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# The Crucifixion in Matthew and the Theology of the Cross in Canada Today

Allen G. Jorgenson<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

**M**y task is formidable. To tackle the topic of the crucifixion in Matthew's gospel and to articulate a theology of the cross in the Canadian context is nigh impossible, but with that acknowledgement comes a certain freedom. And so what follows is more of a poem than a treatise, more of a sketch than an architectural blue print. In sum, what I will say is the following: a theology of the cross in the Canadian context today cannot but take leave from our history, wherein we encounter God in solidarity with those who suffer, too often, in the care of the church and who in their suffering give us a glimpse of God in Christ, whom we can discern precisely because Holy Scripture has schooled us in hearing and seeing. The gospel of Matthew, the land where I live, and the people of that land will be my tutors in this essay. And so I begin with my context, so you know something of who I am by knowing a little about where I come from.

The city where I live was once called Berlin. In 1916, with Canada in the throes of the First World War, the city fathers thought it wise to rename it Kitchener, after the famous British soldier. Berlin had been a nod to the German heritage of my city, settled in the main by Mennonites coming north from Pennsylvania. These peaceable folk acquired their land from the Haudenosaunee, sometimes called the Six Nations or the Iroquois, whom were deeded six miles on each side of the Grand River from its source to Lake Erie in the Haldimand Tract in thanks for their fidelity to the Crown in wars with the Americans. This river flows through Waterloo and Kitchener. The Six Nations of the Grand River Nation now own about five percent of their deeded territory.<sup>2</sup> Its loss largely came about as a result of unscrupulous Indian Agents, who had a kind of power of attorney over the Haudenosaunee. Sometimes land was lost because of misunderstandings about conditions of sale, and bits of it were sold honestly. Among that lost land includes the lot upon which my house now sits, as well as the land upon which sits Waterloo Lutheran Seminary, and St. Matthew's Lutheran Church where I worship. Much has been lost for our First Nations, but land is only the tip of the iceberg.

In 1876 a series of regulations were introduced in the Dominion of Canada that went by the illustrious title "The Indian Act." This act still governs the life of the so-called Status Indians of Canada. "Status Indian" is a technical term used to define individuals of Canada's First Nations who were registered as such according to the definition of "Indian" in the Indian Act of 1876,<sup>3</sup> and their descendants who were moved to land held in trust for them by the government. These lands are called reserves. Some draconian rules have been added

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.sixnations.ca/LandsResources/HaldProc.htm> (accessed March 15, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> <http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/home/government-policy/the-indian-act/indian-status.html> (Accessed August 8, 2014).

to this act over the years, some of which have since been repealed. But let me give you a taste of some of the Act's amendments.

- In 1881 some Status Indians were prohibited from selling grain etc., since their labour would compete with that of Settler farmers.
- In 1885 traditional Indigenous religious ceremonies and dances were outlawed.
- In 1911 municipalities and companies were allowed to expropriate lands without the permission of the local Indigenous bands in order to build railways, roads etc.
- In 1914 Status Indians were required to get permission in order to wear their traditional costumes in public events.
- Until 1968 Status Indians could lose their status by the following
  - Marrying a non-status person if you were a woman,
  - Getting a university degree, and by
  - Becoming a clergyman, or lawyer.<sup>4</sup>

As can be discerned from this list, the relationship of Canada to its First Nations was one that was increasingly parochial. Not only were the Indigenous inhabitants robbed of their land, but of their pride. But it did not stop there. They were also robbed of their children in a brutal move that was intended to fully and finally assimilate Indigenous Americans. In the 1880's residential schools were established in a partnership between the churches and the government that had the aim, in the words of one government official, "to kill the Indian in the child."<sup>5</sup>

In a city some forty kilometres south of where I live, the Mohawk Institute Residential School was the place where this project was advanced for the Haudenosaunee, although it is but one instance across our land. Children were forcibly removed from their homes, sent to boarding schools where speaking their language resulted in physical punishment. Children at these so called schools suffered malnutrition because of inadequate funding, physical assault because of malicious deployment of power, sexual assault because of demonic wills and cultural extermination because of the deeply rooted belief that these people were not civilized and needed the West, and its religion in order to achieve some degree of sophistication. The last of these schools closed in 1994. The churches have since apologized for their involvement in this. The government has since apologized for its promotion of this.<sup>6</sup> But, as you can imagine, devastation litters the nation and blood cries from the ground. The tears of mothers missing their babies still salts our water, and the forests still reverberate with the weeping of villages that saw generations robbed of their children, their future, their hope. You can hear it if you listen carefully, if you listen with care: *Eloi, Eloi Lema Sabachthani*.

Whenever I have a chance to be with these folk from our First Nations, I try to take advantage of it, because I sense myself drawing near, ever nearer to holy ground when I receive their hospitality, even when I sometimes experience their hostility, righteous hostility at this horrid history. I know I need to sit at their feet, because these people of the

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Thomas King *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America* (Anchor, 2012), 70-71 for the above list.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=39> (Accessed August 28, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100015644/1100100015649> (accessed August 28, 2014).

land alone are able to school me in the task of living authentically on this *terra firma* I am trying to call home. And the amazing thing is that they welcome me in. They widen the circle and make space for me. And I learn so much from them, in part, because they see the world so radically differently from the way I have been taught to see the world.

George Tinker mentions four major distinctions between traditional cultures and those of Settlers: 1) identification of land as more than a resource, but as their mother, 2) the importance of space over time in conceiving reality, 3) the preference for the community over the individual, and 4) the narrative of creation as an ongoing and sacred act that is more important to the ritual life of the people than narratives of redemption.<sup>7</sup> Others add other points, and one that I think is implicit in Tinker's list, but made explicit in the work of many others is the importance of balance, or harmony, or wholeness.<sup>8</sup> In some ways, this is an overarching motif in the many Indigenous worldviews of North America.<sup>9</sup> Some of these motifs are very friendly toward Christianity, others less so, but as we turn now to revisit the narrative of the crucifixion in Matthew's gospel on this land, this Indigenous land, we do so attentive to this overarching motif of totality, or wholeness, asking how does harmony, or balance illumine this age old story that we know so well? As we do so, we first need to listen to First Nations who encourage us to address a prejudice that is deep seated in our collective consciousness: that Christianity is more interested in time than space, and that the Christian understanding of time is simply linear in character.

Our fixation with time over space is more a function of the Enlightenment than Christianity proper.<sup>10</sup> The notion that time is thoroughly linear is challenged by the church year, yet this assertion is insidious and affects us as it effects among us a preoccupation with progress and growth. We who have imbibed deeply in the cult of progress will have our prejudices exposed as we ponder the cross, where our fixation with success will be exposed for what it is. Perhaps our Indigenous friends will help us, and so as we begin to think through the crucifixion in Matthew, we could do worse than listen to the Indigenous author Thomas King who, in ruminating on the nature of knowing, suggests the following from Ezra Pound:

We do not know the past in chronological sequence. It may be convenient to lay it out anesthetized on the table with dates pasted on here and there, but what we know we know by ripples and spirals eddying out from us and from our own time.<sup>11</sup>

Time, as it were, is not always experienced chronologically, and attention to time in its totality, is demanded of us. In what follows, then, something of a reading of the crucifixion in Matthew takes place that is not simply a chronological plotting of the narrative, but more of an attempt to set together pieces that help to hold forth a faithful vision of the narrative. In this sense, the project is informed by an Indigenous interest in harmony, or the whole. At

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<sup>7</sup> George "Tink" Tinker, *American Indian Liberation: A Theology of Sovereignty* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 2008), 7.

<sup>8</sup> Cf especially Randy S. Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 18. See also Alfred Taiake, *Peace, Power, Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 48.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989), 15.

<sup>11</sup> As quoted by King in *Inconvenient Indian*, xi.

the same time, I will be in conversation with Luther, a masterful theologian of the cross. I begin with some reflections on a theology of the cross before exploring the passage under discussion.

## Protocols for Discerning the Cross

Much can, and should, be said about a theology of the cross. Unfortunately, I will need to be somewhat circumspect in attempting to articulate such a theology in this short article. In sum, I propose that in order to do justice to a theology of the cross, we need to articulate some protocols, or conventions, for discerning how we discern the cross. My presupposition is that the narrative of the cross in Holy Scripture provides us with some guidelines for this task. What follows, then, is more circular than linear in that I will propose some protocols for discerning the cross in advance of a reading of the Matthean passage. The reading itself will serve to advance, clarify, and possibly correct these protocols which will be employed in the conclusion to address the question of the location of the cross in the Canadian context. We will begin with some reflections on a theology of the cross as found more broadly in Luther's work.

David Yeago has suggested that the theology of the cross is, in fact, a particular instance of a strategy of contrariety that was a mark of the early Luther.<sup>12</sup> One could, then, see Luther's sacramental theology as a continuation of this strategy and so imagine a deep-seated agreement linking these two together. This seems helpful to me, and so allows us to affirm Ebeling's assertion that the theology of the cross is a red thread that winds its way through all of Luther's corpus.<sup>13</sup> The cross, then, is that action by which God is ever up-ending our certainty and so drives us to the grace of God in Christ. The theology of the cross is, as noted by von Loewenlich, God's "no" to our pretensions to a direct and so certain knowledge of God.<sup>14</sup> Humans are put on notice that God will not be subject to our prognostication, our presumption, nor will God entertain our epistemological entitlements. It is for this reason that phrases such as "how things seem" and "how things appear" occur strategically at key points in the "Heidelberg Disputation (1518)."<sup>15</sup> Our seeing is suspect and so subject to the correction afforded by sacramental life. And what do we learn from the sacraments and cross both? That hiddenness is God's *modus operandi* and so demands our attention to those moments when God seems absent.

One of the protocols for discerning the cross is an attentiveness to that which is obliquely, rather than directly, manifest. The cross shapes us in the art of looking at life from peculiar angles; perhaps peripherally, with eyes narrowed and never gazing at a thing straight on; ever putting our head to left, to the right in spite of our desire to know things directly, and so immediately. No, our knowing is not immediate, but mediated by resources that teach us to look through, to look around, to refuse to have our gaze arrested by idols;

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<sup>12</sup> David S. Yeago, "The Catholic Luther," in *The Catholicity of the Reformation*, eds. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 20.

<sup>13</sup> Gerhard Ebeling, *Luther: An Introduction to his Thought*, trans. R.A. Wilson (Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 1972), 236.

<sup>14</sup> Walter von Loewenlich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, trans. Herbert J. A. Bouman (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1976) 11, 19.

<sup>15</sup> Martin Luther, "The Heidelberg Disputation (1518)" in *Luther's Works Volume 31* eds. Harold J. Grimm and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), 43-46.

but rather to insist on viewing the world iconically.<sup>16</sup> The cross, then, is a pedagogue of indirect discernment and it provides us with such a posture, with such a way of seeing. But it is not our sight alone that is transformed by the cross.

Our hearing is transformed by the cross. Robert Jenson has aptly noted that if the medieval church was captivated by sight, the churches of the Protestant reformation were fixated by hearing.<sup>17</sup> Of course, a *sacramental* church cannot be wholly uninterested in sight. But there is something to Jenson's assertion. Luther was especially interested in hearing as the faculty which correlates to the nature of God's operations on the human condition. Hearing speaks to our passivity. A theology of the cross, according to Forde, is a theology that affirms our passive nature as God works upon us.<sup>18</sup> This is important, yet more must be said and in fact is said by Forde who notes that Luther is more interested in Christians being made theologians of the cross than an abstract theology of the cross.<sup>19</sup> The cross is the event of our transformation whereby we begin to see differently – to see askance, to see slant; but it is also the occasion whereby we begin to hear differently. We begin to listen.

When I was on my sabbatical a few years ago, my research question was: What might Christians learn from Indigenous spiritualities and world-views? I would ask this questions of elders, who would then reply in pleasant surprise that this tack was not their experience of Christians or Christianity. It seems that we are far more interested in talking than hearing. And on those occasions when we hear, we do not always listen. The cross crafts our ears so that we become listeners. Listeners are aware that they are not in charge of sound events, but they learn to listen carefully, to listen *expectantly*. In fact, to listen, to listen truly, is to be expectant, pregnant with the anticipation that something is about to rupture. We learn to listen in anticipation of the cross orienting us to the Reign of God, looking for curtains ripping in two, for rocks moving, for the dead being raised. We learn to listen and so to look askew because the cross trains us in the upside down character of that same Reign. The cross trains us to be attentive for what is hidden, not invisible, but hidden. So, with eyes, with ears, renewed and ever being renewed, we look at the crucifixion in Matthew's gospel.

## The Crucifixion in Matthew's Gospel

Forde reminds us that a theology of the cross presumes the resurrection.<sup>20</sup> In light of that wise assertion, and my interest in attending to the whole, I first explore some of Luther's reflections on the resurrection in a sermon based on Matthew 28, which was preached on March 14, 1525 before looking at three sermons on Matthew 27 that he preached mere days before the Matthew 28 sermon.<sup>21</sup> We begin with a passage in which Luther comments on

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Vitor Westhelle, *The Church Event* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 147-149.

<sup>17</sup> Robert W. Jenson, "Triune Grace" in *The Gift of Grace* eds. Niels Henrik Gregersen, Bo Holm, Ted Peters, and Peter Widmann (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 26.

<sup>18</sup> Gerhard Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 86, 87.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>20</sup> Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, 25.

<sup>21</sup> The sermons under discussion are dated March 6, 8, 13 and 14, 1525. Bugenhagen had initiated a sermon series on the gospel of Matthew and Luther participated in these sermons preached regularly on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays from February 14, 1525 to March 15, 1525. Cf. *D. Martin Luther's Werke Band 17, Erste Abteilung* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1907), xxiv-xxv for the comments on the sermon series by the editors of the Weimar Ausgabe. (Hereafter cited as WA 17.1, page number: line numbers).

Matthew 28:11 wherein we read that “some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests everything that had happened.” Luther comments,

Here you see that God compels his enemies so that they confirm the resurrection; so that his sealing of the tomb and his defense effect nothing other the confirmation of our faith and the resurrection of Christ.<sup>22</sup>

When I first read this I was intrigued by two things; first that our faith (*nostrum fidem*), led the pair “faith and resurrection,” and second that they were a pair. I was expecting to read Luther reference “our faith in the resurrection,” or “the resurrection establishing our faith.” Luther sets up something of a co-emergence of the resurrection and our faith. This does not preclude something of an asymmetry between them, but it does present them as emerging together in a fashion that allows some of the verbs proper to the cross and resurrection of Jesus to be admitted to the discussion of faith. In the sermons under discussion, this is not restricted to the phenomenon of the resurrection but we find a likened pairing of faith and the crucified in Luther’s discussion of Matthew 27:50 where we read that “Jesus cried again with loud voice and breathed his last.” Luther writes,

Christ does not endure this [death] except for you (*te*), and by this blood conquers your (tuam) death. By this it is taught what faith is to be: on the one hand great, but on the other slight. That is why the one part will be more disputed [now], then the other. And this is the second part: that Christ’s passion draws (*tractetur*) [us] just as the sacrament draws us. This [first] happens to me for my good, and then as an example [for me] so that I suffer (*patiar*), not according to my soul, but according to the old Adam, so that the passion, from eternity, is made temporal because by a perpetual constraint I am made to endure this and to suffer in my soul.<sup>23</sup>

Observe how faith itself is likened to this death on the cross. Luther asserts that the cross teaches us what faith is, as much as it teaches us about the suffering Christ – and in fact suggest the two cannot be torn from one another. And so we can envision faith to be like both cross and resurrection, but cross and resurrection as something beyond historical events even though faith – like the cross and resurrection – is most certainly historical. But faith is more than historical. While faith can be plotted as an event in history, it can also be described as that which is ever coming to be from eternity, just like the cross is ever being suffered. Note also how Luther described the passion under the category of the eternal being made temporal. In other words, Luther understands that love suffers, even the Divine love that loves eternally. To love is to embark on the path of suffering, as is made manifestly clear on the cross of Christ. And so Luther, in describing Matthew 27:52 where we read that “the tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who fallen asleep were raised,” comments:

In the passion and death of Christ the whole earth is moved, so that by this fruit of the passion the whole world is still shaken, which is seen today. The gospel is preached;

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<sup>22</sup> WA 17.1: 91, 2.

<sup>23</sup> WA 17.1:74, 12-19.

the world rages, it persecutes us. This is as Christ said: "I did not come to bring peace" etc.<sup>24</sup>

The cross thrusts us into conflict because the cross vests us with faith. This faith given us is described as bearing fruit, just as the cross bears fruit. The cross is here a tree, and faith a branch and both bear fruit. There is fruit that comes from both this cross and the faith parasitic upon it, this faith branching out of the tree; it is described more fulsomely by Luther as he comments upon Matthew 27:55 where we read that "Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him." Luther notes how these women, whom we expect to be full of fear are actually full of courage, and so testify that their hearts are full of faith.<sup>25</sup> Luther posits that God says to these women, and to all who like them, are faithful:

I will kill you and bring you to life again, and play with you. You shall be my song-birds (*meine Spielvoegele*). This is the history, the fruit and the power of the suffering of Christ.<sup>26</sup>

Faith, while predicated upon our suffering the cross, does not preclude an agency that comes forth from the cross as fruit. Luther sketches the character of this agency in his comment on the confession of the Centurion. In this text he affirms that the death of Christ both consoles us and enables us to live life as a wager.<sup>27</sup> It both comforts and encourages. This is not altogether surprising since faith is the power of God.<sup>28</sup> This power is, of course, a surprising power since it is manifest in the death rather than the life of Christ, a power we share in our dying.<sup>29</sup>

In sum, we find that Luther's reading of the cross in Matthew's gospel does not turn away from the darkness, from the hard and harsh fact of death but instead digs deep into it so that he sees what might not been seen by others: that this death of Christ is the dying of faith which is its very life, its very power. Moreover, Luther hears from this cross the call to live this death, to live the no to self that is the cross – that is faith – so that we might live, we might truly live; in fact, Luther even uses language of play and wager or bet to get at what faith is. Faith is daring to fail because failure alone is the condition for the possibility of life. To live faithfully is to venture, to wager, to risk because to prescind from freedom, from that glorious giddy freedom that releases us to be ourselves; to refuse this freedom is to refuse the uncertainty which is the gift of life. The faithful are dying to live; to give themselves away because fruit that does not take leave of the tree will never be what fruit is: life bearing life in death.

Luther's fulsome description of the cross in his reflections on the passion in Matthew narrate a world grasped in its fullness and affirms that God's delight is hidden in the seeming darkness that marks our journey from cradle to grave. This narrative of the cross is

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<sup>24</sup> WA 17.1:77, 23-27.

<sup>25</sup> WA 17.1:80, 22 notes that a heart full of faith is not able not to be courageous.

<sup>26</sup> WA 17.1:80, 26-28.

<sup>27</sup> WA 17.1:78.30, 29-31.

<sup>28</sup> WA 17.1:73, 35.

<sup>29</sup> WA 17.1:83, 22. Moreover this powerful death gives us pause because Luther identifies the cause of this darkness in the heart of Christ with nothing other than God. (WA 17.1:70.27).



simultaneously a recounting of God's account of me, of you: God's speaking us into Christ on the cross, on that strange place where we begin to listen expectantly, where we begin to see askew, where we begin to believe and engage – not the *faculty* that is faith – but the *life* that is faith. Faith is listening expectantly. Faith is seeing obliquely; seeing aslant. But what bearing, we might ask, has this hearing the cross, this seeing the cross for our context?

## Hearing Whole, Seeing Harmony

As I begin to move from Matthew's account of the cross back to my context, I do so mindful of the need to attend to the whole, to think holistically about the passion in connection with the larger project of Matthew's gospel, anticipating that this will open an entrée for a dialogue with contextual matters. In so doing, I want to be especially attentive to the Matthew's engagement of the non-Jewish communities in the gospel even while I recognize that Matthew presumes that "God has guided the whole of Israel's history so that it might culminate in the birth of 'Jesus,' the protagonist of the story."<sup>30</sup> In so doing, Matthew establishes Jesus as legitimate king within the household of Israel.<sup>31</sup> While it seems clear that Matthew is directed to Jewish believers, the Gentile world is not excluded from the horizon of concerns in the text.<sup>32</sup> Instead, it is carefully located in a mission strategy wherein Jesus must first attend to the chosen people before releasing the disciples to a mission to all nations at the end of the gospel.<sup>33</sup> Given this, it is incumbent upon us to ask ourselves how the crucifixion reads in light of this reality. I will restrict myself to a couple of observations before moving from text to context.

First, I note that in the above passage, Jesus's command to the disciples in 28:11 to go to Galilee is of a piece with the ending of the gospel. Galilee is where the so called Great Commission will be enacted, and this mountain's reference here is significant.<sup>34</sup> Jesus' command is of a piece with the expanded mission to the nations. But what is especially significant in this text is that this going is paired with Jesus's command that the disciples are not to be afraid. Luther describes the fruit of the resurrection as lack of such a fear.<sup>35</sup> By attending so specifically to the theme of fear as Jesus sends his own on to Galilee Jesus draws our attention the menace that is fear. Jesus sees that mission under the tutelage of fear brooks grave danger.

Christian mission, alas, has been too often fed by fear, or more commonly, fears. Such fears are manifold and beyond a comprehensive analysis in the present work. Suffice it to say that fear of death in some fashion underlines the majority of our preoccupying fears. A theology of the cross, while affirming the resurrection, calls Christians to deal with fear of death by facing death and embracing the finitude that is of a piece with the human reality. Sadly, we rarely approach death under such a tutelage, and in fact, allow our fears to master both our personal sense of mortality as well as our communal sense of mortality. No religion is quite as dangerous as one which fears its death. Healthier alternatives beckon and invite Christians to think long and hard about what fears fuel their mission. Consider the following from Vine Deloria Jr.

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<sup>30</sup> Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 45.

<sup>31</sup> Douglas R.A. Hare *Matthew* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1993), 5.

<sup>32</sup> Kingsbury, *Matthew*, 122.

<sup>33</sup> Hare, *Matthew*, 333-34.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. especially Terence Donaldson, *Jesus on the Mountain: A Study in Matthew* (London: Sheffield, 1987).

<sup>35</sup> WA 17.1:90, 37.

The Indian ability to deal with death was a result of the much larger context in which Indians understood life. Human beings were an integral part of the natural world and in death they contributed their bodies to become the dust that nourished the plants and animals that fed people during their lifetime. Because people saw the tribal community and the family as a continuing unity regardless of circumstances, death became simply another transitional event in a much longer scheme of life.<sup>36</sup>

To be sure, Indigenous people in the main affirm some form of life after death.<sup>37</sup> Yet it is interesting to note that the consolation found in the above is primarily located in the individual's sense of contribution to the whole. Such a perspective of finding solace in the whole can be perfectly well understood for the individual. Yet this turn to the whole for the individual is applicable for communities as well. If I am able to address my individual fears of finitude by referencing the whole, how much more should we collectively be able to address our collective fears as Christians by imagining our faith – our faith together – as an integrative part of a world larger than our religion? The story of Christianity in Canada seems, however, to be too closely connected to a fear that fueled greed: for more power, for more prestige, for *more*.

It is time to see obliquely; it is time to listen to the voices of those who summon us to a different way of being in the world: to be in the world generously. Too often Christians evaluated the religions of our First Nations with a zero sum view of truth, imagining that if we are right, you are not. A kind of poverty of imagination, a paucity of appreciation marked life in residential schools. Certainly there were exceptions to the rule, but a church that thrives in the future will need to make exceptional generosity to be its *modus operandi*. By way of conclusion, I will explore this generosity as the way of faith, of the cross.

## Conclusion

At the beginning of this article I noted that the Gospel of the Matthew, the land, and the people of this land will tutor me so that I might discern how the cross is taking shape in the Canadian context. From Matthew I have learned, in conversation with Luther, of the manner in which the cross determines the character of faith – of that power in death that allows me to eschew fear in working in the Reign of God; to be confident that the future is in the hand of God who shapes us ever anew for good. From the people of this land I have learned of the need to attend to the whole, and so to look for the cross to be at work for the good of all. And now in conclusion, I want to consider what I might learn from the land as ponder the path of the cross in my context. I begin with a quotation from Taiake Alfred, a Mohawk scholar who speaks eloquently of the need for a reclamation of traditional teachings. He writes:

The challenge we face is made up of specific patterns of behaviour among Settlers and our own people: choices made to support mentalities that developed in serving the colonization of our lands as well as the unrestrained greed and selfishness of mainstream society. We must add to this the superficial monotheistic justifications for the unnatural and misunderstood place and purpose of human beings in the

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<sup>36</sup> Vine Deloria Jr. *God is Red: A Native View of Religion* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Pub., 2003), 171.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

world, an emphatic refusal to look inward, and an aggressive denial of the value of nature.<sup>38</sup>

This quotation warrants a paper in its own right. Much is said in these two sentences, but I want to lift up the following: patterns of greed are causing the land to bleed, and humans have lost their sense of their place in this world, on this earth. I want to address these two comments attentive to the Canadian context, but assume that much of what I say will be transferable in some fashion.

Alfred notes that patterns of greed – colonizing the land – infect both Settler and First Peoples. Here we see that the whole is affected, is infected by the part. Not the Settlers alone but all people on the land suffer the consequence of gridlock. All of us, and us includes our mother the earth, cry in travail as tailing ponds leak poison into our bloodstreams. All of us are living in a parched land as glaciers disappear from us like breath from the mouth of the crucified. All of us have open pit mines wounding our sides. All of us are addicted to energy, too weak to refuse wine mixed with gall, carbon mixed with convenience. All of us are stripped of our forests, denuded with clear cuts scarring our souls. All of us are dying. And we are earth, and so earth dies. But what is our place in all of this?

On my less optimistic days, I imagine the earth looking about her body, and finally after growing weary of these pests which we are, giving herself a good shake and being rid of us. Thankfully I don't experience these days too often, but I experience them often enough to ask myself: what am I doing on this planet. I ask this in two senses. First, what is my purpose on this planet? But second, at a more literal level: what am I doing? Have you ever spent a day or so tracking your activity? Look at yourself askew, obliquely, from around a corner. Sneak up on yourself and see how your days unfold. I suspect you will be surprised and surprised. Surprised by how you, how I, how we are like hamsters on a treadmill; but also surprised by the way in which every now and then the Reign of God breaks through in what you, what I do. Look at yourself anew. But also listen to yourself. What do you hear in your prayers, your conversations, and your mutterings under your breath? When do you hear "Eloi, Eloi" slip across your lips? When do you despair and how is that voiced? But more importantly, listen to yourself expectantly. Listen because your words are also born by the Word of God, the Word calling us to account for our greed, for our misplaced sense of self.

Alfred is correct. Canada, like too many nations, suffers from our propensity to colonize the land and from a refusal to look seriously at ourselves. But there is more to what Alfred writes and some of what he related may find some resonance with followers of the crucified. He writes of the need for Indigenous people to return to their ceremonies and then comments that these ceremonies "connect us to the earth and to our true natural existence as human beings."<sup>39</sup> Those of us who are not Indigenous will not share the same ceremonies, but we who are the baptized are immersed in the Great Lakes, we are washed with the St Lawrence, we emerge from Great Slave Lake. We who are the baptized eat the wheat of the prairies, drink the wine from Niagara, from the Okanagan, from the Annapolis Valley, and because we become what we eat we become earth, we become world, but we also become

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<sup>38</sup> Taiake Alfred, *Wasáse: indigenous pathways of action and freedom* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 102.

<sup>39</sup> Alfred, *Wasáse*, 250.

partners in the Christ; Christ who from the cross schools us in seeing askew; in expectant hearing, in attention to the whole, to each part, to each one, to the one who is earth.

How is the cross taking shape in Canada? In 2008 our Prime Minister made a formal apology to the First Nations of this land for the horror which was the residential school system and initiated a Truth and Reconciliation Commission with a five year mandate, which was extended to a sixth year. The TRC ended with a report that had as its précis a document with ninety-four recommendations for the path forward in truth and reconciliation.<sup>40</sup> And across our land, here and there, people are looking for more truth, for more reconciliation. It mostly occurs in strange and unexpected ways as people agitate for the implementation of the recommendations, and as they learn to walk with their neighbours in peace and righteousness. When and where this happens, many of us can see the cross taking shape and from the ashes of this hell emerges a plant, a plant so beautiful it takes your breath away. And from this flower comes seeds, blown by the Holy Wind into cracks in Settler armament, where reconciliation takes root and shatters that myth called security.

How is the cross taking shape in Canada? Surreptitiously.

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. [http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls\\_to\\_Action\\_English2.pdf](http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf) (Accessed July 4, 2017).