



# Truth and Reconciliation

Commission of Canada

March 30, 2014

Dear London Conference,

These are insights from President Rev. Philip Newman:

In 2009 at a news conference of the G20 gathering, Prime Minister Stephen Harper stated that, "Canada has no history of colonization."

Really? We all share in a history of colonization. We share in it as victims and dominants.

As I listen to the experiences being shared at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, TRC, I have to wonder what is truth? Who has truth? Does 'the truth' as a concept exist. I can't help but think that being willing to consider that there is more than one way of understanding things is a helpful challenge in the process of decolonization.

Colonization was a process of occupying Indigenous lands over a period of a few hundred years. Colonialism, on the other hand, is a persistent ideology that occupies hearts and minds and that serves to legitimize the domination of one group over another. Tweets and emails being received from the general public in response to the issues before the TRC continue to indicate de-colonization will be a process that will take time. It will begin when we choose to listen to other peoples' stories and let them transform us; change the way we think and act and be in relationship with each other. Again and again we hear as witnesses that we must be better with one another, walk in better ways, speak to and of each other in better ways. These ways are ways of respect, honesty and truth-telling.

The theme of this seventh TRC national gathering is 'It's About Wisdom.'

Acknowledging the wisdom in Indigenous knowledge resists the colonial notion of one single truth. Sharing wisdom is important to reconciliation, or the process of building good relationships, because it resists shallow and empty narratives of one history to include the diversity of peoples needed to create an atmosphere of mutual respect and self-determination. This to us is exactly what the TRC is meant to accomplish. I hope it does.

Like many Canadians, I thought I knew our history. But it was a story told from one perspective, the dominant perspective. I don't recall ever learning about residential schools. Or the Sixties Scoop. Or the Indian Act.

On this the end of the third day of the TRC, the opening ceremonies and the lighting of the Sacred Fire seem a long time ago.

We were told at the end of today's Listening Circles that some 220 stories had been told. We heard from one survivor that, "Residential School is like a cancer. It catches you off guard when you are weak. Residential School affected everything about how we lived. They targeted and destroyed our strong family unit, the basic foundation of our communities. They destroyed the glue that holds us together - love, respect and sharing."

As survivors pour out their experiences, a pattern surfaces. Children were taken, often abducted, from their families. They were not allowed to speak their language. Brothers and sisters were separated from each other. Everything they brought with them from the reservation, gifts of new clothing and food and medicine were taken and thrown away or burned. They were taught that they were inferior, that they were uncivilized, that they were savages.

As the TRC Chair, Murray Sinclair points out, while they were being taught that, so were non-Aboriginal kids in public schools. Whole communities have suffered. Indeed, we have lost much as a country.

I've met some of the strongest, most resilient, bravest people I've ever encountered. When we have significant events in our lives such as marriage or graduation, we invite people to come and bear witness. These national gatherings of the TRC are significant events.

Those who accept the invitation to bear witness have a responsibility to remember and to take the story forward. It means opening yourself to the truth, allowing yourself to be changed by it.

Everyone who attends these events is a witness. We share a collective responsibility to make things better. To act. Because if we do nothing, nothing will change.

Philip Newman  
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