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# Useless Experience: Community Engaged Learning and a "Culture of Encounter"

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It started with a personal encounter.

It was maybe 7:30 or quarter to eight on a weekday morning in the fall term. I was the newest faculty member in the undergraduate Christianity and Culture program at the University of St. Michael's College, a specialist in Hindu–Christian Studies, and a fresh transplant to Canada from the United States. Driven by an early-career elixir of ambition and terror, I started most days early, attending the 7 a.m. Mass before embarking on five or more hours of intense preparation for an afternoon class. Between Mass and class prep, I would slip into my department's modest lounge and kitchenette to make myself instant oatmeal.

This is what I was doing on this particular morning—pouring water from the kettle to the bowl—when I heard a soft voice: "And who are you?" Startled, I turned to discover a lanky older man in one of the lounge chairs, waiting for the college principal. We shook hands and introduced ourselves. I explained that I was new to the college, and he told me that he used to teach philosophy at St. Mike's. He had come back to give a public lecture and to see if he could generate some interest in a new academic–community partnership for our programs. Once the principal arrived to collect our guest, I retreated to my office. I did manage to make it to the public lecture, where our largest amphitheatre was filled to bursting with fans and devotees.

For that weekday morning I had encountered Jean Vanier.

That meeting with Vanier was transformative in at least two respects. First, this encounter marked the beginning of my experiments with community-engaged learning in the Christianity and Culture program.

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Vanier's proposal eventually bore fruit in a course entitled "International Development, Justice and Human Dignity"; I would be charged with teaching it for over a decade. Along the way, I would also develop two other community-engaged courses closer to my own academic specialty. Second, Jean Vanier's philosophy would shape the way I approached experiential learning in all three classes. In particular, at least on my reading, Vanier encourages us to resist the instrumentalization of community experience for the purposes of future employment, intellectual development, or even making a difference for those in need. Such experience is more fruitfully conceived as useless in a technical sense: it is directed to no purpose beyond the engagement itself. Stated another way, in a phrase made popular by Pope Francis in the last few years, the best community-engaged approach aims to foster a "culture of encounter" as the most fruitful context for students to acquire vocational skills, to pursue their studies, to exercise their care for others, and to advance the cause of justice in the world. The encounter is primary; its effects are secondary.

I propose to develop this line of reflection in two steps. In a first section, I draw on selected writings of Vanier, Pope Benedict XVI, and Pope Francis to develop the culture of encounter as a principle of Catholic Social Teaching and as an alternative framework for conceptualizing community engagement. In the second, I attempt to illustrate how this framework can be seen, in retrospect, to have informed my own engaged teaching in the last decade and a half. For a variety of reasons, none of the courses described in this essay are still being offered at St. Michael's College, and I am discerning how the values that animated them might find expression in a new stage of the college's history and a revised structure of my academic program. We have also just this past May lost Vanier himself. So perhaps it is a fruitful moment for recollection and reflection.

## A "Culture of Encounter" in Catholic Social Teaching

On the day of Vanier's death and the day following, the CBC decided to rebroadcast a two-part *Ideas* documentary entitled "Remembering Jean Vanier." Midway through episode two of this documentary, interviewer Philip Coulter refers to a contrast Vanier once drew between the rabbit and the giraffe. The rabbit sniffs its way along in the brush, apparently without direction, rather than—like the giraffe—seeing a distant goal and striding towards it. L'Arche, the movement of intentional communities Vanier founded for and with persons with disabilities, follows the way of the rabbit. This implies that "there is a virtue in not knowing where you're going."[1] In the interview, Vanier affirms this intuition. He indicates that this well describes the historical emergence of L'Arche International as an organic, undirected process of "sniffing your way along."[2] More broadly, he also suggests that the highest value of human life is found in one-on-one relationships, formed as we sniff our way close to the ground, rather than in any powers we may accumulate or goals we manage to achieve.

In a discussion of institutional reform, Vanier speaks directly to this point:

> It's about becoming fundamentally human . . . like, the other day there was a man who was responsible for forty schools, Catholic schools, and he said, "Our schools want to be schools of relationship. We must teach people, teach kids to relate." And he went on to say, 'We have enough techniques today to help people to understand why they hate some people and appreciate others. Our schools can become places of relationship." Like the same thing: an industry can be a place of relationship, or it can be a place of power.[3]

In the broader context of the documentary and of Vanier's life's work, it's clear that the relationships he has in mind here have to do with forming bonds across boundaries of exclusion, becoming weak in the presence of others' weakness. In his Massey lectures, entitled *Becoming Human,* for example, he makes the categorical assertion that "We human beings are all fundamentally the same. We all belong to a common, broken humanity."[4] The discovery of this truth happens one person, one encounter, and one relationship at a time.

Philip Coulter describes Vanier's vision as, paradoxically, both deeply religious and also, in its own way, deeply secular.[5] Certainly, my teaching experience suggests that it does speak powerfully to many students, including those who have little sympathy with his Catholicism. The same paradox governs Vanier's relation to broader currents in Catholic Social Teaching. On the one hand, he articulates his understanding of social change in the specific context of his own work with persons with disabilities. On the other, in a work like *Becoming Human,* he describes the well-functioning society as the one that is concerned "by the needs of all, that is to say, by the common good and the family of nations."[6] For him and for Catholic social thought, this common good is not an abstraction that exists only at the level of public policy or the deliberative structures of the United Nations. It is a concrete reality, fostered through ever-widening circles of relationship.

Many examples could be adduced to illustrate this point. I will confine myself to two. Shortly after his

election to the papacy in 2005, Benedict XVI produced his encyclical letter *Deus Caritas Est,* "God is love," on the charitable activity of the Catholic Church.[7] At one point in the letter, Benedict addresses a common criticism of traditional Christian "charity" as inadequate to the construction of a "just social order." While he concedes some truth to the critique and insists on the "necessary commitment to justice" by the Church, Benedict nevertheless upholds the enduring value of traditional charity.[8] Part of his reasoning is practical: so long as there are people, he suggests, there will be situations of personal suffering, material need, and loneliness. Beyond this, there is a wider philosophical issue. "The State which would provide everything, absorbing everything into itself," he writes, "would ultimately become a mere bureaucracy incapable of guaranteeing the very thing which the suffering person—every person—needs: namely, loving personal concern."[9] Though persons have many diverse needs, and it is obligatory to reform social structures to meet as many of them as possible, the deepest human need—the need for relationship—can be met only through personal encounter.

Benedict's successor in the papacy has developed this theme more fully and, at least arguably, made it the central theme of his public teaching. In his 2013 apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium,* "The Joy of the Gospel," for example, Pope Francis uses the term "culture of encounter" to summarize Catholic teachings on integral development and the common good.[10] Four principles undergird Francis's discussion of peace and justice: "Time is greater than space," "unity prevails over conflict," "realities are more important than ideas," and "The whole is greater than the part." Though each of these principles speaks in its own way to the priority of relationships over structures—in his account of reconciliation, for example, Francis draws a contrast between a "negotiated settlement" and a deeper "conversion of hearts"[11]—the discussion of time and space stands out for special attention. For Francis, "'time' has to do with fullness as an expression of the horizon which constantly opens before us, while each individual moment has to do with limitation as an expression of closure."[12] This fullness of time qualifies the apparent closure of individual moments, of "space," thus enabling "us to work slowly but surely, without being obsessed with immediate results." He elaborates the idea: "Giving priority to space means madly attempting to keep everything together in the present, trying to possess all the spaces of power and of self-assertion; it is to crystallize processes and presume to hold them back. Giving priority to time means being concerned about initiating processes rather than possessing spaces."[13]

Here the contrast is between two different dispositions toward the present moment of personal or historical experience. One disposition views such moments as things to be possessed or controlled. The other views them as seeds of a new beginning, fields of pure possibility, inherently resistant to subordination to one or another "immediate result."

It would be a mistake to conclude from this analysis that Vanier, Benedict, and Francis do not value careful planning or building effective social structures. All three are deeply institutional figures. Nevertheless, each in his own way also resists the diminution of persons, relationships and even time itself to instrumental calculation. A moment of personal encounter is useless, in a very positive sense. It is a moment that cannot be possessed or controlled, a moment that offers its own depth of meaning, above and apart from any other purpose to which it may eventually be put. Such moments will ideally have momentous consequences beyond themselves. Francis explicitly calls for "new processes in society" that may "bear fruit in significant historical events," and Jean Vanier and the international L'Arche movement would seem to represent inspiring examples of this precise dynamic.[14] But the dignity of the human person, realized most especially in relationship, remains at the centre of attention and value.

## Academic Learning in the Context of Encounter

The teachings of Jean Vanier, Pope Benedict XVI, and Pope Francis may seem far removed from the university classroom, particularly in the context of a Catholic college fully integrated into a secular university, serving students from many different religious backgrounds and a range of academic interests. Yet, in the practice of community-engaged learning, questions of fundamental value are difficult if not impossible to separate from questions of effective pedagogy. The educational theorist Dan Butin, for example, has differentiated four conceptual models employed by faculty in explaining and defending their use of engaged learning methods. These include a "technical" model that aims to foster a stronger apprehension of existing course content, as well as two alternative approaches that emphasize broader social values of civic virtue or political activism.[15] Each of these models, at least arguably, locates the value of community engagement firmly outside the engagement itself. Butin's fourth model, which he calls "anti-foundational," is more complex. He writes: "an anti-foundational conceptualization is focused on what John Dewey termed a 'forked-road' situation, one that fosters a state of doubt as a prerequisite for thoughtful deliberation. Community engagement's experiential components open up questions about basic, seemingly 'natural' norms, behaviors, and assumptions."[16]

Here the community engagement is intended to upset the cognitive framework(s) that govern students' thinking about their shared study. The experience of community engagement establishes a new context for study reflection on academic content, on civic virtue and on the value of political activism.

Butin's category of anti-foundational learning, I suggest, approximates and opens space for considering a "culture of encounter" as a fruitful approach to community-engaged learning. Consider the course mentioned at the beginning of this essay: "International Development, Justice and Human Dignity," or IDJustice for short. This course consisted of a seminar on development theory, philosophical anthropology, and critical theory, followed by an eight- to 13-week summer placement with a grassroots community partner in Latin America, Africa, Eastern Europe, or South or Southeast Asia, or sometimes in underserved communities in Canada. For most of the program's 12-year trajectory at St. Michael's College, the international placements were arranged through a Canadian NGO founded by Vanier himself, called Intercordia Canada. Students lived in the communities they served, usually in family homes but also in other forms of intentional community. They completed regular reflections on readings and placement experiences; the final course requirement was an integration paper.

In accord with Vanier's philosophy, the ethos of community engagement in IDJustice emphasized themes of relationship, rather than traditional service or social change. Some students' international placements were in L'Arche, living and working in community with people with disabilities. Most students worked in educational settings, in cooperative agriculture, or in peacemaking. Regardless, for every student at every stage of the program, from recruitment to the final post-placement meeting, the instructor and several assigned theorists (including Vanier) critiqued instrumentalist conceptions of community engagement, in favour of an ethic of relationship, encounter, and creative accompaniment. That is, students were repeatedly reminded that they were being sent to live and work in solidarity *with* local change agents, not *for* them to "make a difference" or to imagine themselves as the primary agents of change. The IDJustice program was designed to foster "empathetic accountability" across boundaries of difference, as well as to encourage more sophisticated patterns of reasoning.[17] During the placement, the instructor or another assigned reflection partner received periodic student reflections, provided support where needed, and pressed students to reconsider the theories they had learned in seminar in light of the relationships they were forming in their host communities.

A few years after I began teaching IDJustice, I also had the opportunity to apply some of what I had learned in that course to a more traditional academic structure. At a regular meeting of Christianity and Culture faculty, a colleague suggested that I propose an alternative to the introductory survey course offered in the Department for the Study of Religion. Within hours of accepting the invitation, I settled on the idea of constructing this study by focusing on interreligious dialogue and by adopting a community-engaged learning model. The result was "Interreligious Dialogue and Practice," which I offered several times between 2008 and 2013. Emerging from and closely related to this course was a more advanced seminar, focused on one placement setting and co-taught with a colleague with a specialization in Jewish–Christian relations, entitled "Theology and Religion after Auschwitz."

The dialogue and Auschwitz courses both focused, again, on encounter and relationship. The coursework for "Interreligious Dialogue" was divided into three parts: direct service, shared readings and discussion, and critical reflection. The community placements, arranged through the University of Toronto Centre for Community Partnerships, involve students in a variety of work assignments, including a community program for Holocaust survivors, anti-racism programming, English as a second language instruction, and even skating lessons. The only firm requirement was that each placement setting would require close contact and collaborative relationships with religious others. The shared reading and discussion, on the other hand, aimed to familiarize students with ongoing scholarly conversations about the religious diversity in Canada, the academic study of religion, and some representative theologies of pluralism and dialogue from prominent Jewish, Christian, and Muslim religious thinkers and institutions.

A key conviction of the dialogue course was that scholarly conversations about religious diversity and theological initiatives in interreligious dialogue should be evaluated in light of concrete, lived relationships with religious others, rather than the other way around. Hence, it was very important that I give students ample opportunities for structured reflection on their service experiences and application of this experience to our shared study. During several class sessions, students wrote responses to question prompts, discussed these responses in small groups, posted more developed versions of these reflections to an online discussion board, and offered mandatory feedback to their peers. Students selected from these reflections, along with a research project and other occasional work, to construct a final portfolio that illustrated their learning in the course. Finally, one question on the final examination asked students to choose one assigned source from the course and to demonstrate how the

experience of community engagement enriched, clarified, or challenged the arguments advanced in that source. The fourth-year "Auschwitz" seminar followed a similar model, albeit with a wider range of scholarly assignments and no final examination.

As in all teaching, so also in community-engaged teaching: faculty objectives are one thing, and student experience and learning are another. One assessment tool I have adapted to test the alignment between my objectives and students' experiences of community engagement across all of these courses is the Most Significant Change technique developed by Rick Davie and Jess Dart.[18] When asked to tell a story that illustrated their "most significant change" in their international or local placement experiences, students would offer diverse responses, affirming course content in some cases, sharply challenging assigned theorists in other cases, or even raising critical questions about the value of community engagement. They nearly always advanced these ideas, however, with reference to specific relational encounters. Students in IDJustice described moments of vulnerability as they sought support in their struggles with a new language and culture, moments of celebration with adopted parents, brothers, and sisters in host families, experiences of prejudice or misunderstanding, and moments of indignation, when they vividly witnessed the impact of local structures of privilege or transnational corporate actors on the lives of persons whom they now counted as friends.[19] Students in "Interreligious Dialogue" and "Auschwitz," on the other hand, offered narratives of more quotidian experiences: dancing the hora with elderly members of a long-term care facility, admiring the effective witness of a community leader, providing hospitality to participants in a "lunch and learn" series on diversity issues in the city of Toronto, entertaining children, or hearing the life story of a survivor of the Shoah. In each case, specific relationships usually took centre stage, and students found themselves reconsidering course content in the light of these relationships.

One student reflection from "Interreligious Dialogue" helpfully clarified for me what I hoped for in my community-engaged teaching. Asked to look over reflections she had written over the past several months and to identify her "most significant change," this student wrote:

> Looking back at my first few reflections, I see more of a trend of conceptual analysis of the Sabbath in relation to my tradition, discussion of how the Jewish people might view Jesus' judgment of the Pharisees, etc. Gradually, however, I notice more of a trend towards discussing the people I meet and their stories … Now I see that what is central to dialogue is coming to get to know the microcosm that each person is—their stories, their faith, and their very person. One can also come to know how their stories have in turn come to affect their faith … my experience at [this placement] has been one in which the deep sense of history that pervades these people's lives shines and is brought out in the open. I have come to really appreciate this deep sense of individual and collective history.[20]

Measuring the experience simply as "change," this student does not report anything especially dramatic. But one could hardly imagine a better illustration of a culture of encounter, at least as I have developed it in this essay. At first, the student reports, her encounters at the placement offered occasions for deepening her understanding of Judaism and Jewish–Christian dialogue. Eventually, such considerations became less interesting as the "microcosm that each person is" emerged as interesting and valuable in its own right. Her personal encounters became fruitfully useless, and thus transformed her whole perspective on religious difference.

## Conclusion

I began this essay with an account of my first and only encounter with Jean Vanier. I hope it is obvious that this encounter was fruitful. Not only did I learn something about this important Canadian—about whom I knew little or nothing up to that point—but Vanier's quiet presence in that lounge early one morning also significantly reshaped my own teaching practice. But that was not the end of it. The experience lingers in my memory, and from time to time, often early in the morning, I imagine I hear that gentle inquiry, "And who are you?"

This is a question that Vanier continues to ask me and that I ask, in my own way, to every student who enters my classroom. I think I continue to be drawn to community-engaged learning because it offers such a vital context for students as they raise this question for themselves and for those with whom they find themselves in relationship. There are other reasons to use community-engaged methods, to be sure: intellectual acumen, vocational training, habits in civic participation. The witness of Vanier and the wider stream of Catholic Social Teaching, however, suggest that we not make too much of these extrinsic benefits of fruitful encounter. The highest good will always be the encounter itself.

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1 "Remembering Jean Vanier: The Rabbit and the Giraffe, Part 2," *Ideas,* Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 8 May 2019, at 27:10, https://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/remembering-jean-vanier-the-rabbit-and-the-giraffe-part-2-1.3766420, accessed May 21, 2019.

2 Ibid., at 27:17ff.

3 Ibid., at 31:44–32:36.

4 Jean Vanier, *Becoming Human* (Toronto: Anansi Press, 1998), 37.

5 "Remembering Jean Vanier: The Rabbit and the Giraffe," at 31:18.

6 Vanier, *Becoming Human,* 34.

7 Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est,* The Holy See, 25 December 2005, https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est.html, accessed May 21, 2019.

8 Ibid., nos. 26–28.

9 Ibid., no. 28b.

10 Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium,* The Holy See, 24 November 2013, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html, accessed 21 May 2019. The phrase "culture of encounter" occurs at no. 220, as part of a wider discussion of "The Common Good and Peace in Society," across nos. 217–37.

11 Ibid., no. 230.

12 Ibid., no. 222.

13 Ibid., no. 223.

14 Ibid. Cf. Linda Bordoni, "Pope Francis pays tribute to Jean Vanier," Vatican News, 7 May 2019, https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2019-05/pope-francis-tribute-jean-vanier.html, accessed May 21, 2019.

15 Dan W. Butin, "Focusing Our Aim: Strengthening Faculty Commitment to Community Engagement," *Change* 39:6 (2007): 34–37.

16 Ibid., 36.

17 See Reid B. Locklin, with Ellen Posman, "Discourse, Democracy, and the Many Faces of Civic Engagement: Four Guiding Objectives for the University Classroom," in *Teaching Civic Engagement,* ed. Forrest Clingerman and Reid B. Locklin (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 3–22.

18 Rick Davies and Jess Dart, *The 'Most Significant Change' (MSC): A Guide to Its Use,* April 2005, https://www.mande.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2005/MSCGuide.pdf, accessed April 21, 2019.

19 I have discussed some of these experiences in more detail in Reid B. Locklin, "Weakness, Belonging and the 'Intercordia Experience': The Logic and Limits of Dissonance as a Transformative Learning Tool," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 13:1 (2010): 3–13.

20 This reflection was previously published, with the permission of the student, in Reid B. Locklin, Tracy Tiemeier, and Johann M. Vento, "Teaching World Religions without Teaching 'World Religions,'" *Teaching Theology and Religion* 15:2 (2012): 170.

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# Too Chicken to Cross the Road? Jean Vanier and Getting to the Other Side

**By Carolyn Whitney-Brown**
St. Jerome's University, Waterloo, ON

I was recently invited to update my 2008 Introduction to *Jean Vanier: Essential Writings*, and I have been thinking about that old joke: "Why did the chicken cross the road?" The answer, of course, is "To get to the other side." The joke comes to mind because in reading Jean Vanier's books and presentations from the past decade, I find in nearly every text the same curious little story about a road in Chile that gripped Vanier's imagination. As a literary scholar, I can't resist an influential story, all the more because it is actually not much of a story at all.

I am prompted to write this article because I see the possibility of a whole Vanier industry heating up after his death on May 7, 2019, and I want to offer a corrective note now, early on. Already books and articles about his work have appeared in an astonishing range of scholarly disciplines.[1] A Jean Vanier Research Centre opened this spring at King's University College in London, Ontario. A feature-length film, *Summer in the Forest*, has been shown around the world. Immediately after his death, dozens of obituaries and tributes appeared internationally. All this could serve to reinforce a myth of Jean Vanier as a stand-alone writer and thinker, when in reality much of his writing was done collaboratively, and his most original and significant contributions arose from his life in community with others, shaped especially by people marginalized and rejected in nearly every culture.[2] So perhaps this little non-story can provide a compass point orienting us to Vanier's core message, and helping us and our students become a little less chicken.

Here's the story as Vanier told it in 2013 when accepting the Pacem in Terris Peace and Freedom Award: "I went to Chile some years ago, and on the road from the airport to the city my driver at one moment said to me, 'On the left side of the road are all the slum areas of Santiago and on the right are all the rich houses, protected by police and military.' And he added, 'Nobody crosses this road. Everybody is frightened.'"[3]

This moment in Chile seized Vanier's imagination: he recounted it in a series of conversations with the Christian ethicist Stanley Hauerwas published in 2008 as *Living Gently in a Violent World*. Versions of the same story can be found in *Signs of the Times,* a book "born out of exchanges with Cristiana Santambrogio" (2011, translated in 2013), *Mental Health: The Inclusive Church Resource,* co-authored with John Swinton (2014), *The Gospel of John, the Gospel of Relationship* (2015), *Life's Great Questions,* "written in close collaboration with Janet Whitney-Brown" (2015), and *Un cri se fait entendre* (2017), translated as *A Cry Is Heard* (2018), written with François-Xavier Maigre.

I have been wondering: Why? His experience in Chile is uneventful compared to his other oft-repeated stories, which usually involve specific moments of encounter and transformation, often told with a hint of subversive humour at toppling social expectations or relational assumptions. But perhaps it is a story pared down to its essence, like late artworks by artists at the end of their careers, a whole lifetime distilled into just a few lines.

In a book about Aristotle, which is based on his doctoral thesis, Vanier explains the connection between ethics, psychology, and spirituality:

> Psychology helps us to understand human behaviours and grasp the fears and blockages that are in us, in order to help us free ourselves of them. Spirituality is like a breath of inspiration that strengthens our motivation. Ethics help to clarify what is a truly human act, what justice is, and what the best activities are – those that render us more human and happiest.[4]

Vanier's story of the road in Chile can be read on all three levels: psychologically, spiritually, and ethically. He introduced the story to his Pacem in Terris audience saying, "Peace comes not when we say or believe that each and every person in the vast human family is precious and important, but when we begin to leave the security and comfort of our own clan and group, in order to meet and become friends with those who are different and who belong to another clan or group or culture." In other words, the invitation of peacemaking is not to words, but to action: meeting and becoming friends of people with different lives. But, as Vanier understands, the communities on each side of the road are both afraid.

Fears and blockages within us, Vanier suggested, are questions in the realm of psychology, reminding me

of another reflection on crossing the road, this one from an unpublished 1966 talk by Henri Nouwen to a Unitarian congregation near Notre Dame University, titled "Confession and Forgiveness."[5] Nouwen ponders the limitations of self-understanding: "If you are afraid to cross the road and someone helps you to understand that this is caused by a traumatic experience in your early childhood, the only result is that now you cannot cross the road, while knowing why you cannot. The problem remains that you still cannot cross the road." Nouwen frames the challenge as forgiveness, which for him is a form of giving that is the opposite of taking. Forgiveness, Nouwen insists, creates new possibilities: "Forgiveness is more than understanding; it is mobilizing; and it creates a new life and does not stop by understanding the old one."

For Vanier, the motivation to cross the road must come from somewhere deeper than words or ideas: "Spirituality is like a breath of inspiration that strengthens our motivation." Especially when speaking with younger people, he urged people to develop and trust their conscience. Quoting *Gaudium et Spes*, Vanier says:

> Conscience is something that echoes deep inside of us and helps us live in harmony and grow to greater love, truth, and inner freedom. It calls us to grow to a plenitude of our humanity; it calls us to grow to God. The first chapter of *Gaudium et Spes* (which means Joy and Hope), a text resulting from the Second Vatican Council, describes the dignity of the human person. "Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a human being. There one is alone with God, Whose voice echoes in one's depths. In a wonderful manner, conscience reveals that law which is fulfilled by love of God and neighbor."[6]

Vanier defined ethics as helping to "clarify what is a truly human act, what justice is, and what the best activities are." I assume crossing the road would be among his Aristotelian "best activities."

In *Life's Great Questions*, Vanier elaborates on the meaning of his experience of the road in Chile, presenting the road as an ethical challenge to face the reality of divisions between people:

> So often the division between rich and poor is reinforced with barriers that keep us comfortably ignorant of one another. … This question of what is reality is essential. We must be careful not to be enclosed within a narrow perception of the world. We must not be led to believe that reality is what is on my side of the road.[7]

The road can represent limiting narratives: "Healing our reality means breaking out of the narratives that protect and limit us."[8] He offers the example of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, which was undertaken as a part of a response to injustices and harms of Indian residential schools.[9] Vanier explains:

> The TRC is about exposing the incredible injustice that lies behind what was and still is perceived as normal. Today there are no more residential schools. But the narrative of inferiority and the consequent segregation persists. We cannot live in reality until we are free of embedded judgments and racism so that we can accept our neighbors as they are, not seeking to change them or to become the same, but celebrating together our differences and our humanity.[10]

After recounting his story of the road in Chile to his Pacem in Terris audience, Vanier continued, "To cross the road to meet people who are different and belong to another culture, and to become their friend is to take a risk, it is the risk of peace. I took this risk to leave a normal and conventional road when I began L'Arche."[11] The motivation to take such a risk, we might intuit from Vanier's other writing, comes from conscience, and is fulfilled by taking action to love God and neighbour. He cheerfully admits, "I had no plan; my idea was just live together, eat together, work together, have fun together and pray together."

He continues his Pacem in Terris acceptance by describing the life of L'Arche:

> Bishop Amos, many of those to whom you awarded this prize before me were heroes for peace. Some were imprisoned for their courage and determination for peace; some were assassinated. How is it you turned to us? We are a strange and crazy bunch in L'Arche. The road of peace which we have learnt in L'Arche is a very simple one. You see, we are not very austere or stressed, struggling to be heroes. We eat wonderfully, we drink merrily, of course Coca-Cola, orange juice and now again wine and beer, moderately, we sing loudly and frequently out of tune, and we dance wildly and we play as much as possible. Feast days, birthdays are all occasions for parties and for fun, we pray with all our heart but not long hours. We do put our trust in God who is watching over us.

For Vanier, understanding our fears, then making choices to cross a road of difference to make friends is not just an ethical imperative or a worthy response to the proddings of conscience: it is fun. In conversation with Hauerwas, Vanier identifies "three activities that are absolutely vital in the creation of community. The first is eating together around the same table. The second is praying together. And the third is celebrat-

ing together. By celebrating, I mean to laugh, to fool around, to have fun, to give thanks together for life."[12]

I have often used Vanier in my religious studies courses at St. Jerome's University; students find him accessible, engaging, and inspiring, in large part because he insists on the *pleasure* of building communities that are founded in all kinds of difference. In an exchange of letters with the renowned feminist philosopher Julia Kristeva in 2009, Vanier announced, "What is the secret that allows L'Arche to exist still? I'll tell you: pleasure!" Kristeva agrees, writing in 2013:

> In this central role of *empathy* and of this *love, that is continuously clarified and questioned* … the exceptional experience of Jean Vanier is pioneering. We have recently seen a secular version … in the film *Untouchables* (produced with the support of the association Simon of Cyrene). The love, with the humour and gaiety that result from it, this roar of laughter, which breaks through pain, this joyful alchemy, all this embodies marvellously the philosophy of sharing in the singular … This secular and stimulating *corpus mysticum*, which I am now talking about, which Jean Vanier practises in his way, which the film *Untouchables* brings to the general public, is a horizon and a hope for all, parents and professionals alike.[13]

Kristeva highlights what she calls a "joyful alchemy," suggesting that the joy of unexpected mutual relationships can turn base metals to gold.

## Conclusion

It bears repeating: Vanier's legacy is a communal discovery, not the individual work of one person. He shared what he learned each time he crossed a road, which was not about himself, but rather what his friends taught him. The pleasure as well as the suffering and struggles in the life that they mutually discovered became for them a road of peacemaking. Crossing the road is something we can all choose over and over in small and large ways throughout our lives. "Perhaps today, I would say that it is not only people with disabilities but all those who have been humiliated and put aside who transform us if we enter into relationship with them," Vanier mused in a public letter in October 2018. It can be too easy to latch onto Vanier's ideas while remaining firmly on one's own side of the road, still overlooking people with disabilities or people who are pushed aside or rejected. Vanier insists that while the challenge of crossing the road is not easy, it is significant and can even be fun: "maybe we will change the world if we are happy. Maybe what we need most is to rejoice and to celebrate with the weak and the vulnerable. Maybe the most important thing is to learn how to build communities of celebration. Maybe the world will be transformed when we learn to have fun together."[14]

**Dr. Carolyn Whitney-Brown** lived at L'Arche Daybreak for seven years. Her publications include *Jean Vanier: Essential Writings* (Orbis/Novalis/DLT, 2008, revised DLT edition, 2019), *Sharing Life: Stories of L'Arche Founders* (Paulist Press, 2019), and *Tender to the World: Jean Vanier, L'Arche and the United Church of Canada* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019).

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1 For a partial list of recent Vanier scholarship in English, see Carolyn Whitney-Brown, *Tender to the World: Jean Vanier, L'Arche and the United Church of Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019), 192n18. The new Jean Vanier Research Centre at King's College intends to create "a database of scholarly work pertaining to Jean Vanier." See https://www.kings.uwo.ca/research/research-centres/jean-vanier-research-centre-at-kings (accessed June 28, 2019).

2 For a discussion of the appeal and dangers of framing Jean Vanier as a myth and a symbol, see Carolyn Whitney-Brown, *Sharing Life: Stories of L'Arche Founders* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2019), 24–29, and Carolyn Whitney-Brown, "Jean Vanier: Remembering an Icon, Not an Idol," *Sojourners*, May 20, 2019, https://sojo.net/articles/jean-vanier-remembering-icon-not-idol (accessed June 7, 2019). For further discussion of Vanier's collaborative writing, see Carolyn Whitney-Brown, "Introduction to Revised Edition," *Jean Vanier: Essential Writings*, rev. ed. (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 2019).

3 Jean Vanier, "Remarks of Jean Vanier upon Receiving the *Pacem in Terris Peace and Freedom Award* of the Pacem in Terris Coalition of Davenport, Iowa." L'Arche USA, July 7, 2013, http://www.larcheusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Jean-Vanier-Remarks-for-Pacem-in-Terris-Final.pdf (accessed November 21, 2018). Further quotations from Vanier are from this document, unless otherwise identified.

4 Jean Vanier, *Made for Happiness: Discovering the Meaning of Life with Aristotle*, trans. Kathryn Spink (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2001), x.

5 Nouwen "Confession and Forgiveness," quoted in Carolyn Whitney-Brown, "How Not to Comfort a New Orleans Hurricane Survivor," in *Turning the Wheel: Henri Nouwen and Our Search for God*, ed. Jonathan Bengtson and Gabrielle Earnshaw (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), 141.

6 Jean Vanier (in collaboration with Janet Whitney-Brown), *Life's Great Questions* (Cincinnati: Franciscan Media, 2015), 45.

7 Ibid., 11, 14.

8 Ibid., 14.

9 The commission was a step towards "establishing new relationships embedded in mutual recognition and respect." See Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, "Our Mandate," http://www.trc.ca/about-us/our-mandate.html (accessed June 26, 2019). Vanier, *Life's Great Questions,* 13, offers more history of Canada's Indian residential schools.

10 Ibid., 14.

11 October 2019 marks 50 years since L'Arche crossed the Atlantic – L'Arche Daybreak was founded in Canada by Anglicans Steve and Ann Newroth, with Bill Van Buren and Peter Rotterman – thus also marking 50 years since L'Arche became ecumenical. See Carolyn Whitney-Brown, *Sharing Life: Stories of L'Arche Founders* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2019).

12 Stanley Hauerwas and Jean Vanier, *Living Gently in a Violent World: The Prophetic Witness of Weakness* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2008), 37. Decades later, I still remember my professors who invited students to their homes. Here I offer a shout-out especially to Tony Urquhart in Waterloo, and Thomas and Janine Langan in Toronto.

13 Julia Kristeva, "A Tragedy and a Dream: Disability Revisited," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 78:3 (2013): 229.

14 Hauerwas and Vanier, *Living Gently in a Violent World*, 75.

# Catholic Social Teaching and Service Learning: The Case of Social Justice and Peace Studies at King's University College

**By Megan Shore**
King's University College, London, ON

The Social Justice and Peace Studies (SJPS) program at King's University College at Western University is an interdisciplinary academic program committed to experiential education and inspired by the Catholic Social Teaching tradition. Established in 2002, it encourages critical reflection on oppression and injustice, locally and globally, and examines theoretical and practical approaches to justice and peace. The curriculum is founded on the premise that justice and peace are inextricably connected. An important element of SJPS is an intentional, value-based approach we take to service learning for students at various stages of their academic life. My purpose in this article is to introduce the SJPS program and to discuss the role that Catholic Social Teaching and service learning play in the program. I conclude with a discussion that identifies some of the challenges and opportunities that a unique program like SJPS faces.

## Introducing Social Justice and Peace Studies at King's

King's University College, in London, Ontario, was founded in 1954. It is a Catholic, publicly funded liberal arts university that is affiliated with Western University.[1] King's describes itself in the following terms:

> As a Catholic university, King's emphasizes the value of each individual and the importance of social justice. Students from all faiths and backgrounds are most welcome. Respect for the human person is behind our commitment to diversity, accessibility, social justice and to building the common good. An inclusive, supportive community is one of King's greatest strengths.[2]

The SJPS program's founding champion was a professor of sociology who recognized a need at King's for a program that was rooted in Catholic Social Teaching and the Church's attempt to "read the signs of the times." The founding mission statement of the SJPS program stated:

> The Social Justice and Peace Studies program encourages critical reflection on structural injustices locally and globally and calls for social action to transform the world in the interests of equity and the pursuit of peace.
>
> Whether their chosen career is teaching, law, social work, civil service, business, or the arts, graduates will be better equipped to take an active part in civil society as responsible, informed and concerned citizens. In a global economy currently dominated by corporate capitalism and the pursuit of profit for its own sake, they will be prepared to join the struggle to elevate the common good, the survival of the planet and the pursuit of peace as more meaningful and worthy human goals.

In its first year, 2002–2003, there were 100 course registrations. The following year, uptake doubled.

Intentionally rooted in Catholic Social Teaching, the curriculum highlighted values such as the preferential option for the poor, the dignity of the human person, and the concept that we are stewards of the environment. But SJPS has never been promoted as a Catholic program; neither SJPS leadership nor King's staff have portrayed SJPS as the University's "Catholic program" or as a program for Catholics. This program, in line with the objectives of the University, is open to students of all religions, philosophical and political persuasions, and worldviews. The purpose is to prepare students for different life trajectories and train them for various fields in which they do transform the world.

The SJPS program grew steadily and was at its peak in 2012 with 203 module registrations (students who declare SJPS as a major or minor). That made SJPS one of the more popular programs in the University. Majors have declined since the peak in 2012, but they have remained steady for the past few years with about half the number of majors from the peak.

Over the course of its existence, SJPS has become the hub at King's for engaged social innovation and active learning. Although many programs at King's offer

courses on topics related to injustice and peace, and a number of courses offer experiential learning, the SJPS program is unique at King's because the guiding orientation of this program is normative. This means that the SJPS program considers how individuals (and collectives) *ought* to act politically, professionally, and personally to create a more just and peaceful world. Graduates of the program work in the areas of non-governmental organizations, education, social services, business, law, and health care.

In 2014, SJPS created a new mission statement that still reflects the roots of the program. It states:

> Social Justice and Peace Studies is an interdisciplinary academic program committed to experiential education and inspired by the Catholic Social Teaching tradition. It encourages critical reflection on oppression and injustice, locally and globally, and it examines theoretical and practical approaches to justice and peace. It calls students to social action that transforms the world in the interests of human dignity, equality, sustainability, and peace.

The SJPS program stands out in Canada because it is one of the few (if not the only one) that fundamentally connects justice and peace. This is in keeping with Catholic Social Teaching and the roots of the program. In this tradition, the inextricable connection between justice and peace goes back through the Second Vatican Council and the encyclical *Gaudium et Spes*, which states that peace is "the fruit of that right ordering of things with which the divine founder has invested human society and which must be actualized by man thirsting for an ever more perfect reign of justice."[3] In 2002, Pope John Paul II reaffirmed this relationship between justice and peace in his World Day of Peace letter, entitled "No Peace Without Justice, No Justice Without Forgiveness." He proclaimed,

> How can we speak of justice and forgiveness as the source and condition of peace? *We can and we must*, no matter how difficult this may be; a difficulty which often comes from thinking that justice and forgiveness are irreconcilable. But forgiveness is the opposite of resentment and revenge, not of justice. In fact, true peace is 'the work of justice' (*Isaiah* 32:17).[4]

The SJPS program critically examines the root causes of social injustice and violence in society, in our community, and in the world. And it explores alternatives to injustice and violence by focusing on how to build peace and justice. It does this through rigorous academic training, combined with community-based learning and numerous optional experiential learning opportunities in the global community. The purpose of this type of learning is to emphasize relevance and the integration of theory and practice. The SJPS program combines the academic study of theories, methods, and concepts of justice and peace praxis in the local and global community.

There are two community-based learning experiences in London. The first is situated within a third-year course that is required for SJPS students who major in SJPS, and optional for those who minor in it. The objectives of this course are to critically reflect on how theories of social justice and peace coincide with the realities of social justice and peace in practice, and to make connections on how change is created through local community organizations, policy, politics, and the lived experiences of people. Placement options include working with organizations that focus on issues such as food security, gender-based violence, housing, immigration, mediation, poverty, restorative justice, and substance use. Working in partnership with local organizations, students undertake a placement where they engage in a service-learning project that contributes something meaningful to the organization and its mission.

The second experience is a unique learning opportunity entitled Women in Civic Leadership. It is based on the premise that women continue to be underrepresented in local and civic leadership. The course is for students who identify as women and are interested in civic issues and municipal leadership. They are paired with a female civic leader as a mentor and are provided with opportunities to learn about barriers facing women while learning alongside women already engaged in civic leadership. Each student and mentor work on a local community impact project.

The SJPS offers numerous optional global experiential learning courses. They range from the work and study of environmental degradation and marginalized communities in the Dominican Republic, to the study of migration and immigration at Rondine Centre for Peace in Arezzo, Italy, to the study of border security in Arizona. These learning opportunities offer students practical experiences to engage with what they learn in the classroom.

## Challenges and Opportunities

Three challenges raise concerns about the sustainability of the program.

The first area is balancing the unique SJPS curriculum against the University mission and identity. Over the past few years, other programs at King's have begun to teach courses and develop degree options that directly overlap with and compete with the SJPS program. In many respects, this is a natural progression resulting from SJPS's leadership in social justice education and

student demand. This is not a surprise given that social justice is central to King's identity and thus is included in substantial sections of the University's strategic plan. What is surprising, and somewhat troubling, is that a number of programs have directly duplicated our courses, while other programs have created streams or modules that directly overlap with our program. For example, as programs and departments try to make their courses more relevant, examining issues of justice and peace becomes a natural extension.

Second, the SJPS program needs to be sure that it is a place that allows for, and promotes, multiple voices and paths to justice and peace. One challenge with a normative program such as SJPS is that it can become bogged down in ideological positioning. In this era, where "social justice" is under attack and "grievance studies" has become a way to dismiss programs that seek to address social justice, we need to ensure that SJPS remains both a place of academic rigour and a forum where multiple voices and paths to justice and peace are supported and encouraged.

And third, one of the primary challenges we face is to stay true to the roots of the Catholic social tradition. This is true even though many of our students are not claiming to be religious or, to be more specific, Catholic. Some students have expressed anti-Catholic views both in class and in assignments. In situations such as this, our SJPS faculty members tend to reframe matters to allow students to understand that the Catholic tradition is broad and that the general public often does not realize that there is a Catholic social tradition that has been at times quite critical of the status quo. The spirit of this exercise is not to change the mind of the student but, rather, to provide additional context to allow the student to come to a more fully informed understanding of justice and peace. It also helps make the point that justice and peace initiatives often require partnerships, coalitions, and networks that include a diversity of worldviews but a shared vision to work for a more just and peaceable world.

As for opportunities, King's has consistently and successfully maintained the delicate balance of carrying out its Catholic mission and existing as a publicly funded liberal arts/social sciences university within a large research-intensive university system. Consequently, King's is in a unique position to continue to foster, promote, and be a leader in developing Catholic values and thought, while at the same time creating an educational experience that is unique in Canada.

The combination of the academic study of theories, methods, and concepts of justice and peace are the practical experience in the local and global community: students have the opportunity to engage what they learn in the classroom with the experiences of the world. While SJPS will never be a theology program, it will be important for SJPS faculty to find ways to keep the program grounded in the Catholic social tradition even as the Catholic tradition in general becomes less relevant to our student population and, perhaps, to our faculty and administration.

Another opportunity for the SJPS program is to serve as a connector for local and international organizations, including universities, that work for justice and peace. Locally, we currently have 13 partners that cover a variety of issues in our community such as poverty with the London Poverty Research Centre, Indigenous issues with Atlohsa House, housing with the Unity Project, and the environment with the London Environmental Network. And internationally, we have two primary partners: Rondine Centre for Peace in Italy, and Rio Blanco in the Dominican Republic. Continuing to strengthen these partnerships will allow our program to integrate the theory and praxis that are fundamental to the roots of our program, as well as the Catholic Social Teaching tradition. It deepens the students' understanding of local issues, opportunities, and challenges within London and helps them to make connections on how change is created through local community organizations, policy, politics, and the lived experiences of people in our community. In September 2019, we will offer a certificate and diploma in Refugees, Migration, and Forced Displacement. It will engage students on issues of global migration as challenges and opportunities for local communities that are welcoming newcomers. Students will have opportunities for community placements with organizations serving newcomers in southwestern Ontario, as well as to explore these issues in the international context of the Dominican Republic, the United States, and Italy. This will provide students with the opportunity of a wide range of experiences with professionals and organizations working in different capacities related to immigration, migration, and forced displacement.

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1 Readers familiar with privately funded Catholic education in the United States may be somewhat confused about the publicly funded nature of King's and other Catholic and faith-based universities in Ontario. Many of these faith-based universities have affiliated or federated arrangements with larger public universities, which transfer government money to the faith-based institutions for operational support.

2 https://www.kings.uwo.ca/about-kings (accessed May 10, 2019).

3 Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 78.

4 Message of his Holiness Pope John Paul II, For the Celebration of World Peace Day, 1 January 2012.

# Student Affairs and Learning from Jean Vanier

**By Joe Henry**
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The field of student affairs in post-secondary education has become more varied in recent years.[1] Historically, student affairs professionals were employed primarily to be responsible for monitoring students and to provide support in developing the character and moral maturity of students under the principle of *in loco parentis* (in the place of parents).[2] Over the last century, the profession has evolved to encompass more than 25 sub-specialties, including admissions, counselling, career advising, residence life, and experiential learning. Some who work in the field are members of regulated professions, such as nursing and law, while others have varied educational backgrounds.[3]

As student affairs has grown, so too has the body of research, which has resulted in a number of theorists becoming recognized authorities in North America. Each of these scholars of student affairs has helped to build a consistent and clear knowledge base from which we do our day-to-day work and engage in associated programming across diverse departments on campus. Much of the profession is connected primarily to the student development theory, which contains a subset of (1) broader psychosocial theories, which focus on how people deal with important issues and challenges, their relationships, and what to do with their lives, and (2) cognitive structures theories, which focus on how intellectual mind structures are developed over time.[4]

Arthur Chickering – likely the most cited psychosocial theorist in student affairs – in his book *Theory of Identity Development* (1993) outlines a series of seven developmental tasks or "vectors" for student development, including changes in thinking, feeling, behaving, valuing, and relating to others and oneself.[5] Chickering's model examines the directions in which individuals advance during their educational experiences on campus, all leading to students developing identity (who they are), purpose (who they will be), and integrity (how they conduct themselves). Chickering's work is often connected to campus life programming, including service-learning assessment and residence life programming.

William Perry, in an influential chapter entitled "Theory of Intellectual Development," offers a cognitive-structural theory that describes a typical course of post-secondary student development, moving from stage to stage, which is informed by encounters within a diverse university or college environment.[6] Perry suggests that students move through stages of understanding and will often not comprehend one step beyond where they currently stand. Perry's ideas continue to inform many activities within student affairs, including those dealing with career development, code of conduct initiatives, and academic advising.

Criticisms of these theories are many. For example, in the case of Chickering's work, critics note that vectors of development do not take into account diversity, including age, gender, and culture, which are prominent matters of concern on contemporary university campuses.[7] With respect to Perry, much of his theory was developed with a small sample size consisting mainly of Caucasian males of wealth; consequently, some question the validity of this framework as it pertains to the contemporary student population.[8] Still, their work remains foundational in the field of student development theory.

## Connecting Student Development Theory to Jean Vanier

In reviewing the work of Chickering and Perry, I see a clear connection between their theories and the work of Jean Vanier, a philosopher and co-founder of L'Arche, an international federation of communities for people with developmental disabilities and those who live with them. Vanier's concepts can resonate in the lives of students on their learning journeys and the culture built by student affairs professionals on campus. Specifically, the Five Principles of Humanity can provide a solid foundation on any campus, large or small, secular or non-secular, to build or reframe student affairs services and supports, in concert with existing historical frameworks on campus.[9]

*Principle 1*: All humans are sacred, whatever their culture, race, religion, whatever their capacities and incapacities, whatever their strengths and weaknesses may be. Student affairs professionals know that our students' lives are composed of many identities. As universities attempt to increase the number of

students from marginalized communities, it is increasingly important to meet our students where they are to provide support, encouragement, and service so they may have the opportunity to experience success. Vanier believed that "all of us need help to become all that we can be." The work of student affairs staff across all units should be focused on breaking down barriers and changing attitudes about who belongs in post-secondary education and who does not belong. This is, as Chickering was suggesting, in the fifth vector of the model, *Establishing Identity*, where students, as a consequence of their development, should be able to acknowledge differences, including gender and ethnic background.

*Principle 2*: Our world and our individual lives are evolving. Vanier believed that education is all about evolution. According to Perry's ideas of intellectual development, all students move through a staged process of understanding informed by the world, the campus culture, and the people interacting with students on a daily basis. In thinking about the difficult conversations convened on campuses about identity or politics, Vanier's ideas combined with Perry's become more critical, because they encourage us all to look at matters differently and learn from differing vantage points.

*Principle 3*: Maturity comes through working with others**.** Throughout his life, Vanier worked with others. It was Vanier's daily interactions with people with disabilities within the L'Arche community that shaped his views and identity and helped him grow as a human person. In the same vein, both Perry and Chickering posited that in higher education, it is critical to develop our campus communities so that students can meaningfully interact with each other. Whether it is the variety of service learning opportunities in the community or the daily small-group interactions in residence life, student affairs professionals must constantly reflect on how these experiences will support students to learn, grow, and develop with one another.

*Principle 4*: Humans need to be encouraged to make choices**.** Many students come to higher education seeking *the* right answer or the proper path without thinking about the impacts of these choices or decisions. In some cases, students make decisions without regard to how some choices may affect others. Vanier believed in the idea that people "need to become responsible for ourselves and for the lives of others as well." In connecting Vanier's work with the Chickering's, there is alignment with the fourth of Chickering's seven vectors, *Toward Developing Mature Intrapersonal Relationships*. This specifically resonates in areas where we might be dealing with students in code-of-conduct situations and restorative justice. It is not enough simply to provide a sanction; it is through the process of helping students examine that choice as it relates to others around them that the learning happens.

*Principle 5*: To make choices, we need to reflect and to seek truth and meaning**.** Of all Vanier's Five Principles, this speaks to the heart and soul of higher education. According to Vanier, it is not just about graduation and getting a high-paying career. Both Chickering and Perry believed, from a student development perspective, that it is critical to encourage students to examine how their choices help them find their calling and purpose in this world as part of their development. It is, therefore, important that academic advisors, chaplains, or career counsellors support students by asking big questions so they can look beyond the material outcomes of their choices to inform their overall purpose in life.

This is not an exhaustive list of exemplars connecting Vanier's concepts to campus and student development theory. There are many opportunities to consider further how Vanier's thought can inform the work of student affairs and support we provide to students on their academic and life journeys.

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1 Tricia A. Seifert and Jeff Burrow, "Perceptions of Student Affairs and Services Practitioners in Ontario's Post-Secondary Institutions: An Examination of Colleges and Universities*," Canadian Journal of Higher Education* 43:2 (2013): 132–48 at 133.

2 Philip Lee, "The Curious Life of *in loco parentis* in American Universities," *Higher Education in Review,* 8 (2011), 65–90 at 66.

3 See Seifert and Burrow, "Perceptions of Student Affairs and Services Practitioners in Ontario's Post-Secondary Institutions."

4 Vasti Torres, Susan R. Jones, and Kristen A. Renn, "Identity Development Theories in Student Affairs: Origins, Current Status and New Approaches," *Journal of College Student Development* 50:6 (Nov./Dec. 2009): 577–96.

5 Arthur W. Chickering and Linda Reisser, *Education and Identity*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993), 2.

6 William G. Perry, "Cognitive and Ethical Growth: The Making of Meaning," in Arthur W. Chickering et al., eds., *The Modern American College* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1981), 76–116.

7 Robert D. Reason and Ezekiel W. Kimball, "A New Theory-to-Practice Model for Student Affairs: Integrating Scholarship, Context, and Reflection," *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice,* 49:4 (2012): 359–76.

8 Ibid.

9 See Carolyn Whitney-Brown, *Jean Vanier: Essential Writings* (Ottawa: Novalis, 2008); see also Joseph S. Henry, "What Jean Vanier's Five Principles of Humanity Can Teach Student Affairs Professionals," *University Affairs Magazine* (June 5, 2019), https://www.universityaffairs.ca/opinion/in-my-opinion/what-jean-vaniers-five-principles-of-humanity-can-teach-student-affairs-professionals (accessed June 24, 2019).

# Protecting Minors: Canadian Bishops Issue Guidelines on Sexual Abuse

**By David Seljak**
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In the year 2000, as director of the St. Jerome's Centre for Catholic Experience[1]—the public outreach and education program at St. Jerome's University, a small Catholic college in Waterloo, Ontario—I invited Dr. Nancy Nason-Clark, a well-known sociologist at the University of New Brunswick, to present her research on sexual abuse in Canadian Christian churches. I received a complaint from two parish priests who saw the event as insulting to Catholic clergy and one from the bishop of the diocese, who lamented that a Catholic college would raise the issue of clerical sexual abuse just when the issue had died down in the media. Surely, the crisis had passed. Why embarrass priests and the church? Why cause scandal? Regrettably, our bishop's attitude was widespread.

Of course, two years later the *Boston Globe* published its now-famous "Spotlight" articles on clerical sexual abuse in Boston, as well as the equally shocking systematic coverup of these crimes by Cardinal Bernard Francis Law and the reassignment of offending priests to other parishes—where, inevitably, they were free to offend again. Of course, more recently we have seen the defrocking of Cardinal Theodore McCarrick of Pennsylvania, the conviction of Cardinal George Pell of Australia, and the report of the Pennsylvania grand jury that named more than 300 clergy in accusations of abuse of more than 1,000 children. Scandals in Ireland, Chile, Australia, the U.S., Canada, and elsewhere revealed the global reach of the abuse, leading Pope Francis to call for a special summit on the topic in February 2019.

Obviously, the crisis had not passed. More importantly, the abuse was ongoing. I felt it was the role of a Catholic university to confront the truth, even in the face of the denial and wishful thinking of some members of the Catholic leadership. Surprised and a little unnerved by these complaints, I wrote letters of explanation to the priests and the bishop, defending the invitation of Dr. Nason-Clark (whose presentation was brilliant, by the way) and explaining the necessity of confronting these important issues. The president of my institution supported my response, which was important to me as I was an untenured assistant professor at the time. However, rereading these letters of explanation, I am embarrassed at how deferential and conciliatory they were in tone. I should have been less polite and more blunt. It was the attitude of many Catholic leaders that was the scandal. It was their priority that the priesthood must be defended first, last, and always that inspired them to ignore the reality of sexual abuse in the Church in Canada and in our diocese. It was precisely their attitude that allowed the abuse to continue and the children to suffer. In this story, I am no hero. I am also embarrassed that, after this event, I had done so little both as director of the Centre and as a Catholic scholar to address the issue of sexual abuse in the Church.

Which brings us to October 2018, when the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops released its new guidelines for dealing with the sexual abuse of minors: a 184-page document called *Protecting Minors from Sexual Abuse: A Call to the Catholic Faithful in Canada for Healing, Reconciliation, and Transformation.* What is welcome here is—as the title suggests—the emphasis on the current and future protection of minors who suffer sexual abuse at the hands of Catholic clergy and lay leaders. The title suggests that the CCCB is aware that the abuse of minors is not confined to the past and that the Church needs to be ever vigilant, responsible, and compassionate in its response. Addressed to bishops, superiors of religious orders and institutes, and all who hold authority and supervisory roles in the Church—but also to victims and survivors, those who work in ministry (such as chaplains), the Catholic community, and Canadians in general—the 2018 document replaces *From Hope to Pain,*[2] the CCCB's 1992 document (considered groundbreaking at the time) that was updated in 2007.

*Protecting Minors from Sexual Abuse* goes much further than the 1992 guidelines, recognizing sexual abuse and the subsequent coverups by church authorities as systemic problems rather than just individual crimes, relying more on outside resources and oversight of church practices, and suggesting more

steps aimed at prevention (such as new approaches to education, training, and formation) rather than just responding to reported cases of abuse. It also calls for outside agencies to audit the policies and practices of each diocese for addressing and preventing sexual abuse. This is a clear admission that church leaders cannot police themselves. The document seeks to update the bishops' guidelines for dealing with abuse in line with changes in Canadian norms and law as well as directives from the Vatican in addition to integrating current research on the sexual abuse of minors. *Protecting Minors* is divided into three parts: an analysis of the effects of the crisis on the Church; guidelines for preventing abuse, responding to allegations, and reducing risks; and resources for persons with authority in the Church to address and prevent sexual abuse.

Beyond practical steps to address policy and procedures, the greatest advance over *From Pain to Hope* is the new report's shift in emphasis and tone. The 1992 document opens with a brief dedication, which is aimed at the survivors of abuse, followed by a more substantial foreword that addresses clerical sexual abuse as a crisis *for the Church.* While throughout the 1992 document the committee expresses clear and frequent concern for the victims-survivors of abuse, the authors of *Protecting Minors* more explicitly address clerical sexual abuse as a crisis *for the victims and their families* first and only later as a crisis for others in the Church, specifically for priests and religious who have never offended but are tarred with the same brush, lay leaders, and church members. The title *Protecting Minors from Sexual Abuse* emphasizes the first priority: protecting minors. It also suggests that this is an ongoing necessity. It looks forward rather than back.

The tone of the more recent document, which is set in the first chapter, entitled "Lessons Learned and Recommendations," is another improvement. The title indicates that the CCCB is aware that the past response of the Church has been plainly inadequate. You don't need to learn lessons unless you understand that you were wrong: that is what this document admits. *Protecting Minors* opens in a tone of humility. Sr. Nuala Kenny, a retired professor and pediatrician who once served as Deputy Minister of Health for Nova Scotia and Head of Pediatrics at Halifax's Dalhousie University, pointed out this tone in the document's sensitivity to the suffering of victims and survivors as well as the clear willingness to admit to and learn from past mistakes. In an interview, Kenny, who served on the committee that created *From Pain to Hope*, said that this tone of humility sets *Protecting Minors* apart from documents coming out of other episcopal groups.[3]

This first chapter is organized around nine lessons learned and 69 recommendations in light of those lessons. These appear under the following titles:

1. The Need for a Pastoral Encounter with Victims of Clergy Sexual Abuse
2. The Need to Understand Sexual Abuse Properly
3. The Need to Respond More Effectively to Allegations
4. Deal with Offenders
5. The Need for Better Safeguarding Practices and Training
6. The Effects on Clergy, Members of Institutes, and Laity: Coping with Shame
7. The Need for Better Initial and Ongoing Formation
8. Learning about the Legal Process
9. A Call to Greater Authenticity

The sensitivity and humility highlighted by Kenny are apparent in the first lesson, "the need for a pastoral encounter with victims of clergy sexual abuse." The document recognizes that in the past, people coming forward with accusations "were often treated in a way which they found to be dismissive, insensitive, and even demeaning."[4] In light of this lesson, the CCCB offers six recommendations to assure that individuals making allegations are embraced in a respectful, compassionate, and non-judgmental manner, and that their spiritual and mental health needs are addressed.[5] In the recommendations that follow, compassion for the victims and survivors, along with the commitment to prevent future abuse, become the guiding principles. This emphasis on the victims and survivors was not missing from earlier documents. However, it was often obscured by other interests. For example, in *From Pain to Hope*, the section on dealing with offenders sought to balance the rights and pastoral needs of the accused with those of the victims and survivors. In the 2018 document, the priority is on preventing abuse. It suggests that only after that has been done can the Church turn its attention to the legal, psychological, and pastoral needs of the offender. It is a subtle but important shift.

In the second chapter, the bishops turn their attention to the healing of individuals and communities, emphasizing the seriousness of the harm inflicted by clerical sexual abuse on the victim-survivors. Given the isolation and shame that victims and survivors had faced in the past, the bishops highlight the importance of community support in the process of the psychological and spiritual healing of individuals. They recognize that the individual child or survivor is not the only victim in a case of abuse. The bishops acknowledge that often

the victim's family, the parish, and the broader community are also deeply wounded by instances of abuse.

Finally, the third chapter of *Protecting Minors from Sexual Abuse* lays out the plan for preventing abuse in the future. It outlines policies and protocols for protecting minors, delineating the duties and responsibilities of bishops, leaders of church institutes, lay leaders, and others with formal roles in the Church. Many of these are clearly aimed at avoiding the mistakes of the past. For example, church leaders are reminded that they are expected to respect civil laws and authorities regarding abuse. Bishops, the CCCB document observes, must accept the principle of accountability, even inviting "third-party auditing services" to implement and maintain safeguarding standards.[6] Accountability also requires an increased level of transparency, a value often forgotten in the past.

With the preceding in mind, these new policies and procedures remain a dead letter without a conversion to the prevention of sexual abuse. The bishops write:

- Within the Church, the goal of prevention is first and foremost a call to conversion. Firstly, this entails identifying longstanding institutional practices linked to sexual abuse; and secondly, it involves transforming those practices, ensuring that they are more closely aligned with the Gospel and the Church's mission.

- The Canadian experience and the worldwide crisis of sexual abuse have highlighted difficult lessons about human weakness, sexuality, ministry, leadership, authority, and the interrelationship of laity with clergy and religious. As eye-opening and heart-wrenching as the crisis has been, it presents a renewed opportunity for the spiritual transformation of the Church today by way of repentance and conversion.[7]

It is here that the *Protecting Minors* moves beyond suggesting immediate, pragmatic steps to contemplating fundamental questions. The bishops shift their analysis from one that focuses on individual failings and weak policies to one that highlights the culture of the Church itself. Following Pope Francis' call for a transformed Church, the bishops are looking for renewal of the manner in which ministry, power, responsibility, and relations between lay and ordained Catholics are defined and exercised.[8] For example, the bishops write:

- The abuse of minors by clergy and religious has also uncovered the extent and the evil of clericalism with its focus on the privileges and prerogatives of authority and the expectation of some clergy and religious to be treated as entitled, superior, and untouchable. Many such offenders took full advantage of their authority and social status in order to abuse children within the communities they were meant to serve. The culture of clericalism made it easier for clergy and religious to overcome the resistance of their victims with psychological and spiritual intimidation as well as by physical force. In some communities, this culture and its conditions made church leaders as well as parents and other guardians of society less vigilant about protecting minors and dismissive of allegations when they arose.[9]

Like Pope Francis, the Canadian bishops are not afraid to single out clericalism as an evil in the church. First, clericalism gave offenders a power over their victims. It also convinced their families to ignore their accusations or to sign non-disclosure agreements. More insidiously, clericalism prompted some priests to think of themselves as above the law and untouchable. The traditional actions of their bishops reinforced those attitudes.

At three workshops I offered at St. Jerome's University to the University Worshipping Community and to faculty, staff, and students concerning this document, we read this passage, and I asked participants to imagine the offender priest who has been found out. Fearful of exposure, public-shaming, and criminal charges, the offender is told by the bishop that the diocese has taken care of everything and that the priest will be reassigned if he promises to stop offending. I asked them to imagine his relief, his jubilation at being relieved of those anxieties. "That must have been the best day of his life," one participant said. "Yes," I replied, "and it must have made him feel '*untouchable*.' No wonder he went on to offend again." Finally, clericalism as a general feature of the culture of the Church prevented people from taking seriously the issue of sexual abuse as well as specific accusations of abuse. It made them blind to the problem.

Denial of the problem of clerical sexual abuse, efforts to shelter offenders from persecution, schemes to cover up the extent of the crisis, and wishful thinking that the crisis would go away often stemmed from a genuine attempt to protect the reputation of the priesthood, already diminishing in status as societies become more secular. Furthermore, these schemes were often rooted in the desire to avoid "scandal" that might diminish the reputation of the Church. This was my experience at the St. Jerome's Centre. However, the good reputation of the clergy and the Church was paid for by the abused children. In fact, in the years that followed the controversy over Professor Nason-Clark's lecture, several priests in the Hamilton diocese were charged with sexually abusing children.

The bishops' condemnation of clericalism is certain to alienate many conservative Catholics. Totally absent from the document is the argument put forward by

many conservatives that the sexual abuse crisis is the product of widespread homosexuality in the Catholic priesthood and seminaries. While a minority, there are conservatives, such as Bishop Robert Morlino of Madison, Wisconsin, and writers at Catholic websites such as Church Militant, the Lepanto Institute, and LifeSiteNews, who argue that a "homosexual subculture" within the hierarchy of the Catholic Church has led to laxness about sin in general and sexual sin in particular. In contrast, various studies, including the 2001 John Jay College of Criminal Justice study commissioned by the United States conference of bishops, have found no link between the sexual abuse of minors and homosexuality.[10] Although the authors of *Protecting Minors* do not criticize or even address this conservative argument, that analysis is conspicuous by its absence.

Additionally, the bishops avoid the position taken by many liberal Catholics that the sexual abuse crisis is a direct result of the near-universal application of the discipline of celibacy on priests and other religious. While some of these Catholics suggest that celibacy engenders psychological and sexual immaturity and even dysfunction that leads to abuse, others argue that the rule of celibacy—along with the fact that many priests violate the rule on a regular basis—creates a culture of secrecy around sexuality that results in a "don't ask / don't tell" attitude about sexual abuse.[11] While calling for a radical transformation of the Church, *Protecting Minors* avoids any critique of the Church's teaching on sexuality or its discipline of celibacy, except to say that seminaries must review and improve their formation practices and that church leaders need to train priests and supervise them more closely to avoid abuse.

While the bishops do not take sides in this debate, they do issue "a call to greater authenticity" as the ninth "lesson learned" and make nine recommendations to address the culture of clericalism and the abuse of power in the Church. They call for a "profound pastoral conversion and purification" to promote greater transparency and accountability in every diocese. The bishops and major superiors are called to encourage a "culture of dialogue," openness to power sharing, as well as a "pastoral attitude rooted in repentance and conversion."[12]

While certainly welcome, the document's discussion of the "evil of clericalism" as a significant source of the crisis also reveals its limitations. *Protecting Minors* defines clericalism largely *as a culture*—a set of attitudes, beliefs, and values that prompts some members of the clergy to see themselves as "entitled, superior, and untouchable." The authors fail to look seriously at clericalism *as a structure* that upholds and promotes that culture. Several centuries of experience have taught us that, in a Church where all decision-making power is concentrated in the hands of a few celibate men, the culture of clericalism is an inevitability. The document courageously calls for a "renewal and transformation of 'everything'" in the Church, and especially pastoral practices and structures. In terms of clerical authority, the authors write boldly:

- There must be openness to changes in the way ministry is exercised. There is equally a need to understand authority not as a manifestation of power, but as ministry of service. Certain challenges persist concerning the quality of relationships among clergy, religious, and the laity; around the understanding of coresponsibility for the Church by all of its members; and with respect to the role of parents and the entire parish community in the prevention of sexual abuse and the protection of minors.

However, in spite of these bold words, the nature and extent of this transformation is left undefined.

In contrast, the more mundane sections on the duties, responsibilities, and powers of church leaders—and especially bishops—are precise and detailed. Of course, given the nature of the document, that is a matter of necessity. The bishops and other church leaders require immediate, practical guidelines for dealing with accusations of abuse and implementing steps to avoid abuse in the future. Even so, it means that the sections on lay responsibility and the transformation of the Church's culture and structures are lofty, but brief and general. They are unlikely to be acted upon. The detail and seriousness of the former sections call the bishops and clerical church leaders to greater responsibility, but they also reinforce the authority (and power) of the clerics.

*Protecting Minors from Sexual Abuse* gets many things right. It prioritizes the suffering of the victims and survivors; it defines abuse as a systemic, long-term, ongoing problem; it emphasizes long-term prevention and pre-emptive action; it encourages new approaches to education, training, and formation of church personnel; and it calls for outside auditors to ensure that institutional policies and practices are effective. Finally, it addresses the abuse of power and authority in the Church. In setting out a plan of action to address the protection of minors from sexual abuse, the document is very good, perhaps the most developed in the Catholic world. It is a great improvement on previous efforts. However, in terms of analyzing and critiquing the church structures and power relations as the basis of the crisis as well as imagining a blueprint for the radical transformation of those structures and relations, *Protecting Minors* falls short. In fact, in its emphasis on legal and administrative responsibilities—along with its lofty but vague language on

lay responsibility, transparency, and accountability—it actually reinforces the gendered power structure of the Church, a structure that many feel is at the source of the "evil of clericalism" that the report courageously condemns. The recent accusations by nuns who have been sexually abused and raped by priests[13] highlight the urgency of confronting this outdated structure of power and authority. Despite its positive and important contributions to the Church's response to the clerical sexual abuse crisis, *Protecting Minors* remains a work in progress.

In any case, the fine sentiments and excellent recommendations of this report will be judged by the actions taken by individual dioceses, parishes, and institutions of the Church. Catholics and others are rightly suspicious of the pronouncements of church leaders on this issue. After all, who doesn't condemn the sexual abuse of minors? Who doesn't sympathize with victims and survivors? Who doesn't support courageous admissions of guilt? Who doesn't want the Church to commit to ending abuse and the covering up of abuse? In the end, the effectiveness of our *actions* in protecting minors from sexual abuse—and not the quality of our words—will be the criteria of success. Given that the report argues that effective action will require deep structural renewal and transformation in the Church, Catholics and others are right to question whether anything will change without a fundamental change in the clerical structures as well as the culture of the Church.

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1 The St. Jerome's Centre for Catholic Experience was founded in 1982; it continues under the name the St. Jerome's Lectures in Catholic Experience. See https://www.sju.ca/LCE (accessed May 20, 2019).

2 Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, *From Pain to Hope: Report from the Ad Hoc Committee on Child Sexual Abuse*, https://www.cccb.ca/site/Files/From_Pain_To_Hope.pdf (accessed May 17, 2019).

3 Deborah Gyapong, "Positive Reviews for Canadian Bishops Sex Abuse Document, But Hard Work is Ahead," *Catholic Register,* October 9, 2018, https://www.catholicregister.org/item/28158-positive-reviews-for-canadian-bishops-abuse-document-but-hard-work-is-ahead (accessed May 17, 2019).

4 *Protecting Minors*, 22.

5 Ibid., 24.

6 Ibid., 68.

7 Ibid., 71–72.

8 Ibid., 74.

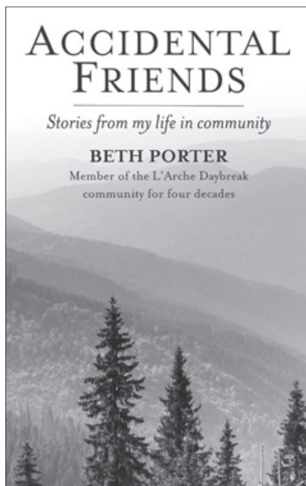
9 Ibid., 73.

10 Brian Roewe, "Bishop Morlino, others charge 'homosexual subculture' for clergy abuse crisis," *National Catholic Reporter,* August 21, 2018, https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/bishop-morlino-others-charge-homosexual-subculture-clergy-abuse-crisis (accessed May 17, 2018). Dr. Gregory Herek, professor of psychology, University of California Davis, writes, "The empirical research does not show that gay or bisexual men are any more likely than heterosexual men to molest children. This is not to argue that homosexual and bisexual men never molest children. But there is no scientific basis for asserting that they are more likely than heterosexual men to do so." See "Facts about Homosexuality and Child Molestation," http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/rainbow/html/facts_molestation.html (accessed May 17, 2019).

11 This was the finding of the late A.W. Richard Sipe, the psychologist who was an important source for the investigative journalists who uncovered the widespread clerical sexual abuse in Boston. See http://www.awrsipe.com (accessed May 17, 2019).

12 *Protecting Minors,* 142–43.

13 Max J. Rosenthal and Michelle Boorstein, "Pope Francis confirms Catholic clergy members abused nuns," *The Washington Post,* February 6, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2019/02/05/pope-francis-confirms-catholic-clergy-members-abused-nuns/?utm_term=.7f1f91a78da5 (accessed May 20, 2019).

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