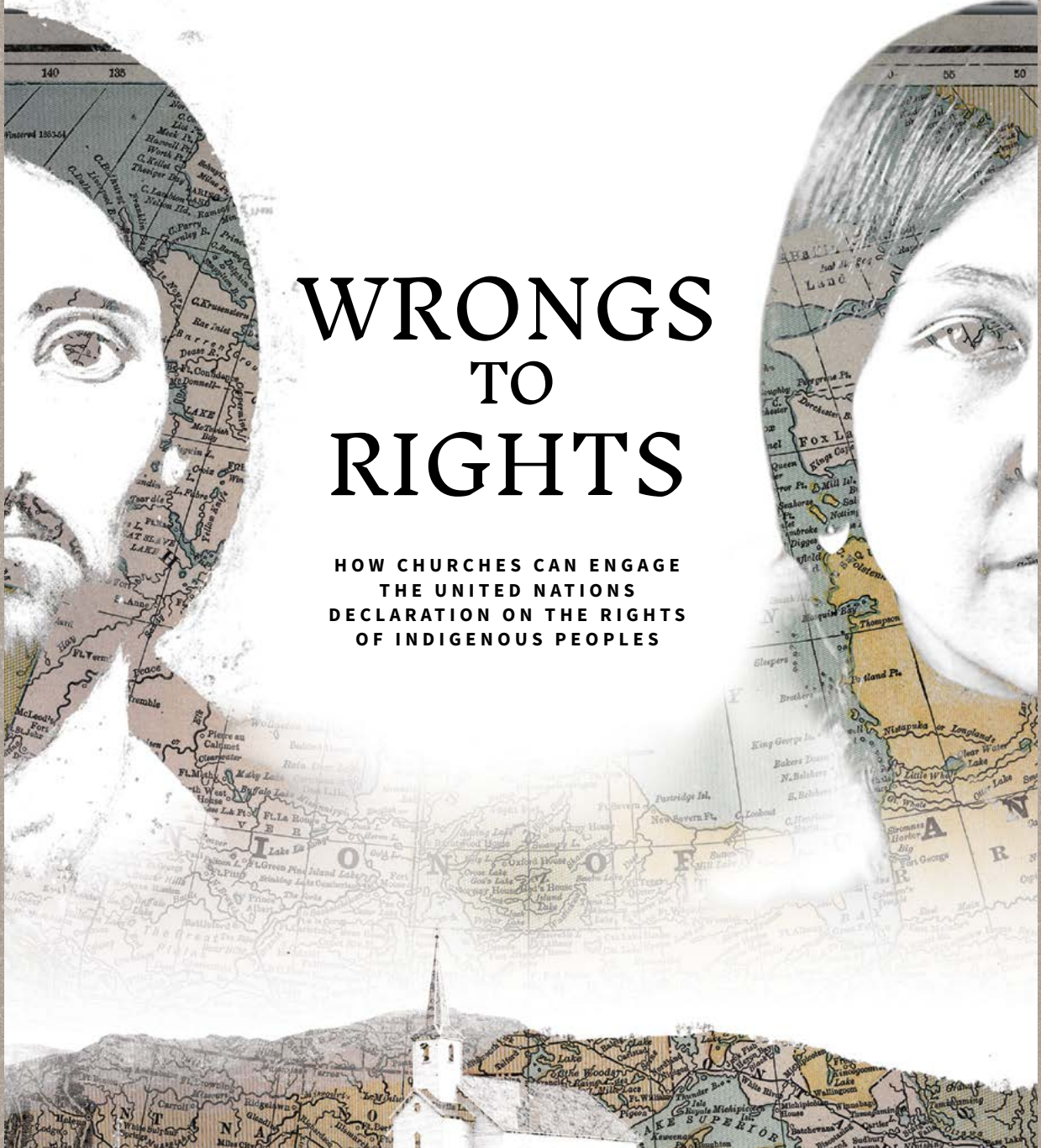


DIGITAL EDITION

WRONGS TO RIGHTS

HOW CHURCHES CAN ENGAGE
THE UNITED NATIONS
DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS
OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES



WRONGS TO RIGHTS

HOW CHURCHES CAN ENGAGE
THE UNITED NATIONS
DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS
OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

DIGITAL EDITION
2023

Honouring the call of Indigenous peoples from around the world, Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission has specifically summoned, not only the State, but all churches to embrace the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. But what is the *Declaration*? And how might it gift and reorient Christian faith and practice?

In *Wrongs to Rights*, over 40 authors from diverse backgrounds – Indigenous and Settler, Christian and Traditional – wrestle with the meaning of the *Declaration* for the Church. With a firm hold on past and present colonialism, the authors tackle key questions that the *Declaration* and the TRC's call to "adopt and comply" raises: What are its potential implications? How does it connect to Scripture? Can it facilitate genuine decolonization, or is "rights talk" another form of imperialism? And what about real life relationships? Can the *Declaration* be lived out – collectively and personally – on the ground?

WRONGS TO RIGHTS

HOW CHURCHES CAN ENGAGE THE
UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION
ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

W

DIGITAL EDITION - 2023

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Two other special editions--*Yours, Mine, Ours* and *Quest for Respect* were released in spring and summer of 2017 respectively, creating what would come to be known as the [TRC Trilogy](#).

In 2018, *Intotemak* was discontinued. Past issues of *Intotemak* are available at [CommonWord](#). Mennonite Church Canada's Indigenous-Settler Relations office has continued to produce publications in its place, beginning with the title *Unsettling the Word* in 2018 and continuing with *Be It Resolved* in 2020.

In 2021 it became clear that demand for all 3 editions of the TRC Trilogy would continue. Faced with the challenge and cost of managing 3 separate large order reprints, the decision was made to create digital editions for each of the 3 books. This trilogy is available from [CommonWord](#).



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Cypress Hills. / PHOTO: ERIK LIZEE / PUBLIC DOMAIN



"What it means to be a Warrior." /
TREVOR ANGUS AND ANGELA STERRITT,
GITXSAN NATION FROM GITANMAAX

Who is Indigenous?

Historically, colonial powers, nation-states, and international agencies have developed and imposed their own rigorous yet exclusionary definitions of who is Indigenous upon Indigenous populations.

The formulation of exclusionary definitions has been one among many strategies that nation-states have used to systematically deny Indigenous rights. As a result of the many negative experiences Indigenous peoples and organizations have had with official definitions of Indigenous status, they have insisted that they know better “who is Indigenous.”

One of the most cited working definitions of “indigenous” communities, peoples, and nations was proposed by José R. Martínez Cobo, the first UN special rapporteur for the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, in his famous *Study on the Problem of Discrimination against Indigenous Populations* (1986). The working definition offers a number of basic ideas for defining “indigenous peoples” while recognizing their right to define themselves. The definition reads as follows:

Indigenous communities, peoples, and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing on those territories, or parts of them.

ISABEL ALTAMIRANO-JIMÉNEZ

Indigenous Encounters with Neoliberalism: Place, Women, and the Environment (UBC, 2013).



Former Chief Marilyn Baptiste of the Xení Gwet'in First Nation speaks in defense of her people's traditional lands under threat by mining interests. / PHOTO: DAVID P. BALL

We have struggled for generations for recognition of our rights. We have fought for our survival, dignity, and well-being, and the struggle continues. Canada's denial of First Nations' land rights falls well short of the minimum standards affirmed by the *Declaration* and demonstrates a clear failure by Canada to implement its human rights obligations. Prime Minister Harper's apology for Canada's role in the Indian Residential Schools acknowledged that the policy of assimilation was wrong and has no place in our country. Yet Canada's policy of denying Aboriginal title and rights is premised on the same attitude of assimilation. It is time for this attitude and the policies that flow from it to be cast aside. The *Declaration* calls for the development of new relationships based on recognition and respect for the inherent human rights of Indigenous peoples.

GRAND CHIEF EDWARD JOHN

Hereditary Chief of the Tl'azt'en Nation in northern British Columbia and North American Representative to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

A wholesale rejection of human rights can presuppose that there is a “pure” alternative framework....

It also presupposes that decolonization can happen tomorrow without short-term strategies to improve the current conditions under which Indigenous peoples live.

And... it presupposes that Indigenous peoples are not capable of violating human rights.

In *X-marks*, Scott Lyons notes that those who call for decolonization often do not effectively engage in any short-term strategies that are viewed as reformist even though they may save the lives of Indigenous peoples who are currently under immediate attack.

As a result, the immediate needs of people often get sacrificed in favour of articulating seemingly politically pure ideals.

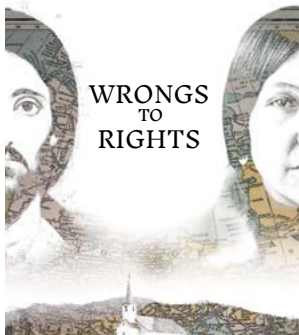
Conversely, those who do engage in short-term reform strategies often decry the goal of decolonization as “unrealistic.”

In doing so, they do not critique the manner in which these strategies often retrench rather than challenge the colonial status quo.

Consequently, it is important to consider how human rights, no matter how implicated in colonialism, may be redeployed by Indigenous peoples to advance decolonization.

ANDREA SMITH

Cherokee, author of *Native Americans and the Christian Right* (Duke, 2008)



WRONGS TO RIGHTS

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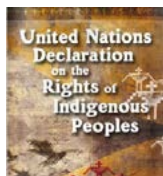
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Editorial

Called to Relationship



STEVE HEINRICHS is a Settler Christian living in Winnipeg – Treaty 1 Territory and the homeland of the Métis Nation. The director of Indigenous Relations for Mennonite Church Canada, Steve loves to dialogue with communities about the need for decolonization and the good life it can bring.

I'm at Six Nations, sitting in a circle of local Haudenosaunee and Settlers from various churches. With curiosity and confusion, we're earnestly thumbing through the s of a small booklet – the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* from 2007. We're wrestling with what this might mean for our particular communities, for us individually, and for the hope of real on-the-ground relationships between Settler and Indigenous peoples.

The previous day we visited the Mush Hole, a former residential school run in nearby Brantford, Ontario. We heard horrific stories of abuse, and brilliant stories of resilience. And we were totally shaken: shaken by the unspeakable violation of Indigenous rights and well-being: shaken by the resistance narratives of little ones.

The night before I was sitting with local drummers as we sang traditional songs and danced – simple two-steps, intricate fancy steps, brown hands holding white with pride and much laughter. We – both Settlers and Indigenous friends – were shaken, but in a good way: shaken by the beauty of Indigenous language, Indigenous culture, Indigenous resurgence and joy. And Settler joy too.

With reverberations of these transformative experiences moving in and around our circle, we sit with the *Declaration* in hand and ask each other what this could mean.

Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Indian Residential Schools (TRC) recently released its *Calls to Action*. One of these 94 calls – number 48 – summons Canadian churches and all interfaith social justice groups to engage with the *Declaration* by reading it, learning it, and publicly nurturing conversations about it. Number 48 also calls us to compliance.

The TRC lifts up the *Declaration* as a foundational guide; it is “a blueprint for reconciliation.” If churches are serious about repairing the fractured relationship



with host peoples – a relationship bruised and battered by generations of settler-colonial violence that has not ended – then this, we are told, is the way. Walk in it.

The *Declaration* is not long. There's a preamble and 46 short articles. It does not take more than 30 or 45 minutes to read. Google it and you can get it. It's readily available (remember – it's almost a decade old).

Yet most of us in that circle at Six Nations had not read it or even heard about it. And our reactions as we engaged it for the first time were diverse.

"I can't believe this!" exclaimed a Cayuga woman. "Isn't it unbelievable that the world needs to agree that we're truly human like everyone else?"

"This Declaration is a gospel-like call to justice," said a young Catholic man. "It calls the Church to radical peacemaking and to count a real cost. Who will have the courage to respond?"

"It doesn't go far enough, and it sounds too Western," one Tuscarora leader said. "But it does a number of good things and can get us moving, if we're willing."

"I'm just not sure how to respond to this idea of 'human rights,'" wondered a Mennonite young adult. "It's all too anthropocentric [human-centred]. Plus, the whole thing gives legitimacy to nation-states. That's a problem for my tradition."

We have a lot of learning to do and questions to work through. And it's imperative that we do this learning and asking. It's not just the TRC that's called Canadian Christians to study the *Declaration*, to wrestle with it and transform our lives and institutions according to its principles, standards, and values. Though that should be enough for us to take the *Declaration* seriously – *for this call comes ultimately from the Indigenous victims of Christian residential schools* – we must also recognize that the summons is a global one. Indigenous peoples from hundreds of Indigenous nations have tasked Settler peoples and states around the world to learn and live the *Declaration*.

I believe it is good work. The *Declaration* may not be perfect. Yet it can be an incredible tool to help Settler Christians and our church communities walk the path of decolonization.

This special edition of *Intotemak* – a one-time "super issue" – is intended to help us begin this work. The contributors are an amazing group coming from a variety of peoples, places, and perspectives. They do not share the same worldview or religious tradition. That's a good thing. And they hold differing opinions about the *Declaration* and how it is best used. They are, however, all deeply committed to the task of undoing the colonial patterns and practices that keep Indigenous and Settler peoples apart. They're all committed to the hope and real potential of a renewed, respectful relationship.

The volume is divided into five parts. I encourage you to work through the material in a way that best suits you and your circle. You can read it straight through; you can freely move in and around the various parts; you can even start from the back.

PART ONE explores what the *Declaration* is – the story behind it, why many Indigenous peoples believe it's necessary, and some of its specific implications (for state, for the Church, for us all).

PART TWO tackles potential objections that might prevent Settler Christians from sitting at the table with the *Declaration*: suspicion about "rights" language, the roles of nation-states, the efficacy of international law, and so on.

Then, in **PART THREE**, we turn to Scripture and theology, pondering the ways in which our Christian narratives can both gift this conversation and be challenged by it.

Next, in **PART FOUR**, we turn to the nitty-gritty of relationships on the land and in our churches. How can the *Declaration* help us re-imagine how we – Settler and Indigenous peoples – can live side by side? And what of the ways we Christians – both Settler and Indigenous – wield the gospel, do mission, and operate as the Church? What does the *Declaration* help us see that we haven't seen before?

PART FIVE then takes us to a conversation around next steps. Is it reconciliation or decolonization (or both!) that we're after? And how do we live this out – collectively and individually – in "a good way"?

Courage, honesty, and the strength of the Spirit be with you, and all of us, as we take up the critical and life-affirming conversations in our circles.



Stewart Redsky, Curator of Shoal Lake 40's Museum of Canadian Human Rights Violations, takes a group of Settlers on a learning tour of his community (2015). PHOTO: JAMES CHENG / JAMES CHRISTIAN IMAGERY

Freedom Road

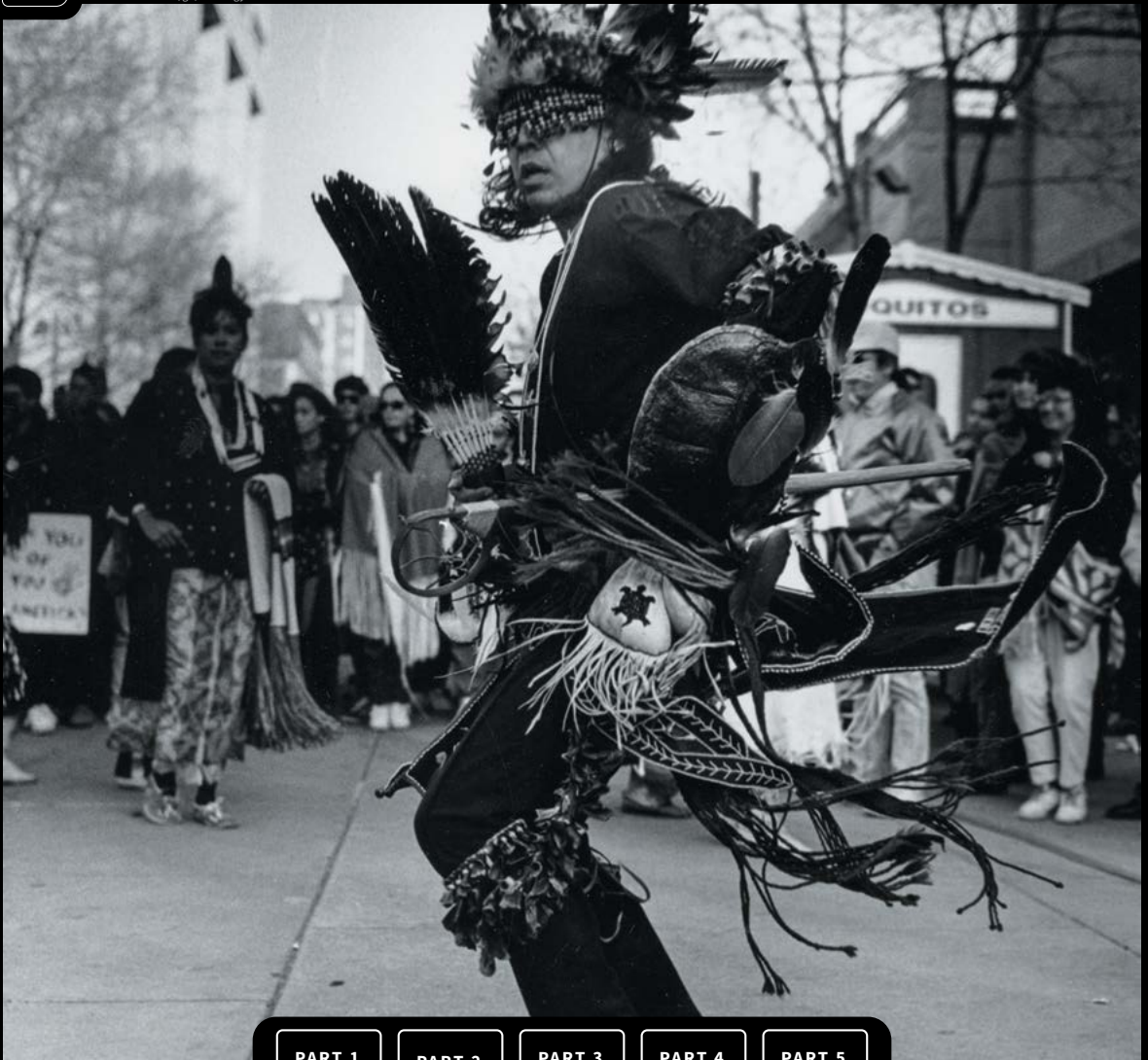
Treaty people know from history
The path of freedom teaches them this wisdom:

Ironically, we're only free to be
When we've committed to another's freedom
A curse, conversely, falls on those who wend
A selfish way, betray a trust forsaken
For covenant is holy and extends
Till all has been restored that once was taken
The narrow way, the strait of the Great Spirit
The way the ancients knew the meaning of
Our better angels know we need not fear it
The best of angels speak the truth of love:

*We'll come to see the healing of the nations
If first we learn and live our declarations*

STEVE BELL

Steve Bell is a singer/songwriter who lives in Winnipeg, Treaty 1 Territory and homeland of the Métis Nation. Steve was an organizer of Churches for Freedom Road, a coalition of congregations who joined with other solidarity groups in the summer of 2015 to support Shoal Lake 40 First Nation.

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PART 1:

What is the *Declaration*?
The Hope and Challenge of
Indigenous Rights

Blueprint for Reconciliation, Beacon of Hope



JENNIFER PRESTON works for Canadian Friends Service Committee, a nongovernmental organization that carries out the peace, justice, and human rights work of the national body of Quakers, based in the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe. Jennifer holds the Indigenous Peoples' human rights file for the international body of Quakers at the United Nations.

In the last year, the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* has garnered significant public attention. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has called for the *Declaration* to be the framework for reconciliation and repeatedly references it in its *Calls to Action*. Canada's new prime minister, Justin Trudeau, has publicly affirmed the government's commitment to the *Calls to Action*,

including the implementation of the *Declaration*. But what is it? And where did it come from?

The UN General Assembly adopted the *Declaration* on September 13, 2007 after more than 20 years of discussions and negotiations that included representatives of Indigenous peoples and states. I was engaged in the final years of the development of the *Declaration* and in the intense lobbying effort that ensured its adoption by the General Assembly. I am a Quaker, and as a historic peace church, we place a high priority on this work. To be faithful to our spiritual commitment to a world of peace, we work for justice, equality, non-discrimination, and human rights.

Today, there are more than 370 million Indigenous

The board at the UN lights up in a wave of green in favour of the *Declaration*. / PHOTO: STEFAN DISKO



peoples in over 70 countries. Their human rights are routinely trampled, even when protection is established in national laws. Developed in response to deep injustices and extreme human rights violations, the *Declaration* is a symbol of triumph and hope.

International human rights declarations are intended to guide governments, courts, and other institutions to ensure that human rights are respected, protected, and fulfilled. The *Declaration* makes a critical contribution to the international human rights system, being the most comprehensive universal instrument that addresses both the collective and individual human rights of the world's Indigenous peoples. Its adoption was celebrated globally in recognition of the extraordinary achievement and the need that it fills.

The development was a unique and democratic process. A critical element was that, for the first time, a UN human rights instrument was created with the rights holders themselves as active participants. Indigenous peoples' representatives participated in both working groups that developed the text, first with the Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP) and then in the Working Group on the Draft Declaration (WGDD).

In 1977, Indigenous people went to Geneva for the International NGO Conference on Discrimination against Indigenous Populations in the Americas. One of the outcomes was the development of the WGIP, first meeting in 1982. The WGIP began drafting what was to become the *Declaration* and worked on the text from 1983–1993. The WGDD was established to further work on the text with a 10-year mandate – due to end in 2004. Extensions to the WGDD carried it through 2006. Over the course of more than two decades, Indigenous peoples' representatives went to the UN and shared details of their experiences and the human rights violations they suffered – the articles of the *Declaration* were crafted, revised, and ultimately adopted from these words.

The final adoption did not come easily. There were many times that it seemed impossible to produce a text that both states and Indigenous peoples could support. Throughout most of the development, Canada did not contribute positively. However, the final years saw Canada show leadership and encourage other states,

notably with regard to the right of self-determination.

Regrettably, in January 2006, Prime Minister Stephen Harper's newly elected government did not support a declaration on the rights of Indigenous peoples. Weeks later, the WGDD completed its final meeting. In March 2006, the chair of the WGDD forwarded a compromise final text to the Commission on Human Rights, with the support of the Global Indigenous Peoples' Caucus. This text was presented for adoption in June 2006 at the UN Human Rights Council. Canada and Russia were the only states to vote against.

The *Declaration* then advanced to the General Assembly. Lobbying by Canada and its few allies caused an unexpected delay and, for nine months, the text was further negotiated. One week before the deadline imposed by the General Assembly, nine changes were made to the text.

The Global Indigenous Peoples' Caucus had a matter of days to review the changes and accept going forward or refuse them, thus ending the journey. Each geographic region had coordinators who were responsible for circulating the revisions and providing feedback to representatives in New York. After careful analysis, the Indigenous caucus concluded that the changes did not alter the text to the extent that they could not be accepted. Some, in fact, strengthened the text, while others were neutral. Indigenous peoples around the globe agreed that they wanted the revised text to go forward.

In September 2007, the General Assembly adopted the *Declaration*. Canada, the U.S., Australia, and New Zealand were the only states to vote against it. Canada spent the next several years aggressively undermining the *Declaration* at every opportunity. This continued even as Canada endorsed it (with qualifications) in 2010. This position was strictly ideological – and widely criticized by international and domestic experts.

States that did not vote in favour could later endorse or express their support. In late 2010, the *Declaration* achieved the status of a consensus instrument. All four dissenting states reversed their position and expressed support. Colombia, Samoa, and the Ukraine, three of the abstaining states, have now also endorsed.

How can the *Declaration* be used?

Declarations adopted by the General Assembly are universally applicable upon their adoption and are not signed or ratified by states. The *Declaration* was adopted as an annex to a General Assembly resolution, which are generally considered to be non-binding. Human rights declarations are different from legally binding treaties or conventions, to which states are bound after they ratify. This does not mean the *Declaration* does not have diverse legal effects. The *Declaration* provides a principled legal framework for achieving reconciliation, redress, and respect. Rather than creating new rights, it affirms the economic, social, cultural, political, environmental, and spiritual rights of Indigenous peoples. As described by the former Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous peoples, James Anaya, “The *Declaration* does not affirm or create special rights separate from the fundamental human rights that are deemed of universal application, but rather elaborates upon these fundamental rights in the specific cultural, historical, social and economic circumstances of Indigenous peoples.”

The *Declaration* makes a unique and much-needed contribution to global understanding and the promotion of human rights through its emphasis on inherent collective rights, which are indispensable to the survival, dignity, security, and well-being of Indigenous peoples and their ongoing development as distinct peoples. These collective rights are wide-ranging, including treaty rights, land and resource rights, and the right to self-determination.

There are many ways that the *Declaration* can be used. Here are just a few examples:

- The standards can be used in the engagement between Indigenous peoples, governments, corporations, and other third parties. Indigenous leaders and members of civil society are increasingly invoking the *Declaration* to assert the rights of Indigenous peoples in relation to resource development. In particular, to encourage governments and resource companies to honour the right of FPIC – free, prior, and informed consent. FPIC is the right to say *no* to the imposition of decisions that would further compound the marginalization, impoverishment,

and dispossession to which Indigenous peoples have been subjected throughout history. FPIC is also the power to say *yes* to mutually beneficial initiatives that promote healthy and vital Indigenous nations for the benefit of present and future generations.

- The *Declaration* is used to interpret Indigenous rights and related state obligations. It is one of the tools available as Indigenous peoples continue to seek redress for rights violations. The *Declaration* can fill the gaps in treaties, particularly (in the Canadian context) the numbered treaties that often include less detail than contemporary treaties related to lands, resources, and governance. The *Declaration* can serve to ensure that treaties remain dynamic and lasting agreements.
- The application of the *Declaration* by domestic courts is a tool to guide the interpretation of constitutions and legislation. The case of *Cal & Coy v. Attorney General of Belize* (2007), in which the Supreme Court of Belize relied in part upon the *Declaration* in upholding the constitutional rights of the Maya people to lands and resources, is an example of this potential. Recently, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal referenced the *Declaration* in the Child Welfare decision, in the case brought by the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society (2016).

Amnesty International and Canadian Friends Service Committee have argued before the Supreme Court of Canada the importance of using the *Declaration* in domestic Indigenous rights cases. As intervenors in the landmark case on land title brought by the Tsilhqot’in Nation (2014), we focused on how standards in international law, including the *Declaration*, need to be used by the courts. The Coalition for the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples has collaborated for several years on the *Declaration*. Consisting of national and regional Indigenous organizations, Indigenous nations, and human rights and faith-based organizations, this coalition was built over several years based on common objectives. Currently, the Coalition is focusing on the implementation of the *Declaration*, especially related to the *Calls to Action* of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Positive momentum around the *Declaration* continues to grow. It is a living instrument with an auspicious past and a tremendous future. It is increasingly championed in grassroots communities and throughout the United Nations. It provides a blueprint for reconciliation. UN

Secretary General Ban Ki-moon emphasizes,

The *Declaration* is a visionary step towards addressing the human rights of Indigenous peoples. It sets out a framework on which states can build or rebuild their relationships with Indigenous peoples. The result of more than two decades of negotiations, it provides a momentous opportunity for states and Indigenous peoples to strengthen their relationships, promote reconciliation, and ensure that the past is not repeated.

I look forward to continuing to work in partnership with Indigenous peoples and strengthening the “tapestry.” In the words of international human rights lawyer Paul Joffe,

The UN Declaration is much like a tapestry, carefully woven over many years with countless interrelated and mutually reinforcing strands. These fibres are based on the thousands of interventions of Indigenous peoples worldwide, who repeatedly travelled to Geneva to recount the legacy of colonization and the injustices, discriminations, and other human rights violations that they continue to suffer... This tapestry of human rights remains a work in progress, since their significance and interrelationships are always evolving. Thus, it is the responsibility of present and future generations of all concerned to continue to weave new strands and collectively reinforce its indelibility and relevance.

■

Indigenous Law and Reconciliation



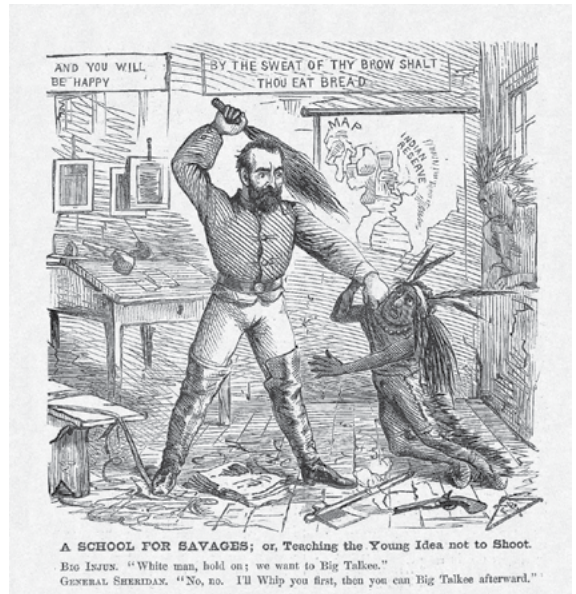
BRENDA L. GUNN (Métis) is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Law at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg (Treaty 1 Territory and homeland of the Métis). An active member of the international Indigenous movement, Brenda's research focuses on the domestic application of international law.

After close to 30 years of dialogue, debate, and discernment, the United Nations finally recognized that Indigenous peoples are peoples – part of the human family of the world. The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* represents a significant development for both international and Canadian law. It is the first international instrument that sets out Indigenous peoples' rights as they understand them. It recognizes that these rights are grounded in Indigenous peoples' own customs, laws, and traditions. It recognizes that these rights are inherent (often described as coming from Creator), not given by the UN or some country.

Now, the difficult job of implementing and realizing the standards set out in the *Declaration* must begin in earnest. All Canadians must be engaged in this process if we are truly going to reconcile. While change and unknowns can be uncomfortable, we cannot let fear hold us back. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's *Calls to Action* revolve around the implementation of the *Declaration* because it provides a framework to adjust the current relationship between Indigenous peoples and Canada (both the state and Settler Canadians).

Why Indigenous Rights?

Some people wonder why there's a special UN declaration on Indigenous peoples' rights. The introductory paragraphs tell a compelling story as to why the *Declaration* was necessary. It recognizes that countries like Canada were



The widespread dehumanization of Indigenous peoples has facilitated the dispossession of Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty. (1869) COMIC IN HARPER'S WEEKLY, FRANK BELLOWS / IMAGE: PUBLIC DOMAIN

founded on colonialism (the assertion of ownership over land and authority to govern) despite the presence of Indigenous nations. It recognizes that colonization has negatively impacted Indigenous peoples and has prevented them from fully realizing their human rights. The UN believes that recognizing and protecting Indigenous peoples' rights and Treaties will lead to harmonious relations amongst people in Canada – contrary to beliefs that different rights for different people tears us apart. The failure to recognize Indigenous peoples' rights divides us in Canada. We must work together in the spirit of partnership, based on mutual respect, to achieve these rights. This can contribute to reconciliation.

The *Declaration* provides a new way to approach Indigenous peoples' rights and the relationship with Canada – one that is based on justice, democracy, respect for human rights, non-discrimination, and good faith. Indigenous peoples' rights are inherent, derived from their political, economic, and social structures and from their cultures, spiritual traditions, histories, and philosophies. These rights are grounded in Indigenous peoples' own legal traditions, not created by or contingent upon recognition from any government or court. To realize Indigenous peoples' rights, we must make space for Indigenous laws within Canada.

Many of the rights articulated in the *Declaration* specifically mention the role of Indigenous laws and institutions. They are referenced in relation to identifying and redressing violations of cultural rights (Article 11), land rights (Article 26), membership (Article 33), and the many references to consultation and participation in decision-making. Remedies for past violations should be determined in relation to Indigenous peoples' laws (Article 40), and that, going forward, consultation should be carried out in accordance with Indigenous peoples' own laws.

It is not just Indigenous laws that are acknowledged and protected under the *Declaration*, but also Indigenous legal institutions. Article 5 explicitly states:

Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinct political, legal, economic, social, and cultural institutions, while retaining their right to participate fully, if they so choose, in the political, economic, social, and cultural life of the State.

The *Declaration* places a strong emphasis on affording proper recognition to and space for Indigenous laws and institutions. This will move us past eras where the Canadian government imposed new government structures and law to a future based on mutual respect and cooperation where Indigenous peoples maintain control over their internal affairs.

Indigenous Rights are Human Rights

Some have expressed concern about the *Declaration* because it grounds Indigenous peoples' rights within the international human rights framework. Including these rights within human rights recognizes

that Indigenous peoples are in fact people, entitled to the same human rights as other people (the right to equality and nondiscrimination found in Articles 1 and 2). This is an important recognition since Canadian law justified the seizure and appropriation of Indigenous land because Indigenous peoples were not people, but “fierce savages.”

It is important that Indigenous peoples are recognized as peoples with a right to self-determination (Article 3). Indigenous peoples should be in control of decisions that effect their lives, including political, social, cultural, and economic development. The Canadian government should not make these decisions on its own.

The human rights regime is very flexible and



commonword.ca/go/3369

For generations, Indigenous peoples have articulated and practiced their legal traditions. Contemporary teachers, like John Borrows (Anishinaabe) contend that Indigenous law is not only critical for Indigenous nations, but for Canada too. / SCREEN CAPTURE FROM [YOUTUBE.COM / MURDITH MCMLEAN](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MURDITHMCMLEAN)



Canada's Indigenous Constitution

JOHN BORROWS 2015

has adapted greatly over the past 30 years to better recognize Indigenous peoples' rights. For example, human rights used to only protect individual rights. But the *Declaration* successfully recognizes collective rights. Even though the UN's initial understandings of international human rights were based primarily on Western ideas of rights, the world's understanding of these rights has evolved greatly. It is important not to criticize international human rights today based on our past or now-outdated understanding of rights. International human rights provide a general framework (grounded in the essential humanity of Indigenous peoples) to protect Indigenous peoples' rights as they understand them, as articulated by Indigenous peoples' own laws, which need to be fully implemented in Canada.

Indigenous rights are based in human rights, not merely in cultural practice. This is a critical distinction. If Indigenous peoples' rights were grounded in culture, it would over-emphasize "Indigenous." This could lead to a static conception of Indigenous peoples' rights – freezing those rights in some fictitious or romanticized notion of Indigenous peoples and their culture that is grounded in past practices. This would limit how Indigenous peoples exist today as modern people. Grounding Indigenous peoples' rights in culture is a major problem that has arisen in the Canadian court's interpretation of Aboriginal and Treaty rights under the Constitution. The court emphasizes "Indigenous" not "people," thus trapping Indigenous peoples' rights in time, back to the point of contact with European people.

Next Steps

In Canada, we are well positioned to recognize the role of Indigenous laws in articulating and understanding Indigenous peoples' rights because the laws already in place are diverse. Authority to make law is divided between the provinces (education, healthcare, natural resource development) and the federal government (criminal law, fisheries and oceans, banking). In fact, Quebec uses an entirely different legal system (civil law) than the rest of Canada (common law). Since we are a country that respects and promotes diversity, protecting Indigenous peoples' rights as articulated in the *Declaration* and grounded in Indigenous peoples' laws is the next logical step.

Churches can play an important role in implementing the *Declaration*. Members can learn about it and share that information with others. They can also encourage all politicians to review and amend Canadian law to conform with the *Declaration*. Within the Church, congregations, synods, and denominations can endorse the *Declaration* and review church policies and activities to ensure that they comply with the standards. Finally, churches and their members can support projects that promote Indigenous cultures, languages, and spiritual traditions to help address the harms of residential schools and other systems of colonial dispossession.



THE UN DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND THE CHURCH

CHURCHES & MISSIONARIES PLAYED A VITAL ROLE IN THE COLONIZATION OF THE AMERICAS, BEGINNING WITH COLUMBUS' VOYAGE OF 1492.



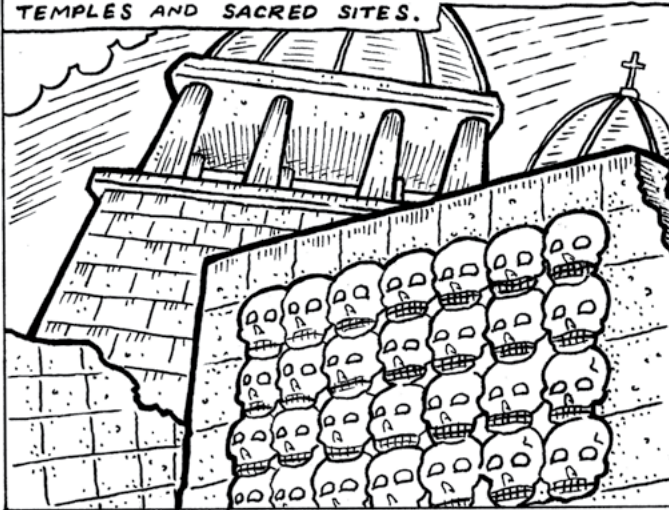
COLUMBUS BELIEVED HE WAS ON A MISSION NOT JUST TO "DISCOVER" NEW LANDS, BUT ALSO TO IMPOSE CHRISTIANITY ON ALL NON-CHRISTIANS.

ONE YEAR AFTER COLUMBUS' FIRST VOYAGE, POPE ALEXANDER VI ISSUED A PAPAL BULL GRANTING SPAIN & PORTUGAL VAST PARTS OF THE AMERICAS.



IN FACT, THE CHURCH PROVIDED LEGAL AND MORAL SANCTION TO THE COLONIZATION AND GENOCIDE OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES.

MANY PRIESTS OVERSAW THE DESTRUCTION OF NATIVE CEREMONIAL OBJECTS & SPIRITUAL PRACTISES. OFTEN, CHURCHES WERE BUILT DIRECTLY ON TOP OF NATIVE TEMPLES AND SACRED SITES.



IN CANADA, CHURCHES WERE CONTRACTED BY THE STATE TO RUN THE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SYSTEM...



GENERATIONS OF NATIVES WERE FORCED TO ATTEND, FORBIDDEN TO SPEAK THEIR LANGUAGE OR PRACTISE THEIR CULTURE. MANY WERE ALSO PHYSICALLY AND SEXUALLY ABUSED BY SCHOOL STAFF, INCLUDING PRIESTS & NUNS.



AS A RESULT OF THE ANTI-COLONIAL STRUGGLES OF THE 1950'S & '60'S, NEW INDIGENOUS ORGANIZATIONS EMERGED.



BY THE 1970'S, SOME OF THESE GROUPS APPLIED FOR & RECEIVED STATUS AS UNITED NATIONS NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS (NGO).

IN 1982, SOME OF THESE NGO'S HELPED FORM THE UN WORKING GROUP ON INDIGENOUS PEOPLES (WGIP).



THE WGIP BEGAN WORK ON THE DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN 1985. IT WAS ADOPTED BY THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN 2007 (CANADA, USA, AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND AT FIRST OPPOSED THE UN DRIP).

ALTHOUGH NOT LEGALLY BINDING, THE UN DRIP SETS STANDARDS & MAY ASSIST IN DEVELOPING NEW LAWS PROTECTING INDIGENOUS RIGHTS...



ARTICLE 11 OF THE DRIP RECOGNIZES THAT INDIGENOUS PEOPLES HAVE THE RIGHT TO PRACTISE & REVITALIZE CULTURAL TRADITIONS.

ARTICLE 12 RECOGNIZES THAT INDIGENOUS PEOPLES HAVE THE RIGHT TO PRACTISE & TEACH THEIR SPIRITUAL CEREMONIES...



IN ORDER TO PRACTISE THEIR CULTURE AND SPIRITUALITY, HOWEVER, INDIGENOUS PEOPLES NEED CLEAN AIR, WATER, AND LAND...



TODAY, INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AROUND THE WORLD ARE ENGAGED IN STRUGGLES TO PROTECT THEIR TRADITIONAL TERRITORIES & SACRED SITES.

HOW CAN CHURCHES, IN THE SPIRIT OF RECONCILIATION, HELP PROMOTE THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES?



ALONG WITH PROMOTING DOCUMENTS SUCH AS THE UN DRIP, & INDIGENOUS RIGHTS IN GENERAL, CHURCHES COULD ALLY THEMSELVES WITH INDIGENOUS LAND DEFENCE CAMPAIGNS AND ALSO PROVIDE MATERIAL ASSISTANCE AND RESOURCES.



Does the Church Have Hope for Relationship?

An Interview with Justice Murray Sinclair on the *Declaration*.



JUSTICE MURRAY SINCLAIR

was the lead Commissioner of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Indian Residential Schools (TRC). On June 2, 2015, the TRC released 94 Calls to Action, inviting all parts of Canadian society to pursue specific pathways of intentional learning, justice seeking, and decolonization. Call 48 summons churches and faith-based social justice organizations to comply with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.



STEVE HEINRICHS, a Settler and the former director of Indigenous Relations for Mennonite Church Canada, spoke with Justice Sinclair to hear how he understands the relationship between the *Declaration* and the Christian community.

HEINRICHS: The *Declaration* is a document that recognizes the rights of Indigenous peoples in relation to nation-states. Many Christians will understand why Canada, the state, must grapple with it, but they might not make the connection to their church communities. Why is the *Declaration* relevant to the Church?

SINCLAIR: That's a general question that also applies to all other communities, including the business community, municipalities, provinces, and organizations generally. The *Calls to Action* that we put together were for all parties to look closely at utilizing the *Declaration* as a framework for reconciliation. And what we meant by that, was 1) come to an understanding of what the *Declaration* says, and 2) come to an understanding of what it recommends and the implications it has for specific levels of government.



"Your courage will not go unnoticed" / TREVOR ANGUS AND ANGELA STERRITT, GITXSAN NATION FROM GITANMAAX

So in the case of nation-states, because Canada is not a unitary state in the sense of having one government that runs the whole show, each of the various levels of government has certain powers within their specific areas of jurisdiction, and therefore, each of these power-holders should be looking at ways they can modify their authority, or conduct themselves in utilizing their powers in a way that is consistent with what the *Declaration* says. And that also means legislative changes, if necessary, to those provisions within their laws and practices that are in conflict with the *Declaration*. So the *Declaration* gives a great deal of guidance to governing entities and those that have influence over the Indigenous peoples in this country. They need to look seriously at how they are

doing business so that they do not infringe on the rights of Indigenous peoples.

Now if I wanted to take that a step further in terms of Christian organizations and churches, the need to show respect for the cultural and language rights of Indigenous peoples, rights which are specifically recognized in the *Declaration*, is one of the key components that we think Christian organizations need to respect. The *Declaration* expressly provides, as well, that those organizations that played a role in the destruction or loss of language and cultural knowledge have an obligation to assist Indigenous peoples revive their language and cultural base and traditional knowledges.

HEINRICHS: So, when you say traditional knowledges, we're talking spiritual matters. Are you saying that churches involved in residential schools and, more broadly, the Christian community – which has denigrated Indigenous spiritualities for 100 plus years (generally speaking) – has some redress to do?

SINCLAIR: Well, the *Declaration* is very specific that it is not for governments or other entities to actually do that, because the right to cultural protection and cultural knowledge and utilization of language is a right that Indigenous peoples have. What the *Declaration* talks about is that those entities that played a role in destroying or attacking that knowledge base have an obligation to provide assistance to Indigenous peoples in their own attempts to recover that knowledge and awareness.

The *Declaration* and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission are not suggesting for a moment that churches should be engaged in cultural revival activities. We think, in fact, that that would be inappropriate, because Christian entities can only go so far before they begin to lose consistency with their own internal rules of belief and behaviour. Because of that potential for conflict, what we're saying is, basically, help Indigenous peoples when they want it and need it, particularly in the areas of financial help. Or in many cases, churches are holders of artifacts and religious information; the Jesuits, for instance, have an incredible amount of historical documentation about their early contact with Indigenous peoples that contains information on traditional practices that were in place at the time,

and names of Indigenous leaders, and locations of Indigenous boundaries and borders. The suggestion is that those entities that have access to or have in their possession things they have taken from Indigenous peoples have an obligation to return them and assist Indigenous communities to regain them.

HEINRICHS: As people in the Church read the *Declaration*, what do you think are the key values and principles that they should hold on to? I think, for example, of “free, prior, and informed consent” – that has a lot to say to churches. What sticks out to you?

SINCLAIR: Going forward, I think, the reality is that for Christian organizations, their ability to interfere with the daily lives of Indigenous peoples in spiritual matters is long gone. And that, if they want to be consistent with the *Declaration*, they need to engage in processes of partnership and sharing visions for the future.

For example, when it comes to building churches in a community, in the past church entities merely got permission from the government of Canada without looking to the Indigenous community who they assumed would want it anyway. But the *Declaration* says that before you interfere that deeply in the lives of the community, you need to receive their consent into the kinds of things you're doing. The “free, prior, and informed consent” provisions – and there are several of them in the *Declaration* – are talking primarily about land loss and interference with resource rights, but it also has implications for the whole question of what is it that entities can do that might further result in the deterioration of language and culture. And our view would be that the *Declaration* says very clearly that activities that have resulted in loss of culture, and language, and access to resources, need to be stopped.

HEINRICHS: Some Christians might be daunted by the task of engaging a United Nations *Declaration* – the language is strange, the form is foreign. But many could be encouraged to press on by a vision of hope that the *Declaration* offers. What would you say to such folks? What is the “good news” of the *Declaration*?

SINCLAIR: The “good news” is in the title. If people actually understood the title, that would go a



Chiefs Stewart Phillip, Allan Adam, and Derek Nepinak at the Tar Sands Healing Walk / PHOTO: RAINFOREST ACTION NETWORK / FLICKR COMMONS

long way to appeasing any concerns. The United Nations undertook a study of Settler countries and decolonizing countries around the world in terms of their approach to Indigenous peoples, so it's important for people to keep in mind that this is not only declaratory with respect to the rights of Indigenous peoples in North America and South America, but also in Africa and other parts of the world. And the intention was to have the world community understand and take action in regard to putting in place a set of standards for behaviour and correction with regard to the rights of Indigenous peoples on the world stage, generally.

And so, the *Declaration*, while primarily focused on the actions of nation-states and governments around the world, also has implications for entities who are engaging in dialogues of reconciliation with Indigenous people at any level, and can be utilized as a framework for reconciliation. Therefore, while the *Declaration* is directory – in that it gives a set of directions to nation-states – it is a document that other entities should look to as being advisory. It suggests that certain behaviours they are engaged in should be consistent with the ways that governments in the future will be conducting themselves. In other words, entities basically need to get in line with what

will be public policy in this country in the years to come.

HEINRICH: Do you have hope when it comes to the Church's engagement with the *Declaration*?

SINCLAIR: I've been asked that question a number of times, and I always turn it around, by saying, "*Do churches have hope that they will be able to have a relationship with Indigenous peoples?*" That's the question that really needs to be answered. Because there is no question in my mind that Indigenous peoples are on the road to recovery of their sense of identity, be it collectively or individually, and that they are beginning to stand up on their own two feet. And that might take a few generations to put in place. So the question really becomes, now, "What kind of relationship do churches want to have with this new found, prideful, group of people?"

■



SHANE RHODES is the author of five books of poetry including *Err* (Nightwood Editions, X: *poems and anti-poems* (Nightwood Edition, 2013), which builds poetry out of Canada's post-confederation treaties. Shane lives in Ottawa, on unceded Algonquin territory.

“Today, Canada”

The Government of Canada
 would like to acknowledge
 this non legally binding
 not reflecting customary international law
 nor changing Canadian law

Declaration
 which speaks
 to our strong
 and exemplary
 and historic
 and tremendous
 and strong

of honouring
 our resources.
 commitment

The Government has shown.

This government has also taken.

Under this Government,
 our endorsement gives us
 opportunity to reiterate
 a shift
 a new path

and a future

Under this Government,
 cherish the richness and depth
 of these strong
 actions
 marked by apologies.

and concrete
 with real impact
 and real results
 for real property

as we reaffirm
 our continuing agenda
 focused on taking
 the land, territories, and resources.

Today, Canada,
 we place on record
 our concerns.



“All words used in this poem are from the Government of Canada’s Statement of Support on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (November 12, 2010). I chose to focus on this document because I find that the Government statements of action/inaction in relation to Indigenous issues significantly illustrate where Canada currently is in terms of general settler sentiment. The over-stated language of non-commitment and evasion show the best of the previous government’s desire to appear concerned while doing, at best, nothing, or, at worst, the opposite of their words.”

Discerning Questions on the *Declaration*



SHERYL LIGHTFOOT is Anishinaabe, a citizen of the Lake Superior Band, enrolled at the Keweenaw Bay Community in Baraga, Michigan. Sheryl is the author of *Global Indigenous Politics: A Subtle Revolution* (Routledge, 2016), and an assistant professor in the First Nations and Indigenous Studies Program and Political Science at the University of British Columbia.



ADAM J. BARKER and **EMMA BATTELL LOWMAN** are Settler Canadians from the borderlands of Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe territories in southern Ontario. They currently live in Leicester, United Kingdom, where Adam is a Teaching Fellow in Human Geography at the University of Leicester, and Emma is working for a Welcome Trust-funded project on the “Power of the Criminal Corpse.” They are the authors of *Settler Identity and Colonialism in 21st Century Canada* (Fernwood, 2015).



Three Questions from Settler Perspectives

The Canadian Constitution already affirms Aboriginal and Treaty rights (Section 35), so why does Canada need the *Declaration*?

Canada has been faced with criticism for its treatment of and relationships with Indigenous peoples for many years, going back at least as far as Deskaheh, hereditary Chief of the Haudenosaunee, who petitioned the League of Nations in 1924. Canada has generally argued against or refused to recognize these critiques. The *Declaration* can help by pointing out the shortcomings of Canadian law and policy compared to a broader international standard. The *Declaration* represents the international consensus on the rights of Indigenous peoples. It is a set of normative expectations for state behaviour; it represents the minimum standards on what

The Constitutional Express arrives in Ottawa (1981).

PHOTO: PUBLIC DOMAIN



Indigenous-state relationships should look like. The *Declaration* is a framework for Indigenous-state relationships grounded in mutual respect and provides countries like Canada with a road map for change.

Section 35 was originally included in the patriation of the Constitution in 1982 only because of grassroots Indigenous activism, including the Constitutional Express led by George Manuel and the National Indian Brotherhood/Assembly of First Nations. Since then, the Constitution has provided a legal avenue by which First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples can challenge discriminatory laws around hunting, access to education and health care, or limited territorial jurisdiction. But the Canadian government has had to be forced through court action into recognizing inherent rights, treaty rights, and Aboriginal title.

The government has consistently spent more money on fighting rights claims and treaty negotiations through courts than actually supporting Indigenous communities. The push that Indigenous peoples in Canada have made for the recognition and implementation of the *Declaration's* articles and principles is because the state has consistently undercut Indigenous rights – such as in the way the National Energy Board has repeatedly failed to uphold the principle of consultation with First Nations when approving pipeline projects, dam sites, and mining claims. The *Declaration* demonstrates that Canada, even with Section 35, is underperforming international expectations on the rights of Indigenous peoples.

Why do Indigenous people need special consideration? Isn't the *Universal Declaration on Human Rights* (UDHR) good enough for everyone in Canada?

The UDHR was drafted in a specific place and time. It came from the post-World War II drive to protect liberal democratic rights to freedom and property from oppressive governments. Indigenous peoples were deliberately disqualified from the right of self-determination that all peoples were said to have under the UDHR, the UN Charter, and major international human rights treaties. Prior to the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, the “salt water” or “blue water” thesis of decolonization prevailed, meaning

that only non-contiguous colonies – those overseas from the powers colonizing them – were eligible for the right of self-determination. Indigenous peoples in Canada, therefore, were excluded and the *Declaration* corrected this.

Indigenous nations have notions of rights and responsibilities that predate and exceed those foundational to the citizenship and individual rights articulated under the Constitution. Indigenous communities practice collective rights – articulated through the nation, the community, and the clan or family. These are different from the rights enshrined in the UDHR and the Constitution, which are based on the idea that individuals (only) are the carriers of rights. Powerful Western countries, including Canada and the U.S., have resisted the notion that peoples could hold certain rights as groups, like rights to language or culture. The *Declaration* represents the first time that the international community has agreed upon a broad body of social and cultural collective rights.

Indigenous people are not alone. Many other groups have conventions and declarations to protect their human rights in specific circumstances, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Indigenous communities need particular protection from coercive assimilation and loss of lands, and the power to address the impacts of damage done to these communities (including loss of language and access to land and economic opportunities). The *Declaration* makes clear the way human rights apply to the circumstances of Indigenous peoples.

If Indigenous communities don't like the way the Canadian government has acted on Aboriginal rights and the needs of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities, why don't Indigenous people just vote for a different party?

The Harper government was atrocious on Indigenous issues, but it did not deviate from the usual federal approaches. For most of the 20th century, the government of Canada participated in practices that are considered cultural genocide today – and neither Liberal nor Conservative was better or worse than the other.

The Liberal government of Pierre Trudeau and Minister of Indian Affairs Jean Chretien proposed the 1969 White Paper, which called for the assimilation of Indigenous people and as such, the destruction of Indigenous peoples. It remains to be seen what, if anything, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau will do differently. At the provincial level, governments have made repeated promises toward Indigenous peoples that they failed or did not try to fulfill – for example, the “new relationship” announced by the British Columbia government in 2005 under the same Liberal Party that leads the province today. The B.C. government has been adamant that pipeline construction and the development of oil and gas resources trump the land claims and rights to self-governance of Indigenous peoples.

For many Indigenous nations, voting in Canadian federal or provincial elections is historically troubled and unlikely to bring change. It can also be seen as a violation of Indigenous sovereignty. The Haudenosaunee, among others, point to their treaty – the *Guswenta*, or *Two Row Treaty* – as the document that details the nation-to-nation relationship between their peoples and the Canadian state. They commonly see voting in Canadian elections as a violation of their own treaty. Voting becomes an even more contentious issue because many Indigenous peoples refuse to vote in band elections, seeing them as similarly imposed by the Canadian state and in violation of pre-existing treaties. When we look at the history, it becomes clear that Indigenous communities are justifiably suspicious of voting as a way of making change and that engaging international efforts like the *Declaration* hold greater promise.

Three Questions from Indigenous Peoples Perspectives

Canada refused to sign the *Declaration*, then watered it down, and, after finally signing in 2010, refused to acknowledge it as international law. So does the *Declaration* actually translate into any benefits or protections for Indigenous people(s) in Canada? Canada calls the *Declaration* an “aspirational” document and specifically refuses to acknowledge it as binding. As a human rights declaration, like the UDHR, the *Declaration* is not a treaty and is therefore not legally binding under international law. Like other human rights declarations, its power comes from acting as a normative standard that can inform domestic policy, law-making, and court decisions. Even though it is not applied as law at present, the *Declaration* is changing the dialogue and providing a forum and standard for international engagement. The *Declaration* is intended to be a tool for political and moral persuasion with states like Canada.

During the 2015 election, Justin Trudeau attracted a lot of support from Indigenous people by promising to implement the *Declaration*. Since taking power, there has been no mention of it and it remains to be seen if the change in government will result in any concrete action on the *Declaration*.

The *Declaration* provides protection for land rights (see articles 10 and 25–32). If Canada infringes on Indigenous lands, is there any legal recourse under the *Declaration*?

International declarations are not “laws” that take the place of the laws of the states that sign them. Declarations are international standards for state behaviour and tools for pressuring states to respond to violations of the word or principle of such documents, but they are uncertain and troubled.

Some say that declarations are ultimately more powerful because, as normative standards, they apply to all states, whether or not they sign and ratify them. Canada has resisted this interpretation. However, the articles of the *Declaration* may be cited in legal actions and/or included in state constitutions, along with legislation and policy change. For example, Bolivia and Ecuador have converted the *Declaration* into domestic law. Frequently, documents like the *Declaration* are used

in the exercise of “soft” political power – to shame states that fail to uphold their international human rights obligations in the public eye. It is debatable whether this tactic is effective, however, as only some states respond to human rights shaming techniques.

Beyond the direct relationship between Indigenous communities and the Canadian state, what are the important effects of the *Declaration* for Indigenous people in Canada?

One of the primary benefits of the *Declaration* is the context in which it was created. The *Declaration* was drafted and defended by Indigenous activists and remains tightly connected to Indigenous movements and the goals of grassroots communities in Canada and worldwide. Indigenous activists first introduced the principles now found in the *Declaration* during international conferences at the UN in the 1970s and early 1980s. Over the following decades, a UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations fully developed the *Declaration*, which was passed by the UN General Assembly in 2007. As a result, new bodies were created to deal with Indigenous rights, such as the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. This forum, which provides consultation to the Economic and Social Council of the UN, has brought together Indigenous peoples and nations from around the world and has helped to forge strong bonds between peoples experiencing the effects of colonization, displacement, and state genocide.

The *Declaration* is only one expression of a much larger transnational Indigenous movement. In the same way that the *Declaration* is being used differently by a variety of nations, movements like Idle No More spread tactics like the round dance flash mob to Indigenous communities around the world, who used it to protest many different grievances. The *Declaration* has also helped link Indigenous communities to international discussions and debates about climate change and environmental degradation. It was a central point in the critiques of the recent Paris climate talks (2015) made by an international Indigenous bloc, which effectively identified the limitations of state responses to climate change.

Good Words Need Action: Bill C-262



ROMEO SAGANASH was born in Waswanipi, a Cree community in the [Eeyou Istchee territory](#) of northwestern Quebec. At the age of 7, he was taken away to a residential school in La Tuque, where he spent the next 10 years. Since 2011, Romeo has represented the riding of Abitibi – Baie-James – Nunavik – Eeyou as Member of Parliament (New Democratic Party).

We call upon federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to fully adopt and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as the framework for reconciliation.

Call to Action #43

Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

After more than two decades of negotiations led by Indigenous peoples from around the world, the United Nations adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. I was invited to represent the Grand Council of the Cree, and ultimately, I spent 23 years in those discussions. The *Declaration* is an incredibly important document. It recognizes that Indigenous peoples are experts on their own rights. It honours the tenacity and knowledge of our ancestors by reaffirming our inherent rights.

But the *Declaration* is not simply for Indigenous peoples. It is for all of us. The *Declaration* provides guidance to governments, a roadmap for non-Indigenous peoples to better understand the rights of Indigenous peoples, and a powerful tool to advocate for Indigenous rights, both collective and individual.

Today, courts in Canada and around the world use the *Declaration* to interpret law. And human rights bodies are using it to interpret state obligations. Key provisions – such as the right of Indigenous peoples

to say “no” to unwanted development on their lands – are even being adopted by some investors, corporations and international lending agencies. The time has come to formally adopt the *Declaration* into legislation and bring Canada in line with international conventions.

Legislation will provide clarity on jurisdiction and process; it will be a catalyst to repeal the Indian Act; it will formally reject discriminatory doctrines of “discovery” and *terra nullius*; and it will explicitly reject colonialism in favour of a contemporary approach based on justice, equality, respect for human rights and good faith.

On April 21, 2016, I introduced a private member’s Bill, C-262, which **requires the federal government to ensure that all Canadian laws are consistent with the *Declaration***. I believe that Bill C-262 will ensure that the devastating impacts of colonialism, such as intergenerational trauma, severe impoverishment, epidemics of suicide, impairment of mental and physical health, and profound loss of hope, will receive the attention they deserve.

There is much talk about reconciliation and a new nation-to-nation relationship in this country. I have heard the many good words that have been spoken by the current government. With Bill C-262, I am proposing cooperative, concrete action to back up those words. I believe the political and public will exist to propel this Bill through the House and into law.

I am inspired and compelled by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action. The Commission listened to our collective experiences with each individual testimony, and the Calls offer another way we can honour our communities and ancestors. The Commission has been clear that reconciliation on the part of the government is only

possible if the federal government fully adopts and implements the *Declaration*.

There are concrete steps that you and your family, church or circle of friends can take to help make this happen. Speak with your Member of Parliament. Write letters to the Minister of Indigenous Affairs. Raise awareness about the Declaration and this Bill locally – with your city counselors and your neighborhood – for the TRC invites all levels of governments to “adopt and implement.” Create a petition. Pray. Protest publicly, creatively and non-violently. The possibilities are endless. We simply need to take action, and together, we can.



After much advocacy, on June 21, 2021, the Federal Government passed Bill C-15, An Act Respecting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

To read this legislation, visit
<https://www.commonword.ca/go/billc15>

Remembering Names

a short list of Indigenous people who struggled for rights

Future generations will wonder why the *Declaration* was so significant or even necessary. By listening to historic and contemporary Indigenous activists, artists, land defenders, and language preservers, we understand why the 46 articles are vital. Every Indigenous right recognized in the Declaration has been routinely and systematically trampled on – and this has been justified by Settler society. Here are a few of the many who have taken action to protest abuses and assert Indigenous rights long before the UN even existed to declare them.



THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

SOLIDARITY TEAM is part of Community Peacemaker Teams, focusing on supporting Indigenous-led land defence and decolonization of Settler societies in North America. As an organization with Indigenous and Settler members from various religious backgrounds, including Christian, traditional Anishinaabe, and none, we draw strength from many examples of righteous resistance to empire.



THE POWHATAN

LEGAL RESISTANCE TO IMPERIAL CLAIMS

In the early 1600s, the English laid claim to traditional Powhatan territory, what is now eastern Virginia. The Powhatans, part of the larger Algonquin peoples, responded by launching a sophisticated set of legal arguments concerning title over the contested territory, based on their attachment to the land ("from time immemorial"), and their current use and occupation of it. Their story reminds us that Indigenous resistance through law is not a recent phenomenon.



MISTAHI-MASKWA

ENSURING SURVIVAL, ENDURING STARVATION

A Cree chief, Mistahi-maskwa (1825–1888) was the son of Black Powder. He opposed Treaty 6 and the creation of reserves, foreseeing the intended limitations on cultural rights and his band's ability to move freely to hunt. Mistahi-maskwa refused to sign the Treaty for years, but was forced to do so by starvation conditions imposed by the Canadian state.



DESKAHEH

TEACHING THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY ABOUT INDIGENOUS NATIONHOOD

"We want none of your laws and customs that we have not willingly adopted for ourselves. We have adopted many. You have adopted some of ours – votes for women, for instance."

Deskaheh (1873–1925) was a Haudenosaunee chief (Cayuga). In the 1920s, he brought Haudenosaunee concerns to the League of Nations and spoke widely about Europe's obligation to the First Peoples of Turtle Island under the Two Row Wampum. Despite Canada's opposition, Deskaheh's dedication and skills as an orator brought awareness of the rights of Indigenous Nations.



RITA JOE

THE POWER OF LANGUAGE AND TRUE REPRESENTATION

"I have to call attention to the gentle people of Canada. My song is gentle, bear with me. I still want to offer my hand in friendship, the Indian of today."

Rita Joe (1932–2007) was a poet from Cape Breton's Eskasoni First Nation reserve, known as "the poet laureate of the Mi'kmaq people." Her poetry represents her community as creative, strong, and positive in social resistance to stereotypes and assimilation thinking.



MARY TWO-AXE EARLEY

UNDOING COLONIAL CONTROL THROUGH REJECTION OF PATRIARCHY

A Mohawk born in Kahnawake, Quebec (1911), Mary Two-Axe Earley was instrumental to the Indigenous feminist movement, helping change patriarchal Canadian law to ensure equal status, rights, and access for First Nations women. After campaigning for 20 years with the support of other Indigenous women like Sandra Lovelace, Bill C-31 was passed on June 28, 1985, amending the Indian Act and restoring the status of thousands of women and their children.



BUFFY SAINTE-MARIE

CELEBRATING CULTURE, SURVIVAL, AND RECONNECTION

"Instead of kids just hearing about beads and baskets and fringes, and about what 'was' and 'were,' we present Native American culture as a living contemporary culture."

Originally from the Piapot Plains Cree First Nation Reserve in Saskatchewan, Buffy Sainte-Marie (b. 1941) was adopted by a family in Massachusetts, returning to and reconnecting with her community in her 20s. Known as an artist and musician, she is a visible human rights activist for Indigenous communities throughout Turtle Island, using her fame to bring light to the treatment of First Peoples and their rich and enduring culture.



FRANK CALDER

ASSERTING INHERENT RIGHTS

A Nisga'a chief, provincial politician, and residential school survivor whose name lives on in the 1973 Calder decision of the Supreme Court of Canada, a landmark ruling that recognized the existence of Aboriginal law and land title. This overturned – in principle – the Doctrine of Discovery concept that Euro-Christian land claims erased existing title and changed the legal-political landscape with regard to treaty and inherent rights, not just in Canada but worldwide.



AUDREY HUNTLEY

REFUSING TO FORGET THE MISSING AND MURDERED

"This is a morning that must be made public, despite efforts to silence, erase, and displace those who are Indigenous, and to stand in the way of ongoing genocidal policies and destruction of the land, our mothers."

Audrey Huntley is a storyteller, activist, and advocate who has been calling for action on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) since the 1990s. Of mixed European settler and Anishinaabe ancestry, Huntley is a founder of No More Silence, which supports families in the legal and political struggle for justice and recognition of the ongoing violence towards Indigenous women and girls.



THOMAS KING

TELLING STORIES THAT DEFY IGNORANCE

"Take [his] story, for instance. Do with it what you will. Tell it your friends. Turn it into a television movie. Forget it. But don't say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You've heard it now."

Thomas King (b. 1943) is Cherokee artist who uses literature to challenge issues that impact Indigenous rights throughout Turtle Island, including land theft, restriction of rights and status, and the gross misrepresentations of Indigenous peoples in mainstream media throughout the world.



CINDY BLACKSTOCK

EXPOSING RACISM AGAINST CHILDREN

"Reconciliation means not having to say sorry a second time."

Cindy Blackstock is a member of the Gixsan First Nation and the Executive Director of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada. Her work offers community and culturally-based responses to the Federal Government's inadequate provision of welfare and services for Indigenous children, including a human rights challenge.



SYLVIA MCADAM, JESSICA GORDON, NINA WILSON, & SHEELAH MCLEAN

ACTIVATING A GENERATION TO TAKE TO THE STREETS

IdleNoMore was the rallying cry that began in the Prairies with these three Indigenous women and their Settler friend and ally. Calling for cultural resistance to Bill C-45, an omnibus budget bill which enabled new Federal jurisdiction over Indigenous land and resources to the detriment of the environment, Idle No More inspired international response and



THE CLAN MOTHERS OF GRASSY NARROWS FIRST NATION

WORKING FOR THE FUTURE GENERATIONS

"Our culture is a land-based culture, and the destruction of the land is the destruction of our culture."

— Roberta Keesick, Clan Mother, Blockader, Trapper.

They are defenders of land and water, educators, activists, teachers, and powerful voices. They are mothers, grandmothers, sisters, aunts, and friends. Their tools are the drum, the song, the camera, the medicines and the land, and the alliances formed in the years of struggle to protect Grassy Narrows First Nation (about 100 kilometres northeast of Kenora, ON) from clear-cut logging, mercury poisoning, and the loss of hunting territory.

The Declaration's Children



FRAN KAYE is a professor of English and Native American Studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. She also works as a volunteer with Native American prison groups and vulnerable Native families and individuals.

Picture the flimsy grate on a little gas stove in a cheap apartment. Justin, a young Native man from Nebraska, was convicted of killing his mother's abusive boyfriend by beating him to death with such a grate.

Justin was born from an abusive relationship and the beatings and alcohol consumption he endured before his birth damaged him. He spent most of his childhood shuffled back and forth between his mother, Marva, group homes, foster homes, and other placements. They all failed him. At 19, he aged out of the system, unable to get a job or even to qualify for Job Corps, leaving Marva to care for him as best she could. And Marva fell back on the boyfriend. The violence increased. Without a trial, without the opportunity to present evidence of his disability or his need to protect his mother, threatened with the death penalty if he did not cooperate, Justin accepted a plea bargain of second degree murder and a sentence of 75–80 years in prison. He might be eligible for parole when he is 58 years old.

Justin is my friend – someone who has eaten at my table and slept on my couch, someone who helped me set up a cellphone, and someone I failed when he was a teenager. Someone I will not live long enough to care for when – if? – he is released from prison.

Justin was innocent at birth. One could, perhaps, blame Marva, whose other children have not prospered, either. She too was an abused child, finding no safety at her grandmother's or at boarding school and leaving home for the city at 16. All the years I knew Marva, she was a generous, funny, nurturing



In the 1960s and 70s, huge numbers of First Nations and Métis children were 'scooped' and placed into white homes. This *Montreal Gazette* article celebrates such. / IMAGE: PUBLIC DOMAIN

woman, but pain, loss, grief, and the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder reflex of fighting back at any touch were always more prominent. Shall we blame her parents, or the men who abused her, fathered her children? They too had been the recipients of poverty, abuse, alcoholism, learned hopelessness. "Blame" has no meaning in a context of intergenerational trauma.

Here's an even sadder story. Phoenix Sinclair was born in Manitoba to a family that, like Justin's, was Indigenous and struggling. Like Justin, she went back and forth between her parents, individually and together, and formal or informal foster placements. Various children's service workers opened and closed files on her, and sometimes she and her family received helpful services. Ultimately she was removed from safe informal foster care by her mother, Samantha Kematch, and her mother's new boyfriend. Phoenix died at their hands after being starved, shot, and beaten. She was 5 years old.

Intergenerational trauma describes Phoenix's family as well as Justin's. Both Phoenix's mother and her father, Steve Sinclair, had



Cheyenne child (early 1900s - Oklahoma)

PHOTO: PUBLIC DOMAIN

been removed from their families and raised in care, surviving violent, abusive childhoods that left them deeply mistrustful of child protective services. Their removal from their homes, no matter how necessary it may have seemed to child care workers, failed to give them physical, economic, psychological, or emotional stability. They were unprepared to care for Phoenix at her birth, and Samantha, who had already given up one child, was uncertain about wanting her new little girl. Steve, however, was in love with his baby and eager to take parenting classes and be a good father.

Although Phoenix, Steve, and Samantha were provided good services in the first months after Phoenix's birth, these soon dwindled. Steve never got the assistance he asked for with daycare and job training. The funds for a home helper soon ran out. Child workers could not make appointments with the family because they did not have a phone. A second baby, Echo, was born, and Samantha left both children with an increasingly overwhelmed and bewildered Steve. Echo died of pneumonia. Steve began leaving Phoenix more often with his friends, from whose safe home Samantha eventually took her. Phoenix's case was never marked as urgent because little distinguished it from the files of hundreds of other children. One baby was dead and the other had no secure place, and that's just the way it is?

Stealing Children, Stealing Rights

Since Columbus, Europeans have taken Native children, first as curiosities but later, and more systematically, to assimilate them to European religions, culture, and wipe out Native identity, with its complicated and inconvenient – for Settlers – treaties and land claims. From the 1950s through the 1970s, about half of Native children in the United States and Canada were raised all or in part outside their families of origin. That was genocide, according to the United Nations. It was also extremely destructive to Native families, and it has passed down dysfunctions that result in children like Justin and Phoenix entering out-of-home care at a disproportionately high rate.

In the latest figures available, for 2011, Native American children make up 1.2 percent of children (0–19) in Nebraska, 8.2 percent of children in foster care, and 12.1 percent of children, like Justin, re-entering foster care. In Manitoba in the same year, the child population (0–15) was 72 percent non-Indigenous, 18 percent First Nations, and 9 percent Métis; of foster children, 15 percent were non-Indigenous, 70 percent were First Nations, and 13 percent were Métis. Moving children back and forth to damaged parents avoids the actual child-stealing of the residential schools and the Sixties Scoop, but it does not serve our Justins and Phoenixes.

What rights do children like Justin and Phoenix and Echo have, or parents like Marva and Steve? Do various United Nations declarations and conventions on rights bear on these stories? After World War II, the UN set out to establish norms of decent behaviour for human beings, specifically including children, all over the world. The UN adopted the Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide on December 9, 1948. Article II defines genocide as including “Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.” The following day, the UN adopted the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, which called for special protection for children and parental rights. Four decades later, the UN adopted the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, which protected the rights of Indigenous children to their Indigenous culture (Article 30) and established

the rights of parents to “appropriate assistance” in supplying all of the enumerated rights to their children (Articles 18-2, 27-3).

Another generation later, in 2007, the UN adopted its *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. Article 7 provides that “Indigenous peoples . . . shall not be subjected to any act of genocide or any other act of violence, including forcibly removing children of the group to another group.” As Charmaine White Face points out, that is a considerable change from the original text put forward in 1994 by the Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, which prohibited the removal of children “under any pretext” and referred to “families and communities” rather than unspecified groups. The enacted wording followed the original genocide convention. Justin and Phoenix were never moved from any placement through overt violence, but any child care worker who is authorized to remove a child can call an armed police officer as backup, so all removals are implicitly forcible. Marva did not give up Justin willingly, but years of fighting with the system taught her that she could best protect their rights to each other by allowing Justin to be “removed.”



Terry Cross, founder of the National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA), names child theft as central to the colonial project.

PHOTO: STEPHANIE WOODARD / STEPHANIEWOODARD.BLOGSPOT.CA

What could have been done differently for Justin and Phoenix? Does the *Declaration* protect future Justins and Phoenixes, Marvas and Steves? For children, it duplicates the Convention on Genocide. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) promises more, though it did not protect Justin and Marva, since the United States has not ratified it. Canada, however, ratified it a decade before Phoenix’s birth. When Marva, two years before she died, finally received disability payments, she kept a hospitable house that allowed many to shelter there, but never descended to substantial violence. What if Marva had received that support 20 years earlier? What if Steve had had the help he asked for?

Why don’t our nations provide all needy parents with the assistance that the CRC guarantees? The 1978 Indian Child Welfare Act in the U.S. provides limited aid to families like Marva and Justin, but it has shifted some power over children and their placement to tribes and families from state and federal government agencies. Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s *Calls to Action* include greater autonomy and funding for First Nations and Métis child protection agencies and, perhaps even more important, call for all child protection agencies to stop confusing poverty with neglect and to assist rather than destroy Indigenous families. For centuries, Native children have been removed from their families of origin and their safe places, supposedly for their own good. It hasn’t worked.

NOTES

Justin and Marva are real people, but their names have been changed. All information is from personal experience.

Phoenix Sinclair’s story has been told many times. All references to her case are taken from the report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Circumstances Surrounding the Death of Phoenix Sinclair.



Conventions on the Rights of the Child

UNICEF 1989

The Yin and Yang of the Declaration:

Unpacking Articles 11 and 12



SHARON VENNE (MANYFINGERS) is an Indigenous Treaty person (Cree) and, by marriage, a member of the Blood Tribe within Treaty 7. Sharon is the author of numerous works, including *Our Elders Understand Our Rights* (Theytus Books, 1999), and worked at the United Nations prior to the establishment of the Working group on Indigenous Peoples in 1982.

ARTICLE 11

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to practise and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs. This includes the right to maintain, protect, and develop the past, present, and future manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, artifacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies, and visual and performing arts and literature.
2. States shall provide redress through effective mechanisms, which may include restitution, developed in conjunction with indigenous peoples, with respect to their cultural, intellectual, religious, and spiritual property taken without their free, prior, and informed consent or in violation of their laws, traditions, and customs.

The process of drafting the *Declaration* was done over a period of years by Indigenous Peoples¹ and Nations. The end product was a vote by the states of the United Nations General Assembly that broke down the strong and positive language of rights. The *Declaration* is a minimum standard. Indigenous Nations and Peoples did not vote in the General Assembly. There is no United Nations mechanism to implement the *Declaration* because a declaration is the lowest level of standard within the UN system. At present, there is no place or process



For hundreds of years, Cree people would routinely gather at a large rock in the middle of the Prairies. This sacred relative was known as Mistasiniy.

Wilfred Tootoosis, Cree Assiniboine (Nakota), is pictured here standing in front of Mistasiniy. Wilfred's son, Tyrone, says: "This big rock was blown up by the Saskatchewan Government in the 1960s despite a heroic effort by First Nations (including my late father and family friend Ms. Buffy Sainte-Marie) and non-First Nations who fundraised so that the rock could be moved to a safe place. However, the Government proceeded to blow it up so that it wouldn't be in the way as the Gardiner Dam was being built. My Dad took several dancers from Poundmaker and Little Pine to do one last ceremonial [sic] at and for Mistasiniy prior to it being blown up." / PHOTO: TYRONE TOOTOOSIS / STORY: WWW.

within the UN system to move the *Declaration* into a convention that would be legally binding and subject to international review and enforcement. What are Indigenous Peoples left with? State implementation without international standards or international oversight? Yet civil society can play a key role to push for higher standards and compliance with the spirit and intent of the *Declaration*.

Articles 11 and 12 indicate the problems with the rights of Indigenous Peoples. While the *Declaration*

appears to recognize a right with the one hand, it actually takes it away with the other. These two articles demonstrate very clearly the problems with implementation.

In Article 11, there's a strong statement in the first part related to the rights of Indigenous Peoples to their "right to maintain, protect, and develop the past, present, and future manifestations of their cultures." In the original text adopted by the Working Group on Indigenous Peoples, Article 11 was one complete article. In the final version it was split into two. The second part refers to the states and their obligations: "States shall provide redress through effective mechanisms, which may include restitution, developed in conjunction with indigenous peoples." In the original text, the critical words, "as well as the right of restitution," have been left out with the splitting of the article into two parts. Restitution was to be recognized as an Indigenous right. And since these parts do not read together it gives the state the power over the type and kind of redress mechanism. Restitution may take place, but it is not required. Moreover, there is no implementation mechanism to force states to comply. In the original text, Indigenous Peoples wanted the right of restitution to be included because without restitution, we believe the colonization process merely continues. In the *Declaration*, the power to return or not return remains in the hands of the colonizers.

In the drafting of the *Declaration*, Indigenous Peoples and Nations sought to address the 500 years of colonization we've experienced, and the ongoing effects of this colonization. Christian churches had a heavy hand in this death-dealing process. One particular impact was the stripping away of our "religious" and "spiritual" artifacts and objects.² Many of these items have found their way into private collections, museums, and display cases for the consumption of non-Indigenous peoples. They are not protected or honoured.

A few years ago, I was in the British Museum in London, England. In the western Canada section, Chief Poundmaker's pipe is on display. It is in a glass case. No one is taking care of it. Why can't that pipe be returned to the family of Poundmaker? Why is it an object to be stared at? It is very disrespectful. But there it is, in the museum along with a picture

of the Chief. One day while in Geneva, a number of Indigenous Peoples from different nations visited a museum that had drawers and boxes of materials from Indigenous Peoples collected from around the world. They would not let us do any ceremonies in the building for those relatives. They were a source of income to attract visitors.

In trying to have these items returned to their original caretakers, it often involves many years of negotiations and the exchange of monies to have our relatives returned to us. Churches have done very little to assist in the return of the materials. One classic example comes to mind: *pi-wa-pisk-oo* or Ironstone.

An article from 1993 titled "Manitou's Meteorite" reported that

The Rev. George McDougall, despite the medicine man's warning, ordered the iron stone removed and taken to the Pakan Mission near Smoky Lake, about 135 kilometres northeast of Edmonton. It was stolen away, likely on a sleigh during the winter. McDougall, in a letter in 1969, acknowledged that 'the stone's removal roused the ire of the conjurers,' who worshipped what he called 'the idol.'

The relationship of the Ironstone to the Indigenous Peoples continues to be discounted. The Ironstone was in Ontario from 1886 until 1973, when it was returned west from Ontario, but placed in the Royal Alberta Museum in Edmonton. According to our old Peoples, the museum refuses to release it back to its original place because they cannot determine who owns the Ironstone. Who are they to determine who "owns" the Ironstone? The Ironstone belongs to the land. While it is held hostage, its work is being denied. There is a reason for the Ironstone. While it might not be clear to the non-Indigenous reader, it was clear to McDougall who was a minister in the Christian faith. He did not want Indigenous Peoples making offerings at Ironstone. It's a racist double-standard. Why can non-Indigenous people put money in the collection plates? Why can they put candles before their saints and altars? Why are these things "okay" while the placing of gifts before a stone is not acceptable?

It would be a major effort to return our spiritual and ceremonial objects back to the Nations, but it

is necessary to achieve true reconciliation. If the colonizers continue to hold onto our relatives, where is the reconciliation going to occur? This is a clear manifestation of the ongoing colonization process, where the colonizers consider what is best for Indigenous Peoples.

ARTICLE 12

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to manifest, practise, develop, and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs, and ceremonies; the right to maintain, protect, and have access in privacy to their religious and cultural sites; the right to the use and control of their ceremonial objects; and the right to the repatriation of their human remains.
2. States shall seek to enable the access and/or repatriation of ceremonial objects and human remains in their possession through fair, transparent, and effective mechanisms developed in conjunction with indigenous peoples concerned.

As in the previous article, the first part refers to the rights of Indigenous Peoples. The issue of spiritual practices and sacred sites is a necessity for the future generations of Indigenous Peoples. There is a direct link between Indigenous Peoples and the territories of the Peoples. Yet our most sacred sites are not automatically protected. Indigenous Peoples have to prove our relationships to our sites and identify them. It is tantamount to asking whether you want to keep your right arm or your left arm. Here's why:

During the drafting of the *Declaration*, Indigenous Peoples repeatedly said, "Our entire mother is sacred." It is not a site. In the non-Indigenous world, there are no real examples of a sacred site being protected (in any real sense). They usually become sites of pilgrimage and money making operations. When Indigenous Peoples discussed this with Canadian officials, they were at a loss to give one instance of a spiritual site from their world that has not become a tourist destination. Indigenous Peoples are reluctant to name or identify sites for fear that they will be overrun by tourists.

Think about Machu Picchu: It is in the Andes Mountains of present day Peru, a site for the Inca Ruler, as well as a place of worship and education. When the Spanish arrived, Machu Picchu was abandoned and the colonists never learned of its

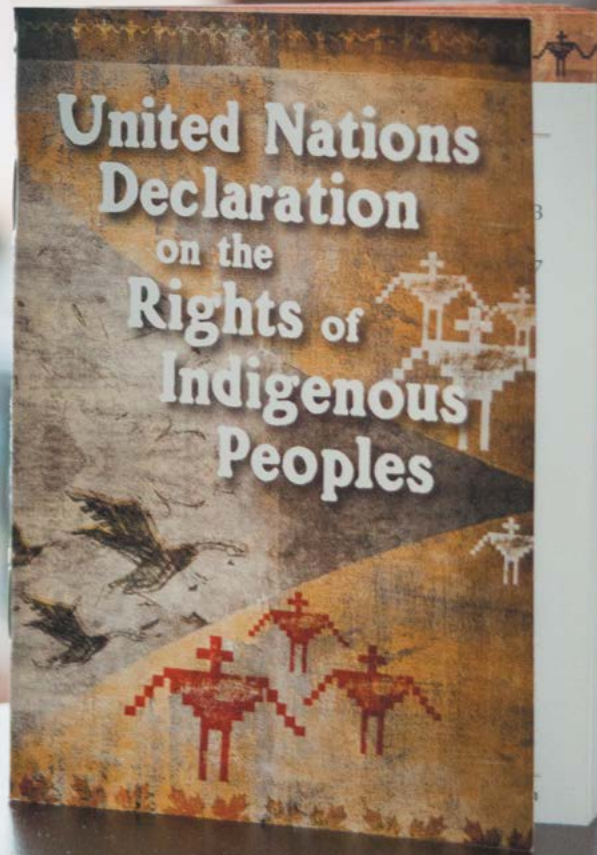
existence. The site remained hidden in the Andes. Then, a Mormon "discovered" it. Now, with 2,500 visitors per day wandering around the sacred stones, the temples are starting to topple. Structures that held for more than 500 years through earthquakes and landslides are coming apart. It has become one item on the "bucket list" for those with the money to travel. How much has been returned to the Indigenous Peoples who act as guides and packers for the tourists? It is not in the best interest of Indigenous Peoples to expose their spiritual sites. If there was a way for Indigenous Peoples to identify an area as off limits, would that be respected? I would argue that it should be enough for Indigenous Peoples to say "no" and that should be sufficient. That would be a real implementation of Article 12.

Our sacred sites should be returned to us. At this time, many of our sacred sites are out of bounds to our Peoples as these sites have been incorporated into National or Provincial Parks. An Indigenous person needs a park pass to gain access. Can you see how unjust that is? In the summer of 2015, spiritual fasters were "allowed" by Parks Canada to return to their original fasting grounds after being banned for 107 years. It was *permitted* by Parks Canada. It was not seen as a right that had been denied to the Indigenous Peoples for 100 years. Why did John Sundown and the Sioui brothers end up at the Supreme Court of Canada for trying to practice their traditions? They were charged because the spiritual rights of our peoples are not respected and honoured.

In the original version of the *Declaration*, the language was very clear – return of human remains. The revised version adds the words "of their," which transfers the onus onto Indigenous Peoples who must prove that these remains belong to them. Who decides what is fair? Is this another colonial standard? What is transparent? In Canada, Indigenous Peoples have been through two years of threats and intimidation as the state tried to implement legislation "on financial transparency." It did not matter that the financial transparency legislation stripped our Nations of our right of privacy, violated treaties, and withheld contracted monies from the Nations who challenged the legislation.

Is this the standard of transparency that is going to be used? If that is the case, then there is no transparency from an Indigenous point of view. It is one-sided and heavy-handed. Why did no one – no real movement of Settler peoples and churches – stand up with Indigenous Peoples against the injustices being heaped onto them? In this case, silence is acceptance. Acceptance that the state has a right to terrorize Indigenous Peoples by taking away housing and other funds needed to survive. If decolonization is going to work, then there needs to be engagement on every level. This is a long process. We have been colonized for 500 years. How long is it going to take to decolonize? It will start with admitting that the colonial project has been a failure.





ARTICLES

At a glance

ARTICLE 3: SELF-DETERMINATION

Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.



More than 100 Indigenous people march on Parliament Hill to protest the elimination of Aboriginal rights in the proposed constitution on November 16, 1981. PHOTO: THE CANADIAN PRESS / CARL BIGRAS

ARTICLE 15: ACCURATE PUBLIC INFORMATION

Indigenous peoples have the right to the dignity and diversity of their cultures, traditions, histories and aspirations which shall be appropriately reflected in education and public information.



For generations, Indigenous children in residential and boarding schools were not taught their histories, cultures, and traditions. Settler children have also suffered by not learning the Indigenous histories, cultures, and traditions of the peoples and places in which they live. Some changes have taken place. Much more needs to happen to honour the dignity and diversity of Indigenous peoples. PHOTO: PUBLIC DOMAIN

ARTICLE 22: NO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN

States shall take measures, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, to ensure that indigenous women and children enjoy the full protection and guarantees against all forms of violence and discrimination.



Hundreds gather for the annual Missing and Murdered Women's Memorial March in downtown Vancouver, BC (2013). PHOTO: DAVID P. BALL

ARTICLE 28: REDRESS

Indigenous peoples have the right to redress, by means that can include restitution or, when this is not possible, just, fair and equitable compensation, for the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned or otherwise occupied or used, and which have been confiscated, taken, occupied, used or damaged.



The Cheslatta Redevelopment Fund
c/o Cheslatta Carrier Nation
P.O. Box 909
Burns Lake, B.C.
V0J 1E0
Telephone: (604) 694-3334
Fax: (604) 694-3632

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GRAVE YARD AT CHESLATTA LAKE WHICH IS
FLOODED TWICE A YEAR BY KEMANO 1 SINCE 1952

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Almost 900 square kilometres of Cheslatta territory was flooded by the Kemano dam without their free, prior, and informed consent. Whereas Settler peoples impacted by the dam were given up to 2 years notice, the Indigenous community was only given two weeks' notice. Their burial grounds were desecrated, their lives fractured. PHOTO: PUBLIC DOMAIN

ARTICLE 36: NO BORDERS TO RELATIONSHIPS

Indigenous peoples, in particular those divided by international borders, have the right to maintain and develop contacts, relations and cooperation, including activities for spiritual, cultural, political, economic and social purposes, with their own members as well as other peoples across borders.



An Haudenosaunee delegation crosses the United States-Canada border at Niagara Falls on July 14, 1928.

PHOTO: THE SMITHSONIAN'S NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN

THE DAILY GRAPHIC, FRIDAY, AUGUST 3, 1906.



Simon Pierro
(Interpreter).

Chief Joe
Capelaus.

Chief Charles
Filpayment.

Chief
Basil.

TO PETITION THE GREAT WHITE KING: THE INDIAN CHIEFS WHO HAVE ARRIVED IN LONDON FROM THE RESERVES.

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

PART 4

PART 5

PART 2:

Decolonizing Human Rights and Roles of States

Deposed Folk Made Neighbours



WALTER BRUEGGEMANN lives in Cincinnati, Ohio, the traditional lands of the Shawnee, and is the the William Marcellus McPheeters Professor Emeritus of Old Testament at Columbia Theological Seminary. His numerous books include *The Prophetic Imagination* (Fortress Press, 1978) and *Sabbath as Resistance* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2014).

How strange you are, good God,
 that you gather those without rights or power, and
 transpose them onto chosen people
 who carry your future in their midst.

How strange that in ancient Egypt you gathered displaced slaves and
 they became your chosen people.

How strange that Jesus came among distressed people and
 welcomed them as your kingdom carriers.

How strange that generous attentiveness to “the least” is
 as though it were done to you.

And now!
 We attend to many displaced peoples
 and
 we notice afresh dispossessed peoples in their own lands
 who have been devalued and dismissed.

We confess before you and our neighbours
 that some of us have been preemptive in aggressive ways.
 We have been indifferent to the claims of sisters and brothers.
 We have been complicit in pretending we are legitimate
 possessors.

Thus we pray to you, strange God,
 do your strange work,
 and guide us in doing your strange work.
 Do your good work that the world does not expect.
 Do your work of being mother and father to orphans.
 Do your work of being guardian and patron of
 disenfranchised peoples.
 Do your work of restoring displaced peoples,
 of recovering devalued cultures,
 of giving back what has been lost but never
 relinquished.

You are the God who regards “the other” as friend and neighbour.
 So bind us into your neighbourhood.
 People your neighbourhood with folk unlike us, and
 guide us as we learn to cherish and respect our neighbours



First Nations family on the pier at Port Alice (Date unknown) / PHOTO: VANCOUVER PUBLIC LIBRARY ARCHIVE / PUBLIC DOMAIN



‘Honour the Treaties’ reminds America - the Black Hills are not for sale. / PHOTO: NEETA LIND / FLICKR COMMONS

Keeping Faith with Human Rights



LINDA HOGAN is Vice-Provost and Chief Academic Officer and Professor of Ecumenics at Trinity College Dublin, Ireland. A theological ethicist whose research interests lie in the fields of human rights and gender, Linda has worked on a number of research projects focusing on religious pluralism and inter-religious ethics.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 aims to become “the common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations,” and in the 70 years since its promulgation it has garnered a remarkable degree of support across the world. Subsequent and related declarations, including the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, are vital to expanding our understanding of how human rights must be embodied in practice, especially in the context of historic and systemic marginalization of certain peoples. Yet, notwithstanding the fact that the language of human rights has saturated political discourse across the world, the category of human rights continues to be both controversial and contested. Moreover, it is clear that the work to ensure that human rights become embedded across the world, especially amongst vulnerable peoples, will continue to be impeded when the very idea that human beings are entitled to certain fundamental protections is itself disputed.

Skepticism about the concept of human rights comes from many quarters, including from people who are committed to peace and justice but who have concerns about the language of rights. Amongst some Christians, there is a concern that the category of human rights promotes individualism, secularism, and western political imperialism, and that when Christians adopt this language they contribute to the marginalization of their own narrative tradition. It is surprising that this concern about human rights



The United Nations Headquarters in Manhattan in New York City. (c. 1950s) / PHOTO: PUBLIC DOMAIN

continues to flourish because Christians played a very significant role in the development of the very idea of human rights itself; they helped create the Universal Declaration and continue to have a vital role around the world in ensuring that all people, especially those who are vulnerable, have access to the fundamental goods that are essential to their well-being.

Are human rights “a Western construct of limited applicability?” ...to use Adamantia Pollis’ phrase. **Is the promotion of human rights across the world a new form of neo-colonialism?** This is a charge that has followed human rights from the beginning. Indeed, even while the *Universal Declaration* was being drafted, charges of ethnocentrism and imperialism abounded. It is true that the *Universal*



Hansah Mehta / India



Peng Chun Chang / China



Charles Malik / Lebanon

Declaration was created against the back-drop of significant western power and influence, and western philosophical thought provided the backdrop from which the concept of human rights emerged.

However, this is only part of the picture and the historical record shows that delegates from the global South played a major role in developing the Universal Declaration. These included the celebrated Chinese negotiator Peng Chun Chang, Indian delegate Hansa Mehta, and Lebanese representative Charles Malik. Lesser known delegates who also influenced the agenda were from Syria, Uruguay, Greece, Brazil, Venezuela, Iraq, Haiti, Cuba, the former Soviet Union, Lebanon, the Philippines, and Saudi Arabia. Moreover, although the western philosophical antecedents of human rights are important, over the course of the 20th century, other political, philosophical, and religious traditions have made a formative impact, and have been crucial in giving new shape to the category of human rights. The recognition of the rights of peoples (a key feature of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples) is one such example of how non-western insights have had a transformative impact on what we understand by human rights.

A further concern for Christians is that **human rights may be seen in terms of an exclusively secular agenda**, whose progress can only be advanced through the exclusion of all religious perspectives, including that of Christianity. While it is true that some theorists have attempted to establish an exclusively non-religious basis for human rights, this in fact represents a minority strand within the whole panoply of human rights thinking. Most historians agree that the antecedent of the concept of human rights (natural rights) was part of an over-

arching theistic worldview, although this worldview was ruptured definitively with the Enlightenment. Since then, the Christian tradition, along with other religions, has been highly influential in shaping human rights discourse in terms of its values, foundations, and practices. More recently, we have seen a slow and tentative evolution of a new kind of human rights thinking, one that is premised on creating a genuinely cross-cultural and pluralistic discourse that draws on both religious and non-religious voices. The ultimate objective of human rights thinking is the creation of a global coalition to secure the kind of political structures that will support the dignity and rights of all human beings, especially the vulnerable.

Human rights politics is at a cross-roads, and will only flourish if an authentically inclusive, deliberative, multi-religious, and multi-cultural discourse can be forged. It is vital that Christians, along with others who work within a religious framework, participate in and shape this conversation. Human rights can provide the means by which the human community can articulate a vision of global public good in a pluralistic world. And as such it needs the support of all people of good will.

The Church and Human Rights: Complex, Ecumenical, and Practical



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A Complex History

Human rights are a key part of contemporary discourse about justice, yet what role do they play in ethics? In my estimation, rights do not trump all other ethical considerations, but are a boundary discourse, protective of the greater moral dimensions of virtue and generosity that we are called to. The language of human rights draws attention to suffering and gives guidelines for the exercise of responsibility in response to that suffering. It emphasizes equality, defined beautifully by John Finnis as “the truth that everyone is a locus of human flourishing which is to be considered with favour in him or her as much as in anybody else.” The whole project of human rights has been a journey to practically expand and concretely realize this concept of equality.

So how does the church engage with human rights discourse? For Christians, the ultimate theological justification is the doctrine of *Imago Dei* (the image of God):

So God created humankind in his image; in the divine image he created them; male and female he created them (Genesis 1:27).

Over the centuries, Christian theology has attempted to come to terms with the meaning of this assertion. However, in the struggle to interpret the practical and political implications of *Imago Dei*, theology showed itself vulnerable to the same dangers as secular conceptions of human equality: universal assertions of human dignity which incorporated – consciously or unconsciously – categories of practical exclusion based on race or class or gender. While Indigenous peoples are recognized as being, like all persons, in the image of God, and are part of the “everyone” included in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, historical exclusions necessitated a more explicit recognition of their dignity as peoples through the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. As such, the latter declaration presents the Church with an opportunity to refine our theological understanding of human rights.

There are those who contend that human rights discourse is a relatively recent invention, lacking roots, specifically Christian roots. I am persuaded otherwise. Along with John Witte, a specialist on rights and their relationship to religion, I believe “the deeper genesis and genius of many modern rights norms” can be found “in religious texts and traditions that antedate the Enlightenment by centuries, even by millennia.” Western rights theories also have roots in the natural rights thinking of medieval law and religion. In the context of the history of the Americas, Francisco de Vitoria, a scholar of Thomas Aquinas in the 16th-century School of Salamanca, developed a natural rights critique of the treatment of the Indigenous peoples of Spanish America. De Vitoria argued that that all human beings – “sinners, infidels, and children” – could be “bearers of rights and did

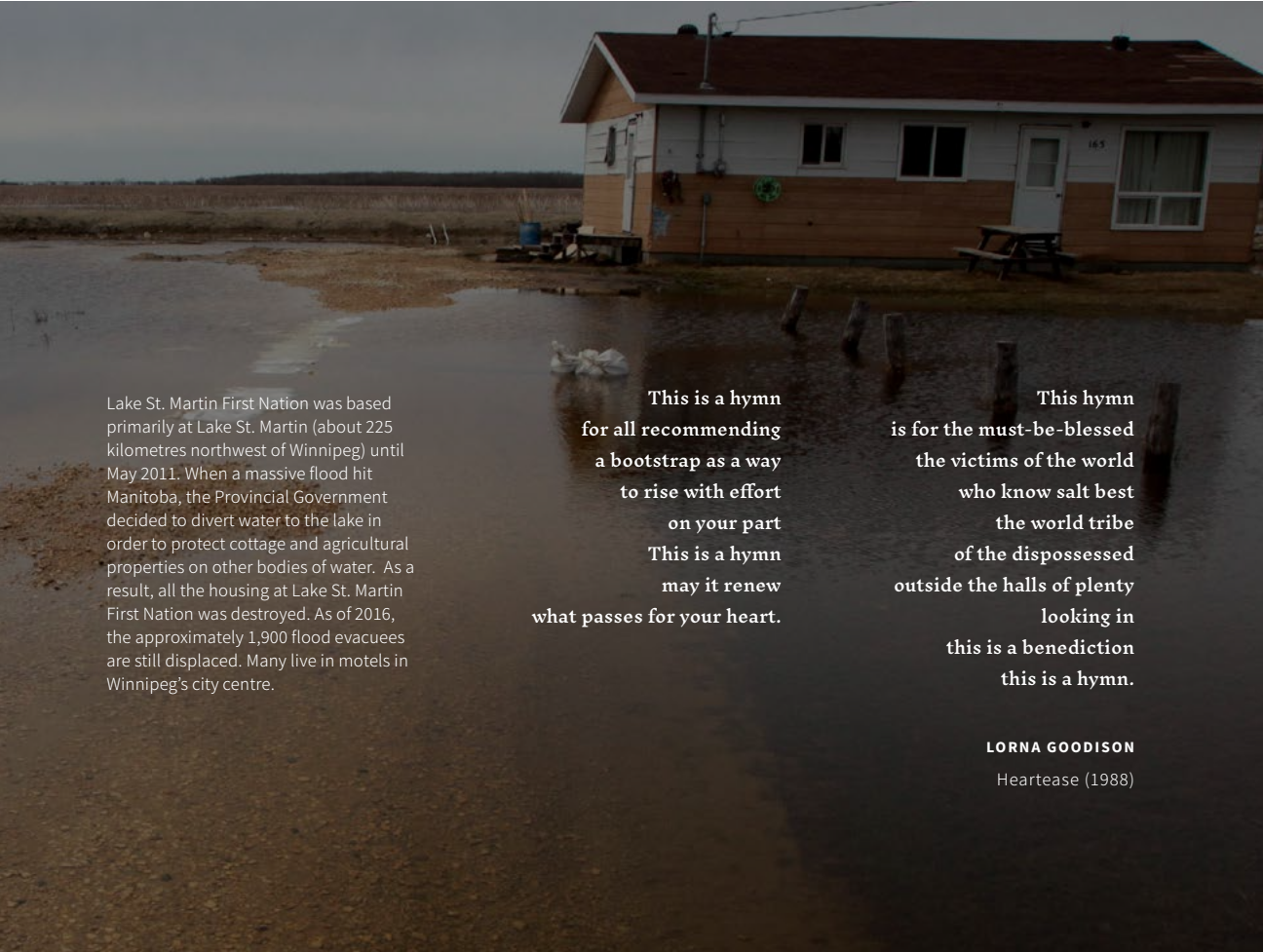
possess certain natural rights.” In the context of the early Reformation, the link between religious freedom and other rights – such as the right to assemble, to worship, freedom of association, and freedom of press – became clear. These brief examples remind us of a richer history of human rights than is sometimes acknowledged by those who argue for a purely secular genesis of rights.

Ecumenical and Practical Engagements

Within the Church, there is significant diversity in the ways that human rights are theologized and thought about. Some scholars claim that the concept, if not the language, of human rights, is found in the Jewish and Christian scriptures, and that the biblical tradition offers both a unique justification for human rights and a distinctive understanding of their content and character. Other scholars

reflect theologically on human rights in the light of Christian doctrine. George Newlands, for instance, attempts to bring together the centrality of human rights in contemporary political discourse with the centrality of Christ in Christian faith, focusing on a Christ of the vulnerable and on the margins. Newlands’ work moves from a Christology of human rights in the tradition of classical liberal theology to a “theology for human rights, grounded in Christology but explicitly articulated in relation to practical social outcomes.”

The most common theological engagement with human rights is critical and dialogical, focusing on practical issues of justice, politics, and the common good. Charles Villa-Vicencio, for example, discusses human rights in the context of post-apartheid South Africa, suggesting that the specific task of theology is to “help locate the human rights struggle at the



Lake St. Martin First Nation was based primarily at Lake St. Martin (about 225 kilometres northwest of Winnipeg) until May 2011. When a massive flood hit Manitoba, the Provincial Government decided to divert water to the lake in order to protect cottage and agricultural properties on other bodies of water. As a result, all the housing at Lake St. Martin First Nation was destroyed. As of 2016, the approximately 1,900 flood evacuees are still displaced. Many live in motels in Winnipeg’s city centre.

This is a hymn
for all recommending
a bootstrap as a way
to rise with effort
on your part
This is a hymn
may it renew
what passes for your heart.

This hymn
is for the must-be-blessed
the victims of the world
who know salt best
the world tribe
of the dispossessed
outside the halls of plenty
looking in
this is a benediction
this is a hymn.

LORNA GOODISON

Heartease (1988)

centre of the debate on what it means to be human and therefore also at the centre of social and political pursuit.”

In 20th-century Latin America, there was initial skepticism among liberation theologians about human rights discourse due to a perception that it was based on an individualistic liberal anthropology and politics. During the growing repression in the 1970s, however, there was gradual critical engagement with human rights, linked with the preferential option for the poor. This option is deeply theocentric (God-centred) with biblical, Christological, and eschatological foundations. In the words of Gustavo Gutiérrez,

This is what many Christians are now learning in Latin America. To be followers of Jesus requires that they walk with and be committed to the poor; when they do, they experience an encounter with the Lord who is simultaneously revealed and hidden in the faces of the poor.

Human rights discourse in liberation theology became increasingly associated with the preferential option for the poor, leading to a gradual emphasis on the rights that the poor have – namely, their social and economic rights. This emphasis on the poor points towards authentic universality – the under-resourced and dispossessed are the global majority – and it enables the concrete historicization of human rights. The *Declaration* is an example of that effort towards authentic universality and concrete historicization of human rights, in this case, for Indigenous peoples as collectives and as individuals.

A new dimension to theological engagement with human rights discourse emerged in the work of Evangelical theologians in the United States in response to rights issues arising in the context of the “war on terrorism.” They are particularly critical of Christians whose ethical blind spot prevents them from rejecting the use of torture in this war, who do not see that torture violates the intrinsic dignity of the human person as *Imago Dei*, a violation that affects not only the victims but also the perpetrators and society at large. Secular human rights discourse is viewed as derivative of pre-Enlightenment Christian sources. The evangelical commitment to human rights, including the rights of suspected terrorists, are grounded in the core theological conviction that

every human life is sacred.

There are a number of theologians who discourage Christian use of human rights language, including Stanley Hauerwas and John Milbank. They perceive rights as based on a liberal ethic of the autonomous individual. They believe it is a perversion of the Judaeo-Christian valuing of the human person. Moreover, they contend that the Church is a community of virtue in contrast to a society of rights-holders in which people have no real common goals, but relate based on the principle of non-interference.

Hauerwas and Milbank offer an important reminder of the distinctiveness of Christian ethics, but they do not acknowledge the deeper genesis of human rights. Furthermore, their position does not easily facilitate Christian dialogue with those of secular conviction, thus inhibiting the necessary reciprocity of critique between religious and secular conceptions of human rights and justice.

The relationship between Christian faith and human rights is historically complex. And the story is not always a happy one. The universality of the “everyone” of the *Universal Declaration*, for example, and the universality of the doctrine of the *Imago Dei* have been vulnerable to practices of exclusion. Despite these failures, we must also receive the rich and evolving human rights heritage that is being passed on to us – a human rights tradition with a nuanced anthropology and a fulsome account of justice. We must remind ourselves that human rights discourse, with its concrete provisions and protections, is not simply to be discussed, debated, and refined theologically and philosophically. The doctrine of *Imago Dei* is not just a matter of what we preach as churches; we must ensure that it is embodied in lives and embedded in politics. Let us commit ourselves to making real in history, both in our churches and in our society, the essential rights articulated in the *Declaration*.

■

Native American Circularity and the Renewal of Indigenous Rights



EDGAR HEAP OF BIRDS (HOCK E AYE VI)

is an award-winning multidisciplinary artist living and working out of Oklahoma. A Southern Cheyenne, Heap of Birds' work is expressly political, anti-colonial, and rooted in traditional ceremony.

Artists are chosen to observe, comment, and protect through their creation. We live to grow via visual learnings. In my role, I act as mentor by supporting artistic endeavours that send wishes of guidance through public art interventions, monumental sculpture, glass works, drawings, paintings, prints, and ceremonial actions within our tribe. An artist will produce works that are offerings toward the betterment of this natural world, loved ones, far away peoples, and ourselves.

Our artistic creations become essences of invention to be cared for just as any parent would love their child or grandmother. We take sacred custody of all that we can carry and seek the blessing of knowing our best efforts are meeting these challenges. With this mono print: **WILL GET ILL FROM STATIC BELIEFS** and this artist statement, I seek to fulfill these above-mentioned missions.

To understand Indigenous rights, one must understand basic principles of Indigenous worldviews. Not all worldviews are the same. At the heart of Native American and Indigenous communities is the philosophy of renewal. This understanding provides social responsibility and respect for the environment, natural elements, and animal spirits, while cherishing tribal youth, parents, and elders. It is a “circumference awareness,” reflected in the round Plains tipi architecture, beadwork, astronomy designs from Cheyenne moccasins, the creation story of Turtle Island from the Six Nations of New

York, and the spinning time spirals of many rock art petroglyphs. All of these entities are progressive forms, part of a continuum, which reflect the wonder of nature and its ongoing circular realm. Indigenous life, and thus Indigenous rights, are founded upon a soul of renewal – that curving sense one apprehends in song and drum.

The tribal world that we value has no head of the table, no chief operating officer or elite director of power, such as a religious priest or business capital executive in a corporate organization. Such small leadership pyramids, the top-down model which is utilized in the modern Anglo world, foster “static beliefs.” The leaders, at the top, are routinely respected for fortunes of money and power that they have amassed, not for the progressive acts of sharing with the larger circle of humanity. Even the Church, as an institution, is guilty of having an inordinate focus on the collection of wealth.

Contrast this with Cheyenne leadership. The council of 44 chiefs, a body of chosen people, is constituted by the following law: All possessions of the chief belong to the tribal citizens. If a tribal individual is in need of a tool, implement, or money, that individual must only offer a request to one of the 44 chiefs and the needed article or form is given away to the citizen. All members of the council of 44 must offer complete generosity to their public or they do not accept the role as chief (or continue in such a role). “Static beliefs” are exercises in hoarding, which is termed an illness; it is the gaining of pride from exclusivity, refusing to be cognisant of the circular flow of life in its beauty of rejuvenation through a balanced care toward all.



WILL
GET
ILL
FROM
STATIC
BELIEFS

Indigenous rights are not static. To contribute, give, and offer is the movement of the non-static, a passage of grace coming for the earth, seas, and sky, yet to return.

Indigenous rights and ways must be respected. This can sound threatening, but it is a gift for all. For we all suffer and triumph together, whether

non-native or tribal. And, across racial divides, we can share more commonalities than differences. Mutual esteem shall flourish by keeping the sacred circularity. We cannot wait any longer to awaken, dash the behaviour of accumulation, and dance spirals of sharing over the four corners of this earth.

Wake-Up Call for Nation-States



WALTER BRUEGGEMANN lives in Cincinnati, Ohio, the traditional lands of the Shawnee, and is the William Marcellus McPheeters Professor Emeritus of Old Testament at Columbia Theological Seminary. His numerous books include *The Prophetic Imagination* (Fortress Press, 1978) and *Sabbath as Resistance* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2014).

Since the earliest appearance of states – those with large concentrations of wealth and power and control of media and violence – they have been ambiguous operations. Since the emergence of the earliest states (empires) in Mesopotamia, they have been charged with the common good, but tempted to act against that common good. The state of Israel in the Old Testament under the regime of David is illustrative of that recurring ambiguity.

I. Nation-states are charged, from the outset, with *guardianship of the common good*. This includes responsibility to maintain a safe order and manage the economy in a way that permits all inhabitants to benefit from and rely upon the largess of the community. This requires both economic viability for the non-productive and respect for cultural variation. In the Bible, this commitment to the common good is signalled in the Psalms that celebrate the kingship of God whose rule is marked by equity, justice, and righteousness (Psalms 96:13; 97:2; 98:9). It is for that governance that we pray, “Thy kingdom come.” In the imagination of ancient Israel, the king in Jerusalem is the agent of God’s justice, and the throne of David depends upon such justice for the poor and needy:

Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king’s son... May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor (Psalms 72:1, 4; see vv. 1-4, 13-14).

The well-being of the entire community depends



Nehemiah weeps at the ruins of Jerusalem’s walls. / gustave dore (c. 1885) / IMAGE: PUBLIC DOMAIN

upon such policy and action by the state toward the “left behind.”

II. But such states are regularly *seduced away from such responsibility*. The elite who manage the political economy regularly fashion an ideology of entitlement that justifies exploitative economics and self-serving politics. Such ideology leads to a self-congratulatory pride that loses sight of the vulnerable and comes to regard them as a dispensable inconvenience.

Thus, in ancient Israel, the old seer Samuel warned Israel concerning the pernicious prospect of a royal government that would specialize in confiscation and taxation:

The king will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen... some to plough his ground and reap his harvest. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers.... He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers (I Samuel 8:11-14).

And, of course, such predatory policies are always justified by an ideology that claims that the purposes of the state (elsewhere the purposes of God) are best served by the enhancement of the power elite. That enhancement requires a strong military that depends upon exploitative taxation and the deployment of the “left behind” as cannon fodder for military adventurism, all to support the avarice of the governing elite. In the end, such power-mongers do not notice or care about the poor, the vulnerable, or



Aerial view of the U.S. Capitol and Federal Triangle (1936).

PHOTO: US NATIONAL ARCHIVES / PUBLIC DOMAIN

the unproductive.

Such hubris is encoded in economic practices, in military commitments, and in cultural colonization, all of which amount to nothing less than an addiction that no longer pays attention to social reality. Such an addiction to arrogance eventually devours all before it. Thus, Paul can commend “love of neighbour” and warns:

If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another (Galatians 5:14-15).

The devouring of arrogant nation-states is often without restraint or compassion, accomplished by those contained within an uncritical self-justifying ideology.

III. Such nation-states, charged with responsibility for the common good but seduced by arrogance, are from time to time *summoned to recovery from such addiction*. In the Old Testament, a dramatic narrative of recovery from addiction is narrated in Nehemiah 5. The elite Jews, in collusion with the empire of Persia, were taxing vulnerable Jews in unbearable ways:

“We are having to pledge our fields, our vineyards, and our houses in order to get grain during the famine.” And there were those who said, “We are having to borrow money on our fields and vineyards to pay the king’s tax” (Nehemiah 5:3-4).

Those left behind are victims of a political economy of cynical exploitation.

Nehemiah boldly intervenes on behalf of the disenfranchised and speaks against the devouring addiction of the privileged:

I was very angry when I heard their outcry and these complaints.... So I said, “The thing you are doing is not good. Should you not walk in the fear of our God, to prevent the taunts of the nations our enemies.... Restore to them, this very day, their fields, their vineyards, their olive orchards, and their houses and the interest on money, grain, wine, and oil that you have been exacting from them” (Nehemiah 5:6, 9, 11).

Nehemiah summons a return to a vision of the common good.

The sequence of *initial responsibility, seduction to arrogance, and recovery of the common good* is the narrative of many Western powers now. The recovery features a new valorization of those long dismissed and disregarded. It is a recovery that resonates with God’s will and that promises good for all. It is a recovery that, like every serious recovery from addiction, requires resolve and discipline. It is, however, a recovery in sync with our true human destiny. It is now a wake-up call for Western nation-states that too long have practised uncritical colonization.

■

Should the Church Care about International Law?



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The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has challenged churches to take steps to comply with, and fulfill, the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. There is irony in this challenge. Because of the moral high ground the Church often claims for itself, one would normally expect the Church to be at the fore of advancing human rights, not called to a place of remembering and practising such. Moreover, the *Declaration* was a collaborative document created not only by Indigenous peoples, but also by state representatives. So even though there were small pockets of the global Church that advocated for the *Declaration* over the many decades it was in process, the United Nations is also issuing a significant challenge to Christian communities who reside in nation-states. Will you, as individual and corporate citizens, recognize and act on these Indigenous rights? This is an interesting reversal of roles that raises several questions for the Church.

First, what deference should be given to the *Declaration* in defining justice? **Should state-articulated rights represent the ideal to which the Church should aspire?** The reason these questions are important is that law and state-sanctioned rules are often unjust and have routinely legalized oppression under the guise of fairness. Reliance on the state to define justice has often been disappointing.



International standards like the Declaration can provide ethical structures, but cultures of care and respect are needed to sustain them.
PHOTO: MIKE ROBINSON / PUBLIC DOMAIN

Almost every global systemic human rights violation in the last 200 years has been “justified” by law. Apartheid in South Africa was lawful according to South African laws. Racial discrimination in the U.S. was enshrined in the Constitution. Colonialism in Africa was accepted global practice enabled by international law. The Indian Residential Schools in Canada were legal, even though we now know how immoral they actually were. One can even argue that the rampant poverty we see around the world today, which results in millions of people dying prematurely from preventable causes, is lawful, because the global economic system allows deprivation, and even starvation, as long as the rules of the economic game

are followed. The Church, therefore, has good reason to be suspect of those who think that rules, law, and even instruments such as the *Declaration*, can lead to the creation of God's peace on earth. Rules and laws have too often done just the opposite and created hell instead.

It's my contention that those who critique human rights instruments such as the *Declaration*, because of the way law has been abused, misunderstand what these instruments are. They assume that the *Declaration*, or even a treaty, needs to be viewed as law in the way a lawyer would analyze it, and administered in a way that a police officer or judge would enforce it. This view of human rights law is fundamentally wrong. **Human rights law is important not because it is law, but because it isn't.** Human rights "law" and declarations occupy an inspirational role in global politics that transcends what we usually think law should do. Human rights law does not "fail" in the way we normally think law fails, even when not enforced.

Take for example the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. When adopted in 1948, no one anticipated that it would have significant impact. Even Eleanor Roosevelt, who chaired the Commission that drafted the *Universal Declaration* in her appeal to United Nations delegates just prior to its adoption reminded diplomats that they should not take the *Universal Declaration* too seriously. "It is not a treaty; it is not an international agreement. It is not and does not purport to be a statement of law or of legal obligation."

History has shown that this lack of "law-ness," or of enforceability, has been the *Universal Declaration's* greatest strength. Rather than being limited in time, and by careful interpretation of specific words, the vagueness of the *Universal Declaration* allowed people of conscience to breathe life into it in a way that has evolved and grown, resulting in it becoming far more powerful than law. Literally thousands of legal instruments have been impacted by the *Universal Declaration* in a way that no one ever imagined. The bottom line is that the *Universal Declaration* has been impactful not because it represented law as traditionally viewed, but rather because it did not.

The second and related question logically flows from the discussion above: **is the standard described**

by the *United Nations Declaration on Indigenous Rights* the right one? Should religious communities view full implementation of the *Declaration* as a success? The answer to these questions follows a similar logic to that provided by the questions just answered. Those who view law as the standard of achievement to which we strive misunderstand what law is all about. Human rights law is like a floor, not a ceiling. It does not presume that if the bare minimum of respect for human rights is respected, that this result is good enough. Rather, human rights instruments recognize the limits of law; law alone cannot create a world that espouses compassion and empathy. But without law restraining the worst of humanity, a compassionate world is impossible.

Let's consider this another way and assume that a house represents the rigid and inflexible structure of law. Without the protection a house provides, in a Canadian winter we would be very cold, and would probably freeze to death or die from exposure. In summer, the heat, rain, and mosquitoes would also probably torment us if we lived outdoors without some form of shelter. But a house does not make a home, or create community. What is needed for life to have meaning, and for there to be true community, are the attributes of love, personal warmth, respect for the uniqueness of each individual and culture, empathy, care, forgiveness, and genuine interpersonal tolerance. Law can never force any of these human attributes, or even define them with all their nuances.

What this house analogy shows is that the *Declaration* – which serves as the structure of the house – cannot mandate the deep community, the care, friendship, and good intent that thorough reconciliation between Settler and Indigenous peoples requires. But without the structure that the *Declaration* represents, achieving this level of community and reconciliation (the atmosphere and warmth inside the house) would be terribly difficult because the untamed elements naturally result in harsh living conditions in which human life cannot thrive. Professor Louis Henkin, referred to as the grandfather of international law, put it this way: "Human rights are not a complete, alternative ideology, but rights are a *floor*, necessary to make other values – including religion – flourish."

A third critical question for the Church in assessing its relationship to human rights law is, **how can secular principles of law be reconciled with theological beliefs?** How can we view the two not as an either/or, or privilege one as taking precedence over the other? Too often, law and religion get into a shouting match with each other, each critiquing and condemning the other for their shortcomings. In my view, this critique usually undermines both law and religion, and leads to further harm of the marginalized – those who can least protect themselves.

It is within this context that I believe Micah 6:8 provides a framework for how we in the Church can reconcile the apparently conflicting roles of law and religion when it comes to respecting human rights. In this scripture, the prophet Micah calls us to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly. Father Donal Dorr in his book, *Spirituality and Justice*, asserts that this text is an invitation to three distinct conversions, conversions that need to occur for there to be a balanced spirituality.

First, Dorr describes the challenge to walk humbly as a call to a genuine *religious conversion*; we must acknowledge, understand, and follow what God requires of God's people. Second, Micah's call to love tenderly is a call to *moral conversion*: being present in the life of those who need care, no matter what the circumstance. Lastly, Dorr suggests that the command to act justly is akin to a *political conversion*: being "concerned with how society is organized, how wealth, power, privileges, rights, and responsibilities are distributed to every level – local, national, and global."

When we apply Dorr's "balanced spirituality" to the *Declaration*, and also to the current conversations regarding the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission *Calls to Action*, we can see how all three conversions are part and parcel of successful reconciliation. When we see the state trying to do justice through quasi legal instruments such as the *Declaration*, we can celebrate – even though it will likely fall short. We can recognize the *Declaration* as a political vision of what might be, and a floor defining at a minimum what is not acceptable. We need not – and should not – expect it to lead to God's Kingdom on earth.

Let's also celebrate the actions of society that lead to moral conversion – actions that nurture a warm and caring community, that foster a deep sense of reconciliation (or striving towards such). Assuming that law can do this alone is foolish. Assuming that theology can do this alone turns theology into a cruel ideology that only masquerades as peace theology. The prophet Micah had it right when he asked what is required of us. The answer then is still the answer today: walk humbly, love mercy, and do justice.

■

The Cost of Reconciliation: Distinguishing Colonialism and Settler Colonialism



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Colonialism

Colonialism is a relation. It is an unequal relation, one of many possible. Ability and disability, age, class and status, gender, and phenotypical appearance also produce unequal relationships.

Equal relationships are rare. They are often a thought exercise of political scientists and philosophers.

Alongside inequality, colonialism is also premised on a foundational displacement. It is on the difference between *someone who has moved and is from somewhere else* and *someone who has not and is a native* that colonial relationships are built. Thus, colonizer and colonized are mutually constituted, and one cannot exist without the other.

This unequal relationship involves different people and different places. Under colonialism, the colony and the metropole (or the mother country) are not



'We Want Land Rights Right Now' — sign used at the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, Canberra, Australia (c. 1972 -1981) / IMAGE: PUBLIC DOMAIN

the same location and there is an imbalance of power: the former is controlled while the latter is in charge, the former is far away and the latter is at the centre. They are also mutually constituted as one would not be itself without the other.

Under colonialism, inequality and displacement – colonialism’s main ingredients – are used in varying proportions. There are many local recipes and there are many colonial relationships involving different colonizers and colonized. Yet this is certain: while inequality is permanent, displacement is not. As far as the colonizers are concerned, the metropole is and remains “home.” They aim to return there.

Let me add a disclaimer: these notes are offered for the purpose of understanding, not simplification. The unequal relationships mentioned above routinely mix in existing situations, and colonialism is always mixed with other unequal relationships. As individuals and communities, we are defined by the multiple relationships that effect us. We live in a complex world and these remarks cannot change this complexity.

Settler Colonialism

Settler colonialism – the kind of colonialism lived and experienced in Canada, the United States, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand – is different than the generic colonialism I have described. As it was called in South Africa, settler colonialism is “colonialism of a special type.” The two main ingredients, inequality and displacement, remain the same, but the recipe is fundamentally different. In the case of settler colonialism, displacement is permanent. As far as the Settler colonizers are concerned, “home” is not somewhere else. They still aim to get “home,” but its location ends up in the colony, not the metropole. Under settler colonialism, colony and metropole thus exchange places. Not only is the Settler’s notion of home redirected, the unequal relationship that initially defines colony and metropole is also upturned. Under settler colonialism, the Settler colony eventually becomes independent. It emancipates itself from an unequal relationship and becomes a Settler nation. If things go the settler colonial way, colony and metropole lose their meaning, or at least they should (there are many instances of botched settler colonialism).

Yet, despite this fundamental difference, settler colonialism is still an unequal relationship, and the Settler colonizer and the colonized Indigenous person are mutually constituted. Inequality in this case, however, produces a very different outcome: the Settler colonizer’s home is overimposed on the Indigenous person’s. If the colonizer thrives on the subjection of the colonized (the former makes money out of an ability to exploit the latter), the Settler colonizer thrives on the Indigenous person’s disappearance or invisibility. Thus, Settler colonizers and Indigenous peoples also change place under settler colonialism: one moves towards “home,” while the others are made to live in a place that is no longer so. The colonial relationship is meant to be unequal and ongoing; the settler colonial relationship is meant to be unequal but temporary.

And now a further disclaimer: colonialisms and settler colonialisms also mix. Settler colonialism in existing situations is always mixed with other colonialisms and other unequal relationships. The world is complex, but complexity cannot excuse us for not attempting to understand or making the world better. Inequality is wrong; there is no excuse.

But if the unequal relationship between colonizer and colonized and between colony and metropole can be discontinued (this is generally called decolonization), the unequal relationship between the Settler colonizer and the colonized Indigenous person cannot. Something else is needed. This something is often called “reconciliation.” This is why the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* was eventually approved some 60 years after the global age of decolonization that began after World War II. Decolonization did not address settler colonialism as a distinct mode of domination. What is needed, however, is not a cheap version of reconciliation that does not affect inequality, like the one currently being undertaken in my context of Australia. What is needed is *genuine* reconciliation. It’s expensive (see below), but I believe it is worth it.

Reconciliation

Settler Canadians are the political descendants of Settler colonists. That’s why they are Settlers even if they or their ancestors moved as colonized or as powerless migrants. They have inherited structures



of domination that are inherently unjust. They have inherited settler colonialism as a relation that involves them whether they know it or not. This inheritance makes Settler Canadians complicit: they are sustaining and perpetrating structures of domination that must be changed. *Canada as a settler colonial polity was not made without Indigenous peoples, it was made against them.* It is not like a party, and a belated invitation to join after a long time of exclusion cannot be sent out with apologies. Other groups, migrants and refugees, for example, would gladly accept the invitation. Indigenous peoples are different and for a good reason. The settler colonial party must stop.

What resources can be mustered for positive change? Who must act when the past is not past? All must, but some have been privileged with more and better resources than others. And it is not only about material resources: intellectual traditions matter. The Bible, for example, is crucial to understanding settler colonialism. It is a founding story, and parts of it are about a settler colonial invasion (see Numbers 13; Deuteronomy 2). Israel was built on someone else's land. The emotive structures of a Settler society were hardwired

in the Settlers' mind as they travelled. Communities that have a close relationship with the biblical text (and can read it with "the Canaanites") are in a particularly good position to understand settler colonialism and the need to address an unjust past that impinges on the present.

If "reconciliation" is the answer, genuine reconciliation must be clear. There is a fundamental tension in received understandings of "reconciliation." On one hand, reconciliation aims for closure. It is often seen as something one does once, a bitter pill that will make one feel better. But, on the other hand, treaty traditions envision ongoing relationships. Treaties are about changing the way one relates to others, something one practices every day. To "entreat" and "treaty," after all, have the same origin.

There is a contradiction in "treaty" too: treaty can be a final settlement in a transaction, or an ongoing contract. Clarity is important, and the important parts of a contract should be easy to understand and not be tucked away at the bottom of the page. Reconciliation can be about accounting and computing (and recounting, or narrating; that's why telling and listening to stories of abuse is so important for reconciliation), but it can also refer to a return to council (there is a "re" in reconciliation, and councils are where treaties are signed). Remember the point above about colonialism being ongoing and settler colonialism envisaging its own end? Reconciliation is not like decolonization, something one does once and for all.

It seems important to note that this future rental agreement would be fair. In fact, it's more than fair, because the assets that can be used to honour it ultimately emanate from the aggrieved party's dispossessed property. The political descendants of Settler colonizers must realize that something is to be done, and that it is just that it should be done.

The political descendants need to muster the intellectual and material resources to do it, and opt for a type of reconciliation that avoids closure and envisages relationships that are respectful because they are ongoing. They must also return land because there is no Indigenous life without Indigenous land. Not only will Indigenous peoples stay and not join the Settler party, the contracts drawn up in

council will also stay. Honouring covenants is what honourable communities do. People that know the Bible know this. Settler Canadians will relinquish their inheritance and doing so will enable them to embrace a more ancient and valuable inheritance.



As the land is hurt,
we are hurt as a people.
If the land produces,
we produce as a people.
If we are kept off the land,
we are kept away from who we really are.
But as we return to the land,
we return to who we really are as a people.

KALEIKOA KA'EO






"Morning Mist"

Once part of the mainland, this land became an island when hydro development raised the water level of the lake.



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A black and white portrait of Reverend Edward Ahenakew, a Cree Anglican Priest. He is shown from the chest up, wearing a dark suit jacket and a white clerical collar. He has short, dark hair and is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression.

Why should we take the path they tread
And leave our own approach to God
Exchanging our own humbler way,
For that along the bloody sod?

Oh! Surely Christ will not despise
The winding trail our fathers trod
With simple steps and faithful hearts
With loyal minds to reach their God?

Can we not then in "heathen" rites,
As ritual, serve the Crucified?
Mayn't He in dances, reverent, pure,
As truly then, be glorified?

Why ape the race whose stated creed
Seems not to lie plumb with their deeds,
Why follow that which is not ours,
Nor which doth satisfy our needs?

REVEREND EDWARD AHENAKEW
(1885-1961)

Cree Anglican Priest

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PART 3:

Can the Scriptures Speak? Memories of Indigenous Rights

What about the Canaanites?

Re-Reading the Bible



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Many years ago, Taiwanese theologian C. S. Song asked us to read the Bible not only from the Jewish side, but also from the Canaanite perspective. What would the Exodus story mean to those living in Canaan, whose land of milk and honey was to be occupied by others?

In the late 1970s, I had the opportunity to join a church group from Hong Kong to visit the Indigenous peoples of Taiwan, to hear their stories of struggle and resistance. Many Taiwanese aborigines lived in the mountains and faced economic and social barriers, yet continued to fight for a higher degree of self-determination and economic development.

In the mid-1980s, women of colour in the United States began to articulate Black women's theology, Hispanic and Latina theology, and Asian American feminist theology. Yet the voices of Native American women were often left out. When I had a chance to edit a book on Third World women's theology, I purposely included Indigenous women's writings in it. *Hope Abundant* presents Indigenous women's voices from Palestine, North America, and Australia.

Over the years, I have learned a different way of reading the Bible from Indigenous theologians – especially women. And I am convinced that the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* – birthed out of Indigenous struggle and shaped by place-based knowledges and principles –



Medicine Wheels are a reminder that Indigenous and Western conceptions of time are significantly different. Pictured: Bighorn, Wyoming PHOTO: US FOREST SERVICE / PUBLIC DOMAIN

challenges us to look at the world from a different vantage point and to interpret our Scriptures in new and life-giving ways.

The first challenge is to **envision time and history differently**. Since the so-called “Enlightenment,” many powerful peoples and nations have believed that “primitive” and “traditional” societies had to change so that they could catch up with modernity. The process of modernization was taken to be synonymous with Westernization. Scores of Christian missionaries were sent around the world for

a “civilizing mission,” while residential schools were built to change Native ways of life. The ideology of “progress” casts people in the Global South and all Indigenous peoples as peoples of the past, while white Europeans, Canadians, and Americans are reckoned people of the present and the future. We need to understand that we coexist in the same temporal frame with tremendous diversity, plurality, and multiplicity. Different worldviews and traditions should be respected.

The second challenge is to **look at space and land with new eyes**. Osage theologian Tink Tinker argues that the Christian tradition has been profoundly influenced by the concept of time (God as acting in history, the historical Jesus, and Jesus’ Second Coming, for example), while Native traditions are more shaped by the concept of space. For Native peoples, land is sacred and connected to their ancestors, their sense of belonging, and their stories, rituals, and customs. Native peoples’ communal understanding of land clashes with Settlers’ assumptions that land and space are commodities that can be bought, sold, and exchanged. Native peoples’ struggle for recognition and sovereignty is a fight to protect their land, heritage, and wisdom passed from generations.

The third challenge is to **enlarge our political imagination**. At a professional meeting, Cherokee academic and activist Andrea Smith challenged her racial and minority American colleagues not to accept the political status-quo as it is by fighting for a piece of the pie within the system. Instead, she urged her colleagues to ask the fundamental question of whether the formation of the state was just and whether a different pie needs to be imagined. It is not sufficient to fight for equality within the current notion of the state and political system if they are based on the disenfranchisement of Indigenous peoples.

As someone who was born in Hong Kong and works in post-colonial interpretation of the Bible, I have heard Indigenous peoples assert that they are not yet post-colonial, for they remain colonized by Settlers. Those protests have created space for me to learn how they read the Bible – *from a Canaanite perspective*. It

is a reading I have often overlooked.

The Book of Ruth can serve as an example. The book talks about the story of two Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth. Both of their husbands die and they are left with their mother-in-law Naomi without means of support. Ruth decides to follow Naomi back to Bethlehem and she eventually gives birth to a son. Her loyalty to Naomi and her apparent assimilation into Jewish culture wins her praise. Yet Orpah, who returned to her Moabite people and to her gods is left without a story. She is never mentioned again. What happened to her when she returned to Moab? Did she remarry and give birth to children? Did she miss Ruth and Naomi? Were there any contacts between Orpah and her sister-in-law? What would a book of Orpah look like? And why does our tradition not include such? What does that say?

As Christian women, we have learned to remember not only the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but also faithful women leaders such as Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Ruth, and Mary. But Native women scholars remind us that there is another trajectory: Rahab, Orpah, and the unnamed Canaanite woman whose daughter Jesus healed and whose faith Jesus praised (Matthew 15:21-28). Their stories remind us of the diversity of cultures, religions, and peoples in the biblical tradition. Remembering the Canaanites helps us not to forget the difficult negotiations, tensions, and conflicts of living together across differences.

Indigenous peoples have been speaking their histories, visions, and dreams for a long time. We need to listen. Let us receive their wisdom with open hearts. Listening closely and working side by side, we can bring a measure of peace to the land and to the nations. This is a slow process. Entering into another time and space is not easy. Solidarity requires new imagination. But together, in a circle of radical diversity and respect, we can do this.

**You must keep learning and continue
to share the knowledge for generations to come.
So come to the circle of the heart beats.**

– **COMAKA**, “The Heart Beat,” in *Tea and Bannock Stories: First Nations Community of Poetic Voices*.



From Naboth to the Declaration: Protecting Nahala



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As Christians hear me for my downtrodden people!... With all your goodly possessions, covering a territory so immense that there yet remain parts unexplored... do not covet the little vineyard of Naboth's, so far from your shores, lest the punishment of Ahab fall upon you, if not in your day, in that of your children, for "be not deceived, God is not mocked."

These words were penned in 1898 in an open letter to "honest Americans" by Queen Lili'uokalani (1838-1917), the last Constitutional monarch of the sovereign nation of Hawaii. They were written in jail after she was deposed by a coalition of American missionary families and plantation owners. This Indigenous leader called on the conscience of Americans to rectify injustice in the wake of their nation's colonial takeover of her homeland.

Lili'uokalani's poignant (though unsuccessful) appeal resonates still in a world in which states and corporations continue to dispossess native peoples. The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* states in Article 26.1-2:

Indigenous peoples shall not be forcibly removed from their lands or territories. No relocation shall take place without the free, prior, and informed consent of the indigenous peoples concerned and after agreement on just and fair compensation and, where possible, with the option of return. Indigenous peoples have the right to the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied, or otherwise used.



Lili'uokalani in London. / PHOTO: PUBLIC DOMAIN

A devout Christian, Lili'uokalani invoked the woeful biblical tale of Naboth's Vineyard, which articulates the archetypal contrast between powerful interests who expropriate land for profit and vulnerable people of the land who are displaced. This ancient story's critique of this pattern of oppression continues to be compelling and prophetic today, and resonates strongly with the *Declaration*.

I Kings 21 is a relatively free-standing narrative unit, briefly featuring the traditional landowner and protagonist Naboth and the infamously apostate Israelite King Ahab. Hebrew Bible scholar Ellen Davis, in her important 2009 book *Scripture, Culture and Agriculture*, rightly calls this "an emblematic tale of two economic systems or cultures in conflict, each with a different principle of land tenure." The

struggle between these two cultures persists today, and influences how we read this text. Most North Americans, socialized as we are into the culture of real estate deals and the government's right to exercise eminent domain (i.e., the expropriation of private land for public use), see no problem with Ahab's proposition. The king appears to make a generous offer (I Kings 21:2), and Naboth's unequivocal refusal seems to us unreasonable (verse 3). So we need to take a closer look with the *Declaration* in mind.

In fact, the contrast portrayed in this tale between Naboth's ancestral domain and Ahab's royal land-grab is stark and full of grim parody. The setting is most relevant (I Kings 21:1). The Jezreel valley was then (and still is today) the agricultural heartland of Israel, and Naboth represents the traditional agrarian class. Davis points out that the key to understanding this conflict lies in the Hebrew term *nabala*, poorly translated as "possession" or "inheritance" (verse 3). Rather, it connotes a sense of ancestral stewardship



of land that is understood as a gift from the Creator, whose use is conditional upon a deep and intergenerationally enduring covenant relationship.

Significantly, there is no appropriate word in English that expresses this meaning. After all, our linguistic system correlates closely with the rise of capitalism, under which our attitudes toward land have been shaped by notions of absolute ownership, commodification, and "productivity." Indeed, our modern world was forged through 500 years of relentless conflict between Europeans with aggressive political and legal ideologies of land *possession* and Indigenous peoples who typically *had no word for land ownership*. The former prevailed, first by force of arms, then by economic and legal appropriation. But the struggle continues, as the *Declaration* makes clear.

"The LORD forbid that I should give you my *nabala*." This is the only line Naboth speaks in

this story, yet it articulates concisely a traditional worldview, as if to say: "The land does not belong to me, I belong to the land." Davis points out that Naboth's objection is predicated on the theological idea of impurity (*balila*): to sell land would defile him. To traditional people throughout history and around the world still today, land is simply not a commodity for sale. In a few strokes, the biblical storyteller has captured the essential distinction between two ways of life.

The historical context here makes the conflict even more poignant – not to mention of keen contemporary relevance. We know that Ahab's expanding reign brought an intensification of land expropriation and centralized command economics to early Iron Age Israel. The monarchy followed the old ways of Canaanite elites, "foreign and domestic policies," summarizes Davis, that "were enriching for the elite but difficult or disastrous for small farmers." Traditional smallholders were forced off the land by debt or tribute burdens, or forced to grow commodity exports controlled by urban managers. The result was a disenfranchisement of traditional agriculture, the destruction of village life, a rising disparity of wealth, and the degradation of local ecosystems. This sounds eerily familiar to native people in modernity, from Lili'uokalani to the Cree facing Canadian Tar Sands development.

Such developments provoked, scholars contend, the second great wave of prophetic protest in Israel's history. Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Jeremiah railed against the ruling class, while Sabbathary restrictions were re-asserted to try to preserve the old agrarian system of mutual aid in the face of elite "structural adjustments" (see my *Biblical Vision of Sabbath Economics*, 2001, for more on this). But Naboth's story provides a reality check for what land justice was up against – then and now.

In I Kings 21:4-16 we have a dark account of the royal conspiracy to seize what Naboth refuses to sell or trade. According to Davis, this was not just a provincial dispute over eminent domain, but a *political* power play – Ahab wished to break agrarian pockets of resistance to his growing royal control. This may have been why he moved his winter palace into the Jezreel valley (21:1) – not unlike putting a U.S. fort in the heart of Indian Territory in the 19th

century, or a U.S. military base in the middle of tribal areas of Afghanistan today. This is a continuing story: resources that cannot be taken by persuasion (or market seduction) will be expropriated by force.

Davis further suggests that Ahab's "vegetable garden" plan (21:2) was a ruse, given the value of an established vineyard compared to a mere garden. His purpose was "to expropriate Naboth's vineyard and produce wine, first for his own table, and then for the export economy." Lavish displays of wealth were key strategies through which elites maintained power, secured trade deals, formed political alliances, and bought off potential opponents.

The intractable Naboth's refusal to sell out is reiterated incredulously no less than three times by his antagonists (verses 4, 6, 13). Unable to co-opt him, Ahab eliminates him. Jezebel is the primary conspirator in this sordid plot, while Ahab is portrayed as a sulking little boy who can not get what he wants. "Are you exercising sovereignty or not?" she taunts (21:7; Heb. *ta'aseh meluka*). This caricature has all the elements of a political cartoon (echoed in the gospel parody of the murder of John the Baptist by Herod, Mark 6:17-28).

The local village assembly of elders, of which Naboth was part, is then turned against him (doubtless by granting favors to those who cooperate, though significantly nothing is mentioned to them about the king's land-grab strategy; 21:8-13). This too is part of the archetypal story – divide, then conquer. Local leaders who collaborate with the regime end up losing their way of life, too.

This scenario exhibits the worst kind of political behavior: murder, veiled in religious language, engineered by false witnesses (perhaps the worst sin in Torah). We should note carefully that Naboth's alleged blasphemy is against God and *the king* (verses 10, 13) – as if the two were equivalent. The story makes a mockery of sacred ritual, community deliberation, and theological confession all at once, only to grind to an apparent depressing halt with the successful assassination of Naboth (21:16).

But just as the king is about to take possession of Naboth's land, the Word of God suddenly opens a new chapter. The prophet Elijah – who has skirmished repeatedly in I Kings 17-19 with both Ahab and Jezebel – shows up with God's double indictment:

"Have you killed, and also taken possession?" (21:19). Ahab's economic growth policy is exposed as the two-fold power of death. The inevitable consequence of such bad politics is, in effect, "to reap exactly what one has sown" (though Elijah puts Ahab's fate in rather more graphic language). The king rightly understands the prophet to be his enemy: "Ah, *you* again!" he laments (21:20a). Elijah's reply is sharply ironic: The one whose land policies are creating debt slaves across the economic landscape has voluntarily sold *himself* into slavery (21:20b).

This biblical tale offers an enduring description of how the powerful steal the *nabala* of traditional people, and names it as a travesty in the eyes of God. This was what Queen Lili'uokalani was trying to get the American people to understand more than a century ago. And this moral perspective is what the *Declaration* is trying to establish as international law today. This is why people of faith must embrace and embody this document in our world – in the spirit of Elijah, in memory of Naboth, and in solidarity with people struggling to protect their *nabala*.



Celebrating Indigenous Knowledge of our Common Creator



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Christians have been taught to see Christ in one another – that all human beings, from every race on earth, in all our diverse physical forms, reflect God the Creator. We are gifts to each other and through each other we see the Divine more clearly and completely. Most Christians understand this. Seeing and celebrating “the other” helps us learn more about God. But there’s more to it; learning how others see God – how they approach, revere, engage, talk to, listen to, ritualize or abide in that Great Mystery – can also help us learn about the Creator.

The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* celebrates the giftedness of Indigenous peoples. Article 12 reminds us that Indigenous peoples have spiritual and religious traditions, customs, and ceremonies; sacred religious and cultural sites; and ceremonial objects worthy of protection. These spiritual gifts reflect our Indigenous neighbours’ knowledge, experience, and understanding of our common Creator and Lord.

The *Declaration’s* call to respect the spiritual rights of Indigenous peoples echoes the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s call for churches to respect Indigenous spirituality in its own right (*Call to Action 60*). What the *Declaration*, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the gospel of Christ have in common is a call to respect the value of every human being. They remind us not to judge each other. They remind us of the importance of listening



Elder Velma Orvis packs a pipe with tobacco as she prepares a ceremony prior to an event at the 9 Circles Community Health Centre / PHOTO: JOE BRYKSYA / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

to each other, listening deeply, listening actively, and, above all, listening before speaking, before coming to conclusions, and before making judgments. We just may be surprised and enriched in ways we cannot conceive or imagine when we listen openly, especially to those whose lived experiences, including of the Creator, may be very different from our own. The more time we devote to listening, the more we have to gain from the process.

Linguists tell us that there are unique human knowledges and unique ways of thinking to be found in the many different languages spoken across the earth. Hence, there is significant loss to the common wisdom of humankind when languages are lost. Is there not also unique human knowledge of the Spirit to be found in the various spiritual traditions

among humankind? Do we not risk taking a narrow and perhaps even sinful view of the Kingdom of God by rejecting the spiritual beauty and giftedness of other human beings, who like us were created by the same Creator God, the great and ineffable mystery?

We do not have to be fearful that we are denying Christ by learning about Indigenous spirituality. When we consider, for example, the wisdom and beauty of the great Iroquoian prayers of thanksgiving to creation or the Anishinabek reminder to approach worship and each other with good minds, good hearts, and good spirits, Christians will be reminded of what they have already been taught in both the Old and New Testaments. It is true that there are some aspects of Indigenous spirituality and worldview which may be more difficult to reconcile with Christian beliefs. Nevertheless, through respectfully learning Indigenous traditions, Christians will grow to understand how Indigenous peoples relate to each other, to peoples from other spiritual traditions, to the created world around all of us, and to God. This spiritual understanding of the other builds community and breaks down barriers as peoples learn what each other holds to be sacred.

What might we gain as people of God if every Christian church community in Canada committed to participate in one traditional spiritual ceremony led by a recognized traditional Indigenous Elder or spiritual teacher from a nearby community? To benefit fully, churches would need to engage in some advance preparation with the Indigenous spiritual leader to understand what such a ceremony would involve and how best to prepare the members of the Christian community to participate.

How reconciling might it be to see God from Indigenous eyes? How reconciling for the nation might it be if every single congregation of every single church in Canada took part in one such ceremony? What might we learn together about God and about how to live together as peoples of God by experiencing how others worship God? How much more clearly would we see God if we took the time to see God through our Indigenous neighbours' eyes?



then spoke again to call it good
 and took on flesh that re-orders our distorted relations.
 Hear this Word, the cries for justice and healing calling from the cracks
 bringing us back to one another
 back to the land and its Maker.
 Cries that name this distorted creation as no good for any of us.

Rights are an invitation to repent and think again
 to sit at Creator's table forever extending love, belonging.
 If you ask me if Indigenous peoples have a *right* to this table
 I will tell you two things:
 if they are not at the table there is no feasting table for any -
 only a banquet that leaves us hungrier than when we began,
 so hungry we tear up the earth and one another.
 Yet rights is the language born of this re-made world,
 cut off from paths of wisdom about what it means to be human
 born in connection to land-God-people.
 Rights is a language made necessity by this remade world
 to alleviate suffering without reordering the distortions causing it.
 Distorted relations are our sickness.
 Requiring rights as protection from one another prevents abuse
 but it cannot heal us, only mask our disease.
 So pause. Listen. Think again. Learn to see right.
 Listen to the voices that reorder our relations toward love
 let UNDRIP
 drip
 drip
 drops
 its holy water
 baptizing us into the reality our colonial theologies missed,
 for there is no salvation without bodily communion.
 I cannot love God and rob my neighbour.
 The right to not be robbed is too low a standard.

We need a declaration of rights because we live poorly within this remade world.
 But we must be a declaration of love that re-orders our distorted relations.
 We need a declaration of rights to uphold minimal care and understanding.
 But we must receive it as a declaration of communal reorientation
 the gift of voices that help us to see
 that in the wake of this world remade,
 we must seek its unmaking.
 And if you have eyes to see
 then in the wake of a world re-made
 growing quietly in the cracks
 remains the possibility of transformation.

Unsettling Whiteness: Refocusing Christian Theology on Its Own Indigenous Roots



JAMES W. PERKINSON is a long-time activist and educator from inner city Detroit, re-named such by Jesuit Settlers taking over Ojibwa/Odawa/Potawatami and later Wendat/Huron territory. Currently teaching as Professor of Social Ethics at the Ecumenical Theological Seminary, James is the author of numerous works, including *White Theology: Outing Supremacy in Modernity* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2004).

I am a white Settler on native land in a place known as “the strait of Lake Erie” (*le détroit du lac Érié*), more colloquially named the Motor City. I write as a Christian activist, who came to this epicentre of the industrial revolution in 1974, fresh from college. Back in the day, I was eager to translate Pentecostal spirit and Evangelical energy into mission to “help” poor people in the inner city deal with desperate conditions. More than 40 years later, I have been deeply chastened by such a damning sense of superiority and profoundly unsettled by my involvement with folk who look differently than I do. I continue to wrestle with my own hubris in a schoolhouse of initiation whose confrontation of my ignorance and embrace of my fumbling efforts at solidarity has been, and continues to be, life changing. I owe most of what I have to say here to the ongoing challenge of black and native “street teachers” and ordinary folk.

It is out of that hothouse experience that I both listen and respond to my northern neighbours. The advocacy of the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission for ecclesial attention to the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* is a bellwether on this side of the river as well. My own country has not gone so far in its attempt to listen to those whose lands and cultures it has violated and marginalized over the last 500 years. Listening is



Elder Velma Orvis packs a pipe with tobacco as she prepares a ceremony prior to an event at the 9 Circles Community Health Centre / PHOTO: JOE BRYKSYA / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

exactly what I want most to lift up here.

The *Declaration* represents a framework for that listening, but only begins to uncover its heart and hurt. I have had much help from people of colour in my life in becoming aware of a thing called White Privilege and its institutional consort, White Power (or White Supremacy or just plain Whiteness). I capitalize them as they function like spiritual influences the Bible would label “Principalities and Powers.”

What is this thing called “Whiteness” as a force of history? A hidden Power that inhabits institutions, influences policies, whispers in psyches, and colours perceptions without itself appearing, except in shadows and at the edge of vision. I have only become aware of how profoundly this Power has moved my will, shaped my desire, and birthed my

thought, as black and native people in my life have called out its nearly invisible Presence that is so obvious to them. I am married to a Filipina, from a country colonized by my own for half a century, so the scrutiny is relentless – but also very healing, in the midst of the “trouble” it occasions. I am, year-by-year, deepening my understanding that I am a Settler on someone else’s land, and enjoy access to unjust amounts of “resources” and goods because of someone else’s labour. I am being “unsettled.” Or more precisely, what is being unsettled within and around me is White Power (I am actually more than just the Whiteness that “possesses” me).

Again, what is Whiteness as a force of history? It is the presumption of superiority: the supposed right – indeed the duty – to think of oneself and one’s culture and lifestyle as superior to those who have been conquered, subdued, enslaved, and coerced into submission.

The *Declaration* points to the profound difference Indigenous peoples and their cultures embody compared to the ideas, technologies, policies, and values exhibited by the white westernized peoples and cultures that colonized the Americas beginning in 1492. Today, climate change raises serious issue with a number of those colonial values and much of that “modern” cultural orientation. By comparison, Indigenous cultures that have inhabited bioregions for thousands of years without destroying their local ecosystems stand as a witness of hope and the possibility of living more sustainably and justly in a given area. But admitting such when one has been trained to think of one’s own western, Christian, modern white culture as *the* superior way of being on the planet is a traumatic admission. How shall we negotiate such an admission? How do we talk about it? All I can do is talk about my own experience, awareness, and practice.

The *Declaration* offers a comprehensive framework for listening to the uniqueness of Indigenous experience in its *difference* from white, western, globalizing hi-tech culture. That difference is not just a matter of political correctness – like learning to respect, say, Mongolian throat singing when one is used to Handel’s *Messiah*. The stakes are much deeper, failure to hear much more catastrophic. It may well be that Indigenous insight into how to live

respectfully in a given locality is now the litmus test for our species if we are going to avoid extinction within the next century. If we don’t learn to listen to our Indigenous brothers and sisters, and begin to be schooled by some of what they know, it is likely to be “us” who will not survive.

But here is the hopeful thing. Go far enough back in the family trees of any of us and you ultimately get to an “Indigenous” memory and way of living.

The *Declaration* is a framework to guide a Listening. The heart and soul of what needs to be heard, however, is not simply a series of rights and duties, but a Speaking that is full of mystery and vitality: co-extensive with the land and all that lives in it, under it, and above it. The rights and duties are disciplines, a latticework of accountability. The quest the *Declaration* underscores is a journey towards a Voice – or really, a plurality of Voices – and not all of them human. Indeed, the most comprehensive Voice that the *Declaration* renders audible today is climate change.

Climate change is, in fact, a form of communication. “What” is speaking in the new extremities of changing weather is certainly what Indigenous peoples have long warned about – the comprehensive “blowback” that happens when too many cultures have been decimated and peoples disappeared, too many rivers dammed, mountains decapitated, fish stocks collapsed, and oceans filled with plastic. But climate change could equally be said to express a more rudimentary and comprehensive “demand for respect” from the kindred life forms – such as corn kernels, oak trees, sunflower seeds, bears, salmon, honey bees, or even more complex “creatures” like cloud banks, stream beds, forest canopies, lava chambers, gas fields, etc. – that Indigenous peoples have long listened to and cared for, but that modern cultures have disparaged as mere “resources” to be re-engineered and used up at will. Each of these can be distinctly “heard” in climate science, as in Indigenous myth. And one of the Voices most silenced in this ensemble of extreme weather is our own Indo-European ancestry. Among other things, I would venture that this *Declaration* represents a counsel and a demand of our own forebears.

As a Christian, I am learning that Christianity itself, in its primal roots, carries an Indigenous



Gregg Deal of the Pyramid Lake Paiute Nation explores stereotypes in his performance art. / PHOTO: GREGG DEAL

memory that was only gradually eclipsed in the long march of history. The Jesus of first-century Palestine initiated a movement of peasant folk struggling to recover a way of living inside the situation of Roman occupation that was more just in human relations and more sustainable in ecological relations. Throughout the European Middle Ages, Christian folk often amalgamated earlier ways of living that still respected the soils and forests and rivers as “living creatures.” But so much of that got lost inside the Whiteness that was birthed by European Christian colonialism. African American theologian William James Jennings is helpful here.

In his book, *The Christian Imagination*, Jennings traces the way Whiteness embodied and encoded a double displacement. Europeans were voluntarily displaced from their homelands and Native and African folk were forcibly displaced from theirs. Both were offered Whiteness as the replacement for identity and hope.

Europeans were invited to forget their particular German, Irish, Italian, Hungarian cultures and identities and embrace the psychic compensation of being considered “White” by the leadership class that was taking over the land – even while they were often oppressed and exploited by that same elite. And Native folk were forced to forgo all the elaborate and subtle ways they had built their cultures into the local environments, working out their sense of identity in relationship with the particular plants and animals whose characteristics, habits, and bodies they admired and relied on to survive. Native folk and enslaved Africans were confronted with a White way of being: they had to emulate language, dress, economic practices, religious beliefs, or face utter disparagement and annihilation. Of course, as the Cherokee experience in the Trail of Tears (the forced removal of 1838–1839) so clearly shows, trying to conform to “Whiteness,” in the end, secured nothing.

Most Europeans who came across the Atlantic were trying to escape horrific conditions, like economic exploitation, religious repression, famine, and plague in their homelands. But coming over as colonists, settling on stolen land and participating in the genocidal elimination of native dwellers, and (in my country) agreeing to cooperate with the enslavement of darker-skinned others because of the economic benefit it offered all meant losing the connection to Indigenous ancestry, memory, and ways of living symbiotically “on the land.”

The *Declaration* – once it is actually heard and understood by white western Christians – so often occasions deeply visceral reactions. So many lost voices, devastated cultures, ravaged peoples, ripped up eco-systems, disappeared species, painful compromises, and forgotten ancestries are speaking up. If we let go of our defences and denials, face the dire prospects of the climate apocalypse that threatens, and seek a viable future together, the *Declaration* represents a counsel and channels a Voice that Christians may well discover, after the fact, is the same kind of Voice Moses encountered in the bush.

Listening to the *Declaration* means, first of all, listening to First Nations peoples *here*. Owning the genocide our forebears committed. Facing the fact that our entire claim to property rights was conjured out of thin air by 15th-century papal bulls that created the heresy of the Christian Doctrine of Discovery. Learning that thousands of Indigenous children were kidnapped, abused, sterilized, and killed in church-run residential (or boarding) schools. That even today, Indigenous women are being raped and disappeared, and Indigenous children stolen and some prostituted out. Understanding that their demands for justice are paramount and require active support for movements like Idle No More or resistance to pipelines on Indigenous land.

Listening will also push us towards learning to listen to older, more Indigenous *European* traditions of living close to the soil – some of which “converted” Christianity itself back to the land in the Middle Ages.

Ultimately, the crisis we face demands uncompromising honesty, a willingness to learn from a quite brutal history, and the resolve to cooperate with native movements working for change. “All our relations” are speaking, as are all of our ancestors. Can we halt our hubris and respond with justice?



What Would Zacchaeus Do? Repair Sets Sinners Free

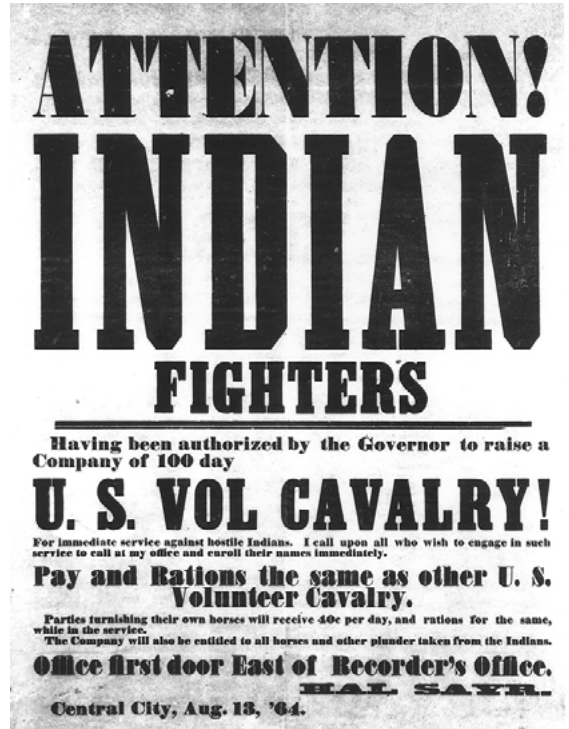


JENNIFER HARVEY lives in Des Moines, Iowa, traditional lands of many Indigenous nations, including the Báxoje, Sac, and Meskwaki. A Professor of Religion at Drake University, Jennifer is also an ordained minister in the American Baptist Churches. Her most recent book is *Dear White Christians: For Those Still Longing for Racial Reconciliation* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014) and she regularly speaks to faith communities on the challenge and potential of white anti-racism.

A profound pain is evoked in recognizing the seeming inevitability of “Settler colonial” identity. We can never undo what has been done. We who are of European descent “unbecome” what we became when our ancestors engaged in conquest and colonization of this landmass – Turtle Island – and its First Peoples. It is important to name this. Pain comes when those of us committed to justice and human rights take an unflinching look at what it means to be a Settler colonial people, and sometimes prevents us from taking such a look.

I have felt such pain in my own life. I remember it washing over me when I suddenly realized the meaning of my own family’s legacy. “We settled ‘Cripple Creek,’” (Colorado) my beloved, courageous, and hardworking great grandmother would tell me with pride. Then she would regale me with stories about the challenges of such settlement and, as a child, I too was proud.

I remember it came when I learned my ancestor – a great, great uncle – participated in the Sand Creek Massacre: on November 29, 1864, 700 American soldiers destroyed a peaceful village of Cheyenne and Arapaho. The horror of learning my own flesh and blood slaughtered women and babies was matched only by the horror of realizing my own had not thought such atrocities (and my ancestor’s



Elder Velma Orvis packs a pipe with tobacco as she prepares a ceremony prior to an event at the 9 Circles Community Health Centre / PHOTO: JOE BRYKSYA / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

participation in them) noteworthy enough to pass down the truth to me.

I remember catching my breath as I turned a page in Waziyatawin’s book, *What Does Justice Look Like? The Struggle for Liberation in Dakota Homeland*. I was studying Minnesota’s history in preparation to facilitate a conversation, in part, about the debt owed by white, Settler colonial Christians to Indigenous peoples in a place where struggles for sovereignty recognition and land rights persist. Instead I heard



IMAGE: SILAS CREWS / MCC

Waziyatawin ask about Ouray, Colorado, a place as beloved to me as Cripple Creek was to my grandmother. “Who were Ouray’s first people?” she wrote. “Where are they today?” I imagined her looking directly at me as she asked, “and, who are these people who dare now claim this place as their own?”

Whether or not we know them, stories like mine are part of the legacies of all us who are of European descent. Even if we immigrated later in the development of the United States, Canada, or Mexico, our national identities themselves exist only through violent, colonial histories that continue to shape the present. Our national identities put European descended peoples today in relationships with Indigenous peoples that reveal us to be Settler colonial peoples still.

It’s as easy to feel trapped by this history as it is to be overwhelmed by its pain. How are we to escape a way of existence bequeathed to us by our ancestors through no choice of our own? Can we respond meaningfully to a reality so encompassing that redress, even if we want to pursue it, might seem impossible?

These questions are particularly acute for Settler colonial Christians. They are acute because our churches actively participated in genocide – through the cultural destruction of much missionary work, by

functioning as governments’ hands through running boarding schools, in institutional “ownership,” and in continuing to occupy lands from which Indigenous peoples were dispossessed.

But these questions are also acute because we claim to follow Jesus. In this context we must journey with Zacchaeus as we engage the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

Zacchaeus too was complicit in an all-encompassing system. The Roman Empire too was saturating, its ways seemingly inescapable. It is tempting to easily condemn Zacchaeus for agreeing to serve as the Empire’s tax collector, which meant he actively implemented and benefited from the exploitative, grinding practices Rome exerted over the lives of the poor. But, we do better to admit, instead, how closely Zacchaeus’ life story resonates with our own.

In fact, as we recognize how deeply our stories as Settler colonial Christians resonate with Zacchaeus’, we might begin to realize that rather than responding to the question we often ask in church circles – namely, *WWJD?* What would Jesus do? – we are, instead, in a *WWZD?* moment.

Namely, *What Would Zacchaeus Do?*

Consider Article 26 of the *Declaration* which asserts the rights of Indigenous peoples to lands and to the full use, development, and control of the lands they “traditionally occupied.” The diverse, specific

situations of Native nations throughout Turtle Island cannot be fairly recounted here through a generic account. But, in a variety of locations, Indigenous communities are engaged in ongoing struggles to fish, hunt, and/or collect medicinal plants on lands to which they never rescinded their rights. If we ask *WWZD?* we see how Settler colonial Christians should relate to such struggles. We hear ourselves called to stand boldly with Indigenous peoples when they challenge Settler colonial laws that constrain such rights and face harassment and violence by locals who refuse to recognize them.

It's worth noting that the crowd muttered when Jesus announced he was going to Zacchaeus' house. Who would blame them? They knew Zacchaeus was an oppressor! But Zacchaeus responded boldly, "Look! I am giving half my possessions to the poor right now! And *if I have cheated anybody*, I will pay them back four times over."

Zacchaeus recognized that discipleship – the decision to follow Jesus – required him to set right the exploitative material relations within which he was embedded (relations that structured his actual relationship to the poor). Discipleship was active and concrete: giving half to those made poor by the very system that made him rich and repaying several times over anyone he had cheated directly.

WWZD? enables us to respond to the moral audacity of Article 28, which declares Indigenous peoples' rights to full and just redress for lands unlawfully taken and/or damaged by Settler colonial peoples. The moral case is irrefutable. But maybe the history still seems so complex, the harm so complete, the dispossession so vast that we're not sure how to climb down out of the tree. *WWZD?* helps here too.

Consider John Stoesz. A Mennonite Christian, Stoesz knew the 13 acres near Butterfield, Minnesota he inherited had belonged to the Dakota. He determined to take 50 percent of that inherited estate and repay it by giving it to the Dakota Land Recovery Project.

But Stoesz went further. He took a 2,000-mile bike ride through Minnesota in 2013, stopping at local towns and sharing the history of the land, and of the Indigenous-Settler relationships there. The next year he took another tour and offered these

concrete recommendations to folks who came to hear him: Settler colonial peoples can give portions of real estate sales to Indigenous groups working for land recovery; they might "pay portions of our monthly income as 'back rent'"; or, they could put reparations in our wills. There is no reason churches cannot do all of these things as well, and more.

Waziyatawin has proposed a plan consistent with Article 28. Minnesota could return "state-owned" land to the Dakota and this plan doesn't even require any individual colonial-settler person or family to be divested from land they have come to understand as their own. The Paiute have spoken boldly about the reality that it is they who have rights to "federal land" in Oregon and not the colonial-settlers who provoked an armed standoff against U.S. land agents in early 2016.

There is no reason churches cannot publicly and politically support such proposals and claims, and so many others. Just as my story is not unlike that of other European-descended Settler colonial people, Minnesota's and Oregon's are not unlike other territories, states or regions. In fact, *WWZD?* makes it clear: they must.

Recognizing our identification with Zacchaeus may bring pain and the work it reveals as imperative is difficult. But in stories like Stoesz' – who, it should be noted, works with Indigenous organizations and not individualistically – we see living, breathing examples of discipleship work to shift the concrete material relationships in which our lives are all embedded toward justice.

No doubt those toward whom Zacchaeus enacted repentance and repair experienced liberation and transformation, if only partial. But, I bet Zacchaeus did too. I have no doubt Zacchaeus was also liberated. After all – Jesus came to his house!

WWZD?

If, in our personal, collective, and institutional lives, we ask and respond to that question, the possibility exists that we might find that Jesus comes to our house too.



Post-colonial Challenges to the Church



MARK BRETT is Professor of Old Testament at Whitley College in Victoria, Australia, the traditional territory of the Wurundjeri people. Mark's most recent book is *Political Trauma and Healing: Biblical Ethics for a Postcolonial World* (Eerdmans, 2016).

But if they will confess their sins and the sins of their ancestors – their unfaithfulness and their hostility toward me... I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land (Leviticus 26:40-42).

The Old Testament provides a number of different perspectives on the idea of intergenerational guilt and, in particular, Leviticus 26:40-42 provokes us to think about the implications of the sins of our own founding fathers. This is often a challenge for us to grasp, not least because some of our ancestors who founded the nations of the British empire thought they were following God's calling. But whatever their intentions, the traumatic legacies of colonial settlement are still with us. This passage in Leviticus follows on from the so-called Jubilee law, in chapter 25, which claims that only God owns the land and that the justice of landholding is a matter of high theological significance. Before I spell out some of the implications of this theology, let me tell you a story or two.

When I was growing up in Papua New Guinea in the 1960s, we were taught that Australian identity was a relatively simple thing. It all started with Captain Cook in 1770. Under the blessings of the British Empire, churches were free to engage in mission and celebrate the transitions that local people made as they accommodated themselves to the obvious advantages provided by the British Crown and its Australian agents in Papua New Guinea. My school in Port Moresby was appropriately called the "Coronation Primary



Poster celebrating the “non-discovery” of Australia by Captain Cook. / IMAGE: PUBLIC DOMAIN

School” and I used to hold the Australian flag at school assemblies. Clearly, it would be difficult to avoid the mid-life crisis that led to my rebirth as a post-colonial critic.

When Captain Cook arrived at our continent in 1770, there were around 500 First Nations. They didn't manage the land in the way that Europeans understood at the time, but the Indigenous polities did exercise their own complex jurisdictions over the natural resources that were given to each group by their ancestors. The Europeans couldn't grasp these facts at the time because they didn't pause long enough to learn the local languages and appreciate the significance of the existing borders. They were overwhelmingly convinced by their own sense of providence and destiny, and by their own interpretations of scripture, which all pointed to the legitimacy of colonial expansion and the urgency of mission.

Many of us would be aware of the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494 that divided South America between the Catholic monarchs of Spain and Portugal, adopting a north-south meridian that cut the world in half. Pope Alexander VI had established this meridian in 1493, but the Treaty moved it slightly to the west. Perhaps less well known was the continuation of that meridian on the other side of the globe, clarified by the Treaty of Zaragoza in

1529. Running roughly at the 141st meridian, it cut Papua in two. At the time, the Europeans were not especially interested in the island where I grew up, but they were competing for possession of the Moluccas (or Maluku) – just to the west of Papua; they had grown fond of the spices that were produced there. This is the colonial history one needs to grasp in order to understand the western border of Papua New Guinea today. But as the colonial negotiations

moved on, there was a subsequent agreement that divided Spanish and Portuguese interests at the 135th meridian. When the Dutch named the western part of Australia “New Holland” the following century, they were in effect challenging the Portuguese authority over our continent, leaving the land east of the 135th meridian within the Spanish prerogative. Subsequently, in 1788, the British selected the 135th meridian as the western boundary of New South Wales, ironically allowing this history of conflict between Catholic kings to create the borders of the first Australian colony. As Watkin Tench commented at the time in his account, *A Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay*, “By this partition, it may be fairly presumed, that every source of future litigation between the Dutch and us, will be for ever cut off, as the discoveries of English navigators only are comprised in this territory.”

What Tench did not anticipate was the distant possibility of litigation coming from the First Nations, once their rights were finally recognized. The straight lines on Australian and Papuan maps severed the arteries of our traditional Aboriginal polities, and the intergenerational trauma is still with us.

In its Mabo decision of 1992, the Australian High Court expressed a measure of legal repentance; the court confessed that the Crown had not properly acknowledged the ongoing existence of native title. But it was only native title – conceived as a bundle of traditional rights – that was acknowledged as ongoing; it was not that Aboriginal or Islander sovereignties might have an enduring significance. Unlike the legal histories of the U.S., Canada, and Aotearoa New Zealand, we have no treaties in Australia, and, after the Mabo decision, we don’t even have the legal preconditions that could form the foundations of treaties. Any aspirations for treaties would need to be dealt with in the political space, rather than in the High Court, and our political space is entirely subject to the unstable will of democratic majorities who can easily overwhelm the three percent of our population identifying as Indigenous. Even constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is regarded as politically difficult.



Eddie Mabo shifted the conversation in Australia over land rights. / PHOTO: PUBLIC DOMAIN

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Those of us who are immigrants to this country are embedded in this history of injustice whether we like it or not. In some respects, it doesn't matter whether our families have been here for one generation or seven; we are the recipients and beneficiaries of this land's wealth. We can't do much about the mistakes of previous generations, but it does not follow that all attempts at reconciliation will be fruitless, or that measures aimed at restorative justice will be merely symbolic gestures without practical effect.

It is in this context that churches need to face the challenges posed by the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. If we are genuinely to repent of the Christian Doctrine of Discovery, then one of the key questions to discuss would be the challenge posed by Article 28 of the *Declaration*:

Indigenous peoples have the right to redress, by means that can include restitution or, when this is not possible, of a just, fair, and equitable compensation, for the lands, territories, and resources which they have traditionally owned or otherwise occupied or used, and which have been confiscated, taken, occupied, used or damaged without their free, prior and informed consent.

Leviticus 26:40 suggests that we should confess the iniquity of our ancestors, and no doubt we need to see the practice of confession linked to practices of restitution. Governments may disregard traditional rights and polities, but churches do not need to follow suit. We still have a choice to make. Regardless of what transpires at the level of national politics, religious bodies have a particular calling to embody practices of apology or confession, to transform the historic patterns of injustice, and to join redemptive networks of friendship. These efforts on the part of churches will inevitably have implications for the resources commanded by our institutions.

What we need, I think, is a root and branch critique of our economic life as churches, and a rebuilding of local economies – beginning by acknowledging the traditional ownership of local lands and resources. Churches and faith-based agencies are called to embody alternatives to the dominant models of economic growth and well-being. Of course, it is not possible simply to return to the agrarian economy presupposed in the laws of Moses, but these laws can still shape a renewed social

imagination. In particular, we should ask ourselves what it would mean to restore the traditional ownership of lands and resources in Jubilee-type events, when harmful patterns of economic activity have led us astray. It is not enough to say that we are not personally responsible for the sins of the founding fathers; we need to confess that we are the beneficiaries of injustices committed against the First Nations.

We cannot assume, with an ethnocentric confidence, that we already have the right strategy for acts of reconciliation, even before we have learned the culture and circumstances of the First Nations who are our neighbours, and even before the complex work of relationship building has been undertaken. Actually engaging with “the other” means that our original standards of judgment may be transformed. Faith communities need to summon the courage of our convictions and create new patterns of communion – shifting resources to where they are needed and expanding our networks of love through the intricate grace of friendships formed in local contexts.



Tree of Life, Healing Justice



TERRY LEBLANC is a Mi'kmaq/Acadian, married to his partner Bev for over 40 years. The founding Chair and Director of the North American Institute for Theological Studies (NAIITS), Terry also oversees iEmergence and My People International, organizations focused on building capacity with Indigenous peoples.

And in the centre
of the garden...
the Tree of Life
(Genesis 1:9).

Picture the story. Harmony, order, balance, care, and nurture. Abundance of life is centred in each relationship. Everything in the created order is acting, living, being in right relationship with and right relatedness to all else. This is the intent, plan, and desire of the Creator of all things. Harmony. It is the image of the first two chapters of Genesis, and when we act in just ways, it is also the focus of Indigenous endeavour within creation.

Creation's coherence is what we disrupt each time we willingly, or even unknowingly, subject the Creator's ordered relationships to disobedience. Creation goes awry, becomes messy, unsustainable, fractious, and mean-spirited. It is not what was intended, cursed by our misbehaviour. The need for renewal, restoration, and redemption is evident in the fracturing of our connectedness.

When Indigenous stewardship, and the right to a unique way of life continues to be demolished by a misguided perception of divine authority; when failure to act in just ways entrenches dysfunction among a people created in the image of their Creator; and when unjust medieval doctrines provide justification for such actions in the present day, we live in disharmony; the curse is at our door.



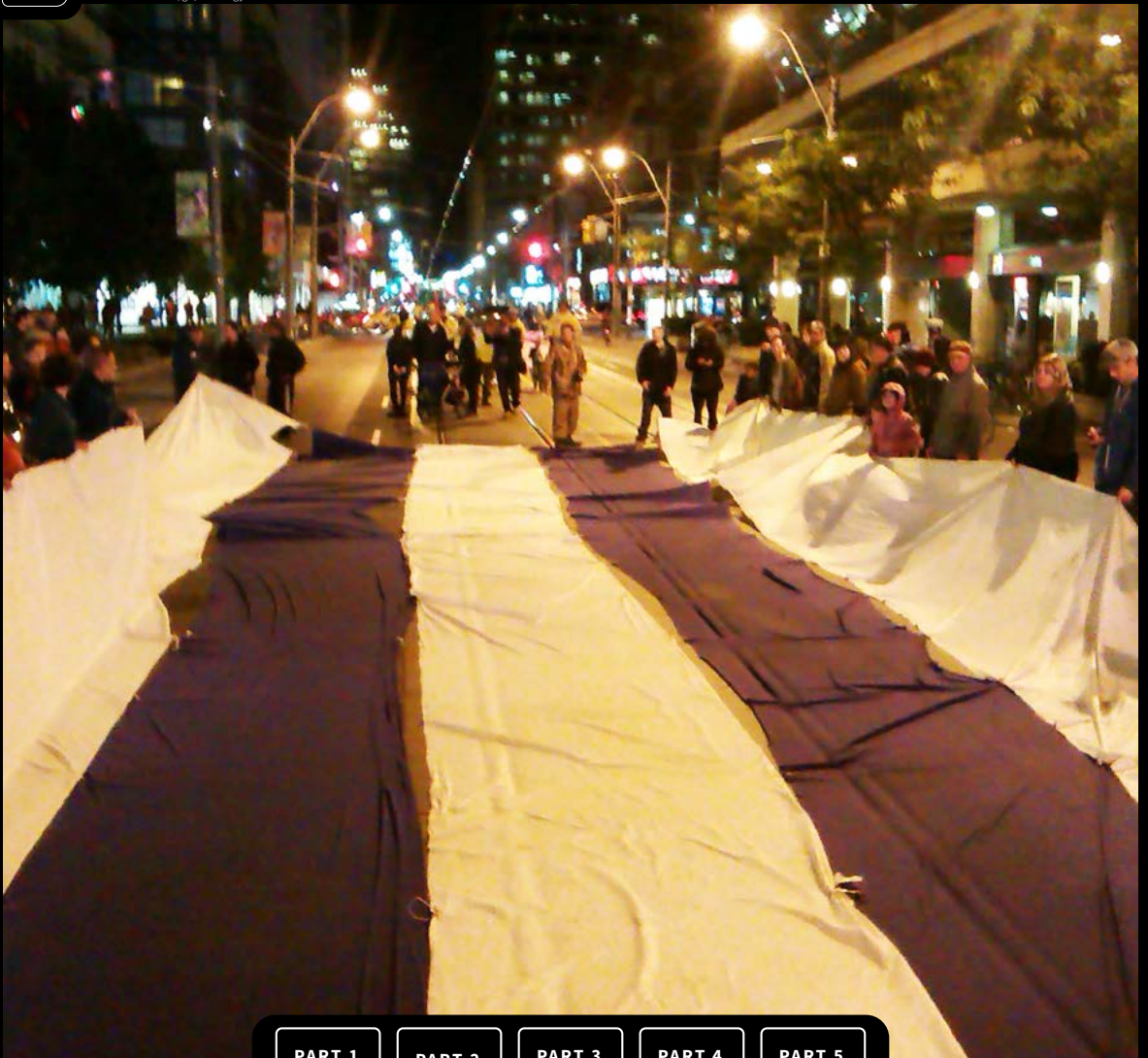
A red dress hangs on Acadia University Campus to highlight the violence against Indigenous women / IMAGE: RODGER EVANS / FLICKR

But Christ has rescued us from the curse... When he was hung on the cross, he took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing. For it is written in the Scriptures, "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree" (Galatians 3:13).

Picture the story. The perfect seeded into imperfection, creating the means by which the renewed plan, thought, and intent of the Maker will be realized. This tree, intended for evil, becomes the means of creation's restoration. The Crucified One, the Tree of Life, is again centered in the garden of the created order.

On either side of the river is the tree of life... and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations (Revelation 22:2b, 3a).

Right relationship with the Creator, the human community, and the rest of creation is within our grasp. It is made possible by the One who provides for creation's healing – the Tree of Life. Justice is one of the leaves.

[PART 1](#)[PART 2](#)[PART 3](#)[PART 4](#)[PART 5](#)

PART 4: Re-imagining Relations on Land, in Church, with Others

More than two hundred Indigenous and Settler peoples gathered in downtown Toronto on the 250th Anniversary of the Royal Proclamation of 1763. They marched with the giant Two Row Wampum, which symbolizes the wampum bead treaty formed 400 years ago between the Haudenosaunee and the Dutch, and was intended to govern relations between Indigenous peoples and Settlers. photo: basics news & two row times

Coming Together at Stoney Knoll



HARRY LAFOND is from the Muskeg Lake Cree Nation and is an Indigenous member of Treaty 6. An avid student of Treaty history and Christian spirituality, Harry is the Executive Director at the Office of the Treaty Commissioner in Saskatchewan.

Growing up a half-day's horse ride west of the North Saskatchewan River, we heard foggy stories of a reserve that used to be just across the river at Carlton Ferry. My mother remembered stories of people who had lived across the river from the script land her grandfather had accepted for settlement.¹

What happened to our “almost neighbours” and lost relatives? Much has happened on the lands and to the people we speak of in those distant memories. The land has become rich, producing significant grain farms on both sides of the river. My great grandfather's script land is now just a couple of lines on the Rural Municipality map. On the east shores of the river, farms prosper where, in the early days, the laughter and gentle lullabies of “nēhiyawak” (Cree) moms soothing their babies to sleep were replaced by the murmur of German stories and prayer songs from the Mennonite and Lutheran Settlers.

These two solitudes have come together in the midst of world awareness of Indigenous rights and Settler responsibilities. We are beginning to see now in Canada the distance that keeps us apart from our neighbours, even under the formal covenants of Treaty 6.

Reserve #107 and Article 10 of the Declaration:

Indigenous peoples shall not be forcibly removed from their lands or territories. No relocation shall take place without the free, prior, and informed



Members of the Young Chippewyan, Lutheran and Mennonite communities sign a covenant. / PHOTO: NEILL VON GUNTEN

consent of the indigenous peoples concerned and after agreement on just and fair compensation and, where possible, with the option of return.

Travel back in time to the 1880s. Perhaps we would be remembering Stoney Knoll very differently today if the 1885 Canadian government had been influenced by the *Declaration*.

The story begins in the 1860s and 1870s. Chip-ee-wayan (Treaty Commissioner Alexander Morris's spelling) becomes chief and leads his people criss-crossing the plains in search of game, gathering with other nēhiyawak for ceremonies and for social events. In times of conflict, they join with war chiefs to raid enemies to the south and west. In 1876, after years of experiencing poor hunting accompanied by the devastation of measles, smallpox, and tuberculosis, Chief Chip-ee-wayan joined the huge gathering at Fort Carlton to meet with Queen Victoria's representative. Among the nēhiyawak, the talk



View of Cypress Hills. / PHOTO: ERIK LIZEE / PUBLIC DOMAIN

around the home fires had been about the need for an agreement with the Crown to ensure the future of their people. Five treaties had been signed with their relatives to the east and south. Perhaps now was the time to take that step. After days of consultations and negotiations, Chief Chip-ee-wayan followed the lead given by his relatives, Chief Mistawasis and Chief Ahtahkakoop, and agreed to sign onto Treaty 6.

And Her Majesty the Queen hereby agrees and undertakes to lay aside reserves for farming lands, due respect being had to lands at present cultivated by the said Indians, and other reserves for the benefit of the said Indians, to be administered and dealt with for them by Her Majesty's Government of the Dominion of Canada; provided, all such reserves shall not exceed in all one square mile for each family of five, or in that proportion for larger or smaller families....

Placing their "X" on the document prepared by Commissioner Morris's clerks, Chief Chip-ee-

wayan and his four headmen, Nah-poo-chee-chees, Wah-wis, Kah-pah-mah-chahk-nay, and Kee-yew-ah-kah-pim-waht, signed on for a wild ride into the future. They chose prime farmland on the east banks of the North Saskatchewan River close to their relatives of the Beardy's Band. They became the Young Chippewayan Band #107.

At this time, the people of Young Chippewayan Band #107 would have been better served by a United Nations Declaration that recognized their Indigenous rights, rather than the Indian Act that was legislated by Prime Minister Macdonald in 1876. Their vision of a future that would ensure the growth of their children's children into a prosperous people, enjoying the wealth of their lands alongside the Mennonite and Lutheran Settlers moving into their territory, came to a dramatic end in 1885.

The Treaty promises of relief from starvation never materialized. The Métis rallied around the Batoche



Treaty 6 was agreed to at Fort Carlton and Duck Lake in August of 1876, and at Fort Pitt one month later. Alexander Morris (1826-1889) (TOP LEFT) was the main Crown negotiator of the western treaties. Píhtokahanapiwiyin, also known as Poundmaker (1842-1886) (BOTTOM RIGHT), was a Plains Cree Chief who agreed to Treaty and challenged the Crown to live into its covenant roles and responsibilities. PHOTOS: PUBLIC DOMAIN.

Medals were made to commemorate the Numbered Treaties. IMAGE: LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA / PUBLIC DOMAIN

settlement to protest the lack of recognition by the Canadian government. Chief Young Chip-ee-waysan had been selected to lead the people of his band when his father died. He was caught up in the struggle to feed his people and adhere to the terms of Treaty 6 while feeling the tension of strained Métis relations just a day's ride to the east at Batoche.

With the rumour of buffalo at Cypress Hills and the promise of safety among relatives, Chief Young Chip-ee-waysan moved south with his band. In their struggle to survive, the people of the Young Chippewayan Band remained with their relatives from the neighbouring bands. This was particularly crucial during the turbulent years following the conflicts at Batoche, Cutknife Hill, Frog Lake, and Battleford. This was also the era of severe repressive practices by the Indian Agents working for the Canadian government. Leaving the reserve without

the Agent's knowledge could be cause for severe reprisals, such as withholding rations.

As it is, the consequences for the Young Chippewayan people proved to be disastrous considering the importance of their spiritual connection to Mother Earth. In 1897, the Canadian government unilaterally wiped Young Chippewayan #107 off the reserve land map. It no longer existed as of that time. It was now only to be a foggy memory.

Yet memory can be strong, and it has been for the descendants of the families who followed Chief Young Chip-ee-waysan to the Cypress Hills. Over the course of 130 years, oral stories continued to keep alive the memories and the great wrong done to their ancestors under the care of the Canadian government. Now landless and squatters in some communities, they have come back to their roots to re-group.

In 2006, the descendants of the two solitudes: nēhiyawak and Mennonite and Lutheran Settlers reached across the divide to acknowledge their connection to the same land, but most importantly to plan how they would move forward to resolve a wrong committed in 1897. In the shade of their spiritual traditions, the descendants came together in prayer. The Mennonites and Lutherans from their Christian traditions and the nēhiyawak with their Sweat and Pipe Ceremonies, agreed, together, to pursue a claims settlement so that the nēhiyawak would once again find land to call home and return to be under the care of Mother Earth. Together, the new partners gave thanks for the gifts received from the Creator/God as they hold in great honour Stoney Knoll, once known as Young Chippewayan #107. Together, these Indigenous and Settler friends press ahead. The tools are there to be invoked and to carry out this living covenant: joint effort, the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, access to law advocates, and the strength of collective memory.



About Time: Relocating Hearts to Respect



SHANNON PEREZ is a member of the Sayisi Dene First Nation, and lives in Winnipeg with her husband and children. Shannon works for the Christian Reformed Church as the Canadian Ministries' Justice and Reconciliation Mobilizer, providing staff support to the Canadian Aboriginal Ministry Committee and fostering leadership among congregations for reconciliation and right relationships.

In some ways, the *Declaration* is a strange document. Many of the rights it articulates are ones the vast majority of Canadians take for granted. The *Declaration* takes these rights that every Settler assumes and applies them directly to Indigenous peoples. Common sense and courtesy, one would hope? Consider Article 10, which speaks of *the right to live on one's lands and not be removed without consent*:

No relocation shall take place without the free, prior, and informed consent of the Indigenous peoples concerned.

Sadly, frustratingly, such basic and obvious rights have not been accorded to untold numbers of Indigenous peoples. I speak as a Sayisi Dene woman, a member of a Nation that had such rights ignored.

My mother grew up in a community that was forcibly relocated two years before she was born. In 1956, the Sayisi Dene at Duck Lake (Northern Manitoba) were relocated by the Government of Canada to the barren shores of Hudson Bay near Churchill because of the government's flawed understandings of the threats to the caribou population in relation to the Sayisi Dene's subsistence lifestyle. Many people died and the relocation was, and still is, devastating to our identity, culture, and livelihood. My mother lives with the trauma of that forced relocation. Her family and community had to struggle to survive and to try to rebuild themselves without the benefit of other rights described in the *Declaration*.



A Sayisi Dene family in northern Manitoba (c. 1890s).
PHOTO: PUBLIC DOMAIN

Article 15:2 requires nation-states to

...combat prejudice and eliminate discrimination and to promote tolerance, understanding and good relations among indigenous peoples and all other segments of society.

I can tell you, the state did not promote tolerance or eliminate discrimination towards my family. Today, my family is very tired. We are suffering. Despair took over when our dignity and rights were ignored. We are tired of doing double the work to prove ourselves and seek justice in a society that doesn't value our contributions. I always wonder how much more my family could have given to me and to the world if their rights were respected from the beginning, if they were valued and loved as God taught us to love.

The legacy of colonialism has touched my family and far too many other Indigenous families in this place called Canada. Our churches need

to know these stories as part of the journey of reconciliation. My local church is on this journey. They are planning a Sunday service to hear my aunt talk about her experience of being relocated. This is one way of turning away from the past of paternalism and disrespect towards mutually respectful relationships with Indigenous peoples. We are getting to know each other. The old relationships of condescension and paternalism do not work. Relationships of reciprocity will. The preamble of the *Declaration* states that “all peoples contribute to the diversity and richness of civilizations and cultures, which constitute the common heritage of humankind.” My Christian Reformed pastor spoke recently in a sermon about the need to let go of universalizing expectations, so that we may be free to love unconditionally in our differences. This is a reflection of the basic Christian principle that all people are gifts created in God’s image. It is also a teaching that creation, in its incredible ecological diversity, impresses on us.

The Christian Reformed Church is learning the history of Indigenous people by studying the Doctrine of Discovery and its impacts on our denomination. The Church cannot be ignorant about the past and its current-day effects anymore. The Christian Reformed Church signed the ecumenical *New Covenant with Aboriginal Peoples* in 1987 and again in 2007 as a gesture of respect for and celebration of Indigenous rights, distinct identities, and self-determination. Honouring the *Declaration* and working for its implementation is a chance to live in respectful relationships that uphold the very same rights recognized in that *Covenant*.

The *Declaration* is a clear pathway to *never again*: we must never again allow a forced relocation, never again allow residential schools, and never again allow the patronizing postures that shaped colonial relationships and their ongoing legacy. And of course, the *Declaration* is also a call to stop those current colonial behaviours and practices that have persisted and show no signs of stopping. I think of the push by federal and provincial governments for various pipeline and dam projects without the grassroots consent of Indigenous nations.



Chief Joseph (1840-1904) / PHOTO: PUBLIC DOMAIN

Living implementation of the *Declaration* can become a pathway for mutual deference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. The *Declaration* is a gift to Canada and its churches for the journey of reconciliation. The critical thing is to push beyond good feelings to real, on-the-ground-commitment. Consider the words of the Nez Perce leader, *Hinmatóowyalahqit*, popularly known as Chief Joseph, who challenged the powers of Washington:

I have heard talk and talk, but nothing is done. Good words do not last long unless they amount to something. Words do not pay for my dead people. They do not pay for my country, now overrun by white men.... Good words will not give my people good health and stop them from dying. Good words will not get my people a home where they can live in peace and take care of themselves. I am tired of talk that comes to nothing. It makes my heart sick when I remember all the good words and broken promises.... You might as well expect the rivers to run backward as that any man who was born a free man should be contented when penned up and denied liberty to go where he pleases.... I have asked some of the great white chiefs where they get their authority to say to the Indian that he shall stay in one place, while he sees white men going where they please. They cannot tell me. Let me be a free man – free to travel, free to stop, free to work, free to trade where I choose, free to choose my own teachers, free to follow the religion of my fathers, free to think and talk and act for myself.

Chief Joseph spoke those words in 1879. One hundred and forty years later, we are still asking for recognition of our rights. It is time.



Connecting the Dots: Why Mennonites Should Support the *Declaration*



SUE EAGLE is co-director of Mennonite Central Committee Canada's Indigenous Work program. Along with her partner Harley and their daughters – Danielle and Emma – she lives in Coast Salish and Kwa'kwakawa'kw territory, in Courtenay, B.C.

The Mennonite community in Leamington, Ontario in which I grew up sought to preserve our language, culture, and faith, because it provided an anchor in turbulent times. A number of our older members, including my grandparents and father, were refugees from Ukraine. Many Mennonites, like my mother, my siblings, and I, were the first generation born in this country. Many of the first Mennonites here were provided with a loan for our travel by the Canadian Pacific Railway. We were able to secure land soon after our people first arrived, so that we could support ourselves through farming. We secured land to build Mennonite churches, which have been the foundation of our community. A weekly German Language school provided children with language instruction. A Mennonite high school was established so that the youth could learn about Mennonite theology, the Bible, and our collective history in a Christian setting, supported by Mennonite teachers. A retirement home, established 50 years ago, was built to provide supportive care for the elderly in our community.

There were times, during World War II, when our community experienced antagonism, even the overt threat of those who feared German-speaking Canadians. Yet for the most part, we maintained our culture, language, and religion without extreme hardship, and found support from government and existing community to do so.



Historically, since European contact in the 1740s, Indigenous nations living in what is now Essex County, where Leamington is located, faced severe adversity in maintaining their languages, culture, and spirituality. Historically, Pottawatomie, Odawa, Anishinaabe, and Wendat (Huron) all lived in the region. I found a map of old “Indian trails” around the county documented by Europeans between the 1740s and 1873. It's marked with Indigenous villages, mounds, cemeteries, and corn fields – fields which would have included beans, squash, and tobacco.

The 1790 McKee Purchase transferred land, which is now Essex County, to the Crown to give as grants to Settlers moving into the area from across the river in Detroit. Yet it is doubtful, according to historian Alvin Armstrong, that the Indigenous leaders who agreed to this understood it as anything more than a sharing of the land. The Indigenous bands in this area were referred to as the “Neutrals” by the French, as they did not engage in conflict with other nations,



Many Mennonites have suffered oppression and their culture, language, and spiritual traditions have helped them survive. / ART: RAY DIRKS

but were accomplished traders. They were pushed off their lands and taken advantage of due to their peaceful nature. The Wendat, due to encroaching settlement in what became Detroit, moved into the area south of the Detroit River. They became the focus of the Jesuit mission, but were eventually relocated north to accommodate more settlement. Many would die of the diseases that were brought by Europeans and many were killed due to conflicts resulting from colonization, including struggles over resources.

Alliances with Indigenous leaders like Tecumseh during the War of 1812 are well documented. Most know that history, or at least the name. Less well known are the Jesuit missions to the Huron (Wendat), or the many villages and communal meeting places that existed, including what the French called Bois Blanc (later Boblo Island) across from present-day Amherstburg. Records show that intermarriage of the Indigenous population with Settlers was common.

The names of the streets – including Wyandotte, Huron Church, Indian, and Chippewa – the town of Tecumseh, and a number of cemeteries in Windsor, Amherstburg, and Point Pelee provide clues to the Indigenous history.

The Caldwell Band, also known as the Chippewas of Point Pelee, lived near what is now Leamington until the 1850s. Gradually, most were pushed out by encroaching settlement. In the 1920s, RCMP and local law enforcement chased the rest of the members out of Point Pelee and burned their homes to force them to leave. Presently, they are revitalizing their community, and a 2010 land claims settlement has provided financial support to purchase a land base. People who live in the area will remember the reactions the Band received after the land claim was settled. “Not for Sale” signs went up in the area and the Chief’s home was vandalized. Tensions were enough to prompt a call to Mennonite Central

Committee and Christian Peacemaker Teams for support.

The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* provides support and protection for traditional lands and territories, culture, spirituality, and language, things that many Canadian Mennonites now take for granted. Surely those of us from Dutch-Mennonite backgrounds – whose people once faced similar experiences in the colonies of Ukraine – can understand how adopting and implementing the *Declaration* would be foundational in our journey towards reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.



Challenge to the Powers of State ... and Church



CHRIS BUDDEN is married to Wendy, has six children, and lives on the land of the Awabakal people. He is a Minister of the Uniting Church in Australia, presently serving with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, and teaches in the areas of theological ethics, reconciliation, and politics.

The modern history of Australia shares much in common with Canada, particularly in regard to First Peoples. Alongside the good and life-affirming things that mark this country is a history that is shaped by invasion, dispossession, abuse, and inequality. As the Church, we are required to pick

our way through a multitude of conflicting views and experiences. We try to understand where we stand and with whom we stand in our national stories as followers of Jesus.

For the Indigenous peoples of Australia, land was at the heart of life. It still is. Land is the foundation of Indigenous economies, legal traditions, relationships, and family structures. People and land are intimately bound to one another; as the land sustains all life, First Peoples have a responsibility to nurture the land, to tell and celebrate the stories that sustain it. Land is truly sacred because it reminds Indigenous



communities of those powerful spiritual events that maintain life.

Colonial invasion and settlement not only rob Indigenous peoples of the economic foundations of life, but also fracture their languages, cultures, and communities. The narratives that justify colonial activity further diminish dignity and humanity, as labels like “primitive,” “pagan” or “uncivilised” profoundly impact real relationships on the ground. In Australia there were no treaties, because the legal fiction that underpinned the nation was Terra Nullius – land empty and unoccupied. Too often the Church was also part of the dispossession and the story that justified it.

To be separated from land and the ability to exercise custodial care was and is soul-destroying. Literally. Indigenous people have struggled hard to stay near their land, often suffering exploitation and indignity in order to do so.

Consider the example of Western Australia. In that state, many Indigenous people stayed on their land as poorly paid workers. In 1968, the law required them to receive the same wage as Settler Australians. Most were no longer offered work, and were forced to leave their properties. A decade later there was a movement for Indigenous peoples to return to their “country,” and many small communities were established. While they are often economically poor communities, they are integral to identity, health, and well-being. To force Indigenous peoples to leave their land is nothing less than an act of genocide.

Recently, the federal government removed its basic services funding support for these communities, pushing responsibility onto state governments who can ill-afford this extra financial burden. There have been ongoing threats to close the communities and move people to other places.

The justification for this decision is simple. The dominant narrative in our world is about individual citizenship rights inside a free-market economy. The central feature of our identity is the freedom to participate in the economy – as producers or consumers. Thus, the rationalization offered for community closures was that they were not economically viable, and people who lived there could not fully participate in the economy.

This thin and ultimately death-dealing view of the world denies two things that are central to First Peoples – the necessity of collective rights (i.e., the rights they have as a community and not simply as individuals), and the importance of language and culture (sustained in such communities) to their identity. In the dominant world, First Peoples can not be First Peoples.

In this context, the *United Nation Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People* is vital. While Australia did not initially sign the *Declaration*, and took some years to do so, it is now part of the public story. The government claims that the *Declaration* embodies the sort of world and nation it wishes to inhabit and support. Having made this public commitment, the *Declaration* can become the measure for the things which the government does. It allows the Church and others who are active in support of First Peoples to challenge the government on its own terms: to hold a mirror up to it and ask how its actions reflect what it claims.

Yet note this. While the *Declaration* is certainly about Indigenous rights, it is not simply 46 separate “rights” articles. The *Declaration* is ultimately an alternative narrative. It lifts up another way of seeing the world rooted in Indigenous values that shines a critical light on the colonial imaginary and offers us all – both Indigenous and Settler peoples – another path. In so doing, it not only confronts state powers and their neo-liberal practices of assimilation, but also confronts the powers and practices of the Church.

When I read the *Declaration*, it is not hard to see a deep resonance with core values of the Christian tradition: values like reparative justice, the preferential option for the oppressed, and radical love and respect for neighbour. At the same time, it is not hard to see a profound challenge concerning the actual practice of those values, a call to recover values that may have been deeply suppressed in our tradition(s), and an invitation to learn new values that our tradition simply might not have. When I read the *Declaration*, I find myself asking:

- Who does the Church share its life with?
- Where does the Church locate itself in society?
- What are we going to do about the land we occupy and the tangible need for reparations?

- Why are our Christian traditions, in contrast to Indigenous ways, so disconnected to the actual places in which we live?
- What kind of spaces do First Peoples find in the Church? And what kind of space is the Church?
- How does the Church's proclamation of the gospel contribute to assimilation?
- How can our spiritual disciplines and practices sustain people's identity?

There are so many questions that we need to wrestle with. But I thank God for the *Declaration*, and the many Indigenous peoples who fought for it. In the struggle in Western Australia, it was the foundation for the Church's place in public protest, our resistance to narratives of oppression, and our engagement in public discourse. I pray that the *Declaration* will continue to spur the Church into such spaces of solidarity and resistance. Yet I also pray that we will have the courage to allow the *Declaration* and its alternative narrative to challenge the powers that are closer to home.



They Did Right

a short list of Christian Settlers who honoured Indigenous rights

STEVE HEINRICHS

The Settler Church has done much harm to Indigenous peoples – from outright denial of rights, to attempted cultural assimilation and genocide.

Yet, alongside these dark and dominant stories of betrayal (stories we need to know and embrace), there are also small, alternative narratives that we can draw inspiration from – stories of Settler Christians who walked in solidarity with host peoples.



BARTOLOMÉ DE LAS CASAS 1484–1566

The Dominican friar publicly opposes the horrific violence of Spanish colonists, defending the humanity and rights of West Indies Indigenous peoples. Las Casas is far from perfect – at one time he lifts up the African slave trade as a way to offset the



WILLIAM PENN 1644–1718

Penn receives a Charter from the British Crown for his Quaker colony, but moved by a concern for justice and friendship he seeks out the Delaware – the Indigenous people who held jurisdiction to the territory – and establishes his community



PHILADELPHIA YEARLY MEETING 1763

Disturbed by fellow Christians who were settling on contested lands, the Quaker Philadelphia meeting decides to prohibit such activity: *"Friends should not purchase nor remove to settle such lands as have not been fairly and openly first purchased from Indians by those persons who are or may be fully authorized by the government to make such purchases."* Two weeks later, the Royal Proclamation of King George III comes into effect, creating a vast Indian Reserve west of the Appalachians. The Philadelphia Yearly Meeting actually withholds membership from fellow Christians who move west, in violation of the royal decree.



ABORIGINES PROTECTION SOCIETY (APS) 1836–1909

Driven by the energies and influence of many women, the APS is an international humanitarian rights organization that seeks to defend the interests of Indigenous peoples, especially within the British Empire. Critics rightly point out that it often proposes policy solutions about First Nations without First Nations and is imbued with assimilationist goals. *That cannot be excused.* Yet it should be noted that the APS resists British attempts at relocating Indigenous communities, repeatedly calls the government to honour Treaties, speaks out against British Columbia's neglect of Native title, and even purchases lands for Mi'kmaq peoples on the East Coast.



REVEREND ARTHUR E. O'MEARA 1861–1928

A missionary in the Yukon and British Columbia, O'Meara works tirelessly to have the Indigenous rights of the western First Nations recognized by the government of Canada. Though mocked and bullied by colonial authorities, he is steadfast, using his position in the church to pursue justice for the Cowichan, the Nisga'a, and the Allied Tribes of British Columbia as their legal counsel. O'Meara even travels to England to carry an Indigenous petition to the Crown in 1909.



ELAINE GOODALE EASTMAN 1863–1953

Partner to the Dakota doctor Ohiyeesa (Charles Eastman), Elaine Goodale fights against the removal of Native American children to distant boarding schools, while starting a day school on a Dakota reservation. Goodale also collaborates with her husband to record his story which powerfully communicates both the beauty of Dakota lifeways and the impact of assimilation and racism on Dakota communities.



IAN MACKENZIE 1969

Mackenzie, an Anglican priest, connects with Bob Thomas, a Cherokee organizer and activist, and together they seek to bridge the religious divide between Christians and traditionalists, a divide that has fractured many Indigenous communities. From 1970 to 1992, the *Indian Ecumenical Conference* comes together, building friendships, understanding, and new collaborations. For Mackenzie, it is an opportunity for Christians "to begin to learn something about how to live their own religion from Indians."



ECUMENICAL SUPPORT FOR THE AMERICAN INDIAN MOVEMENT 1960s–70s

Roman Catholic, Episcopal, Methodist and other church communities send tens of thousands of dollars to support Native American activist agendas. In late March of 1973, during the reclamation of Wounded Knee, 4,000 people attend a special



PROJECT NORTH 1970s

Project North – sponsored by the Anglican, Lutheran, Mennonite, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, and United churches – seeks to come alongside Indigenous communities in their struggles around land claims and Northern development. One significant battle they wage concerns the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline. In solidarity with the Dene, Project North embraces a "moratorium" position, which is adopted by Judge Thomas Berger.



ELAINE BISHOP AND BETTY PETERSON 1988

Having sought justice in the courts for over a decade, the Lubicon Cree in northern Alberta assert their sovereignty by setting up a peaceful blockade in their territory. The blockade shuts down all oil extraction and raises the ire of big business and the RCMP. Standing with the Lubicon are Settler allies, including Elaine Bishop and Betty Peterson – two Quaker women. Six days later, the RCMP officers forcibly remove the barricades and arrest Elaine, Betty, and 26 other resisters. Though put in jail, they are later released when the judge refuses to board a special plane provided by the province to get to the remote community.



CHRISTIAN PEACEMAKER TEAMS 1999

Asubpeeschoseewagong (Grassy Narrows) First Nations sets up a blockade to resist the ongoing deforestation of their traditional territory and violation of Treaty rights. Christian Peacemaker Teams is invited to join them on the blockades... and continues the working friendship to this day.



KAIROS CANADA 2011

In 2007, the Canadian government votes against the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Churches had been working for a long time, behind the scenes, in support of the *Declaration*. In 2011, KAIROS – the largest ecumenical social justice organization in Canada – organizes a march of 350 banners through Ottawa calling for its implementation.

Preach the Ground Level



RYAN DUECK is pastor at Lethbridge Mennonite Church in Treaty 7 Territory, Alberta. He is the proud husband of Naomi and the father of two amazing Indigenous youth – Claire and Nicolas. Ryan writes at www.ryandueck.com.

I entered the run-down apartment and was greeted by group of people sitting in the living room while the country music station blared loudly from the TV in the corner. There were loud hellos and semi-awkward introductions, before people gradually began to trickle out to the street.

“Those are my street brothers.” The voice came from a little old man who had come tottering into the living room. His name was Leroy. He was actually not very

old at all, I would discover, only 49. But he looked far older than that. To say that the years had not been kind would be the height of understatement. His body was thin and frail, his long black hair hanging over stooped shoulders and heavily bruised arms. He had few remaining teeth and a nose that had been broken many times. The knobby knees and stick legs emerging out from under his shorts revealed numerous scars. His movements were painfully slow. He slumped down on the couch looking like one of the most defeated human beings I have ever met.

His wife Sandy sat down beside him. She, too, was thin. She, too, was quite obviously well acquainted with the harsher side of life. We began to talk and a painfully familiar and familiarly painful story



“Christ of the Breadlines.” / ART: FRITZ EICHENBERG

emerged. Leroy's parents died when he was 12. He had spent a bit of time in a residential school, but ran away. After his parents died, he went to a white foster family. "They didn't like me," he said. "They beat me. So I ran again. I've been living on the streets since I was 16."

The story got worse. I heard of near-death experiences, of crippling addiction to alcohol and drugs, of a long train of broken relationships, of kids and grandkids that he rarely saw. Leroy had also been forgetting things recently, seeing dark visions, wandering aimlessly around the house, confused, at all hours of the night. "I don't know how to help him anymore," Sandy said. She looked at him. He looked down. "Sometimes she gets angry at me when I forget stuff," he mumbled. Sandy looked out the window, a tear falling down her cheek.

I glanced at the walls that surrounded us. There were pictures of Mary and Jesus alongside kitschy Bible verses in calligraphy with lace borders. There was a poster advertising a Pow-Wow on the local reserve that must have been at least 5 years old. There was also a picture of a basketball team, with a strong, happy-looking black-haired young man front and centre. Beside the picture were some awards and plaques: "Most improved player." "Honours student." "Player of the month." And beside these, an obituary. I swallowed hard. "Is this your son?" Sandy nodded. "What happened," I asked, inwardly bracing for the response I knew was coming. "He hung himself," Sandy said. She looked out the window again. The tears flowed freely.

And then, into this ocean of sadness, we set out in our little rowboat of prayer. I sat down on a rickety chair with an old pair of socks hanging on the back, joined hands with Leroy and Sandy and pleaded for mercy to the God who said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," to the suffering God well-acquainted with sorrow and rejection. We prayed for healing, for peace, for strength, for any kind of goodness and joy to find its way into all this pain and confusion. We prayed that God would banish the "dark spirits" that Leroy had been encountering in his nocturnal walks (there had apparently been a murder in this place prior to them moving in). We prayed that the doctors could help uncloud Leroy's mind. We thanked God for Leroy's faith, even in the midst of a

life of struggle ("Yeah, amen!" Leroy mumbled at this point). We prayed for some shred of hope and light for these two dear people so well acquainted with darkness and despair.

Leroy and Sandy's friends returned. One of them, Maurice, surveyed the scene of sorrow and began to add some more of his own. I told him how very sorry I was that the Church bearing Jesus' name had been involved in such awful stories for his people. "It's okay," he said. "I don't blame the Church.... I'm not sure we would have been any better if we were the ones in power... I dunno... power... it does something to people." He paused. Then he said, "You know," he said, "I think if we all just realized that we're the same, that none of us are any better than the others, we could fix a lotta stuff."

On September 13, 2007, the United Nations adopted the *United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* to enshrine the rights that "constitute the minimum standards for the survival, dignity, and well-being of the indigenous peoples of the world." In November 2015, the government of Canada officially endorsed the *Declaration* as a framework for our nation's relationship with Indigenous peoples. I am glad that this document will guide and constrain us as a nation going forward. But the *Declaration* should be entirely redundant. Its 40 or so articles basically amount to Maurice's affirmation that "none of us are any better than the others."

As a pastor, I don't make grand pronouncements like the *Declaration*. But I do stand up in front of a group of people every week and attempt to point toward an alternative reality, toward something called "the kingdom of God." I bring people face-to-face with words from Jesus like:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me to bring good news to the
poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and
recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go
free
(Luke 4:18-19).

Or words like these, from the prophet Isaiah:

Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven
ground shall become level, and the rough places a
plain.

Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all
people shall see it
together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken (Isaiah
40:4-5).

Every week, it is my job to hold this vision before a
community that sees the life and work of Jesus as the
script for our local performances of the Gospel, and
to ask hard questions. Questions like,

- Are we, as a community, good news to the poor?
- Are we in the business of seeking liberation and
release for the harassed and oppressed? Are we
convinced that God cares about level ground?
- Are we open to possibility that if the “glory of the
Lord” is to be seen by all people, it might require
some of us who have known little but privilege
and opportunity to be brought low so that those
who have not can be raised up?
- Are we open to hearing good news – news that
wounds and liberates us from hurtful attitudes
and damaging assumptions about our
neighbours?
- Are we open to hearing this news from unlikely
sources and unsanctioned places?

These are not very convenient questions to
ask. But if I am going to pretend to speak about
Jesus Christ and the kingdom he proclaimed,
they are unavoidable. I cannot call what I am
doing “preaching” if my words do not speak truly
about those God cares about, if they do not make
some small effort at levelling the playing field.
I can not proclaim a king like Jesus or a kingdom like
the one he inaugurated without people like Leroy
looking over my shoulder, steering my words back
toward level ground.

If my words only “work” in well-manicured church
sanctuaries but not in run-down apartments soaked
with suffering and sadness, then they are not Gospel
words. Or, to put it another way, if it is not good news

for Leroy, then maybe it should not be good news for
me either.



Hearing Gospel in the Waters: A Dialogue

A dialogue between

ADRIAN JACOBS & DAVID DRIEDGER



ADRIAN JACOBS is a father of five and grandfather of two. He is the Keeper of the Circle at Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre, the national Indigenous ministry training centre for The United Church of Canada, located in Beausejour, Manitoba (Treaty 1).



DAVID DRIEDGER is associate minister at First Mennonite Church in Winnipeg. When he is not reading Deleuze or Freud, David loves being with his partner Chantal and son Salem.

ADRIAN: The release of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and its 94 *Calls to Action* is a kairos moment in Canadian history. The western Christian Church has been complicit in the colonial project by attempting to civilize Indigenous peoples through overt assimilation policies and practices like the Indian Residential Schools. But it is not only the schools. The same churches that ran the residential schools also sought to Christianize Indigenous peoples, making them into members of their particular denominations. And in the process of converting Indigenous peoples, many were cut off from their lands, languages, elders, and community leaders as Settler Christian values, cultures, languages, and ways were imposed on them.

Call to Action 48 summons churches to embrace the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, which asserts, among other things, the recognition of Indigenous land rights and the right to self-governance. Moreover, churches are asked to report on the progress they have made in ensuring that their Indigenous constituents are treated in compliance with the *Declaration*. Policies, programs, and procedures reflective of the Policy of Assimilation should have no place in Indigenous faith communities.

David, in your reflections on contemporary

missions, you speak of Christian mission as arising from a “superiority” perspective. Your concerns are in agreement with the *Declaration*, when it declares this kind of approach in any doctrine as “racist... morally condemnable and socially unjust.”

DAVID: I was born and raised in the cradle of the colonial project in Canada. My ancestors came to the newly established province of Manitoba in 1876. Five years earlier, Treaty 1 was negotiated to make space for settlement. The negotiations included threats directed at the Indigenous peoples in the form of white Settlers. Wemyss Simpson, the Crown’s Indian Commissioner, stated in his journals, “We told them whether they wished it or not, immigrants would come in and fill up the country, that every year from this one twice as many in number as their whole people there assembled would pour into the Province, and in a little while would spread all over it, and that now was the time for them to come to an arrangement.” My people were given safe passage and settlement in Canada to fulfill this threat. My story as a Canadian was birthed in actions that the *Declaration* now condemns. It has taken me some time both to understand and *feel* the significance of my history in this context (and to be sure I have not felt it fully).

In light of these realities and further reflection on the history and theology of Christian missions, I have come to the conclusion that Christian missions have been and continue to be a *supremacist* expression. By that I simply mean that *Christians have been trained to approach (and actively pursue) strangers with an understanding that they are insufficient prior to any knowledge or relationship with them.* So I am certainly in agreement with the *Declaration’s* condemnation of such a posture to cross-cultural or inter-religious relations. The question that lingers, and the one that

Prayers in Thompson.

by J. M. R. LeJeune S. M. P.

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1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16. 17. 18. 19. 20. 21. 22. 23. 24. 25. 26. 27. 28. 29. 30. 31. 32. 33. 34. 35. 36. 37. 38. 39. 40. 41. 42. 43. 44. 45. 46. 47. 48. 49. 50. 51. 52. 53. 54. 55. 56. 57. 58. 59. 60.

I am forced to engage as a pastor is, “What remains of the Gospel?”

ADRIAN: I see your writing as encouraging the middle ground of encounter between individuals and communities and being the place where gospel goes back and forth. This is not a one-way street, from those who see themselves as sufficient to those who are inadequate (that’s Christian superiority).

In the space you’re describing, David, that of the middle ground between peers, I see novices and those long in the tooth on equally legitimate grounds of integrity where each voice is respected. Consider the Haudenosaunee Two Row Wampum belt. It has three rows of beads separating the two “river of life” vessels and describes what a respectful relationship between people(s) is: desire for peace, the reciprocity of friendship, and the strength that comes when things are in right relationship.

I would suggest another view of what “preaching the Gospel” can mean: sharing gift, the story(ies) of our people’s engagement with God/Creator/the divine. Each of us understands this. This engagement is variously informed by our understanding of Scripture, creation’s voice, conscience, and the wisdom of our elders. For me, this includes the narrative of Jesus. I have received such as a life-giving gift. And I am happy to share such as gift – no strings or demands attached, to be embraced, interpreted, responded to as the receiving community sees fit. As peers, we have a sibling care for each other as individuals and communities. We are our sibling’s keeper.

DAVID: I certainly resonate with the desire for mutuality, that if the Gospel is to be good news it cannot be in the sole possession of one group or individual and must be able to move where it needs to. My understanding of the Gospel is that it is *problematic*. In other words, it makes problems in its resistance of powers that destroy as it makes spaces of healing and empowerment for those who suffer. The Gospel is never settled but always problematic. In this way I have gone so far as to say that, “The *good news* of the Christian declaration is *nothing in itself*.” The Gospel is heard in the way that those who suffer become misaligned to the powers opening a new possibility.

From what I know of you, Adrian, I see this reflected in your life, in the way that you have maintained a witness to the “power of the Gospel.” But this is a witness that has come through and been invigorated by your formation in traditional Indigenous spirituality. Such a witness seems to have put an orthodox understanding of the Gospel into misalignment. *Something* seems to have emerged in your life particular to your ability to continue listening to what has often been perceived as distinct if not antagonistic worlds (at least by Christians). In this way, according to your imagery of the Wampum belt, perhaps it is the waters, the living movement between differences, which finally speaks the Gospel.

ADRIAN: My last name is Jacobs, which means “struggler.” I have struggled much with the Gospel and with my upbringing in the traditional religion and ways of my ancestors. I have never been happy with the idea of Christian faith turning me into something other than what Creator made me in the beginning of my life and all that shaped me as an Indigenous person. To then think I am to be changed into something so at odds with this, such as a foreign identity, does not make sense. I know what Creator has given our people and I am happy to have found this living water medium to receive a gift that has helped me to be a better Indigenous person. This is a gift received, but – as with all gifts – it has been on my terms as an Indigenous person.

DAVID: Thanks for sharing your gift, Adrian. I feel inadequate when engaging the *Declaration’s* call in relation to our Christian faith and the dominant Settler practice of Christianity. I have had to still many voices to think through this, and now hope to hear what the waters between are saying. I’m grateful for our ongoing friendship, which is helping me make my way.

■

Talking Resilience and Recovery: A KAIROS Conversation



As Canada's leading ecumenical justice organization, **KAIROS** has been at the fore of Christian advocacy on various human rights and ecological issues since 2001. A prime focus for KAIROS is living into right relations with Indigenous peoples. As such, they are no strangers to the *Declaration*. In this article, **KATY QUINN, ED BIANCHI, SARA ANDERSON,** and **JENNIFER HENRY** from KAIROS explore what it might mean to Christian communities.

Why is the *Declaration* important?

KATY: Significantly, the *Declaration* was created in partnership with Indigenous peoples. It is the first international human rights instrument developed with the full participation of the rights-holders themselves. It was a long, arduous, 20-year process that required sacrifice, dedication, and determination from many people. The *Declaration* fully acknowledges the human rights of Indigenous peoples and for the first time provides a strong framework for reconciliation.

ED: Some of those involved in its development feel too much was compromised on its way to being adopted by the UN. It's important to remember that the *Declaration* sets out a minimum standard for the well-being of Indigenous peoples and so it is crucial that rights described are not watered down during implementation.

SARA: Given the comprehensive process that led to the global consensus about what constitutes the collective rights of Indigenous peoples and the individual rights of Indigenous men, women, and children, it's easy to see why the *Declaration* has been identified by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and others as a framework and foundation for reconciliation. If Indigenous peoples



Ellen Gabriel (Mohawk) speaks at the KAIROS 'Roll with the Declaration' event in 2011. / PHOTO: KAIROS

in Canada are not able to enjoy the basic rights that ensure their dignity and survival, how can we expect to repair the relationship between them and the rest of Canada?

How do we live into it in our day-to-day lives?

KATY: By ensuring that Indigenous rights are respected in relationship, whether it's the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Crown, or the relationship between a congregation and the neighbouring First Nation. We all have a responsibility to ensure our governments actively work toward fully implementing the *Declaration*. We also have a responsibility to work at adopting and complying with the *Declaration* at a much more personal level. Achieving a genuine nation-to-nation relationship where the core principal of

the *Declaration*, self-determination, is realized, will require us to decolonize our minds, hearts, and spirits.

JENNIFER: We need to learn the real history of Canada, the history we were not taught in school. We need to build respectful relationships that enable us to learn from each other as Settlers and Indigenous peoples. We need to let that good learning and those relationships transform the way we live in the world. This kind of personal, hard work, commitment, and action is what will lead us to the systemic change that is needed for living into the *Declaration* as a country.

What does the *Declaration* mean to us as Christians?

JENNIFER: Chapter and verse, or the articles of the *Declaration*, are important, but so are the principles, and the spirit. What are those principles? Things like “self determination” or “nothing about us without us,” the right of Indigenous peoples to be defined not by others but to determine their own future. The *Declaration* was written by Indigenous peoples to safeguard Indigenous rights, to ensure their survival. As Christians, we are required to honour the dignity of every human person made in the image of God.

ED: We may also consider how to honour the diverse culture and identity of every nation, which we could also understand as reflective of God’s diverse vision of humanity. Honouring every person, every nation, means listening to their self-definition, respecting their right to define themselves, and responding in responsibility to what they identify as their rights, what they identify as the necessities for their survival or, even more, their thriving. For far too long the Church has tried to control and define Indigenous peoples. Listening to and being guided by the *Declaration* means responding in deep respect to the peoples the Creator loved into being, and their particular wisdom and way of being in the world.

How can the *Declaration* impact the way we approach theology?

JENNIFER: Our theologies got tangled up in the colonizing project. Early Church ideas that aided explorers – that Indigenous peoples could and should be dominated for their own sake – were codified in ways of thinking and in law, in processes we now refer to as the Doctrine of Discovery. While we try to repudiate or turn our backs on these ideas, we need to be clear what we embrace or move toward.

Perhaps the *Declaration* can contribute to a Doctrine of Recovery, a Doctrine of Liberation, a completely different starting place for how we understand one another in God’s world. Christian theologies were used to suppress and attack Indigenous wisdom and spirituality. If we begin with a different place, offered by the *Declaration*, a place of equality and mutual respect, then we have the potential for dialogue across our truths, finding places of deep understanding and convergence, and finding places of difference that can complement and challenge our perspectives, in a creative way.

SARA: The *Declaration*, along with other important works such as the *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (2015) and the report of the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (1996), offer us Christian Settlers a vision of what a respectful relationship with Indigenous peoples looks like without a colonizing agenda. The *Declaration* provides us with a response to the call for justice and for living in right relationship with Indigenous peoples, one that comes not from the conquering colonizer but the resilient colonized. If we as Christians take seriously the articles and spirit of the *Declaration*, I think it can transform our thinking and our ways of living into reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

How can we as church members hold our national Church bodies accountable so that adoption of the *Declaration* moves forward in a timely way?

KATY: The first thing to do is find out if your national Church has made statements or commitments to the *Declaration*. Ask your national Church what it is doing to respond to this Call to Action and how individual congregations and regional church communities can be involved.

SARA: These steps must be followed by a widespread education campaign, so that congregations and communities across the country are aware of the nature and content of the *Declaration*, why it is important, and what role the Church can play in its implementation. Invite members of Indigenous communities on whose territories you meet to speak to the ways in which your community can walk in solidarity with them as they work to uphold the *Declaration*. Meet with Settlers in your area to find out how to support each other in this journey.

It's important to remember that this must be the beginning of a long dialogue, as the implications of the *Declaration* are both deep and wide.



Centring Indigenous Peoples at Siloam



LAIZA PACHECO grew up in Treaty 5 Territory in Gillam, Manitoba, and the city of Winnipeg in Treaty 1 Territory. She has worked at Siloam Mission since 2013, starting the Exit Up! program in May 2014, and now works as the Director of Programs. Laiza has had the privilege of working in the social services field, predominantly with the Indigenous community, since 1997.



MELANIE KAMPEN is from Treaty 1 Territory, and worked in Siloam Mission's Progressive Services department from 2014–2015. Currently pursuing a PhD in Theology at Emmanuel College at the University of Toronto, her work focuses on the interlocking structures of Christianity and colonialism in Canada.

“Well, it seems a good book – strange that the white people are no better, after having had it so long.”

CHIEF DROWNING BEAR (Cherokee)
on the Bible and White Christianity (1836).

It's an overstatement, but Drowning Bear highlights the contentious relationship Christianity has often had with difference, and with “the other,” since its institutional beginnings. With the close of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Christian churches and organizations across the country are beginning to see the importance of changing how they relate to Indigenous peoples, from postures of paternalism and superiority to relationships built on respect, equality, and equity, and real recognition of the rights of Indigenous peoples.

Siloam Mission is a Christian humanitarian organization in Winnipeg that offers emergency services to transition individuals out of homelessness and poverty – three meals a day, an overnight shelter, a clothing room, a clinic for physical health services, resources for mental health, supportive housing, and more. Although Siloam did not develop its services with the *Declaration* specifically in mind, the staff and



Members of Winnipeg's under-resourced community wait outside Siloam Mission / WAYNE GLOWACKI / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

volunteers seek to honour what is expressed in Article 7 – the right that Indigenous individuals have to “life, physical and mental integrity, liberty, and security of person.” By acknowledging all community members as full persons, fellow humans with their own agency, identity, experiences, and ambitions, Siloam Mission aims to provide all services in a respectful manner that is centred on the needs of the community and the individuals who access the services.

Approximately 70 percent of community members who come to Siloam identify as First Nations, Inuit, or Métis. This statistic cannot be understood apart from settler colonialism. The purpose of church-run Indian Residential and Day Schools, the Sixties scoop (systematic removal of native children into non-native homes), and legislation like the Indian Act, was to ensure Settler sovereignty through the cultural and



PHOTO: PHIL HOSSACK / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

physical genocide of Indigenous peoples, and, where this could not be accomplished, coercive assimilation into Euro-Canadian culture. The goal, as Duncan Campbell Scott, the deputy superintendent of the Department of Indian Affairs, put it back in 1920, was “to get rid of the Indian problem.” The degree to which these colonial policies impacted the socio-economic challenges that many Indigenous people in Canada face today cannot be overstated. The staff and volunteers at Siloam Mission understand the deep connections between intergenerational trauma in Indigenous communities and the services provided to community members. This creates a potentially contentious situation given Siloam’s Christian roots.

Although Siloam is a Christian organization, we encourage everyone to explore and practice their own spiritual path. Support and assistance is offered to help make this happen, including connecting community members with Indigenous staff and volunteers, as well as elders, spiritual leaders, and ceremonies in the neighbourhood. While Siloam is grounded in its own Nazarene Christian tradition, and its values and services come out of that belief system, this is not imposed on anyone else.

The organization is committed to honouring the right expressed in Article 8 that

Indigenous peoples and individuals have the right not to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture.

Siloam Mission’s Exit Up! Program is a focused effort to support young Indigenous people exiting, or who have exited from, the child welfare system. Article 21 of the *Declaration* states that

Indigenous peoples have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions, including, inter alia, in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and retraining, housing, sanitation, health and social security.

Exit Up! facilitates this by providing supportive housing, life skills workshops, and resources to pursue education and employment.

Recent statistics have shown that nearly 50 percent of the homeless population in Canada have had experiences in the child welfare system. In the province of Manitoba, over 80 percent of the children and youth in the Child and Family services system are Indigenous. In recognition of this gross

overrepresentation, development of the Exit Up! program inevitably required careful consideration and attention to the cultures and unique experiences of Indigenous peoples. Exit Up! is intentionally delivered by only Indigenous staff who impart their traditional approach to holistic healing to the young people participating in the program. It was crucial in the development of this program to amplify and honour the Indigenous peoples' right to self-determination by ensuring that Indigenous people led the direction and implementation of this program. This initiative resonates with Article 23:

...indigenous peoples have the right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic and social programmes affecting them and, as far as possible, to administer such programmes through their own institutions.

While many of Siloam's policies and operational approaches honour several aspects of the *Declaration*, there is room to grow. Consider our Transition Services program which seeks to help individuals move out of homelessness and poverty. This program is primarily accessed by non-Indigenous people; approximately 34 percent of the individuals meeting with case managers are First Nations, Métis, or Inuit. This is highly disproportionate with the number of Indigenous community members who access Siloam Mission's emergency services. One of the reasons for this is that, while Exit Up! is an Indigenous-run program, most of Siloam's other programs and services are not; the representation of staff and volunteers is still predominantly non-Indigenous.

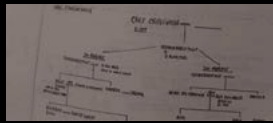
What this means for programs like Transition Services, is that individuals accessing them are required to adhere to a specific set of practices that are governed by a linear view of time and contractual relationships. While Transition Services is intentionally person-centred, it is still by-and-large a clinical approach to helping. Individuals wanting to access the program must meet with case management workers who are usually white and who operate on a tight schedule of appointments. Because of the historical and intergenerational trauma so many Indigenous people have experienced, and the discrimination and racism they continue to

experience on a daily basis, there is an overt power imbalance between the non-Indigenous workers and the Indigenous individuals who may want to access the services.

The *Declaration* pushes against this model for transition programming. Articles 13.1 and 34 present Siloam with the challenge to take Indigenous histories, languages, oral traditions, and philosophies seriously. Many Indigenous philosophies of life contain a cyclical view of time in which trusting relationships are built over continuous encounters, mutual support, and circles of care. In contrast, Transition Services offers a one-on-one approach in a formal setting that develops on a predefined timeline of progress or transition. The right of Indigenous peoples to "promote, develop, and maintain their institutional structures and their distinctive customs, spirituality, traditions, procedures, and practices" challenges Transition Services to rethink its model for helping individuals in the community transition out of homelessness. In a similar vein, this mandate also challenges the organization as a whole to redesign its operational structure to reflect and honour the right to self-determination, which the articles we have addressed express in multidimensional ways.

It is imperative that any organization that provides services to marginalized populations recognize and acknowledge the inherent power imbalance present between the service providers and the individuals accessing the service. This especially runs true for a non-Indigenous agency that provides services to a predominantly Indigenous population. This does not mean that quality and effective services cannot be achieved in a non-Indigenous organization; however, recognizing this power imbalance and its overall impact is essential to developing meaningful, beneficial, and effective programs. It is the responsibility of any organization to establish an operational philosophy that incorporates the *Declaration* in order to genuinely honour and recognize the traumatic historical and present experiences of Indigenous peoples.

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PART 4

For decades, stories have spread throughout the village of Laird, Saskatchewan. It is said that First Nation descendants of an old treaty have visited shopkeepers and town officials. It began back in the 1970s. Indigenous leaders insisted that a treaty signed between their people and the British Crown had given them land - land that was currently occupied by the settlers.

When a group of Mennonites and Lutherans look into the story, they discover that their land is in fact the former reserve of the Young Chippewyan First Nation. As they grapple with the betrayals and broken relationships that have brought them to this uncertain place, they are not sure how to respond. And then it happens. A chief and a descendant of the Young Chippewyan Band decide to invite the local community to a meeting at Stoney Knoll - a sacred site on the former reserve.

Myths, assumptions, and fears are shattered as this old injustice is about to provide an opportunity for friendship and kindle a fierce determination to repair the wrongs of the past.



PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

PART 4

PART 5

PART 5: Next Steps: Learning Rights, Living Responsibilities

Confessional



MELANIE DENNIS UNRAU lives on Treaty 1 Territory in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Author of *Happiness Threads: The Unborn Poems* (Muses' Company, 2013) and poetry editor at *Geez* magazine, Melanie is preparing to write a PhD dissertation on protest poetry at the University of Manitoba.



When I was a white middle class kid I wanted to be a missionary.
I know something about zeal and good intentions.

In summer I volunteered at an inner-city day camp where my strength was belting
oh you can't get to heaven on the long bus ride to the waterslides or the zoo.

Now I'm content to let my faith go lukewarm and try to light a fire under my politics.
Even that old male god with his tepid coffee would spit me out.

I own land, drive a car, go shopping, fight the pipelines in our racist city where I belong
with Shoal Lake water for the laundry and mukluks to warm my feet.

That woman on the bus is angry and when she sees my guilt-laced fear she plays
cat-and-mouse with me for once, watches me jump when she goes boo.

When I pass my spare change through the car window I am the one grovelling.
I say take care, stay warm but want to say sorry, hand over the keys.

We learn to mistrust the poor, the Indigenous here, yet it's clear who the greedy are.
Canadian comforts cling like static. I let go and nothing falls away.

Weak ally, coward, self-absorbed, wretched, I turn from the grace of the sage bowl
not sure what to do with my overfull hands, my wincing need for mercy.

Between 1900 and 1959, there was a small Métis community in the south part of Winnipeg, known as Rooster Town. Many of the families owned their homes. Others rented. Though the conditions were difficult – there was no running water and housing was substandard – it was home. But in 1959, Rooster Town was shut down.

The city of Winnipeg had opened a school nearby and planned the creation of a park and other amenities, including a shopping mall. A community of under-resourced Métis was not seen as desirable in the growing suburbs. And thus the city offered the various families an ultimatum: receive a cash payment of \$50 to \$75 dollars or face eviction proceedings. / PHOTO: MANITOBA ARCHIVES / PUBLIC DOMAIN

Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery: A Call to Action



SYLVIA MCADAM (Saysewahum) is a nēhiyaw (Cree) author, lawyer, protector, and defender of land and water. A co-founder of Idle No More, Sylvia is also a proud mother and grandmother.

Everything has a beginning, a genesis, its “birth” so to speak. And so it is for the Doctrine of Discovery. It almost sounds like an adventure, this Doctrine of Discovery – a journey to discover, seek, and learn new and wonderful things. Yet the reality is anything but wonderful – it is the opposite of all that is just, ethical, and moral. The genocide committed under the Doctrine of Discovery (also referred to as the Doctrine of Christian Discovery or Doctrine of Dominance) must be brought into the light for all to see. Great Indigenous scholars like Steven Newcomb, Tamara Starblanket, Vine Deloria Jr, Arthur Manuel, and Sharon Venne have written about the Doctrine of Discovery bringing attention to its brutal global impact. I invite each reader to research the information provided in this article as a part of one’s duty to live morally, and to help all our children walk toward a future of peace.

Let’s be clear: Indigenous peoples have always been here in these lands now known as “Canada.” We lived as vibrant, independent, and free peoples enjoying structured leadership, centuries-honed legal systems, and intimate relationships with all the diverse landscapes and waterscapes that make up Turtle Island. Our Indigenous history did not begin with the arrival of Europeans. What happened when Europeans arrived is a critical turning point that all Christians need to understand so that they may be given the opportunity to take action. *Please consider this article a “call to action.”*



Pope Nicholas V issued the infamous papal bull *Romanus Pontifex*.
IMAGE: PUBLIC DOMAIN

The Doctrine of Discovery is a complex legal tradition that arose in western Europe during the medieval period. And the Church played a central role. A series of papal bulls both reflected the thinking of dominant European powers and reinforced the trajectory of justifying conquest by Christendom powers. Among them was the 1455 Papal Bull, *Romanus Pontifex*, which sanctified the seizure of newly “discovered” lands and encouraged the enslavement of native peoples. Then, in 1493, Pope Alexander VI issued *Inter Caetera*, which gave the Americas to Spain and Portugal. It is through this that the infamous explorer (or land speculator) Christopher Columbus was given his royal prerogatives. Columbus’ prerogatives were to subdue, convert, or kill the barbarians and assert the Monarchy’s title to the land; in other words, to colonize the lands and its peoples. With his royal rights in hand, Columbus arrived to the far south of Turtle Island.

His first act was one rich with Christian symbolism. He planted a sword into the soil and invoked a Christian chant that baptized the lands. This chant was a symbolic act of asserting sovereignty and dominance over Indigenous peoples, lands, and all that came with it. This seemingly simple act – a symbolic Christian ritual – set in motion a series of horrific events still felt today in many Canadian court cases, laws and policies.

Briefly, the 15th-century papal bulls defined all unbaptized persons, including Indigenous peoples (Original peoples), as barbarians, heathens, pagans, infidels, and savages. Only Christians were considered humans. Since they could not kill all the barbarians in order to acquire the wealth of land and resources, they had to do something with us. Thus began a horrific forced baptism of Indigenous peoples based on the belief that we became somewhat human through conversion... though it did not prevent the ongoing massacre of thousands, if not millions. As Indigenous peoples were baptized, they became baptized barbarians – not civilized humans on equal footing with Euro-Christians. They were forever designated for servitude and slavery. Though baptized, we were nonetheless pagans and savages. Therefore, we could not own property or claim Nationhood as peoples. As a direct result of the Doctrine of Discovery, millions of Indigenous peoples perished through intentional and purposeful genocide to clear the lands and memory of their existence. It was an overwhelming erasure of peoples through colonial laws, policies and outright theft. These systems were the typologies of genocide that still exist today.

O Canada?

So what does this have to do with today's Canada? Everything. Settler Christians and all non-Indigenous peoples who benefit from the riches and wealth of these lands have such well-being at the cost of Indigenous peoples' continued poverty and racism against them.

The very idea that one group of people could assert domination of another – through slavery, death, and servitude – by virtue of being religiously superior is utterly absurd. Yet that's what we are dealing with today. For example, all court cases that challenge



Papal Bull, Inter Caetera, issued in 1493. / IMAGE: PUBLIC DOMAIN.

the Crown's title to lands come from the Doctrine. Whenever Indigenous peoples have taken their issues to Canadian courts questioning and challenging the Crown's assertion of title to Indigenous lands, we are told that the "underlying title" of the Crown is the basis of their ownership to all lands and resources. What is the "underlying title" of the Crown? Simply put, it's the application of the Doctrine of Discovery.

We need to disrupt and deconstruct this myth and lie. The mentality that Indigenous peoples are barbarians incapable of making decisions (without the paternalistic help of the government of Canada) is imbedded in every law, policy, and legislation in the federal system. The ongoing existence of the Indian Act is proof: it is the most racist piece of legislation still utilized to monitor and police Indigenous peoples and their lands. Even as we took Treaty with the British Crown in 1871 – and were promised a relationship of peace, mutuality, and respect – the Indian Act was being created in total violation of that Treaty.

The Doctrine of Discovery is an act of theft with no basis in law. It is fiction constructed out of the

imaginings of Church and State. This act of theft has left Indigenous peoples with very little means to defend against an impending environmental catastrophe created by the destructive activities of colonial corporations acting under the presumed sovereignty of Canada, which gives them permission to extract resources. The horrific impacts of the Alberta tar sands, mass flooding of our traditional territories by the dams of British Columbia, Manitoba, and Quebec, the potash mines in Saskatchewan, the precious metal mines of Ontario, the clear-cutting of old-growth forests all across these lands... these are just a few of the actions of Canada's presumed sovereignty through the Doctrine of Discovery.

The colonization and genocide of Indigenous peoples continues. There is no freedom or self-determination for my peoples, the nēhiyawak of Treaty 6. So long as the Doctrine of Discovery is used as the basis of ownership over Indigenous lands and resources, there is no real humanity and no hopeful future for anyone.

The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* does push against the Doctrine of Discovery, but not totally. Articles 8, 10, 26, and 28, for instance, assert that Indigenous peoples have the right not to be dispossessed of their traditional lands, the right not to be relocated, the right to receive redress for lands that have been taken, and the right to control their lands. All those rights speak against the "right of discovery." Yet Article 46 seems to undermine such rights when it asserts that "Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying... any action which would dismember or impair, totally or in part, the territorial integrity or political unity of sovereign and independent States." How can one work against the Doctrine of Discovery if the colonial state's territorial integrity cannot be challenged? To undo the Doctrine, something of what has been taken must be returned.

This is where we, the Indigenous peoples, need you. There are things you can do; the power resides in each of us to seek recourse when we see injustice. The Doctrine of Discovery effects all of us. If you are against the domination and discrimination of any peoples, then seek to question the information provided here and, together, let us do something so that a wrong can be corrected. Do some homework.

Ponder the statements recently issued by some churches to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery. Learn from them. Discern what is missing. And, most importantly, connect with the host peoples of your territory to learn their stories, their experiences, and the impact of the Doctrine on their lives and lands. That's a solid beginning.

This article is a call for justice, liberation, and freedom; let's demand that the Doctrine of Discovery – created by Christendom, and sustained by such imaginings – be dismantled and abolished. Our collective effort to protect and defend the earth needs all of our voices to stop the contamination of land and water for our collective future to endure.



Churches Adopt UN Document: What Change Will it Bring?



WILL BRAUN lives on a farm in Morden, Manitoba, with his partner Jennifer and their two sons. He works for the Interchurch Council on Hydropower, which advocates for fair treatment of lands and Indigenous communities affected by hydro power projects.

What will it mean for churches to adopt the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* as a “framework for reconciliation,” a step required by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission *Calls to Action*? What exactly will this look like?

Adoption of the *Declaration* provides a very specific step churches can take toward reconciliation, but adopting a document is only as meaningful as the action that follows. This reflects a broader challenge faced by the many Canadians who care about reconciliation: What exactly does reconciliation look like? How can the wave of positive sentiment be translated into change before the energy dissipates?

It is not clear [at the time of this writing] that churches have a specific or comprehensive vision of what to actually do with the *Declaration*. When I asked Sara Stratton how adoption of the *Declaration* will play out for the United Church, she said the first steps will be issuing a church statement and establishing a process. Those steps are expected to take six months. Stratton, who is the Reconciliation and Indigenous Justice Animator for the United Church, says there will also be an inter-church public event at the end of March, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s deadline for church adoption of the *Declaration*.

But statements, church processes, and public events hardly capture the fullness of the moment. I wanted to know what it will mean for churches to comply with the notion of consent that arguably forms the crux of the *Declaration*. While concepts



Kapyong Barracks sits empty in the heart of Winnipeg - it could become an urban reserve. PHOTO: MENNONITE CHURCH CANADA

like self-determination and various cultural rights are already enshrined in other UN documents – such as the *Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights* (1966), which is actually more enforceable than the *Declaration* under UN rules – the main new element that the *Declaration* brings is the concept of “free, prior, and informed consent.”

This has become a buzzword, but how it will be given meaning is yet to be determined. While sometimes associated with the notion of an Indigenous “veto” over development, free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) is better understood as a more nuanced and adaptive process that starts with thorough exchange of views and information at a very early stage of development. Ideally, this would result in scenarios in which a project deemed unacceptable to Indigenous peoples would be altered or abandoned prior to the sort of high-stakes stand-offs that can happen once

companies have already poured major effort and money into proposed projects.

If taken seriously, FPIC will have major implications for Canada, as it could for churches. What does compliance with FPIC mean for churches? The Right Reverend Mark MacDonald, National Indigenous Anglican Bishop, points to the need for Indigenous consent within church structures. This would relate to the redrawing of jurisdictional lines and related



Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) and Indigenous leaders nurture public conversations about an urban reserve.

PHOTO: MENNONITE CHURCH CANADA

staffing questions. Stratton echoes this emphasis on Indigenous authority within church structures.

When asked whether the FPIC provisions of the *Declaration* would require the Church to advocate for Indigenous peoples with concerns about certain projects, MacDonald says, “absolutely.”

In addition to being an “essential advocate,” MacDonald believes the Church can also be a “safe place for critical conversations.” That points to a more nuanced potential church role in relation to consent.

Ultimately, consent will require a societal willingness and ability to have healthy discussions about tough decisions. Some of those discussions need to happen at official government-to-government levels, but official happenings need to be rooted in public discussion to help public understanding evolve. Churches are well-positioned to convene such discussion. As an example, Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg has brought together community members and Indigenous leaders for a number of public discussions regarding

a contentious plan to create an urban reserve in the affluent neighbourhood near the university. That is the groundwork for consent and the hard work of reconciliation.

Church bodies can facilitate such discussions because they are partially removed (no direct interest in outcomes), they have public meeting places, they have networks to tap, and they generally have enough moral authority to bring a range of people together in a good way.

Does that mean church basements along the proposed Energy East pipeline route will soon be buzzing with candid, nuanced discussions between Indigenous leaders and members of the public? Probably not. Any such specifics are not imminent.

And perhaps something of that scope is too much to expect. Part of the challenge of reconciliation for churches is that this era of unprecedented public interest and momentum coincides with a time of contraction and reduced capacity within many congregations and national and regional church bodies. It is harder to dream big when you’re struggling to keep the doors open.

Bill Phipps – who was Moderator of the United Church when it offered its 1998 apology to Indian Residential School survivors and is a veteran organizer and advocate in Calgary – concedes that preoccupation with keeping church doors open is a factor, but he says churchgoers are finding ways to live out reconciliation that do not necessarily require church resources.

He also says interest in reconciliation among churchgoers and others is at an all time high. “I feel more positive now than I have in 30 years.” In a phone interview, he spoke with enthusiasm about a range of activities particularly in the arts and education realms, though not all directly church related. People want to come to events, he said, and Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are increasingly meeting in “non-threatening” ways. Phipps believes the discourse is less inclined toward blame, victimization, and guilt than it once was. People are connecting in constructive, positive, and collaborative ways.

Bishop MacDonald echoes the observation about unprecedented public interest in reconciliation. When he started in his current position eight years ago, he says people talked about “Aboriginal fatigue”; non-Indigenous Canadians were tired of the issues. Looking back, he believes that was really a lack of hope. But now, he says that has changed. He wants to see the reconciliation process bring about a

Declaration and Action: Indigenous Communities and Relationship to Land



LAUREL DYKSTRA is the priest of Salal and Cedar, a community in the lower Fraser/Salish Sea watershed whose mission is to grow Christians' capacity to work for environmental justice. In the language of the global Anglican communion, what we do is "strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth."

A couple of weeks ago, members of our community joined a circle of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in our diocese to respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission *Calls to Action* and were struck by the heavy reliance that these calls have on the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. The circle was made up of people who have been involved in the slow work of church-Indigenous relationship-building before and after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, mostly from a justice perspective. Some are very grassroots, some have an abundance of credentials and degrees, but the only one in that gathering who had actually read the full text of the *Declaration* was a university student in an Indigenous Feminisms class.

So the questions, for me and my community – and more broadly for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Christians who are seeking to address issues of global climate change and ecological injustice – are these: How important is the *Declaration*? What does it contain? How do we begin to engage with it?

I am not an expert. I am a person for whom a confluence of factors – the biblical mandate for justice, a knowledge and love for the plants and creatures of these Coast Salish territories, the powerful witness of Indigenous land defenders, residential school survivors, cultural practitioners and historians, activists, and elders – call me to stumbling and imperfect action for climate justice. I write to those who share that constellation of



One way to honour the Declaration is to join local Indigenous efforts to care for and protect the land. / ART: ANNIE BANKS

concerns and vocations out of a profound urgency. Around the world, Indigenous communities, northern communities, coastal communities are dying because their land and water are poisoned and leaders are silenced (even killed) when they speak out or organize community defence.

What I have to offer is a brief tutorial on the *Declaration* and some observations as to what it might mean for Christians concerned with environmental justice.

First a quick and dirty look at the *Declaration* from an environmental justice perspective. Nearly half the *Declaration* pertains to the relationships of Indigenous people to land. The preamble to the document emphasizes colonization and removal from land; the right to land, territories, resources; the threat and opportunity of land development; and the militarization of Indigenous land. After the "rights of indigenous people," the third most used word in the content of the *Declaration* is

“land,” the second is “develop,” and the fifth is “territory.” Nine articles refer explicitly to Indigenous peoples’ rights and relationships to their land; one article is concerned with treaties. A further eight seemingly less controversial articles – like the rights to practice traditional sciences, medicines, and education, retain place names, access sacred sites, maintain cross-border relationships, and even speak Indigenous languages all involve relationship to and control over land.

In terms of environmental justice, the most important parts of the *Declaration* are Articles 29, “the right to the conservation and protection of the environment and the productive capacity of their lands or territories and resources,” and Article 32, “the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for the development or use of their lands or territories and other resources,” which includes the key phrase “free and informed consent prior to the approval of any project affecting their lands or territories and other resources, particularly in connection with the development, utilization or exploitation of mineral, water or other resources.”

So what might this all mean for Christians who are concerned about environmental justice?

First of all, not everybody has the inclination or capacity to read a 16-page, 42-article, legal-language, international body-generated, rights-based document that, unlike international trade agreements, is non-binding. Nor do they need to. To give just a few examples, many Indigenous clergy in my denomination serve isolated and geographically dispersed communities facing poverty, addictions, suicide, and unemployment. While these issues have their roots in displacement from land, a UN *Declaration* is far from addressing their practical and immediate needs. Some Indigenous and land-defender communities believe the *Declaration* is a European, rights-based model at odds with their understanding of relationship and responsibility to their traditional territories. Moreover, Indigenous peoples are actively practising the principles recognized by the *Declaration* and have been for centuries, not based on the external authority of an international document but on the lived experience and authority of Indigenous culture in relationship to land.

So the *Declaration* is not everything, but it is important in a number of ways. Whether you read it or not, it is useful to know that the document exists, that it is profoundly concerned with land, and that many Indigenous peoples helped create it and are hopeful that persistently leveraging its growing legal authority will result in real change for their communities.

The emphasis on land makes it clear that it is not possible to meaningfully engage with issues of environment, creation, or the earth without relationships with Indigenous people. Yet some of us Christians and environmentalists persist in operating from a kind of residual *Terra Nullis* understanding of “the environment” as empty land. This, combined with the Church’s role in displacing Indigenous peoples from land through “industrial” residential schools, promotion of farming, and outlawing of traditional ceremonies (like the Potlatch), means that we have a great deal of work to do to become trusted conversation partners, much less collaborators in action.

The *Declaration* affirms Indigenous peoples’ rights to “free, prior, and informed consent” to *whatever* happens to them and on their land seven times. The Canadian government has refused to acknowledge this right. Anglican Indigenous Bishop Mark Macdonald has suggested that supporting Indigenous communities, while corporations and governments try to short-cut their right to free, prior, and informed consent, might be one of the most critical opportunities churches have to take action for reconciliation.

It is possible for churches and faith communities to build relationships and take action that supports Indigenous communities in their land and environmental struggles without reference to the *Declaration*. God’s kingdom of justice and mercy will not come when a critical mass of *Declaration* study groups have met. We need to combine our study of this document with learning from Indigenous people where we live what their land issues are. We can follow the leadership of communities, peoples, and clans actively practising their relationship to the land. When we plan solidarity actions, we can follow local protocols for letting First Nations know about our actions on their territory.

We can support them financially, practically.

- At the request of Haudenosaunee organizers, Christian Peacemaker Teams witnessed and documented anti-hunt protesters' attempts to impede hunters Treaty rights to hunt deer in Short Hills Provincial Park.
- Streams of Justice and Grandview Baptist Church in Vancouver hosted fundraising and education events in support of the Unist'ot'en encampment on traditional lands in the pathway of several pipeline projects.

Christians need to balance being bold for justice with being humble in the face of Indigenous knowledge experience; the situation is so dire and our shared history is so fraught, that over-stepping, disagreements, and painful miscommunication are inevitable. But slowly, incrementally, some within churches are growing the relationships and the skills for something that might look like *reconciliation in action*.



From Reconciliation to Decolonization: How Settlers Engage in Indigenous Solidarity Activism



JEFF DENIS is a white Settler Canadian who grew up in East Toronto near the former site of a Seneca village, learned much about colonization and treaties from the Anishinaabe and Métis peoples of Northwestern Ontario (Treaty 3), and now teaches Sociology at McMaster University on traditional Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe territory. He is the author of the forthcoming *Canada at the Crossroads: Boundaries, Bridges, and Laissez-Faire Racism in Indigenous-Settler Relations*.

How do Settler Canadians become engaged in solidarity activities with Indigenous peoples? What do reconciliation and decolonization mean to them? And what are they doing to make good on their commitments?

As a white Canadian sociologist, over the past few years, I have attended Truth and Reconciliation Commission events across the country and intensively interviewed non-Indigenous participants about how they came to participate, how they understand their roles in the process, and their vision for the future of Indigenous-Settler relations.

Although there is no single pathway to engagement, a few common factors stand out. While some Settlers describe a continuous learning journey, many recount pivotal experiences that deeply unsettled their fundamental beliefs, leading them to ask new questions, seek out more information, and think differently. These “wake-up calls” ranged from witnessing shocking cases of racial discrimination to hearing residential school survivors’ stories for the first time.

Many also noted the importance of close friendships with Indigenous people, and some



Jared Redekop joins other Settlers in a traffic slow-down in support of Idle No More (2013). / PHOTO: DAN DYCK / MENNONITE CHURCH CANADA

transitioned into this work from other forms of activism. For example, one man recalled protesting the South African apartheid and being asked by a black South African what he was doing about the injustices imposed on Indigenous people in his own backyard.

Among Christians (about two-thirds of the interviewees), one salient theme was the quest for redemption. Many expressed collective guilt and sorrow, as a result of the Church’s role in residential schools and more generally in the settler-colonial project. Yet, rather than reject their Christian faith, many felt compelled to take responsibility on behalf of the Church, to redeem their people by supporting Indigenous peoples’ healing and rebuilding efforts; being a “good” Christian, in their eyes, depends on it.



Idle No More rallies in downtown Toronto (2012). / PHOTO: DAVID P. BALL.

Many Canadians (Christian and non-Christian) similarly described how learning about the oppression of Indigenous peoples challenged their image of Canada as a fair, peaceful, and generous society that respects diversity. They still strive, however, to realize these ideals; being a “good” Canadian, and a decent human being, depends on it.

The challenge is to develop a shared understanding of what reconciliation and decolonization mean or what kind of society we are working towards. Although many interviewees identified as “allies,” they attributed diverse meanings to the term, including listening to and learning from Indigenous peoples, working together on issues of mutual concern (for example, environmental contamination), educating fellow Settlers, speaking out against racism, and advocating for changes in government policy. While such roles are potentially useful and not mutually exclusive, these same “allies” sometimes conceived of the long-term goals in contradictory ways, ranging from the integration of Indigenous peoples into a multicultural Canada to the radical restructuring of society based on recognition of nation-to-nation treaties and Indigenous self-government.

More concretely, “engaged” Settlers have found many creative ways to enact their ethical commitments in their daily lives. Among other things, these include:

- Teachers making it a priority to teach (primarily non-Indigenous) students about residential schools, treaties, and related issues, whether or not

it is mandated in the curriculum;

- Church ministers including concepts of reconciliation and decolonization in their sermons and articulating connections to Christ’s messages about love, peace, and social justice;
- Members of churches and community groups organizing educational workshops (sometimes facilitated by an Indigenous elder or scholar), movie nights, book clubs, and plays about colonization and reconciliation;
- Researching, writing, and creating resource lists for fellow Settlers who want to learn;
- Reaching out to local Indigenous communities to plan bridge-building activities together, such as music festivals, sports leagues, and community gardens;
- Confronting racist comments by fellow Settlers at social gatherings and on social media;
- Offering food and shelter to homeless Indigenous persons;
- Supporting local Indigenous artists and businesses, and boycotting Settler businesses that are known to discriminate or that disregard Indigenous and Treaty rights;
- Voting (at all levels) based on candidates’ support for Indigenous and Treaty rights;
- Writing letters to newspapers and to elected officials about *Shannen’s Dream* (for equitable funding for First Nations schools), the lack of clean drinking water in many Indigenous communities, and the need for a public inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women;
- Participating in *Idle No More* rallies and round dances, as well as Indigenous-led walks and protests;
- Fundraising for Indigenous education programs, language camps, and legal campaigns; and
- Finding ways to live more sustainably, as Settlers, and thereby minimizing environmental impact (for example, walking or taking public transit).

Despite these and other important actions, it is striking how few participants mentioned supporting initiatives to reclaim or restore Indigenous *lands*, to protect Indigenous lands from resource extraction, and to revitalize and recognize Indigenous self-government. In fairness, a few had supported or even participated in blockades, such as the anti-clear-cutting campaign at Grassy Narrows First Nation. But, overall, there appears to be a disconnect between the reconciliation movement (with which many Settler participants in Truth and Reconciliation Commission events strongly identified) and the broader struggle for decolonization and Indigenous self-determination. Settlers need to remember that, as noted in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report, the residential school system was only one part of an ongoing settler-colonial project that seeks to strip Indigenous peoples of their land and usurp their political authority.

Implementing the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* would be one important step towards a deeper reconciliation (that includes political, economic, cultural, and spiritual dimensions). But it cannot be seen as just an “aspirational” document. The values and principles underlying it must be applied daily, on the ground, in local communities, across Canada.

As Settlers, this means respecting Indigenous leadership and jurisdiction, including the principle of “free, prior, and informed consent” on any project that affects Indigenous lands or rights. It means building ongoing relationships with local Indigenous communities and contributing meaningful resources (financial or otherwise) to Indigenous healing and rebuilding efforts, where desired.

And it means holding one another accountable for upholding our end of treaties. It means developing more sustainable, self-determining ways of life that do not depend on the exploitation of Indigenous lands, resources, or peoples, but that thrive in partnership with them.



Twelve Steps to Post-colonial Reconciliation



JOYCE GREEN is a professor of political science on faculty at the University of Regina, currently on long-term disability leave. The editor of *Indivisible: Indigenous Human Rights* (Fernwood Publishing, 2014), Joyce is of English, Ktunaxa and Cree-Scottish Métis ancestry and struggles to honour them all.



MIKE BURTON is a Settler who currently lives and works in Ottawa on the traditional territory of the Algonquin peoples. Until 2015 he was a doctoral student in Political Science at the University of Alberta.

Canada is a Settler state that emerged through imperial and colonial processes. Colonialism is now considered to be a wrong against peoples and nations, proscribed by United Nations declarations having the force of international law. Colonialism's consequences, which continue today, have been genocidal for Indigenous people. Some of the most recent and powerful accounts of these consequences are to be found in the evidence provided by the *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. And yet, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) asserts the real possibility of reconciliation in Canada, a reconciliation that is more than fleeting good feelings and fine apologies. In the words of the TRC,

[t]he principles of reconciliation, such as mutual respect, coexistence, fairness, meaningful dialogue, and mutual recognition... are about action; that is, they give shape and expression to the material, political, and legal elements of reconciliation.

Reconciliation for the evils of colonialism is a possibility, but not a certainty. In between truth and reconciliation there are many steps to be taken. Truth-telling and truth-hearing are necessary though insufficient conditions for reconciliation, which also requires remediating action to secure decolonization.



A 12 step meeting for those struggling with addiction - what about a decolonization process? / PHOTO: PUBLIC DOMAIN.

In this article we propose actions that non-Indigenous Canadians may take toward personal and collective reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

Canadian Colonialism, Indigenous Dispossession

In the emergent Canada, displacement of Indigenous nations was desired for the efficient execution of settler colonialism. That great white father of contemporary Canada, Sir John A. Macdonald, pursued this through his "National Policy." The primary components of this policy included the creation of a cohesive Settler population obtained through select immigration and settlement on Indigenous territories; a regime of tariffs at the U.S. border to support the new national economy; an early infrastructure spending initiative, i.e., the publicly subsidized railway that was granted enormous tracts of Indigenous territories to link Settler communities across the nascent state; and the

policy of containment of Indigenous peoples.

Macdonald's and subsequent governments ensured that Indigenous populations were contained by state force on reserves (in the case of "status" Indians) or dispersed (in the case of Métis and "non-status" Indians) and effectively starved and oppressed into submission. Inuit, called "Eskimos" by Canada, were similarly controlled and disciplined into compliance with state visions. State policies constructed legal mechanisms, bureaucratic administrations, and physical restraints in the form of reserves, industrial day and residential schools, legislation, policy, and policing, which produced, in the words of Glen Coulthard, a "governmentality" of colonialism. The result was a permanent self-perpetuating affirmative action program for Settler populations in relation to political, economic, and cultural power, while the same program discriminated against Indigenous peoples' access in muscular legislative, economic, and cultural ways. Yet there is a cultivated ignorance among many – what Tricia Logan calls Canada's "memory block" – about the violent assault on Indigenous people in the course of building the not-so-peaceable kingdom.

In Canada, imperialism was followed by colonialism – the practice of creating permanent settlements with people from the imperial state. Colonization was accompanied by claims of sovereignty, by permanent political and legal frameworks, and by the marginalization and dispossession of Indigenous peoples. Colonialism was and is justified by racism, which provides a legitimating framework for land theft and policies that control and discipline Indigenous peoples. A racialized hierarchy is a prerequisite of colonialism, but Canadian mythology constructs our society as a colourblind meritocracy. Yet, the political economy of the Canadian state is underwritten by Indigenous dispossession. As the late Oji-Cree leader Elijah Harper said, "With your democratic state, you oppressed us, democratically."

Addiction to Privilege and Power

A major impediment to reconciliation lies in the ways we are all implicated in colonialism – not merely historically, but contemporarily as well. The deep investment Canadians have in this order has become what can best be understood as an addiction to privilege and power, a state of affairs sustained by



Elijah Harper celebrates with supporters following his refusal of the Meech Lake Accord, June 1990. / PHOTO: WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

continuing Indigenous oppression and a Canadian wish *not to know*.

With our addiction model, we propose a way of understanding the self-perpetuating power differentials between Indigenous and Settler people in Canada, and the reasons why so many cling to false myths about the origin of the state and the reasons for ongoing Indigenous immiseration. Our proposal for recovery challenges Settler Canadians to face our

past, accept collective responsibility for genocide and other Indigenous human rights abuses, and then move to policy and practices that will decolonize the state.

We propose this 12-step plan to assist participants to acknowledge colonialism and privilege, and move to action rising from responsibility, empathy, remorse and, commitment. These are the elements of reconciliation, which require both recognizing wrongs and the appropriate remediating action on the part of the state and Settler populations. The intent is to produce the conditions for “right relationship,” conditions which do not currently exist. Meaningful reconciliation is not primarily or merely personal, but must include the apparatus of the state and its political and economic power being reshaped by Indigenous conceptions and participation. We suggest that the outcome of “right relationship” would also produce a move from Canada’s genocidal history to conditions permitting mutuality, respect, and possibility.

Addiction produces a range of dysfunctions, not the least of which are denial and justification. The Canadian addiction to the illegitimate benefits of settler colonialism has kept Canadians singing from a racist songbook of justifications for and pseudo-explanations of Indigenous oppression. As an alternative, this 12-step program invites us to grapple with these dysfunctions.

For our 12-step program, the problem is colonialism and Canadians’ implication in the perverse legacy of colonialism; the solution is a program of decolonization, and the action required includes both recognizing and renouncing the benefits associated with settler colonial privilege. A similarity between our program and other 12-step programs is that all require a disciplined approach to self-knowledge and change – in our case, to comprehension and to transformation.

Twelve-step programs are renowned for their ability to bring communities of those who suffer addictions and compulsive disorders together in a climate of support and respect, and through the steps, to empower sufferers to create personal change for a healthier life. While 12-step programs are intended for individuals who truly seek to change their lives, our 12-step decolonization program is intended for

individuals who understand themselves to be part of a national community and thus beneficiaries of the national colonial project. Conventional 12-step programs are rigorously non-political and anonymous. Our proposed program is entirely political, and its practitioners’ willingness to claim their role in it is part of the power of the program to change minds and hearts. In this way, our 12-step program is not identical in its conception or deployment with standard addiction model programs.

The Path to Decolonization

STEP 1 is to admit we have a problem. We – and we do mean all of us – can struggle with our implication in and complicity with racism, or we can live as racists, the equivalent of living and dying drunk. Beyond admitting that we have an historical and continuing problem, we need to address the unmanageability of the current situation, built, as it is, on a foundation of colonialism, racism, and the privilege derived from their structures. Step 1 involves the ending of denial, identifying with those who suffer, and the humility to admit our collective faults.

STEP 2 is to commit to work collectively for a just post-colonial order. We must move from reflection to committed action, which will undermine our privilege by replacing it with a just political order.

STEP 3 is to recognize Settler privilege and the many structures that guarantee that privilege. Step 3 also requires fully accounting for historical and present day injustices committed in the name of the colonial project. The residential schools are one of these; there is also that little land-theft matter.

STEP 4 requires us to make a “searching and fearless moral inventory” of how our lives and choices follow from our positioning in society. Working this step requires acknowledging our relative positioning in a raced, gendered, and classed hierarchy, including how our gender, our sexuality, our class position, or our skin colour vests us with advantages or social liabilities. In a very real sense, Step 4 will be the *truth* step of a more robust truth and reconciliation process.

STEP 5 is to admit to ourselves and our communities the findings from our Step 4 inventory. Step 5 is a continuation of the truth portion of this exercise combined with a process of accountability. Step

5 liberates us from the guilt and shame that we invariably feel when we realize that our privilege comes at the continuing expense of others. The fifth step is also about entering into empathetic conversation with others

STEP 6 is to be “entirely ready” to step away from our privileges and step toward systems of merit that include those who have been historically disenfranchised by racialized and gendered subversions of merit. This step means recognizing that change involves changing the practices we have benefited from – and that our own expectations will have to be reframed if a measure of non-racialized justice is to be obtained.

STEP 7 is to be humble in our expectations of where we fit in society, in the struggle for justice, and in the esteem of those who have been marginalized. Humility is painful but necessary if others are to have the social space and confidence to speak their truths to power.

STEP 8 is to make inventories of the wrongs done and the privileges we have received by historical injustice and the structures of colonialism. We must also become willing to do our part to make meaningful amends. This prepares us for the process of making the formal restitution required in Step 9.

Which takes us to **STEP 9**: restitution. Empathetic listening leads us to action – to solidarity, to collective restitution, to deliberation on new ways of being together in the context of our contemporary societies. Canadians’ self-image of being a just people will be tested by the requirement to share power, to defer to Indigenous political formations, to share or vacate land, to share wealth, and to transform political culture. We will be tested as Settler Canadians learn to accept political and legal constraints on what has heretofore been largely privileged access to wealth, resources, lands, and institutions.

One legal precept that impels this step, cited in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, is the need for consultation with Indigenous peoples prior to exploiting their traditional territories; in international law, this is the “free, prior, and informed consent” requirement. Think of the examples of pipelines, mines, and luxury ski resorts – issues frequently in today’s news.

STEP 10 is to take continuous personal and collective social and political inventory so that when we act on our race and gender privilege, we can recognize and surrender that power immediately. In other words, this is a set of practices, never complete and always changing as we and the conditions in which we struggle change. It requires self-conscious self-reflection against the standards of decolonization.

Only then will we be able to take **STEP 11**: Indigenization. By that we mean a self-conscious and collective process of adoption of Indigenous practices, ideas, values, knowledges, and cultural signifiers in this place, Canada, which is still Indigenous territory. The result will be something mutual and entirely new. It will include all of us.

STEP 12 is to carry our understanding of colonization, decolonization, and post-colonial political development to others, in our families, affinity groups, professional associations, and citizenship communities. We must be diplomats for change: the Indigenization of Canada means all of us change, and the change is positive for all of us.

Through these steps, Canadians can work towards reconciliation. Reconciliation emerges from action between those whose relationship have been damaged. The TRC writes:

For reconciliation to take root, Canada, as the party to the relationship that has breached that trust, has the primary obligation to do the work needed to regain the trust of Aboriginal peoples.

Reconciliation implies finding a formula for non-Indigenous politics, economics, and residency that is based on negotiation and the consent of Indigenous peoples, in a framework that is not some mushy “friends with privileges” approach. This 12-step program provides some direction on how we may begin to reframe our collective reality. Reconciliation offers a positive future for us all.



This is an adapted version of a shorter piece written by Joyce Green and Mike Burton for Canadian Dimension.

A Settler Christian Declaration of Roles and Responsibilities:

Personalizing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples



STEVE HEINRICHS is a Settler Christian living in Winnipeg – Treaty 1 Territory and the homeland of the Métis Nation. The director of Indigenous Relations for Mennonite Church Canada, Steve is passionate about nurturing right relations with host peoples. In this piece, he takes various articles of the *Declaration* and turns them onto himself, to discover ways that he and others can commit to a journey of solidarity with Indigenous Nations and neighbours.

The following is not offered with ease. With prayer, earnest wrestling, and a deep awareness of the harm that words—which stretch beyond-genuine-action can cause, I put these forth as a serious-and-fragile effort to respond with integrity to the *Declaration*. My hope is threefold – to grow into these statements over the course of my life; to nuance and add to these confessions as I continue to learn from Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples; and to stoke imaginations (like yours!) that can craft their own declarations, in conversation with neighbouring circles. In peace, in friendship, and in Spirit.

ARTICLE 1: With sorrow and anger, I lament that Indigenous peoples have not been respected as fellow human beings created in the image of the Creator. I recognize that my beloved community, the Church, has played a significant role in this dehumanization, and that these sinful attitudes and practices continue, not only within individual Christian hearts, but within our very institutions and systems. I repent and commit to undoing my distorted understandings as I make every effort to respect Indigenous peoples'



The Three-Figure Wampum belt, dated back to 1760, is an agreement between the Barriere Lake Algonquin, the Church, and the Settler community. The belt depicts an acknowledgement whereby, under the sign of the cross, no interference would occur.

PHOTO: IPSMO.WORDPRESS.COM

human rights and freedoms, relating to them as sisters and brothers.

ARTICLE 4: I will honour the sovereignty, autonomy, and self-government of Indigenous Nations. I recognize that Indigenous Nations have existed in these lands “from time immemorial” and have a legitimacy that questions the present jurisdiction and singularly sovereign claims of our Settler governments (who are currently not living into Treaty relationship). My prayer is for pockets of Settler society to rise up and persuade, provoke, and push

our federal government into honouring the covenants of these lands.

ARTICLE 7: I will respect Indigenous peoples' collective right to live in freedom, peace, and security as distinct peoples. Recognizing that the Church has been involved in the removal of many Indigenous children from Indigenous families, I will seek – in the small ways that I am able – to resist the ongoing fracture of Indigenous communities. As a father of two adopted Indigenous children, I understand that the current adoptive and child welfare systems have much work to do in order to decolonize. I recognize and embrace my responsibility to be in good relationship with Indigenous neighbours where I live and intentionally nurture friendships with Indigenous aunts and uncles and elders so that I can be an adoptive parent who honours his Indigenous children's connections to their distinct peoples, cultures, lands, and histories.

ARTICLE 8: Recognizing that the Settler Church is guilty of

- attempted cultural genocide (i.e. residential/boarding schools)
- practising theologies and engaging in missional activities that have promoted assimilation and the dispossession of Indigenous lands
- advocating Christian religious supremacy while suppressing and/or denigrating Indigenous lifeways

I weep. My heart goes tight. I mourn the devastation and feel overwhelmed. Yet I commit to deep wrestling with my Christian tradition that I so love – finding ways to decolonize it and uncover hidden treasures that point me and my community to mutual ways of being. But that is not enough. I must also nurture conversations and real action to redress, at least a piece of the vast harm that has been inflicted, in the past and the present, by the Church.

ARTICLES 11 & 12: Recognizing that the Settler Church has marginalized Indigenous religious traditions, customs and ceremonies, and in many ways continues to do so, I commit to

- Learning from Indigenous spiritual leaders and teachers without appropriation
- Honouring and tangibly supporting Indigenous spiritual revitalization efforts

- Confessing historic wrongs and addressing present-day settler Christian misconceptions of Indigenous lifeways

ARTICLES 18 & 19: With good intentions and much zeal, it is easy for Settlers like me to run ahead and do a lot of damage. So I commit to not engaging in decision-making processes that may effect Indigenous peoples' dignity and rights without their presence, participation, and leadership. "Free, prior, and informed consent" not only means – in the words crafted by disability activists – "Nothing about us without us." It also means, "We are all in this together." My actions must embody such values.

ARTICLE 25: I will respect the right of Indigenous peoples to maintain and renew their spiritual and material relationships with traditional lands, waterscapes, and territories. As a Settler Christian, I confess that I – like many of my sisters and brothers in the Church – lack deep roots in the lands in which I live. Though I love this place in which I move and have my being, I don't have ancient stories and millenia-old connections that tie me to it. I will, therefore, make a patient and persistent effort to learn about these traditional relationships so that I, along with my children, can honour Indigenous neighbours and Indigenous lands with greater understanding and joy.

ARTICLE 28: I commit to learning the contested histories of the Indigenous lands in which I live, coming to understand their past and present dispossession by settler colonialism. Moreover, I will pursue paths of solidarity with local Indigenous Nations to nonviolently struggle for redress and repatriation of lands. I will not only seek to push the nation-state, but in conversation with local Indigenous Nations I will pursue collective and personal strategies for entering into respectful relationships with stolen, contested, and/or damaged lands.

ARTICLE 37: I am a Treaty person living in Treated land. I commit to honouring the original spirit and intent of the Treaties that Indigenous Nations and the Crown agreed to. Not waiting for the Canadian state to live into these covenants, I will formally recognize and respect these covenants, finding creative ways in conversation with Indigenous peoples to live into them. As a citizen

of the state, I will encourage fellow citizens to join in this journey and put pressure on the political powers to honour Treaties, recognizing that this will benefit all our relations.

ARTICLE 46: The commitments in this Settler Christian Declaration are costly – I acknowledge such. I recognize that many before us have made “sweet promises” that have not been acted upon. These commitments will require a radical reorientation of my Settler Christian attitudes, beliefs, and practices. They will require time, effort, and possibly a change in my financial and propertied status. They may – in contrast to the *Declaration* – query the territorial integrity or political unity of the state of which I am a part. But hard as these commitments are, they are also very good. They can bring tremendous blessing, nurturing healing and new relationships of genuine friendship.



MOVING FORWARD: A Study Guide

TIM RUNTZ

Responding to documents like the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is best done through both individual reflection and community discernment. Use this study guide as a resource to facilitate conversation in your church, classroom, or small group. You may choose to spread your discussions over five separate meetings, or consider several sections at once.

You're encouraged to read and reflect on each piece in this magazine, but we've selected a few key stories from each section to help focus your reading as a group.

The questions provided are not meant to limit the scope of your discussion, but to prompt honest and open exploration of what the *Declaration* might mean for your church or community.

PART 1:

What Is The Declaration?

“The Declaration provides a new way to approach Indigenous peoples’ rights and the relationship with Canada – one that is based on justice, democracy, respect for human rights, non-discrimination, and good faith.”

— **BRENDA L. GUNN**

Recommended Reading

**Blueprint for Reconciliation,
Beacon of Hope** 15

JENNIFER PRESTON

**Does the Church Have Hope for
Relationship?** 24

INTERVIEW WITH JUSTICE MURRAY SINCLAIR

Discerning Questions on the *Declaration* 28

**SHERYL LIGHTFOOT, ADAM J. BARKER, EMMA
BATTELL LOWMAN**

Questions for discussion:

- The *Declaration* affirms that Indigenous people are entitled to “all human rights and fundamental freedoms” laid out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Have you witnessed or experienced the double standard that has made this affirmation necessary? What are some ways in which these basic human rights have been violated in your community or country?
- Jennifer Preston outlines a brief history of how and why the *Declaration* came to be. Was there anything that surprised you about this process?
- Non-legally-binding documents such as the *Declaration* are sometimes disregarded as merely bureaucratic, but writers in this section argue that they can be very significant. What impacts might the *Declaration* have if it was truly embraced by individuals, churches, and governments?
- Given the road to recovery that Indigenous peoples are already on, Murray Sinclair asks, “What kind of relationship do churches want to have with this new found, prideful, group of people?” What are your hopes for engaging with the Indigenous communities in your midst?

PART 2: Decolonizing Human Rights and Roles of States

“Human rights politics is at a cross-roads, and will only flourish if an authentically inclusive, deliberative, multireligious, and multi-cultural discourse can be forged. It is vital that Christians, along with others who work within a religious framework, participate in and shape this conversation.”

– LINDA HOGAN

Recommended Reading

Native American Circularity and the Renewal of Indigenous Rights 55

EDGAR HEAP OF BIRDS (HOCK E AYE VI)

Wake-Up Call for Nation-States 57

WALTER BRUEGGEMANN

The Cost of Reconciliation: Distinguishing Colonialism and Settler Colonialism 62

LORENZO VERACINI

Questions for discussion:

- Several writers in this section address concerns about the notion of human rights. Do you find “rights” language troubling, or do you agree that it’s a good way to move forward in addressing injustices on the ground?
- Edgar Heap of Birds contrasts the “static beliefs” of Western thinking to Native American philosophies of rejuvenation. What are some “static beliefs” that you or your community have held? What might you learn from a worldview that is “cognizant of the circular flow of life?”
- Walter Brueggemann says that from Old Testament times until now, governments have tended toward “exploitative economics and self serving politics.” What are some ways in which Christians could encourage governments to work towards a common good today?
- Lorenzo Veracini writes that “even if they or their ancestors moved as colonized or as powerless migrants,” Settler Canadians “have inherited structures of domination that are inherently unjust.” Do you agree? How do you think these structures have impacted your own life?

PART 3: Can The Scriptures Speak?

“And if you have eyes to see, then in the wake of a world re-made, growing quietly in the cracks, remains the possibility of transformation.”

– DEANNA ZANTINGH

Recommended Reading

What about the Canaanites? 69

Re-Reading the Bible

KWOK PUI-LAN

Celebrating Indigenous Knowledge of our Common Creator 74

LORI RANSOM

What Would Zacchaeus Do? 82

Repair Sets Sinners Free

JENNIFER HARVEY

Questions for discussion:

- Do you tend to identify more with the oppressor or the oppressed when you read scripture passages like The Exodus or Naboth’s Vineyard? How do the characters in these stories relate to your own experience?
- Kwok Pui-Lan says that “remembering the Canaanites helps us not to forget the difficult negotiations, tensions, and conflicts of living together across differences.” How might your study change if you read the Bible from a “Canaanite” perspective? Which stories would take on new meaning?
- Lori Ransom writes: “we do not need to be fearful that we are denying Christ by learning about Indigenous spirituality.” She also suggests that Christian churches should participate in a traditional Indigenous spiritual ceremony. Are you open to forms of spirituality that are different from your own? What might it look like for your community or congregation to participate in an Indigenous-led spiritual ceremony?
- Jennifer Harvey encourages Settler Christians to ask the question: “What Would Zacchaeus Do?” Do you agree that the story of Zacchaeus parallels Settler experiences today? How might you begin to follow his challenging example?

PART 4: Re-imagining Relations

“The Declaration is ultimately an alternative narrative. It lifts up another way of seeing the world rooted in Indigenous values that shines a critical light on the colonial imaginary and offers us all – both Indigenous and Settler peoples – another path.”

– CHRIS BUDDEN

Recommended Reading

Connecting the Dots: Why Mennonites Should Support the Declaration 95

SUE EAGLE

Preach the Ground Level 102

RYAN DUECK

Centring Indigenous Peoples at Siloam 111

LAIZA PACHECO & MELANIE KAMPEN

Questions for discussion:

- Stories of struggle have been formative for many Anabaptist communities. If you're not Indigenous, what are some ways in which your church or cultural background share similar stories to those of Indigenous peoples? How have the experiences been different?
- David Driedger argues that “Christians have been trained to approach (and actively pursue) strangers with an understanding that they are insufficient prior to any knowledge or relationship with them.” Do you agree with this statement? What would it mean to pursue the Gospel in a way that rejects a “supremacist” way of approaching others?
- How did reading about Siloam Mission challenge your assumptions about how society's most vulnerable people should be engaged?
- Ryan Dueck asks: “Are we open to hearing good news – news that wounds and liberates us from hurtful attitudes and damaging assumptions about our neighbours? Are we open to hearing this news from unlikely sources and unsanctioned places?” What are some “unsanctioned places” from which your church or study group might hear such good news?

PART 5: Next Steps

“If you are against the domination and discrimination of any peoples, then seek to question the information provided here and, together, let us do something so that a wrong can be corrected.”

– SYLVIA MCADAM

Recommended Reading

Declaration and Action: Indigenous Communities and Relationship to Land 121

LAUREL DYKSTRA

From Reconciliation to Decolonization: How Settlers Engage in Indigenous Solidarity Activism 124

JEFF DENIS

Twelve Steps to Post-colonial Reconciliation 127

JOYCE GREEN & MIKE BURTON

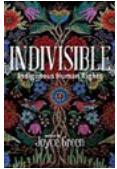
Questions for discussion:

- Laurel Dykstra writes, “it is not possible to meaningfully engage with issues of environment, creation, or the earth without relationships with Indigenous people.” What are some other struggles for justice that are deeply intertwined with Indigenous issues?
- The *Declaration* uses the phrase “free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC),” to describe what is required before Settlers move ahead with projects that may impact Indigenous peoples. What decisions or initiatives could your church or community seek FPIC for?
- Jeff Denis lists several ways in which Settlers can enact solidarity with Indigenous peoples. How could you undertake some of these actions in your community? Similarly, which of Joyce Green and Mike Burton's Twelve Steps are the most intimidating for you? Which would be easiest to start right away?
- The TRC calls all churches and faith-based groups in Canada to formally adopt the *Declaration* as a framework for reconciliation. What steps could your church or community take in moving forward with this recommendation?
- How else can you and your community work to uphold the rights of Indigenous peoples?

EDITORS'S PICKS for further reading

To borrow or purchase these books and other resources on the *Declaration*, please see: www.commonword.ca/go/508.

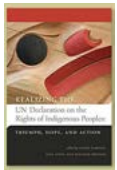
ON THE DECLARATION AND INDIGENOUS RIGHTS



Indivisible: Indigenous Human Rights

JOYCE GREEN, ED. 2014

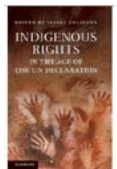
Some say Indigenous rights aren't human rights, fearful that the "universalizing" tendencies of such discourse will actually undermine the rights that rightly belong to Indigenous nations as First Peoples. Joyce and her fellow contributors respond to this critique, carefully arguing that Indigenous rights understood within a human rights framework is not a concession to colonialism, but one of our best tools to resist the ongoing violence of settler-colonial states like Canada.



Realizing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 2010

HARTLEY, JOFFE, PRESTON, EDS.

How did the *Declaration* come to be? What does it mean to Indigenous leaders who worked on it? What about state players? And how might it actually be implemented? This is a solid collection of articles by Indigenous and Settler authors from diverse backgrounds that tell the story of the *Declaration* from a variety of angles, exploring the opportunities it presents and the significant challenges of implementation. Though it looks academic, it's very readable.



Indigenous Rights in the Age of the UN Declaration

ELVIRA PULITANO, ED. 2012

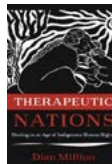
Running in similar directions to the previous volume, Pulitano's collection strikes out in a few unique paths by creating space for sustained critique of the *Declaration* and some significant conversation engaging worldviews, ecology, and even Indigenous literatures. One of the key takeaways is the way in which Indigenous peoples are actually "humanizing" international law and de-centring the state in the process.



In the Light of Justice

WALTER ECHO-HAWK 2013

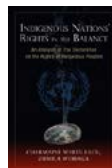
Written in popular style and complemented with savvy artwork by his son Bunky, Walter Echo-Hawk's text is a thoughtful look at how the *Declaration* challenges and gifts contemporary United States law. This work is not full of technical jargon. It reads like a "spoken ethics" on how we can respectfully restructure our relationships in real time. It would be great if there was a book like this written for the Canadian context.



Therapeutic Nations: Healing in an Age of Indigenous Human Rights

DIAN MILLION 2010

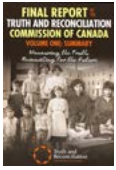
Through a judicious engagement with narratives of "trauma" and the ways that such are leveraged by Indigenous peoples and nation-states (particularly, Canada, the U.S. and Australia), Million queries both depoliticized notions of trauma and the dominant human rights discourse that Indigenous peoples are taking up to pursue self-determination. The book is not easy, and I do not think she does the Truth and Reconciliation Commission justice, but it is brimming with theoretical and practical insights as Million brings writers like Foucault and Spivak into dialogue with Indigenous feminisms and on-the-ground histories.



Indigenous Rights in the Balance

CHARMAINE WHITEFACE 2012

Some say the *Declaration* is a compromise document, balancing the rights of Indigenous peoples with the rights of states. WhiteFace contends that it is a "compromised" document in which state powers and the UN trammelled over the rights of the Indigenous. The main focus is a comparison between the final form of the *Declaration* that was not – according to WhiteFace – approved by a majority of Indigenous representatives, to the previous versions that could claim Indigenous consent. Whatever the reader discerns, this commentary helps illuminate, with a sense of urgency, some of the primary concerns and debates within Indigenous nations – especially around territorial sovereignty.



Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Volume I 2015

Indian Residential Schools were a devastating part of Canada's attempted cultural genocide of Indigenous peoples. Though that story is just one part of the larger and ongoing colonial project, it provides a powerful window into the goals of settler-colonialism and the suppression of Indigenous rights. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Final Report includes both an accurate historical account of the schools and the *Calls to Action*: 94 paths that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is summoning Settler society to take up in order to mend our fractured relationship.



Settler

EMMA BATTEL LOWMAN
æ ADAM BARKER 2015

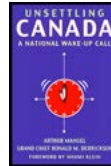
Turning our gaze from the supposed "Indian problem," Lowman and Barker get us to focus on the very real "Settler problem." They explore what it means to be a Settler, how that identity has been shaped by past and present settler colonialism, and what the many possibilities are for Settlers to live into right relationship with host peoples. It is a slim volume that is serious and practical.



The Fourth World: An Indian Reality

GEORGE MANUEL æ MICHAEL
POSLUNS 1974

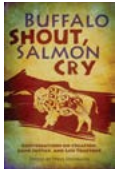
You will have to go to the library to get a copy of this out-of-print text, but it is worth it. George Manuel was a significant leader in both the North American and Global Indigenous movements – he actually started the World Council of Indigenous Peoples. *The Fourth World* is a moving, personal narrative that describes the struggles of Indigenous peoples to survive as nations. The fact that it was written more than 40 years ago is a gift – for it not only shows the thinking and concerns of the time, but demonstrates that the main issues really have not changed.



Unsettling Canada

ARTHUR MANUEL
æ GRAND CHIEF RON
DERRICKSON 2014

Four decades after George Manuel wrote his manifesto about the Indigenous (Fourth) World, his son Arthur – a significant Secwepemc leader and activist in his own right – teamed up with Ron Derrickson, Chief of the West Bank First Nation, to write a stirring account of the present day struggles of Indigenous peoples in Canada and beyond. The issues demanding our attention are plain: Aboriginal rights and title, land reparations, and economies that respect our common ecology. It is a fast-paced read.



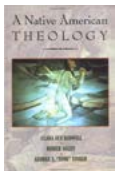
Buffalo Shout, Salmon Cry
STEVE HEINRICHS, ED. 2013

New to this whole discussion and not sure where to begin? This could be a good place. Bringing together two dozen Indigenous and Settler authors, this volume contests many of the histories we have inherited, our mainstream theologies, and our relationships with land and one another. A popular read, but it is not easy. Yet it can create space and imagination, particularly for Christians, to imagine alternative ways



Hope Abundant: Third World and Indigenous Women's Theologies
KWOK PUI-LAN 2010

Female authors from all over the world – Mexico, Australia, Korea, Cuba, Malawi, the United States, and more – explore Scripture, the Church, Christology, Theology, and the Body from their gifted vantage points. It is a fascinating collection filled with insight, emotion, and a thirst for justice. As a white male Settler, I found myself repeatedly saying to myself, “Why didn’t I see that? That makes so much sense.”



A Native American Theology
TINK TINKER, SUE KIDWELL, HOMER NOLEY 2008

Three Indigenous theologians come together to dialogue with the classic categories of Christian systematic theology – God, sin, salvation, creation, eschatology, and more. The result is an unsettling challenge for those of us who’ve assumed that Euro-white-Christianity is “mere Christianity.” If you are open to Jesus as trickster and a living, teaching land, then this is for you.



Theology and the Boundary Discourse of Human Rights

ETHNA REGAN 2012

The language of human rights is heavily contested these days, and many arguments lobbied against such are coming from Christian post-liberals like Stanley Hauerwas and John Milbank. Can theology, with integrity, lift up human rights? Ethna Regan contends that human rights discourse is not only possible, but essential in the Church’s task to



If God Were a Human Rights Activist

BOAVENTURA SANTOS 2015

Conventional human rights discourse, claims Santos, is hegemonic – supporting the status-quo of capitalism and patriarchal colonialism. It is a discourse that has eerie similarities to the theocratic visions of fundamentalist religions – be they Christian or Islamic. Yet progressive religious movements offer counter-hegemonic theories and insights that can invigorate and revision secular human rights discourse so that it can be leveraged towards post-colonial realities.



"First Contact" / ART: ANGELA STERRITT, GITXSAN NATION FROM GITANMAAX

A wholesale rejection of human rights can presuppose that there is a "pure" alternative framework.... It also presupposes that decolonization can happen tomorrow without short-term strategies to improve the current conditions under which Indigenous peoples live. And... it presupposes that Indigenous peoples are not capable of violating human rights.

In *X-marks*, Scott Lyons notes that those who call for decolonization often do not effectively engage in any short-term strategies that are viewed as reformist even though they may save the lives of Indigenous peoples who are currently under immediate attack.

As a result, the immediate needs of people often get sacrificed in favour of articulating seemingly politically pure ideals. Conversely, those who do engage in short-term reform strategies often decry the goal of decolonization as "unrealistic." In doing so, they do not critique the manner in which these strategies often retrench rather than challenge the colonial status quo. Consequently, it is important to consider how human rights, no matter how implicated in colonialism, may be redeployed by Indigenous peoples to advance decolonization.

ANDREA SMITH

Cherokee, author of *Native Americans and the Christian Right* (Duke, 2008)

A Christian who is true to their teachings offers love, respect, gifts and hope to those who need it most. The Church has overwhelmingly failed to offer such to the First Nations, Métis and Inuit of this land.

The Church has brought sorrow, division, and generational hurt – emotional, physical, psychological, and spiritual. So much was lost because of the paternalism and arrogance of Settler Christians "who knew better."

The *Declaration* calls the Church to change their ways – to respect Indigenous peoples, to honour our dignity, cultures, traditions, and lands, and to receive our gifts too.

GEORGE LITTLECHILD

Plains Cree artist



"Red Man Descending" (2006) / GEORGE LITTLECHILD

WRONGS TO RIGHTS

HOW CHURCHES CAN ENGAGE THE
UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION
ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES