In the Biblical letter to the Romans, Paul goes through some mind-bending contortions about what he wants to do in the freedom offered by Christ and what sin actually does through and to him despite any strength of will or good intentions—to the point that Paul declares he does not understand his own actions, eventually driving him to cry, “Who will rescue me from this body of death?”

The discipline of repentance lies at the heart of the Christian life. It is essentially the willingness to look at one’s own actions, desires, and movements in the world (as Paul does) and to state plainly: “these are not as they should be.”

Lament, too, lies close by. In the face of the magnitude of wrongs done, lament recognizes that setting things right does not necessarily mean seeking personal restitution for having been wronged yourself. Rather, it is the persistent commitment to drag overshadowed (or overshadowing) wrongs into the light of day and name them before the Lord: things are not as they should be.

Implicit in both these acts is the call to change. So in light of the past year, ICS is making a sustained effort to examine how we might repent of and lament increasingly prevalent issues of systemic racism, and how we might learn to see, think, and act otherwise moving forward. Each of the authors in this issue of Perspective models such moments of learning along their educational journeys—at various times, delving deeply into the difficult territory of calling their own prejudices to account, grappling with the unintended (and built-in) shadow sides of the very tools they and others use to engage with their communities and the world around them, and shaking off a status quo unduly protected by sociopolitical systems and institutions.

Most of these pieces share an air of beginning—of exploring new territory, taking on new habits, finding new language—but begin they do. And by beginning, these authors share a glimpse into how things could be.

Danielle Yett
Some time ago, before the Black Lives Matter movement rose to international prominence, and well before the May 25, 2020 police killing of George Floyd shocked the world, a PhD student at ICS asked me why our courses failed to confront the question of systemic racism more directly. “ICS is really good at addressing issues of gender equality and discrimination,” he flatly surmised, “but we’re really bad on race.” I must admit I had no good answer for him at the time. I reflected on the courses that I teach and asked myself how many racialized thinkers I included in my syllabi. Off the top of my head, I could count only one essay by W.E.B. Du Bois as required reading in my Pragmatism and Religion seminar. Not good. Then I recalled an earlier moment when Cal Seerveld stopped by my office with a copy of a poster from 1968 advertising a Chicago event sponsored by the AACS, ICS’s parent organization, which highlighted keynote speakers from the NAACP on the topic of a Christian response to systemic racism. What had happened to ICS in the meantime, I wondered? ICS seems to have followed a trend in democratic societies after the civil rights era, in which the issues of systemic racism and white supremacy gradually lost prominence in public discussions that were largely controlled by a white majority. But the killing of George Floyd (in addition to the raft of other murders of racialized minorities that filled the news cycle in 2020) disturbed our dogmatic slumber. Like many
other educational institutions, we drafted a statement denouncing the killing and the systemic racism that lay behind it. But we also promised ourselves and our supporting community that we would take a deep, hard look at our own silent complicity in sustaining an entrenched system of oppression and marginalization.

Personally, I took the opportunity to reflect on what I could change in my own teaching practice. Given the challenge we at ICS had just put to ourselves, I decided to forego my regularly scheduled seminar on Paul Ricoeur, and instead offer my Pragmatism and Religion seminar, this time highlighting the profound and prophetic scholarship of the leading Black intellectuals in that tradition whose work my course had heretofore so woefully neglected. So now I find myself researching what is essentially an entirely new seminar devoted to the work of Du Bois, Cornel West, Eddie Glaude, and Denise James.

Now that I am engaging the scholarship of these thinkers more deeply than I ever have in the past, I am coming to an altogether different understanding of an intellectual tradition in which I had considered myself somewhat of an expert. This has been a needfully humbling experience. What struck me immediately in the work of these thinkers is the strain of tragedy and lament—which West simply calls ‘the blues’—that their work introduces into a tradition otherwise known for its optimism and can-do spirit. Basically, my research has made me aware that I had been largely ignoring the voice of suffering in this tradition, a voice that was always there for me to heed if only I cared to listen. And now that I am no longer ignoring that voice, my understanding of this intellectual tradition and its relevance for our contemporary religious self-understanding has been both deepened and transformed.

Perhaps the most profound lesson these thinkers have taught me is about the deep and troubling historical relationship between white Christianity and white supremacy. In the extreme, of course, the hateful scourge of white supremacy reveals itself in such groups as the KKK and the Proud Boys. Yet its tentacles reach much farther and deeper than these fringe movements, creating a cultural context in which it has been perfectly fine and not strange at all for a Christian professor such as myself to ignore the important contributions of racialized thinkers to a thought tradition in which they actively participate.

Why did my Christian convictions not prevent my inaction and perpetuation of injustice from the start? Du Bois helps me answer this question in his essay “The Souls of White Folk.” Reflecting on the failure of white American Christians in his day to uphold the impartial and inclusive justice to which scripture calls all people, he flatly concludes: “A nation’s religion is its life, and as such white Christianity is a miserable failure.” That statement hit me between the eyes, and I knew from the moment I read it that I should not attempt to dodge, deflect, or refute it, but rather to let it sink in, and lament the fact that, sadly, such a criticism is all too true all too much of the time.

In his earlier collection of essays, The Souls of Black Folk, Du Bois persuasively argues that we must respect the emotional, intellectual, and spiritual longings of Black people because “the rich and bitter depth of their experience, the unknown treasures of their inner life, the strange rendings of nature they have seen, may give the world new points of view and make their loving, living, and doing precious to all human hearts.” This too is a phrase that I wish to tarry with and let sink in. I now pray for such a heart within myself—one that considers precious the loving, living, and doing of those myriad voices that systemic white supremacy had led me to ignore.
I grew up in the town of Newmarket, Ontario and attended the Christian Reformed church a couple blocks from my home. I loved attending the girls club there. Each week our head counsellor would ask us, “What does the Lord require of you?” and each week we would respond in unison, “To do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God. Micah 6:8.” The question and answer were good, but I now realize that recitation did not automatically lead me to confront the social injustices that were happening around me and in the wider world.

Today, as an educator of other educators, I am called to instill the truth of this verse into the lives of my students (and their students) while also helping them find meaningful ways to act on this call to justice, mercy, and love toward each other. I often start by reminding my students that they are created in God’s image, emphasizing that, as God’s image bearers, we can celebrate who God has made us to be as well as explore the world in which God continues to be at work. Now, we talk a lot in education about celebrating and appreciating the differences of one another, but the scope of that is often unintentionally limited to celebrating differences in people’s talents and academic abilities, while people’s cultural differences get swept aside. But valuing difference can’t be just a pick-and-choose matter or something added on top. It has to be thoroughly integrated in our practices.

In their 2016 Global Education Monitoring Report, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) challenges educators throughout the world to teach students how to be global citizens. The goal is to ensure, by 2030, “that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote... human rights, gender equity, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development.” This is a call for all learners, Christians included, to be transformers of society by seeking justice for those who are marginalized and disenfranchised.

Such “global education” pedagogy aims to teach students the values, skills, and behaviours needed to thrive in a world that is both diverse and interconnected—and in classrooms with a wide array of students sitting side
by side. But there is a significant difference between teaching global education that frames global phenomena and current events as happening in other parts of the world, and teaching global education that attends to what is happening right here. The phrase “think globally and act locally” is often used in global education to address this difference, encouraging students to share their own backgrounds as a way to see things from different perspectives, learn from one another, and recognize that real change happens when we start with ourselves.

Let me share two examples from my own experience to illustrate different shapes this can take. I know of a school that had many Korean children attending as international students. In a practice that was commonplace in schools until not long ago, these students were forbidden from speaking Korean at school, both in the classroom and out in the playground, in an effort to encourage English language-acquisition. But actively prohibiting these students from speaking their native tongue singles them out and can make them think “Oh, my language is bad.” When it’s not. It’s just different. In fact, research now shows that students being able to speak in their native tongue is actually important socially and emotionally. It will not keep them from learning their second or third or fourth language, and celebrating diverse languages as a school shows students that we value their whole selves.

Here is another smaller, but no less significant, example. There’s a teacher I know who, rather than defaulting to a presumed “common” celebratory snack on special classroom occasions, would instead encourage his students to bring food that they felt represented their own ethnic background. This turned a celebration into an opportunity for his students to share something meaningful about themselves and say: “This is what my family makes when we want to celebrate.”

These examples point to a way in which I might better think globally and act locally in my own practice: by listening even more carefully to the diverse voices of my own students as I prepare them to address issues of equity and justice. As I write this article, students in my MA-EL course, Deeper Learning: From Wonder to Inquiry to Practice, are working on projects in which they are designing curricula to create intentional connections between what their own students are learning in the classroom and how those students can take action based on that learning. The teachers in my class are considering educational approaches like service learning (which combines learning goals with community service) for students and teachers to work together to identify real world problems and examine ways they can respond.

As teachers and students come together in these ways, with different learning interests and challenges, as well as with different life experiences, genders, and ethno-racial backgrounds; the fullness of God’s image is put on display. I see this as just one way in which our identity in Christ can provide the framework for building signature pedagogies that foster interconnectedness as the body of Christ, and that call each of us to participate in God’s redemptive story...
Since my arrival in Toronto from Colombia almost 15 years ago, my life as a professional, a scholar, and a human being has been marked by the need for translation. It wasn’t long after enrolling in an undergraduate program in philosophy in Canada when I realized that, if I wanted to belong and succeed, I needed to do much more than learn the language of instruction and hone the craft of a philosopher. My concerns, questions, and hypotheses needed to undergo an incessant translation process before appearing in public; otherwise, they would seem out of place and, on occasion, simply unintelligible. Years of practice have helped me understand that this exhausting and thankless process had, in fact, very little to do with language barriers. It was about my ability to render my thoughts audible in a fundamental way to most of my instructors and colleagues.

But I wasn’t alone. In every classroom there were a few individuals sharing my fate. I remember with particular clarity the very few who were exceptional at translating in the sense to which I am alluding here. More often than not they were English-speaking female and racialized classmates that excelled at speaking the normative language of our field—a language that was as foreign to them as it was to me. Unfortunately, I was not aware of any of this at the time. It is only in retrospect that I am able to catch a glimpse into the anxiety and urgency hiding beneath their prudent and moderate philosophical articulations of things like injustice, suffering, and violence. It is only in retrospect that I can point to the translation tools I borrowed from them—and that have allowed me to survive in this profession so far. And it is only in retrospect that I think of their journeys—and not only of mine—as plagued with a burden of translation imperceptible to most.

Although at ICS I have been extremely fortunate to find colleagues and mentors who have made consistent efforts to meet me outside of their comfort zones, translation continues to be unavoidable for me. One of the most paradoxical aspects of this process is that the very same upbringing that I am gradually off-loading in order to secure some level of philosophical fidelity is the origin of the urgency of my translation task. This points to my focus in this piece: that is, not the translational burden that I have described but the compromises it engenders. It is absolutely clear to me that such a translation process represents the loss of some of the integrity of the message I originally intended to convey and, with it, of the person who I was at the beginning of this journey. Is any of it retrievable? Should I even spend time attempting to do so?

Like the rest of the contributors to this issue of *Perspective*, the events that have reshaped our physical, political, intellectual, and imaginative worlds over the last few months have given me pause. In my case, this circumstantial *epoché* has afforded me an “opportu-
nity” to reflect on my own integrity as a philosophical apprentice. It has made me painfully aware that I have forced—and continue to force—myself to leave behind aspects of my background to make my existence in this new realm more graceful, more efficient, more recognizable as philosophy. As my translation strategy becomes more robust, I have become more and more capable of blending in, of fading into the background of conversations, and of avoiding concerns that are too situated, too practical, too applied, and therefore not “really” philosophical. But the limited success I have had on this front has come at great cost.

Has my profound desire to belong in the philosophical community made me abandon key aspects of my original call as a scholar? Have my efforts to blend in made me even more complicit in the systems of oppression whose sheer existence drove me to seek philosophical alternatives in the first place? What circumstances allowed me to look away from concrete expressions of injustice, particularly of racial injustice, and turn to ways of philosophizing that are in themselves oppressive, exclusionary, and violent in their attempts to universalize? These are a few of the questions with which I am wrestling at the moment, not only in this writing but in my philosophical work. Having been shaken by the events of 2020 like so many others, I have decided to stare directly into the void in my own intellectual life—which I created in my desperate desire to be understood—and to reflect on what I have done to myself and others in the process. Opening this space for lament has already proven invaluable, as in the silence of my reflection I have been able to hear the voices of all those who, with similar backgrounds and experiences to mine, have already struggled through these questions and generated alternative visions, languages, and ways of doing philosophy otherwise.

One of the voices that has come to the fore in this listening process has been that of Colombian philosopher María del Rosario Acosta, who has dedicated a significant part of her professional life to lending a philosophical ear to the survivors of the Colombian armed conflict. Through her “grammars of listening,” Acosta attempts to make “audible (and, at least to a certain extent, politically and strategically legible) those lives designated as... impossible (as unbelievable) by traumatic and colonizing forms of violence.” Refusing to reduce her findings into existing philosophical categories, Acosta opens up a space for philosophical reflection beyond its traditional contexts and language, through the impossibility of the life of the colonized, racialized, and marginalized body of the conflict survivor.

Acosta’s is only one of the multitude of voices that populate philosophical spaces at the margins of the Western world. Radically opposed to the flawed approach of translation that has characterized my own philosophical journey, thinkers like Acosta continue to develop alternative ways of doing philosophy at the margins, finding authentic strategies to communicate their work to the rest of the philosophical world and maintaining their integrity in the process. My call in this process is to remain attentive to these voices and reimagine my work in light of the trailblazers who I have silenced along the way.

Race, Philosophy, and Complicity
DECOLONIZATION AND AN ETHIC OF CARE: AN INTERVIEW WITH MATAU SETSHASE
Matau Setshase: I am a junior researcher at the Unit for Institutional Change and Social Justice at the University of the Free State in South Africa. Originally, the Unit had methods of intervention around social justice issues that we eventually realized were going to be impossible to achieve without first seeking institutional change. So most of the work that we do now is about institutional transformation, about changing the aspects of the institution that need to change. Especially things like names, spaces, symbols. For instance, the project we are working on now is changing the names of buildings because some of the names still come from the Apartheid era. So the names need to change because students from all backgrounds need to feel that they belong in their spaces, and they need to feel that they have a stake in the conversation.

Practically speaking, what I can tell you is that it’s a difficult process and it can’t start at the top. You can’t just take off an old name and put a new name onto a community’s building. It’s a long road of proposing, revising, and piloting policy; and the university community needs to own the process for itself. My Unit approached the problem by first proposing policies for how to change names of buildings and procedures for going ahead with the change. Once that was done, there was a pilot study in which the people who actually live or work in the building would drive the process. For instance, last year we piloted the name change of a student residence. The whole process was driven by the students themselves, and we only came in to assist. The students did the educational pedagogy around the figures after whom the buildings were named. That’s just an example of what we do.

What first drew you to the work you do at the university? What kinds of questions did you think an academic path would help you find the answers to? And what questions do you find yourself asking now?

As an undergraduate, I got a degree in philosophy. At that time I was driven by the question: What is a good life? At first, I thought philosophy would give me the answers. What it did instead was give me even more (and better) questions. By learning to ask these better questions, what eventually led me to shift my attention to social justice was this realization: with philosophy, I was able to see what a good life should look like in theory, but I was not seeing much of it in my actual communities. So my move to social justice expanded my first question into a series of more pressing questions: What is the meaning of life? Are the people around me living good, meaningful lives? What can I do to improve that? How could I help to alleviate suffering? Those were my new questions.

Now what keeps me up at night? Well, my daughter is six years old. Sometimes, when we go out, we will meet people who live on the streets and she’ll ask: “Mommy, why are people sleeping on the
Are there nevertheless ways in which you think you can bring about change through your work? In particular, in relation to the South African context, what do you find to be life-giving about the work that you do?

I think what is life-giving and what is challenging about my work is more or less the same. I am a young scholar and there are opportunities because there is a lot to do. This means that there are possibilities for transformation, that there is room for creation, for scholarly innovation. That is what is giving me life. Now, the challenging part is that our knowledge structures—our higher education system—in South Africa is still very much colonial. Being young and embracing decoloniality as a praxis means that I have run into a lot of walls from many academics. For a couple of decades there has been dialogue about decoloniality. We have hosted conferences, colloquia, and seminars about decoloniality. However, there has been a failure to translate those efforts into curricula, into pedagogy, into educational praxis. Many South African academics see decoloniality as a scholarly fad, while for me it is a life-long praxis, whether it is in my private life, in my academic life, or in my reading of the Bible.

Here’s what’s happening in South Africa at the moment: I don’t know whether it’s global but there seems to be a reactionary impulse to harken back to the time of colonialism, to defend all things colonial. I’ll give you an example. A friend of mine was using decoloniality as a framework for his thesis, but his study leader insisted that he write on the positive aspects of colonialism. If my friend had not written about the positive sides of colonialism, he would not have received his degree. And that is something that happens a lot. Those are the lingering effects of colonialism in our universities, which are very protective of their history, whether their history was harmful or not. If I were to lecture on decoloniality—if I were to begin the decolonial educational praxis—I would invite people who would not be welcomed at the university. I would want to teach people who I would drag from the margins, the most vulnerable in society, those to whom I would want to give a message of hope, of love, of justice—the widows, the orphans, and so forth.
I was unhappy with African philosophy and its lack of definitions. So I started breaking it down, asking: Who is African? Who is Indigenous (South African Indigenous people’s status had been in question)? Do Indigenous Africans know they are Indigenous? What do they know? I was interested in how Africans are capable of knowing—of developing and creating knowledge. So I ended up asking what African Indigenous knowledge was and whether it still exists. There are a lot of definitions of Indigenous knowledge, but my problem became the dispossession and oppression of Indigenous people. I realized we cannot understand Indigenous knowledge without directly confronting the wounds and the ruptures that colonialism and oppression inflicted on Indigenous knowledge.

That’s why my dissertation is a decolonial project. I started looking into the 1913 Land Act, where Black people were dispossessed of land. 70% of them were removed from land they already occupied so it could be given to white people. This tells me that if there was an already existing knowledge, that knowledge was uprooted. So we have to admit that South African Indigenous knowledge is uprooted knowledge, vulnerable knowledge, knowledge that was interrupted. Then there’s a 1927 policy from the South African government which regulated and controlled the native populations, prohibiting the practice of any African Indigenous knowledge. Because of this prohibition, Indigenous knowledge was not transferred from generation to generation. It was interrupted. It was outlawed. I think people don’t go deeply enough into what it means to be decolonial. Decoloniality, when you look at Indigenous knowledge, means to acknowledge and wrestle with this interruption, this uprootedness, this grief.

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I’ve tried to think about that, but I can’t come up with an answer. What I can tell you is that there are two primary social imaginaries in South Africa at the moment: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (whose success is now being questioned) and the Rainbow Nation (where South Africans come together under one umbrella, whether Black, white, or Indian). So, I think that we cannot have a single social imaginary. I think there should be multiple social imaginaries that cover differences, that cover vulnerability, and that embrace community bonds against capitalism, imperialism, and neo-colonialism. I think it was anthropologist Rita Segato who said capitalism cannot co-opt the intimate community bonds we form with each other; it does not know how to commercialize them. I’m not talking about bonds over social media or bonds over money. I’m talking about bonds between community members where an ethic of care is the driver.
ON RACE AND PROPERTY
Recently I have been asking myself: how does one write a PhD dissertation on property (as I am) without also somehow treating issues of race and colonialism? Although this is not what my project started out as, the connections between the concept of property and the injustice of racist and colonial legacies were always apparent to me: for example, land expropriations from the First Nations by the European settlers, or the enslavement of Africans by colonists thus rendering them objects of property. But what if such instances of gross inhumanity were not just accidental to modern property laws? What if the concept and operations of property emerged right alongside and directly through colonial and racist modes of appropriation? What if our contemporary understandings of property—whether as things, or as rights to things, or as relationships between people by way of their rights to things—are somehow unavoidably enmeshed in a political, cultural, and economic system of white supremacy? What if racial categorization itself defines the very core of the idea of property as the right to exclude?

Such questions are powerfully explored by legal scholars like Cheryl I. Harris in her seminal 1993 *Harvard Law Review* article “Whiteness as Property,” and (following in Harris’ footsteps) by Brenna Bhandar in her 2018 book *Colonial Lives of Property: Law, Land, and Racial Regimes of Ownership*. Their analyses make for a sober, if not grim, read.

In her article, Harris convincingly demonstrates that racial identity and property are deeply interrelated. She argues that through a process of social construction, whiteness as a racially superior category evolved into a form of property. At the core of slave economic relations are propertized Black bodies: the racial line demarcating whites (who could not be enslaved) and Blacks (who were presumed to be slaves) “facilitated the merger of white identity and property.”

While the legal property regime—slavery—converted Black bodies into objects of property, another key property concept—possession—was weaponized in the settlement and seizure of Indigenous land. As Bhandar puts it, the “colonial encounter produced a racial regime of ownership that persists into the present, creating a conceptual apparatus in which justifications for private property ownership remain bound to a concept of the human that is thoroughly racial in its makeup.” Bhandar’s distinct contribution is to further argue that “legal forms of property ownership and the modern racial subject are articulated and realized in conjunction with one another.”
If the histories and definitions of racial, colonial, and property categories are somehow co-implicated by having emerged in a cross-referential way, then racism and colonialism are far from incidental to modern property regimes. In fact, the opposite is the case: the route to the heart of modern property lies through racist and colonial histories and their contemporary effects.

As I said, this is not what I originally thought my dissertation would be about. As a recovering property lawyer, I was interested in contemporary Protestant theories of justice and how those theories treat the question of property. Justice and property belong in the same conceptual space, but recent theories on justice seemed to have relegated the property question to specialists: lawyers or economists. I thought of my project as a way of connecting the rarefied discussion of political philosophers and theologians about justice with that of property specialists.

However, the deeper I dug into the property question the more eclectic sources that emerged. As David W. Opderbeck, a commentator on “Christian thought and property law,” indicates in his essay in the book *Christianity and Private Law* (2021), the “dominant concepts of private property in Anglo-American property law trace their roots to sources that include the Westphalian settlement of the wars of religion, the Calvinist work ethic, the English Civil Wars, the Scottish Enlightenment, British Mercantile capitalism, and the entrepreneurial fervor of the American Great Awakenings.” Intermixed with race and the (post)colonial experience, Anglo-American property law also provided a key part of the ideological bulwark against the totalitarian threats of the 20th century. And in our day, as Opderbeck points out, “elements of the Christian right have aligned themselves with libertarian rhetoric that exalts property rights as the fundamental pillar of society, while other streams of Christianity emphasize a ‘prosperity gospel’ that views wealth as a key sign of God’s blessing. At the same time, elements of the Christian left... have aligned themselves with movements that at their extreme edges sometimes advocate the forcible redistribution of private property.”

Where does all this leave my project? In brief, I am still processing.

In the meantime, the community of scholars here at ICS has long recognized that concepts—especially social science concepts like *property*—are contestable (for example, Lambert Zuidervaart in his ICS inaugural address titled “Earth’s Lament: Suffering, Hope, and Wisdom”). One’s view of justice will inevitably inform the concept and politics of property. Hence, my project is still worth pursuing: the intrinsic connections between justice and property must be spelled out. The Christian community was established for the sake of its corollary, the world. Those who were called out—forming the *ekklesia*—were charged to *care for* those at the margins, including the squatters, trespassers, homeless, refugees, outlaws. In contrast, racist and colonial practices marginalize—that is, *exclude* the ones at the margins from the relationship to the owners. We cannot care for those we are not already in relationship with, and neither can we be in relationship with those marginalized by the exclusionary logics of racial and settler superiority.
When I began my teaching career as a newly minted graduate of a Catholic college’s art education program, I was eager to start my new position as parish-school art teacher for the Archdiocese of New York. I loved God, art, and kids. What could possibly go wrong?

Well, it was the fall of 1999, and then-Mayor Rudy Giuliani threatened to ban a work by British born artist of Afro-Caribbean descent Chris Ofili from the Brooklyn Museum. According to Giuliani, the painting “The Holy Virgin Mary” (1996)—which received city funding—was an “insult to Catholics” because it contained elephant dung as well as a depiction of Mary as a tribal Black African woman. Now, I believe one of the advantages of an art education is that it has the ability to expand the horizons of a learner, allowing for the appreciation and understanding of new (and not-so-easy to decipher) imagery from cultures different from our own. So it quickly became apparent to me just how little cross-cultural art history awareness and sensitivity lay at the heart of this firestorm.

Surely there was work to be done in assisting students, faculty, as well as parish clergy, to unpack images such as the one by Ofili—who identifies as Catholic—and to learn how to apply principles of aesthetic judgment across cultures. Even in a city as ethnically diverse and artistically saturated as New York, cross-cultural art appreciation can be a tricky business. So given my first-year teacher status, I wondered: “Just how well can I balance such a delicate topic and still keep my job?”

I began by inviting conversations with students in order to consider contextual meanings at play in many works of art. My aim was to model ways of safely exploring artistic meanings as a community of learners and truth seekers. I was careful not to be too critical because I was aware that the students had very little experience in this arena, and (much like myself) they were working within white, middle-class Christian
communities who received their Eurocentric art and religious traditions as singularly authoritative.

Then, on September 11, 2001, my mettle, as well as the mettle of all New Yorkers, was tested in a much more difficult and dramatic way. On that clear and sunny day, I was teaching art at St. Margaret’s parish school, a predominantly Irish immigrant parish school in the Bronx. When we heard the news, we needed ways to cope and to address our worst nightmare come true: so many friends, neighbors, and family members were killed or died while rescuing people at the towers. After the initial shock and collective unity wore off, tensions began to heighten, and our faculty grew concerned about the potential fallout, particularly towards our Muslim, and Arab Christian students, as well as our Jewish Yeshiva neighbours. As Catholic school teachers we had a religious mandate to teach the love of Christ, to model forgiveness, and to oppose violence in all of its...
forms—particularly in the form of irrational retaliation against perceived or imagined enemies.

As the school’s art teacher, I was able to supplement the religion and social studies teachers with a unit on Islamic decorative arts and architecture, and I worked together with our Arab and Muslim students to create and share their artwork in a special student art exhibit. As a result of our collective efforts the rest of the student body rallied protectively around these students, recognizing that they too were victims and that they remained the same friends and neighbours with whom they studied and played before that difficult day. Later that year, I introduced a “redesign the Twin Towers” architectural design competition and the student art works were amazingly imaginative. The process was, above all, therapeutic.

Today, in my current position as Director of Christian Education at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church and School, I continue to use art as a primary vehicle through which Bible and religious education lessons are either responded to or taught. During the month of February, our exclusively white parish joined together with a neighbouring predominantly Black parish to offer joint online Sunday school sessions. We saw this as an opportunity to build bridges in light of the U.S. Episcopal Church’s Presiding Bishop Michael Curry’s challenge to seek racial reconciliation and healing. Again, working collaboratively as educators, we presented images and stories about the important contributions of Black Episcopalians and Anglicans from the world-wide communion. Students from both parish church schools participated, in defiant recognition of the saying that “Sunday morning is the most racially segregated hour in America.” We were able to temporarily bridge the gap and to start making plans for future collaborations with students, parents, and clergy from both congregations.

Last spring, I began planning with members of our local community arts council and youth bureau to create a special youth-designed Black Lives Matter mural (with which we hope to move forward once public health regulations permit). As I anticipate this project and consider my own teaching journey, I have learned over and over the power of art to help and to heal, to reveal, and to “mediate” in the very best sense of the word. Moving beyond our own reflexive and reactive aesthetic judgments (which are often embedded within our own familiar experiences and comfort zones) enables us to be more thoughtful and sensitive when we approach art outside of our own lived experience. This takes time and practice, but it is surely an important goal of art education—particularly in our present global era.
“Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who is the fairest of them all?” again and again asks the Queen in Snow White, insecure and all alone. Before narcissistic vanity or obsession with control (the character flaws of which she is typically accused), what could have been the reason that pushed her towards the mirror in the first place? What is revealed through her interaction with the magic mirror invites us to paint a more complex picture. Perhaps we can imagine an outsider queen. Perhaps she was born in a foreign land where exercise of sorcery is not stigmatized as evil practice. Upon entering the kingdom, however, she was probably asked to abandon her old habits, lest she be vilified and ostracized. ‘Fair price to pay for the comfort and power I will have in the palace,’ she could have thought, gladly assimilating to unfamiliar customs of the kingdom. But alas, soon widowed and left without much political support base, she found her whole identity reduced to a new role she is demanded to perform—a caretaker of the beloved princess, the royal blood, whose snow white skin is the object of everyone’s adoration. “Who am I?” The queen asked herself. Rendered a stranger to herself, she now lacked her own terms to evaluate her self-worth in this new dominant culture she was placed in. Her beauty, her sole personal asset considered valuable in the palace, was being appraised and validated by the others, independent of her views. Isn’t it ironic, then, that it was her very own magic mirror—one thing still left of her previous individuality—that she started using as a tool for this external evaluation? “Mirror, mirror, who is the fairest of them all?” The queen had become one of them to herself. Caught up in a state of paralysis by the internalized dominant gaze of the other encroaching her, the only resort left for her was to find her meaning by seeking constant validation from the outside and placing herself in the logic of competition.
In the first chapter of Richard Wright’s *Native Son*, a novel set in the racially segregated society of 1940s Chicago, the male protagonist named Bigger Thomas finds himself standing in front of another type of mirror, a movie screen. “Goddammit, I’m always broke!” Immediately after making this abrupt remark, Bigger goes to see a movie. The narrator says that “his senses hungered for it” because “in a movie he could dream without effort; all he had to do was lean back in a seat and keep his eyes open.” There on the screen he would see newsreel images of affluent white people lying down on the beach, followed by exotic images of naked Black men and women whirling in wild dance in the movie. Laura Mulvey’s work, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” published in 1975 in the British film journal *Screen*, extends psychoanalytic theories of Freud and Lacan to discuss two types of erotic pleasure involved in the experience of watching a film: one is what Freud calls *scopophilia*, pleasure in making others the object of our gaze, and the other is pleasure in identifying with an ideal image on the screen, much like Lacan’s theory of the mirror stage. If the movie screen is a mirror upon which society’s subconscious collective desire is projected, can Bigger feel either type of pleasure from the mirror he sees? Not really. He could not identify with either the white bodies leisurely bathing in the sun or the Black bodies dancing before the white gaze. Nor could he consume either spectacle with an objectifying gaze, not necessarily because he was denied access to do so in real life, but more importantly because the very image presented to him on this mirror was a product of somebody else’s narrative formation in which Bigger had absolutely no role to play. “Where am I?” Bigger asks himself. If it was a mirror, it was one that reflected his invisibility, his non-existence in his own native land.

The two types of mirror in the stories told here may sound obsolete. We no longer live in the world where the magic mirror defines our objectified worth and the dominant voice behind the movie screen dictates what we should desire. We might think that everyone’s uniqueness is safeguarded in the world where plurality of voice is celebrated, difference is respected, self-actualization is encouraged, and decentralized education driven by individual students’ self-initiatives is promoted. We might feel relieved. But really? We live in the world of the non-hegemonic hegemony of Netflix and YouTube! In the sea of content produced by creators of assorted cultural and geographical backgrounds who participate in the storytelling that emphasizes inclusion and diversity, there is yet another mirror being formed—at the nadir of our personal accounts, the mirror that we call suggestions made by an algorithm. What is being suggested to you? *That’s you!* An important question to ask in front of today’s new mirror would then be: “Why are you watching/hearing/learning what are you watching/hearing/learning? Are you happy with your reflection in the mirror?”

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