Why Educating for Shalom Requires Decolonization

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Abstract

Indigenous scholars argue that reconciliation requires educators to make space for Indigenous perspectives in the curriculum. This paper agrees, arguing that Christians who are committed to Wolterstorff's concept of "educating for shalom" must work towards decolonization of the educational system. Eurocentrism in the current system is a product of racism, and prevents students from learning from a diversity of cultural perspectives. Further, failing to decolonize actively perpetuates injustice towards both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, and fails to equip students to participate in the societal changes that are necessary to heal the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in North America.

Introduction

In 2015, Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) released its final report on Canada's Indian Residential School system. The report began with these damning words:

> For over a century, the central goals of Canada's Aboriginal policy were to eliminate Aboriginal governments; ignore Aboriginal rights; terminate the Treaties; and, through a process of assimilation, cause Aboriginal peoples to cease to exist as distinct legal, social, cultural, religious, and racial entities in Canada. (2015: 1)

Residential schools, which were designed to acculturate Indigenous children into Euro-Christian Canadian society, were part of a broader colonial system that used policies of assimilation to gain control over land and resources. It was rooted in the Doctrine of Discovery, originating in a 15th-century series of papal bulls that asserted European sovereigns had the right to claim "uncivilized" lands. Under the terms of the Royal Proclamation of 1763, the British Crown and, later, the Canadian government negotiated a series of treaties with First Nations peoples. The treaties set aside small tracts of land for the exclusive use of Indigenous peoples and permitted settlement by non-Indigenous immigrants on the rest, in return for small payments, agricultural assistance, and various other benefits to Indigenous peoples - many of which never materialized. The federal government also established the Indian Act, which enabled the government to strip people of their Indian status, banned cultural and spiritual practices, compelled parents to send their children to residential schools, and limited Indigenous self-government. The end goal, as stated by Indian Affairs Deputy Minister Duncan Campbell Scott, was to "continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic, and there is no Indian question" (quoted in Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015: 54).[1]

These policies did not achieve their stated purpose of assimilation. Instead, Indigenous peoples fought to maintain their ways of life, resisting unjust policies to the best of their abilities. As a result of pressure from Indigenous leaders and grassroots groups, some parts of the Indian Act were gradually rolled back. Indigenous peoples

continue to exist today as distinct nations and societies, and are reclaiming their cultural heritage and standing up for their rights.

Nevertheless, the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada is still in need of healing. Residential schools and broken treaty promises caused damage that will take generations to repair. The legacy of colonialism continues to sustain a variety of structural injustices related to land, governance, and access to public services. Though the treaties are still in force and Indigenous rights are recognized in Canadian law, Indigenous peoples have to fight protracted legal battles to compel the Canadian government to honour these rights. Racism continues to be evident in the ways Indigenous people are treated in Canadian society. As a result of these factors, Indigenous people tend to have worse economic (Macdonald and Wilson, 2016), educational (Parkin, 2015) and health (UNICEF, 2009) outcomes than non-Indigenous people, and are disproportionately represented in the legal (Canada. Office of the Correctional Officer, 2018) and child welfare (Hyslop, 2018) systems.

By drawing national attention to the need for reconciliation, the TRC prompted many educators to ask what their role might be in helping to make things right. In fact, the TRC included "education for reconciliation" in its calls to action. In part, this means teaching students about the history of the Indigenous-settler relationship in Canada, the ways in which colonialism and residential schools have contributed to the contemporary challenges that Indigenous peoples face, and the historical basis for Indigenous and Treaty rights. Many schools and provinces are, in fact, moving towards including more of this content in the curriculum, though much work remains to be done (KAIROS Canada, 2015).

However, the TRC also goes beyond this to issue a more radical challenge, echoing previous work by Indigenous scholars, that "the education system itself must be transformed into one that rejects the racism embedded in colonial systems of education and treats Aboriginal and Euro-Canadian knowledge systems with equal respect" (2015: 239). In other words, the TRC is calling on schools to "decolonize" their curriculum. Their argument draws on the work of Mi'kmaw scholar Marie Battiste, who defines decolonization, in this context, as:

> A process of unpacking the keeper current in education: its powerful Eurocentric assumptions of education, its narratives of race and difference in curriculum and pedagogy, its establishing culturalism or cultural racism as a justification for the status quo, and the advocacy for Indigenous knowledge as a legitimate education topic. (2013: 107)

Indigenous perspectives and pedagogy are to be integrated into the curriculum across all subject areas, and treated as equally valid to the Euro-western perspectives that currently dominate the educational system. Furthermore, this challenge is directed to *all* schools, not only to schools that primarily teach Indigenous students. How ought Christian educators to respond to this call?

Nicholas Wolterstorff (2004) argues that the central goal of Christian education ought to be "educating for shalom." As he explains, shalom captures God's vision for

human flourishing. It is built on a foundation of justice - that all persons “enjoy and possess what is due them” (2004: 23). Shalom requires living and delighting in right relationships that honour the responsibilities we all have to God, our neighbour, and Creation. To educate for shalom means to equip students to practice justice and seek shalom in their lives and vocations.

By virtue of living together in this land, all Canadians – in fact, all who live in settler-colonial states – participate in the broken relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Therefore, educating for shalom must certainly include equipping students to play a role in healing this relationship. The first part of the TRC’s call – teaching students about the history of the relationship, how historical injustices continue to play a role in present injustices, and the actions and attitudes that are necessary for reconciliation – is likely to be widely accepted by Christian educators. But what of the TRC’s second challenge? Two questions arise here. First, is it legitimate for someone who is committed to teaching and learning from a Christian perspective to treat Indigenous perspectives as valid sources of knowledge and truth in the classroom? In other words, *may* we decolonize? Second, if the answer to the previous question is affirmative, *must* we decolonize? Given that many Christian educators have few (if any) Indigenous students in their classes, many other demands on instructional time, and limited expertise and resources relevant to these issues, should decolonization be a priority?

This paper argues that the answer to both these questions, for those committed to educating for shalom, is “yes.” Recognizing that Christianity is not tied to one particular culture, that the current dominance of Euro-western perspectives in the educational system is rooted in colonialism and racism rather than the gospel, and that diverse perspectives enrich understanding, it is legitimate for Christian teachers to bring Indigenous perspectives into their classrooms. And, because the failure to decolonize not only fails to bring about right relationships, but actively contributes to broken relationships, all Christian educators – including those who teach few or no Indigenous students – should place a high priority on decolonization.

The remainder of this paper elaborates on these two arguments. It begins by exploring the call to decolonize in more depth, drawing on the work of Indigenous scholars along with the TRC’s report. It then tackles the two questions summarized above, drawing on the work of Nicholas Wolterstorff and other Christian theologians. It concludes by suggesting a few ways in which non-Indigenous educators might start moving towards decolonization.

The call to decolonize

In its final report, the TRC describes how the current educational system fosters racism towards Indigenous peoples. In fact, the TRC goes so far as to say that “much of the current state of troubled relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians is attributable to educational institutions and what they have taught, or failed to teach, over many generations” (2015: 234). By teaching the history of Canada as a story of European exploration and settlement, for example, schools have fostered ignorance of the

rich histories and cultures of Indigenous peoples. By failing to teach about the treaties that provided a legal foundation for European settlement in North America, schools have left students unable to understand the treaty and Indigenous rights held by Indigenous peoples, and the corresponding obligations of the federal government. By failing to teach about the legacy of residential schools and other harmful colonial policies, schools have led Canadians to believe that Indigenous peoples themselves are the cause of the challenges they face today. In response, the Commission calls for mandatory education on "residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada" throughout the K-12 educational system (238).

However, the TRC goes on to suggest that the Canadian educational system also fosters racism in a deeper way, by treating Indigenous knowledge systems as invalid. In her book *Decolonizing Education: Nourishing the Learning Spirit* (2013), Marie Battiste argues that "the most important educational reform is to acknowledge that Canadian schools teach a silent curriculum of Eurocentric knowledge that is not accommodating to other ways of knowing and learning" (2013: 66). Battiste calls this exclusion of Indigenous and other forms of knowledge "cognitive imperialism." She argues that it is rooted in false assumptions of racial and cultural superiority, and that it serves to maintain the power and dominance of Euro-Western culture while eroding Indigenous knowledge, culture, and languages.

The solution, Battiste argues, is to decolonize the educational system as a whole and re-make it in a way that reflects the true, pluralistic nature of Canadian society. Decolonization, in this context, involves confronting the Eurocentrism of the current educational system as well as the assumptions about race and culture that support it. Battiste calls on "Canadian administrators and educators…to respectfully blend Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy with Euro-Canadian epistemology and pedagogy to create an innovative ethical, trans-systemic Canadian educational system" (2013: 168). Such a system would recognize Indigenous knowledge, alongside Euro-Western knowledge, as valid and worthwhile for all students to learn. Battiste argues that Indigenous knowledge "can be sources of inspiration, creativity, and opportunity, and can make contributions to humanity, equality, solidarity, tolerance, and respect" (2013: 72). Inclusion of Indigenous knowledge in schools would not only improve outcomes for Indigenous students, she suggests, but would contribute to better learning for *all* students and equip them to live together respectfully.

Sami scholar Rauna Kuokkanen has made similar arguments, directed at the post-secondary level. Kuokkanen critiques the "epistemic ignorance" of the academy. Epistemes are "common and shared ways of seeing, understanding, interpreting and relating to ourselves and the world" (2007: 58). Epistemic ignorance refers to "the ways in which academic theories and practices marginalize, exclude and discriminate against other than dominant Western epistemic and intellectual traditions" (66). Indigenous epistemes – if they are considered at all - are typically seen by the academy as "inferior, not worthy of serious intellectual consideration" (3). To be welcome in the academy, Indigenous people are forced to "check those perspectives and understandings at the door" (xviii). Kuokkanen argues that this constitutes "epistemological racism" (67) and perpetuates imperialism, not only by entrenching the power of the colonizers, but also by

keeping non-Indigenous people ignorant about this ongoing form of colonialism. The solution, she suggests, is for the university to "accept the gift" of Indigenous epistemes, recognizing them as valid sources of knowledge and truth. Doing this, without perpetuating colonial patterns of domination and appropriation, means being open to learning *from,* rather than *about*, "the other."

Kuokkanen further argues that accepting the gift requires reciprocity, which is a fundamental feature of Indigenous epistemes. This means that in accepting the gift, the academy must also recognize its responsibilities to Indigenous people, addressing its own privilege and ignorance, and be willing to enter into an ongoing, engaged and participatory relationship. Among other things, this will involve attending to concrete issues of ongoing oppression and injustice, both inside and outside the university itself: "As an institution with a colonial legacy that shows ongoing neocolonial complicity, the academy – at the institutional *and* individual levels – has a stake in dismantling those colonial structures and practices as well as an ethical responsibility to do so" (140). For example, those in the sustainability movement who are inspired by Indigenous understandings of the human relationship to the land have a responsibility to also address contemporary issues around the lands and livelihoods of Indigenous people who are often worst affected by ecological degradation.

The call to decolonize is gaining increasing traction in the Canadian educational system, both at the K-12 and post-secondary levels. Examples of decolonization have been documented in a variety of subject areas, including mathematics, science, environmental education, history, literature, and business (Battiste, 2013; Dion, 2009; Kapyrka and Dockstator, 2012; Michell et al., 2008; Munroe et al., 2013; Pete et al., 2013; Scully, 2012; Sterenberg and McDonnell, 2010). While many of these efforts have been directed towards schools that teach primarily Indigenous students, decolonization is increasingly finding its way into the broader educational system as well. For example, the province of Saskatchewan has been working towards integrating Indigenous perspectives throughout its provincial science curriculum (Aikenhead and Elliott, 2010).

Is decolonization permissible?

May Christian educators, with their distinctive task of guiding students towards a Christian way of living in the world (Wolterstorff, 2002, 2004), also accept the call to integrate Indigenous perspectives into the curriculum? Wolterstorff argues that guiding students into a Christian way of living includes, in part, helping them understand the world from a Christian perspective. All learning, of course, is perspectival; there is no such thing as "generically human learning" (Wolterstorff, 2004: 185). To teach from a distinctively Christian perspective, the Christian teacher allows their Christian convictions to function as "control beliefs" when deciding what theories to teach (Wolterstorff, 2002: 56). How, then, should Christians respond to the urging to decolonize?

It is important, first, to recognize that "Christian" and "Indigenous" are not mutually exclusive categories. While religion and culture are closely intertwined, Indigenous culture – and any other culture – includes many other aspects of life as well,

including language, traditions, social norms, economic practices, art, and so on. Christianity, as a religion, has found a home in many different cultures; many Indigenous people are Christians and have yet maintained many aspects of their Indigenous cultures.

The gospel will always, inevitably, be embodied and understood within the context of particular cultures (Newbigin, 1989), but no one culture has a monopoly on "true" Christianity. As African-American scholar Willie Jennings (2010) shows, the long-standing tendency of white Western Christians to see themselves as the archetype of Christianity is rooted in a deeply flawed theology, closely entwined with colonialism and slavery. This tendency has often shaped Christian missional efforts to Indigenous peoples in North America, leading to the belief that a person must abandon their Indigenous culture and worldview in order to become a Christian (Jacobs et al., 2014). However, Indigenous scholars Jacobs, Twiss and LeBlanc point out that Indigenous understandings of the world are in many ways compatible with Christian beliefs, and in some ways even "closer to the classic unsynthesized Hebraic-Christian view of life than is the contemporary western evangelical's segregated view" (2014: 10). They argue for "sanctification" of Indigenous culture, instead of rejection, which would examine Indigenous culture from a Biblical standpoint in order to decide what may be kept, what must be rejected, and what should be adopted into the wider Christian church to enrich it.

In contrast to white Western Christian exclusivism, Jennings calls for "a faith that understands its own deep wisdom and power of joining, mixing, merging, and being changed by multiple ways of life to witness a God who surprises us by love of differences and draws us to new capacities to imagine their reconciliation" (9). Randy Woodley, a Keetoowah Cherokee and Christian pastor and scholar, argues that a diversity of cultural perspectives can contribute to our understanding of God:

> Each people group possesses unique understanding and giftings that God has placed within that culture…But each people group also wears cultural blinders. No individual alone, and no people group alone, can fully understand God. But working together, uniting our many different experiences, cultures and understandings, we can see more of the greatness of God. (2004: 29–30).

Lesslie Newbigin argues that cultural diversity can also help us understand how our own culture has shaped our understanding of our faith, leading to greater discernment:

> The only way in which the gospel can challenge our culturally conditioned interpretations of it is through the witness of those who read the Bible with minds shaped by other cultures. We have to listen to others. This mutual correction is sometimes unwelcome, but it is necessary and it is fruitful. (1989: 196–197)

All of these scholars recognize, of course, that there are some aspects of any culture that are incompatible with the gospel. This is true for Indigenous culture, and it is equally true for Western culture. Appreciating the insights of diverse cultures does not mean accepting every part of those cultures uncritically. Christians are tasked with discerning which parts are compatible with the gospel, and which are not. However, it is

essential that “these judgements arise from the gospel itself,” not “from the cultural presuppositions of the person who makes the judgement” (Newbigin, 1989: 186). Because all of us are, inevitably, shaped by our cultural presuppositions, this must be a matter for respectful cross-cultural dialogue, mutual correction, and, above all, humility.

What of perspectives coming from Indigenous people who are not Christian? Wolterstorff (2004) argues also for dialogue between Christian and non-Christian scholars, calling on any scholar who comes from a particular perspective to “engage in conversation with those who represent other perspectives, so as both to share insight and submit to correction. The goal is thereby to arrive at a richer, a broader, a more accurate perspective” (190). He argues that our particularities “often give us access to realms of reality that would otherwise be extremely difficult to come by…Our narrative identities lead us to notice things and believe things that otherwise would almost certainly go unnoticed and unbelieved” (237). The key to a richer mutual understanding is careful listening. There may well be disagreements, but Wolterstorff notes that “even from scholarship with which we disagree, and from art whose animating vision is foreign to us, we may receive benefit and delight” (Wolterstorff, 2004: 30). Furthermore, there is much room for agreement, even between Christians and non-Christians, and such agreement can be welcomed, since “the general goal of the Christian in the conversation of science will not be difference but fidelity; not scholarship different from that of all non-Christians but scholarship faithful to Scripture and to God in Jesus Christ” (129). Thus, engaging with a diversity of perspectives in the Christian classroom, including both Christian and non-Christian Indigenous perspectives, is not only permissible, but beneficial in its contribution to richer and more refined understanding.

Of course, this discussion and discernment already happens in the Christian classroom, not only with respect to Indigenous perspectives, but also with respect to ideas coming from Western culture. For example, lacking a distinctively Christian explanation of how markets work, the supply and demand model is a staple in Christian economics classrooms. This is so even though the theoretical basis of the model relies on several assumptions, such as utilitarianism and individualism, that are problematic from a Christian perspective. The role of the Christian teacher is to guide students towards a critical understanding of the model, appreciating the insights that it has to offer while questioning those assumptions and conclusions that are incompatible with Biblical beliefs. The idea of engaging with non-Christian perspectives is not, therefore, new to the Christian teacher. What may be new, for many, is the idea of engaging not only with perspectives that come from Western culture, but also those from Indigenous and other cultures, both Christian and non-Christian. Or, for teachers who already do make an effort to include diverse perspectives, what may be new is the challenge posed by Battiste and Kuokkanen to truly decolonize – to include these perspectives not just as an interesting digression, but to fully integrate them into the curriculum as equally valid and respected sources of knowledge, and wholeheartedly grapple with what they have to teach us.

Is Decolonization Essential?

Even if Christian educators are convinced that it is legitimate for them to make space for Indigenous perspectives in their curriculum, the question of prioritization remains. Taking the call to decolonize seriously will require a fundamental rethinking of both curriculum and pedagogy, in the context of a mutually respectful relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators. Most Christian educators in North America, themselves educated in institutions dominated by Euro-Western perspectives, are ill-equipped to take on this task. Doing so also requires confronting our own, often unconscious biases, and learning how to engage respectfully with unfamiliar cultural norms. Given these challenges, together with other demands on instructional time and the fact that many Christian teachers have few, if any Indigenous students in their classes, it is tempting to decide against engaging Indigenous perspectives in the classroom. Even for a Christian teacher who is committed to educating for shalom, surely there are many other justice issues that also need to be addressed, and could be tackled more easily. Furthermore, Christian teachers could still teach their students *about* Indigenous history, culture, rights and concerns, even if they are hesitant to integrate Indigenous perspectives into the curriculum. Even if this decolonizing effort is permissible, it is really essential?

This paper argues that it is. The key reason is that the current, neo-colonial educational system *actively* perpetuates unjust and broken relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in North America. The decision not to decolonize – to continue with the status quo – is thus not simply a decision to prioritize other concerns or justice issues over this one, but a decision to actively (even if unknowingly and unintentionally) contribute to injustice. This should be unacceptable to Christian educators. There are at least three ways in which failing to decolonize perpetuates injustice and denies shalom: it fails to give Indigenous students what is due to them; it distorts the relationship between the educational institution and *all* of its students, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous; and it produces students who are unprepared and ill-equipped to live in right relationships with each other. Simply teaching students about Indigenous history, culture and rights, while an important and necessary step, is not enough to address these three problems.

Justice for Indigenous students

Part of what is due to all children and young people is an education that meets their needs and enables them to live out God's calling in their lives and vocations. There are many facets to this task. Students need to develop an understanding of and critical appreciation for the culture and society in which they live. They need to be equipped with the basic skills and knowledge needed to participate in and contribute to their communities. They need to be supported in discerning and developing their own unique gifts and calling, and preparing for a vocation in which they can serve God and provide for themselves and their families. If justice means that all people "enjoy and possess what is due them," (Wolterstorff, 2004: 23) an educational system that does not meet the needs of its students is unjust.

The Canadian educational system has a responsibility to meet these needs for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. When European settlers came to this land, they signed treaties with the Indigenous peoples that provided for peaceful co-existence

between both parties. The Europeans gained the right to live on the land and benefit from its resources, in exchange for undertaking specific responsibilities towards Indigenous peoples. This included, among other things, the responsibility to provide for the education of Indigenous children, a provision welcomed by many Indigenous peoples because it would supplement their own traditional educational practices by preparing their children to participate in the changing economy (Carr-Stewart, 2001). As with other treaty obligations, the government's present-day responsibilities require interpretation. Many of the treaties specifically refer to the establishment of schools on First Nations reserves. Some First Nations do operate their own schools, with funding from the federal government. However, about 40% of children who live on reserve attend provincial schools (public, Catholic or independent) along with non-Indigenous children (National Panel on First Nation Elementary and Secondary Education for Students on Reserve, 2012). Furthermore, more than half of the people in Canada who identify themselves as Indigenous do not live on reserves, and most of their children also attend provincial schools. Some attend Christian schools. What are the responsibilities of Canadian schools to their Indigenous students?

Statistics establish that there is a significant educational achievement gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in Canada. Indigenous people have lower rates of high school completion and post-secondary education than non-Indigenous people; the differences are most stark for those who live on reserve, but are still significant for off-reserve Indigenous people (Gordon and White, 2014; Statistics Canada, 2016). Although high school and post-secondary completion rates are increasing for Indigenous people, they are also increasing for non-Indigenous people, so the gap persists (Parkin, 2015).

Through a number of factors contribute to these disparities, Marie Battiste (2013) suggests that one key reason is the cognitive imperialism of the current Canadian educational system. By privileging Western perspectives and reducing Indigenous inclusion to fragmented bits of "culture," the system leads Indigenous students to "not see the merit of holding to Aboriginal language systems, cultures, or world views, nor understand the wealth of knowledge within their own systems. This self-doubt, coupled with racism, continues to sabotage their expectations for their own futures" (Battiste, 2013: 162). The problem is not with the students themselves, she says, nor the contexts from which they come, but with an educational system that excludes and looks down upon their cultures, languages, and ways of knowing. Similarly, Kuokkanen (2007) argues that the academy is a place that is inhospitable and even hostile to indigenous students, unless they agree to leave their worldviews, values and culture behind. Added to this lack of respect, indigenous students must "learn to conform to the unwritten, unstated discursive and epistemic norms and rules of the academy, whether they want to or not. This may involve painful negotiation of their identities, cultural backgrounds, desires, and aspirations…Some students find that adaptation is too big a challenge and leave the institution" (Kuokkanen, 2007: 53). The issue is not just cultural differences, she says; it is "the wilful ignorance that is embedded in the mainstream middle-class culture; and the logic of European rationalism, which denies the existence of intellectual conventions and perceptions of the world other than those rooted in the Enlightenment" (54). In other words, the root cause of the challenges that Indigenous students face in the Canadian educational system is the failure of the system to accept their ways of knowing as valid.

This failure constitutes injustice towards those Indigenous students, because it fails to educate them in a way that meets their needs.

Some might argue that the solution to this problem is to offer separate Indigenous and non-Indigenous school systems, each designed to be responsive to the cultural backgrounds of its own student population. To some extent, this does happen through First Nations school on reserves and a few Indigenous-focused schools within provincial systems. However, there are currently not nearly enough of such schools to meet the needs of all Indigenous children in Canada. It is also possible that segregating children into separate schools – even if such segregation is voluntary – will exacerbate persistent issues of racism in Canadian society. Christian educators might still argue that it is public schools that should fill in the gaps by meeting the needs of Indigenous children, since Christian schools already have a responsibility to their own unique group of students. One problem with this argument is that many Indigenous people are Christians and may desire to send their children to Christian schools. But the two arguments following also suggest that even for schools with no Indigenous students at all, there are still compelling reasons to decolonize.

The proper role of the school

The role of the Christian school, according to Wolterstorff, is to "equip students for the Christian life" (2002: 22). He goes on to explain that this includes helping students to develop their intellectual and physical capacities and become disciples of Christ in all aspects of their lives, and equipping them to play their particular role within the Christian community, broader human society, and human culture.

It is arrogant and racist to assume that Western culture has all the answers for how to do this, even for students who come from that culture. As the Christian scholars quoted above (Jennings, 2010; Newbigin, 1989; Wolterstorff, 2004; Woodley, 2004) have argued, a diversity of cultural perspectives can enrich our understanding of God, the world, each other and ourselves. Diversity can help to overcome the blind spots present in any single cultural perspective. By drawing from the strengths of different cultures, a decolonized curriculum can offer students a fuller and richer understanding of what it means to serve Christ in the world, as well as greater discernment of the limitations and faults of their home cultures.

Battiste and Kuokkanen similarly argue that decolonization can contribute to the understanding of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Kuokkanen bluntly asks how the academy can "call itself a place of knowledge as long as the knowledge it produces and reproduces is based on a fraction of the understanding that is possible in this world?" (2007: 153). Battiste suggests that "to reject other knowledge systems is to subject students to selective silences and collective ignorance" (2013: 120–121). For example, both Battiste and Kuokkanen, as well as many other scholars, point to the insights that Indigenous cultures have about the relationship between humans and the rest of Creation. While Western culture has often focused on domination of the natural world and treated it as an object, leading to exploitation and environmental destruction, Indigenous cultures tend to focus on interconnectedness and interdependence between

humans and the rest of the natural world (Jobin, 2014; Olsen Dannenmann, 2009). They value harmony and balance between human and non-human Creation (Makokis, 2010; Woodley, 2013). Furthermore, they have embodied these beliefs through thousands of years of living in a sustainable way in Creation. Today, many Christians have rejected the idea that they are called to dominate Creation and instead see themselves as stewards called to care for Creation. These Christians can learn much from the wisdom, history, skills and knowledge of Indigenous peoples.

Another example comes from the field of economics. Standard economic theory, which is deeply rooted in Western culture, focuses on depersonalized exchange relationships between human beings. Individuals, each aiming to maximize their own utility, voluntarily agree to exchange goods and services for money and vice versa. Each participant benefits from the exchange, and is left with no further obligations to the other party. Indigenous perspectives, on the other hand, tend to focus on the concept of reciprocity, where gifts are given, often in a circular pattern rather than individual-to-individual, "to actively acknowledge kinship and coexistence with the world" (Kuokkanen, 2007: 38). These gifts affirm that to be human is to have relationships with and responsibilities to other forms of life, both human and non-human, which extend far beyond the act of gift-giving itself. One of the concrete implications of this principle is the sharing of goods and services with those who are in need, not with the expectation of being paid back in the future, but simply because it is the right thing to do (Jobin, 2014). It is obvious that such a perspective is better than the economic exchange model at capturing certain kinds of relationships, such as those within the family. But it is also possible to imagine that acting according to reciprocity could lead to healthier, more life-affirming and sustainable approaches to other economic relationships, such as in international trade. Some Christian economists already reject the idea that all economic relationships are (or ought to be) fundamentally characterized by depersonalized exchange (Graham et al., 1990). Economists thinking along these lines may find support and insight in Indigenous economic perspectives.

If the role of the school is to prepare students to live a Christian life, and Indigenous perspectives offer insights that can help students do this, then excluding these perspectives from the curriculum does a disservice to all students, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. The school will fail to live up to its calling and responsibility to educate students to the best of its ability. Furthermore, it will do so for reasons that should be unacceptable to Christians – racism and the belief that Western culture is superior to all others. Thus, this argument offers a compelling reason for all schools to decolonize, whether they have Indigenous students or not.

A cautionary note is that basing decolonization solely on this argument can lead to appropriation, rather than respectful engagement. Appropriation happens when non-Indigenous people or institutions draw on Indigenous knowledge in support of their own goals, without recognizing the responsibilities that come along with the use of this knowledge. For example, environmental activists who claim inspiration from Indigenous teachings about the natural world are guilty of appropriation when they fail to also address related issues of land rights - the question of "whose environment are we talking about?" (Kuokkanen, 2007: 124) - and ignore the real-life struggles of the people whose

ideas they are borrowing. The solution to appropriation, according to Kuokkanen, is to acknowledge that reciprocity calls for those who have accepted the gift of Indigenous perspectives to also accept their responsibilities to Indigenous peoples. Thus, a third argument in support of decolonization is that it is a necessary step in equipping students to live out their responsibilities of seeking reconciliation and justice.

Equipping students to pursue justice and reconciliation

Shalom, according to Wolterstorff (2004), is characterized by justice, right relationships, and delight in those relationships. There are at least three levels on which justice and reconciled relationships are needed between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada. One is the personal level: non-Indigenous and Indigenous people must learn to respect and even delight in each other as people. In particular, non-Indigenous people need to overcome deeply rooted racism and cultural stereotypes about Indigenous people and instead find delight in them, both as individuals and in the richness of their cultures. A second is the structural level: systems and institutions in Canada need to be transformed to treat Indigenous people justly, so that they have what is due to them as treaty partners, as Nations, and as the original inhabitants of the land. A third level is the relationship between all people in Canada and the land which we share: our economy needs to be transformed into one in which both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples are able to live in right relationship with the land and each other. Decolonization of the curriculum is a necessary foundation for healing all of these relationships.

On the personal level, decolonization is necessary to foster respect for Indigenous peoples. Both Battiste and Kuokkanen argue that the decision to exclude Indigenous perspectives from the school curriculum is rooted in racism and false ideas about cultural superiority. If students are taught (even only implicitly) that only Western knowledge is worth learning and that Indigenous perspectives are not worthy of respect, it is unlikely that they will learn to respect Indigenous cultures and individuals either. As long as the curriculum continues to include only fragments of Indigenous history and culture, it will "perpetuate the belief that different cultures have nothing to offer but exotic food and dances or a shallow first chapter" (Battiste, 2013: 168). This leads students to see Indigenous peoples as the "'inferior' 'other'" (Kuokkanen, 2007: 71) rather than people genuinely worthy of respect and engagement.

Furthermore, racism towards Indigenous people in Canada is often fed by a perception that they receive too much "special treatment" from the government. In part, these perceptions are due to ignorance about the legal status of Indigenous peoples and what is due to them as a result of the treaties, and could be partially addressed by educating students about the history and rights of Indigenous peoples in Canada. But underlying these attitudes seems to be a persistent belief that the solution for the challenges that Indigenous people face, particularly on reserves, is for them to assimilate into Euro-Canadian society. For example, *Macleans* columnist Scott Gilmore wrote a column after the 2016 mass shooting in La Loche, Saskatchewan, which argued that "the violence and depravation that plagues Canada's remote Aboriginal communities" can only be solved by helping residents "to leave, to build lives in southern Canada, integrated into one of the world's healthiest, safest, most rewarding societies" (Gilmore,

2016). Overcoming this attitude requires fostering genuine understanding and respect for Indigenous values and ways of life, including an understanding of the deep ties to the land that lead many Indigenous people to remain on their reserves despite the challenges often associated with doing so.

On the structural level, much work remains to be done to honour the rights of Indigenous peoples in Canada and to treat them justly. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) presented 94 Calls to Action in its final report, including changes in the child welfare, education, health, and justice systems, changes in the ways that Aboriginal title is dealt with in the legal system, and specific actions by churches, businesses, and the media. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples called for even more sweeping institutional change, including recognition of the right to self-governance by Indigenous peoples and a significant redistribution of land and resources (Canada. Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). Canada recently adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which has a number of significant economic and political implications (United Nations General Assembly, 2007), though it remains to be seen how the Declaration will be practically implemented in this country.

These issues should be matters of concern to all Canadians. Every non-Indigenous Canadian is here in this country by virtue of the treaties. It is the treaties that gave us the right to settle and live here; in doing so, we must also accept the responsibilities that come with the treaties. While many of us will never be directly involved in decision-making about these matters, we will all be involved as democratic citizens. When our government fails to honour the treaties, it is our responsibility to hold it to account. To benefit from injustice without speaking out is to fail in our calling from God.

To participate well in this work of structural reconciliation, non-Indigenous Canadians must not only be educated about the legal rights of Indigenous peoples, but also must be able to understand how Indigenous peoples think about the world and their place in it. While Indigenous peoples must be at the forefront of directing changes that affect them, continuing to live as neighbours in this land will require cooperative decision-making. Reconciling structural injustices between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada will take much negotiation as colonial systems of control are broken down. Transfers of decision-making power will need to be accompanied by transfers of resources to support new structures and institutions. Those on the non-Indigenous side of the table need a solid understanding of Indigenous people's values and ways of living in order to participate in these discussions respectfully and constructively.

Finally, regardless of how extensively systems and institutions are transformed in the process of reconciliation, Indigenous and non-Indigenous people will continue to coexist in this land. Historically and into the present, the settler economy has had the effect of displacing Indigenous peoples from their traditional lands and resources, making it difficult and sometimes impossible for them to pursue economic practices that align with their culture and values. This has happened through the reserve system, the wholesale relocation of some communities, the depletion of animal and plant species, industrial and agricultural development, and a variety of other policies. It continues to

happen today, particularly through resource and infrastructure developments such as mines and dams. Since their traditional lands, in many areas, can no longer sustain them, Indigenous peoples are often forced to participate in the settler economy in ways which may conflict with their values (Ghostkeeper, 2007; Jobin, 2014; Makokis, 2010). It is also, of course, becoming clear that the settler economy is making the land less and less able to sustain the non-Indigenous inhabitants of the land as well. Transforming the economy so that it preserves the land's ability to sustain us all will require all participants to operate on the basis of a solid understanding of what Indigenous peoples need from the land, and what they understand a proper relationship to the land to mean.

Moving towards decolonization

This paper has argued that Christian educators have a responsibility to make space for North American Indigenous perspectives in the educational system. It is true that there are many other perspectives with whom Christians also need to be in dialogue. But Indigenous peoples stand in special relationship with non-Indigenous people in North America because we live together in this land. Our agreements to live together mean we have responsibilities to each other, many of which have been ignored by non-Indigenous people. Therefore, we have a particular obligation to make things right in this relationship.

Decolonizing the educational system will require a mutually respectful partnership between Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators, administrators, and community members. It will require a wholesale rethinking of curriculum, pedagogy, and policy. It is an enormous undertaking. However, individual non-Indigenous educators can already begin honouring their responsibilities to Indigenous peoples by taking small steps towards decolonization. One key step is to educate ourselves by learning about the history of the Indigenous-settler relationship, contemporary issues of concern, and Indigenous cultures and perspectives. A second is to critically and humbly assess how our current teaching practices might embody cultural imperialism and epistemic ignorance, and to seek out available curricula and other resources to begin correcting these issues. A third is to reach out to Indigenous people and communities who are willing to partner with and guide us in the journey of reconciliation; true understanding and change can only come through relationship. A fourth is to seek out opportunities, as individuals and together with our students, to take concrete action on issues of concern to Indigenous communities in our areas.

Recognizing the inherent value in Indigenous ways of knowing and doing and the benefits of learning from diverse cultural perspectives will better equip us to do justice to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and to all of our Indigenous brothers and sisters. The path to reconciliation and shalom will be long, and no one can say beforehand exactly what it will look like. Nevertheless, we all have a responsibility to begin.

Notes

[1] For readers who wish to learn more about this history, introductory resources include the TRC's summary report (2015), the summary report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (Canada. Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996), and Métis scholar Olive Dickason's history text, *Canada's First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times* (2009).

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