The Creative Word: Canon as a Model for Biblical Education. 2nd edition

Walter Brueggemann. (2015).
Augsburg Fortress Press, 216 pages. Kindle Edition.
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Brueggemann's text (Brueggemann, 2015) is substantial. A skim through on Kindle suggested it was heavily theological - not an easy to read practical guide to Christian teaching. My perseverance with the book, which I have since found very instructive, came from one of the paragraphs I had initially highlighted:

> **The juxtaposition of ethos, which assures, pathos, which wrenches, and logos, which instructs, is crucial. The practices of disclosure, disruption, and discernment all are important in faithful living. The life of faith consists in treasuring the consensus, breaking the consensus with new truth, and valuing new experience in tension with the tradition of experience. (Loc. 2556)[1]**

I could see this aligning with *What If Learning's* (n.d.) strategies of "Seeing Anew", "Choosing Engagement" and "Reshaping Practice" and my interest was piqued.

Brueggemann draws on the Hebrew Bible's canon, its tripartite division of the Old Testament - Torah-Prophets-Writings (Jer.18:18), as a framework for education/formation – for God's words to be spoken afresh and for faithfully handing down the living tradition. He draws on obedience as a common mode of knowledge across the three strands of God's ethos, pathos and logos; that trust and obedience to a holy "Thou" is the locus of education. This should

[1]The reason that location numbers are used instead of page numbers is that the user can adjust the size of the text, but that might result in the book being fewer or more "pages," so location numbers are more accurate for locating a particular spot in the book. (Quora, n.d.)

inform faith based pedagogical processes - that they reveal trust and obedience to God whether teaching the treasured consensus – our Biblical foundations; the disruption in thinking that the Prophets encapsulate; or the importance of discernment that the Writings with their wisdom focus encourages. Brueggemann argues each part serves a distinctive theological and educational function.

The Torah treasures consensus providing the sure and undoubted disclosure of God's purpose for his people. This addresses the importance to education of having knowledge to work on and knowledge that is certain. Students cannot build on their learning without foundational knowledge first (Hattie, 2019). Seeing anew is present in terms of the structure of presentation, ensuring that God's word is spoken afresh - not fossilised (Loc. 138). This innovativeness requires flexibility as well as fidelity, a freedom of imagination which operates in context. Choice might be available as to how the story, and it "must characteristically be a story" (Loc. 6750), is contextually framed for it to be engaging. However, the content must be of the intervention of the one true, holy God. The context may require that practice be reshaped to use YouTube rather than a becloaked ancient Israelite leader teaching a multitude in person, but the content must not be altered. This steadfastness helps students define themselves against the other cultures of today, to guard against syncretism (Loc.1053).

The prophets thinking of, "Yes, but what if …", is where debate comes in. The disruptive word of the prophets, shatters consensus (e.g. royal realities) and leads to a giving of new truth - to exploring a skepticism toward authority and tradition – to thinking anew. In the same way that the prophets speak God's alternative word, education in the prophetic means to nurture people in an openness to alternative imagination which never quite perceives the world in the way of the dominant reality. To recognise, for example, that just because I am a nice teacher with a Christian worldview and teach using the scriptures, does not mean that my pedagogy is faith enhancing. If I value competition and completion over community and connection, then I need to think anew, choosing to be engaging and reshaping practice, accordingly. This is the tension between the Torah and the prophets which Brueggemann considers must always be attended to in education - the tension between

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Reflections, Impressions & Experiences

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establishing or asserting the consensus, then raising questions which challenge it.

In the writings, the practice of discernment that attends both to the connections and to the incongruities of God's created order, to wisdom, the readiness both to penetrate the mystery of the order of life, at times available and at times hidden, and to live obediently with its inscrutability. This recommends that we study the world, to try to figure out God's creation, but that we recognise the interconnectedness we see is the tip of the iceberg and acknowledge that this hiddenness means we will never fathom it all. We need to teach that those who say we can 'fathom it all' should be approached with caution, e.g. using the internet sagaciously. This speaks to reshaping practice, especially if there is a tendency in our teaching to be constrained by the Torah, by the kind of certitude that believes all of the important questions are settled. Brueggemann encourages that all three modes—ethos, pathos and logos - be equally considered to avoid disequilibrium (Loc. 2921).

Brueggemann concludes by establishing that it is the simple claim of trust and obedience that is the commonality that draws God's ethos, pathos and logos together. Moving from certitude (Torah) to disruption by 'new truths' (Prophets) to settling down with the mundane and the mystery (Writings) (Tan, 2020), all require obedience (Ezek. 36:27) and the compelling wisdom—or this is the fear of the Lord (Job 28:28). **TEACH**

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