Learning the Bible in the 21st Century

Lessons from *Harry Potter* and vampires
where I live contextualizes what I bring
young people are eager learners -- when interested
attributes of the Facebook generation

- all ideas compete on an equal footing
- contribution counts for more than credentials
- hierarchies are natural, not prescribed
- leaders serve rather than preside
- tasks are chosen, not assigned
- groups are self-defining and self-organizing
- resources get attracted, not allocated
- power comes from sharing information, not hoarding it
- opinions compound and decisions are peer-reviewed
- users can veto most policy decisions
- intrinsic rewards matter most
- hackers are heroes
issue is not *how* to teach the Bible, but *why* to learn it
bad implicit messaging
key shift: from teaching to learning
good teachers design and sustain learning environments that are adaptive and geared to the learners they are working with
learners come from myriad places, with diverse learning needs
learning to listen, learning to teach
confirmation, contradiction, continuity

authority, authenticity, agency
if we want to help people desire to learn the Bible, then we need know what they currently think of the Bible
an exercise in listening to pop culture
four short video clips, place them on a spectrum
what did you discover?

• what criteria did you use?

• did the genre matter?

• did the production values matter?

• was it the message?

• did you feel manipulated, or was there anything authentic in a particular clip?
we all carry interpretive frames already
what is most real to me is likely not most real for you
what do you want to reinforce?  
what do you want to contradict?
part of what is so hard is that we want the Bible to matter to people *differently* from how it already does
confirmation is only the first step
raising and engaging contradictions is a crucial element of learning
“Word of God,” for instance, can help us here
ELCA articulates Word of God in three ways:

- Jesus Christ, Word of God incarnate
- the *kerygma*, the proclamation of *Law & Gospel*
- the Holy Scriptures
Not a static object

Shepherd contradicts River’s idea of the Bible as a “static, fixed object” and argues faith is a crucial element of the Bible; we don’t fix it, it fixes us.
Invitation,
not a weapon

Sin and forgiveness (law and promise) can all too easily become a weapon in the hands of some, rather than an invitation, a promise of God’s enduring love.
The Bible can critique itself

Lisa argues that the Bible has integrity, and that it must be embodied. She draws analogies from the Bible itself to critique the church’s transformation.
there may be no more critical challenge than providing this kind of continuity
Part Two: A deeper exploration of continuity
authority, authenticity, agency are shifting rapidly amidst media cultures
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authority, authenticity, agency are shifting rapidly amidst media cultures
these shifts in authority, authenticity and agency hold both promise and challenge to us in religious community
they are also a key to what it means to provide continuity
people say the Bible...

- is best understood personally, in individual devotion
- creates divisiveness, *not* community
engage that contradiction

• accepting that the Bible creates community, but then understanding that community in very narrow, constrained ways — essentially the path that leads towards fundamentalism

• rejecting that claim but accepting the privatized, individualized forms of religious knowing “authorized” by certain kinds of pop culture — the path that leads towards relativism
to go beyond either of these, we need to offer continuity in the face of the contradictions
something from our previous understanding needs to be connected to a new frame that resolves the contradiction
in this example, we need to
draw from personal experience
that emerges from
shared learning
communal forms of knowing

• have resonance with authority emerging from, but not overly constrained by, community

• have dissonance if authority is understood primarily as heightening individualist forms of knowing
we need to support learning the Bible in ways that consciously and consistently understand authority in community-oriented ways that draw out new meaning rather than closing it down
we have not done that well in the church
to teach is to create a space in which obedience to the truth is practiced
we create shared authority by supporting relationality
what about authenticity?
does our ability to "feel with" enlarge us or narrow us?
Today as well, we stand at the rich uncertain dawn of a new level of scientific innovation. ... Our technological arrogance mirrors more and more the Wellsian dystopia of dissatisfaction, while allowing us to feel safe and connected at all times. We can call, see or hear almost anything and anyone no matter where we are. For most people then, the only remote place remains within. “Know thyself” we do not.
our ability to attend to that embodiment, in all of its rich, confusing, and authentic diversity is key
the continuity we have to offer involves stretching our embodied knowing beyond sympathy to empathy
Parabolic narratives show the seams and edges of the myths we fashion. Parables show the fault lines beneath the comfortable surfaces of the worlds we build for ourselves. Myth may give stability to our story, but parables are agents of change and sometimes disruption.

Herbert Anderson and Edward Foley
mythic provides continuity,
parabolic creates contradictions
the Bible demands empathy but media culture teaches us sympathy
empathy is a form of identification that does not merge
one can *empathize* without becoming the other
sympathy invites a kind of self-centeredness
the deeper call is to relationship with those from whom we are most separated
provide continuity through ongoing experiences of shared authority in participatory knowing
provide continuity through deepening *authentic* knowing from sympathy into empathy
a final element: provide continuity through agency
religious communities conceive of *agency* as granted by, empowered through, God
God’s agency is highlighted, while human agency is intimately connected to God through community.
yet many of these practices are increasingly unfamiliar to people even in vibrant communities of faith
we learn far more by telling our own stories
tell their own stories bound up in God’s story
we need to ask

• what do you/we think God is doing here?

• what do you/we hear God saying personally to you?

• what do you/we hear God saying to us?
we need to engage the responses in community
we need to help each other
live in a God saturated world
meet our learners where they live
draw them more deeply into the contradictions
move together into our shared story
authorize, authenticate, take action
why learn the Bible?
it tells us who we are and who we can become
slides and citations available at http://religioused.org/heinfra