

## **RE-IMAGINING THE WORLD POST-PANDEMIC – THOUGHTS ON INDIGENOUS PEOPLES DEMANDS**

I guess there is nothing extraordinary about saying this, and I don't want to be overly dramatic about it, but I believe humanity has entered a new season (I know - duh..). Every aspect of our lives is having to be examined, redefined to some degree, due to the need to restrain the spread of the pandemic, and both our present and our future are uncertain.

So we are all back to the basics: feeding our families, raising our children, protecting one another from infection, and continuing life as best we can. Survival. Basically doing what is in front of us, live in the present, be creative and industrious, learn to value time spent with loved ones, and hope for a cure.

Many people want to go back to the way things were. We hear about continuity, but others also talk about re-imagining, about revolution. In a way, many feel we have to let go of what was, and hold on to what keeps us safe and sane, but do we know what these terms mean for us, and for Blacks, Indigenous and People of Color?

### **OLD TRADITIONS ARE NEW AGAIN**

Speaking of Indigenous peoples, I had a thought: it seems that for our post-colonial countries to move forward and move away from self-destruction, the path ahead needs to include what Indigenous cultures, African Americans, have been pointing at for centuries. We need to

bring the changes they have asked for, walked for, protested for, died for. And due to the present protests around Black Lives Matter, we need to be starting with reforms of our justice systems, which unjustly targets Blacks, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC). This would then trickle down to law enforcement in their dealings with these community.

This could then open the way to make the management of the environment more efficient, a constant request by Indigenous people around the world. It could end the ludicrous criminalization of those protesting risky projects of pipelines across Native lands, rivers and shores.

Why do these cultures seem to be discriminated against still today, through the court system? As if we haven't grown beyond racism and apartheid. Because to the degree there is systemic discrimination and racial profiling in our country's justice system, to that degree an apartheid regime is still in operation within our borders. And who benefits from this? We need to find out. It is a stain on our countries as a whole, and makes our international advocacy for human rights hypocritical.

## **INDIGENOUS LIVES - HERD IMMUNITY FOR THE VIRUS OF RACISM**

How can we re-imagine a country where human rights are truly equally experienced? Why not ask those who for centuries have been on the receiving end of blatant and subtle abuse? They already know what needs fixing and keep spelling it out on the media and on the streets.

In Canada, we have a quadricentenary record of human rights violations toward Indigenous people. I would think they are more than

qualified to inform a re-imagining of our societies. But they are not given a proper seat at the table, if only a token presence for photo-ops and votes, or so it seems. Just not right.

Consider the conditions of how and where they live today in North America (where I live). Consider that they are still being given the run-around regarding ancestral treaties, while corporations keep getting a pass to destroy (exploit) forests, pollute rivers and build pipelines on their lands. And how many reservations don't even have drinking water today. It's shameful.

Yet, we have to admit the Indigenous peoples have never lied to us regarding the state of the Environment, and have warned us about our treatment of the sacred earth, to which they are deeply related to, and the need for its protection. But our governments continue rushing ahead nonetheless. We clearly don't have the same attachment to the land as they do. We clearly don't have their understanding of how Creation works. We just don't get it.

Our governments and industries see investment and profit\$, and the environment can take care of itself, thank you very much. So the abuse of the land and its inhabitants persists, the degradation of the ecosystem continues, and we seem to be unable to connect the dots with the parallel degradation of the quality of life of Indigenous peoples and their youth. It is a question of universal balance for them.

## **CREATION AS SANCTUARY**

Indigenous peoples are not confused. They still carry the flame of thousands of years of spirituality, the light of divine wisdom evidenced

in their relationship to the earth, the animal kingdom, the air and the sea, and to one another, honoring the Creator's love and wisdom in all of them. All are equal before the Creator.

As westerners, we hardly have had a theology that encompasses the cosmos, and here they are, a more advanced civilization in this regard, called idol worshippers, animists, barbaric, retarded, soulless, not even human. So-called civilization despised them upon encounter, found them primal, simplistic, naive, therefore - exploitable.

So, we came here with our "Inquisition" and "Crusader" Christianity, and our religious authorities had no concept of spirituality beyond religion, they couldn't perceive that the Natives were much further spiritually than was convenient for our colonial and religious enterprises. We understood nothing in their "attachment" to the land, their relationship and bond to universal harmony between them and all living things. We projected on them our thoughts of "possession" and so they became de facto "rivals" for the resources Europeans coveted, including the Church.

In his song *Dream Like Mine*, Bruce Cockburn expresses land ownership:

"Beautiful rocks, beautiful grass  
Beautiful soil where they both combine  
Beautiful river, covering sky  
Never thought of possession, but all this was mine"

© Bruce Cockburn, *Dream Like Mine*, *Nothing But A Burning Light*

The doctrine of discovery makes no sense when you face as formidable a spirituality as theirs. It was we, the Europeans, who were savages, powdered wigs and deadly artillery notwithstanding. And so the road to genocides was traced and followed.

Greed and discrimination (racism) continue to animate our western systems, and therefore they infect the projects designed for profit and not for the well-being of all. Humans are treated as worker bees, consumers, cannon fodder, mob avengers, as tax payers (rather like an ATM machine for the political class), as hostages for totalitarian regimes.

### **CAN WE REALLY AVOID PAYING THE PIPER?**

So here we find ourselves at a crossroads today. Ancient racial discrimination and genocidal tendencies are coming back in the spotlight, and people are tired of it, they demand this to be addressed once and for all. It's as if some ancient call is reaching our ears finally, a bill is coming due.

The age of empires is behind us and our generation is facing the reality of unholy damages done to nearly all indigenous cultures on earth, as well as to the poor and disenfranchised. Are we going to pass this opportunity and weather the storm until silence returns in our countries, as if there was no ferment of cruelty and discrimination contaminating our whole population?

This sudden pandemic piggy-backs on the sporadic social explosions of revelations highlighting the dusty truths of discrimination and

engineered soft genocides. How are we handling the revelations so far? A lot of kicking and screaming, denial and stiff-neckery are happening.

Let's face it, our North American societies are in the process of being brought to their knees in front of the whole world, and in front of the BIPOC that have suffered injustices from our governments, and the populations.

The values of yesterday and the status quo of colonialism are facing off. Either unwillingly or willingly, one will be overpowered and subdued, but it could also be surrendered in humility, if not prayerfully, seeking mercy and reaching out for contribution to a re-imagining of a social project God would be proud of.

We already see expressions of mass repentance, and not just from citizens or NGOs, but also from politicians. Lots of people say they agree on the reality of racism and racial inequalities and apologies continue to be tweeted. A few mayors even allow their cities core to be occupied by protestors, as well as - unfortunately - retail stores and police stations to be looted and destroyed by some of the more radical supporters of BLM. And that is not mentioning the lawlessness that has caused deaths and seen rapes. God help those cities citizens and law enforcement. Maybe it could have been avoided, but this ship has sailed... 😞

## **CLEANING THE SLATE**

I was personally encouraged to see statues of slave-owner politicians being either toppled by crowds, or removed by city workers to be warehoused. Names of buildings and public spaces are likewise changed. Local governments also explore realistic ways to tentatively

redirect funds away from their police force to invest into supporting community services and resources to better the lives of communities.

A clean-up of sort is underway, and there is, as John Lewis used to call it - "good troubles" – along some bad troubles too.

Can our governments dismantle the structures of injustice fast enough to help those suffering and demanding change, now that the message cannot be misunderstood? Will the spirit of the empire rise to defend itself, or will the spirit of leaders rise up to govern with wisdom and advance the cause of righteousness?

Can they finally humble themselves and confess the truth of centuries old crimes? Because, to this day, there still exist laws and attitudes which perpetuate the abuse of our fellow humans (and of Creation, which we delude ourselves in thinking we bent to our will).

## **THE LAND CRIES OUT**

Adopting a new way of life isn't easy, especially when it is forced on us. Ask indigenous cultures. Strangely, the path ahead includes what Indigenous cultures, including enslaved Africans, have been trying to get us understand, for centuries.

***Indigenous** comes from the Latin **word** *indigena*, which means "sprung from the land; **native**." Therefore, using "**Indigenous**" over "**Aboriginal**" reinforces land claims and encourages territory acknowledgements, a practice which links **Indigenous** Peoples to their land and respects their claims over it.*

[Source: animikii.com]

For a few decades now, awareness toward the destruction of the environment by non-Indigenous people has started gaining momentum, sometimes in very dramatic ways. In front of the deafness of our governments and corporations, drastic actions were taken by environmental groups to draw attention to this one

thing: the life of Indigenous peoples is intimately linked to that of the land, and all living things on it – but ours as well.

The ravaging of natural habitats to mine the soil and forests, the rivers and the sea, and the devastation it caused to the natural ecosystems, can be felt more deeply by the Indigenous people than we can imagine. Rivers are turned into blood, primordial forests are shredded, oceans are fast becoming toxic soups, exploited lands are turned into ashes, and the air into a suffocating fog. It is as if their own bodies and soul are being rampaged, the spiritual umbilical cord nurtured for millennia is ripped from their belly.

In fact, I argue that wanton industrial destruction of Creation is just another manifestation of rebellion against the living God, an ongoing crucifixion and demonization of the work of His hands. We still haven't learned the difference between ownership and stewardship.

O! Columbus he was lookin good  
When he got lost in our neighborhood  
Garden of Eden right before his eyes  
Now it's all spyware Now it's all income tax

O! Brother Midas lookin hungry today  
What he can't buy he'll get some other way  
Send in the troopers if the Natives resist  
Same old story, boys; that's how ya do it , boys

- Buffy Sainte-Marie, No No Keshagesh

**FIRST NATIONS WERE HERE FIRST, HOME**

Today, more than ever, we need the First Nations light. Indigenous cultures and traditions are connected to a cosmogony of supernatural reality. Can we not relate to it as believers? They relate to Creation in their cultures and traditions as an interface to connect with the Creator, this is their Jacob's Ladder, they are a people that value prophetic dreams and visions. This is a highly spiritual people, although not necessarily in the "Christian" sense.

Could westerners handle this kind of accountable spirituality, build a society around it, embedded with divine, universal truths, highlighting the foundations not only of humanity, but of the universe? Our religious traditions have not emphasized this, but personal profit, personal blessing bestowed via the interface of our own creations, written words in the Bible in the form of *promises*, most of it founded on greed and lust.

We hear stories of first encounters between Europeans and First Nations. Of how indigenous people have taught Europeans how to survive the harsh conditions of life on this land. We learned to survive thanks to them, but have not learned how to live on this land alongside of them. How could we have missed that these cultures could light the way for us? Instead, we continued our old habits of pillaging and looting, sending the fruit of our crimes to European crowns.

### **FINAL THOUGHTS, INITIAL THOUGHT**

Whatever way we look at this (maybe you don't agree with me, that's fine), most will agree that racism is wrong, that it underscores the presence of discrimination in terms of sharing of resources, abuse of power, social inequalities. And if left unchecked, racism breeds systems of government that are unjust, partial, and the whole country is

infected, no matter what our creeds may say. We may check our anthems, though.

I see an opening right now, an opportunity to remove these shackles of ignorance and discrimination (contempt) that hold us all back from re-inventing a better world that is inclusive of all, as the veil is removed before our eyes and our hearts. It is time. Or something much worse than a pandemic could possibly be waiting in the wings. Not as punishment, no, but as a harvest of what we have kept sowing in the name of God.

For centuries we have sowed winds of war, spilled rivers of blood, trampled upon Creation as if it was a lifeless inanimate pile of dirt there for the taking, when it is a magnificent and complex network of interconnected and interdependent forms of life, issued from the same divine Being as a gift to one another. That's why I use the terms "reaping what was sowed for centuries," because we abused both Nature and groups of Humans we share the planet with.

Crimes against humanity are born in the heart and mind of racism, and discrimination is the systemic manifestation of this racism. These actions originate from the same well of brute darkness, and for the same purpose. We need to stop this and show we, as humanity, have learned from our bloody mistakes.

We can't be sure of what lies ahead, the view is obstructed with the universal hope of a vaccines and the confusion resulting from contradictory information. There sure is a sense of impending doom floating about, of helplessness. What else is coming for us?

We put our bets and hopes on political leaders to push things forward and for a cure to come our way. But a lot of what was lost cannot be replaced: parents, elders, brothers, sisters, friends, leaders... and centuries of stubborn laziness in addressing injustice are a testament to all the chances we had to make this right. I'm not saying the pandemic is a punishment, but rather I can see in this a consequence of meddling with turning Creation into what it wasn't meant to be.

### **THE END NEEDS NOT BE NEAR**

Even though my imagination can produce doomsday scenarios, as a believer I have faith in the God which Jesus revealed to us. Not in the religious sense but in the sense of the ultimate reality filling the whole universe, down to the invisible and beyond time and space. The Logos sustaining the cosmos. That should count for something.

And I have faith in the Indigenous people's spiritual cornerstone, that Creation holds a promise of renewal for all, if we but participate in integrating their understanding of it to our own spiritual heritages.

I have no question that God's heart is still always pure and well-intent toward all, and I do not believe that certain people have a golden ticket to avoid the years of trouble we could be facing. That is rarely how He has worked in our lives in the past. But He is a good Father. There may be baggage we need to leave behind, but with Him we can make it through to the new age of His Kingdom.

In the midst of all this, the Creator has always stood as a place of refuge, of comfort, of presence, across all races, genders, ethnic

backgrounds, social status, ages. He has measured everything precisely, for abundance and multiplication, and His breath is in us.

I trust He can give us understanding in this crucial transition time, and gift us with individuals carrying His vision and heart to help post-colonial humanity finally be reconciled with one another, serving one another, barefoot in the cathedral of His Creation.

Blessings,

Andre

P.S. These are opinions I have, things that came to mind inspired by Brad's post where he shared a clip from Inuit people. And something clicked in my mind, and this is what it was, as best as I can describe it.