



Leadership Calgary February Book Club / Discussion Topic

FEBRUARY BOOK CLUB

When: Wednesday, February 17, 2010

Time: 5:30 – 7:30 pm

Where: Volunteer Calgary Library, Kahanoff Centre – 2nd Floor (1202 Centre St. SE)

Cost: Free of charge for everyone!

Registration: Roopa Khanna at rkhanna@volunteercalgary.ab.ca or (403) 231-1402

Large Scale Failures of Humanity & The Human Venture

Human progress depends on our will and ability to learn from the failures of humanity. Genocide is a large-scale failure of humanity that we have not yet eliminated. Vowing 'never again' is not enough. To successfully prevent genocide, we must understand its roots in a convergence of circumstance, human nature, power politics and culture. While the subject is deeply troubling, something that many people would rather not think about, anyone seriously concerned about the future must be prepared to look at this aspect of humanity without flinching, and work on its implications for collective learning and action.

Large scale failures of humanity are not disconnected from everyday experience, they are larger versions of the small-scale failures of humanity that run through much of everyday life. The patterns of thinking behind injustice, indifference and cruelty are scalable. Barbara Coloroso explores these patterns in her book, where she links the dynamics of dominance and aggression seen in school-yard bullying with the genocides of the 20th century. This might seem like a huge leap at first, but her case is well reasoned and fits well with the Human Venture framework.

Richard Rubenstein's book goes deeper into the roots of genocide, moving past the simplistic explanations of ethnic hatred and criminal leadership. He tracks the roots to narrow rationality, limited responsibility, depersonalization, and the inability of most people to comprehend the forces at work in society. He does not see these limitations of conscience, imagination and meaning making capacities as anomalies, but as by products of modern civilization and institutional structures.

Romeo Dallaire's experience as commander of the UN observer force in Rwanda, the ensuing existential struggles he has endured, and his book "Shake Hands With The Devil" should be familiar to most Canadians. I recommend reading the chapter on Rwanda in Samantha Power's book. "A Problem From Hell" before reading "Shake Hands With the Devil".

Chris Hedges book provides a clear and compelling picture of how the experience of war creates a downward spiral that destroys higher-level imagination, conscience and meaning making capacities.

During this discussion we will be exploring the roots of evil in human nature and what we are learning about what it takes to contain and move beyond it. Toward this end, a number of further study books have been recommended.

Primary Recommendations

- “Extraordinary Evil: a Brief History of Genocide” by Barbara Coloroso; Viking Canada, Toronto 2007
- “The Cunning of History: The Holocaust and the American Future” by Richard Rubenstein; Perennial, Harper-Collins, 1978, 2001
- “Shake Hands with The Devil; The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda” by L. Gen. Romeo Dallaire, Random House Canada, 2003
- “War is a Force that Gives Us Meaning” by Chris Hedges, Public Affairs, New York, 2002 [Now available in paperback]

Further Study – General

- “A Problem From Hell” America and the Age of Genocide” by Samantha Power, Basic Books, 2002 [now available in paperback].
- “Genocide, War Crimes and the West: History and Complicity” edited by Adam Jones; Zed Books, London 2004

The Holocaust

- “Approaches to Auschwitz: The Holocaust and Its Legacy” by Richard Rubenstein and John Roth; Westminster John Knox Press, 2003
- “The Holocaust and History: The Known, The Unknown, The Disputed and the Reexamined” edited by Michael Berenbaum and Abraham Peck; United States Holocaust Museum, Indiana University Press, 1998
- “The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939 - March 1942” by Christopher Browning; University of Nebraska Press and Yad Vashem, 2004
- “Into That Darkness: An Examination of Conscience; Based on extensive interviews, an unprecedented portrait of Franz Stangl, Commandant of Treblinka - the largest of the five Nazi extermination camps” by Gitta Sereny; Vintage Books - Random House, 1983
- “Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil” (Penguin Classics 2006) by Hannah Arendt and Amos Elon
- “Of Blood and Hope” by Samuel Písar; Macmillan Publishing, 1980

Rwanda & Africa

- “Genocide in Rwanda: Complicity of the Churches?” edited by Carol Rittner, John Roth and Wendy Whitworth; Paragon House, 2004
- *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda* by Mahmood Mamdani; Princeton University Press, 2002
- “Machete Season; The Killers in Rwanda Speak” a report by Jean Hatzfeld, Farrar, 2003. translation published by Straus and Groux, New York, 2005
- “Genocide in German South-West Africa: The Colonial War of 1904-1908 and Its Aftermath” by Jurgen Zimmerer & Joachim Zeller, Translated by E. J. Neather; Merlin Press, 2003

Detection, Responsibility & Response

- “World Report 2010 (Human Rights Watch World Report)” Seven Stories Press (to be released February 1, 2010, 2009 Reports available)
- *"Complicity with Evil": The United Nations in the Age of Modern Genocide* by Adam LeBor; Yale University Press, 2008
- *"Responsibility to Protect"* by Alex J. Bellamy; Polity, 2009
- “The Responsibility to Protect: Ending Mass Atrocity Crimes Once and for All” by Garath Evans; Brookings Institution Press, 2009
- “The Responsibility to Protect: Ending Mass Atrocity Crimes Once and for All” by Gareth Evans; Brookings Institution Press, 2009
- “Not on Our Watch: The Mission to End Genocide in Darfur and Beyond” by Don Cheadle & John Pendergast; Hyperion, 2007
- “The Responsibility to Protect: Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty”, International Development Research Center, Queens Printer, Ottawa, 2001

Further Study – Human roots

- “The Science of Good & Evil: Why People Cheat, Gossip, Care, Share, and Follow The Golden Rule” by Michael Shermer; Henry Holt & Co., Times Books, New York, 2004
- “Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View” by Stanley Milgram; Perennial Classics, New York, 2004 [first published 1975]
- “The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil” by Philip Zimbardo; Random House, New York, 2007
- “Moral Man & Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics” by Reinhold Niebuhr; reprint by Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville Kentucky, 2001, originally published in 1932