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**A RESPONSE TO DIVERSITY AND GLOBALISATION:
SHAKESPEARE IN THE CHRISTIAN CLASSROOM**

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Introduction

“I am a Jew. . . . If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why, revenge. (Merchant of Venice, III, i, 58-70)¹

Some time afterwards, in England, I am playing with my doll Lucy in a garden full of browns and greys. Lucy’s face is cracked like crazy paving because I left her out in the rain but I love her because her hair is the colour of golden syrup. The cockney boy who lives next door has climbed into the pear tree on his side of the fence and is intoning in a sneery voice:

“Your fahver looks like a monkey. Your fahver looks like a monkey.”
I go inside and tell my mother.

“Mum, Keith says Daddy looks like a monkey. And I think so too.”

My mother stops beating the cake mixture. She looks sad but not the way she looks when she is sad. It is the way she looks when she is teaching me what to be sad about.²

Literature throughout the ages has mirrored the complexity of the world’s response to the issue of difference and diversity.³ But this ever-present challenge has taken on even greater significance in an age where mass communication, the ease of travel and global business corporations have delivered our neighbors into our living rooms. It has brought us the advantages of enriched culture, the opportunity for greater understanding, and for much of the world, an increased standard of living. It has also brought with it unprecedented hatred, often phrased in terms of religious difference. The

¹ *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972), p. 268. All further references to plays by Shakespeare will be cited in text. All are taken as in *The Riverside Shakespeare*.

² Pauline Melville, “Eat Labba and Drink Creek Water,” in *Fields of Vision: Readings about Culture, Race and Ethnicity*, ed. Elizabeth J. Stieg (Toronto: Prentice Hall, 2002), p. 279.

³ In this paper the terms “difference” and “diversity” will be used interchangeably. Although in recent years “difference” has often become the preferred term, as it can suggest more subtlety of variation than traditionally has been meant by diversity, both terms are used by different authors to identify the challenges society faces in responding to a rich but complex human world. Since this challenge is the focus of this paper, I have not distinguished between use of the two terms.

attack of September 11th, 2001 shook the world, but it basically encapsulated the tensions that have become inherent in a society that has not learnt how to communicate with itself. Was it an attack on the United States, a stand against capitalism, or a wish to destroy the “infidel”? The answer perhaps is not so important to our futures as another question: can the hatred that inspires such actions be replaced by an understanding of difference that will allow us culturally, religiously to live together in peace, and ideally in harmony, while allowing us to maintain personal and corporate conviction? Can we even find a way to communicate acceptance across the boundaries of generations and differences of values, while holding confidently to our own faith?

For Seventh-day Adventist educators the question is even more specific: how can we transmit values in the classroom that will encourage the next generation of politicians, religious leaders, thought leaders, Christians to approach difference in a way that enriches and heals? How can we teach youth in our global church community to espouse values that will provide an alternative to intolerance, and allow the church to be a showcase of the biblical imperative to love one another as Christ loved us? How can we help youth develop a positive paradigm for responding to difference in their most immediate communities, differences for example of age and backgrounds? And how can we do all of this without encouraging an environment where there are no absolutes?

The responsibility facing us is well expressed by Arthur Holmes:

The educated Christian should approach life as a reformer, not just standing around ringing her hands in dismay, nor marching out in disgust to set up a Christian enclave, but working within the structure of things to change it for the better. She has learnt that justice and compassion, the makings of social righteousness, belong in the work place where she stands as a representative of God’s kingdom.⁴

⁴ Arthur F. Holmes, *The Idea of a Christian College* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 1997), p. 41.

Where do we start? This paper will seek to identify the Christian values that underlie a positive response to difference. It will then explore how these values can be transmitted in the classroom, using English Literature (and the teaching of Shakespeare) as a medium. By discussing the teaching of Shakespeare in the classroom at three different education levels, the paper will explore how the values can be transmitted at different levels of sophistication, depending on the age of the student.

Value 1: Thankfulness for Diversity

One of the debates amongst political scientists is over a definition of globalisation and the question of whether its spread, or at least the nature of its spread, can be managed constructively. The ideology of Philippe Legrain provides one of the more positive approaches to the topic. In his view globalisation is not a fact, but a process—and how it proceeds is up to the world to decide. He sees it as the potential to be as positive as we choose to make it. In itself the diversity inherent in globalisation is constructive to the degree its strengths are harnessed.⁵

Legrain does also recognize that the chief emotion behind some of the negative press received by globalisation is fear. “Yes, it can be scary. Yes, some people will lose at first,” he comments.⁶ And our students will be no different from the rest of the world. But he considers the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages. He does not go as far as using the word “thankfulness”, but certainly he sees it as something to be embraced, not to run from, or be dealt with as mere necessity. This by no means suggests that all have to think the same or even agree. It does mean that we can truly value others, even if they do not stand where we do.

⁵ *Open World: The Truth About Globalisation* (London: Abacus, 2002), pp. 22-24.

⁶ Legrain, p. 24.

The Christian has every reason to welcome diversity. It is a result of creation and mirrors the mind of the God we serve, who declared at the end of each day of creation that creation (with all its variety) was “good”. Even in the context of a fallen world the biblical position is clear—all have been created by God, all are equally loved by God. Christ gave time to the children, to the elderly, to the sinners, to the Gentiles. His was a world of inclusion, not exclusion. This did not mean that Christ agreed with the way men and women lived their lives; on the contrary, he constantly encouraged change and growth. There were unchanging constants. However, his love, his appreciation of the variety of humanity, and his invitation for inclusion remained constant. The Christian ideal then is to remain confident in faith, but approach diversity with thankfulness, seeking out the complementary strengths that diversity brings, rather than focusing on points of tension.

This still does not deny the problem of fear: fear of the unknown, fear of loss of control, and the need for teachers to help students face this reality with honesty. Jonathan Sacks, explaining the inevitability of fear that comes with change (and the growth of diversity brings with it inevitable change), tells the story of a therapist who worked with families who had children with stammers. She asked the families to think of the most important thing they owned, and then to imagine losing it. How would they feel? Devastation, grief. That was how their child could feel in losing a stammer, she informed them. Just because something is negative, does not mean that there will not be a sense of loss when it is gone, because it acts as a stabilizing force, a form of security.⁷ Sacks continues that there is nothing we can do to eliminate “insecurity” in a world that is changing so rapidly, and asks us to change with it. However, like Legrain, he concludes

⁷ *The Dignity of Difference* (London: Continuum, 2002), p. 70.

we do not have to be overcome by the fear that we have no control over our environment.

As a rabbi he argues the biblical position:

There is a personal dimension to existence. Our hopes are not mere dreams, nor are our ideals illusions. Something at the core of our being responds to us as persons, inviting us to exercise our freedom by shaping families, communities and societies in such a way as to honour the image of God that is mankind, investing each human life with human dignity.⁸

What a challenge this presents to the teacher! How can we through our teaching encourage students both to move beyond the fear that comes with difference and then to help shape the future of their communities in a way that recognizes the creatorship of God and celebrates His diversity as seen in the whole spectrum of humanity?

And how can we do all of this without encouraging an environment where not just all people are truly valued for their difference, but that all the decisions they make about the way they live their life are also equally valued? It is often difficult for young people to distinguish between holding a position of faith that includes absolutes on the way we should live, and defining their world so tightly that anyone who is different is not invested with the dignity that God gives to them. Yet the first is a place of confidence—confidence in our God and his position in our lives. This is not a place of fear. The second is a place that lacks confidence, that is fearful of anyone who does not measure up to our paradigm of the “world”, that tries to control the world and not value the personal identity and freedom God has given each person. Christ’s model to the Rich Young Ruler is a good one: he valued him greatly, he looked at him with “love”, but within that context, because of that context, he challenged him to give up his idol—money.

Value 2: The Dignity of Difference

⁸ Sacks, pp. 84-85.

If a primary positive response to diversity is thankfulness, the second value is a natural development of this: a respect for difference. Here is a value that also counteracts fear. The value of thankfulness helps develop an environment where diversity is genuinely welcomed; the value of respect nurtures that environment further—recognising that difference can bring vibrance and energy.

Sacks seeks to find a paradigm for responding to the threat that difference brings with it. He suggests the answer lies in a true understanding of scripture and God's active role in the universe. He argues,

The test of faith is whether I can make space for difference. Can I recognize God's image in someone who is not in my image, whose language, faith, ideals, are different from mine? If I cannot, then I have made God in my image instead of allowing him to remake me in his.⁹

This is not about looking for similarities, but valuing the uniqueness of difference. John Donne in the seventeenth century put it, "No man is an island, entire of itself." As the bell tolls for the death of any person, in his mind we are all diminished. Jonathan Sacks, nearly 500 years later writes, "Can we create a paradigm shift through which we come to recognize that we are enlarged, not diminished, by difference, just as we are enlarged, not diminished, by the 6000 languages that exist today, each with its unique sensibilities, art forms and literary expressions."¹⁰

Respect for difference on the level of a value is not merely acting in a manner that provides equal opportunity, or ensures representation of diversity at all levels. Those are strategies that may have some advantages, but respect as a "value" demands more. It seeks to recognize blind spots in our attitudes, such as the tendency to misname desire for homogeneity as unity, or simplify difference in terms of culture, colour or religion, when

⁹ Sacks, p. 201.

¹⁰ Sacks, p. 201.

significant difference may exist within these groups.¹¹ It seeks to build relationships around difference, not because of necessity, but because of the richness the diversity can bring.

The book Partnering: The New Face of Leadership brings together essays from 30 thought leaders, all of whom argue one point in common—future success in business will demand relationships that work across normal boundaries, that consider collaborative involvement in the workplace of more importance than having knowledge and power invested in only leaders, or an elite group.¹² Another term used in recent texts on leadership is “synergy”: the value of the whole being greater than the individual parts. To Kevin Treston “the most formidable challenge for leadership” is to work within the wide-ranging world views of any group “to name common concerns and values . . . and fuse these common elements into an agreed on position without compromising the integrity of the group members”.¹³ This he calls “synergizing”. It is about finding the balance between seeking points of unity, while recognizing that it is the existence of difference and diversity that provides energy and strength to any community.

The business model also provides a balance to our discussion. While synergy respects and builds on difference, it still demands that the business has a clear focus and direction. It is only when that is strong that difference can be respected and harnessed in a constructive manner. If there is no confident centre then the differences will break the organization apart, not bring energy and strength.

¹¹ Andre Lorden, “Race Matters,” in *Race, Class and Gender*, eds. Margaret Andersen and Patricia Hill Collins (New York: Wadsworth, 1995) considers this in relation to the black community. She argues that even among the Black community there is a need for the community to recognize that it is not “immune to the errors of ignoring and misnaming difference” (536).

¹² Lorraine Segil, Marshall Goldsmith and James Belasco, eds. AMACOM; New York, 2003.

¹³ *Creative Christian Leadership* (Mystic, Ct.: Twenty-third Publications, 1985), p. 72.

If the world of management recognizes the value of having a clear focus and direction and then, within that context, capitalizes on the energy that difference can bring when each individual is respected, the Christian has even more reason to do so. A Christian's faith and belief structure provide a confident centre, and the gospel teaches that "synergy" is an essential part of God's plans (after all, why does God choose to use humanity, and all types of humanity, to deliver his message to the world?).

Our students need to be challenged first to accept respect of difference as a value that impacts all their relationships; the skill to be successful in the workplace is then a secondary bonus.

Value 3—Authentic Relationships

Another biblical value key to developing a positive attitude to difference is authentic relationships. This means relationships that are characterized by transparency, genuine compassion and the ability to ask forgiveness and forgive.

So many of the barriers that occur in relationships of difference are due to lack of trust. "I don't understand you, so I don't trust you"; "you are a threat to my world, so I won't trust you". And lack of trust breeds lack of trust. Robert Frost wrote the poem, "Fences make Good Neighbours". He is being ironic—but his point is important. We are safe when we hide behind our own walls (or fences); but yet when that happens we lose much more than we gain. Transparency invites individuals to be willing to be vulnerable; then in an atmosphere of trust barriers are much more likely to be broken down.

Authentic relationships also demand genuine compassion. Compassion stands as the opposite to the control and power that often seeks to demean others in order to give

oneself greater prominence. It springs from a sense of the value of all individuals, and under girds the servant leadership model of Christ. In the world economy, little compassion plays itself out. The level of support of the richest countries for the poor continues well below the level required to make any significant difference. “Am I my brother’s keeper!” Yes, according to Scripture, but not with an attitude of merely fulfilling charitable requirements. It is a way of being, empathizing, loving. Compassion encourages the Christian to focus on responding to the needs of those who may be different from ourselves, rather than on the threats to our own position.

The value of authentic relationships is again a very biblical model. One only has to consider the vulnerability, transparency and compassion God shows in his dealings with humanity, both in the Old Testament and through Christ in the New Testament to realize the importance in God’s leadership model of authentic relationships. Philippians 2:1-5 (NIV) perhaps encapsulates the biblical model well:

If you have an encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your interests, but also the interests of others.

The passage continues by talking of the model humility and sacrifice of Christ (Phil 2:6-8). There can be no better model than this for our students. We need to build authentic relationships, characterised by vulnerability, transparency and compassion. In that environment trust develops and the potential of strength in diversity finds a soil in which it can be rooted and fully grow.

The value of authentic relationships, however, cannot be left without consideration of one more vital element: that of forgiveness. In any human interactions

mistakes are made and there is need for healing and forgiveness. When it comes to diversity the likelihood for mistakes and hurts increases. Further, all students come to the classroom affected by their wider environments, and those are ones of considerable intolerance; these experiences will have already impacted on their attitudes.

The cycle of revenge and hatred that devastates countries and families can only be broken eventually if one group or individual has the courage to break that cycle and hold out the hand of reconciliation and forgiveness. Perhaps none know how difficult that is more than the Jews. Jonathan Sacks tells of an American Jewish man killed by a Palestinian, for no reason more than he was a Jew. The daughter obsessed by revenge seeks nothing but the worst for the murderer and goes to the trial to try and influence the jury to give a tougher sentence. But as she is giving her testimony, her mother stands up and speaks instead of forgiveness and hope. Mother and daughter leave the court together and in tears, the family of the gunman run out and embrace them, and the gunman later writes to the daughter, “We have been in a state of war and now we are passing through a new stage of historical reconciliation where there is no place for hatred and detestation”.¹⁴

The question then for Christian educators is: does the world have the courage to love enough to forgive? Can the Christian educator point students to the God who could forgive his murderers even while he was still in agony?

Value 4: Active Hope

The final chapter of Jonathan Sacks’ *Dignity of Difference* is called “The Covenant of Hope”. He contrasts hope with optimism—optimism is the belief things will get better; hope, he believes is more active: it focuses on what we can achieve together in

¹⁴ Sacks, pp. 188-89.

the future. It can be argued that biblical hope relies in what God will do in the future—also active. But in the meantime, Sacks is probably right in his summing up of our present situation: “Something has changed: our power for good and evil, the sheer reach and consequences of our interventions. We have come face to face with the stranger, and it makes all the difference whether we find this threatening or enlarging.” He continues to note the potential for all religions towards intolerance, but suggests there is equally a tradition in all religions that emphasise “kinship”, that “extend a hand across the boundaries of estrangement or hostility”.¹⁵ This is where hope takes on a human form and represents most accurately God’s image. Can we encourage our students to discover this hope?

Russell Linden reminds us of the immense feelings of hope that were raised by the coming down of the Berlin wall. But instead of the “walls” being replaced by “bridges”, the world has continued to take the negative response to difference by responding with increasing ethnic hatred and terrorism. This has led to retreat and a desire for greater separation by many. But he continues on a note of hope:

. . . maybe, just maybe, this is precisely the time to rediscover that we human beings are far more alike than different, that the categories and lines we use to define and separate us are blurred to the point of irrelevance. We can find creative ways to build bridges to other groups . . . not to become better bridge builders, but for the purpose of creating better outcomes for those we serve.¹⁶

Active hope looks to the future and sees possibilities, not just problems. It seeks to make a better world—a little of God’s kingdom on earth. And as Linden points out, this is not about building bridges for its own sake. It is about looking for ways of serving others better, in effect, of loving more effectively.

¹⁵ Sacks, p. 207.

¹⁶ *Working Across Boundaries* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), p. 238.

It is upholding the values of thankfulness for diversity, the dignity of difference and authentic relationships that provide a concrete basis for hope. In many ways the four are inseparable. All are biblically-based values that together offer our students a powerful response to the intolerance and fear that too often are the responses to difference.

Shakespeare and Difference

Many disciplines offer opportunities to teach values that respond to the challenges of diversity and difference. The literature classroom offers particularly rich opportunities due to the focus on difference in so many key literary texts. The plays of William Shakespeare are no exception. In particular, many of his plays reflect the conflicts born of difference: culture, religion, gender, age and values. They range in sophistication and also show an interesting development throughout Shakespeare's career. They offer a myriad of opportunities for teachers to explore the complex issue of difference and a constructive response to it.

First Introduction to Shakespeare

One of the texts often studied as a first introduction to Shakespeare is *A Merchant of Venice*, and for the purpose of this paper, I am assuming the students will be around age fourteen when they study the text.

The issue of difference permeates the play, most noticeably in the character of Shylock and the reactions of the Christians to him. "I hate him for he is a Christian," says Shylock of Antonio (I, iii, 42), but as he reminds Antonio, Antonio has called him "misbeliever, cut-throat dog/ And spet upon my Jewish gabardine (I, iii, 111-12). "I am like to call thee so again/ To spet on thee again, to spurn thee too," Antonio replies (I, iii,

130-31). Was Shylock a self-made villain, or a villain made so by the intolerance of the Christians? Of course even if the attitude of the Christians can be blamed (and their mocking and arrogance are certainly hard to defend), Shylock's own actions later in the play, in wanting to kill Antonio, are still indefensible.

The Merchant of Venice is full of opportunities to discuss all of our values identified above. The play is frankly without thankfulness for diversity, respect for difference, compassion or forgiveness. Although in the famous trial scene Portia declares, "The quality of mercy is not strain'd/ It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven" (IV, I, 184), there is little understanding of the Jew by the Christians. Whether he deserves his judgment or not, the fact is that the play ends with one man in hopelessness. And if we are not careful we, the readers, find ourselves laughing at the mocking and at his predicament. The play may end in apparent happiness for the majority Christian characters, but the attitudes of a society that would breed such mutual hatred remain unchanged, and there is an inevitable bitter note to the conclusion. Writer, Adrienne Rich, remembers her difficulty playing the role of Portia at school. Here she is, of Jewish origin (the only Jewish girl in the class), being expected to turn Portia into her heroine, as she spits out the word "Jew" with "scorn and contempt".¹⁷ But is Portia truly a heroine and Shylock really the only villain?

So the questions for our 14 year olds: is it ever acceptable to demean others in the way the Jew is demeaned, even if we think their beliefs are wrong? What makes the Christians so arrogant and Shylock so intolerant? Are there any positive relationships in the play that give a positive model of how we can deal with difference? A study of this

¹⁷ "Split at the Root: An Essay on Jewish Identity, in *Fields of Vision: Readings about Culture, Race and Ethnicity*, p.75.

text could well be part of a module on difference that looked at Christ's dealings with individuals with different beliefs and backgrounds, a section of history (religious intolerance) and creative writing—story or poem on being included/excluded.

Upper Secondary

Romeo and Juliet and *Othello* are two texts commonly studied at the upper secondary level. Both texts are tragedies, both focus on love and obsession. But one of the reasons for the tragedy in both cases lies in the ability of the society in the case of *Romeo and Juliet* and the main character in *Othello* to deal with difference.

Romeo and Juliet is an interesting study of our values, because here the main characters are able to surmount the feud between their two families, and show evidence of thankfulness, respect, and an authentic relationship. Their lack of sophistication is clear and their responses more instinctive than thoughtful, but real nevertheless. They understand that they are not supposed to love, but they do. “My only love sprung from my only hate!” Juliet declares on discovering Romeo's identity (II, I, 138). They also understand that the barriers between them are not ones that have justification. A mature 14-year old Juliet comments:

‘Tis but thy name that is my enemy;
Thou art thyself, though not a Montague? Is it nor hand nor foot,
Nor arm nor face, [nor any other part]
Belonging to a man. O be some other name! (II, ii, 31-42)

They also exhibit a high degree of hope despite all the odds against them, until the end where the circumstances and the weight of their families' hatred (families who have no desire to show any respect or forgiveness to each other) become overwhelming and both commit suicide. Ironically their deaths do bring some degree of both healing and hope, as both fathers at the end of the play vow future peace.

The difference in this play is not one of race or religion. But a brief history of stage plays shows that it has been seen throughout history as an exploration of intolerance of difference. The play has been performed as interracial, intercultural, and as a clash of religions—all dependent on the issues at the time and place of performance. The questions for our 16 to 18 year olds then are: what are the parallel situations in their generation? What are the positive and Christian responses to intolerance and hatred? What is the cost of compassion and forgiveness? Is there a point when the cost becomes too high—when we should give up our hope and visions for a more Christian approach to living and relationships?

Othello is a good text for our top secondary and for our college students. It has a much more sophisticated approach to studying difference than our two earlier texts, but asks very relevant questions. Othello, the main character in this play, gets duped by a brilliant but manipulative lieutenant into doubting the honesty and integrity of his wife, so much so that eventually he murders her. His actions seem incomprehensible in one way, but seen as a clash of cultural expectations, becomes more understandable. Othello is a Moor, who everyone likes while he remains a military hero, but who is immediately a threat when he marries the beautiful Italian Desdemona (I, iii). And by Othello and Desdemona's own admission, their love is based on visions of heroism on her side and his appreciation of her adoration on the other. "She lov'd me for the dangers I had pass'd/ And I lov'd her that she did pity them," says Othello (I, iii, 167-68). But did either understand enough of the culture of the other to deal with the pressure that time, circumstance and villainy would put on it? Is this why Othello so badly misinterpreted his wife's actions, how he found it impossible to trust her word, and can find her no

mercy? Certainly his responses seem to come from a different cultural perspective. He understands the military world, but he does not seem to relate to the “personal” world into which his marriage has thrown him. His confusion results in tragedy.

So the first question: how could two good people end up in this situation? Was the end inevitable? Are there any biblical principles that would have helped in this type of situation? Othello could not find compassion or forgiveness for his wife. Did he really respect her difference? Is it possible for us to see beyond our own worldview in making judgments about others? If so, what attitudes help us do so?

Shakespeare in College (English major/minor)

Finally, what about Shakespeare in the undergraduate (English major) classroom? Here often students will study a variety of Shakespeare texts. One useful approach is to look at the development of Shakespeare’s thought and art throughout his career. The question of difference could be one useful theme to study in that context. Then to the three texts discussed above, two other texts could be added: *King Lear* and *Measure for Measure*. *The Merchant of Venice* and *Romeo and Juliet* were early plays, *Measure for Measure* was written close to the time of *Othello*; *King Lear* was written last of the five, but close to the time of *Othello* and *Measure for Measure*.

King Lear is probably the darkest of all Shakespeare’s plays, very much because of the intense sense of hopelessness and loss that comes to King Lear because of his degradation as a human by his children. Here is the difference of age. King Lear, becoming demanding in his growing senility is seen by his two eldest daughters as a threat to their future prosperity. They respond by treating him with a total lack of respect

and compassion, so much so that Albany, husband to one of the daughters, says in disgust to his wife:

. . . What have you done?
Tigers, not daughters, what have you perform'd?
A father and a gracious aged man,
Whose reverence even the head-lugg'd bear would lick,
Most barbarous, most degenerate, have you madded? (IV, 11, 39-43)

Yet there are redeeming qualities in this play. The third daughter, Cordelia, who has every reason to be angry with her father, shows not just forgiveness but respect, compassion and a true appreciation of all he has been and still could be. In a moment of coherence in his “madness” he recognizes her and her right to not love him for his treatment of her. “No cause, no cause,” she says (IV, vii, 74). Cordelia is dignified by her actions and attitudes; that she should then die is as tragic as the death of the broken-hearted King Lear, and in fact is the final catalyst for his death. It is ironic, however, that in many productions of the play prior to the twentieth century, the producers changed the play to have a happy ending! Neither Lear or Cordelia die and the values that Cordelia represents are those that rule the country. The view of the world was considered too dark. However, in more recent years the play has often been considered the greatest of Shakespeare’s tragedies—a mirror on the modern world. Frank Kermode, Shakespeare critic, calls the play “in part, a play about the end of the world”.¹⁸ Certainly the attitudes and the depth of the horror of the tragedy caused by selfishness and intolerance mirror some of the atrocities that the world has now come to own.

Measure for Measure on the other hand needs no help with its ending. This play, along with two of Shakespeare’s latest plays, *The Winter’s Tale* and *The Tempest* have been difficult for critics to characterize. They are not tragedies, comedies, or really

¹⁸ *The Riverside Shakespeare*, p. 1249.

romances. They have often been called the problem plays. In a way they are the most Christian of the plays, certainly when it comes to the key questions of mercy and forgiveness. And *Measure for Measure* is a good example of forgiveness and transparency in a world of “difference”. The difference here is not of race, religion or age, but of different values: the novice nun and the corrupt world that she is asked to respond to. How much will she compromise her values? In the end there is no compromise, but there is growth. Here is a good example of a situation where an individual holds to personal convictions, while responding positively to a “difference” she cannot personally support. She learns not to distance herself from the corruption of the world, but respond to the corruption around with creativity and morality. At the end of the play she has the fate of the man in her hands who has tried to blackmail her to sleep with him and who she thinks has killed her brother? Will she forgive him and plead for mercy? She does (V, I, 443-54). Her incredible act of mercy and forgiveness changes the total tone of the play and provides a basis for the rebuilding of society.

What then are the questions for the college students? How does Shakespeare play out the problem of “difference” in his plays? How do his questions seem to change as his career progresses? What are his questions? What are his answers? Does he leave questions unanswered? To what degree are the questions and answers relevant to today’s society? How do the plays reflect the students’ biblical understanding of how we are asked to respond to “difference”?

Conclusion

Speaking at Leeds University in 1965, Nigerian writer, Chinua Achebe spoke of the role of the writer in responding to the world that still struggles with difference:

Today, things have changed a lot, but it would be foolish to pretend that we have fully recovered from the traumatic effects of our first confrontation with Europe. Three or four weeks ago my wife, who teaches English in a boys' school, asked a pupil why he wrote about winter when he meant the harmattan. He said the other boys would call him a bushman if he did such a thing! Now, you wouldn't have thought, would you, that there was something shameful in your weather? But apparently we do. How can this great blasphemy be purged? I think it is part of my business as a writer to teach that boy that there is nothing disgraceful about the African weather, that the palm tree is a fit subject for poetry.¹⁹

So according to Achebe, one role of the writer is to show the dignity of difference. And as we have seen, writers also mirror the intolerance in the world, and remind us of our ungratefulness for diversity, our lack of compassion, and our struggle to find and give forgiveness. The Christian educator's role must then be to unpackage those writings and help students gain insights that will provide greater hope for the way we relate to each other. If in our classrooms students can learn that dignity of difference, the appreciation of diversity, we will provide them with tools to more accurately represent God's kingdom on this earth. The process of globalization will indeed open up doors for them to embrace in harmony the richness of the world God has created.

¹⁹ "The Novelist as Teacher," in *Fields of Vision: Readings about Culture, Race and Ethnicity*, p. 11.