

COLONIZATION: NOT SO WELCOME!

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OPENING WORDS

~ Stephen Kendrick¹

We are here to face the truth, about ourselves, about this faith we love, and the ways it presently serves others and the world.

As well as to open ourselves to ways it can better, and more joyfully, reflect our potential and core values.

We want to know the ways we are bound to one another, as well as to larger religious movements normally beyond our sight and vision.

We say we are open and diverse...yet it is too easy to feel stuck in old paths and stubborn habits reflecting not so much tradition as our comfort.

We want to answer the call to service, to a world that needs our message, our hope, our revived energy –

We are gathered to learn, to unlearn, to hear, and to move forward.

And with our intention so set...to learn, to unlearn, to hear, and to move forward, let us gather in the practice of paying attention to that which matters most.

STORY FOR ALL

Caribou Song

~ Tomson Highway

(A story about two young Cree brothers who go on a magical adventure, and about a way of life that no longer exists.)

READING

Prayer of Reconciliation

~ Anne Barker²

We gather with a hunger for reconciliation.

What is done cannot be undone.

What is done next must now be done with care.

We gather because we are hopeful,

Because we have visions and dreams of a brighter future.

That there may be more than vision in this room,

These are the wounds we must heal together –

Grief and anger for all that has been lost,

Guilt or fear in the reliving,

Pain that has gone without sufficient comfort,

Mistrust that was earned, that continues burning still,

Every injury we may have named, and yet still carry,

Those we haven't, can't, or dare not speak aloud,

Those we are not ready to make public,

Those still not recognized, accepted, understood.

These are the wounds that seek replacement –

Not cancellation or denial,

¹ From Lifting Our Voices...#48

² <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/prayer/prayer-reconciliation>

Wounds we will tend cautiously,
Applying the salve of understanding,
Forming scars that mark our history,
Without disfiguring the future we might share.
This is not a time of quick solutions, fancy talking.
This is a slow precision. This is a prayer for peace.
We are new at this endeavor. New at listening, new at hearing.
New at taking enough time to honestly receive one another's stories.
What is done cannot be undone.
What is done next must now be done with care.
We gather because we are hopeful,
Because we have visions and dreams of a brighter future.
May the strength of this time together help us to walk forward.
May the wisdom of this experience help us to know our path.
May we have the courage to return, as often as necessary, until our way is clear.
May we have the perseverance, together, to see it through.
May we cause it to be so.

MESSAGE *Colonization: Not So Welcome*

Wow. Another huge topic for a Sunday morning. It would be silly for me to try to take a 20-minute romp through the history of the colonization of this land we call Canada...partly because of that time constraint, but mostly, really, because of my limited knowledge. What I do want to explore is the impact of colonization on the first peoples here and on our relationships, and what we might do to start the process of de-colonization.

We're going to start simple; you probably know all of this already. But, let's begin with trying to define colonization. But again, I must state my lack of expertise on this topic, and my intent to be humble and in learner-mode, and to learn from you. This is one of those days when it is especially true that in this faith, the sermon is not the final word!

Our commitment to the process of Truth and Reconciliation is evident on the national level with the Canadian Unitarian Council's "Truth, Healing and Reconciliation Task Force." I found a few definitions of colonization in their resources.

Simply put, colonization is the establishment of a colony in one territory by a political power from another territory, and the subsequent maintenance, expansion, and exploitation of that colony.

In longer form, colonization is defined as some form of invasion, dispossession and subjugation of a peoples. The invasion need not be military; it can begin – or continue – as geographical intrusion in the form of agricultural, urban, or industrial encroachments. The result of such incursion is the dispossession of vast amounts of lands from the original inhabitants. This is often legalized after the fact.

Historically, First Nation peoples in Canada lost some 98% of their original lands through various means such as treaties and the Indian Act. Métis Nation peoples lost about 83% of their Red River lots through the Scrip program.

The long-term result of such massive dispossession is institutionalized inequality. The

colonizer/colonized relationship is by nature an unequal one that benefits the colonizer at the expense of the colonized.³

Okay, I know that's a lot to take in, and that there's a LOT more that could be said, but even defining colonization, let alone agreeing on that definition, is not the point of my message today.

Here's a much more poetic way to get inside of this; *We Are Not Guests*⁴ was written by Rev. Alicia Forde, here adapted for the Canadian context with her permission, and with Barbara Herring's help:

AM I A GUEST HERE. HERE IN THIS HOUSE. ARE YOU?

Are we guests here. Here in this House. And, whose House do we inhabit?

In the small world of our lives the borders between us: easements, fences, gates, hedges – serve to delineate, to separate us.

To remind us of where my property begins and ends.

Where your property begins and ends.

If you cross over: you are a trespasser or a guest in my house.

You've worked to own this small plot of land and the house erected on it.

You've claimed it. It is now part of yourself. Your definition of self. Your identity.

If I cross over your fences: I am a trespasser or a guest in your house.

What does it mean then, that Canadian settlers moved into British Columbia and took over almost all that province and its resources, without any treaty being signed?

Or that, with treaties signed in Ontario and other parts of this country, Canada has not kept its agreements?

Was Canada trespasser? Guest?

Are there to be no consequences for taking what does not belong to you?

Should we simply forget whose House we inhabit?

The actions of the past have led us, step by step, into this current predicament.

A predicament in which we perceive that the land, the resources that are a part of this House, are ours, and we, who now live here, are being virtuous in our willingness to share it with the original peoples.

This perception erases the history, and would have us believe that the mining resources newly discovered in the "Ring of Fire" in northern Ontario belong to the mining companies alone...that those companies need only share in this wealth if Indigenous People living on that land can prove that they can contribute to the faster or more efficient extraction of that wealth.

This is, for the Indigenous peoples, a matter of survival.

It is, for Canada, a matter of keeping our treaties, and of de-colonizing our culture.

The prospect of de-colonization is scary. The notion of reconciliation is overwhelming.

Where do we begin?

With First Peoples?

³ Excerpt from *Colonization and Racism* by Emma LaRocque

<http://www3.nfb.ca/enclasse/doclens/visau/index.php?mode=theme&language=english&theme=30662&film=&excerpt=&submode=about&expmode=2>

⁴ <http://www.uua.org/worship/words/reading/we-are-not-guests>

With territories?

With ourselves?

How do we acknowledge and address the complexities of our past, present, and – if we're not conscious – future of dominance?

What would right relationship look like?

What conditions and considerations would make reconciliation possible?

And. For us – Unitarian Universalists – what would it mean for us to shake off the structures of colonization and delve into the reality of reconciliation, of restoring friendship and harmony.

Whose House do we inhabit?

For we are not hosts. We are not owners.

Nor are we guests.

What, then, is our responsibility?

During September, we have been exploring the meaning of welcome. We have most often have put ourselves in the position of the one doing the welcoming, so this shift in imagination is difficult. If all that is accomplished today is that we are given pause to think on this question of guest/host/trespasser/owner, then we will have accomplished something.

But I want to go further, and to go at it from the point of view of our stories.

You know I'm a fan of Parker Palmer, a Quaker theologian, although I don't know that he would call himself that. About a year ago, he wrote a blogpost that I find really meaningful. It was titled, *Five Stories about Otherness and Me*.⁵ He prefaced his writing with these words:

"If you believe as I do that diversity is to be welcomed, not feared, you've probably heard some version of this adage: "The more you know about another's story, the less fearsome and more human that person becomes."

It's equally true that the better we understand our own stories, the more human we become. Revisiting our own experiences with otherness and trying to learn from them is key to becoming the people we want to be. It gives us a chance to live into the best of our stories and transcend the worst."

He went on to tell of five moments when he discovered something important about otherness. He told of learning, as a young boy, that one of his grandfathers supported the lynching of black people, and the other respected and loved Mr. Bass, a neighbouring black farmer. He told of his father taking him into the south side of Chicago, and of his failure in trying to teach Sunday School in Spanish Harlem.

And after telling these stories, he listed his central lesson in each experience: that racism is evil, that friendship across racial lines is possible and beautiful, that fear of 'the other' cuts all ways, and that cultivating humility opens us to a larger truth...which is, that we have a lot to learn.

Our non-fiction bookclub is reading an academic tome called "Unsettling the Settler Within." It is humbling to learn so much. One of the main points the author makes is that it's critical to know our own history, to tell it true, and then to learn from it. Colonization is Canada's history. Canada as we know it would not exist had it not been for the taking and settling of

⁵ <https://onbeing.org/blog/five-stories-about-otherness-and-me/>

lands and resources, and if not for the heavy-handed imposition of western ways on indigenous peoples. Many of the privileges we enjoy have come at the expense of others' lives and cultures. And, land acquisition is only the beginning in the process of colonization. Colonization, and its resulting systems and institutions, goes much deeper than the land itself.

In their book, *Aboriginal Peoples in Canada*, James Frideres and René Gadacz list seven aspects of colonization. Let's look at them through Parker Palmer's lens, as seven historical 'moments' from which we might learn.

The first is the incursion of the colonizing group into a geographical area. When white people first arrived, native peoples helped them to survive, and there was a period of peaceful coexistence. But Europeans brought with them a hunger for wealth and acquisition, and in fighting amongst each other for control, pulled indigenous allies into the fray. We know how this turned out; Britain 'won', and in order to keep control, agreed, in the Royal Proclamation of 1763, that traditional lands would not change hands without agreements.

And in the Treaty of Niagara (1764) the British promised the 24 Nations of the Great Lakes that they would not let them become poor or have their lands taken from them.

Decolonization lesson: The attitude that we are all powerful and should exercise control over everyone else has not been well received. Now we must educate ourselves about the history of Indigenous-settler relations during the whole colonial project...learn about broken treaties, unresolved land claims, and conflicts over resources. Commit ourselves to reconciliation.⁶

The second aspect of colonization is the destructive effect on the social and cultural structures of the Indigenous peoples. In this area, the Anishnaabe had a sophisticated society with community laws, and a rich spirituality based in a belief that every living thing should be treated with respect.⁷ As the settler population grew, the government no longer needed the indigenous peoples as allies. Settlements turned first peoples into refugees, and European systems of government were imposed. Indigenous social and cultural norms were pushed aside, discarded, and even made illegal.

Lesson: Thinking that we are saviors who know what is the 'right way' is dehumanizing of the other. De-colonization requires the re-centering of indigenous social and cultural practices and norms, showing them full respect. The first step is truly listening in silence, knowing that their stories and traditions are doorways into learning.⁸

Three more aspects of colonization are external political control, economic dependence, and the provision of low quality services for the colonized people. Treaties soon began to be seen as ways to move Indians off their traditional lands, and health care and education was not provided as promised.

Racism and the establishment of a colour line is another aspect of colonization. Here in Canada, the "Indian problem" was that of trying to somehow fashion indigenous peoples into the image of the European settlers, or in the case of the residential schools, to "kill the Indian

⁶ Regan, Paulette, *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada*. 2010, UCB Press. P.230

⁷ Switzer, Maurice. *We are all...Treaty People*. 2011. Union of Ontario Indians (used as a resource through this sermon.)

⁸ Michelle LeBaron, as quoted by Regan, p. 192

in the child.” On the other very twisted hand, we have required them to prove their Indian-ness in order to receive certain treaty benefits.

Lesson: If we believe that true diversity is to be welcomed, decolonizing ourselves is going to require a dramatic re-imagining of relationships...it will require conversation and more education about our internalized racism. It will be an unlearning and an ongoing practice.⁹

The ultimate consequence of colonization is to weaken the resistance (of the Indigenous Peoples) to the point they can be controlled.¹⁰ It is to leave the first peoples with broken spirits, living in third world conditions. Canada almost succeeded at this. Almost, but not quite. Meegwitch, Gchi Manitou. Thank God. The spirit of our First Nations neighbours is healing, and rising (without our help.)

Lesson: Decolonizing is to act in solidarity with indigenous peoples...organizing support with their clear consent and guidance, building long-term relationships of accountability, and never taking for granted their trust.¹¹

But, feelings of guilt (though predictable) or waiting to be told what to do, cannot be used as excuses for inaction. Our (white settler) willingness to de-center ourselves and to act from a place of respectful responsibility is needed if we are to undo colonization.¹²

Ultimately, decolonization is a process whereby we create the conditions in which we want to live and the social relations we wish to have. It is the process of becoming the people we want to be, and the chance to live into the best of our stories while transcending the worst.¹³ In order to do this, we'll need to commit ourselves to supplanting the colonial logic that resides within white culture¹⁴...and within this congregation. I hope that next month, as we explore the theme of courage, we'll dare to begin to expose some of that white culture.

In closing, I share these words of Victoria Freeman, found in “Unsettling the Settler Within”:¹⁵

“I believe it is possible to move beyond this ugly and often violent history, to be a society that is founded not on mere ‘tolerance’ but on respect, a society that lives up to its word. But I know we can’t move forward until we look the past in the eye, until we understand ourselves more deeply, acknowledging and exploring even the darker aspects of our history – not to damn our forbearers, but with hope for a more humane world.”

So may that world be.

Amen.

RESPONSIVE READING *We Answer the Call of Love* ~ Julia Corbett-Hemeyer¹⁶

In the face of hate,

⁹ <https://briarpatchmagazine.com/articles/view/decolonizing-together>

¹⁰ Frideres, James S. and Gadacz, René. 2012. *Aboriginal Peoples in Canada* 9th Edition. Toronto: Pearson.

¹¹ <https://briarpatchmagazine.com/articles/view/decolonizing-together>

¹² <https://briarpatchmagazine.com/articles/view/decolonizing-together>

¹³ Parker Palmer

¹⁴ <https://briarpatchmagazine.com/articles/view/decolonizing-together>

¹⁵ Regan, p. 233.

¹⁶ <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/responsive-reading/we-answer-call-love>

We answer the call of love.
In the face of exclusion,
We answer the call of inclusion.
In the face of homophobia,
We answer the call of LGBTQ rights.
In the face of racism,
We answer the call of justice for all races.
In the face of xenophobia,
We answer the call of pluralism.
In the face of misogyny,
We answer the call of women's rights.
In the face of demagoguery,
We answer the call of reason.
In the face of religious intolerance,
We answer the call of diversity.
In the face of narrow nationalism,
We answer the call of global community.
In the face of bigotry,
We answer the call of open-mindedness.
In the face of despair,
We answer the call of hope.

ALL: As Unitarian Universalists, we answer the call of love — now more than ever.

*** CLOSING WORDS** *Hymn (2017)* ~ Sherman Alexie

I will sing for people who might not sing for me.
I will sing for people who are not my family.
I will sing honor songs for the unfamiliar and new.
I will visit a different church and pray in a different pew.
I will silently sit and carefully listen to new stories
About other people's tragedies and glories.
I will not assume my pain and joy are better.
I will not claim my people invented gravity or weather.
And, oh, I know I will still feel my rage and rage and rage
But I won't act like I'm the only person onstage.
I am one more citizen marching against hatred.
Alone, we are defenseless. Collected, we are sacred.

Indeed, collected, all of us are sacred.

Blessed be. Amen.

EXTINGUISHING THE FLAME