

Who is my Neighbour? Theological Education in the Global Village of the 21st Century: Panel Two (Responses)

Karen Petersen Finch and Alyson Huntly

Volume 4, Number 2, Spring–Summer 2023

Who is My Neighbour? Interfaith Dialogue and Theological Education in the Global Village

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1109996ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26443/jcreor.v4i2.95>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Council for Research on Religion

ISSN

2563-0288 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this document

Petersen Finch, K. & Huntly, A. (2023). Who is my Neighbour? Theological Education in the Global Village of the 21st Century: Panel Two (Responses). *Journal of the Council for Research on Religion*, 4(2), 128–139. <https://doi.org/10.26443/jcreor.v4i2.95>

© Karen Petersen Finch and Alyson Huntly, 2023



This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

Who is my Neighbour? Theological Education in the Global Village of the 21st Century: Panel Two Introduction

Chukwuemeka Anthony Atansi's keynote address offered a series of reflections on how the Igbo theological anthropology of the neighbour can enrich theological education in diverse contexts such as Montreal. The Igbo theological anthropology of the neighbour offers a *relational* understanding of the neighbour, a relationality which comprises a crucial component of Karen Finch's response, one which argues that good pastoral education in today's polarized world strongly resembles good ecumenical formation. For Finch, ecumenical formation is about *relationality* and the dialogues that this relationality provokes, and she argues that, when approached with openness and transparency, such dialogues can be truly generative for pastoral education. Alyson Huntly's response offers a series of reflections about the state of theological education in Quebec, reflections which also highlight relationality, or, more precisely, the need for Western institutions, hitherto predominantly white, to re-evaluate and re-envision how they relate to – and thereby dialogue with and learn from – the “Others” who now represent a majority demographic in Quebec's theological colleges, many of whom come from the Global South or formerly colonized nations. This, she argues, represents the path to renewal for theological education in twenty-first century Quebec.

Keywords: Theological education, neighbour, ecumenical education, dialogue, doctrine, diversity, transformation

Ecumenical Pastoral Formation

Karen Petersen Finch, *Presbyterian College of Montreal*

As we reflect on theological education in this century's global village, it seems both relevant and urgent to consider the question "Who is my neighbour?" from an ecumenical angle. It is relevant because my panel colleagues and I all teach at the Montreal School of Theology which, in association with the School of Religious Studies at McGill, educates students from around the world in an ecumenical setting. It is urgent because as Protestant churches and seminaries in North America grow smaller and make do with fewer resources, we who educate the next generation of Christian leaders find ourselves collaborating more and more across doctrinal and denominational lines. At the Montreal School of Theology, we rely on this collaboration – and the pedagogical opportunities it creates – every day.

Even where it began as a necessity, shared pastoral training can develop special competencies in students who are heading for ministry. While I teach for our consortium,¹ McGill University, and *L'Institut de Theologie pour la Francophonie*, I am also an ecumenist. I research and facilitate dialogue between Christian neighbours locally, nationally, and internationally. I have recently been noticing an affinity between the self-development that is required of those who turn toward the Christian neighbor in dialogue, and the interior journey of someone who is on the road to becoming an authentic pastor or Christian leader. For example, this morning I led a seminar for Bachelor of Theology students at McGill who are working toward a Master of Divinity degree. The subject was on the laity's ecumenical formation, and I intended to use my book *Grassroots Ecumenism* as an example of catechesis and adult education.² Yet the conversation kept turning to pastoral formation. Rather than mentoring laypeople in the art of dialogue, as a form of congregational learning, the students were much more interested in acquiring dialogue skills for themselves.

It could be our community's geographical and cultural diversity that provoked this interest. The seminar included pastors and pastoral candidates from Syria, Nigeria, Taiwan, Canada, and the United States. Students could have been looking to connect across their personal differences. But I believe their need is even more specific and has more to do with the future than the present. Every seminary student whom I know, regardless of their home country, is concerned about the intense polarization of worldviews that we experience today and its divisive effect on Christian communities. They wonder how they will be able to foster *koinonia* (the Greek for fellowship) or *communitas* (the Latin for community) in this social environment, and I share their concern. Our ministry students want to be instruments of peace; but first, they must develop the mental, emotional, and verbal habits that guide diverse congregations into their missional identity in a way that unites rather than divides. An ecumenical setting is a fitting space for this very specific and practical kind of theological education.

In a time of rapid change, characterized by forces that move people away from one another, good pastoral formation bears a strong resemblance to good ecumenical formation. Of course, the main pedagogical tool of the ecumenical movement is dialogue. We assume that graduate students know how to participate in discussion (even when they do not) and we expect them to read and prepare to that end. But discussion and dialogue are very different. Discussion shares part of its etymology with the word

1. Here referring to the Montreal School of Theology.

2. Karen Petersen Finch, *Grassroots Ecumenism: The Path Toward Local Christian Kinship* (New York: New City Press, 2022).

“percussion” and connotes the banging or clashing of objects: in this case, objects of thought.³ In successful dialogue “the word,” or the meaning, “moves through” a gathering of learners, stirring up creativity and sparking relationships as it goes.⁴ According to the definition of dialogue which I use in my Christian reunion work, dialogue is “non-adversarial group communication that invites new relationships and new forms of meaning to emerge, on the way to discovering a common and comprehensive viewpoint.”⁵ What are pastors doing, if not inviting relationships to emerge and grounding those relationships in fresh articulations of Christ’s gospel on the way to a shared embodiment of it? It stands to reason that in teaching pastoral candidates to dialogue across their differences, we are also training them to be authentic, Kingdom-style leaders.

I can make this argument more specifically by focusing on what I have called the three hallmarks of dialogue: openness, transparency, and generativity. They represent a cluster of attitudes and behaviours that serve as training wheels for dialogue. Each one has its role in theological education in an ecumenical setting. Firstly, openness is an attitude that welcomes the neighbor with as few preconceptions as possible. It is a willingness to hold our previously formed conclusions lightly, making space for the ecumenical neighbour to surprise us with new visions of what is true and what is valuable. Openness does not mean the avoidance of coming to conclusions; we all have our conclusions because we are wired to make them, and we could not function well in the world or solve our problems without them. Rather, the invitation is to suspend them. As William Issacs notes, in suspension “we neither suppress what we think nor advocate it with unilateral conviction. [...] We simply acknowledge and observe our thoughts and feelings without being compelled to act on them. This can release a tremendous amount of creative energy.”⁶

At the Montreal School of Theology, we use a teaching tool called “theological reflection” in which a professor meets with three or four students, usually for an afternoon. Each student brings a brief description of an episode from their congregational placement. Our handbook specifies that “the experience will have involved the student in some personal way, and raised questions around their role, understanding of ministry, or identity as a pastor. Often such situations will have aroused some strong feeling or response in the student.”⁷ Theological reflection is not dialogue, because it is too focused on the learning of one student at a time, and because it follows a series of prescribed steps. But its effectiveness as a learning tool depends on openness, especially in a diverse group.

For example, one of our African students described his participation in a “crossover” worship service on New Year’s Eve, a Zoom service which he notes was heavily attended. The speaker was a popular African Christian leader who identified as a prophet. Our student supported this identification and spoke with deep satisfaction of the message of encouragement he had received directly from God during the Zoom service. The other students present during this particular theological reflection were from different denominational backgrounds. One represented the United Church of Canada; another served the Anglican Church of Canada; and a third was Presbyterian/Reformed. The next step in theological reflection suggests that we brainstorm for biblical associations, theological themes, and liturgical resources that can shed light on the episode, for the deeper learning of the whole group. As reflection unfolded, it became clear that all three of the listening students – for different reasons – were suspicious of personal prophecy, and that these

3. The etymological root of the word discussion comes from the Latin *discutere*, “a shaking.”

4. Here referring to the etymological root as coming from the Greek *dia* (through) + *logos* (word).

5. Petersen Finch, *Grassroots Ecumenism*, 12.

6. William Isaacs, *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together* (New York: Currency, 1999), 135.

7. Montreal School of Theology, “Ministry Situations and Theological Reflection - In One Page” (unpublished document, 2022–2023).

reservations stemmed from the culture and doctrine of their home churches. However, I could see and hear them putting these judgements on hold in honour of their colleague's experience. They were neither hesitant nor patronizing nor corrective; they simply believed him. Their openness had the creative effect of driving our conversation down from the splintered doctrinal level to the more mysterious, shared biblical level, namely to Paul's exploration of prophecy in I Corinthians 14. This biblical text, with its assumption that God speaks to the churches, and its prescriptions to prevent misuse, belongs to all our traditions. We found that it spoke meaningfully to each of us.

Dr. Chukwuemeka Atansi, today's keynote speaker, has argued that theological education "ought to take seriously the fact that there is something irreducibly astonishing about the human person – each and every human being regardless of geographical boundaries, physical proximity, and social, political and economic connections."⁸ I could add theological boundaries to this list. The training that our Montreal School of Theology students are receiving in an ecumenical setting is preparing them to receive the theological "other" with charity – and our churches are full of the theological "other." Local congregations are not as monolithic in doctrine and culture today as they were under Christendom (or were more likely to be). As a case in point, the student who brought an experience of personal prophecy was also affiliated with the United Church of Canada; but his theological style is very different because of his African heritage. He identifies deeply with the United Church because their ministry to immigrants brought him to Canada. As our North American churches become highly complex mixtures of people from every corner of the world and diverse spiritualities, openness is more essential to pastoral training than ever. Moreover, in addition to expressing love of neighbour, dialogic openness helps a pastor to create a listening community that seeks God's guidance from Scripture, tradition, or context.

A second hallmark of dialogue is transparency. Isaacs calls this behaviour "speaking in one's authentic voice."⁹ An unfortunate effect of polarization is that transparency (which I also call dialogic courage) carries a high risk of shame, and nowhere more so than in academic settings. In *Tehanu*, the fourth volume of Ursula K. LeGuin's *Earthsea* series, an observer comments that the wizarding community is fueled by shame. The Guild of Wizards in this series is a thinly veiled portrait of the current state of academia in our world, and LeGuin's observation is astute. Students may not feel free to speak of personal faith experiences when they are in an academic setting, for fear that their experiences will be judged as invalid. In ecumenical theological education, however, everyone benefits when individual students speak from their own traditions.

I have already noted that people cannot function well in the world without coming to conclusions; neither can churches. It is very difficult to be a church community without taking a stand on something. Therefore, churches do form their own judgments of truth and value, which we call doctrine. And doctrine plays an important role in the development of pastoral identity for seminary students. As we saw in the story above, an African student may inhabit (for example) the United Church of Canada doctrine differently than a Canadian student in the same community. But both students are actively engaged in determining what their relationship will be to the doctrine of the church they are planning to represent. This is called the reception of tradition, and it is a large part of what seminary is about. Ideally, students would be able to share the fruit of their reception processes with one another when they are feeling confidently Lutheran or Presbyterian or Anglican or United Church – and even when they are not.

8. Chukwuemeka Anthony Atansi, "My Neighbour: The Beauty of Life (*Mmadu*) that I See (*Ifunanya*); The Significance of Igbo (African) Theological Anthropology for Theological Education in our Time," Keynote Address, School of Religious Studies Lilly Foundation Symposium, McGill University, October 21, 2022.

9. Isaacs, *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking*, 159.

For example, in the theological reflection example mentioned above, the Reformed student could have rejected his colleague's experience of personal prophecy based on his own commitment to *sola scriptura* (scripture alone). But because he did not reject it, the reflection was able to dive to a very deep level. However, there did come a time in the reflection for the listening students to voice their concerns about personal prophecy, all of which were shaped by denominational training. Since we had first established a "container" of openness and charity, these acts of transparency did not create conflict; instead, they increased the opportunity for theological learning.

Among Christians of goodwill who are interested in unity, I often encounter the assumption that doctrines – Christian judgments of truth and value – are inherently divisive. They argue that if our doctrines are keeping us apart, then the best approach to unity is to avoid being doctrinal altogether. But that proposal is misguided. In ecumenical practice, differences are the very power that moves a dialogue forward – as wood fuels a fire. They give each dialogue its own unique shape and teaching power. In the classroom, Christian theology functions like a web of questions and answers. When students come from different denominations, their professor finds an opportunity to display more of the panoply of possible answers. Doctrinal positions are no longer abstract but carry a face and voice – ideally, the face and voice of a neighbour, "one who finds refuge in my heart, with whom there is mutual vulnerability and support."¹⁰

I argue that ecumenical transparency makes it possible for pastoral candidates to encounter the push and pull of doctrinal diversity before they leave seminary. Like their Montreal School of Theology professors, these pastors will have to find a way to teach from within a tradition while also teaching the skills necessary to handle doctrinal differences. Finally, transparency carries a benefit for the one who is transparent: it can acquaint us not only with our own truth and value claims but with the tricks and strategies we use to defend them when they are less than defensible. Epistemological humility is a necessity for pastors, as it is for all leaders who desire to be learners.

The third hallmark of dialogue is generativity. Unlike openness and transparency, generativity is a characteristic of dialogue itself, rather than of the people who practice it. Dialogue pioneer David Bohm suggested that "in a dialogue [...] it may be said that the two [or more] people are making something in common, i.e., creating something new together."¹¹ Ecumenists are drawn to the practice of dialogue because of its generative potential, searching as they are for "new insights into the faith, new witnesses to the truth, new forms of expression" that separated Christians can affirm together.¹² Even when it is not structured as dialogue, theological teaching may also take on the power of generativity when students and faculty make space for what I have called "new relationships" and "new forms of meaning."

Let us take the second element first. By "new forms of meaning" I am referring to what Jesuit theologian Bernard Lonergan called "insight."¹³ Lonergan argued that human beings are born with an unrestricted desire to know and that we begin to satisfy this fundamental curiosity by turning first to sense experience. "Without the prior presentations of sense, there is nothing for a [person] to understand."¹⁴ Professors instinctively know this and work very hard to provide the auditory, visual, and kinesthetic experiences that will lead their students toward the formation of new knowledge. But no lecture, series of slides, or shared activity exists that can guarantee that crucial moment when the mind of a student is able

10. Atansi, "My Neighbour: The Beauty of Life."

11. David Bohm, *On Dialogue* (London: Routledge, 1996), 2.

12. Michael Putney, "A Roman Catholic Understanding of Ecumenical Dialogue," *Ecclesiology* 2, no.2 (2006), 185.

13. Bernard J. Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, CWL 3 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), Preface.

14. Bernard J. Lonergan, "Cognitive Structure," in *Collection*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), 206.

to put all the elements together and produce a meaning the mind has never pondered before. That is the experience of insight: the grasp of an immanent intelligibility, a meaning or explanation that makes sense of one's experience. Insight is a daily miracle, one of the most creative of human acts.

For the professor who teaches theology in an ecumenical community, the setting already provides a powerful stimulus to generate insight: the presence of a diverse group of students. The more transparent students are with one another, the greater the possibility that their stories, their body language, and the insights they share will provoke the development of new knowledge in one another. Ideally, however, an ecumenical classroom generates more than new meaning, and this is where my phrase "new relationships" comes in. When an insight is judged to be accurate, it can carry us beyond ourselves toward an encounter with reality that is other than ourselves. In so doing, insight can potentially carry us toward our neighbours.

Loneragan scholar Bernard Tyrell was known for his expression of the connection between insight and love. He wrote, "Knowing is cognitive self-transcendence, while loving is self-transcendence and entrance into communion with the other. It is in the self-transcendence of love that we discover ourselves and realize our true identities."¹⁵ Here we see a parallel between Lonergan's work and the Igbo theological anthropology featured in Dr. Atansi's presentation. In Igbo language, the encounter between neighbours carries the possibility of insight into reality itself – called *ifunanya*, "the act of beholding" – because the neighbour embodies *mmadu*, "the beauty of life."¹⁶ True knowledge of the other is true knowledge of reality and provokes the fitting response of love. And both have the added benefit, essential to pastoral education, of introducing students more fully to themselves.

I have experienced the connection between insight and love both in dialogue settings and in my teaching at the Montreal School of Theology. In the end, because of the relational way that human beings learn, it is difficult for us to separate "new forms of meaning" from "new relationships," and this is all for the good. Recently I had the opportunity to observe a diverse group of our students in action away from the classroom, interacting with indigenous communities in Winnipeg, Manitoba. My colleague from the Montreal Diocesan Theological College (Anglican) had set up the excursion to teach intercultural competence and humility. Pedagogically, the trip was a classroom in which the auditory, visual, and kinesthetic stimuli that we encountered were impossible to ignore. Students responded compassionately to stories of immense pain, which led to the creation of loving relationships, which in turn generated fresh insight into their own Christian belief and practice. The result was the transformation of both mind and heart. Does this episode prove that ecumenical education is generative of the love of neighbour? Perhaps not. But it does indicate that love can generate insight, and insight can nurture love – especially in settings where difference is not avoided but fostered and claimed.

This exploration of the three hallmarks of dialogue, as experienced in ecumenical education, illustrates the bright side of a contemporary necessity. There are gifts hiding in the circumstances which compel our Christian communities to educate pastors across denominational boundaries. To claim these gifts, at the Montreal School of Theology, we embrace an ecumenical atmosphere so that our students can emerge from theological education with the peacemaking habits that they need, including the love of neighbour. In the process, both faculty and students have an opportunity to deepen their understanding of Jesus Christ, his gospel, and his coming kingdom.

15. Tyrell, Bernard, as quoted in Ferch, Shann Ray, "Servant-Leadership and Forgiveness Asking," in *Servant-Leadership and Forgiveness: How Leaders Help Heal the Heart of the World*, ed. Jiying Song, Dung Q. Tran, Shann Ray Ferch, and Larry C. Spears (Albany: SUNY Press, 2020) 272.

16. Atansi, "My Neighbour: The Beauty of Life."

Bibliography

- Atansi, Chukwuemeka Anthony. “My Neighbour: The Beauty of Life (Mmadu) that I See (Ifunanya) – The Significance of Igbo (African) Theological Anthropology for Theological Education in our Time.” Keynote Address, School of Religious Studies Lilly Foundation Symposium, McGill University, October 21, 2022.
- Bohm, David. *On Dialogue*. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Ferch, Shann Ray, “Servant-Leadership and Forgiveness Asking,” in *Servant-Leadership and Forgiveness: How Leaders Help Heal the Heart of the World*, ed. Jiying Song, Dung Q. Tran, Shann Ray Ferch, and Larry C. Spears (Albany: SUNY Press, 2020), 259–277.
- Isaacs, William. *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together*. New York: Currency, 1999.
- Lonergan, Bernard J. “Cognitive Structure.” In Frederick E. Crowe, ed., *Collection* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), 221–239.
- Lonergan, Bernard J. *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*. Ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran. CWL 3. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992.
- Montreal School of Theology. “Ministry Situations and Theological Reflection - In One Page.” Unpublished Document, 2022–2023.
- Petersen Finch, Karen. *Grassroots Ecumenism: The Path Toward Local Christian Kinship*. New York: New City Press, 2022.
- Putney, Michael. “A Roman Catholic Understanding of Ecumenical Dialogue.” *Ecclesiology*, 2.2 (2006), 179–193.

Theological Education in the White Western Academy: Our Neighbour is the Stranger Who Can Pull Us Out of This Ditch

Alyson Huntly, *Montreal Diocesan Theological College*

I learned the Parable of the Good Samaritan as a model for good Christian charity. That is how it has been passed down to us, it in Western Christianity, from Sunday School on. A good neighbour – that would be us – helps the poor, indigent, the one in the ditch. We, the ones on the good side of the story, help those who cannot help themselves. Of course, that isn't the parable. This is a parable of reversal,¹ a parable with a twist. If we listen expecting a moral tale, we will be disappointed because the parable will disrupt our cherished view of ourselves and of our institutions. The parable will turn on us, opening into a worldview other than our own; into a way of understanding that is so new that it can only be grasped within the metaphor itself.

The twist. Those of us who inhabit White Western Christian institutions are not the good neighbours who can save the “other.” We never were. We and the institutions in which we serve are the ones in the ditch, broken, floundering. We are the ones who need rescuing, because we are the ones who are perishing. The neighbour is the stranger who saves us.

Transposing this parable into the context of theological education in the twenty-first century, here in Montreal, we will be reminded that our neighbour is the one reaches out to help *us*. Christendom has floundered,² and, with it, its institutions of higher theological education. We who live in the rubble need neighbours who can pull us out of the ditch. We need others who carry us to the inn, transform our brokenness. Our neighbour is the foreigner walking down the road, the one with a different accent, the one who comes from outside.

I say this as a theological educator. I say this to myself and others who, like me, are displaced by this parable of reversal. We who are teachers need to become learners. Our educational institutions will be taught/transformed by those who come to us as foreigner, as neighbour.

I am White, European-born and I came to Canada as a child of immigrants. I was born into a set of relations shaped by the centuries of colonial domination. As we know, the pedagogical relationship of colonialism has positioned the colonizer/the Westerner as the teacher who brings the gift of knowledge. The “colonized” as the grateful recipient. This distortion still structures teaching and learning, still structures most of Western theological education. Now, a story.

1987, southern Zambia. Thirty women from remote villages gather for a workshop on microbusinesses, present are a few foreigner educators, including myself. Mr. Moyo is there, from Harare, to lead a workshop on record keeping. Like me, he has been formed in a Western-based academic institution. He values the literate world, in his case a world of business, accurate minutes and tidy accounts. Mr. Moyo is there to teach the group how to organize their microbusinesses on a Western literate model.

1. John Dominic Crossan, “Parable, Allegory, and Paradox,” in *Semiotics and Parables: Exploration of the Possibilities Offered by Structuralism for Exegesis*, ed. Daniel Patte (Pittsburgh, PA: Pickwick Press, 1976).

2. Douglas John Hall, *The End of Christendom and the Future of Christianity. Christian Mission and Modern Culture* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International 1996).

He uses an activity to make his teaching point. His activity, his parable if you like, is based on the European folktale of Goldilocks and Three Bears, which he retells as Braided Hair, and the Three Elephants. The Zambian women don't know this story. Mr. Moyo asks three women to move out of earshot: Victoria, Mandi, and Beverly. Then he tells the story to the rest of the group. Calling Victoria back, he asks one of the group members tell her the story. Then he calls Mandi back and asks Victoria to tell her the story. Then it is Mandi's time to tell Beverly the story. By the time the story has passed hands three times, Braided Hair has lost her name and the elephants are smashing the beds and the chairs. Who knows what has happened to the white corn porridge.

"See," says Mr. Moho. "See. That is why you must write things down."

After tea break Mr. Moho says, "Whoever gets back to the group last must tell the story of Braided Hair and the Three Elephants."

Loveness, the oldest woman in the group, stirs a little extra sugar into her cup. She sits and waits. Teatime is over but she has all the time in the world. She has been sitting and observing this group for a long time.

"Ah ha," said Mr. Moho, as Loveness finally arrives, "You must tell us the story." Loveness tells the story, oh yes she does. Braided Hair dances on her tongue and the earth trembles with outraged elephants. Loveness flawlessly replicates the order and detail of the original tale, but her story is a parable of reversal. It twists back on itself and on its hearers. She turns to the group.

"See," she says, "This is why you must learn to listen." She includes Mr. Moho and me in the sweep of her gaze, "You must learn to listen."

Loveness knew that fragile paper perishes in heat and humidity, and conflicts emerge from written documents, but that learning to how to listen in one's bones, learning to carry to story as living artefact, is the fabric of sustainable community. Loveness began to teach us, the so-called teachers. She instructed us to listen, which is to say, to be transformed into learners.

The reversal is this. The ones who think they have something to teach must learn to listen to the ones who will be our teachers, the agents of our own transformation.

I have been trying for the last thirty-five years to learn how to listen as Loveness says I must. Watch for the reversals of roles, be ready to change places and mindsets, and be willing to give up cherished assumptions. And power. I admit that it is hard. Hard to give place, hard to change, hard to accept with grace the transformation that comes from outside one's own culture, context, worldview.

Margaret Mead³ cautioned us over half a century ago that, in a globalized world, teacher-learner relationships will shift. The cataclysmic changes we experience in our lifetimes make us immigrants in time and place, inverting relationship between learner and teacher. This is no less true in theological education. The project of theological education here in Quebec is in deep trouble. We know this. We have watched theological faculties close, one by one, across the province of Quebec. Not much is left.

The more the tides of globalization erode our Western foundations, the more we must learn from the Global South; the more the institutions of Christendom crumble, and I include here Western theological institutions, the more we must be transformed by the stranger, the immigrant, the diaspora, the so called "Other."

What I have heard from those who have participated in this colloquium is an invitation to those of us shaped by Western thought and European-centric theology, an invitation to be transformed by our encounter with the Global South. It is the invitation, at its core, to invite the one who is perceived as

3. Margaret Mead, *Culture and Commitment: A Study of the Generation Gap* (Garden City, NY: Published for the American Museum of Natural History, Natural History Press, 1970).

foreigner to touch our hearts. It is the gospel invitation to greet Christ who comes to us as stranger on the road. Ruth the Moabite, the Samaritan. The colonizers sent missionaries to teach and convert; but can the colonizer learn from the colonized? What might that look like at a time when more and more of our students are recent arrivals from Global South? Can our teaching and our institutions be transformed by the blessing of Mmadu and Ifunnaya, by the pedagogies of the poor, by theologies Asia, Latin America, and Africa? How can we begin to learn what we don't know we don't know?

The question I struggle with at this point in our broken relationships is how to move from the principles into the weeds, that is to say, into the details where we encounter the complexities. Let me suggest a few examples.

In learning circles and courses, I hear participants from Zambia, Kenya, Cameroon, or the Philippines asking leaders and pastors from Canadian mainline churches, "Where are your youth? Where are your children? Why are you letting your churches die?" They are deeply troubled by what they experience as lack of passion, lack of passion for the Gospel, lack of willingness to risk, lack of engagement with our community, lack of nerve.

"How could you let your dying empty churches obscure your view so that you cannot see-feel-touch-experience Christ in your midst?" "Do you experience Good News, and if so, why are you reluctant to share that with others?"

I struggle with the complexity of this question, knowing that we cannot simply transplant things that work in one context and culture into another. I also know of many United Church congregations that are being revitalized from within, as Christians from the African diaspora, often francophone, plant new communities of faith within traditionally White anglophone congregations. Sometimes parallel worship services happen in two or three languages. Sometimes one worshipping community begins to evolve to embrace hybrid and intercultural forms of worship practice, faith experience and theology. Our church is being transformed by those who arrive as foreigner-neighbour.

In a seminar a few weeks ago, two African students reflected on how culturally and personally burnt-out Canadians seem to be, struggling with overwork, anxiety, fear, stress, overload, drowning in a sea of information. "What is going on in this society that seems to be so rich and yet is such a mess?"

Good questions. No simple answers.

Educational institutions that receive students from the Global South are aware of the difficulty students have finding a path through the entrenched racism of Canadian immigration, the excess cost they will bear, the racism they will encounter once they arrive, and the challenges they will face as they adapt to the codes and norms and hidden curriculum of the White Western academy.⁴ I can explain that the academy considers knowledge to be a commodity, something that is be privately owned and must be credited. But I cannot explain *why* this is so. How did knowledge come to be privatized? In another worldview, wisdom belongs to the whole community, carried through culture and story.

Some codes lie buried like snares in course assignments. "Write a journal entry," really means "talk about your personal experience, give your own opinions, talk about yourself." An exegesis task asks for a student's own opinion; a student tries to give the professor the right answer they think is expected. But that is not the assignment. We talk about a globalized twenty-first century, but our syllabi and reference lists rarely or barely reflect that reality. Those who can and will transform our curriculum, our pedagogy, and institutions, are sitting in our classrooms right now, struggling to adapt to a model of theological education still enacting colonial hierarchies.

4. Philip W. Jackson, *Life in Classrooms* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1990).

In class we discuss Paulo Freire's work to transform the relations of colonial education into relationships of justice and justice-making.⁵ We consider how a pedagogy of the oppressed lifts the objects of colonial education to become subjects, agents of God's transformative power, and how this pedagogy still enlivens the work of social transformation in Canada. A student asks, "Is that liberative pedagogy transforming our churches?" And together, we try to understand why it is not.

I believe that the future of theological education in Canada, and our capacity to form leaders able to bring the gospel good news to our own context, resides in our capacity to be transformed from teachers into learners, to decolonialize own minds and our institutions and to continue to learn from the stranger how to listen from the heart.

For this we need to inhabit a parable. Who is our neighbour. How might we be transformed by the one who comes to us as the foreigner?

5. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed [New ed.]* Continuum Impacts - Changing Minds. (London: Continuum, 2004).

Bibliography

- Crossan, John Dominic. Parable, allegory, and paradox, In D. Patte, *Semiology and parables: Exploration of the possibilities offered by structuralism for exegesis*. Pittsburgh, PA: Pickwick Press, 1976.
- Crossan, John Dominic. *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus*. 1st ed. New York: Harper & Row, 1973.
- Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed [New ed.] ed. Continuum Impacts Changing Minds*. London: Continuum, 2004.
- Hall, Douglas John. *The End of Christendom and the Future of Christianity. Christian Mission and Modern Culture*. Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996.
- Jackson, Philip W. *Life in Classrooms*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1990.
- Mead, Margaret. *Culture and Commitment: A Study of the Generation Gap First ed.* Garden City, NY: Published for the American Museum of Natural History, Natural History Press, 1970.
- Scott, Bernard Brandon. *Re-Imagine the World: An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus*. Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 2001.