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The Restless Heart: Finding Our Spiritual Home in Times of Loneliness, by Ronald Rolheiser

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seek help from Federal funding agencies, which in turn have strings attached. For this reason, there is a push for parishes to become proactive and concerned with issues of public relations. Ultimately, whether in Europe or North America, the same critical issues plague the livelihood of the Catholic Church. This book presents honest answers to some of these concerns and sets the stage for the reader to challenge one's own beliefs.

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THE RESTLESS HEART: FINDING OUR SPIRITUAL HOME IN TIMES OF LONELINESS

RONALD ROLHEISER
DOUBLEDAY, 2004
\$19.95, 208 pages

Reviewed by Dana Bayer

“No person has ever walked our earth and been free from the pains of loneliness....To be human is to be lonely” (p. 3). This shared human experience of loneliness is the focus of Rolheiser's *The Restless Heart*. The author asserts that the loneliness that all humans feel is at the very center of our being. This book takes an in-depth look at loneliness from both secular and Christian perspectives. It examines the sources of loneliness, the dangers, the potential value, and finally the spirituality of loneliness using stories and examples from the author's personal experience as well as contemporary and ancient sources.

The book is divided into two parts. Part I discusses the nature of loneliness in our world today and attempts to bring the problem into focus. Rolheiser takes a candid look at our culture and the circumstances that contribute to our feelings of aloneness, citing among other factors, the transient nature of people, the decline of the family, and the influence of the media.

The first chapter is a look at the problem of loneliness faced by so many. Unable to give a specific definition, Rolheiser generalizes loneliness as an

experiential reality—an experience of our whole person. As humans, we are made to live in union with others and with God, but we suffer, desiring understanding, yet knowing that others cannot fully understand us. The author uses St. Paul's example as a recurring image in the book, that we are living as "through a glass, darkly" and not able to see God clearly or be seen by others. It is this longing of our hearts to love and be loved that causes us to feel lonely.

Next, Rolheiser explores the dangers that can result when we do not effectively deal with our loneliness. The examples and descriptions of these dangers are ones with which the reader can easily relate. This chapter helps to give clarity and awareness to the power that loneliness has over us, causing us to act in ways which can be harmful and which generally fail to fulfill the longings inside of us.

Part II deals with a Christian understanding of loneliness. To help us connect with our roots and realize that our experience of loneliness is not a modern phenomenon, Rolheiser examines the theme of loneliness in the Old and New Testaments, and in the writings of Christian theologians. The author uses these chapters to illustrate that loneliness can also be a positive force, even our greatest strength, when channeled effectively.

The Old Testament is "the story of the human heart, its pains and its joys, its search for meaning and its search for God" (p. 74). Using the Hebrew Scriptures, Rolheiser examines historical reasons for loneliness that include sin, the transitory character of all things, and human nature. Rolheiser addresses Scriptural resolutions for loneliness in examples of conversion, returning to God, and casting away of old selves. Perhaps the best example is the knowledge of the Israelites that they were God's chosen people. However, Rolheiser asserts that the Hebrew Scriptures leave us with more of a promise than a definitive resolution to loneliness.

In the New Testament, the promise of the Old Testament is fulfilled by the incarnation of God. The next chapter focuses on the perspective of Jesus: "We see in Jesus' message the definitive analysis of human loneliness, both in terms of its causes and in the direction we must take in order to come to a creative resolution of the problem" (p. 93). In essence, Jesus came to alleviate loneliness and to invite us into communion with each other. The New Testament focuses on two factors that cause loneliness and sin, and the resolutions of moving away from sin and toward the Gospel, to live in fullness in the Kingdom of God. In this section, we are also left with the thought that perhaps our loneliness cannot be alleviated: "There is a certain loneliness which exists not because of sin or any other culpable factor, but because the human heart, by nature, is insatiable, haunted by timelessness, and thirsting constantly for the infinite riches of God" (p. 95).

The final sections of the book deal with the potential value of loneliness as a force in our lives and the journey toward a spirituality of loneliness:

What is needed is a spirituality of loneliness: a spirituality that differentiates among the various types of loneliness and offers certain directions within which we can move in order to turn it into a creative rather than destructive force in our lives. (p. 151)

Handling this loneliness involves a process of turning inward and finding true contentment and solitude within ourselves. Loneliness can be a positive force, turning us toward greater creativity, allowing us to be more empathetic, and drawing us toward the end for which we were created, being in union with God and with others. Finally, Rolheiser asserts that loneliness invites us to share in the loneliness of Jesus. While we are here on earth, we can never be truly free of loneliness; we struggle to find the wholeness and total love and understanding that can only be found with life in God. Christians can take great comfort in the fact that we do have a solution to loneliness should we choose to seek it. “Jesus had precisely our loneliness in mind when, on the night before he died, he called his followers around a table. It was here that he gave us the possibility of a final solution to our loneliness” (p. 179).

Perhaps the ones who experience the pain of loneliness most intensely are teenagers. Their worlds are filled with technology and devices, such as cell phones, email, instant messages, and the Internet, which serve to keep them connected at all times to others; however, they are still lonely. Rolheiser suggests that the cause of this can be related to the amount of leisure time our lifestyle affords us, together with geographic mobility, the lack of extended families and communities as support systems, and the influence of the media. For teachers, this book is a valuable resource to help students process their feelings and to find ways to channel them so as to use loneliness as a creative rather than destructive force in their lives.

The Restless Heart is a book that will touch the hearts of all who have ever experienced feelings of loneliness or restlessness because it gives spiritual perspective to this loneliness, uniting us with others through common experience. Rolheiser does not propose to have a solution to the human condition of loneliness but rather gives an inspirational guide for processing these feelings. The book gives readers “directions within which we can move in order to turn it [loneliness] into a creative rather than destructive force within our lives” (p. 151). The author captures the essence of loneliness through meaningful, relevant stories and examples which offer the reader comfort in the knowledge that all humans share these feelings of loneliness and a restlessness within their hearts.

Rolheiser quotes the words of St. Augustine: “For you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you” (p. 111). Perhaps the most important realization is that the answers can be found only when we look inward and find contentment in knowing that the restlessness that we feel is part of our journey here on earth, and that the true alleviation of loneliness will be found when we are united with God. The combination of narrative, anecdotes, stories, and quotations makes the reading enjoyable and pertinent to every aspect of our lives. *The Restless Heart* leaves the reader with a feeling of connectedness to other Christians who all hunger for the same true meaning in life.

Dana Bayer teaches eighth grade at St. Joachim School in Hayward, CA.

BULLYING IN AMERICAN SCHOOLS: A SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION

DOROTHY L. ESPELAGE & SUSAN M. SWEARER, EDS.
LAWRENCE ERLBAUM ASSOCIATES, 2003
\$45.00, 408 pages

Reviewed by Adrianna Duncan

Misery is...

Misery is when you go to school and bullies pick on you.

Misery is when you share with someone, but they don't share with you.

Misery is when bullies become friends, and friends become bullies.

Misery is when you go to school and people threaten you by telling you that they will get you after school.

Misery is when you are at breakfast recess and people push you around for no reason.

Misery is when people invite everyone but you to play tag and football.

-Written by a 10-year old depressed and anxious bully victim. (Espelage & Swearer, 2004, p. 63)