

# Critical Theology

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## Introduction

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Ending colonialism and seeking justice for Indigenous peoples is a pressing matter in many places around the globe. The issues involved, with their many ramifications, are so far-reaching that it is difficult at times to find terms and frames of reference to describe them. One might say that the three articles in this issue of *Critical Theology* discuss some of these issues in relation to Canadian and American contexts. Yet, these terms can be criticized as colonial descriptions. Indigenous peoples have their own names and understandings of these territories and the histories that have transpired in them. Seeking right relations between Indigenous peoples and settlers places vast agendas before both.

The three articles address different aspects of these. The first, by Sarah Augustine and Doe (Alison) Hoyer, focuses on action. The second, by Jean-Pierre Fortin, addressed primarily to settlers, focuses on listening to Indigenous voices. In a similar vein, the third focuses on self-critique. The two book reviews that follow address other social issues. As Augustine and Hoyer point out, the struggles of Indigenous peoples for justice involve engagement with issues like climate change and resistance to neoliberalism, which the books reviewed address. Conversely, those working on climate change and economic injustice need to be aware of how these relate to Indigenous struggles for self-determination, cultural survival, and community well-being.

For most settlers, seeking right relations with Indigenous peoples includes self-examination, repentance, becoming educated about Indigenous histories, cultures, and worldviews, and learning to live as treaty people. It can be difficult for white settler Christians to engage these issues. By virtue of our colonial heritage, we enter into them as implicated in the injustices we seek to overcome. Our engagement with these issues must involve self-critique and correction as well as acts of solidarity.

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# Right Relations Between Settlers and Indigenous Peoples Must Involve Systems Change and Balancing Power

By **Doe (Alison) Hoyer**, United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, Coalition to Dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery and **Sarah Augustine**, Goshen College, Coalition to Dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery

## Introduction

How can settlers engage in right relations with Indigenous Peoples? As organizers with the Coalition to Dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery, we hear this question often. Many of us in North America are becoming aware of structural inequality that is an intrinsic element of settler colonialism, especially as we face the legacy of boarding schools.<sup>1</sup> Indigenous societies today find themselves without access to meaningful self-determination in the face of settler governments and economies. Indigenous communities face contamination that comes with extraction on their lands and waters, continued large-scale child removal through the mechanisms of the child protection system, a lack of access to food security on Indigenous reserves and reservations with land bases that are dwindling, mass incarceration, indifference to the epidemic of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and a host of other social problems that result from the process of dismantling a civilization with the intention of replacing it. Indigenous Peoples are Peoples under attack.

Given the context of all that is happening in Indigenous North America, addressing the topic of right relations feels like being offered the opportunity to explain what helpful neighbours or bystanders can do while watching a house on their street burn to the ground. When faced with full conflagration, what are neighbours to do?

At an individual level, bystanders could give the afflicted family shelter for the night in question. This attention offers no long-term solution but meets an immediate need. Certainly, at least one neighbour will call the fire department, and others could form a bucket brigade, and in so doing, try to halt the fire or at least slow its progress until help can arrive. This response requires collective action but does not address the displacement of the family once the fire is out. Perhaps, then, neighbours might pass the hat or create a crowdfunding site, relying on the generosity of individual households to help the family build a new home.

Yet, none of these common types of aid address why the house is burning in the first place or provide a response that will actually rehouse the neighbour. A holistic response would require a commitment to walk with the family through the traumatic night in question, hauling away the cinders and garbage left on the burn site, supporting them through an investigation into how the house was set ablaze, all the way to rebuilding a dwelling that is clean, safe, and habitable. No individual action alone can do this—it would require the whole neighbourhood to respond collectively to find a common cause, which entails feeling the outcome personally, as though the fire were happening to one's own kin.

For the sake of this example, let us now imagine that the house was burned intentionally: the house had been identified by the local municipality as a site that needs to be cleared because it is considered risky to the neighbourhood as a whole. Let us imagine that authorities intentionally set the fire, and it is considered legal and legitimate to do so. Now, as neighbours watch the dwelling burn, they must also deal with the narrative that the house is burning for the well-being of the neighbourhood. It is pointless to call the authorities for help given this context because the authorities set the fire. What is an appropriate response under these conditions?

While the best-case scenario—collective action of the neighbourhood—is holistic in its response, it does not engage societal systems in acknowledging the universal human need for shelter. Nor does it commit to incorporating a provision for this need in the social contract, for to do so would require a systems-level response where the systems of a society that are willing to burn down a house are transformed to instead respond to human needs. This kind of response involves changing laws and policies or the rules that define reality within our societies.

## Responses at Individual, Community, and Systems Levels<sup>2</sup>

As we address the question we were invited to reflect upon, namely how settlers might seek right relationship with Indigenous Peoples, we are faced with addressing actions across multiple levels.

The individual level is where we often frame this question, identifying responses that one person can accomplish in their lifetime. Individual-level responses are often informed by traditional models of charity or by providing material aid when comfortable and convenient for a person to do so. These responses tend to be transactional in nature.

Responses at the collective level involve coordinated responses by communities like churches and other organized communities, where larger material aid can be garnered, long-term relationships can be fostered, and goods and services provided. These responses tend to be relational in nature.

Systems-level responses focus on changing the laws and policies that target and damage Indigenous communities. In the context of this paper and our organizing work, we refer primarily to the Doctrine of Discovery, a legal doctrine based in Christian theology that has resulted in a paradigm or system of laws and policies designed to remove Indigenous Peoples from their lands and subjugate them to a status subordinate to settlers. It is this pervasive system of laws and policies that we seek to recognize and transform toward the aim of seeking right relations with Indigenous Peoples.

*Systems-level responses span generations and require those who benefit from systemic injustice to work toward change that balances power.* Relationship where power is balanced is right relationship. To seek right relationship between Indigenous Peoples and settlers, we must venture into systems-level actions.

Actions taken at the systems level are not simple or straightforward. How do we coordinate efforts toward systemic action as a people of God? For the framework we propose here, we assume that our current society is defined by its economic system, which further creates our material reality. Our current economic system, extractive neoliberal capitalism, is designed to generate, transport, and sell products to consumers with minimal regulation from the government. It is designed to keep the cost of labour and other inputs as low as is feasible, to keep the cost of products as low as possible. This is also a core function of settler colonialism—to identify a source of low-cost labour and to capture resources that can be extracted cheaply and then processed for added value or profit. The accumulation of wealth for firms and some households,

especially the descendants of those who created the current political system, is an intended and desired outcome. This economic system is not designed to protect life, uphold equity, ensure that life continues, cooperate with the support systems of the Earth, or even ensure the well-being of humans. It has a simple purpose—to generate profit for its beneficiaries.<sup>3</sup> Under neoliberal capitalism, Money is God, and corporations are not expected to endure any reasonable limitations to their perpetual growth and profit.

In this paper, we suggest that charting a course toward right relations with Indigenous Peoples necessarily involves economic systems change and a fundamental restructuring of what we consider sacred. We analyze the relational, cultural, and structural productions of power<sup>4</sup> that keep extractive capitalism going, and we seek to encourage the development of new economic theologies rooted in relational integrity that includes the Earth and the ecosystems of which we are a part. Finally, we recommend strategies from our Coalition that can illuminate how economic theologies of integrity can help lay the foundation for action and a mass mobilization of Christians advocating for new systems and laws, wherein land and labour are recognized as sacred.

## The Coalition to Dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery

The co-authors of this paper are organizers with the Coalition to Dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery, a faith-based coalition that emerged from the Mennonite tradition and is now ecumenical in its composition. The Coalition is a network of communities and working groups that mobilize Christian church communities to dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery. Our work is to dismantle the oppressive laws and policies that remove Indigenous Peoples from their lands, extract resources, and disenfranchise Indigenous Peoples from full participation in political and economic systems. We do this by following the leadership of Indigenous Peoples in the protection of their own lands and waters and by coordinating the efforts of Christians to support the liberative work of Indigenous Peoples. We proclaim an Anabaptist Spirit of discipleship rooted in the call to love of neighbour, seeking right relationship and reconciliation through active nonviolence. The Coalition calls for the Christian Church to engage with a vision of decolonization, where Christians find common cause with Indigenous communities and acknowledge that we are interdependent. We recognize that what devastates Indigenous communities devastates us all.

If we assume that colonization is a complex of ideas and actions that form the context of the injustice, acknowledging that we live in a society based upon settler colonialism, then decolonization is a complex

of ideas and actions that seeks repair.<sup>5</sup> Within the context of repair, we must be able to articulate our call as Christians to resist economic systems of oppression and imagine new systems based upon the principles articulated by Jesus in his ministry.

Our vision of decolonization is for colonizing powers and their beneficiaries to relinquish control of a subjugated people and then identify, challenge, and restructure or replace assumptions, ideas, values, systems, and practices that reflect a colonizer's dominating influence.<sup>6</sup> This includes developing alternative economic theologies that can guide societal transitions to new economic systems.

## The Context Calling Us to an Economic Theology of Integrity

In *Caring for Souls in a Neoliberal Age*, pastoral theologian Bruce Rogers-Vaughn analyzes how neoliberal economic policies shape the dominant culture, creating and obscuring the novel human suffering and exploitation of our times. He writes: "Pastoral theology today must also be an *economic theology*."<sup>7</sup> In other words, we cannot ignore material realities or the systems we are enmeshed in as we seek to respond to the suffering of all God's creation—human and more-than-human.

To begin to address the structural problems inherent to extractive neoliberal capitalism, we must recognize its deep roots in Christian domination theology. Over 500 years of European colonization have led to global laws, policies, philosophies of land, and economic ideologies that all hold settler colonial power dynamics in place. The same logic of the Doctrine of Discovery, which in the 15th century granted power to white European monarchies by sanctioning their supposed divine right to non-European land and resources, is reproduced in the power hierarchies of today. Decision-making power is granted to corporations and colonial governments that seek profit at the expense of Indigenous Peoples' land rights and well-being. How is this so, and how do settlers play a role in this still today?<sup>8</sup>

In *Performance and Power*, Jeffrey C. Alexander reveals the way that performance (roles) and symbolism (ritual) produce and reproduce political power. Alexander writes: "At both the micro and macro levels, both among individuals and within collectivities, our societies still seem to be permeated by symbolic, ritual-like activities."<sup>9</sup> Understanding how we each play roles at micro and macro levels, and that there is a symbolism to these roles, helps to illuminate the political arrangements of a society.

Many of us have retirement accounts invested in the mining industry and give little thought to those who might be impacted. Likewise, church institutions

participate in financial systems rooted in extractive industry. Household economics are a ritual at the micro level, while our investments and tax dollars uphold global economic systems at the macro level. All of these economic behaviours emphasize individualism and private property ownership, ultimately reproducing white supremacy culture and upholding neoliberal economics.

Through the interplay of willful cultural ignorance, individualism, and the economic rituals engaged at micro and macro levels, white people especially function to uphold extractive capitalism—so much so that social power is given to white people so they will serve capitalism's financial interests and strategies. Relationally, white people of financial wealth and of the dominant culture enact these power roles and values by how we behave economically within our family systems, churches, and neighbourhoods.

Private property ownership is especially relevant as a material mechanism through which white Euro-descended people are participants in these systems, holding settler colonialism and extractive capitalism in place culturally and structurally. Under these systems, white settlers physically hold the landscape in a different structural reality through their presence and privilege under settler colonialism. Meanwhile, cultural stereotypes about Indigenous Peoples abound, invisibilizing the presence of contemporary Indigenous activism and perpetuating the myth that Indigenous Peoples are gone. This myth reinforces the logic of settler entitlement to land, which is further reflected in neoliberal policies to deregulate collective oversight of industry.

Due to ongoing colonial power arrangements, reproduced today as global neoliberal economic policy, all modern-day consumers are bound to ecological and human suffering within a global web of extraction that violates Indigenous Peoples' rights globally. This is the tragic reality of our economic and political systems, whether we acknowledge it or not. In many ways, our lack of widespread cultural awareness about these issues is caused by the intentional design of deregulation, as political and corporate elites are not required to have transparency or integrity in their labour and environmental practices.

This is especially significant because extractive industry is on the rise, especially on Indigenous lands.<sup>10</sup> Today, the ongoing cultural production of extractive capitalism is being fuelled in new forms through the advent of the Green Transition. Green technology is being marketed to potential consumers as the solution to the climate crisis, yet it still reproduces the logic and processes of extraction by targeting minerals used in the production of electric vehicles and other

technology. As our society strives to move toward a carbon-neutral economy, we are especially anxious to justify extraction at the expense of the vulnerable for these desired resources like copper and cobalt. As corporations pivot to marketing green technology, they continue to obscure how labour practices and environmental impacts continue to lead to immense suffering for Indigenous Peoples and ecosystems worldwide. While corporations and their investors profit, Indigenous Peoples globally are further dispossessed of their land and sovereignty while subjected to the near-constant threat of mining and extractive industry.

It is not illegal to participate in financial processes that harm the vulnerable; in fact, it is considered wise by the standards of the dominant culture. Under neoliberal capitalism, profit and wealth accumulation are the only things considered sacred and defensible. Yet, colluding with the systems of colonization harms those oppressed by colonization. Jesus understood the plight of the vulnerable and voiced a mandate to bring good news to the poor and freedom for the oppressed. Zacchaeus responded to Jesus' mandate by seeking right relationship through repair.<sup>11</sup> Their examples lead us to question: How can these systems be transformed as an act of repair with Indigenous Peoples and God's creation?

All of the structural, cultural, and relational realities of the dominant culture that we have described here ultimately produce hierarchy, a pyramidal shape where a select very few are concentrated at the top, and all of us feel the weight at the bottom. This is the shape of our class structure, our economic system, and most institutions of power. Yet, as hundreds of years of comparative world history can show us, hierarchy is utterly the wrong shape for flourishing communities and the development of sustainable systems. For social health, our systems must be fundamentally transformed into a shape of integrity—the circle. If we follow the metaphor of a circular shape, each point on the edge is equidistant from the centre. Metaphorically and relationally, each person's voice matters to maintaining the shape of a circle. Power is not concentrated at the top but rather balanced across all points.

In the Coalition, we practise and uplift circle process, a method rooted in traditional Indigenous community practice, to transform how we relate to each other. What we can experience at the micro level, among our communities, can apply as well to our macro-level systems and how we relate to each other and the Earth. What we can practise through our lived, relational experiences can also begin to form the foundation of values for the transformed economic theologies we need. The shape of the circle, and all it symbolizes, is our guiding metaphor for relational integrity.

## Conceptualizing an Economic Theology of Integrity

Fundamental to an economic theological discussion is how we societally and spiritually relate to labour and Earth. At the heart of transforming extractive capitalism is this question: How do we see God materially? In other words, how is the sacred present through our embodiment and life on Earth, including the ways we engage in micro- and macro-level systems? And how do we redesign our macro-level systems to honour our sacred land and sacred labour? As Rogers-Vaughn notes from his pastoral care perspective, we need a “new materialism for human systems.”<sup>12</sup> This will require an alternate vision of sacred land and sacred labour, rooted in new economic theologies that are guided by relational integrity with all human and more-than-human relatives. We call for this vision knowing that many more voices are needed to facilitate such a cultural and structural shift.

In praxis, an economic theology of sacred land and sacred labour would promote mutual flourishing, integrity, regeneration, relational systems, reciprocity, and sustainability. Moving away from the dominating discourse of extractive capitalism, mining, and extractive agriculture would no longer be the only viable economic options for rural communities to participate in. By instead economically valuing all stewards of land and ecosystems—farmers and Indigenous land stewards alike—we can start to envision a new kind of economy wherein jobs are created for the resuscitation of ecosystems and regeneration of the environment. We could advocate for a reallocation of tax dollars, such that corporations are no longer deregulated and incentivized by the colonial governments. Such structural shifts are part of a long-term movement for Indigenous, ecological, and economic justice. We recognize that spiritual resourcing is necessary to actualizing this kind of long-term, active solidarity.

Culturally, we envision that white Christian-lineage people can divest from their involvement in systems of finance and death, choosing instead to decolonize, deprogram, and reclaim a theology of life, weaving together the sacred Earth, the indwelling of Spirit, and the resistance and ministry of Jesus. As the laws and policies of how we relate to and manage land were established in Christ's name, so can we powerfully undo these same laws in Christ's name.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Rogers-Vaughn notes: “To undo the spell of neoliberalism, we must ‘play the record in reverse.’ That means finding paths, however meagre, back to solidarity.”<sup>14</sup>

## Seeking Right Relationship: Preliminary Strategies for Intervention

Solidarity is about coming alongside oppressed peoples: white Christian-lineage people can lever-

age their power and voices to advocate for changing laws and policies. Putting pressure on lawmakers to honour the self-determination of Indigenous Peoples, de-incentivizing extraction, and creating jobs to regenerate ecosystems are actions consistent with moving toward an economic theology of integrity where all life matters. In a Christian hegemony, faith is a powerful and even bipartisan place from which to advocate and offer testimony for new legislation. The Coalition to Dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery works to organize and activate delegations of Christians to testify publicly in support of Indigenous rights. For example, there are several bills proposed in the U.S. federal and Minnesota state legislatures that have great implications for Indigenous Peoples' lived realities. These include the *Save Oak Flat from Foreign Mining Act*, *Advancing Tribal Parity of Public Land Act*, *Tribal Cultural Areas Protection Act*, and *American Indian Recovery Act* (Minnesota). These bills ultimately affirm Indigenous rights to land while structurally balancing power and establishing new systems for the regulation of extractive industry. To pass each and any of these legislative efforts, the first strategy we suggest is faith-based political organizing to leverage Christian values and advocate for the land and the rights of Indigenous Peoples. This may feel strange from an Anabaptist perspective that has historically favoured non-resistance. But inaction within an oppressive system amounts to collusion, and our active solidarity is needed.

Imagining and participating in systems change is a theological endeavour as much as an economic and political one. As such, the second strategy we propose to bring about liberative change involves supporting many new theological voices to write and help imagine new systems of integrity at the intersections of Indigenous, ecological, and economic justice. Ideally, this would bring liberatory theology into conversation with ecological, degrowth, and well-being economics.<sup>15</sup> To cultivate such voices and perspectives, we imagine that theological writers might establish partnerships with seminaries, universities, and Indigenous-led organizations to co-write and publish with students of economics and theology. The aim would be to generate new interdisciplinary discourses and get this content out into the world in many forms, appealing to an intergenerational audience. These forms would include academic journals, guest blog posts, podcasts, and social media educational content. A strategy of supporting emergent theological perspectives gets at what Alexander says about "performative power": that through the "staging of successful alternative plays," we evoke the "possibility of converting turned-off audiences into turned-on counter-powers."<sup>16</sup>

As new theological and economic discourses activate more and more people of the dominant settler culture, the third intervention strategy we propose is standing

with Indigenous Peoples in seeking self-determination, sovereignty, and land return. As we imagine an economic theology of integrity, land return must be a crucial social transformation strategy. Land return means returning land that was wrongfully taken from Indigenous Peoples. This includes land held by federal and state governments, such as national and state forests, as well as land owned by corporations and churches and even land that is privately held.<sup>17</sup> Land return affirms the self-determination of Indigenous Peoples and their resistance to the dominant economic system of extractive capitalism. The Coalition to Dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery engages institutions, congregations, and families in discernment and action regarding land return. In Canada, the Mennonite Coalition for Indigenous Solidarity in Manitoba is hosting working groups that grapple with topics like "returning wealth" and "land return." We believe that systems-level intervention undertaken collectively is embodied through land return.

The practice of decolonization uses our knowledge, our understanding of life, and our value systems to dismantle harmful, colonial power structures and establish noncolonial, life-giving systems. This "demands the valuing of Indigenous sovereignty in its material, psychological, epistemological, and spiritual forms," write scholars Amam Sium, Chandni Desai, and Eric Ritskes. "We cannot decolonize without recognizing the primacy of land and Indigenous sovereignty over that land."<sup>18</sup> Sovereignty means acknowledging the right of Indigenous tribes to govern their own affairs on their own lands. Standing with Indigenous tribes in pursuit of sovereignty means supporting Indigenous movements for self-determination. For example, the *Indian Child Welfare Act* of 1978 (ICWA) grants federally recognized tribes "exclusive jurisdiction" in determining child welfare placements for their enrolled members, rather than Christian organizations or state child welfare agencies. Affirming Indigenous sovereignty in this example includes supporting tribes' bids to retain this crucial jurisdiction.<sup>19</sup>

These are the kinds of actions and strategies that call the larger church to engage in systems-level interventions, calling on the body of Christ to resist an economic system that is oppressive to Indigenous Peoples, workers, and the Earth.

## Conclusion

We began this article with a metaphor where good people watch as a neighbour's house burns to the ground. They want to respond: What could they do? They can respond at the individual level, offering temporary shelter or giving money; at the collective level, accompanying the family through the long process from removal to becoming rehoused; or at the sys-

tems level, challenging society to affirm housing as a basic human right in the norms of the collective social contract, which are articulated in laws and policies. In this paper, we call on Christians to move beyond individual-level action to systemic action, where we collectively challenge the economic systems of extractive capitalism and stand with Indigenous Peoples in their bid for sovereignty, decolonization, and land return.

We have attempted to describe some of the relational, cultural, and structural productions, roles, and behaviours that uphold extractive capitalism and neoliberalism to the detriment of Indigenous communities globally. We have suggested that new economic theologies of integrity must be created to shift us collectively toward valuing land and our labour as sacred. Toward this aim, we have suggested strategies of faith-based political organizing, generating new theological and economic discourses, and facilitating land return to Indigenous Peoples. While the issue of transforming extractive capitalism is complex, we hope that these strategies nonetheless hint at alternative productions and the roles we can play within them, which might begin to enact social and spiritual changes on micro and macro levels.

## Acknowledgements

Many of the ideas expressed here that challenge the church to stretch beyond individual-level intervention have been formed in relationship with environmental toxicologist Daniel Peplow, with whom Sarah Augustine has collaborated for two decades. His early work identifying the ecological impacts of mining at multiple trophic levels has formed the impetus to identify impacts and intervention strategies at multiple social levels.

Additionally, much of the analysis of extractive capitalism and vision for economic theologies of integrity come out of Doe Hoyer's cumulative work done through Dr. Gary Green's social transformation courses at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities. Thank you to Dr. Green for providing the educational environment and analysis framework to inspire this kind of systems-level thinking.

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1 A system that aims to displace a population and replace it with a settler population. In a colonial system, the rules of reality reflect the presumed supremacy of the occupying society. The values, norms, and culture of the occupying society transmit, affirm, and reinforce this supremacy.

2 Our analysis of intervention at multiple levels of social organization is based on the early work of environmental toxicologist Daniel Peplow, with whom co-author Sarah Augustine has collaborated for two decades. His succinct analysis of the impact of extraction from cellular to eco-system levels is outlined in Daniel Peplow and Robert Edmonds, "The Effects of Mine Waste Contamination at Multiple Levels of Biological Organization," *Ecological Engineering* 24:1–2 (2005), 101–19. Our shared ideas that extend this ecological perspective to interventions on behalf of Indigenous communities at multiple levels of social organization is outlined in Daniel Peplow and Sarah Augustine, "Intervention Mapping to Address Social and Economic Factors Impacting Indigenous People's Health in Suriname's Interior Region," *Globalization and Health* 13, 11 (2017).

3 Sarah Augustine and Sheri Hostetler, *So We & Our Children May Live: Following Jesus in Confronting the Climate Crisis* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2023), 209.

4 This analysis framework comes out of Dr. Gary Green's course "Social Analysis and Community Engagement," offered through United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities.

5 Augustine and Hostetler, *So We & Our Children May Live*, 174.

6 *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. "Decolonize," <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/decolonize>.

7 Bruce Rogers-Vaughn, *Caring for Souls in a Neoliberal Age* (Nashville, TN: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 87.

8 This question, and the subsequent language of cultural productions and reproductions of political power, are informed by the analysis framework presented by Dr. Gary Green in his course "Social Analysis and Community Engagement."

9 Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Performance and Power* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2011), 27.

10 "Extraction Operations on Indigenous Peoples' Land without Consent Cause Irreparable Harm, Speakers Stress, as Permanent Forum Begins Session," United Nations website, United Nations Meeting Coverage, Twenty-first session, April 25, 2022, <https://press.un.org/en/2022/hr5467.doc.htm>.

11 Sarah Augustine, "Oak Flat and Zacchaeus: What Does Decolonization Look Like?" *Anabaptist World* (February 2023).

12 Rogers-Vaughn, *Caring for Souls in a Neoliberal Age*, 175.

13 "About Us," Coalition to Dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery, <https://dismantlediscovery.org/about>.

14 Rogers-Vaughn, *Caring for Souls in a Neoliberal Age*, 161.

15 These are just a few existing economic ideologies that seem aligned with the moral framework we propose here.

16 Alexander, *Performance and Power*, 91.

17 For more information about the Church's part in land return, check out the Nuns and Nones Land Justice Project: <https://www.nunsandnones.org/land-justice>.

18 Aman Sium, Chandni Desai, and Eric Ritskes, "Towards the 'Tangible Unknown': Decolonization and the Indigenous Future," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1:1 (2012), I–XIII, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/279660253\\_Towards\\_the\\_'tangible\\_unknown'\\_Decolonization\\_and\\_the\\_Indigenous\\_future](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/279660253_Towards_the_'tangible_unknown'_Decolonization_and_the_Indigenous_future).

19 Nathan Tanner, "Defending ICWA: The Next Fight over Tribal Sovereignty," *Indian Country Today*, November 5, 2022, <https://ictnews.org/opinion/defending-icwa-the-next-fight-over-tribal-sovereignty>.

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# “Let Settlers with Ears Listen”

## Arthur Manuel and Taiaiake Alfred on the Requirements of Authentic Reconciliation

By Jean-Pierre Fortin

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### Introduction

It started all at once, as if they had met up to plan it before the game, all the opposing players flapping their hands in front of their open mouths to make the noise: “Wah-wah-wah-wah-wah-wah-wah-wah.” ... It was the noise made by the Indians Bugs Bunny killed, counting them off on a chalkboard and singing as he went: “One little, two little, three little Injuns. Four little, five little, six little Injuns.” ... The kids on the other team knew what it meant, too. They'd seen the same cartoons and the same kind of movies. Their parents, who would have known my parents, also understood. As did the coaches, though no adult stepped in to put a stop to it. It meant I was an Indian. The bad guy. The savage. The loser.<sup>1</sup>

Jesse Wenthe here reminisces about a painful experience as a teenage baseball player, through which he became aware of his Indigenous difference and marginality, as well as of the prejudice and discrimination recurrently expressed toward him by non-Indigenous Canadians. The fact that each and every Indigenous person can relate to such experiences reveals how deeply embedded in the fabric of Canadian society racism is. According to Wenthe, “Canada's very being is dependent on the assertion that Indigenous people are less than human,” and this because “Canada is nothing more than a murderous resource extraction project” created as part of the global colonization enterprise of the British Empire.<sup>2</sup> Reconciliation (with Indigenous peoples) as understood and promoted by the Canadian government operates as an instrument furthering this endeavour.

The state's version of reconciliation is one of empty apologies. It seeks to frame the crimes of colonialism as wrongs that exist only in the past, foisting any guilt or blame onto long-dead antagonists who can't answer for their actions. It refuses to acknowledge that colonialism persists, that there are those who still benefit from the subjugation of Indigenous communities. ... The relationship it outlines is not one of mutual

understanding, reparations, and healing, but yet another one-sided resource extraction project. ... We are exploited for forgiveness, for the elimination of white guilt.<sup>3</sup>

Wenthe takes the further step of claiming that the word and concept of reconciliation are themselves inadequate, for they presuppose what has yet to be built: a “functional relationship” between Indigenous Peoples and Canada/settler Canadians. The current dysfunctional relations must be deconstructed to enable a fresh start on new bases.<sup>4</sup>

This strong critique of the word and concept of reconciliation is concurrent with and results from a significant social phenomenon: the resurgence of Indigenous Peoples.<sup>5</sup> As their presence and voice become louder and harder to deny by the Canadian state and settler Canadians, Indigenous Peoples nevertheless still suffer the Canadian state's and its settler citizens' inability and unwillingness to listen. As John Ralston Saul notes, “the problem for more than a century has been that non-Aboriginals seem to have lost [if they ever possessed it] the ability to listen to exactly what is being said by Indigenous peoples. We find it troubling, or simply not what we want to hear.”<sup>6</sup> Hence, there is (still) need for settler Canadians (and Christians in particular) to listen to Indigenous voices that critically deconstruct the word and concept of reconciliation and articulate the conditions and requirements for a healing and life-giving relationship between settler and Indigenous communities. New arguments or insights are not required, for compelling cases have already been laid out by Indigenous scholars and activists. The issue, rather, is that the Canadian state, settler Canadians, and Christians do not respond with positively transformative words and actions such that the reality and effects of centuries of colonization and the plight of Indigenous Peoples are suitably acknowledged and definitively addressed (which is not to say that nothing at all has been said or done toward achieving this aim).

The task is to enable a majority of settler Canadians and Christians to come to terms with the long-stand-



ing challenge and demands levelled at and placed before them by Indigenous Peoples. I am writing this article as a settler Canadian and Christian who teaches theology at a leading Roman Catholic university, attempting to take the full measure of these challenges and demands, in the hope that it will contribute to summoning and equipping myself and perhaps also a few of my fellow settler Canadians, Christians, and theologians to take responsibility for the history of colonization and its detrimental effects on the person and life of Indigenous Peoples and challenge the Canadian state and Christian churches to do the same. The knowledge of this history and its lingering effects are imprinted upon the bodies, souls, and spirits of its victims who, thereby, are most entitled to speak the truth to those, like me, who enjoy the undeserved and unjustified power and luxury to deny or at least (pretend to) live without having to take account of them. To listen, at long last, to Indigenous survivors of the Canadian enterprise of colonization and their descendants constitutes a necessary step in the process of (re)humanizing Canada and its settler citizens, as well as Canadian Christianity and Christians. The present article wishes to embody and provide a humble contribution toward achieving this most important goal.

In this spirit, this article engages the thought of longstanding and renowned Indigenous scholars and activists Arthur Manuel and Taiaiake Alfred to lay foundations for a transformative encounter between settler Canadians and Christians and Indigenous Peoples and cultures. In their respective ways, Alfred and Manuel struggle for the retrieval of traditional Indigenous moral principles and spiritual practices to define a path forward involving the reclamation and achievement of self-governance, land restitution, and proper reparation for colonization and its intergenerational effects. Manuel's efforts to speak truth to the Canadian state and settler Canadians, based on the awareness that the latter can and must come to understand and support the Indigenous quest for political self-determination (if the latter is ever to come to fruition), parallel Alfred's attempts to help Indigenous Peoples decolonize themselves by retrieving and living out their Indigenous identities and cultures again and anew. While undoubtedly distinct, Manuel's politics of challenging dialogue to/with and Alfred's politics of resistance toward the Canadian state and its settler citizens both claim that beyond legal and constitutional amendments, a profound transformation of Canadian identity and the relationships Canadians entertain with their fellow humans, land (nature), and God is needed. Genuine reconciliation supposes empowering Indigenous Peoples to (re)learn and (re)appropriate their Indigenous identity and agency as well as enabling settler Canadians to disengage

themselves, Canadian culture, social institutions, and religion from the enterprise of colonization.

In what follows, I draw from Manuel's analysis of the *modus operandi* of (neo)colonialism and Alfred's study of the requirements for the reform of colonized individual and communal identities in order to offer a more comprehensive depiction of the challenge and task the Canadian state, settler Canadians, and Christians must now face and complete. The goal pursued here is not to demonstrate the complete adequation of Manuel's and Alfred's outlooks but rather, much more narrowly, to establish the compatibility of the former's theoretical articulation of the nature and workings of colonization and its overcoming with the latter's understanding of the process of individual and collective decolonization. Such compatibility will in turn confirm that the work to be done has already been set before the Canadian state, settler Canadians, and Christians. The time has now (arguably more than) come for the latter to seriously try to grow into a nation, persons, and communities able to tackle it. Severe growing pains are to be expected.

### **Arthur Manuel: Nature, Effects, and Overcoming of Colonization**

The critical deconstruction of colonizing notions of reconciliation supposes the careful study of colonialism and its contemporary modes of operation for, as Arthur Manuel observes, "colonialism is ... the foundational system in Canada."<sup>7</sup> Colonialism is not a thing of the past, but rather an ongoing experience and reality producing deleterious effects in the present and for the future. Manuel describes colonization as a process involving three steps or stages: dispossession, dependency, and oppression.<sup>8</sup> The illegitimate appropriation of the land through dislocation of Indigenous communities enables the unlawful extraction and commerce of its resources. The Canadian economy was built at the expense of Indigenous communities, who are no longer able to provide for themselves and thereby are made dependent on the Canadian state. Indigenous poverty directly results from and forms an integral component of the colonizing enterprise.<sup>9</sup> Not only are Indigenous communities forcefully deprived of access to their ancestral lands and the benefits generated from their use, they are also forced by the Canadian government to manage their externally imposed deprivation (especially on reserves).<sup>10</sup> Permanent dependency is, however, not the ultimate goal pursued by the Canadian state, but rather only a means and stage leading to the complete assimilation of Indigenous peoples (and their status and rights) into Canadian society. This latter claim finds confirmation in the illegal/extralegal force the Canadian state uses to repress Indigenous resistance and defence of ancestral rights.<sup>11</sup> In Manuel's limpid terms, "We cannot

negotiate if Canada and the provinces' ultimate plan is to not recognize existing rights and to extinguish Aboriginal and treaty rights."<sup>12</sup>

In addition to structural legal, political, and social reform, decolonization must therefore also include the moral, psychological, and spiritual transformation required to generate decolonized personal and communal identities and behaviours. Hence, as Manuel further observes, the issue (about colonization) "is not just how settlers treat Indians, it is how they treat each other."<sup>13</sup> The core problem is not the understanding of and relationship to the (human) other across difference but rather the dehumanizing relationship the oppressing culture, society, and community entertains with itself. The core need is for settlers to rehumanize the relationship they have with themselves, one another, and nature. Once this core work has been completed, there will be no more need to dehumanize Indigenous Peoples and objectify nature, which undergird and support the extraction and exploitation of resources (humanity included) required to substitute and compensate for the colonizers' loss of their own humanity. As long as the Canadian state and its settler citizens do not affirm and cultivate truly life-affirming, inclusive, and sustainable forms of human identity, ways of life, and relationships to land and other creatures, Indigenous Peoples will never be able to heal and recover from the process of colonization and its effects, as it will still operate in full force. To positively improve the quality of its relationships to Indigenous Peoples, the Canadian state and settler Canadians and Christians must therefore significantly alter their relationship to themselves—that is, redefine the idea and ideal they have of themselves and which they seek to embody at the expense of Indigenous Peoples and nature. Colonization directly depends on and consists in the forceful imposition by the colonizers of their self-idea(l), worldview, and way of life upon others.

This colonization of the personal identity and way of life affects all Indigenous persons, especially those entrusted with leadership roles within institutions created, funded, and overseen by the Canadian government, such as Band councils and the Assembly of First Nations. These individuals and communities are generously compensated to have "faith" in Canada and embrace the corresponding neoliberal capitalist consumerist and extractive mindset and lifestyle. In the process, they become powerful agents of colonization at a collective and national stage. As Manuel explains, there is

a whole class of Native leaders working in off-reserve organizations funded almost exclusively by the government of Canada, and who have been negotiating almost continuously since the late 1980s on the government terms of surrender. ...

These "leaders" and their paid consultants have also done enormous damage to our political and economic position with backroom deals that sell our resources—often for ridiculously low prices, which they often end up pocketing as wages and commissions. ... Once they retire from the government-funded organizations, many of these "leaders" acquire lucrative "consulting" jobs.<sup>14</sup>

Even more problematic is the fact that these leaders earn personal benefits by selling away that over which they have no legitimate authority, namely, "the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of their people and their traditional lands."<sup>15</sup> The danger for coopted individuals and communities thus resides in the possibility of becoming so adept at playing the colonial game that their Indigenous identity becomes merely a peel concealing thoroughly colonized flesh and core. There remains very little Indigenous substance to individuals and communities who have so completely "absorbed not only white man's learning but their values as well" that "they have forgotten who they are."<sup>16</sup> These individuals and communities must retrain themselves into being, feeling, remembering, imagining, thinking, and acting in and as their authentic Indigenous selves (which will inevitably integrate and process elements of settler culture).

In Manuel's view, at the collective level, the process of moral-spiritual formation that forms the core of the work of decolonization comprises three main components/stages: 1) overcoming dependency on the colonial state through affirmation of Indigenous identity; 2) self-determination through defining and implementing forms of communal life and governance reflective of Indigenous cultures and traditions; and 3) economic independence by developing notions and practices of work and trade enabling Indigenous communities to achieve sustainable self-subsistence and flourishing.<sup>17</sup> These same components/stages can be articulated in more practical/pastoral terms: 1) reconnect with and re-enact Indigenous cultures/traditions; 2) reclaim, journey to, and reinhabit ancestral lands; and 3) identify and deconstruct appropriated colonial ideologies and practices. Reanchoring self and community in Indigenous (for settlers, indigenized) cultures and ancestral lands is necessary to enable the long work/walk of decolonization. No transformation is possible without an alternative vision and way of life.

The work of decolonization paving the way to actual reconciliation places certain duties and responsibilities on both settler Canadians and Indigenous Peoples. The three components/stages of decolonization just described thus translate into corresponding duties/responsibilities: 1) recognize Indigenous and settler treaty/land rights; 2) acknowledge the Indigenous right to self-determination/sovereignty; and 3) engage

in nation-to-nation negotiation about land sharing.<sup>18</sup> For Manuel, independently from whether they accept or refuse Canadian citizenship, Indigenous Peoples always retain their claims to this land on account of their inalienable ancestral rights (despite repeated attempts made by the Canadian state to deny or eliminate these). They form and are members of distinct and sovereign nations entitled to engage Canada as a partner nation with which they are to negotiate suitable modalities of shared and sustainable inhabitation and use of common land and resources. Indigenous Peoples and communities must therefore be allowed to and be assisted with permanently reconnecting physically and symbolically with their ancestral territories so they can retrieve and rebuild their unique and irreplaceable traditional languages, cultures, and ways of life. The harmonious inhabitation of Turtle Island will not be possible as long as the coexistence of multiple nations living in consensually achieved covenantal agreement (treaties) is prevented by a settler state (Canada) denying the self-determination and governance of Indigenous Peoples.

Manuel provides the rationale undergirding such a vision and move: “As Indigenous peoples we view all human activity with the understanding that water, land, animals, plants, fish and human beings are equal. We understand that if we damage one area it will eventually impact us. Human beings do not dominate the earth, but are part of the earth.”<sup>19</sup> From this ecological anthropology follows an ecological ethics: “Indigenous peoples are accustomed to thinking about the impact human activities will have on future generations. This is part of our spiritual relationship with our traditional territories.”<sup>20</sup> The result is that Indigenous culture and way of life are foundational to and components of a worldview and practices able to kindle healing and sustainable coexistence on earth.<sup>21</sup> The Canadian state and its settler citizens can benefit from accompanying Indigenous Peoples as the latter retrieve their own ancestral wisdom and practices to discover and embrace personal and communal identities and a way of life that is more respectful of human dignity and nature. The destruction of life forms and land results from the unwillingness of the Canadian state and its settler citizens to actually settle and grow roots on Turtle Island, which entails becoming part of the existing ecosystem of interdependent beings living on this land. The colonizing way of being and living sets human settlers apart from, over, and above the land and other life forms (including and especially Indigenous species). Settlers can then adopt a way of life involving the extraction of resources to ensure their own existence and well-being at the expense of other creatures, without offering anything (of/from themselves) in return. Colonization is grounded in unidirectional self-serving extraction, not mutually benefitting inter-

dependence and exchange to meet shared needs and objectives.

## **Taiaiake Alfred: Reforming the Colonized Self**

For Taiaiake Alfred, colonialism persists as long as humans hold on to uprooted ways of living.<sup>22</sup> Human beings acquire their humanity by entertaining a lasting organic connection to the land they inhabit. The land acts as primary source of existence and meaning for humans, who are relational creatures dependent on their surroundings to ensure their survival and flourishing. Colonization cuts the organic ties relating individuals and communities to a specific (home)land, preventing the formation and preservation of a unique culture (collective vision and embodiment of human identity and existence), which in turn prevents the formation and nurturing of meaningful relationships with fellow humans and other creatures.<sup>23</sup> Colonization is a process that (re)shapes individuals and communities by uprooting Indigenous Peoples and preventing settlers from being indigenized.<sup>24</sup> Colonization operates within (in the heart, mind, and soul of individuals and communities) and without (as endemic structural conditioning).<sup>25</sup> As it effects a “redefinition from autonomous to derivative existence and cultural and political identities,” this process yields “occupied peoples who have been dispossessed and disempowered in their own homelands.”<sup>26</sup> The detrimental effects of colonization on the lives of Indigenous Peoples are not abstract but rather very real, deep, encompassing, and lasting across generations. Alfred argues that

the real problems are the disunity of our people, the alienation of our youth, our men disrespecting our women, the deculturing of our societies, epidemic mental and physical sicknesses, the lack of employment in meaningful and self-determining Indigenous ways of working, the widespread corruption of our governments, and the exploitation of our lands and peoples.<sup>27</sup>

The combined effects of these problems bring about a spiritual crisis directly threatening the very existence of Indigenous communities.

We are divided amongst ourselves and confused in our own minds about who we are and what kind of life we should be living. We depend on others to feed us and to teach us how to look, feel, live. ... There are no more leaders and hardly a place left to go to where we can just be native. ... If we do not find a way out of the crises, we will be consumed by the darkness, and whether it is through self-destruction or assimilation, we will not survive.<sup>28</sup>

The process of colonization is ongoing and pervasive; all Canadian institutions, leaders, and citizens promote and contribute to it in explicit/intentional and/or implicit/unconscious ways.<sup>29</sup> Alfred considers more closely the ideological worldview justifying the assimilation of all things Indigenous. The subjugation of Indigenous Peoples is accomplished and accounted for post facto by means of their dehumanization. Indigenous Peoples are deemed subhuman or less than fully human when privileged white male Christian European settlers set themselves and their way of life as the standard of “civilization.” As Alfred notes, “on a theoretical level, the enemy of our struggle is the noxious mix of monotheistic religiosity, liberal political theory, neoliberal capitalist economics and their supportive theories of racial superiority, and the false assumption of Euroamerican cultural superiority.”<sup>30</sup> Core social-political doctrines undergird the Euroamerican civilizational ideal and colonization enterprise: individualism and its rights (as foremost instantiation of free agency), democracy (ultimate warrant of peace and order), and capitalism (best means to meet human needs).<sup>31</sup>

The Christian faith and theology form integral components of the justifying rationale for colonization. They account for the election of European settlers mandated by divine decree to subjugate and convert Indigenous Peoples, who fall under divine judgment on account of their lack of (human) dignity and civilization. Indigenous Peoples must suffer at the hand of colonizers, who embody their unique hope for redemption (from themselves and their inherently depraved ways) through Christian evangelization and Eurocentric inculturation.<sup>32</sup> Righteous settlers bring humanity and salvation to condemned Indigenous Peoples, who cannot question or resist externally imposed redemption through assimilation. The Christian faith and theology are also invoked to prevent and oppose Indigenous self-affirmation and resistance: “As long as we have the pacification from within the Christian religion, we always have this mentality of ‘turn the other cheek,’ ‘forgive and forget,’ that ‘in the end there will be a reward for us somewhere in the white man’s heaven.’”<sup>33</sup> Indoctrinated to accept assimilation as predestined fate and suffer their plight in hope of a redemption postponed to the afterlife, Indigenous Peoples are compelled to be and act as “good faithful”—that is, passively obedient Christians. Christian churches provided direct support to the enterprise of colonization in the form of doctrine, funding, and staff.

The balance of Christianity’s effect is very clear: churches provided financial backing for colonial enterprises; churches rationalized racism for their white parishioners; churches caused [Indigenous peoples] to accept the biblical ethic of suffering and to normalize their oppression by seeking

transcendent rather than imminent redemption; and churches were responsible for residential schools, which were the main instruments of the policy of outright assimilation.<sup>34</sup>

Even the notion and practice of reconciliation are conditioned by and oriented toward serving the colonization enterprise and ideal. Preventing open and honest sharing of historical truth and, as a consequence, the formulation of the real demands of justice, reconciliation as understood and promoted by the Canadian state and institutions prevents the necessary work of reparation and restitution, essential requirements for authentic and lasting reconciliation.<sup>35</sup> Genuine Indigenous–settler dialogue supposes that Indigenous Peoples and settler Canadians sit at the same table as equal partners holding their own rights to self-determination and this land. Restitution is a precondition, not the result of such dialogue.

The decolonization of reconciliation involves overcoming serious impediments. The first is settler resistance. Owning Canadian history and the demands it places on settlers in terms of the responsibility to recognize and offer reparation and restitution for the ancestral lands and resources stolen, cultures and traditions decimated, individuals and communities traumatized, and lives taken over multiple generations is overwhelming. Embracing the Indigenous cause is not so easy a task for comfortable settlers enjoying undue privilege by virtue of colonization. According to Alfred, the challenge can be articulated as follows:

If you are asking a colonizer who lives right here on your land to completely sympathize with your cause, you are going to ask him ... to admit that his ownership of his private property is wrong; that his job is based on exploitation of your resources and is wrong; that his whole social, political, and economic structure is wrong. How many non-native people in Canada are going to turn around and sympathize to that degree?<sup>36</sup>

Beyond the need to reform the Canadian state and institutions to enable recognition of the history of colonization, offering reparation and restitution (of land, rights, and resources), and the formation of relationships with Indigenous communities on a nation-to-nation basis, the challenge consists in leading Indigenous Peoples and settler Canadians to experience decolonization in their person and way of life. Colonization creates a socially formative structure, context, and atmosphere, which shapes individuals and communities, who then embody and enact it in real time. The colonized population actively participates (albeit not necessarily with conscious awareness and intent) in its own colonization. Colonization coopts its victims, who become instruments of assimilation (their

own and that of others). This challenge affects not only settlers but also Indigenous Peoples, to the extent that the process of colonization succeeds at assimilating them into settler society. As a result, Indigenous individuals and communities acquire a composite identity. Alfred uses a helpful analogy to describe this hybrid condition: the apple, in reference to a “person whose thin red skin masks a mushy core of a shade closely resembling white.”<sup>37</sup> Individuals and communities who have acquired this hybrid identity present the following traits: they are processing significant traumatic experiences, they seek to avoid (further) conflict and reach compromise at almost any cost, and they feel they must assist settlers with the task of “understanding” Indigenous Peoples.

In light of these considerations, Alfred argues that repeated and/or lasting transformative action leading to actual reconciliation flows from personal and collective spiritual conversion and reform.<sup>38</sup> Self-transformation induces the development of a decolonized personal identity empowered to engage actively in decolonizing other individuals, communities, and social-political institutions and structures. The decolonization of settler Canadians and Indigenous Peoples is effected through the (re)generation of rooted (Indigenous) personal and collective identities. This regeneration involves thorough self-examination: “Regeneration starts with a thorough and proper investigation of one’s own life. It is a form of self-challenge, a contest really, between the lies and the truth of the self, where the task is to convince us to take care of ourselves and to change our lives.”<sup>39</sup>

The formation of authentic (Indigenous/indigenized) identities depends on the ability to break free from colonized/colonizing representations and narratives, access personal and historical truth and perform transformative action. To discover the truth, the colonized (settlers and Indigenous) must renarrate and/or rewrite their personal and collective history. The critical work of decolonization therefore involves

thinking through what we think we know to what is actually true but is obscured by knowledge derived from our experiences as colonized peoples. The truth is the main struggle, and the struggle is manifest mainly inside our own heads. From there, it goes to our families and our communities and reverberates outward into the larger society, beginning to shape our relationship with it.<sup>40</sup>

Settler Canadians and Indigenous Peoples must put on hold their assumptions about themselves, others, and history and become truth seekers struggling to get a sense of and hold on to who they really are. The truth is not a given but the object of a lifelong journey and quest that will, if authentically undertaken, effect

radical self-transformation (conversion). Decolonizing truth seeking affects all dimensions of the individual: body, mind, and spirit. Decolonization requires the hard work of reforming oneself through daily discipline. Decolonization involves and identifies with moral and spiritual reform. Alfred articulates the demands of such work in vivid terms:

The overall challenge for all of us is to cause a mental awakening, beginning inside ourselves, to give people knowledge of themselves and of the world, thereby restoring the memory of who we truly are. We need to make our people and our movement courageous again, by reinstilling the emotional fortitude that comes from being rooted in a strong community and supported by strong families. We need to heal and strengthen our bodies through discipline, hard work. ... And we need to reconnect with our Indigenous spirituality, the foundations of our cultures and guarantors of psychological health.<sup>41</sup>

The end goal of decolonizing moral and spiritual formation is to foster the emergence of well-rooted, robust personal identities empowered to join the collective struggle for liberation from the shackles of colonization. Alfred argues that the emergence of healthy, self-sustaining Indigenous Peoples is tributary of the rise of what he calls “warriors.” A “warrior” is

a person, male or female, native or non-native, from any time in history, any segment of society, who has managed to find that place inside themselves that has integrity, that has managed to generate power and confidence, and then to emanate that power and that confidence and to dedicate themselves to the betterment of their people and to the fundamental advancement of the fundamental values of unity, and freedom and justice and all of these things that all of our cultures share as end objectives.<sup>42</sup>

This definition of the warrior is non-violent and highly inclusive (comprehending both Indigenous and settler individuals and cultures). The primary objective is to discern and preserve foundational personal integrity. On the basis of this integrity, confidence and power leading to self-formation and external transformative initiative can themselves be generated.

This vision of the decolonized self draws from the well of Indigenous wisdom, which promotes the development and nurturing of peaceful harmonious relationships to self, others, and creation. The goal is to cultivate friendship and joy flowing from mutually recognized and responsibly assumed interdependence instead of conflict and despair arising from selfish self-assertion and instrumentalization of self, others,

and creation (characteristic of colonized/colonizing society). Respect of and reverence for self, others, and creation undergird the expression of gratitude in recognition of the giftedness of existence (human and other). From gratitude springs kindness: that is, loving concern and care for self, others, and creation strong enough to empower engagement in the fight for their preservation and the common good. The warrior does not flee from the challenges of real life but rather takes these on with resilient hope.<sup>43</sup>

Alfred moreover strongly emphasizes that settler Canadians and Indigenous Peoples must reckon with the fact that insofar as they are natural fruits and instruments of the colonization enterprise, the Canadian state and its institutions (including the legal system) have no legitimacy (be it moral, social, political, spiritual, or other).<sup>44</sup> As the creation and tool of a colonizing empire, Canada is the child and harbinger of systemic violence concealing itself under the appearances of the rule of law. The process of decolonization must bring about the deconstruction of Canada as a colonial/colonizing state to enable the edification of a settler nation not founded in and oriented toward dehumanization but rather sustainable human and natural development and able to sustain peaceful nation-to-nation relationships with the Indigenous communities with which it shares the same land and resources. Alfred enjoins his readers to move away from the modern Western empire's ideology of infinite progress and engage Indigenous spiritualities to learn how to nurture the "universal responsibility and respect ... needed to achieve peaceful coexistence and ensure our survival on this earth."<sup>45</sup> Without this critical work of decolonization, the survival (let alone the flourishing) of the human communities living on Turtle Island will never be ensured.

## Conclusion

As both Arthur Manuel and Taiaiake Alfred have helped us foresee again and anew, the path to reaching such a state of effective reconciliation through authentic dialogue will not be straightforward. The challenge is as great as the stakes are high: ensuring the survival and flourishing of Indigenous and settler peoples. For settler Canadians, taking on this challenge means relinquishing a destructive culture and lifestyle by means of daily discipline. Jesse Wenté spells out the commandments of decolonization:

Stop the endless consumption. Stop the endless work to feed that consumption. Stop the hoarding—of everything, by so few. Stop the police; stop them killing us, stop them from provoking us in order to imprison us. Stop the nationalism that blinds so many to the failure and corruption of their leaders, that sows division when we most

need to rely on one another. Stop keeping people poor and sick. Just. Stop.<sup>46</sup>

Joining the struggle for decolonization comes at an exacting price. The freedom to protest and resist, to propose and embody an alternative way of living in speech and action entails losing the comforts and privileges generated by the colonial system. Arthur Manuel bears witness of the demands and burden responsible resistance to colonization placed on him:

When you selflessly participate in the struggle, it means doing this kind of work without pay. I have been basically unemployed since 1988. I work on this issue on a daily basis, but I do not get paid from any source. That is why I can say what I say—I am broke but I am free. Indigenous peoples need to know that freedom does, indeed, have a price. Settlers will not suddenly give us freedom. No, they are going to throw us in jail when we decide to demand our freedom from their colonialist system.<sup>47</sup>

New generations of Indigenous people and settler Canadians are taking on the challenge of recovering and living out authentic Indigenous and/or indigenized personal and collective identities. As Wenté observes,

Young people are re-engaging with their communities, their languages, and their land, and diving into the politics that influence them. Indigenous people are present in a wider variety of media. Our young people are on the front lines of protests. It feels as if the future is there, waiting for us to shape it. And while there is much to overcome, much to heal, and so much to change, it feels as if we are ready for that work—ready to fight.<sup>48</sup>

Indigenous Peoples are alive and resurging. Compellingly articulated by Manuel and Alfred, their legitimate demands for due recognition of Indigenous rights and restitution of ancestral lands and resources are loud and clear. The Indigenous struggle for liberation is ongoing. Colonization, this most human of problems (as it stems from and leads to human-induced systemic dehumanization), can only be addressed by the Canadian state and settler Canadians (and Christians) joining forces with Indigenous Peoples to discern and enact healing and sustainable ways of living together in this world, on this land.

The question is: Will the Canadian state and settler Canadians (and Christians) muster the courage to join in the struggle for decolonization and the creation of a Canadian nation, culture, and society grounded in historical truth and absolute respect for the dignity and rights of all peoples and cultures (Indigenous especially)? The time has come for Canada and settler Canadians (Christians included) to join the movement

and struggle for liberation from colonization. Wenté offers his own reformulation of Manuel's and Alfred's call to responsible engagement and action: "Despite all that has been done to Indigenous peoples, despite all that continues to be done to us and will be done to us today and tomorrow, we were here before Canada and we will be here long after it. Show us that the myth of this country can be replaced by truth. ... It's your turn."<sup>49</sup> How are we, as settler Canadians and Christians, to answer? The emergence and sustainability of our shared future directly depend on it. The very life and sustenance of our faith may also be at stake for, as the Apostle Paul teaches, "faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17). Hence, Christ himself might indeed be inviting us to transformative dialogue and work through the persons, voices, and actions of our Indigenous neighbours. Let us therefore relearn to believe and become human by discerning the presence of, encountering, listening to, and following the Indigenous/indigenized Christ already living in our midst, teaching and ministering to us: "Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking: if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come to you and eat with you, and you with me" (Rev. 3:20).

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- 1 Jesse Wenté, *Unreconciled: Family, Truth, and Indigenous Resistance* (Toronto: Allen Lane, 2021), 2–3.
  - 2 Ibid., 189.
  - 3 Ibid., 189–90.
  - 4 See *ibid.*, 188.
  - 5 See John Ralston Saul, *The Comeback* (Toronto: Viking, 2014), 5.
  - 6 Ibid., 29.
  - 7 Arthur Manuel and Ronald Derrickson, *The Reconciliation Manifesto: Recovering the Land, Rebuilding the Economy* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 2017), 62.
  - 8 See *ibid.*, 65.

- 9 See *ibid.*, 70–71.
- 10 See *ibid.*, 71.
- 11 See *ibid.*, 72–73.
- 12 Ibid., 127.
- 13 Arthur Manuel, *Unsettling Canada: A National Wake-up Call* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2021), 113.
- 14 Manuel and Derrickson, *The Reconciliation Manifesto*, 135–36.
- 15 Ibid., 136.
- 16 Ibid., 139.
- 17 See *ibid.*, 153.
- 18 See *ibid.*, 146.
- 19 Ibid., 248.
- 20 Ibid., 246.
- 21 See *ibid.*, 246.
- 22 See Taiaiake Alfred, *Wasáse* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2005), 38.
- 23 See Taiaiake Alfred, *Peace, Power, Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2009), 5.
- 24 See Taiaiake Alfred, "Cultural Strength: Restoring the Place of Indigenous Knowledge in Practice and Policy," *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 1 (2015), 3–4.
- 25 See Taiaiake Alfred, "Pathways to an Ethic of Struggle," *Canadian Dimension* 41:1 (2007), 39.
- 26 Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel, "Being Indigenous: Resurgences against Contemporary Colonialism," *Government and Opposition* 40:4 (2005), 598.
- 27 Alfred, *Wasáse*, 44.
- 28 Ibid., 31.
- 29 See *ibid.*, 93.
- 30 Ibid., 103.
- 31 See *ibid.*, 109.
- 32 See *ibid.*, 108–09.
- 33 Ibid., 67.
- 34 Ibid., 145.
- 35 See *ibid.*, 151.
- 36 Ibid., 68.
- 37 Alfred, *Peace, Power, Righteousness*, 101.
- 38 See Alfred, *Wasáse*, 22.
- 39 Ibid., 280.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Ibid., 282.
- 42 Alfred, "Pathways to an Ethic of Struggle," 38.
- 43 See Alfred, *Wasáse*, 10.
- 44 See *ibid.*, 230.
- 45 Ibid., 266.
- 46 Wenté, *Unreconciled*, 195.
- 47 Manuel and Derrickson, *The Reconciliation Manifesto*, 148.
- 48 Wenté, *Unreconciled*, 193.
- 49 Ibid., 196.

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# A Theological Assessment of the Canadian Government's Action Plan for Implementing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

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On June 21, 2023, Canada's National Action Plan (NAP)<sup>1</sup> to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) was tabled in Parliament. This 72-page document lays out the federal government's intentions and plans to act in collaboration with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit to bring Canadian laws, practices, and public values into alignment with the Declaration. What follows will offer a theological assessment of the NAP from a white Christian settler perspective using criteria drawn from the Sermon on the Mount. I write as one white settler Christian to other settler Christians, aware that Canada is not a Christian country and that Christian values have no automatic claim on Canadian citizens. Yet, I hope that this assessment may contribute to secular policy debates about Indigenous rights in Canada. The Sermon can provide a stimulus to ethical thought to move beyond traditional ways of thinking when these have become dysfunctional. It can be an important moral source for Christians and others who seek greater social justice that breaks with deeply entrenched colonial social practices and ways of thinking. It can help broaden the discussion about implementing the Declaration beyond the arenas of law and political philosophy and ethics to personal interiority and communal commitment to a transcendent good that justifies and inspires self-sacrifice for the sake of justice and the greater good.<sup>2</sup> Moving toward right relations between Indigenous and settler Canadians is going to require self-sacrifice on the part of the latter and of settler Canadian society as a whole. Settler governments are going to have to relinquish their autonomy over significant natural resources and the income derived from these. Settler Christians and settler Canadians are going to need all the strong moral sources they can muster to help make this happen.

Canadian governments and Canada's settler population have a long history of denying or failing to recognize the dignity and rights of Indigenous Peoples, even when these entities think they are doing what is good. The Sermon confronts this history with the truth

that an individual's or community's "'good' could always be better."<sup>3</sup> The Coalition for Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples has described the NAP as "promising but flawed."<sup>4</sup> In light of the Sermon, the NAP's promising aspects should be affirmed. By the same light, Indigenous concerns about the NAP's flaws should move settler Christians to press the federal government to implement the UN Declaration in ways that fully uphold the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

## An Ambiguous History

To appreciate the promising and flawed aspects of the NAP, it must be understood in relation to the morally ambiguous history from which it emerged. When current Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was leader of the Opposition, he promised that, if elected, his Liberal party would follow through on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) 94 Calls to Action, including #43 and #44, which recommended adopting and implementing the Declaration as a framework for reconciliation and developing an action plan for this implementation. Trudeau's Liberals were elected in 2015. On May 10, 2016, Carolyn Bennett, Minister for Indigenous and Northern Affairs, stated in a speech at the United Nations that the Declaration would be fully implemented in Canada. Her statement was tremendously important. Indigenous activist Arthur Manuel and Grand Chief Ronald Derrickson noted that getting the Declaration fully implemented has been central to the struggle of Indigenous Peoples in Canada for their rights to their lands and self-determination.<sup>5</sup> This promise signalled a break with Canada's colonial past and the long history of Canadian governments seeking to ignore, deny, or extinguish Indigenous rights that the Declaration affirms. However, shortly after Bennett's speech, Trudeau's government backtracked on this commitment, deeming the Declaration unworkable in Canada and unsuited to Canadian realities. Manuel and Derrickson described this as the greatest betrayal of Indigenous Peoples in this century.<sup>6</sup>



This backtracking repeated a pattern of behaviour followed by previous Canadian governments, which Sheryl Lightfoot describes as “selective endorsement.”<sup>7</sup> This involves advocating and affirming Indigenous rights internationally to maintain Canada’s reputation as a leader in human and Indigenous rights, then reducing these rights domestically so they fit with Canada’s existing colonial policies and practices.

This pattern of inauthentic behaviour expresses a fundamental disrespect for Indigenous Peoples. It has instilled among them a great distrust and cynicism toward Canadian governments.<sup>8</sup> It indicates that despite the advances made in recognizing and implementing some Indigenous rights in Canada, there remains an “unresolved colonial ambivalence”<sup>9</sup> in the attitudes of Canadian governments. Federal and provincial governments have typically been unwilling to cede control over land tenure or to recognize Indigenous rights to self-determination that would diminish Crown sovereignty.<sup>10</sup> Yet, this is precisely what fully implementing the Declaration requires.

Theologically, the selective endorsement of the Declaration reveals how a sinful social structure<sup>11</sup> of colonialism remains an important part of the framework of the policy making of Canadian governments and the public values of Canada’s settler population. Even well-intentioned settlers participate in this sin. This colonialism is rooted in a form of racism that legitimates the oppression and suffering of Indigenous Peoples, causing many to live in poverty.<sup>12</sup> It violates the ideals of freedom, equality, and inclusion that underlie democracy. The TRC’s Calls to Action #43 and #44 call Canadian governments and Canada’s settler population to choose between Canada’s democratic ideals and its colonial past. The continued practice of selective endorsement corrodes these ideals, underlie Canada’s democratic ethos, and, for Christians, reveals a certain idolatry in Canadian beliefs, practices, and structures.

The selective endorsement of Indigenous rights by Canadian governments violates the golden rule, Matthew 7:12, which concludes and summarizes the ethical teachings of the Sermon.<sup>13</sup> This injunction calls for people to let their actions be guided by a fundamental respect for the dignity of others. One is to act toward others as one would like to be treated by them.<sup>14</sup> The gruesome hyperbole of Matthew 5:29-30 (if your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away) demands that we root out the sin of disrespect. It calls for a conversion to the recognition of the dignity and rights of Indigenous Peoples that is free of compromise<sup>15</sup> with colonial racism. Can we apply such high standards of ethical behaviour to the “real world” of Canadian politics and the framework of Confederation, which was built on the racist suppres-

sion of Indigenous rights, lifeways, and spirituality? With that question in mind, we turn to examine the Action Plan.

## The Action Plan’s Promise: Breaking with Canada’s Colonial Heritage

The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (UN Declaration Act)* became effective on June 21, 2021. It committed the federal government to fully implementing the Declaration in Canada and to developing a plan for doing so within two years. In December 2021, the government began consulting with Indigenous Peoples to identify priorities and means for this implementation. In March 2023, a draft action plan and a report on these consultations were released. Further consultations with Indigenous Peoples ensued. These identified omissions in the draft action plan and further priorities, some of which are included in the NAP. The NAP’s release on June 21, 2023, marked the beginning of the Declaration’s implementation. The NAP covers a five-year period, 2023–2028, but describes itself as an “evergreen roadmap” (NAP, 8) that will need regular revision in consultation and collaboration with Indigenous Peoples.

The Sermon on the Mount calls for respect for the dignity of others, which the NAP’s rhetoric of partnership promises to promote. The NAP repeatedly speaks of how the federal government will cooperate and collaborate with Indigenous Peoples to “co-develop” guidelines, policies, and mechanisms for implementing the Declaration. The NAP defines “co-development” as “the Government of Canada working together in good faith through a substantive, collaborative, and consensus-based process to develop effective solutions and advance the UN Declaration in a timely way” (NAP, 20).

This language of partnership reflects a recognition of the dignity and rights of Indigenous Peoples in a nation-to-nation collaboration that breaks with Canada’s “guardian-ward” relationship that marked so much of our colonial past. It is in keeping with the NAP’s description of itself as outlining “a whole of government roadmap for advancing reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples through a renewed, nation-to-nation, government-to-government, and Inuit-Crown relationship based on recognition of rights, respect, cooperation, and partnership as the foundation for transformative change” (NAP, 18). Indigenous Peoples are no longer to be treated as wards of the Crown. Instead, they are to be recognized as self-determining peoples whose rights, traditions, and decisions must be honoured and respected. In several passages, the NAP acknowledges the necessity of this break with the past. It admits unequivocally that “Indigenous peoples have

suffered historic injustices as a result of ... colonization and dispossession of their lands, territories and resources” (NAP, 9). It goes to say that “the Government of Canada rejects all forms of colonialism and is committed to advancing relations with Indigenous peoples that are based on good faith and on the principles of justice, democracy, equality, non-discrimination, good governance and respect for human rights” (NAP, 9).

The NAP also states that “the Government of Canada recognizes that all relations with Indigenous Peoples must be based on the recognition and implementation of the inherent right to self-determination, including the right of self-government” (NAP, 9). It makes this intention concrete by promising that “[c]olonial laws, policies and practices that have interfered with Indigenous peoples’ self-government are [to be] repealed or amended” (NAP, 29). In discussing the need to improve dispute resolution processes, the NAP acknowledges that previously, “Canada’s refusal to reasonably consent to arbitration has presented challenges in addressing disputes effectively, efficiently, and in good faith” and that henceforth, Canada will “re-examine its approach to dispute resolution and work with Indigenous Modern Treaty Partners to co-develop solutions” (NAP, 69). In effect, this is a confession of guilt and a pledge that, having confessed its sin, Canada will turn from it and act more appropriately. The most obvious acknowledgement of this break with Canada’s colonial heritage and practices comes in the NAP’s statement regarding Canada’s *Indian Act* (1876)<sup>16</sup> in the section on civil and political rights: “Canada recognizes that the *Indian Act* is a colonial-era law designed to exert control over the affairs of First Nations, and as such, the *Act* will never be fully aligned with the *UN Declaration*. For Canada’s laws to fulfill the *UN Declaration*, the *Indian Act* must be repealed” (NAP, 50).

Important here is the acknowledgement that colonialism and this colonial-era law are incompatible with the *Declaration* and therefore must be abandoned. The *Declaration* is acknowledged as the standard with which the federal government’s laws and practices must be aligned and to which its ways of relating to Indigenous Peoples must conform. Throughout the NAP, the *Declaration* is assumed to be pivotal for Canada’s relationships with Indigenous Peoples. No longer is the *Declaration* to be conformed to Canada’s colonial laws and customs. In keeping with the TRC’s Call to Action 43, the *Declaration* functions in the NAP as the framework for Canada in seeking right relations with Indigenous Peoples. Federal laws, practices, and attitudes are to be shaped by it.

Indigenous commentators have recognized the break with Canada’s history of colonialism that this signals, and its importance. On June 29, 2023, the Coalition

for the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples, a consortium of individuals and organizations that includes respected Indigenous scholars and organizations from across Canada, released a public statement that said: “After years of opposition to the *Declaration*, in 2021 Canada became one of the first countries in the world to pass national legislation to fully implement the *UN Declaration*, including adoption of a comprehensive national action plan. The significance of this cannot be understated.”<sup>17</sup>

To appreciate this significance, we can look back to June 11, 2008, when Prime Minister Stephen Harper apologized in the House of Commons for the government’s role in residential schools. This admission of guilt was delivered with appropriate ceremony, but it lacked an essential component of a full apology. It did not say how the government would change its attitudes and actions so that what it was apologizing for would not be repeated in the future.<sup>18</sup> As historian J.R. Miller observed, “Thus, while impressive as a performance, the 2008 apology fell short of satisfying an objective measure of what constitutes an effective apology and, at the same time, failed to impress many of the Aboriginal people who witnessed it.”<sup>19</sup>

The Harper government subsequently adhered to the *Declaration* but described it as an aspirational document that was not legally binding and that did not require changing Canadian laws.<sup>20</sup> Harper and many in his government did not seem to realize or were unwilling to publicly acknowledge that Canada’s colonial past continues in the present.<sup>21</sup> By contrast, the TRC recognized that colonialism was foundational to the creation of Canada, and continues; the TRC highlighted the need for structural change in Canada’s relationship to Indigenous Peoples in its Calls to Action #43 and #44. The *UNDRIP Act* and the place the *Declaration* holds in the rhetoric of the NAP suggest that the current federal government is now attempting to provide what was lacking in the 2008 apology: a statement of what the government will do to ensure that what was apologized for does not happen again.

### **The Action Plan’s Promising Rhetoric: Recognition of the Living Nature of Indigenous Communities**

The NAP’s rhetoric is promising in another respect. John Borrows, an academic and jurist, has argued that the Supreme Court has tended to take an “originalist” approach to interpreting Indigenous rights.<sup>22</sup> An originalist approach understands Indigenous rights to be determined by events, practices, or the state of an Indigenous community at a particular point in time, either when treaties were signed or first contact with Europeans occurred.<sup>23</sup> Yet, when interpreting the rights of women or the legality of same-sex marriage,

the Court has taken a “living tree” approach, which recognizes that communities evolve and develop over time, and has ruled that, consequently, constitutional rights must be recognized as capable of evolving, too. Borrows argued that originalism, when used to interpret Indigenous rights, has two detrimental effects for Indigenous Peoples. First, it treats them as static entities and limits their rights to what the courts believe were operative at a particular moment in the past. According to Borrows, the use of originalism to interpret Indigenous rights in section 35(1) of Canada’s *Constitution Act* (1982) denies Indigenous Peoples “the growth of rights not connected to founding intentions and events,”<sup>24</sup> while rulings on other rights and freedoms that include settlers “are free to draw their meanings from more contemporary considerations.”<sup>25</sup> As originalism fails to respect the living nature of Indigenous Peoples—how their communities, and thus their rights, needs, and freedoms continue to evolve—it denies them the respect accorded settler society. This violates the Sermon’s call for respect for the dignity of others equal to that accorded to oneself.

Second, the Crown’s views and actions at the time of first contact were often grounded in “discriminatory assumptions regarding Aboriginal inferiority.”<sup>26</sup> When these past moments are the prime determinants of Indigenous rights in the present, colonial attitudes present therein become enshrined in Indigenous/settler relations. Consequently, an originalist approach enshrines these past discriminatory assumptions in current relationships and violates the Sermon’s call for respect for the dignity of others.

While the past should play an important role in determining Indigenous rights, Borrows argues that a “living tree” approach would allow the courts to consider historical developments and contemporary realities in recognition that Indigenous Peoples, like settler societies, are living, dynamic communities. As Indigenous communities evolve over time, so do their needs and capabilities, and so should their rights and freedoms. In fact, Borrows demonstrates that there have already been elements of this approach in some important Canadian legal cases involving Indigenous rights.<sup>27</sup>

The NAP’s rhetoric is promising in that it moves beyond originalism in two ways. First, the NAP twice explicitly affirms a living tree approach to Indigenous rights. In the programmatic section entitled “Vision for the Future,” it states that, in keeping with the UN Declaration, “Aboriginal and treaty rights – recognized and affirmed by section 35 of the Constitution Act ... are not frozen and are capable of evolution and growth” (NAP, 10). This approach is affirmed again in chapter 3, “Inuit Priorities,” which recognizes that Inuit modern treaties are living documents “capable of evolving over time” (NAP, 55). Second, equally impor-

tant is the statement in the Introduction that the NAP is an “evergreen roadmap” that may itself evolve through co-development with Indigenous Peoples and that will be periodically reviewed through consultation and in cooperation with them (NAP, 8). Here again, the rhetoric of the NAP suggests that, henceforth, Indigenous Peoples are to be respected as dynamic, living communities that evolve over time. As self-determining Indigenous Peoples, they will shape their own future and be partners in shaping the future of Canada as a whole.

## Transforming Initiatives

The rhetoric of the NAP is promising in a third way. In addition to acknowledging that Canada’s colonialism continues in the present and that the government intends to turn away from this, it states that the government must undertake new kinds of initiatives, in cooperation and consultation with Indigenous Peoples, to do this. Judged by the Sermon, this recognition of the need for new measures to change relationships between Canada’s federal government, the settler population, and Indigenous Peoples is promising, for it is in keeping with the Sermon’s call for transforming initiatives in situations of conflict.<sup>28</sup>

In the Sermon, the examples of these transforming initiatives illustrate the higher righteousness that it calls for. These examples are typically the third member of a triadic structure that occurs in a number of the passages in the Sermon.<sup>29</sup> In this structure, the first part is a statement of traditional righteousness. The second part identifies a sinful condition or vicious cycle of behaviour. The third part describes a transforming initiative that can lead beyond the sinful condition to right relations. The emphasis in these triadic structures is on the transforming initiative.<sup>30</sup> The heart of the Sermon’s call to a higher righteousness lies in the vision of reality laid out in the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3-12). The transforming initiatives illustrate what this higher righteousness looks like in practice.<sup>31</sup> An example of this triadic structure is Matthew 5:21-26. It begins with a statement of traditional teaching: “You shall not murder” (v. 21). Next comes a description of a sinful condition that goes further than traditional teaching: anyone who is angry with someone else and who denigrates them is liable to judgment (v. 22).<sup>32</sup> Then come two illustrations of transforming initiatives that lead out of the sinful condition and break the cycle of violence that anger and denigration perpetuate: go and become reconciled to your brother or sister, and come to terms with your accuser before you get to court (vv. 23-26).

The examples of transforming initiatives in the Sermon emphasize positive, creative actions that go beyond customary guidelines and seek to change the relationship at issue, to lead out of cycles of violence and into

right relations.<sup>33</sup> These examples are not new legal requirements to be followed literally. They are illustrations of the combination of creative fidelity<sup>34</sup> and concrete initiative required to transform unjust situations. They frequently call for what Charles Taylor describes as a “vertical move”<sup>35</sup> out of a clash of claims and counter claims to a new relationship of reconciliation and trust. Behind the ethical teaching of the Sermon stands the crucified and risen Jesus, who walks with his community and whose history gives it the assurance, hope, and courage needed to follow his path. The ethical teachings of the Sermon are guidelines for living out the grace given in him. They are themselves a form of grace, intended to help the Church be faithful in following him.<sup>36</sup> The application of these illustrations cannot be restricted to personal relationships. They also address the broader public. The Sermon is set within the horizon of the coming reign of God and calls for transforming initiatives in all spheres of life, “including the political and the economic.”<sup>37</sup> Aspects of the reign of God are actualized in history through these kinds of creative fidelity.

The transforming initiatives that the Sermon calls for are concrete actions that seek to change the relationship of the parties involved in a situation of conflict. An example of such an initiative related to a residential school that was run by The United Church of Canada took place at a traditional Gitksan feast hall in 2004 in Hazelton, British Columbia. After extensive preparations and education of government and United Church representatives into Gitksan traditions, these representatives hosted a modified version of a Gitksan feast and ceremony to reintegrate survivors of the residential school back into the communities from which they had been removed.<sup>38</sup> Part of what was transformative about this event was the recognition and respect accorded by these government and church representatives to Gitksan traditions and the Gitksan people. The feast involved these representatives “putting themselves into the hands of knowledgeable and patient Gitksan ... history being rolled back and the colonizers being tutored by the colonized.”<sup>39</sup> Reflecting on this event, Paulette Regan, a settler participant, noted how making “space for Indigenous knowledge systems and pedagogy thus acts as a fulcrum point, decolonizing and rebalancing our relationship.”<sup>40</sup> This is the kind of action that both the UN Declaration and the Sermon call for. This aspect of the event held in the Gitksan feast hall exemplifies how the rhetoric that runs through the NAP about consultation and cooperation between Indigenous people and settlers should be put into effect.

To realize the break with Canada’s colonial past that the NAP calls for in order to properly implement the Declaration, Canadian governments and institutions, Canadian churches, and settler Canadians will need to

undertake transformative initiatives like this in relation to Indigenous Peoples’ “hard rights”<sup>41</sup> regarding land and natural resources. They will need to make space for Indigenous knowledge systems, culture, nationhood, and law<sup>42</sup> by respecting Indigenous Peoples’ right to make their own decisions, including when that decision is to say no to actions for which settler Canadians and governments seek their consent.<sup>43</sup>

The NAP acknowledges the need for new initiatives in the following programmatic statement: “Implementing the UN Declaration requires intentionally moving beyond existing ways of doing things and work that is already underway. To be transformative and honour the vision at the heart of the UN Declaration, this work must build on and exceed existing efforts” (NAP, 21).

Here again there is an emphasis that the relationship between the Canadian state and Indigenous Peoples must change, and that the federal government, working with Indigenous Peoples, must undertake new initiatives aimed at transforming this relationship. Another programmatic statement, previously quoted, found early in the NAP, states that it outlines a “whole of government roadmap” that is based on a renewed “nation-to-nation, government-to-government, and Inuit-Crown relationship based on recognition of rights, respect, cooperation, and partnership as the foundation for transformative change” (NAP, 18). Important here is again the emphasis on transformation.

The word “transformative” occurs five times in the NAP, each time to describe the kind of change in Canada’s relationship with Indigenous Peoples that the NAP is intended to effect. In another example, the *UN Declaration Act* is described as providing “a historic, transformative opportunity to ensure the full implementation of the inherent rights of Indigenous peoples as affirmed in the UN Declaration” (NAP, 8). The NAP includes a number of quotes from statements made by Indigenous groups and individuals involved in the consultations held to develop it. One of these, by Grand Council Treaty #3, states that “Canada’s Action Plan must provide for the honourable implementation of historic treaty promises and do so in a transformative way that renews the Crown-Indigenous treaty relationships and implements UNDRIP” (NAP, 12). The drafters of the NAP seem to have heard this, to some extent.

The emphasis that measures laid out in the NAP must be transformative fits with its recognition of the break with Canada’s colonial past that must take effect in order to fully implement the Declaration. Earlier, we noted that there is a confession of guilt in the NAP, a recognition that the federal government’s previous goals and typical approaches to dealing with Indigenous Peoples were wrong and must be corrected. There

is also a pledge that having recognized and admitted this, Canada must change course and fully respect the dignity of Indigenous Peoples and their inherent rights. The emphasis in the NAP on transformative action is in keeping with this pledge.

In the *Second annual progress report on implementation of The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*, released in 2023,<sup>44</sup> David Lametti, who was then Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, described the challenge that the NAP faces as “the task of undoing 150 years of colonialism.”<sup>45</sup> This recognition that Canada has a history of colonialism that must be rectified is promising, as is the recognition that this undoing will require transformative measures, designed and implemented through consultation and cooperation with Indigenous partners. Passing the Act and developing the NAP could itself be the beginning of this transformative initiative. A generation of Indigenous activists campaigned to have the Declaration adopted and implemented in Canada.<sup>46</sup> The passage of the *UN Declaration Act* was an important step toward what they sought to achieve. On paper, both the break with Canada’s colonial past and the promise of a new relationship of mutual respect and nation-to-nation and Inuit-to-Crown cooperation in the NAP have the potential to take this further. But it is at this point, in terms of how the NAP will be put into effect, that Indigenous commentators have criticized the NAP.

### “Promising but Flawed”

Indigenous commentators have criticized the NAP as flawed in serious ways. First, it has been criticized as inconsistent on the issue of seeking the consent of Indigenous Peoples in relation to initiatives that affect their rights.<sup>47</sup> At the heart of the UN Declaration is article 3, which states that “Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination.” It is this right that clashes with Canada’s colonial practices of subordinating the wishes, rights, and well-being of Indigenous Peoples to the interests of Canadian governments and settler society. This right leads to article 32(1), which states that Indigenous Peoples have the right to determine how “their lands or territories and other resources” are used or developed, and 32(2), which stipulates that states must obtain the free and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples prior to approving any projects that affect their lands or resources. The NAP acknowledges these rights and obligations in eight or nine places and describes how the government, in consultation and cooperation with Indigenous Peoples, will develop “guidance” on how to engage with Indigenous Peoples about projects that affect their lands and territories in ways that align with article 32(2), and recommendations for how to seek their “free, prior and informed consent” (NAP, 31) regarding such projects.

Indigenous commentators have stressed that governments must do more than seek the consent of Indigenous Peoples in such regards. They must also respect the right of Indigenous Peoples to say no to such projects.<sup>48</sup> The NAP needs to be strengthened on this point. It must state unequivocally that the right of Indigenous Peoples to say no to such projects will be respected, and that if Indigenous Peoples do not consent to such projects, they cannot go forward.<sup>49</sup> This is the kind of respect for the other that the Sermon calls for and the kind of recognition of Indigenous rights that an authentic “nation-to-nation, government-to-government, and Inuit-Crown relationship” (NAP, 18) entails.

A second major criticism, in line with the first, concerns oversight of how the NAP is carried out. The NAP announces that an Action Plan Advisory Committee will be created. This will be composed of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis experts, selected by their people’s governments and representative institutions. It will provide “support and advice, upon request, related to the implementation of shared priorities” (NAP, 28) in the NAP. However, Indigenous Peoples are looking for more than an opportunity to provide advice when requested.<sup>50</sup> The right of Indigenous Peoples to self-determination must be built into the NAP’s oversight mechanisms. This means that a committee like this must have more than an advisory and consultative role.

The NAP also announces that an independent Indigenous rights monitoring body will be created to resolve disputes over Indigenous rights. However, as two commentators note, its “proposed powers and authorities are unclear.”<sup>51</sup> The NAP does state that its functions could include “[a]dvancing, monitoring and/or reporting on implementation of the UN Declaration and the UN Declaration Act, as part of ensuring accountability” (NAP, 27). But there is no guarantee that this will happen. A firm commitment that this body will have this role and an expeditious timeline for establishing it could go a long way to resolving concerns about the lack of Indigenous involvement in oversight of the NAP’s implementation.

It is a glaring inconsistency that the NAP speaks of establishing a “nation-to-nation, government-to-government, and Inuit-Crown relationship” (NAP, 18) based on partnership while, to date, the annual progress reports on how it is being implemented come only from the Ministry of Justice. In a genuine nation-to-nation partnership, a group such as the proposed independent Indigenous rights monitoring body would be signing off on these progress reports, too, and these reports would only state what both this body and the government agree on—or would state their disagreement. On this crucial point of oversight, the

NAP fails to carry through on its promise to break with Canada's colonial mentality. This failure and the way it undermines the rhetoric of respect and cooperation has been noted in several commentaries on the NAP. As one commentator put it, "[a]s is typically the case with reconciliation initiatives, implementation is where good intentions go to die."<sup>52</sup> While the NAP's rhetoric is promising, as long as oversight is left solely in the hands of the Canadian government, there is the danger that history will repeat itself and any good intentions will remain unfulfilled.

The Sermon's demand for an uncompromising respect for the dignity of others requires that the right of Indigenous Peoples to self-determination be honoured by their having a say in the oversight of the NAP equal to that of the federal government. Until this kind of oversight is implemented and honoured, the NAP will fail to break with Canada's colonial mentality and practices.

### **Ajuinnata**

The NAP has two titles. One is *The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan*. The other is *Ajuinnata*. The latter is an Inuktitut term. It means a commitment to act, to never give up even against overwhelming odds. Mary Simon, Canada's governor general, used it in her 2023 New Year's message to encourage Canadians to act with kindness and compassion in facing challenges. When Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy visited Canada in September 2023, she taught him this word, and he used it in his speech to Parliament. Indigenous Peoples have demonstrated what this word speaks of in their ongoing struggle to preserve their rights, identities, and cultures. It is due to their struggle and commitment that Canada's federal government is now attempting to implement the UN Declaration. Canadian governments and settler Canadians will need this commitment, too, if the Declaration is to be fully and properly implemented in Canada. At least two massive obstacles oppose this implementation.

The first is the tremendous inertia of Canadian society and its social systems, which tends to work against the full recognition of Indigenous rights. Sociologist Niklas Luhmann showed how the major social systems of modern Western societies tend to develop their own goals, codes of meaning, and rationalities.<sup>53</sup> These social systems have great difficulty in receiving and understanding information and concerns coming from outside their own framework. They tend to receive this as noise rather than meaningful communication.

This is how Indigenous concerns about their rights, lands, waters, and traditions have tended to be received when they clash with the functioning of the

major social systems of settler Canadian society. However, these social systems are not omnipotent. When risks and challenges to these systems or to society as a whole become sufficiently pressing, the underlying human interests of people threatened by these risks can break through the self-referentiality of these systems and create a context in which the needs and demands they present must be reckoned with.<sup>54</sup> The assertion of Aboriginal title to land in British Columbia has created this kind of risk in relation to resource industries there, which in turn has created political pressure to settle Indigenous land claims.<sup>55</sup> A variety of challenges, most generated by Indigenous activism, led to the passage of *The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*. But the inertia of settler society's social systems remains. It will take a tremendous amount of *ajuinnata* on the part of settler Canadians as well as Indigenous Peoples to overcome this inertia and fully implement the UN Declaration in Canada. The Sermon can help foster and guide this commitment and work against the tendency toward selective endorsement that the inertia of social systems in settler society generates.

A second obstacle is the deep entrenchment of colonial patterns of thought and action in settler Canadian society. Settler Canadians think and act in colonial ways without realizing it, even when they think they are being anti-colonial. It will take a tremendous amount of ongoing soul-searching, dialogue, and confrontation to remove this tendency, but this is what the Sermon's call to a higher righteousness demands.

Read in light of the Sermon on the Mount, much of the rhetoric of the NAP is promising. Yet, the NAP is deeply flawed in failing to build in ways for Indigenous Peoples to be full and equal partners in oversight of its implementation. For the promise of the NAP's rhetoric to be realized, settler Christians in Canada will need to draw on spiritual resources like the Sermon, with its insistent call for a higher righteousness, and allow their response to this to be informed by insights of Indigenous commentators on the NAP. The Sermon can be one source of the *ajuinnata* that settler Canadians will need to see that the UN Declaration is properly implemented. Another source can be the observation of Paul Tillich<sup>56</sup>: those who truly love their country desire it to be just.<sup>57</sup>

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1 *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan*, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Implementation Secretariat, Department of Justice Canada, 2023. Hereafter, "NAP."

2 Don Schweitzer, "The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Sermon on the Mount," *Toronto Journal of Theology* 39:2 (October 2023), 110–21.

3 Amy-Jill Levine, *Sermon on the Mount: A Beginner's Guide to the Kingdom of Heaven* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2020), 2.

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- 5 Arthur Manuel and Grand Chief Ronald Derrickson, *The Reconciliation Manifesto* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 2017), 158.
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- 7 Sheryl Lightfoot, *Global Indigenous Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 95–97, 106–108.
- 8 James Anaya, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples: The situation of indigenous peoples in Canada* (2014), 2.
- 9 Lightfoot, *Global Indigenous Politics*, 99.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 192.
- 11 Sinful social structures can be defined as "institutional realities, such as colonialism and imperialism, that create an unjust distribution of wealth, power, and recognition, and thus push a section of the population to the margin of society where their well-being or even their life is in danger." Gregory Baum, "Structures of Sin," in *The Logic of Solidarity*, ed. Gregory Baum and Robert Ellsberg (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), 112.
- 12 Manuel and Derrickson, *The Reconciliation Manifesto*, 80. James Anaya noted that the "most jarring manifestation of these human rights problems is the distressing socio-economic conditions of indigenous peoples in a highly developed country." Anaya, *Report*, 7.
- 13 Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 518.
- 14 Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 367.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 247.
- 16 The *Indian Act* became law in 1876 and has been amended many times since then.
- 17 The Coalition for Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples, "Public Statement."
- 18 J.R. Miller, *Residential Schools and Reconciliation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 199.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 200.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 202.
- 21 In 2009, Prime Minister Harper publicly stated at a G20 meeting that Canada has no history of colonialism: <https://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/prime-minister-harper-denies-colonialism-in-canada-at-g20-538621372.html>.
- 22 John Borrows, *Freedom and Indigenous Constitutionalism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 128–60.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 130–31.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 131.
- 25 *Ibid.*
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- 27 *Ibid.*, 148–51.
- 28 Schweitzer, "The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Sermon on the Mount," 115–16.
- 29 Glen Stassen, "The Fourteen Triads of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5.21–7.12)," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122:2 (2003), 267–308.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 270, 279.
- 31 Alan Culpepper, *Matthew* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2021), 106.
- 32 No exception is made here for righteous or prophetic anger; see Culpepper, *Matthew*, 108. However, there is anger that makes a judgment "in the hope of something better": Debbie McMillan, "To Proclaim Jesus, Our Judge and Our hope," in *Intercultural Visions*, ed. Rob Fennell (Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 2012), 75. This anger is in keeping with the transformative ethos of the Sermon and has a place in the work of love.
- 33 Stassen, "The Fourteen Triads of the Sermon on the Mount," 280.
- 34 Creative fidelity can be defined as "the ongoing process of deconstruction and abandonment, on the one hand, and reconstruction and novel expression, on the other," of the church's practices: Terrence Tilley, *The Disciples' Jesus* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 130.
- 35 Charles Taylor, *Dilemmas and Connections* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 350.
- 36 Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 201–202, 239.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 199.
- 38 Miller, *Residential Schools and Reconciliation*, 117–21. A settler participant's account of this event and reflections on it are given in Paulette Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 193–212.
- 39 Miller, *Residential Schools and Reconciliation*, 118.
- 40 Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*, 211.
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- 43 The Coalition for Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples, "Public Statement."
- 44 Department of Justice Canada, *Second annual progress report on implementation of The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, 2023*.
- 45 *Ibid.*, 28.
- 46 Hayden King, "The UNDA 101: Canada's Declaration Action Plan," Yellowhead Institute, March 28, 2023, <https://yellowheadinstitute.org/2023/03/28/unda-action-plan>.
- 47 The Coalition for Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples, "Public Statement."
- 48 *Ibid.*
- 49 *Ibid.* The question of who speaks for Indigenous Peoples in such regards has been raised. The Coalition has called for clarification in the NAP on this point, noting that only "peoples or nations, not communities or groups, hold the right to self-determination."
- 50 *Ibid.*
- 51 Nick Leeson and Mariana Gallegos Dupuis, "Unravelling Canada's UN Indigenous Action Plan," *Law 360 Canada*, August 2, 2023.
- 52 King, "The UNDA 101."
- 53 Niklas Luhmann, *Ecological Communication* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 36–43.
- 54 Ulrich Beck, *Power in the Global Age* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2005), 104.
- 55 Manuel and Derrickson, *The Reconciliation Manifesto*, 123.
- 56 Gregory Baum, *Nationalism, Religion and Ethics* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 82.
- 57 I thank David Seljak for helpful suggestions on an early version of this paper.

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## Book Review

# Re-centering Class Relations, Organizations, and Power Dynamics in a Socially Conscious Theology

Joerg Rieger. *Theology in the Capitalocene: Ecology, Identity, Class, and Solidarity*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2022. ix + 257 pp.

The financial crash of 2008 and the Great Recession were the beginning of the end for the ideological side of neoliberalism. The long decade following was one in which the social and economic crises covered over by that ideological hegemony came forward. From the Occupy movement of 2010–11 to the Black Lives Matter uprisings in 2014 and 2020, to the Sanders and Corbyn campaigns of 2016–19, to the Covid-19 pandemic, not to mention the various reactions against these, culminating in the January 6 insurrection in America and the ‘freedom convoy’ protests across Canada, we are seeing that old ideas will no longer serve to justify the worsening conditions under which working people are obliged to live. How can religious institutions respond to this moment?

*Theology in the Capitalocene* is an attempt to develop such a response, positing the ‘Capitalocene’ as opposed to the ‘Anthropocene,’ arguing that this geological age is dominated not by humanity at large but by the accumulation of capital for a small handful of individuals at the top of the system. About halfway through, Rieger sums up the mission of the book, asking, “Which material practices are currently producing the most fertile ground for the alternative agency that is needed to transcend the exploitative relationships that affect both people and the earth?” (85).

The book incorporates a variety of intellectual currents (so many that early passages feel more like survey than analysis), synthesizing an approach that can address the overlapping environmental, social, and economic crises facing our society. Rieger foregrounds class relations and the material conditions that shape them, and he draws in the introduction on Antonio Gramsci’s notion of the ‘organic intellectual’ to argue for an ‘organic theologian,’ for a theology grounded in those material conditions and that takes a side with the exploited and oppressed. Rieger argues convincingly that different theological trends are, consciously or unconsciously, products of those conditions and reflect

the interests of either the oppressed or the oppressors at any given moment.

As the book progresses through the chapters on class and deep solidarity, the argument becomes more focused. Rieger argues for a recentring of class as an axis of struggle, insisting that class not be viewed in terms of classism but as a relationship of power and exploitation. This approach correctly criticizes those who “consider mission accomplished when millionaires and homeless people share the same pews” (116) in the name of diversity and recognizes the necessarily opposing interests of these groups. This requires a recognition of division in our society, a notion that Rieger argues has been consciously downplayed by some scholars and faith communities in the name of ‘inclusion.’ This theme is continued in the discussion of solidarity. Here, we see the most cogent arguments put forward for a solidarity based on shared interests across diverse identity groups. This can only be based on an analysis of power dynamics within capitalism and how, for example, racism is used to divide white and racialized workers, giving privilege to some and encouraging them to mistake this for power.

While Rieger draws on a wide variety of influences, Marx is his most frequent interlocutor. The relationship to Marxism in this book, however, is an arm’s-length one, one current among many other social theorists. This leads to some inconsistencies: for example, the treatment of class. Is it one more social category, like race, gender, and so on, or is it a more fundamental relationship that conditions how race and gender dynamics are lived? Both perspectives are present here, to varying degrees, but not enough is done to explain how they could sit together coherently. The most problematic instance is in the sections discussing economic democracy, which emphasizes worker cooperatives as a solution to class exploitation, where a more thorough use of Marx’s critique would not have economic democracy confined to the workplace. This



leaves out any discussion of the coercive influence that markets have, even on cooperative enterprises, and the need for democratic planning across economic sectors.

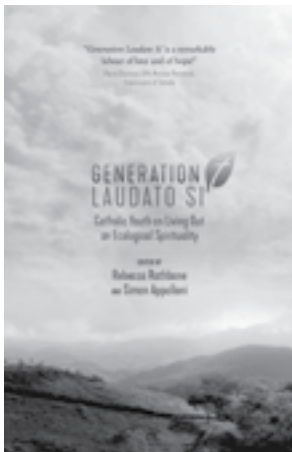
Even so, this book is a refreshing attempt to recentre class relations, organizations, and power dynamics in a socially conscious theology. Without taking on

and developing this perspective, religious institutions, along with academia, will continue to sit on the outside of social movements and struggle, looking in.

**Simon Schweitzer**

*Social activist and member of the Canadian Union of Public Employees in Saskatoon, Canada*

## Generation Laudato Si' Catholic Youth on Living Out an Ecological Spirituality



Edited by Rebecca Rathbone and Simon Appolloni

Written entirely by youth (aged 17 to 35) from 20 countries, this book comprises the thoughts, wisdom, dreams and aspirations of a generation that wants to change how we run the economy, foster community, lead and govern, facilitate education, use and apply technology, and live among the rest of creation. But it is more than just a book; through multimedia including a website, Instagram, Twitter and videos, it is a call to a global conversation to foster ecological conversion.

The news that Francis's remarkable encyclical is working its way down through the vast institutions of the Catholic Church is very welcome – and even better that it is lodging in the minds and hearts of young people. —*Bill McKibben, Schumann Distinguished Scholar, Middlebury College, Vermont*

... an irresistible compendium of pragmatic hope, a vibrant collage of how inspired young persons around the world are defending, and befriending, our planetary home. —*Stephen Bede Scharper, Associate Professor of Environment, University of Toronto*

*Generation Laudato Si'* ... has bolstered my conviction that this is not the end: there is still much to be done, and ours is the generation that can do it – we can “shift the paradigm.” —*Yusra Shafi, KAIROS Youth Delegate to COP27*

**Rebecca Rathbone** is Officer Promoting Youth Leadership, Caritas Internationalis, and a former Animator for Development and Peace. **Simon Appolloni** is an Assistant Professor at the University of Toronto, School of the Environment, and author of *Convergent Knowing: Christianity and Science in Conversation with a Suffering Creation* (McGill-Queen's University Press).

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## Book Review

# Max Weber and the Current Crisis of Democracies

Wendy Brown. *Nihilistic Times: Thinking with Max Weber*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2023. 132 pp.

Wendy Brown is UPS Foundation Professor in the School of Social Science at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton. This elegantly and concisely written book began as her 2019 Tanner Lectures at Yale University. In it, she examines Max Weber's famous lectures, "Science as Vocation" and "Politics as Vocation," for insights for addressing the current crisis of democracies, which she describes as a manifestation of nihilism in public life. Brown sees nihilism—the view that life is meaningless and the rejection of all moral principles—to be present in assertions of power shorn of accountability to any transcendent values; in the normalizing of deceit in human behaviour; in popular indifference to these traits in the conduct of political and religious leaders; in attempts to use traditional morality and religion to buttress class, gender, or racial supremacies; and in indifference to climate change. She astutely argues that reckoning with this should consider how people in the past understood and addressed similar crises in their time. Like Weber, Brown is a moralist, concerned about the quality and direction of public life. Unlike Weber, Brown is a person of the Left, concerned about reinvigorating left-leaning thought, culture, and politics. She gleans from Weber strategies for how nihilism can be countered in university teaching and politics.

Brown begins with Nietzsche's and Weber's understandings of nihilism. Both describe it as not just an attitude but a moral condition produced by Western modernity and unfettered capitalism. According to Weber, nihilism is fed directly by modern affirmations of autonomy and indirectly by the latent effects of instrumental rationality and the weakening of traditional forms of authority. The Enlightenment critique of religion and tradition left human life without any authoritative values or rational means of discovering or adjudicating them. This leads to values becoming politicized, cheapened, and instrumentalized. The growth of modern bureaucracies and the dominance of technical rationality further displaces substantive values from decision-making.

Turning to Weber's lecture on politics, she agrees with him that politics is the sphere where this lack of

values must be resisted. The hope of resistance lies in charismatic leaders who passionately and responsibly pursue a sense of purpose. Their passionate vision proclaims values and inspires action. A sense of responsibility guides how these are invoked and pursued. Brown argues that university educators need to bring such passion into public thought, awaken desire for a better social order, help others understand the world in light of this desire, and articulate how pursuing it can be viable. Like Weber, Brown sees this to be a tall order, but necessary if nihilism is to be resisted.

Turning to Weber's lecture on science, Brown agrees with Weber's call to depoliticize knowledge and the academy. Nihilism's boundary breaking—which turns everything into an expression of self-assertion and recognizes as true only what serves this—needs to be resisted by university classrooms being no-combat zones where people of different political outlooks can engage in committed yet respectful dialogue about facts, values, and their ramifications. Brown reads Weber dialectically. She affirms much of his complex, multi-dimensional social analysis. But Weber's rigid distinction between facts and values is untenable and self-defeating as a strategy to resist nihilism. Brown deepens Weber's emphasis on the contingency of values with her discussion of the need for conjunctural analysis that studies how values and facts are related, how they are situated, and how they operate in public life. Her vision of how values should be taught and how they should critically inform teaching deserves a wide hearing. As she argues, a good university professor can be transformative for students without seeking disciples.

This insightful, thought-provoking book illuminates some objective culture factors contributing to the social division and degradation of public life in many democracies today. Unfortunately, it has a weakness. Brown criticizes the Religious Right but never mentions the Religious Left. This is at odds with her "all hands on deck" sense of urgency regarding the crisis she addresses. Her endorsement of Weber's categorical denigration of religion as requiring a sacrifice of the intellect and being susceptible to nihilistic exploita-

tion might seem to justify this omission. But Weber's denigration, while true of some religion, is inaccurate as a description of the praxis of Rosemary Radford Ruether, Shawn Copeland, and others. Religions at their best are forms of resistance to nihilism. Brown's

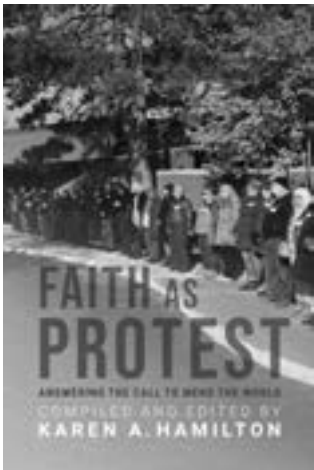
concern to address it would be better served by also attending to the Religious Left.

**Don Schweitzer**

*St. Andrew's College, Saskatoon*

## Faith as Protest

### Answering the Call to Mend the World



Compiled and edited by Karen A. Hamilton

Is faith still relevant in today's world? Amid polarization, war, a refugee crisis, a pandemic and environmental devastation, it's easy to feel that faith no longer has a role to play. This book is evidence that nothing could be further from the truth. As you listen to voices from a range of religious traditions, you will see that faith – and the actions that arise from it – can mend the world.

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“The stories in this book, compiled by The Rev. Dr. Karen Hamilton, are from interviews with people of different faiths who have acted courageously for justice. They are powerful and inspiring and proclaim the hope our faith gives us. People in our parishes, and many others, are struggling to know how God is calling us to respond to the injustices in our day. I wholeheartedly recommend this book.” — *Most Rev. Ronald Fabbro, CSB, Bishop of London, Ontario*

**The Rev. Dr. Karen Hamilton**, the former General Secretary of The Canadian Council of Churches and Co-Chair of the 2018 Parliament of The World's Religions, is an award-winning author. She is the recipient of national and international awards for interfaith dialogue and practices.

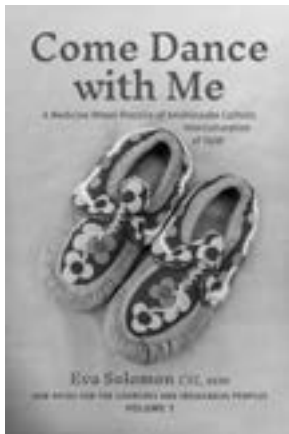
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# Come Dance with Me

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It is an invitation: an invitation to dance across the circular plain of the medicine wheel, a framework for Anishinaabe Catholic interculturation of faith. This rhythm of the dance is a means of healing, integrity, transformation, and reconciliation. The invitation, “Come dance with me,” reflects the invitation of the Cosmic Christ to all creation.

Sponsored by the Centre on the Churches, Truth, and Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples (CCTR) of the Faculty of Theology at Saint Paul University in Ottawa, Canada, the purpose of the series *New Paths for the Churches and Indigenous Peoples* is to publish academic

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**Eva Solomon CSJ, ssm, DMin**, lives in Winnipeg. In her traditional way, she is a Sacred Pipe Carrier and has worked for several decades with the Canadian bishops on Indigenous ministry and on the development of a truly Indigenous Catholic church.

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