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As I prepared to write this chapter, I was haunted by a line from one of Walter Brueggemann's eloquent prayers, a prayer of longing for the coming of God's kingdom amid our experience of violence and suffering. "We are people grown weary of waiting," Brueggemann writes. "We dwell in the midst of cynical people, and we have settled for what we can control."[1] Here is one way of articulating the failure of hope: settling for what we can control.

Control is, of course, not a bad thing in itself. I take Brueggemann here to be questioning the kind of control that seeks to close the horizon of possibility so that life, and the people with whom we share it, can be manipulated for our convenience. Such control suggests presumption, yet, as Brueggemann suggests, it can arise from a kind of giving up, a surrender of riskier hopes in favor of manageable routines. I offer three examples to illustrate how such a descent might inhabit teaching.

The first is a moment many years ago, when I was teaching French and German at an urban secondary school in England. Social and economic needs among the school population were high, reading levels were low, student capacity for sitting still in classrooms was modest. I was also working for a Christian nonprofit on a curriculum project. One day, during a rare moment of respite, I sat in the resource room with my department chair and explained what I was trying to

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[1] Walter Brueggemann, *Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth: Prayers of Walter Brueggemann* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 149.

change in my teaching.

I was struck by the consumerist bent of the standard course materials. Young language learners were asked to spend much of their time talking about eating and shopping, hobbies and travel, cinemas and restaurants. The scenarios they were expected to rehearse typically implied a level of affluence that was beyond the experience of many of my current students. As we laboriously chipped away at the language skills needed for asking foreigners for things while traveling, our efforts were punctuated by the defensible protest that "I am never going to go to France."

The curriculum project in which I was involved focused on ways of fostering moral and spiritual development across the school curriculum.[2] French and German were part of the school curriculum, so I was spending a great deal of time wondering what moral and spiritual development would look like in a language classroom. Our writing team developed a range of approaches including teaching units that invited learners to explore the life story of an elderly refugee, examine the motives of a student resistance group in Nazi Germany, listen to teenagers from Burkina Faso discussing their views on truth telling, and more.[3] The team approached language skills with the hope that more than language could be learned, that at the same time as gaining academically and linguistically, students might listen to strangers, reflect on interpersonal ethics, or consider the possibility of sacrifice for a just cause.

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[2] See John Shortt, "The Rationale of the Charis Project," in *Spiritual and Religious Education*, ed. Mal Leicester, Celia Modgill, and Sohan Modgill (London: Falmer, 2000), 160-70.

[3] See, e.g., David I. Smith, "Teaching (and Learning from) the White Rose," in *Critical Essays on Resistance in Education*, ed. David M. Moss and Terry A. Osborn, Counterpoints: Studies in the Postmodern Theory of Education (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 67-82.

Now I sat in the resource room with my department chair and showed her drafts of the new materials. I explained the stories and said a little about the successes and challenges of my first experiments with my students. After listening for some time, she sat back and declared the material was much better than what she was doing in her classroom—more meaningful, more compelling, more educational. She also rejected the idea of ever being able to use it herself. It was enough of a challenge to get the students to comply with learning, she explained. If she came to class with something that really mattered to her, and the students still rejected it, she would be devastated. The risk felt too great. Better to settle for a degree of control.

A second example caught my attention more recently, when my wife asked for a Spanish grammar book for Christmas. When it arrived, I began reading the introduction. The opening sentences are as follows: "Grammar is one of the most difficult (read: boring!) parts of learning a language. Unfortunately, it's something that cannot be left on the sidelines or learned as an afterthought."[4] Two sentences into the text we are told that the topic is difficult, that difficult is equivalent to boring, and that all of humanity finds grammar to be devoid of interest, but it's sadly necessary to learn it.

This opening gambit may be reaching for empathy, an attempt to articulate concern for less motivated learners and an admission that not everything teachers find fascinating will automatically thrill their students. Yet I think it achieves cynicism. I know you don't want to learn and the material is inherently tedious, it says, but I still have to teach. Perhaps if I position myself alongside you in your disaffection, I can at least buy some solidarity. Let's settle for getting through this.

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[4] Frédéric Bibard, *Spanish Grammar for Beginners: The Most Complete Textbook and Workbook for Beginners* (San Bernardino, CA: MyDailySpanish.com, 2019), v.

My third example is quite recent. A few months ago, I provided professional development for faculty from various disciplines at a Christian university. I presented some of the things that I will discuss later in this chapter, talking about ways to design teaching and learning processes that meet academic goals but also aspire to something more. One example (discussed later in this chapter) focused on building a mutually accountable community during a course, creating concrete ways for students to care for one another while also enhancing one another's learning. An attendee later described to me a colleague's protest that their course was already so full that they could not possibly make room for accountability in small groups. The social and logistical pressures on teaching are all too real. One convenient response is to settle for content coverage.

These are relatively mild failures of virtue. I chose them precisely because they are ordinary moments, not dramatic collapses. They are routine capitulations to the stresses of the teaching environment. Avoiding such capitulations is not easy. As Brueggemann's prayer says,

We are people grown weary of waiting.

We dwell in the midst of cynical people,

and we have settled for what we can control.

There are many factors in teaching that the teacher cannot control. We cannot control the context in which schooling happens or the ways that context impinges upon our work. The pandemic and the stresses of tribalized political discourses that often have schools in their crosshairs added to the pressures of an already difficult job. We often cannot control the processes by which larger institutions of which we are part make teaching feel less authentic, less rewarding, more bureaucratic. We cannot control the range of emotional and behavioral responses that students bring to our classrooms.

In an article titled "Love and Despair in Teaching," Daniel Liston draws upon a short story

by Andre Dubus to evoke the peculiar despair that can arise from rejection:

> She had stopped teaching because of pain: she had gone with passion to high school
> students, year after year, and always there was one student, or even five, who wanted to
> feel a poem or story or novel, and see more clearly because of it. But Emily's passion
> dissolved in the other students. They were young and robust, and although she knew their
> apathy was above all a sign of their being confined by classrooms and adolescence, it still
> felt like apathy. It made Emily feel isolated and futile.[5]

Liston says teaching is most vulnerable to this kind of despair when rooted in a "romantic" love, a love rooted in our own enjoyment of learning and talking about our subject area and a yearning for students to affirm and share our enjoyment. We need, he suggests, an "enlarged love" that extends beyond our own need to be heard. We need a love ethically grounded beyond the self and capable of being sustained through suffering if we are to sustain hope in the classroom.

The challenge here has to do with more than attrition. Doris Santoro, for example, draws a useful distinction between burnout and demoralization. Burnout arises from intensifying responsibilities and demands. Demoralization has more to do with moral sources of dissatisfaction. In Santoro's words, it "derives from teachers' inability to enact the values that motivate and sustain their work."[6] It "signals a state in which teachers can no longer access the

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[5] Andre Dubus, "Dancing After Hours," quoted in Daniel P. Liston, "Love and Despair in Teaching," *Educational Theory* 50, no. 1 (2000): 84.

[6] Doris A. Santoro, *Demoralized: Why Teachers Leave the Profession They Love and How They Can Stay* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2021), 43.

moral sources of satisfaction that made their work worthwhile."[7] Santoro presents a series of

case studies of demoralized teachers, focusing on ways in which school or state policies placed

them in positions where they did not feel they could do the right thing for their students, or

where the behavior of school leadership eroded their sense of dignity and competence.[8] Their

responses vary. Some dig in and protest or disobey. Others put their heads down and follow the

rules, cutting corners as necessary, joining those who seemed content with the unreflective

demands of a prescribed routine.

Santoro notes that "teachers who come to their work with significant moral purpose or

those who operate with a strong sense of professional ethics are more likely to experience

demoralization than teachers who have a more functional approach to their work."[9] When we

raise the moral stakes of teaching, we are more likely to feel the pain of falling short. Available

defense mechanisms include settling for routines of efficiency, covering the material,

downplaying potential, talking up the shortcomings of students, and aiming only for what we

know we can most often compel them to do. Hope for more seems elusive and potentially

painful.

Teaching as Hope

By way of contrast, I turn to a characteristically helpful little essay titled "The Peculiar Hope of

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[7] Santoro, *Demoralized*, 49.

[8] Santoro stresses that while burnout may be something that the individual can ameliorate through lifestyle changes, demoralization is often fed by systemic issues beyond the individual's control and is a pointer to the need for changes at a larger scale.

[9] Santoro, *Demoralized*, 53.

the Educator" by Nicholas Wolterstorff.[10] He begins by offering a summary of Aquinas's delineation of the nature of hope in the *Summa Theologica*.[11] I cannot beat it for succinctness and so quote it here in full:

> Hope, says Aquinas, is a special form of desire. It is unlike *fear* in that the object is a good of some sort—or at least something that the agent regards as a good. It is unlike *joy* in that its object is a future good, whereas the object of joy is a present good. It is unlike the desire for small things in that, in Aquinas' words, its "object is something arduous and difficult to obtain." We do not "speak of anyone hoping for trifles which are in one's power to have at any time." And it is unlike *despair* in that "this difficult thing is something possible to obtain: for one does not hope for that which one cannot get at all."[12]

As he weaves together the threads binding hope to teaching, Wolterstorff goes on to argue that "aiming to teach someone is inherently an act of love, specifically, an act of benevolence."[13] He is not simply saying that the act of teaching should ideally be accompanied by benevolence or love toward our students. The point is that benevolence is intrinsic to the nature of teaching. To aim to teach is to aim at enhancing a good in the lives of students; seeking to enhance goods in

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[10] Nicholas Wolterstorff, "The Peculiar Hope of the Educator," in *Foundations of Education: A Christian Vision*, ed. Matthew Etherington (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014).

[11] In citing this generalized account, I do not intend to invoke the full machinery of Aquinas's account of the dynamics of human emotions and theological virtues.

[12] Wolterstorff, "The Peculiar Hope," 120.

[13] Wolterstorff, "The Peculiar Hope," 122.

others' lives is an act of benevolence. This also means teaching involves hope. The act of teaching entails hoping that the good being sought will be realized. Loss of hope may show through if we habitually shy away from seeking difficult goods or settle for controlling small things.

It follows that those who aim at nothing more than presenting the material are, in Wolterstorff's stark evaluation, "not teachers; they are not trying to teach."[14] He reaches this conclusion by focusing on the triggers of our disappointment. If the aim is presenting the material, disappointment will arise if something prevents us from getting to the end of the material; the aim is merely to have enough time to finish, to feel as if we covered everything.

But if our aim is to teach someone, to bring about the desired change in their learning, then disappointment is tied to the failure to achieve the intended good in the life of the student. Teaching is inherently about seeking the good of others. Presenting the material is not inherently so. Coverage and teaching have different disappointments and therefore different aims. A loss of hope may therefore manifest itself precisely in the form of allowing coverage of the material to become the dominant goal.

Let's consider this idea of teaching as seeking various goods in the lives of others. Does every kind of good that students might experience need to be sought by the teacher with equal energy? Fear that every good should be heartily addressed can animate the common modern desire to severely curtail the list of goods that it might be proper to address. It may be suggested that we can aim for improvement at math or understanding of Shakespeare or marketable skills, but that the pursuit of moral or spiritual goods is not the teacher's job—that the academic calling is to train the mind, not to provide moral or spiritual formation. As Stanley Fish puts it, we

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[14] Wolterstorff, "The Peculiar Hope," 123

should save the world on our own time and leave the classroom to focus on mediating

disciplinary content and skills.[15]

Such cautions are driven by reasonable concerns, including the risk of indoctrination, the

downsides of an educational savior complex, a concern for the rights of parents, and a worry that

educational settings are easily subverted by group agendas extrinsic to learning. There is more

here than I can begin to address in this essay (or even if I were given boundless time and space).

For present purposes, however, I observe that it is normal, perhaps even unavoidable in complex

human activities, to be driven by some focal hopes and goods and yet still hope for and act to

realize a whole range of goods at once.

Suppose, by way of illustration, someone opens a paint factory near where I live. Suppose,

over time, it becomes apparent that culpable failures of investment and management led to the

factory polluting the local water supply, with damaging health consequences for people living in

the area. If the factory leaders are brought to account, it will not suffice to say "but my proper

purpose is to manufacture paint and make money; environmental well-being and community

health are not my job." We can properly hold the leaders responsible for their impact on a wider

set of goods, not just for whether they fulfilled their central purposes.

Those wider goods do not supplant the factory's focal purpose, nor do they confer

omnicompetence. No one expects the factory to abandon the paint business and become a

conservation program. We are unlikely to reason that because the process of paint manufacture

can have health consequences, the factory managers should take over running the local clinic.

But none of this implies that the wider goods are irrelevant to the making of paint. Those wider

goods should be actively hoped for, with corresponding planning and investment, by those who

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[15] Stanley Fish, *Save the World on Your Own Time* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

make paint. The wider goods become part of what makes the paint-making good.

So with teaching. Our focal goal may be to teach chemistry. It does not follow that in doing so we have no impact on other goods. Nor does it follow that we have no responsibility to do what is within our power to work toward the realization of other goods. We can be held responsible for all of the effects of our teaching. More than one way exists to teach any given matter; we have choices to make. Those choices will say something about our hopes, which are related to the particular goods in which we want to invest. I hope to show that this is so by turning now to more concrete depictions of teaching practices rooted in specific hopes.

Hope and Community

In the interests of hastening our journey from philosophical considerations to the habits of the classroom, I propose to narrow our focus to one kind of good for which the Christian tradition has nurtured hope. It is not the only one, but it is quite central and will serve as a place to focus our attention here. What Paul called "the hope of the glory of God" (Rom 5:2) involves more than the possibility of salvation for individuals. The working of grace includes incorporation into a new kind of community grounded neither in individual self-assertion nor in kinship-based solidarity. Redemption involves the building of disparate people into a new body, a new temple, a new fellowship. One pithy summary of what is now to be both hoped for and practiced can be found in section 26 of the Westminster Confession:[16]

All saints that are united to Jesus Christ their head, by His Spirit and by faith, have fellowship with Him in His graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory: and, being

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[16] A document produced by the 1646 Westminster Assembly to serve as a confessional framework for the Church of England. See e.g. www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/westminster-confession-faith.

united to one another in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man. Saints, by profession, are bound to maintain an holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God, and in performing such other spiritual services as tend to their mutual edification; as also in relieving each other in outward things, according to their several abilities and necessities.

The hope expressed here is that in Christ we might live out of and into a form of human community in which our commitment to one another does not arise from sharing the same gender, politics, musical tastes, ethnicity, or neighborhood, but is built upon God's choice to welcome us in Christ. Such a hope entails active responsibilities and practices: we are "obliged" to the "performance of duties," with the content of those duties being whatever contributes to the mutual good.

This vision of community includes shared "worship" and "spiritual services," but it does not stop there. It includes "relieving each other in outward things," things both "public and private." The hope is not primarily that we will enjoy congenial company, but that we will commit ("obliged," "duties," "bound") to one another's good. The ground is neither our personal inclination nor our ability to secure and control the desired outcome, but the prior commitment to our collective good enacted and being completed in Christ.

Such a passage is, of course, a terse summary of more textured biblical and theological sources. We could refer back, for instance, to Galatians 5 and 6, where Paul affirms that "the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love" (5:6 NIV). The series of contrasts that Paul then draws between indulging the flesh and walking by the Spirit are disproportionately

focused on the ability to dwell together in love. The pattern of "not," "so," and "however" in these chapters pits mutual service and love of neighbor against various forms of self-preoccupation and hostility. "Therefore," he concludes, "as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people" (6:10 NIV). As John Barclay notes in a detailed discussion of this passage, the focus on mutual service here is not merely an ethics section appended to the central theology, but rather describes the necessary expression of the gift of Christ worked out in the "creation and development of communities governed by new values and norms."[17]

We could also turn to broader theological sources. Dietrich Bonhoeffer emphasized a contrast between our dream of experienced community and the actual community called into being in Christ. He emphasized that "Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. No Christian community is more or less than this. . . . We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ."[18] If we allow this ground to be replaced by our romantic visions of friction-free fellowship, Bonhoeffer warns, we are likely to quickly become disappointed with the actual people with whom we have been placed in fellowship. They will fall short of our dream. Despair at the failure of our romantic longings will be expressed in indignation. Before long we will become their embittered accusers.[19]

Each of these sources, with many others like them, expresses a hope for a community of mutual edification founded in mutual care and service. At first blush, it seems that in sketching

[17] John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Power of Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020), 64.

[18] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible*. Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, vol. 5, trans. James H. Burtness and Daniel W. Bloesch (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996).

[19] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 34-35. For examples of application of Bonhoeffer's account of community practices to teaching, see David I. Smith, *On Christian Teaching: Practicing Faith in the Classroom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018), 97-113, and the literature cited there.

this hope, we drifted away from the affairs of the classroom. The hope in these sources is theological. It reaches toward God's agency in creating a new humanity in Christ. This is not something to be secured by better teaching strategies.

Yet these theological sources do not speak as if affirming the necessity of grace or the primacy of God's agency entails quietism. Instead, they articulate a realism about the work entailed and a call to express hope in active labor. We should seek to do good "as we have opportunity," wrote Paul (Gal 6:10).

Such an understanding is also reflected in various Christian confessions. For example, the Westminster Confession urges us to consider the active "duties" that we become bound to perform because of our having been united in Christ. As the Belhar Confession puts it, our reconciliation to one another is "both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ; that through the working of God's Spirit it is a binding force, yet simultaneously a reality which must be earnestly pursued and sought," with the proviso that "unity can be established only in freedom and not under constraint."[20] Hope is meant to lapse into neither self-gratifying yearning nor feats of control; it is meant to ground patient practice pointed toward what has been promised. Theological hope creates a horizon toward which our mundane hopes and worldly energies are to be pointed.

This focus on dependent duties suggests that it is not at all improper to ask how our hopes for the classroom might intersect with this endeavor. What kind of educational practices might prove consistent with hoping for the "difficult thing" of living toward this kind of community, while remaining focused on the importance of more quotidian learning goals and avoiding both

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[20] *The Belhar Confession*, Reformed Church in America, at www.rca.org/about/theology/creeds-and-confessions/the-belhar-confession/, 2

romantic dreaming and cynical control?

Leaning into Community

I have been thinking for some years about how to structure my classes to emphasize *communion in one another's gifts and graces* and the hope for a life together grounded in the gift and obligation of seeking one another's good. I began to make this explicit in my course syllabi. Here is one example from a course on world language pedagogy:

> Learning to think deeply entails paying attention to and learning from those around us. The best teaching does not grow out of solitary reflection. This course will therefore include an emphasis on collaboration. Success means not just getting your own tasks done but helping those around you to become better learners and teachers, so that more of the needs of their future students will be met. This is an important way in which you can begin to serve those students now as well as honoring the gifts and needs that each other participant brings to the class. As we work at collaborating on transformative educational practices, we will have opportunities to try to do *justice* to the ideas of others, exercise *patience* with their learning process, offer our own ideas with *humility* (which means not thinking too highly of ourselves but also being willing to share ideas openly). Our goal is not to win arguments. It is to figure out how teaching languages can be a work of love.

Including such prose in the syllabus could easily be little more than romantic aspiration, especially if the syllabus is broadcast to students for passive consumption and followed by business as usual. If, however, the syllabus can be turned into what Quentin Schultze calls a

"covenant syllabus,"[21] one that articulates a shared rule of life that is negotiated with students and includes expectations for the instructor, it can become an initial orientation to hopeful practice. The syllabus is not merely a communication of boundaries to students. It is an initial public commitment on my part to fostering the kind of teaching and learning practices that might make such language impinge upon our work together.

One way that I have approached grounding the syllabus themes is to explicitly structure interaction around mutual care. On the first day of the semester, I begin with an activity that focuses not just on students introducing themselves to me, but on them learning something about one another.[22] A week or two later, when the cognitive demands of the first days have settled a little, I introduce the idea of accountability groups. I assign students to groups of four (or the best approximation based on class numbers). These groups are intentionally not based upon affinity networks, though I do sometimes find it helpful to base them on shared vocational trajectories (such as an intended teaching career focus in terms of subject or grade level). I communicate explicitly my reasons for not forming friendship-based groups. These groups are an opportunity to explore a less individualistic learning culture and to work at an active commitment to another's good that responds to grace rather than preference. I ask group members to commit to small, achievable ways of seeking one another's good, providing examples to prompt imagination. If one group member does not show up for class, the others should be the first to notice and to contact that person to offer help or class notes. If one group member begins to

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[21] Quentin Schultze, *Servant Teaching: Practices for Renewing Christian Higher Education* (Grand Rapids, MI: Edenridge Press, 2022), 74.

[22] I elaborate on this in David I. Smith, *Everyday Christian Teaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2024). I describe another example of such an activity in detail in Smith, *On Christian Teaching*, 14-26.

struggle academically or personally during the semester, others should notice and see if they can offer support or nudge them toward me or relevant student services. If we are heading into demanding phases of the semester, such as midterms, that might be a good time for an encouraging word, a supporting prayer. The actions chosen should not be ones that unreasonably increase the workload, nor should they be efforts to impress. They should be small ways of leaning into the awareness of others as recipients of grace.

To avoid this exhortation becoming one more airy aspiration, I check in with students at intervals and provide regular learning activities that draw the group members into interaction. About once a week a learning activity asks the group to collaborate. The task might be a brief discussion based on a shared core reading supplemented by each group member reading a different additional piece and sharing what it could add to the group's understanding. It might focus on weighing a key idea from class and submitting a joint paragraph summarizing the group's reactions and questions.

I am, however, mindful of two potential obstacles. Students live in varied locations and have complex schedules, so tasks requiring lengthy meetings outside class will be disproportionately burdensome. Students also describe to me a common tendency for their teachers to assign group projects focused on product rather than process, resulting almost inevitably in the work being divided up and assembled at the last minute, making the group activity essentially a series of parallel solo projects but with the added stress of relying on others' promptness.

With those obstacles in mind, I focus the tasks on processing ideas together and keep the time necessary to complete them down to fifteen or twenty minutes, with time, if needed, assigned in class. This is not the only group configuration. Other class activities create space for

students to learn with and from those outside their group. I offer periodic reminders that we are seeking ways for every class member to experience being supported by at least three others, rather than leaving successful learning to the varying strength of each person's networks and abilities. This means we are seeking a way in which each class member can commit to serving those around them regardless of how deserving they seem. Like the content of the class, this is something we will work at together, confessing when we fall short and periodically revisiting our progress. At the end of the semester, I debrief with students in focus groups.[23]

This is not a technique for fixing students' failings or ensuring academic success. I work to frame it to students as an invitation into intentional practice, practice that may go well or poorly, practice that must be open to grace, the kind of practice that pushes back a little against the ingrained patterns of our formation and invites us to hope for and perhaps live into more than what is familiar. It adds minimal time to my teaching load, and I find that it contributes to rather than subtracts from the time spent learning course content.

Most of my students are Christian. Over the years that I have been doing this, I have found students generally willing to embrace the practice and appreciative of its rationale. That does not mean instant harmony. Last year one student wrote eloquently at the end of the semester about how she could work more efficiently and get better grades alone, and it made life more convenient to do so. Yet she concluded that by the end of the semester she realized perhaps the most important thing she learned at university that semester was what she could gain from working with others.

This is, of course, just one student's experience, but it is suggestive of the proper arc of

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[23] See David I. Smith, "Reflections on How to End a Semester," *Christian Scholars Review Blog*, December 2, 2020, at christianscholars.com/reflections-on-how-to-end-a-semester/.

sustained practice. This kind of practice is a leaning in the same direction over time, a gradual and partial living into hope for supportive community in response to the promises that ground such a hope.

Building Toward Community

I turn to the classrooms of my colleagues in the natural sciences for a second example. The lone genius in a warren of arcane equipment may be a recurring media trope, but science is not typically done alone. Teams of scientists with varying disciplinary tools and concepts, as well as the usual range of human differences and failings, need to function well together to get complex scientific work done. The recently established field of the Science of Team Science investigates how such collaboration flourishes and founders.[24]

Rachael Baker and Amy Wilstermann, science faculty at Calvin University, decided to explore how the Science of Team Science might connect with the practices of intentional Christian communities. Through interviews and site visits, they identified practices that seemed to play a constructive role in enabling such communities to function. Those practices included hospitality, humility, learning together, self-reflection, gratitude, silence, and rest. Identifying these as practices, rather than as values or aspirations, enabled a bridge to science classroom practices and the creation of science courses framed by intentional relational practice.

Wilstermann writes that "equipping students with an understanding of the collaborative nature of science helps them to recognize and value the individual contributions of team

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[24] See, e.g., Daniel Stokols, Kara L. Hall, Brandie K. Taylor, and Richard P. Moser, "The Science of Team Science: Overview of the Field and Introduction to the Supplement," *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 35, no. 2 Supplement (2008): S77-S89.

members who bring a variety of skill sets, insights, and experiences to their work."[25] Baker and Wilstermann developed an instructional process that included discussion of what each practice means, opportunities to experiment with the practice, and then discussion of its effects on learning and belonging. Each of these phases was important for the learning process.

Take humility as an example. Julie Yonker, a psychologist who helped evaluate the project, describes how the process began with discussion of what we might mean by humility in a science lab and what behaviors might be related to it.[26] Those behaviors might include asking for help instead of pretending competence, listening to others with the expectation of learning from them, and being honest and realistic about one's capacities.

In a Christian classroom, the context for such behaviors includes awareness of our creaturely dependence and our call to charity toward others. Once shared understanding is established, students are asked to select a practice from a number of alternatives and focus on pursuing it for a week. For instance,

- At least once a week during class (either as part of the whole class or during a small group discussion), ask a question to the professor/teacher or a peer about something you don't understand.

- Admit when you do not know something, do not understand something, or do not know how to do something (do not pretend to have knowledge or abilities that you lack).

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[25] Amy Wilstermann, "Building Thriving Science Laboratory and Classroom Communities," *Christian Educators Journal* 62, no. 1 (October 2022): 10-13, p.12.

[26] Julie E. Yonker, "Could Humility Be the Heart of Our Classroom Communities?," *Christian Educators Journal* 62, no. 1 (October 2022): 21-24, p.22. There are relevant discussions to be had here about how procedural definitions of humility relate to thicker theological definitions; for present purposes I am merely noting how a particular faith-grounded hope, however expressed, can inform teaching.

- Admit mistakes when they occur, rather than hide/ignore them.

- Ask for help when you need it.

- Display patience when others ask for help, or admit they do not understand something, or tell you that they have made a mistake, recognizing that these acts require humility (and courage).[27]

Next, students were invited to reflect on their experience of the practice and its effects on their learning, using questions such as these:

- Was this practice comfortable or uncomfortable for you? How did it change your experience in the classroom/lab?

- Why is humility important in community?

- Is humility a virtue that is valuable in leaders?

- Are there limits to the value of admitting mistakes, acknowledging lack of knowledge?

- Does humility have a place in competitive settings? If so, what does humility look like in an environment where prestige and recognition matter?[28]

Preliminary data gathered from students suggest gains in intellectual humility as well as gains in terms of regular science learning.[29] Student reflections convey something of their own perceived growth. "When looking back at my experience in the classroom, humility changed my

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[27] Yonker, "Could Humility Be the Heart?," 22.

[28] Yonker, "Could Humility Be the Heart?," 23.

[29] See also Julie E. Yonker, Adrienne R. Pendery, Christopher Klein, and John Witte, "Relational-based Christian Practices of Gratitude and Prayer Can Positively Impact Christian College Students' Reported Prosocial Tendencies," *International Journal of Christianity and Education* 23, no. 2 (2019): 150-70.

orientation from me-focused to group-focused," wrote one. Another reported: "I also noticed that I was a happier person while intentionally practicing humility. The prideful mentality is a heavy load to carry while being a college student."[30] A third noted that "being humble has elevated my learning experience because now, I get the chance to hear other people's thoughts and ideas as well as how they have come to their conclusion."[31]

Such student comments hint at how intentional relational practices might enhance rather than compete with the conventional task of learning science. As one instructor noted, "a classroom of humble individuals also creates efficiencies in how a classroom or team functions, namely, students are more willing to ask questions and be vulnerable in their learning which makes it easier for the teacher to address areas of confusion, thereby saving time."[32] Pursuing the goods of mutually supportive community enhanced the ability to work well with others, listen well to others, communicate clearly and honestly, and request and receive input from their collaborators.

Here we bump once more into questions of hope and control. The findings reported so far from this experiment suggest that the common faculty instinct that sees investment in formational goals or intentional relational practices as time stolen from covering the course material is a misperception. A faith-informed hope for *more* need not compete with getting things done. At the same time, the focus on virtues such as humility and hospitality seems likely to become self-undermining if such virtues come to be seen as merely instrumental for

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[30] Yonker, "Could Humility Be the Heart?," 24.

[31] Rachael Baker, "What Faith has to Offer Science," *Christian Educators Journal* 62, no. 1 (October 2022): 3-4, p.3.

[32] Yonker, "Could Humility Be the Heart?," 24.

improving the efficiency of science instruction.

This tension is not unusual, however. It seems we can turn just about anything, prayer and worship included, into a routinely managed substitute for genuine hope and dependence on grace. Yet turning away from such practices is not the answer. Does the framing vision for a course involve the pursuit of *communion in one another's gifts and graces* in light of what Christ promised and accomplished? Or is it merely a quest for variables affecting course coverage? The answer matters. It matters what kind of hope frames the habits.

Practices of Hope

I suggest the practices described above are best framed as efforts to lean hopefully into teaching as an act of benevolence. Those who invest in such practices dare to seek goods deeper than content coverage and test scores, and they dare to imagine that the larger and smaller goods can be pursued together rather than being approached as a zero-sum game. These practices are examples of educational habits that are "unlike the desire for small things," focusing instead on matters that are "arduous and difficult to obtain" and yet "possible to obtain."[33] As habits of hope, they seem to me to live in a space between at least two undesirable options. One is the despair that might lead us to perceive the complex humanity of students and the breadth of Christian hope as obstacles to efficient performance and to settle for routinely controllable learning outcomes. The other is the airy optimism that might see us treating goods such as community and humility as matters for exhortation and aspiration in the classroom yet failing to invest in intentionally and patiently sustained practices and shared narratives that might support their growth.

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[33] Wolterstorff, "The Peculiar Hope," 120.

Especially in our current pedagogical culture, practices like the ones described here could be misread as attempts at control, attempts to secure the goods envisioned in New Testament and confessional language through the application of pedagogical technique. We might then be replacing the hopes characteristic of Christian eschatology by educational fixes, which could in the end be one more way of settling for what we can control.[34] After all, the Scriptures and confessions ground the hope of a new community in Christ rather than in good lesson planning.

Furthermore, if the hopes described here turn into one more technique of control or into romantic visions of unfailingly harmonious classrooms and virtuous students, by raising the stakes of teaching through the naming of larger goods we may be inviting a fresh despair. As Santoro noted, those with the grandest ethical visions may often become the most demoralized.

Another story, however, is possible. That story would read practices like those described here not as techniques of behavioral manipulation, but as narratively framed ways of inviting students into hopeful practices and exploring the complex consequences for students' overall growth and self-understanding. It would note (like the theological sources touched on earlier) that grounding hope in God's gracious intervention and invitation to a new way of life does not negate the validity of intentional or even confident efforts to live toward that hope. As James K. A. Smith puts it, "hope differs from a guarantee, even though it is also characterized by a certain confidence."[35] Living out of that confidence, we should "make every effort" to add goodness to

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[34] See Richard Bauckham and Trevor Hart, *Hope Against Hope: Christian Eschatology at the Turn of the Millennium* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999).

[35] James K. A. Smith, "Determined Hope: A Phenomenology of Christian Expectation," in *The Future of Hope: Christian Tradition amid Modernity and Postmodernity*, ed. Miroslav Volf and William Katerberg (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 200-227, p.209.

our faith (2 Pet 1:5). Such effort is not merely individual; we can pursue the kinds of goods described here in terms of our own characters and that of our students and also in terms of our shared hope for the goods of grace-sustained community in our life together.

In all of this, our effort needs a better ground than romantic love. Liston suggests teaching can be sustained only by an "enlarged love," a love larger than our own desires for fulfillment in the classroom. Such love needs to be rooted beyond the self, in goods that exceed us and in attentiveness to the stake that others have in those goods.[36] Seen within a Christian frame, it must be a grateful love of God and neighbor that reaches beyond our need for others to gratify our preferences. If we are rooted in such a love, we might approach the mundane task of teaching within the context of hope for all things made new, accepting God's promises as having a solidity that makes them a proper ground for action.[37] The possibility emerges here of a resistance to despair that is not dependent on our students' or our schools' immediate perfectibility.

This has been, of course, a fragmentary account. The examples here are examples. The goods of community are not the only difficult goods that Christian hope might illuminate, though they are essential to Christian hope. In pursuing such goods, there is much more to address than the choices of the individual teacher, embedded as all teaching is in systemic institutional and cultural processes. In seeking transformation and discerning the geography of grace and presumption, we reckon with the complexities of the teacher's own heart and motives as well as

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[36] Drawing upon Iris Murdoch, Liston describes "enlarged love" as involving "a diminished sense of self, an attentive gaze toward the situation and the other, and a presumption that 'good' exists and is the object of love." Liston, "Love and Despair," 95.

[37] Smith, "Determined Hope," 208.

those of our students.

I have merely attempted to concretely illustrate a few basic intuitions. Teaching is beset, especially now but perhaps always, by the temptation to despair. Hope is most like itself when it exerts a formative influence on our mundane daily practices. It is denatured when reduced to lofty rhetoric or romantic yearning or replaced by control. Teachers can and should hope for more than covering required material and getting students through the exam. This need not be incompatible with desiring to teach all the material or get students through the exam. Teaching practices grounded in the intentional pursuit of benevolent but difficult goods can help sustain hope as well as arise from hope. Hope can become a pedagogical habit.