Rethinking the relationship between spirituality and reconciliation

A SYMPOSIUM ON INDIGENOUS AND NON-INDIGENOUS RELATIONS IN CANADA

MARCH 8–9 2018

UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA

First Peoples House
Ceremonial Hall

www.reconciliation-and-spirituality.ca

We acknowledge with respect the Lkwungen-speaking peoples, on whose traditional territory the university stands, and the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ peoples, whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

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This includes how we understand our own history, the dynamics of individual and collective healing, the on-going social, cultural, political, and economic impacts of Canada’s history of colonization, and how to foster transformed and mutually respectful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in this country. This conversation, and the work it demands, is complex, multi-layered, and touches all sectors of Canadian society. Included in this work are unresolved issues about self-government, land rights, resource extraction, environmental protection, the well-being of children and families, gender equality, and policing — just to name a few. Many of these issues continue to be fraught with conflict, and few have been resolved satisfactorily through political or legal processes.

It is encouraging that in recent years there has seen significant research and study — increasingly led and informed by Indigenous scholars — about how to understand these challenges and effect the required transformations. This symposium asks whether and how this work of decolonization and reconciliation may be understood as also being a spiritual challenge, and what that might mean for individual and social action.

It must be acknowledged that there are some potential tensions associated with raising such a topic, given the roles of religious institutions and belief systems in settler colonialism. Furthermore, the meanings and goals of reconciliation, as well as the definitions of religion and spirituality themselves, are contested. Although these factors suggest we adopt a cautious and humble approach to these discussions, there are nonetheless vital areas for exploration and further understanding: What might it mean to understand reconciliation as being a spiritual challenge? Are there serious pitfalls to conceiving of reconciliation in those terms? What are the specific understandings of reconciliation that may be gained from Indigenous spiritual traditions, as well as other spiritual traditions, and do they work cross-culturally? How might this alter our approach to reconciliation? Can concepts and approaches offered by various spiritual traditions present useful contributions to processes of reconciliation or give rise to new strategies — social, political, legal, economic — for working for social change? Do the differences and disagreements on the meanings and nature of spirituality render such a focus counter-productive? What is the role of love, trustworthiness, truthfulness, and compassion in reconciliation? Do spiritual perspectives on reconciliation help us understand the relationship between healing the harms that have occurred and achieving justice in the present and future? What kind of alternatives and visions of the future can acknowledging the spiritual dimensions of reconciliation open up to those who are working to transform relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canadian society?
March 8
7:00 – 9:00 pm
The Role of the Sacred in Indigenous Law and Reconciliation
IdeaFest Event, in partnership with University of Victoria VP Research
Alax Goldien Hall, 907 Pandora Ave.

It is often said that Indigenous peoples’ relationship to the land — and Indigenous peoples’ law — is sacred. What does “sacred” mean in this context? What should it convey to non-Indigenous Canadians when they engage with Indigenous peoples? How do Indigenous peoples understand another person’s sense of the sacred? Two of UVic’s leading Indigenous scholars, John Borrows and Val Napoleon, will discuss the sacred in Indigenous law and reconciliation.

Keynote speakers:
• Prof. John Borrows
• Prof. Val Napoleon

March 9
8:30 – 9:00 am
Welcome and Opening
9:00 – 10:30 am
Panel 1: Whose Reconciliation? Which Spirituality?
“Reconciliation” and “spirituality” are both contested, multiple, and at times divisive terms. As such, it is important at the outset to explore the range of meanings, misunderstandings, and approaches which can be employed when speaking of reconciliation, spirituality, and their possible relations with each other. What do we mean when we talk about these things separately and in relation to each other? What are the distinct and diverse ways of talking about them? What models of talking about them have been predominant, and which have been marginal? Should we be cautious in speaking of their relation to each other?

Chairperson: Dean Jeremy Webber (University of Victoria)

Speakers:
• Dr. Dinah Darow (University of Victoria) — “A genealogy of a symposium”
• Prof. André Bossé (York University) — “Reconciliation: Learning from the Coast Salish witness”
• Prof. Perrot-Ross-Tremblay (Université Laurentienne) — “The Test of Truth: First Peoples, Canada and the Journey to Reconciliation”

10:30 – 11:00 am — Coffee break
11:00 am – 12:30 pm
Panel 2: Understanding the Past
The history of relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada is full of pain and oppression, as well as periods of cooperation and dialogue. We are already deepening our individual and shared understandings all the time, and learning to listen and dialogue in new, more respectful, and purposeful ways. How are we understanding the history of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations in Canada changing? How does looking at spirituality help us to interpret and understand past events, and their influence on the present day? How is religion and spirituality being used to divide and harm people, and in ways that they contributed to resilience in the face of oppression, and to relationships of mutual understanding and respect?

Chairperson: Geoffrey Cameron (Baha’i Community of Canada)

Speakers:
• Prof. Heidi Kiewiet/Dunlop (University of Victoria) — “Giving Voice to Creator: Considering Treaties as Sacred”
• Prof. Tolly Bradford (Concordia University) — “A Brief History of Spirituality, Christianity, and Reconciliation”
• Dr. Dylan Hurt (University of Victoria) — “Reconciliation and Relationship: Histories of Heart, Hope, and Humility”

12:30 – 1:30 pm — Lunch break
1:30 – 3:00 pm
Panel 3: Acting in the Present
The Truth and Reconciliation Commission stated that the process of reconciliation is about “establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country.” The TRC also called for the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to be endorsed and implemented as comprehensive framework for reconciliation. The work of building the required new relationships embraces the whole of society. It is not something that is left to future generations — although they will also have a role to play. What are central foundations for such new relationships? What are the characteristics of relationships based on recognition and respect? What is the role of Indigenous legal traditions in revitalizing and re-imagining our relations? Are there spiritual principles that can guide this work of coming together? What conditions are needed for people to pursue sustained healing, collective learning, and an unbiased recognition of the truths about our history? What attitudes and practices of dialogue can help to transcend prejudices, foster common understanding, truly respect distinctiveness and diversity, and promote greater social solidarity? 

Chairperson: Prof. Paul Bramadat (University of Victoria)

Speakers:
• Prof. Gordon Christie (University of British Columbia) — “The Valorization of Human Spirituality and the Oppression of Indigenous Peoples”
• Prof. Hadley Friedland (University of Alberta) — “Spiritual Space: The Importance of Non-knowing”
• Prof. Sarah Hunt (University of British Columbia) — “Gendering the T of the TRC truth-telling and transformation”

3:00 – 3:30 pm — Coffee break
3:30 – 5:00 pm
Panel 4: Imagining the Future
As we examine the conditions of society today and reflect on our hopes for social transformation, our vision can be uplifted by efforts to imagine alternative futures. How might society look differently that it does now, and what different roles would religion and spirituality play in society? In what ways will relationships based on recognition and reconciliation be reflected in families, neighbourhoods, communities, and in public conversation and social action? How must society change to properly respect Indigenous laws, governments, and jurisdictions? How will cultural distinctiveness and diversity be reflected in families, neighbourhoods, communities, and in public conversation and social action? How must society change to properly respect Indigenous laws, governments, and jurisdictions? How will cultural distinctiveness and diversity be reflected in families, neighbourhoods, communities, and in public conversation and social action? How must society change to properly respect Indigenous laws, governments, and jurisdictions? How will cultural distinctiveness and diversity be reflected in families, neighbourhoods, communities, and in public conversation and social action?

Chairperson: Prof. Lisa Dufraint (Dundonald Hall, York University)

Speakers:
• Douglas White (Vancouver Island University) — “Love, Acceptance, Justice and Reconciliation”
• Prof. Sarah Moralee (University of Toronto) — “Speakers, Witnesses and Blanketing: The Need to Look Beyond the Courts to Achieve Reconciliation”
• Prof. Tolly Bradford (Concordia University) — “Reconciliation and Relationship: Histories of Heart, Hope, and Humility”

5:00 – 5:30 pm
Closing comments
Prof. Val Napoleon and Prof. John Borrows
Prof. Andrée Boisselle is an Assistant Professor at Osgoode Hall Law School. She holds a joint civil and common law degree from McGill University, and a PhD in University of London. She is a member of the Tsawout First Nation in Vancouver. Her research interests include Indigenous law and treaty practices, Aboriginal law, Indigenous legal traditions and legal theory, and her research work is entirely concerned with Aboriginal/Indigenous law and legal theory (and their intersection). Her most recent work focuses on how colonial systems of cultural meaning frame Canadian jurisprudence around Aboriginal rights.

Prof. Sarah Hunt
Sarah’s research and teaching builds on over 15 years of collaboration with Indigenous people and communities, with emphasis on issues facing youth, Two-Spirit people and women. Sarah is an assistant professor in the Institute for Critical Indigenous Studies and the Department of Geography at UBC.

Prof. Hadley Friedland
Hadley Friedland LLB, LLM, PhD, is an Assistant Professor at the University of Alberta Faculty of Law. She was the First Research Director of the University of Victoria’s Indigenous Law Research Unit and has worked extensively with Indigenous communities across Canada to revitalize their own laws. Hadley teaches and researches in the areas of Indigenous legal traditions, Aboriginal law, family law, child welfare and therapeutic jurisprudence.

Prof. Sarah Morales
Sarah Morales, JD (UVic), LLM (University of Arizona), PhD (UVic), PostDoc (Illinois) is Coast Salish and a member of Cowichan Tribes. She is an Assistant Professor at the University of Ottawa, Faculty of Law where she teaches torts, Aboriginal law, Indigenous legal traditions and international human rights, with a focus on Indigenous peoples. Sarah’s research interests are on Indigenous legal traditions, specifically the traditions of the Coast Salish people, Aboriginal law and human rights. Specifically, she is committed to the recognition and reconciliation of Indigenous legal traditions with the common law and civil law traditions in Canada. In addition to these academic interests, Sarah has been actively involved with Indigenous nations and NGOs across Canada through her work in nation building, inherent rights recognition and international human rights law. Her community-based research has resulted in new policies and practices that are reflective of the laws and legal orders of the communities who utilize them.

Prof. Val Napoleon
Val Napoleon is the Law Foundation Professor of Aboriginal Justice and Governance at the Faculty of Law, University of Victoria. She is from north-east British Columbia (Treaty 8) and a member of Saltats First Nation. She is also an adopted member of the Gitanyow (Gitksan) House of Luuxhon, Ganada (Frog) Clan. She has taught and researched on aboriginal law issues, Indigenous law and legal theory, and issues on Indigenous law and legal theory. Her dissertation, titled “Law's Hidden Canvas: Teasing Out of the Threads of Coast Salish Legal Sensibility”, is the product of a decade of engagement with Tslíw/Castl Island communities.

Prof. Robert Clifford
Robert Clifford is WSÁNEĆ and a member of the Tsuauñ First Nation on Vancouver Island. He carries the name YELD from his grandfather Earl Claston Sr. He is a doctoral candidate at Osgoode Hall Law School and lives and works in his home community of Tsawout. He works the engagement of WSÁNEĆ law with the ways that laws reflect and generate out of the values, philosophies, lands and worldviews of his people. He work is community focused and draws upon WSÁNEĆ law in relation to pressing problems throughout WSÁNEĆ territory.

Prof. Chelsea Horton
Born and raised on the west coast, historian Dr. Chelsea Horton had a deep interest in intersections of religion, colonialism, and reconciliation in this region. She is a research coordinator with the Centre for Studies in Religion and Theology at the University of Victoria. She is also the editor of The Wetiko (Windigo) Legal Principles: Cree and Anishinabek Responses to Violence and Victimization, which has recently been released.

Prof. Sarah Hunt
Sarah Hunt is a Knegwuth (Kwawalkwa’wa) scholar whose work critically takes up questions of justice, gender, sexuality, violence, self-determination and the spatiality of Indigenous law. Her research and teaching focuses on Indigenous legal traditions, Aboriginal law and legal theory, and legal orders of the communities who utilize them.

Prof. Pierrot Ross-Tremblay
Pierrot Ross-Tremblay is Innu, sociologist and professor at Laurentian University in Sudbury. His research focuses on Innu law and legal orders within the context of the WSÁNEĆ YELD territory. His work is community focused and draws upon WSÁNEĆ law in relation to pressing problems throughout WSÁNEĆ territory.