CROSSING BORDERS:

ECO-THEOLOGY IN THE SHADOWLANDS

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Abstract

The construction and effectual application of eco-theology must seriously engage the shadowlands, the places where borders have created inequities and injustice. In this liminal space, many aboriginal peoples have lived as mere shadows in their ancestral lands, marginalised by the nations that have colonized them. When the place of Christianity in a society's public sphere is in flux, and it finds itself, at times, within the shadowlands, its relationship to other religious traditions, including Aboriginal worldviews, also encourages changes. What happens to Christianity, particularly eco-theology, when it engages mostly earth-based traditions in this context? These encounters bring to the fore porous borders that have operated consciously or unconsciously in the past and point the way to a new kind of dialogue in the present. We contend that the answer to the above question is a key component in a meaningful eco-theology which finds its context in a pluralist nation. Other key components to be explored extend beyond theology to broader issues: one, of coming to terms with the effects of colonialism and the need to pay attention to trust in order to become effective allies effecting real ecological change; and two, the very practical need Christianity has to find an effective voice if it is not to be completely marginalised in a pluralist, post-colonial context. This article focuses on Christian engagement with Canada's First Nations and Christian theology. Consideration of the following themes attempts to further a conversation regarding the future of Christian Eco-theology in a post-Colonial, pluralist context where Christianity often finds itself in much the same shadowlands as those who it colonized: the theoretic understandings of porous borders, a metaphor grounded in the porous non-containment of ecosystems themselves, the complex history of Christianity in the Othering of aboriginal peoples legally and geo-politically within Canada, and the contemporary theological implications – particularly in terms of salvation – for Christianity as it attempts to listen respectfully to the ecological insights of a people seeking agency within its own primal traditions, which are at the same time Christian-influenced.

Key Words: Canada, Colonialism, Earth-based Traditions, Eco-theology

The Theoretic Understandings of Porous Borders:
The Significance of Space and Place

In *Turning to Earth,* E Marina Schauffler raises the gnawing issue of why the consistent work in environmentalism to date, the endless lists of ways to live ecologically, the rapidly increasing knowledge of environmental problems, and the work of activists has not substantially effected more sustainable living on a wide scale nor produced significant

results ecologically (Schauffler, 2003). She points to the lack of attention to inner ecology, the dynamics of conversion within the self, as a key explanation of the problem. Schauffler is not writing an eco-theology. However, she shares with many eco-theologians an attention to conversion and transformation. The purpose of the reconstruction of a Christian theology as eco-theology is transformation of Christian life to one that is earth-honouring (Rasmussen, 2010). While Schauffler presents stories of individual transformation, her exploration of a conversion of self is also applicable to the vision of wider community transformation. What is required for an authentic eco-theology grounded in communities of eco-practice?

Eco-theology has always attempted to cross borders; it is interdisciplinary from the beginning. Its interlocutors included the physical and social sciences, the arts, economics, and so on (Swimme and Berry, 1992) (Eaton and Lorentzen, 2003) (McFague, 2001) (Ruether, 2005) (King, 2002). There have also been attempts to engage minority groups in conversation with eco-theologians of all religious stripes.[1] The political, liberationist, feminist and contextual theologies have all influenced eco-theologians in that direction. But there is more to be done. In many religious traditions, especially those like Christianity, which have been associated with colonialism and missionizing, religious belief and practice is synthetic; it is always an amalgam of cultural expressions (from the beginning certainly Christianity is so). Despite the various mixtures, however, Christianity has always had borders and perceived certain places as normative Christian places and other places as somehow less Christian – a kind of polluted Christianity. Hence there is Christian theology, and then the contextual Christian theologies! Some of these Christian expressions are considered at best quixotic, and at worst idolatrous. While postmodernism has turned our attention to a kind of smorgasbord of interesting and even titillating religious expressions around the world, this is not equivalent to genuine and respectful engagement across borders. There is the normative Christian way and then there are the shadowlands. For the most part, Euro-centred Christianity sets a norm against which the so-called contextual or post-colonial Christianities contend for legitimacy.

CS Lewis used the notion of shadowlands to refer to the illusionary quality of this world, in particular in relationship to the mystery of suffering and death (Lewis, 1956). The word carries the sense of mystery of the non-yet complete or the unknown. The sense of the metaphor in the context of this paper is that Christianity has its perceived shadowlands, places that are considered somewhat Christian, but not quite so. For many churches and individual Christians, these places and peoples are too close to the earth, too tuned in to other voices, too embedded in ancient narratives and rituals, too challenging in the shame and guilt they evoke for how they have been treated. Such shadowlands are created by borders between aboriginal groups and their missionisers, the colonised and the colonists, those in the shadows and those in the light. The borders were not created by religions alone, probably not even principally by religion, but religions have been complicit. While religions and their eco-theologies have made strides in recent decades in attempting to address the dark side of history, we are still far from an equitable engagement in the spirituality and theology of those who have experienced the shadowlands.

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[1] Many churches have environmental networks that attempt to involve their own adherents, as well as to reach out to marginal communities. The point here is that the ecological identity of those in what we are calling the shadowlands has not seriously and extensively informed Christian eco-theology. For up to date reports on religious involvement and publications related to many topics in religion and ecology, see Forum on Religion and Ecology at http://fore.research.yale.edu/

In some ways these advances are helped in Canada by Christianity's position as outsider in the public sphere. Once regarded as the shadow establishment to government, Churches no longer hold that privileged place in elite Canadian society (Beyer, 2000) (Martin, 2000) (Van Die, 2001). Once part of the power elite that proclaimed boundaries and the normative, Christianity now often finds itself in a shadowlands of its own. However, co-occupation of metaphorical space is not akin to confluence of perception. Even though the boundaries between normative and not-normative have been shown to be porous, the notion of what constitutes border and what those borders might mean is contentious.

Humanist geographers and environmental psychologists have explored the role of the environment in the construction of human identity for decades. Earlier studies looked primarily at the built environment, but more recent work attends to the relationships of humans to the more natural elements of environment (Clayton and Opotow, 2003) (Relph, 1976) (Sack, 1997). What emerges is a strong case for the formation of identity, in general, and of an ecological identity, in particular, related to experiences of the natural world. Further to this claim is the realisation that the natural world as we perceive and experience it is constructed by the cultural views and practices within which we live, just as those views and practices are influenced by the peculiarities of the natural places we inhabit (Erhard, 2007). Thus the power of more natural settings to interpret history past and present enters a kind of Gadamerian hermeneutical circle in which everyday life occurs. The place that becomes 'home' or has been 'home' is the most significant confluence of factors that constitute identity. For religious communities, belief and faith are defining elements within that hermeneutical circle. Often religious commitments have served as sentinels or filters governing cultural perceptions of the natural world both for better and for worse. Scholarship in religion and ecology to date deals with a critique of these sentinels or filters and a recovery and reconstruction of more earth-honouring commitments.

Borders separate and define places, all kinds of places, whether these are physical or psychological or philosophical. The very emergence of abilities to order life, whether swimming in schools or pods or making words, involves the creation of borders around things. Living beings demand places for existence; they need inside and outside – the borders that limit possibilities and make survival possible. In turn, these places and their borders construct their inhabitants. Taken from their places, released from their borders living beings, from amebae to humans, will struggle and adapt, or die, depending on the degree and rapidity of change, and the genetic and cultural potential for adaptability. There is always a risk throughout the natural world when beings are uprooted from their place. Some contemporary scholars point to the uprootedness of humans from an earth place as a primary cause of environmental devastation and indifference. Some study the substitution of virtual place or of global citizenship for local natural setting (Heise, 2008). It is generally the case that traditional worldviews are rooted in the places from which they emerge (Clarke, 1971) (Tuan, 1974). For humans (and perhaps some other species) rootedness in place is the result of both the erotic attachment to place and its re-enforcement and celebration by story and ritual. Scott Russell Sanders tells of a rural region in Ohio, which was flooded for the construction of a dam when he was a child. Residents of his neighbourhood were relocated; they went without resistance. Sanders contends that there was no resistance because there was no communal attachment to the land; no stories or rituals to hold the community together and to their place. The attachments were all private (Sanders, 1995). That's how it is on the modern, enlightened side of the border. That's the side on which normative theology gets done – where theologians attempt to reformulate a more earth honouring theology.

In contrast, the normative Aboriginal worldviews of deep embeddedness precipitate an urgency and awareness of the immanence of space and place. Unlike Sanders' Ohio example, these communities include the land in their self-understanding. So some development projects entail not only destruction of traditional practices and contamination such as high levels of mercury and other toxins, but also catastrophic social consequences (Quinn, 1991) (Grinde and Johansen, 1995). The Canadian Aboriginal understanding of the physical world is fluid and non-hierarchical. What Western thought would relegate to the transcendent is, in Aboriginal worldviews, tangible and interactive. The social imaginary in an Aboriginal context is one of complete integration with the tangible, the spiritual and the intellectual – an integration so complete that it is seamless.[2] Canadian Aboriginal world-views also consistently posit a cosmos in which balance is the causation of harmony and vice versa (Paper, 2007). A key component of that harmony is the primacy of the common good. In Canadian Aboriginal mythologies, heroic and laudable actions are almost always linked to ends that benefit the community as a whole and there is a strong conveyance that the individual profits excessively at the peril of the community. These are the cultural values that integrate with space (specific bioregions) to create place – a place of security and attachment.

These values speak directly to the ways in which the natural world was regarded and used by Canadian Aboriginals: although the Aboriginal nations that were extant in Canada at the time of first contact were making use of the natural resources for the very practical purpose of survival, their underlying philosophy towards the resources that they were utilising was one of mutuality and balance rather than one of entitlement and dominion (Paper, 2007).

Therefore, Aboriginal worldviews have their wisdom, their lived experience of what is normative and their experience of what it is to encounter a missionizing religion such as Christianity. Consequences of that encounter for Canadian Aboriginals are, in part, the ways in which Christianity has become subject to the construction of Canadian Aboriginal culture, places and borders within the shadowlands. At their best, it is possible to see that these shadowlands are places of vital and living religions constructed by and constructing new cultural realities and new theologies. However, if we are to claim that what is being developed is an authentic eco-theology, a theology bound to the inner transformation required for effective ecological practice and way of life, there must be a genuine, respectful engagement across such borders.

The borders among religions and among different variations of the same religion have always been porous. As recent literature on the globalisation of religion has convincingly argued, this has only increased in recent decades. Intentionally and unintentionally, religious persons and communities are influencing each other, adapting to each other's ways and/or resisting the incursion of the other (Beyer, 1994) (Esposito, Fasching, Lewis, 2007). Much of the change this brings, however, can be characterised as cultural drift, the unintentional and subtle accumulation of new practices and ideas.[3] Real and focussed engagement for effective change does not automatically happen. Instead, the ideologies that

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[2]   For a discussion of 'social imaginary' in an ecotheological context, see Anne Marie Dalton and Henry C Simmons, *Eco-theology and the Practice of Hope.* (Albany: SUNY, 2010:3-5).

[3]   'Cultural drift' is a widely used term in sociology and cultural studies to refer to changes within a culture resulting from interactions with other cultures or elements of that culture. See, for example, Thomas Torrens, *Forging the Tortilla Curtain: Cultural Drift and Change along the United States-Mexican Border from the Spanish Era to the Present* (2000), or Mark Galli, 'Stopping Cultural Drift' in *Christianity Today* . Available at http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/november/33.66.html. Accessed July 23, 2012.

have created the shadowlands persist during drift; the hegemony remains. The result of this is what the Canadian theologian, Bernard Lonergan, would call a loss of insight and a resulting stage of bias and decline (Lonergan, 1978) (Dalton and Simmons, 2010). An eco-theology that fails to confront the inherited biases, that does not engage the shadowlands, is not only incomplete but subject to those some biases and ideologies. Its wisdom is based on limited contexts, is subject to a limited history, and carries the complexion of the colonizer. As pointed out above, many of those who inhabit the shadowlands still carry some fragment at least of a different kind of relationship to the natural world than is common among modern Christians. Many eco-theologians are aware of this when it comes to indigenous groups in particular, but often it is a romantic construction of the past. We have in a real sense created an ecological identity for them, that serves our own purpose (Davis, 2011). Shadowland inhabitants also carry other *experiences* of the natural world, however. As mentioned above in contrast to Sanders' observation of disembeddedness of place, for many there is the experience of loss; a former intimacy with specific landscapes exists only in sorrowful memory. Their present identity may include new natural settings, such as reserves, but these were not voluntarily chosen and are marred with the deep emotional and psychological realities, such as shame, regret, anger, and oppression. What kind of ecological identity is this? What in Edmund Husserl's terms is this 'life world' on which theology must reflect?[4]

Othering: Implications for Cross-Border Relationships in the Shadowlands

It is irrefutable that Christianity informed the social imaginaries of 16th and 17th century Western Europe (Taylor, 2007). As well, these social imaginaries differed from those held by the Aboriginal peoples they encountered in North America during this time period. These Western European social imaginaries continue to have a profound effect on Canadian public policy – especially in terms of Canadian Aboriginal and environmental policies. The social imaginaries held by Canadian Aboriginal populations do not inform public policy. But the environmental policies that are still part of those social imaginaries have resonance with others in the public sphere. Civil policies are informed by deep and sometimes implicit cultural values, themselves informed by religious worldviews and in a pluralist culture, these divergent worldviews create boundaries that are made permeable only with great difficulty. The difficulty is exacerbated in Canada, not only by its colonial past but by a still-strong assertion by many of Canada's power elite that Canada is a secular nation – a modern, Western democracy that thrives, in part, because religion has been removed from the public sphere (Bramadat, 2007). This creates myriad problems for institutional Christianity which now moves in and out of the same shadowland as other worldviews who vie for life, relevancy and recognition in the Canadian public sphere – hoist on its own petard of Othering. This predilection for Othering has deep roots and harkens back to the 16th and 17th centuries when Western Europeans began their forays into what is now known to us as North America. The original inhabitants call it Turtle Island.

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4   As Edmund Husserl argued about science in *The Crisis of European Science and transcendental Phenomenology*, if theology is to remain vital and certainly if the theology of salvation is to speak to an ecologically broken world, then it must acknowledge its rootedness in the everyday world of all people of faith; cited by David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous* (New York: Random House, 1997), p. 43. See also Veronica Bragg, *Uncommon Ground: Cultural Landscapes and Environmental Values* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1997), an ethnographic study of the peoples who inhabit part of the Cape York Peninsula in North Queensland, Australia. She illustrates the different ways in which the various cultural groups have experienced the same place.

The reduction of tracts of arable land, the shift from Feudalism, the rise of a mercantile and post-subsistence economy pressed Western European expansion into Turtle Island and that opportunity itself was seen as a sign from God and the economic and consequent social good that would presumably come from such ventures as evidence of God's good will towards the endeavors. This drive to tame and subdue that which was hitherto wild and unpredictable had a deep influence on later settlers to the New World, who would claim that the Aboriginals could not possibly lay claim to land that they had not permanently cultivated (Merchant, 1995).

The picture that emerges from this period on Western European history is a culture embedded in an enchanted universe where Godlessness was inconceivable and humanity stood in a liminal shadowland – longing for heaven – but bound to the temporal place of Earth which was both place and part of the cause of longing for the Space of heaven. The Western Europeans envisioned a non-permeable boundary between themselves and the non-human natural world and did not see themselves as embedded in that world – like the Aboriginals they encountered, it was Other (Taylor, 2007).

As Other, the position of the non-human natural world was a tool or instrument. God used it as such to exalt or to punish human beings. Human beings used it to discern God's countenance and nature and for their own flourishing. The culture that emerges from this to create place in concert with space is what the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor calls the ordered or disciplined society.

The Reformers whose thinking came to dominate much of the 16th and 17th centuries believed that creating order out of chaos was a divine mandate, that cultivation and civilization were also signs of the Divine presence and pleasure. Confronted by space that was unattainable in its ideal state (Heaven) in this life, the Reformers of early Modern Europe developed a culture that endeavoured to craft place as a replica of the perfectly ordered City of God. Part of this included embracing the perceived mandate in the Bible to dominate and/or subdue the non-human natural world. This perceived mandate to create place – in a non-human natural world that is completely Other – resulted, in part, in a rigidly hierarchical culture with a political and economic order which champions private ownership, enclosed lands, and a Lockean utilitarianism that leads to a conception of place that differs markedly from that of the Canadian Aboriginals. Here, security and attachment are found not in embeddedness, harmony, and balance, but in Othering, ordering, and overseeing. It was this social imaginary that was brought to the shores of Turtle Island and which presented itself to the Aboriginals thereof.

Although generalities can be fairly made, it is important to note that Aboriginal cultures should not be homogenized into one form. The early-contact cultures of the western coastal people were more socially stratified, for example, including inherited caste. Those in the plains and in the east were more egalitarian. Nevertheless, ideas of power and authority that undergirded both French and British imperialism, as well as church hierarchies, would have been quite different from those of indigenous peoples. As mentioned above, European society functioned on the principle that order was next to Godliness. In addition, order required obedience enforced by the threat of punishment. This permeates Christian theology, as the proper stance toward the divine is described as servant or slave to a master, and the grace of salvation is most often understood as a reprieve of punishment deserved for disobedience.

In contrast, most indigenous cultures have a cosmos in which power is distributed among both human and non-human persons (including animals, plants, elements, and spirits), a power derived from and connected to 'the Creator,' and subject to constant flow

and negotiation of relations (Battiste, 1997) (Goulet, 1998) (McPherson and Rabb, 1993) (Preston, 1997). Traditionally, authority and respect are not generally held in place by punishment but granted on the evidence of wisdom, skill (natural and supernatural), and persuasive power. Social sanction of disruptive behaviour most often took the form of teasing, gentle indirect reproof via storytelling, or healing practices (Brant, 1990) (Ross, 1996), as jurist Rupert Ross discovered when he asked at a meeting with elders and the chief and council of a remote Cree First Nation in northwestern Ontario what the community traditionally did, before Canadian courts came, to those who misbehaved. Through an interpreter, a woman elder answered: "'We didn't do anything *to* them. We *counselled* them instead!' Her emphatic Cree suggested that she couldn't understand why I would ask such a question" (Ross 1996).

These principles of community-building, deep observation and sense of the equal value of all is also manifest in the concept of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). TEK is the cumulative knowledge a traditional culture has about the cycles, habits and fluctuations of its natural environment. In Aboriginal cultures, TEK is the way in which continuity and changes in resource management are tracked. TEK is not static, but neither is it fickle. It relies on the observations and teachings of generations before but is open to the observations and experiences in the present. It has developed systems by which any new knowledge can be tested and integrated into the body of the TEK of that particular culture. These systems rely on spiritual as well as temporal knowledge. Therefore, TEK incorporates the ways in which human beings show respect or disrespect towards the spirits of the non-human natural world as a component of knowledge (Berkes, 1999).

The above principles enable one to begin to grasp how Aboriginal societies in Canada worked in concert with one another and with their physical environment. The social imaginary was one of mutual use and benefit rather than of individual ownership. TEK shows that the systems that developed did so over time and that, like any process, encountered errors in judgement and practices that were not, in the end, practical or good for the land. That being said, it is also clear that by the time of First Contact, the policies and practices that were extant had been so for generations – honed and perfected over the years; making note of subtle changes in Space, dynamic, but, generally speaking, not reckless. Patience and acumen had enabled them to maintain rich, viable societies in North America. Place and culture in Aboriginal terms are embedded in a cosmology of profound equity which facilitates a vision of space as a part of rather than an ends to a mean. In this sense, the equation is circular rather than linear.

The coming of the Europeans introduced a vastly different social imaginary to North America and with that social imaginary came environmental policies that were, at times, in direct opposition to those practiced by the Aboriginals. This dissonance continues in the present day and is exacerbated by a persistent lack of cross-cultural understanding on behalf of Canada's federal government.

The mining, forestry, fisheries, and oil and gas development upon which Canada's extractive economy depends more often than not takes place on lands and waters recognised by treaties as territories of First Nations, or currently in dispute over title.[5] Much of that territory is in remote areas, especially the North. Yet while the dominant culture treats

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[5]   Not all treaties ceded land. In the east, particularly, there were 'peace and friendship' treaties, which promised goods, non-interference with traditional practices and opportunities to trade, in exchange for agreements not to attack established European settlements. There are also areas claimed by First Nations which were never subject to treaty. Land claims under treaties and independent of them are the subject of ongoing negotiations and legal disputes.

these lands as resource hinterlands, the people for whom they are home bear the most direct ecological and cultural consequences of development. Ecological issues do not stand alone but are woven into the complex of challenges facing first peoples, which include self-governance, housing, education, language preservation, incarceration issues, and mental and physical health. If we are too narrow in our focus, we do nothing to build crucial trust, and by assuming we set the agenda, we risk repetition of colonial habits. Facing up to the colonial history and its persistent patterns, and for Christians, the complex role the church and its theologies have played in shaping the present, is crucial to the process of becoming allies.

There is no solid, tidy border between aboriginal peoples and non-Natives, much less Christians, in Canada. Even the question of who is aboriginal is contentious. The legal determination is done according to the colonialist 'Indian Act'. Self-determination by communities would be preferable, but the matter is complicated by the question of how scarce funds and rights to hunt and fish, for example, should be allocated. It is not a physical border, either; nearly half of Canada's indigenous people live off-reserve, in cities. Some maintain close ties to their communities of origin, others do not. And many aboriginal people are also Christian.

How they became Christian and understand themselves as Christians is a fascinating story, too intricate to cover adequately here. But it is clear that colonial missionaries saw their task in terms of conversion. To them this meant wholesale repudiation of aboriginal beliefs and practices, deemed 'demonic' in early missions and merely 'superstitious' in later times, and adoption of an approved form of Christianity. There is evidence, however, that from the indigenous perspective 'conversion,' particularly in colonial times, was seen in complex terms, and not always done for purely 'religious' reasons. Conversions were understood as a means of building alliances, both human and supernatural, as well as a subtle strategy to preserve language (and therefore culture) through its adoption in Christian worship and catechetical contexts (Brock, 2000) (Fitznor, 2006:72-3) (Blackburn, 2000) (Neylan, 2003) (Prins, 1996) (Van Lonkhuyzen, 1990). It is not a given that this entailed an abandonment of traditional ways. By no means does this imply that theirs was or is a deficient form of Christianity vis-à-vis that of Europeans. Both European and indigenous understandings of Christianity came to be shaped by their respective cultures and physical space.

The persistence of aboriginal determination to remain in the shadowlands of the dominant society, particularly in relation to Christianity, was so significant that it led to the adoption of a policy of state-sponsored, church-run residential schools. It was deemed necessary to remove children coercively from their families and communities in order to, as it was explicitly put, "kill the Indian in the child" (Royal Commission, Vol 1, 1996:349). Using the churches to administer these schools was partly a cost-saving measure. The rationale was that they would draw people to work in them who were motivated by some-thing other than money, and many teachers and other staff no doubt had benevolent intent. The schools were chronically under-funded by the government, and so the children were frequently inadequately housed, clothed, and fed. It was also explicitly argued that adhe-rence to Christianity was necessary in order to become orderly, productive participants in the economic roles for which the children were being trained: mostly low-paying farm labour and household servants. Children were told that their traditions had no value, were forbidden by government policy from speaking their own languages, and many found themselves alienated from their home communities. According to the practice of the day and the paradigm of obedience enforced by punishment within which they operated,

corporal punishment to the point of severe abuse took place in these schools for the least or even imagined infractions. The isolated location of these schools and the culture of coercion created a condition in which sexual abuse occurred at an appalling frequency. While not all children were subject themselves to physical or sexual abuse, and many express gratitude for what education they were given, all were witnesses and suffered assaults to their self-worth and culture. Not all indigenous children were taken into residential schools, and in spite of their experiences, many of those who were have remained Christian, distinguishing the message of Christ from the behaviour of the churches. Nevertheless, the devastation of communities is generational, and both some of the survivors and many of the children of survivors regard Christianity with suspicion and hostility because of its role in the entire colonialist project of displacement and assimilation.

Churches have officially apologized, and as the result of a class-action lawsuit by survivors, so has the government. In addition to financial reparations, the settlement required a national Truth and Reconciliation process, which began in 2009 (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, n.d.). Reconciliation requires on the part of those who inflicted a wrong an acknowledgement of the harm and effort to repair or restore where possible. Sincerity of remorse is gauged by willingness to change those patterns that led to harm in the first place – which raises questions. Where does our language alienate and demean, even if unintentionally? Are there elements of Christian theology as it is normatively understood that need to change if we are to become authentic allies and effective partners?

Contemporary Theological Implications

Aboriginal worldviews of deep embeddedness precipitate an urgency and awareness of the immanence of Space, Culture and Place. Traditional Western Christian worldviews as contextualized in Canada introduced theologically-supported conceptions of radical disembeddedness, artificial boundaries in the guise of private ownership, and a strict, God-ordained hierarchical relationship between Europeans, the non-human natural world, and cultures other than their own. The current social imaginary reflects Space not as transcendent Heaven – but something nearly as ephemeral, combining a dream of individual economic well-being with the fantasy that national economic security will either preclude or minimize environmental disaster and deprivation. This space combines with culture wherein the social imaginary is rapidly becoming dissonant with its current reality. The physical beauty of the Canadian landscape and the social ideology undergirded with the most noble tenets of the Social Gospel movement are embraced by the populace but are being eroded by the current government. This dissonance is fracturing the attachment and security that is supposed to be found in place. Strong voices willing to be heard over the thundering shouts of the powerful for progress at any cost are speaking, but they lack resonance: thus a dilemma encountered by eco-theology and other religious worldviews in Canada which share environmental concerns. Trust and mutual respect, along with the humility that comes from recognizing and owning up to systemic wrongdoing are necessary if Aboriginal peoples and proponents of eco-theology are to be able to strive in accord towards creating that resonance.

The context of this particular shadowlands is not unlike that following World War II, in which theologians grappled with Christian teachings about Judaism in the wake of genocide. This entailed reversing course on centuries of doctrine regarding what a 'new covenant' meant, revisiting scriptural accounts of the death of Jesus and the portrayal of the Pharisees, as well as correcting common misconceptions about Judaic thought. So we are

not suggesting simply affirming the worth of aboriginal cultures and their expressions of Christianity as valid or even valuable. This entails a serious self-examination, uncovering assumptions, challenging simplistic readings of scripture and even deeply-held doctrines. A place to begin could be with doctrines of salvation – what it means and for whom.

Theological and Soteriological Implications in an Eco-theology Context

The mills of change grind slowly. Like the builders of the great cathedrals of Europe, initiators of change in religious traditions do not always live to see tangible results of the work for which they laid the foundations. Likewise, in the conclusion to *Cosmopolitcs I,* in which she forcefully argues for a self-critique and change to how physics is done, Isabelle Stengers observes that the path forward from such a change is not predictable but that fact should not preclude our setting the stage (Stengers, 2003). Setting the stage for a renewed eco-theology requires a re-examination of the borders that have been set, of what sentinels are guarding the pores, and how these might change.

A consistent concern for Christian eco-theologians has been how to integrate creation and soteriology. A critique of an over focus on salvation, traditionally, was common in the beginning years of relating religion and ecology. Recent efforts within Christian eco-theology are attempting to recover and articulate a soteriology that is mindful of all of creation.[6] These are important beginnings. As we seek how to go forward, resist the hegemonic nature of globalizing culture, even of its 'green-ness', an eco-theology of salvation must be rooted in transformed or converted communities – and this conversion includes the 'inner conversion' mentioned above. Such communities can only be authentic if we seek also to recover the shadowlands, their present places and those places of sorrowful memory that have been lost to their culture. It is to those first, Christians profess, that the Kingdom of God has been revealed.

Just as postwar theologians have tackled Christian supercessionism with regard to Jews, we need to develop a robust recognition of the freedom of the Creator to manifest in diverse religions with the same lush and exuberant variety as demonstrated in Creation. There is no more need for people to abandon other faiths or traditions and become Christian to be 'saved' than there was for Gentiles to become Jews, as Paul successfully argued. Many of us may personally hold this position, but to further it needs vigorous public voice from theologians and consistent teaching within churches.[7]

As post-Shoah theologians were able to gain deeper insight into both testaments through greater understanding of Judaic thought and practice – listening to indigenous peoples, Christian or not – and understanding how they see the human condition can reveal possibilities already within our theologies and our scripture. We would propose that the indigenous traditions of centrality of 'healing' and 'balance,' – in relationships inter- and intra-communal and human with more-than-human – hold great promise. This is not the same as trying to adopt indigenous traditions wholesale. Such appropriation is colonialism in another form. There are still borders important for the integrity of both, however porous a border might be. It is not enough, however, to promote such doctrines as 'alternative.' Not to engage in this endeavour of healing and understanding ultimately denies both

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[6] The relationship between creation and salvation under the horizon of ecological responsibility is the contemporary concern of Ernst Conradie's work. See description and publications at http://www.ctinquiry.org/research/researchtopic.aspx?id=11.

[7] This is a position held by proponents of both pluralism and of comparative theology. For a good discussion of both, see James L Fredericks, *Faith Among Faiths* (Paulist Press: NJ, 1999).

traditions the ability to work for the theological and ecological changes imperative for the healing of our Earth.

The above paradigm of acknowledgement, healing and humility plays out in significant ways in the intersection of worldviews with perspectives of the non-human natural world. As eco-theology consistently shows, neither stewardship nor dominion are sustainable theological positions in light of the current ecological crises. Both allow for a disembeddedness and Othering of the non-human natural world. Aboriginal worldviews in this regard *are* sustainable, but like Christianity, lack real persuasive power at a public policy or populist level. They dwell together in the shadowlands where a humbler, wiser Christianity is (we hope) learning slowly to re-imagine itself as a voice within a plurality rather than a voice of Ultimate Truth and supercession – eco-theology is, of course, one of these re-imaginings – both on an individual and on an institutional level.

In the classical, anthropocentric sense, salvation means being free from the barriers of temporal life – the sin and guilt that preclude a complete relationship with God. Traditional Christianity teaches that the way to healing that relationship is through accepting the salvific actions of God on behalf of humanity through Christ. The zeal of centuries of Christianity to impose that conception on others has led to immeasurable human suffering. But it has also placed Christianity in a shadowlands between public and private sphere where it encounters a wary bevy of Others.

The question of the relevance, effectiveness, and impact of eco-theology in a pluralist culture such as Canada is operating, in part, on the premise that what happens to Christianity matters outside of the Christian communion. Canada considers itself a secular nation but that premise is highly debatable (Hale, 2012). To state that this is a false premise is to argue that Christianity (or any religious worldview) actually does and *should* matter in both the public and the private sphere. Christianity in Canada has been struggling for quite some time with its loss of status as the unacknowledged but implicit conscience of the people with the ear of and influence on the government – struggling because it does not know how to *be* when it is not in charge and when its relevance is questioned or denied. There is a profound need for Christianity as an institution to justify its own continued existence. Christians put forth that they hold valuable truths about who God is and how God cares but the key here from a non-Christian perspective is not whether those truths hold soteriological promise but whether or not those truths have value that make life worth living and worth living well(Fredericks, 1999).

Eco-theology advances Christianity in particular and valuable ways. (Dalton and Simmons, 2010) We suggest that the shadowlands is a potentially fruitful place from which to re-imagine Christian ways of being in the world. The openness required from both sides, and the humility required from Christianity to commit to healing and relationship building on a level that honours the best of what each worldview – Christian and Aboriginal – has to offer could be the model of radical transformation that eco-theologians have envisioned from the start. An inner transformation of the most profound kind, nurtured and brought to fruition in the mystical fecundity of a shadowlands necessitates that Christianity hold on to its most precious tenant of "love your neighbour as yourself" but to let go of the exclusivity around traditional soteriological beliefs. From Aboriginal peoples in Canada the potential for blossoming in the shadowlands requires an almost impossible trust. But this trans-formation of the soteriological imagination could be one way to inspire the kind of zeitgeist shift that is necessary to save our Earth. Our space, our place.

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