Reading Between The Lines – Volume 23
(Formerly BibleWorkbench)

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What is Reading Between The Lines?

What is Reading Between The Lines? (formerly BibleWorkbench)

We believe in stories. Stories are how we make sense of our own experience and learn about the experiences of others. Stories are how we pass on perspectives, traditions, understandings and expectations. As we make our way through life each day, we are surrounded by stories—from conversations around the breakfast table to items in the newspaper or on TV to books, movies, songs, pictures and videos.

The Bible is full of stories, too. They speak to us of what is best and worst, hopeful and despairing, creative and destructive about human life and the experience of the sacred in its midst. From generation to generation, human beings have discovered themselves again and again in the Bible story.

Reading Between The Lines offers a different way to engage the Bible stories, to connect them with the world around us, and to explore the resonances those stories stir in our inmost depths. Some forms of Bible study treat the Bible as an objective teacher, a ground for doctrine, or a quaint historical record, others look to it as a book of rules for behavior. Reading Between The Lines invites you to use your imagination as well as your intellect, your intuition and your reason.

Our assumption is that the biblical text and story is not about you, but it is you. Engaging at that level requires stepping through the looking glass as Alice did, into a world where assumptions and values are challenged and brought to awareness. An encounter of this kind with the text invites you not simply to analyze and understand the text, but to experience it as a reality within yourself, connecting the text, the world around you, and your inner world.

What’s in Reading Between The Lines?

For each Sunday of the Church year, there are five components:

**Lectionary Text**

Each week, one of the readings designated by the Revised Common Lectionary is featured. The text is taken from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, and is formatted without verse numbers, to focus more clearly on the story. Line numbers in the margin can help in referring to specific sections.

Begin with the text. Try to read it as if you have never seen it before. Don’t confuse the words with the Word. Read between the lines, listen to and note your feelings, questions, wanderings, confusions, and surprises. Rather than trying to figure out, master, or understand the text, your initial task is to begin to see yourself in the text and to recognize the text within you.

**Entering the Story**

Some brief contextual notes to help you get started. It helps you to locate the story in the flow of the larger Bible story, and may include some historical background to help you understand the story better.

**Exploring the Story**

This series of open-ended questions helps to move systematically from encountering the text to connecting with the world around and to the inner world. Enter as fully as you can in response to questions and suggestions, and try the non-verbal exercises.
What is Reading Between The Lines?

The questions can be used “as-is,” but be open to other ways of encountering the text that may come to mind. Particularly if you are working with a group, shape the questions to fit what you know of the members. Let the process be "God's playground" where you can stretch and dig and build.

**Between the Lines**

These brief comments and questions may open up other avenues of approach to the text. They can be incorporated into the main questions, or substituted as seems appropriate.

**Exploring Further**

Readings are offered to stir up, console, challenge, upset, enrich, and tantalize you. There is no right answer hidden here. Sometimes readings will contradict each other or other material presented for the same text. They will, hopefully, be timely words from the world for your reflection.

**Group Guidelines**

Over years of practical experience, we have developed a set of guidelines for using *Reading Between The Lines* in a group setting:

- **Focus on the text.**
  *Reading Between The Lines* is an invitation to enter into the story. It is not a group for exegesis, theology, discussion, or therapy. If the focus begins to wander, come back to the text.

- **"I statements" are encouraged.**
  The goal is to explore how you respond to the text. This is not to discount tradition and the scholars; but to say that here it is how you hear, feel, think about, and react to the text that is of primary importance.

- **Pauses between responses are important.**
  A subtle reminder that we are not in a discussion group. The aim is to engage the text rather than one another. What we hear others say can be crucial. Why they say what they do is a conversation that can take place over coffee later.

- **The goal is not consensus, agreement, or a right answer.**
  The richness and value of the experience may depend upon the very opposite.

- **There is no expectation that you explain, justify, or defend anything you say.**
  This may be hard to remember; even if you are working through *Reading Between The Lines* alone.

- **Silence is part of the process/ silence can be pregnant.**
  Alone this may simply be about taking your time and allowing some in-between spaces. In the silence there is a chance not only to ponder what others have said, but to hear the echo of your own voice.

- **Allow space for others to speak**
  The richness of the discussion depends on hearing different voices and different perspectives, not just one.

- **You can change your mind as often as you like.**
  "How do I know what I think until I hear myself say it?" In this process, once you hear what you have said, feel free to change your mind not once but over and over again.

- **Honestly try the nonverbal exercises.**
  This is not an art or theater competition. Silence your inner critic and be prepared to be amazed and enlightened.

- **What is said in the RBTL group stays in the group.**
  In the group, we touch sacred ground in ourselves and each other. Have the respect for the group and yourself to honor that confidentiality.
Advent marks the beginning of a new year in the calendar of the Christian tradition, and we begin our 23rd year of publishing this resource to encourage people, whatever their place in or outside the Christian way might be, to join in the adventure of discovering their deepest stories by reflecting on sacred stories.

We begin this year with a new name—Reading Between The Lines—and an updated format. Those of you who are familiar with our previous issues of BibleWorkbench will see some changes intended to make each session simpler, easier to use, and more “user friendly” than before. At the core of each week’s material is the chance to enter into the story presented in the text, to discover where it resonates within your daily experience and in your inner world. This process unfolds through asking questions, not giving answers. It is a form of maieutic education, a term based on the Greek word for midwife. We are convinced that sacred stories are alive in every one of us, and that a leader, like a midwife who understands her role to be one of assisting and supporting a mother to give birth to her own child, can enable group members to discover their own connections and understandings of the text.

Each week is based on one of the readings listed in the Revised Common Lectionary for that given Sunday. The text is presented in a block, without verse numbers, to emphasize its story nature (you can use the line numbers to refer people to specific places, if you need to). These readings come from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

Entering the Story offers some brief contextual notes to help you get started. It helps you to locate the story in the flow of the larger Bible story, and may include some historical background to consider.

Exploring the Story is the heart of the process—the questions to connect with the text, the world around you, and your inner world. Often this will include suggestions for a non-verbal exercise—artwork, movement, imagining a dialogue or acting out a scene—to bring in the imaginative, creative side of your brain.

Between the Lines features short comments from our writers on different aspects of the story or alternate suggestions for exploring it. These can be included alongside the main exploration, or might suggest another way to approach the text.

Exploring Further contains brief readings, quotes, historical background, and even links to art, music, and video as resources to stir up, console, challenge, upset, enrich, and tantalize you.

Each issue of Reading Between The Lines will include additional resources to enhance your explorations—hints on maieutic preaching, book reviews, or additional study designs based around texts like the Gospel of Thomas or sacred stories from other religious traditions. In this issue, we have a bibliography of books that were cited in BibleWorkbench Volume 22, and Parting Lines: Musings from Here and There which includes comments on the religious “nones” by Richard Flory, Zach Hunt’s observations on chopping up the Bible, some reflections by Oliver Sacks on facing his impending death, and part of an interview with the new leader of the United Church of Christ.

Also with this issue, we are making Reading Between The Lines available in an electronic version which can be used on your favorite portable device, and allows easier access to online resources and links.

I had the great fortune years ago to serve on the staff of the great Presbyterian theologian Robert McAfee Brown at Stanford University. Recently I was reading a sermon he had preached in 1984 on the story of the Transfiguration. He says, “Now the story of what happens there (on the mountain) has difficulties for many of us in modern terms, but
stay for a moment simply with the story and see what the imagery is telling us.”

Brown, like Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan writing 20 years later about the resurrection, found the key to the stories in living into them and pondering their significance. These last two write: "Believe whatever you want about whether the stories happened this way—now let’s talk about what they mean.” If you believe the tomb was empty, fine; now, what does this story mean? If you believe that Jesus’s appearances could have been videotaped, fine; now, what do these stories mean? And if you’re not sure about that, or even if you are quite sure it didn’t happen this way, fine; now, what do these stories mean?“*


**RBTL** challenges us to move even beyond meaning to discover how these stories are alive in us and in those around us even when we may have questions about their historical accuracy.

Let us know how the new format works for you and your groups. We appreciate your feedback to help us make **RBTL** as useful as we can. You can contact me at editor@educationalcenter.org, and contact addresses for each of our writers appear at the end of each week’s design.

Grace and Peace,

D. Andrew Kille, Editor
PARTING LINES: Musings from Here and There

From “What’s in a Name? Religious Nones and the American Religious Landscape” by Richard Flory at ReligionDispatches.com

These reactions to the increase in the number of people classified as “religious Nones” represent an assumption based on a market approach of religion and an understanding of religion as a binary reality. Just like any other business, success in the religious marketplace is the goal, and it is measured by the number of people who identify with your particular brand of religion (or irreligion as the case may be). Further, individuals are thought of as either being religious (or spiritual) or not; there are no other options. Thus the basic gist of the majority of writing and hand-wringing about the “rise of the Nones” is that secularism is on the rise, and religion and spirituality is in retreat. […]

Despite all this attention, the Nones category isn’t particularly helpful for understanding what is happening with religion in the U.S., unless the different groups that can be identified within the larger category are disaggregated. Moving beyond simply classifying individuals by their religious or irreligious identity, particularly by listening to how they describe the diverse ways that they think (and act) about religion, we can identify some of the groups within the larger Nones category. […]

Some Nones attend religious services on occasion, are generally open to the idea of the supernatural and believe in God or a higher power, but do not identify themselves as religious or with any particular religious tradition. As one young woman told me when I asked her whether religion had any relevance in her life, “A little bit, maybe 5 percent.”

From “Sometimes I Wish The Bible Had Never Been Written” by Zach Hunt at ZachHunt.net

When the Word of God is reduced to words on a page, when the revelation of God is chopped up into chapters and verses ripe for the picking, words that were meant to give life too often and too easily become nothing more than ammunition for condemning the behavior and opinions of others, particularly those in the minority, who don’t look exactly like us, who don’t talk exactly like us, who don’t think about God and the Christian faith exactly the way we do.

From “My Periodic Table” by Oliver Sacks at The New York Times

[Ed. Note: Oliver Sacks, the noted neurologist and author of The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat and other books on brain functions and malfunctions, died August 30, 2015 from cancer. After he had been diagnosed with melanoma, he wrote about his collection of minerals—his “Periodic Table” in physical form.] And now, at this juncture, when death is no longer an abstract concept, but a presence — an all-too-close, not-to-be-denied presence — I am again surrounding myself, as I did when I was a boy, with metals and minerals, little emblems of eternity. At one end of my writing table, I have element 81 in a charming box, sent to me by element-friends in England: It says, “Happy Thallium Birthday,” a souvenir of my 81st birthday last July; then, a realm
devoted to lead, element 82, for my just celebrated 82nd birthday earlier this month. Here, too, is a little lead casket, containing element 90, thorium, crystalline thorium, as beautiful as diamonds, and, of course, radioactive — hence the lead casket. […]

I almost certainly will not see my polonium (84th) birthday, nor would I want any polonium around, with its intense, murderous radioactivity. But then, at the other end of my table — my periodic table — I have a beautifully machined piece of beryllium (element 4) to remind me of my childhood, and of how long ago my soon-to-end life began.

From “Racial Justice Will Be Top Priority for New Prez of the United Church of Christ” by Frederick Clarkson at Religion Dispatches.com

[Ed. Note: John Dorhauer is the newly elected General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ and the author of a new book, Beyond Resistance: The Institutional Church Meets the Postmodern World. In this interview, he describes what he sees as emerging trends in contemporary religious life.]

The mistake made by people of faith regarding postmodernity is this: they see both the deconstruction of enlightenment faith and the experimentation with new ways to express faith as commensurate with abandonment, rebellion, and indifference.

It is anything but.

What is emerging is the authentic endeavor of people engaged in spiritual practices and disciplines that they find deeply meaningful. They experience institutional religion as stale, irrelevant, and unable to fulfill their spiritual longings and desires.

It is too early to be able to identify the exact nature of the emergent church. But I think we can say this much:

The emerging church is and will be far less committed to a denominational identity than the institutional church. Practitioners won’t find meaning in declaring loyalty to a denomination. They will not only sample the best practices from a variety of Christian traditions, but their spiritual horizons will invite them into a larger spiritual field. If there is a way to encounter the sacred or the divine, a way to draw closer to nature, a way to engender compassion for humanity, they will give themselves over to it without rejection, judgment, or reservation.

There will be less reliance on or need for religious experts: namely, full-time, seminary-trained, ordained or authorized clergy.

“Membership” as currently defined by (and deemed essential for) the institutional church will have no meaning in a postmodern, emergent world. People will belong in both an organic and fluid way to those groups or cohorts that provide their lives with meaning, that meet their spiritual hungers, that equip them to encounter the sacred, and that engage them in actions that effect change in the world. People may actively participate in two or three such communities of faith. They may stay with one for a while, only to move easily and seamlessly into another for no other reason that it feels right to them.

They won’t be investing their missional resources of time, talent, and money in building and property, in sanctuaries adorned with stunning Tiffany stained-glass windows and nine-rank pipe organs and mahogany pews. They will meet wherever two or three can gather, and wherever the divine can be
encountered they will be open to engaging that space and declaring it sacred.

While much of this will feel awkward, unorthodox, and threatening to the institutional expression of the church it is nonetheless an authentic expression of an evolving faith that, like all its predecessors, was birthed out of a call to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with the divine—and, like its predecessors, was constantly evolving in order to maintain its relevance in a changing world.
EDITOR: D. Andrew Kille earned an interdisciplinary Ph.D. in psychology and the Bible from The Graduate Theological Union. Ordained in the American Baptist tradition, Andy has been a pastor, teacher, facilitator, and spiritual director. He currently serves as Chair of the Silicon Valley Interreligious Council (SiVIC). Andy is author of Psychological Biblical Criticism, and co-editor of Psychological Insight into the Bible and A Cry Instead of Justice. He lives in San Jose, California.

READING BETWEEN THE LINES CONTRIBUTORS:
William Dols, an Episcopal priest who received his Ph.D from The Graduate Theological Union in 1987 is RBTL’s founding editor and served as Executive Director of The Educational Center from 1987 to 1995. Before retiring to Alexandria, Virginia, in 2001, Bill was minister of education at Myers Park Baptist Church. He is the author of Three Dimensional Man, Awakening the Fire Within: A Primer for Issue-Centered Education, Just Because It Didn’t Happen: Sermons and Prayers as Story, and coauthor of Finding Jesus, Discovering Self: Passages to Healing and Wholeness with Caren Goldman.

Beth Harrison taught philosophy and religion at Northern Virginia Community College for forty years before retiring in 2010. She established the Women’s Center there, and is currently co-chair, with Dr. Jill Biden, of the Women’s Mentoring Project. She has been involved with RBTL since its inception as group leader, trainer, writer, and associate editor. Beth lives in northern Virginia.

Tiffany Houck-Loomis received her Ph.D. in Hebrew Bible and Psychology & Religion at Union Theological Seminary. She is an Analyst in Training with the Jungian Psychoanalytic Association, an adjunct professor in undergraduate institutions and seminars in and around NYC in the fields of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Pastoral Care & Counseling, and Hebrew Bible, and an ordained Minister of Word and Sacrament with the Reformed Church in America. Tiffany lives in North Carolina.

Al Ledford received his undergraduate degree from Wake Forest University majoring in religion and psychology. Further studies include a degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. After a variety of church staff positions and denominational work, Al entered the business sector. Al lives in Versailles, Kentucky.

Bill Lindeman is a Transition Ministry Specialist in PC (USA) serving churches in NC, VA, AR, SC, GA, OH and TN. He earned his D. Min. from Union Theological Seminary (now Union Presbyterian Seminary) in Richmond. He is a longtime leader and contributor of RBTL. Bill lives in the mountains of North Carolina.

Jennifer Woods Parker has a passion for leading and facilitating groups and trained with Bill Dols in RBTL at Myers Park Baptist Church. She received her M.A. from The University of Chicago Divinity School, with a specialty in comparative religion and theology and later earned her M.S.W. from UNC Chapel Hill. Jennifer has published two college teachers’ manuals on World Religions for Prentice Hall, as well as articles and poetry in newspapers and journals. She currently works as Community Partnerships Coordinator for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. Jennifer lives in Charlotte.

THE EDUCATIONAL CENTER STAFF:
Rebecca Rizzo, Managing Director joined the staff in 2012; however her relationship with the Center began as a RBTL group member. A graduate of Bucknell University, she brings a wealth of non-profit management, marketing, and sales experience to the Center. Becky has been an active member of the Charlotte community through her volunteer service and by serving on several local boards.

Melissa Thomas, Managing Editor and Office Manager joined the Center in 2009. She earned her B.S. at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte and has experience working across many industries: legal, financial, insurance and non-profit. Melissa has served as an officer on several boards of directors in both the non-profit and for-profit sectors.

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Committed to fostering spiritual growth, psychological development, personal transformation and social renewal since the 1800's, our unique educational approach helps participants come to know sacred stories as their own stories through guided discussions that bring texts to life.

VISION AND MISSION

We are an inclusive community of spiritual seekers, thinkers, educators and artists who create resources and opportunities to explore the mystery and wisdom in sacred and archetypal stories. We exist to support and serve spiritual growth in children, youth and adults and in the communities around us, believing that personal transformation can engender global transformation as we seek to embody the community of God.

PHILOSOPHY

Stories have the power to ignite the imagination and to evoke symbols that teach us something about who we are. That's why our philosophy of spiritual education is grounded in story. Stories - the Bible, the Gnostic gospels, the mythologies of culture, the poetry of Rumi, the works of Shakespeare, the films of Spielberg, the paintings of Chagall - whether derived from religious or literary texts, the media culture, or the narratives of our own lives, can awaken universal patterns that can enliven and inform our choices. We acknowledge that powerful stories often create tensions that make us uncomfortable, but it is out of that tension that vital questions arise: Who am I? Who are you? How are we connected? Why are we here? What waits for us around the corner? The resources and opportunities we create provide a context for conscious involvement in the never-ending search for meaning in our lives.
READING BETWEEN THE LINES

Exploring our story through biblical stories