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**Dialogue at the Boundaries:
An Exploration of the Native Apology (1986)
And its Relationship to an Understanding of Mission
Within The United Church of Canada**

**By
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**Submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for the
Doctor of Ministry Degree
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Autobiographical Statement

The privilege and opportunity to serve in historic ministries and the engagement with cutting edge issues in society have been touchstones of my work and life within The United Church of Canada.

Upon ordination in 1976 Heather and I accepted transfer to the East Labrador Pastoral Charge and settled in North West River, the home of the northern medical and social services of the International Grenfell Mission. Parish responsibilities involved frequent travel to the coast of Labrador to communities, at that time, with few of the services taken for granted in the rest of Canada. While my parish work did not directly serve First Nation peoples, native issues including land claims and development became a central part of my work. These concerns led to my chairing a series of Labrador-wide meetings involving native communities, government, university and business representatives on development issues and land claims.

In 1980 we moved to St. John's, Newfoundland, where I became first an associate and later senior minister of Gower Street United Church. Through ten years of ministry at Gower, I was drawn more deeply into the linkages between pastoral and prophetic leadership and became involved in numerous aspects of social ministry within the larger Newfoundland and United Church community. From 1988 through 1992 I served as Chair of the national Division of Mission in Canada, and in 1989 as President of the Newfoundland and Labrador Conference.

The move to Hamilton in 1990 was initiated primarily because of a sense of completion of time and work within Newfoundland. The next four years involved ministry at Melrose United Church in Hamilton, continued chairing of the Division of Mission in Canada and the beginning of this Doctor of Ministry program.

In 1994, the position of Interfaith Secretary within the Division of World Outreach became vacant. My decision to apply came out of a strong belief that The United Church of Canada's unique understanding of mission was interconnected with its willingness to risk moving beyond itself, into what I called even at that time, boundary relationships. This thesis documents something of my understanding of that dynamic. In 1996 the Interfaith portfolio was merged with another portfolio, Area Secretary for South Asia and the Pacific Islands. The learning curve in that position, as well as the implications of merging two full time portfolios with significant historical responsibility into one job, meant that the final work on this thesis was delayed until this moment.

I offer my sincere appreciation to those who have patiently awaited its completion.

Abstract

"Dialogue at the Boundaries" explores the meaning and implications of the Native Apology offered in 1986 by the General Council of The United Church of Canada. The Apology addressed the troubling history of Native missions in Canada. In particular, this study suggests, the focus of the Apology was directed towards the failure of the Church to acknowledge the validity of traditional Native Spirituality. The Apology therefore opened the Church to the welcoming of Traditional Spirituality, the other, into its life and work.

Acknowledging the validity of Traditional Spirituality, this study argues, raises significant challenges to the usual understanding and practice of mission within the Church. It also has important implications for the practice of dialogue and what has been called the interfaith question. Through in-depth interviews, and an examination of a traditional Native form of dialogue called the Talking Circle, the contributions and teachings of Native people to an understanding of mission as mutual transformation is named. The Native experience of "two path" spirituality is furthermore pointed to as offering a new approach to understanding the nature of pluralism.

Finally the concept of Whole World Ecumenism, lifted up within a recent document on mission for the United Church entitled "Mending the World," is offered as a new paradigm of mission. The experience and learnings from the Apology and the Talking Circle are used to deepen reflection on this paradigm.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The 20th General Council of The United Church of Canada established the Commission on World Mission in 1962. It was a time when significant social, political and economic changes were pressing the Church to examine more closely its theology and practice of mission. The "paper tiger"¹ of Western military and economic dominance, increasing resistance to colonialism and the resulting three-self movements,² the rise of Communism, the resurgence of Eastern religious traditions and increasing Western pluralism all pointed to the need to re-evaluate prevailing concepts of mission.

In its early history Canada had been on the receiving end of missionary activity. Through the last century, however, Canada had sent missionaries overseas repeating the same patterns of its own early experiences in which power and direction were vested in foreign mission sending centres. But it was clear that another stage of missionary history had now been entered, a stage defined by partnership with indigenous churches in former mission fields, and a new understanding of mission that focused on common participation in God's mission. It was, most importantly, a time when the Christian church was becoming sensitive to the criticism applied to the collusion of Christian mission and Western

¹ The phrase, "paper tiger" was used in China as a depiction of Western power as no more to be feared than papier mache figures used in dances.

² The three-self movement of the churches of the People's Republic of China, self-government, self-support and self-propagation, were widely adopted by many indigenous churches.

colonialism. Similarly the awareness of religious pluralism in Canadian society itself, and the increasing interaction between Christianity and other world faiths, presented significant challenges to traditional understandings of mission.

The recommendations of the Commission, brought to the 22nd General Council in 1966, were wide ranging. In the midst of an exploration of the new realities of pluralism in Canada and throughout the world, the Commission offered a significant openness and sensitivity to the importance of interfaith dialogue as a primary task of the Church. In a recommendation flowing from a section entitled "Rethinking the Relationship Between Christianity and Other Faiths, and the Uniqueness of Christianity," the following was offered:

The Church should recognize that God is creatively and redemptively at work in the religious life of all people. Christians have much to learn, as well as contribute, through dialogue with people of other faiths. Their special responsibility is to present the knowledge of God in Christ Jesus in humble and sincere dialogue in ways which will respect each other's integrity. We recommend a) that our church actively pursue, both informally and formally opportunities and occasions for dialogue with representatives of other faiths; b) that the General Council instruct its Executive to find or create suitable means for achieving this purpose.³

This recommendation led to the appointment of a Secretary for Interfaith Dialogue within what is now the Division of World Outreach; a position that was possibly the first full time interfaith office established in a mainstream denomination anywhere in the world⁴. My own subsequent appointment as the

³ Record of Proceedings. United Church of Canada. 22nd General Council, 1966, pg.435-6

⁴ Marcus Braybrooke, Pilgrimage of Hope: One Hundred Years of Interfaith Dialogue. (New York: Crossroads Publishing, 1992) pg. 245

fourth person to hold that position placed an exploration of dialogue at the heart of my practice of ministry.

As the Commission on World Mission affirmed, interfaith dialogue, its practice, methodology and the theology which undergirds it, is inextricably linked to an understanding of mission. Dialogue is not about techniques of conversation but qualities of relationship and is for the Church a way of being in and relating to the world. A starting assumption of this Doctor of Ministry project therefore was that an exploration of dialogue must of necessity be related to an understanding of the mission of the Church.

My interest in the meaning and practice of dialogue led to an exploration of another significant event in the life of The United Church of Canada. In 1986, twenty years after the adoption of the Commission on World Mission report, the 31st General Council meeting in Sudbury, Ontario offered an Apology to Native⁵ Peoples for the Church's historic role in Native missions. This Apology I believed could provide a window into the dynamics of both mission and interfaith dialogue. It raised a significant challenge to the objectives of the historic Native missions. It symbolized the Church's difficulty in the past of coming to terms with "the other" and the tension between faithfulness and openness. It challenged

⁵ "Native," "Aboriginal" and "First Nations" are all terms of self-identification of Native people in Canada and are used somewhat interchangeably within this paper. "First Nations" is becoming more widely used in Canadian society referring to the many distinct but interrelated communities that compose North America's indigenous peoples. More formally it has come to refer to Indian people with status under the Indian Act. "Aboriginal" and "Native" are used primarily within this paper following their use by those interviewed for this project. Both terms are also used in conjunction with Spirituality signifying a common unity to the spiritual practice and beliefs of First Nations and other aboriginal peoples. "Native," for historical purposes, is the term that is used in conjunction with the Native Apology, Native missions and the Native church community.

the core values and structures of the non-Native church and led to the formation of an alternative model of Native presence within the Church.

Shortly after beginning the position of Interfaith Secretary, I visited the Dr. Jessie Saulteaux Resource Centre in Beausejour, Manitoba, to attend a workshop on Aboriginal images of God. During that visit I experienced the Aboriginal Talking Circle which is the basis of the educational model of the Centre. Stan McKay, the director of the Centre and the first Native Elder to be elected as Moderator of the United Church, spoke about the Talking Circle as one of the ways that First Nations people expressed the core value of respect. Respect, McKay noted, was at the heart of the Aboriginal way of life.

I was struck with several things. First, that respect is a core value of dialogue and a fundamental quality of relationship. Second, that as a Western Christian in particular I had every reason to identify our past history with First Nations people as one of profound disrespect. And finally I felt that an important way of honouring the wisdom of First Nations people would be to invite their help in understanding what it means for those of us who came much later to this land to be in relationships of respect with each other.

The Apology, we shall see, was foremost about the need to revisit and rebuild a spiritual relationship with Native people. But this relationship is no longer confined there. In the modern context of a pluralist society it now involves many faith traditions. Before I left the Centre that weekend, I proposed to Stan McKay that we hold an interfaith Talking Circle gathering called "Paths of Respect." Eventually it involved some 22 people from seven different faith traditions gathering for four days of dialogue at the Dr. Jessie Saulteaux Centre.

Throughout that gathering participants met in the Talking Circle, an experience that left me convinced that it revealed, and was at its core representative of, many of the differences between Native and non-Native cultures and spirituality. The relationship of respect to the Circle and the Circle to dialogue suggested to me that reflection on the experience of this Talking Circle gathering would assist in further exploring the meaning of the Apology and the relationship of dialogue and mission.

The Very Rev. Robert F. Smith, a past moderator of the Church, in presenting a report entitled "Towards a Renewed Understanding of Ecumenism" to the 34th General Council meeting of 1992, summarized work that had begun several years earlier as the Ecumenical Agenda Research Project and would conclude in 1997 with the adoption of "Mending the World" by the 36th General Council. He spoke of how the "fire in the belly" of the United Church has been almost extinguished. That fire was constructed at the time of Union and burned within the Church at the core of our mission as we named ourselves a "Uniting and a United" Church. The diminishing of the ecumenical agenda and the ending of the vision of further unions between Canadian churches were symptoms along the way of this fire burning itself out. The rekindling of the "fire in the belly," he suggested, would be an understanding of ecumenism that embraced the whole world. This "Whole World Ecumenism" would lead the church into partnership with people of different faiths and ideologies for the sake of the healing of the world. It is this concept of Whole World Ecumenism that we shall return to in the final chapter as we conclude an exploration of dialogue at the centre of a paradigm shift in mission for The United Church of Canada.

The Research Project

The intention of this project is to undertake an exploration of dialogue and its relationship to mission as evidenced in a series of actions, the implications of which I believe are interpretive of the life and ethos of The United Church of Canada. Specifically the focus of the research is on the meaning and implications of the Native Apology to an understanding of dialogue and mission within the United Church. An additional and related focus will be an exploration of the Aboriginal Talking Circle as experienced through the “Paths of Respect” Consultation. The Talking Circle, it will be argued, offers insight into the implications of the living of the Apology and in discerning the values that undergird respectful relationships in a pluralistic society.

The Native Apology has been chosen as a pivotal occurrence in the life of the Church. It opens to question historic patterns of mission and reveals significant issues at stake in the formation of a renewed concept of mission for the future. The Apology itself is contributing to a revitalization of Aboriginal Spirituality within the Native church and a movement towards recognition of Aboriginal Spiritual traditions within the wider Church. As such it represents a significant transition point in the relationship between Christianity and Aboriginal Spirituality, one that reflects critical points of interaction between Christianity and other world faiths.

The action research process consisted of a number of stages involving a review of documentation, in-depth interviews, and an analysis of the experience of the "Paths of Respect" Consultation. The focus is on the interpretation of the Apology and through that interpretation, reflection on the nature and practice of dialogue and its relationship to mission.

The Apology, it will be argued, represents a unique occurrence in the history of the Church. It points to and encourages the movement towards dual participation in religious practices that is becoming a hallmark of interfaith experience in this post-modern time. It represents a challenge to a traditional understanding of authority within the Church and the exclusive character of theology, which undergirds that authority. It represents an authentication of the "otherness" of Aboriginal Spirituality, a religious tradition grounded in a different worldview than that of Christianity, and the invitation for that Spirituality to find its place within the life of the Church.

The experience of many First Nations people, holding within themselves "two bundles" of faith and seeking to understand their relationship, offers potential for insight into the future of interfaith dialogue itself. But it also holds within itself the potential to radically transform us, perhaps as some have already said, marking the beginning of a new era in the history of the mission of the Church.

In the Anishnabe tradition there is a prophecy that speaks of the Seventh Fire:

In the time of the Seventh Fire a new people will emerge, to retrace their steps and history, to find what was left by the trail. Their steps will lead them to many different places, and to teachers and elders of their nations. But many of the elders will have fallen asleep and will have forgotten, or

never learned, the teachings. Some elders and historians will be silent out of fear and ignorance. Many more will be overlooked and nothing asked of them...

Their task is not easy. It will take time, hard work, perseverance and faith. The new people must remain strong in their quest... But in time there will be a rebirth, and a rekindling of the scared fire which will light the Eighth and Final Fire of eternal peace, understanding and acceptance over the entire world.⁶

The prophecy of the Seventh Fire speaks of the gifts of the Aboriginal way to the healing of the world. Perhaps what is most striking is the recognition that relationships between the world's faith communities are at the crux of the search for world peace. Changing political structures have dissolved the East/West divide. What has replaced it now, many suggest, are the tensions between the Christian geo-political world and Islamic nationalism. We are coming to sense deeply the meaning of the phrase, "No peace among the nations until there is peace among the religions."⁷ The prophecies of the Seventh Fire offer some hope that wisdom might be found in the Aboriginal experience to suggest new ways of journeying together; that we might learn what it means to truly respect each other in our differences and work together in partnership for the sake of the healing of the world.

⁶ Dan Smith, The Seventh Fire, (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1993) pg.7

⁷ Ascribed to Hans Kung

Methodology

The first phase consisted of a preparatory review of records of proceedings and archival material related to the Native Apology. In-depth interviews were then conducted with seven people with varying experiences of the Native Apology and its role in the Native and non-Native church. The interviews, while conducted from a set questionnaire, varied considerably as the conversations developed. The interviews were transcribed and common themes and interpretations were identified. In Section 3, relevant sections of the interviews have been summarized. In later sections, quotes have been used and attributed to those interviewed.

The second phase of the Research Project incorporated the results of a consultation entitled “Paths of Respect” held at the Dr. Jessie Saulteaux Resource Centre. Twenty-two people from seven different faith traditions (Christian, Aboriginal, Sikh, Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish and Hindu) were invited to gather together at the Centre to explore Aboriginal teachings on respect and to employ the Talking Circle as a method of dialogue (Appendix B). Several Aboriginal Elders including Stan McKay and Myra Laramée shared various teachings about respect in Native traditions but the primary focus of the gathering was on the experience of the Talking Circle. A description of the process of the Circle and an interpretation of its meaning are offered. With the approval of participants the conversations were taped and transcribed. Content was analyzed and themes and interpretations identified as in phase one.

The Apology

In a teepee set against the moonlit sky in Sudbury in the summer of 1986, the Moderator of The United Church of Canada offered an apology to the Native people of the United Church.

Long before my people journeyed to this land your people were here, and you received from your elders an understanding of creation, and of the Mystery that surrounds us all that was deep, and rich and to be treasured.

We did not hear you when you shared your vision. In our zeal to tell you of the good news of Jesus Christ we were blind to the value of your spirituality.

We confused Western ways and culture with the depth and breadth and length and height of the gospel.

We imposed our civilization as a condition for accepting the gospel. We tried to make you like us and in so doing we helped to destroy the vision that made you what you were. As a result you and we are poorer and the image of the Creator in us is twisted, blurred, and we are not what we are meant by the Great Spirit to be.

We who represent The United Church of Canada ask you to forgive us and to walk together in the spirit of Christ so that our people may be blessed and God's creation healed.

2. THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE APOLOGY AND GENERAL COUNCIL PREPARATORY DOCUMENTS

The focus of this study does not involve a detailed exploration of the history of Christian missions among the Aboriginal people of Canada. It is important however, to understand something of the historical context that was the focus of the Apology.

The Workbook of materials sent in early 1986 to the delegates preparing to attend the 31st General Council included an article by the Rev. George van der Goes Ladd.⁸ While serving on the Peguis reserve in Manitoba, Ladd had undertaken research on the life of Chief Peguis (1765-1864) of the Anishnabek people of Red River. Ladd included two descriptions by Europeans of Peguis and his band. The first was by Colin Robertson of the Hudson's Bay Company in October 1816.

When Peguis and his Band consisting of 65 men doubled Point Douglas and were in sight of the Fort, they fired a volley which we returned by a three Pounder. We then hoisted our flag. Peguis immediately returned the compliment by mounting his colours at the stern of his Canoe. And when the whole squadron came in sight consisting of nearly 150 canoes, including those of Women and Children, it had a wild but grand appearance, their Bodies were painted various Colours, their heads decorated, some with branches and others with feathers, and every time we

⁸ The article written for General Council drew extensively from George van der Goes Ladd, Shall We Gather at the River, (Toronto, CANEC, 1986)

fired the Cannon, the woods re-echoed with that wild whoop of joy which they gave to demonstrate the satisfaction they received.⁹

The second description was written eight years later by the Rev. David Jones of the Church of England.

A band of Indians came today with their Chief at the head to beg some wheat seed. Their appearance was truly ridiculous, the old Chief in a field officer's uniform given to him by Lord Selkirk some years ago. They had about three birch rind canoes with a flag in the foremost, given to them by the Company, and thus they did proceed up the river, beating an old drum and shouting and yelling. Their appearance altogether was a representation of human nature in its lowest state of degradation.¹⁰

Ladd notes that for Robertson, Peguis was a powerful ally as the Europeans struggled for their existence. At the time of Jones' observation, the Red River settlement was firmly established, the larger game of the region had been hunted out, and the fur trade controlled by the Company. The Red River Anishnabek were reduced to a collection of individuals and families without power and without options.

In the 1830's the choices open to Peguis were control by the fur traders or the missionaries. Peguis choose the missionaries because of their plan to create an Indian agricultural settlement. He saw it as a way of liberating his people from the control of the Hudson's Bay Company. The Rev. William Cockran was an

⁹ Hudson's Bay Company Archives: E10/1, Colin Robertson's diary, 1814-1817, in Workbook for 31st General Council, GC 144, 1986.

¹⁰ Church Missionary Society Archives: David Jones' Journal, 24 May 1824; in 31st General Council Workbook, United Church of Canada, GC 145, 1986.

example of the best and the worst that characterized the missionary enterprise. As

Ladd writes:

He was a principal shaper and celebrant of the settler's consciousness of the Native as pure evil while being a courageous defender of human rights. He was a furious hater of everything that constituted the actual human reality of Native people and a tireless opponent of their economic oppressors, his fellow-settlers and co-religionists. He was a Super Settler and a Robin Hood, and it did not strike him that this was impossible and grotesque. Therefore he was a walking pitfall for any Native person who wanted to escape economic oppression without embracing spiritual death.

Cockran resolved that the Native settlers should give up their Indian ways and become English. "I thought of making the Red Men Christians," he wrote, "and then Christians and Englishmen were so closely united in my imagination, that they appeared as one." His expectation was that all the active virtues of English Christians would become evident in Indians when they became Christians: industry, cleanliness, taste, good order and so on. But "every attempt, every invention ... has failed."¹¹ Years later Cockran was to admit that "In whatever light you contemplate the Indian on earth, you behold him destined to suffer a large amount of misery." The problem, in Cockran's mind, was clearly the nature of 'Indianness' itself.

Ladd related an additional story recorded in the diary of the Rev. John Smithhurst. In the summer of 1840, Peguis' son suffered an extended illness. Smithhurst sought to use the illness to the advantage of the gospel and implored him, under the threat of everlasting hell-fire to renounce everything he held sacred

¹¹ Church Missionary Society Archives: Cockran to Secretaries, 1 Aug. 1836; GC 146

and "receive the Saviour." The sick son replied with a caustic wit, as Smithhurst records:

He said in reply that all I told him was good but God was so great and holy and pure that he would never allow Indians to live with him, for when they went to the houses of European chiefs who had fine rooms they were never allowed to go further than the kitchen because they were not clean enough. If, then, they were not fit to live with men how could they be fit to live with God.¹²

Ladd notes that no more information was available about Peguis' son. And concerning Peguis himself there was not enough data to indicate how far he entered into the project of becoming English. But there is a troubling contrast between two documents he signed. The first, the Selkirk treaty, marked in 1817 with the stylized representation of a wolf, the signature of a traditional Anishnabe chief. The second on his last will and testament in 1858, with an "X", the mark of an illiterate Englishman.

The article, with the closing sentence, "I leave it to the reader to speculate whether the father or the son chose the better part," served as a moving introduction for the General Council to the confusion between gospel and culture that so typified missionary work of that period. Cockran, who could not imagine what it meant to be Christian without also being culturally English, was one of many missionaries who believed that Christianization for First Nations people was inextricably linked with a transition from Native to European ways. The adoption of numerous European customs including such superficial characteristics

¹² Ecclesiastical Province of Rupert's Land Archives: Smithhurst's Journal, 2 Aug. 1840, in Ibid.

as the wearing of hats and more substantial expectations as the alignment of houses along a straight street, civilization, became the expected outcome of Christian belief.¹³

In many cases various incentives were used to open Native communities to competing missionary advances. Food in times of famine, trade for various goods, government homes, as well as training and education were all part of the persuasion to accept one missionary group over another.¹⁴ Some bands were wooed by a number of denominations, each however offering, with its own particular denominational expressions, the common values of a Christian European society. Methodists, John Grant suggests, typically expected a sudden conversion and transformation from Native to European ways. Roman Catholics were the least inclined to require conformity to any one set of cultural norms. Anglicans relied heavily, however, on the links with established society.¹⁵ It must be said that underlying much of this cultural abrogation was the belief that the missionary effort was necessary to ensure the survival of a people otherwise facing inevitable destruction. In the minds of many missionaries the provision of a new set of beliefs supplanted one that was about to collapse.¹⁶

¹³ John Webster Grant, Moon Of Wintertime: Missionaries and the Indians of Canada in Encounter Since 1534, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984) pg. 89

¹⁴ John Bacher, "The Church and the Legacy of Colonialism", The Ecumenist, Vol. 27 No. 2, (Montreal: Paulist Press & Faculty of Religious Studies, McGill University, 1989) pg.19

¹⁵ The Moon of Wintertime, pg. 91

¹⁶ Ibid.

The inevitability of the collapse however was conditioned by a strong belief in the progress of Native people up an evolutionary ladder. To many in the nineteenth century Native people resembled the stereotypes of primitive cavemen, far from the ideal of Western civilization. In the late eighteenth century a new "science" of race proposed stages of societal evolution which compared the development of the human species to the development of a person from infancy through adulthood. In addition to providing a rationale for treatment of First Nations people as children it also fed an assumption of the uniformity of history and the development of the new concept of civilization.¹⁷ The concept, however, of a single civilization structured out of the identical needs and wants of people regardless of cultural heritage or race, resulted in a profound inability to sense the reality of the otherness of Native people. For much of the missionary history of the church, grounded in human reason and rational faith, the "other" simply did not exist. Writes Robert Berkhofer,

one arrives at the fundamental premises behind much of white understanding of the Indian from about the middle of the eighteenth century to very recent times. Under these conceptions civilization was destined to triumph over savagery, and so the Indian was to disappear either through death or through assimilation into the larger, more progressive white society.¹⁸

The program of civilizing First Nations people was singularly hampered by nomadic traditions. Missionary reports, as John Grant notes, did indicate that religious work was "ninety-nine percent better in every way" among the nomadic

¹⁷ Jamake Highwater, The Primal Mind: Vision and Reality in Indian America, (New York: Meridian: 1981) pg. 35

¹⁸ Robert Berkhofer, Jr. quoted in *Ibid.*, pg. 38

people. But as long as they maintained their migratory patterns "Indians would not acquire the skills or adopt the attitudes of the civilization of the West."¹⁹ Yet settlements alone did not provide the solution. Irregular attendance at school and alcoholism were only two of the problems that persisted. The result was that in the hope of achieving both civilization and Christianization, the missionaries gradually assumed the role of guardians. With that role came an increasing emphasis on agriculture, which tied the First Nations to the settlements and promoted stability and a controlled environment, and residential schools.²⁰

Residential schools, from one perspective, represented the mission program of Christianization and civilization in its most fully developed and oppressive form.²¹ They offered the promise of character formation, education and indoctrination of European culture into the lives of those in its care in a manner and over a period of time that would not easily be countered by, in the words of a superintendent of Indian Affairs of that time, the "retrograde influence of home life."²²

While the Church's involvement in residential schools was part of a much broader strategy of education designed to secure greater justice for the poor and marginalized, schools for girls and the children of immigrants, for example were

¹⁹ Moon of Wintertime, pg. 224

²⁰ Ibid., pg. 226

²¹ Ibid., pg. 226

²² John Bacher, "The Church and the Legacy of Colonialism", op.cit. pg. 20

operated by the United Church before public education became widely available,²³ nevertheless, residential school policies merged quickly with the larger goals of assimilation. In the early part of this century the federal government began to fund and set policy for the schools and, with little apparent Church opposition, established such infamous policies as allowing students to return home only once a year and enforced English language speaking.

A 1993 Brief by the United Church to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples offered this summary:

Many Native people have spoken in United Church sharing circles about their experience in Residential Schools. Virtually none have mentioned sexual abuse, but their stories are nonetheless raw with painful memories: the forced separation from parents at a young age (one woman described how at eleven years of age she tried to comfort the five and six year-old girls in her dormitory who would cry themselves to sleep night after night); punishment for speaking their own language or engaging in Native customs at the school; constant hunger (a woman described how she learned to be a thief at Residential schools through stealing food from the kitchen to try to quell the hunger pains); and derogatory remarks about Native people, their customs and beliefs (one man described the experience as "learning to be ashamed that I was an Indian"). The abuse was cultural, physical, spiritual, and emotional.

The unrelenting Native resistance to the schools - parent boycotts, chronic absenteeism, runaways, drop-outs and the number of schools which burned down - reveals a telling tale of both the underlying strength of Native identity and of the failure of the Residential School systems to meet the needs of its students. The Residential Schools were premised on a racist understanding of the superiority of European civilization as it was being transplanted in North America, and the inferiority of Aboriginal societies. This racist premise was reinforced by the churches in their

²³ Brief to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples by The United Church of Canada, 8 November 1993.

theology and their attitudes to Native spirituality. Contact between these two ways of living in the world led to a rapid and often brutal disintegration of the Aboriginal way of life. Combined with the relentless economic and social pressure of expansionist European society, the effects of the Residential Schools dealt an almost fatal blow to Aboriginal societies.²⁴

The belief in the superiority of European civilization over Native traditions extended, as we have already noted, to the mission attitude towards Aboriginal Spirituality. One example of a highly symbolic nature was the deliberate breaking of taboos by missionaries and other actions designed to undermine traditional beliefs.²⁵ This intentional breaking of taboos and traditions served to create confusion around spiritual traditions. In some cases the government acted, with church compliance, to make traditions such as the potlatch ceremony, the sweatlodge or the sun dance a criminal offence.

In the preparatory documentation sent to the delegates of the 31st General Council Katherine Hockin, a well known missionary, offered a personal story of work in a West Coast Indian reservation during the depression years.

That Christmas the village people wanted to express their gratitude and we were all invited to a party in the Big House. It was a lively occasion and a magnificently masked figure of the Thunderbird arrived moving with the vigour of the Native dance. As we responded appreciatively to the dramatic traditional dance, there was a disappointing anti-climax. A modern Santa Claus came in and set about driving the Thunderbird out of the company, thus affirming that Christianity had come to the village. I remember feeling shock and sadness in realizing that this was offered by the village people as their own perception of change.²⁶

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Moon of Wintertime. op.cit. pg. 22

²⁶ 31st General Council Preparatory Workbook, pg. GC 149.

It is important to note that within Aboriginal spiritual traditions there were in most situations no apparent internal restrictions hindering the appropriation of the spiritual powers of another tradition. Borrowing from one tribal tradition to another was a common practice.²⁷ While there were differences in worldview that are obvious to an observer at this time, from the perspective of Native people during this early period Christianity and Aboriginal Spirituality must have seemed genuinely compatible. Grant notes the quest for a personal vision, prayer conceived as genuine encounter with the unseen, and prophetic recalls to origins with claims to direct personal inspiration²⁸ as some examples of this congeniality. There were also however differences that ran very deep.

Expressions of dualism in Indian mythology and Christianity constitute as good an example as any...the Christian sees good and evil, personified in God and the Devil, as locked in a conflict that must ultimately end in the victory of good. In the Iroquoian myth it does not appear the conflict is ever to be resolved, or even that it needs to be...²⁹

Gradually, however, at least some First Nations people began to realize that more was involved than just another source of spiritual stories and remedies. The missionaries, it became obvious, were out to replace their stories with a totally different system of religious beliefs.³⁰

²⁷ Moon of Wintertime, pg. 39

²⁸ Ibid., pg. 23

²⁹ Ibid., pg. 24

³⁰ Ibid., pg. 40

Throughout Canada, First Nations people varied in their response to Christianity. Many offered objections while some answers were ambiguous. One chief responded that his people would worship God in both "your way and our way," while another saw both religions as equally good but acknowledged that in fact they observed neither.³¹ For many who adopted the Christian way it meant putting aside traditional ways as symbols of a "pagan" past and accepting Christian beliefs superimposed with Western European culture. It wasn't until 1969 that the historic mission churches terminated at their own request contracts with the federal government for the operation of residential schools. This termination signalled a growing intensity of awareness and sensitivity to Aboriginal issues in the mission churches; a sensitivity that would lead to actions of support for Aboriginal rights such as the United Church's Apology in 1986.

Towards the Apology

Several other factors played a part in preparing the way for consideration of the Apology within The United Church of Canada. In 1977 a request to the 27th General Council Meeting in Calgary to undertake a thorough review of the United Church's work with Native people led to the first national Native consultation in 1980. Several more consultations followed, ultimately leading to

³¹ Ibid., pg. 87

the formation of a National Council for Native Ministries in 1982. The Very Rev. Stan McKay was appointed in that year as the first national Native Ministries Coordinator. Throughout this time, geographically based Native Presbyteries were formed, first in Keewatin in 1981, followed in 1984 by Plains Presbytery and in 1987 by the All Tribes Presbytery.

In 1979 the Saskatchewan Conference structured a task force to analyze the problem of white racism against Native people. The Task Group was composed of activists who felt that what was needed was not another report but rather outright repentance for the grave injustices of the past. The documentation to what was to become a Call for a Year of Repentance offered this introduction:

We repent because anything less is a refusal to make the changes in our life necessary to be faithful to the God who becomes brother to all sister and brother creatures in Jesus Christ. By repenting as a people, the church in Saskatchewan, we begin to seek basic changes in our past, in the present situation, and in new future directions. Repentance seeks to break through the prison of guilt, suspicion, hidden anger, and the situation of fear and hatred. It is our task to repent. It is God's willing that will create new beginnings.³²

The Call pointed to three movements of repentance. There was the necessity to "mourn," "grieve," "bemoan earlier wrongs done from which we presently benefit - even when those wrongs were done with the highest intentions." Then to uncover the specifics of the wrongdoing; "to see where our forebears went astray"

³² Bob Haverluck, "A Year of Repentance." in the Ecumenist, Vol 20, Sept.-Oct. 1981-2, pg.89

and to turn and start anew on a right path. A key part of this movement would be the necessity of an apology.

As the gospel teaches us, it is not enough to apologize to God for offending our neighbours, but we must apologize to those offended. Apologies are appropriately accompanied by amends when recompense can be made. We may now be closer to discerning what that might or must mean for us.³³

And finally the movement towards repentance would be to put the entire society under scrutiny. "How do we go and sin no more." One of the outcomes of the Year of Repentance was Conference support for a Native controlled ministry training program which was to result in the formation of the Dr. Jessie Saulteaux Resource Centre in 1984.

The mandate of the Centre was to enable the United Church Native communities to train and develop candidates for Native ministry in the Native way. The first ordained Native minister had struggled with many expectations for theological training including that of debating points of argument. The traditional Native way of respect for others' beliefs, which included a reticence to confront and therefore debate, it was suggested, led to him being judged as non-participatory in the classroom. The Dr. Jessie Saulteaux Centre therefore developed the use of Talking Circles as one way in which participation could be achieved while honouring and respecting the opinions of others. The training model also incorporates an action/reflection process placing students on pastoral

³³ Session VI in a series of six workshops prepared for the Year of Repentance.

charges and bringing them back to the Centre for periods of time throughout the five year program for courses and reflection.

Throughout these interlocking paths Native people had many long discussions seeking to define the needs of the Native United Church community. Consideration began early on of the formation of the All Native Circle Conference which was finally constituted in 1988. But much discussion was also given to the need to address the way the gospel had been presented to Native communities and in particular the very clear valuing of one culture over another. As Stan McKay expressed it:

Until we made some new initiative in the context of our theological understanding and our spiritual development in Aboriginal communities we would always live under this cloud of the history of Native missions and never encounter from our side the true history which would be liberating.

It was in the midst of the ferment of that discussion that a representative of the National Native Council, Alberta Billy, stood up at a 1985 General Council Executive meeting and said simply that the Executive needed to consider an apology to the Native community. It had not been planned either by the National Council or by the Executive of General Council. It was, says Stan McKay, in part because Alberta Billy was the clearest in naming the realities of that moment. It was also, many say, a wonderful example of the leading of the Spirit.

Responses varied across the Native church community. In British Columbia, in Alberta Billy's own community, many were opposed. Alf Dumont noted that for them the Church had been there during a difficult time over health issues and that it was through the Church, they understood, that a great deal of

physical healing had been brought to the community. But others noted that it was Europeans who had brought the illnesses in the first place. They asked what good an apology would be if there was nothing substantial along with it. It was then that discussions began on what the meaning of an apology might be.

In the summer of 1985 about 70 Native people from across the Church gathered in consultation. Stan McKay commented that there was some confusion about an apology but much discussion again took place around its focus. It was clear that the Native community was not uniform in its recognition of the need for an apology. Many United Church Native people felt that no apology was necessary and in fact that it would diminish the significance of the gospel as it was received by Native communities. As preparations proceeded for the Apology it seemed particularly incongruous to some that while the General Council sought to enter a consensus model of decision making in honor of Aboriginal ways, no consensus had in fact been achieved across the Aboriginal community about the meaning of the Apology itself.

There was never any consensus about the meaning of the apology particularly in respect to its meaning around the validation of traditional Native spirituality. The question of whether the apology was needed or not was never clarified among United Church Native people. -Glenys Huws

The leaders also began to prepare for what would happen if the General Council decided against an apology. One clear step that had been agreed to, McKay remembers, is that regardless of what the Council would decide, the people would dance. Plans were made, therefore, to bring a drumming group to the site of the Council. Momentum began to build towards Sudbury as an

important milestone in the history of Native peoples within The United Church of Canada.

Preparatory documents, some of which we have already noted, were sent to Commissioners. In a March 31st, 1986, letter to Conferences and Presbyteries, the Secretary for Theology Faith and Ecumenism, Hallett Llewellyn, included both an historical sketch on Native Missions and a brief outline of a "Theology of Apology." In the text of his letter he offered this interpretation of the proposed action:

For many of us, consideration of an apology will raise the interfaith question, what is the appropriate Christian response to other spiritual expressions? The Apology material does not deal directly with this question. It remains as a vital issue to be addressed in a spirit of trust and open dialogue. It is the latter, unfortunately, that our past Christian mission, in large measure, obstructed. Based on the unqualified premise that Native spirituality was wrong or pagan, Christian mission often resulted in the shameful dismissal of the Native Christian's unique and valuable cultural and spiritual heritage. It is this fact that lies at the heart of the Apology.

An apology by the General Council was not something new, Llewellyn continued in his letter. The 29th General Council had apologized to James Endicott and in 1984 had called upon the Government of Canada to formally and publicly acknowledge the injustice done to Japanese Canadians during wartime.

In the accompanying document the following was offered as the theological meaning of apology.

The word apology brings to mind an expression of regret or sorrow for personal or social wrongdoing. As individuals we often recognize after the fact that our words or actions have hurt someone, so we apologize. The act

carries with it the admission of fault and an association of guilt. Also it carries the desire to change in ways that can restore a relationship.

As such, the meaning of apology brings us close to the biblical idea of repentance - an act that involves feelings of regret for action displeasing to God. A United Church apology to the Native people would be an act of deep theological significance, as well as being an humanitarian gesture. In its recognition of error and subsequent move towards a new partnership with the Native churches, the church would be simultaneously renewing its relationship with God.

Repentance takes on a radical dimension in the Scriptures, when the Bible suggests that even God can repent. In Hosea 11:7 God repents of a course of action for the sake of the human future - "my heart recoils within me." In Jonah 3:10 the reference is even more direct - "God repented of the evil which he said he would do them." This is God's willing of a covenant partnership with us. What God wills for God's Self is expected of us as co-creators.

In Galilee, when John is arrested, Jesus calls people to repentance. This call is issued in the light of the "closeness" of God's reign. (Mark 1:14) Inherent here is the belief that human beings have the dynamic power - (*dunamis*) - and the responsibility to change the present so that it will mirror the image of God's future. Repentance, therefore, is an act that calls us to claim the power of new beginnings and of re-creation.

Jesus' message of repentance speaks of the whole world being revolutionized. While new relationships, systems and structures are to be established, new fruits of the spirit are to be expected. In the Bible, joy is the chief mark of repentance (Luke 7:45; 15:3-10) A reconciliation between sinner and sinned-against is cause for great celebration.

Repentance then does not demand that people feel guilty - "the poor can't eat guilt." Repentance requires us to redress injustices so that people can eat. It is important to keep this in mind in relation to the current condition of Native people.

A recognition of our denial of Native culture is not enough to redress the wrong. Repentance of thought and deed are required. Repentance requires that we do justly not just think justly. It means that we must 'act' in such a way that Native congregations are given proper recognition, and that a new partnership is established with them.³⁴

³⁴

"Apology to Native Congregations" Flyer issued prior to 31st General Council.

The Apology itself was written during the General Council meeting by a Sessional Committee. While early plans called for the participation of the National Native Consultation to contribute to the formation of the Apology, this did not materialize. It was not until the evening of the Apology that the Sessional Committee brought the draft to Moderator Robert Smith. He described it as being written in "committeese." With less than a half an hour before the beginning of the evening session, Smith redrafted the Apology on the back of an envelope. This more poetic draft was the text that was finally adopted with the exception of one word, which was added during the evening's discussion. The draft prepared by Smith said, "We ask you to forgive us and walk with us.." Early in the evening's session it was pointed out that this suggested a continued paternalism in the expectation that Native people would walk with the Church. The phrasing was changed to read, "We ask you to forgive us and to walk together in the spirit of Christ so that our people may be blessed and God's creation healed."

The evening session began with Smith requesting that the Council move out of parliamentary procedure into a consensus model. Presentations were offered by a number of Native Elders. Smith particularly remembered the presentation of Bernice Saulteaux who, unlike the other presenters who wore traditional Native dress, was there, she said, only in the clothes she was dressed in. She spoke of her heritage being taken from her. She spoke of the fear and trepidation that was felt when, just a week before, drums had been allowed for the first time in the church at Carry the Kettle for a funeral. After the presentations the Native people left the meeting hall in complete silence. It was a silence, Smith said, which lasted for an extended period.

Discussions continued until after ten that evening. Many concerns were raised, the most passionate around whether the intention was to apologize for the gospel of Jesus Christ or the actions of faithful missionaries. After hours of debate, and clarification that the Apology referred to the imposition of European interpretations of the gospel with its implicit denial of the validity of Aboriginal spiritual traditions, substantial agreement was reached. But it was not unanimous. In the end, two people chose to withhold consensus. The Council therefore moved out of a consensus mode and a vote was finally taken.

Smith then led the Council out of the building down to the parking lot where a group of Elders waited in the teepee. It was not a scripted event, he reports, and there was much uncertainty about what was to happen next. It was suggested that he go into the teepee where he found about fourteen or fifteen Elders sitting around the fire. It was smoky, and the only way he could see was to kneel down by the fire. With tears in his eyes from the smoke he read the Apology and concluded with the words "We ask you to forgive us and walk together in the spirit of Christ so that our people may be blessed and God's Creation healed."

In Smith's words what happened next was one of the most moving occasions of his life.

Edith Memnook got up, stood in front of me and said, 'I have been waiting all my life to hear those words. I've been waiting to hear them for myself and for my grandchildren.' Then she opened her arms wide and said, 'Of course I forgive you.' And then she embraced me. and then it wasn't the smoke that was causing me to cry. -Bob Smith

When they left the tent the people gathered around were informed that the Apology had been offered. The Council was then told that the response of the

Native community would not be to accept the Apology but only to receive it. Glenys Huws suggested that “to receive” the Apology was a wise step precisely because of the lack of clarity within the Native community over its meaning; in particular questions about whether the Apology implied a validation of traditional Aboriginal Spirituality.

Smith spoke of another significant insight from that evening. He remembers sharing with a Native colleague that the drumming had a distinctive rhythm to it. So he asked what this was about. His colleague looked at him and said, "Don't you know, this is our praying." Smith remembered Bernice Saulteaux's statement that the drum had not been allowed into the church. And it was then, he says, that it truly hit him "how totally perhaps deliberately (the Church) had misunderstood the nature of their spirituality."

Two years later during the 1988 General Council meeting Edith Memnook offered the official response from the Native community to the Apology.

The Apology made to the Native people of Canada by The United Church of Canada in Sudbury in August 1986, has been a very important step forward. It is heartening to see that The United Church of Canada is a forerunner in making this Apology to Native People. The All Native Circle Conference has now acknowledged your Apology. Our people have continued to affirm the teachings of the Native way of life. Our spiritual teachings and values have taught us to uphold the Sacred Fire; to be guardians of Mother Earth and to strive to maintain harmony and peaceful coexistence with all peoples.

We only ask of you to respect our Sacred Fire, The Creation and to live in peaceful coexistence with us. We recognize that hurts and feelings will continue amongst our people, but through partnership and walking hand in hand, the Indian spirit will eventually heal. Through our love, understanding and sincerity the brotherhood and sisterhood of unity, strength and respect can be achieved.

The Native People of the All Native Circle Conference hope and pray that the Apology is not symbolic but that these are words of action and sincerity. We appreciate the freedom for culture and religious expression. In the new spirit this Apology has created, let us unite our hearts and minds in the wholeness of life that the Great Spirit has given us.

3. THE INTERVIEWS

The following section offers a synopsis of relevant parts of the interviews undertaken as part of this research project. While the interviews were conducted from a set questionnaire they tended to be free ranging, following the insights and interests of those being interviewed. Further interviews focused specifically on the Talking Circle were also undertaken and are referenced in a later section.

The Very Rev. Robert F. Smith is a past Moderator of the United Church. Most recently he has been minister of First United Church in Vancouver, and is now retired. He was Moderator of the 31st General Council and presided over the Council during the offering of the Apology. Sections of the interview have already been referred to in Section 2. This summary deals with other parts of the interview.

Smith's involvement with the Apology was primarily as the presiding officer of the Council and through most of it, he notes, he was simply an interested and concerned bystander. He actively encouraged the process but it was something, he says, that the Church did not engineer. It came out of the Native church itself. So the Council, through most of the process, was in a reactive mode. "It was," he says, "one of those moments of the Spirit where we were taken over and didn't have any choice about it."

The Sessional Committee, Smith notes, did the basic work on the Apology. On the evening in which the Apology was to be considered, the Sessional Committee brought the draft to him. During the next half-hour he rewrote the Apology in its more poetic form and it remained what was adopted with the exception of the addition of one word. As it stood it was paternalistic, inviting Native people to “walk with the Church.” So the phrasing was changed to invite a walking together.

The Sessional Committee had worked through the issues relating to the role of missionaries. The concern was not to disparage the vocation of missionaries “who went into Native communities believing they were bringing the light of the gospel.” As the debate proceeded it became clear nevertheless that consensus was not possible. The two people in opposition were unyielding and the decision was made finally to move out of consensus and back into parliamentary mode where the formal text of the Apology was adopted.

Smith noted the tension inherent in the Native communities’ concern about consensus. He pointed to the significant initiatives the Church had undertaken precisely because it was prepared to move ahead prophetically in spite of a lack of consensus. The most obvious example was the Church’s decision in 1988 concerning the ordination of gay and lesbian people.

Smith remembers saying the Apology “was without substance unless from this moment on we lived its intention.” But he and others had little idea of what the wider implications of the Apology might ultimately mean. He did know that from the moment of the Apology on, the Church was obliged to shape its life differently. Clearly he felt the Apology was directed towards United Church people and not to the wider Native community. The United Church, he noted,

would have little right to speak for other churches. The great emotion that greeted the Apology that night, Smith remembers, was a surprise. The other surprise was that the Native people were not going to accept it.

In response to questions concerning the distinctive nature of the United Church, Smith notes the short history of the Church. In contrast to other denominations, which have much stronger traditions in areas such as liturgy, the United Church is able to move much faster on issues such as the ordination of gay and lesbian people. The risk, he notes, is that we might become sectarian. A significant reason that the Church was open to the Apology was its Methodist heritage. The assumption that we must do something about the injustices of the world has been a strong thread in the life of the United Church since 1925. The Apology therefore had a strong component of righting an injustice. It is not just the Methodist tradition. The Methodist Church of the USA is not as progressive as The United Church of Canada. In part this might be because of the strong central power of Bishops. The United Church in contrast operates much more out of a conciliar structure and ethos. This conciliar system among other things has given place for people's voices to be heard including the voices of Native peoples.

There is also, Smith suggests, great diversity within the United Church. There are segments of the Church that are incredibly vibrant and in that vibrancy had no difficulty in risking the action of the Apology. The fact that there is no conservative central structure to hold back initiatives that come from certain areas of the Church means that sometimes controversial actions can move forward with incredible momentum. What underlies the United Church's ability to undertake such initiatives are its conciliar system, the legacy of the Methodists and its relatively free form of church government.

In conclusion Smith responded to a question on his understanding of Christ by speaking about the incognito Jesus. For him, a majority of the hidden faces of Christ he meets are Native people and they are incredibly scarred. It is on the streets that Smith meets Jesus, and it is there that he ministers to him. The primary question of faith for Smith is “Who is my neighbour?” and what with his neighbour can he say about the mystery that is God. The Whole World Ecumenism paper therefore, he says, really does have a subversive agenda. It is to redirect the Church to more important questions than what the Church is normally conditioned to ask.

The Rev. Dr. Alf Dumont is Ojibway. He was the first speaker of the All Native Circle Conference and currently is minister of St. John’s United Church in Alliston, Ontario. In the interview he spoke initially of the importance of recognizing the differences in the way that the All Native Circle Conference functions from the non-Native church. The ANCC, as it was being formed, would function under a consensus model and seek agreement before making major decisions. This would at times require long periods of time to make decisions, “perhaps even months,” while other parts of the church might not have time to wait. There would be inevitable tension, he suggested, between these two forms of governance.

The Apology itself, Dumont noted, issued from the statement of Alberta Billy at the General Council Executive meeting. Many Elders felt that the Church had taken neither Aboriginal Spirituality nor Native culture seriously. Nevertheless when Alberta Billy requested the Apology there was a mixed reaction within the Native community. Some were very much opposed, speaking

of how the Church had brought healing to their community. Others argued that it was the Church that brought the illness in the first place. Most suggested however that the time was right. But what, it was asked, would the Apology mean? Early on in the discussions it was recognized that there were different understandings of the meaning of apology between the European and Aboriginal communities.

European communities, Dumont suggested, see apologies as addressing a wrong and attempting to restore relationship. The focus is on the past and the attempt therefore is to address a specific action to a specific problem. Often an immediate response is expected. In the Aboriginal community, apologies are seen as an indication that the one who apologizes is seeking to change his ways. Frequently a story is told in response to the Apology as a way of preserving honour and of offering guidance. It was for this reason that the Apology itself was only acknowledged. The message was: "We wish to walk with you to see how you will live out the meaning of the Apology."

For some Native people it meant that they finally felt free to talk about and explore the practices and beliefs of their traditions within the Church. For many younger people, Dumont suggests, it meant that they could now walk both with the Church and with their Aboriginal traditions with integrity. But for others it meant significant difficulties.

In particular Dumont pointed to the problems surrounding the usual interpretation of the biblical passage, "I am the way, the truth and the life." For many Natives and non-Natives this passage represents the most significant challenge to affirming the validity of other religious traditions. But instead, he suggests, if one interprets it as "the way of sacrificing your life for other people, and following the way of loving those who persecute you and hate you," then it

need not mean anything different from following the traditional ways of respect. It does not have to close the door to the possibility of many valid paths. Underneath this concept of many paths there are both the traditional ways of respect and the multiversal character of the Aboriginal mind.

In response to questions about what the Apology reveals about the United Church, Dumont pointed to his understanding of the reconciling character of the Church. We are an open Church, which affirms diversity. Our commitment to be a uniting Church underlies our desire to bring marginalized parts of the community back together. In contrast to Episcopal church structures, our lack of bishops has forced the Church into more extensive practices of consultation. In addition it has resulted in a more flexible governance system that has allowed Aboriginal leadership to gain an effective voice and to move forward dramatically into positions of leadership. In particular it has been the creation of Native educational facilities and various national bodies which have given Native people political voice within the Church.

At the Sudbury General Council the Native community was aware that a draft Apology had been developed but they had not seen it. Native leaders representing the National Council were asked to speak about their experiences within the Church and many shared personal stories of pain. As had been decided in advance the Council was then informed that the Native members would leave and wait by the Sacred Fire in the parking lot. They would gather to talk but regardless of the outcome they would dance.

Dumont notes a difference in understanding with Bob Smith's interpretation of the intention of the Apology. Smith's interpretation was that the Apology was directed to Native people within The United Church of Canada.

Dumont saw it as a Apology for all Aboriginal people. The presence of traditional people in the teepee who were not part of the Church symbolized this reality. Moreover, he argues, Aboriginal people do not define membership in the same way as the non-Native church. The Apology therefore was for all Aboriginal people and “it was received for the whole body.”

In tracing the more recent history of Aboriginal ministries leading up to the Apology, Dumont notes that prior to 1967, Superintendents of Home Missions were the primary link between Native communities and the Church. But in 1967 the Divisions of the General Council were formed and responsibility for Native ministries fell between the cracks. In 1979, when he was requested to review the current status of Native ministries, he found many records out of date and incomplete. This was a significant statement itself. It meant that the Native church had been ignored as unimportant.

Furthermore, individual Native leaders had frequently been asked to assume positions of leadership. But in the Aboriginal tradition you cannot be a spokesperson for the community unless a body gives you that right. Leaders therefore often felt isolated and pressured for what they had to offer. The formation of the National Council was therefore a powerful symbol of the Church beginning to listen and created a significant momentum leading to Sudbury.

In response to a question on the place of Christ in Aboriginal Spirituality, Dumont responds that Christ is walking in the midst of the people. Christ is in the midst of the justice, in the midst of the love, in the midst of the circle. In the Aboriginal community people do not have difficulty with this image because they see many Christ figures. Jesus is one of them. He is the focal point of the

significant ones but there were many teachers. Christ said, "You will do these things and greater things than I do."

The full meaning of the Apology, Dumont indicates, will take many years to discover. But in the meantime Aboriginal people are participating at all levels of the Church. Many are being asked to be leaders in workshops exploring the relationship between Aboriginal Spirituality and Christianity. The history of residential schools is being addressed slowly but carefully.

Many Native people recall the prophecy that there will be a time when the light skinned people will be given an opportunity to change their ways and walk in the good way. Many believe we are in the time of the seventh fire and this is the time to light the eighth fire, the time of co-operation, brotherhood, sisterhood. It will be a time when Aboriginal Spirituality is to rise up again out of what appears to be ashes. And a revival will come. It will take time because many of the old people have forgotten the ways, but the time is right and the spirit is moving.

The Rev. Evelyn Broadfoot is a Cree from Northern Manitoba. She is currently a Conference staff person with the All Native Circle Conference. Her connection with the United Church goes back to her grandfather who served as a lay minister on her reserve. She started formal theological training in 1986 and in 1991 was the first woman ordained from her reserve. When she started her training for ministry and began to study the United Church Manual she was surprised to read a particular passage that to her recognized Aboriginal people. Others disagreed with the way she read that section of the Manual, nevertheless for her it meant that she was welcome and recognized as an Aboriginal woman

within the Church. But it also disturbed her that the Church didn't practice what was written in its own Manual.

She remembers the stories of the Elders about how a long time ago people worshipped in their own way, with the drum. But the missionaries and the government tried to restrict it. She feels sorry for the missionaries because they understood very little about the Native people they served. They didn't see the sweatlodge representing the whole of creation. They saw Native people worshipping a rock or the sun. The teachings that the Native people followed called for respect for visitors and for their ways. So when they were told, "This is God's book," they respected it. But when they were told to put the drum away, that's when they began to lose their identity and hope.

As a young girl, she experienced the power of God in creation. Her mother died when she was young, and her father did not want to leave the eight children alone so he took them on his trap line. There she felt God's presence in ways that she never had in church. When her father was sick with TB, she and a younger sister were placed in a residential school. There she was taught about God's love but the words, she says, didn't match the actions. They showed something far different.

Broadfoot was at the Sudbury General Council only by accident as an alternate. She remembers particularly the Elders speaking of how, even if the Apology was not given, they would still dance. When the time arrived, however, she was certain that the Apology would pass. It seemed to her that this was the right time.

To Broadfoot, the Apology meant that she could worship in the ways her ancestors worshipped. It opened a door. She didn't have to feel embarrassed or

that her children would someday be told that Native traditions were evil as she had been told. It meant a new beginning for the Church, not just for Aboriginal people. The Apology said we will walk together, and that means we will walk in a good way, side by side.

She has a “simple understanding,” she says, of Jesus. God sent Jesus to the world so that we can know God through His Son. There are many Native people who walk the sweet grass road, and some say they don’t believe in Jesus. But when they pray they use the same language. They end their prayers with “the Son of God.” Jesus came not for white people or black people but for all people, for all creation.

“The Christian teachings that my parents gave me are a part of me. I can’t show disrespect to them because that would be to show disrespect to my parents,” Broadfoot says. “But they also gave me the traditional teachings as well. They gave me two roles, two paths. I am an Aboriginal woman and a Christian. If you say to me put aside the eagle feather or the traditional name you would be telling me to cut myself in half. The same is true about the Bible and the Cross. I hold two bundles. Both teach about love and care, and the best of all respect for our creator, the creation and other people.”

Christ is always in the midst of the people, in the Circle, she says. But she remembers an experience that struck her sharply at a college in Winnipeg. She was attending a workshop about the relationship of Aboriginal and Christian Spirituality and felt distinctly uneasy. Finally she noticed the brochure which portrayed the two symbols of the Cross and the Circle. But the Cross was so huge it overwhelmed the Circle. For her Jesus is appropriately represented in the

middle of the Circle. The Sacred Fire is Christ. He is the centre, but he does not overwhelm the Circle.

There is a right time for everything, she says. And it was the right time for the Apology. No one was there by chance. If it wasn't meant to be it would not have happened. When the Commissioners came down to the Sacred Fire in the parking lot, it seemed like something out of biblical times. Something came over her, she says. She just wanted to dance. The next morning she went for a walk. "It was so peaceful," she says, "It was just like the universe was at peace."

The Very Rev. Stan McKay is Cree and the first staff person of the National Consultation. From 1992 to 1994 he was Moderator of The United Church of Canada, possibly the first Native person elected to head a mainstream denomination in North America. He has been director of the Dr. Jessie Saulteaux Resource Centre in Beausejour, Manitoba and is currently director of Pastoral Care at the General Hospital in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

McKay also speaks of Alberta Billy initiating the movement towards the Apology with her statement before the General Council Executive. Within the National Native Council however there had been long discussions about what the ethnocide, the oppression and the imperialistic understandings of the gospel had done to Native people. Early consultations had identified the need for leadership development. The Native community needed space to develop its own style of leadership. There was also an identified need to challenge the way that the gospel had been presented in terms of the valuing of one culture over another. Alberta Billy was the clearest in naming the reality. Until the Native community could deal with that history, until it made some initiatives in theological understanding

and spiritual development it would continue to live under the cloud of that history and never encounter from its own perspective the true history that would be liberating.

After Alberta Billy's intervention, there was widespread support within the National Council. But the reaction of the General Council Executive pointed to the size of the task of preparing the Church for dealing with the request for an Apology. That summer the meeting of the National Consultation of some 60 to 70 people from across the country offered support for the concept. There was some confusion but also an attempt to frame why the Apology was being requested. That meeting also began the exploration and preparation for what would happen if there were no Apology.

The National Consultation met just prior to the Sudbury General Council and continued on through it. "We were not thinking very much in the long term," says McKay. "We were focused on the General Council meeting itself, trusting that a way could be found to work through the implications of no Apology as much as working with the implications of one." The main concern was with the ceremony that would be held the night of the debate. The National Council recognized the importance of this moment to the future life of the Church and non-Native church. The Elders had advised long before that it was important that the people dance regardless of the outcome.

McKay feels that if the Apology is read from the perspective of the Native church it is an Apology not just to those who were gathered in Sudbury as members of the United Church. It is, he suggests, the first from a national church body and the clearest of its kind. Some of those who gathered in Sudbury knew that the Apology was very much about history, that it had the potential to have an

impact on many areas of life beyond the United Church and in the Church's theological understanding. It was about the struggle for spiritual liberation of a people within its culture and its tradition. It was about dealing with the gospel as a message of hope. It was significant. But the Elders did not presume that it would be made. Therefore not a lot of planning was undertaken. The elders would wait and see.

During the General Council meeting the Native people present had already decided to leave, McKay says. The Elders were concerned that there would be the tendency to ask questions or to grill the people about what the Apology might mean and why it was necessary. The feeling was that enough time and resources and information had already been provided. The suggestion was made that the Council try to come to a consensus. It was only afterwards that the Elders heard that this was not possible.

The strongest opposition, McKay notes, was from people who were involved in Native ministry, and from their families. People who had given so much of their lives to ministry among Native peoples were threatened and offended. Many framed the Apology as, "Do you apologize for bringing Jesus Christ to a community?" Even among some of the First Nations people there was this misunderstanding. But among those who were involved in the preparation leading up to Sudbury there was no confusion. The Apology was about inequity in relationships between those who came out of middle Canada and a European theological understanding and those who had a different culture.

Many people, McKay says, speak of the two paths and many talk of them as being parallel and separate. Some spiritual teachers say that the ceremonies and the sweet grass road cannot be brought together with the Christian way of

understanding. So the Elders faced criticism both from traditional teachers, and from some Christian teachers who say that you can't bring the two paths together. And that was certainly true in many Native communities. In many Native villages there are three or four Christian denominations and United Church people are influenced by their theology and their perceptions of what is acceptable. The Apology therefore was breaking significant ground for Native people as well as non-Native people.

The key issue, McKay says, is that Canadian Christians have not yet been able to work out what it means to relate Christ and culture. A much more effective job has been done in Africa and other parts of the world. McKay recalls that he knew that in Africa they were able to use the drums in their ceremonies and had done so for almost a decade before it was even talked about in Canada. In Africa, Korea, the Philippines, Australia, indigenous people in all these contexts are still working on what it is for them to be a people of Christ.

McKay notes that in the Cree language there is no word that expresses being apologetic, repentant, or sorry for what has happened. Therefore for him the way to express what the Apology was about was to say this was the end of mission. It meant the end of the kind of mission that would say, "we have answers for you about what it means to be Christian." One of the Elders summed up the meaning of the Apology when he said, "Now I can go home to my grandchildren and tell them the stories." Therefore, McKay says, the "keeping hidden of those things that were ours, and the belief that they had no part in our faith, in our journey as Christians was radically turned around in that night for many of our people. Many of us were already exploring the ceremonies, but we were doing it without clear understanding of where we would fit into the Church."

McKay notes that a large part of difference between the two faiths is how the Christian stories are read. They are read differently because the cultures are so different. There are differences across Aboriginal cultures that emphasize different aspects of the Christian story as well. But overall it is important to go back to the Hebrew Scriptures to get the full implications of Christ coming from a tribal people, out of an oral tradition which teaches about a God who cares for the earth, and which uses symbolism to describe that. "When I read the 107th Psalm and it speaks of the four directions, that for us is a teaching of healing, a prophetic teaching about the coming together of the peoples of the earth. There are many, many traditional teachings about that image in the Psalms."

McKay expressed the importance of the Church understanding the passage "For God so loved the world" as a holistic concept, not just anthropocentric in terms of salvation but about the healing of the whole earth which is a biblical image. Seven and eight year old children, McKay says, know that unless we care for the earth we will die, and yet Christian theology has not yet moved to that place. There is a tremendous futility in Native communities, a great deal of suicide and disintegration within villages. The Elders say that the children become hopeful again at the point when they recognize that we are keepers of the earth and that we have a function on the earth. So for First Nations people the balance between human and the created order, the place of human beings, is central to an understanding of Christology.

The Apology revealed to McKay that scholarly and academic learning within the context of a culture can be very exclusive. The nature of the membership of the United Church made it a cloning community, which couldn't easily live with differences of culture and language.

Finally McKay explored the importance of the Talking Circle as a model of respect. "I have been taught by the elders to model respect and gentleness and the ability to listen as well as speak. And so for the Church the circle is a wonderful gift from the Aboriginal community. It is all I need to carry in terms of a model for the Church. Because what it does is reinforce again the grounds that we could not do spiritual work on the model that the United Church was normally using; the model of debate, with its aggressive and often competitive styles." The Elders, McKay says, could not reconcile the Christian faith with what often appeared to be a "House of Commons Question Period." The model of the circle, in contrast, is a model of equality, of everyone having a voice and of decisions being made with respect for the whole community. Fundamentally, McKay says, it questions the marriage in the Christian church between individual salvation and individual strength over against community.

The Rev. Dr. Janet Silman is on the teaching staff of the Dr. Jessie Saulteaux Resource Centre. Her grandmother was Cree and she remembers always being proud and intrigued by her Aboriginal heritage. Her earliest memories of her Aboriginal spiritual roots relate to the wonder of creation and spirituality.

Silman points to the Year of Repentance in Saskatchewan as an important step in the movement to the Apology. But the resistance that was experienced surprised her. Many asked, "What do we have to repent for?" The Apology, she feels, was a watershed moment in the history of the Church. It was a confessional statement which will be many years in working itself out in the life of the Church. The real effect of the Apology however has been on Aboriginal people

themselves. It is Native people who say, "Now I can take part in a smudging, now I can reclaim some of my ways, now I can be Indian again." That itself is the most important outcome of the Apology, but it is troubling, she says, to think of what existed. "The Apology is like the abolition of slavery. It is like women getting the vote. It was absolutely necessary. It has to do with being faithful. We shouldn't overestimate it, but if we had not done it I'm not sure what would have happened. It allowed a number of people to stay in the church who otherwise would have left." It was also, she says, a prod to other denominations and to other apologies that have followed. It was a push towards self-government, which led to the formation of the All Native Circle Conference and the educational training centres. Perhaps the Apology is like a banner, she says, coming out of a movement for recovery, a strategy for calling the church towards a new way of relationship. In a way the Apology functions like a covenant between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal church.

Silman talks about common ground between Native and Christian Spirituality. It is important not to collapse Native Spirituality into Christianity. It is important that Christianity look seriously at how throughout its history it had been so destructive to entire continents and accepted the obliteration of millions of people. To her the most important questions concerning the distinctions between the two spiritualities is what difference does Jesus make in your life, and is it worth it? There is an enormous cost for Aboriginal people given the history of Christian missions.

There is a strong connection between the tribal history of Christianity and Native Spirituality. The key question in both is by what name do you call your

God? Janet sees herself as a child in practicing the traditional ways. But these practices have enormously enriched her Christian faith.

One of the biggest problems, Silman argues, is appropriation. Christians will take traditions and use them and co-opt them. They will wear beads and place them on the altar. Native Spirituality has always had much more to lose in coming in contact with Christianity than the other way around, she says. Therefore syncretism is a red herring. The church has always been syncretist.

What happens at the Jessie Saukteaux Centre with the Learning Circle is that students grapple with the question of how they can be Native and Christian. Then it is the sorting and sifting of the common ground between traditions. Smudging for example is understood as a cleansing, purification and invocation. It has do to with prayer, and like most of the traditions there are parallels. Therefore each student ends up in an internal dialogue within herself. For example going into the lodge is a deep experience of prayer. The traditional teachings of the lodge are all based on respect for the different ways that people can pray.

Silman feels that she does not have to sacrifice her Christian beliefs in order to take part in traditional ways. Her theology is also an internal dialogue where her Christian understanding is deepened and informed by her Native spiritual practice.

The Circle, which is the basis of the educational model of the Centre, represents equality and dialogue. It is a basic paradigm for relationships. Everyone is expected to have a voice and to speak and to have something to offer. The Circle models a connectedness between all of the participants and with all of creation.

She described the action of one Elder who taught about the four directions and in drawing a diagram placed Christ in the centre - for conversation and dialogue. Silman describes this as an exciting way of locating Christ in the Circle. He is there to inspire the conversation. The United Church, she says, offers the freedom and the space to explore this area probably far more than most other traditions.

Glenys Huws is the Director of the Francis Sandy Training Centre, one of two Training Centres for Native Ministry within the United Church. She was a member of the National Native Consultation during the time of preparation for the Apology.

One of the important preparations for the Apology was the Mission Study theme for 1984-85 entitled "Dialogue with Native Peoples." Huws was critical of the first year's content because of its lack of reflection on the Church itself in the encounter with Native Peoples. Her concern was with the nature of white racism as a factor in the marginalization of Native people. But it was decided that this one year's study couldn't do everything and that it was enough to provide the opportunity for Aboriginal people to talk about their experiences in the Church. The Mission study developed out of the Year of Repentance in Saskatchewan. During that year many Native people worked hard responding to many invitations. Most were exhausted responding to these invitations but the focus had been on Native people and most of the work done by Native people. The whole issue of how the non-Native church fit into this was not addressed.

Alberta Billy was motivated by a comment that shocked her into action, Huws remembers. But her intervention in the General Council Executive had been

preceded by six years of the National Native Consultations. Many Native people from across the Church had opportunities to talk and discuss the issues. There had been contact with Aboriginal people from other parts of the world, some much more radical than members of the Consultation.

Huws had hoped that the Apology would mean that the Church would acknowledge the injustice it had done in not recognizing the validity of Native Spirituality and in categorizing it. There were certainly some missionaries who had sympathy for the spirituality of the people. But the missionary literature by and large framed Native Spirituality in a discourse of pagans, savages, or nature worshippers. There didn't appear to be much understanding of the underlying values, or the real meaning of the rituals, and the worldview of Aboriginal people. "We needed the Apology for that," says Huws, "but also the Church needed to acknowledge the role that it played in the overall oppression of Aboriginal people." In terms of their land being taken, the overall way they were treated, by use of certain kinds of language, the Church was almost blessing the approach that Aboriginal people were less than human. They gave the European settler society permission to treat Aboriginal people in the scandalous way they were treated. There were several levels of behaviour. The first was the way Native Spirituality was trivialized and denigrated. There was the terrible effect this had on the self-esteem and fabric of Aboriginal society. When you are told that the stories and the rituals and the symbols that have grounded your society and given meaning to yourselves as a people are no good, then it is very hard not to say that you as a people are no good. But second there was the economic encounter with Europeans which was made worse by this underlying theological permission to look at

Aboriginal people as less than human. Because of this view you could take away their land.

You don't change attitudes through legislation. Therefore the Apology, Huws suggests, was a bit like the civil rights legislation of the sixties. But it does provide a base on which to move in a different way in the future. It can be referred back to. It was certainly a sign of wanting to do things differently. It meant recognition that Native people within the Church were going to do things differently, that they didn't have to function the way the rest of the Church functioned.

The underlying worldviews and values and customs made it impossible for Aboriginal people to function the way the Manual requires, Huws notes. So there had to be space made for the Aboriginal church to try and develop a way of functioning that would be different. And in the process and out of that development the larger Church hopefully would gain some wisdom about how it might also change.

In Huws' understanding the Native community did not talk about the decision to only receive the Apology ahead of time. Where the impetus came from was unclear. But discussions that preceded the Apology suggested to Huws that the United Church was not making and could not make an apology for everyone; it was specific to people within the Church. But there was a very strong sense that this would be a model for other churches.

Part of the context of the Apology was the division within United Church Native people themselves as to whether it was needed or not. There was no consensus. It was one reason, Huws says, that the Apology was acknowledged and not accepted.

There were issues of what the Apology was saying about the value and integrity of the Longhouse and the traditional ways. For many within the Native community the answer, Huws says, would be that those ways are valid, but if you are a Christian then you should have nothing to do with them. Therefore there is no reason to apologize for bringing the gospel. The Native Community has not been able to discuss this conflict very constructively.

One way of talking about the two paths is the two row wampum, Huws acknowledges. But another is the two canoes going downstream. You are either in one canoe or the other but you can't be in both. This is a very striking image Huws says.

It also relates to the use of the Sacred Bundle as a symbol of the two paths within the All Native Circle Conference. The Sacred Bundle is a container holding both Christian and traditional Aboriginal symbols. One of the difficulties of talking about this, Huws says, is that the decision about having a Bundle in the first place was not inclusive. People arrived at the first gathering of the ANCC and there was the Bundle and they had not been consulted. The Bundle included the traditional and Christian symbols together. The result, Huws says, has been a controversy to the extent that during one particular meeting of the ANCC, the local Elders refused permission for the Bundle to come into their community.

A central issue for Huws is how the Native Community can discuss the tension over the Sacred Bundle constructively and how this discussion might take place in the communities of the students of the Centre. A major focus of the Francis Sandy Centre is providing people models and processes in leading this discussion. But the spectre of raising this discussion in already fragile congregations is very difficult.

For some of the students at the Centre, Huws says, the Apology has provided a touchstone that has enabled them to feel okay about recovering some of the symbols and rituals of the traditional ways. Part of this is understanding them as spiritual realities not only as cultural ones, although it is very hard to make that separation. There is a profound unity between daily life and spiritual realities.

While some students of the Centre are comfortable moving back and forth between the two canoes, others choose to journey only in one canoe. They are respectful of traditional ways, but they are not searching particularly to weave understanding to rituals or patterns of behaviour between their Christian faith and traditional ways. Huws notes however that with even the most Pentecostal of students, their function and their internalized values are clearly Aboriginal. These students, Huws says, feel resentment and pain when other folks in the Circle accuse them of being white Indians. Part of their indignation is that at their core they know they do behave in a way that makes them different from white society.

Rituals are important, says Huws, especially those that express the value of sharing, but it is no less important than having that core value integrated into your being. What is important is what these rituals and symbols express in terms of the core values such as sharing and respect. Other core values are non-interference with other's behaviour. Some think that this is dysfunctional, Huws says, or that it may have had some value in a traditional society but it is now maladaptive. The value of the group, where you draw the boundary between group and individual identity, and commitment to the group identity are other expressions of Aboriginal core values. Attachment to place is another core value. At its extreme it becomes the sacred place but short of that there is an attachment

to a specific location. It is the valuing of the earth. The place of your community and ancestors becomes sacred. All of these make a difference in the way that non-Native people participate in Aboriginal rituals.

Huws believes the United Church is unique. But where does it come from? Huws suggests from Canada itself. We have been intentional about being in touch with the Canadian context, with the social and economic realities.

The addition of the line “To live with respect in Creation” to the United Church Creed is one example of the Church’s willingness to be open to the Aboriginal community, Huws says. The Apology has helped the Church to be more intentional about looking back and seeing where it has been closed, not only offensive, but also closed to the gifts of the Aboriginal worldview. What the Apology has done is enable us to be open to an entirely different worldview.

Rev. Grafton Antoine is Oneida and staff of the Toronto Native Ministries Council. He is a past Speaker of the All Native Circle Conference. Antoine remembers the Sunrise Service held at the 32nd General Council during which the All Native Circle Conference was constituted. It was a “real eye opener” because he was aware of the resistance of Native peoples to anything to do with Native Spirituality. His own history was that of incorporating the strong messages of church leaders that Native spiritual traditions were wrong. When the 1988 Council began with a Sunrise Ceremony it was for him much more significant than the Apology itself. It was that experience that he describes as “the Church opening up the doors.” Native traditions could be brought into the church.

Antoine points particularly to the model of Jim and Alf Dumont, two brothers who chose to walk different paths. This became for him a model of the

Church's renewal of Aboriginal spiritual traditions. Both were trained in Christian theology yet Jim chose to walk the traditional way while Alf seeks to bridge the traditions.

The formal constitution of the All Native Circle Conference during the 32nd General Council involved the presentation of various symbols including the talking stick and an eagle feather. Antoine saw this time as the granting of license by the Church for their use in Native Spiritual ceremonies. Prior to that the message was clear from both the Native and non Native church. Native Spiritual traditions were not acceptable. Smudging and sweet grass were not acceptable rituals to be practiced by Christians. In spite of his own lack of experience with any traditional ways, he found himself open and welcoming. Many of the traditions were not from his own tribal experience. The use of sweet grass in rituals for example was not his tribe's tradition. However, the burning of sacred tobacco, which he sees as prayers lifted up to the creator, was.

Antoine speaks of the Apology as a treaty. In order for a people to make a treaty with each other, something big has to be exchanged. He compares the Apology to that of the Magna Carta for the British peoples. The point is that power is given to the people. The treaty that was offered was that the Church stopped and said you're free to do some things and we will not restrict you. It was a turning point.

The Two Row Wampum treaty, Grafton remembers, was used during the 1992 General Council as a symbol of walking together. In the walking together the two row wampum says you will do what you want in your boat and we will do what we want to do in ours. And we don't tell each other what to do. So we can journey together in respect.

When Antoine became a Christian, he says, he believed wholeheartedly and became a diligent worker. The Christian faith became a discipline for raising children, building family, directions on how to get along with others. "I used it and became more Christian than traditional." In his background he suggests there was no great pain in the relationship with non-Native people, unlike the history of the Plains people. "We did not feel conquered." For him the Two Row Wampum has been a lived reality. "Others however do have a pain that I can't touch or talk about because I have this other experience."

Antoine speaks of the story of the peacemaker who came to bring peace among the warring tribes of the six nations as a story central to understanding the relationship of Christianity to his Native Spiritual traditions. The Peacemaker went to the Mohawk who embraced his message. Then he went to the Oneida who also accepted. So also the Cayugas. But the last ones to embrace the message were the Onandaga. And they had a main chief who was the worst of the worst. It was only when the Peacemaker came and spoke to him personally that he accepted the message and the peace.

Christ is the peacemaker, says Antoine. As the peacemaker Christ went to the far land and gave himself for the people of that land - Israel. He went across the lake in a stone boat and across the sea. Like the last chief to accept the message of the peacemaker without the change of heart there is no peace. The peacemaker is at the centre of the Circle and is there for anyone. Without the change of heart there is no salvation.

Accepting Christianity is not difficult for his people, says Antoine, because the stories merge together. There is however black magic, there is both

the good and the bad. This is why there is so much opposition to traditional ways, because of the fear of those who practice the black or the cursing ways.

The United Church is unique, he says, because it is the only church created in America - its roots are indigenous to Canada. Even though its theology has its roots in Europe, it is still distinctly Canadian. The Church is making its own history. It doesn't depend on what happened before 1925. It was, Antoine suggests, like the fall in the creation story that the Iroquois people tell. When Sky woman fell and created the earth and turtle island, it all had its point of time and beginning. The United Church of Canada is the same way.

In the Apology, he says, the Church is granting its permission for Native people to be and do what they believe to be right. The Church is giving Native people a chance to retake as much or as little of their Native Spirituality as they wish. The Church is making room for all of you, he says. The Church in its free way has a wide road, and we are all on this same road. "I think this is what the church is trying to say." Because of the peacemaker, Antoine says in conclusion, there is meaning to the Apology, there is forgiveness, there is a changing. Therefore the Church can say, "I repent of my ways. I'm sorry. In the actions you are freed."

4. THE CIRCLE OF RESPECT

So the model of the circle is a model of equality, of everyone having a voice, of decisions being made with respect for the whole community.

- Stan McKay

The circle is often identified as a central metaphor of Aboriginal Spirituality. It is not surprising therefore that it also provides a critical image in this exploration of the Native Apology and of the relationship of dialogue to mission. The Paths of Respect Consultation was conceived during the interviews with Stan McKay and Janet Silman. It grew out of the interpretation of McKay and Silman that the Talking Circle provided a window into the meaning of respect at the heart of Aboriginal Spirituality and therefore insight into the meaning of the Apology. Respect, I also felt, was the central issue in articulating the relationship between mission and dialogue and therefore the meaning and implication of the Apology.

We proposed therefore to hold a consultation to bring together people of seven different faith traditions to meet for a minimum of three days in the Talking Circle. A number of traditional Native Elders would be invited to offer teachings on the Circle and on the meaning of respect in Aboriginal culture. Underlying the concept of the consultation was the assumption that Aboriginal Spiritual traditions are the indigenous spiritualities of Canada and respect requires that their wisdom be sought in exploring how the many faith traditions of Canada ought to relate together. But there was also the understanding of Stan McKay that traditional

Native understandings of the Circle offered insight into the differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities; differences at the heart of the confusion identified in the Apology.

The Sacredness of the Circle

The Circle has many different expressions within First Nations communities. The form of self-government undertaken by First Nations people within the United Church was called the All Native Circle Conference and was symbolized as a circle incorporating the four directions and their related qualities and images. It was established, suggests McKay, because it was obvious to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members of the Church alike that the existing forms of church government presented significant challenges to Aboriginal people. Issues of respect, non-interference, majority rule, argumentative style and time pressures were among some of the qualitative differences in meeting style identified in the interviews.

Stan McKay spoke of the Circle as a paradigm for the Church as it should be. In doing so he was echoing, he says, what he had been taught by the Elders: to model respect and gentleness and an ability to listen as well as speak. The differences between the circle and the usual patterns of church governance convinced him of the need for Aboriginal people to conduct their church life in a different manner.

The formation of the Native presbyteries and ANCC in 1988 was on the grounds that our culture could not do spiritual work on the model the United Church was normally using. It was all too often a debate that we were not comfortable with, with aggressive and competitive styles. How can we reconcile what we call the Christian faith with the manner of the House of Commons question period, which is usually a fairly clear definition of disrespect and the inability of people to hear each other. I think it is an extreme situation but I know some Presbyteries where it has happened. In any case we have to now call that into question. -Stan McKay

Underlying these and other issues however is a fundamentally different worldview represented for First Nations people by the circle. The 1984 Mission Study³⁵ materials offered this summary of the significance of the Circle.

Just as the circle has no beginning and no end, so all Creation follows an endless cycle. The seasons of the year, the stages of life, the links between the animals and the plants - these things all follow in natural order. We don't exist as separate from our environment, but as part of it.³⁶

Because of its connection with the essence of creation, the Circle is also identified by many First Nations people as having a sacred quality. Writes an Ogala Dakota Sioux:

The Ogala believe the circle to be sacred because the great spirit caused everything in nature to be round except stone. Stone is the implement of destruction. The sun and the sky, the earth and the moon, are round like the body of a man. Everything that grows from the ground is round like the stem of a plant. Since the great spirit has caused everything to be round, mankind should look upon the circle as sacred, for it is the symbol of all things in nature except stone. It is also the symbol of the circle that marks the edge of the world and therefore of the four winds that travel

³⁵ The Mission Theme is a yearly study program of the General Council Divisions inviting congregations throughout the Church to focus on a common theme relating to Mission.

³⁶ Worldview: A Dialogue with Canada's Native Peoples. Vol. 4 No. 1 July 1985. pg. 23

there. For these reasons the Ogala make their teepees circular, their camp-circle circular, and sit in a circle in all ceremonies.³⁷

The pervasiveness of the circle through all aspects of Aboriginal thought and life exists because of the connection it represents between the individual and the creation. If the power of the world works in circles and the very nature of the world is that everything living tends towards being round, then to be connected with the universe means living one's life in the circle says one of the most widely known Native Elders, Black Elk.

..the universe is circles within circles, and everything is one circle, and all the circles are connected to each other. Each family is a circle, and those family circles connect together and make a community, and the community makes its circle where it lives on the Earth. It cares for that part, but cares for it as a circle - which is to say in a co-operative way and an egalitarian way, where everybody is cared for and everybody is respected.³⁸

Myra Laramee is a Cree Elder and Principal of Niji Mahkwa School in Winnipeg, Manitoba. She was invited to be the teaching elder present at the Paths of Respect consultation. A central characteristic of the circle, Laramee suggests is found in the image of the four directions. There are many teachings attached to the directions, but it is her understanding that it is acknowledgment of the four directions that convenes the circle.

What makes the circle a circle, is the sacredness of the four directions. Without each part of it the circle isn't formed. In the recognition of the

³⁷ The Perennial Dictionary of World Religions. Ed. Keith Crim. (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), pg.529

³⁸ Black Elk, quoted in Steven McFadden, Profiles In Wisdom, Native Elders Speak about the Earth, (Sante Fe, New Mexico, Bear & Co.: 1991) pg. 123

four directions the absences of those from the circle will be recognized. The most important thing to me is that those who are absent from the circle will be recognized. If it's a women's circle then the men are recognized for their absence. If it's a group of Aboriginal people, then it's important that the other nations are not ignored. -Myra Laramie

This image of inclusiveness points, she says, to the importance of recognizing the interconnectedness of all circles. That the circle is frequently used to represent the commitment to consensus seeking within First Nation, she acknowledges, is sometimes challenged by the question of who is invited to the circle. Circles are sometimes characterized as limiting participation and excluding some within the community. To suggest this ignores the belief of the interconnectedness of circles, Laramie says. The point is not that one circle represent all, but that the collective wisdom of the whole community is tapped through interconnected circles. The four directions, she suggests, are inclusive of the whole world. In some traditions, the colours, white, black, red and yellow are used to symbolically represent all the people of the world. Therefore each circle, it is believed, carries with it a part of the whole.

The linking of the spirits of animals and of nature with the four directions suggests another characteristic of the sacredness of the circle. George van der Goes Ladd points to the naming of the Great Spirit as the Great Mystery by some of the Elders of the Red River Indians. He suggests that "Faith in the Great Mystery is not monotheism as Christendom had understood it." In this sense monotheism sees the cosmos as a monarchical structure and requires a theology of empire and domination. The image of the Great Mystery however is,

...the consensus that enables an egalitarian band of hunters to act with a common purpose. Godhead is shared out among the spirit powers that

manifest the Great Mystery in the world. Rule by many is good if the many are unified by a Great Consensus. The Great Consensus is called Kitchi Manitou.³⁹

So, seated in a circle the participants first of all acknowledge the unity and wholeness of the cosmos itself and invoke the

“spirit powers of, the four directions, the Grandfathers who preside over birth, growth, old age, and death of nature and human beings.”⁴⁰

The Pipe Ceremony therefore, records Ladd, is a sacramental act of communion with the Great Consensus. It is focused though, not on the individual’s experience of communion but, “above all the group’s celebration of itself in its aspiration to be a small consensus.” For this reason, says Ladd, councils were called Zuguswediwin, or The Smoking of the Pipe and such councils become the group’s celebration of its own autonomy, its power to determine, as a group, its course of action and carry it out.⁴¹

This understanding of the circle’s intention of being a reflection of this Grand Consensus, we note, was implied in a number of responses during the interviews to the question, “Where is Christ in the circle?” Christ is seen in the midst of the circle among the people, said Alf Dumont.

Christ is in the midst of the circle. Walking and dialoguing with the people is to me the image of God at the centre. But Christ is in the midst of the justice, in the midst of the love, in the midst of the circle. And people don’t have difficulty with that image in the Aboriginal community because they can see it’s the Christ figures. Jesus is one of the Christ figures. We in the Aboriginal church community say that Christ is the focal point of the

³⁹ Shall We Gather At The River, op.cit. pg. 70

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., pg. 71

significant ones -we're learning also to recognize that others are Christ figures and the teacher of the great law of the Mohawk people. There were many teachers; the Buddhists and the Buddha for example were Christ like figures. And that was part of Christ's teachings too, "You will do these things and greater things than I do." -Alf Dumont

It is not surprising that Jesus is placed in the circle, as Alf Dumont suggests, as "the focal point of the significant ones." In this image it is possible that for many Native people, Jesus becomes representative of the Great Consensus. This is the image Grafton Antoine points to in his linking of Jesus with the story of the Peacemaker.

The circle, it is suggested, points to the deep structures of the Aboriginal worldview. Therefore a recovery of Aboriginal Spirituality would require that the integrity of the circle be reclaimed. As Evelyn Broadfoot indicates in her description of the course she attended where the image of the cross overwhelmed the circle, Jesus, who in the past has overwhelmed the circle, is now welcomed back into the midst of the circle. For many of those who follow the Christian path, Jesus as the one who brings wholeness becomes the focal point of that consensus. For others Jesus becomes one among others of the significant ones in the circle. The Apology signalled, it is being suggested, the readiness of the Church to welcome the recovery of Aboriginal Spirituality, a recovery that is intimately linked with the image of the circle.

The sacredness of the circle is expressed in many different ways in Aboriginal cultures. One form in particular however is explored here in detail. It provides a window into understanding the significance of the circle as a model of dialogue within Aboriginal communities. Because of the connection of a number of those interviewed to the Dr. Jessie Saulteaux Training Centre the use of the

term “Talking Circle” refers to the model used as part of their educational programming. It is a process, however, that has been practiced across many Aboriginal traditions over many years of history. Explorations into the Talking Circle come in part from the “Paths of Respect” Consultation, from further interviews with Stan McKay and Janet Silman, and with Myra Laramee.

The Talking Circle

The Paths of Respect consultation was convened at the Dr. Jessie Saulteaux Centre in Beausejour, Manitoba, beginning on a Thursday evening and ending on Sunday afternoon. Twenty-two people were involved, from Aboriginal, Sikh, Jewish, Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu and Christian traditions. The invitation to the event expressed the desire to explore Aboriginal teachings on respect as a foundation for interfaith dialogue. It spoke of Aboriginal Spirituality as the indigenous spiritual tradition of the land and questioned what it might mean for people of other faith traditions to see themselves as guests in this land. The understanding that was shared was that Aboriginal teachings of respect, expressed in the practice of the Talking Circle would be the focus of the event itself.

The Talking Circle involves the use of a talking symbol, sometimes a rock, referred to as a grandfather or grandmother, perhaps an eagle feather, or a talking stick. While the symbol often carries deep meaning and lengthy teachings, for example the wisdom of the earth or the vision of the eagle, Myra Laramee explains that anything might be used. What is important, she says, is the circle

itself. While sitting in a circle the talking symbol is passed from one person to another. All others are expected to listen to the person who holds the symbol and to wait until their turn to speak. It is a simple process but a process that structures communication in a way that requires intensive and patient listening.

Part of the story of the development of the Talking Circle was likely the need for the preservation of community life and mutual dependence. Saving face, honouring the contributions of the Elders, telling stories, listening carefully until a consensus appeared were ways in which damaging disagreements could be minimized and self-esteem honoured. In small, scattered communities struggling for survival it would be of vital importance to foster cohesiveness. “That the people might live..” we will note later is an underlying philosophy of Aboriginal Spiritual traditions. So too the Circle is spoken of not as a means or process in which Aboriginal Spiritual traditions are exercised, but is seen itself as the exercise of that spirituality. It was also however clear from the early planning stages of the gathering that the teachings would be offered primarily through example. In the same way that Alf Dumont speaks of an Elder telling a story to respond to an Apology, so the gathering would provide an experience of respect that in itself would be the teaching.

Stan McKay began the event with a sweet grass ceremony. Braided sweet grass was lit and the smoke from the smouldering grass was fanned with a feather as McKay moved around the circle. The people were invited to smudge themselves with the smoke as a sign of preparation for the event. McKay spoke of the ceremony inviting the Spirit into the circle then offered the following to begin the gathering.

In the philosophy of the indigenous community whatever you bring to the circle is what has to be here. We are about respectful listening, but beyond the listening is an attempt to work with the edges of what is permissible and acceptable about what we share with each other.

The past couple of generations of interfaith dialogue has been about safe sharing, safe because we have decided what we could share, safe because the structure of the society has declared that there are limits to what we can share. So it is not surprising that the academic paper has been the foundation of interfaith sharing. But where does that leave the people and the ceremonies that are part of our spiritual journey? What have we given to each other that is meaningful to our understanding of ourselves, therefore building the family that we say we belong to on this planet?

And so the teaching of respect is one we would offer to you here from an Aboriginal perspective and we would offer it not because it will resolve all differences, but that it will heighten them, give them flavour, that it might give us a level of trust that we will nurture each other in good ways.

So the Sweet Grass ceremony is an invitation to be involved in a good way and to come as people willing to be involved in a journey and be in the process of learning from each other. I'm saying that I hunger for the quality of spiritual reflection that we can share on this snowy morning and that the world hungers for that level of trust, of renewed trust in each other as human beings on this earth.

I will tell you two stories and then I will pass the Eagle feather on. Emma LaRocque, a Metis woman who teaches at the University of Manitoba in Native Studies, about twelve years ago was speaking to a group of church people about history in Western Canada. She is a very passionate woman and a very powerful speaker. Emma said as part of her conclusion to her talk, "My truth does not deny your truth." She had made a very strong statement about historic perception and mis-perception of native people. And the focus of her whole talk was this statement, "My truth does not deny your truth."

The other element that is very important in terms of respect I saw played out by a Mohawk leader of a Long House in Brantford. It was a gathering in which the United Church had brought together community leaders to talk about the vision of the community at the Six Nations reserve. One of the people who had spoken was from a Christian fundamentalist church.

He spoke with some concern about the Long House, which is a Mohawk place of community and prayer and spiritual life. He completed his presentation, and the next person to speak on the panel was a tall, dignified man who was the leader of a Long House. As he stood to speak he said, "What my brother says is true." And then he went on to describe his experience in the Long House. Never once did he defend or justify the Long House. He just went on to tell stories. It is one of the most powerful teachings that I have ever had about respect. Because there had been a broadside attack, and his response was, "What my brother said is true."

When the snow comes upon the earth, this is the time when stories begin for the Cree. Once the earth is covered with snow, then we begin to talk about the stories of our people. A Spirit being in the Cree community, Weesekajack, is very involved in teaching us about life on the earth. Weesekajack is a powerful teacher because he is silly. In fact, often it is by his mistakes that we learn. So as I come to this circle I am very aware of many mistakes in the spiritual journey we take on this earth. Many times we are very laughable. If we talk in interfaith discussion and there isn't any laughter, I would be very concerned. In our community laughter is part of the healing process. It is almost a kind of rebirth, an opportunity to go on in the process. At times the line is drawn very close between tears and laughter, the power of memory and the power of story. It isn't an easy divide and so also in the sharing of life.

So it is an honour to be here as part of a process whereby so much rich history is available to us through the minds and spirits of everyone here. Everyone is a teacher in our circle of theological reflection, and everyone is a learner, and that makes me very excited today. I am honoured to be in the circle of life.

In his opening remarks Stan McKay offered a summary of his understanding of the nature of respect and the functioning of the Talking Circle. The welcoming of all contributions, telling stories, the willingness to risk sharing in ways that build community and trust, an understanding of truth that does not contradict another's truth, humility to accept misunderstanding with gentleness and laughter. All of these characteristics, McKay indicated, are part of an

Aboriginal understanding of respect. We turn first therefore to a general reflection on respect before looking in a more focused way on other values of the Talking Circle.

The Central Value of Respect

To speak of the Circle as an expression of Aboriginal Spirituality is to point to the value of respect at the heart of the Aboriginal way of life. In 1995 the General Council Executive, at the request of the All Native Circle Conference, approved the addition of a line to the United Church Creed: "To live with respect in Creation."⁴² The ANCC had indicated their concern that the Creed made no reference to creation nor to humanity's obligation to live in healing and respectful relationships. For the Native people it was a necessary addition to broaden the Creed beyond the doxological statements of faith.

In any consideration of Aboriginal Spirituality the mention of the value of respect is inescapable. Native Elder Charlie Fisher explains that traditional Native common law is comprised of only five words. The first word is "Respect": respect for all things, for all people, for the Creator and for oneself. If that is learned then the next two follow. "Good" and "Bad" are known only once one has an

⁴² The New Creed was adopted in 1968 by the General Council. It has undergone a number of revisions. most recently with the addition of the "To live with respect..." line. The New Creed is found in Appendix C.

understanding of respect. And if these three things are known then the final two words follow: "Good Life." Respect however is the beginning and the foundation for all the rest.⁴³

Eva Solomon, an Ojibway, writes of seven gifts or values that provide guidance for life among the Ojibway people. They are respect, wisdom, courage, love, humility, integrity, and truth. The primary gift is respect.

If we live out the gift of respect for all that is, then we will be able to journey to the centre of our own being and thus know the peace of living in harmony with all that is. We will have the wisdom and the understanding that gives us the courage to love and to live with integrity. In facing life with such honesty and integrity we come to know truth which is the ultimate culmination of all the gifts ...Out of the same respect, the good of the individual finds itself on the same plane as the good of the community.⁴⁴

Glenys Huws, we have already noted, spoke of the core values that are common to many Native people. She points to the importance of these qualities over outward expressions of language or ritual.

I believe that around our circle even the ones who would be most uncomfortable with participating in smudges or sweats or whatever are at their core Aboriginal. They are Aboriginal people. They self-identify as Aboriginal people, their behaviour is based on internalized values that are clearly Aboriginal. And so their resentment and pain is sharp when folks at other places in the circle are more comfortable with the expressive activities like smudging, and accuse them of being white Indians or uncle Toms. Sometimes this even gets said in the ANCC and it is hurtful to

⁴³ Rupert Ross, *Dancing With A Ghost: Exploring Indian Reality*. (Markham, Ont.: Reed Books, 1992) pg. 166

⁴⁴ Eva Solomon, "Unity and Diversity in Native Spirituality," in *Ecumenism*, No. 112, December 1993 pg. 17.

them. Part of their indignation is that at their core they know that they do behave in ways that make them different from mainstream society. I can sense the different values and patterns of behaviour very clearly. And so some kind of ritual that expresses the value of sharing in Aboriginal society - yes that's important, but it's no less important than that core value of sharing integrated into your being, and the way you function. There are those who have the traditional language - but when you examine the shape of their discourse and their behaviour it is really European. So that is something I really struggle with too, what do these rituals express in terms of core values and behaviour, and can you have one without the other... One core value is clearly respect. - Glenys Huws

Janet Silman talks of respect as being the foundation of the Talking Circle. "It is there from the beginning," she says. "The respect is there in that we listen to one another as long as the person is speaking. This is their time. There is something to learn from this person." Stan McKay suggests that the respectful listening "is that we do not have to challenge anyone, we do not have to be defensive in what we have to offer." The invitation to sharing within the circle, McKay suggests, is therefore much different than what has been traditionally understood as interfaith dialogue.

The direction of the Talking Circle is not the resolving of differences but rather of heightening them, McKay suggests. The implication of the sequential order of speaking is not the resolution of any one statement with another but rather that each voice, each perspective may, be heard. During the Paths of Respect Consultation a Buddhist Priest shared the following observation:

A model, which is running through my mind, is my grandfather's field with meadows and prairie grasses that he never ploughed under. It has something like fifty different kinds of grasses on it, and plants and insects. The minute you plough it under and plant wheat you have only one crop, and you have a desert. So I think that respect for me would start with the idea of need. I need there to be other religions in the world in order that my practice can be better. It would be an unhealthy world, to live in a

world with only Buddhists. It wouldn't work. My respect I think rather derives from the observation that I need you to be strong in your faith so that I can be strong in mine. -Buddhist Man

In this sense respect implies mutuality, a recognition that respectful interaction requires acknowledging the complementarity of traditions, and as another participant suggested, even one's understanding of truth.

We will deny other peoples truth because we are so insecure that our identity is fixed upon our insecure faintly held little truth. But when one stands in truth, then another person's truth is a kind of complementarity to one's own. A part of the whole. The word truth, we're not sure where that word in English derives from, but we think it's from the word troth. It is a modern construction of the word troth, which means yoking. You talk about people who marry, for example pledging or plighting their troth. In the old English form troth is a covenant word, a relational word, so truth is always relational, it is always related. I have a particular kind of truth because I was born white male and Protestant. I've learned to look again and again at those truths. Not to throw them away but to respect them.

-Christian Man

During the consultation Janet Silman shared the wisdom of a woman Native Elder who talks about the importance of three things in the walk of life: listening, patience and respect.

Listening in the circle means you don't have to worry about what you are going to say next. So much of our conversation is thinking about what I am going to say next. So I am often anxious about what I am going to say. But to be free to genuinely listen... Then patience. .. not the traditional kind of patience - putting up with injustice and waiting for the afterlife - but patience for the long haul, patience that things aren't going to be necessarily solved in my lifetime, that it might be seven generations.. patience that we are connected with all of creation, that we are not the centre of it but we have a place in it. Patience with my own healing journey. And if we live a life of listening and patience, respect will come.

The importance of patient listening, not surprisingly, was repeatedly identified as a fundamental quality of respect. But in particular also mentioned was the special nature of communication that moved away from argumentation.

I think that if we are to move forward to make progress this is the process we need to develop. I see that listening fosters respect. Debate and argument, even finding points of agreement and points of disagreement does not foster respect. In the listening, if we listen deeply enough, our questions are answered, our internal struggles are resolved. If we could just listen enough. -Woman interfaith leader.

We will explore later the meaning and importance of “ideal speech situations.” For now it is enough to say that a fundamental quality of dialogue is its concern for the use and abuse of power. The question is what manner of the balancing of power between people is necessary for fruitful conversation to take place? The experience of the Talking Circle suggests that a starting point is the balance between listening and speaking, which Myra Laramée speaks of as reciprocity. To speak one must also listen. The Talking Circle “reframes the concept of power,” she says. Reciprocity, found in the balance between listening and speaking, is one example of this.

Without condition there is listening and speaking. Even if the speaking is in the silence there is listening. And those two skills ...have been minimized in our human relations and compromised in the misuse of power.

-Myra Laramée

We’ve noted that one of the characteristics of the Talking Circle is that one does not challenge or confront directly the comments of another person. One

offers respect through understanding, listening and valuing what is shared, not by questioning or challenging another's ideas, nor through argumentation. McKay points to the adversarial nature of Western culture. The "competitive sharing of information," he suggests is how people advance and get ahead. So the Talking Circle is a "counter cultural movement" which allows people to step back from European systems of control. In characterizing the Talking Circle in this way, McKay is again pointing to the fundamental importance of respect in understanding the cultural differences between Native and non-Native cultures.

Values of the Circle

Another way that respect is lived out within the Circle, Myra Laramee suggests, is that it invites people to speak from the heart. At times people will speak for lengthy periods, and by the very nature of the Circle, without interruption. For those unaccustomed to the Circle it can be a struggle to reframe the usual expectations of conversation, she suggests. McKay notes that instead of a linear progression of thought and argument, the conversation flows through story. Participants let go of the expectation that they can respond directly to another's contribution or that an idea can be debated.

We hear in different ways when we know there will be ten speakers before we can respond to the spirit of the community. We listen to others. We process in our being. It is more than mind. It is how we feel. I find that the pattern of wanting to interrupt one another is one of the main learnings of the circle. The respectful listening is that we do not have to challenge anyone, we do not have to be defensive in what we have to offer. We can

offer freely. That whole flow is so different from many gatherings. It is a turning upside down of modern communication. -Stan McKay

McKay notes that in Western-European models of conversation one person's skill and wisdom often carries the argument or sways the listeners. The Talking Circle however works to shift this power to an equality of voices and contributions.

In the Circle it is likely that we are being moved by various ideas and we want to jump in. There is a tendency in many cultures, especially North American cultures, to be a very adversarial people. You have to be quick to get your ideas in. Because it is about competitive sharing of information. That's how people advance in North American society. So part of the Circle is counter culture. It is to set us back from patterns that are European and that we may not have analyzed. We work here (at the Centre) extensively with analysis and it would be our opinion that most systems have a potential to fail humanity, things like democracy are really a very clever way to deceive people and for the powerful to have their way. And so systems that we might offer to the world that provide a framework into which our spiritual life will fit are very helpful.

We say everyone in the Circle is gifted. Everyone has something of value to offer. In my village my father and mother taught me as a child that the people we might pick on or make fun of, who are physically or mentally or spiritually in different places, were the people who had the greatest gifts for the village. The full humanity of the village must be realized. Those are the people who would lead us. -Stan McKay

Laramee also speaks about the quality of listening being transformed. The assumption is that wisdom is to be found in every contribution no matter who offers it. "He has taught me a lot," McKay notes, is a common expression among Native people. Behind that phrase is a profound respect for the wisdom that everyone shares. The teachings of humility, Myra Laramee suggests are practiced in the circle by the valuing of every contribution.

I try to move quickly to the point where I deal with myself, my own frailty in the Circle and say, "This person is your teacher. This person is your teacher and they are teaching you through this method. It may not be on target, it may be like a drunk that I was talking about the other day who walks down the street and people pass that person by never recognizing the kinds of teaching that that individual has for us. -Myra Laramée

Another part of the reciprocity that Myra speaks about is found in her understanding of the reflection of the Creator in all who sit in the Circle. "There is a flow of energy," she says, "that happens through the Circle, a flow that any one person can block. Without the energy flow the Creator is not there. What brings the energy into the Circle, however, is the sound of one's voice."

The sound of my voice is what the Creator depends on. That's why the silence of women has been so powerful. The silence of children. People being silenced. Because once the sound is made God talks.

While participants in the Circle may pass the talking symbol on without speaking, they may also hold it in silence. Stan McKay, as does Myra Laramée, speaks of the importance of sounding one's voice but also inviting people to remain silent as well. The important point is not that one speaks vocally, McKay says, but that one is given space to speak. Silence can also represent one's voice being sounded. The symbol therefore carries with it the recognition of the community that this person now has the right to be heard.

The inviting of the quiet ones into voice is another part of the Circle when we talk about inclusion and the invitation of everyone to take part. It may take two or three times around; it may not happen in the first hour or first day, but the inviting of the quiet people into their powerful expression of life is a gift to the community. When people feel marginalized or devalued and begin to speak, I always find that exciting. - Stan McKay

McKay speaks about the importance in Aboriginal communities of taking time for people. The people rather than the issues are the agenda. There might well be an introduction of a topic, but the overriding assumption is that whatever people bring to the Circle is appropriate. What is important here is not, McKay suggests, the avoidance of an agenda but rather the assumption that everyone who is in the Circle brings a particular wisdom to bear on the topic under discussion. The assumption is that there are neither extraneous, nor less than helpful comments. Everyone has something to contribute and there is something to learn from every contribution.

Respect is foundational; it is there from the beginning. The respect is there in that we listen to one another as long as the person is speaking. That is their time. That there is something to learn from each person is a given.

-Janet Silman

McKay notes that a foundational expression of respect in the Circle is the acceptance of diversity.

So often diversity is looked at as a problem to overcome, with its divisions, for example. In the circle what amazes me is that the more diversity, the richer it is. Of course, there usually is diversity of one kind or another - age, gender, whatever. But when we have ecumenical gatherings, or interfaith, whatever the diversity is, it adds to the richness of the experience. And that is the opposite of many gatherings where diversity makes it impossible to hear one another or to come to any consensus or common experience. -Stan McKay

One Native author, Jamake Highwater, points to the acceptance of many forms of behaviour within Native communities that might be considered undesirable in

other societies. He notes, for example, that the "clown" exists in almost all Native cultures and is frequently honoured as people who possess knowledge of another reality.⁴⁵ The acceptance of diversity within the Circle, McKay suggests, extends to acknowledging the legitimacy of every remark and topic. The role of the clown is an important symbolic statement that all contributions are to be valued and even those that are just apparent silliness, increase the wisdom of the community.

Story telling is another of the ways in which diversity is accepted, McKay notes. "This allows us to cross vast historic chasms and yet hear the other's voice." Stories predominate in the record of the "Paths of Respect" Consultation. In part this is likely due to the example of McKay and Laramée who told stories themselves as an invitation to participate in the Circle. Many of the teachings of the Elders are recorded as narrative or are contained within a mythical story. Alf Dumont's comment that the response within his community to an expression of regret would often be a story speaks of one example of the role of stories in sustaining community life.

It also relates significantly, some suggest, to a fundamental ethic of Aboriginal culture. The ethic of non-intervention, suggested Dr. Clare Brant, is one striking example of the differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal decision-making. Dr. Brant, a Mohawk and a psychiatrist, explained it this way.

The Ethic of Non-Interference is probably one of the oldest and one of the most pervasive of all ethics by which we Native people live. It has been practised for twenty-five or thirty thousand years, but it is not very well articulated... This principle essentially means that an Indian will never interfere in any way with the rights, privileges and activities of another person... We are very loath to confront people. We are very loath to give

⁴⁵ The Primal Mind, op.cit. pg. 176

advice to anyone if the person is not specifically asking for advice. To interfere or even comment on their behaviour is considered rude.⁴⁶

One way in which this ethic manifests itself, Dr. Brant suggested, is in the use of stories or parables in situations where non-Native Westerners might be far more directive. In part this might be a reflection of the awareness of the inappropriateness of directly offering advice that is characteristic of Native culture. The use of stories, however, allows a lesson to be shared, which likely will contain the necessary advice but also allows both parties to save face regardless of whether the advice is followed.

Another perspective on the use of stories comes from a reflection by Janet Silman that within the circle each person is expected to speak about what they know to be true in their own lives. Stories are what principally compose the oral traditions of Aboriginal Spirituality. And it is through the use of stories that one's own experience is incorporated into that of the larger community.

James Weaver notes that, in Aboriginal communities, stories belong fundamentally to the community. It is unusual, he argues, to find a story with a single author; instead stories and narrative traditions tend to develop communally.⁴⁷ He makes reference to the difference between visions and ideas as part of the reason for this. There is an old Indian saying, he notes, that the white man has ideas, Indians have visions. In contrast to ideas which have single

⁴⁶ Clare Brant, "Living, Loving, Hating Families in the 80's" Address delivered at Oshweken Community Hall, Jan. 9 1982 quoted in Rupert Ross, Dancing with a Ghost: Exploring Indian Reality. (Markham, Ont.: Reed Books. 1992) pg. 12

⁴⁷ Jace Weaver, That The People Might Live: Native American Literature's and Native American Community. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) pg. 42

dimensions and require a chain of connection to make sense, visions present a whole picture of experience and can stand on their own as independent revelations. Visions, therefore, in contrast to ideas, contribute to the shaping of defining of Native communities in ways that ideas cannot.⁴⁸

An example of this occurred during the “Paths” Consultation with Myra Laramee. On the second day a Sikh participant shared at length his own experiences first as a child in India and then later as an adult in Canada. He described his family’s journey from Pakistan to India during the time of partition in 1947 and the profound sense of rejection that stayed with him throughout his life; even as a senior management employee in a large Canadian company. Until, he said, this experience. The Talking Circle had provided the deepest sense of acceptance that he had felt in his life.

While he was sharing this story, Myra Laramee began to weep. She later explained that in that moment she had felt a personal prophecy had come true. She explained:

I’m called to remember last evening when in fact the blessing that I understand came for me in the Circle, but I believe for all of us. The old man, who had talked to me on many occasions about the good life, the prophecy in its completion and the new start, said to me once that, when the nations come together and sit in the Circle, there will be a time when there is no other skin colour. The only thing that you will see is the colour of tan. I didn’t understand him then. I thought intermarriage was going to take care of that. But I understand something different today.

Last night, when tears fell for me, the way I have been instructed and shown, they say the Spirit has landed. In that landing, my spiritual grandfather, Ernest, stood behind me and put his hands on my shoulders,

⁴⁸ Ibid., pg. 130

and he said, "Look. Look to the centre of the Circle. Do you see what I see?" Last night, when I was listening to the people, when I looked to the centre of the Circle, all I could see was the colour tan.

Last night it was much like you see in the middle of an original dream catcher, with the sinew that the people used to use, all the connections were there, and in the colour of tan. I guess for me that it is the blessing that I bring from my heart to yours, from the old man about what he used to talk about, the time when the nations would sit in the Circle and all that you could see is the colour of tan. For that I am very grateful.

- Myra Laramée

The significance of this moment for Laramée was profound. It points to the use of vision and story in the Talking Circle and the importance in speaking about what one has experienced personally. But also it provides a powerful example of the ways in which new visions and experiences are incorporated into the tradition.

Another aspect of this was expressed in a slightly different manner by a participant in the Paths of Respect Consultation who noted the willingness of participants to speak out of their experiences of faith rather than attempting to represent the whole of their tradition.

I want to share with you that I have been involved in journeys in interfaith dialogue probably for twenty-five years. I consider this weekend to be the highest point that I've reached so far on my journey. This is the first time that I've ever been in a group where people didn't say they represented the whole of their faith tradition. They spoke of the small things, or perhaps the big things that their tradition taught them. And I want to thank the Native people for teaching us that way of expressing how we are children of our faith. I think that it made the experience of being faithful people much more acute for each of us. And also it offered the possibility of reaching across to other faithful people as a much safer thing to do. You are not reaching across to an institution that the person told me they represented but to the faithfulness that person told me they held. -
Jewish Woman

One of the issues raised in this comment is the extent to which any person can claim to speak as a representative of an entire faith tradition. It raises the question of whether it is possible at all to speak objectively about a faith or only subjectively about one's own faith. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, among others, argues that the world's religious communities cannot and should not be understood as stable systems but as participation in historically grounded processes that more and more are overlapping into interdependence and inter-involvement.⁴⁹ There is therefore not a Muslim faith or a Christian faith, but only your faith and mine.⁵⁰ The teaching of the Talking Circle, that one speaks about what is known to be true in one's own life, is related to this understanding, and emphasizes the oral and cumulative character of Native Spirituality. It is impossible to speak of Native Spirituality as an integral whole in part because rituals, stories and traditions vary from First Nation to First Nation. But also it is because it is the incorporation of the stories into each individual's life and teaching that gives them meaning and power.

One way of speaking of the Circle, we have noted, is the desire to be a small consensus. In this sense Traditional Native Spirituality, as George van der Goes reminds us, is neither monotheistic as classically understood nor certainly monolithic. Rather it acknowledges the coming together of many parts into a small consensus, which reflects the Great Consensus. The pattern of the Circle is therefore not to speak of universal categories, i.e. doctrine, but rather what is true for each person in their own understanding and experience. What is affirmed

⁴⁹ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Towards a World Theology: Faith and the Comparative History of Religion, (New York: Orbis, 1981) pg. 127f.

⁵⁰ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, The Meaning and End of Religion, (New York: Mentor, 1962) pg. 172

therefore, is the diversity of beliefs and stories within Native communities. If reality itself is composed of consensus rather than uniformity, then that is what is to be hoped for within communities themselves. This, we shall see, will point us later towards a critical and important reflection of the nature of truth itself.

Conclusion

It is the profound inter-relationship of people with each other, and with the creation, to which the Circle witnesses and which forms the foundation of Aboriginal Spiritual beliefs. Myra Laramée's description of the Circle being convened by the four directions is indicative of the extended inter-relationship of all of Creation. In a similar manner the animal representatives as the focus of the directions affirms the inclusion of all, human and animal, within the Circle. The use of stories within the Circle, reflecting the ethic of non-intervention, also points to the importance of consensus at the heart of the Talking Circle. However, rather than what is commonly understood in non-Native communities as consensus, it is more likely that what is meant is communal thinking. The critical point is that the self-esteem of everyone is maintained; that no one feels put down, ignored, or forced to give in. Everyone should feel that they have contributed in some way to whatever decision is reached. The fundamental issue at stake in reaching "consensus" is not that everyone agrees with the decision but that respect is maintained.

The Aboriginal worldview it is suggested, as we will note later, is characterized by the ethics of reciprocity, non-intervention, interconnectedness and respect, the qualities that define the function of the Talking Circle. The provision of space for all voices to be heard and respected flows from the underlying orientation of Aboriginal Spirituality, “that the people may live.” The Talking Circle, as one expression of the Circle in Native Spiritual practice, is the place where the community becomes a small consensus, a reflection of the Great Consensus. Such an understanding of consensus does not imply a uniform mind but rather that everyone is heard and every voice is respected. It is the additional characteristics of multiversality and “cumulative adhesion” that most directly point towards the meaning of this consensus. These are the characteristics, to be explored later, that provide a significant challenge to the church, and where the most pressing cultural confusion continues.

The Talking Circle therefore is a symbol of the relationship of equality and respect towards which the Apology points. It suggests that the walk is not about searching for common understandings that can be mutually affirmed but about a way of being together grounded in respect. The focus of dialogue therefore must be concerned for the process, the way of being together, and the community of conversation that encompasses it. Dialogue finally is not an exercise in communication but, for the Church, is a way of being in the world and as such redefines the nature of mission. So also the Circle is not simply a form of conversation, but rather an expression of Spirituality itself.

5. EXPLORATIONS FROM THE INTERVIEWS AND THE TALKING CIRCLE

The research project points to a number of issues related to the meaning of the Apology. As with the history of Native missions itself, the Apology reveals the complexity of interaction between different cultures. Alf Dumont points to the differences in the meaning attached to the intention of the Apology. He explained that in an Aboriginal community when a child comes to a grandparent and says, "I'm sorry for what I did," the grandparent either tells a story of what he had done at a certain time or perhaps the grandparent will offer a teaching. It is then up to the child to gain the lesson. In either case the response is not an acceptance of the apology but an acknowledgement that the child had come forward seeking to change. The response therefore is some appropriate teaching that helps towards that change.

There is a sense in the Aboriginal community that it's not just a matter of you being willing to change - therefore we will walk with you in a different way but that walking will take some time to do. Since you are willing to make the first step we will walk together. But we will walk with you as observers at the same time - to see whether you are living out the Apology. -Alf Dumont

The Native community clearly interpreted the Apology as an expression by the Church of its willingness to change its ways. It was not simply a statement focused on past wrongs but a signal that the church was willing to find a better way of living together with Native people; a change that would of necessity transform the Church.

Evelyn Broadfoot spoke of the Apology as opening a door. She could now worship the way her ancestors worshipped.

It meant I didn't have to be embarrassed, I didn't have to be afraid to worship and to respect the way that my people worshipped many years ago. -Evelyn Broadfoot

It signalled for her not only a new beginning for Aboriginal people but also for all believers in the United Church. For her the key image of the Apology is the call to walk together side by side. Grafton Antoine used the image of a treaty in which the Church said that we would no longer restrict you in the exercise of your spirituality. But clearly, to him, it is a treaty that has mutual implications.

Glenys Huws remembered her hope that the Apology would do two things, first to acknowledge the injustice done to Native people in not recognizing the validity of Aboriginal Spirituality; in categorizing it all too frequently in a discourse of paganism, savagery and nature worshippers. She hoped that the Church would come to terms with its inability to understand the real meaning of Native rituals and the worldview behind them. But then also that the Church would acknowledge the role that it had played in the overall oppression of Aboriginal people. In using the kind of language that it did about Aboriginal people the Church implicitly blessed the approach of European settlers in seeing Native people as less than human. The Church was guilty not only of disparaging Native Spirituality but in providing permission for the treatment that Native people received.

So there was the first level of behaviour that needed to be acknowledged - the way that Native spirituality was trivialized - and that had such terrible effects on the whole social fabric of Aboriginal society. When you are told that the stories and symbols and rituals that have grounded your society

and given meaning to you as a people are no good - it's very hard not to say that we as a people are not very good. But I think there was also the economic and social impact of the encounter, which was made worse by this underlying theological permission. Aboriginal people were less than human; therefore you could take away their land. - Glenys Huws.

While the focus of the Apology was directed towards the question of the valuing of Native Spirituality, fundamentally a theological question, this was clearly inseparable from economic and social implications as well. The Apology would subsequently open doors to initiatives such as the United Church Healing Fund. The starting point however for living out the meaning of Apology would be recognition of the validity of Aboriginal spiritual traditions. Acknowledging validity, says Huws, implied a rejection of the past language of categorization. It would mean accepting Aboriginal traditions on their own premises and in their own context rather than interpreting them through the lenses of Western expectations. To acknowledge the value of Native Spirituality would also mean that the Native community within the United Church needed to function differently from the rest of the church; that there were underlying values and customs and a worldview that made it difficult for Aboriginal people to function the way the rest of the Church functioned. To do this, space had to be made for the Native community to function in its own way with integrity. The immediate outcome of this commitment was the constitution of the All Native Circle Conference in 1988.⁵¹

⁵¹ The formation of the All Native Circle Conference was approved in principle at the Morden General Council in 1984. It was reaffirmed in 1986 in Sudbury.

The ANCC was officially constituted on August 17, 1988, and recognized as the 13th Conference of The United Church of Canada. While governed by the same rules and regulations as other conferences there are a number of significant differences. Not all members of the Conference are Native, but all of the ministries within the Conference serve Native people. The Conference is also non-geographic, covering most of Canada and includes a number of language groups: Cree, Saulteaux, Ojibway, Iroquois, Sioux, Stoney and Assiniboine.

Significantly, the Conference serves people who are poor and dispossessed, the "Fourth World" in Canada. In a 1990 report to a funding oversight body of the Church, the situation in the ANCC was described as follows:

Over 75% of all the people within our Conference are on welfare. In many communities the number of welfare recipients is as high as 90%. Although a small minority within the total population of this land, the Aboriginal people have by far the highest incidence of infant mortality, school drop-out, suicides, incarceration, and the list goes on.

None of the reserve communities within our conference have a bank or financial institution. .. No matter where in this country, poverty is a daily reality for most of our people and there are few signs of hope for improvement. In fact most signs are more ominous pointing to an even more devastating future.⁵²

Perhaps the most important distinctiveness of the ANCC is "its reality of being pulled, pushed and driven by a new spirituality that brings together the Christian Tradition and the Traditional Native expression of Faith." John Thompson, staff of the ANCC in 1990 wrote the following:

⁵² John Thompson, Presentation to the Mission Support Consultation, Toronto, April 1-5, 1990.

This is our core, our centre, our very reason to be. It is the source of our greatest hope and yet, ironically, it is also the source of much pain. When people have been told for generations that their traditional ways were wrong and evil, it takes time, struggle and pain to turn this around. The Apology opened the door to a new beginning where our people can start to reclaim the spiritual truths and expression of their ancestors.

At the present time the people are at different points on the spectrum, between acceptance and non-acceptance of traditional Native spirituality. It will probably take several generations for the people to name their new Spiritual reality in a truly indigenous theology but the struggle and the pain will be worth it, for the whole church will be enriched by the gifts of the Elders.⁵³

It is the symbol of the All Native Circle Conference, the Sacred Bundle, that witnesses most profoundly to the hoped-for integrity of the Aboriginal way within the Church, as Glenys Huws suggests. This gathering together of sacred symbols or articles of both Christian and Aboriginal traditions: the Talking Stick, the Cross, the Bible and the Pipe, was introduced at the first meeting of the ANCC. It represented the “two paths” that would journey side by side and the equal respect that would be given to both Aboriginal and Christian ways. It points therefore to the holding of both traditions as equally valid. It is this acknowledgement of the equality of the two paths that had a very profound meaning for Stan McKay. It pointed, he suggests, to one overriding image.

“Very simply the Apology signalled the end of mission.”

-Stan McKay

We will explore this statement in more depth later, but among many things, it meant McKay said, the end of an attitude that said, “we have the answers

⁵³ Ibid.

for you, we will tell you what being a Christian means." It represented a "struggle for the liberation of a people within its culture and within its tradition." What is at stake for all of those interviewed was the ability of the Native community to reclaim Aboriginal values and traditions out of the context of missionary colonialism. But also there is the search, as McKay says, for renewed understanding of the relationship between Native and Christian spiritualities. It is the question of relationship, and therefore of authority, that is at the heart of a renewed understanding of mission.

Stan McKay pointed to the key issue of power at the crux of the meaning of the Apology and in understanding the relationship between the two traditions. There are a number of Aboriginal values that contrast sharply with patterns of Western Christian behaviour and expectations. A significant underlying issue, however, is clearly that of authority. Who determines what is and is not acceptable Christian belief? What the Apology points to, McKay suggests, is the end of European styles of authority and control and, at least for those who choose to do so, the freedom to follow both paths; to be both Aboriginal and Christian. For the Aboriginal community it means the ability and right to determine what that means from within the Aboriginal context and community.

Authority is, of course, a critical issue in any exploration of mission. Classically, mission has presupposed a sender in whom authority is vested. David Bosch notes that for much of the history of the church, mission was used exclusively in reference to the Trinity; the sending of the Son from the Father or the Spirit from the Father and the Son. Only in recent history had it come to refer

to the actions of a church or mission society.⁵⁴ It is this more recent understanding that began to see mission in terms of expansion and conquest. It presumed an interpretive authority for mission vested in the mission agency or church. And it saw these agencies maintaining responsibility for determining the content and integrity of the faith. Most mainstream churches would argue that such understandings of mission and its colonial history have long since been left behind. The Apology, McKay suggests, is nevertheless a sign of the ending of a concept of mission that is still operative and still representative of this colonial model. In Bosch's terms, it points to a paradigm shift taking place in the theology of mission.

A paradigm shift, it is now widely interpreted, implies a fundamental break with the belief system or frame of reference which has provided a way of understanding reality for a given community. Thomas Kuhn first used the term to describe the transition from one scientific theory to a new one. Science does not grow cumulatively, he argued, but rather through revolution. There are of course significant differences between scientific paradigms and theology, Bosch notes, not the least of which is that while shifts in scientific worldviews generally make previous paradigms untenable, different theological perspectives generally continue pervasively within segments of the Christian community and frequently within individuals as well. What is important however is recognizing and acknowledging the transition into a new era. Bosch sketches in broad outline the theological eras in the understanding of mission first proposed by Hans Kung: primitive Christianity, the patristic period, the Middle Ages, the Reformation, the

⁵⁴ David J. Bosch, Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991) pg. 3

Enlightenment and the emerging ecumenical era.⁵⁵ It is the Enlightenment worldview that provided a backdrop for the historic Native missions and therefore the context for the Apology and its relation to a new emerging paradigm of mission.

In the Enlightenment worldview, reason became the starting point for knowledge, and facts, determined through scientific means, provided the foundation for reason. And since facts existed independent of the observer, and knowledge, based on facts, was therefore neutral and value free, a separation developed between knowledge as objective truth, and values, to which religion belonged, as subjective and dependent upon one's beliefs and preferences.⁵⁶

It was this distinction between facts and values, between the objective and the subjective, that contributed, in the Enlightenment worldview, to the separation of humans and their environment. The human mind, the *res cogitans*, became the analytical tool capable of exploring and understanding, through facts, the *res extens*, the non-human world. As the emphasis turned towards analysis, the whole became less important and parts became the focus of examination. Human beings were no longer treated as whole entities but rather separated into segments through the various disciplines for more effective study. With this developing scientific approach came also a powerful sense of mastery over the world and a pervasive trust in progress. The world could be remade at will into whatever possibilities were desired.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Ibid., pg. 187

⁵⁶ Ibid., pg. 265

⁵⁷ Ibid., pg. 267

Perhaps most significantly in the Enlightenment paradigm the autonomous individual began to take precedence over the community. Society, which once took priority over the individual, was now seen to come “into existence only through the voluntary contract of individuals seeking to maximize their own self-interest.”⁵⁸ As the struggle for the freedom of knowledge set the arbitrary authority of belief against science, so monarchical and aristocratic authority, representing the oppressive structures of society, were set against the rights of citizens to govern themselves. The emancipated autonomous individual became the ideal but at the price of the loss of balance between the individual and the larger community.

The proclamation of salvation to individuals became therefore the hallmark of nineteenth century missions; a proclamation that in the end resulted in separating Native people from the cultures and communities in which they once lived. As indigenous culture diminished in importance so also the romantic view of the “noble savage” gave way to pessimistic depictions of the “pagan” world and Western concepts of civilization became inextricably linked with Christianization. Colonialization and the adoption of western culture became either the needed precondition or the expected result of mission.⁵⁹

In the Enlightenment paradigm, mission and colonialism, many believed, belonged together. “It is the mission that subdues our colonies and assimilates them inwardly,” wrote a Catholic missiologist in 1913. While the state may incorporate the colonies outwardly, the inner colonization was the role of

⁵⁸ Robert Bellah, et al., Habits Of The Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life, (New York: Harper & Row, 1985) pg. 143

⁵⁹ Transforming Mission, op. cit. pg. 297

missionaries for “it is the mission which secures the inward servility and devotion of the Natives.”⁶⁰ It is the nature of this inner colonization that is the concern and focus of McKay’s comment on the ending of mission and an underlying issue presented in the interviews.

Many missionaries did, of course, stand in opposition to abusive colonial powers and did argue that mission and, at least, social and political colonialism were incompatible. The inescapable reality was however, as Bosch notes, that most missionaries “never really doubted the legitimacy of colonialism.” Wilfully or not, missionaries did become the agents of Western imperialism. “The mission agencies were simply not able to see reality in any other way.”⁶¹ The question the Apology raises is whether the Church, in spite of its rejection of this history of colonialism has fully addressed the implications of this history in respect to the nature of an inner colonialism.

Bosch points to the deeper issues at stake in this question. With the Enlightenment, he argues, an additional element had entered the picture. While, in the past, people were divided according to religious criteria, now they were categorized according to levels of civilization and ultimately ethnicity and race. The civilized were not only superior to the uncivilized but morally responsible to care for them. What began as a mission of love, therefore, all too often ended as a mission of charity, pity and therefore ultimately control.

In the Enlightenment mentality, it was suggested, “good means to know what is good for others, and to impose it on them.”⁶² Progress, defined by a

⁶⁰ J. Schmidlin, quoted in *Ibid.*, pg. 306

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pg. 312

⁶² D. Schellong, quoted in *Ibid.*, pg. 313

Western perspective, would ultimately offer hope for all the ills of the world. But intimately linked with this concept of progress was the belief structure that surrounded it. The nature of mission and its interrelationship with colonialism was not only about the control of the missionaries over external patterns of behaviour and the teaching of the gospel. It was fundamentally about the universality of the gospel in the heart and mind of the believer. The division of people by race and ethnicity was a matter of determining purity. So also the logical integrity and therefore purity of religious belief became a paramount goal of mission.

New models of partnership in world mission at least, have superseded beliefs in the superiority of the Western worldview, in mainline churches. The model of partnership represented by the World Council of Churches Resource Sharing agreements⁶³ stand in sharp contrast to the colonial models of mission. McKay's statement is undoubtedly focused on the colonial aspect of mission but it is also, I suggest, about the transformation of concepts of the purity or exclusiveness of religious belief itself. The interviews point to the Apology as "opening a door." The door that is pointed to, I suggest, is that of dual participation of faith traditions within the mind and heart of an individual. Related and underlying this issue is the acknowledging and accepting of differences in the perception of reality and the nature of otherness.

To speak of the "end of mission," Stan McKay argues, calls the Church to step out of the prejudice of a Western Universalist worldview and approach

⁶³ The World Council of Churches convened a gathering of Southern and Northern partners in El Escorial, Spain in 1986. The report of the consultation, known as El Escorial document, lifts up the values of partnership and commitments of mutuality and shared decision making in North/South relationships.

Aboriginal Spirituality with a radically different mind. It is this radical difference that suggests that the Apology has signalled a paradigm shift in an understanding of mission. To explore this further we turn now to an exploration of a number of other issues raised by the Apology.

The Relationship between Gospel, Culture and Power

We needed to question the way the gospel had been presented to us, in particular the valuing of one culture over another. Until we dealt with that history, until we made some new initiative in the context of our theological understanding and our spiritual development in Aboriginal communities, we would always live under this cloud of history and never encounter from our side the true history which would be liberating. -Stan McKay.

In the above comment McKay points to the question of gospel and culture at the heart of the Apology. The confusion of “*Western ways and culture with the depth and breadth and length and height of the gospel*” was reflected in most of the interviews. Evelyn Broadfoot in particular noted her sadness that the missionaries didn’t understand the Aboriginal people they were sent to serve. She refers especially to the use of the drum as the way of worship of her people. The desire of the government and the Church to “stamp it out” convinced her that the missionaries understood very little of the ways of her people.

When they saw the Sweat Lodge they didn’t understand that everything they saw related to the creation. What they saw was Indian people worshipping that rock or the sun. That’s all they saw, and they were told to tell these people to do away with worshipping the sun and the water or the rock. When the missionaries came, they brought with them the Bible and

they were received graciously by our people. And the reason they were received graciously and with love and care was because they were talking about God. And our people knew who God was. They didn't have to read it in a book. It was there. Everything that surrounded them was God.

-Evelyn Broadfoot

What was at stake was respect for the integrity of Native spiritual traditions but underlying it, was the question of the confusion of gospel and culture.

Wesley Ariarajah describes, in an introduction to the World Council of Churches' study on Gospel and Culture, how, at the beginning of the Council's Seventh Assembly in 1991 in Canberra, Aborigines recalled the story of the colonization of Australia. The presentation portrayed the disregard of missionaries for the spiritual and cultural heritage of Aboriginal peoples. Following the presentation a traditional ceremony was held to give permission to the WCC to hold its assembly on Aboriginal land. In preparation and as a sign of purification delegates were invited to pass through a smudge created by the burning of green leaves as Aborigines danced in traditional dress around the altar. Ariarajah notes the difficulty many delegates had in accepting as authentically Christian what at one time would have been seen as pagan.⁶⁴

But perhaps the most serious controversy erupted during the presentation of Professor Chung Hyun-Kyung. Her invoking of *ki*, the life energy in traditional North East Asian thinking, as interconnected with the Holy Spirit and the representation of Christ in Kwan In, the woman Buddhist bodhisattva, to many demonstrated an unacceptable syncretism.⁶⁵ Said Professor Chung,

⁶⁴ Wesley J. Ariarajah, Gospel and Culture: An Ongoing Discussion within the Ecumenical Movement. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994)

⁶⁵ Ibid., pg. 48

...the image of the Holy Spirit comes from the image of Kwan In... venerated as the goddess of compassion and wisdom by East Asian women's popular religiosity. She is a bodhisattva, an enlightened being. She can go into nirvana any time she wants to, but refuses to ... until the whole universe becomes enlightened. Perhaps this might also be a feminine image of Christ...⁶⁶

The issue was not a new one in the World Council. Syncretism as a negative description first appeared in the records of the 1938 World Missionary Council meeting in Tambaram.⁶⁷ But the issue of the legitimacy of mingling religious traditions began very quickly to raise questions about whether any expression of Christianity could ever be free from its cultural home. As the Sri Lankan theologian Tissa Balasuryia expresses it,

It could be justly argued that when the ancients have recourse to their cultures to interpret the divine, it is called theology: When persons of non-European cultures use their own concepts and images to speak of God, the theological establishment calls it syncretism and paganization of Christianity.⁶⁸

The claim for universality within the Christian tradition has usually been supported through the negative judgement of syncretism. But syncretism is a complex term referring to both objective realities in interreligious contact and

⁶⁶ Chung, Hyun Kyung, "Come Holy Spirit, Renew the Whole Creation!" Signs of the Spirit: Official Report of the Seventh Assembly. Ed. M. Kinnamon (Geneva: WCC, 1991) pg. 38,39 quoted in Burton Sankeralli, ed. At the Crossroads: African Caribbean Religion and Christianity, (St. James, Trinidad: Caribbean Conference of Churches, 1995) pg. 31

⁶⁷ Ibid., pg. 34

⁶⁸ Tissa Balasuryia. "Liberation of the Holy Spirit." Ecumenical Review 43(2)(1991)pg. 202. quoted in Ibid., pg. 34

subjective judgement of violation of the integrity of a tradition. Because of this confusion in meanings some scholars have advocated abandoning the use of the term altogether.⁶⁹ The difficulty is that it does describe a significant reality of interreligious encounter. Andre Doogers points to a number of historical uses of the term. In its earliest form it referred to overcoming differences of opinion and the forging of alliances. Only in the 17th century did it take on its negative connotation and speak of the “illegitimate reconciliation of opposing theological views.”⁷⁰

In some definitions of syncretism the focus has been on the “ambiguous coexistence of elements” in which an attempt is made to seek coherence. The choices become assimilation (one element is eliminated), coherence (a new religion), or dissolution (elements drift apart.)⁷¹ Others however forgo the need for any resolution of the ambiguity and reserve the name for cases where two conflicting ideas or practices are held together without either assimilation or coherence - what we have already described as a multiversal mind set. Doogers adds to this by suggesting that an exploration of power is critical in any consideration of syncretism.

Only rarely, Doogers, suggests, is syncretism ever named as that by the syncretists themselves. It is usually in the context of *contesting* new patterns of religious belief or practice by representatives of an orthodox tradition that syncretism becomes an issue. It assumes, in other words, the existence of an

⁶⁹ Andre Doogers, in Jerald D. Gort et .al., Dialogue and Syncretism, (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1989) pg. 7

⁷⁰ Ibid., pg. 9

⁷¹ Ibid., pg. 11

unequal relationship of power in which one party assumes the right to determine what is right belief or practice. Syncretism, he suggests, is really about contested religious interpenetration.

He contends therefore that in any study of syncretism questions of power must be addressed.

...we should ask ourselves to what extent the religious interpenetration under study is contested and by whom. The symbolic mechanisms must be analyzed. Changes in symbols, meaning, and patterns must be studied within the wider cultural and social context, including power structures. The position the authors of these changes and their critics occupy in society must be included.

What Doogers notes is that the blending and borrowing that characterises syncretism is composed of symbols or clusters of symbols and the meanings attached to them. People may change these symbols, give other meanings to them or perhaps integrate them into another pattern or context altogether. The point is that an almost infinite series of transformations is possible because symbols are in themselves "multivocal."⁷² It is in the realm of common believers that he believes this multivocality of symbols exists.

Frequently clergy but also at times the laity function in roles of vested power with much to gain and lose in contesting syncretism. What is important, Doogers concludes, is interreligious dialogue that incorporates the "hidden face of religion" represented by this interchange and interpenetration of symbols. Syncretism, in this sense, is a common experience among the followers of the world's faith traditions. What is important, he suggests, is the dialogue which

⁷² Ibid., pg. 18

takes place not just between those who represent the orthodoxy of the traditions, but between those who incorporate the populist or common expressions of the faith, where syncretism is becoming a more and more prevalent experience.

“Syncretism”, says Janet Silman, “has always been a red herring.” Each tradition has, in individual ways, always been syncretistic. What’s at stake, she argues, is maintaining an internal dialogue that acknowledges both the parallels and the separateness.

I don't think for me that it's so much a merging. I don't look at it that way. The ongoing thing that our students grapple with is how can I be Indian and Christian. It is a kind of sorting process - with the ceremonies and practicing the traditional ways of the smudging. Then recognising in the Bible that there are ceremonies like that that are done. And then knowing the meaning - a purification and cleansing - and that it has to do with prayer. There is a mutual kind of conversation. It's in dialogue within them, and it's in dialogue within me. -Janet Silman

The issues of gospel and culture therefore some have suggested is simply about power and who has the right to set limits on what is an acceptable expression of the gospel. Ariarajah raises the issue of limits and acceptability in the debate over gospel and culture in the conclusion to his introduction to the WCC study:

What are the essential marks of a Christian and of the church in any culture? And how can Christians who can and must interpret the gospel in their own culture recognize others in other cultures as belonging to the one family in Christ? Are there real limits to diversity, or is there only a centre for the faith, and everything that comes out of and relates to that centre is a valid expression of faith? What are the power elements at work here? For who, in the ecumenical context, has the teaching authority to say that a

particular interpretation or response to the gospel in a given culture puts a person or a community outside the bounds of the church?⁷³

The Apology therefore touched directly on these questions. It acknowledged that there is indeed more than one centre to faith, and that the boundary of membership in the Church can no longer be determined by an established orthodoxy. It recognised the confusion within the Church of the identification of Western culture with the gospel, but more importantly it offered an understanding of the misuse of power that was central to that confusion. It affirmed that the misuse of power was directed towards the denial of the legitimacy of the traditional ways, and in particular the failure to understand and respect the distinctive communal identity of Native communities.

The Nature of Differences and The Communal Soul

During the General Council debate concern was expressed whether the Apology would be understood as a chastisement of the work of respected missionaries. Clearly, one focus of the Apology related to the confusion in missionary history between the gospel and European or Western culture. Yet such distinctions are only today coming into greater clarity. To have expected missionaries of a century ago to be sensitive to issues of cultural bias and

⁷³ Wesley J. Ariarajah, Gospel and Culture, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994) pg. 50

superiority is somewhat unrealistic. To add to this, much missionary activity took place after the effects of colonization were felt. Missionaries often began their work not with healthy, self-sufficient Native communities but with people overcome by the effects of conquest and disease. Many missionaries were motivated therefore by concern for providing social stability in the midst of devastated communities. While impressions of their own cultural superiority undoubtedly merged with such altruism it is almost impossible to conceive of missionaries of that era stepping out of their context and recognizing the confusion that seems obvious today.⁷⁴

Some missiologists have argued that it is inevitable that the gospel be expressed in the language and life-style of the particular culture of those proclaiming it. It is impossible, it is argued, to conceive of the gospel separated out from its human cultural ingredients; therefore a cultural bias is simply a reality of the way the gospel exists in human communities. The first generations of converts therefore inevitably adopted the forms of life and worship that missionaries brought. It is only later that following generations begin to look more critically at the forms of Christianity and make distinctions about culture that the early missionaries were unable to do.⁷⁵ The Apology, in its reference to the confusion between Western culture and the gospel, reflected this growing critical stance to culture within both Native and non-Native communities.

⁷⁴ George E. Tinker, Missionary Conquest: the Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993) pg. 10

⁷⁵ Leslie Newbigin, The Gospel in an Pluralistic Society, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publ., 1989) pg.191

Clifford Geertz defines culture as consisting of habitual responses to the world.⁷⁶ These habitual responses, which provide social and spiritual cohesion to the community, largely remain unexamined and undifferentiated and provide a foundation for what can be called "common sense knowledge."⁷⁷ Underlying this common sense knowledge are a complex set of symbol systems which,

embodies, codifies, integrates and communicates humanly constructed and historically transmitted patterns of meaning, perceptions, values, ideas, attitudes, judgements, beliefs, ideals, aspirations, commitments and actions through which life is interpreted more or less coherently and structured more or less consistently, at least plausibly, in accord with its own supportive ethos and world view.⁷⁸

Geertz notes, however, that the undermining of any of these key symbol systems or their replacement by a foreign belief structure can begin a process of cultural disintegration. Bernard Lonergan suggests that such actions by representatives of foreign culture, missionaries and others, are particularly capable of being "screened by self-deception" and even "admired as the forward march of progress."⁷⁹ When the symbol system under threat involves religious beliefs and

⁷⁶ Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures, (New York: Basic, 1973) quoted in Missionary Conquest, op.cit. pg. 113

⁷⁷ Ibid., pg. 114

⁷⁸ Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures, (New York: Basic Books, 1973) pg.89 quoted in Eugene Hillman, Many Paths: A Catholic Approach to Religious Pluralism, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1989) pg. 10

⁷⁹ Bernard Lonergan, Method in Theology, (New York: Seabury, 1972) pg. 244 quoted in Ibid., pg. 11

particularly religious rituals then what can be threatened is a "general conception of the order of existence."⁸⁰

Missionaries to the Native communities found a people whose spiritual traditions were rooted in cultural contexts quite different than anything they had experienced or likely could comprehend. Their own cultural symbols for example had been formed in ideologies of cultural superiority and universalist assumptions.

Differentiation by race, originating out of Aristotelian emphasis on classification; beliefs about the superiority of European culture and religion, developing in significant ways during the period of the Crusades⁸¹; the "scientific" examination of differences in the early 1800's which reinforced attitudes of qualitative differences between the races and particularly the genetic superiority of the white race⁸²; were all part of a trajectory of beliefs that lead to the assumption that Native people were in need of careful development and direction in order to become civilized.⁸³ The universal character of the gospel, the expectation that Christian belief, in order to be true, must be authentic and uncorrupted undoubtedly was hardened side by side with racism. It was such ideologies that likely were internalized and became part of the "common sense knowledge" of the European and missionary mind.

⁸⁰ The Interpretation of Cultures, op.cit. quoted in *Ibid.*, pg. 15

⁸¹ Missionary Conquest, op.cit. pg. 9

⁸² *Ibid.*, pg. 99

⁸³ *Ibid.*, pg. 100

Ideologies of genetic superiority are not part of mainstream assumptions today, but it is much harder to argue that all vestiges of cultural superiority have been overcome. Perhaps the most difficult issue to address for Native people themselves is the extent to which their Christianization represents an internalisation of Western cultural and religious superiority and whether an inner colonialism has persisted in spite of a rejection of an external colonialism.

George Tinker, an Osage/Cherokee, and a Lutheran Pastor, notes that some Native congregations have remained faithful to aspects of missionary theology long after the parent denominations have moved to more open articulations of the gospel.

One must at least suspect that the process of Christianization has involved some internalization of the larger illusion of Indian inferiority and the idealization of white culture and religion. Some have called it internalized racism, and as such it surely results in a praxis of self-hatred.⁸⁴

It is comparable, he suggests, to an abused child who internalizes the parent's abuse as self-loathing.

This internalization of Western religious superiority takes on more subtle expressions today than in the past. Tinker challenges the common practice of merging Native religious symbols with Christian ones. Placing the pipe next to the elements of communion, for example,

elevates the white religious expression of the gospel as superior to traditional Native spiritual forms. The pipe is being used in this case to enhance the power of the missionary spiritual form, that is, holy communion. Most often the pipe is used not as a sacrament in and of itself,

⁸⁴ Missionary Conquest, op.cit. pg. 3

but as a mere symbol of comfort to the people as they focus on the true sacramental presence in bread and wine.⁸⁵

Tinker's analysis emphasizes that the problem of colonialism has not ended with the missionaries and that therefore cultural confusion is not only a one sided problem. The misappropriation of Native Spirituality by non-Native people is increasingly part of the dynamic between Native and non-Native communities and a sign of continuing colonialism. The difficulty is presented most clearly when traditional spiritual activities as the sun dance or the sweat lodge are shared with non-Natives. The risk is that those who participate do so from the habitual responses of the Western world's structure of individualism. So rather than sharing in these spiritual traditions for the life and well being of the community, "that the people might live," many do so today out of a desire for individual spiritual power.⁸⁶

The problem, Tinker suggests, using the framework of Noam Chomsky, is that Native and non-Native people might well see identical surface structures, yet understand that surface structure in radically different ways. They are rooted in entirely different deep structures⁸⁷, which are the conceptual systems that underlay our common sense knowledge of the world. These differences in habitual understandings, which might also be named as differences in the worldviews that undergird Native and Christian spiritual traditions, have lead many Native people to a belief that separation between the two traditions is necessary to provide

⁸⁵ Ibid., pg. 115

⁸⁶ Ibid., pg. 122

⁸⁷ Ibid., pg. 121

adequate room for Aboriginal traditions to be recovered. The cost otherwise is the sacrifice of the integrity of the spiritual traditions themselves as they continue to be overlaid by a Western European worldview. What remains would be ritual activities separated from their deeper connections to an Aboriginal worldview; interesting cultural expressions which no longer function to provide the integrative role that a culture needs to survive. As Janet Silman notes, “ Native Spirituality always has much more danger in coming in contact with Christianity than the other way around.”

Coming to terms with the internalisation of a Western worldview is one of the critical questions Stan McKay identified in the interviews, and one of the major challenges facing Native people as they struggle to recover the spiritual traditions of their ancestors. For those who have chosen to walk in both Aboriginal and Christian paths the challenge is even more pressing as they struggle to hold separate worldviews in tensions within themselves. McKay points to the Talking Circle as representative of these differences. Recall his emphasis that it was impossible for the Native church to function with integrity within the usual patterns in which the Church operated.

Various sections of the interviews pointed to the significant differences in understanding between the two communities. Bob Smith’s admission of the lack of awareness of the meaning of the drum reveals the most obvious differences in rituals of worship and prayer. Clearly the drum has much deeper significance than as just an alternate instrument, involving such images as the heartbeat of the earth. The bringing of the drum into Carry the Kettle Church pointed to more than a recovery of a Native ritual of prayer but, as Evelyn Broadfoot identified, allowed her people to “worship in ways that our ancestors worshipped. ”

Alf Dumont noted the differences in interpretation of membership. Smith interpreted the Apology as directed only to United Church Native people. Dumont responded that such an interpretation was in itself Western. The Native community, he said, does not conceive of membership in the same way. The representatives of traditional people within the tepee at Sudbury confirmed for him that the Apology was directed towards all Native people. McKay noted the differences between the communities in the use of stories and in the ways that they are understood. There are, he suggests, not only significant differences in the ways that certain passages are understood and emphasized, but the way that native stories and traditions are read into those passages.

The recovery of traditional stories and patterns of worship point to some of the deeper issues at stake in ordering Native communal life. As Glenys Huws emphasized there is an entirely different worldview within Native communities, which transcends superficial patterns of beliefs. What is at stake, she argues, are differences in core values such as sharing, respect and non-interference, values that are at the heart of a Native understanding of community.

James Weaver in a study of Native American literature names what he sees as a special commitment of Native writers to the survival of Native communities as “communitism,” a combination of community and activism. He writes,

A feature that cuts across various Native worldviews is the importance of community. The need for collective survival in diverse, often quite harsh, natural environments led to such an emphasis. Such an emphasis ...means ... (quoting Vine Deloria) that “Indian tribes are communities in fundamental ways that other American communities or organizations are not. Tribal communities are wholly defined by family relationships,

whereas non-Indian communities are defined primarily by residence or by agreement with sets of intellectual beliefs.”⁸⁸

Native peoples, he suggests, “find their individual identities in the collectivity of the community.” Native identities, therefore, should be conceived not in terms of boundaries that maintain separation, but as subjects defined by relationships and transactions.⁸⁹ The concept of the person as a bounded, unique and whole entity set against other wholes and against its social background is in fact an idea peculiar to Western thought, Weaver argues. A more consistent and universal understanding is expressed by the traditional saying of “All my relations.” These are the words spoken, Stan McKay explained during the Paths of Respect Consultation, when one leaves the Sweat Lodge. It points to the web of relationships between people, animals and indeed all of the earth and the encouragement to accept the responsibility that flows from that relationship.

Jamake Highwater similarly notes that people of different cultures do not only see events and understand objects differently but also understand themselves as persons in quite different ways. For Aboriginal people a fundamental difference from Western concepts of individual identity is what could be called the “communal soul.”⁹⁰ By nature, primal cultures, he suggests tend to be tribal and any concept of salvation does not exist apart from the continuance of the tribe. It is therefore through relationships that Aboriginal people comprehend themselves.⁹¹

⁸⁸ That The People Might Live, Opt. Cit., pg. 37

⁸⁹ Ibid., pg. 161

⁹⁰ The Primal Mind, op.cit. pg. 169

⁹¹ Ibid., pg. 172

Marimba Ani, in a study of European cultural thought, extends this understanding of tribal perspectives to the relationship with creation itself. For African and tribal people, she argues, the universe is perceived as sacred and organic in composition. Human beings see themselves as part of a unified cosmos and relate intimately with each of its parts. Knowledge comes through relationship and experience and is expressed in metaphor and symbol.⁹²

European thought, still based within an Enlightenment paradigm, in contrast she says, is based on an objectification of the universe which is composed of distinct and isolated parts. In the formation of knowledge it is the separation of the knower from that which is known which allows analysis and identification to take place. The “thinking being,” the ultimate achievement of such knowledge, is autonomous, distinct and isolated from its environment.⁹³

In the European construct of society the objective of this independent thinking being, Ani suggests, is control. The self, no longer manipulated by its context, is able to make distinctions, to categorize, to confront. Oppositional thinking becomes the ground of logic and the basis of determining what is true and false. The mind, from birth, is trained to think in terms of dualities, dichotomies and oppositions, black and white, good and evil, higher and lower.

This form of oppositional thinking leads ultimately, Ani argues, to the division of the world into categories of friend and foe. The search for harmony becomes overshadowed by the need for confrontation as justice is defined by the overcoming of evil by good and is achieved when the best controls the worst,

⁹² Marimba Ani, Yurugu: An African Centred Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behavior, (Trenton, N.J., Africa World Press, 1994) pg. 29

⁹³ Ibid., pg. 31

when the highest controls the lowest, when reason controls passion. European culture, Ani suggests, creates persons who thrive on competition and therefore on individual achievement. But there is no counterpart to this distinct individual in African and, by implication tribal civilizations. The opposition between the individual and the group collapses and instead become interdependent.

The person is nothing (spiritually dead) outside of the context of the community because of the emotional, spiritual and physical necessity for interaction with other human beings: This is necessary for the realisation of humanness. The community is created by the spiritual communion of joining of persons. Its proper functioning and perpetuation is dependent on healthy, whole, committed, happy persons.⁹⁴

The Talking Circle, therefore, can be seen as a symbol of this interdependence of the individual and the community within Native societies. I have suggested that it also points to the deep structural differences between Western and Native societies. To some extent any simplistic comparison of this kind, however, is full of risk. Both cultures are complex and varied with extremes that overlap each other. There are for example, many Western expressions of community that are profoundly communal in character. But clearly the experience of the Jessie Saulteaux Centre and the various contributions of Native authors offered here point to this aspect of relationships at the crux of the differences between Native and Western peoples. The Native people interviewed for this project have expressed their understanding of deep differences between the communities, but identifying these differences with a ritual act such as the Talking Circle raises other difficult questions.

⁹⁴ Ibid., pg. 352

Stan McKay and Myra Laramée have suggested that what is at stake in recovering traditions is a matter of remembering. Practices, stories and rituals have not been lost, they have suggested, but only forgotten for a time. The journey today, therefore, for Native people who wish to recover their ancient traditions is the hard work of remembering. Emma LaRocque is an Aboriginal historian who critically questions some of the implications of this approach.

In an article dealing primarily with Sentencing Circles within First Nations communities she points to the complex issues at stake in assuming that the particular practice of Healing Circles so common in Native justice initiatives today, are in fact truly representative of ancient traditions.⁹⁵ She questions whether such practices, while being interpreted as traditional methods, are not in fact more vestiges of pacifist, Christian and patriarchal cultures. Her article addresses the particularly troubling case of a husband and wife who sexually molested their two young daughters and were sentenced by a Healing Circle to several years of community monitoring. Speaking of the assertion that an Aboriginal approach to justice emphasizes personal restitution and face to face forgiveness, she argues,

...there is no anthropological basis for asserting it is Native tradition for victims to either 'forgive' or meet 'offenders.' It is, however, traditional to pursue 'healing' in the form of justice.

While pressing victims to forgive, she suggests, is more Christian than traditional in origin, so too the "emphasis on collectivity resembles misconstrued socialist ideals and romanticized Noble Savage images."⁹⁶ A traditional approach to justice,

⁹⁵ Emma LaRocque, "Culturally Appropriate Models in Criminal Justice Applications", in Michael Asch, ed. Aboriginal and Treaty Rights in Canada: Essays on Law, Equality and Respect for Difference, (Vancouver, B.C. UBC Press, 1997) pg. 85

⁹⁶ Ibid.

in this case, she notes would more appropriately have involved much greater concern for the individual rights of the daughters and therefore a concern for the removal of the couple from the community and their children.

It is the implications of her arguments regarding the interpretation of differences between Native and non-Native communities that specifically concern us here. In particular, she says, it is because of the myth of European "civilization" confronting Native "savagery" that Native people have "clung to the defence of being culturally different."⁹⁷ Native peoples have furthermore been forced to make their case for Aboriginal land rights on the basis of cultural differences rather than on the inherent rights of aboriginality itself. Therefore, in the area of individual versus collective rights, Native leaders have been required, in contrast to the individualism of Western liberal democracy, to over-emphasize collective rights. This emphasis has furthermore also been abused for political interests, and often, LaRocque suggests, at the expense of native women. She writes,

The strident insistence by the Native leadership on our cultural differences has pushed Aboriginal people to the extreme margins. We have given the message that we are so fathomlessly different as to be hardly human. We are supposedly so different as to be exempt from the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, as if our history of oppression has made us somehow immune to ordinary human evils, as if we do not require basic human rights that other Canadian citizens expect. As evidenced by statistics and court decisions regarding Native sexual violence, 'otherness' can be carried to rather chilling extents by both communities. It is ironic today as we struggle to decolonize, we ourselves are turning to stereotypes that have segregated and defined us as inferior in the first place.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Ibid., pg. 87

⁹⁸ Ibid., pg. 90

Her arguments provide a significant warning about the risks of defining "otherness." Differences between people have been used to justify the most evil of purposes in our century and must therefore be approached with the utmost of caution. What is important to emphasize in this study is that it is the values of the Talking Circle that are identified as representative of Native culture and tradition and that these values are clearly not exclusive to Native communities. The values can be shared and adopted. What is fundamentally at stake in recognizing the differences between Native and non-Native peoples, as Emma LaRocque says, is aboriginality- itself. But Native peoples nevertheless do have traditions and teachings that challenge the prevailing tendencies and therefore the values of Western societies. Native communities are grounded in complex symbol systems and resulting worldviews that, in many cases, are different from non-Native communities. But what is critical in naming this difference is the invitation it offers to mutual transformation.

It is the profound interrelationship of people with each other, and with the creation to which, I have argued, the Circle witnesses. Myra Laramée's description of the Circle being convened by the four directions is indicative of the extended interrelationship of all of Creation. In a similar manner the animal representatives as the focus of the directions affirms the inclusion of all, human and animal, within the Circle. The use of stories within the Circle, reflecting the ethic of nonintervention, also points to the importance of consensus at the heart of the Talking Circle. The critical point is that the self-esteem of everyone is maintained; that no one feels put down, ignored, or forced to give in; that everyone should feel that they have contributed in some way. The fundamental

issue at stake in reaching “consensus” is not that everyone agrees with the decision but that respect, and therefore relationship, is maintained.

This profound interrelationship at the heart of the meaning of the Circle therefore does not work to collapse identity, but rather, as McKay suggested, heightening differences. The values of respect, reciprocity, non-intervention and interconnection all contribute to an appropriate balance of interconnection, the honouring of differences and therefore the structuring of the community, “that the people might live.” It is this balance that reveals the particular significance of consensus in Native spirituality.

One way of speaking of the Circle, we have noted, is as an expression of the desire to be a small consensus which reflects the coming together of many parts into a Great Consensus. The Circle, this suggests, is a way of affirming the diversity of beliefs and stories within Native communities, of sustaining community. If reality itself is composed of consensus rather than uniformity, then that is what is to be hoped for within communities themselves and points, as we now suggest, to the possibility of consensus within an individual herself.

Evelyn Broadfoot describes her experience as that of two bundles within her, the traditional ways and those of the Christian path. The ability to hold seemingly contradictory stories within, said Alf Dumont, is part of the multiversal nature of an Aboriginal worldview. One habitual or cultural response to the world within Native communities is the concept of welcoming many different stories, and through stories, different interpretations of truth. Native communities welcomed missionaries with the expectation that they were bringing a good story to add to the good stories already within the community. Dumont’s description of Jesus as “one among the honoured ones” suggests the attitude of Native people to

the early missionaries that refers to what we will note later has been called “non-exclusive cumulative adhesion.”⁹⁹ It is this concept of multiversality, we now note, that challenges specifically a Western ideal of universal, logical truth and profoundly opens the Church to transformation.

Multiversality and The “Other” Within

The understanding sought between the two traditions of Christian and Native Spirituality has been spoken of in terms of the image of the “Two Row Wampum,” a sacred relic that carries for Native people the history of treaty commitments of equality and respect. During the 1992 General Council the ANCC reminded the church that walking together was represented by the two rows of the wampum, separate but equal. During the Council, a beaded arm bracelet, symbolizing the Two Row Wampum, was given to each Commissioner. One way of understanding the wampum, it was suggested, was as a river with two canoes travelling down it. Grafton Antoine described it as the ANCC reminding the Church that “you do what you wish in your canoe, we will do what we wish in ours.”

The image of two canoes travelling down the river is striking because you obviously cannot be in both at the same time, says Glenys Huws. Canoes are also tippy and the balancing that is needed to move between canoes can be very difficult. The risks to each canoe’s stability are significant. In other words for

⁹⁹ That The People Might Live op.cit. pg. 63

Christianity and Native Spirituality to exist side by side with equality and respect is a very difficult journey. If the Two Row Wampum image is to be followed, the relationship between the two traditions must be grounded in mutual respect for the integrity of each other's ways.

The difficulties presented by this task were evidenced in the decision concerning the Sacred Bundle itself. Huws points to the troubles faced by the organizers of the ANCC in bringing the sacred symbols of both traditions together into the Sacred Bundle.

Some of the Presbyteries arrived at the first meeting of the ANCC and there was the Sacred Bundle, they had not been consulted. We're living with the fallout from that today. Two or three years ago the elders of Norway House said that the ANCC could not meet there - they could not bring the Bundle into the Presbytery. -Glenys Huws

The problem concerned the lack of agreement within United Church Native communities that traditional Native symbols belonged side by side, in a Sacred Bundle, with Christian symbols. The traditional Native symbols clearly carried many images but most significantly for some Elders, that of a past that had been rejected. Grafton Antoine points to the concern of many Aboriginal people that the acceptance of traditional ways back into the Church opens the possibility that some of the "dark ways" might also be allowed. "There is the tradition of bad medicine," says Antoine, "that brings with it the potential of harm and evil."

Huws and McKay both point to the reality that many issues concerning the relationship between Aboriginal and Christian Spirituality still have to be worked out.

Many talk of the two paths, of them being separate and impossible to join. And this especially from Aboriginal teachers who say that the sweet path road cannot be brought together with the Christian way of understanding. So we face that from traditional teachers, and that is certainly true in some of our own Aboriginal communities. Within the context of the church we recognise that most of our communities have three or four denominations, and we are also affected by their theology about what is acceptable. There are still a lot of unresolved questions about what the Apology might mean. It is still not worked through. -Stan McKay

Perhaps the most critical place that the meaning of the Apology must be worked through is in the inner experience of those who are seeking to walk both paths. One way of speaking about the relationship is Evelyn Broadfoot's sense of holding "two bundles" within her. From her earliest days she remembers being taught in two ways. She was given, she says, two roles.

"And so for me I hold two bundles. If I say to myself or you say to me, put aside this eagle feather that was presented to me when I was ordained, or put aside the traditional name that was given to you, you would tell me to cut myself right in half and throw that part of me away. And then I would only be half a person. And on the other side, if my Aboriginal teacher says to me, put your bible away, or put your cross away, he would also be telling me to cut myself in half. And how could I be a helper if I were only half a person. In order for me to walk on this journey I have to hold two parts together." -Evelyn Broadfoot

Alf Dumont points to numbers of people who are followers of both paths, and who have come to understand that the two paths can walk side by side inside a person. In part it is because

In the Aboriginal mind-set you can walk with many parallel truths without destroying who you are, because the Aboriginal mind is set up that way. You can have respect for the different truths. - Alf Dumont

The problem, Dumont says, is with the European mindset that emphasizes logical consistency and therefore one integrated philosophy. But the Aboriginal way allows not only for respect for different truths but also for holding what might appear to be inconsistent truths together within oneself. It is the difference, he says, between what has been called a multiversal and a universal mind-set.

The multiversal mind-set is one I'm more comfortable with but one I had to wrestle with when I entered the Christian tradition. And I also had to come to terms with the Christian tradition in relation to Aboriginal spirituality. If it were not for that I probably would not have wrestled with Buddhism and Hinduism in the same way. I can walk with those within my mind and recognize that they are valid paths for people. -Alf Dumont

Mary Loomis in a study of the relationship between the Medicine Wheel and Jungian types offers the following further insight on multiple viewpoints:

The fourth stage is the fire mind in the east. The fire mind is also called spirit mind. This mind is capable of holding multiple viewpoints. The sense of self exists but the ego is capable of suspending its particular viewpoint. The fire mind is also referred to as clear mind or mirror mind. Where few people ever attain one-mind in the west of the wheel, fewer still move to the point of having a fire mind. That point, in the east of the wheel, would be held by the enlightened ones, those being like Jesus or Buddha who walked the world in human form and are connected to the universal consciousness.¹⁰⁰

We have already noted how the Talking Circle, as an expression of Native Spirituality, affirms differences. There is, I have suggested, a similarity between the respecting of different voices in the Talking Circle and that of holding different paths within oneself. The Talking Circle invites its members to share the

¹⁰⁰ Mary E. Loomis, Dancing the Wheel of Psychological Types. (Wilmette, Illinois: Chiron Publications, 1991) pg. 8

wisdom of their own path to be heard and pondered. The expectation that it is inappropriate to challenge or question other speakers in the Circle is grounded in the fundamental value of respect. The goal is not the reaching of a common mind but rather the awareness that comes from mutual respect and careful listening. There is, as Mary Loomis suggests, an invitation to suspend one's own particular viewpoint and listen deeply to another. Dumont and Broadfoot both point to a similar dynamic within a person who carries two or more paths. While one must choose to walk in one path at a time, and some may move back and forth between paths with greater ease than others, the foundation of this multipath existence is ability to see the world in more than one way, to have access to different worlds.

This multiversal mind-set has its basis, says Jamake Highwater in the “visionary apprehension of the other.”

Without the grasp of the essential heterogeneity of being we commit ourselves to solitary confinement. All the education and refinement in the world cannot supplant a capacity for otherness. There can be nothing more horrifying for the victors of the Western world than to discover that they have won everything and in the process lost themselves. By methodically divesting their children of the capacity for vision they have forfeited the ability to see anybody but themselves.¹⁰¹

Understanding the world only through one medium, discursive facts, meant that Western society could see the world only in terms of itself. But now a “cultural earthquake” is being felt and we are awakening to the realization that there are other worlds.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Jamake Highwater, The Primal Mind: Vision and Reality in Indian America, (New York, Meridian: 1981) pg. 13

¹⁰² Ibid., pg. 39

Much of the tragedy of the churches' mission work among Native peoples can be characterized by the failure of missionaries to acknowledge the validity of the differences between the two cultures. I shall suggest that it has everything to do with acknowledging the "space between" which establishes the relationship of those differences. Those who saw the world only in terms of themselves were simply unable to acknowledge the world of the other, of Native Spirituality. This we have seen is characteristic of most dominant cultures who seek to define the world in universal terms such as progress and civilization. Jamake Highwater argues that the conception of "the one" or "the absolute" has followed a lengthy succession of monopolistic, monotheistic and later technological civilizations. It has, he suggests, "deprived all but primal peoples of a grasp of 'the other.'"¹⁰³

That otherness does not exist, or if it does, needs to be overcome, is the inevitable outcome of a rationalistic belief that all people seek the same goals and have the same needs. Progress, which defines these goals and needs in terms of technological advancement, we have seen, is one of the most pervasive assumptions of the worldview of the West. Its concept of a linear path of development shuts out the possibility of different forms of development and any awareness that Native society may just as intensely have been "growing" rather than locked into a primitive past. Furthermore, understanding the world exclusively through discursive facts shuts out a whole spectrum of different ways of seeing and defining the world.

In the Western, Enlightenment-moulded worldview we are by and large spectators in the world standing outside of nature and observing it. In spite of the

¹⁰³ Ibid., pg. 10

impact of the new physics which claims that there is an inescapable relationship between the observer and the observed we still by and large are unable to see objects as anything other than inanimate things. We seek to define things by the terms that we apply to them. To say, "This is bread," seems a natural way of speaking to the Western mind. Yet contrast it with a more traditional Native way of speaking, "I call this bread." There is an aggressiveness towards reality implicit in the former, says Dorothy Lee.

We say, This is bread; we do not say like the Wintu, "I call this bread." If he speaks of reality that is not within his own restricting experience. He does not affirm it, he only implies it. If he speaks of his experience, he does not express it as categorically true. Our attitude toward nature is coloured by a desire to control and exploit. The Wintu relationship with nature is one of intimacy and mutual courtesy. He kills a deer only when he needs it for his livelihood, and utilizes every part of it, hoofs and marrow and hide and sinew and flesh. Waste is abhorrent to him, not because he believes in the intrinsic value of thrift, but because the deer had died for him.¹⁰⁴

To say, "I call this bread," is to speak of one's relationship to bread as primary. To say "this is bread" speaks of the bread as object, separate from the one who defines it. To name oneself in relationship is to participate in a kinship. It is to acknowledge, as one says when leaving the womb of the sweat lodge, that the world is "all my relations."

The attempts of Native missions to force Aboriginal children to give up the use of their traditional languages was in this sense fundamentally about seeing the world "rightly" through Western concepts and definitions. Excluded was the interrelationship of forces that flow through the objects of this world, a belief

¹⁰⁴ Dorothy Lee, quoted in *Ibid.*, pg. 74.

implicit within the structure of Aboriginal language itself. The restrictions on the practice of traditional ceremonies meant that the great events that were recounted in rituals and myths could no longer give meaning to appearances. The missionaries clearly sought to define for Native people as well as themselves what they believed to be truth. The recognition of the otherness of Native thought and meaning was not considered. Native children were seen as objects to be trained and indoctrinated. What was missing was the sense of a kinship of equality.

Conclusion

To speak, as Stan McKay has done, of the end of mission, is to suggest that the concept of mission that has been operative through much of the recent history of the Church is facing a profound transformation. Within the United Church, as likely within most of the North American mission churches, a significant sign of this paradigm shift is found in the relationship with Native people. The Apology signalled the start of a new relationship in part symbolized by the self-government of the All Native Circle Conference. The Conference, it was said, would be “pulled, pushed and driven by a new spirituality that brings together the Christian Tradition and the Traditional Native expression of Faith.” Fundamentally, therefore, it is the relationship between Native Spirituality and Christian beliefs that has been at the crux of this transformation.

The issues identified as crucial in the relationship between the two traditions; the differences between the two cultures, the patterns of abuse of authority and power, the nature of multiversality and its relationship to otherness, all point to a yet more fundamental issue at stake in a renewed understanding of mission: the quality of relationships themselves. The paradigm shift in the understanding of mission that is signalled by the Apology starts with the importance of exploring the dynamic at the point of intersection between the two faith traditions. It starts with an appreciation of the differences between cultures and worldviews, the willingness, as Stan McKay suggests, to heighten and respect differences, but through that to emphasize the relationship that sustains community.

As the historical relationship between Western society and Native peoples reveals, the denial of Native traditions and the harm done to Native communities was, in simple but profound terms, because of a lack of respect. The silencing of Native languages in residential schools was only a tragic symptom of the larger silencing of Native people in their own communities, but together they reveal the most destructive implications of this lack of respect. If, as Myra Laramée suggests, the Creator is present through the power of voice, then this was also the silencing of the power of the Creator in the midst of the people. It is in this context that the Talking Circle reveals the deepest meaning of the Apology. The respectful honouring of all voices through the patterns of reciprocity and mutuality acknowledges the presence of the Creator in the midst of the people. Where is Christ in the Circle? “Among the people,” replied Alf Dumont. “Not overwhelming the Circle,” says Evelyn Broadfoot. “In the midst of the conversation,” said Janet Silman. In the Apology the United Church acknowledged that the relationship between the Christian story and the stories of the Elders is one story among others. It is like two paths winding together. Or as several interviews suggested, it is like one canoe travelling side by side with another. In such a situation it becomes critically important to know how and when to move safely between the canoes. At the very least it means acknowledging that it cannot be done without the invitation of the other.

In the recent history of relationship between Christianity and other faiths, the concept of dialogue has been used to contrast with the older patterns of relationship defined as mission. It is to a reflection on dialogue as a process that we now turn.

6. BOUNDARY DISCOURSE

The Dialogical Imperative: Towards Interpretation and Action

The need for dialogue has taken a significant position of prominence today for a number of reasons. The increasing commitment to participatory democracy throughout the world has meant that processes of discerning common vision out of divergent positions needed to be found. Increasing cultural and religious pluralism has also required the construction of bridges between communities to reduce prejudice and the disastrous effects of ethnic conflict. In philosophical circles it has been represented by the desire to move forward from the isolation and self-certainty of the individual which has been characteristic of the enlightenment to a recognition of the plurality of human experience. "Objective evaluation" which formed the basis of enlightenment rationality was shown to be itself limited by its own history and cultural connections. Dialogue therefore has reached a stage of prominence precisely because of the increasing recognition of the presence of "the other."

Traditionally, dialogue has been understood to refer to two parties in conversation. Charles Amjad-Ali notes that there has been a displacement however of the prefix of motion "dia" meaning "through" or "by means of" with the numerical prefix "di." The result is that we have seen dialogue as two persons or groups just talking without any deeper goals. He suggests that this becomes

obvious when the opposite of dialogue is commonly understood to be monologue where one numerical prefix is replaced with another. If dialogue is understood however as meaning "dia," or through, then the action is one of moving through one's respective "logi" or "principles and significant cohering realities" to address a common set of problems or questions. The movement is not simply conversation but interpretation and action.¹⁰⁵

The true opposite of dialogue, Amjad-Ali argues, is not mono-logue but meta-logue. In this sense the implication of "meta" is transcending one's own logos. Metaphysics for example speaks of going beyond physics, so also metalogue means the attempt to escape the prejudice of one's own beliefs, worldviews, symbols and so on to achieve a transcendent reality. Because of the enlightenment heritage that has so pervaded our theology when we have entered dialogue we have ended up, says Amjad-Ali, in a metalogical position, "either looking for easy commonalties or looking for a way beyond the particularities of the dialogical partners."¹⁰⁶ The implications of this become evident as we look at the traditional Christian approaches to interreligious relationships.

Allan Race¹⁰⁷ first proposed what has now become the familiar theological scheme of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism. Exclusivism represents the classic Christian view that restricts salvation to those who profess belief in Jesus Christ and what God has accomplished through him. Exclusivism by definition

¹⁰⁵ Charles Amjad-Ali, Religion and Culture: An Invitation to Dialogue in Post-Modern Debate in Al-Mushir: Theological Journal of the Christian Study Centre, Rawalpindi, Pakistan. Vol. 32 Summer 1990 No.2 pg. 44

¹⁰⁶ Charles Amjad-Ali, Towards a New Theology of Dialogue, op.cit. pg. 61

¹⁰⁷ Allan Race, Christian and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in Christian Theology of Religions. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1983)

gives priority to the question of faithfulness to the tradition and sometimes has been called the Christocentric option. For example, Karl Barth wrote his theology of the Word of God in reaction to the predominant liberal theology of his day, which had made Christianity into part of a cultural continuum of a universal religious consciousness. Barth's argument was that there is an infinite qualitative distinction between God and humanity. God is not restrained by any human activity and therefore all human religion comes under the judgement of God. Knowledge of God comes only through God's self-revelation, and that revelation only through the Word of God made flesh in Jesus. Barth is fundamentally a universalist, what God has done in Christ, Barth proclaims, is for all people, both for those who have responded to the Word and those yet to be transformed by it. Nevertheless, it is not possible in his theology to acknowledge that the world's religions are salvific in their own right. They are significant only in the way that they reflect the singular truth of Christ.¹⁰⁸ Whether Barth's theology falls into an exclusivist or inclusivist category is open for debate and depends much on interpretation. However it is the denial of the validity of other religions and faiths "in themselves" that perhaps most fairly defines exclusivism.¹⁰⁹

Inclusivism covers a variety of perspectives but uniformly includes other religions within a Christian understanding of truth. Its origin can be traced to the 2nd Century and Justinus's idea that "germs" of the divine Logos have been scattered everywhere in human history.¹¹⁰ The full Logos however, Justinus

¹⁰⁸ Christian Identity and Religious Pluralism, op. cit. pg. 35

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., pg. 22

¹¹⁰ Wolfart Pannenberg, "Religious Pluralism and Conflicting Truth Claims, in D'Costa, Gavin, ed. Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions. (New York: Orbis Books, 1990) pg. 98

assumes, has appeared only in Jesus Christ. Therefore while God's gift of salvation is found only in Jesus this gift becomes universally available to all through Jesus' fulfilment of or presence in other faiths. This option extends the particularity of Christ's presence into the universal experience of humanity. For some the image of the cosmic Christ, not limited to the historical Jesus, extends God's love and grace far beyond the bounds of the Church. The Eternal Word, Jesus, sometimes seen as the Universal Wisdom, is active throughout the world wherever truth, beauty, goodness or justice is present.

For others, the image of anonymous Christians is chosen. This classic position of post Vatican II Roman Catholicism suggests that non-Christian religions can be considered vehicles of salvation insofar as they are within God's will for the salvation of the whole world. They are part of a "universal history of salvation common to all mankind"¹¹¹ which is mediated and fulfilled in everyone's life through grace made available in Christ.

For others yet again the emphasis is on the work of the Holy Spirit, which blows where it will, extending God's grace and presence into the world. Through the Spirit, the creative and redemptive action of God works in people of good will everywhere. Nevertheless the Spirit remains the one who is the third person of the Triune God. The redemptive purposes of God are those, therefore, that are mediated and accomplished by Christ. In the similar manner as the exclusivist position therefore, other faiths, "in themselves," are not sufficient for salvation.

¹¹¹ Karl Rahner, Unity of the Church- Unity of Mankind, Theological Investigations, Vol. 10 (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1966) pg. 106 quoted in Wesley Ariarajah Hindus and Christians: A Century of Protestant Ecumenical Thought, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Pub., 1991) pg. 200

Pluralism is perhaps the broadest of the categories with many different approaches. But uniformly it offers the acknowledgement of a rough equality between faiths and the possibility that the God, known to Christians in Jesus Christ, may have many other ways of being known and present in the world. It is the option that focuses on the universal and openness and is sometimes called the theocentric option. Pluralists start from a perspective that truth is found in the larger religious history of humanity. So John Hick speaks of a Copernicum Revolution in theology in which Christians discover that Christianity is not the centre around which all other faiths revolve. The Divine mystery, God, is the centre and Christianity must take its place as one faith among many.

Some pluralists suggest that religions are each partial and incomplete, and therefore only part of a larger whole. The emphasis here is on how the differences in each tradition work to complement the other, each with their own strengths and weaknesses. Some search for a global theology in which the gifts of each tradition could be molded into the building of a common household of faith.¹¹² Others argue that each religion offers a particular framework of understanding; that traditions are cultural-linguistic ways of seeing the world with an internal coherence that makes it irrelevant to question the truth of the tradition from outside its own internal framework.

Questions, for example, such as whether other faiths lead to salvation are not helpful, perhaps even irrelevant, from a pluralist perspective because of the possibility that the questions at the heart of the world's traditions are conditioned by the structure of the faiths themselves. To suggest that a Buddhist, for example,

¹¹² S. Mark Heim, Is Christ the Only Way? Christian Faith In A Pluralistic World, (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1985) pg. 115

is searching for salvation as Christians understand it, is to deny the integrity of the Buddhist understanding of Nirvana or similarly the Hindu view of the mystical union with Brahmin. While exclusivists therefore could be characterized as being concerned with an authoritative articulation of the Christian tradition, and inclusivists with balancing faithfulness with God's universal love, the pluralist is focused on truth as a function of the whole religious history of humanity. In this position the question is not whether other faiths are capable of mediating salvation. The issue of *in themselves* however is still critical because it raises the question of whether other traditions can be legitimate and complete avenues of revelation of God's or the Divine will in isolation from the other. To acknowledge the integrity of the other is by definition a necessary starting point for pluralism. Nevertheless the question might best be asked more directly. Is God, as a Christian understands God, at work creatively and redemptively in the world's religious traditions - in themselves alone? The question here is the extent to which any faith tradition can exist in isolation. Are we not all interconnected in some way each with the other?

The other option that at various points has been added to Race's scheme is syncretism. But this, we have suggested, is not easily categorized. Much of the history of Christian belief, as indeed that of most faiths, has involved some form of absorption, adoption or incorporation of the stories, beliefs or interpretations of other traditions into its own. Judgements of syncretism are often couched in negative terms but are usually a matter of contested interpenetration. For this reason syncretism is not, we have already suggested, a helpful term.

Another category has gained increasing recognition. It opens the possibility of mutual transformation of faiths through their interconnection. We

will look closer at this approach in the final chapter in consideration of the debate over missions during the early part of the Century. For now it is enough to say that the transformation approach argues that no religious tradition can exist in themselves alone. Each needs the other for mutual correction, for inspiration and for discovery. No faith or religious tradition can ever be complete in isolation from the other.

The difficulty with Race's scheme is that it seems to justify one strategy, the pluralist, above the others and to suggest the adoption of one means of discourse to the exclusion of others.¹¹³ This approach to a theology of world religions has sought, it has been suggested, to be able to view the other in a way that brings them into one blueprint of understanding. It has also been an obvious means of categorizing the various orientations by which Christian communities have identified themselves in relationship to others: the conservative to the exclusive end, the liberal to the pluralist. The difficulty is that these theologies, regardless of their intentions of rejecting, including or recognizing the validity of otherness, inevitably lead to reducing the other "to the status of preliminary and inadequate adjuncts."¹¹⁴ They fail to take others seriously in their own right and seek to place them in an already predetermined scheme.

Like the classic image of the blind men and the elephant, which has so characterized the pluralist position, this scheme of categorisation clearly has a major flaw. As each of the blind men can feel and therefore describe only a part of the elephant, the story requires and assumes an outside observer who witnesses

¹¹³ Michael Anthony Barnes, Between Rhetoric and Reticence: Theology of Dialogue in a Post-Modernist World, in the Bulletin: The Henry Martyn Institute of Islamic Studies, Vol. 12 Nos. 1&2, January-June 1993, pg.5

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

the entire scene. The end result is the metalogical position, which assumes a perspective above the others and therefore "beyond the particularities of the dialogical partners." So also Race's scheme requires us to stand above our own particularity and define a common ground on which each depends.

Dialogue, however, must take seriously the right of the other to define their own place. To do so it must take with equal seriousness the integrity of both particular and universal truth claims. It must seek to go beyond itself to common action while honouring the particular and concrete identities of the participants. The exclusivist approach tends to give adequate expression to particularity while calling universality into question. The pluralist approach tends to suggest that the universal focus of religions can transcend the particular and therefore relegate it to a preliminary status. The inclusive option risks becoming another form of imperialism.

The central issue in dialogue, this suggests, is not the theology with which one understands the other, but the structure or framework by which one enters into relationship. The concern is how the integrity of each "logi" is respected, and how each is able to move *through their* "logi" to mutual interpretation and action. This means recognizing the importance of analyzing the forms of discourse in which dialogue occurs and ultimately the ways in which one is willing to be transformed in that dialogue.

The Space In-Between

Raimundo Panikkar notes that each religious tradition naturally assumes that it alone is capable of meeting the religious urge of its members and seeing others from the outside tends to judge them as partial. The destiny of our time, he suggests, is to somehow move through our own respective traditions to a point where we can break down our own self-sufficiency. The encounter of religions, he argues, “is today one of the most profound human problems.”¹¹⁵

To address this problem Panikkar has developed what he terms “diatopical hermeneutics” in which three levels of discourse are identified.¹¹⁶ The first level, the morphological, refers to the language in which we make assertions about matters of fact. This is the common language of argument in which true and false are determined by commonly accepted criteria. Morphological hermeneutics deals with what is understandable and explainable from within similar cultural contexts.

There is a problem, however, when what we are dealing with is another culture and time period. To understand now involves reconstructing the context through time and mediating it within our own context. This Panikkar calls diachronic hermeneutics. While it involves the retrieval of texts and events through time, it still presumes that these remain within one specific cultural tradition. To deal adequately with another culture requires yet another higher level

¹¹⁵ Raimundo Panikkar, The Unknown Christ of Hinduism, revised and enlarged edition (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1981) pg. 32

¹¹⁶ The New Universalism, op.cit., pg. 46

of discourse. This is the level that opens up the “horizon of encounter” in which radically different contexts of meaning meet.

I call it diatopical hermeneutics because the distance to be overcome is not merely temporal, within one broad tradition, but the gap existing between two human topoi, ‘places’ of understanding, between two or more cultures that have not yet developed their patterns of intelligibility or their basic assumptions out of common historical tradition or through mutual influence.¹¹⁷

What is offered in first level discourse is true or false according to a given set of criteria. However, what is said in the higher levels, what Panikkar calls “Boundary Discourse,” is not a matter of dealing with facts but proclaiming the very boundaries of the world. In this horizon of encounter, Panikkar argues, understanding what a statement means is the same as acknowledging its truth. He writes,

In the thesis lies the assertion that one cannot really understand the views of another, if one does not share them.¹¹⁸

At this level of discourse, understanding the other cannot be just the familiar attempt to discover similarities and differences. At the very least they cannot be dealt with as similar or different without some fixed criteria. Dialogue, says Panikkar

is fundamentally opening myself to another so that he might speak and reveal my myth that I cannot know by myself because it is transparent to me, self-evident. Dialogue is a way of knowing myself and of

¹¹⁷ Raimundo Pannikkar, Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics, (N.Y.: Paulist Press, 1979) pg. 9 in *Ibid.* pg. 50

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pg. 51

disentangling my own point of view from other viewpoints and from me, because it is grounded so deeply in my own roots as to be utterly hidden from me. It is the other who through our encounter awakens this human depth latent in me in an endeavour that surpasses both of us. In authentic dialogue this process is reciprocal. Dialogue sees the other not as an extrinsic, accidental aid, but as the indispensable, personal element in our search for truth, because I am not a self-sufficient autonomous individual. In this sense, dialogue is a religious act par excellence because it recognizes my *religatio* to another, my individual poverty, the need to get out of myself, transcend myself, in order to save myself.¹¹⁹

In this context it becomes helpful to introduce what has been called an “ideal speech situation.”¹²⁰ Paul Knitter argues that such a situation requires mutual respect, openness to the other as other, and the willingness to be transformed. Implicit in this is an equality of power; all must be heard and all be taken seriously; or in the words of Vatican II “par cum pari” equal with equal.¹²¹ It is in fact this equality of voices, Knitter suggests, that is the hardest thing to achieve.

Given the inequalities in our world today and the way those inequalities are created and sustained by the structures of economic, political and military power, there is no common table of discourse in our world where all have ready access, where each voice counts as much as the others, where each participant feels free and unthreatened.¹²²

What is needed therefore, Knitter suggests, are shared efforts to create ideal speech situations in our world and in our neighbourhoods. There is a need, he

¹¹⁹ Ibid., pg. 69

¹²⁰ Jurgen Habermas, in Paul F. Knitter, One Earth Many Religions: Multifaith Dialogue and Global Responsibility, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1995) pg. 85

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid., pg. 86

argues, that dialogue be a means of changing structures of exclusion rather than being an agent of suppression.

To do this means first structuring dialogue so that everyone has a voice and secondly, affirming in that dialogue the freedom and dignity of all participants. "Dialogue demands equality," he suggests. "Honest conversation is not possible between partners that have an unequal access to power." The power inherent in the inequality modifies the speech of the powerful in such a way as to protect his or her superior position and the powerless are too vulnerable to be perfectly honest. "Inequality of economic, political and cultural power is the great barrier that keeps humanity divided."¹²³ Yet, even though humanity is divided by pervasive inequality, or perhaps because this is so, it must be possible to find models of dialogue in which respect and equality are present. The search for "ideal speech situations," Knitter suggests, therefore is one of the most critical tasks of our time.

It is here that issues around what is commonly called argumentation might also be helpfully examined. David Kreiger notes that much of our everyday conversation is meaningful precisely because it can be argued for; reasons can be given that connect it in a systematic way to a validity claim. Common agreement on the importance of factual information, for example, is critical in argumentation. But this implies that those who argue must agree to some common understanding about the world, and as Jurgen Habermas suggests, consequently "move within the horizon of the common lifeworld."¹²⁴ It is the *within* and the *common* that

¹²³ Gregory Baum, "Religious Pluralism and Common Values." *The Journal of Religious Pluralism* 4:1-16 in *Ibid.*, pg. 86

¹²⁴ The New Universalism, op.cit. pg. 132

Kreiger notes allows the conversation to be termed logical. It implies that there are rules that are being followed and that the goal of reaching some form of consensus or agreement is possible. Yet it is also precisely in questions of argumentation that imbalances of power predominate.

The possibility of agreement, within the context of an ethics of discourse, is defined through a number of conditions. In addition to the requirement of a common or shared worldview there is also the need that assertions can be contested or criticized and therefore also revised in the light of facts or vindicated through the giving of reasons. Ultimately argumentation requires that validity be determined within a universal community of communication because argumentation itself cannot secure truth without achieving a consensus.¹²⁵ But if there is a conflict between radically different horizons of meaning and values, if the *within* and *common* are not givens, perhaps through pronounced differences in worldviews, or in power, then the possibility exists that communication on the level of argumentation cannot happen at all. At this point we are forced out of argumentative discourse, Kreiger argues, into a boundary discourse.

An ethics of discourse, Kreiger notes, is based on the assumption that it is sometimes necessary to suspend argumentation and act strategically to do whatever is practically necessary to make argumentation possible. But when argumentative discourse is not possible, when something more than argumentation is required, then the question to be faced is what sort of actions are admissible while still maintaining a universal ethic of discourse? To fail to provide an alternative, to fail to make room for an other-rationality means that

¹²⁵ Ibid., pg. 134

rationality and irrationality become the only possibilities. It is an irrationality, Kreiger suggests, that means the exclusion and suppression of the other leading ultimately to violence.¹²⁶

Boundary discourse, however, opens one to the possibility of being taken up into a new world of meaning. In particular, communication at this level, Kreiger suggests, is narrative, repetitive and mythical.

As proclamation of founding events that took place at the beginning of the world, such discourse is necessarily narrative. For the continuity of a common history on the basis of founding events is necessarily a narrative recounting rather than an abstract generalization based upon counting up experiences of reality testing and progressive learning. This gives boundary discourse a temporal orientation towards the past and a repetitive dynamic of retrieval or renewal of founding acts and patterns of meaning which are typical of mythic speech. For this reason it is appropriate to speak of boundary discourse not as “logical” but as “mythological.”¹²⁷

Such communication, Kreiger suggests, allows the space of encounter to be perceived as an “open space” and therefore as a space of disclosure.

It is the space of encounter which grants and makes possible “worlds” by providing the opening up from out of which mythological discourse draws the ability to identify itself, even if at the moment of self-identification a cultural tradition blinds out or represses the other which enables it. This is the diatopical space which precedes all identity and may therefore be called a space of difference, of dis-continuity, of disclosure.¹²⁸

But what is the form of discourse that is peculiar to this diatopical space of encounter? It is, suggests Kreiger, the pragmatics of non-violence. A discourse of

¹²⁶ Ibid., pg. 139

¹²⁷ Ibid., pg. 145

¹²⁸ Ibid., pg. 150

closure is the space where power confronts and excludes the other. An open space however allows discourse to penetrate and transform communication at the boundary into a place where a truly universal community can be constructed. It is a place where issues of power are addressed and mitigated and where truth is sought. It is this understanding of truth within community that has a close connection to the concept of *satyagraha* developed by Mahatma Gandhi.

Satyagraha has generally been seen as Gandhi's concept of civil disobedience. Gandhi however named it as the "quiet and irresistible pursuit of truth."¹²⁹ Satya comes from the root word "sat" which means both truth and God. Gandhi bases his understanding of truth in the principles that truth is imperishable and indestructible, and ultimately that "truth is God."

Truth binds man to man in association. Without truth there can be no social organization.¹³⁰

It is however Gandhi's understanding of non-violence that moves this understanding away from the problems identified with an objectivist stance. Each person, Gandhi suggests, is honestly called to search after truth in his or her own way. Each will always see truth from his or her own perspective, therefore absolute truth must always be a goal rather than a possession. But only non-violence as a method can lead to this goal. If at any time, through whatever means, we force our views on another, we cut off the communication that allows

¹²⁹ Ibid., pg. 152

¹³⁰ Ibid.

truth to be spoken. Truth therefore can only be approached through non-violence, and it is for this reason that non-violence is necessary to establish community.¹³¹

But what then of the reality that most worldviews do assume that they possess the whole truth? Is it not this belief that justifies most abuse of power? Has this not also been the foundation of much of the past history of mission? Gandhi suggests that self-suffering, or *ahimsa*, is the witness that leads the other ultimately to conversion. When one sees the other willing to suffer for their understanding of truth, and yet not resort to violence, then questions about the source of the other's moral courage begin to challenge one's own ideology.

Conversion, however, in Gandhi's understanding, does not mean exclusion. To simply switch sides as it were is no answer at all. To do so is only to understand differently, not better. The goal of satyagraha is rather mutual conversion or, as David Kreiger expresses it, methodological conversion. Referring to Panikkar's theory of diatopical communication he writes:

Panikkar clearly saw that if the encounter of religions and worldviews does not give rise to a conversion to the truth on all sides, then the outcome could only be coercion of one sort or another. The history of colonialism as well as problems confronting us today...amply testify to this fact. The problem however was how we could make sense of the possibility of a radical transformation of our system of thought such that it would remain within the domain of discourse.¹³²

Conversion from one belief system to another is therefore not a solution, because, says Kreiger, it means that the mode of thinking remains apologetic and polemic.

Methodological conversion does however imply a movement outward to the other. What is at stake in this is closer to what John Dunne described as

¹³¹ Ibid., pg. 153

¹³² Ibid., pg. 163

“passing over” and “coming back.” To shift one's standpoint to that of another culture or language or religion and then to come back with new insights and understanding, Dunne suggests, is the religious phenomenon of our time.¹³³ It is, Dunne suggests, this capacity to pass over that is the mark of our capacity to grow towards an enlarged wholeness.

Passing over, therefore, entering sympathetically into other lives and times, ... is the way to completeness. This is not an unlikely hypothesis. For whenever a man passes over to other lives or other times, he finds on coming back some aspect of his own life or times which corresponds to what he saw in others. Passing over has the effect of activating these otherwise dormant aspects of himself.¹³⁴

Martin Buber, in a similar frame, reminds us in his classic study of dialogue, that the focus of all relationships is the move from using another (I-It) to the appreciation of the other (I-Thou). It is, to use our previous language, to move from closed space to open space in relating to the other. To move to a relationship of I-Thou is to affirm the right of the other to be who they chose to be. Always, says Buber, “the essential element of genuine dialogue, is 'seeing the other' or 'experiencing the other side.'”¹³⁵ But this, Buber notes, draws our attention to the relations between, the *dazwischen*. (there in between.)¹³⁶

The starting point of dialogue therefore must be the question of how can one approach this “open space.” What are the structures that allow this “there in

¹³³ John S. Dunne, The Way of All the Earth: Experiments in Truth and Religion (New York: MacMillan, 1973), pg. ix-x

¹³⁴ Ibid., pg. 180

¹³⁵ Maurice S. Friedman, Martin Buber: A Life of Dialogue (New York, Harper Torchbook, 1955) pg. 87

¹³⁶ Ibid., pg. 57

between” to take form. What forms of dialogue invite participants to move out of their own constructs of reality to approach another in a way that doesn’t collapse the discourse through rejection or conversion?

It is the possibility of this “open space” that I will now suggest is at the heart of a new emerging paradigm of mission for the Church. It is a space that invites the Church to be faithful to its own story and tradition yet open, at the boundaries, to the other and to transformation. The mission of the Church, I will argue, must find its ground in a profound respect for the other that leads both to honouring the boundaries between traditions and to the possibility of being transformed by moving into the in-between space. Care must be given, I shall argue, to the structures of conversation, to address imbalances of power and establish new models of authority. The use of stories, the shared wisdom of the whole community, the acknowledgement of the validity of multiple viewpoints, are all part of this conversation, modelled, I will suggest, by the Talking Circle. I will also suggest it is the experience of what has been called dual participation, or what has been named as the two path journey in aboriginal experience that is particularly revealing of this new paradigm of mission.

7. FROM DIALOGUE TO RELATIONSHIP: MISSION AS MUTUAL TRANSFORMATION

The Native Apology had its origins, we have seen, in the claims of Aboriginal people for a recognition of their self-identity; an identity intimately linked with their spirituality and grounded in deep structural differences between Native and non-Native communities. The affirmation of the practice of Aboriginal Spirituality within the Church implied a validation of that spirituality as distinctive from Christian belief and an acknowledgement of the equality of the two traditions. We have not explored in depth the nature of traditional Aboriginal beliefs but rather have focused on underlying characteristics, those of multiversality, reciprocity, non-interference, and the encompassing value of respect. These qualities, we have suggested, are part of an Aboriginal worldview, yet they are also the shared qualities that the Native community would desire to characterize the new relationship signalled by the Apology.

The Apology was needed because respect had been violated; the validity of the other had not been acknowledged. The assumption of the universality of the Christian tradition, the unwillingness of many missionaries to listen to the wisdom of traditional ways, the extensive interference of early and later missionaries in Native communities, and the underlying lack of respect for Native Spirituality, all pointed to a pervasive denial of a true relationship between equals. As the awareness of relationship was at the heart of the Apology, so I will also suggest, it is at the crux of the paradigm shift in the understanding of mission

occurring today. To accept the legitimacy of relationships of respect between faith communities means coming to terms with the reality of pluralism. It is to acknowledge the legitimacy of the different frameworks through which other faith traditions perceive the world. And beyond that, to avoid the isolation of communities separated from each other by significant differences in understanding and meaning, it is to acknowledge that there must be some point of contact, some possibility of approaching each other in understanding and interconnection. It is the willingness to enter an “open space” which characterizes the nature of this new relationship and what this implies for mutual engagement and transformation that we now suggest points to the emerging new paradigm of mission. To begin this exploration we look first into the early history of this century to a series of World Missionary Conferences. They provide a backdrop to consideration of the nature of relationships of respect between faith communities and in particular the emergence of a transformationist option.

World Missionary Conferences: The Transformationist Option

The World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910 was the first modern ecumenical world conference on mission with a stated purpose “to consider the missionary problems in relation to the non-Christian world.” Wesley Ariarajah, in a study of the history of Hindu-Christian dialogue notes that several

Commissions formed the basis of the Conference's work but Commission IV offered the most startling insight. Its mandate was to examine the "Missionary message in relation to non-Christian religions" and it did so by inviting extensive input from missionaries working in direct contact with people of other faiths.¹³⁷

The responses pointed to a remarkable openness to seeing the relationship between Christianity and other faiths as parallel to the encounter of the early church with Hellenism. What was required then as in the present moment was a double response of being faithful to the gospel message as well as remaining open to what is "deep and true" in other faiths. This would lead Christians back to a re-examination of their own faith and allow them to see dimensions of that faith that had not been seen before. "New faith," the Commission declared, "is always born out of new emergencies... the historic peculiarity of the present situation is that after long neglect the church is once again facing this emergency."¹³⁸

In response to the challenge of Hinduism, Ariarajah notes, the Commission argued that Christianity on the one hand must search for deeper truths within itself to respond to what Hindus found unacceptable in Christianity. On the other hand it must also accommodate and incorporate what was vital in India's search for God and spirituality.¹³⁹ In this sense the Commission argued that Hinduism could appropriately challenge the Christian faith to look deeper into itself in search of new resources. This, Ariarajah notes, was a remarkable

¹³⁷ Wesley Ariarajah, Hindus and Christians: A Century of Protestant Ecumenical Thought, (Grand Rapids Michigan, Eerdmans Publishing:1991) pg. 17

¹³⁸ The Missionary Message: Report of Commission IV of the World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh, quoted in *Ibid.*, pg.23

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

suggestion in the midst of a prevalent attitude of converting the world to Christianity.

The strength of Commission IV, Ariarajah argues, was that it refused to become defensive. It did not engage in apologetics, nor marginalize the faith experiences of others, nor categorize them as primitive or preparatory. Instead it dealt with them theologically. It adopted an attitude of listening and learning with a view of grasping the deeper meanings of the other faiths. It committed itself to examining other faiths at their best through the lived experiences of their followers. And ultimately the doctrinal beliefs of other faiths were not ruled out as incompatible with the gospel message.¹⁴⁰

This led to several implications. First, the Commission suggested, there were inadequacies in the way that Christianity was formulated. Christian understandings of reality, of human life, or ultimate goals could be deepened by contact with other faiths. Therefore the Church should elaborate and expand its own theology to make sense of the Church's contact with other traditions. Such contact is needed to support the development of a living theology, which would grow out of living encounter.¹⁴¹

The controversy that developed over this approach would deepen over the next few decades and lead to the second World Missionary Conference that took place in Jerusalem in 1928. Almost half of the delegates present represented "younger churches" who spoke clearly for a shift in mission agenda. Power and authority, they argued, must be transferred from Western controlled mission

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., pg.29

¹⁴¹ Ibid., pg. 30

centres to the younger churches themselves who must be free to develop in ways that would root them in their own cultures. The image of partnership that would become the predominant metaphor of mission into the present began to be voiced at this meeting.¹⁴²

The central issue of the Conference however was identified by the theme of Commission 1: "The Christian Life and Message in Relation to non-Christian Systems of Thought and Life." Ariarajah notes that three major questions focused the work of the Commission: Is the Christian message meant for the whole world, and if so what is the content of this message? What is the best method for the presentation of this message? And how does the Christian understanding and view of other religions, including their life and thought, call for the presentation of the message to them?¹⁴³ These questions however soon receded in importance as the threat of secularism to religious life in both the East and the West came to the forefront of the debate. It is here that the views of W.E. Hocking had a significant influence on the Conference.

Hocking's position was that a new concept of religion must be found that cuts across religious boundaries in order to confront the effects of materialism and secularism in the world. Ariarajah quotes Hocking's argument from the meeting reports that the spread of secularism "required a new alignment of religious forces, a recognition of alliance with whatever was of the true substance of religion everywhere."¹⁴⁴ This view however contrasted sharply with another predominate viewpoint at the conference, that of Hendrik Kraemer.

¹⁴² International Review of Mission Vol. LXXXVI No. 342 July 1997 pg.212

¹⁴³ Hindus and Christians, op.cit. pg. 32

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., pg. 43

The tension between these two views was not resolved in the final statement of the Jerusalem Conference. It was, says Ariarajah, “a bundle of theological contradictions.”¹⁴⁵ Unfortunately as well, the insight of Edinburgh of the challenge of others’ faiths to the deepening of Christian theological understanding was lost. What Jerusalem did was identify the need for a clearer, more certain position on the relationship of Christianity to other faiths. The conflict between the views of Hocking and Kraemer would continue to intensify over the next decade and come to the forefront at Tambaram in 1938.

Hocking had written several major books prior to the Jerusalem Conference on what he called, “The Reconception of Christianity.” He argued that a consociation of living religions for work and worship was what is needed for authentic universal human development. It was the mystics, he suggested, in all faiths that would be the agents of reconception.¹⁴⁶ Hocking’s mystic, notes Catherine Stidsen, is a universalist, committed to the material and spiritual progress of humanity. The reconception of Christianity, therefore, begins with its de-Westernization so that it can become a truly universal faith. The core of Christianity for Hocking is the integral human development of all people that must be both known and preserved in new universal forms. The mission of the church therefore is not the supplanting of other faiths, but rather the reconceiving of its own self towards this new universal faith.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., pg. 50

¹⁴⁶ Catherine Berry Stidsen, William Ernest Hocking’s Theory of the Reconception of Christianity. (Bangalore, India: NBCLC Publishers, 1992) pg.2

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., pg. 145f

The way of reconception for Christianity would not be different from the broadening experience individuals have in their own development, Hocking suggests. There is an inevitable broadening of understanding coming in the midst of the increasingly closer contact between the world's great traditions. For this general transformation to take place one must at the start be sure of each religion's essence, or the core of its beliefs. Reconception, therefore, is mutual transformation. All religions in contact with one another will be affected by this deepening self-understanding. Each will absorb into itself the best qualities of the other.¹⁴⁸

Stidsen suggests that the major impetus for the refinement of Hocking's concept of reconception came from his work with a document entitled: "Rethinking Missions: A Laymen's Inquiry After One Hundred Years." Shortly following the Jerusalem conference Hocking was approached to chair an inquiry into Protestant missions. A prominent group of Baptist laymen, including John D. Rockefeller, and ultimately supported by seven Protestant U.S. denominations, determined to examine through this inquiry what had been really happening through the one hundred years of history of Protestant missions and what the future should hold.¹⁴⁹

The report of the inquiry "Rethinking Missions," which was substantially written by Hocking, recommended that Christian missions should be continued but dramatically altered. Missionaries should be concerned with the human development of all people whom they encounter. They should be prepared not

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., pg. 185f.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., pg. 27

only to serve but also to learn. The attitude of missionaries towards other faiths, the Commission suggested, should be one of “reverence for reverence.”¹⁵⁰

The response to the report was generally not positive. Through the next few years Hocking spent considerable time defending and explaining his views, in particular how religious traditions could learn from each other without distorting or diluting their own positions, and how this would lead to the reconception of religions. At the centre of his concept of missions, Stidsen suggests, was what could be called the “sharing process” model. Hocking writes,

The relation between religions must take increasingly hereafter the form of a common search for truth. Sharing becomes real only as it becomes mutual, running in both directions, each teaching, each learning, each with the other meeting the unsolved problems of both.¹⁵¹

Hocking continued publicly defending the report until the Commission was disbanded in 1937 but by then the report had become the focus of his antagonist Hendrik Kraemer, and indirectly the focus of the next World Missionary Conference to be held in Tambaram in 1938.

Hendrik Kraemer was asked to produce a study document in preparation for the next meeting of the World Missionary Council in Tambaram in 1938 in part to counter the ideas of “Re-Thinking Missions.” Instead he wrote a major work, “The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World,” in which he laid out his own concept of the theological foundations of mission. In contrast to the openness

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ William Earnest Hocking, Re-Thinking missions: A Layman’s Inquiry After One Hundred Years (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1932) pg. 46-47, quoted in Ibid., pg. 28

of the Edinburgh and Jerusalem discussions, and their vision of the encounter with other faiths as a "new emergency", which would drive the Christian church towards a deeper understanding of the gospel, Kraemer put forward his concept of "biblical realism." What was at stake in mission as in faith, he argued, was the sovereign God encountering the sinful human person for decision.¹⁵² Joining with Karl Barth, Kraemer made a sharp distinction between revelation and religion. All religions fall under the judgement of the gospel and all, including Christianity, are human endeavours standing in complete discontinuity with the gospel.

The implications of Kraemer's approach are what concern us rather than a more detailed explanation of his theology. He writes,

...It is clear that for a Christian the only standard of reference can be the new and incommensurable world which has been revealed and made real by God in Jesus Christ, and His life and work, and which is accessible to faith alone, that is, the free affirmative answer of man to God's "wonderful deeds." Christ, as the ultimate standard of reference, is the crisis of all religions, of the non-Christian religions and of empirical Christianity too. This implies that the most fruitful and legitimate way to analyse and evaluate all religions is to investigate them in the light of the revelation of Christ.¹⁵³

How then is God revealed in the religious life of the world? Kraemer responds that all religions, all philosophies, all worldviews are efforts of humanity to understand their existence, and all, inspiring though they may be, are "pathetic and revolting in their ineffectiveness."¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Hindus and Christians, op.cit., pg. 56

¹⁵³ Hendrik Kraemer, The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World, (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1938) pg. 110

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., pg. 111

The doom of death, corruption and demonic self-destruction is always hovering over this splendid world of man and nature... the universal religious consciousness of man has everywhere produced also the most abhorrent and degrading filth that perverted human imagination and lust can beget. This fundamental and horrid disharmony, this dialectical condition of man is called by the Christian revelation as contained in Biblical realism, sin, guilt, lostness past recovery except by God Himself; and no other religion does this in such unmistakable and consistent terms. The universal religious consciousness of man itself nowhere speaks this clear language, because it is confused and blinded by its inherent disharmony.¹⁵⁵

It is important to acknowledge that these selections portray Kraemer at his worst. In other sections of "The Christian Message" and in other writings he rejected arrogant and imperialistic approaches to other faiths. In the context of the Tambaram debates, it appeared inconclusive whether his views, taken as a whole and even when pushed to their logical conclusions, constituted an intolerant dogmatism. Our purpose, however, is to contrast them with the concept of "reverence for reverence" found within the Layman's report, and to note his impact on the final outcome of the Tambaram Council.

Ariarajah notes that Kraemer's stamp is unmistakable in the theological sections of the final report. In Christ alone, the report declares, "is the full salvation which man needs. Mankind has seen nothing to be compared with the redeeming love of God in the life and death and resurrection of Christ." We might see glimpses of God's light in the religious life of the world, but "all religious insight and experience have to be fully tested before God in Christ."¹⁵⁶ What was lost in the final report of Tambaram, Ariarajah notes, was any sense of mutual

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., pg. 113

¹⁵⁶ W. Paton, ed. The Authority of the Faith, (London: Oxford University Press, 1939) pg. 200f. Quoted in Hindus and Christians, op.cit. pg.81

enrichment let alone transformation, between faiths, and in particular the concept of the encounter with other faiths being comparable to the early churches' encounter with Hellenism. Kraemer successfully expunged from the world missionary movement any openness to the interfaith encounter leading to a radical rethinking of Christian theology itself.¹⁵⁷ The theological attitude of discontinuity, Ariarajah notes, pervaded subsequent World Mission Councils and is still part of the theological understanding of the World Council of Churches to this day.¹⁵⁸

One of the pronounced examples of this was at the Vancouver Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1983. The report of the section "Witnessing in a Divided World" offered the following statement for the consideration of the Assembly.

While affirming the uniqueness of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus to which we bear witness, we recognize God's creative work in the religious experience of people of other faiths.¹⁵⁹

Serious objections raised to the recognition of "God's creative work" in the religious experience of people of other faiths forced a referral of the statement back to committee. The formulation finally adopted by the Assembly, still surrounded by controversy, changed the second phrase to, "we recognise God's creative work in the seeking for religious truth among people of other faiths."¹⁶⁰

In Ariarajah's judgement the underlying issue in the Vancouver debate and what remains unresolved in the history of ecumenical discussions is the question

¹⁵⁷ Hindus and Christians, pg. 88

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., pg. 169

¹⁵⁹ Monthly Letter on Evangelism 11(WCC: Nov. 1983) pg. 1f quoted in Ibid., pg. 170

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

of the Christian attitude to religious plurality. The predominate direction solidified at Tambaram and witnessed again at Vancouver was that plurality must be overcome. Yet, as we have seen, there has been an underlying current within the history and theology of world missions that has offered an alternate model, that of mutual interconnection and transformation.

While there are undoubtedly many different conceptions of the transformationist stream, the critical issue is the openness to mutual interaction between traditions in such a way that each is transformed through the encounter. Or perhaps it is better to say that the issue is the willingness to acknowledge that such relationships are already the reality and are indeed what God desires. The concern is therefore both to articulate a theology that expresses and welcomes this reality and that structures forms of interaction to support it.

There have been numerous attempts to articulate such a theology including those of W.E. Hocking and W.C. Smith, whose contribution we will explore further in a moment. However since the focus is on the nature of interaction and therefore the quality of relationship, a starting point, from the perspective of this paper, is to name both the values and the practice that undergird it. These values, we would suggest, are those identified in the exploration of the Talking Circle which provides, we suggest, a model of such a theology in practice. We will return to this after we first explore briefly the contribution of The United Church of Canada to a transformationist understanding of mission and in particular to an understanding of Whole World Ecumenism.

The Commission on World Mission and the Origins of
“Whole World Ecumenism”

The Report of the Commission on World Mission dealt with by the 22nd General Council of The United Church of Canada in 1966 pointed to the emergence of a new kind of world differing dramatically from the past. The interpenetration of cultures through travel, immigration and new forms of communication would lead ultimately, the report suggested, to a new world civilization, to the reality of one world. In the emergence of this one world, which would not be based on superficial homogenization but rather on interpenetration and interconnection, the central question to be faced is, “How can mutual respect be achieved?”¹⁶¹

The report provided an historical sketch of the relationship between Christianity and other religions and offered this assessment:

(the) major encounter of the twentieth century between the church and the other great religious communities is .. more profitably to be thought of in relation to the earlier major encounter between the church and Greek rationality. One outcome of this encounter with Greece was the church’s development of a theology, which Christianity might not have had but for this.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ The Commission on World Mission, op.cit. pg. 322

¹⁶² Ibid.

The theology of the early church was not formulated in the great ecumenical councils, the report argues, but rather was the outcome of “intimate and continuous encounter between the knowledge of Jesus Christ and the Graeco-Roman patterns of thinking and living.” But the same thing is happening today. What is needed, therefore, are not crafted theological positions to be handed to people of other faiths, but,

that mission be conducted in a way that will facilitate intimate, continuous and creative encounter between the knowledge of Jesus Christ and the thinking of people who have come through neither the Hebraic nor the Graeco-Roman traditions, or of other people for whom these traditions have lost much of their meaning.¹⁶³

It is this interaction in particular, the report suggests, that is needed for the “reconceptualization” of theology and attitude. The church must begin to move beyond its established Western logical understanding to those more Eastern in form or, to refer back to the previous section, to enter a dialogue between two places of understanding that have not developed from common historical or philosophical traditions. It is this form of encounter that will potentially lead to new depths of understanding within the Church.

The encounter of Christianity with other ideologies and faiths, the report acknowledges, is not something new.

..recent research has uncovered the fact that for more than eighteen centuries (the church) was deeply affected by a whole array of religious ideas, such as the notion of angels, a devil, and a heaven and hell that appear to be derived from Iran rather than from the Old Testament. In another direction, it is also now clear that the Christian Church, along with the Jewish community, became involved from its very inception in the

¹⁶³

Ibid.

Islamic movement, to which it contributed enormously. One example is the idea that a religious system should have a scriptural revelation at its centre, basic to the Islamic venture..¹⁶⁴

The patterns of interconnection have been in place throughout history, but in recent times, the report notes, the level of this interaction is increasing dramatically. As the new “one world” comes into being we are becoming aware of the growing involvement of each of us in the religious life of the other. Eastern and Western traditions continue to grow towards a future yet to be discerned. In this future,

Hindus will be Hindus, not in any past sense, but in some future one; the future of Buddhists will be Buddhist, in a way yet to be created; the future of the Muslim world will be the next chapter in the ongoing evolution of an Islamic history now vigorously in process. ¹⁶⁵

The report clearly evidences a remarkable openness to pluralism. The assertion of the future existence and growth of other world faiths appears both as an historical fact and as a preferred reality. In the section entitled, “Rethinking the Relationship between Christianity and other World Faiths” it suggests that the church should “probably welcome the religious plurality of the modern world” because “rather than limiting effective encounter in dialogue with non-Christians, (it) may facilitate it.” It will drive us “back to a better understanding of (our) own faith” helping us to disentangle ourselves from the intricately interwoven Western and Hellenistic customs that so characterize our thinking and beliefs. As we proceed to separate those things that belong to the core of our faith from the

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., pg. 323

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., pg. 324

things that belong to our Western culture, we understand our own faith better and more firmly. At the same time we grow in respect for our neighbours of other faiths.¹⁶⁶

As the world changes, the report argues, religious communities will be challenged by the need to develop a new element in their individual and corporate lives: compatibility. Because of its history and present position, Christianity is called to do so first, to lead the way. This compatibility has a clear objective in mind. It is because for the first time the world's religious communities are facing not similar but joint problems.

Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus and the others are being called upon to collaborate in building a common world... not merely a world of which we can severally approve, but also one to the building of which the faith of each can inspire.¹⁶⁷

The language of these sections of the report clearly reflected the contribution of Wilfred Cantwell Smith, one of the members of the Commission and a leading contributor in the field of comparative religion. Smith spoke of the gradual convergence of the world's different religious communities towards a common religious history. We are, he suggested, at the beginning of a phase in Western religious evolution when,

Asian missionaries, Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim, and certainly Buddhist and Hindu ideas and motifs and art, is evidently going to be consequential in the development of Christian life, in one way or another... for good or ill, wittingly or unwittingly, little or much, Muslims, Hindus and

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., pg. 352

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., pg. 326

Buddhists may be seen as participating in the future evolution of the Western religious tradition.¹⁶⁸

Smith argues in another work that the concept of religion as a complete system of belief is somewhat recent. It was only when the Western intellectual tradition began to classify religious behaviour that the use of the word religions even came into common use. At the core of his philosophy of religion therefore he makes the distinction between faith and belief.

My faith is an act, I make myself naked before God.. So there is no generic Christian faith, no 'Buddhist faith,' no 'Hindu faith' no 'Jewish faith.' There is only my faith, and yours, and that of my Shinto friend, of my particular Jewish neighbour...In the eyes of God each of us is a person, not a type.¹⁶⁹

And therefore we are all "participants in one community, the human."¹⁷⁰ But the most distinctive thing about this new one community is that for the first time we are being faced with a joint challenge: "to collaborate in the building of a common world... in which we can all live together, but one also of which we can jointly approve, and to the building of which the faith of each of us can effectively inspire."¹⁷¹

Smith's contribution was undoubtedly central to one of the most significant recommendations of the report.

¹⁶⁸ Towards a World Theology, op.cit. pg. 40

¹⁶⁹ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, The Meaning and End of Religion, (New York: Mentor, 1962) pg. 172

¹⁷⁰ Towards a World Theology, op.cit. pg. 102

¹⁷¹ Ibid., pg. 192

The church should recognize that God is creatively and redemptively at work in the religious life of all mankind. Christians have much to learn as well as to contribute, through dialogue with people of other faiths. Their special responsibility is to present the knowledge of God in Christ Jesus in ways which will respect each other's integrity.¹⁷²

Taken alone, it might be argued that it is possible to read an inclusivist perspective into this statement. In the context of the report as a whole, however, it is hard to accept that possibility. It is unlikely, furthermore, that the words "creatively and redemptively" would have been joined together with "religious life" without it being clear to the authors that a pluralist stance was being adopted. The use of "religious life" also implied a sharp distinction with the widely accepted stance of Kraemer and Barth, and therefore the World Council of Churches, that sees all religious life, including Christianity, as human constructs standing under the judgement of Christ. The statement positioned the United Church in a distinctive position of acknowledging the creative and redemptive work of God in the religious traditions of the world, "in themselves."

This is also the perspective suggested from the attitudes of reciprocity and respect that the Church is to bring to dialogue. Not only should the church be open to learning but it must also respect the integrity of the other. This statement, as I've already noted, led to the appointment of what was possibly the first full time interfaith officer in a major Christian denomination in the world. It also, I suggest, set in place the foundations for the concept of Whole World Ecumenism within The United Church of Canada.

In 1997 the 36th General Council received another report on the ecumenical mission agenda of the United Church. "Mending the World" was the

¹⁷² "The Commission on World Mission," op.cit. pg. 436

final statement of a project begun ten years earlier by the Interchurch Interfaith Committee of the General Council. The Ecumenical Agenda Research Project was charged with discerning a renewed vision of ecumenical understanding and action for the United Church. The interim report, "Towards a Renewed Understanding of Ecumenism" summarized the results of hundreds of interviews. "The world is in serious trouble," the report said, "the churches should join with peoples of good will to work together for the cause of peace, justice and the healing of God's creation."¹⁷³

Both the interim and final reports introduced the concept of Whole World Ecumenism with the same text:

From its beginnings, The United Church of Canada has demonstrated a sizeable and sustained commitment.. to overcome the fragmentation within Christ's Church. While continuing our efforts to strengthen and deepen our ties to other churches, endeavouring to make visible the vision of Christian unity in one Spirit and in common action, we recognize that the precarious time in which we and the world live calls us to broaden our understanding of "ecumenical" commitment and activity. The context in which we live might be called "the wilderness of the world" and the understanding might be called "whole world ecumenism."

Whereas traditional ecumenical activity has been church-centred, placing emphasis on the churches as they relate to one another both in matters of faith and service, the broader ecumenism is world-centred, placing emphasis on churches relating to the world beyond themselves, to persons involved in other religious traditions, ideologies, and secular agencies. In this understanding of "whole world ecumenism" the churches are called to make common cause with individuals and institutions of good will who are committed to compassion, peace and justice in the world. ¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ "Towards a Renewed Understanding of Ecumenism" Study Document prepared by the Interchurch Interfaith Committee. 1992

¹⁷⁴ "Mending the World: An Ecumenical Vision for Healing and Reconciliation" Report adopted by the 36th General Council, 1997.

The earlier report argued that such a vision would mean the church would no longer embrace ideas presenting the Church as the only vessel of salvation or identifying Christians as the only children of God. For some this would create problems. Referring back to the Commission on World Mission, the report suggested

For some Christians, the idea that “God is creatively and redemptively at work in the religious life of all people” will be a questionable one. Some Christians have been reluctant to acknowledge that God’s Spirit gives gifts and produces worthy fruit in people of other religions or in those of no religion.

Nevertheless, the report affirmed the new ecumenical imperative calls the Church to work in partnership with any and all who will share the task of respecting and preserving God’s creation.

While the interim report sought to be very explicit in reaffirming the 1966 statement that “God is creatively and redemptively at work in the religious life of humanity,” the final report chose to ground the ecumenical vision in a spectrum of theological positions. The intention was to focus primarily on the mission imperative of Whole World Ecumenism. The end result was a less than clear theological position but siding more with an inclusivist perspective, in contrast to the pluralistic viewpoint of the earlier document. The most relevant phrase, found in the final document in the section “An Affirmation,” offered the vision that God calls the Church “to discern and celebrate God’s Spirit in people of other religions and ideologies.” Even though the final report linked this statement back to the interim document and to the 1966 Report, the implications are, it would seem,

quite different than affirming God's creative and redemptive work in the religious life of humanity.

Throughout the process of the writing of the final document, the Interchurch Interfaith Committee struggled with challenges from many places concerning the use of the term "Whole World Ecumenism." Christian ecumenical partners in particular challenged the broadening of the term ecumenism to include other faiths. While the paper argued that the original meaning of *oikoumene*, from which the word ecumenism derives, referred to the whole inhabited earth, many argued that today it had explicit and special meaning within the Christian communion. Nevertheless the decision was made to continue to use the term, with the understanding that it clearly pointed to a broader understanding and in fact opened the way to affirming equality between traditional Christian ecumenical and new interfaith partners.

The General Council ultimately did not approve "Mending the World" as a policy statement, but rather offered it to the Church as a "lens" through which to test its mission agenda. While it is impossible to discern the mind of the Council, it is possible that, in part, the failure of the document to be accepted as a policy statement was due to this attempt to pull back from the full implications of pluralism.¹⁷⁵ The Council action, nevertheless, affirmed the vision of Whole World Ecumenism as calling the church forward to new forms of engagement and partnership throughout the world.

¹⁷⁵ This possibility is further supported by the willingness of the Council, on the recommendation of the same Sessional Committee which dealt with "Mending the World," to accept for study a clearly pluralist document on Jewish Christian relationships entitled "Bearing Faithful Witness."

Although the term “Whole World Ecumenism” has come distinctly from within the United Church, the overall concept has much broader and earlier origins than the United Church’s use of the term. The first indication of the development of the concept of what has become known elsewhere as macro-ecumenism comes from within the World Council of Churches and its predecessors. The conviction that the concern for unity as well as the call to witness and service belonged together was a clear theme at the first world conference on Faith and Order in Lausanne in 1927. These early stages of discussion ultimately led to the formation of the World Council of Churches in 1948 through the merging of the Faith and Order movement and the World Missionary Congress.

At one of the early meetings of the Central Committee of the World Council, Konrad Raiser notes, the Central Committee of the Council sought to clarify the use of the term “ecumenism” as follows:

We would especially draw attention to the recent confusion in the use of the term “ecumenical.” It is important to insist that this word, which comes from the Greek word for the whole inhabited earth, is properly used to describe everything that relates to the whole task of the whole church to bring the gospel to the whole world. It therefore covers equally the missionary movement and the movement towards unity, and must not be used to describe the latter in contradistinction to the former.¹⁷⁶

The primary debate within ecumenism, Raiser suggests, has been centred on these two polarities of understanding, one referring to the whole church and the other to the whole world.

¹⁷⁶ Konrad Raiser, Ecumenism in Transition, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1991), pg. 84

Is work for justice and peace an expression of Christian responsibility in the social and political realm, or is it central to the church's confession of faith? How far can and may the ecumenical movement go in solidarity and support for social and political initiatives and movements outside the bounds of the church?¹⁷⁷ Does renewal have as its goal a new form of church, which can do justice to God's commission in a changed world, or does renewal mean rather recovering community with the origins of the church and its witness?¹⁷⁸

Questions such as these point to the heart of the debate and to the uncertainty at the centre of the ecumenical movement, says Raiser. Clearly however the challenge is in affirming the indivisibility of the polarities and in doing so acknowledging the interconnectedness of the world itself. Relationship is the very foundation of life. Humans are from their very beginning related to the world, to others, to their environment. This is true of all living organisms including, of course, the church itself. Therefore there cannot be any doubt that the ecumenical search stretches both towards one church as well as one world.

In speaking therefore of the oikoumene as "household" the emphasis, suggests Raiser, is on habitability or sustainability. The "oikoumene" is the one household of life sustained by God that extends beyond the human race to that of the whole created order. This vision of the household of life points beyond human history to that of the history of all living things. To avoid, however, the imperialism of one world, or the domination of the household, what is important in this concept is to acknowledge that the oikoumene is composed of a variety of households each dependent and related to the others. Each household, for its very survival, needs a protected space, a space for living. Human beings, as well as other beings, must create for themselves their space, their abode, their dwelling

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., pg. 9

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., pg. 12

place, the boundaries of which must not only enclose and protect but also open to relationship and change. This, suggests Raiser, is a critical definition of “oikos,” the root of the word oikoumene, as meaning “space for living.”¹⁷⁹

The World Council has struggled to maintain the unity of the two polarities of ecumenism. But it has done so through the adoption of the theological paradigm of Christocentric universalism comparable to what we have earlier identified as the inclusive theological position. On its own the Christocentric position is traditionally exclusivist; the salvation of the world lies in Jesus Christ alone. The WCC paradigm of Christocentric universalism, however, identifies Christ as the one who is not only Lord of the church but also of the whole cosmos. Inasmuch as followers of other traditions find grace and salvation in their religions, it is the “hidden Christ” they experience.¹⁸⁰ The difficulty we have already noted is that in this view others are simply incorporated into a Christian understanding. There is little room for respecting the self-identification of the other who likely would not see themselves in the interpretation. It is of course the reality of pluralism that challenges the Christocentric universalist option, and that has increasingly been pushing at the edges of the Council towards a new paradigm of thought.

Perhaps the most significant initiative of the World Council in this area has been the conciliar process of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation. The intention of the process was to engage the church “in a conciliar process of mutual commitment (covenant) to justice, peace and the integrity of creation.”¹⁸¹ This, it

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., pg. 88

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., pg. 57

¹⁸¹ Ibid., pg. 117

was hoped, would lead ultimately to the formation of a “peace council” which would include the broadest participation of the Christian community including the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches. A world convocation was envisaged through which church leaders would commit themselves and their institutions to mutual action. The Roman Catholics and the Orthodox, however, proved to have different understandings of the meaning of the word “council.” The JPIC process ultimately developed an entirely different character than what was originally hoped for, as it became contextualized and adapted throughout the world to the indigenous causes of the poor and dispossessed.¹⁸²

Identifying JPIC as a conciliar process finally had to be abandoned, for theological reasons. One of the problems was that the term conciliar carried with it a number of meanings, for some referring to modern day councils of churches meeting together for common witness while for others to the ancient undivided church.¹⁸³ In itself it revealed significant limits to the possibilities of the common witness and action of the churches. Nevertheless the implications of the JPIC process have been felt world wide as a call to bottom-up engagement and action. Konrad Raiser, in his exploration of “Ecumenism in Transition” also points to the JPIC process as an example of a concrete testing ground for learning to live in the “ecumenical household.” What is discerned in the process are the basic rules for relationship:

¹⁸² D. Preman Niles, ed. Between the Flood and the Rainbow: Interpreting the Conciliar Process of Mutual Commitment (Covenant) to Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1992) pg. 27

¹⁸³ Ibid., pg. 137

Self-restraint and striving for truth in dialogue, sharing in solidarity with one another, and readiness to correct oneself in the course of ecumenical learning - these describe the dimensions of hope in a new vision of the ecumenical movement.¹⁸⁴

Another of the outcomes of the JPIC process was increased reflection on the nature of unity. The WCC's Uppsala Assembly (1968) had focused on the emerging "one world" becoming evident through new forms of communication and increased world travel. At a time of increasing human interdependence it was imperative that new "ecumenical, conciliar forms of common life and witness" be sought. The reality however is that the "one world" affirmed by both the United Church's Commission on World Mission and the Uppsala Assembly soon became a significant threat to human freedom and individuality. It was not only the threat of transnationalism and what is today referred to as economic globalization but it is also the threat of what Jose Bonino called the "oikoumene of domination." In contrast to such a system which occupies the oikoumene and "...determines the structural relations within it, assigns roles and resources, sets the laws, regulates communication.." there is the "oikoumene of solidarity..."

..which rests on a qualitatively different logic and rationality; the presence of transcendence, the search for the immanence of the new future latent in reality and therefore, the search for a praxis which releases this future. This is the rationality of faith, for which the reality of God is more decisive than the reality of the world as it is. Its logic reinforces life and the human and demands a constant *anakainosis tou noos*, the transformation of understanding, repentance and conversion.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ Ecumenism in Transition, op.cit. pg. 120

¹⁸⁵ Jose Bonino, quoted in Ecumenism in Transition, op.cit. pg.64

In the midst of this, it is clear that the churches' search for institutional unity is becoming not only increasingly difficult but also fundamentally questioned.

"Mending the World" stated it this way:

The world is in serious trouble; the churches should join with peoples of good will to work together for the cause of peace, justice and the healing of God's creation. One person expressed it this way: "The chief ecumenical scandal of our time is not the disunity of the church. Rather it is the institutional preoccupation of the church in the face of the suffering of the world."

If a preoccupation with Christian ecumenism blinds the church to the suffering of the world, then it must be opposed. What are needed therefore are new conceptions of unity and engagement, new models of ecumenical and conciliar interaction that encompass the broader world community. One of the key examples used in defining Whole World Ecumenism in the "Mending the World" document is found in a section dealing with Partnership and Dialogue. The "Paths of Respect" Consultation reported on in this paper is offered as a model and a metaphor for interfaith partnership.

The Aboriginal Talking Circle is perhaps the best model we have for conversation grounded in respect and mutual understanding. The equality of voices, the encouragement to speak from the heart about what we know to be true in our lives, the commitment to listen deeply for wisdom in every contribution, the willingness to spend time, all are qualities of what should be part of an ideal conversation. The Talking Circle provides a metaphor and a model for the values that ground dialogue, and by extension, partnership.

Following this exploration of mission within the World Council of Churches and The United Church of Canada, we return once again to the Talking Circle and to

the Apology. Our goal in this final section is now to explore their contribution towards an understanding of Whole World Ecumenism, which, I suggest, is a significant symbol of an emerging new paradigm for mission within The United Church of Canada.

Whole World Ecumenism as a New Paradigm of Mission

Martin Luther King begins one of his well known addresses, entitled, “The World House” with the following:

Some years ago a famous novelist died. Among his papers was found a list of suggested plots for future stories, the most prominently underscored being this one: “A widely separated family inherits a house in which they have to live together.” This is the great new problem of humanity. We have inherited a large house, a great “world house” in which we have to live together - black and white, Easterner and Westerner, gentile and Jew, Catholic and Protestant, Muslim and Hindu- a family unduly separated in ideas, culture and interest who, because we can never again live apart, must learn somehow to live with each other in peace.

This story, one of many framing “Mending the World,” sets the context of Whole World Ecumenism in the question of survival. Muslims and Jews, Christians and First Nations' peoples and many others must learn how to live together in a world that can be compared to a single household. The challenge, of course, is not just how to learn to live together in peace, but how to restore the household to health, how to mend the brokenness. This task requires a commitment to common action,

to shared engagement, to searching for new forms of partnership with people and communities beyond usual relationships for the sake of the healing of the world.

Whole World Ecumenism implies the extension of the churches' patterns of ecumenical relationship beyond the Christian family to relationships with people of other faiths. The difficulty is that in interfaith relationships we approach the boundaries of different worldviews. The assumption that we speak the same language with the same meaning is not only mistaken but also evidence, within the Christian community at least, of an arrogance that has undergirded the imperialism of the past. This broader ecumenism must take seriously the nature of those differences at the same time as it sees the quality of the relationships themselves as part of what ultimately brings needed change and transformation to the world.

Whole World Ecumenism is a concept that has captured the imagination of many within the Church, but it is clearly a work in progress. As in the early history of the ecumenical movement much work remains to be done on the inter-relationship of reflection and practice, that can allow a deepening of both the skills and theology of relationship with people of other faiths. The objective of the final part of this paper is to point to the ways that the experience of the Church in its relationship with First Nations people can inform the further development of Whole World Ecumenism and through that understanding, redefine the Church's understanding of mission. Our study has suggested that the foundation of this resides in appreciating and acknowledging the radical nature of otherness at the heart of the relationships between religious traditions. But more than just acceptance or tolerance of these differences, it means deepening and exploring the

meaning of respect as the primary metaphor through which relationship is sustained.

The contribution that can be offered from this study is not the only vision of Whole World Ecumenism that is possible. Our intention, however, is to offer a framework that is consistent with the closest and most intimate interfaith relationship that the Church has experienced and from which the Church has committed itself to learn. Stan McKay speaks of the Talking Circle as a gift to the Church, as a model of respectful interaction. It is, he suggests, a metaphor for the relationship between the Church and the Native community towards which the Apology points; one that honours the differences between the traditional and Christian paths and which nevertheless holds these differences together in community. It is from this understanding therefore, that we suggest that the Talking Circle and the Apology have important contributions to make to understanding the dynamic of relationships of respect at the heart of Whole World Ecumenism.

Whole World Ecumenism starts with the image of the household, the common space for living. But there is not just one space, but many spaces that nurture the varied cultures and religions of its peoples. Therefore Whole World Ecumenism must deal with the nature and quality of the relationship between different parts of the household. "That the people may live," we have noted, is the foundation and goal of Native Spirituality. So too in Whole World Ecumenism, the direction is outward through the relationships to the healing of the earth. This is what Charles Amjad-Ali points to in his reminder that dialogue is about going through, "dia", one's logi to common action.

The experience of the ecumenical movement points to the difficulty of achieving common understandings across cultures and diverse histories. The current transition of the World Council of Churches towards a "forum" points to the concern of member churches that individuality and distinctiveness might be preserved. Particularly as evangelical churches consider membership and Roman Catholics deepen their observer status towards wider participation, it has become necessary to reaffirm in even stronger terms the understanding that the World Council is not a super-church. The concept of forum, therefore, implies that it is a place where churches may come together, without losing their individuality, for common reflection and action.

So too within the world interfaith movements, organizations such as the World Conference for Religion and Peace, the International Interfaith Centre, the United Religions Initiative and the Parliament of the World's Religions all acknowledge as a starting point the legitimacy of differences between traditions. The idea that a universal faith might come into being through the stripping away of superficial differences between traditions until a common essence of faith is achieved no longer has credibility.

Post-modern theologians such as George Lindbeck remind us of the encompassing nature of religious identity.¹⁸⁶ The pervasiveness of ethnicity and nationalism and their interrelationship with religious beliefs also suggest that differences between people cannot readily be diminished. Understanding dialogue as movement through one's own logi therefore becomes increasingly important as a shared framework in which interfaith relationships are structured. The starting

¹⁸⁶ George A. Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984)

point of Whole World Ecumenism, I would argue, is the assumption that the place of each partner, and therefore the space between them, is honoured and respected. But at the same time there exists the possibility of each becoming open to transformation as each moves through their own logos into the space in-between. It is the movement into this open space that is the test of respect. Without the willingness to seek a common place of encounter, of shared understanding and discourse, there can be no mutuality, and therefore no respect. It is here that the Apology and the Talking Circle have significant contributions to make.

Respect, not surprisingly, is the starting point for acknowledging the legitimacy of differences and therefore the ability to move into this open space. But an attitude of respect necessarily involves an analysis of the arrangements of power and knowledge that silence, or make invisible, differences. Our conversations inevitably are based on assumptions that exclude other assumptions. Truth claims are often inextricable from claims of status and power. The Talking Circle, we have seen, is an attempt to structure communication in such a way that at least some of these issues of power and status are addressed. By moving away from argumentation into narrative and non-exclusive conversation the Talking Circle attempts to provide a model of respectful interaction that honours and perhaps, as Stan McKay suggests, even heightens differences rather than seeking to collapse them.

The reflections on the Apology and the Circle point to respect for differences as a necessary foundation for both appreciating the meaning of Aboriginal Spirituality and for building a new relationship with Native peoples. This involves an acceptance of Aboriginal Spirituality as a legitimate faith tradition as well as acknowledging the right of Native people to define the

relationship between Christianity and Aboriginal Spirituality in their own terms. Respect in this context means not only the acceptance of differences as legitimate, but also a willingness to let go of the usual patterns of authority; to forgo intervention in Native beliefs; to acknowledge different concepts of reality and ultimately to accept the possibility of mutual transformation.

Respect, from the perspective of this study, is related to openness to transformation and is evidenced through the characteristics of reciprocity, non-intervention and multiversality. Together, we suggest, these are also characteristics of engagement in the space in-between, carrying with them the potential of healing and restoring relationships. The Talking Circle was identified by Native people as the model of interaction that best exemplified the relationship that was sought between the Church and the Native community. Its structure and meaning, we suggest, can also provide a metaphor for interpreting the nature of Whole World Ecumenism. To construct this understanding we revisit the qualities that exemplified the Talking Circle and Aboriginal Spirituality. Finally, in conclusion, we will turn back to ask what “open space” might look like for the Church itself by asking what boundaries the Church might approach and ultimately cross to enter an “open space” for mission.

“That the people may live!”

The emphasis on respect for diversity raises a troubling and difficult problem. From what has been identified as the post-modern perspective, human

experience and knowledge is inextricably dependent upon the worldviews, or frames, through which people perceive their environment. Since our perceptions and understandings are filtered through an incredible diversity of culture, history and language, reality itself, at least as far as it has meaning to us, is also diverse. In contrast to the “modern” Enlightenment model of reason as universal truth, the focus in this post-modern perspective is on historical realities, and the recognition that we can never see the world beyond our own particular historical and cultural constructs. Even the understanding achieved through scientific methods invariably depends upon starting points contingent upon the assumptions of the scientific model itself. There is, accordingly, no universal foundation. Diversity is irreducible and at times even incommensurable.

George Lindbeck points to religion as a framework that shapes the entirety of life and thought. There is, he argues, no universal inner experience of God common to all religions because each religious experience is dependent upon the cultural-linguistic mould into which it fits. William Placher, among others, suggests that the ultimate implication of this is that religions, at their heart, may simply be just different, at times in conflict and offer no common points of evaluation except from within one tradition or another.¹⁸⁷ But it is this kind of radical pluralism, suggests Placher, which most people today find very difficult to accept.

More often than not the assumptions of interfaith dialogue start from the perspective of what is held in common, what experiences might be analogous, what beliefs are comparable. But to accept this starting point opens the way to

¹⁸⁷ William Placher, Unapologetic Theology: A Christian Voice in a Pluralistic Conversation. (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1989) pg.144

one side imposing its own interpretation on the other. Common ground, in other words, is all too easily manufactured in the image of one's own understanding. To see interfaith dialogue as the movement towards reconciling differences therefore can potentially result in renewed expressions of religious imperialism and lead ultimately to further tensions and misunderstandings.

Paul Knitter, in a study of what he terms Globally Responsible Dialogue, points to the question of power at the heart of every attempt at dialogue. The language of common contribution and co-operation is often the means that privileged groups use, he notes, to deflect attention from the unequal distribution of power. When we make assumptions about what is beneficial for all members of society, we are invariably wrapped up with the politics of privilege and its preservation. A true acceptance of diversity would mean acknowledging that not only are there different cultural/linguistic systems at work in religious worldviews, but also potentially radically different goals.¹⁸⁸

A response to this challenge, Knitter notes, has been the post-liberal model, which argues that what is possible in interfaith dialogue, is only a "good neighbour policy." The search for some method or foundation of common understanding should be abandoned; instead we should each try to convince the other, with care and without violence, of the truth that we have discovered. The primary goal, in this approach, is to stand firmly in one's own tradition and to witness to it. Hence the increasing popularity of the term witness instead of mission. The best that we can hope for in interreligious encounter, then, is that as we describe ourselves faithfully, we might each become more aware of the depths

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One Earth, Many Religions, op.cit. pg.46f.

of our own tradition. There should of course be an openness to learning from each other, but only as we stand firm in and witness to the core of our own beliefs.

The insights and implications of the post-liberal model, however, are profound. Among them, Alasdair MacIntyre sees the inevitable outcome of radical pluralism as "a new Dark Age" in which communities "retreat into isolation in the face of an incommensurable chasm of meaning." But yet a world of differences remains the undeniable reality. The Apology in its essence, we have argued, was about restoring appropriate boundaries between the Native and non-Native communities. "We will do what we want in our canoe, and you in yours." Differences must be acknowledged and respected. But, within the Aboriginal mindset, these differences can be held together, in community as well as within an individual.

The image of the Two Row Wampum points to the parallel paths of Christian and Aboriginal Spirituality but indicates as well that they remain connected and interrelated. The two path journey reinforces this image by pointing to the existence of these parallel paths held together as "two bundles," within the mind and life of an individual herself. We will consider in just a moment the further implications of this multiversal reality, but what underlies it, we now suggest, is the fundamental ethic of Native Spirituality itself, "that the people may live." In the face of different worldviews, languages and cultures, the life of the community takes priority. The Talking Circle, we suggest therefore, is fundamentally a metaphor of community, which honours differences yet sustains relationship.

Consider again the pattern of speaking as the talking symbol is passed from one person to another. Stan McKay noted the difficulty that many have in

not responding directly to another's thoughts but rather speaking from one's own understanding and truth, and contributing one's own insight to the larger conversation of the Circle. There is also a clear pattern of conversation that allows speakers to pause and not be interrupted, or to simply sit in silence. The result is that space is created between each speaker, not only of time but also of ideas and thoughts. The passing of the symbol marks the acknowledgement of boundaries between each speaker. The intention, we have noted, is to avoid argumentation. One might be tempted to respond to the immediate speaker before one's turn, but over the course of the Circle, it becomes less and less likely that this will happen. The expectation, we saw was that everyone feels that they are contributing to the wisdom of the Circle.

There are obviously many ways that Talking Circles might function. In our exploration, however, it was clear that there was no attempt to achieve consensus. There was no process of testing group understanding or reaching a group decision; nor did the Elders suggest that this was at all an objective of the Circle. What is at stake, it appears, is the relationship itself that is sustained in the Circle, "that the people might live." This provides a critical starting point for understanding Whole World Ecumenism, that the starting point must be the quality and nature of relationship itself.

Whole World Ecumenism therefore, we suggest, must start with accepting the differences between the various faith traditions of the world. It must come to terms with a radical plurality that is the only reality we know. The objective of engagement will not be to diminish differences but rather to give them voice and presence. Nor will the objective be initially to conceive of common action. What is primary is working on the models of community that allow conversation and

dialogue to take place in such a way that differences are respected and power equalised. "That the people may live," is the fundamental issue, for without the ability to sustain community then the reality of "incommensurable chasms of meaning" will in fact bring isolation and mistrust.

This starting place for Whole World Ecumenism has a parallel in the Resource Sharing agreements of the World Council of Churches and in particular, the El Escorial Agreement of 1987 (Appendix D). These agreements identify concern for the quality of the relationship between Northern and Southern partners as the primary task in mission. A central focus of the agreement deals with the sharing of resources, and offers a vision of equality among different kinds of contributions. The North has financial resources but these should not lead to an imbalance of power in decision making to the South's equally important human resources. What is critical in this vision of partnership is that the North intentionally seek ways of divesting itself of its financial power by involving Southern partners in its decision making concerning the allocation of resources. It is the commitment to partnership itself that is the goal and the agenda of this concept of mission.

The Division of World Outreach has continued to affirm this model of mission in the face of questions about its idealism. We are "Agencies not Angels" suggests one recent book, arguing that what the poverty and injustice of the world demands is accountability and professionalism in its deployment of development dollars. "We do not have time to worry about the nature of relationship in the midst of the crisis of our world," the argument goes. That we can somehow get it right is a dream. Yet the Division has continued to lift up the model of partnership, with all its idealism, as the central focus of its work. An

understanding of Whole World Ecumenism that focuses on the quality of the relationships with interfaith partners is consistent therefore with this existing understanding of partnership. To extend the language of mission partnership to interfaith relationships, however, is a significant leap and part of why Whole World Ecumenism marks a paradigm shift in an understanding of mission.

A critical aspect of the present understanding of partnership is that God calls each partner to the primary role of mission in their own place, but the resources to enable the mission are not there alone. Therefore the South needs the resources of the North to complete its call to mission. So too the North needs the resources of the South to be faithful to its responsibility to mission in its own place. To extend the language of partnership to interfaith relationship adds an interesting further dynamic. By implication it suggests that the locus of mission rests primarily within our own traditions, Christian to Christian, Hindu to Hindu, Muslim to Muslim, but that the theological resources necessary to do the work might reside elsewhere. In other words, to be fully and faithfully Christian, we need the insight and wisdom of the other who is not. This returns us once again to the image of the Talking Circle as a metaphor for community. The differences that are welcomed in the Circle are there not to be silenced, but that they might bring wholeness, that the people might live.

To speak of the Talking Circle as a metaphor for Whole World Ecumenism invites us now into an exploration of the other characteristics of the Talking Circle and of Aboriginal Spirituality, specifically: reciprocity, non-intervention and multiversality and how these relate to the use of story. Together these contribute to an understanding of mutual transformation as a further characteristic of Whole World Ecumenism.

Space for Transformation:

The Characteristics of Reciprocity, Multiversality and Non-Intervention

A General Council Sessional Committee, without involvement of the Native Church community we recall, drafted the Apology. This was not seen to be inappropriate since clearly the Apology needed to be an expression of the non-Native Church. However the one change requested by Native people was the addition of the word “together” to the closing sentence. The initial text, which suggested that the Native community be invited to walk *with* the Church, was seen to be patronizing. To be respectful the walk must be mutual, a walk together. The implication, of course, was that the walk must lead both partners in a new direction. There must be, at the heart of the Apology, a commitment to reciprocity that opens both to transformation.

Reciprocity, we have noted, is also a central value of the Talking Circle, expressed primarily in the expectations that participants both listen and speak. The sequential order of speaking provides the space to ensure that everyone can be heard. Similarly the Talking Symbol acknowledges that every voice is welcomed and honoured within the Circle. To listen with respect, however, implies an openness to the possibility of incorporation into one’s own beliefs what is heard. Judgement is still clearly operative. But the overall attitude is one of openness to incorporation. Recall the argument of Panikkar that, at the level of Boundary Discourse, one cannot really understand the views of another if one does not share them. Dialogue, if it is to be dialogue, must open one up to the truth that the other possesses, or as John Dunne says, to pass over, and come back

again. The ethic of reciprocity in the Talking Circle implies that listening brings transformation.

This becomes clearer when the practice of what has been called “non-exclusive cumulative adhesion” is considered. In simpler terms what is referred to is the incorporation of other stories and their meanings into the beliefs of an individual and of the community. This was expressed in various ways during the interviews, for example as the welcoming of the story of Jesus into the good stories of the community, or the acceptance of Jesus as one of the honoured ones in the Circle. As Evelyn Broadfoot explained it, the ethic of respect opened the Native community to accept the missionary’s statement that the Bible was God’s book. It was when they were told to restrict their beliefs, “to put the drum away,” that the problems started. The difficulty for many Native people, therefore, was not the incorporation of Christian beliefs and stories, but the requirement that accepting these beliefs meant the exclusion of others. What was dishonoured in this expectation was the non-exclusive nature of Native tradition. As Stan McKay expressed it, my belief does not have to contradict your belief. Or more specifically, the exclusion of beliefs violated not just the commitment to reciprocity but also the values of multiversality and non-intervention.

To speak of “non-exclusive, cumulative adhesion” on the other hand is to point to an openness to transformation at the heart of the Native tradition. Myra Laramée’s vision of the colour tan during the Talking Circle is a significant example of this. Her prophecy, like many within the Native tradition, was based on a widely known traditional story, but a story that was open to continued growth and interpretation. In a sense it is perhaps not different from the sharing and transference of stories between the world’s major faith traditions that Wilfred

Cantwell Smith identified in his study “Towards A World Theology.” Smith argues that the “unity of humankind’s religious history is obvious, once one sees it.”¹⁸⁹ His task was to make it plain, he said. But he did so through the comparison of myths, parables and stories. The implication is that it is the stories of the various traditions that can in fact be transferred and transformed and witness to the overlapping histories of religious traditions.

The use of stories, we have suggested, plays a major part in the functioning of the Talking Circle. The sequential order of speaking works against logical connections to speech, or responding directly to the contribution of the preceding speaker. The example of Native people, in their own use of stories, lends a further expectation. We have noted the importance of non-intervention and the ways in which stories allow advice to be given and received without losing face. All of these pressures work against the predominance of logical argumentation in the Talking Circle and leads to the alternative of narrative or the telling of stories. It is the telling of stories that also most directly speaks to the nature of multiversality.

In a study of the great Lakota leader, Black Elk, Clyde Holler explores the issue of dual participation in Native Spirituality. He notes that the usual interpretation of Black Elk’s acceptance of both traditional Lakota as well as Catholic beliefs was explained as insincerity in one or the other of the traditions. The fundamental assumption, for most interpreters of his life, was that a person could not believe in two religions at once. Why? Because both propose truth claims that are contradictory, and a person cannot profess contradictory beliefs at

¹⁸⁹ Towards a World Theology, op.cit. pg. 7

the same time. There is, in other words, an assumption that religious beliefs are, like scientific propositions, either straightforwardly true or false.¹⁹⁰

The difficulty, Holler argues, is that the notion of orthodoxy itself, the idea of correct belief, is foreign to traditional Lakota culture.

Lakota religion exhibited considerable individualism in both belief and ritual expression. There was no credo, no catechism, no prayer book, and no hell to threaten those who failed to believe. The traditional religious expression, if it could be called that, is with power and not with truth... Furthermore, the fundamental orientation of an oral culture is to storytelling for the transmission of culture and ritual for theological and philosophical expression.¹⁹¹

Each tribe, therefore, has its own religion, each Elder his or her own vision. Interpretations and versions of myths differ dramatically from person to person. No one, in a traditional Native culture would question which one was true, because the issue is not literal or objective truth, but symbolic meaning. The problem of truth arises only when story and myth are transformed with a “historical-critical consciousness” into “objectifying discourse.”¹⁹² Black Elk’s traditional Lakota beliefs, and his Catholicism, were therefore not mutually exclusive systems of propositions, but “two alternative ways of envisioning the sacred... two stories about the sacred.”¹⁹³

It is the use of stories as “alternative ways of envisaging the sacred” that provides a possible explanation of multiversality within the Aboriginal

¹⁹⁰ Clyde Holler, Black Elk’s Religion: The Sun Dance and Lakota Catholicism, (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1995) pg. 213

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid., pg. 215

¹⁹³ Ibid., pg. 217

worldview. Stories offer not only the capability of respect to be shown for listeners by avoiding the giving of advice but also allow individuals and the community to hold differing myths and understandings together. The Talking Circle, I suggest, is a community structure which invites its participants to hold different paths, or ways of envisaging the sacred, without requiring that they be collapsed into one logical and integral whole. In other words, it invites the participants to move out of the logical structure of doctrine within many religious interpretations into an open space characterized by narrative.

To identify mutual transformation as a central value of Whole World Ecumenism is not new, but nevertheless marks a paradigm shift in an understanding of mission. We have noted Hocking's proposal for the *reconceptualization* of Christianity and his suggestion that this can only be achieved when the *essence* of Christianity is known. The problem, as we have also noted, is that religious traditions are not composed of outer superficial layers that can be peeled back to reveal an inner core. As Lindbeck suggests, they function more as systems of thought, as collective stories, or worldviews which create a language and a culture through which one interprets the world. While still affirming that Christianity must be transformed in its relationship with other faiths W.C. Smith speaks primarily of individual faith as opposed to corporate belief. What is clear, however, is that whether one speaks about a formal magisterium of belief or an informal tradition, it seems unlikely that world religions will ever disperse into individual expressions of faith in spite of the reality of pluralism. Rather, it seems likely that the resurgence of nationalist and ethnic identities, intertwined with religious belief, is the counterpoint to increasing pluralism.

So also is the resistance to the idea that the religious traditions of the world are historically interconnected and mutually transformative. The early transformation of Christianity in its contact with Graeco-Roman thought is hard not to acknowledge, but to suggest that Christian theology might be reconceived through its relationship with other world faiths today is generally and strongly resisted. The theologies of discontinuity of Barth and Kraemer are examples, but so also are theologies of inclusion which portray a one-sided transformation of the other into the Christian sphere. Many pluralist approaches, which isolate faiths from each other even as their legitimacy is acknowledged, similarly resist the possibility of mutual interconnection and transformation. The problem, of course, as Native people identify readily, is one of authority and power.

Syncretism, we have already noted, is contested religious interpenetration. It is the term that is applied to control and to limit the existing interconnections between faiths. It is used precisely because the loss of identity is threatening. To offer mutual transformation as one of the goals of Whole World Ecumenism, therefore, raises the question of how one ensures the preservation of identity and therefore the authority of a particular religious tradition. What is the plumb line that can be used to preserve the integrity of the Christian tradition if it is open to change in every encounter? The multiversal mind, we suggest, offers one particular pattern of transformation that might be helpful. It suggests the possibility, through the use of story, of maintaining the integrity of the core stories of each tradition while being open to the meaning of others.

We turn back to Panikkar's understanding of "diatopical hermeneutics" and its identification of levels of discourse. It is the third level of discourse, boundary discourse, that opens up an "horizon of encounter" in which radically

different contexts of meaning meet. It is the discourse of cultures that have not (yet) developed their basic assumptions from common historical traditions or mutual influence. Here, we recall, one is opened to the possibility of being taken up into a new world of meaning through communication that is narrative, repetitive and mythical. This is what opens up, David Kreiger suggested, the space of encounter to be perceived as an “open space” of disclosure. We would suggest it opens as well the possibility of transformation.

It is the language of story, we suggest, that characterises this “open space,” and with it the nature of transformation. What is suggested here is that the transformation that takes place in this open space begins with moving out of logical thought and into narrative. It means to adopt a multiversal mind that is able to understand and therefore accept the stories of the other without attempting to collapse the stories into an integral and logical whole. It begins with an acceptance of reciprocity, that each has the right to offer stories that ground their own religious worldviews, and that the stories of each participant are equally valued and meaningful for the community as a whole. By accepting and being open to discerning meaning in other stories the path towards multiversality is entered. It is inevitable that stories will be interpreted through my own language and culture, but as I grasp their meaning, and I begin to understand them, I also come to adopt them as my own, and therefore to believe them.

“Non-exclusive cumulative adhesion,” I have indicated, is a characteristic of Native Spirituality. But perhaps it is more directly a quality of story telling itself. The nature of story allows us to move away from logical understandings of truth towards, as we have already seen, the language of symbolic meaning. Stories themselves are multiversal, often parts of a larger whole, but sometimes

complete in themselves. Ultimately they provide a means for the incorporation of the other into the community. To respect the story of another is to honour them and bring them into the circle. Stories, therefore, provide both the sources of communal identity and the means by which the community continues to transform itself. Our consideration of stories also provides a place to situate this understanding of “open space” within a larger ethical framework.

We have indicated that the primary direction of the Talking Circle is towards the structuring of a community of respect. The quality of relationships, expressed in the acceptance of diversity and the practice of reciprocity and non-intervention are what sustains community. Relationships of respect, therefore, are not simply a foundation for other more important work, but substantially at the heart of what will bring healing to the world. The wisdom and witness of the Native tradition is that earth healing will not happen until we are able to fully live together with a deep and profound respect for each other.

The movement towards shared analysis and common action was therefore not part of the exploration of the Talking Circle nor indeed the Apology. But the definition of dialogue that we have offered, the movement through one's own logos towards common action, implies that further steps are necessary. Ultimately diverse communities, in spite of their differences, do have to make decisions together. Ways of mutual agreement and understanding must be found. Choices must be made for and against certain paths of action.

Roger Hutchinson has helpfully situated storytelling within a framework of ethical decision making. He points to the importance of levels of clarification corresponding to various types of discourse. The starting point of this model of comparative ethics, Hutchinson suggests, deals with storytelling first as a way of

providing a preliminary look at each position in a respective debate. This “background” information sets the stage for “subjecting particular claims and arguments to closer scrutiny.” Serious debate, however, involves a shift from storytelling to analysis, from “uncritical sharing to disciplined moral discourse.”¹⁹⁴ Subsequent stages in this model therefore involve the movement from factual clarification, involving the resolution of different or conflicting claims about facts, to a consideration of values, or ethical clarification. The final movement, the post-ethical stage involves, in part, a return to storytelling and a deeper exploration of aspects of identity, including an identification of the background or underlying issues at stake.

Central to this approach is the necessity of distinguishing between description, interpretation and evaluation and the different forms of discourse involved in each. The clarification of these different stages, Hutchinson suggests, is critically important in improving communication and co-operation between communities grounded in different cultures and histories. Mutual agreement on when it is necessary to shift attention from the description of facts to “the judgements that are being made about conflicting rights, different ways of life, and competing visions of the future” is necessary for the participants to work towards common agreement on complex public choices.

The contribution of this study suggests that storytelling is more than just a preparatory stage providing background information for the debate over facts. Nor does Hutchinson suggest that this is all that it is. The model that he

¹⁹⁴ Roger Hutchinson, Prophets, Pastors and Public Choices: Canadian Churches and the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Debate, (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1992) pg. 33

presents moves in a circular fashion from storytelling through factual and ethical clarification and back to storytelling again. Panikkar's understanding of diatopical hermeneutics, in a sense, also involves this movement in and out of storytelling. But, as David Kreiger suggests, narrative and mythology is the primary form of boundary discourse. So too I would argue that storytelling is a necessary and a critical stage in preparation for any movement towards common action among communities of faiths. It is the dynamics of "open space" that provides some insight into why this is important.

While Kreiger suggested that open space is characterized by repetition, narrative and mythology, we have further defined it by multiversality, reciprocity and non-intervention. Both include storytelling as the basic form of discourse. We have also suggested that mutual transformation is a quality of open space, characterized by the nature of stories themselves. It is the ability of people to hold different stories together, to adopt another's story as their own, without having to abandon their own core beliefs, that offers the starting point of seeing the other's perspective, as it were, through their own eyes. The movement to factual and ethical clarification, or to common action, begins, in other words, with a shared respect for each other's stories; a respect that ultimately moves towards an acceptance and incorporation of the stories into our own understanding.

The question of authority, then, becomes one not so much of questioning the orthodox beliefs of a tradition, but rather the right of a tradition to insist on the universality of that belief with an individual. The transformation that is pointed to, then, does not of necessity involve redefining one's own beliefs, although that is certainly a possibility, as much as it means being open, as Evelyn Broadfoot

described it, to “two bundles” within, or in other words to a multiversal worldview.

In this understanding of transformation, what is at stake is not the internal and logical consistency of a tradition, but the need for those beliefs to be exclusive of other beliefs within an individual. What is pointed to is the ability of an individual to hold what apparently might seem to be two mutually exclusive traditions together. Ultimately, in other words, the possibility must be considered that the multiversality of stories within “open space” will translate into a multiversality of beliefs within the lives of individual believers. It is this possibility of what has been called “dual participation” that opens Christianity to a far more significant transformation than has previously been experienced in its relationship with other world faiths.

The question that was raised in the early years of this century during the World Mission Conferences was whether the Church would be willing to move away from its Western assumptions to become a truly universal faith. Perhaps today that question might be restated. The concept of “Western assumptions” implies a uniformity of society that no longer exists, if it ever did. Yet there do exist cultural “patterns of meaning, perceptions, values...through which life is interpreted” that characterize our non-Native societies in contrast to Native ones. The question to be asked is whether or not there are still “Western assumptions”

that the Church might address that would allow it to more fully embrace relationships of respect with Native spiritual traditions and with other world faiths.

The "De-Westernization" of the Church

The Apology named the confusion of “Western ways and culture with the depth and breadth and length and height of the gospel.” The Apology itself didn’t define the nature of “Western ways,” but clearly part of the assumption of the phrase was the imposition of European culture expressed in language, dress, community structure and so on. The interviews didn’t deny this interpretation, but pointed further to issues of authority and control. The primary question for many Native people was, “who defines what it means to be Christian?” On what basis are traditional Native beliefs and rituals excluded from the Church? The practice in Native Spirituality of “non-exclusive cumulative adhesion,” we have seen points to one of the pronounced differences between the Church and traditional Native ways.

One of the ways that the Enlightenment worldview impacted on Native Missions, we have noted, was in the desire to categorize and through categorization, to control. Who is a Christian? In the Enlightenment and mission framework the question was answered by reference to an external authority and

code of beliefs. One is either a Christian, according to set criteria and pattern of beliefs, or one is not. In contrast, the Native tradition of the stories of the Elders with their ability, for example, to invite Jesus into the Circle as one of the honoured ones, or to add cumulatively to the stories, points to a different way of thinking. In the “two path” journey, it is possible to be both Christian and Traditionalist. In Evelyn Broadfoot’s understanding it involved both an acceptance of many of the orthodox teachings of Christianity in one “bundle” and the spiritual practice of traditional ways, in the other. It is this practice of dual participation that points now to a significant challenge to the “Western” ways of the Church.

The Commission on World Mission identified the challenge to the Church of moving beyond its traditional Western understandings to those more Eastern in form. Hocking spoke of the de-Westernization of the Church in order that it might become truly universal. The Edinburgh Council compared the encounter of world faiths with that of the early churches’ encounter with Hellenism, by implication pointing to the radical shift from one locus of thought, Hebrew, to another, Greek. Each in their own way suggested that the implications of the encounter of the Church with other world faiths involved approaching the boundaries of the churches’ identity.

Stan McKay, we recall, identified the Talking Circle as a counter-cultural process. It reframes the exercise of power, suggested Myra Laramée, inviting the participants to move beyond the usual forms of conversation. Instead of responding to the comments of another, participants instead must listen for the patterns of conversation and speak out of the wisdom of their own life. Instead of argumentation the Circle invites reciprocity and storytelling.

Of course, not all forms of communication in non-Native communities are based on argumentation and the Talking Circle is not used in every Native community. The point is that it represents a different pattern than what is perceived as the *usual* ways. In particular, in contrast to the patterns of superiority, it represents a model of respectful interaction grounded in the ethic of non-intervention. In other words, the Talking Circle is an example of how the relationship between Native and non-Native communities should have been structured.

But of course the reality was that intervention and control, for much of the history of interaction between the two communities, was the rule. The meaning of the Apology was therefore interpreted through the language of freedom: a door has been opened, a treaty declared, the usual patterns of mission have ended. And the principal outcome of this freedom is the right of self-determination expressed in a rejection of one of the central tenets of Western Christian thought, the exclusiveness of Christian belief *within* an individual.

The two path journey is not solely a phenomenon of the Native Spirituality-Christian interaction. Another significant manifestation of this occurs with the increasing number of people speaking of themselves as Buddhist Christians. Less frequently, and with greater difficulty, some speak of being both Muslim and Christian, and some of being Hindu Christians. The possibility of the relationship between Buddhism, as a non-theistic tradition, and Christianity seems, superficially at least, to be understandable; Buddhism can be approached as a spiritual practice not necessarily in conflict with the theological foundations of Christianity. However, a more than superficial engagement clearly points to

comprehensive worldviews of most Buddhist traditions that differ significantly from Christianity.

Similarly Islam and Christianity have many points of intersection, particularly concerning the history of Abraham and some aspects of the story of Jesus. Some Christians, at least, have little difficulty accepting Muslim veneration of Jesus as a prophet and the rejection of the divinity of Jesus in favour of the unity of God. But there are also irreconcilable differences such as the Quran's interpretation of the crucifixion. Hindu Christians have an even greater task of reconciling the profound differences, for example, between a Hindu understanding of karma and reincarnation and the Christian concept of grace.

It would appear likely that what happens in these and similar examples of dual participation are something similar to the experiences of the two path journey. The emphasis shifts towards the symbolic meaning of stories rather than their historical and objective truth. But the real issue is not so much the way in which people are able to hold two traditions together, but that they do and that it is an increasingly common pattern of religious experience. It is, of course, a not unexpected outcome of pluralistic societies in which people come in close contact with neighbours of different faiths. Interfaith marriages also provide a setting in which many children are raised within two traditions, often without any attempt to reconcile the differences, instead allowing children to experience both traditions in non-exclusive ways. It is also likely part of the phenomenon of the post-Christendom and post-modern era represented by the declining authority of the church and the increasing movement away from materialistic formulations of reality.

The experience of dual participation is, and will be, in other words, inevitably and increasingly part of the experience of individuals in our pluralistic societies. Will it potentially lead to a new “emergency” that can drive the church to discover new insights and dimensions of the gospel, as the language of the Edinburgh World Mission Conference once suggested? In part the answer to that question will depend on the theology that is developed to support it and the extent to which that theology is open to learning from the wisdom of First Nations people. As the church is able to explore more fully the implications of respect it will undoubtedly find itself honouring the contribution that other faiths can make to the Christian tradition itself. It will find that its self identity as well as its theology can no longer be formed in isolation, but rather, to be truly faithful, must be now be done in relationship. This then is perhaps the real implication of speaking of the "de-Westernization" of the church. It is to suggest the possibility that the church will come to know itself, no longer in isolation, but rather in relationship with those we have called “the other.”

What is being suggested, therefore, is that the church needs a theology to address this new reality; a theology based in the inter-connection of world faiths, which affirms the dependence of each faith on the other. What is needed is a theology not so solely about relationship but a theology in relationship.¹⁹⁵ It is this development that will further signal a profound shift from classical Western thought and it will be such a theology that will undergird the churches understanding and commitment to Whole World Ecumenism.

¹⁹⁵ Hindus and Christians, op.cit. pg. 212

“All My Relations”

“All My Relations” is the affirmation that each person offers on leaving the sweatlodge. The lodge itself is a place of prayer offered, usually, through a number of rounds, to the spirits or themes of the four directions. It is dark, moist and hot, a place which becomes a metaphor for rebirth. As one leaves this “womb,” the affirmation becomes a statement that one is reborn to a new awareness of the interconnectedness of all of Creation. “All my relations,” is a declaration that one is related to all of Creation.

It is this theme of relationship that has been carried through this study, underlying the Apology and witnessed to in the Talking Circle and that now brings this study to a close. To speak of a theology in relationship is to point to something more than a theology about relationship. Alan Race’s scheme of exclusive, inclusive and pluralistic approaches for example provide various categories for theologies of relationship. But each, including the pluralist approach, seeks to situate the other into a predetermined understanding, defining the relationship from a Christian perspective.

A theology in relationship would imply however, a willingness to approach the space in-between and to seek to articulate an understanding of its meaning in dialogue and connection. It would affirm with Sallie McFague that “relationship and interdependence, change and transformation, not substance, changelessness and perfection, are the categories within which a theology of our

day must function.”¹⁹⁶ What then might be the components of a theology in relationship?

The starting point of such a theology is the affirmation of diversity as the very structure of creation, and the recognition that the world's faiths are a part of this created diversity. This implies therefore an acknowledgement of the legitimacy of the religious life of humanity as a common household in which faith is given meaning and content, and in which God is creatively and redemptively at work. In a theology based in relationship, therefore, it would be inappropriate to accord to Christianity a status not granted to others. For example to dismiss religious life as human construct, while arguing that Christ stands above all religions, as revelation and judgement, is inappropriate. The concern here is in part the unwillingness to accept others on their own terms. But it is also the willingness to see Christianity as part of the household of faiths, as interconnected and as one among many. The household must therefore be understood to contain many legitimate spaces for living, each with their own integrity and purpose, each with their own distinctive history, and at times, even language and culture. A theology in relationship therefore would affirm the distinctive and separate identities of each of the faith traditions and their right to self-definition. It would acknowledge diversity, not just within creation but also within the religious life of humanity, as a gift from God and part of God's design for the world. But it would also affirm the interconnection of each of the traditions as again part of God's design for the world.

¹⁹⁶ Sallie McFague, Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987) pg. 8

Reciprocity would be seen as a further commitment in this theology. It would mean concern for the structure of conversation, and for the balancing of power within those conversations. The basic commitment of both giving and receiving would apply not just to dialogue but to the fundamental affirmation that religious traditions each have gifts of wisdom to offer to the other. Therefore such a theology would assert that no tradition is complete in itself. Indeed to be faithful and true to its own self, to be aware of the depth of its own tradition, each tradition needs the wisdom of the other.

A theology in relationship therefore would argue that care for the quality of interfaith relationships in themselves is a fundamental part of the “mending” that the world needs to survive. In part this is because respect must be universally applied to all of one’s relationships if it is to be meaningful. Part of the nature of respect will also be the recognition of the appropriate and legitimate place of boundaries between traditions. To acknowledge the legitimacy of boundaries would preclude theologies of incorporation which collapse the other into one worldview. It would mean honouring the right of others to their own self-definition and self-direction.

An acknowledgement of the possibility of multiversality is another aspect of a theology in relationship. To accept the legitimacy of different “spaces of living” and their boundaries implies an understanding of reality, at least as far as it has meaning to us, as multiversal. Theology therefore cannot and should not attempt to speak for the whole, and therefore must exist solely to provide meaning and understanding within one space, or it must be a theology in relationship. Theology, in this understanding therefore, should not seek to be universal, encompassing the other realities, since that is an exercise in imperialism. What is

left is to speak of being in relationship in such a way as to seek to understand the implications of the space in-between.

Finally a theology in relationship would affirm the possibility of mutual transformation. It would affirm that interfaith relationship must involve a re-examination of our own faith that allows us to see dimensions that had not been seen before. But it will mean more than just deeper insights into our own faith. Ultimately, to be open to receiving the wisdom and insight of the other, will mean incorporating that wisdom into our own understanding. To accept and find meaning in the stories of others will mean beginning to see and interpret reality through those stories as well as our own. The openness that is found in the space in-between cannot finally stay there. It must eventually transform us as well.

8. CONCLUSION

The title of this paper, *From Dialogue to Relationship*, refers to both the meaning of the Apology and the practice of the Talking Circle. After the opening affirmation of the Apology itself, the words of confession begin with "We did not hear you..." Whatever else typified the relationship of the mission churches to Native people surely it is the failure to listen that is the most troubling. To ignore the wisdom of the other, or to dismiss it, is to deny the creativity that makes us human. Myra Laramée speaks of the sounding of one's voice as the sign of the Creator within and in doing so suggests that the failure to listen is a denial of the other's connection with the sacred. Both, we have noted, were the results of the failure of the Church to truly listen to Native peoples.

This is why the Talking Circle becomes a metaphor for the intention of the Apology. If we are truly sorry then we will learn what it means to listen as well as speak. We will enter into relationships where reciprocity is sought and mutuality lived. We will learn what it means to honour all voices, to affirm a diversity of wisdom and to see this as the foundation of building community.

The Circle, therefore, is a metaphor of the healing that our world needs to survive. There is nothing profound in what the Elders offer, just the simple truth that we need to learn how to live together with respect. Yet, if we are honest, it is something that we find very difficult to do.

"My truth does not deny your truth," Stan McKay noted in his introduction to the Paths of Respect Consultation. But the Western ways we live by seek

conformity of understanding and resolution of contradiction. The gospel, on the other hand, is first and foremost story. We confuse its depth and diversity with our interpretations and doctrine and thereby lose its fullest meaning. The journey to new ways of relationship will of necessity invite us into new understandings of truth.

At the start it will mean learning what it means to accept complexity and contradiction as mysteries of life. Like the multiversal mind, the church is already discovering what it means to accept different paths within its own house. As the Apology invited Native people to recover their own Spiritual truths and to hold them side by side with Christian truth, so also people within the Church are increasingly exploring other faiths and traditions. The Apology has signalled an openness within the Church to welcome into its midst "the other."

The Apology also confessed the violence that is at the heart of all forms of colonialism. "We imposed our civilization..." are words that refer not only to the compulsion of empire but also of mission. It points most directly to the abuse of power and position. Violence, we know, is not only physical attack. Silencing the voice of the other is violence. Coercion is violence. Abuse of power is violence. It is with the recognition of violence at the heart of many aspects of our behaviour that the Talking Circle seeks to balance power and voice. It is a counter-cultural movement that becomes a metaphor for the non-violent search for truth. Like Ghandi's *ahisma* what is important is that truth is only known in the complete rejection of violence in all its forms. Both the Apology and the Talking Circle challenge the Church to discover its mission in building a society of non-violence.

From Dialogue to Relationship not only affirms the casual connection between dialogue and relationship but also signals a transition in emphasis. If

dialogue once meant only shared understanding, then the movement offered here is towards a new stage, a new paradigm that holds out the expectation of mutual transformation. Whole World Ecumenism offers the understanding of a common household in which respect for relationships is the essence of life. We need each other in order to be fully who we are meant to be. We need each other to grow, for without growth and transformation we die.

Prophecies, we have seen, play an important role in Native spirituality, as indeed they do within most faiths, as a means of sustaining hope and courage in the face of adversity. Our rational minds however have worked to deconstruct and dis-empower prophetic visions. Yet today, we need courage and hope to continue to dream of a world that will not simply slip away into a new Dark Age. Hans Kung's words strike us directly with the central challenge of our time; "There will be no peace among the nations until there is peace among the religions."

In this historical moment, the vision of First Nations peoples that they have a special role to play in healing the earth and its peoples should not be dismissed. There are many prophecies within Native traditions that point to the recovery of traditional ways as part of the journey of healing for the whole earth. However, one doesn't have to believe in prophecy to understand that healing of necessity involves restoring right relationships. The journey of healing for the Church, and for its understanding of mission, therefore, must involve renewing a relationship of respect with Native peoples, with peoples of other faith, and ultimately with the earth. And this, of necessity, must transform us in all parts of our life.

APPENDIX A

Doctor of Ministry Thesis Proposal Addendum

The Thesis Proposal has been modified as follows in consultation with my thesis advisor, Dr. Roger Hutchinson. The original Action in Ministry contained several steps involving a review of archival materials and in-depth interviews on the Native Apology of 1986. The final phase in the project was a Delphi study to validate the analysis of the interviews. The original proposal also included an examination of the Oka Crisis as part of the exploration of The United Church of Canada's experience in living out the meaning of the Native Apology.

A first round of the Delphi study was conducted with questionable results. A critical problem related to the focus, of this stage of the project, on the identity of The United Church of Canada. The relationship between the nature of dialogue and the identity of the Church proved not to be the primary outcome of the interviews. Exploration of the nature of dialogue did however lead directly to consideration of the nature and understanding of mission within The United Church of Canada.

The interviews also led directly, within the larger context of my work as Interfaith Secretary of the Church, to planning for the "Paths of Respect" Consultation. My experience in the consultation and in continued work with First Nations colleagues, suggested that it provided a window into both the meaning of the Apology and the nature of dialogue. The question of theological, structural and process issues in the identity of the United Church gave way to consideration of an understanding of mission as a critical factor in our identity. The inclusion of the "Paths of Respect" Consultation within "Mending the World" provided a further link between the consultation and an understanding of mission as a key factor in exploration of the identity of The United Church of Canada.

The difficulties during the first round of the Delphi study led therefore to a request to Dr. Hutchinson to redirect the study to replace that phase of the project with an analysis of the "Paths of Respect" Consultation and exploration of the Talking Circle as a model of dialogue.

Consideration of the Oka crisis added a further and unnecessary complexity to the thesis. The individuals chosen for interviews had limited direct experience with the event and did not make reference to it in the interviews. The decision was made therefore not to make reference to it in the final document.

APPENDIX A

AN EXPLORATION OF THE NATURE OF DIALOGUE
AS A FACTOR IN THE IDENTITY
OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA

A Doctor of Ministry Thesis Proposal
Submitted to the
D.Min. Programme Committee
Toronto School of Theology

April 1993

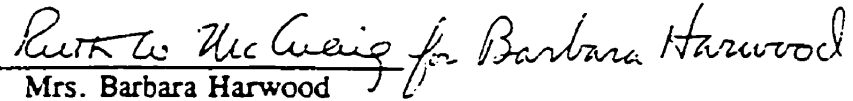
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Thesis Proposal

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Introduction

In 1988 the General Council¹ of the United Church of Canada formally adopted a controversial statement declaring that sexual orientation should not be a factor in determining eligibility to be considered for Ordination or Commissioning. The previous General Council had dealt with similarly contentious issues including among others the offering of an apology to Native People for the role of the Church in denying the validity of Native spirituality and culture. These and other General Council meetings have spotlighted a decade or more of intense disagreement in the life of Canada's largest Protestant denomination.

Many interpretations of the nature of the United Church have been offered to explain the disagreements that have surrounded these actions including the customary polarity of liberal and conservative, or the more disparaging "culture affirming" and "culture denying." What is evident is that many have felt a need to give explanation for the Church's recent actions. Underlying this concern however is an even more pressing issue of identity. What is it, many have asked, in the theological or structural make up of the Church that leads it into such controversy? What can be said about the identity of the Church that would help its members and others understand the underlying reasons for its decisions?

It is not simply through the current moment that the United Church of Canada has faced controversy. From its very beginning the Church has adopted a pattern of engagement with the issues of society that have given it a distinctive place in the world community. Its foundations in "Serving the Present Age"² have continued to transform the life of the Church in response to the issues of the day. But the controversies of the present moment have raised in many people's minds fundamental questions about the identity of the Church. It is my conviction that what is vitally necessary for the well-being of the United Church at this time is a process of reflection and interpretation on its recent actions. While acknowledging that many diverse viewpoints exist in such a large and non-confessional³ body as the United Church of Canada, it is my belief that there are underlying factors at work which can be discerned in its present decision making processes. It is my hope to contribute to an understanding of one of these factors and to examine its contribution to the larger task of articulating the identity of the United Church of Canada.

I have had the opportunity through this last decade in the life of the Church to serve in a variety of leadership positions both regionally and nationally. Although I no longer serve directly in an official

¹ The General Council of the United Church of Canada refers to both the Council of elected members (approximately 400 elected by regional Conferences) held every two year and to the Administrative and Programming structures of the national level of the Church.

² Phyllis D. Airhart, Serving the Present Age, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992)

³ While possessing a "Statement of Faith" the United Church of Canada has historically remained a Non-Confessional Church requiring only "essential" agreement of its Ministers to the Basis of Union on which the Statement is based. Similarly no Order of Worship or Creedal Statement is directed for use within the Church.

capacity I have chosen, for the purposes of this project, to define my ministry base in the context of the national decision making structure of the Church. My research interest is based in a concern for interpreting why the United Church deals with controversial issues as it does. It rests also in my perception that the United Church is different from many other denominations but that this difference is not clearly articulated nor understood. Both grow out of my conviction that the United Church is acting faithfully and in continuity with its own tradition and in the process is also giving redefinition to that identity.

Research Problem

This Project will seek to generate data out of which grounded theory might develop on a particular aspect of the theological and structural identity of the United Church of Canada. It will involve a process of systematic exploration of a series of decisions which I believe are representative of the distinctive character and theology of the Church. Specifically, the area of exploration will relate to the processes and decisions leading to the Native Apology⁴ the formation of the All Native Circle Conference⁵ and the actions of the General Council in respect to the OKA crisis⁶.

The particular focus of this research will be on understanding the nature of dialogue at work in the decision making of the United Church of Canada. For the purposes of this Action in Ministry Project, dialogue is understood as conversation in which meaning and truth may be experienced; in which different levels of discourse are acknowledged; and through which undistorted communication takes place.

I will seek to give further clarification to dialogue as a factor at work in the specific actions chosen for examination and the ways that this understanding might be extended to other aspects of the life and identity of the Church.

The Problem Statement is:

Through this Action in Ministry Project focusing on a significant series of actions of the United Church of Canada, (specifically the Native Apology, the formation of the All Native Circle Conference, and the response to the OKA crisis) I will seek to give definition to the nature of dialogue as it relates to theological, structural and process issues in the identity of the United Church of Canada.

A proposal to enter into this process of understanding-as-interpretation requires a careful selection of the best test case for the issue being examined. The Native Apology and the formation of the All Native Circle Conference have been chosen as pivotal occurrences in the life of the United Church in which internal and external dialogue played significant roles. The Native Apology was preceded by a Church-wide "Dialogue with Native Peoples." The Apology itself led to a revitalization of native spirituality and a movement towards recognition of native spiritual traditions within the wider life of the Church. The

** See Appendix A

⁵ See Appendix B.

⁶ This refers to the confrontation in August of 1990 between the native community of OKA and the non-native town Council over the construction of a Golf Course on native lands known as "The Pines."

creation of the All Native Circle Conference represented a formalization of the process of dialogue into structure and resulted in a transformation of the existing organization of the Church. The recognition of native spiritual traditions and their incorporation into practice in the non-native life of the Church offers significant parallels with inter-faith dialogue and questions relating to crossing over into other cultural/linguistic traditions. The actions the General Council in support of the native peoples during the OKA crisis provides an additional window on the results of the dialogue.

Theoretical Framework and Assumptions

Dialogue as it is used in this proposal is understood to be much more than simply conversation. It has its basis in a conversation between two or more persons but with an added crucial dimension of a willingness to learn from the other so that change and growth can take place in both. Its genesis is found in the writings of Plato where dialogue is presented as an art in which the Socratic method of asking questions enables truth to emerge. The progress of inter-faith relationships and the acceptance of pluralism have led to a renewed understanding of dialogue as not only the means by which differing faith perspectives might relate, but also as a means by which the mission of the Church might be redefined in the pluralistic context of today. In its broadest sense, the mission of the church might be seen to be dialogue with the world. It is an understanding of dialogue as it has developed through the processes of inter-faith relationships that provides the first critical comparative definition for the purposes of this study.⁷

An equally important component of this Project is the recognition of different levels of discourse requiring varying types of clarification. A further comparative basis for interpreting the nature of dialogue operative within the Church is found in an approach to the clarification of ethical issues developed by Roger Hutchinson. The process includes four levels of clarification: story-telling, factual, ethical and post-ethical.⁸ In the first level participants report their feelings and experiences about the issue under consideration. The second level explores the factual claims of the differing sides and, while acknowledging and dealing with empirical evidence, also recognizes that behind the factual claims lie interpretive frameworks. The third and fourth levels move from value judgements and the ways in which the issues are characterized to "confessing one's faith" or the clarification of identities. It is assumed that open and undistorted communication, by my definition a prerequisite for dialogue, will incorporate something of these different levels of discourse. This model also holds out a goal in dialogue of seeking consensus and possibly closure on some foundational issues. It allows a recognition of commitment to deeply held beliefs while enabling an openness to engagement with persons of differing assumptions. This provides the second comparative definition for dialogue in this study.

The first approach to dialogue has its major focus "outside" and might best be termed "inter-faith." The second approach, while relevant to inter-faith discourse, has its major focus "inside" and could be termed "intra-faith." These two basic assumptions will provide a basis for comparative analysis and the development of grounded theory on the nature of dialogue within the United Church of Canada. In giving

⁷ See APPENDIX C

⁸ Roger Hutchinson, "Towards A Pedagogy for Allies of the Oppressed" in *Studies In Religion*, 13/2, 1984 pgs. 145-50. See also Roger Hutchinson, *Prophets, Pastors and Public Choices*, (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1992)

definition to dialogue in this context this Project will therefore also explore the relationship between inter-faith and intra-faith dialogue.

An interesting facet of this research project is that two critical but somewhat contradictory assumptions create a dialectic which informs the project.

The first is a rejection of an absolutist view of truth in favour of a relational, interpretive understanding. Truth, it is assumed, exists in the interaction between persons and is discovered in dialogue. An "ecological"⁹ understanding of reality conceives of relationship and interdependence, change and transformation as the categories within which our theology must function in contrast to theologies based on essence, changelessness and perfection. In this context, dialogue becomes a vital and needed theological endeavour and the means by which relationship is sustained and relativism avoided.

A second assumption is the recognition of a cultural/linguistic understanding of belief in which doctrines function "not as expressive symbols or truth claims but as communally authoritative rules of discourse, attitude and action."¹⁰ Religions from this perspective are seen as cultural or linguistic frameworks which shape life and thought and one's perception of reality. The external features of a religion are derived from a symbolic framework, the external word, that gives life to the experiential aspects of faith. In this understanding, the critical movement of doctrine and belief is in giving identity to a particular people formed and nurtured by the classics of their tradition.¹¹

The dialectic is established in the tension between the formation of a distinctive people of faith who nevertheless must be in relationship to others to find truth. It is an assumption of this project that dialogue is the means by which the dialectic is sustained.

In my *Theology of Ministry*, I would define the church as a constitutive community of practical wisdom. Constitutive communities are formed because their members conceive that their identity is given definition in community. Practical wisdom is the goal that is sought in relationship with the other; practical in the sense that it seeks to determine "What is going on?", and oriented to wisdom because it is in wisdom that God has become incarnate in the world.

Following the work of John Cobb Jr. I name for myself a Wisdom Christology which allows for the wisdom incarnate in Christ to be present also throughout the world. The formation of constitutive communities of practical wisdom is then through dialogue which both requires the constitutive formation of ones own identity and seeks a larger wisdom for the sake of the world. It is in this manner that I believe that it is possible to maintain a Christocentric theology and still engage faithfully in dialogue.

⁹ John Cobb Jr., *Can Christ Become Good News Again?*, (St. Louis:Chalice Press, 1991)pg.42f.

¹⁰ George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984) pg. 18.

¹¹ From this perspective dialogue also becomes a critical movement of opening oneself to another not just to know the other but also to know oneself. Quoting Raimundo Pannikar in David J. Kreiger, *The New Universalism, Foundations for a Global Theology*, (New York: Orbis, 1991) pg 69.

"Dialogue is a way of knowing myself and of disentangling my own point of view from other viewpoints and from me, because it is grounded so deeply in my own roots as to be utterly hidden from me. It is the other who through our encounter awakens this human depth latent in me in an endeavour that surpasses both of us."

The Action in Ministry

This research project will take the form of a systematic exploration of the decision-making processes and experiences that led to the Native Apology, the formation of the All Native Circle Conference and the 1990 General Council's response to the OKA crisis. In this exploration, correlations will be made between dialogue as understood from an inter-faith context and the experiences of participants in the decision-making processes under consideration. Levels of discourse will also be analyzed as a means of reflecting on the process. From these comparative bases it is hoped that data might emerge from which grounded theory on the nature of dialogue operative in the United Church of Canada might be developed.

Three phases will be involved.

The first will consist of a preparatory review of records of proceeding and archival materials related to the identified actions. This will be undertaken in the early fall to inform the development of the second and third phases.

The Second phase will begin in November and involve in-depth interviews of eight people chosen to represent different perspectives on the topic. The purpose of the interviews is to give a living definition to the nature of dialogue in a United Church context and discern what similarities might be extrapolated to other actions of the Church. With a proposed interview schedule of one per week the planned completion date of the interviews is mid-January. Phase two would be completed with the analysis of data by mid-March.

The final phase will involve the conduct of a Delphi study to authenticate the data developed from Two. It will be conducted with a different group of participants but utilize questions arising from the data of Phase Two. It will begin in late March and be conducted over the period of two months to conclude in May.

Research Methodology

Phase One will focus on a preparatory review of available resources on the events under consideration. Records of Proceedings related to the key decisions, minutes of meetings (The General Council Transition Team) as well as documentary reports will be reviewed. From the review, questions will be formulated for use in Phase Two.

Phase Two of the Action in Ministry will involve the implementation of eight semistandardized, in-depth interviews. A semistandardized approach allows for the use of a series of predetermined questions to ensure that some consistency is achieved in examining a variety of topic areas. Sufficient leeway will be assumed to be available for unscheduled probing of issues and insights arising in the interview process itself. The series of standardized questions will also allow for pretesting of the interview schedule in order to identify problems in question sequencing, style, content and conduct of the interview itself.

Participants will be selected to provide a balance of male, female, lay, ordained, native and non-native persons and will be drawn from those whose experience in either the General Council or its Executive cover the three areas under consideration.

Specific attention will be paid to the following criteria, adapted from Kirby & McKenna, in the

preparation for and conduct of the interviews:¹²

Concern will be paid to the formation and clarity of the questions. Underlying values inherent in the phrasing of a particular question will be identified.

A relationship of equality will be sought between myself as interviewer and person being interviewed.

There will be a full disclosure of the research focus and my own bias in that research.

An understanding of the interview process as more than simply a collection of data but as a sharing of ideas, philosophy and experience will be established with the participants.

There will be an acknowledgement of the contribution made by participants through a commitment to provide information on the results of the study.

The interview process will be seen as dynamic and will change in response to new information.

Further collaboration with any of the participants will be invited and welcome.

Phase Two will conclude with the analysis of data.

In the analysis of data I will use ~~the principles of grounded theory~~. As such I will seek to maintain an essential openness to new insights and theory that might emerge out of the data. The comparative base of dialogue established in the previous sections will focus the gathering of data and the research field. Since it is assumed that some form of discourse is operative, the principles of grounded theory will apply to the nature of dialogue revealed within the processes under consideration. I will also seek to be aware of the ways in which assumptions of theory can affect the interpretation of data and lead to questionable practices of validation. Interpretation however remains dependent upon theoretical assumptions and for the purposes of this study it is assumed therefore that there is a continuous interaction between theory and data.

The comparative basis for analysis will be established with the theories of dialogue and levels of discourse as assumed in previous sections. This understanding will be used to compare and reflect on the data gathered from both the literature review and the interview process. Common themes, interpretations, word usage and definition, and insights will be codified. The objective will be to achieve as much diversity as possible in generating categories. An analysis of the relationships between categories will then lead to the formation of hypotheses and will provide the core of the emerging theory.

Phase Three will contain the implementation of a ^{quasi} Delphi Study to authenticate the data generated in Phase Two.

A delphi study is a form of structured communication in which a series of written questionnaires are given to participants. At each part of the process there is an opportunity for written feedback from the

¹² Adapted from Sandra L. Kirby and Kate McKenna, Methods From the Margins, (Toronto: Garamond Press,)

participants, an assessment of group judgement, and a further opportunity to review individual responses. Some degree of anonymity in the individual responses is a key characteristic of the Delphi process.

A Delphi study may include:¹³

- * *an initial invitation to explore the subject, in this case the theory developed during the previous phases of the study and how it might be used to reframe the Church's identity.*
- * *an invitation to contribute any additional information participants feel is relevant.*
- * *an examination of areas where disagreement or agreement occur.*
- * *an understanding on the meaning and use of relative terms (desirable, preferable etc.).*
- * *an examination of disagreements to identify and evaluate underlying reasons for the differences.*
- * *an application of further iterations of the questionnaire to determine if consensus is possible or to ensure that other alternatives are identified.*
- * *a final evaluation of the process.*

For the purposes of Phase III of this research project the conduct of the Delphi study will proceed as follows:¹⁴

- 1 The Delphi questionnaire will be developed. This will arise from the previous research data and analysis but will be more generally focused on the identity of the United Church.
- 2 A group of ten new participants will be invited to participate in the study. (This is recognized as a small but acceptable number for a Delphi study.¹⁵) The criteria for selecting participants will be the same as in Phase Two.
- 3 The first questionnaire will be developed. Questions at this point will be open-ended to invite as broad a range of responses as possible.
- 4 The responses from the first questionnaire will be analyzed. Specifically categories of responses are developed.
- 5 The second questionnaire will be developed and applied. One possible process to be used at this stage is to invite a ranking of responses from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. Other options for formulation of the Second questionnaire will be considered.
- 6 A third and final questionnaire is developed and applied presenting a summary of arguments and inviting people to explain differences.
- 7 A final analysis of results is undertaken and a final report prepared and sent out to

¹³ Harold A. Linstone and Murray Turoff (Eds.), The Delphi Method, (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1975) pg. 3f

¹⁴ Adapted from, T. Harrel Allen, New Methods in Social Science Research, (New York: Praeger Special Studies, 1978) pg. 123f.

¹⁵ Ibid.

participants. At this stage an evaluation of the process is also undertaken.

The development of the process will be dependent on the data arising from Phase II of the study. However while many Delphi studies place a strong emphasis on the development of consensus through the stages of the process, this study will seek instead to elicit alternatives to ensure a comprehensive overview of the issue.

Risks and Limitations of the Study

A critical limitation of this study relates to the difficulty of seeking essentialist understandings of the identity of an organization as complex and diverse as the United Church of Canada. Clearly any theological interpretations of the identity of the Church would be highly specific to this study and not easily generalized to the whole Church. Identity itself is understood to be a function of common history, shared stories and goals. It is an expectation of this study that identity might also be spoken of in terms of underlying principles of dialogue. The risk is that this might not be so. A related issue is the possibility of divergent data between Phase Two and Three. Such a possibility would likely result in a negative report. Both outcomes would, however, lead to their own interpretations and conclusions about the life and identity of the United Church of Canada.

The Contributions of the Study

A significant possible contribution might be a means of reframing the identity of the United Church of Canada. Much of the old terminology no longer seems to work. Liberal and conservative divisions fail to provide adequate rationale for complex directions and decisions yet many continue to define the Church in these terms. Niebuhr's Christ and Culture distinctions provide greater insight into the life of the United Church but fail to give adequate explanation to its distinctive nature and are often misused. This study could provide significant content to the use of the term "dialogical" in defining the United Church of Canada.

A additional hoped for benefit of the study is to deepen the Church's understanding of the significance of both the Native Apology and the formation of the All Native Circle Conference. It will also contribute to the recording of the story of these events. To the best of my knowledge there is at present no narrative record of either event.

There is also an underlying objective and a further contribution found in my hope to examine the ways that the United Church might remain faithful to its identity in a post-liberal, post-modern age. In order to do so my ~~assumption is that~~ the United Church must find a way of navigating two powerful currents found in the neo-conservatism of a cultural/linguistic understanding of doctrine and the historic movement of the church ~~outward in~~ articulating common sources of practical wisdom for living faithfully in a troubled world.

The United Church has always identified itself as a United and a Uniting Church. But reduced optimism over the possibilities of church union has led us to see the possibility of Whole World Ecumenism as the "fire in the belly" for renewed identity. I share that optimism but recognize the tension it creates with

the desire to recover a strong constitutive identity. It is my hope that this study will offer some insight into the nature of dialogue as a means by which the United Church of Canada can faithfully balance these two streams; in other words to examine dialogue as a bridge between constitutive identity and practical wisdom.

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APPENDIX B

The Paths of Respect Consultation

The following text is a report summarizing the initial experiences of the consultation. Following is the invitation sent to invited participants.

"The Circle of Respect"

In traditional Aboriginal spirituality, like many faith traditions, the circle takes on symbolic meaning representing completeness, unity and the sacred. Teachings of respect for the earth and for its people are also at the heart of many Aboriginal traditions. Both come together in the form of dialogue in aboriginal communities known as the Sacred Circle. It is a process grounded in respect for the place and contribution of all participants. At the Dr. Jessie Saulteaux Centre, the Learning Circle is an expression of the Sacred Circle and is the basic form of gathering around which all educational programs are focused. The intention of the Paths of Respect Consultation was to explore the Learning Circle as a model of interfaith dialogue and to listen to Aboriginal teachings of respect. Our hope was to begin a process of exploring the contribution that Aboriginal spiritual traditions, as the indigenous faith of the land, have to make to interfaith relationships in Canada.

Representatives of seven faith traditions met at the Dr. Jessie Saulteaux Centre from Thursday evening to Sunday afternoon in November. We formed a circle of 21 people of Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Sikh, Hindu and Buddhist and Aboriginal faiths. Stan McKay as the leading Elder invited us into the circle with a traditional smudging ceremony and a sharing of the teachings of the Sacred Circle.

As is the tradition at the Centre and in many expressions of the Sacred Circle, a talking symbol was used, in this case either a feather or a "grandmother," a small rock. There are teachings concerning the feather and the "grandmother" that are part of the meaning of the circle that hopefully can be shared. The symbol of the 'grandmother' carrying the wisdom of the earth, for example, is a powerful invitation to move deeply within oneself and to speak from the heart. As the symbol is passed (in the direction of the sun) around the circle each person in turn is invited to speak as all others listen. It is a simple process but profoundly different from our usual forms of communication. Each round we found would take as long as three or four hours. As we moved through successive rounds we found our conversations deepening. Individuals who were used to saying very little in other situations spoke at length. Often the topics seemed to vary with what appeared to be only tenuous connections to the "point at hand." Yet we found a deeper wisdom began to form in the midst of our conversations.

Some spoke of how difficult it was to adapt to what appeared to be an agenda-less meeting. Some felt frustration when others spoke for as long as thirty minutes and when

they could not respond immediately but had to wait their turn in the circle. By the conclusion of our three days we found that the discipline of listening was a part of our community. One participant who had been part of interfaith activities for many years spoke of how this was the first time he had truly felt that he was listened to. Others expressed appreciation for the underlying values that were discovered in the process. In a concluding session when everyone was invited to speak as they wished, we found ourselves moving naturally once again into the practice of the circle sharing.

It was clear at that point that what is important for our understanding of interfaith dialogue are the values represented by the circle. Time and circumstances might not permit the use of the Sacred Circle in all experiences of dialogue, but the values expressed in the Circle offer a benchmark for what dialogue is about. The Circle offers a metaphor for a community of respect and understanding.

The following are some preliminary reflections on the Sacred Circle and dialogue:

The Circle commits us to

The valuing of the contribution of all. Wisdom is not an individual possession, it is found in the midst of the Circle, in the encounter, with the other. All voices therefore are to be valued and all participants are equal.

Respect for differences. The Circle is made richer by differences. The practice of the circle invites us into respect by giving the time and place that is needed for someone to express from the heart who they are. To say that we respect differences without truly listening to the other is false. The Circle invites us to discover the importance of patience.

The proper balance of the individual with the community. We enter into the circle out of a desire that 'the people might live.' Dialogue is not about individual spiritual growth or experience (as much of our Western orientation would lead us to believe) but about rediscovering our place in community.

Acceptance of each other as people with human needs. The circle invites us to speak from the heart, yet each of us comes from many different paths. The Circle accepts what is brought to it and everything that is brought belongs. We do not enter dialogue by denying our humanity. We seek community in dialogue and therefore desire to meet the needs of all who come into the Circle.

Speaking from the heart. The Circle invites us into the integration of knowledge and wisdom. In dialogue we speak from the heart what we have discovered to be true in our own lives.

Communication with more than words. Silence must also be valued. The holding of the talking symbol in silence powerfully invites the community to be with the person without words and without the need to break the silence.

Acknowledging the importance of symbols. The use of a talking symbol is vital to the functioning of the Circle in conveying an authority to speak. The talking symbol reminds us the interruptions that are so much part of our western styles of communication do not respect the speaker. The symbol allows the speaker to ponder and pause in the midst of dialogue without losing the right to speak. The symbol also relates us to the mother earth. It reminds us that our dialogue is not in isolation but part of a larger search for the healing of the world.

The need for healing. The Circle does not exist only for itself. Dialogue also has a goal. We enter the Circle for healing. We enter dialogue so that the world might be healed.

The encompassing need to respect others. The Circle witnesses to respectful relationships. We commit time to each other. We listen deeply. We seek to understand. Respect means "to look again." In interfaith relationships it means to get beyond misconceptions to understand in deeper ways the meaning of the other. Our interfaith work is grounded in respect.

"Paths of Respect."

An interfaith consultation to be held at the Dr. Jessie Saulteaux Centre (near Winnipeg) November 2-5, 1995.

Representatives of different faiths will be invited to gather with native Elders to share teachings and stories from their traditions relating to the healings of peoples and respect for the other. An assumption of the consultation is that finding resources to help our faith communities reflect on the importance of relationships built on respect for the other is a critical part of the interfaith journey today. A second key assumption is that the interfaith journey can be informed by the wisdom and teachings of Aboriginal Spirituality. As representatives of non-Native spiritual traditions, we recognize that our faiths are not indigenous to Canada. Aboriginal spiritual traditions are native to this land and also contain many teachings about the nature of respect and the healing of peoples. It is our hope that these stories as well as the sharing of insights from our different traditions can help us to reflect in new ways on the Canadian interfaith journey. The process will be in "the learning circle" reflecting the goal of the consultation and recognizing that finding new directions in interfaith dialogue relates as much to the means and process of dialogue as the content.

Interfaith dialogue, it is assumed, consists in the search for mutual understanding and the progression towards partnership and collaboration. We are reminded, however, that dialogue is always about relationship and the purpose of dialogue is the fostering of an attitude towards life which creates and sustains healthy and life-giving relationships. The assumption of this consultation is that this attitude can best be expressed in the word respect.

We recognize that we have much to learn about the nature of respect. As the pluralistic nature of our society increases we find ourselves drawn to the importance of affirming our own traditions as expressions of identity and meaning. Yet we question how it is possible to live with strong convictions about our own traditions while respecting those which differ from our own. We are concerned that attitudes of superiority, which find expression in many subtle and not so subtle ways, seem to be a natural outcome of passionate commitment and belief. Understanding the nature of respect and finding ways of speaking about its meaning in terms common to all faith traditions is critical for the building of interfaith relationships today.

With this challenge before us we remember that Aboriginal Spiritual traditions are the indigenous faith of this land and that respect for all things, for all people, for the Creator and for oneself is the foundation of what might be called the common law of Aboriginal societies. Participants in this "Paths of Respect" Consultation will be invited to explore the connections that can be made between Aboriginal teachings about respect, their own faith traditions and the Canadian interfaith experience.

Aboriginal leadership will come from Stan McKay, past-Moderator of the United Church of Canada, Janet Silman a Professor at the Dr. Jessie Saulteaux Centre, and traditional elders Gladys Cook and Myra Laramée. Participation will take place in a learning circle with its commitment to full participation and the honouring of all voices. The exploration of the nature of respect will therefore be expressed in practice as in content.

Participants are asked to come prepared to share teachings/stories/expressions on the nature of respect from their own traditions. How does your tradition include the other? How is the nature of respect understood and expressed? What sacred stories help in understanding respect? How are differences accepted? affirmed? While there will not be a formal time for presentation, the teaching circle will allow opportunity for sharing these insights.

Since the consultation will provide material for an interfaith resource by the same title, the circle will be asked for permission to audio-tape the sessions. The expectation would be the production of a resource booklet that would provide a process of dialogue based on a learning circle model and reflection on the stories of the various traditions relating to respect.

The consultation will also be a pilot project for a possible national consultation in 1996/7 on the general theme of Directions for Interfaith work in the Canadian Context. This much larger gathering would be sponsored by the Canadian chapter of the World Conference on Religion for Peace with co-sponsorships sought from other interfaith bodies in Canada. The general approach will be similar to the Jessie Saulteaux gathering and will be informed from its experience.

Participation is by invitation and is limited to a number suitable to the teaching circle.

Resources which might be read by participants in preparation include:

"Songs For the People" Art Solomon

"Dancing with a Ghost" Rupert Ross

Contact: Bruce Gregersen
 Secretary
 Interfaith Dialogue
 United Church of Canada
 Phone 416-231-7680 Ext. 5171
 FAX 416-232-6005

APPENDIX C

The New Creed

**We are not alone,
We live in God's world.**

**We believe in God;
who has created and is creating,
who has come in Jesus,
the word made flesh,
to reconcile and make new,
who works in us and others
by the Spirit.**

We trust in God.

**We are called to be the Church:
to celebrate God's presence,
to live with respect in Creation,
to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil,
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
our judge and our hope.**

**In life, in death, in life beyond death,
God is with us.**

We are not alone.

APPENIDX D

The El Escorial Agreement



Guidelines for Sharing

I.

Out of abundant and outgoing love, God has created the world, and has given it to all humanity for faithful use and sharing. As recipients of God's gift of life, we are called to see the world through God's eyes, offering it in blessing through our own acts of love, sharing and appropriate use.

But, because of our sin and selfishness, we have misused God's gift. We have allowed the interests of a few to diminish the life of many. It has led to the rise of unjust structures which perpetuate dependence and poverty for the majority of the world's people. This surely is contrary to the purpose of God.

It is in the midst of this sinful reality that in Jesus Christ God offered God's very self for the life of the world. Jesus' self-emptying love on the cross leads us to repentance. It becomes the power and pattern of our sharing.

The presence of the Risen Lord in the power of the Holy Spirit enables us to break down barriers and renew structures, preparing for the coming of God's Kingdom of justice and peace.

The new life given by the Holy Spirit in Christ creates us as a new people - members of one body, bearing one another's burdens and sharing together in God's gift of life for all.

In the Eucharist, we offer to God ourselves and the whole of creation in its brokenness, and receive all things back anew. The Eucharist sends us back into the world to be Christ's body, broken and shared for the life of the world.

As the first-fruits of the new humanity, the Church is called to stand in solidarity with all people, particularly with the poor and the oppressed, and to challenge the value systems of this world.

Having confidence in the grace of God in Jesus Christ, who alone through the Holy Spirit enables us to live in obedience to the Divine will, we, the participants in the World Consultation on Resource Sharing, coming from different regions, commit ourselves to a common discipline of sharing among all God's people.

II.

In all such sharing we commit ourselves:

1. To a fundamentally new value system based on justice, peace and the integrity of creation. It will be a system that recognizes the rich resources of human communities, their cultural and spiritual contributions and the wealth of nature. It will be radically different from the value system on which the present economic and political orders are based and which lies behind the current crises like those of nuclear threat and industrial pollution.

2. To a new understanding of sharing in which those who have been marginalized by reason of sex, age, economic and political conditions, ethnic origin and disability, and those who are homeless, refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants take their place at the centre of all decisions and actions as equal partners.

This means, for example, that

- churches, councils and networks will establish for this purpose ecumenical mechanisms both nationally and regionally.
 - equitable representation will be provided for women and youth in decision making structures.
3. To identify with the poor and oppressed and their organized movements in the struggle for justice and human dignity in church and society. This in turn will imply the refusal to participate, either as giver or receiver, in ways of sharing that undermine this struggle.
 4. To bear witness to the mission of God by identifying, exposing and confronting at all levels the root causes, and the structures of injustice which lead to the exploitation of the wealth and people of the third world and result in poverty and the destruction of creation. This entails working for a new economic and political order.

This would mean, for example, that the churches of the North and the South commit themselves to strengthen and participate in the various anti-nuclear movements and to bring pressure upon their governments to stop nuclear testing and the dumping of nuclear waste. It will also mean joining with the people in their struggle against transnational corporations, militarism and foreign intervention and occupation.

5. To enable people to organize themselves and realize their potential and power as individuals and communities, working towards the kind of self-reliance and self-determination which are an essential condition of interdependence.
6. To be open to one another as friends on the basis of common commitment, mutual trust, confession and forgiveness, keeping one another informed of all plans and programmes and submitting ourselves to mutual accountability and correction.

This implies, for example, the implementation of mutual accountability and participation in decision making between the South and the North.

7. To represent to one another our needs and problems in relationships where there are no absolute donors, or absolute recipients, but all have needs to be met and gifts to give, and to work for the structural changes in the institutions of the North and the South which this calls for.
8. To promote through words and deeds the holistic mission of the church in obedience to God's liberating will. We are convinced that in responding only to certain parts of the mission we distort and disrupt mission as a whole.

9. To participate in the struggles of people for justice, and thereby overcome all barriers between different faiths and ideologies which today divide the human family.

This means, for example, churches in East and West making use of all opportunities to strengthen the process of detente and integrating the resources freed by this process for ecumenical sharing.

10. To resist international mechanisms (such as the International Monetary Fund/World Bank) which deprive the people of the South of their resources, transferring for example their hard-earned capital, which is more than the aid they receive, in payment of foreign debt thereby putting them in a state of perpetual dependence - contributing instead to a fundamental and just redistribution of the wealth and resources of a country including the wealth of its churches.

11. To devise ways of shifting the power to set priorities and terms for the use of resources to those who are wrongfully denied both the resources and the power, such as movements for social justice.

This would imply that participation of the South in the decision making must not only be on a consultative basis as it is practised today.

12. To facilitate and encourage mutual involvement among the churches and people in the South who have common concerns, for example through the sharing of human resources.

13. To promote and strengthen ecumenical sharing at all levels, national, regional and international.

III.

Ecumenical sharing of resources will take place at all these three levels:

- local
- national/regional
- international/inter-regional

Relations between bodies at the three levels of sharing should be characterized by flexibility, complementarity and mutual power sharing.

All levels of implementation should recognize and work towards the goal of an equitable representation of 50% women and 20% youth in all decision-making structures over the next five years.

At the local level

The initiative to obtain resources from national and international agencies should, as far as possible, be taken by the local community.

In situations where local ecumenical groups and churches are not working together and where it prevents resource sharing, the process should be facilitated through local community action, and every effort made to encourage ecumenical cooperation among groups and churches.

At national and regional levels

Where national or regional mechanisms for resource sharing do not exist need to set them up must be seen as a matter of urgency. These mechanisms may consist of representatives of churches, ecumenical groups and those popular or people's movements which are involved in the struggle for justice, peace and full human development.

These bodies should constantly and critically examine their own composition and activities and the power structures inside and outside the church, in order to achieve a more just and equitable resource sharing. They should invite and facilitate both dialogue and critical assessment through visiting teams from the churches or groups with whom they share resources, to enhance mutuality and sharing of power. International agencies should take part in the activities of these bodies only when invited.

It is important to educate public opinion in all our countries regarding the structural causes of world economic disorder. This can be done in theological training centres, for example, with the help of witnesses from among partners in sharing.

The regional level is where methods for monitoring resource sharing can be most effectively established.

At the international level

International ecumenical resource sharing bodies must be based on equal representation of the partners involved. They should complement national/regional and local decision-making bodies, for example through round table structures and through the sharing of all relevant information, including financial, of projects/programmes among the partners involved.

All Christian World Communions and ecumenical organizations are called on to take part in the ecumenical sharing of resources through the WCC and to adhere to the discipline emerging from this Consultation.

The WCC is called to a better integration of existing units and sub-units of the Council, and as far as possible, to coordinate the channelling of its resources through existing networks.

It is recommended that the WCC set up a mechanism to follow up the implementation of the discipline emerging from this Consultation.

IV.

We will follow this discipline ourselves. We will try to create a climate in which it is understood and welcomed. We will challenge our churches, their peoples and their agencies to accept it.

We will urge acceptance of this discipline beyond the membership of the WCC. We will refuse cooperation when this discipline is explicitly being rejected. We will create opportunities to develop new ecumenical partnerships to enable churches of different traditions and contexts to enrich one another.

We will support one another in our commitment. We undertake to give an account to each other and so to God, of the ways in which we have turned our words into deeds, within a period of three years.

APPENDIX E

Mending the World



ACTIONS OF THE 36TH GENERAL COUNCIL REGARDING RESOLUTION 1 – MENDING THE WORLD

Having studied the report, listened to the voices of ecumenical visitors and of commissioners, and having consulted with representatives of the Inter Church Inter Faith Committee and the Division of Finance,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the 36th General Council:

1. Express its deep gratitude to the Inter-Church and Inter-Faith Committee (ICIF) for its persistent commitment over 10 years to help the Church discern within its life and witness a new understanding of ecumenism.
2. Affirm the *Mending the World* report
 - as the fruit of faithfully pursuing the ICIF mandate to “challenge the Church to a vision of ecumenism which includes the whole inhabited world.” (Record of Proceedings, 1988 GC, p. 315); and
 - for clearly linking the UCC’s historic and ongoing commitment to be both a united and uniting church with “God’s work of healing, sharing the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and making common cause with all people of good will, whether they be of faith or not, for the creation of a world that is just, participatory and sustainable”; and
 - as a lens through which the work of the Church can be reviewed and assessed in terms of the whole world understanding of ecumenism.
3. Commit itself
 - to continue and build on “our historic commitment to seek the unity of the body of Christ”;
 - to continue to nurture and foster faithful relationships with others in the Christian family, in national and global inter-church structures, through the ecumenical coalitions, and with partner churches around the world;
 - at the same time to seek conversations and partnerships in mission with other sisters and brothers in God’s wider human family;
 - to use the *Mending the World* report as a lens through which all the work of the General Council is reviewed on an ongoing basis.
4. Offer to the whole United Church
 - the *Mending the World* document, and especially its “Affirmations,” as a resource and tool for use as a lens through which individuals and households, congregations and other mission units may prioritize their response to God’s call to commit ourselves and our resources to work with God for the transformation and healing of the whole human family in a universe that is respected as the creation of God.
5. Invite Congregations
 - to review their mission statements and activities through the lens of the *Mending the World* report;
 - to pursue actively partnerships for mission with other Christian communities and other faith communities and all people who seek healing and wholeness in God’s world.
6. Invite Presbyteries and Conferences
 - to support congregations as they deepen and strengthen their faithful participation in God’s mission;
 - to encourage increased support of the Mission and Service Fund;
 - to review their mission statements and activities through the lens of the *Mending the World* report and to encourage related corporations to do the same.
7. Request the Inter-Church and Inter-Faith Committee
 - to prepare, in cooperation with the Division of Mission in Canada, a supplementary educational resource to *Mending the World* for use by groups and individuals;
 - to prepare, in consultation with relevant units, an instrument by which other mission units and court can use *Mending the World* as a lens through which mission statements and activities are assessed;
 - to ensure that in any printing of the *Mending the World* report, these actions of the General Council Executive precede the body of the report.

An Affirmation

We believe
that the Church's passion to be involved in the transformation of the world is grounded in its relationship to God in Jesus Christ¹

We believe
that God calls the Church
to do separately only what it cannot do with others
to care for itself in order to care for others
to set basic human needs above institutional enrichment
to give and not to count the cost²

We believe
that God calls the Church to help build a culture
of non-violence and respect
of solidarity and just economic relationships
of tolerance and truthfulness
of equal rights and partnership between men and women³

We believe
that God calls the Church
to profess its faith in ways that honour God's love for all people
and creation
to make decisions that demonstrate an unqualified
commitment to justice, peace and compassion
to work in partnership with all who seek the health and well-being of the whole creation
to discern and celebrate God's Spirit in people of other religions⁴ and ideologies
to stand first with the poor⁵

We believe
that God calls the Church
to do justice and love kindness
to show courage in the face of evil
to seek reformation for itself and society
to share God's liberating and empowering work
to trust in God⁶

We believe
that God yearns for the healing of all creation, and calls the Church
to share that yearning by joining now with other persons of good will
in the search for justice, wholeness and love

¹ Santiago de Compostella, WCC, 1995

² St. Ignatius Loyola

³ Stanza based upon the Global Ethic, 1993

⁴ Stanza based upon the chapter "Whole World Ecumenism" in the study document *Toward a Renewed Understanding of Ecumenism*, 1994, (phr. 1-3), the Report of the Commission on World Mission, 1966, (phr. 4)

⁵ "In his beatitudes, his healings, and his table fellowship with outcasts and sinners, Jesus declares God's special concern for the oppressed. God sides with the poor not because of their virtue, but because of their suffering; not because of their goodness but because they have been sinned against." (from *Engaging the Powers*, Walter Wink, p. 112)

⁶ Stanza based upon Micah 6.8 and the Creed of The United Church of Canada

Our Ecumenical Journey

*"We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time."¹*

In April, 1988 the members of the BC Conference Working Unit on Peace organized an event at Christ Church cathedral in Vancouver on the theme of militarism and development. OXFAM and Project Ploughshares participated. Speakers from Honduras, South Africa and Canada made the connections between militarism and development in each country. Among the one hundred participants was a good mix of people—church, community, trade unionists—of all ages.

From *A Million for Peace*, by Shirley Farlinger, The United Church Publishing House, 1995

During the Winnipeg general Strike in 1919 J.S. Woodsworth was arrested and charged with sedition. Included in the charge was the statement that he had incited the crowd with these dangerous words; "They shall build houses, and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat." (Isaiah 65:21 - 22)

The editors of the London *Daily Herald* noted, in their response, that "perhaps Isaiah was lucky to be long dead."

The Greek word *oikoumene*, from which we derive the English word *ecumenical* occurs fifteen times in the New Testament, whose writers used it to describe "the whole inhabited earth," or—more specifically—the Greco-Roman world. By the year 381 C.E.² its meaning had been more sharply defined by the Council of Constantinople to refer to that which is accepted as authoritative for the whole Church, and by the 16th century it had ceased to have any meaning other than a narrow ecclesiastical one, referring to councils, creeds, and the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

With the rise of the modern missionary movement it began to be used to denote the whole world-wide Church, although such usage was sporadic up until the first World War and the development of the Faith and Order and Life and Work movements, the precursors of the World Council of Churches.³

What we now know as the *ecumenical movement* is widely regarded to have begun with the convening of the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910, and with the dawning realization that Christian unity, rather than being an end in itself, was necessary for the sake of mission.

Prior to 1910, however, that realization had found expression in a number of unions, or reunions within the churches of the Reformation, with the rise of movements like the Evangelical Alliance, the World Student Christian Federation and the YMCA, and various calls for prayer for reunion.

The United Church of Canada came into being as a kind of "first fruit" of the modern ecumenical movement. While there were a number of practical considerations—the churches were greatly challenged by the rapid expansion of settlement across the west—the growing recognition of the anomaly of a divided church preaching a reconciling gospel was critical. That, however, was not sufficient to prevent disruption and pain in the period between 1904 and 1925, leading, paradoxically, to division

¹ Faber and Faber, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays*, London, 1969, p. 197

² In a pluralistic world it is considered respectful to replace B.C. and A.D. with B.C.E. (before the Common Era) and C.E. (Common Era)

³ "The Word 'Ecumenical'-Its History and Use" W.A. Visser't Hooft in Rouse and Neill, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517 - 1948* S.P.C.K. 1954 p. 735

among the Presbyterians and the creation of, or continuation of, the Presbyterian Church in Canada. On June 10, 1925, the establishment of The United Church of Canada became a reality. Though there were only four signatories to the Basis of Union those bodies themselves were the result of previous unions, so that what the participants were able to celebrate was the coming together of some forty distinct bodies, made one through nineteen separate acts of church union.¹

Some eleven years later the commissioners to the Seventh General Council focussed priorities more clearly, declaring their readiness "as opportunity may offer and as God may direct, to seek with other Christian communions, further development of its ideals...We seek" they said, "to become not only a united church but a uniting church".² Thus was set forth what would be a central piece in the church's ecumenical agenda for the next forty years, and would lead to the union, in 1968, between the Evangelical United Brethren and The United Church of Canada.

Church union negotiations continued in earnest in response to an invitation from the Anglican house of bishops in 1943 and were expanded to include the All-Canada Convention of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in 1969. However, in 1975 the Anglican Church of Canada voted not to proceed with *The Plan of Union*. A decade later, negotiations between the United Church and the Disciples also came to an end. The vision that had inspired two generations, and which had been given the provisional name of the Church of Christ in Canada, had died. For the first time in more than a century, church union negotiations in Canada had ceased.

Other ecumenical initiatives, however, had in the meantime been undertaken. The United Church was deeply involved in the creation of the Canadian Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches, and participated actively in the life of world confessional families in which it was rooted, including the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the World Methodist Council. It was instrumental in the development of coalitions—Canada's unique contribution to ecumenical methodology—and through the coalitions had begun actively to address pressing economic, political and social issues.³

Meanwhile, explorations of interfaith relations had begun. In 1936 the General Council approved a statement that said, in part, that "the Christian should exhibit toleration, a genuine desire to understand and appreciate, and a willingness to co-operate, where co-operation is possible, with

The Task Force on the Churches and Corporate Responsibility (TCCR) was involved in the founding of the Canadian Working Group for the Forest Stewardship Council. The FSC is a non-profit non-governmental organization to promote forest stewardship in 25 countries. It encourages voluntary accreditation for certifiers of forest products and encourages the development of national and regional forest management standards.

From Promises to Keep, Miles to Go

¹ Rouse and Neill, *op. cit.*, p. 454

² R.O.P. 7th General Council, 1936, p. 168

³ Among the coalitions are such bodies as the Task Force on the Churches and Corporate Responsibility, Ecumenical Coalition for Economic Justice, Inter-Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America, Ten Days for Global Justice, Aboriginal Rights Coalition.

No religion is an island. We are all involved with one another. Spiritual betrayal on the part of one of us affects the faith of all of us. Views adopted in one community have an impact on other communities. Today religious isolationism is a myth. For all the profound differences in perspective and substance, Judaism is sooner or later affected by the intellectual, moral and spiritual events within the Christian society, and vice versa.

We fail to realize that while different exponents of faith in the world of religion continue to be wary of the ecumenical movement, there is another ecumenical movement, worldwide in extent and influence: nihilism. We must choose between interfaith and inter-nihilism. Cynicism is not parochial. Should religions insist upon the illusion of complete isolation? Should we refuse to be on speaking terms with one another and hope for each other's failure? Or should we pray for each other's health, and help one another in preserving one's respective legacy, in preserving a common legacy?

A.J. Heschel, *I Asked for Wonder* (Crossroad, 1990), p. 70.

sincere men and women of other faiths."¹ In 1966 the *Report of the Commission on World Mission* stated that "while maintaining the primacy of Christ, the Church should recognize that God is creatively and redemptively at work in the religious life of all mankind [sic]."²

In 1977, at the time of the fiftieth anniversary of the Faith and Order movement, Jurgen Moltmann had written that "after fifty years of concerted theological effort we now have to say quite openly to Christians and church authorities that there are no longer any doctrinal differences which justify the division of our churches."³

His comment seemed to be borne out when, five years later, in Lima, Peru, the Faith and Order Commission received the final text of the document, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, which exhibited a remarkable convergence of thought. One commentator noted, "that theologians of such widely different traditions should be able to speak so harmoniously about baptism, eucharist and ministry is unprecedented in the modern ecumenical movement"⁴

That remarkable convergence notwithstanding, we find ourselves today in a time of what Mary Jo Leddy has called "ecumenical eclipse". The mainline churches of Canada, faced with aging membership and dwindling resources, have responded by turning inward. The United Church of Canada has become increasingly preoccupied with questions of survival. The vision of a church united and uniting in order that it may witness to the purpose of God for wholeness has been lost.

This is the setting in which the Interchurch Interfaith Committee of the General Council launched, in 1988, what came to be called the Ecumenical Agenda Research Project. The purpose was to rediscover the nature of the ecumenical imperative in a time of "ecumenical winter", and in the process, to enable The United Church of Canada to set priorities for its life and mission.

That study, carried out over the course of a decade, has brought us to the conclusion that, for now, and for our time,

*in the world in which we live, we are faced with urgent moral issues...
These issues are part of the life of the members of the Church and forge*

¹ R.O.P. 7th General Council, 1936 p. 288

² R.O.P. 22nd General Council, 1966 p. 435

³ *Lausanne 77: Fifty Years of Faith and Order*, Faith and Order Paper No. 82, p. 39

⁴ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper 111 (Geneva; World Council of Churches, 1982) p.ix

the way faith is lived out and reflected upon. In facing them the Church will often need to work with other communities of good will, sharing in their expertise and commitment. Christians can frequently be motivated and challenged by the dedication and urgency that others bring to this task.¹

Ernst Lange had said earlier that

the Christian conscience has to learn to adjust itself to the larger household to which it was from the very beginning "called out" and toward which it was, from the very beginning, directed, namely, to the household of the whole inhabited earth.²

It is this understanding that has led us back to the beginning, to an understanding of *oikoumene* as referring to "the whole inhabited earth". While not departing from our commitment to seek the unity of the body of Christ we are called to set as priority for The United Church of Canada God's work of earth healing, sharing the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and making common cause with all people of good will, whether they be people of faith or not, for the creation of a world that is just, participatory and sustainable.

Let it be noted with great care that the vision of Christian unity for which we are called to pray, "that they may all be one...so that the world may believe" that God has sent Jesus into the world³ has not altered. To paraphrase the words of those who gathered for the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order in Santiago de Compostela in 1993, we bring to our engagement with ethical and social matters a particular dimension.

The source of [our] passion for the transformation of the world lies in [our] relation to God in Jesus Christ. [We] believe that God—who is absolute love, mercy and justice—is, by the Holy Spirit, working through [us].⁴

Two American friends recall their visit, a few years ago, to the village of Jamkhed in India. Two Indian Christian doctors, a husband-and-wife team, educated at Vellore and then Johns Hopkins, had determined to try to make an impact on the suffering of rural people through a focus on preventive medicine. Through the provision of sanitary facilities, clean drinking water, early diagnosis of disease, healthy diet, pre-natal care and education, they have been instrumental in reducing the infant mortality rate to almost zero in the 150 villages they serve.

As a result of a \$25,000 gift from the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the USA, this extraordinary medical team was able to build a hospital for active treatment. Sensitive to the fact that the people whom they served were all Hindu, they resolved not to place a cross above or on the building. Conversion did not seem to be their prime motivation. But the Hindu builder, aware of what motivated these two saints, insisted that the building should not rise except under the cross.

¹ Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order: Santiago de Compostela Report of Section IV p. 259

² Lange, Ernst *Ecumenical Review*, Vol 23, #1, 1971 p.8

³ John 17:21

⁴ Compostella, *loc. cit.*

Theological Foundations

*We are not alone, we live in God's world.
We believe in God, who has created and is creating...*

James Muilenberg, late Professor at Union Seminary, used to say to his students, "Every morning when you wake up, before you affirm your faith in the majesty of a loving God, before you say 'I believe' for another day, read the Daily News, with its record of the latest crimes and tragedies of mankind, and then see if you can honestly say it again."

Quoted by Frederick Buechner

The new creed, which has properly been described as a creed in the process of formation, and which has undergone substantial revision and refinement since first adopted by the General Council some twenty-eight years ago, provides us with a beginning. It reminds us that we are not orphaned, that we are residents of a place created and owned by God, who came in Jesus and who works still, through the Spirit, to bend the broken creation back into the unity and wholeness for which it was made. The creed reminds us that we, the Church, have been called into being to participate in this healing work, "to celebrate God's presence," "to seek justice and resist evil," and, in its latest version, "to walk with respect in creation." The Church's task is to discern what this means in our time. To this end the Church turns to its formative story for understanding and guidance, as it seeks to be faithful to its past, and responsive to its present.

Story and Method

While Christians routinely speak of the "story" of Jesus, the phrase in the old children's hymn, "Tell me the *stories* of Jesus," captures our situation more accurately. There are, we observe, four gospels in the New Testament, and not just one, and many other testimonies to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus were never included in the canon of scripture. From the Church's beginnings, a common, pithy, and universally acceptable understanding of Jesus' life and significance has not existed. While the Church has gathered around titles and creeds, it has resisted attempts to combine everything into a single narrative, preferring instead to struggle with multiple presentations of Jesus, each with its own particular emphases, and to learn from the creative tension among them.

The methods by which we sharpen our description and understanding of these portraits vary, and are themselves the subject of constant discussion. Still, Christians seek to respond faithfully to the question: How do we get to Jesus? The options are not simple nor the choices easy. Do we begin by analyzing a specific type of literature (*i.e.*, parables, sayings, pronouncement stories) to get to the heart of his teaching? Do we restrict the analysis to the titles applied to him (*i.e.*, Lord, Rabbi, Son of Humankind, Son of David, Son of God), and the texts in which these titles are found? Do we attempt to identify the historical layers of scripture, assembling and analyzing first those texts, regardless of their type, that are deemed "early," and thus presumed closest to the man? Do we content ourselves with the emphases of individual gospel writers and their communities?

Or do we begin elsewhere, perhaps with a reconstruction of first century Judaism, transposing by analogy onto him many of the religious attitudes and outlooks that were part of the fabric of his place and time?

Depending on the method, several different pictures come into view.¹ They include, but are not limited to, the following:

Jesus, prophet of the end time

Jesus announces that the rule of God is near—that it is, in fact, already breaking in, but not yet encountered in its fullness. His focus is on God's reign, and the expectations of his time that God would soon manifest that reign fully. There is an emphasis on interim ethics—not on action that would change the world, but action enabled by God as a witness to what God is doing and about to do.

Jesus, teacher of law

People point to the scriptural material that affirms Jesus' connection with the teachings of Judaism ("I came not to condemn the law, but to fulfill it"). In places, he seems to intensify the demands of this teaching (the sermon of the mount), and elsewhere, is portrayed as the educator of people in the moral life (golden rule, love of enemy, forgiveness...)

Jesus, emissary of wisdom

The quotations placed in his mouth (*i.e.*, "The wisdom of God said"), or the vantagepoint of wisdom (*i.e.*, "How often I tried to gather you under my wing as a mother hen her chicks"), or the whole body of wisdom literature that is the primary component of the common source now found within Matthew and Luke, all contribute to a picture of Jesus as an emissary of wisdom, appealing to people to return to wisdom's way.

Jesus, revolutionary for social change

The presence of zealots among his followers, the suggestion that some of them were armed with swords, the kingly significance of his royal "ride" into Jerusalem, his altercation with the moneychangers at the temple, and the title placed above his

¹ Cf. G. Strecker, "The Historical and Theological Problem of the Jesus Question" in the *Toronto Journal of Theology*, 6/2, 1990, 201-223.

head at crucifixion...are all indicators of a life committed to significant and wholesale change.

Jesus, revealer of the gift of grace

The director of Transition House told Mary that she would never be safe in Saskatoon as long as her partner, Bob, still lived there. He had beaten her numerous times, locked her in a closet for twenty-four hours at a time, and continued to harass her by pounding on her door and threatening to break in. So Mary was transferred to Interval House in Victoria. Nancy is on the board of Interval House. She helped Mary and her infant son to relocate in Victoria and get started in a new life there. One Sunday in October Nancy's long term commitment to Interval House was recognized in her home congregation. There were prayers for her work, and a collection of clothing and household items was donated in support of Mary and others like her.

His intensification of the law, the "last-chance" warnings of wisdom, the urgency of his call to decision, and the unattainable standard placed upon any and all who would respond to this call, all work together to underline the futility of attempting to save oneself, and to recognize finally, and fully, that life is a gift of God—freely offered, gratefully accepted. The ethical life that proceeds from this understanding does so, not out of fear of God, or a desire to win God's favour, but in gratitude for the life already received. This message of justification by grace is underlined in the stories of his associations, his deeds, and his teachings.

All of these images, as well as their combinations and permutations, emerge within the sphere of Judaism. They have their genesis in scripture, as much as in any later philosophy that would call them out of scripture. They are constructions. And we have always to do with constructions. The constructions are always stories of faith, not history. Even the biographical bits are recorded by post-Easter people, and are included not to provide some presumed "neutral" history of Jesus, but in order that, as John's gospel states, "you may believe."

What is critical for this paper is the observation that ethical implications for mission arise out of each of these constructed portraits, providing priorities for action that direct us toward a whole-world ecumenism. These include the living of God-centred rather than self-centred lives, the priority of right action (whether as sign only, or as transformative action), and care for others.

*We believe in God...
who has come in Jesus, the Word made Flesh,
to reconcile and make new...*

Jesus, representative¹ of humanity

The testimony of Scripture and Church is that Jesus was fully human. In his life and work, he showed himself to be the model of faithfulness, never wavering in his sense of call or his confidence in the reign and presence of God, his commitment to a life of justice and compassion, of healing and hope, demonstrating a faith and ethics Christians hope to emulate.

Christians believe they are called to the kind of living exemplified by Jesus. He responded to people's hurts and hopes through his teachings and actions. He subdued the forces that threatened people in mind or body. He shared with people in want or need of healing. And he illumined the eyes of those blind to God's presence and activity. He was capable of crossing the boundaries that hem life in. The forces that threaten, deprive, and blind, he exposed, cast out, subdued, and overcame.² He altered simple table customs in ways that reconfigured the relationships and priorities among rich and poor, women and men. His parables and sayings, through shock and surprise, dismantled people's attitudes and reconstructed them along egalitarian lines.³ By all accounts, he ate and drank with the best of them, wept and had compassion, showed anger and frustration, was in every way one of us.

Jesus was a Jew whose faith grew out of his heritage—a tradition and people that affirmed the reality of a God who covenants with people, who guides and frees human life through law, and whose spirit empowers human beings to live out this life of righteousness. According to this same heritage, the God who makes covenant with the Jews also built relationship with other peoples, including the Ethiopians, Philistines, and Arameans (Amos 9.7). Christians believe that God calls us out (ekklesia) to be a covenantal people in a body whose head is Jesus. The God of our covenant is the same God who established relationship with Israel and other peoples.

Art Solomon's Ojibway prayer

*Grandfather, look at our
brokenness.
We know that in all creation
Only the human family
Has strayed from the Sacred
Way.
We know that we are the ones
who are divided
And we are the ones
who must come back together
to walk in the Sacred Way.
Grandfather,
Sacred One,
Teach us love, compassion
and honour
that we may heal the earth,
and heal each other.*

¹ There are many possible models for Christology. This report uses a representative model. Other theologians who employ representative models include Dorothy Soelle, Douglas John Hall, Schubert Ogden, and Pamela Dickey Young.

² G. Theissen, *The Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition*, (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1983), p. 117.

³ J.D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, (San Francisco, Harper Collins Publ., 1991), epilogue.

The gospels present the Church with a Jesus who teaches about God's reign, God's laws, and God's Spirit.

They present a Jesus whose teaching is centred on the kingdom, or reign, of God. We hear him urging his followers to strive first for the kingdom of God and its righteousness (Mt. 6:33), a kingdom that was both present and yet to be fulfilled.

There was once a rabbi in a small Russian village who mysteriously disappeared every Friday. It was whispered, and the villagers sincerely believed, that on those days he ascended to Heaven itself. A newcomer to the village heard this, and was extremely skeptical. So, making sure he was not seen, he stealthily followed the rabbi one Friday. He saw the rabbi change into the clothes of a peasant. Then, carrying an axe, he went into a nearby forest where he cut down a tree. He cut the tree into firelogs. Gathering enough for a week's burning he took them to the home of an old and frail woman. After that, he returned to the village, changing back into his usual clothes.

And ever afterwards, when the villagers declared that every Friday their rabbi ascended to Heaven, the newcomer would say under his breath, "If not higher."

Saul Bellow

We hear him teaching from Jewish tradition and scripture that the laws of God can be summed up in the two great commandments: love of God (Deut. 6:4-5) and love for neighbour (Lev. 19:18). On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Mt. 22:40). Both laws expand the horizons of Christian concern beyond our own community of faith. In loving God we must love and respect the world God loves, including all its peoples and creatures.

We hear him teaching that the Spirit, like the wind, "blows where it wills" (John 3:8). He says nothing about it blowing only among Christian people. The Spirit goes out to the ends of the earth and may be found even in Sheol (Psalm 139).

For Jesus, God's healing concern was extended to the sparrows, the lilies, the outcast, the oppressed, the sick, the sinful, and the holy people, regardless of race or religion. Jesus spoke of God feeding the widow of Sidon and healing Naaman the Syrian. The breadth of God's caring extends to the whole world (Lk 4:16-19)

For Christians, Jesus is the quintessential, representative human being. We believe that who he was is what we are called to be, and as we respond to the summons, we participate in his passionate love and service toward both God and humanity. His teaching and example serve as basic foundations for Christian mission and ecumenical commitment. Something of God broke into this world through him, and still does, through those who follow in his way.

Jesus, representative of God

The nature of a representative is to face two ways—to be capable of mediating the concern of one party to the other, and vice versa. While Jesus' humanity serves to instruct, guide and motivate, it is Jesus, representative of God, to whom the Church looks first for hope. The tradition of the church affirms the divinity of Christ. Jesus is not only the proclaimer of the reign of God, or the pioneer and perfecter of our faith,

but is, before all things, the One in whom we have faith. He is the one that neither the crowds, nor the soldiers, nor even the grave, could hold. Jesus is the one affirmed as God's child, the one through whom the world has been reconciled to God (II Cor. 5:19).

We believe that in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ none other than God was incarnate, overcoming alienation and bringing about the reconciliation of the world to the divine love and purpose. Out of this reconciliation comes the world's hope for redemption, and its restoration to the order and beauty intended by God. As we await this redemption, we share with all creatures a longing for renewal and fulfillment, confident that God's own Spirit joins us in our sighs and our hopes.

The Church is united in its affirmation that God has reconciled the world. When we ask how this has been done, tradition responds by saying that Jesus died to save us from our sins. Just how his death and subsequent resurrection achieve this is a matter of significant discussion and debate.

The "Christus victor" tradition sees Jesus' suffering as a necessary prelude to triumph over evil. In his victory is the promise and guarantee of our own. Our suffering is to be considered temporary.

The "Satisfaction" tradition argues that Jesus' suffering and death was a payment for our sin, a sacrifice that met the requirements of God's holiness and had the effect of negating the anger of God.

The "Moral" tradition sees Jesus' suffering, not as payment for sin, nor as precursor to victory, but as an expression of the love of God towards humankind. Only such an act of self-sacrifice could soften the hardened hearts of those who had turned their backs on God.

The "Return" tradition sees Jesus, like the prophets, as the teacher of return to the Reigning of God (see the story of the prodigal son), and as the "pioneer and perfecter" (Heb.12:2) of human return to God in the Way of the Cross. Followers of Jesus take up their cross and share in Christ's sufferings, as Christ calls them to do (Matt. 10:38; 16:24, Mk. 8:34, Lk. 9:23; 14:27), being reconciled to God and others as Christ lives in them and they live in Christ.

Each tradition, or "theory of atonement" as it is called, has its strengths and liabilities.¹ The challenge before us is to find how the traditions that

We have to leave the Lord in order to find God in our brothers and sisters. We have to give up obedience and find solidarity. We have to give up relationships of domination, even if our role in them is the servant's role. We have to overcome the master-servant relationship and become one with our brothers and sisters, and in the course of this becoming one, as Eckhart says, we become quit of a God who commands and dominates.

Dorothee Söelle, *The Strength of the Weak*, p. 105

¹ Cf. Joanne Carlson Brown, "For God so loved the World" in *Christology, Patriarchy, and Abuse*, (The Pilgrim Press, 1989), 1-30

Earth Day in Winnipeg was marked this year by a week-end event which included a sunrise service at the St. Boniface Cathedral. The worship began with an Islamic call to prayer. Readings, prayers, meditations and blessings followed from First Nations, Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Islamic, Jewish and Sikh faiths. A candle and bowls of water and soil on the central table symbolized the elements of fire, air, land and water. People were invited to process to the front and place their hands in the soil and water, signifying our unity with the earth, and asking for blessing upon it.

move us most, move us also to live out what J.W. Grant has said:

In an interrelated world and an increasingly multicultural nation, it is vital that we should do our utmost to understand and learn from one another. One can go further to speak of a genuine ecumenism based on the unity of the human race that calls for the greatest possible cooperation among people of good will belonging to all faith communities and none, an ecumenism that demands especially high priority in view of growing threats to the very survival of humanity. Christians who find in Jesus the great agent of reconciliation have all the more reason to commit themselves to this ecumenism.

Christians also differ in their understanding of the degree to which other religious traditions link with God's initiative to reconcile and redeem.

For some Christians, salvation pertains primarily to individual humans, and is appropriated exclusively through faith in Christ. Taking their cue from passages like John 14.6 and Acts 4.12, they believe that only those who make an explicit confession of faith in Jesus Christ will be among the redeemed. From such believers comes great energy for the church's evangelistic mission, since much is at stake in inviting others to believe.

Another perspective holds that God's work of redemption is solely through Jesus Christ, but that God's gracious care for the creation is always mediated through the eternal Word and Wisdom who became incarnate in Jesus. There is one light and everywhere that people live in the light, the eternal Christ is present, even if not named. Thus God's grace and saving power, fully revealed in Jesus Christ, may also be present in other religious traditions, so that redemption also extends to those who know Christ "anonymously."

Still others hold that all authentic religions can mediate salvation. What is essential in faith is the life-transforming encounter by which we turn from life centred in the self to life centred in God. Many kinds of religion are vehicles for this conversion of the heart. In this pluralistic approach, it is possible to think of God entering into a number of covenantal relationships. Just as a parent's love is not exhausted on a first child, but can extend equally but differently to all the children that follow, so too God is able to have a specific covenant with Jews, another with Christians, another with Hindus, and so on.

These three differing understandings—referred to respectively as "exclusive," "inclusive," and "pluralistic"—are marked by strengths and weak-

nesses. Each can claim warrant for its specific emphasis from the Biblical witness. We seek not to adjudicate among them here, but to acknowledge this multiplicity of views as a significant issue for Christians in the new ecumenical setting. Our confession of Jesus and of his saving significance must now be made in a world that is religiously plural and, in some venues, religiously indifferent. Making faithful Christian witness in such a context will involve coming to personal clarity about these differing outlooks. As we struggle to love God and our neighbour, we do so challenged by our faith and creed to share and live out our truth claims "with respect in creation".

Jesus, representative of the whole creation

To paraphrase the poet: No one is an island.¹ Humanity is like an enormous spider web...says another. If you touch it anywhere, you set the whole thing trembling.² The same can be said for the whole creation.

There is, buried in the rich treasure of scripture and Christian theology, an idea and image of how this relatedness has come about. It is not simply that everything that exists here has evolved in a closed environment, and has, consequently, been built with the same basic building blocks of life, and must, therefore, on some level, show signs of kinship. Faith's story says something more. It says that in addition to the linkages we expect to find developing and existing in a closed system, we also affirm a connection within the creation that has its origin in God.

We read in the book of proverbs that when God set out to create the world, Wisdom was God's consort or agent (Proverb 8). The important role assigned to Wisdom was developed further by authors who wrote between the Testaments (Sirach 24), and emerged in the New Testament. In language and imagery that echoes elements within Greek philosophy, John tells the story of the pre-existent Word: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God..." Behind the English "Word" in the text lies the Greek notion of the underlying structure of things—the principle by which life is ordered. "All things were made through him," John goes on to say, "and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life and the life was the light of humanity." This Wisdom, this Word, is what became visible in Jesus Christ. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth."

¹ John Donne, 1572-1631.

² F. Buechner, "Pontifex" in *The Hungering Dark*, (New York, The Scabury Press, 1981), p. 45

Rusty Schweikert, an astronaut on the 1969 Apollo mission, had just been let out the door of the capsule on an umbilical cord when a malfunction in the capsule was reported. Both Mission Control in Houston and the other astronauts had to concentrate on the problem. This left Rusty floating alone in cosmic silence, beholding the earth. What he saw was "a shining gem against a totally black backdrop" and he realized that everything he cherished was on that gem—his family and land, music and human history with its folly and its grandeur. He was so overcome that he wanted to "hug and kiss that gem as a mother does her first-born child."

Trained as a jet fighter with the "right stuff" and admitting to having been a very macho man, he experienced a conversion to the mother-love of compassionate caring. He experienced a second conversion as well; it was political. He had always been a red, white and blue American, but now, floating in space, he saw that "rivers flowed indiscriminately between Russia and Europe; that ocean currents served communist, socialist and capitalist nations alike; that clouds did not stop for political ideologies, and that there are no nations. Nations exist in the minds of human beings alone."

Matthew Fox, The Coming of the Cosmic Christ

While on a visit to Zimbabwe Harvey Cox attended the preparatory phase of the annual Communion service of the African Apostolic Church—an all-night prayer service, including running and jumping around great bonfires, “searching their souls for whatever unworthy actions or thoughts they need to confess, including offenses against the Earthkeeping Spirit, which is in itself an African understanding of the Christian Holy Spirit...Violations of the Earthkeeping Spirit encompass any activities that lead to soil erosion, fouling the water supply, or chopping down trees without replacing them...a religiously based ecological ethic is emerging...it is the extension of an age-old sanction against cutting the trees in a sacred grove, one that was inhabited by spirits. Now, however, the whole earth and all the trees are understood to be sacred.”

Christian Century, November 9, 1994

The Church speaks, then, both of the humanity and divinity of Christ. It affirms that this Christ is present to, and in, every form of life in the universe. “All things were created in Christ” says the author of Colossians, “and in Christ all things hold together.” (Col. 1:17) The One who is the author and sustainer of all that exists is the One who comes to redeem. (The redemptive work of God through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit involves nothing less than the restoration of all things to their intended nature.) This redemptive work does not displace the natural order, but heals and perfects it.

One benefit of the idea of this cosmic Christ (Col. 1:15-20) is that we can no longer imagine the creation as only a handsome backdrop to human history. Creation and humankind share a common story, both of fall and degradation, and of reconciliation and restoration.

One of the criticisms leveled against Western Civilization is that we have put ourselves at the centre of things. We have sought to fulfill our own aspirations and needs without much thought about the impact of our “progress” on the rest of the creation. The present ecological crisis, as well as the shadowy threat of nuclear devastation, are evidence of our foolishness and self-preoccupation.

Eight hundred years ago, a Christian by the name of Hildegarde first warned Christendom about the cost of interfering with “the web of the universe”: “The earth should not be injured...all of creation God gives to humankind to use. But if this privilege is misused, God’s justice permits creation to punish humanity.”¹ The tragedies of Chernobyl and Bhopal, of hydroflorocarbons and oil tanker spills, as well as other expressions of human error, have scarred people and the planet. How much longer this maltreatment can be sustained is anyone’s guess. The signs are clear that without a change in behaviour, humankind may not be long for this world.

Lifting up the image of Christ as present in and to all of life may help us re-image and transform our relationship to nature. No doubt there will always be a place for management in that relationship. One cannot imagine, for instance, that we would simply let floodwaters ravage productive fields and human habitations without trying to control them through dikes or dams. But if we see ourselves only in a managerial relationship to nature then not much will change. Francis of Assisi had imagination enough to see himself related to other, non-human creatures as kin: Brother Sun and Sister Moon and Mother Earth. It was Francis who first set up a nativity manger scene. It was Francis who got the woolly

¹ M. Fox, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*, (Harper & Row), 144.

lambs and cows and donkeys onto the stage of Christmas. Following his example, we might develop further our relationship to the earth as one of friendship.

Francis did not picture the universe as a mechanism but as a mystery. Others have shared his vision, seeing the world as one permeated with the life of God. Said Mechthild of Magdeburg: "The day of my spiritual awakening was the day I saw, and knew I saw, all things in God and God in all things."¹

For some Christians, then, the cosmic Christ is the source of the coherence and relatedness of life. For them, belief in the pre-existence of this Christ, as the Wisdom and Word of God, is fundamental to understanding and living out the priorities of whole-world ecumenism.

*We believe in God...
who works in us and others
by the Spirit...*

Mission and the Ecumenical Imperative

The Church affirms that God is acting to reconcile and make new, to heal and restore, to bend the creation back toward what, according to the ancient story, it was originally created to be. Christians speak of God's initiative as one that seeks to introduce a new and transfigured creation, and not just an improved one.

The Church's responsibility is to align itself with God's initiatives, not equating our often flawed achievements with what God ultimately wills, but understanding them as a witness to our conviction that "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof," and that "the Lord God omnipotent reigneth," and that this Lord continues to work to reconcile and heal the whole creation.

We turn to the tools of storytelling and social analysis, praise and prayer, to help us discern more specifically what God is doing, and what, as a consequence, we should be doing too. While the particular mix of these tools remains a matter of constant debate within the Christian community, we nevertheless look always to these aids to counsel and guide the Church's activity.

The Christian life does not restrict itself to ethical concerns and activity

The ultimate test of a moral society is the kind of world that it leaves to its children.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Courage, my friends, 'tis not too late to make a better world...

Tommy Douglas

¹ M. Fox, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*, (Harper & Row), 118

only. It involves the mix and integration of the whole person, connecting head, body, and heart in a life that values truth, pursues right action, and participates in matters of beauty, creativity, and joy. However, the ethical component in mission looms large in our time for two reasons:

As humans, we are driven to give priority to ethics because we have an environmental imperative to prevent the deterioration of our planet. We ignore this imperative at our peril.

As people of faith, we are called to give priority to ethics because we have a theological imperative to respect and preserve God's creation, and to remember that, according to the Biblical story, the consummation of history is God's work, not ours. To bring about humankind's, or creation's, end—either by intention or neglect—is an act of unbelief.

[I have been learning] a beautiful and harsh truth, that the Christian faith does not separate us from the world but immerses us in it; that the Church, therefore, is not a fortress set apart from the city, but a follower of the Jesus who loved, worked, struggled and died in the midst of the city.

Archbishop Oscar Romero

Seeking to align ourselves with God's restoring work is how we both bear witness to what God is doing and introducing, and how we preserve the creation as the proper theatre for God's action.

The ecumenical imperative calls us to participate in this work of reconciliation and healing in partnership with any and all who are prepared to work with us. This imperative proceeds out of the conviction that solutions to the challenges posed by ongoing political conflict, racism, poverty, and environmental degradation, require the assembled resources of a broad partnership among religious communities and secular organizations. No one religious community or group can accomplish the task alone. This imperative also proceeds out of a belief that God has provided the Christian community with sufficient theological motivations to engage in such work and partnership. Commandments, such as "the golden rule," and convictions, such as our own tradition's affirmation that "God is creatively and redemptively at work in the religious life of all mankind [*sic*]," are but two of many theological reasons to move in this direction. More than anything else, we turn to the story of Jesus—the accounts of his life, the impact of the proclamation of his resurrection, and the Church's reflection on the meaning of both—for the content of what God's reconciling work is about, and for guidance in regard to our role in it.

*We are called to be the Church:
to celebrate God's presence,
to live with respect in creation,
to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil,
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
our judge and our hope...*

Inter-Faith Partnership and Dialogue

A Church which gives priority to seeking the common good in the world, requires guidelines for partnership and dialogue with other caring people. The brief suggestions here are not intended to be complete or comprehensive. It would not be possible to cover all situations. We are on a journey of recognizing and realizing the call of God to join with God's other servants from other communities of faith and commitment.

Identifying the Concerns and Resources

Beginning with the question "Where does God's world need mending today?" the Church has to assess the existing needs in society, locally and globally, and seek out other groups or individuals who share concern about particular needs. This may mean that Church people will approach organizations already formed for the purpose of addressing certain needs and offer to collaborate in any possible way. Or the Church may organize open forums to discuss particular issues and to see what can be done in collaboration with others.

A useful guideline for public forums is that they be held in "neutral" locations so that anyone may attend without feeling that they are on someone else's "turf." Another guideline is that open meetings should be organized by a committee with as broad a representation as possible from different groups of concerned people.

In 1994, for example, some Mormon representatives approached the United Church Secretary for Interfaith Dialogue with a concern that there be an interfaith festival of the family in Toronto during the International Year of the Family. The Mormons realized that such a festival could not succeed if sponsored by themselves alone, so they began to seek for partners. Eventually a festival was held in the Royal Ontario Museum focusing on all kinds of family issues. Dozens of different religious and non-religious groups participated, including some social agencies and the gay and lesbian Metropolitan Community Church. Participants collaborated on the basis of their common concern for family issues, and each group contributed to the program what they felt their particular group could best offer. There were obviously different values and beliefs about family issues. But participants agreed not to proselytize or "bad mouth" each other—and to stay focused on the positive supports for family life which they could offer for the common good.

Partnership is a key concept in whole world ecumenism. It implies mutuality and collaboration. An example can be seen in the Healthy

The Mennonite Central Committee is teaming up with Manitoba's Winkler Tire Recycling Corporation to develop two new recycling plants in the Maritimes. The MCC is investing \$100,000 in seed capital because, says their spokesperson "we want the payoff to be jobs. Period. End of story."

In the spring of 1995 800 women, organized by the Fédération des femmes du Québec, from all different backgrounds, walked two hundred km in ten days, converging from Montréal, Longueuil and Rivière du loup, in front of the Québec parliament to draw attention to poverty. Church groups, particularly communities of Catholic nuns, took an active part. The Moderator of the United Church, Dr. Marion Best, was present at the beginning of the march, which concluded with a demonstration with 15,000 women, men and children supporting the walkers.

It is well to remember that the entire population of the universe, with one trifling exception, is composed of others.

Andrew Holmes

The Atlanta Declaration was adopted in December, 1989 at the Carter Center of Emory University. Religious leaders, congregations, regional and national agencies and institutions, and AIDS-HIV interfaith coalitions were invited to endorse the declaration which said, in part, that

we come together as members of different faiths. Our traditions teach us different ways to embrace God...across our diversity, however, AIDS magnifies the fact that we are also one. AIDS is an affliction of the whole human family. Our religious vision proclaims that living with AIDS-HIV is a condition in which we must all participate actively. It is a scandal that many people living with AIDS-HIV suffer and grieve in secret. We seek hope amidst the moral and biological tragedies of this epidemic in order to pass on hope for generations to come.

Ecumenical Trends Graymoor Institute, April, 1990, pp. 61-63

Community Network in which some churches have participated. This network brings together any community group or agency that may wish to serve the goal of making their local community healthier. The participants assess the needs which can be identified in the community and then assess their own abilities to address some of the needs. Shaughnessy Heights United Church in Vancouver joined in a partnership with Picasso's Café, a restaurant that trains "at risk" young people. The same Church has partnerships which focus on local needs, global needs and the needs of the inner city. Many United Churches have taken similar initiatives without any formal network creating the incentives or suggesting strategies.

Sharing Faith as well as Work

It is the work of the Church and other religious communities to share faith and to see the glory of God in all the Earth. If this is done in interfaith dialogue, then one of the essential guidelines is to have due respect for others in the dialogue.

A "Paths of Respect Consultation" was held at the Jessie Saulteaux Centre in November 1995. Representatives of seven faith traditions met from Thursday evening to Sunday afternoon. They formed a circle of twenty-one people of Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist, and Aboriginal faiths. In the Sacred Circle a "Talking Symbol" was used, in this case, a feather or a small rock. As the symbol was passed around the circle each person in turn was invited to speak as all others listened. As they moved through successive rounds they found their conversations deepening. A deeper wisdom began to materialize in the midst of their conversations. Love, which seeks the well-being of others, needs wisdom in order to achieve real well-being. Wisdom is not an individual possession. It is found in the encounter with others. All voices are, therefore, to be valued and all participants are equal.

The non-aboriginal participants in the Paths of Respect Consultation found the Talking Circle to be dramatically different than anything they had ever experienced. It was particularly difficult to make the shift from conversation as debate to respectful and careful listening. The passing of the Talking Symbol gives the invitation to speak from the heart for as long as one wishes to speak. One participant, a Sikh, who was not used to talking at length in any circumstances, spoke for an extended period of time about his own deep search for acceptance. Later in the Consultation he shared how this gathering was one of the most meaningful times in his life in which he felt he had been truly listened to and accepted. By contrast, in many meetings and programs many people feel excluded and voiceless.

The Aboriginal Talking Circle is perhaps the best model we have for conversation grounded in respect and mutual understanding. The equality of all voices, the encouragement to speak from the heart about what we know to be true in our lives, the commitment to listen deeply for wisdom in every contribution, the willingness to spend time, all are qualities of what should be part of an ideal conversation. The Talking Circle provides a metaphor and a model for the values that ground dialogue, and by extension, partnership.

Both dialogue and partnership require faithful witness to one's own beliefs, as well as listening to the faithful witness of others. This faithfulness may well lead to an agreement to disagree about certain things. It can also lead to agreement about beliefs or goals or methods. Ecumenism, whether among churches, or among other groups of people, does not assume or require unanimity. Rather, it seeks to do or affirm together what can be done or affirmed together and to do separately and affirm separately what cannot be done or affirmed together (The Lund Principle).

Partnerships or dialogue require humility which is capable of learning from others. If God is indeed the God of the whole world, then whole world ecumenism requires doing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly with God (Micah 6:8). God may well be encountered in the wisdom and loving spirit of the others. Christians have to be prepared to grow and, possibly, to change their minds about some things in the process of dialogue and partnership.

Working together and dialogue with others may lead to joint liturgical or ceremonial occasions. The United Church on Salt Spring Island has joined in ecological Earth Day Celebrations for a number of years. Joint planning and involvement of all participants have been key factors in making such celebrations possible.

Peterborough Presbytery invited the minister of the Buddhist Church¹ in Toronto to share with the presbytery meeting some of the beliefs and practices of the Buddhist congregation. The Buddhist minister asked if he could demonstrate some of the liturgical chants or prayers characteristically used in his church. He was given permission and did so. Some of the presbytery members experienced the meditative spirit of the Buddhist liturgy. Others felt it was inappropriate for such liturgy to take place in a Christian sanctuary which was dedicated to the glory of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ. This incident illustrates the necessity of clarifying

After the Gulf War a Muslim development agency approached the Canadian Council of Churches to inquire if they might join efforts with Christians and others to provide food and medicine for children in Iraq. The joint effort was broadened. Other concerned organizations were invited to participate, and a number responded, including a major labour union.

MUCK—that's the name of the youth group at Morden (Manitoba) St. Paul's United Church—held a 30 hour fast the other week. They raised \$568, and after much discussion, decided to donate the entire amount to The Healing Fund.

Sharon grew up in a strong Christian family but had not chosen to join the church before she went off to college. In the summer of 1992 she attended an interfaith camp north of Vancouver. At the camp seven religions were represented each by a teacher-elder as well as young people. When she returned home after camp she reported to her parents that it had been a good camp and that she was now ready to join the church. When asked why she was now ready she replied that "getting to know people of other faiths and talking about my faith with Buddhists and others has made me realize how I love and appreciate my Christian faith that I really believe". A Buddhist friend from the camp was present on the day Sharon was confirmed as a member of the church.

¹ This particular branch of Buddhism in its North American expression describes itself as "church" and its leaders as "ministers".

theological issues before sharing worship experiences of, or with, other religious communities.

To love and to seek justice above all

Habitat for Humanity is a Christian housing ministry whose mandate is to make home ownership possible for people with low income. Community volunteers as well as the family involved work together to build, or in some cases renovate, houses for the family's use.

From Promises to Keep, Miles to Go

Michael Harrington called for a new alignment between faith and anti-faith. He said that "serious atheists and agnostics now share a common cause with serious believers: a concern for values as such, for a vision of individual and social meaningfulness which goes beyond the latest consumer or cultural fad."

From The Politics at God's Funeral

St. Augustine has often been quoted as saying "love and do what you will."¹ This is good advice for Christians who collaborate and dialogue with people of other religions or no religion. If we meet the standards of love in ecumenism we will not be far from the will of God.

Another author writes that "justice is the form in which and through which love performs its work."² This may require "walking in the others' shoes" in order to experience the injustice which they suffer. Injustice can be seen in prayer when we stand before God in solidarity with our neighbours.

Practicing justice in partnerships or dialogues requires following the Golden Rule. One of the subtle infractions of the Golden Rule is to insist on using our own terms of belief or understanding to define the other's beliefs or ideas, rather than allowing them to define themselves in their own terms. As Christians, we certainly do not like being accused of polytheism because we affirm the doctrine of the Trinity. Similarly, other religious folk do not like it when inaccurate terms are used to describe their beliefs. They must be allowed to define their own beliefs.

Interfaith etiquette is an important aspect of both loving and seeking justice with people of other faith communities. There are good handbooks available on how to relate to people of various religions without inadvertently offending their special beliefs and practices. The Sudbury Interfaith Dialogue Group has produced one especially for the use of hospital visitors and medical personnel. The Ontario Multi-faith Council on Religious and Spiritual Care has produced a substantial book outlining the fundamental beliefs and practices of the major faith communities in the province.

If we practise love and justice, with humility and prayer, we will learn the wisdom of how to be faithful co-workers with God in whole world ecumenism.

¹ St. Augustine, Epict. Joann. Tractuatus, vii, 8.

² P. Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice*, 71.

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