

Critical Theology

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Introduction

By Lori Ransom
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In the late spring of 2021, Canadians were shocked by news that unmarked children's graves had been discovered at the sites of four former Indian residential schools. These discoveries drew attention not only to the unresolved work of reconciliation within Canada but also, more specifically, to unresolved issues in the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the churches. Media reports focused on calls for a Papal apology for the Roman Catholic Church's involvement in residential schools; all of the aforementioned schools had been run by Roman Catholic religious orders. (The Anglican Church of Canada, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, and The United Church of Canada also ran residential schools and have apologized for their involvement at the highest level of each church.) The public outcry in response included a few instances of churches in First Nations communities being deliberately set on fire.¹ Not widely reported were stories of the complexity of Indigenous peoples' relationships with the Church. For example, in response to the burning of the South Indian Lake United Church in Manitoba, The Rev. Deb Anderson-Pratt (Cree/Saulteaux), a United Church minister from Saskatchewan, posted her anger at "people burning down churches" on Facebook, noting that "so many of our Elders took on the church and dedicated their lives to the church"; she was frustrated that people "want [to] take that from them." She called for prayers in response.

Anderson-Pratt's post reveals how the Christian faith remains strong among Indigenous peoples, even as the violence of the relationship with churches requires

redress and attention. It reminds me of the surprise expressed by some of my former Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) colleagues when Elders leading ceremonies at the TRC's Northern National Event in Inuvik invoked the name of Jesus whenever they prayed in TRC public ceremonies. Despite the churches' involvement in residential schools, these Elders' Christian faith ran deep.

I am also reminded of the words of another Elder at another TRC gathering, which brought together Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers, who said

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that for reconciliation to occur between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, specifically Church peoples, the churches needed first to reconcile with God over what they had done. Profound words.

Christian mission and ministry among Indigenous peoples in Canada was not confined to the residential school system but took place historically, and it continues to take place today in Indigenous communities and among Indigenous peoples off reserve. Churches are grappling with how to carry out this mission and ministry in light of the mistakes of the past. They are also struggling to understand how to reconcile their practices in light of the resurgence among Indigenous peoples, including among some Indigenous Christians, of traditional Indigenous spiritual beliefs, ceremonies, and cultural practices. In its final report, the TRC said, “The churches, as religious institutions, must affirm Indigenous spirituality in its own right. [And further] that without such formal recognition, a full and robust reconciliation will be impossible.”² For some churches, at least at an institutional level, this recognition is not an issue; some, however, observe some of their Christian brothers and sisters even today engaging in mission practices that assert Christian supremacy and denigrate traditional Indigenous practices. How to address this ongoing spiritual violence against Indigenous peoples perpetrated from within the Christian community is a fraught subject among Christians.

In light of these complexities, a number of institutional churches within Canada have been working individually and collectively to address the subject of spiritual violence against Indigenous peoples. An ecumenical working group has been meeting since May 2020 to

reflect theologically on this topic and related questions concerning how and whether Indigenous and Christian spiritual traditions can be practised together. Indigenous peoples, including Indigenous Christians, have a range of views on these matters, which adds complexity to the process of discernment for churches seeking to prevent spiritual violence and find ways to address the spiritual harm they and their fellow Christians have done and continue to do.

I am engaged in this working group along with four of the contributors to this issue. We are carrying out our work through a process of respectful dialogue collectively and with guest interlocutors. We recognize that each one of us is on an individual spiritual journey and have found our individual journeys enriched by the opportunity to learn from, challenge, and build on each other’s insights. In this issue, four of my colleagues—Christina Conroy, Christine Jamieson, Benjamin Luján, and Brian McDonough—offer insights on the subject of how churches can respond to spiritual violence against Indigenous peoples and the resurgence of Indigenous spirituality. We look forward to responses to these articles, anticipating that they will contribute to our ongoing process of discernment on these matters.

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1 The causes of these fires, including at South Indian Lake, has not been officially determined in all cases, but is under investigation for possible arson.

2 *Canada’s Residential Schools: Reconciliation, The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, Vol. 6 (Ottawa: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015), 105.

Why Christian Churches Should Listen to the Voices of Indigenous Resurgence Thought

By Benjamin Luján

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The shocking discovery at the Kamloops Indian Residential School and the controversial response of the Catholic Church's leadership in Canada makes it clear now more than ever that the Christian churches, and in particular the Catholic Church, need to listen to Indigenous voices more closely and act informed by them and with them. One of the most important voices – or groups of voices – in Canada is that of Indigenous resurgence scholars, many of whom have been critical of reconciliation efforts by government and churches while offering insightful and challenging reflections on what living in right relations with Indigenous peoples entails. In particular, there is a rich spiritual dimension to their contributions, which can help faith communities deepen their understanding of the spiritual character of reconciliation and of living in right relations more generally.¹ Resurgence thought sees everyday living as spiritual, particularly the realm of human responsibility as lived in daily life, and as something applicable to Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples alike. This responsibility to live in right relations with all is a fundamental common ground that is ultimately spiritual and binds all peoples together. Taking this insight as the ground of decolonization and reconciliation efforts, the churches can better fulfill their commitment to Indigenous justice. By supporting Indigenous freedom and empowerment, they can both foster Indigenous responsibility and exercise their own—a task that is ultimately spiritual.

Canadian Indigenous resurgence literature incorporates the work of several scholars, working in a variety of research areas.² There have been important criticisms of the concept of reconciliation by some of these scholars, typically because reconciliation might have a tendency to be assimilative and colonizing, which leads some to advocate instead for “Indigenous peoples exercising powers of self-determination outside of state structures and paradigms.”³ Despite differences in the degree to which these authors see the resurgence and reconciliation models as compatible, a major point of agreement is their shared emphasis on what Taiaiake Alfred (Mohawk) calls a “restored spiritual foundation” to ground Indigenous freedom and right relations with all.⁴

One thinker who has engaged with what he sees as the spiritual basis of both the resurgence and the reconciliation models is Aaron Mills (Anishinaabe). Mills argues that neither model has engaged sufficiently with the way colonial violence threatens Indigenous worldviews and philosophies on a fundamental level. For Mills, Indigenous notions of personhood, freedom, and community are at the core of how Indigenous peoples understand themselves and their lives. These notions are rooted in a spiritual way of living, communicated through stories that express the interrelated and interdependent nature of all of reality.⁵ He calls this holistic relationality “the earth way” and sees living in line with this spiritual reality as what ultimately constitutes Indigenous identity. Mills argues that from an Indigenous perspective, freedom is always for fostering and maintaining right relations. He says, “If we’re always already connected in relations of deep interdependence, then the question of freedom is never about standing apart from the other and always about *how* to stand with it.”⁶ According to Mills, then, the Indigenous view of freedom is not arbitrary, but rather, is bound by the normativity of responsible relations with all.⁷

Furthermore, since we are all rooted, ultimately, in the earth way, all peoples are called to live out this holistic relationality. Although the earth way is typically associated with Indigenous worldviews and identity, Mills emphasizes that it is equally open to non-Indigenous peoples. He recognizes, for example, the “powerful affinity” between his own work and that of James Tully (settler), which Mills sees as showing that “this way of thinking is equally available to Indigenous and non-Indigenous persons: it’s a foundation for political community available to all.”⁸ However, there are diverse ways of manifesting one’s rootedness in the earth way,⁹ and Mills argues that reconciliation involves a commitment on the part of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples to “listening to the stories others tell of their creation, for this allows us to see that, despite the vast difference separating their life ways from ours, theirs, too, is a disclosure of the earth way.” This opens up space for diversity, as the ultimate “vision of harmony that the earth way sustains isn’t one of non-conflict, but of non-disconnection.”¹⁰

Mills points out that, at least more recently, Taiiake Alfred has also been speaking of a similar kind of rootedness as a “core resurgence principle.”¹¹ Alfred’s notion of rootedness refers to the importance of recovering traditional Indigenous practices carried out in Indigenous lands and promoting land-based education initiatives that foster this traditional living. He notes that this understanding is also present in the work of other resurgence authors, such as Glen Coulthard (Dene) and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg).¹² Alfred places the importance of recovering traditional land-based practices within a broader spiritual responsibility to live in right relations with all.¹³ He argues that frustrating the ability to live out this spiritual responsibility for all has severely damaging psychological, physical, and cultural effects, which continue to afflict many Indigenous persons and communities.¹⁴

Alfred makes a similar point to Mills about the fact that Indigenous spiritual teachings and the emphases of the resurgence movement are not exclusively or narrowly Indigenous, but rather are grounded in something more fundamental to human nature and the nature of the whole of reality.¹⁵ For example, he speaks of decolonization as rooted in love as a universal force that guides our actions to look for justice in the world.¹⁶ More specifically, Alfred illustrates the connection between Indigenous and other peoples’ spiritualities and decolonizing struggles by pointing out, for example, the influence on his own work of Gandhi’s concepts of *Satyagraha* (“holding to the truth”) and *swaraj* (self-governance, independence from colonial oppression). He explicitly notes that the *Satyagraha* movement against British imperialism in India was “the only mass movement that was founded on the premises we are advocating.”¹⁷ Somewhat similarly, he notes the crucial importance of Christian liberation theology in the Indigenous resurgence struggle in Chiapas, Mexico, beginning in the 1980s. He calls the Zapatistas in Chiapas “the most exemplary of Onkwehonwe [Indigenous] movements” and their struggle for liberation as “the only successful Onkwehonwe movement in recent generations.”¹⁸

Alfred is thus recognizing a shared spiritual drive at the core of various practices and interpretations across different spiritual traditions. This spiritual drive is manifested in the holistic, unrestricted nature of human responsibility. Indigenous peoples live out the unrestricted nature of this spiritual drive in their care for their lands and relationships. Traditional ceremonies function to strengthen the connection with this drive, but they are subordinate to the responsibility to strive for right relations with all, which is ultimately more fundamental to spiritual life. Thus, ceremonies must constantly evolve and adapt to the particular needs of individuals and communities. Alfred notes what he

perceives as a lack of interest from Indigenous youth nowadays in traditional ceremonies. He mentions that young Indigenous people seem more interested in learning to be connected to land and establishing proper relations with others. In short, Alfred says that Indigenous youth are—quite rightly—less interested in formalized spiritual practices than in the lived, relational emphasis of Indigenous spirituality.¹⁹ Leanne Simpson’s emphasis on “grounded normativity” makes a similar point. This notion refers to a whole set of “ethical frameworks generated by ... place-based” traditional practices—essentially “all of the associated practices, knowledge, and ethics that make us Nishnaabeg and construct the Nishnaabeg world,”²⁰ as is similar for other Indigenous peoples. The purpose of these place-based traditional practices is to provide a context for living out the spiritual drive for responsible relations in an Indigenous way.

An illustration of the nature of this spiritual drive—as well as of Alfred’s point about Indigenous youth and the relevance of ceremonies—comes out of Simpson’s reflection on her frustration with certain aspects of ceremonial protocol, specifically the requirement for women and girls to wear a skirt and the exclusion of menstruating women from ceremony. This issue arose for her when her teenage daughter was “questioning her gender and how to express it in a truthful way” and was avoiding clear expressions of femininity. Simpson reflects that if her daughter had been denied the opportunity to participate in ceremonies at this time, due to the traditional requirement to wear a skirt, “the pain and hurt ... might have been enough for her to remove herself from ceremony, maybe forever.”²¹ Simpson gives an insightful reflection on what is most fundamental in spiritual life:

[M]y child has the responsibility of figuring out a meaningful way to live in the world that is consistent with her most intimate realities. The job of everyone else is not to direct or control that but to support her. This is a relationship between her and the spirit world. No one else has the right to interfere with that, unless it is causing great harm to someone else. This is true for all Nishnaabeg people regardless of gender. We all have the responsibility to figure out how to become contributing members of our society while honoring our deepest truths, our gifts and skills.... Self-actualization is a relationship between ourselves and the spirit world, and it is supposed to take place in the context of family and community.²²

This self-actualization process is a spiritual discovery of one’s own responsibilities with all. Ceremonies and land-based practices are some of the distinctively Indigenous ways of expressing and cultivating this

(spiritual) responsible self-actualization, but they take their meaning from it and not vice versa.

The universal applicability, however, of the spiritual nature of human responsibility is evident in the emphasis Simpson and others place on everyday living—the “context of family and community” that Simpson mentions above. In the last several years, an important focus in resurgence literature has been an increasing revalorization of Indigenous relationality in everyday living as a way to further ground resurgence in Indigenous spiritual worldviews and experience. In addition to Alfred and Simpson, Jeff Corntassel (Cherokee) and others have called attention to the realm of daily life as a central locus of personal acts of resurgence:

Everydayness reveals the choices we make on a daily basis to engage with our lands, cultures, and communities. These seemingly small actions are significant in informing both the micro and macro processes of community resurgence. Resurgence also entails a consciousness of being in a daily struggle to regain rebellious dignity. We are interested in how these transformational moments regenerate and invigorate Indigenous nationhood as well as our community and individual health and well-being. While rallies, protests, and other publicized events are often viewed as catalysts for change, it is these quiet, transformational, intimate actions that occur on a daily basis in ways that are seen and unseen that form the basis for revolutionary shifts.²³

Corntassel et al. affirm, “These intimate spaces of home and family are critical sites of resurgence and nationhood. They demonstrate how responsibilities are grounded in our relationships and the ways in which we act on them on a daily basis.”²⁴

Similarly, in discussing Indigenous fatherhood, Corntassel and Mick Scow (Kwakwaka’wakw/Snuneymuxw) illuminate the spiritual nature of interpersonal relationships of everyday life.²⁵ Jeffrey Ansloos (Cree) also emphasizes the holistic nature of Indigenous living, which includes “the *spiritual, emotional, and communal*,” stressing daily life practices as the locus of healing and “decolonized reconciliation.”²⁶ Ansloos notes that Indigenous youth are “struggling with asserting their cultural, and more specifically, their spiritual identity as Warriors shaped by the daily practices of Indigenous spiritual teachings.” He identifies such daily spiritual practices as the roots of the non-violent activism that mobilizes Indigenous resurgence.²⁷

I find this locating of the spiritual in everyday living, and the holistic, all-inclusive nature of human responsibility,

understood as spiritual, to be a crucial entry point for the efforts of Christians and Christian churches to live in right relations with Indigenous peoples. This is what I understand to be the ultimate reason why, for example, Peter Bisson (settler) affirms that the “spiritual dimension of reconciliation and decolonization makes for a lot of *lived common ground* between Indigenous people and the Churches.”²⁸ At the level of lived experience, in the realm of daily living, the responsibility of Indigenous peoples to live in right relations with all is neither more nor less spiritual than that of Christians or anyone else. This affirmation, rooted in Indigenous living, has parallels in Christian living, too, at least as it is understood in several Christian denominations, including in Catholic thought.

In this way, Indigenous resurgence thought contributes to highlighting why Indigenous spiritual traditions, as the TRC affirms, are as valid as Christian ones. The TRC asks Christian churches to recognize this fact and makes it clear that without this recognition, “a full and robust reconciliation will be impossible.”²⁹ In light of this suggested equality in spiritual value supported by Indigenous resurgence thought, Christian persons and theologians are to be cautious not to seek ways of “validating” the spiritual value of Indigenous stories, ceremonies, or land-based practices based on how similar (or different) they seem to those of Christianity. Rather, non-Indigenous persons, Christians or otherwise, are encouraged to recognize and live out more fully their spiritual responsibility with all and to renew the ways their own stories and ceremonies encourage this.

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1 The theological importance of engaging with resurgence literature has been noted, for example, by Michel Andraos in “Christianities and Indigenous Peoples: The Urgency for ‘New Paths,’” *Critical Theology* 1:2 (2019): 5, 8, n. 10.

2 These scholars include Taiaiake Alfred (Mohawk, governance and political theory), Jeffrey Ansloos (Cree, psychology), John Borrows (Anishinaabe, law), Jeff Corntassel (Cherokee, political science), Glen Coulthard (Dene, political science), Sarah Hunt (Kwakwaka’wakw, geography), Aaron Mills (Anishinaabe, law), Audra Simpson (Mohawk, anthropology), and Leanne Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg, women and gender studies).

3 John Borrows and James Tully, “Introduction,” *Resurgence and Reconciliation: Indigenous–Settler Relations and Earth Teachings*, eds. Michael Asch, John Borrows, and James Tully (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 4.

4 Taiaiake Alfred, *Wasáse: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 22.

5 Aaron Mills, “Rooted Constitutionalism: Growing Political Community,” in *Resurgence and Reconciliation*, 157.

6 *Ibid.*, 160. Emphasis in the original.

7 *Ibid.*, 158–59.

8 *Ibid.*, 169, n. 64.

9 *Ibid.*, 157.

- 10 Ibid., 156.
- 11 Ibid., 173, n. 77. See also Taiaiake Alfred, "Research as Indigenous Resurgence," public lecture, Carleton University, Nov. 12, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=myLUkzbiG_o.
- 12 Alfred, "Research as Indigenous Resurgence."
- 13 Taiaiake Alfred, "Being and Becoming Indigenous: Resurgence Against Contemporary Colonialism," public lecture, University of Melbourne, Nov. 28, 2013, <https://youtu.be/VwJNY-B3IPA>.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Alfred, "Reflections on Gandhi, the Great Law of Peace, and Indigenous Resurgence," public lecture, Carleton University, Sept. 30, 2018, <https://youtu.be/5tnMgMKKY34>.
- 17 Alfred, *Wasáse*, 204. See also Alfred, "Reflections on Gandhi," where he discusses *swaraj* more specifically.
- 18 Alfred, *Wasáse*, 281.
- 19 Taiaiake Alfred, "Catholicism, Christianity, and the Resurgence of Indigenous Spirituality among First Nations in Canada," public lecture, University of Victoria, May 12, 2013, <https://vimeo.com/66026538>.
- 20 Simpson, *As We Have Always Done* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 22–23. Simpson attributes the term "grounded normativity" to Glen Coulthard.
- 21 Ibid., 119–20.
- 22 Ibid., 120–21.
- 23 Jeff Corntassel et al., eds., *Everyday Acts of Resurgence: People, Places, Practices* (Olympia, WA: Daykeeper Press, 2018), 18.
- 24 Ibid., 17.
- 25 Jeff Corntassel and Mick Scow, "Everyday Acts of Resurgence: Indigenous Approaches to Everydayness in Fatherhood," *New Diversities* 19, no. 2 (2017): 55–68.
- 26 Jeffrey Ansloos, "Peace Like a Red River: Indigenous Human Rights for Decolonizing Reconciliation," in Heather Devere, Kelli Te Maihāroa, and John P. Synott, eds., *Peacebuilding and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: Experiences and Strategies for the 21st Century* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2017), 70, 72. Emphasis in the original.
- 27 Jeffrey Ansloos, *The Medicine of Peace: Indigenous Youth Decolonizing Healing and Resisting Violence* (Halifax: Fernwood, 2017), 61.
- 28 Peter Bisson, "Beyond Apology: Decolonizing the Jesuits," in Laura E. Reimer and Robert Christmas, eds., *Our Shared Future: Windows into Canada's Reconciliation Journey* (London: Lexington, 2020), 85. Emphasis added.
- 29 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (Ottawa: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015), 226–27.

Meeting of Cultures and the Christian Gospel Message¹

By Christine Jamieson

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¹ Now the apostles and the believers who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God. ² So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him, ³ saying, "Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?" ⁴ Then Peter began to explain it to them, step by step, saying, ⁵ "I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. There was something like a large sheet coming down from heaven, being lowered by its four corners; and it came close to me. ⁶ As I looked at it closely I saw four-footed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles, and birds of the air. ⁷ I also heard a voice saying to me, 'Get up, Peter; kill and eat.' ⁸ But I replied, 'By no means, Lord; for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' ⁹ But a second time the voice answered from heaven, 'What God has made clean, you must not call profane.' ¹⁰ This happened three times; then everything was pulled up again to heaven. ¹¹ At that very moment three men, sent to me from Caesarea, arrived at the house where we were. ¹² The Spirit told me to go

with them and not to make a distinction between them and us. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. ¹³ He told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, 'Send to Joppa and bring Simon, who is called Peter; ¹⁴ he will give you a message by which you and your entire household will be saved.' ¹⁵ And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning. ¹⁶ And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' ¹⁷ If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?" ¹⁸ When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, "Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life." (Acts 11:1-18, NRSV)

The account of Peter's meeting with Gentiles who heard and encountered the gospel sheds light on the important distinction between, on the one hand, hearing the teachings of Jesus Christ and, on the other,

how those words were received and expressed. One might think of the gospel as a seed sown in the soil of varied cultures, which received that seed differently in diverse contexts. It is the same gospel. Yet, when received by diverse peoples, it grows and develops in unique ways. The distinctive fruit of the seed sown (witnessed in the concrete living of the community) adds to a depth of ways of understanding, of communicating, and of living out the New Testament message.

In the third chapter, titled “Meaning,” of Bernard Lonergan’s book *Method in Theology*, he explores different “embodiments” or “carriers” of meaning.² He identifies six carriers of meaning; intersubjectivity, intersubjective meaning, art, symbols, linguistic meaning, and incarnate meaning. The limits of this paper prevent me from providing explanations of these six carriers of meaning, yet there are two that allow us to make sense of the different expressions that emerge from the encounter with Jesus and his teachings: art and incarnate meaning. Art is the carrier of what Lonergan calls “elemental” meaning. Art is the expression of a prior encounter that so inspires the artist (painter, poet, etc.) that the artist is impelled to communicate the encounter in a manner unique to the artist and their culture. A remarkable example of this phenomenon is contemporary Indigenous Australian artist Shirley Purdie, who was awarded the 2007 Blake Prize for religious art. Her winning piece was an Indigenous depiction of the “Stations of the Cross,” a series of images traditionally portraying the Passion of Christ, the steps from Jesus’ condemnation to death to his crucifixion and being placed in the tomb.

There are many significant features of Purdie’s work of art, which reveals an Indigenous experience of the Passion of Christ and an Indigenous *expression* of that experience of elemental meaning. I will highlight two. Shirley Purdie chose to depict these stages of Jesus’ last day in a manner that diverged from traditional depictions, which use stone, wood, or metal. Purdie chose the land on which she is situated (Warmun, a community in the northwest of Australia) as the source for her depiction of the Stations. She used the medium of ochre paint, which is derived from the land upon which Purdie and her people (Gija) are located. Ochres are primary natural pigments and minerals found in the soil. It is significant for Purdie to use pigment from her people’s land, as the land is inseparable from their spirituality. This inseparability of physical place from spirituality is true for Indigenous peoples around the world.³ The second feature that reveals an Indigenous artistic expression of elemental meaning is the work’s focus toward the ground or the earth rather than the standard Western focus in depictions of the Stations of the Cross, toward the sky. For Purdie, the Creator Spirit is found in the land. Jesus is walking the passion with Purdie and her people, on their land. Her

depiction clearly brings one to that understanding. For Purdie, Jesus is walking with her people, on their land, through suffering toward healing. Purdie’s portrayal of the Stations is a unique Indigenous expression of elemental meaning.

The second carrier of meaning that has some significance here is incarnate meaning. Lonergan expresses it as “Cor ad cor loquitur,”⁴ which means heart speaking to heart. It is the meaning of a person’s life encountered through heart speaking to heart. Rev. Dr. Raymond Aldred, status Cree from Swan River Band, Treaty 8, and Director of Indigenous Studies at the Vancouver School of Theology, often speaks publicly of an encounter with the person of Jesus that transformed his life.⁵ In his late teenage years, he was faced with addiction to drugs and alcohol; despite many attempts to quit, he could not. He decided to pray to have the strength to overcome these challenges: through prayer, he was able to change, to stop taking drugs and alcohol. For Aldred, “something happened,” something that made a difference in his life. That encounter was the beginning of a journey for Aldred that led to his embracing Christianity from his Cree worldview. Aldred speaks of others who have had similar encounters that changed their lives or gave them the strength to move forward. The encounter—and, in Indigenous worldviews, this new and important “relation” among their other relations—made a difference in their lives; it gave their life meaning. Like Shirley Purdie, Aldred expresses his experience of the incarnate meaning of Jesus through the reception of the gospel message in the soil of his Indigenous worldview. Rod Pattenden, in his article “Seeing Otherwise: Touching Sacred Things,” articulates the encounter between the gospel message and Indigenous peoples:

Rather than these boundaries being places of dilution of once-pure cultures, this imagery indicates a place of creative reconstruction, where, in this case, a displaced community is re-imagining itself to be at the very heart of religious narratives for healing and renewal. For Western audiences it offers the potential for new insight into the traditional narratives as it plunges the transcendent tendencies of the tradition into the mud of the earth. Transcendence in aboriginal culture has to do with the surface of the land as a skin through which the dreaming stories are made present.⁶

In many contexts, the encounter between Indigenous peoples and Christianity emerged as an active participation in a uniquely contextual way. Of course, there is resistance to the gospel, and in some contexts a coherent resistance by traditionalists that is cogent and theologically sound. Yet—and despite the at times brutal manner in which Christian faith was communicated and the ways it was blindly and arrogantly conflated

by almost all European Christians with their particular culture—some Indigenous people experienced in their own ways and on their own terms a life-giving encounter with Jesus and his message. Indigenous artist Shirley Purdie and Cree theologian Raymond Aldred are concrete examples of a positive impact of that encounter, of a value that Indigenous peoples say has been added to their lives. Yet, the key point of this paper is that the soil receiving the seed was already rich.

Long before Christian missionaries arrived in North America, Indigenous peoples thrived on their land. They lived a good life in community, with a profound understanding of the interrelatedness of all things. Spiritual life was not merely one aspect of many different dimensions of being human; rather, the spiritual *included* the physical, the intellectual, and the emotional. For Indigenous peoples, spirituality was the apex of human living. The spiritual life of Indigenous peoples existed and developed for thousands of years before European missionaries arrived. The multitude of different Indigenous nations that existed when Europeans came and settled in what later became the country of Canada lived and expressed differently their understanding of creation, the Creator, and the Creator's gifts. While there are more than 630 First Nation communities in Canada, representing more than 50 Nations and 50 Indigenous languages, each with its separate culture and spiritual way of life, there are commonalities among the various traditions. Most traditions have a "creation" story, a rich tradition with strong social structures, a spiritual worldview, and a deep sense of connection with all of existence.

Indigenous peoples recognize the spiritual "status" not just of human beings, but of all creation: the earth, the water, fish, plants, animals, trees, birds, the winds, the sun, the moon, and the stars. In this vision, there is an equal, horizontal, rather than hierarchical, spiritual status for all creatures. Rather than only human beings expressing the image of God, all of creation images the Creator. Rather than "owning" the Land, a common belief of Indigenous groups is that the Land owns us. Indigenous peoples honour these truths, and their deep respect for the harmony of all the Creator's creation directs their understanding of how they will "walk" on this earth.

Many Indigenous ceremonies cause concern among non-Indigenous Christians and create tension within Christian Indigenous people and their communities. Yet, following what we have learned from Peter's encounter with the "Gentiles," it becomes clear that different cultural traditions and contexts will celebrate and worship Jesus and the Christian message in a multitude of different ways. For many years now, biblical scholars have pointed out the wide historical and cultural gap between the Jewish movement

around Jesus and the faith that much later became known as Christianity. That faith changed as it became predominantly non-Jewish and again changed and acculturated as it spread around the world, including to the people of what was to become Europe. Those nations made the faith their own, adopting and adapting language, symbols, festivals, and expressions for the faith that was familiar to them. In short, Christianity has always been "enculturated." This is part of what the passage from Acts is pointing toward.⁷ Not to recognize the validity of different and various expressions of the Christian faith is a "spiritual imperialism" not unlike the social, political, and economic imperialism that has haunted Indigenous peoples for so long. One may consider Indigenous ceremonies such as the sweat lodge, the smudging ceremony, and the pipe ceremonies. Each of these expressions of Indigenous spirituality, among Indigenous Christians, continues to have important significance after encountering Christianity.

When the European missionaries arrived in North America, they not only brought the New Testament teachings: they also couched the message within a European cultural context and too often mistook their medium for their message. Still, Indigenous peoples of Canada were able to understand and resonate with the value of the teachings of Christ despite the at times oppressive carriers of the message and the undoubted oppressions of the systems the colonizers brought with them. Today, it is important to recognize the Indigenous reception of the Christian message. That reception is significantly different from the European reception. This must be acknowledged so that Indigenous Christians can live their faith in authenticity. The devastating disruption that came with the Christian missionaries must be acknowledged. The gospel—that is, the teaching of Jesus—was distorted because the Christian missionaries could not differentiate between the gospel message and their own cultural expressions of that message. The European and Canadian missionaries were blind to any difference between the elemental meaning communicated and the variety of expressions of that meaning. We continue to live with the fallout of first encounter. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report's Call to Action #60 clearly names the "spiritual violence" that continues to be committed by non-Indigenous Christians who are ignorant of the legitimacy—indeed, the enrichment, authenticity, and beauty—of the gospel seed planted and expressed in Indigenous cultures.

"Native Americans will not share their vision of Christ unless they have met, heard or personally experienced him in their lives."⁸ This statement by Achiel Peelman, a Roman Catholic Oblate priest who spent time living with the Cree people in Northern Alberta, expresses an important insight regarding the encounter between

Indigenous peoples and Christianity. As we saw with Raymond Aldred, the encounter is not an abstract, intellectual assertion; rather, it is a personal encounter with Jesus, who is brother and saviour. Indigenous Anglican Archbishop Mark MacDonald helps us to understand how Scripture is interpreted through an Indigenous lens. His reading of different biblical passages sheds light on the message being communicated. His interpretation points to how Indigenous peoples absorbed Christianity into their culture and way of viewing reality. MacDonald indicates that even in the early years of attempted assimilation, Indigenous peoples encountered the Christian message in a unique manner, removed from its presentation to them through a European lens. One concrete example of this is the passage from the Gospel of John:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. (John 1:1-5, NRSV)

MacDonald's Indigenous reading of this passage from John's Gospel is the following: "The Creator has placed within history, within creation, a way of life that will ultimately triumph over evil."⁹ As MacDonald understands this, in the context of Indigenous life and history, the evil that will be overcome is the colonization of peoples. For MacDonald, it is this hope that is the heart of a growing spiritual movement within Indigenous communities. Thus, Indigenous peoples in their relation to and reception of the Christian message interpret the teachings of Jesus through the lens

of Indigenous experience. This means taking into consideration the spiritual abuse (violence) inflicted upon Indigenous peoples by European missionaries and settler colonizers. A new understanding and practice of Christian mission is needed in light of the abuse and violence. We saw in the passage from Acts the ambiguity of how the teachings of Jesus should be spread. In fact, the book of Acts expresses the struggles with understanding the Christian churches' mission in relation to a diversity of cultures. What becomes clear in consideration of the history of Christian mission to a multitude of different cultures is that "God is revealed to many peoples in many ways ... and that salvation is possible in many ways."¹⁰

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1 I would like to thank Matthew R. Anderson for his helpful feedback to this paper.

2 Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

3 Rod Pattenden, "Seeing Otherwise: Touching Sacred Things," in Jione Havea, ed., *Indigenous Australia and the Unfinished Business of Theology: Cross-Cultural Engagement* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017).

4 Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 73.

5 Story used with permission from Dr. Aldred.

6 Pattenden, "Seeing Otherwise," 21.

7 For a valuable example of this work, see Matthew R. Anderson, "Strangers on the Land: What 'Settler-Aware' Biblical Studies Learns from Indigenous Methodologies," *Critical Theology* 1:2 (2019): 10–14.

8 Achiel Peelman, "The Native American Christ," in T. Merrigan and J. Haers, eds., *The Myriad Christ: Plurality and the Quest for Unity in Contemporary Christology* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2000), 318.

9 This quote comes from a presentation that Archbishop MacDonald gave at a conference at Concordia University in 2014.

10 Ibid.

The Challenge of Spiritual Violence

By Brian McDonough

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According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), spiritual violence occurs when persons are not permitted to follow their preferred spiritual or religious tradition; or when a different spiritual or religious path or practice is forced on them; or when spiritual or religious tradition, beliefs, or practices are demeaned or belittled; or when persons are made to feel shame for practising their traditional or family beliefs.¹ Perhaps spiritual violence needs to be under-

stood in a broader sense to encompass not only "sins of commission" but also "sins of omission," perpetrated by persons vested with spiritual authority, acting in a religious context.

Disparagement of Ancestral Beliefs

Spiritual violence manifests itself in different ways. For example, an Oblate missionary declared before a parliamentary committee in 1947 that because Canada

was a Christian nation committed to having “all its citizens belonging to one or other of the Christian churches,” he could see no reason why the residential schools “should foster aboriginal beliefs.”² In some quarters, hostility toward Indigenous cultures and spiritualities continues even to this day.

For perpetrating spiritual violence, the Christian churches came under severe judgment by the TRC. They have been called upon to examine the beliefs which led to this kind of violence, lest they repeat such practices in the future:

That Christians in Canada, in the name of their religion, inflicted serious harms on Aboriginal children, their families, and their communities was in fundamental contradiction to what they purported their core beliefs to be. For the Churches to avoid repeating their failures of the past, understanding how and why they perverted Christian doctrine to justify their actions is critical knowledge to be gained from the residential school experience.³

Because of the religious education they received at school or at church, there are Indigenous persons who experience shame and fear in respect of the spiritual traditions of their ancestors. Some parents believe that to teach traditional cultural or spiritual beliefs to their children is to propagate evil. Others, that their ancestors or their relatives who were not Christians may be damned. This spiritual fear can be internalized over several generations and become difficult to shed.

Spiritual fear has led some Indigenous church members, including pastors, to criticize and even ostracize family members who have wanted to learn about the spiritual beliefs of their ancestors. Not so long ago, an overwhelmingly Christian Cree community in northern Quebec proceeded to tear down a sweat lodge and to ban all forms of traditionalist spirituality, claiming that shamanism was a form of evil witchcraft.⁴ Spiritual fear can lead to acts of spiritual violence.

In the *Summary of its Final Report*, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission stated that affirming the right of Indigenous people to self-determination in spiritual matters must be given high priority in any reconciliation process.⁵ The Commission went on to declare:

the Churches, as religious institutions, must affirm Indigenous spirituality in its own right. Without such formal recognition, a full and robust reconciliation will be impossible. Healing and reconciliation have a spiritual dimension that must continue to be addressed by the churches in partnership with Indigenous spiritual leaders, survivors, their families, and communities.⁶

Clearly the TRC was calling upon Church leaders—both Indigenous and non-Indigenous—to deal with the legacy of spiritual fear that leads to spiritual violence and to correct the distortions of the Church’s teachings that have been passed down over time.

Rivalry, between Different Churches

Related to the legacy of spiritual fear regarding ancestral beliefs and practices is the legacy of spiritual fear regarding adherence to one church rather than to another. Competition, mistrust, and fear of “sheep stealing” between the churches not only contradict Jesus’ prayer (John 17:21) that his disciples remain “one,” but have also over several generations eroded the social fabric of Indigenous communities. Fear leads to violence. Families and individuals have been confused about which is the authentic path to follow Jesus, leading to unnecessary arguments and divisions. Such counter-witness to the gospel message undermines the credibility of Christian mission and ministry.

While there may be less competition and mistrust between the churches today (certainly when compared to the 19th century), one can deplore the lack of collaboration between the churches at the local level in implementing the TRC’s Calls to Action.

Thinking, speaking, and acting ecumenically should not prevent the different churches from preserving their own specific traditions or from offering their particular gifts. Each denomination needs others to help it read the gospel in new ways and to discern the signs of the times. Churches must work together conscientiously to overcome the divisiveness that undermines good relations within communities and that leads to family breakdown—a manifestation of spiritual violence.

Ignorance of the Spiritual Gifts Offered by Indigenous Persons

During the TRC hearings, some survivors indicated that the Christian faith, which they may have received from their parents or grandparents, was shattered by their residential school experience, particularly in cases where there was physical or sexual abuse. Some survivors may have lost any faith in the existence of God. Others may have been drawn to traditionalist spiritualities. Still others have sought to blend Christian beliefs about God with traditionalist Indigenous beliefs.

It may be asked whether some survivors and their descendants have been led to a new image of God—a suffering God—who understands their experience, who was mysteriously present to them in their darkest moments, and who continues to summon them, to console them.

In *Christ is a Native American*, Achiel Peelman refers to an Indigenous woman named Mary who worked with Indigenous persons trying to survive in an urban environment and met regularly with young persons scarred by the residential school system. Mary indicated that for her, Christ was a very concrete person who had suffered from different forms of abuse, who was in prison or travelled with homeless persons. Mary said, "We must resurrect Christ in the life of our people... because the history of Christ's suffering goes on, in a very real way, in the human suffering I see every day."⁷

Duane Gastant Aucoin, a Wolf Clan member of the Tlingit Nation in the Yukon and a Carmelite brother, has written:

Just as God brought good out of the evil done to His Son after they crucified Him, by raising Him up from the dead, so too, must we work with God and with each other to bring good out of the evil done to our people. So that we as a whole may be given new life and rise up from the tomb in which we have been placed, stronger and more alive than before.⁸

For Christians, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, the Church is born of the mystery of redemption in the cross of Jesus Christ; as such, Christians have *to try to meet* people on their path of suffering. Meeting face to face with Indigenous persons whose lives have been deeply marked by suffering must therefore remain an important part of the Church's mission in a Canadian context.

Indigenous persons, both Christian and non-Christian, are intimately familiar with the Suffering Servant of the Lord (Isaiah 53). Indigenous persons may choose to share their spiritual experience and to help non-Indigenous believers to deepen their understanding of the mystery of human suffering and its transformative value. But are the churches ready to receive such spiritual gifts? Surely to deny that Indigenous persons have such gifts to offer amounts to spiritual violence.

Lack of Sensitivity and Ignorance of Indigenous Experience

In early March 2017, Senator Lynn Beyak presented to her fellow members of the Canadian Senate a different version of the residential school story. While acknowledging that "horrible mistakes" were made, she deplored the fact that these were "magnified and considered more newsworthy than the abundance of good" that happened in those schools. She considered it important to speak "in memory of the kindly and well-intentioned men and women and their descendants ... whose remarkable works, good deeds and historical tales in the residential schools go unac-

knowledged for the most part and are overshadowed by negative reports."⁹

Spiritual violence results when non-Indigenous persons, especially official representatives of the State or prominent religious leaders, make statements which might be construed as defending the residential school system. The Commission itself acknowledged that there were individual students who looked positively upon their experience at residential school¹⁰ and that, at hearings between 2009 and 2011, many students did come forward to express their gratitude to former teachers.¹¹ However, this can mask the fact that a system was put in place to assimilate Indigenous children into the dominant culture and that this system caused irreparable damage to many of the students as well as to their families and nations.¹²

Out of respect for those for whom residential school was a nightmare, it may be wiser to let those who have suffered tell their stories. Non-Indigenous persons, after showing that they have truly heard the stories of those who suffered, may then be required to lament over the structural evil of colonialism, which gave rise to the residential school system and resulted in cultural genocide. This may lead non-Indigenous persons to accept the collective responsibility for repairing the harm caused. Only then may non-Indigenous persons bring up the "good things" that may have occurred and refer to the "good intentions" of those who ran the schools. Collectively, we are not there yet.

The Anglican Church of Canada severely criticized Senator Beyak for her statement in the Senate.

While there is no doubt that some good things happened, that is so clearly not the whole story that it demands a response. What your story doesn't tell us is of the cramped and unsanitary conditions in schools run by the Church Missionary Society of the Church of England (the Anglican Church of Canada) ... Conditions in these schools led to fires, to outbreaks of diphtheria, to gas leaks. Children died. We cannot speak about the Residential Schools without acknowledging these truths. To do so would once more silence the witness of thousands of children – some of whom never returned home. It is Indigenous people who have the authority to tell the story. It is our duty to receive that story and allow it to change us.¹³

Regrettably, the formal body that represents the diocesan leadership of the Catholic Church in Canada is widely perceived as not having been sufficiently forthcoming in apologizing for the Catholic Church's role in the residential school system and in the perpetration of spiritual violence. It may be true that the

Catholic Church in Canada is organized in a different way than the Anglican or United Churches. It may be true that Catholic religious communities and a number of Catholic dioceses involved in the administration of residential schools have expressed regret and made apologies. However, there is a general perception that the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops has not shown the kind of leadership that might be expected in the search for truth and in the active pursuit of reconciliation. This is symbolized by bishops' perceived unwillingness to invite the Pope to come to Canada to issue an apology.¹⁴

Many Catholics, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, think that the collective leadership of the Catholic Church in Canada—and the Pope himself—seem to be snubbing Indigenous people and, in particular, the survivors of residential schools. Different reasons have been put forth for not inviting Pope Francis to come to Canada.¹⁵

The recent discovery of the remains of children who died at residential schools run by Catholic religious communities has generated outrage among the Canadian population in general. But it has also stirred up painful memories among the elderly survivors of the residential school system. To confront the legacy of spiritual violence caused by negligence and disrespect toward the families of these children, perhaps Catholic authorities could pledge themselves to the repair and upkeep of cemeteries attached to former residential schools and could erect memorials to the victims of abuse. Failure to remember and to commemorate is a form of spiritual violence.

Failure to respect commitment to Indigenous baptized

While many elders in Indigenous communities, and even their immediate children, still identify with Christianity or at least are familiar with Christian beliefs, there is a growing number of young adults, adolescents, and children who have had little or no faith education. Without a strong sense of identity or purpose in life, they are particularly vulnerable to pressures coming from both within and outside their communities that can lead to drug and alcohol addiction, violence, and suicide. This is especially true in contexts marked by poverty, underemployment and family breakdown.

The lack of Indigenous persons engaged in youth and family ministry and the paucity of programs that speak to the hearts and minds of Indigenous young people mean that the needs of a whole generation are being neglected. This also is spiritual violence.

Lack of Support for Indigenous Clergy and Pastoral Workers

Listening to Indigenous members of the clergy makes us aware of a real disparity between their working conditions and those enjoyed by clergy in urban centres. Indigenous clergy members, in the exercise of their ministry, often have to cover the expenses of long-distance travelling and are provided with sometimes meagre housing. Some Indigenous clergy have pointed out that they have limited opportunity to pursue ongoing formation in various areas of ministry—and their communities suffer from this. Others have mentioned that they feel their needs are not being heard by their Church's leadership. Such a state of affairs leads to burnout and depression, resulting in the loss of committed Indigenous clergy who know their communities and understand their people's needs. Inadequate funding for ministry and limited professional development opportunities for clergy are also forms of spiritual violence.

Another more subtle, but certainly pervasive, form of spiritual violence results from how local churches and denominations administer budgets and thereby control hires and resource allocation. In the day-to-day operations of any medium to large institution (including churches), there is the struggle to maintain (and even to expand) the funding required for various programs, services, projects, and constituencies. Administrators find themselves having to justify why they must receive a larger portion of the pie. This sometimes leads to excluding potential competitors from the decision-making table and resisting questions that might jeopardize existing programs or established priorities.

Indigenous representatives are rarely invited to sit at this decision-making table; accordingly, the needs of Indigenous faith communities are neither understood nor met. The persons who already have budgets and who control human and financial resources would prefer to fit Indigenous communities and needs under their own programs rather than let Indigenous representatives design and take responsibility for programs that might better meet the needs of their communities. In other words, Indigenous representatives are not treated as responsible partners. Contrary to the principle of subsidiarity, resource allocation decisions are not being made as close as possible to the people who will be impacted by these decisions. This can become a form of spiritual violence.

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1 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Volume 6 of the *Final Report*, "Reconciliation" (2015), 96.

2 *Ibid.*, 5.

3 *Ibid.*, 98.

4 See Mark Blackburn, "Cree community bans FN's spirituality," APN, Jan 7, 2011, <https://www.aptnnews.ca/national-news/crees-ban-sweat-lodges-fns-spirituality-from-community>.

5 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Summary of its Final Report*, 226.

6 *Ibid.*, 227.

7 Achiel Peelman, *Christ Is a Native American* (Ottawa: Novalis, 1995), 109–10.

8 Duane Gastant Aucoin, "Residential Schools: A Reflection," *Mission 2* (1995): 23–29, at 26–27.

9 Senate of Canada, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, Volume 50, Issue 102 (Tuesday, March 7, 2017), https://sencanada.ca/en/content/sen/chamber/421/debates/102db_2017-03-07-e#81.

10 The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's 2012 Interim Report, *They Came for the Children*, states: "The individual student's ability to succeed within the residential school system, and the positive difference that individual teachers and school staff made in some students' lives, are important parts of the history and legacy of the schools and deserve recognition" (49).

11 *Ibid.*, 45.

12 Duane Gastant Aucoin writes, "No one is saying that no good came out of the residential schools, such as learning about Jesus and all He did out of love for us, plus the knowledge and skills to cope in an ever changing world, not to mention also the countless sacrifices of the missionaries in helping our people. But this cannot excuse or condone the attempted destruction of our culture and of us as a people." See Aucoin, "Residential Schools," 26.

13 Anglican Church of Canada, "There was nothing good: An open letter to Canadian Senator Lynn Beyak," March 20, 2017, <http://www.anglican.ca/news/nothing-good-open-letter-canadian-senator-lynn-beyak/30018179>.

14 Call to Action 58 asks the Pope to come to Canada "to issue an apology to Survivors, their families, and communities for the Roman Catholic Church's role in the spiritual, cultural, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children in Catholic-run residential schools."

15 Here are some of the reasons put forth: 1) The Catholic Church has apologized *in the way it is structured*. 2) The Canadian Catholic entities that operated residential schools issued a public apology in 1991. 3) Three-quarters of the Catholic entities involved in residential schools were religious orders. 4) Only 16 out of the 61 Roman Catholic dioceses in Canada were involved. 5) In a brief submitted to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (November 1993), the CCCB acknowledged that abuses had moved the bishops to a profound examination of conscience. 6) Neither the Holy See nor the CCCB nor the *Catholic Church as a whole* ever ran residential schools.

Proposals for Addressing Spiritual Violence

By Christina Conroy

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The concept of living out the gospel is central to the Christian faith. Living out the gospel in a particular Canadian context and with a mind to our capacity for spiritual violence takes intentional reflection on the past as well as on the future we would like to imagine together.

Spiritual violence is named in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (TRC) Calls to Action #60 in the context of remembering the history of colonization and residential schools with an immediate call to "respect Indigenous spirituality in its own right."¹ While Indigenous spirituality certainly refers to the traditional knowledge and traditional practices of First Nations across Canada, we have come to understand that Indigenous Christians also experience spiritual violence.² When former United Church Moderator Reverend Stan McKay (Fisher River Cree Nation) ushered the concept of spiritual violence to the forefront of ecclesial examination, he intended the theological reflection of the Church to benefit all Indigenous people. In this spirit, this essay gathers the insight of Elders, theologians, and practitioners to offer a proposed set of ethical guidelines for Christian communities that seek to relinquish the practices of

spiritual violence in life and mission.³ Spiritual violence against Indigenous nations is still being committed at the hands of the Church. This violence is being committed against traditional Indigenous and Christian Indigenous, reserve and off-reserve, individuals and communities. Although every Christian denomination has a different authority structure, we trust that churches and institutions will take up, question, and expand upon these ethical guidelines in a way that moves your own community toward renewed goodness, respect, and compassion.

The seven guidelines below are not exhaustive. They are a beginning. The guidelines build on one another and so have shifting and sometimes overlapping content. Readers will note that the language is pointed in light of the current Christian habit of aspiration over action. You may find concepts and language that your community will need to research further or navigate with your particular Christian theological culture. We invite you to embrace this challenge with the sense of hope and determination we all need in order to live out the gospel with renewed faithfulness.

Guideline 1: Accept and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, which acknowledges the inherent sovereignty of Indigenous peoples.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada understands the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People as the framework for reconciliation (TRC Call to Action #48). By inherent sovereignty we mean that First Nations have law, principles, and territory that predate European contact and have not expired. The idea of sovereignty also embraces the arena of the cultural, and Indigenous nations have language, knowledge, and ceremony that predates European contact and evolves in ways determined by the nations themselves. At the time of writing, Bill C-15, An Act Respecting the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, has passed the third reading in the Senate and is set to receive Royal Assent. The Canadian Church as well as the state is in good stead to use the Declaration as a lens through which to view their own policies and actions.

Guideline 2: Accept the languages, practices, and ceremony of Indigenous peoples. If Indigenous people come to adopt a Christian identity, support a contextual, culturally determined expression of Christianity.

Accepting the languages, practices, and ceremony of Indigenous peoples does not mean taking these things as your own or teaching them to others even if you have been taught them yourself. Language, stories, practices, and ceremony belong to Indigenous peoples and are a gift not only to their own communities but to the world at large. Part of the teaching of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is that the knowledge that comes from the languages, stories, practices, and ceremony was withheld for generations from all people. All people, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, have suffered as a result of this loss. Recognizing that we as non-Indigenous Christians, too, are wounded by the policies of assimilation is the beginning of what it means to be friends. Accepting languages, practices, and ceremony means creating a space for the diversity of Indigenous culture in Canada to be recognized and

affirmed in a respectful way. Learn to be a good guest. Learn to be a good host of our own particular Christian traditions.

Accepting Indigenous forms of Christian theology and practice is to understand that all expressions of Christianity are embedded in culture. In the West, many Christians have normalized Western Christianity without acknowledging that it, too, is a particular cultural expression of Christianity. Theologically, we understand that cultural expressions are inherently ambiguous, capable of being used for good or for harm. We encourage Christians to understand how Western values and practices have influenced Christianity. We encourage diverse denominations to respect each other. We call on denominations to heal rather than create divides among Indigenous peoples. Our working group bore witness to stories of communities and families torn apart because of different baptismal affiliations in one family or on one nation.⁴ We consider the judgments passed on the spiritual efficacy of other traditions an act of spiritual violence. We consider the practice of re-baptism an act of spiritual violence. We call on Christians to make room for people who do not hold the same views. We call on Christian denominations to provide intercultural competence resources and anti-racist resources to its clergy and members to facilitate moving forward in relationship and mission in a good way.

Guideline 3: Accept that Indigenous communities themselves, traditional or Christian, can discern the difference between good and evil in their own context, including in their own ceremonial practices. Identifying nefarious influences and spirits must be trusted to the local spiritual community.

Many stories of missionary encounter, both past and present, include missionaries telling Indigenous people that their practices are demonic. Residential school testimony bears witness to this as we hear former students recount how their language was called “the devil’s tongue” or their traditional items or practices were cast out as evil. The Nisga’a nation remembers

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that Methodist ministers came in and burned all their regalia.⁵ The assumption of evil has become so embedded in a contemporary Christian understanding of difference that many Christians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, assume a suspicion or fear of what they do not recognize or understand. The idea that the demonic is elsewhere should be replaced with the Christian understanding that the demonic hides itself in the holy.⁶ The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada has unearthed the demonic distortions within Western Christian thought and practice. We need to be communities that recognize the presence of evil and good within our own cultural version of spiritual practices. We encourage faith communities to practise discernment with a gaze toward their own practices and habits of mind. We encourage practitioners and theologians engaged in ministry with Indigenous people to support the role of Elders and Knowledge Keepers and to incorporate the voices of children and youth, as both are integral to the discernment process.⁷

Guideline 4: Accept that land is a player in the ongoing legacy of spiritual violence. Learn and advocate for land justice in a way that is supported by your Indigenous neighbours.

Seek to understand what land means to Indigenous peoples in your area and the particular history of the land on which your faith community resides. Attend to stories that speak to what land means from an Indigenous perspective. Provide ways for your parishioners to have a working knowledge of the history and use of the Doctrine of Discovery, the reserve system, the pass system, and treaty. This will help inform why a land acknowledgement, for many Indigenous people, has little to do with intellectual assent and more to do with who they are as people, past and present and future. Loss of culture, language, ceremony, ancestors, children, stories, and access to capital are bound up in colonial appropriation of land. Community members suggest that Indigenous youth are the biggest inheritors of these losses and should not be overlooked in these conversations. Be advised that a refusal to renounce the Doctrine of Discovery or to offer a land acknowledgment is felt as a deep refusal to listen and as a perpetuation of colonial violence for communities still experiencing the effects of being a displaced people.

We call on individuals and churches to learn the history of your own relationship to the land you currently occupy. Learn the history of the treaty in your territory. Learn the terms of the treaty. Make an effort to understand what treaty means to your local First Nations. If the land you are on is unceded, explore that story and the complex relationship between modern nations and communities. We encourage the Church to dialogue

with Indigenous theologians to develop a theology of treaty and a less anthropocentric doctrine of Creation.⁸

Guideline 5: Assume and trust Indigenous autonomy and agency. Consult your local Indigenous community prior to engaging in particular acts of service. Amplify the vision, efforts, and leadership of the community itself rather than bringing ministry to the community.

Renew consultation with your local community whenever you have the time or resources to be generous. Just because the community decides that a food donation is helpful once does not mean that they will need or want a food donation again. We call on individuals and denominations to recognize that traditional and Christian Indigenous communities determine what is best for themselves and what resources and support is needed. We call on individuals and churches to show up to Indigenous-led initiatives and amplify the voices of Indigenous leaders. At the time of writing, water and land protection, access to clean water, and the discovery of residential school children's unmarked graves are at the forefront of Indigenous-led initiatives in the country. We encourage faith communities to amplify these efforts.

Indigenous autonomy and agency extend to the Indigenous relationship to Christianity. As theologians, we call denominations to recognize that the Holy Spirit has been at work among First Nations people before European contact and continues to be present and active independent of missionary service.

Guideline 6: Actively maintain the physical and spiritual structures of the people your denomination has baptized.

We call on denominations to have a renewed theology of baptism and a renewed sense of what it means to be in a spiritual kinship relationship through baptism.⁹ On many First Nations across Canada, the Church came, baptized members of that nation, and claimed them as their own. The Church has an obligation to the baptized. We find on reserves around the country that church buildings are neglected by their host denominations, reserve clergy are paid less or not at all, and parishioners are obligated to manage themselves. One Indigenous advisor suggests that while these measures may be branded as 'empowerment' by church administrations, it functions as a form of abandonment. We can trace the repercussions of such forms of abandonment through the archives of residential school history. During the residential school era, reduced funding, the failure to maintain buildings, the inability to financially support staff, and the insistence that schools could provide for and manage themselves resulted in a range of tragedies, from the rampant spread of disease to the unchecked abuse of

power and unjust child labour practices. We recognize in the testimony of reserve ministers the continuation of the habit of abandonment at the hands of the Church today.

Christianity has become a core part of the identity of many Indigenous families living on reserve. Baptized Christians are kin. Practically attending to both physical and spiritual structures is an act of kinship. The church community is where Good News is offered. The church building is where ceremony takes place. We call on denominations to maintain the church structures on reserves. We call on denominations to build and maintain proper markers and burial grounds for residential school students and parishioners. We call on the Church to support Indigenous leadership of Indigenous churches. We call on churches that have historically engaged in mission in Indigenous communities to establish scholarships for Indigenous students in religious education. We call on the Church to remunerate Indigenous staff and clergy at the same rate as urban clergy. We call on denominations and schools of theology to provide professional development opportunities for Indigenous clergy that will move clergy toward salary/stipend growth. We call on the Church to relinquish habits of hiring part-time for full-time work. We call on the Church to eliminate volunteer and self-support positions for clergy working on the nation. We call on denominations to support the practice that the Church's highest-paid representatives make no more than 10 times the yearly salary of the lowest-paid full-time staff member.

Guideline 7: Fulfill your obligations to the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement and to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action. If you are an individual, make it known to Church and government that you expect monies owed and relevant documents to be granted to the former students through the TRC.

At the time of writing, not all monies owed to the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement have been paid to the survivors. Also, not all documents relevant to residential schools have been handed over to the TRC. The documents are necessary for an increasingly accurate understanding of the history of residential schools. We call on individuals and churches to put pressure on money holders and document holders. We call on churches to consider their obligations to extend to the missing children of residential schools and to

support any First Nations in their search for unmarked or mass graves, repatriation of remains, documentation of findings, and the honouring of lives lost in the way the families see fit.

In the spirit of friendship, may we consider these guidelines, argue about them, add to them, and honour the spirit in which they were written, that we may learn to walk together—all of us—in a good way.

Christina Conroy is Assistant Professor of Christian Theology at Ambrose University, Calgary, which is located in the Treaty 7 region of Southern Alberta.

1 The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action, as well as the findings of the Commission itself, can be found online at nctr.ca.

2 In this document, I use the term "traditional Christian" to refer to those who identify as Christian in one way or another and maintain Indigenous ways of knowing and practice in their Christianity. You may hear people say they 'follow the Jesus way' rather than identify with a colonizing or overtly Western Christianity.

3 Throughout this article, I use the term 'we' to indicate that though the curation of this material is my own, I am intending to reflect the diverse group of thinkers who came together to craft a response to Rev. Stan McKay's call to the Church. This article is, in part, an experiment in method. It is an exercise in decolonizing the research process by thinking in community and by using oral sources alongside written sources. The 'we,' however, is inevitably 'me.' This is my own scholarly expression of how we might imagine moving forward the concerns and insights related to the Church's capacity to commit spiritual violence. I take responsibility for the tone, the prompts, the gaps, the brevity, and the organization of these guidelines. I do not mind that they will provoke disagreement and conversation. Our advisors and guests came with differing perspectives and commitments, as did the members of our own working group.

4 Oral history relayed to us by Rev. Stan MacKay in November 2020 and Rev. Dr. Ray Aldred in March 2021.

5 Oral history relayed to our circle by Rev. Dr. Ray Aldred in March 2021.

6 Paul Tillich is an example of a theologian who weaves this understanding into his theology.

7 Our consultants, including Rev. Dr. Carmen Landsdowne, Rev. Rosalyn Elm, and Rev. Stan McKay, each from a different Indigenous nation, have spoken of the central place of children and youth as teachers.

8 Rev. Dr. Ray Aldred's current scholarship focuses on the possibilities of treaty as a framework for good relationship. Rev. Stan McKay observes that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action are focused on the human, and in order to offer a full vision of reconciliation, the land would need to be included.

9 Indigenous Archbishop Mark MacDonald spoke to us on this issue in November 2020. I would like to note that many evangelical denominations are engaging in missionary activity with First Nations and may have a different theology of baptism. For some Evangelicals, conversion is the new baptism. If that is the case, we extend responsibility to those you have led through a conversion process.

Book Review

David Tracy and Critical Theologies

David Tracy, *Fragments: The Existential Situation of Our Time. Selected Essays, Volume 1*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020. 418 pp.

David Tracy, *Filaments: Theological Profiles. Selected Essays, Volume 2*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020. 479 pp.

These two books gather thirty-seven essays by David Tracy written between 1978 and 2018. Each has been revised for republication. They are well worth collecting and represent only a fraction of the essays he has written. To read them is to be educated and enriched by a remarkable breadth of inquiry and depth of analysis. What follows will provide background to these two books by briefly reviewing Tracy's career, then an overview of their contents, then discussion of some developments in his thought therein and some of his observations on the North Atlantic context. In doing so, we will note some differences between Tracy's approach of public theology and that typical of critical theologies, such as liberation, feminist, and Black theologies. Tracy presents himself as an ally of critical theologies who collaborates with them by demonstrating and clarifying the public meaningfulness of their truth claims.¹ We will identify an underlying tension between critical theologies and Tracy's approach and conclude by assessing what his theology offers critical theologies.

Tracy's Career

Born on January 6, 1939, in Yonkers, New York,² Tracy studied for the priesthood in the US and was sent to the Gregorian University in Rome in 1960. He attended sessions of Vatican II and became a priest in 1964. He returned to the Gregorian to do a doctorate, writing his dissertation on Bernard Lonergan.³ In 1967, he began teaching at the Catholic University of America and then moved to the University of Chicago Divinity School in 1969. His first major book, *Blessed Rage for Order*,⁴ published in 1975, addressed the debate about theological method in the United States. It displayed the immense erudition and engagement with an incredible range of thought that remain his hallmark.

Blessed Rage affirmed the pluralism of theologies in the North Atlantic context, because this allows every theologian to learn from different theologies around them.⁵ But Tracy argued that all Christian theologies face an ethical dilemma between loyalty to the Christian message and loyalty to the secular faith in rational inquiry characteristic of Western modernity. He addressed this dilemma through a theological

method that demonstrated the meaningfulness of the Christian message by showing how Christian beliefs provide symbolic representations of this secular faith and common human experiences of meaningfulness. What was impressive here was his attempt to clear a space for religion in public discourse by showing that talk of God is not foreign to secular society's deepest self-understanding.⁶

In 1981, he published *The Analogical Imagination*,⁷ which cemented his reputation as a theologian of note. Here he continued working to overcome the segregation of theology from secular thought with his notion of a classic: a work of art, philosophy or theology, or an event, that has an excess of meaning meriting everyone's attention and that always has something new to say to us.⁸ Religious traditions are shaped by classics like the gospels or letters of Paul and are extended by the production of new classics like Augustine's *Confessions* or the thought of Aquinas, and by new interpretations of existing classics in response to emerging challenges. Allied to his notion of a classic was that of hermeneutics-as-conversation, drawn from the thought of Hans-Georg Gadamer.⁹ Stephen Okey aptly described the latter as the heart of Tracy's theological method. "Tracy is the 'theologian as host', who brings an ever-growing party of divergent voices together in conversation oriented toward discerning the truth of the Christian tradition in the contemporary world."¹⁰

Later in the 1980s, Tracy engaged the deepening pluralism of American culture and the philosophical challenge of deconstructionism in a small book, *Plurality and Ambiguity*.¹¹ Each of these three books addressed a broad spectrum of theologians and a variety of intellectual and ethical issues on a methodological level, trying to show how theology could communicate the Christian message effectively and with intellectual integrity to both Church and society. *Blessed Rage for Order* and *The Analogical Imagination* were part of a planned trilogy of fundamental, systematic, and practical theology. While Tracy published some essays on practical theology, the third book never appeared.

After *Blessed Rage for Order*, the influence of liberation, feminist, and Black theologies, and the political theology of Johann Baptist Metz, gave Tracy's work a more critical stance toward American society. In 1990, he published a small book on interreligious dialogue, *Dialogue with the Other*.¹² By now he was interested in what he called the mystical and prophetic trajectories in religion, which seek to productively relate the non-contemporary aspects of religion to surrounding culture and society.¹³ In 1994, *On Naming the Present* appeared, featuring his essays previously published in the journal *Concilium*.¹⁴ Then he stopped publishing books. *Fragments* and *Filaments* are his first in over two decades. What happened?

The Turn to God

Tracy's first three major books focused largely on theological method. A review of *Plurality and Ambiguity* by a non-theologian asked why God was a source of hope for Tracy.¹⁵ This was a turning point for him. He had been trying to relate the Christian message to a wider secular audience, and a member thereof had responded by asking to hear about God rather than theological method. This shifted Tracy's focus to God, his central concern ever since and the subject of his 1999–2000 Gifford Lectures. Tracy has published 20 or more essays on God and repeatedly said that his book on naming and thinking God is forthcoming. It still hasn't appeared. Work on this seems to have prevented him from writing other books.

In 2006, Tracy retired from the Chicago Divinity School. Despite some illness, he has continued working vigorously. While the doctrine of God is his main subject, as *Fragments* and *Filaments* indicate, the conversation he has been hosting is very broad indeed.

Fragments: The existential situation of our time

The essays in the first volume are arranged under the headings "The Existential Situation of our Time," "Hermeneutics," "Publicness and Public Theology," and "Religion, Theology, and Dialogue." In the "Introduction," Tracy identifies "fragments" as works of thought or art that disclose a compelling meaning. Strong fragments shatter all hegemonic totalities, opening up to infinity and opening a person to otherness and difference. They thus can play a liberating role for those oppressed by economic, cultural, and political regimes claiming an idolatrous totality.¹⁶ Fragments appear here as a transposition of Tracy's earlier notion of the classic. According to Tracy, all traditions and systems of thought have become fragmented. The aim should not be to restore the former wholeness of any tradition, but to move beyond what was to what could be through creatively interpreting their fragments. Theologians have a double task: interpreting the fragments of Christian traditions and

showing their public meaning for the present.¹⁷ One can demonstrate this public meaning through argument, as Jürgen Habermas has done in arguing that secular reason should open itself to the sources of hope and moral concern in religious traditions. It must also be established by hermeneutics, which interpret what these fragments disclose, as their wealth of meaning surpasses what arguments can demonstrate.

After discussing fragments, the opening section alternates essays on God as the infinite with others on suffering and horrors. Tracy explores the infinite as a term for God's transcendence. It is the most appropriate name for God as it pervades all others.¹⁸ Naming God the infinite enables one to think of God's transcendence without domesticating it and to speak of God in a public way. Tracy is also more impressed with suffering and evil than he once was. "We are all damaged goods,"¹⁹ he argues, and Christian theology must encompass a notion of tragedy and a renewed understanding of original sin to comprehend this, even while remaining faithful to the hope for a final overcoming of evil that comes from Jesus' resurrection and God's infinite love. These two "frag-events,"²⁰ God the infinite and tragic suffering, are the poles that seem to substantially structure Tracy's thought now. Their influence is present throughout this volume.

The sections on hermeneutics, and on publicness and public theology, carry forward Tracy's work in *The Analogical Imagination*. Christian theology is fundamentally hermeneutical: "the infinite attempt by a community of finite interpreters over twenty-one centuries, now well, now poorly, to use whatever various hermeneutical methods are available in their time."²¹ Tracy's own approach to this has been sharpened by his dialogue with critical theory. He now insists that notions of "rationality" and "modernity" must be analyzed together, with attention to how they are related and socially grounded.²² As God is infinite and people are finite, theologians constantly need to broaden and enrich their limited perspectives through conversation with others. Tracy, apparently addressing Catholic and Protestant theologians, argues that today, every Christian theologian should attempt to study at least the three major forms of Christianity: Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant.²³ The Orthodox emphasis on contemplation can help overcome the separation of theology from spirituality that entered Catholic and Protestant thought in the 14th century.

Tracy continues to identify his thought as a Roman Catholic public theology, enriched through conversation with other traditions and theological approaches.²⁴ As such, it is primarily oriented toward increasing understanding through conversation, whereas critical theologies primarily seek social change through social analysis and critique. His orientation toward

enhanced understanding may explain his identification of Catholicism, Protestantism, and Orthodoxy as the three theological traditions that all theologians should study, as he sees each as representing different fundamental cognitive orientations. Critical theologians might identify other traditions as also worth engaging. For example, dialogue with the Mennonite tradition led Jürgen Moltmann to recognize the Sermon on the Mount as the ethic of the way of Jesus Christ.²⁵

Filaments: Theological profiles

Fragments largely discusses theological issues. *Filaments* examines how these issues have been approached by theologians, philosophers, poets, and an artist. The first section, “Ancients, Medievals, Moderns,” has essays on Augustine, William of St. Thierry, Martin Luther, and Michelangelo. Tracy argues that William made a crucial shift in trinitarian theology, from Augustine’s “primary but not sole focus in *De Trinitate* on intelligence-in-act”²⁶ to understanding the inner trinitarian relations primarily in terms of love-affectus, a desire for the Good. Tracy may be foreshadowing what his book on God will discuss when he suggests that a future task for trinitarian theology will be to think through these two approaches and unify them, thus producing “a new Trinitarian theology, based on the interdependence of reason and affect, with love as the primary drive: the desire to know as grounded ultimately in the desire for the Good.”²⁷ The conclusion of his essay on Luther may offer another foreshadowing when he asks, how can the notion of God as incomprehensible, as found in Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine, be related to Luther’s notions of God as hidden in the cross and as hidden beyond revelation?²⁸ If Tracy has been working through and trying to integrate these four theological traditions as well as others, it is no wonder his book on God is taking so long to finish.

The second section, “Mentors,” features studies of Reinhold Niebuhr, Karl Rahner, Paul Tillich, and Bernard Lonergan. The third section, “Conversation Partners,” discusses the thought of Louis Dupré, Franklin Gamwell, George Lindbeck, and Jean-Luc Marion. The fourth section, “Prophetic Thought,” looks at feminist theology, Arthur Cohen, Gustavo Gutiérrez, and James Cone. The fifth section, “Seekers of the Good,” has essays on Simone Weil, Iris Murdoch, and T.S. Eliot.

Developments

These two volumes record some developments in Tracy’s thought. In 1991, Gregory Baum observed that Tracy preferred “not to dwell on evil.”²⁹ This has changed. Tracy has reflected on the horrors of modernity and the present age. He now argues that while the visions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are

not ultimately tragic, Christian theology must reckon with radical experiences of horror, with a sense of the necessity of some forms of suffering, with intense suffering caused by this necessity, and with how people have responded to these.³⁰ For Tracy, the basic Christian response to such suffering must be a theology of the cross, an interpretation of how and why God experienced horror and suffering in Jesus’ crucifixion. He does not mention that the accounts of healings and exorcisms in the gospels are also important in this regard. While always ambiguous, these nonetheless help to establish the basic character and orientation of Jesus (and thus of God) to suffering.

Baum also noted that Tracy did not explore in detail the historical forces that produce sinful social structures and much human suffering.³¹ This remains the case. Here, Tracy and critical theologies part ways. Tracy’s focus is typically more on understanding the theoretical challenge that a horror like the Holocaust presents to Christian theology than on analyzing its causes and mechanisms in historical context. Also, his reflections on events like the Holocaust typically move more toward developing more adequate theoretical approaches and concepts for such horrors in general rather than toward direct engagement with a particular horror in question. For example, his essay on Arthur Cohen’s book on the Holocaust, *The Tremendum*,³² emphasizes how the Holocaust forces theologians to think anew, how the radical nature of this evil makes traditional theodicies seem banal and demands new theological language.³³ This differentiates his work somewhat from critical theologies, which asked more about the role of Christian anti-Semitism in the Holocaust, where and how God was present during it, and what a Christian ethic must be today in light of it.

Tracy’s gifts to critical theologies tend to be his clarifications of how evils like the Holocaust or racism require theology to think and speak of God in new ways, and the method of critique and retrieval he has provided for doing this. He affirms the demand of critical theologies that theology be recast as a critical theory in response to horrors and radical evil and for critical reflection on the background theories of theologies as well as their concepts. His theory of the classic shows how this kind of critique and reconceptualization of Christian beliefs is faithful to scripture and Christian traditions. He also collaborates with critical theologies by arguing for the public meaningfulness of their truth claims. However, he doesn’t often hunker down and work through key doctrines like God and Christology in the way that Elizabeth Johnson did in relation to patriarchy’s oppression of and violence against women in her book *She Who Is*.³⁴ He applauds such efforts and learns from them, and his comments on them are usually insightful. Yet, to date, he hasn’t published much of this sort of sustained engagement with specific issues

or struggles himself.³⁵ Tracy allies himself with feminist, mujerista, liberation, and Black theologies, but his own work tends to lie on a more generalizing level.

Tracy's reflections on suffering relate to another development in his thought. In *The Analogical Imagination*, he argued that an adequate Christology must discuss the incarnation, cross, and resurrection. The liberation theologies of Gustavo Gutiérrez and others have since convinced him that suffering, especially that of the poor, demands recognition of the eschatological not-yet of what is promised in Jesus Christ. The Second Coming must be added to these three symbols as a fourth essential topic of Christology.³⁶ With this comes an increased appreciation of the importance of apocalyptic in the New Testament. Quoting Jacques Derrida, Tracy observes that apocalyptic is also "a certain tone in contemporary culture and thought" to which theology must attend.³⁷ Apocalyptic for Tracy is a cry of suffering signalling that redemption is still outstanding and that prevents any assimilation of the gospel to contemporary culture. New Testament apocalyptic cannot be taken literally, but its expression of the cry of the oppressed and hope for radical change in history must feature in any adequate Christology. It is this hope that empowers struggles for the liberation of the poor and the oppressed.

Tracy's reflections on suffering lead him to endorse the preferential option for the poor. He concurs with Gutiérrez that the "central theological problem of our day is not the problem of the nonbeliever but the problem of those thought to be nonpersons by the reigning elites."³⁸ He argues that only when the liberation of the poor, marginalized, and oppressed takes priority over relating the gospel to nonbelievers will "the problem of the nonbeliever receive new thought."³⁹ For Tracy, the option for the poor means that theology should begin by first turning to the marginalized, oppressed, suffering Other. This leads into a discussion of the relationship of mystical and prophetic forms of religion and especially Christianity. For Tracy, these are versions of what he calls the trajectories of manifestation and proclamation in religion.⁴⁰ Their relationship should be dialectical, not oppositional, and this should lead to a renewed understanding of the relationship of love and justice. Tracy distinguishes justice from charity. Love "is greater than justice, but never less."⁴¹ Natural disasters and human frailty mean that some forms of charity will always be needed. However, Tracy correctly sees that the goal of love is justice, not charity, and argues that the option for the poor ensures this.

The option for the poor is an engaged stance of commitment. Yet, in his essay on the thought of Iris Murdoch, Tracy reiterates his idea, gleaned from his earlier dialogue with Buddhism,⁴² that "a turn to the practice of radical detachment is profoundly

necessary for any adequate contemporary Christian theological understanding of the relationship of God and the Good."⁴³ He promises to expand on this in his forthcoming book on God.

Another significant development in Tracy's thought results from the influences of practical theology and Pierre Hadot's work on the importance of spiritual exercises for ancient philosophy.⁴⁴ Tracy argues that three destructive separations have taken place in modern thought: the separation of passion from reason, the separation of form from content, and the separation of theory from practice.⁴⁵ On the whole, he considers postmodernism a boon to theology, as postmodern thinkers reject these separations characteristic of modern thought.⁴⁶ Tracy wants to overcome these three separations with more unified differentiations. With this goal in mind, an interest in spiritual practices and their importance for theology runs throughout these two volumes. In some ways, this fits with his notions of *the classic* and theology-as-conversation. For Tracy, conversations with Others and with the classics are essential spiritual disciplines for theologians.

Observations

Scattered throughout these two volumes are noteworthy observations on the North Atlantic context. Tracy states that feminist theology, "one of the most important advances in all Christian theology of the last few decades,"⁴⁷ has led many to acknowledge "the contextual character of all theology."⁴⁸ This acknowledgement has intensified a major intellectual dilemma of contemporary theology. All theologies reflect their historical context and social location. At the same time, they claim universality for the God they speak about and universal validity for their basic claims about God.⁴⁹ How can theology acknowledge its contextual nature and still make universal claims? Tracy suggests that his criteria for fundamental, systematic, and practical theology, which determine a) the meaning and truth of Christian texts and symbols, b) how this meaning relates to other forms of knowledge and experience, and c) this meaning's ethical and political implications, address this dilemma. Yet, he admits that feminist theory complicates his methodology.⁵⁰ His criteria for discerning the public meaningfulness of Christian revelation assume an intellectual neutrality that some feminists have argued "is not possible in a world of exploitation and oppression."⁵¹ Tracy's enduring contribution to addressing this dilemma probably lies more in his emphasis on conversation with Others and the classics of one's own and other traditions. The contextuality of all thought means that some will see what others miss, and vice versa. Through conversation, one can become aware of the limitations of one's own perspective and broaden the horizons of one's thought. Theologians need bridging social capital;

relationships and contact with theologians and non-theologians working in other contexts and traditions. These relationships can help overcome parochialism and unawareness of or unwitting support for oppressions and exclusions.

Tracy describes recognizing the importance of analyzing who is speaking and the social location as adding “a more ‘materialist’ version to theology.”⁵² However, the kind of change in theological method that feminist theology has brought about with its call for a “critical theoretical analysis of the social location of the theologian”⁵³ can be experienced more as a conversion for some, a break with the past rather than an addition to a previous perspective. For many white male theologians, coming to terms with the contextuality of theology and their white male privilege has been more a decentering conversion to a new outlook than a broadening of their former perspective.

Tracy reflects on postmodernity as a theoretical perspective and a social reality several times in these two books. He affirms its characteristic turn to the Other. While discussing the theology of James Cone and African-American thought, he observes that to prevent modernity and postmodernity from becoming repressively totalizing terms, it is necessary to admit that there are many different forms of both.⁵⁴ African and Asian societies are not following Western paths to modernization, and the postmodernities emerging there differ from those of North Atlantic countries. This leads Tracy to a self-correction regarding the term *pluralism*: “Pluralism is no longer adequate to describe our global, post-Eurocentric, post-‘white’ situation. We need a word like *polycentrism* (Johann Baptist Metz) – a word that tries to articulate the reality of the many centers now present in our culture, which no longer has a dominant center and margins.”⁵⁵

According to Tracy, use of the categories the “Other” and the “different” has led “to a recognition that all of us are now ‘Others’ in a polycentric world.”⁵⁶ Privilege and oppression, centers and margins remain. What is needed is attention to the fragments of thought and meaning of the oppressed and marginalized, which can “shatter any reigning totality system, such as the ‘white’ understanding of modernity and culture.”⁵⁷ Tracy sees this attention to be at work in the thought of Cone and Cornel West. He might also have mentioned the work of Shawn Copeland.⁵⁸ Critical theologians would agree with Tracy, but emphasize more that we are not all equally Others, and stress the differences, for example, between the Otherness an educated white academic may experience and that experienced by refugees denied entrance to a country.

Related to this acknowledgement of the polycentricism of contemporary societies is Tracy’s observation that

at present, no one question commands the attention of all. Instead, “all questions, often all at once, force themselves upon the attention of every theologian.”⁵⁹ Tracy’s understanding of theology as conversation has been his response to the plethora of questions and issues confronting theologians at present. In his view, whatever questions or issues theologians address, they must maintain a “constant self-exposure to the other,”⁶⁰ to broaden their own perspectives. The focus of his approach has been on a kind of meta-issue: bringing theology into the public sphere, so that theology is enriched by the many forms of knowledge and experience in surrounding culture, and at the same time demonstrating the public meaningfulness of the gospel so it attains a hearing in wider society.

An Underlying Tension with Critical Theologies

We now turn to the difference identified earlier between Tracy’s approach to theology and that of critical theologies. Tracy positions his work in relation to critical theologies as follows: “[t]he dialogue of communicative action in the public realm is the exact counterpart of the solidarity in action that these new theologies justly foster.”⁶¹ He sees himself to be collaborating with critical theologies by helping them gain a hearing, while their focus on specific issues informs and has corrected his discussion of the public nature of theology.

This self-assessment accurately gauges the relationship of Tracy’s work and approach to critical theologies. His adoption of the preferential option for the poor has moved his thought closer to critical theologies, and he allies himself with them. Still, a tension remains between the two. Tracy’s notion of conversation originally implied a liberal view of society. All were fundamentally equal, all voices were to be heard, and reason informed by the classics would adjudicate their conversation and discern the truth. The preferential option for the poor implies a conflictual view of society. It demands a greater solidarity with society’s victims than Tracy at times seems willing to offer. Tracy has adopted a both/and strategy in regards to it. Theology must prioritize the issue of the poor and the marginalized yet also continue to address “the problem of the nonbeliever”⁶² by demonstrating the public meaningfulness of Christian truth claims. He criticizes most critical theologies for not entering debates about rationality in order to gain the hearing they deserve in a pluralistic society.⁶³ He is right that critical theologians should enter these debates. However, the dialogue of communicative action and conversations among different theologies need to be carried out from a perspective of solidarity with society’s victims. Their experiences and struggles provide a perspective from

which the truth of all voices in the conversation can be assessed.

There is some truth to Tracy's continuing belief that biases and exclusions can be transcended through reason and dialogue. His move to prioritize the issue of society's victims is evidence of this. Yet he does not seem to realize how the option for the poor entails a spirituality of walking with them. The turn to the "oppressed, repressed, marginalized Other"⁶⁴ that Tracy endorses as the starting point for Christian theology entails a more detailed social analysis and sustained attention to the experiences of society's victims and the causes of their sufferings than he has hitherto been willing to engage in. Engaging in this kind of sustained attention to the experiences of the poor and marginalized is part of the solidarity that the preferential option entails. Tracy's approach misses this dimension of "the radical element of the gospel"⁶⁵ and its implications for debates about rationality. Dialogue and the preferential option are both necessary. But the dominant culture is transcended most profoundly through identification and solidarity with its victims. This act of love for Others and loyalty to Jesus gives reason an access to the truth that it otherwise lacks. Theological conversation undertaken without sustained solidarity with the poor too easily becomes curved in upon itself.

To date, the tension between Tracy's theology and critical theologies has been productive. Tracy has learned from critical theologies to reflect on evil, listen to society's victims, and unfold the emancipatory meaning of the gospel in a more radical way that includes the eschatological not-yet of its apocalyptic traditions. Conversely, Tracy's work offers critical theologians insightful reflections on their concerns and work, and concepts and ideas gleaned from the many dialogues he participates in.

Conclusion

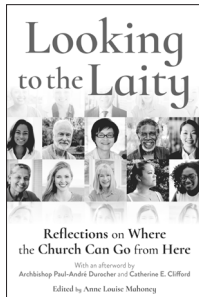
Jürgen Moltmann's theology has a similar dialectical relationship to liberation theology. Commenting on the latter, he observed that theology is born out of commitment to social change inspired by love of God, but also out of wonder, joy, and adoration.⁶⁶ Tracy's passion for theological conversation is similarly fuelled by a desire for justice and peace, but also by wonder at the unending love and creativity of God. His work is an important dialogue partner for critical theologians partly because its continued call for conversation with other theologies and religions witnesses to the transcendence of God, whose love is always greater than any one theology can fully express.⁶⁷

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- 1 David Tracy, *Fragments* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 248–49.
- 2 Stephen Okey, *A Theology of Conversation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2018), 3.
- 3 David Tracy, *The Achievement of Bernard Lonergan* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970).
- 4 David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975).
- 5 *Ibid.*, 3.
- 6 Gregory Baum, "Radical Pluralism and Liberation Theology," in Werner Jeanrond and Jennifer Rike, eds., *Radical Pluralism and Truth* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 7.
- 7 David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1981).
- 8 *Ibid.*, 102.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 101.
- 10 Okey, *A Theology of Conversation*, 2.
- 11 David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987).
- 12 David Tracy, *Dialogue with the Other* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990).
- 13 *Ibid.*, 100–104.
- 14 David Tracy, *On Naming the Present* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994).
- 15 Okey, *A Theology of Conversation*, 162–63. This seems to have been the review by Richard Bernstein, "Radical Plurality, Fearful Ambiguity, and Engaged Hope," *The Journal of Religion* 69:1 (1989): 90–91.
- 16 Tracy, *Fragments*, 1–2.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 14–15.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 47.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 78.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 9.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 209.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 241.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 365–66.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 247.
- 25 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990), 118–27.
- 26 Tracy, *Filaments*, 126.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 129.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 162.
- 29 Baum, "Radical Pluralism and Liberation Theology," 7.
- 30 Tracy, *Fragments*, 69.
- 31 Baum, "Radical Pluralism and Liberation Theology," 7.
- 32 Tracy, *Filaments*, 329–35.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 330.
- 34 Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is* (New York: Crossroad, 1993).
- 35 Tracy does say that feminist critiques of the sexist and patriarchal nature of major Christian symbols have brought to light the profoundly gendered character of Christian talk of God, and that wrestling with this has been one "of the most difficult problems of my own recent work on God." Tracy, *Filaments*, 326.
- 36 Tracy, *Filaments*, 314–15.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 347.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 337.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 338.
- 40 Tracy adopted this typology of manifestation and proclamation as two basic forms of religion from Paul Ricoeur: Tracy, *Fragments*, 223–33.
- 41 Tracy, *Filaments*, 342.
- 42 Tracy, *Dialogue with the Other*, 88.
- 43 Tracy, *Filaments*, 418.
- 44 Tracy, *Fragments*, 297–300.
- 45 *Ibid.*, 3.
- 46 Tracy, *Filaments*, 124.
- 47 *Ibid.*, 323.
- 48 *Ibid.*
- 49 *Ibid.*, 324.

50 Ibid., 326.
 51 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 6.
 52 Tracy, *Filaments*, 323–24.
 53 Ibid., 323.
 54 Ibid., 352.
 55 Ibid.
 56 Ibid.
 57 Ibid., 353.
 58 Shawn Copeland, *Knowing Christ Crucified* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2018).
 59 Tracy, *Filaments*, 220.
 60 Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 362.

61 Tracy, *Fragments*, 249.
 62 Tracy, *Filaments*, 338.
 63 Ibid., 248. Tracy acknowledges that some liberation theologians, such as Enrique Dussel and Leonardo Boff, and others such as Cornel West, have engaged in the dialogue of communicative action. Ibid., 249.
 64 Tracy, *Filaments*, 338.
 65 Gregory Baum, *Religion and Alienation* (New York: Paulist, 1975), 220.
 66 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* (London: SCM, 1981), 5–9.
 67 I thank David Seljak for helpful comments on an earlier version of this essay.



Looking to the Laity Reflections on Where the Church Can Go from Here

Edited by ANNE LOUISE MAHONEY, with an afterword by ARCHBISHOP PAUL-ANDRÉ DUROCHER and CATHERINE E. CLIFFORD

The Church landscape has shifted greatly since the Second Vatican Council ended in 1965. Many people have lost trust in the institution. Others find it irrelevant. Those who remain, however, have much to offer the Church they love. Today's laity is engaged, educated and committed to building God's kingdom.

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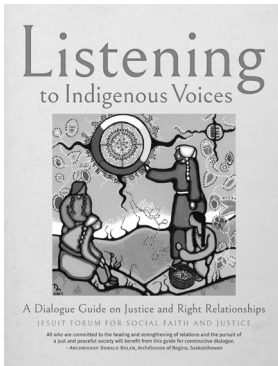
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Anne Louise Mahoney is managing editor of Novalis. She has an ongoing interest in the role of the laity in the post-Vatican II Church.

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