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Journeying Together toward Truth and Reconciliation

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Forward

Cameron Harder and Allen Jorgenson

Just over a year ago, the 94 recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission were released at its final events, held in Ottawa May 31 to June 3, 2015. The editorial board of *Consensus* deemed now a fit time to ponder what “Journeying Together toward Truth and Reconciliation” might look like at this time in our live together. To this end we were invited, as guest editors to initiate a conversation on this topic. What follows is a fascinating and important contribution to the larger question around the pathway forward in truth and reconciliation. Readers will be interested in knowing that we have here a variety of voices, including Christians and not, as well as Indigenous and Settler (Enns), who write in a variety of forms appealing to a varied sources for their theological reflections.

Kelly Laurila begins her essay by directing the reader to a variety of experiences that have raised the question of the definition of reconciliation, for her, a woman of Indigenous Sáami and Settler Irish heritages. After exploring some commonplace articulations of reconciliation, both indigenous and not, she notes a lack. She invites the reader to join in her reflection on her own journey of reconciliation and the importance of following the teachings of the Seven Grandfathers She draws especial attention to her experiences, which underscore that the many connections that are made at a local level branch out to make possible a web of healing with all of her relations.

Kathy Absolon and her daughter Akeisha E. Absolon-Winchester explore the topic of reconciliation with special attention to the historical and contemporary contexts wherein they discern that colonialism continues to be a force that can only be countered by advancing Indigenous narratives and truth telling. It is also noted that the necessary condition for reconciliation to advance is the coming together of Indigenous and Settler in equity and cultural humility. In conclusion, the authors discuss how reconciliation operates within a family impacted by the Residential School System.

Ginny Doctor, in her work in the Anglican Church of Canada, underscores the manner in which the only pathway through trauma is reconciliation. She highlights that reconciliation involves both restoration and recovery. Important resources to this end include the traditional teachings of Indigenous communities, wherein the giftedness of Indigenous people is clear. She identifies the product of Indigenous right relationship as a “right-brained” reconciliation that can then work with its opposite for the betterment of all.

Terry Leblanc notes that the difficulty in moving forward in reconciliation also has to do with the way we perceive time. “That was then, this is now” he often hears as he addresses the question of residential schools and the colonial legacy. Leblanc says that we cut ourselves off from the hard but also potentially healing truths of the past in several ways: 1) by our inability to appropriate our Canadian history in a collective sense even if personally we are recent arrivals to this land; 2) by a re-packaging of the concept of “sin” in humanistic and

personalist forms that remove the communal elements and the need for repentance; 3) the failure to recognize that the instruments of cultural thought and political design that govern our country are riddled with language and concepts created during a period when “exterminating the Indian” was regarded as the way forward in Canada’s development.

Elaine Enns takes the historical divide a step further. A descendant of Mennonite settlers who were themselves dispossessed and then, in their re-settlement, dispossessed Indigenous people, Enns tracks how these traumas get passed through the generations, in part because—as we saw in the TRC hearings—the wounds are hidden under a blanket of shame. The inability to face the harm that was done to a people can inhibit its healing. She notes that her own people—particularly the Mennonite women whose stories have rarely been told—need a kind of TRC as well. In facing our own past with clear eyes, individually and collectively, she suggests that we can move forward into a healthier future.

One of the core difficulties in moving ahead with reconciliation says Indigenous Anglican Bishop Mark McDonald is the fact that corporate reconciliation requires a systemic understanding of evil, which is a somewhat foreign concept in a Canadian culture that values individual choice and responsibility as the cornerstone of social accountability. Reconciliation, he says will required that we pay more attention (in theological terms) to “the Principalities and Powers.”