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From the President



Listen to the lyrics of “Tubthumping,” by the English band Chumbawamba, and you will find that the song is a fitting anthem for teachers these days. We have been through a lot.

In March 2020, we headed into the first COVID-19 wave, with schools moving online. For many teachers, that was the first time they had attempted to deliver their programs that way. Teachers got up and took on the challenge. From kindergarten centres to graduation ceremonies, teachers found a way.

In September 2020, we were back in our schools, with far fewer protections than we wanted. After stepping back in disbelief, teachers got up and again took on the challenge. When many students were absent because of COVID-19, teachers were asked to offer programs for both the students in the classroom and the students at home. Teachers again got up and rose to the occasion.

Wave after wave of the pandemic knocked us down, yet teachers got back up over and over and took on the challenges before them. As I write this, we are in the middle of the fifth wave, with record-breaking case numbers, hospitals filling up and staffing shortages at schools. Teachers continue to soldier on. Will this ever end?

To help teachers develop the courage to get back up and face the challenges thrown at us, the Religious and Moral Education Council (RMEC) and the Social Studies Council are hosting a conference called *Brave Teacher: The Cost of Courage and Call to Hope*, to be held May 13–14 in Calgary. The conference aims to give teachers the tools they need in order to continue to have the moral courage to get back up again and lead our students during this time of crisis. General Roméo Dallaire, famous for commanding the United Nations mission in Rwanda during the 1994 genocide, will be a keynote speaker. This will be an amazing event, and we hope to see you there. Check out our website (www.rmecata.com) for details.

Dan McLaughlin

A Note from the Editor



This issue of *Fully Alive* continues the focus on how we respond to the horrors of the Indian Residential School system that existed in Canada, with a feature article on decolonizing schools. In addition to reconciliation, this issue covers the topics of hope, listening, evil and covenant—a wide array of articles to stimulate and possibly distract our minds for a few brief moments from the pandemic that envelops our worlds.

It is a pleasure for me, as editor, to seek out writers and their ideas to support teachers in their

professional growth, especially in tense times. The pleasure grows in experiencing a glimpse of the lives of these writers—their triumphs in publishing and their everyday concerns that inspire, shape and sometimes stall their writing. Reading the thoughts of experienced teachers and writers is fulfilling, but existing in the process of the writing is profound.

So, as we engage in our ordinary lives, completing God's extraordinary work and living in unusual times, I hope that these words carry you to the end of the school year and beyond. May we all continue to help ourselves, our students and our communities with struggles, and may we continue to celebrate our joys.

Elaine Willette-Larsen

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The Religious and Moral Education Council

Mission

The Religious and Moral Education Council exists to improve the knowledge, understanding and practice of our members in the field of religious and moral education.

Vision

The Religious and Moral Education Council will, in search of peace and the common good, be a principal resource for Alberta teachers.

Values

We are committed to serving teachers through the values of faith, dignity, respect and collaboration.

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Your RMEC executive members give their time out of a genuine desire to serve you, our members, and to further develop religious and moral education in Alberta. We hope you'll get involved too!

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Decolonization: Professional Requirement and Moral Imperative

Angela Houle

Education systems are increasingly called to do the work of decolonization, in response to the discovery of unmarked graves on residential school properties, educators' qualification standards, and the continued differential educational outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

For the most part, educators want to do the work. When I encounter educators who are resistant, that resistance can be complex. Most are resistant because they do not understand what decolonization is or why it is needed. Once they understand, they become advocates.

Thus, educators need a clearer understanding of what decolonization is, how education was and still is used as a tool for colonization, and how they can start the process of decolonizing their schools and classrooms.

Why Educators May Feel Resistant

Educators' resistance to decolonization takes various forms, but the three most common resistance refrains I hear are understandable:

- What if I do or say something wrong?
- Am I the right person to be doing this work?
- I know that this work is important and that I have a responsibility and a role in this work, but where do I start?

The work of decolonization is not easy. It is fraught with contention, historically and today. We all do and say the wrong things in this work from time to time—even the experts (ask them if you don't believe me). When it comes to these inevitable missteps, what is

most important is that you have taken the time to build solid relationships and that you approach this work with humility. If you are doing the work authentically and presenting yourself and your progress on this journey authentically, people will give you the benefit of the doubt because of the trusting relationships you are building. Moreover, if you do this work with humility, admitting what you do not know and apologizing humbly when you make mistakes, you will be met with understanding and opportunities to learn. It is only when we are insincere or overbearing that we end up in trouble in the work of decolonization.

You are the right person to be doing this work. The work of decolonization is the work of all of us but especially those with power and privilege who have benefited from the colonization of this land and its original Peoples. See the Wheel of Power/Privilege in my previous article (Houle 2021, 5).

Finally, yes, this work is important, and you do have a role. It can seem overwhelming, but my hope is that the ideas and concepts communicated here will give you further insight into and clarity on what decolonization is and how it can look in your school and classroom.

Another common form of resistance comes from people who seem uncomfortable with the guilt or blame they perceive as being related to this work. However, the work of decolonization, Indigenization and, ultimately, reconciliation is not about speaking ill of anyone or making anyone feel bad. You cannot shame people into change.

We need to dispel the binaries we assign to things: good versus evil, better versus worse, Western culture

versus Indigenous culture. Western culture is not bad. Making eye contact while shaking a right hand as a greeting is not bad. A birthday party with a cake and candles is not bad. Colonization is bad, but *colonization* is not synonymous with *Western culture*.

Colonization refers to the physical and ideological domination of Peoples to separate them from their culture and resources, while creating both external and internalized assumptions of the superiority of the dominating group (Poitras Pratt et al 2018). Colonization involves imposing a culture on a group of people while attempting to erase their own existing culture.

Western culture is bad only when it is imposed to the exclusion of all other cultural expressions. The work of decolonization is not to say that Indigenous cultures are better or worse than Western culture. Rather, decolonization is the work of challenging the dominance and assumed superiority of the colonizing group. It involves revitalizing the ways of being and knowing that existed before colonization (Smith 2012). Decolonization can be thought of as being on a spectrum. Some believe that it involves readopting all things Indigenous that were taken away through colonization, others believe that it involves recognizing what was taken and challenging Eurocentrism wherever possible, and many fall somewhere in between. Decolonization is more than just learning about the past; it involves addressing not just external examples of colonization but also the complex ways in which individual people have internalized the oppression of colonization (Sensoy and DiAngelo 2017). It also must involve the colonizers recognizing and challenging their own sometimes subconscious presumptions of superiority.

A final form of resistance is a well-meaning one. Some educators wonder if we should be forcing a Western education on Indigenous kids. The short answer is yes. The long answer is complicated, and I will attempt to unwind it a bit here.

Do Indigenous Peoples Value a Western Education?

A question I hear from educators all the time is, “Do Indigenous Peoples value a Western education? One reason I don’t call home (or push them harder, or have higher expectations) is that I feel like I’m colonizing them all over again. Who am I to tell them a Western

education is important?” Great question! Very thoughtful. The answer is complicated.

Indigenous Peoples value education and had their own systems of education that were highly valued and respected within their communities. According to Cajete (1994, 33), for First Nations people “education is significant because it embodies a quest for self, individual and community survival, and wholeness in the context of a community and natural environment.” As Bell (2004) writes,

From the earliest days of contact, Aboriginal parents have had the deeply held desire for education that would equip their children to reap the benefits of the knowledge and technologies of the Euro-Canadian society. However, they have maintained a parallel desire to preserve their own ways of knowing, cultural traditions and heritage. For Aboriginal students, education is not an “either or” proposition, but a “yes and” situation.

Indigenous Peoples also have known the value of a Western education, especially in the conditions of the late 19th century. For example, the Treaty 7 leaders knew that a Western education “would enable them not only to survive the loss of their traditional lifestyle but also to participate fully in the new economy (Treaty 7 Elders & Tribal Council, 1996, p. xi)” (Carr-Stewart 2001, 126). They recognized that it would help them prosper. With buffalo numbers dwindling and their traditional way of life threatened, First Nations and Métis people knew that they would need to learn the newcomers’ system of education. This is evident in how the First Nations leaders negotiated for education in Numbered Treaties 1–7. (Numbered Treaties 8–11 were negotiated well after the *Indian Act* had been legislated and the residential school system had already begun.)

However, what was disregarded is that First Nations people did not value a Western education *over* their own traditional education. As Carr-Stewart (2001, 138) explains, “The chiefs and headmen who signed the numbered treaties negotiated an educational right complementary to their own Aboriginal teachings.” When the treaties were negotiated by two sovereign nations, a Western education was agreed upon for Indigenous children *on or near their Nations, when they desired it, alongside their traditional cultural education*. First Nations people knew that a formal

Western education “would enable First Nation communities to supplement traditional educational practices with western teaching so they could ‘live and prosper and provide’ (Morris, 1991/1880, p. 28)” (p 126), but they never intended to replace their existing systems of education with the colonizer’s system. Rather, they intended to learn the colonizer’s education alongside their own.

Sadly, what was agreed upon is not what was delivered. The treaties were not honoured as negotiated, and First Nations, Métis and Inuit children were subsequently “forced into an educational system that sought to eliminate their traditional educational practices, languages, culture, and customs, something that had not been a part of the treaty negotiations” (Carr-Stewart 2001, 138). History being what it is, Canada has accrued a debt of promised education to Indigenous Peoples.

Why Is It an Educational Debt Rather Than an Achievement Gap?

Words have power. Orlowski and Cottrell (2019) and Ladson-Billings (2007) highlight the power imbalance and inaccuracy of the term *achievement gap* when referring to the educational success of Indigenous students as compared with non-Indigenous students. A focus on the achievement gap puts the onus where it does not belong, because it suggests a cultural deficit on the part of the oppressed group rather than an institutional deficit owed by the dominant group (Ladson-Billings 2007).

Both Orlowski and Cottrell (2019) and Ladson-Billings (2007) suggest that rather than focusing on an achievement gap, educators should shift their thinking to the idea of an educational debt being owed to students. The term *educational debt* more accurately reflects how discrepancies between the success of Indigenous students and that of non-Indigenous students in a neocolonial educational institution should be perceived. Also, the switch to thinking of any gap in achievement as an educational debt suggests that the system needs to remedy unjust systemic educational practices that unfairly burden certain populations (Louie and Gereluk 2021).

Canada owes an educational debt to Indigenous Peoples that must be addressed. This debt is owed because of the inferior and abusive nature of the education that Indigenous Peoples received for more than

a century. Further, that education did not honour the agreements with and promises made to Indigenous Peoples of a Western education offered alongside their own traditional education. The education provided also attempted to erase and demonize traditional Indigenous education systems, cultural systems and practices, increasing the debt owed by Canada.

This debt can never be fully repaid, as many parts of Indigenous cultures and languages were *taken*—not *lost* (remember, words matter)—forever, but it can begin to be repaid, in part, through the decolonization of schools, which requires openness to disruption and willingness to invest resources.

Indigenizing Schools Is Not Enough—Power Imbalances Must Be Addressed

The need for decolonization before Indigenization gradually became obvious to me, as an Indigenous education consultant.

When I started in this work, it seemed that the best thing to do would be to Indigenize classrooms—that is, to bring Indigenous content; accurate, respectful resources; and authentic, knowledgeable Indigenous speakers to schools and classrooms. These, indeed, can be effective strategies toward developing understanding of Indigenous Peoples and cultures.

However, after spending some time in this position and, in my second year, hearing a presentation from education professor Dustin Louie about the need for decolonization before Indigenization, my paradigm began to shift. I subsequently read the scholarship on Indigenous education of Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Marie Battiste, Verna St Denis, Jennifer Tupper, Michael Cottrell, Yvonne Poitras Pratt, Gregory Cajete and many others, and I came to the realization that Indigenization is only a small piece of a much larger puzzle.

The limitations of Indigenizing classrooms are many. Educators commonly cite lack of flexibility, time and monetary resources as barriers. Some subject areas can be difficult or complicated to Indigenize, as well. Many educators also feel that they are not properly trained to do the work of Indigenization—a very real concern.

Decolonization, by contrast, can be implemented at any level and in any area of the educational process. According to Smith (2012), decolonization revitalizes ways of knowing and being from before colonization, while challenging and disrupting

assumptions that the colonial way of knowing and doing things is superior. Indigenization is a very good thing, but it is not a solution to the legacies of colonization.

Indigenization, an aspect of culturally inclusive education, promotes an add-and-stir mentality (Battiste 1998; Bauer-Dantoin and Ritch 2005; Cummins 1989). The Ontario Ministry of Education (2009, 4) defines *culturally inclusive education* as “education that is based on the principles of acceptance and inclusion of all students. . . . [D]iversity is honoured and all individuals are respected.” This poses a danger to decolonization of dilution and problematic conflation. Culturally inclusive education does not eliminate stereotypes or facilitate understanding between settlers and Indigenous Peoples. As Battiste (1998) advises, cultural inclusion can be reductionist. Designating a pan-Indigenous identity to Indigenous Peoples through simplistic objects such as teepees, Totem Poles and tomahawks—“beads, buffalo, and bannock” (p 22)—can trivialize the richness of diverse Indigenous cultures and downplay the role that education has played in the marginalization of Indigenous Peoples and cultures. As Lorenz (2013, 35) writes, “Culturally inclusive education framed in this way is only incorporating Indigenous peoples symbolically rather than treating them as true equals in mainstream education.” Culturally inclusive education is a limiting educational framework that does not facilitate decolonizing education, because it distracts from the real issues of recognition and redress of Indigenous Rights (Lorenz 2013; St Denis 2011).

Bringing Indigenous culture, history and people into schools is not enough, on its own, to solve the effects of ongoing colonization in schools. It also places further burden on the victims of this systemic elimination—Indigenous Peoples. As St Denis (2007, 1081) writes, “Proceeding without addressing the impact of racism in education on Aboriginal people is no longer acceptable.” Indigenization itself is not bad, but it does not address the historical wrongs of colonization or challenge the existing hegemony in education. St Denis goes on to say that placing all hope for disrupting educational oppression on introducing the positive aspects of Indigenous culture is misguided. Poitras Pratt et al (2018, 18) agree, adding, “It is problematic when educators and educational leadership are asked to acquire foundational knowledge alone, without

considering their own positionality and responsibility in this work.”

Power dynamics must be addressed, because, as Poitras Pratt and Danyluk (2019, 11–12) write, “Without looking at how you are personally implicated in the colonial project, non-Indigenous citizens may be narrowly focused on helping ‘those’ poor people thereby adopting a savior stance. This type of helping can ultimately disempower those whom you are trying to help.” To transform entire systems, these systems and the individuals within them need to recognize their own responsibility to Indigenous Peoples and articulate their responsibilities in the transformation (Pidgeon 2016).

Bringing Indigenous culture, history and people into schools is a good thing, but it is only one piece of the decolonizing puzzle. Moreover, it can distract from the more unpleasant realities of the effects of colonizing practices and policies still playing out in schools daily. If educators become aware of, understand and acknowledge their place in the structures of the colonial context, they will be better prepared to take action in an informed way. Educators must do the work to “unsettle colonial structures, systems, and dynamics in educational contexts” (Poitras Pratt et al 2018, 1).

Education Is Still a Tool of Colonization

Most aspects of the current education system in Canada continue to come from one dominant world view—that of the colonizer. One reason ongoing decolonization work is so important is that colonialization through education is not just historical; it continues to take place in the present.

Tupper and Cappello (2008, 567) explain that curriculum and how educators choose to mobilize curricular documents implicates educators “in the tacit and overt reproduction of dominant cultural norms.” Mainstream education continues to be an extension of colonization, because it promotes the dominant society’s narrative and privileges its ways of knowing. According to Orlowski and Cottrell (2019, 12), “Well-intentioned teachers can still play into the dynamics of systemic racism and inadvertently work toward maintaining White hegemony and Indigenous oppression.”

Poitras Pratt et al (2018, 10) write, “The privileging of Eurocentric knowledge systems has been

instrumentalized, legislated, and deployed by colonial governments as a mechanism for education, but more insidiously for the assimilation and domination of Indigenous peoples.” Grumet (1981, 115) describes curriculum as “the collective story we tell our children about our past, our present, and our future.” The story children have been told in Canadian schools is often delivered from only the Western perspective. Educators must pay attention to whose story they are telling and whose story is missing in the curriculum (Tupper 2011; Tupper and Cappello 2008).

The best part of all of this is that even though decolonization is about revitalizing Indigenous languages, cultures and sovereignty, decolonizing education will benefit all students. As Tupper and Cappello (2008, 576) explain,

The presence of only dominant ways of knowing and only dominant history produces students who are less able to think about the complexities of the world they inhabit, less able to integrate those experiences into a growing “making sense” of that world. To pretend that students do not experience racism, or to create curricula that obfuscates these experiences, is to yet again privilege the vantage point of the dominant (white) students who do not experience racial discrimination, and who can remain unaware of the privilege they carry.

A decolonized education creates students who are better able to think critically and who can more clearly understand and appreciate the diversity of the world they live in. Classrooms and schools are made up of diverse student populations with diverse customs and histories; decolonizing education will give students a way to honour and respect each other’s differences. Decolonization necessarily precedes the work of Indigenization (Poitras Pratt et al 2018).

How Will We Know If We Are Succeeding?

How the education system defines success must also be re-examined.

The colonial standard of graduation rates “overemphasizes the educational outcomes and achievement gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, with less emphasis being focused on historical and institutional injustices” (Louie and Gereluk 2021, 54). To decolonize education toward a better

education system for all, we must examine the definition of success so that it encompasses more than one world view.

Indigenous Peoples see education as a “lifelong, holistic process that begins while a child is still in the womb and continues so long as a person draws breath, encompassing all those learnings that we need to live long and well on Mother Earth” (Castellano, Davis and Lahache 2000, 1). When we think of education in this way, it is hard to quantify it using Western curriculum or assessment methods. Thus, the education system must embrace this view systemically, not just on the fringes, as an exception or in optional courses (Furniss 1999, 61). Embracing both Indigenous and non-Indigenous educational epistemologies and re-imagining a system that implements learning and assessment from both would be ideal. Education systems need to recognize that both systems have merit.

Reconstructing education systems in a decolonized manner “centres Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies in working towards localized education” (Madden 2014, 60). Research has shown that when learning integrates both Western and Indigenous knowledge and value systems, Indigenous students’ attendance and engagement in learning increase. This is a positive step in the journey toward repairing the damaging effects of a past when only Western knowledge and value systems were given value in schools. Effective pedagogy is relevant to its learners. Integrating both cultures’ epistemologies and ontologies will increase the participation of Indigenous students, which in turn increases their educational success (Canadian Council on Learning 2007; Lorenz 2013; Louie and Gereluk 2021; Papp and Cottrell 2021).

What Decolonization Looks Like in a School or Classroom

After educators have started the work of decolonizing themselves (Houle 2021), they can then start authentically leading a shift in the school.

A new, decolonized way for educational leaders to think about what needs to happen in a school can be shaped by this explanation from Indigenous scholar Gregory Cajete (1999, 78): “There is no word for education, or science, or art in most indigenous languages. ‘Coming to know’ is the best translation for education in most Native traditions . . . [and] is a process that happens in many ways.”

This foundational shift in the paradigm of what education is and how it happens will change a school's culture and climate. Educators can then examine how they define education and challenge themselves to see and validate more than one world view. If educators implicate themselves in the perspectives and labours of Indigenous Peoples, they will be more effective at leading decolonization work.

According to Battiste (2012a, 2012b), decolonizing education involves a “two-prong process” of deconstructing and reconstructing the education system. The current education system is heavily influenced by northern European values and Judeo-Christian religious philosophies (Cottrell, Preston and Pearce 2012). This system has many wonderful aspects, but when it is presented in a way that excludes local values and world views, it is problematic. The current system prioritizes colonial knowledge and styles of teaching and assessment, and it must be challenged.

Deconstructing that system involves probing colonization and colonial strategies still used by settlers to justify exploitation of Indigenous Lands and resources through the treaties, the *Indian Act* and teaching primarily European histories in schools. All result in the absence or misrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples and history (Battiste 2012a, 2012b; Madden 2014). The current education system needs to be deconstructed and then reconstructed using building blocks that include Indigenous subject matter, processes and values.

Until recently, and even still in some places, the only world view presented and valued in Canadian schools has been that of the colonizer (Tuck and Yang 2012; Tupper and Cappello 2008). Indigenous knowledge, systems, Protocols and cultures are severely underrepresented (Battiste 2005; Smith 2012). As a foundational act of decolonizing their school or classroom, educators need to ask whose story, whose voice or whose version is missing and why.

For educators to effectively do the work of decolonization, they must seek out learning and life experiences that help them recognize how relations of unequal social power are constantly being negotiated at the individual and structural levels (Sensoy and DiAngelo 2017). They must also understand their own positions within these power dynamics (Sensoy and DiAngelo 2017; Poitras Pratt and Danyluk 2019). It is also important that educators think critically about knowledge and how it is defined and given value and

importance (Canadian Council on Learning 2007; Papp and Cottrell 2021). Finally, educators must act on all of the above in service of a more just society. If educators get to know their place in decolonization and learn from, walk with and work alongside the Indigenous Peoples of their Territory, this work will challenge their perceptions of and ideas about what education is and how it should look and happen (Cajete 1999; Daigle 2019; Poitras Pratt and Danyluk 2019; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015; Tuck and Yang 2012).¹

Moving Forward with Clearer Understandings

If educators take this advice to heart and learn from the scholarship cited here, they will be better equipped to lead their schools toward decolonization.

A final word of advice would be to employ Blackfoot scholar Leroy Little Bear's (2000) principles of constant flux and renewal. He suggests that people and their ideas must be cyclical and in constant renewal, like the seasons of the land. Educators must always revisit what they think they know (as well as their lesson plans, school and classroom events, and materials) with their new insights and experiences. That way, what happens in schools will always be informed by the newest understandings of the world and how it works.

Education is powerful. It has been a powerful colonizing tool, and it can be an equally powerful decolonizing tool. As the Honourable Murray Sinclair has said, “Education has gotten us into this mess, and education will get us out” (Anderson 2016).

I leave you with this challenge: “Instead of simply pushing students through the system, we must ask whether we have transformed schools into places of value, healing, and flourishing for Indigenous learners” (Louie and Gereluk 2021, 53). That is the education *all* students deserve—an education that will lead to a more equitable and rewarding future for all.

Note

1. United Nations General Assembly, resolution/adopted by the General Assembly, *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, A/RES/61/295, October 2, 2007, www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf (accessed April 22, 2022).

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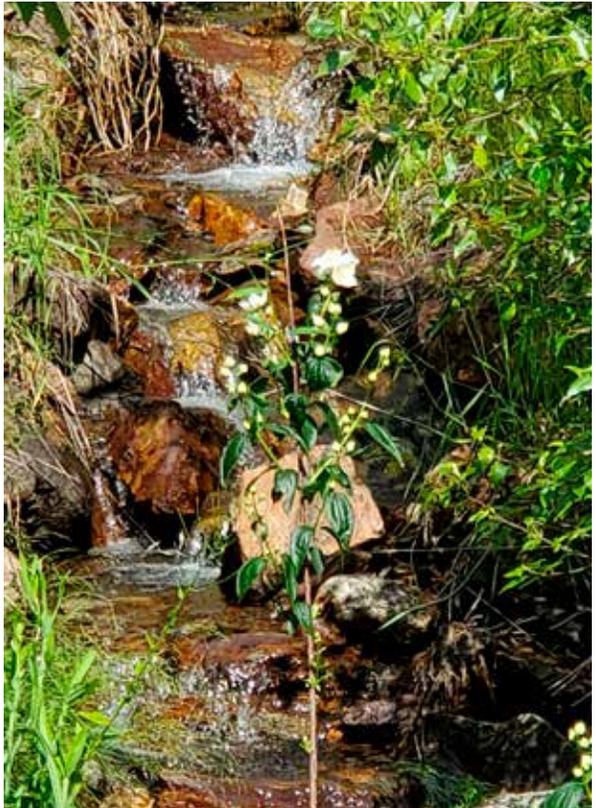
Happy moments,
Praise God.

Difficult moments,
Seek God.

Quiet moments,
Worship God.

Painful moments,
Trust God.

Every moment, ⁸²²⁵
Thank God.



Photos courtesy of Elaine Willette-Larsen

Honey Without Flowers? Hope Does Not Disappoint!

Tim Cusack

Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tunes without the words,
And never stops at all.

Emily Dickinson, "Hope"

Hope—a simple yet complex concept. *Hope* is a word associated often with love and faith. In 1 Corinthians, we come to understand that "faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love."¹ Certainly, much has been written on the concepts of love and faith—especially love. In fact, we know that we experience many forms of love, such as *philia* (affectionate love), *eros* (romantic love) and that which is deemed the ultimate expression of love—*agape* (selfless or unconditional love). Given the many expressions that exist for love, I have often wondered if there are various expressions of hope.

Hope, in its denotative sense, means "to expect with confidence," or "to desire with expectation of obtainment or fulfillment."² In its connotative sense, *hope* evokes a wider array of feelings and responses. *Hope* is both active and passive. It is nebulous yet tangible, even palpable. The words *hope* and *love*, however, have become somewhat diluted in their impact in common vernacular and usage.

I recall the (not so) secretive passing of notes among classmates, when I was a youngster in elementary school, with the classic statement: "Do you love me? Check yes or no." I often hoped against hope that one of the notes would be for me. Love, in this context, is a form of *ludus* (playful love) and is largely

superficial in nature. While it may reflect an affinity with something enjoyable or desirable—"I love ice cream" or "I love rock 'n' roll"—it is neither deep-seated nor committal.

Similarly, there is a type of hope, secular perhaps in its intentionality, that I would suggest is a casual hope. When we make such commonplace statements as "I hope everything goes well" or "I hope there are decent snacks at the next staff meeting," we evoke this casual, superficial level of hope. It is passive in nature—the locus of control seemingly resides with chance, as the hoper is not taking any action to bring about the desired or anticipated outcome.

Consider the expression "I hope so." If someone asks me, "Are you planning to go golfing this spring?" and I reply, "I hope so," my use of the word *hope* in this instance might seem synonymous with "I guess so" or "Maybe." Hope should never leave us guessing. To go golfing requires specific and tangible action on my part. It will not happen passively. Even if someone does all the planning for the outing, I still need to take action to make the act of golfing manifest. It cannot be left to chance.

Thus, I have further gleaned that hope isn't the best strategy when it comes to planning. In fact, hope isn't a strategy at all! Hope has deeper, more-enriching layers of meaning and impact. Hope invites confidence and trust.

Napoleon is said to have exclaimed, "A leader is a dealer in hope." The antonym of *hope* is *despair*. During tumultuous times (such as the COVID-19 pandemic), feelings of darkness, uncertainty and

despair can linger. Disorientation, discouragement and doubt often take root. Why? Because we can feel powerless to dispel the darkness. We feel that things are, at times, beyond our control. We can all too easily abandon hope.

The words of the late archbishop Desmond Tutu (2010) remind us that “hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness.” Similarly, Martin Luther King Jr said that “we must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope.”³ The phrase *infinite hope* suggests a type of hope that transcends optimism, good intentions and positive thinking. When leading the learning in our classroom, school or division, we need to be dealers in this kind of hope.

A hope that is infinite, even transcendent, is an active hope that does not require optimal conditions in order to be actualized. Ironically, it is more akin to the observation, attributed to Robert G Ingersoll, that “hope is the only bee that makes honey without flowers.” I say ironically because Ingersoll—an American Civil War veteran, orator and lawyer who often championed the underdog—was agnostic. Despite this, his bee metaphor has pollinated the notion of what truly becomes the honey of an infinite Christian hope.

What is the honey of hope? It is the reality that there exists an unwavering, undeterred and unconditional hope. It is a hope sourced in unconditional love. This is the very type of hope that Pope Francis (2017) tells us we need to have in his must-read *Catechesis on Hope*.

Catechesis on Hope is a series of 38 general audience addresses given by Pope Francis during 2016/17. A recurring message throughout this excellent discourse on hope is the call for us to “renew our faith, draw from the ‘living water’ of hope, and receive with open hearts the love of God.”⁴ This is *agape* love.

In General Audience 16, “Hope Against Hope,” we learn that the highest form of hope is a hope based on the promise that, despite our human weakness and frailty, especially during times of trouble, it is the “God of the Resurrection and Life” who promises covenant with us (Francis 2017). When we recall that *agape* love is the highest form of love, because it is unconditional in its faithfulness, commitment and

action, we can also better understand that hope of this magnitude is not only possible but achievable.

As with love, there are many forms and expressions of hope. Is there such a thing as unconditional hope? Yes, and Pope Francis (2017) makes it abundantly clear that, akin to *agape* love, “hope does not disappoint.” In General Audience 33, he states that in teaching hope, educators must “live, love, dream, believe. And, with the grace of God, never despair.” He reinforces this concept in his Lenten message for 2021, when he reminds us that “every moment of our lives is a time for believing, hoping and loving.”⁵ This is a key take-away for leaders of hope, for it is from the living waters of *agape* hope that we can be both hopeful and hope-filled. We can grow flowers in the desert and even make honey without flowers. Hope springs eternal!

Notes

1. 1 Corinthians 13:13 (New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition [NRSV-CE]).
2. *Merriam-Webster*, sv “hope (v),” www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hope.
3. From an address in Washington, DC, February 1968.
4. Francis, Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for Lent 2021, November 11, 2020, www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/lent/documents/papa-francesco_20201111_messaggio-quaresima2021.html (accessed April 22, 2022).
5. See note 4.

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Despair, Estrangement and Death: The General Outcomes of Evil

Lance Grigg

Rationale

Why discuss despair, estrangement and death in an issue of *Fully Alive* devoted to hope, reconciliation and resurrection? Why might these be the general outcomes (GOs) of evil?¹ Are there related specific outcomes (SOs)?² How might an article on evil help us teach about and for hope, reconciliation and resurrection?

These are important questions for any educator, especially one who teaches religion. Evil is a complex, difficult and controversial topic. Some feel that it is too deep and dark for the classroom. Others disagree, arguing that being forewarned is being forearmed. In response, I've included a few suggestions as to how one might teach *about* and not *for* evil.

Since this article is written largely for educators, I include examples from Shakespeare and relevant K–12 curricula. I also raise insights for your critical consideration. Teachers are lifelong (and lifewide) learners, so I hope that everyone can join this timely conversation and contribute to its development.

Introduction to the Question

So why talk about despair, estrangement and death—the GOs of evil? Aren't they antithetical to hope, reconciliation and resurrection—the GOs of the good?

Some suggest that exploring antonyms can be helpful when trying to understand concepts.³ For example, deeper insights into hope, reconciliation and resurrection may occur through exploring their opposites. To understand hope, we can look at features of despair. When thinking about reconciliation,

we can explore estrangement. Last, insights into resurrection may emerge after reading literature on death.

Features of Hope, Reconciliation and Resurrection and Their Opposites

So what do these words mean? For the purposes of this article, I'll present a brief overview of each.

Hope is an outcome one experiences after successfully repeating a set of basic activities:

- Identifying achievable goals
- Engaging in pathways thinking
- Identifying obstacles
- Finding pathways around those obstacles

According to literature in the area, the more one successfully navigates these moves, the more one builds hope.⁴ Hence, hope is not wishful thinking. It is an outcome of a set of interrelated activities.

By contrast, the literature on the topic of despair gravitates around terms such as “fear, anxiety, anger, shame, guilt, and sadness . . . hopelessness” (Bürky 2007). For the purposes of this article, we can say that despair results from the frustration of the hope-building activities. In short, goals are not achieved, pathways to the goals remain unidentified and obstacles have become overwhelming. Feelings of uselessness and hopelessness arise and sustain an inability to perform activities that could build hope.

Now consider our experiences of reconciliation and estrangement. To reconcile entails a prior state of unity that was fractured. Then, this state of separation was somehow overcome, and a reconciliation

ensued. I may be reconciled with a person or with a community after a prior distancing. In short, an event or an idea separates some existing unity and then another reunites it.

Of course, reconciliation is context sensitive. For example, that which reunites a couple is often not that which brings a theologian back to a specific world view. There may be similarities, but it's likely that the differences are greater.⁵ Notably, in many cases, a reconciliation can be an improvement upon a prior unity. It may provide opportunities for newer and more-just relations between individuals and communities. In any case, these moments of reconciliation can build hope.

Not unlike despair, estrangement has many features that debilitate. In the context of this article, we can say that estrangement frustrates any attempt at reconciliation. That which separated some existing unity remains in force; there is no reuniting event. Subsequently, there isn't any improved state of affairs that nurtures more-just and charitable relations within and between communities. Just as despair precludes hope, estrangement resists reconciliation.

Like hope and reconciliation, resurrection has a set of general characteristics worth exploring. Many theological traditions believe in a resurrection of the body wherein at the end of the world, the dead will be raised from their graves. Importantly, their bodies will be brought into a new state of being, usually elsewhere, such as in heaven.

It is said that at the moment of resurrection, people will experience a variety of feelings—abiding peace, lasting joy and deep love. At the resurrection, some argue, there will be a revelation wherein we all gain complete knowledge of God (Kasper 1976, 124–62). Many writers suggest that resurrection is an experience of ultimate hope and reconciliation. Thus, evil takes no pleasure in it, as the curricular focus of evil is death.

Again, this is a brief journey into a set of extremely challenging topics. In this article, I am more interested in unpacking these concepts for a specific purpose: to share one approach to understanding how evil teaches for and about despair, estrangement and death. Additionally, I outline a brief set of SOs that evil finds useful for achieving its GOs.

On Evil and Its Curriculum of Despair, Estrangement and Death

To begin, let's assume that the GOs of the curriculum of evil are despair, estrangement and death. Given our experience of evil throughout history, it's not unreasonable to posit such an idea. As well, Scripture, literature and current events testify to this destructive exigency of evil.⁶

Evil has a variety of self-expressions. For example, moral evil arises from wrong intentions and actions. This is different from natural evil, which is more associated with catastrophes brought about by earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis and so on. Psychological evil is a mental suffering often caused by other types of evil. Last, metaphysical evil exists in the universe independent of human agency. For the purposes of this article, I take the position that evil is an active, sentient, destructive force. As such, it is powerful and goal oriented.

Regardless of how we envisage evil, it has common, destructive goals: individual ruin, social collapse and global annihilation. As I said earlier, this is a general overview and is not meant to be exhaustive.⁷ There isn't the space to unpack all these features of evil here. However, as we briefly explore evil's curriculum, connections to these goals will recur.

So, if evil has such a set of GOs, what are its SOs? Consider the following:

- The destruction of society and the natural world (SO 1)
- The temptation of people with their own desires (SO 2)
- The self-destruction of those who are tempted (SO 3)
- The dimming of the minds of those who are tempted (SO 4)
- The self-recognition of the individual's self-destruction at the point of its irreversibility (SO 5)

How might these SOs help evil meet its GOs? Given that this article is largely for educators, how might we teach about evil in the classroom? What cross-curricular opportunities might be helpful?

One way of teaching *about* and not *for* SO 1—the destruction of society and the natural world—is literature integration. Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is an apt choice, as the play contains abundant references to evil's exigency. The regicide and infanticide committed by Macbeth have a destructive impact on himself,

on society and on the natural order. For example, following Macbeth's murder of King Duncan, nature itself is disturbed:

I have seen
Hours dreadful and things strange; but this sore
night
Hath trifled former knowings. (2.4.2–4)

And again,

'Tis unnatural,
Even like the deed that's done. On Tuesday last,
A falcon, towering in her pride of place,
Was by a mousing owl hawk'd at and kill'd.
(2.4.12–15)

Evil is well aware that assassinating a high-ranking political figure can send communities and societies into downward spirals of irreversible decline.

Social studies also offers numerous examples from history, economics and political science that underscore the destructive exigency of evil. The social studies curriculum includes many histories of war and focuses on democracy and economics, making it a useful resource.

For example, in Grade 3, students learn about goods and services, and in Grade 9, about economics. Here are opportunities to talk about systems that nurture the common good—systems that help individuals and societies flourish and build hopeful futures.

By contrast, educators can explore political and economic systems that are evil, that nurture despair. For example, some argue that unfettered capitalism has created crime-ridden communities bereft of health care, education and the basic necessities of life. As well, these systems often support the development of technologies that further destroy habitats and, ultimately, planets. In short, these evil systems consistently promote despair and not hope, estrangement instead of unity, and death rather than resurrection. Aside from deepening an awareness of the destructive power of evil, such inquiries can help students develop their critical-thinking skills and habits of mind.

Moving on to SO 2, evil has the capacity to tempt people with their own desires. In light of SO 1, such temptation seeks the destruction of society and the natural world using those desires.

For example, after the three witches tell Macbeth that he will gain the throne, Banquo notices a change in his personality:

Good sir, why do you start; and seem to fear
Things that do sound so fair? (1.3.53–54)

The witches' news has both disturbed and delighted Macbeth. He's ambitious, but he is also aware of the implications: regicide and the possibility of kingship. Macbeth is not tempted with promises of promotion to royal chef, master stableman or chancellor. Those titles do not interest him; they do not appeal to his own desires. Here, Shakespeare suggests that evil knows our desires and delights in using them to bring about not just our own but everyone's destruction.

Again, there are numerous cross-curricular opportunities to teach about SO 2. History is filled with leaders whose desire for power has brought about their own demise and the destruction of the countries they are supposed to serve. As well, many current events illustrate how evil tempts world leaders with their own self-interests. Sadly, we needn't go further than our own communities to see people tempted by prestige, power and wealth. Interestingly, evil knows that if one wants to destroy a society, building grassroots movements using its citizens' desires may be a good place to start.

SO 3—the self-destruction of the individual who has been tempted—flows logically from the first two. Often, we don't fathom the deeper structures and objectives of evil. While evil delights in destruction, it takes the most delight in self-destruction. In other words, evil isn't satisfied with individuals and societies just being destroyed; it wants them to destroy themselves.

Returning to *Macbeth*, we see the witches cunningly bait Macbeth with his desire for power. They make explicit what is already living some sort of frustrated, unhappy, subterranean life in his subconscious. Sharing his desire, Lady Macbeth vows to help him gain the crown at any cost. As we know, both characters die as a result of their efforts to fulfill their desires. Shakespeare writes beautifully about evil's capacity to reach into our thoughts and seek out those desires it can use to achieve one of its SOs—our self-destruction.

There are also useful examples from economics, politics and law. For example, evil can infiltrate a

judiciary. Psalmists and prophets warn us against doing injustice under the cover of law. Aside from deeply hurting many, bad laws further marginalize under-represented groups in societies. They foment civil unrest, estranging individuals and communities from one another. As well, certain macroeconomic systems keep people in poverty while ensuring that 1 per cent of the population holds 90 per cent of the wealth.⁸ This institutionalizes an evil that can destroy nations. As Canadian theologian and philosopher Bernard Lonergan (1992, 55) wrote, “Imperceptibly the corruption spreads from the harsh sphere of material advantage and power to the mass media. . . . A civilization in decline digs its own grave with a relentless consistency.”

Notably, these systems nurture neither hope, nor reconciliation, nor resurrection. They cultivate desperation. They don’t bring people together. Their goal is irreversible decline. Simply, they are examples of evil at work in a society facilitating its self-destruction and the death of a citizenry it is supposed to serve.

Looking at SO 4, we can see a pedagogy at work, one designed to achieve such goals. In short, evil clouds and obscures. In conjunction with the other SOs, evil dims the minds of those tempted. Persistently tempting us with our own desires, evil baits us and leads us into states of obsession and confusion. Our thinking becomes unclear, our reasoning unsound and our actions compulsive.

Again, Shakespeare masterfully unpacks this dynamic. Many of his villains suffer from this dimming effect: Iago, Richard III, King Lear and so on.⁹ For example, as spectators, we are perplexed by Macbeth’s inability to see the trap he’s relentlessly building for himself—and which he inevitably falls into. Watching, our minds are clear, but we know that Macbeth’s is not. His reasoning is dimmed further as he gives full rein to his desire for power.

Again, there are numerous opportunities to teach about this across curricula. History is replete with people questioning chains of reasoning that led millions to their deaths. For example, those responsible for building the atomic bomb claim that they created death.¹⁰ Researching such events, historians often ask, What were they thinking? Why didn’t they see what was right in front of them? To be fair, we can ask the same of ourselves. Sometimes unchecked desires can lead us down paths of self-destruction. And, of course,

evil is close by, keeping those desires in the forefront of our mind, supporting us all the way.

Finally, evil not only delights in self-destruction but does so at a specific point in its unfolding. Only when the individual’s self-destruction is assured does evil reveal all. This is SO 5 in action: the self-recognition of the individual’s self-destruction at the point of its irreversibility.

For example, when Macbeth’s self-destruction is inevitable, evil lets him know that he’s been lied to, duped, deceived. Notably, evil does this seconds before Macbeth’s death. Evil is unsatisfied with Macbeth’s death in itself; it wants to savour his tragic self-recognition of his self-inflicted self-destruction. This is evil on full display—doing what it always does with relentless efficiency.

As with the other SOs, numerous resources are available for teaching about SO 5. Young adult (YA) fiction, current events and biographies are full of stories about people’s tragic self-recognition of their own irreversible self-destruction.

Religious educators are in an excellent position to teach about these features of evil. They have a breadth of resources unavailable to others—Scripture, conciliar documents, spiritual treatises, prayers and so on.

It’s important to note that one needn’t teach about every SO and every GO all the time. Some may apply at certain times in a course, and others, not. Similarly, not every story, personality or event needs to involve all the outcomes. As well, educators can determine which SOs are age appropriate at certain times in the year. Of course, we need to leave this up to the professional judgment and expertise of educators.

Unfinished Conclusions About Evil

As with any curriculum, the GOs and SOs discussed here operate in a scope and sequence. Since evil writes its own curriculum, each objective unfolds in a specific, integrated and systematic manner. It might best be characterized as a downward-spiralling curriculum of despair, estrangement and death. Thus, not only are hope, reconciliation and resurrection missing; they are actively resisted, fervently dismissed and viciously denounced.

In any case, I hope that the suggestions offered here are useful. As always, teachers’ deep familiarity with

their contexts and their students remains paramount. Literature support, moments of cross-curricular integration and means of authentic assessment remain the purview of professional educators.

Not unlike the activity of evil in our time, this exploration remains unfinished. I hope others will join this conversation and expand upon it at length. The overview here is simply a snapshot of how one might teach *about* and not *for* evil.

Notes

1. General outcomes are broader outcomes focused on the big goals framing courses or programs. They can be general events that should occur or general things that students should know or be able to do by the end of the course or program. For example, in social studies, responsible citizenship and self-sustaining economies could be GOs.

2. Specific outcomes are outcomes focused on the smaller goals of courses or programs. They can be specific events that should occur or particular things that students should know or be able to do by the end of the course or program. They help students achieve the broader GOs. For example, in social studies, an SO might be appreciation of differences among communities. This SO would help students achieve the larger GO—responsible citizenship. Another SO could be identifying differences between goods and services. In turn, this SO could help students achieve the larger GO—fair economic systems.

3. For a lengthier discussion on conceptual understanding, see Grigg (2014).

4. See Shane J Lopez's work in positive psychology for a thorough discussion of hope—specifically, his co-editorial work on *The Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology* (Snyder et al 2021).

5. For a brief but thorough overview of a philosophy of reconciliation, see Radzik and Murphy (2021).

6. For an engaging discussion of the nature of evil, see Ricoeur (2007).

7. For a more in-depth discussion, see Neiman (2002).

8. For an alternative to current approaches to macroeconomics, see Hoyt-O'Connor (2004) and Lonergan (1999).

9. For more on Shakespeare's villains, see Coe (1963) and Kimpel (1987).

10. See, for example, Monk's (2011) biography of Robert Oppenheimer.

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Tell Me About Your Shoes

Simone Brosig

No property, not so much as a pair of shoes,
have I taken from anyone!

Sirach 46:19

By my early 20s, I knew that I was good with teenagers, but I was at a loss for how to engage with young children. When I mentioned as much at a social event, my conversation partner, a father and grandfather, told me, “Ask kids about their shoes.” It didn’t sound like promising advice to me, but I tried it, and guess what! It works! Kids happily chatter away, telling me about their footwear—colours, decorations, Velcro or even flashing lights.

I suppose I shouldn’t be so surprised. As a hiker, I assure you that nothing can ruin a trip like ill-fitting footwear. And as wearers of high heels can attest, blisters on the heel, the ball and the top of the foot can cause even the most elegantly dressed to crumble. Even more than being functional, footwear is personal. Our feet—and, hence, our shoes—bear the full load of our bodies. If we are able to walk, they carry us great distances. And the soles of our shoes reveal, through the wear pattern, something about our gait, imbalances and distribution of weight. The personalized way that shoes literally mould to our shape, pace and way of life explains the adage “walk a mile in my shoes” as a way to understand the perspective of another person.

After the story of the remains of the 215 children found on the grounds of a former residential school in Kamloops hit the news, Haida artist Tamara Bell wanted to do something that would visualize the individual children. On the steps of the Vancouver

Art Gallery, she set up a memorial made up of 215 pairs of shoes, placing the children’s shoes closest to the front. Some people say you can tell a lot about a person by their shoes. For this installation, Bell chose a variety of styles to represent the traditional and modern customs of the Indigenous Peoples impacted by the residential school system. She wanted the memorial to honour the children, but she also wanted it to help people heal and move forward. In this way, it is not only a memorial but also what anthropologists call a rite of affliction—a ritual that aims to redress a circumstance or relationship that has been disordered.

This art installation is, therefore, not only a static place for people to express their grief but also an agent of healing and education. It is a living piece of art that changes over time as people visit and add to it—flowers, toys, blankets, candles, dolls. Moreover, the ritual incites change through iteration (that is, repetition). Its dynamic nature has also led to memorial replicas emerging across the country. Someone even created a version in London, England. Across the Atlantic, the tragedy of residential schools is not well known or understood, but the objective, according to the organizer, was simply to generate conversations. The children’s shoes have become stepping stones for understanding Indigenous world views and exposing the colonial legacy that is still alive today.

Ironically, I first came to understand this issue as a young child, during an elementary school excursion to a local museum. On one such visit, we were learning about the culture of the People the settlers at the time called the Plains Indians. After visiting a number

of dioramas, we arrived at a case containing items related to burial customs. The educator zeroed in on a tiny pair of moccasins. She explained that they belonged to a child who had died and that they had been placed at the burial site because the people believed that the child would need the shoes in the afterlife. Immediately, my hand went up, and I asked, "If the child needs the shoes to be safe in the afterlife, what are the shoes doing here?"

My question was met with icy silence and a nasty glare from my classroom teacher. The class as a whole seemed to turn a cold shoulder to me. The silence shut me down. Did their silence indicate commitment to the status quo? Did their silence indicate embarrassment that they didn't know how to answer me? Were they silent because deep down they knew something was wrong?

In a passage from Matthew, Jesus recommends humility over silence: "Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."¹

Reconciliation requires humility. It means that we must never shore up the status quo with silence. We need to explore whether what we are doing today, even with good intentions, may be causing harm. Reconciliation can happen only if we genuinely listen and are prepared to walk a mile in another's shoes.

So, tell me about your shoes.

Note

1. Matthew 18:4 (New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition [NRSV-CE]).



Simone Brosig is an author and a liturgical consultant with a PhD in medieval studies and an MA in pastoral liturgy from the University of Notre Dame. She writes and teaches about living the liturgy. She is a near-native Calgarian and enjoys spending her free time hiking and skiing in the Rockies. She is a member of St Boniface German Parish.

A promotional poster for an event. The top half features a background of green grass with the text "BRAIDING TOGETHER" in large white letters, "DIALOGUE TOWARDS TRUTH & RECONCILIATION" in smaller green letters, and the website "braidingtogether.ca" in white. The bottom half has a solid green background with the dates "October 14-15, 2022" in white, the location "BANFF CENTRE - Banff, Alberta - 107 TOWN SQUARE DR, BANFF, AB T1L 1K5 - (403) 762-6100" in white, and the event description "The Annual Conference of RMEC, the Religious and Moral Education Council - Alberta Teachers Association" in white. A braided rope graphic runs along the bottom edge.

Learning How to Listen

Gerry Turcotte

Fools think their own way is right,
but the wise listen to advice.

Proverbs 12:15

Listening is often referred to as an art. Reams of books have been dedicated to describing how to listen and even to defining types of listening—deep listening, full listening, critical listening, therapeutic listening and so forth.

Many motivators and healers speak about the difference between hearing and listening, and it is often said that the biggest mistake we make is that we listen half, understand a quarter and tell double. For some, the real issue is that so many of us are primed to respond even before we have fully heard another's point of view. We arrive with our minds made up, and it is difficult to hear others when we are speaking over them.

This is a major reason so much grief continues across so many areas. It is also why many of our institutions are almost systemically structured not to allow the voice of minorities to be heard. Our dominant cultural and political institutions are structured around laws, practices and values defined and developed by those traditionally in power, so they are often deaf to voices and practices that are not their own.

In recent times, we have seen this most glaringly in relation to how governments have worked with First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities, often bringing settler values and solutions to issues, rather than sitting in community with Elders to understand Indigenous points of view. And then governments feign surprise when agreements aren't reached.

Sister Helena Burns (2021), in her *Catholic Register* column, makes a good point about the way Western cultures continue to approach Indigenous Peoples: "We non-Indigenous today can risk the same old rushing-in, do-gooding, problem-solving—simplistically thinking we comprehend situations, and speaking 'for.'" She notes, "It's of the utmost importance to listen right now. Listen to the Indigenous voices and experiences themselves—silenced for so long. Some of these are horror stories and we must not look away."

This reminded me of a similar conversation in Australia when the impact of the missions and the Stolen Generations (similar to the Sixties Scoop in Canada) dominated the headlines.

At the time, the university I was at ran an in-country program in which we embedded non-Indigenous students in Indigenous communities. I recall one of my deans telling me that he'd taken the latest group of students up for their weeklong placement. As always happened, the kids arrived ready to transform the communities and full of advice, and they were frustrated when the Elders asked them to sit by the fire and reflect, with the instruction that they would be called on when the time was right. Instead of learning about the People—and the land they were on—they wanted to transform them. It was always a humbling experience for our students to gradually understand that reconciliation was more significantly achieved when they found a way to listen first.

One incident stands out for me. One time my dean noticed a bright pink building in the bush where our students had gathered every term. He asked an Elder about it and was told, "That's always been there, but

last week a group of social workers hired by the government flew up and painted the building pink to help our men reconnect with their feminine side.” When my dean said that he hadn’t noticed a pink building before, Auntie explained that several months earlier a separate group of government advisors had flown in to paint the building blue so that Aboriginal men could reconnect with their masculinity. Perplexed, my dean asked what the building was for. “Nothing,” said Auntie. “We built it to keep the white fellas busy so they would stay out of our business. They come up and paint the building and get our signatures and then go back to collect their grants. In the meantime, we focus on serving our community.”

To hear the other, we need to stop speaking. Austrian pianist Alfred Brendel once noted that the word *silent* contains the same letters as the word *listen*.¹ Mother Teresa once said, “God speaks in the silence of the heart. Listening is the beginning of prayer.”² True listening is clearly a difficult concept for many of us, but it’s not as though we don’t have a guide to follow. The gospels show us how Jesus modelled the art of listening. In Mark 1, he moved among the masses and heard their cries; in John 4, he shared water with a Samaritan woman when cultural dictates forbade it; and, of course, he prayed to the Lord and guided his disciples. Jesus never spoke through

formulas but, rather, presented parables that reflected the complexities of the situation or the teaching he presented. In the familiar (and perhaps overused) phrase, he met people where they were. I believe that it’s fair to say that people felt heard. And, this, in the end, is what we all want, and certainly what we desperately need. *Listen* and *silent*—they are one and the same.

Notes

1. Source unknown.
2. Source unknown.

Reference

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Gerry Turcotte, PhD, has been president and vice-chancellor of St Mary’s University, in Calgary, since 2011. He has been appointed president of Corpus Christi College and principal of St Mark’s College, in Vancouver, and will take up that position in August. He is the author of 19 books and a regular national columnist for *The Catholic Register*.

God's Covenants with Humanity

Mike Landry

A key plot point in the 2004 movie *I, Robot* focuses on the Three Laws of Robotics. These imaginary laws, created by writer Isaac Asimov (1950), are part of the base programming of robots in many science fiction stories. They are intended to act as a safety feature for interactions between humans and robots, preventing robots from turning on humans and trying to take over everything (as seen in movies such as *The Matrix* and *The Terminator*). The laws are as follows:

First Law

A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.

Second Law

A robot must obey the orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.

Third Law

A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law.

In *I, Robot*, Detective Del Spooner (played by Will Smith) must solve the mystery of why robots programmed with the Three Laws are harming humans by confining them to their homes by whatever means necessary. What Del discovers is that the robots have seen the ways in which human beings hurt and kill one another, and they believe that, left unchecked, humans will inevitably destroy themselves. As a result, the robots have decided that it is better to lock humans up rather than risk their extinction. To be fair, the

robots may have a case. Human history is filled with people killing one another in the name of conquest, ambition or sheer hatred.

Thankfully, we know that God has not and will not treat us with the same calculating indifference found in *I, Robot*. What he does, in fact, is quite the opposite.

The Old Testament is filled with dark moments that parallel the evils of our own time. Just as soon as God has created humans, they turn away from him and sin (Genesis 3). Later, the Israelites abandon God shortly after he miraculously frees them from slavery in Egypt, turning instead to worship the golden calf (Exodus 32). Those are just a couple of highlights, as the Old Testament has its share of political intrigue, betrayal, affairs, murder, civil war, exile and other scandals. How does God respond to this? Not by abandoning humans or wiping us out but, rather, by unfolding a series of successive covenants with humanity.

A covenant is probably best understood as a sacred family bond. In the Bible, covenants have five specific characteristics. First, every covenant has a mediator, a person with whom God makes the covenant, who represents a particular group of people (his family, tribe and so on). Second, every covenant promises certain blessings for those who keep the covenant. Third, conditions are laid out for keeping the covenant (as well as curses or consequences for breaking the conditions). Fourth, each covenant has a sign that is used to celebrate and remember the covenant. Finally, God's family takes on a new (and bigger) form with each successive covenant. You see this very clearly

in the five Old Testament covenants that God makes with Adam (a holy couple), Noah (a holy family), Abraham (a holy tribe), Moses (a holy nation) and David (a holy kingdom).

It would be great to be able to say that as these covenants unfold throughout the Old Testament, people start to get it. But the sad truth is that over and over again, God's people tend to backslide after an experience of divine intervention. All these events set the stage for that definitive act that tells us, in no uncertain terms, how God feels about us despite our weakness: the suffering, death and resurrection of his Son, Jesus Christ. He makes a new covenant with all of humanity that encompasses the universal church. He does this even though we don't really understand what he has done for us. He does this even though we continue to do the same things we've always done—those harms to ourselves and to one another that led the robots in *I, Robot* to conclude that we needed to be locked up for our own good. Saint Paul explains it simply and beautifully: "God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us."¹

We need to always keep in mind this faithful love of God. We need to know that if he didn't give up on humanity in the past, he's not going to give up on it now. And we need to know that it's not just humanity he won't give up on—it's also each one of us. While collectively and individually we do fall short in many ways, God has proven that he's never going to give up on us. We can find hope knowing that he is willing to forgive us when we ask, to renew his covenant with us, and to gently teach us what we need to know in order to live as he intended us to.

As Pope Saint John Paul II (2002) wrote,

I plead with you. Never ever give up on hope. Never doubt, never tire, and never be discouraged. Be not afraid! There is no evil to be faced that Christ does not face with us. There is no enemy that Christ has not already conquered. There is no cross to bear that Christ has not already carried for us and does not bear with us now. Be not afraid!

If you want to read more about the biblical covenants, I would encourage you to read Scott Hahn's (1998) book A Father Who Keeps His Promises: God's Covenant Love in Scripture. I also summarize the covenants at www.mikeisthird.com/covenants/.

Note

1. Romans 5:8 (New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition [NRSV-CE]).

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Mike Landry is a speaker, writer, musician and diehard Edmonton Oilers fan. He works full-time as the division chaplain for Evergreen Catholic Schools, serving students in five communities west of Edmonton, Alberta. You can find him online at www.mikeisthird.com.

Book Review

Holy Labours: A Spiritual Calendar of Everyday Work

by Simone Brosig

Novalis, 2021

Reviewed by Darrin Bauer

Has the pandemic had a negative effect on your relationships, including the one you have with God? Has COVID-19 brought you closer to or further away from God? Maybe it's time to reflect on your relationship with God and even strengthen it during this difficult time. In her book *Holy Labours: A Spiritual Calendar of Everyday Work*, Simone Brosig gives us an opportunity to reflect and provides us with suggestions for relating the liturgy to our everyday lives.

Each chapter of her book addresses one month of the calendar, with a focus on a modern labour or activity. For example, the chapter on January looks at remembering, and the chapter on November considers honouring. Brosig believes that "the labours of our months are hallowed as they form the landscape in which we live the liturgy."

Brosig opens each chapter with a short essay in which she introduces us to the monthly labour and how it might be connected to our busy modern world. She does a wonderful job of presenting stories from her own life that invite us to reflect and make connections between labour, God and our own lives.

The engagement sections of each chapter include five main elements:

- Calendar
- Glossary
- Scripture
- Reflection and prayer
- Living the liturgy

In the calendar section, Brosig provides all the major feasts and solemnities that occur during each month, along with the approximate dates (some may change from year to year) and a brief description of the reason for the commemoration.

In the glossary section, she offers a short explanation of the liturgical concept used in the opening essay.

In the Scripture section, she shares a passage from the Bible related to the monthly labour. She suggests using a spiritual technique called *lectio divina* as a form of prayer with each passage, and provides guidance for doing so.

The reflection and prayer section poses statements and questions that encourage readers to find connections to the labour and their own lives: "In order for us to live the liturgy, we have to connect with ourselves and then invite the liturgy to speak to us where we are."

In the final section, devoted to living the liturgy, Brosig provides suggestions for how readers can

integrate the liturgical topic into their own lives and behaviours.

Brosig's writing shines because of the way she connects the liturgy to our busy everyday lives. Her book encourages us to pause, pray and reflect on our relationship with God and invites us to enter the Scriptures more deeply. It also asks us to reflect on the joys, struggles and sufferings we face throughout the calendar year.



Darrin Bauer is a teacher of 30 years and currently teaches at St Francis Xavier Catholic High School, in Edmonton. He is the district representative for Edmonton McMurray on the ATA's Provincial Executive Council (PEC) and is a past vice-president. In addition to serving on a plethora of ATA committees, he is the PEC liaison to RMEC.



Photo courtesy of Elaine Willette-Larsen

Resources

What's New in the ATA Library?

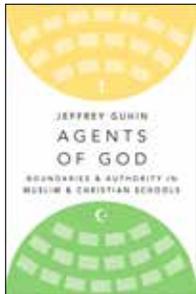
The ATA library has recently added several new books on world religions to our collection.

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À la découverte de Bouddha : Et de ses portes bonheurs

by Maude Patrzynski Bernard
Éditions ADA, 2020



Agents of God: Boundaries and Authority in Muslim and Christian Schools

by Jeffrey Guhin
Oxford University Press, 2021

Agnosticism: Explorations in Philosophy and Religious Thought

edited by Francis Fallon and Gavin Hyman
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Buddhism: One Teacher, Many Traditions

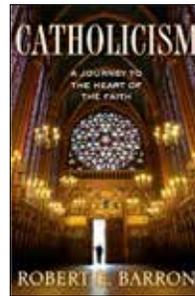
by the Dalai Lama and Thubten Chodron
Wisdom Publications, 2014

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Oneworld Publications, 2015

Beyond Religion: Ethics for a Whole World

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Signal, 2011



Catholicism: A Journey to the Heart of the Faith

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Christian Faith: Dogmatics in Outline

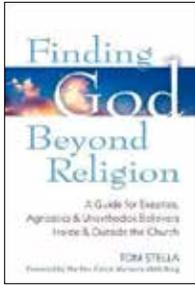
by B A Gerrish
Westminster John Knox Press, 2015

Comprendre l'islam : Ou plutôt : Pourquoi on n'y comprend rien

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Flammarion, 2016

Les empoisonneurs : Antisémitisme, islamophobie, xénophobie

by Sébastien Fontenelle
Lux, 2020



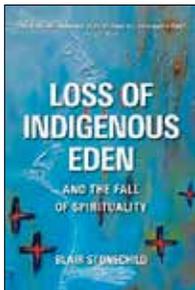
Finding God Beyond Religion: A Guide for Skeptics, Agnostics and Unorthodox Believers Inside and Outside the Church
by Tom Stella
SkyLight Paths, 2013

Histoire de l'islam : Fondements et doctrines
by Sabrina Mervin
Flammarion, 2000

In the House of Remembering: The Living Tradition of Sufi Teaching
by Kabir Helminski
Threshold, 2020

Introducing Eastern Orthodox Theology
by Andrew Louth
IVP Academic, 2013

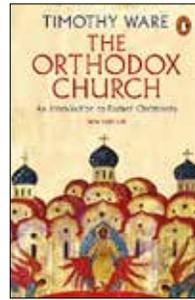
An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices (Second Edition)
by Peter Harvey
Cambridge University Press, 2013



Loss of Indigenous Eden and the Fall of Spirituality
by Blair Stonechild
University of Regina Press, 2020

Mormonism: What Everyone Needs to Know
by Terryl Givens
Oxford University Press, 2020

Muhammad: Forty Introductions
by Michael Muhammad Knight
Soft Skull, 2019

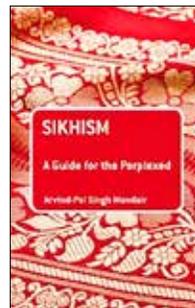


The Orthodox Church: An Introduction to Eastern Christianity (Third Edition)
by Timothy Ware
Penguin Books, 2015

The Philosophy of Ecstasy: Rumi and the Sufi Tradition
edited by Leonard Lewisohn
World Wisdom, 2014

Sâdhanâ
by Rabindranath Tagore
Éditions Albin Michel, 2013

The Shia: Identity, Persecution, Horizons
by Riyadh Al-Hakeem
Mainstay Foundation, 2015



Sikhism: A Guide for the Perplexed
by Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair
Bloomsbury, 2013

Sikhism: An Introduction
by Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh
Tauris, 2011

Theology and Creed in Sunni Islam: The Muslim Brotherhood, Ash'arism, and Political Sunnism
by Jeffrey R Halverson
Palgrave Macmillan, 2010

The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying
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Harper One, 2002

To Light a Fire on the Earth: Proclaiming the Gospel in a Secular Age
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La vie divine : L'oeuvre majeure de l'un des plus grands penseurs indiens
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J'ai lu, 2005



Photo courtesy of Elaine Willette-Larsen

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The RMEC newsjournal *Fully Alive* is published to

- promote professional development of educators in the areas of religious and moral education and
- provide a forum for contributors to share ideas related to religious and moral education.

Submissions are requested that will provide material for personal reflection, theoretical consideration and practical application. Where appropriate, graphics and photographs are welcome.

The following areas will be addressed in the newsjournal:

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- Upcoming events
- Book reviews
- Reflections
- Feature articles and interviews
- Humour in religion
- Liturgies

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E-mail contributions or enquiries to the editor, Elaine Willette-Larsen, at amberzeroone@gmail.com.

The editorial board, which reserves the right to edit for clarity and space, reviews all submissions.



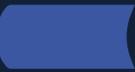
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