

## **Boundaries in Gender and Race in Canadian Personhood**

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We gather on lands long occupied by Mohawk and other First Nations peoples. In the words of the Trappist monk Thomas Merton, “Neither the ancient wisdoms nor the modern sciences are complete in themselves. They do not stand alone. They call for one another . . . Our task now is to learn that if we can voyage to the ends of the earth and there find ourselves in the aborigine who most differs from ourselves, we will have made a fruitful pilgrimage. Mere sitting at home and meditating on the divine presence is not enough for our time.”<sup>1</sup>

I chose the theme for this paper at the Dundas, Ontario public library. Tucked in a book was a card, “New Order: Building a Better World for Future Aryan Generation.” Having a mother with Jewish background, and having recently visited family in Israel, I was alarmed by this expression of hate activity in Canada. I showed it to staff, who later reported having surveyed the area without finding another copy. In terms of the conference theme, “Borders without Boundaries,” the flier spoke to me of issues of exclusion and embrace in Canada.

An anthology edited by William Kilbourn, *Canada: A Guide to the Peaceable Kingdom*,<sup>2</sup> recalls an iconic painting by Edward Hicks, a nineteenth-century American folk painter and itinerant Quaker minister who sought to illustrate the messianic prophecy of Isaiah 11:6-8 (NRSV): “The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze . . . and the weaned child shall put

its hand on the adder's den." Sometimes Hicks included scenes of William Penn signing a treaty with the Indians. A copy of this version has long had a prominent place in my home. It offers a hopeful vision of a diverse community. Eden? Certainly not. Yet an alternative to the insanity of our war-weary, war-worried and war-wounded world.

Hicks depicted a partial fulfillment of a biblical prophecy that influenced the Children of Peace led by David Willson (1778-1866).<sup>3</sup> During the War of 1812, the group broke away from Yonge Street Monthly Meeting and established a farm in what is now Newmarket, Ontario. The Children of Peace reflected their values in building, notably the Sharon Temple. The last members of the community held their final service there over a hundred years ago. Their vision finds contemporary expression in community-supported farms such as Whole Village in the Caledon Hills north of Toronto. Its goal is to be socially, economically, and ecologically sustainable.<sup>4</sup>

Willson's community and Hick's painting challenged me at a time when I became a Canadian citizen (1985). In a paper read in 1987 at this society's annual meeting, I asked, "Is Canada the Peaceable Kingdom?"<sup>5</sup> Thinking of Canada as a peaceable realm, I was aware Lester Pearson (1897-1972) received the 1957 Nobel Peace Prize for his role in mediating the Suez crisis. In "The Four Faces of Peace," he articulated his vision of a society based on the values of peace, equality, and social justice. (I do not render the text gender-inclusive.) He referred to "the dislocations of this terrible twentieth century" and observed that a gulf had been opened between man's material advance and his social and moral progress, a gulf in which he may one day be lost if it is not closed or narrowed. Man has conquered outer space. He has not conquered himself. If he had, we would not be worrying today as much as we are about the destructive possibilities of scientific achievements. In short, moral sense and physical power are out of proportion.<sup>6</sup>

Canadian diplomacy has generally followed Pearson's lead in working for the greater common good, helping resolve disputes outside our region, and leading in environmental justice through drafting the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer (1987) and the Biological and Toxins Weapons Convention (2006). Nonetheless, forty-four years after the publication of Kilbourn's collection, the notion of Canada as a peaceable kingdom seems quixotic. What transformed Canada into a warrior nation rather than a peace-keeper?

Notably, 11 September 2001, "the day the world came to Gander

[Newfoundland].”<sup>7</sup> Events that day propelled Canada into a military role in Afghanistan, which has ended in stages, beginning in 2011 when Canada began to withdraw its troops. The final Canadians departed on 12 March 2014. Many Canadians supported Canada’s intervention in Afghanistan. In 2006, a grassroots phenomenon known as the Highway of Heroes started. Hundreds of local residents have assembled along bridges to salute the remains of soldiers conveyed between CFB Trenton and the Coroner’s office in Toronto.

Historians have generated alternative heroes, for example Merna Foster’s *100 Canadian Heroines* and *100 More Canadian Heroines*.<sup>8</sup> On 22 May 2014, CBC Radio’s “Rewind” featured a 1998 interview by Peter Gzowski of Beverley McLachlin, who has served as a justice on the Supreme Court of Canada since 1989.<sup>9</sup> For our daily devotions this year, my wife and I are reading *Blessed Peacemakers, 365 Extraordinary People Who Changed the World*.<sup>10</sup> The book includes several Canadians: Catharine Doherty, Ursula Franklin, Kalle Lasn, David Suzuki, Jean Vanier, and Charles Yale Harrison, who fought with Canadian forces during World War I. Wounded in France, he recovered. His *Generals Die in Bed*, published in 1930, remains one of the most powerful anti-war novels ever written.<sup>11</sup>

In my 1987 talk, in which I asked if Canada warrants the designation “peaceable kingdom,” I argued that Canada had not achieved its goal of ensuring the full personhood of everyone. I called for historians to focus less on prelates and more on grass-roots people and social movements not widely cited in textbooks then available to introduce the Canadian churches.

Readers might think of other candidates for designation as Canadian heroes. Mine include Frederick Banting, medical scientist, doctor, painter, and Nobel laureate regarded as the first person to use insulin on humans; Dekanawida, who established the “great peace” of the Five (now Six) Nations Confederacy in what is now Ontario; Tommy Douglas, architect of our health care system; Mildred Fahrni, who mediated Gandhian ideas through her Vancouver-based social activism; Basil Johnston, interpreter of the supernatural world of the Ojibwe; Laura Secord, heroine of the War of 1812; Moses Coady and Jimmy Tompkins, co-founders of the Antigonish Movement; Paul Côté, Bronze Medal winner during the 1972 Olympics and a founder of Greenpeace; as well as leaders of the 2000 “Jubilee” campaign, the 2005 make poverty history movement, and the Ontario “colour of poverty” campaign that is now under way.<sup>12</sup>

Canada's social services net has long been a source of pride for Canadians. It is now frayed. Our elderly, youth, Aboriginal people, and people of colour are disproportionately poor. We now rank seventh overall in poverty among the G-8 nations. One in ten Canadian children is poor. Our child poverty rate of 15 percent is three times as high as the rates of Sweden, Norway, or Finland. Every month, 770,000 people in Canada use food banks. Forty percent of those relying on food banks are children.<sup>13</sup> These demographics of poverty are scandalous.

In a recent talk at McMaster University, Ela R. Bhatt, an Indian Gandhian and 1984 recipient of the Right Livelihood Award, underscored the point. She observed, "Poverty is not God-given; it is most definitely man-made. No one is born poor; society makes one poor . . . When a woman does back breaking work hours a day but cannot feed her family with her earnings, society has scorned her . . . Our silence is violent. Our looking the other way is a form of consent. It is our moral failure that we still tolerate poverty."<sup>14</sup>

Our current economic system has widened the divide between rich and poor. I see poverty as a consequence of systemic racism. Though overt acts of racial violence are rare, they take place. In December 2013, Thea Morris, a Jamaican-born businesswoman, closed her restaurant in Morris, Manitoba, and left the community, explaining that she had received a note that had the Ku Klux Klan insignia on it. The restaurant was previously run by a same-sex couple who said they had to close the business and leave town due to homophobia.<sup>15</sup>

What can we do to overcome such violence? In 1985, a poster advertising David Suzuki's series "A Planet for the Taking" warned, "We have long thought of ourselves as masters of the natural world, but now that drive to dominate and control is having dangerous consequences. Can we change the way we see our relationship with the other life forms on Earth?"<sup>16</sup>

Last winter, Canadians participated in sixteen days of activism against gender violence, from 25 November (International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women) through 10 December (International Human Rights Day). Many Canadians have supported the efforts of Stephen Lewis, our former Ambassador to the United Nations, in his campaign to overcome scourges like HIV-AIDS and gender-based violence against women and girls. Many of us have also supported the Idle No More movement that has sought, among other goals, to rally attention to the efforts of the present Federal government to compromise democratic

integrity and environmental safety and to increase military spending.<sup>17</sup> Intellectuals such as Margaret Atwood, Pierre Berton, Joseph Boyden, Cathy Campbell, Lawrence Hill, Linda McQuaig, Bruce Sanguin, Joanna Santa Barbara, John Ralston Saul, and Gretta Vosper have enlarged our understanding of personhood. Church historians have contributed to the securing of the rights of everyone through our myriad involvements, including research, writing, teaching, and advocacy. We have, for example, documented the role that women played, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in offering a vision of Canada that contrasted with violence that permeated the country. Many women championed values of peace, equality, and social justice, yet women could not run for a seat in Parliament until 1919. As recently as 1927, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that women were not “persons” under the law, a decision reversed two years later.

In many areas, women advanced slowly. While the (Baptist) Amherstburg Association ordained a black woman, Jennie Johnson (1868-1967) as early as 1909, it was not until 1936 that the Saskatchewan conference of the United Church of Canada ordained Lydia Gruchy (1894-1992). Other single women followed into the ministry. A married woman was not deemed eligible until 1957 when Elinor Leard was ordained over the objections of the moderator. The General Council was asked to clarify “the relationship of an ordained woman minister to her work following her marriage.” After further study, the way opened for Lois Wilson’s ordination in 1964. Roy Wilson, her husband and a lay person, joined in the laying on of hands. From 1980 to 1982, Dr. Lois Wilson served as Moderator of the United Church of Canada.<sup>18</sup>

The Anglican Church of Canada, particularly the General Synods of 1973 (Act 31) and 1975 (Act 64), advanced the cause of ordaining women to the priesthood. In December 1974, the House of Bishops ruled “the approval in principle could well be a matter of Faith and Order of the Church and should be ratified by a second vote at General Synod under Section 11, paragraph 2 of Declaration of Principles and that this opinion be directed to the Organization Committee.” After General Synod adopted enabling legislation a second time, in June 1975, the ordinations of six women priests took place on 30 November 1976 in four dioceses across Canada. My Baptist congregation at the time shifted the hour of our worship to enable those who wished (myself included) to listen to coverage of the first ordinations. But the denomination has been slow to honour gifts of women presenting themselves for ordained ministry.

In education, women also were slow in attaining full participation. For example, I went through university, seminary, and graduate school without having a single woman as a teacher except in language courses. In 1976, when I began teaching at McMaster Divinity College, I had no female colleague. By the mid-1970s, women had moved from the peripheries to positions of importance in most areas of Canadian life.<sup>19</sup> They lagged behind in the church. Subsequently, there has been progress in most areas of church leadership. Yet in the Catholic and Orthodox traditions, women have not yet advanced to the priesthood or episcopacy. In terms of race, Robin W. Winks' *The Blacks in Canada: A History* remains the only comprehensive history.<sup>20</sup> Despite the role of Atlantic Canada in receiving black loyalists in the eighteenth century, and of Ontario as a terminus of the underground railway, Canadian blacks have struggled for full recognition of their personhood. For example, in 1911, hundreds of Oklahoma blacks moved to the Canadian prairies, where they met the same wariness and discrimination that had prompted them to flee the United States.<sup>21</sup>

In 1963, Leonard Braithwaite, elected as the Liberal member for Etobicoke, was the first African-Canadian elected to a Canadian Parliament in any provincial legislature. In 1964, the year blacks in Australia attained recognition as persons and United States Congress passed the Civil Rights Act, Africville, a poor, largely black area of Halifax, was expropriated. Despite resistance, residents were relocated and the area razed.

In 1965, the year United States Congress passed a Voting Rights Act, KKK activity ran high in Amherstburg. A Black Baptist Church was defaced and a town sign spray-painted "Amherstburg Home of the KKK." Racial incidents, including a cross-burning, took place.

Racism persists. Jody Nyasha Warner tells the story of Viola Desmond, a black woman from Halifax who was sold a ticket at a New Glasgow theatre good only for the balcony. She offered to pay the difference in price but was refused: "You people have to sit in the upstairs section." Viola refused to move. She was hauled off to jail, but her actions gave strength and encouragement to Canada's black community.<sup>22</sup>

In 1991, two racially-motivated incidents took place in Nova Scotia. One broke out at Cole Harbour District High School, a fight that escalated into a brawl involving fifty youths of both races. These events mobilized provincial black activists around the issue of unequal educational opportunities. This led to the passage of educational reforms and, in 1995,

the creation of a fund to improve education and support anti-racist initiatives.

In Toronto, on 4 May 1992, a daytime demonstration against the acquittal of police officers in the Rodney King case in Los Angeles descended into a nighttime riot on Yonge Street. Ignoring the historical context, the media decried United States style violence of the young black men. The events prompted many Canadians to address the root causes of racism. Such incidents are not anomalies. The media regularly reveal how far we have yet to go to create a society that recognizes the full humanity of every person.

Some persons of colour have attained positions of prominence. Lincoln Alexander (1922-2012) was a Canadian politician and statesman. Member of Parliament in the House of Commons in my riding when I moved to Hamilton in the 1970s, he was born of West Indian immigrants. From 1985 to 1991, he served as Lieutenant Governor of Ontario. A few years later, Prime Minister Paul Martin named Michaëlle Jean as the first black Governor General of Canada. She served from 2005 to 2010.

Around the world, discrimination and violence against women and girls are serious, pervasive violations of basic human rights. Among voices calling for change is that of former United States President Jimmy Carter. In an interview with Anna Maria Tremonti on CBC Radio, 28 March 2014, Carter called for action, by reporting the suffering inflicted upon women by a false interpretation of carefully selected religious texts and by reversing a current trend towards tolerance of violence against women.<sup>23</sup> Carter's appeal resonates at a time when Pope Francis has fueled hopes for a new spirit of *aggiornamento* within the Roman Catholic Church. He has updated themes from Vatican II: priority of labour, preferential option to the poor, and the creation of base communities. As church leaders, we must not perpetuate a fantasy that every Canadian has attained full personhood. In words of Adah Price, daughter of a missionary in *Poisonwood Bible*, "Illusions mistaken for truth are the pavement under our feet. They are what we call civilization."<sup>24</sup> We must do better.

### ***Endnotes***

1. Thomas Merton, *Gandhi on Non-Violence. Selected Texts from Mohandas K. Gandhi's Non-Violence in Peace and War*, ed. Thomas Merton (New York: New Directions 1964), 1; Thomas Merton, *Mystics and Zen Masters* (New York: Delta, 1967), 112. Merton's emphasis. I am grateful for comments by Canadian Society of Church History colleagues when I first read this paper on

26 May 2014.

2. William Kilbourn, *Canada: A Guide to the Peaceable Kingdom* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1970).
3. W. John McIntyre, *Children of Peace* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994).
4. See [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mbdG2\\_Dj4sY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mbdG2_Dj4sY)
5. Paul R. Dekar, "Is Canada the Peaceable Kingdom?" *Proceedings of the Canadian Society of Church History*, 1987.
6. See [http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/peace/laureates/1957/pearson-lecture.html](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1957/pearson-lecture.html). At the time, Pearson was Canada's Minister of External Affairs. I am not able in this essay to explore Pearson's legacy, nor the history of Canadian involvement in the Middle East, a subject I have previously explored in several articles including "Christians, Jews and the Holy Land," *Historical Papers, Canadian Society of Church History* (1984); "Does the State of Israel Have Theological Significance?" *Conrad Grebel Review* 2 (1984): 31-46; and "Canada and the Middle East, Senate Report," *Peace Research* 19 (1987): 1-6, 57-63.
7. Jim Defede, *The Day the World Came to Town. 9/11 in Gander, Newfoundland* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002); Ian McKay and Jamie Swift, *Warrior Nation. Rebranding Canada in an Age of Anxiety* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2012).
8. Merna Forster, *100 Canadian Heroines, Famous and Forgotten Faces* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2004); *100 More Canadian Heroines. Famous and Forgotten Faces* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2011).
9. <http://www.cbc.ca/rewind/episode/2014/05/22/beverley-mclachlin--supreme-justice/>
10. Kerry Walters and Robin Jarrell, *Blessed Peacemakers, 365 Extraordinary People Who Changed the World* (Eugene: Cascade, 2013).
11. Charles Yale Harrison, *Generals Die in Bed* (Hamilton: Potlatch, 1975).
12. I thank Stuart MacDonald for projecting Northern Lights' "Tears Are Not Enough," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fsWGfQC3jMs> from the "Live Aid Concert" video. White wristbands are available at the Mennonite Central Committee-run 10,000 Villages shop in Hamilton.
13. [https://www.broadbentinstitute.ca/sites/default/files/documents/towards\\_a\\_more\\_equal\\_canada.pdf](https://www.broadbentinstitute.ca/sites/default/files/documents/towards_a_more_equal_canada.pdf)

14. [http://www.humanities.mcmaster.ca/gandhi/lectures/documents/2013%20GPF\\_Gandhi%20Lecture%20by%20Ela%20Bhatt.pdf](http://www.humanities.mcmaster.ca/gandhi/lectures/documents/2013%20GPF_Gandhi%20Lecture%20by%20Ela%20Bhatt.pdf)
15. Evelyn Myrie, "Systemic Racism Is Alive and Well," *Hamilton Spectator*, 20 March 2014, A11.
16. Helen Forsey citation, *Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Monitor* 20, no. 8 (February 2014): 1.
17. Kenneth Epps, "Arms Export Win Is Human Rights Loss," *Ploughshares Monitor* 35, no. 1 (2014): 20-22.
18. Phyllis D. Airhart, *A Church with the Soul of a Nation. Making and Remaking the United Church of Canada* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), 184.
19. Widely available resources have advanced more inclusive language, worship, and theology. See, for example, books by an Anglican priest Gertrude Lebars: *Out of the Fire. Worship and Theology of Liberation* (Dundas: Artemis, 1992); *Things Too Wonderful: A Manual for the Study and Use of Inclusive Language* (Dundas: Artemis, 1990); *In All Things Goodness: A Christian Vision for the 21st Century* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 2003). In addition to recordings, Miriam Therese Winter, a Catholic Medical Mission Sister trained at a McMaster Divinity College in the 1970s, wrote *Preparing the Way of the Lord* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1978) and *Women Prayer Woman Song: Resources for Ritual* (Oak Park: Meyer Stone Books, 1987). Women in other traditions produced similar books, for example, Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb, *She Who Dwells: A Feminist Vision of Renewed Judaism* (San Francisco: Harper, 1995).
20. Robin W. Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill Queens University Press 1997).
21. R. Bruce Shepard, "Plain Racism: The Reaction against Oklahoma Black Immigration to the Canadian Plains," in *Racism in Canada*, ed. Ormaond McKague (Saskatoon: Fifth House Publishers, 1991) (<http://blackhistorycanada.ca/timeline.php?id=1900>).
22. [http://www.amazon.com/Viola-Desmond-Wont-Budget/dp/0888997795/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1397165522&sr=81&keywords=viola+Desmond](http://www.amazon.com/Viola-Desmond-Wont-Budget/dp/0888997795/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1397165522&sr=81&keywords=viola+Desmond)
23. <http://www.cbc.ca/thecurrent/episode/2014/03/28/jimmy-carter-on-what-he-calls-the-greatest-human-rights-crisis-of-our-time/>; Jimmy Carter, *A Call to Action: Women, Religion, Violence, and Power* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014).

24. Barbara Kingsolver, *Poisonwood Bible* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), 532.