barfield robin@thebarfields.net 23 School Road, Winsford, Cheshire, UK.
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Scripture in a pedagogy for children. This article will focus on one aspect of this question, one prominent in Godly Play, that of the place of parables in children's ministry. This will be examined by doing three things: (1) considering the use of parables in Godly Play; (2) considering the use of parables in select UK evangelical publications for children's ministry; and (3) considering evangelical theologies of parables and commentaries. These will all rotate around the parable of the Lost Sheep in Luke 15:1–7 due to its commonality in both and its general popularity as a parable.

The use of parables in Godly Play

Godly Play is a non-directive pedagogy constructed and developed by Jerome Berryman in which a child is given agency to make theological meaning for themselves through play (Berryman, 2002a, p. 12). He describes this as combining "a deep rooting in classical Christian language with creative openness" (Berryman, 2015, p. 554). Godly Play began in 1972 although it had been in development since the 1960s (Berryman, 2005, p. 446). Only been recently has the full curriculum been published in eight volumes as a holistic and coherent schema derived from Berryman's unique theological perspective.

There are three areas of content within the curriculum: sacred stories, liturgical actions and parables. The sacred stories seek God's "elusive presence" primarily through Old Testament stories but also some from the New Testament; the liturgical actions introduce the child to the calendar of the church year and the saints in order to normalize and understand the rhythms of church life; the parables are more playful and creative and take a distinctly different shape from the other two sections (Berryman, 2002a, pp. 25–26). There are six "guiding" parables in the syllabus as well as "parables about parables."

Although the curriculum is intentionally shorter than comparative pedagogies, the focus on parables is high. Out of 99 lessons published in volumes 1–8 there are 11 lessons on parables. These are found in volume 3, the second book of lessons. In the appendix, Berryman makes clear that there are 6 core parables with 5 enrichments (Berryman, 2017, p. 227). It is not so much the numbers that are significant but Berryman's threefold division and the importance he places on parables as a distinct category from other scriptural narrative sections or church practice. Where evangelicals adopt Godly Play it is usually the liturgical elements that are left out, increasing the parables relative importance further (May, 2006, p. 56; May et al., 2005, pp. 233–234).

The six core parables are "The Parable of the Good Shepherd" based on the expected pericopes in Matthew 18 and Luke 15, but also the "I am"

saying of Jesus in John 10 and Psalm 23. Berryman's interpretation fuses these sections together into one account. Secondly, the Good Samaritan from Luke 10; thirdly, the Great Pearl from Matthew 13:45; fourthly, the Sower from Matthew 13:1–9; fifthly, the Leaven from Matthew 13:33 and Luke 13:20–21; and sixthly, the Mustard Seed from Matthew 24:32, Mark 4:30–32 and Luke 13:18–19. The enrichment parables cover a comparison of parables, a parable about parables and a Rabbinical parable, parable games, and Jesus' sayings. The latter two are still in development (Berryman, 2012, p. 165). (Berryman, 2009, p. 10)

The parable of the Good Shepherd covers the parable of the Lost Sheep in Luke 15 and therefore this lesson will be examined in more detail. As with all the Godly Play sessions, there is no set aim for the session rather the aim is for the children to wonder (Berryman, 2017, pp. 5 & 98). With the parables in Godly Play, there is a box on a shelf in the parables area for the adult to retrieve and open. This box is presented as a gift before it is opened, and a piece of green felt is laid flat. This is where the wondering begins for the children by asking questions such as, "I wonder if you have ever had to go through a place of danger?"(Berryman, 2017, p. 108). The parable sessions are more "fun" and "playful" than the other sessions and these early moments of wondering can demonstrate the humor present in these sessions (Berryman, 2017, pp. 6 & 101). As the physical elements for storytelling are laid out the wondering continues before the clarity of sheep penned in a field comes to light (Berryman, 2017, p. 103). The wondering then becomes about the number of sheep before Jesus' words "I am the Good Shepherd" are introduced and mixed with the words of Psalm 23. The parable of the lost sheep is told resulting in the words,

> When all the sheep are safe inside, I am so happy that I can't be happy just by myself, so I invite all of my friends and we have a great feast. (Berryman, 2017, p. 106)

The presentation returns to John 10 and the hired hand, or "ordinary shepherd" and the wolves. Throughout the storytelling, the movement and speech are slow and intentional as with all the Godly Play sessions (Berryman, 1991, p. 30). There are then 12 "wondering" questions, which are deliberately open-ended and encourage the children to "make meaning" themselves rather than using the "transfer model" which requires children to produce the correct answer (Berryman, 2009, p. 42). These wondering questions are varied; some relate to the symbolic elements of the story, "I wonder if these sheep have names"; and some are personal, "I wonder if you have ever found the good grass" (Berryman, 2017, pp. 107–108). The parables have more wondering questions than the sacred stories and the liturgical lessons. The sacred stories tend to have the same four questions asked, "I wonder which part of this story you liked best?", "I wonder what

part is the most important?", "I wonder where you are in this story or what part of the story is about you?" and "I wonder if there is any part of the story we can leave out and still have all the story we need?" (Berryman, 2002b, p. 56). The liturgical lessons have wondering questions centered on the work they are going to do in the time of response (Berryman, 2018, p. 150). The difference with the wondering questions in the parables compared to the other types suggests further that these sessions have a critical role in the formation of the child in Berryman's understanding. The children then continue to be creative using the tools provided.

The practice of Godly Play is so rooted in the theology of Jerome Berryman that we can make clear claims regarding its theology. Berryman has written extensively in both books and journal articles, seeking to justify and explain Godly Play's coherence and purpose. The appendix to the material referenced above gives his simplest explanation, that a parable is "a kind of metaphor that uses short narrative fiction to reference a transcendent symbol" (Berryman, 2017, p. 227). However, what Berryman means needs to be further fleshed out. In a significant early paper from 1979, Berryman understands the parable as presenting a physical image that communicates itself (Berryman, 1979, p. 282). This symbol does not require interpretation in any form, in fact, for the adult to interpret results in the destruction of the symbol; "finding answers that can be reduced to propositions" would be mistaken and is not an "appropriate approach to parables." Berryman is concerned here with the danger of a pedagogical approach that "teaches *about* the parable *to* children rather than being *in* the parable *with* them" (Berryman, 1979, p. 273). Berryman seeks to achieve this symbolic transcendence by way of a "translating medium." He rejects the use of adults as a translating medium as that has "authority problems that can block participation," rather it is the work of the parable box in the presentation to do this work (Berryman, 1979, p. 284).

We must ask why parables are such a significant element of the Godly Play curriculum. The clue lies in Berryman's approach to the term "play." For Berryman, parables have a unique sense of playfulness about them. We noted the humor in the wondering that opens the sessions. Berryman argues that laughter is "related to the experience of God's presence" as this is "the expression of the image of the Creator, *creating* in each child as its foundation" (Berryman, n.d., pp. 31–32). Playfulness has no defined aim; therefore, the parables must not have an intended purpose. To have an aim for the session, something that the children must understand about the story, would be "pseudoplay" (Berryman, 2002a, p. 43; Hyde, 2011, p. 345). This is "blasphemous" in Berryman's eyes (Berryman, 2009, p. 41, 2013a, p. 86). Parables must stand alone as images themselves.

Berryman's pedagogy has parables in a central role, representing an aspect of God's character and the child's encounter with God. This approach intentionally neither recognizes the context in which the parables are found in the gospels nor the canonical context in which the parables come. Instead, they are explored as free-standing units, or as reconstructed units according to their theme, as with the Good Shepherd above. Therefore no background or historical context is provided. They are more like fairy tales or mythological stories that exist atemporally and can be interpreted freely. For example, Bruno Bettelheim sees Scripture as closer to fairy tales in its universalism and suggestive nature, "permitting the child to draw his own conclusions" (Bettelheim, 1976, pp. 45 & 53).

This reflects Berryman's theology of Scripture. Berryman focuses on the sense of Scripture rather than its meaning (Berryman, 2009, p. 28, 2013b, p. 171). The Bible as the written word of God is secondary to its oral version (Berryman, 1991, p. 68). His theology of parables relies more on the work of Jesus Seminar scholar John Dominic Crossan who writes that Jesus' parables

> are not so much word-pictures about assorted external subjects as they are *icons* of himself. Like good poems, they not only *mean*, but *be*: they have a *sacramental* effectiveness. Whether we "get" them or not, therefore, they remain first and foremost his way of *getting to us*. (Berryman, 1979, 1991, p. viii; Crossan, 1992, p. 3)

This existential approach to parables intentionally removes them from the literary and historical setting and places them before the reader as "icons" for the reader to determine what they can see.

The use of parables in select UK evangelical publications

The use of parables in UK evangelical processes is complex and varied. We will consider several products that self-identify as evangelical and are produced in and for UK churches. With each publication, we will focus on the parable of the Lost Sheep for several reasons. First, it is one of the most common parables and, therefore, available for examination. This extends to some of the youngest age groups where other parables are not explored. It is deeply loved and cherished and has been retold many times. Second, this provides us with a near parallel to our examination of Godly Play above. Third, the brevity of the Lost Sheep, essentially only four verses in Luke's gospel, makes it a straightforward comparison.

The products that will be compared are *Go Teach*, from a background in the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Church (FIEC) (Anon, n.d.), and *Lessons for Life*, from the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London (Masters, 1992). These are two of the more conservative churches, *Click*, produced by The Good Book Company is adapted from Australian material

and would have a broader theological range of churches than *Go Teach* but would still be classically evangelical in its ethos (Clark et al., 2005). *Mustard Seeds* is the fourth example and stems from a large evangelical Anglican church in London that now provides downloadable lessons from its website (Bell et al., n.d.-b). The fifth example is Scripture Union's *Splash*. This publication would have a broader theological appeal than the other examples (Scripture Union, 2018). The slight difficulty is that each publication places the Lost Sheep at different points in their curriculum, and therefore, the sessions are aimed at children of different ages. *Click* includes it in their 3–5s set; *Splash* in their 5–8s; and *Go Teach, Lessons for Life* and *Mustard Seeds* cover the same passage across all junior ages (Clark et al., 2007, pp. 50–55; Kessell, 2018, pp. 247–252; Leggett et al., No Date, pp. 30–31). Some identifying features can still be seen.

There are evangelical pedagogies that intentionally omit parables in their curriculums for developmental reasons (Carmichael, 2000, pp. 40–41). This may lead us to expect that the curriculums in view in this article may make less use of said genre and focus more on the concrete narratives in the rest of the gospels. This is demonstrably true to a certain extent. When viewed as part of the whole curriculum, *Go Teach* has 17 parables out of a 192-lesson cycle, which is one parable every 11 sessions. *Mustard Seeds* has 216 lessons over a 4-year cycle. 11 of these are parables; that is one every 20 lessons. *Click* has 11 out of 360 lessons: 7 for the under 5-year-olds, 4 in the 5–8 age range lessons and, perhaps surprisingly, none for the 8–11 age range. That is one parable for every 32 lessons. *Scripture Union* has 12 parable lessons out of 312. There are 4 in each age group, but they repeat the lessons through the ages. That is one every 26 lessons. It could be argued that this reflects a Biblical balance in each of the curriculums; that the use of parables is in proportion to their scriptural emphases.

While they may be treated as a different genre, for example, by having a particular series within the curriculum on "parables," they are essentially still treated as a part of the larger whole and placed within the canon of Scripture.

As the specific texts of Luke 15 and the Lost Sheep are examined certain unifying features come into view. First, it is clear there is a purpose to the sessions on the parables, as there is with the sessions on other genres. Each set of material has a simple teaching aim they expect the child to have understood by the end of the session. The meaning is set by the text as it has been understood by the writers of the processes. That of *Lessons for Life* is the most complex: "To emphasize our sinfulness in ever going astray from such a wise and kindly Shepherd. To demonstrate the lengths He went to rescue us, and to describe the joy with which He finds us" (Masters, 1992, p. 141). For *Go Teach* it is "We are all like sheep" (Leggett

et al., No Date, p. 31); *Splash* is “To remember that each individual is valuable to God” (Kessell, 2018, p. 247); *Click* states that “The children will appreciate that Jesus came to seek and to rescue those who have turned away from God” (Clark et al., 2007, p. 50); and *Mustard Seeds* is “To teach that God rejoices whenever someone is saved and that we should be happy with him” (Bell et al., n.d.-a, p. 6). The apparent differences in interpretation here are small and the significance is not in their difference but in the presence of an expected outcome of the session. The session is not open-ended but has an expected direction and purpose.

Second, there is an introductory activity in all but *Lessons for Life*. In each there are discussion options that introduce the child to the idea of sheep, should they be unknown, or to being lost and found. In some, such as *Click*, *Splash* and *Mustard Seeds*, there are also options for more energetic activities which support similar aims (Bell et al., n.d.-a, p. 6; Clark et al., 2007, p. 53; Kessell, 2018, p. 247). In each case there is a recognition that there is a disruption between the horizon of the child and the horizon of the text; first-century culture includes aspects and situations which may be unfamiliar to the twenty-first century child. The intention of the introductions is to bring these two horizons in line with each other such that the child can conceptualize what is occurring in the story they are about to be told.

Third, the adult is to engage the child with the text of Scripture. The child is being intentionally focused on the text rather than the apparatus which illustrates it. What is a distinct aspect here is that the Scriptural text is included, even in the youngest setting. The level of understanding expected of the child can be seen to increase with age but only by degree (for example Johnson & Watkinson, n.d.; Leggett et al., No Date; Murdarasi & Smith, n.d.). While the text is embellished to allow the story to be imagined, the embellishments are restricted to imagining where the sheep may be or what the danger might involve. The whole time of the session is moving toward the aim mentioned above. There are three horizons at work here: the child, the text, and the adult. How the three are interacting suggests that the adult is mediating the text to the child in order that some of those cultural aspects which may be missed or misunderstood are able to be conceptualized by the child.

Fourth, within this time of Scripture-sharing there is a limited sense of the agency of the child. There are occasional questions which are asked in most examples, but these tend to be closed questions with the expected answers written in the teacher’s instructions. For example, *Mustard Seeds* has a series of questions for older children:

> Why were the Pharisees angry with Jesus? What did they think about themselves? What did they think about the tax collectors and ‘sinners’?

> Why did Jesus tell this parable? Who was listening to him?
>
> Who went to look for the lost sheep? Who is the man in this parable like?
>
> Who is the lost sheep in the parable like? Could it find its way back by itself?
>
> What did the man do when he found his lost sheep? Who else joined him? Who are the friends and neighbours in this parable? (Bell et al., n.d.-a, p. 8)

These have clear answers found in the text of Scripture or the lesson substance. This places this process firmly in Anthony's Instructional-Analytic quadrant with its cognitive approach. There are later questions in the "Discuss and Apply" section which are more open ended and encourage the child's self-expression (Bell et al., n.d.-a, p. 10). However, *Mustard Seeds* is unusual among publications in including them.

Fifth, each publication has a response section. *Splash* calls this "Living the Life – options to help live God's way." There are three options in *Splash*, with film clips, a game and a more reflective and imaginative option (Kessell, 2018, p. 250). Others suggest a craft sometimes involving a discussion (Bell et al., n.d.-a, pp. 10–11; Clark et al., 2007, p. 52). *Go Teach* and *Lessons for Life* leave much less freedom for the child to establish the significance of the passage for their own life and have clearly written and instructed applications (Leggett et al., No Date, p. 31; Masters, 1992, pp. 143–144). *Go Teach* has a range of optional craft activities (Leggett et al., No Date, pp. 17–24). While the understanding of the significance of the passage for the child varies in these examples between flexible and rigid, each publication has an expectation that there will be an ethical outworking of the passage in the life of the child.

In conclusion, while each publication varies in its appearance there are unifying features which suggest a common theology of parables which appears to be substantially different from that of Godly Play and Jerome Berryman. The three horizons of text, child and adult tend to function together, albeit with different emphases in each publication, to establish a commonality of meaning which then allows a comprehension of the significance of the passage in the horizon of the child.

An evangelical theological appraisal of parables

Can a broad evangelical understanding of parables be established, and does it support the pedagogies explored immediately above or those of Godly Play? Three key evangelical theologians who have written on the functions of parables will be used to establish this: Americans Craig Blomberg and Klyne Snodgrass; and UK theologian Paula Gooder. The parable of the Lost Sheep in Luke 15 will then be examined in evangelical commentaries to establish whether it is an exceptional case in the theology of parables.

Craig Blomberg is an evangelical who has written extensively on the parables over many years. He has, perhaps more than any other, influenced how UK evangelicals read parables. In *Interpreting the Parables* Blomberg responds to John Dominic Crossan's deconstructive approach to the parables which presumes that "the text has no fixed meaning." While accepting the positive intent of this approach, Blomberg sees it as "self-defeating" and states that parables are closer to "performative utterances [which] are exempt from deconstruction" (Blomberg, 1990, pp. 153–155). This leads Blomberg to make his main argument:

> each parable makes one main point per main character – usually two or three in each case – and these main characters are the most likely elements within the parable to stand for something other than themselves, thus giving the parable its allegorical nature (Blomberg, 1990, p. 163, See also Blomberg, 1982, 1991).

Here Blomberg is giving parables a fixed intent while allowing flexibility of interpretation between different parables. This intent comes from the context within the gospel and cannot be read as having the same meanings where they appear in the same form in multiple gospels (Blomberg, 1984).

According to Snodgrass, parables are not "merely stories" but an "expanded analogy" (Snodgrass, 2018). Snodgrass is critical of the postmodern means of treating parables as "modeling clay to be shaped to the interpreters whim" (Snodgrass, 2018). Instead, as his title claims, they are "stories with intent" (Snodgrass, 2018). Jesus has a setting and intention behind each parable, and they are carefully crafted to serve such a purpose. This is not to claim that they are straightforward or always clear as to their purpose. This is also not to say that interpreters may disagree as to their intent. But the very presence of disagreement gives ground for the expectation of such intent. Snodgrass is critical of the very function of lumping parables together. Each must be dealt with on its own terms. Yet, the "intent" of the parable is to "prompt thinking and stimulate a response" in the life of the hearer (Snodgrass, 2018). The narrative function is to draw the listener in before causing them to reconsider their current position.

Paula Gooder argues similarly that since Jesus explained his stories, they were to be "understood" (Gooder, 2020). Like Snodgrass, Gooder is critical of presuming the uniformity of the parables, "All we can say with any certainty is that no one statement is true of all parables, and after that we need to take them on a case-by-case basis and see what emerges as we do" (Gooder, 2020). This is an approach which recognizes the setting in which the gospel writer has placed the parable and takes seriously the historico-cultural apparatus to interpret the story. While such an approach allows exploration, it is exploration with a desire to discover, rather than create, the meaning.

Each of these three evangelical theologians understand parables to have a fixed meaning, an authorial purpose and intent which the reader can

recover. This suggests a common theology and a common understanding of how texts can and should be read. Is this an approach consistent with evangelical commentaries when it comes to Luke 15?

Most commentators see the setting of the first two verses as key to the interpretation of all three parables that follow (Bock, 1996; Edwards, 2015; Garland, 2012; Green, 1997; Marshall, 1978; Morris, 1988). Green states that Jesus is being “indicted” in the opening verses and the three parables are his “riposte” (Green, 1997). This suggests a purpose and intent to the parable of the Lost Sheep. Each commentary suggests a formula such as “recovery of the lost and God’s singular joy in redemption” (Edwards, 2015) or “God’s desire to find the lost sinner” (Bock, 1996) and, similarly, “the repentance of others must be met with joy and celebration” (Garland, 2012).

The details of the narrative are then used to establish the form of the “riposte” and how the parable might function in the original setting. It is the presence of Luke 15:7 that gives most commentators the justification for their stated purpose. Green states that the “form taken by the finale” is “decisive for our understanding of how these parables function in their co-text” (Green, 1997). Darrell Bock describes this verse as the “application” of the parable, a movement from its meaning to its significance (Bock, 1996). This gives a sense that Jesus determines the intent of the parable in the context that Luke has placed it. The meaning is neither freely determined by the reader with equal authority, nor is the story extractable as a coherent and self-defining whole. Bock and Blomberg both state that the equivalent story in Matthew 18:12–14 has a quite separate purpose (Blomberg, 1984; Bock, 1996, pp. 96–100).

Our analysis appears to support the approach of the UK evangelical pedagogies in their approach to parables in expecting an intent and purpose to the stories of Jesus which is discoverable and observable to twenty-first century readers with some help from a mediating adult.

Comparison and analyses

Having examined the use of parables in Godly Play and UK evangelical publications we can now compare and analyze our findings. Godly Play elevates the role of parables within the curriculum as units independent of their setting, allowing the child freedom of interpretation without intervention; evangelical publications tend to keep them within their Scriptural balance, historical and literary settings, with the adult mediating the session with the intention that the child understand the parable as close to how it was originally intended as possible. This reflects two very different theologies, not just of parables, but of Scripture itself. Our third section allowed

us to see that UK evangelical practice is closely tied to the underlying theology of the movement and that the representation of the Lost Sheep was consistent with those found in evangelical commentaries. While it can be observed that evangelical children's ministry material could be improved by allowing more space for the child to formulate and imagine the significance of the passage for their life, this is not to be done at the expense of making the meaning fluid. For the process to be genuinely evangelical, I would suggest that the historical and literary context must be retained. It is likely that the child requires the adult to mediate this aspect.

This paper raises a significant question for evangelicals who are adopting the Godly Play sessions on parables in their children's ministry settings: does it cohere with the theology that is intended to be transmitted to the child, both explicitly and implicitly? The theology of means (how a process is enacted) and the theology of content (what information is transmitted) must match for coherence in any Christian ministry context; a failure in this regard will result in dissonance and confusion. It is entirely possible that children will miss the God of Scripture as they wonder. It is entirely possible that children will find themselves in the story and presume it is the Christian God they have found.

There are two distinct aspects that come to the fore when considering these discrepancies in the context of parables and evangelicalism: canon and agency. First, when considering canon, the position of parables within the canon of Scripture is important. The parables are not an entirely separate genre that can be dislocated from their historical and literary setting in their immediate gospel context, nor in their wider canonical context. When evangelicals adopt the Godly Play sessions on parables, it would seem they are undermining their own inherent theology. While adaptation of the other principles of Godly Play may occur, such as the adult guiding the wondering, this would not seem enough to overcome the presentation of the parables which lie at the heart of the session.

This leads to the second aspect which has been latent in this discussion: the agency of the child. It would appear that many evangelicals are adopting Godly Play due, in part, to the space it allows for the agency of the child to be manifest in the session time. Godly Play allows the child to make their own observations and explore the passage by objecting or querying unclear details. Anna Strhan's research discovered that the child has significant agency in evangelical churches (Strhan, 2019, pp. 78–107). This is not displayed in the evangelical processes in the publications examined here, although it is entirely possible that there are other processes available that may do so. Instead, the questions tended to be closed to discussion rather than encouraging the child to express their thoughts, doubt or questions. A better model may come from Kevin Vanhoozer who, from

a critical realist position, suggests that there is meaning in the text of the parable but that there is an openness to the forming of the significance in the life of the child (Vanhoozer, 2009, p. 423). Perhaps this suggests that the agency of the child lies not so much in the interpretation of the passage (although there should always be the possibility of challenge) but rather in the application of the parable. The open questioning should come once the child has understood the context, some of the historical detail, and the meaning has been mediated to them in some form. This would seem more consistent with standard evangelical convictions regarding parables.

Conclusion

This analysis of the adoption of the parable lessons in Godly Play by evangelical churches in children's education clearly raises some inconsistencies. Godly Play does not fit as clearly within evangelicalism as it may first seem. Traditionally evangelicalism conceives of parables as having a purpose and meaning intended by the authors of Scripture, but Godly Play does not. Likewise, Publishers of educational materials within the evangelical tradition have significant challenges ensuring the child's agency is taken seriously. Children using their publications must have space to explore the significance of these Parables for their own lives.

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Notes on contributor

Robin Barfield is Lecturer in Practical Theology at Oak Hill College, London. His doctoral research was on Godly Play within an evangelical framework. He is also Visiting Lecturer at Union School of Theology and Cliff College, UK.

ORCID

Robin Barfield http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7748-3333

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