

SUMMER REDEEMER READS: Buffalo Shout, Salmon Cry

Cherith Muir

For six weeks this summer, three groups of Redeemer parishioners studied and discussed essays and poetry from the thought-provoking book *Buffalo Shout, Salmon Cry* edited by Steven Heinrichs and published by Herald Press. The study and our conversations about the book were profoundly engaging for all who participated. We are confident that our reflections on the ideas contained in Heinrich's book will help us to understand how we can become "settler allies" for First Nations in the quest for healing and reconciliation.

When we embarked on our study, we were confronted by the fact that as "settlers" we are living on "occupied territory" of the Mississaugas of the New Credit and we learned a bit about the culture and traditions of the original occupants of this territory. It was painful to face how we are all beneficiaries of this multi-generational occupation of a land which doesn't belong to us.

We discussed how colonial occupation is killing the land and its indigenous land forms and we thought about how we have tended to see struggles over the land we occupy and ownership of the resources it includes, as "First Nation problems" instead of thinking about the role which we as settlers and colonialists have played in the broken relationship we have with the first peoples.

Among the consequences of colonialism we discussed were: attempts to extinguish indigenous languages and cultures through residential schools and through the imposition of the values of our consumer society, environmental degradation and various destructive industrial practices which continue to threaten the future of creation. For example, the dumping of industrial waste and other toxic by-products of consumer society in First Nations' territory; the on-going destruction of a diversity of indigenous life forms.

We acknowledged that our 21st century settler civilization idealizes progress built upon a model of resource extraction, but there is another way of thinking about our relationship to the created universe. It has become necessary for our economy to realize the limits of

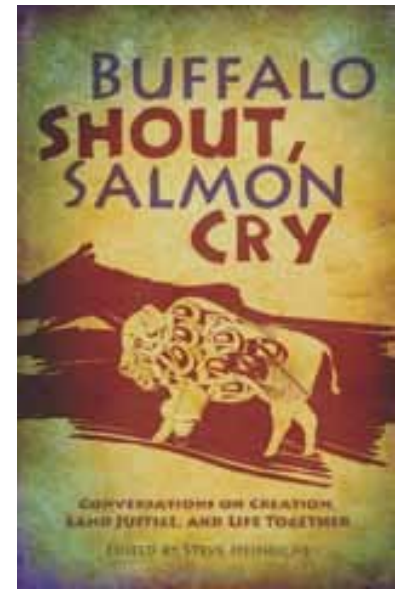
progress and to start making "sustainability" of development a greater priority. The worldview of the Indigenous peoples who speak through various essays in this book, provides

us with a different way to think of how we could live responsibly in this land. First Nations' writers like Randy Woodley, speak in this book of a living relationship with the land, so for them, sustainability might mean taking the bare minimum from the existing natural resources so that we promote the future generations of all living things who depend on the land as a Mother. We are challenged to ask ourselves "How much would you be willing to give up to promote sustainability?"

As we immersed ourselves in the essays in this book, we started to understand why we need to move beyond being educated about Indigenous world views and belief systems. We may need to enter into a real dialogue with theologies and ideologies which include non-Christian spiritualities. Out of this dialogue we can begin to act in ways that will build the possibility of reconciliation by actively listening and learning from the wisdom of each other's teachings and deepest beliefs.

It is clear that we can't undo the colonial past and neither apology nor idealizing the time before the arrival of the settlers will move us toward authentic relationships with the First Nations but when we listened to the range of voices in this book we began to discern how we might support and participate in meaningful dialogue with our First Nation neighbours.

Over the course of our studies, the reading groups were challenged to question the role which Christianity has played in the colonial domination of the First Peoples by European settlers who came to evangelize Indigenous peoples they perceived as heathen and who used "Christian" teachings to make them docile and compliant with the settlers' development agenda.



However, as Dave Diewert's essay in this book notes, the radical prophetic voices recorded in scripture actually offer "powerful currents of resistance and dissent" which we need to listen to as we rediscover the role which Christianity could play as the basis for a re-imagining of the relationships between the whole of Creation, settlers and First Nations.

In his essay, First Nations' theologian, Tink Tinker, challenged us as readers with a radical critique of the hierarchy and maleness embedded in the theology which the settlers brought to North America. He juxtaposes it with the Indigenous understanding of the Creation where the relationship between all living things and the creator is more lateral. In his essay we were encouraged to consider balance between paired elements as an alternative to hierarchy as in the indigenous world view. He contends that one benefit of a more community-minded view of the cosmos would be increased concern for the environment and all living creatures and less pre-occupation with using the Earth as a resource to be exploited to the greatest extent possible.

Other contributors to this volume provided provocative ideas like how the idealistic concept of Jubilee might underpin the return of land which we currently occupy or the payment of reparations to its original First Nation occupants.

At the end of our study as small groups of adult learners, we have been inspired to hope for better communication between settlers and first nations and we are encouraged by the many initiatives which the members of the Redeemer community are undertaking under the guidance of the First Nations' elders who are working diligently with Pamela Thomson and her colleagues on the Aboriginal Issues Working Group to prepare the Church of the Redeemer to be effective allies to First Nations when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission issues its final report in 2015.

Cherith Muir, along with Mark Knight, co-chair the Learning@Redeemer committee. The committee has a number of exciting opportunities to learn and grown in faith planned for the coming months. Check the website and eNews for updates in the coming weeks. ☒

Summer Activity – Autumn plans: Aboriginal Issues Working Group Events

Pamela Thomson

Many of our members were busy walking the walk this summer. We have been attending Pow Wows, meeting, researching, volunteering, reading *Buffalo Shout Salmon Cry*, and connecting in countless ways that nourished us.

We started the autumn series of events with Mike Cheena's discussion with us about the Two Row Wampum treaty on September 10. We are looking for ways to educate the community in anticipation of the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in June. We continue to encourage personal relationships with our Aboriginal neighbours.

On Wednesday, October 8, Redeemer is co-hosting a Thanksgiving feast and social with Toronto Urban Native Ministry (TUNM). The Feast will be at TUNM, 40 Oak Street, which is the Christian Resource Centre in Regent Park. We hope many guests will accept our hospitality, and join a critical mass of Redeemerites for lively entertainment and delicious food, catered by the chefs at Council Fire.

Later this autumn we hope to host an event sponsored by our murdered and missing Aboriginal women initiative. Our Aboriginal education cadre is busy researching and strategizing about Aboriginal history and culture in our curriculum, and about funding and education for Aboriginal people on and off reserve.

We are working towards a relationship with other Anglican and United Church communities to continue our mission of education and encounter. We encourage you to check out the YouTube videos of last spring's sessions with John Ralston Saul and with MP's Romeo Saganash & Craig Scott available on the Redeemer website.

Pamela Thomson is the coordinator of the Aboriginal Issues Working Group. If you are interested in joining this important work, please speak with her. ☒