

Pro-D – TRC – Ruth Guenther

After many years of working with First Nations peoples and hearing story after heartbreaking story of their residential school experiences, I still found reading accounts of the children's first impressions of the schools, of the trauma of being jerked away from their parents, separated from their siblings, of the abuse experienced in the schools, very difficult to hear. But as I write this, I am mindful of Commissioner Dr. Marie Wilson's assertion that our feelings, "are only relevant in determining how people act. Wringing our hands, crying and feeling shame," aren't enough, that we can't stop here but must ask ourselves, "What do we do now?"

Reconciliation was defined as, "a process of healing which requires public truth sharing, apology, commemoration that acknowledges and redresses past harms." The TRC asserts that, "All Canadians must demonstrate courage and determination to commit to an ongoing process of reconciliation by establishing a new and respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians, to restore, repair and return what must be returned."

I'm trying to reconcile this mandate with the Colton Bouchee case here in Saskatchewan. How does one go about establishing, "a new and respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginals," when resentment and racism is so deeply entrenched? A change of heart attitude is necessary, which I don't think is possible apart from God at work in the lives of all involved, which is all of us, good motivation for NAIM staff to continue to share Christ with 1<sup>st</sup> Nations people and challenging prejudice among non-Aboriginals, especially our supporters in loving ways.

If we were to, "return what must be returned," most of the white farmers in Saskatchewan would lose their farms. Obviously, the justice system needs to be changed, in many ways, but at the very least, in making sure jury selection is balanced racially and as fair as possible.

As far as the Calls to Action for churches and para-church groups such as NAIM, I see a lot of gray areas that would lend themselves to syncretism. While I agree that we need to always be respectful of Native beliefs when interacting with people, what does it mean to, "respect Indigenous spirituality in its own right...to prevent spiritual violence?" Can we realistically establish, "permanent funding for community-controlled healing, reconciliation, culture, language revitalization and education?"

We can however, fund and facilitate, "relationship building projects," by working to further develop our Summer Ministry Internship program and on a more personal, individual basis, work on practicing better listening skills, being open to hearing yet another heart-wrenching story, even if it needs to be told over and over again, being that, "safe place," for people to share deep hurts. We need to make a deeper commitment to, "demonstrate courage and determination to commit to an ongoing process of reconciliation, to keep the dialogue going," to especially reach out to the, "inter-generational survivors," and actively bring these deep issues to the throne of grace in prayer. Ultimately the real solution is in seeing God change hearts on all sides of the spectrum.