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## Living in to its Name and Living up to its Legacy: The public practical theology of KAIROS

Jennifer Henry\*

*“Rooting our hope in God and confessing our temptation to despair, we dare to speak boldly because we believe that kairos demands it.”<sup>1</sup>*

In 2001, the Board of the very newly formed *Canadian Churches for Justice and Peace* (CCJP) changed the name of the organization to *KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives*.<sup>2</sup> The new name confirmed not only an activist but a theological mandate for the new unified ecumenical social justice coalition. The word *kairos* is itself a biblically-inspired concept, requiring theological interpretation in public sphere, while the choice of *Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives* invoked a prior Canadian project in collective theological praxis. To name the organization *KAIROS* was also to align it with a global movement of prophetic theological statements that testified, contextually and ecumenically, to issues of grave injustice beginning with apartheid in South Africa.

In the subsequent 14 years, the organization has attempted both to live into its name and live up to the legacy of *kairos* movements by reflecting a public practical theology—one that is “critical and prophetic and suggests a constructive agenda.”<sup>3</sup> Elements in this theology include: building critical consciousness by privileging the experiences of those most affected by injustice; defining a concern for justice in biblical and integrative terms; articulating impossible alternatives fuelled by eschatological hope, and committing to action that transforms, even in the context of risk. Having weathered a recent public storm related to its name, *KAIROS*, now most often referred to as *KAIROS Canada*, looks hopefully towards the emerging challenges of continuing public practical theology in a pluralistic, post-apology time and place.

### What’s in a kairos name?

In November 2000, Canadian churches created a unitary Board as the first step in amalgamating ten inter-church justice coalitions that had emerged in the post-Vatican II period.<sup>4</sup> On one level the amalgamation was motivated by a need for economic efficiencies and legal certainty. On another, there was recognition of the potential of an integrated ecumenical justice program to be owned across the country and responsive to emerging issues. The new organization was to bring together the justice legacies of the previous coalitions, commitments going back 25 years, and to meld them with some hoped for new initiatives in a unified church-owned program of research, policy development, partnership, and education. The first, ultimately provisional name, clearly represented that mandate, *Canadian Churches for Justice and Peace*.

However, by the time of its official launch on July 1, 2001, the coalition had been christened *KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives*, with both parts of the new

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name confirming an explicit theological mandate – an intention towards a public theology. *Kairos* is a Greek word for time referring not to chronological time or *chronos*, but to God’s time. A biblical concept, *kairos* is used 86 times in the New Testament to suggest “God’s special moment of grace, truth and decision.”<sup>5</sup> As in Mark 1:15 – “the *kairos* has come” — or in Luke 12:56 – “how is it that you don’t know how to interpret this *kairos*”— the word captures the critical moment when a community must interpret a crisis, both challenge and opportunity, and respond with decisive action. As described by Guinness, “...the hour is the God-given moment of destiny not to be shrunk from but seized with decisiveness, the floodtide of opportunity and demand in which the unseen waters of the future surge down to the present. Nothing is more critical than to recognize and respond to such a moment.”<sup>6</sup> Employed in the context of justice making, *kairos* invokes the idea that what a community decides and how it acts, when facing a moral crisis of injustice, is a testimony to its faithfulness.

The choice of the word *kairos* confirmed an explicit biblical grounding for the new organization, requiring theological interpretation of “God’s moment” in the simple and repeated act of explaining the name. Accepting the associations of the word *kairos* with biblical commitment and responsiveness in integrity, *KAIROS* began to describe itself as a “faithful ecumenical response to the biblical call to ‘do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8).”<sup>7</sup> Given that *KAIROS* was actually an organization with an ongoing life, the idea of responding to one moment shifted to an understanding of responding to a series of moments: “*Kairos* can also be a stream of moments, daily injustices that call us to act in God’s name.”<sup>8</sup> *Kairos* would become *KAIROS* in so far as it was “a community of people living into hope and engaged in faithful action for justice in our time.”<sup>9</sup> Inspired by the name, *KAIROS* came to understand itself as a theological grounded movement, discerning and responding to moments of God’s time in our time.

It was not only the *kairos* in the organization’s new title that confirmed a hoped for public theology, but the words *Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives*. The ecumenical coalitions from which *KAIROS* emerged were arguably reflections of an implicit practical theology. *Ten Days for Global Justice*, with its national network engaged in education, social action and liturgy on questions of global justice, embodied a spirituality of social justice. Michel Beaudin argues that there was a “...theological breakthrough introduced by the experience of the coalitions,” that of “solidarity with the excluded as a theological paradigm.”<sup>10</sup> However in an explicit manner or at an official level, observers pointed to a “lack of attention to theology.”<sup>11</sup> Theology, more traditionally defined, was perceived as potentially divisive, was understood as the purview of denominations (rather than of ecumenical coalitions), and took away from time for advocacy and action, on which there was ample consensus.<sup>12</sup>

In the late period of the inter-church coalitions, specifically 1998-2001, a project entitled the *Canadian Ecumenical Jubilee Initiative (CEJI)* emerged, reflecting a different theological approach, even at the official level of denominations. As well as an education and action program on global debt cancellation at the turn of the millennium, CEJI was understood as an integrated social justice project that would not “shy away from integrating lively, biblically-inspired faith reflection with attempts to understand and engage the global issues of the day.”<sup>13</sup> A unique feature of CEJI was the initial creation the *Canadian Jubilee Vision Statement* where biblical reflection, social analysis and proposals for action were integrated in a *kairos* expression of the millennial moment.<sup>14</sup> A series of

related theological books, conferences and fora followed in a process that magnified “memory, imagination and hope among ecumenical activists.”<sup>15</sup>

The use of the words *Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives* in the name of the newly integrated organization, with its resemblance to *Canadian Ecumenical Jubilee Initiative*, reflected an intention to not simply draw forward the activism of the coalitions, but this period of more explicit theological reflection that immediately preceded *KAIROS*’ creation. Some of the official ambivalence on explicit theological reflection that had existed in the period of the previous inter-church coalitions appeared to have abated through a hopeful and positive experience of theology as integrative of biblical reflection, analysis, and action, a theology capable of catalyzing the energies of the churches and people of faith, as well as engaging, even inspiring, the broader public.<sup>16</sup> To assert *KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives* as an organizational name was to claim the process and the meaning of future collective ecumenical witness for social justice as theological action.

### What’s in a kairos movement?

The use of the word *kairos* to characterize the ecumenical justice organization was not a decontextualized theological assertion. Beyond the deliberate association of *Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives* with the preceding Canadian Jubilee project, *kairos* directly invoked a global movement of communities that had employed the word to describe a theological crisis requiring urgent moral action. In 1985 “the embodied theologies of ordinary South Africans struggling against apartheid called forth a document and a process that has reverberated around the world.”<sup>17</sup> The *Kairos Document: Challenge to the Churches (1985)*, which called on the churches to condemn apartheid and witness to a new reality in justice, was only the first of a series of documents that both emerged from and nurtured ecumenical justice movements including:

- *Kairos Central America (1988)* from the context of Central American wars;
- *The Road to Damascus: Kairos and Conversion (1989)* as an expression of ‘Third World’ Christians affected by civil conflict;
- *On the Way: From Kairos to Jubilee* (Early 1990’s) from American Christian reflecting on the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Columbus;
- *European Kairos Document (1998)* relating to globalization and competition;<sup>18</sup>
- and much more recently, *Kairos Palestine: A Moment of Truth (2009)* relating to the ongoing occupation of Palestine.

While each of these documents differed, particularly with respect to the audience and the process that shaped their creation,<sup>19</sup> some key elements characterized the *kairos* tradition with which *KAIROS* was now being identified. These include public witness that is contextual and ecumenical, in service to a movement or movements, reflective of a “see-judge-act’ praxis, and related to a particular moment of crisis.

Implicitly, the coalitions which preceded *KAIROS* each emerged from a “*kairos* moment of Canadian or global injustice. Whether it was coups, or pipelines, the pain of Sudan or Burma, the apparently intractable reality of apartheid or poverty, the coalitions were formed as a collective response of the Canadian churches to the hard realities of injustice and pain...”<sup>20</sup> However, by invoking *kairos* in the unified coalition’s name, the churches were linking the new organization directly to an explicit theological “trajectory.”<sup>21</sup>

Early *KAIROS* documents placed the CEJI Vision statement, *Jubilee...A Time for a new Beginning*, into this trajectory and spoke of the challenges of living up to this legacy: “Each community that has seized upon this image of *kairos* in word and action has contributed to the development of a living tradition. It is in this stream of faithful witness that *KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives* finds its place.”<sup>22</sup> *KAIROS* was being called to embody contextual, ecumenical, movement-based theology, a theology that saw and analyzed the signs of the times towards action for justice.

One dilemma in this association was the clear difference between statements issued in a moment in time by voices inside and outside official church structures, and an ongoing organization of churches, including those churches as institutions.<sup>23</sup> This can be observed by reflecting on the Buttelli’s categorization of the three kinds of theology analyzed in the *South African Kairos Document* – *state theology*, *church theology*, and *prophetic theology* (the last of which Buttelli argues is in continuity with a public theology).<sup>24</sup> *KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives* was well placed to mirror the *kairos* movements’ common critique of *state theology*, the manner in which theological concepts are used to justify an unjust status quo. For example, on the issue of fossil fuel exploitation, *KAIROS*, in the paper *Reenergizing the Future*, describes how scriptural texts such as Genesis 1:26 and the exclusive identification of nature as feminine “...amplified by the Enlightenment and convenient to the needs of industrialization, [has] sanctioned militarism, the military industry and an unlimited exploitation of the Earth’s resources.”<sup>25</sup> Collective reflection by the churches and the movement of *KAIROS* created sufficient space to enable critique of elements of Christian theological or scriptural tradition.

Likewise, there is strong evidence of alignment with a *prophetic theology*, grounded in biblical reflection, engaged with social analysis, and inspired and resulting in action.<sup>26</sup> For example, in the mid-2000’s, a *KAIROS* program on water used as a starting point the sacredness of water in scripture, employed a rigorous social analysis on the impact of growing privatization and commodification in ecological harm and water inequality, and fuelled a social action campaign for renewal of water as a public trust.<sup>27</sup> The movement orientation of *KAIROS*, as a network of people of faithful action across the country in solidarity with global partners across the world, while not completely parallel to the basis in struggle of the *Kairos South Africa* document,<sup>28</sup> was nonetheless capable of denouncing *state theologies* that prop up an unjust status quo, and announcing *prophetic theologies* that become embodied in action.

However, *KAIROS*’ identity as an organization reflecting the public witness of eleven churches and church agencies can cause it to be “stretched” when the *kairos* moment requires a challenge to the churches or a critique of *church theology* (defined by Buttelli as “a theology that did not engage deeply in the struggle” or a “spirituality without social engagement”).<sup>29</sup> The ecumenical table of *KAIROS* may offer a private forum for self-reflexive engagement with denominational theology. Denominations can sometimes reflect, in an ecumenical context, whether as churches their practical theology has been deep or sufficient to definitively confront injustice. And yet, in the public sphere, *KAIROS*’ role as a collective voice, strengthened by the institutional power of the denominations, can also be a limitation to a public role in critiquing church practice. There is an understandable challenge in *KAIROS*, as a collective, engaging in a critical assessment of *church theology*, or the practices of its denominations. However, in so far as the churches engage in their own self critique, such as of the practical theologies that gave rise to their participation in the

aggressive assimilation project of Indian residential schools, *KAIROS* can enhance and share in that self-reflexive process.

Naming *KAIROS* was an act of commitment that not only associated it with a theological task, but also placed the ecumenical organization in a trajectory of contextual theological witness towards action. Unlike *Canadian Churches for Justice and Peace*, the naming choice suggested that *KAIROS* be more akin to a movement, and, in its ecumenism, more than the sum of its parts. The integrity of *kairos* witness, from South Africa to Central America, from civil conflict to globalization, and now to the trauma of the continued occupation of Palestine, is a challenging tradition in which to be faithful. And, it can be debated whether the organization has lived into the fullness of the hopes of this name or whether, as Cormie has argued, there has been a “renewed marginalization of theological reflection.”<sup>30</sup> However, a claim was being made that either the unified coalition would further a process of theological reflection--contextual, ecumenical and public in its scope – or that even in its activist mandate, it would be a public theological witness of the churches in this moment in time.

## A public practical theology of *KAIROS*

Without space or necessary distance to engage in a comprehensive assessment of the success of *KAIROS* in living in to its name and up to its legacy, one can observe elements of what is recently described as public practical theology. Denise Ackermann offers a helpful definition:

I have argued that public theology as public practical theology not only affirms the public character of all theology but points to the fact that theology lives in the tension between theory and praxis, between what we believe and what we do about what we believe. Public practical theology that is done in the service of the reign of God comes out of critical consciousness informed by social analysis, a concern for justice, the creative use of human imagination and the willingness to risk actions that express our hope for a better world.<sup>31</sup>

By this definition public practical theology is understood to be critical, hopeful, and definitively linked to action. Some distinguish public from liberation theologies not in the depth of prophetic critique, nor in the praxis orientation, but in the context and audience, which, in the case of public theologies, are “plural democratic societies.”<sup>32</sup> In the work of *KAIROS*, there is evidence of a process of appropriating and applying the insights of liberation theologies, whether emerging from global south or marginalized community contexts, to a plural and democratic Canadian context.

## Critical Consciousness

*KAIROS* understands its task of developing a “critical consciousness informed by social analysis”<sup>33</sup> as a public one: “inspired by biblical teaching, *KAIROS* deliberates on issues of common concern, striving to be a prophetic voice in the public sphere.”<sup>34</sup> While the social analysis anticipated is inclusive of research and critical thinking, *KAIROS* defines its primary source as lived realities of marginalized communities. Relationships with 23 global partners<sup>35</sup> and with migrant and Indigenous communities in Canada are understood as the ground from which critical consciousness develops. For example, a current priority

on the impact of Canadian mining companies abroad did not emerge from a denominational prioritization of mining as a key social justice issue. Rather it was because communities in which *KAIROS* and the previous coalitions had long been in relationship, particularly in the Philippines and Latin American, now named Canadian mining interests as one of the most egregious challenges to their human rights and the ecological integrity of their lands and waters. Where solidarity had been related to civil conflict, it now centres on mining impacts because of the lived experiences of partner communities.<sup>36</sup>

More recently, Indigenous communities in Canada named the pipeline proposed from the oil sands to the British Columbia coast and the practice of shale gas fracturing (fracking) as impediments to the full realization of the rights and health of their communities. It was this impetus – specific struggles in communities – that led *KAIROS* to engage in ethical reflection, producing *Ethical Reflections on the Northern Gateway Pipeline* and *Ethical Reflections on Fracking*.<sup>37</sup> Or, in another example, the courage of the testimony of Indian residential school survivors, including on the intergenerational legacy, is the source for the analysis of ongoing violations of Indigenous rights in Canadian society, a truth that must be understood for true reconciliation to unfold. In this way, *KAIROS* affirms Lebacqz' assertion that the "voices of the poor and oppressed provide the 'praxis' out of which justice must be sought...there is no 'theory' of justice prior to the lived experience of the people."<sup>38</sup> In *KAIROS*' public theology, reflection and research follow rather than lead the development of critical consciousness begun in hearing the lived experience of those most affected.

## Concern for Justice

Since the development of the first identity or mission statement, *KAIROS* has defined its "concern for justice"<sup>39</sup> in biblical terms; *KAIROS* "is a faithful ecumenical response"<sup>40</sup> to the call articulated by Micah 6:8. The choice of this summary statement of the 8th century prophets<sup>41</sup> as an iconic for the organization, often linked to the related Isaiah 58:6 ("is this not the fast that God requires to loose the fetters of injustice"), reflects *KAIROS* central theological assertion that justice is a manifestation of holiness. In *KAIROS*, little distinction is made between "faith and worship" and "justice and peace," suggesting that the concern for justice arises out of faithfulness and action for justice returns faithfulness; doing justice is true worship. In specific terms, this is revealed in program choices such as engaging communities in collective, prayerful bell ringing to sound the public alarm on climate change, inviting participation in "political" walks or marches as acts of meditation or pilgrimage,<sup>42</sup> or a more recent initiative to "re-place church" in the practice of reconciliation in the watershed.<sup>43</sup> *KAIROS*' public theology grounds concern for justice in biblical faithfulness and, in interaction with both churches and the public sphere, refuses a distinction between what is holy and what is just.

*KAIROS* builds on emerging insights within the late days of the previous ecumenical coalitions to define the justice reflected in its public theology in both human and ecological terms. Here again the assertion is biblically based reflecting an affirmation that the whole of the scriptures is a creative tangle of two strands or two windows into God's action – creation and liberation. Creation—these are the narratives about the God who loves the world into being, who saw it was good, who offers the rainbow covenant, and who speaks through the burning bush, in the trees that clap their hands, and in the rocks that cry out.



And liberation—these are narratives of God’s deep passion and pain at the reality of oppression, and God’s promise to be present in every gesture towards freedom, every action to release oppressed people from bondage, sending Christ to liberate us even from death. In *KAIROS*, a concern for justice that emerges not only out of human bondage but also out of ecological degradation, expressed in public sphere as ecological justice and human rights, is a translation into public theology of the integrity of God’s creation and the promise God’s liberation.

Neither in the public expression – ecological justice and human rights – nor in the scriptural sources of creation and liberation are these strands separate. The foundational theological reflection for *KAIROS*, that of Jubilee, is one important place in scripture where the oppression of people and the earth are jointly addressed through themes of release from bondage, redistribution of wealth, and rest and return for the land, instructions honouring the twin strands. The affirmation in Luke 4, that in Jesus, Jubilee is being fulfilled, underscores Christ’s intersectional mandate to renew creation and bring liberation.

*KAIROS*, in identifying twin priorities of dignity and rights and sustainability,<sup>44</sup> and in asserting their interrelation, has affirmed this theological intersection in the public square. Work with partners in the Philippines or Guatemala to intervene with a Canadian mining company that is causing ecological harm and increasing human rights repression expresses a concern for justice that is both ecological integrity and human rights. Reflection on whether the oil sand development on the traditional territories of Indigenous peoples is worth the risks to the earth and to Indigenous livelihood is both human rights and ecological integrity. *KAIROS’* concern for justice as expressed in its public theology witnesses to the biblical intersections of action and worship, creation and liberation, faith and justice.

## Creative Imagination

In *KAIROS*, there has always been a theological impulse to announce and not simply denounce, to make “creative use of human imagination” in proposing alternatives to policies which fail the test of justice. On one level, the construction of these policy proposals, such as a just transition to a sustainable energy economy or another order of government to reflect the rights of Indigenous peoples, bears little distinction from the policy goals of secular civil society allies. On another level, these proposals reflect a public theology of eschatological possibility, affirmed by the sure and certain hope of the resurrection and a belief in the coming realm of God. *KAIROS* does not posit that “another world is possible” but knows it, “with all our hearts and minds,” seeing visions of it in “faithful imaginations,” fired as they are by “hopeful anticipation of all that God intends.”<sup>45</sup> This sense of fidelity to God’s dream, however unreasonable such a dream might seem in today’s reality, is what has led *KAIROS* to reject a focus on incrementalist projects such as the Millennium Development Goals, or purely market based consumptive solutions to injustices, such as cap and trade as the chief response to climate change<sup>46</sup>, choosing instead to assert principles and rights, and a bold horizon for justice. *KAIROS’* public theology may be practical, in terms of systematic advance towards the horizon of justice, but its aspirations need not be reasonable.



Given that privileges and interests can reduce clear vision and creativity, *KAIROS* has often observed that the place of “human imagination” most reflective of God’s impossible dreams is often the communities most affected by injustice.<sup>47</sup> Indigenous wisdom about the interconnectedness of all life, the impact to the seven generations, and the need for balance, wisdom marginalized by colonial conceptions of knowledge, is prophetic in the face of grim realities of the current ecological crisis, and may offer the seeds of imaginative solutions. In their resilience, whether it be an Indigenous community in Canada renewing language and culture in the context of a legacy of cultural genocide, or a Guatemalan community reclaiming from ancient traditional ways the sustainable farming methods to mitigate against climate change, an active imagination towards hope can be recognized. *KAIROS*’ public, practical theology includes listening for the solutions from these communities and magnifying them, “pronouncing” them to a wider and wider circle.

### **Actions that Risk**

The integrity of *KAIROS*’ public theology is in the practical, the continued demonstration of a “willingness to risk actions that express hope.” In 2008, in the context of declining resources from denominations and early indications of a political climate less and less hospitable to social justice,<sup>48</sup> the Board of *KAIROS* adopted a key principle: “That *KAIROS* retain its theological courage.”<sup>49</sup> It was a testimony to partners around the globe whose hopeful commitment to human rights and ecological justice had cost them their lives. If they continued their faithful work at such great risk, how could those in the churches in Canada, in such greater privilege and security not act with them? In establishing this principle for *KAIROS*, the churches recognized the “risks in naming what needs to be named” but also the “profound theological risks in staying silent.”<sup>50</sup> Integrated with social movements, *KAIROS*’ public practical theology turned on its continued willingness to “risk actions” that embodied transformative change.

A test of this principle came one year later. In December 2009, the federal government, in a possible confusion of *Kairos Palestine* and *KAIROS Canada*<sup>51</sup>, or in repudiation of the coalitions’ advocacy on an end to the occupation of Palestine, oil sands development, trade without human rights, and Canadian mining practice, ended a 34-year international development funding relationship (resulting in a cut of \$7 million over 5 years). The named association to the *kairos* movements, in this case of the prophetic call of *Kairos Palestine* for an end to the occupation, may have led to *KAIROS Canada* assuming a small part of the *kairos* movements’ risk, appropriate given the many ways in that it had to date associated itself with the *kairos* movements’ integrity. When the coalition expressed concern at the implications for the direction of international development, such as apparent political interference, they were maligned by government officials, including through false accusations of anti-Semitism.<sup>52</sup> Defunding has been followed by increased scrutiny on the political activity of the coalition, with possible implications on the situation of its charitable status.

When in 2013, *KAIROS*, engaging in a 40-year celebration of the organization and the precursor coalitions chose the phrase “Be Not Afraid,” it was affirming that despite consequences of its advocacy, its public theology would continue to be one of risk taking action, in continued solidarity with partners in much greater risk. Whether high level lobbying or grassroots solidarity action, *KAIROS* public theology can be observed in what

the organization ultimately does about what it believes and would be negated without this practice of hope, whether it be advocating with migrant workers for paths to permanent residency, demanding an inquiry into missing murdered Indigenous women and girls, or calling for access to justice for those harmed by Canadian mining companies, however uncomfortable or unpopular these actions might be.

## Shifting towards the future

Since *KAIROS* was christened in 2001, significant shifts have occurred in Canadian society pertinent to the expressions of public theology. As Legge has pointed out, mainstream churches are “weakened institutions,” in a context of a realignment of public and private space and the increasing plural landscape of difference.<sup>53</sup> For *KAIROS*, the question of what it means to be an organization of churches, with a Christian vocation, given increasing diversity—cultural, linguistic, and religious—is a key subject of reflection. More explicit theological commitment, signalled on one level through increased visibility of theological language in the public expression of the coalition<sup>54</sup>, has strengthened bonds of connection to the organization by the churches and their constituencies, but is it weakening bonds to other faith communities and civil society actors in an increasingly more diverse Canada? Is it time for the organization to shift from an ecumenical to an inter-faith identity and therefore an inter-faith theology (or theologies)?

The most recent strategic plan struggled with these questions. Ultimately the process re-affirmed *KAIROS*’ fundamental Christian identity with an explicit commitment to work together as churches but not to work “in isolation,” and asserted that *KAIROS* “does not only want, but needs, people of different faiths or of conscience to enable effective and credible reflection and action.”<sup>55</sup> Recent commitments to express racial justice and to better engage with migrant and diaspora communities compliment earlier processes of intentional engagement with Indigenous peoples, women, and youth and young adults. Deeper engagement with diverse communities will positively shift *KAIROS*’ public theology, a process overdue, while questions of a fuller inter-faith identity will likely continue.

Another profound change since *KAIROS*’ formation in 2001 is the post-apology context of relationships with Indigenous peoples. While the churches’ devastating collaboration in the colonizing reality of Indian residential schools was known and acknowledged by the churches by 2001, the subsequent decade has brought into greater focus what those apologies, the Government of Canada apology of 2008, and the process and outcomes of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, mean for an ecumenical, public theology in Canada in 2015. *KAIROS*’ deep engagement through this period, not only in Indigenous rights and justice, but in processes of truth, healing and reconciliation, has led to a significant shift, sought by Indigenous leadership in *KAIROS*, to working *with* and not *for* Indigenous peoples. This has had implication for deepened commitment to decolonized ways of thinking, working and structuring the organization, and no less, a process to decolonize *KAIROS* public theology.

*KAIROS*, with its churches, is beginning the long process of discerning what *church theologies* allowed for the churches’ collaboration with government and abusers in permitting the violation of generations of Indigenous children – violations that were physical, sexual, cultural and spiritual – and the broader process of colonization, with its dehumanization and violence. Discerning the role of these theologies is essential to

ensuring their eradication from today's public practical theology, aligning it with *KAIROS* and the churches commitments to right relations and Indigenous justice. These include explicit steps towards a rejection of triumphalism, for a necessary humility. *KAIROS'* most recent strategic plan acknowledges the "ways in which Christianity has become entangled in dehumanizing processes, such as colonization and has been co-opted to support violence," asserting a need for "humility" in the organization's Christian public theology going forward.<sup>56</sup>

Today *KAIROS'* public face, its organizational website, includes bible studies as well as policy briefing papers, sermons, theological reflections and worship resources as well as invitations to policy forums and educational workshops.<sup>57</sup> There is an observable public theology but true to the organization's name, it is not monolithic but linked to specific issues and arising out of particular moments and contexts. It is perhaps truest to say that while there are common elements – a basis in the experience of communities, an integrated biblical vision, an orientation to hopeful alternatives, and a commitment to action, even with risk – *KAIROS'* theological expression is plural, being defined by the *kairos* moment, the particular distinct gifts and challenges of its denominations, the social movements in which its loyalties are observable, and developing engagements with diverse communities. While these plural "words" may frustrate theological depth, they continue to animate a broad movement of passionate, faithful commitment to justice, in creative loving relationship to the Word made flesh in our *kairos* time.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> *KAIROS/USA*. "On the Way: From Kairos to Jubilee," as quoted in *KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives, Becoming KAIROS: Taking Faithful Action for Justice in Your Community* (Toronto, *KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives*, 2003), 3.

<sup>2</sup> The Canadian ecumenical social justice organization *KAIROS*, will be referred to with capital letters, while the word *kairos* will be in small letters. Specific related documents and movements will be attributed as they depict themselves.

<sup>3</sup> Felipe Gustavo Koch Butelli, "Public Theology as Theology on Kairos: The South African *Kairos Document* as a Model of Public Theology," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 143 (Jul 2012): 90.

<sup>4</sup> The coalitions were the Aboriginal Rights Coalition (ARC), the Canada Asia Working Group (CAWG), the Ecumenical Coalition for Economic Justice (ECEJ), the Taskforce on the Churches and Corporate Responsibility (TCCR), Inter-Church Action for Development Relief and Justice (ICA), Inter-Church Coalition on Africa (ICCAF), Inter-Church Committee on Refugees (ICCR), Inter-Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America (ICCHRLA), PLURA, Ten Days for Global Justice (TEN DAYS).

<sup>5</sup> *KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives, Becoming KAIROS: Taking Faithful Action for Justice in Your Community* (Toronto, *KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives*, 2003), 3.

<sup>6</sup> Os Guinness as quoted in *KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives, Becoming KAIROS: Taking Faithful Action for Justice in Your Community* (Toronto, *KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives*, 2003), 3.

<sup>7</sup> *KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives*. "Identity Statement." <http://www.kairoscanada.org/who-we-are/mission-statement/> (accessed October 12, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> *KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives, Becoming KAIROS: Taking Faithful Action for Justice in Your Community*, 4.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Michel Beaudin, ““They Persevered as though They Saw the One Who Is Invisible,”” in *Coalitions for Justice*, eds. Christopher Lind and Joe Mihevc (Ottawa: Novalis, 1994), 280.

<sup>11</sup> Lee Cormie, “Seeds of Hope in the New World (Dis)Order,” in *Coalitions for Justice*, eds. Christopher Lind and Joe Mihevc (Ottawa: Novalis, 1994), 365.

<sup>12</sup> Lee Cormie, “Hope for a New Beginning in History,” in *Intersecting Voices: Critical Theologies in a Land of Diversity*, eds. Don Schweitzer and Derek Simon (Ottawa: Novalis, 2004), 306.

<sup>13</sup> CEJI Evaluation Committee. *Record and Evaluation of the Canadian Ecumenical Jubilee Initiative (1997-2001)*. Toronto: CEJI, 2001, 25.

<sup>14</sup> *A New Beginning: A Call for Jubilee, The Vision of the Canadian Ecumenical Jubilee Initiative*, Toronto: CEJI, 1998.

<sup>15</sup> Jennifer Henry, “Jubilee Activism: A Living Vision of Hope,” *Liberating Biblical Study*, eds. Laurel Dykstra and Ched Myers (Oregon: Cascade Books, 2011), 107.

<sup>16</sup> “The public recognition that churches were exploring their own story and drawing energy from shared memory engendered begrudging respect for what Canada’s largest newspaper called the ‘fine, quixotic idea’ of international debt forgiveness” in Jennifer Henry, “Jubilee Activism: A Living Vision of Hope,” 108.

<sup>17</sup> Gerald West, “Tracing the ‘Kairos’ Trajectory from South Africa (1985) to Palestine,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 143 (July 2012), 4.

<sup>18</sup> KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives, *Becoming KAIROS: Taking Faithful Action for Justice in Your Community*, 5.

<sup>19</sup> West, “Tracing the ‘Kairos’,” 4.

<sup>20</sup> Jennifer Henry, “Canadian Ecumenical Social Justice: A Movement of Prophetic Witness.” *Touchstone: Theology and Social Witness* 33, no. 2 (June 2015), 25.

<sup>21</sup> Gerald West, 4.

<sup>22</sup> KAIROS, *Becoming KAIROS*, 5.

<sup>23</sup> KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives is made up of eleven churches and religious organizations including the Anglican Church of Canada, the Primate’s World Relief and Development Fund, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, Mennonite Central Committee (Canada), The Christian Reformed Church of North America, the Canadian Religious Conference, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, the Presbyterian Church in Canada, the Religious Society of Friends, and the United Church of Canada.

<sup>24</sup> Felipe Gustavo Koch Buttelli, 93-95.

<sup>25</sup> KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives, “Reenergizing the Future: Faith and Justice in a Post Petroleum World.” December 2007. <http://www.kairoscanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/SUS-07-ReEnergizingTheFuture.pdf> (accessed October 12, 2015), p. 4.

<sup>26</sup> Felipe Gustavo Koch Buttelli, 93-95.

<sup>27</sup> KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives, *Water: A Sacred Gift* (Toronto: KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives, 2005).

<sup>28</sup> Note the key difference in that *KAIROS* is made up of largely privileged actors in solidarity with marginalized communities as distinct from being a theological expression of a marginalized community itself (although its demographics and associations are changing). While this is different from *Kairos South Africa*, it is not distinct from European or American *Kairos* expressions.

<sup>29</sup> Felipe Gustavo Koch Buttelli, 94,95.

<sup>30</sup> Lee Cormie, “Hope for a New Beginning in History,” 322.

<sup>31</sup> Denise Ackermann as quoted in Felipe Gustavo Koch Buttelli, 102.

<sup>32</sup> H. Bedford Strohm as quoted in Felipe Gustavo Koch Buttelli, 100.

<sup>33</sup> Denise Ackermann, in Felipe Gustavo Koch Buttelli, 102.

<sup>34</sup> KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives. “Identity Statement.” <http://www.kairoscanada.org/who-we-are/mission-statement/> (accessed October 12, 2015).

<sup>35</sup> Current global partners relate to the priority countries of South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guatemala, Ecuador, Philippines, Colombia, Indonesia and The Pacific.

<sup>36</sup> See “Ecumenical Conference on Mining Final Statement,” May 2011. <http://pwrdf.org/2011/ecumenical-conference-on-mining-final-statement-1320683258/> (accessed on October 19, 2015).

- <sup>37</sup> KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives. "Ethical Reflections on the Northern Gateway Pipeline." July 2012. <http://www.kairoscanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/SUS-RE-NorthernGatewayEthicalFramework.pdf> (accessed on October 19, 2015). KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives. "Ethical Reflections on Fracking." February 2015. <http://www.kairoscanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/final-Ethical-Reflections-on-Fracking-Feb.-2015.pdf> (accessed October 19, 2015).
- <sup>38</sup> Karen Lebacqz, *Justice in an Unjust World* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987), 59, 65.
- <sup>39</sup> Denise Ackermann, in Felipe Gustavo Koch Buttelli, 102.
- <sup>40</sup> KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives. "Identity Statement." <http://www.kairoscanada.org/who-we-are/mission-statement/> (accessed October 12, 2015).
- <sup>41</sup> Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel (Revised and Enlarged)* (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 97.
- <sup>42</sup> KAIROS. "We Make the Road by Walking." 2015. <http://www.kairoscanada.org/product/we-make-the-road-by-walking/> (accessed on October 18, 2015).
- <sup>43</sup> See <http://replacingchurch.com/> (accessed on October 19, 2015) for a project of the United Church of Canada and KAIROS.
- <sup>44</sup> KAIROS, "When they call me, I will answer them: KAIROS Strategic Plan 2010-2015." <http://www.kairoscanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/WWA-StrategicPlan2010-2015.pdf> (accessed on October 19, 2015), 2.
- <sup>45</sup> Rob Fennell, "Theological Foundations for Social Justice: Another World is Possible." *Touchstone: Theology and Social Witness* 33, no. 2 (June 2015), 10, 11.
- <sup>46</sup> KAIROS, "Canada Falls Far Short of Pope Francis' Call for Ecological Justice." Policy Briefing Paper 42, July 2015. <http://1605070727.rsc.cdn77.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Briefing-Paper-42-Laudato-Si.pdf> (accessed on October 20, 2015).
- <sup>47</sup> See KAIROS, "Peoples Climate March outshines UN Summit," Briefing Paper 40, October 2014. <http://www.kairoscanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/BP40-PeoplesClimateMarch.pdf> (accessed on October 20, 2015) or KAIROS, "Indigenous Wisdom: Living in Harmony with Mother Earth." <https://www.kairoscanada.org/blog/indigenous-wisdom-living-in-harmony-with-mother-earth-policy-briefing-paper-39/> (accessed on October 20, 2015).
- <sup>48</sup> Gregory Baum, "From the Heart: Faith and the Option for the Poor." *Touchstone: Theology and Social Witness* 33, no. 2 (June 2015), 54.
- <sup>49</sup> KAIROS, "When they call me, I will answer them: KAIROS Strategic Plan 2010-2015." <http://www.kairoscanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/WWA-StrategicPlan2010-2015.pdf> (accessed on October 19, 2015), 2.
- <sup>50</sup> KAIROS, "When they call me." <http://www.kairoscanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/WWA-StrategicPlan2010-2015.pdf> (accessed on October 19, 2015), 1.
- <sup>51</sup> *KAIROS Canada* has become a more frequent short hand for the organization to distinguish it from other expressions of *kairos*.
- <sup>52</sup> Jason Kenney in "Text of a speech by Jason Kenney, Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, at the Global Forum for Combatting Anti-Semitism in Jerusalem on December 16, 2009," *The Toronto Star*, December 30, 2009. [http://www.thestar.com/news/2009/12/30/text\\_of\\_jason\\_kenney\\_speech.html](http://www.thestar.com/news/2009/12/30/text_of_jason_kenney_speech.html) (accessed on October 19, 2015).
- <sup>53</sup> Marilyn J. Legge, "In the company of God and one another': feminist theo-ethics, heterogeneous publics and intercultural churches," in Stephen Burns and Anita Munro, eds., *Public Theology and the Challenge of Feminism* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2015): 47, 48.
- <sup>54</sup> See Spirited Reflections, regular theological or biblical reflection on justice issues by KAIROS' network across the country at [www.kairoscanada.org](http://www.kairoscanada.org).
- <sup>55</sup> KAIROS, "Animated by the Spirit for God's New Community of Hope: KAIROS Draft Strategic Plan 2010-2015." Proposed Final: October 15, 2015, 4.
- <sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.
- <sup>57</sup> [www.kairoscanada.org](http://www.kairoscanada.org)