

Valerie E. Michaelson and Joan E. Durrant eds., *Decolonizing Discipline: Children, Corporal Punishment, Christian Theologies, and Reconciliation*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2020. 280 pages. ISBN 978-0-88755-865-8. \$31.95 paperback.

*Decolonizing Discipline: Children, Corporal Punishment, Christian Theologies, and Reconciliation*, edited by Valerie E. Michaelson and Joan E. Durrant, is the kind of collection that one might balk at suspiciously at first glance. Certainly, it would take more than a spoonful of intellectualizing to dull the first emotional sensation any Indigenous Studies scholar might feel when seeing the themes of Christianity, child corporal punishment and reconciliation clumped together in one title. Understandably guarded as I was to pick up this book, bracing oneself against the grander mission of the anthology – a measured first pass at responding to Call to Action #6 on repealing Section 43 of the Criminal Code which justifies corporal punishment of children – can mute the high frequency notes of criticism that this wide array of secular and non-secular intellectuals have earnestly contributed in the spirit of reconciliation. I do not choose the word *spirit* lightly but I suppose, in meeting *Decolonizing Discipline* in an era of the recovery of unmarked individual and mass graves of Indigenous children at church run schools, one does not intend to handle the subject lightly either.

*Decolonizing Discipline* is broken into four sections, each with a principle objective that coheres the collection. Section one aims its sights on Call to Action #6 and repealing Criminal Code Section 43 through its attending institutions and cultural protectorship; section two is shouldered by the theologians armed with their analytical knives sharpened for scripture; in section three, Indigenous caregivers take over and offer nourishing alternatives to raising children; and in section four we get to reconciliation.

The confrontation staged in *Decolonizing Discipline* is not between the reader, no matter how cross and ready to fight, and the subject matter but rather the Christian Church and its regressive theologies. For that reason, I cautiously rolled through the opening declarations, dedications and drawings, and decided ultimately I would read each contribution on its own and with an open spirit as a witness to the intellectual class of the Christian Church working through their own pathological drive to deliver obedience through pain and how that impulse permeates through colonial law, behavior, and culture.

The TRC Commissioners gave every Canadian, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, a tremendous gift when they wrote *The 94 Calls to Action*. How we each handle and cherish that gift is deeply personal. Having said that, it strikes me that even the greatest gifts can deliver, like *Decolonizing Discipline* has, rather uncomfortable scenes of contrition, self-reflection, and psychological process that are probably more appropriately confined in church confessionals or interred in the dusty stacks of the seminaries than laid out in a work of critical thought. But unmasking theologies that provide safe harbor for punishing, violent, and problematic behavior is an important mission, nevertheless.

One sentiment that might serve to stand in as a prevailing theme for every chapter in the collection is that of easy justifications. Each chapter in the collection drives headlong at the paper thin protection of all the excuses violent people, especially violent people protected by the cloth,

the badge, the ruler, or the state, used and continue to use as tools of easy justification for hitting Native kids. Indeed, the tools that make it remarkably easy to justify hitting kids at all seem so flimsy under the scrutiny of these social workers, social scientists and Indigenous intellectuals. Much of the second section is spent unpacking Christian values where theologians take their turns at exposing the easy justifications in the Bible specifically.

Unfortunately, theologians when switched to analytical mode can tend to sound overly prescriptive and aggressively rhetorical. Sit long enough inside a junior level theology course because you're trying to impress a Catholic Métis girl and your radar for that kind of intellectualizing gets pretty sharp. Section two of *Decolonizing Discipline* made my radar go haywire. It is a raucous display of intellectual gymnastics, nimble in its semantics and colorfully performative in its explicative rhetoric. Yet, moralistically, a consensus amongst each author seems to form: although the Bible in its various passages and chapters might advise corporal punishment of youth, there are tools within the Bible that can encourage alternative behaviours. Perhaps the goal is a counterfeit paraphrase of Hon. Justice Murray Sinclair's declaration that "Education got us into this mess," but rewritten so that it reads, "The Bible is what led us to hitting kids, but it will be the Bible that leads us to a non-violent future." It does feel like maybe that is wishful thinking.

A breath of Arctic fresh air finally sails into the collection when we arrive at Shirley Tagalik's (Inuit) chapter "Inunnguiniq: Inuit Perspectives on Raising a Human Being." Like the day the Arctic Ocean finally freezes over in the fall, Tagalik's chapter gives the book stable footing to stand on from an Indigenous perspective. Rich in Inuit worldview, harvesting teachings and traditional knowledge from Inuit elders and thinkers, Tagalik carves out an ethic of restorative and rehabilitative Inuit justice for managing problematic behavior in youth and across society. Inunnguiniq as an ethic is holistic and patient. As a pedagogy it is compassionate, and as a corrective to colonialism it is a potent antidote. Tagalik nestles the fruits of her substantial Indigenous research inside a story of Inuit cultural transmission, about a grandmother who teaches while sewing. Tagalik's chapter is as if someone dropped a net which has been handed down for generations by an Inuit family into the deepest trench of Indigenous health research, and pulled up 100lbs of plump Arctic char in the form of incredible Inuit insights on youth mental health and development. Tagalik gives *Decolonizing Discipline* perhaps its tastiest morsels, and is the chapter the entire collection could derive its usefulness from.

Lastly, *Decolonizing Discipline* wraps the project with a working manual of resources to help move along reconciliation and entice a paradigm shift amongst faith groups who may be holding onto child corporal punishment too tightly. These put a bow on an emotional rollercoaster of a read that leaves readers with something useful to take away and a feeling that perhaps things can change theologically at least, if not culturally right away.

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