PARABLES AND THE ADOLESCENT PSYCHE

THE RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE GOSPEL PARABLES ANDADOLESCENT PSYCHOLOGY IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

By

Dr, Dr George S. Fountoulakis[1], Christos Simos[2], & Evangelia Tzagkourni[3],

[1]Post Doc. ThD, Teaching Staff of the Faculty of Social Theology & Religious Studies

[2]Philologist and Theologian, Secondary School Teacher

[3]Phd cand, University of Crete

Abstract

The parables of Jesus occupy a central place in the Greek Religious Education curriculum, nonetheless they are frequently taught as simple moral illustrations rather than as open, provocative narratives that engage the person as a whole. Thus, this present article examines the parables through the lens of developmental, narrative and moral psychology, with particular attention to adolescence as a period of intense cognitive, emotional and identity-related change. Drawing on research on metaphor comprehension, narrative identity, narrative transportation, empathy, moral emotions, attachment and faith development, the article argues that the relationship between parable and adolescent psyche is reciprocal rather than one-directional. On the one hand, parables act upon the adolescent mind by offering metaphorical spaces in which identity, guilt, forgiveness, belonging and responsibility can be rehearsed at a safe distance. And, on the other hand, the adolescent psyche actively reshapes the parable as developmental capacities, emotional needs and personal histories determine which characters are noticed, which meanings are constructed and which questions are raised. The article proposes a reciprocal model of parabolic meaning-making and discusses its implications for Religious Education in general and for the Greek educational context in particular. It concludes that parables are most formative when adolescents are treated as active co-interpreters whose psychological development is both the condition and the outcome of their encounter with the text.

***Keyword*:** parables, adolescence, Religious Education, narrative identity, moral development, faith development, metaphor

1. Introduction

Few texts have shaped the moral and religious imagination of Western and Eastern Christianity as deeply as the parables of Jesus. The stories of the Prodigal Son, the Good Samaritan, the Lost Sheep, the Talents and the Pharisee and the Tax Collector have travelled far beyond their original

setting and have become part of a shared cultural vocabulary. In the school context, and especially in the subject of Religious Education, these narratives are among the most frequently taught biblical materials. Yet their pedagogical treatment often remains limited. Parables are commonly presented as illustrations of a single moral lesson, decoded by the teacher and then summarized by the students, so that the open, unsettling and existential character of the genre is reduced to a short ethical maxim. Such reductions are not merely a theological loss. They also represent a missed psychological opportunity, because the features that make parables difficult to tame are precisely those that make them capable of engaging the developing person in depth(Narvaez et al., 1999; Narvaez, 2002).

Adolescence is the developmental period in which this engagement becomes particularly significant. Between roughly the ages of twelve and eighteen, young people undergo profound changes in their capacity for abstract and hypothetical thought, in their emotional reactivity and social sensitivity, and in the way they construct a coherent sense of who they are (Blakemore & Mills, 2014; Steinberg, 2005). Adolescents begin to question inherited beliefs, to compare themselves with peers, to experience intense feelings of shame, guilt and longing for acceptance, and to search for meaning and purpose (Damon et al., 2003; Erikson, 1968). Research in the psychology of religion has shown that adolescence is also a critical period for religious and spiritual development, during which faith is either personally appropriated, reshaped or abandoned (Benson et al., 2003; King & Boyatzis, 2004; Smith & Denton, 2005). It is therefore reasonable to ask how the parables, as a distinctive form of religious narrative, interact with the psychological processes that define this stage of life.

Existing scholarship has approached this question from separate directions. Biblical scholars have developed rich theories of the parable as metaphor, as narrative and as challenge to conventional expectations (Crossan, 1973; Dodd, 1935; Jeremias, 1972; Ricoeur, 1975; Snodgrass, 2008). Developmental psychologists have studied how children and adolescents understand metaphor, moral stories and religious concepts (Goldman, 1964; Narvaez, 2002; Winner, 1988). Narrative psychologists have shown that stories are central to the construction of identity and to the simulation of social experience (Bruner, 1986; Mar & Oatley, 2008; McAdams, 2001). Researchers in Religious Education have documented the difficulties that young students encounter when they try to make sense of the symbolic language of the Gospels (Freathy&Walshe, 2010). What is still largely missing is an integrated account that brings these strands together and that considers not only what parables do to adolescents but also what adolescents do to parables.

The present article attempts such an integration. Its central thesis is that the relationship between parable and adolescent psyche is reciprocal. Parables influence the cognitive, emotional, moral and identity-related development of adolescents, and at the same time the developmental characteristics of adolescence shape the way in which parables are perceived, interpreted and appropriated. Understanding this two-way relationship is important for Religious Education, because it shifts the focus from the transmission of a fixed meaning towards a dialogical process in which the text and the learner mutually illuminate each other. The article is theoretical in nature and is based on a critical synthesis of literature drawn from biblical hermeneutics, developmental psychology of Religion (Tsitsigkos, 2024), narrative psychology, moral psychology and the psychology of religion. It is guided by the following research questions.

1. What features of the parable as a literary and theological genre make it psychologically significant for adolescent learners?
2. In what ways can parables influence the cognitive, emotional, moral and identity-related development of adolescents?

3. In what ways do the developmental characteristics of adolescence shape the interpretation and appropriation of parables?
4. What are the implications of this reciprocal relationship for the teaching of parables in Religious Education, with particular reference to the Greek context?

2. The Parable as Narrative, Metaphor and Existential Provocation

Any psychological reading of the parables must begin with an understanding of what kind of text a parable is. Modern parable research is usually traced back to the work of Adolf Jülicher at the end of the nineteenth century, who rejected the allegorical interpretation that had dominated the church for centuries and argued that each parable conveys a single central point (Jülicher, 1888/1899). This insight was refined by Dodd (1935) and Jeremias (1972), who situated the parables in the historical ministry of Jesus and read them as proclamations of the Kingdom of God addressed to concrete audiences in concrete situations. Dodd's often quoted description of the parable as a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, which arrests the hearer by its vividness or strangeness and leaves the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought, is particularly relevant for the present discussion. It already contains, in nuce, a psychological claim. The parable does not merely transmit information but provokes a cognitive and emotional reaction, and it leaves the listener with a task to perform.

Later scholarship deepened this insight by focusing on the literary and linguistic nature of the parable. Crossan (1973) emphasised the capacity of parables to overturn the expectations of their hearers and to subvert the world that the hearers take for granted. A Samaritan, a despised outsider, becomes the model of neighbourly love, while the priest and the Levite, the representatives of religious respectability, pass by. A father runs to embrace a son who has squandered his inheritance, while the dutiful elder brother is left outside the celebration. In such stories the familiar order of merit, honour and belonging is reversed, and the hearer is invited to reconsider not only a particular ethical question but the framework within which ethical questions are asked. Ricoeur (1975) described the parable as a combination of narrative form and metaphorical process, in which the ordinary story is stretched to the point of extravagance and thereby points beyond itself. For Ricoeur, metaphor is not an ornament of language but a means of redescribing reality, and the parable is a metaphor extended into a plot. Snodgrass (2008) has more recently offered a balanced synthesis, describing parables as stories with intent, which seek to provoke recognition, decision and transformation in their hearers.

Three features of the parable emerge from this body of research as especially significant from a psychological perspective. The first is its narrative character. A parable is a story with characters, a sequence of events, tension and resolution, and therefore it engages the mental and emotional processes that human beings use to understand stories. Bruner (1986, 1991) argued that narrative is one of two fundamental modes of human thought, distinct from logical and scientific reasoning, and that it is the mode through which people make sense of intentions, actions, and the vicissitudes of human life. When adolescents hear or read a parable, they do not simply process propositions. They follow characters, attribute motives, anticipate outcomes and react emotionally to what happens. In this sense, the parable addresses the whole person and not only the intellect.

The second feature is its metaphorical character. Parables speak about one domain of experience in terms of another. The Kingdom of God is compared to a mustard seed, a treasure hidden in a field or a banquet to which unlikely guests are invited. Divine forgiveness is narrated

through the conduct of a father towards his son. Cognitive linguistics has shown that metaphor is not a marginal phenomenon but a pervasive feature of human thought, through which abstract concepts are understood in terms of concrete bodily and social experience (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Understanding a parable therefore requires the capacity to map relations from a familiar source domain onto a less familiar target domain, a capacity that develops gradually throughout childhood and adolescence (Winner, 1988). The metaphorical nature of the parable makes it at once accessible, since it uses everyday images, and demanding, since its meaning is never exhausted by its literal content.

The third feature is the existential provocation that parables contain. In comparison to fables that usually end with an explicit moral, many parables end abruptly or with an open-ended question. For instance, the parable of the Prodigal Son does not tell us whether the elder brother eventually joined the feast. Similarly, the parable of the Good Samaritan ends with the question of who proved to be a neighbour, which turns the original question about the boundaries of obligation back upon the questioner. This openness places the listener/audience in the position of a participant who must complete the story on their own. Literary theory has described this phenomenon in terms of the gaps or indeterminacies of a text, which the reader fills through an active process of imagination and interpretation (Iser, 1978). Therefore, the parables are a paradigmatic example of texts whose meaning is co-constructed by the reader, and this feature is the foundation of the reciprocal relationship that this article seeks to describe.

It is important to note that this understanding of the parable can be brought into dialogue with the Orthodox theological tradition, which constitutes an important theological context for Religious Education in Greece. Although patristic interpreters employed diverse exegetical approaches, including allegorical, moral and typological readings, early Christian interpretations of the parables reveal a variety of ways in which these narratives were understood within the theological and spiritual life of the Church (Wiles, 1958). Within the Orthodox Christian tradition, repentance (*metanoia*) involves not merely a change of mind but a profound reorientation of the person towards God, expressed in the transformation of one's attitudes and way of life (Ware, 2000; Torrance, 2012). This emphasis on personal transformation can be brought into dialogue with contemporary psychological accounts of narrative engagement, which suggest that becoming absorbed in a story can influence readers' beliefs, evaluations and responses (Green & Brock, 2000). Nevertheless, spiritual transformation and psychological change should not be treated as equivalent processes, since they operate within distinct conceptual frameworks and involve different interpretive aims. Similarly, the reader's active participation in interpreting and appropriating a parable does not imply that its meaning is arbitrarily created by the individual; rather, personal interpretation takes place in relation to the narrative itself and its scriptural and theological context. A psychologically informed approach to the parables can therefore complement theological interpretation by investigating the cognitive, emotional and moral processes through which adolescents engage with religious narratives, while respecting the distinctive aims and methodological frameworks of theology and psychology.

3. Adolescence as a Psychological Landscape of Meaning-Making

Adolescence has long been described as a period of transition, but contemporary research portrays it less as a turbulent interval between childhood and adulthood and more as a sensitive period of development in its own right. Neuroscientific and psychological studies indicate that the adolescent brain undergoes substantial reorganisation, particularly in regions associated with

self-regulation, social cognition and the processing of rewards and emotions (Blakemore & Mills, 2014; Steinberg, 2005). These aforementioned changes are accompanied by a heightened sensitivity to the social environment, especially to peers, and by an increased capacity for reflection on the self and others. For the purposes of this article, four interrelated dimensions of adolescent development are particularly relevant to the encounter with parables, namely cognitive development, identity formation, moral and emotional development, and religious or spiritual development.

Firstly, with regard to cognitive development, the classic account of Inhelder and Piaget (1958) describes the transition from concrete to formal operational thought, which typically begins in early adolescence. Formal operations allow the young person to reason hypothetically, to consider possibilities that are not present, to reflect on thought itself and to manipulate abstract symbols. Although later research has questioned the universality and the timing of this stage, there is broad agreement that adolescence brings a significant expansion in the capacity for abstract reasoning. This expansion has direct consequences for the understanding of a metaphor. Winner (1988) showed that, while young children can produce and understand simple metaphors, the full comprehension of metaphorical and ironic language continues to develop into adolescence, particularly when it involves psychological or abstract target domains. A child may understand the parable of the Lost Sheep as a story about a shepherd who looks for an animal, whereas an adolescent becomes capable of grasping that the story says something about the value of every person and about the nature of God's care.

The second dimension is the process of identity formation during adolescence. Particularly, Erikson (1968) famously characterised adolescence as the stage in which the central psychosocial task is the achievement of a coherent identity, as opposed to role confusion. The adolescent must integrate childhood identifications, new capacities and social expectations into a sense of self that has continuity across time and situations. Similarly, Marcia (1966) operationalised this process through the concepts of exploration and commitment, distinguishing between adolescents who have explored and committed, those who are still exploring, those who have committed without exploration and those who have neither explored nor committed. Later work in narrative psychology reconceptualised identity as an internalised and evolving life story, which the person constructs in order to give unity and purpose to life (McAdams, 2001; McAdams & McLean, 2013). Habermas and Bluck (2000) demonstrated that the cognitive tools needed to construct a coherent life story, such as causal coherence and thematic coherence, emerge primarily during adolescence. This finding is of considerable importance for the present argument, because it suggests that adolescents are not only consumers of stories but are, for the first time, becoming authors of their own life narratives.

Another dimension concerns the moral and emotional development of adolescents. More specifically, Kohlberg (1984) proposed that moral reasoning progresses from preconventional orientations, focused on punishment and reward, through conventional orientations, focused on social approval and law and order, towards postconventional orientations based on universal principles. Most adolescents reason at the conventional level, in which the expectations of significant others and the maintenance of social order play a central role. Gilligan (1982) criticised the exclusive focus of this model on justice and argued for the importance of an ethic of care, grounded in relationships and responsiveness to the needs of others. On the same light, Hoffman (2000) placed empathy at the centre of moral development and described how the capacity to feel with others becomes more sophisticated as cognitive perspective-taking matures, allowing adolescents to empathise not only with individuals who are present but also with whole groups

and with people whose life conditions differ from their own. Longitudinal research confirms that perspective-taking and prosocial moral reasoning continue to increase during adolescence (Eisenberg et al., 2005). At the same time, adolescence is a period of intense self-conscious emotions. Shame, guilt, embarrassment and pride become more frequent and more salient, and research distinguishes between guilt, which focuses on a specific behaviour and tends to motivate reparation, and shame, which focuses on the entire self and tends to motivate withdrawal or defensiveness (Tangney et al., 2007). Elkind (1967) added that early adolescents often experience an imaginary audience, a feeling of being constantly observed and evaluated, together with a personal fable, a belief in the uniqueness of their own experiences and feelings. These phenomena make adolescents especially sensitive to stories that concern acceptance, rejection, failure and return.

Another dimension of adolescent development is the religious and spiritual development. Goldman (1964) conducted pioneering empirical research on the religious thinking of children and adolescents, using biblical stories and pictures, and concluded that genuinely abstract religious thinking appears only from early adolescence. His findings led him to argue that much biblical material, including parables, was being taught too early and was consequently misunderstood in literal and concrete terms. Although Goldman's conclusions have been criticised for relying too heavily on a Piagetian framework, they drew attention to the developmental conditions of religious understanding. Fowler (1981) proposed a theory of faith development in which adolescence typically corresponds to the synthetic-conventional stage. At this stage, faith provides a coherent orientation that synthesises values and information, but it remains largely tied to the expectations and judgements of significant others and of the community. Oser and Gmünder (1991) described a developmental sequence of religious judgement, in which the relationship between the person and the Ultimate is gradually understood in less heteronomous and more autonomous terms. Streib (2001) revised the stage model by introducing religious styles, which can coexist within the same person and can be activated by different experiences. As a result they allow a greater variety and flexibility in religious development. Similarly, from the perspective of applied developmental science, King (2003) argued that religion offers adolescents ideological, social and spiritual contexts that support identity formation by providing a worldview, a community and an experience of transcendence. Lastly, Benson et al. (2003) described spiritual development as a process of growing the intrinsic human capacity for self-transcendence, in which the self is embedded in something greater than itself.

Attachment theory adds a further layer to this picture. It proposed that the relationship that many believers experience with God functions psychologically as an attachment relationship, in which God is perceived as a secure base and a safe haven (Kirkpatrick, 2005). Research has supported two pathways linking human and divine attachment. According to the correspondence pathway, individuals with secure attachment histories tend to develop images of God that mirror their experience of sensitive caregivers, while according to the compensation pathway, individuals with insecure histories may turn to God as a substitute attachment figure, sometimes through sudden conversions (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2004). Psychoanalytic research, in turn, has shown that the representation of God is formed from early relational experiences and is reworked throughout development, particularly during adolescence (Rizzuto, 1979). These perspectives suggest that adolescents bring to religious narratives not only cognitive capacities but also relational histories and emotional expectations.

Taken together, these dimensions depict adolescence as a period in which the capacities required for a deep engagement with parables are emerging, while the existential questions to

which parables respond are becoming urgent. The adolescent is able to grasp metaphor and abstraction, is engaged in constructing a life story, is highly sensitive to questions of acceptance and moral worth, and is in the process of either appropriating, reshaping or rejecting a religious tradition. It is precisely this convergence of capacity and need that makes the encounter between parable and adolescent psyche so significant.

4. How Parables Act upon the Adolescent Psyche

The first direction of the reciprocal relationship concerns the influence that parables can exercise on the psychological development of adolescents. It would be tempting to imagine this influence in a mechanistic way, as though hearing a story about compassion automatically produced compassionate young people, but research on moral education warns against such optimism. Narvaez (2002) reviewed studies of moral text processing and showed that young readers frequently fail to extract the moral theme intended by the author, because comprehension depends on prior knowledge, moral reasoning schemas and reading skills. In an earlier study, Narvaez et al. (1999) found that the ability to identify the theme of a moral story improves considerably with age, while younger readers often recall the events without grasping their moral significance. Experimental work with children points in the same direction, since the effect of a moral story appears to depend on its narrative structure, with stories that emphasise the positive consequences of virtue proving more effective than stories that dwell on the punishment of wrongdoing (Lee et al., 2014). None of this contradicts the long-standing conviction, defended on psychological grounds by Vitz (1990) and by Tappan and Brown (1989), that stories form moral character. It simply shifts the question from whether stories influence people to how they do so. If parables shape adolescents at all, they must do so through specific psychological processes that are set in motion when a young person enters the world of the story, and it is with this act of entering that the discussion must begin.

Psychological research describes this act of entering as narrative transportation. Green and Brock (2000) showed that readers who become absorbed in a narrative world are more likely to adopt beliefs and attitudes consistent with the story, and that this effect holds whether the story is presented as fact or as fiction. Mar and Oatley (2008) explained the phenomenon by proposing that fiction functions as an abstraction and simulation of social experience, a kind of mental rehearsal in which readers infer the intentions of characters and explore the consequences of actions without real-world risk. Oatley (2016) later argued that such simulation exercises the same cognitive processes that are involved in actual social interaction, which is why engagement with fiction may deepen the understanding of others. Some experimental studies have even reported that reading literary fiction improves performance on theory of mind tasks (Kidd & Castano, 2013), although replication attempts have produced mixed results, and the finding should therefore be treated with caution. Parables are extremely brief, yet they contain everything that simulation requires. They place recognisable characters in tense social situations, they set desire against obligation, and they often withhold the resolution, so that the listener must carry the simulation beyond the final sentence. For adolescents, whose social cognition is being refined with particular intensity (Blakemore & Mills, 2014), a parable thus becomes a compact laboratory in which they can imagine what it feels like to be excluded, what moves a person to stop for a stranger, or how a parent might respond to betrayal. Imagining another person's situation, how-

ever, does not by itself lead anywhere. What the reader does with that imagined perspective depends on whether it is accompanied by genuine concern for the other, and this is exactly the question that the parable of the Good Samaritan places at its centre.

The Samaritan is moved by what he sees, and his compassion crosses an ethnic and religious boundary that his audience would have regarded as almost impassable. In psychological terms, he embodies what Hoffman (2000) described as the mature form of empathy, which extends concern beyond one's immediate group to strangers and even to potential enemies. Batson (2011) has gathered extensive evidence that such empathic concern can give rise to genuinely altruistic motivation, whose ultimate aim is the welfare of the other rather than the relief of one's own discomfort. Yet the same research tradition has also produced one of the most sobering findings in social psychology, which bears directly on this parable. In the experiment of Darley and Batson (1973), theological seminary students who were on their way to give a talk on the Good Samaritan were no more likely to help a person in apparent distress than students preparing a talk on another subject, while the degree to which they were in a hurry strongly predicted whether they stopped. Knowing the parable, in other words, did not make them neighbours. For adolescents, this finding is far from discouraging. It can become an object of reflection in its own right, because it shows that the distance between moral understanding and moral action is a real psychological problem, the very problem that the parable addresses when it closes with the command to go and do likewise. Since this gap between knowing and doing is particularly visible during adolescence (Eisenberg et al., 2005), the parable speaks to young people not only at the level of feeling but also at the level of their struggle to act on what they feel. And if the Good Samaritan exposes the gap between knowing and doing, the parable of the Prodigal Son explores what happens after a person has failed to do what is right, leading the discussion into the territory of the moral emotions.

Few biblical narratives map the inner movement of failure and return as finely as the story of the Prodigal Son. The younger son's departure, with its demand for his share of the inheritance, can be read as a narrative of separation from parental authority, and it therefore resonates with the adolescent striving for autonomy. His subsequent degradation brings him to the moment in which he comes to himself, recognises his wrongdoing and rehearses a speech declaring himself no longer worthy to be called a son. This movement corresponds closely to the distinction that Tangney et al. (2007) draw between shame, which condemns the whole self and tends to provoke withdrawal, and guilt, which concerns a specific action and tends to motivate reparation. The son begins in something close to shame, convinced that his very status as a son has been forfeited, yet he chooses to return, and in doing so he moves towards the reparative logic of guilt. The father's response then transforms the scene. He runs to meet his son, interrupts the prepared confession and restores his dignity before the speech is complete, thereby separating the person from the act and affirming the person's worth without conditions. Research on interpersonal forgiveness has shown that forgiveness is closely bound up with empathy for the offender and that it facilitates the restoration of close relationships (McCullough et al., 1997), and the father's conduct offers a narrative image of exactly this process. For adolescents, who are often entangled in conflicts with parents and peers and who are particularly vulnerable to shame, the parable opens a symbolic space in which failure can be integrated rather than denied. The story does not end with reconciliation, however. The elder brother, who refuses to enter the feast, gives voice to resentment, envy and a burning sense of injustice, emotions that adolescents know intimately and that moralising readings usually pass over in silence. His presence reminds us that the parable

does not offer emotional resolution so much as a mirror in which conflicting emotions can be seen and held together.

Emotions of this kind are never isolated episodes in an adolescent's life. As young people try to make sense of their experiences of failure, envy or forgiveness, they weave them into the story they are beginning to tell about themselves, and it is at this point that the parables can offer something more lasting than emotional rehearsal. McAdams (2001) showed that life stories are organised around recurrent themes, such as agency and communion, and around characteristic sequences, among which redemption sequences, in which a negative situation is transformed into a positive outcome, are associated with psychological well-being and generativity (McAdams & McLean, 2013). The parables are saturated with such sequences. The lost is found, the dead comes back to life, the last become first and the excluded are invited to the banquet. Because adolescents are only now acquiring the capacity to construct a coherent life story (Habermas & Bluck, 2000), these culturally powerful templates may provide them with ways of interpreting their own losses and new beginnings. Other parables offer templates of a less consoling and more demanding kind. The servant in the parable of the Talents who buries his talent out of fear behaves in a way that recalls what Bandura (1997) called low self-efficacy, the conviction that one cannot succeed, which leads to avoidance rather than effort. The Pharisee in the temple, who thanks God that he is not like other people, displays the habit of evaluating oneself through comparison with others, a process that Festinger (1954) described as social comparison and that becomes especially intense in adolescence. The tax collector, by contrast, simply acknowledges his own condition without looking sideways, and it is he who goes home justified. Different as they are, these narratives converge on a single conviction, namely that a person's worth is not finally determined by performance or by comparison. This conviction reaches the deepest layer of adolescent need, which is the need to belong.

Nowhere is this need addressed more directly than in the three parables of Luke 15, which narrate the search for a lost sheep, a lost coin and a lost son. The shepherd leaves the flock to look for a single sheep, the woman sweeps the whole house for a single coin, and the father watches the road and runs to embrace his son. In each case, what is lost is valued not because of what it has achieved but simply because it belongs. Read through the lens of *attachment theory*, these stories offer images of what Kirkpatrick (2005) called a secure base and a safe haven, a figure who seeks, waits and welcomes. Such images may be received in different ways depending on the adolescent's history. For young people who experience insecurity, loneliness or exclusion, they may offer a representation of being sought and accepted, which, according to the compensation pathway, can partly substitute for deficient human attachment, while for those with secure histories they may confirm and deepen a sense of security already present (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2004). Research on religious coping adds that religious meanings support adaptation to stress particularly when they convey a secure relationship with a benevolent transcendent reality (Pargament, 1997). The parables of the lost, therefore, do not merely describe relationships. They can become resources through which adolescents interpret and endure their own relational experiences.

Looking back over this path, it becomes clear that the processes described are not separate channels of influence but successive moments of a single movement. Absorption in the narrative opens the way to empathy, empathy gives rise to moral emotions, these emotions are gradually woven into the adolescent's life story, and the life story finds its anchor in a sense of being accepted and belonging. Seen in this way, the formative potential of the parables reaches far be-

yond the memorisation of moral lessons and touches the cognitive, emotional, moral and identity-related development of the adolescent as a whole. Yet every stage of this movement depends on the way in which the adolescent receives the parable in the first place. The same story can console one student and irritate another, can be grasped as metaphor by one and heard as a literal anecdote by another. It is to this second direction of the relationship, the influence of the adolescent on the parable, that the next section turns.

5. How the Adolescent Psyche Reshapes the Parable

If the parable is a text whose meaning is completed by its listener, then the psychological characteristics of the listener are not external to its meaning but part of it. Iser (1978) argued that every literary text contains gaps that the reader fills on the basis of his or her own experiences, expectations and cognitive resources, so that meaning arises from the interaction between text and reader rather than residing in the text alone. Applied to adolescents, this insight implies that the developmental profile of the learner shapes which aspects of a parable are noticed, which characters attract identification, which emotions are awakened and, finally, which meanings are constructed. The influence described in the previous section therefore always passes through a filter, and that filter is the adolescent psyche itself. The most immediate layer of this filter is cognitive, since before a parable can console, challenge or disturb, it must first be understood as the kind of text it is.

Goldman (1964) observed that younger children tended to interpret biblical stories in concrete and literal terms, often attributing magical or anthropomorphic features to God, and that more abstract interpretations became frequent only in adolescence. Even among adolescents, however, the capacity to grasp the metaphorical structure of a parable is far from uniform. Winner (1988) showed that the comprehension of metaphor depends on what the person knows about both the source and the target domain, and this observation has particular force in the case of the parables. A story about sowing seed, tending vineyards or settling debts draws on an agrarian and economic world that is largely foreign to contemporary urban adolescents, so that the source domain itself may need explanation before any metaphorical mapping can take place. Empirical research in Religious Education confirms that this is not a merely hypothetical difficulty. Freathy and Aylward (2010) interviewed students aged eleven to thirteen in English secondary schools and found that many of them assumed that understanding a religious claim required believing it, so that the symbolic language of the Gospels was experienced as an obstacle rather than as an invitation. In such cases the adolescent does not simply fail to understand the parable but actively reshapes it, either by reducing it to a literal account or by treating it as a coded message whose meaning has already been fixed by the teacher. Even when the metaphorical structure is grasped, however, understanding is only part of the encounter, because adolescents do not merely decode a parable. They also judge it.

The judgements that adolescents pass on the characters of a parable are shaped by the structure of their moral reasoning. Young people who reason predominantly at the conventional level described by Kohlberg (1984) tend to evaluate actions in terms of fairness, rules and social expectations, and it is precisely these expectations that several parables deliberately unsettle. When such adolescents hear of the Labourers in the Vineyard, in which workers hired at the last hour receive the same wage as those who have laboured all day, or of the Prodigal Son, in which the dutiful elder brother seems to be overlooked, they often react with a strong sense of injustice.

This reaction is not a misunderstanding to be corrected. It is a genuine response to the provocation of the parable, which confronts the logic of merit with the logic of grace and expects its listeners to feel the shock of that confrontation. At the same time, the ethic of care described by Gilligan (1982) reminds us that adolescents may not all react in the same way. Some focus on whether the brothers have been treated fairly, while others are drawn instead to the question of whether the relationship between the father and his sons can be restored. The parable is thus refracted through the moral orientation of its listener, and each orientation brings a different dimension of the text into view. Yet the question of which brother deserves sympathy is never only a moral question for an adolescent. It is also, and perhaps above all, a question about who the adolescent is.

Because adolescents are engaged in constructing a coherent life story (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 2001), they tend to read narratives through the lens of their own story and to identify with characters whose situations resemble their own. An adolescent in open conflict with his or her parents may side with the younger son's desire for independence and read the parable primarily as a story of liberation, while an adolescent who feels overlooked despite conscientious effort may recognise himself or herself in the elder brother standing outside the feast. Such identifications can be intensified by what Elkind (1967) called the personal fable, the belief that one's experiences are unique and incomprehensible to others, which may also make adolescents resist any interpretation that seems to reduce their experience to a general lesson. The way in which identity is being formed matters as much as its content. Adolescents who have committed to a religious identity without exploring alternatives, a status that Marcia (1966) termed foreclosure, may read the parables in a way that confirms the interpretation they have received, whereas adolescents who are actively exploring may read the same texts in a questioning or even subversive way. In both cases the parable becomes a mirror in which the adolescent's own identity project is reflected and negotiated. Identity, however, is not built in a vacuum. For many adolescents it is negotiated in relation to a religious tradition and to the community that carries it, and this relation in turn colours how the parables are heard.

Fowler's (1981) account of the synthetic-conventional stage, which is typical of adolescence, helps to explain this colouring. At this stage the meaning of religious symbols remains closely tied to the community and to the authorities that interpret them, so that adolescents may experience the parables as expressions of the shared values of their family or parish and may find it difficult to tolerate readings that diverge from those values. The way adolescents imagine the relationship between God and human beings also leaves its mark. Oser and Gmünder (1991) observed that in earlier stages of religious judgement the Ultimate is often understood as intervening directly and unilaterally in human affairs, whereas in later stages human freedom and responsibility come to be seen as compatible with transcendence. Such differences become visible in parables where divine initiative and human response are interwoven, as in the parable of the Sower, where the fate of the seed depends on the soil that receives it. Streib's (2001) religious styles perspective suggests, moreover, that these orientations are not fixed stages but styles between which adolescents may move, reading the same text at one moment in an instrumental way, at another in a conventional way and at yet another in a more reflective and individuative way. Sociological research adds an important caution about the broader cultural setting. Many contemporary adolescents hold a diffuse religiosity in which religion is valued chiefly for its capacity to make people nice and to help them feel good about themselves (Smith & Denton, 2005). Within such a framework the provocative and demanding elements of the parables are easily filtered out, and the parables are quietly reshaped into confirmations of a general ethic of

kindness. Beneath these cognitive and social forms of faith, however, lies a still deeper layer, which concerns the relational images through which adolescents imagine God in the first place.

Psychoanalytic and attachment research has shown that representations of God and of divine figures are shaped by early relationships with caregivers (Kirkpatrick, 2005; Rizzuto, 1979). It follows that the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son will not be received in the same way by an adolescent who has known a warm and responsive father and by an adolescent who has known absence, rejection or harshness. For the first, the parable may confirm an image that is already familiar, while for the second it may awaken longing, suspicion or even outright rejection. The same holds for the shepherd who searches for the lost sheep and for the master who entrusts talents to his servants and later demands an account of them. Adolescents project onto these figures their own expectations of authority, care and judgement, and these projections largely decide whether the parable is experienced as consolation, as demand or as threat. Such projections, however, are neither formed nor expressed in isolation, since the classroom in which the parable is read is itself a relational space with its own dynamics.

Vygotsky (1978) emphasised that higher mental functions are first constructed between people before they are internalised by the individual, and the interpretation of a parable in school follows the same path. Its meaning emerges through dialogue among students and between students and teacher, and given the heightened sensitivity of adolescents to their peers (Blakemore & Mills, 2014), the interpretations voiced by classmates can strongly influence what an individual student is willing to say, and even what he or she is willing to think. A parable discussed in a climate of mockery may shrink into a naïve story, whereas the same parable discussed in a climate of trust may open space for personal disclosure and serious questioning. Winnicott (1971) described a potential space between inner and outer reality in which play, creativity and cultural experience take place, and a parable received within a safe relational environment can become precisely such a space, one in which adolescents try out identities, emotions and interpretations without being bound to them. In this way adolescents are not only recipients of the parable but participants in a long tradition of interpretation, to which they add readings that reflect their own historical and psychological situation. The two directions traced in this and the previous section thus turn out to be inseparable, and the next section attempts to bring them together into a single model.

6. Discussion, a Reciprocal Model and Implications for Religious Education.

The analysis presented above allows the formulation of a reciprocal model of parabolic meaning-making in adolescence. According to this model, the encounter between adolescent and parable can be understood as a spiral rather than as a linear transmission. The adolescent approaches the parable with a set of developmental resources and needs, including cognitive capacities for metaphor and abstraction, an emerging life story, a characteristic moral orientation, a particular style of faith and a history of relationships. These resources and needs determine how the gaps of the parable are filled, which characters are chosen for identification and which emotions are activated. The resulting interpretation then acts back upon the adolescent, through the mechanisms of simulation, empathy, emotional processing, narrative templating and relational security described above. In turn, the psychological effects of this encounter modify the resources and needs that the adolescent brings to the next encounter with the same or another parable. A sixteen-year-old who rereads the parable of the Prodigal Son after experiencing a serious conflict with a parent, or after being forgiven by a friend, does not read the same text as at thirteen, and the new

reading contributes in turn to a reconfiguration of his or her understanding of failure, forgiveness and belonging.

This spiral model has several theoretical implications. First, it suggests that the developmental readiness for parables, which Goldman (1964) posed as a threshold question, should instead be understood as a gradual and recurrent process. Parables are not simply too difficult for younger learners and suitable for older ones. They can be meaningfully encountered at different developmental points, each encounter producing different meanings and laying foundations for later ones. Second, the model suggests that apparent misunderstandings, such as the adolescent protest against the injustice of the Labourers in the Vineyard or the identification with the elder brother, are not failures to be corrected but productive points of engagement in which the provocation of the parable meets the developmental concerns of the reader. Third, the model integrates the perspectives of biblical hermeneutics and developmental psychology. The hermeneutical claim that parables are open texts requiring the participation of the hearer (Crossan, 1973; Ricoeur, 1975) finds its psychological counterpart in the developmental claim that adolescents are active constructors of meaning and of their own life stories (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 2001). Neither perspective alone captures the dynamics of the encounter, which can be understood only by considering both the text and the person.

For Religious Education, the reciprocal model implies a shift of emphasis from the transmission of a predetermined meaning towards the facilitation of an interpretive dialogue. When parables are taught as illustrations of a single moral, the psychological mechanisms described in this article are largely neutralised. The provocation of the text is resolved before it can be felt, the gaps are filled by the teacher rather than by the learner, and the adolescent's own concerns are excluded from the interpretation. Research on moral texts suggests that explicit moralising does not guarantee that the intended message will be grasped (Narvaez, 2002), and research on adolescent religiosity suggests that adolescents who experience religion as a set of external demands are likely to reduce it to a general ethic of niceness or to reject it (Smith & Denton, 2005). By contrast, an approach that allows adolescents to dwell in the narrative, to identify with different characters, to articulate their emotional reactions and to formulate their own questions is more likely to activate narrative transportation, empathy and identity work. Such an approach also requires attention to the source domains of the parables, since the agrarian and social world of first-century Palestine is unfamiliar to contemporary students and must be made accessible before its metaphorical meaning can be grasped (Winner, 1988).

The reciprocal model also highlights the importance of the relational climate of the classroom. Since adolescents are highly sensitive to peers and to the imaginary audience (Elkind, 1967), and since the parables touch upon themes such as failure, shame, envy and rejection, a safe environment is a precondition for genuine engagement. In the absence of such an environment, students are likely to protect themselves by offering conventional or ironic interpretations that do not expose their real concerns. The teacher's role in this context is not that of a therapist, and the Religious Education lesson is not a counselling session. The teacher should avoid both moralising, which closes the text, and psychologising, which reduces the parable to a tool for emotional self-help and neglects its theological claims. The parables speak about God, about the Kingdom and about the relationship between divine grace and human response, and their psychological significance derives precisely from the fact that they place human experience within this wider horizon. A psychologically informed approach should therefore help adolescents to understand both what the parables meant within their original religious context and what they may mean for their own lives, while respecting the freedom of each student to accept or reject their religious claims.

These implications are particularly pertinent for the Greek context. Religious Education in Greece is a compulsory subject that has undergone significant curricular reforms during the last two decades, with a gradual shift from a predominantly confessional towards a more pluralistic, constructivist and learner-centred approach (Koukounaras Liagkis, 2015). KoukounarasLiagkis (2015) noted that this shift creates a tension between the constructivist pedagogy of the curriculum and the traditional Orthodox content of much of the subject matter. The parables offer a promising field in which this tension can become productive. They are central texts of the Orthodox tradition, interpreted extensively in patristic literature and present in the liturgical life of the Church, as in the Sundays of the Triodion dedicated to the Pharisee and the Publican and to the Prodigal Son. At the same time, they are open narratives that invite personal interpretation and dialogue. A reciprocal approach allows teachers to remain faithful to the theological depth of the tradition while taking seriously the developmental and existential situation of contemporary Greek adolescents, many of whom live in a pluralistic and partly secularised environment and come from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds.

Several limitations of the present analysis should be acknowledged. The article is theoretical and relies on a synthesis of existing literature rather than on new empirical data. Much of the psychological research cited has been conducted with Western, and often North American, samples, and its applicability to Greek and Orthodox contexts requires empirical verification. Some of the findings concerning the effects of fiction on social cognition have proved difficult to replicate, and their extension to brief religious narratives such as parables remains an open question. Moreover, the stage theories of moral and faith development have been criticised for their normative assumptions and for underestimating cultural and individual variation (Streib, 2001). The reciprocal model proposed here should therefore be understood as a heuristic framework that requires empirical testing. Future research could examine, through qualitative interviews and classroom observation, how Greek adolescents of different ages interpret selected parables, which characters they identify with, and how their interpretations relate to measures of identity status, moral reasoning, attachment and religious style. Longitudinal studies could investigate whether repeated engagement with parables in a dialogical classroom environment is associated with changes in empathy, forgiveness or narrative identity, while intervention studies could compare the effects of moralising and dialogical approaches.

7. Conclusion

This article set out to examine the parables of Jesus through the lens of psychology, with particular attention to adolescence and to the possibility of a reciprocal relationship between the parable and the adolescent psyche. In response to the first research question, it was argued that the narrative, metaphorical and existentially provocative character of the parable makes it psychologically significant, since it engages narrative thought, requires metaphorical mapping and leaves gaps that the hearer must complete. In response to the second question, five mechanisms were identified through which parables may influence adolescent development, namely narrative transportation and social simulation, the cultivation of empathy, the processing of moral emotions such as guilt, shame and forgiveness, the provision of narrative templates for identity, and the offer of relational security and belonging. In response to the third question, it was shown that the cognitive level, moral orientation, identity status, style of faith, relational history and social environment of the adolescent shape the way in which parables are interpreted, so that the meaning of the parable is co-constructed by its adolescent reader. In response to the fourth question, it was

proposed that Religious Education should move from the transmission of fixed morals towards a dialogical engagement that respects both the theological depth of the parables and the developmental situation of the learners, a direction that is consistent with recent curricular developments in Greece.

The central conclusion of the article is that parables and adolescents meet in a space of mutual illumination. The parable offers the adolescent images, characters and plots through which experiences of autonomy, failure, envy, compassion and return can be named and reconsidered. The adolescent, in turn, brings to the parable questions, emotions and life stories that reveal new dimensions of an ancient text. When this reciprocity is recognised and cultivated, the parables cease to be relics of a distant world or vehicles of predictable lessons, and become living narratives that accompany young people in the demanding task of becoming themselves. It is in this sense that the ancient call of the parable, that those who have ears to hear should hear, may still find an attentive audience among adolescents today.

References

Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. W. H. Freeman.

Batson, C. D. (2011). *Altruism in humans*. Oxford University Press.

Benson, P. L., Roehlkepartain, E. C., & Rude, S. P. (2003). Spiritual development in childhood and adolescence: Toward a field of inquiry. *Applied Developmental Science, 7*(3), 205–213. https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532480XADS0703_12

Blakemore, S.-J., & Mills, K. L. (2014). Is adolescence a sensitive period for sociocultural processing? *Annual Review of Psychology, 65*, 187–207. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-010213-115202

Bruner, J. (1986). *Actual minds, possible worlds*. Harvard University Press.

Bruner, J. (1991). The narrative construction of reality. *Critical Inquiry, 18*(1), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1086/448619

Crossan, J. D. (1973). *In parables: The challenge of the historical Jesus*. Harper & Row.

Damon, W., Menon, J., & Bronk, K. C. (2003). The development of purpose during adolescence. *Applied Developmental Science, 7*(3), 119–128. https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532480XADS0703_2

Darley, J. M., & Batson, C. D. (1973). "From Jerusalem to Jericho": A study of situational and dispositional variables in helping behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 27*(1), 100–108. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0034449

Dodd, C. H. (1935). *The parables of the kingdom*. Nisbet.

Eisenberg, N., Cumberland, A., Guthrie, I. K., Murphy, B. C., & Shepard, S. A. (2005). Age changes in prosocial responding and moral reasoning in adolescence and early adulthood. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 15*(3), 235–260. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1532-7795.2005.00095.x

Elkind, D. (1967). Egocentrism in adolescence. *Child Development, 38*(4), 1025–1034. https://doi.org/10.2307/1127100

Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis*. Norton.

Festinger, L. (1954). A theory of social comparison processes. *Human Relations, 7*(2), 117–140. https://doi.org/10.1177/001872675400700202

Fowler, J. W. (1981). *Stages of faith: The psychology of human development and the quest for meaning*. Harper & Row.

Freathy, R., & Walshe, K. (2010). "Everything is in parables": An exploration of pupils' difficulties in understanding Christian beliefs concerning Jesus. *Religious Education, 105*(1), 86–102. https://doi.org/10.1080/00344080903472790

Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development*. Harvard University Press.

Goldman, R. (1964). *Religious thinking from childhood to adolescence*. Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Granqvist, P., & Kirkpatrick, L. A. (2004). Religious conversion and perceived childhood attachment: A meta-analysis. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion, 14*(4), 223–250. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327582ijpr1404_1

Green, M. C., & Brock, T. C. (2000). The role of transportation in the persuasiveness of public narratives. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 79*(5), 701–721. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.79.5.701

Habermas, T., & Bluck, S. (2000). Getting a life: The emergence of the life story in adolescence. *Psychological Bulletin, 126*(5), 748–769. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.126.5.748

Hoffman, M. L. (2000). *Empathy and moral development: Implications for caring and justice*. Cambridge University Press.

Inhelder, B., & Piaget, J. (1958). *The growth of logical thinking from childhood to adolescence*. Basic Books.

Iser, W. (1978). *The act of reading: A theory of aesthetic response*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Jeremias, J. (1972). *The parables of Jesus* (2nd rev. ed.). SCM Press.

Jülicher, A. (1888). *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu: Erster Teil: Die Gleichnisreden Jesu im Allgemeinen*. J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

Jülicher, A. (1899). *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu: Zweiter Teil: Auslegung der Gleichnisreden der dreierstenEvangelien*. J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

Kidd, D. C., & Castano, E. (2013). Reading literary fiction improves theory of mind. *Science, 342*(6156), 377–380. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1239918

Kidd, D. C., & Castano, E. (2019). Reading literary fiction and theory of mind: Three preregistered replications and extensions of Kidd and Castano (2013). *Social Psychological and Personality Science, 10*(4), 522–531. https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550618775410

King, P. E. (2003). Religion and identity: The role of ideological, social, and spiritual contexts. *Applied Developmental Science, 7*(3), 197–204. https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532480XADS0703_11

King, P. E., & Boyatzis, C. J. (2004). Exploring adolescent spiritual and religious development: Current and future theoretical and empirical perspectives. *Applied Developmental Science, 8*(1), 2–6. https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532480XADS0801_1

Kirkpatrick, L. A. (2005). *Attachment, evolution, and the psychology of religion*. Guilford Press.

Kohlberg, L. (1984). *The psychology of moral development: The nature and validity of moral stages*. Harper & Row.

Koukounaras Liagkis, M. (2015). Religious education in Greece: A new curriculum, an old issue. *British Journal of Religious Education, 37*(2), 153–169. https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2014.944093

Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. University of Chicago Press.

Lee, K., Talwar, V., McCarthy, A., Ross, I., Evans, A., & Arruda, C. (2014). Can classic moral stories promote honesty in children? *Psychological Science, 25*(8), 1630–1636. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797614536401

Mar, R. A., & Oatley, K. (2008). The function of fiction is the abstraction and simulation of social experience. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 3*(3), 173–192. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-6924.2008.00073.x

Marcia, J. E. (1966). Development and validation of ego-identity status. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 3*(5), 551–558. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0023281

McAdams, D. P. (2001). The psychology of life stories. *Review of General Psychology, 5*(2), 100–122. https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.5.2.100

McAdams, D. P., & McLean, K. C. (2013). Narrative identity. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 22*(3), 233–238. https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721413475622

McCullough, M. E., Worthington, E. L., Jr., & Rachal, K. C. (1997). Interpersonal forgiving in close relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 73*(2), 321–336.https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.73.2.321

Narvaez, D. (2002). Does reading moral stories build character? *Educational Psychology Review, 14*(2), 155–171. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1014674621501

Narvaez, D., Gleason, T., Mitchell, C., & Bentley, J. (1999). Moral theme comprehension in children. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 91*(3), 477–487. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.91.3.477

Oatley, K. (2016). Fiction: Simulation of social worlds. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences, 20*(8), 618–628. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2016.06.002

Oser, F. K., &Gmünder, P. (1991). *Religious judgement: A developmental approach*. Religious Education Press.

Panero, M. E., Weisberg, D. S., Black, J., Goldstein, T. R., Barnes, J. L., Brownell, H., & Winner, E. (2016). Does reading a single passage of literary fiction really improve theory of mind? An attempt at replication. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 111*(5), e46–e54. https://doi.org/10.1037/pspa0000064

Pargament, K. I. (1997). *The psychology of religion and coping: Theory, research, practice*. Guilford Press.

Ricoeur, P. (1975). Biblical hermeneutics. *Semeia, 4*, 29–148.

Rizzuto, A.-M. (1979). *The birth of the living God: A psychoanalytic study*. University of Chicago Press.

Samur, D., Tops, M., & Koole, S. L. (2018). Does a single session of reading literary fiction prime enhanced mentalising performance? Four replication experiments of Kidd and Castano (2013). *Cognition and Emotion, 32*(1), 130–144. https://doi.org/10.1080/02699931.2017.1279591

Smith, C., & Denton, M. L. (2005). *Soul searching: The religious and spiritual lives of American teenagers*. Oxford University Press.

Snodgrass, K. R. (2008). *Stories with intent: A comprehensive guide to the parables of Jesus*. Eerdmans.

Steinberg, L. (2005). Cognitive and affective development in adolescence. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences, 9*(2), 69–74. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2004.12.005

Streib, H. (2001). Faith development theory revisited: The religious styles perspective. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion, 11*(3), 143–158. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327582IJPR1103_02

Tangney, J. P., Stuewig, J., & Mashek, D. J. (2007). Moral emotions and moral behavior. *Annual Review of Psychology, 58*, 345–372. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.56.091103.070145

Tappan, M. B., & Brown, L. M. (1989). Stories told and lessons learned: Toward a narrative approach to moral development and moral education. *Harvard Educational Review, 59*(2), 182–206. https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.59.2.d364up55vx875411

Tsitsigkos, S. K. (2024). Developmental Psychology of Religion. National and Kapodistrian University of Athens.

Vitz, P. C. (1990). The use of stories in moral development: New psychological reasons for an old education method. *American Psychologist, 45*(6), 709–720. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.45.6.709

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.

Winner, E. (1988). *The point of words: Children's understanding of metaphor and irony*. Harvard University Press.

Winnicott, D. W. (1971). *Playing and reality*. Tavistock.