Upstander Workshop: Examples of Intellectual Motivation

Excerpts from
Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare Truth and Reconciliation Commission Mandate

“The Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) is formed to uncover and acknowledge the truth, create opportunities to heal and learn from that truth, and collaborate to operate the best child welfare system possible for Wabanaki children, a goal shared by all the signatories to the Declaration of Intent. The Commission's investigation shall focus on the period from passage of the 1978 Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) to the authorization of the Mandate. This investigation will also include information that contributed to the passage of the ICWA in order to put understanding of the truth in a proper context.”

“The Truth and Reconciliation Commission will clarify the experiences of Wabanaki people with the Maine child welfare system during the time period from 1978 to the date of this Mandate with historical references as appropriate. It will seek to understand why these experiences occurred and determine any causes that yet need remedying. The Commission will seek to recognize the impact of these experiences on individuals, families, communities, cultures and state child welfare services.”

What intellectual motivations do the signatories express?

Doubt

The 2008 film *Doubt*, directed and written by John Patrick Shanley, is set in a Catholic School in the Bronx in 1964. Sister Aloysius (Meryl Streep), the principal of the school, suspects that Father Flynn (Philip Seymour Hoffman), the parish priest, is having a sexual relationship with one of the boys at the school. That boy, Donald Miller, is in Sister James’s (Amy Adams) class, when he is called away for a private meeting with Father Flynn. When Donald returns to her class, Sister James notices that he is behaving strangely and has the smell of alcohol on his breath. She reports this to Sister Aloysius. In scene 10 “Intolerance,” the two sisters confront Father Flynn with this evidence. Below are excerpts from that scene.

Sister Aloysius: “The boy acted strangely when he returned to class.”
Father Flynn: “He did?”
Sister James: “When he returned from the rectory, a little off, yes.”
Sister Aloysius: “Can you tell us why?”

 
Sister Aloysius: “What happened in the rectory?”
Father Flynn: “Happened? Nothing happened. I had a talk with the boy.”

Sister Aloysius: “There was alcohol on his breath when he returned from his meeting with you.”
Father Flynn: “Alcohol?”
Sister James: “I did smell it on his breath.”

Father Flynn: “Mr. McGuinn caught Donald drinking altar wine. When I found out I sent for him. There were tears. He begged not be removed from the altar boys. I took pity on him. I told him if no one else found out, I would let him stay on.”
Sister James: “What a relief. That explains everything. Thanks be to God. Look sister it was all a mistake.”

(Father Flynn departs.)
Sister James: “What a relief. He cleared it all up.”
Sister Aloysius: “Do you believe him?”
Sister James: “Of course.”
Sister Aloysius: “Isn’t it that it is easier to believe him.”
Sister James: “But we can corroborate his story with Mr. McGuinn.”
Sister Aloysius: “Yes. These types of people are clever.”
Sister James: “Well. I’m convinced.”
Sister Aloysius: “You’re not. You just want things to be resolved so that you can have simplicity back.”
Sister James: “I want no further part of this.”
Sister Aloysius: “I’ll bring him down.”
Sister James: “How can you be so sure that he is lying?”
Sister Aloysius: “Experience.”
Sister James: “You just don’t like him. You don’t like it that he uses a ball point pen. You don’t like it that he takes three lumps of sugar in his tea. You don’t like it that he likes Frosty the Snow Man. And, you are letting that convince you of something terrible, just terrible...”

What might the intellectual motivations of Sister James, Sister Aloysius, and Father Flynn be?