

Unsettling Theology: Decolonizing Western Interpretations of Original Sin

by

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I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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Abstract

For Native peoples, becoming Christian in north america has also meant becoming white. That is, the theological beliefs, cultural habits, and political movements that characterized american colonialism are inseparable. Among its many shortcomings throughout colonial history, Western Christianity has failed on a basic, epistemological level; it has failed to recognize itself as a particular theological tradition, instead positing itself as a universal. The insistence of the particular theological doctrines and scriptural interpretations of european settlers as Truth led to the demise of many Others—a violence to which the Indigenous peoples of this land attest. If, as I have suggested, particular theologies were part and parcel of the western colonial project, then it follows that attempts at disarming the imperial machine must not only involve decolonizing dominant politics and cultural habits, but also decolonizing dominant western theologies.

This thesis takes up one of the dominant doctrines in Western Christianity, that of original sin. An analysis of this doctrine is pertinent because, in addition to articulating the dominant western Christian understanding of sin, death, and evil, in the world, it also reveals an undergirding anthropology and an implied soteriology, both of which provided justifications for the genocide on the Indigenous peoples of america. Following the decolonizing methodologies of Native americans Andrea Smith and Laura Donaldson, I will demonstrate that the doctrine is

particular, both scripturally and culturally, and that the dominant reading of the supporting texts for the doctrine are neither universal nor necessary. Then I will interrogate the two primary texts, Genesis 3 and Romans 5 with alternative interpretations from Native theologians and the experiences of the doctrine by Native peoples.

Finally, I will argue that if western theology is to truly release its monopoly on the Truth, even what it claims to be the True discourses and interpretations within Christianity, it must make itself vulnerable to deconstruction and interrogation by those it has oppressed; it must cultivate a posture of receptivity to the other and Native interpretive approaches, begin the hard work of unsettling settler theologies, and composing non-dominant readings of the bible.

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here and teaching me through your stories. Your support for my work and your hope in decolonizing Christianity has greatly encouraged me to keep working in settler communities and with Native peoples even when I am uncertain of what I'm doing—which is most of the time. *Nia:wen.* To my friends in Winnipeg and Kitchener-Waterloo, for reminding me that there is a world outside my thesis, thank you. And the Critical Conversation reading group for engaging some of my earliest thoughts for this project. And of course, I am deeply grateful to my mother and father, and Kevin and Erika, for listening to me rant and for your sustaining and unconditional support. I love you. Last, but certainly not least, I want to express my deep appreciation for everyone in the Partnership Circles. To Springfield Heights Mennonite Church and Grace Mennonite Church for keeping me grounded, especially Kyle Penner, and Janna and Terrell Wiebe. And to my friends at Matheson Island and Pauingassi First Nation. A special thanks to Moses Owens, elder Edna Keeper, and elder Allen Owen, for trying to teach me Ojibwa, and to Eric Kennedy and Rebecca Ward for your leadership. And also to all the children that have come to camp in MI and PFN; you have been my greatest teachers. *Chi Miigwetch.*

I dedicate this thesis to everyone in the Partnership Circles, past, present, and future.

*May you never forget that we are all related
and always grow the circle of healing and justice.*

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Preface

Hello, *aniin*, my name is Melanie Kampen. I am a white female of Dutch-Russian-German descent and a first generation Canadian. As such, I identify myself as a settler within the Western Christian tradition, specifically the Mennonites. I was born and raised in Treaty 1 Territory, in the city known as Winnipeg. I live as a guest among the Ojibwa and Cree peoples of this place. The land on which I walk is called Manitoba, from the Ojibwa *manitoo-ahbee*, meaning *where-the-Spirit-lives* or *where-the-Creator-sits*. This is part of the sacred land of Turtle Island.

My own interest in Native philosophical traditions¹ might elicit suspicion from some readers and calls for some account. This thesis grew out of a series of encounters and relationships in my life which I can only now identify as beginning in July 2006. That summer the Mennonite church of which I was a member in Winnipeg entered into a Partnership Circle with a Métis fishing community about 300 km north of the city called Matheson Island.

Although Winnipeg has a large urban Aboriginal population, I had grown up in a homogenous

¹ By this I mean to include questions which Western thought has categorized as cosmological, metaphysical, ontological, phenomenological, epistemological, and theological.

suburb, and this summer was significant in breaking some of those boundaries and challenging stereotypes I held. I have remained in the Partnership Circle ever since.

In 2012, through a different Partnership Circle with which I had relations, I was invited by a Child and Family Services worker in a northern fly-in community to spend the summer living on the reservation and working as a children's program coordinator. I accepted the position. My time spent in the Ojibwa community of Pauingassi First Nation and the relationships I formed there brought me into a relationship with the land and the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island that had not been before. When I returned to school in the fall to begin my masters in theology I felt I wanted to honour those relationships, not to forget what I had seen and heard and learned, and to stand with my friends in their struggles and calls for justice and healing. I am an academic. I am a reader and writer. I am a settler with many different relations I want to honour. As I began to navigate this un-settling path into colonial history and Aboriginal theology, I asked a teacher by the name of Harley Eagle what the best thing was that people like myself could do to stand in solidarity with Native peoples. His reply was to listen to what Native peoples are saying and to learn about the history and the contemporary realities of Native existence in Canada. In addition to that, though, he said, it was important for me to work on my own community, to turn a critical eye on ourselves, and decolonize our imperial ways of thinking. This thesis is an attempt at speaking to the settler communities which I inhabit about the violence of Christian colonialism, the cultural devastation caused through dominant and universalized biblical interpretations, the politics of race and social power, in the hopes of making us more receptive to the calls for justice, truth, and healing of our relationship with this land and with all the people who today inhabit this land. To all my teachers, past, present, and future, I say thank you, *chi miigwetch. Mitakuye oyasin*, we are all related.

Introduction

“Well, it seems a good book - strange that the white people are no better, after having had it so long.”

-Chief Drowning Bear, *Cherokee, on the bible and White Christianity (1836)*²

“The whites told only one side. Told it to please themselves. Told much that is not true.”

-Yellow Wolf, *Nez Percé, c. 1877*³

For Native peoples, becoming Christian in north america has also meant becoming White. That is, the theological beliefs, cultural habits, and political movements that characterized american colonialism are inseparable.⁴ Among its many shortcomings throughout colonial history, Western Christianity has failed on a most basic, epistemological level; it has failed to recognize itself as a particular theological tradition, instead positing itself as a universal. The insistence of the particular theological doctrines and scriptural interpretations of european settlers as Truth led to the demise of many Others—a violence to which the Indigenous peoples of this land attest. If, as I have suggested, particular theologies were part and parcel of the Western colonial project, then it follows that attempts at disarming the imperial machine must

² Quoted in Iris de León-Hartshorn, “Small Hope amidst Empire,” in *Buffalo Shout, Salmon Cry: Conversations on Creation, Land Justice, and Life Together*, ed. Steve Heinrichs (Waterloo: Herald Press, 2013), 257. See n.1.

³ As quoted in Laura E. Donaldson, “The Breasts of Columbus: A Political Anatomy of Postcolonialism and Feminist Religious Discourse,” in *Postcolonialism, Feminism, and Religious Discourse*, eds. Laura E. Donaldson and Kwok Pui-lan (New York: Routledge, 2002), 45.

⁴ When I use the lower case “american” I am referring to both Canada and the United States. When I use the capitalized “American” I am referring to the U.S. and its nationalist-colonial ideology.

not only involve decolonizing dominant politics and cultural habits, but also decolonizing dominant Western theologies.

As Michel Foucault famously said, “power [is] immanent in the sphere in which [it] operates,” and theology is no exception.⁵ In order for this operation of power to be exposed in Western Christianity, the dominant theological doctrines must be interrogated. There are many prevalent doctrines of which one could choose, but due to the scope of this thesis, I will limit myself to one: the doctrine of original sin. An analysis of this doctrine is pertinent because, in addition to articulating the dominant Western Christian understanding of sin, death, and evil, in the world, it also reveals an underlying anthropology and an implied soteriology, both of which provided justifications for the genocide on the Indigenous peoples of America.

In light of colonial history, one might wonder whether Christianity and its scriptures can be a source of liberation at all. Some Native thinkers, such as Robert Warrior (Osage) have suggested that perhaps it is best not to invest in the religious tradition any further, to let it go down, so to speak.⁶ Others, like Andrea Smith (Cherokee) and Laura Donaldson (Cherokee) have suggested that it is possible to reinterpret Christian scripture in decolonizing or non-dominant ways. Smith refuses an essentialist position that considers the Bible inherently colonial; rather, in adopting a poststructuralist approach, she asserts that “there is no objective text that exists outside a community of interpretation. [...] The Bible and other forms of theological discourse are never fixed and always subject to contestation.”⁷ It is with this understanding of texts and their complicity in colonialism that I approach the doctrine of original

⁵ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1978), 92.

⁶ Robert Warrior, “Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 59.1-2 (2005): 1-8. This article first appeared in *Christianity and Crisis* 49 (September 11, 1989): 261-165 and was reprinted with the permission of the author. The original journal is no longer in print.

⁷ Andrea Smith, “Decolonizing Theology,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 59.1-2 (2005): 77.

sin. The texts of this theological discourse must undergo decolonization. This will be done in the following ways: first, the doctrine must be shown to be particular, both scripturally and culturally; second, the development of the texts to a substantial doctrine must be traced; and third, it must be demonstrated that the dominant reading of texts in question is not necessary and that an alternative reading thereof, which draws on Native thought and experience, unravels the colonial power of the doctrine. These tasks will be taken up in five chapters.

The first chapter concerns methodology and serves a number of functions. In it I will define some of the terminology of the thesis and situate myself in the wider conversation between amer-european and Native peoples in north america in general, and Western and Native theologies in particular. I identify myself as a settler within the Western Christian tradition, but also as someone attempting to decolonize that theology and stand with Native peoples. Thus this chapter will include a brief critique of Western appropriation and representation of Aboriginal traditions and thought. I will also clarify that I am not proposing or constructing Native theology; rather, I see my work as an experiment in the decolonization of a particular dominant settler theology, cosmology/worldviews, and interpretations of the bible, and a rereading of the dominant texts employing the tools and approaches of decolonization. It is important to state at the outset that I am writing primarily for a settler Christian audience rather than contributing to Native theology, though my hope is that decolonizing, non-dominant readings of specific scriptural texts can serve as a place for settler and Native Christians to renew our treaty relationship.

Chapter two will begin the work of decolonization. I will start by taking up Augustine's formulation of the doctrine of original sin and analyze its implications for theological anthropology and soteriology. Then I will examine how the doctrine of original sin is manifest

in more contemporary writings, beginning with Reinhold Niebuhr's individualistic understanding and moving towards a more social understanding in liberation theologies. A review of the contemporary literature will provide a sense of the state of the debate, the development of critiques of the first formulation of original sin, and the ways in which they nevertheless can be said to remain Augustinian. Finally, I will consider a few critiques of Niebuhr and liberation theology, and suggest that while these begin a process of decolonization, there is a deeper unsettling of theology that must be attempted.

Since I will argue that the doctrine of original sin is culturally particular, and arises from a specific anthropology, it follows that another culture could function on a different anthropology and in turn differ in its understanding of sin (and salvation). For this comparison I have selected the Ojibwa and Lakota traditions of north america—two peoples who suffer(ed) the effects of Christian colonization of this land. Thus chapter three will examine the philosophy, cosmology, and anthropology of the Ojibwa and Lakota peoples. I will also consider the phenomenological question of how Native peoples experienced the doctrine of original sin. Then, drawing on a number of Native Christian thinkers, I will articulate an understanding of “sin” quite different than that of Augustine and the Western Christian tradition outlined in chapter one.

The two most prominent texts in the formulation of the doctrine of original sin are Genesis 3 and Romans 5. Western Christians have typically interpreted these texts as fall and redemption narratives, respectively. In colonization these narratives functioned as part of a larger conversion narrative that posited Native peoples as original sinners and in need of redemption. Because original sin and redemption were conceived of in racial terms, conversion to Christianity essentially meant assimilation. I take conversion to mean the movement from one identity to another. Moreover, I understand this movement to require the effacement of the

former identity by or for the new one. This is the basic logic of conversion I am working with. However, following Smith's suggestion that theologies are not inherent or essential to texts themselves, it is possible to decolonize, to reinterpret Genesis 3 and Romans 5, without relying on the colonial logic of conversion. In chapters 4 and 5 I will draw on the approaches of Ojibwa and Lakota traditions and various Native theologians to reread both texts. The purpose of these two chapters is to interrogate and reinterpret two prominent Christian texts that are foundational for the dominant theological discourse in the West in non-dominant ways. These rereadings can be thought of as operations of decolonization and experiments in truth (not Truth).

In the final analysis, this thesis seeks to demonstrate one way dominant theological discourses might undergo decolonization. Many other doctrines and discourses of the Western Christian tradition could be treated in a similar way in an attempt to re-particularize and dismantle the Christian colonial regime. Such a task is also undertaken in solidarity with both Christian and traditional Native peoples. If Western theology is to truly release its monopoly on the Truth, even what it claims to be the True discourses and interpretations within Christianity, it must make itself vulnerable to deconstruction and interrogation by those it has oppressed; it must cultivate a posture of receptivity to the other and Native interpretive approaches, begin the hard work of unsettling settler theologies, and composing non-dominant readings of the bible. As Lilla Watson once said, "If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."⁸

⁸ Lilla Watson is an Indigenous Australian woman who works as an activist and artist. I have been told she attributes the quote to a collective of activists with whom she was working to raise awareness on racism and colonialism in Australia in the early 1970s. See also "About," Lilla: International Women's Network, accessed October 24, 2013, <http://lillanetwork.wordpress.com/about>.

Terminology

I use the terms Aboriginal and Native peoples synonymously to refer to the Indigenous peoples of Canada and the United States. The term Indigenous is only used when the point being made is applicable to First peoples across the world. First peoples refers to those who resided in a given geographical area before european settlers or immigrants. I use the term settler to identify citizens of Canada and the United States who are of european descent. I also use amer-european to identify people of european descent, but who were born in Canada or the U.S. I follow George Tinker's lead in decapitalizing amer-european as well as european in order to emphasize its particularity,⁹ as well as scripture, bible, old testament, and new testament. I do, however, capitalize West and Western tradition, Christianity, and White, in order to highlight their ongoing dominance. Additionally, I should note that when I use the terms Western tradition or Western Christianity, I am referring to the dominant discourses and theologies therein, not the minority beliefs, discourses, and practices therein that might be in fact work to subvert or undermine the dominant ones. While this may be a worthwhile endeavour in itself, it is not within the purpose or the scope of this thesis to address. Additionally, when quoting authors, I will use the terms and capitalization they use. For example, in the United States the term Indian or American Indian is used by Native peoples themselves, thus many of the American authors employ it.

⁹ George Tinker, *Spirit and Resistance: Political Theology and American Indian Liberation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), xi-xii.

Chapter 1

On Methodology: Representation, Postcolonialism, Decolonization

“Representation is important as a concept because it gives the impression of ‘the truth’.”
-Linda Tuhiwai Smith¹

“...decolonization’ not simply as theological or political content, but as a methodology for doing theological work.”
-Andrea Smith²

“...to paraphrase slightly, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for many biblical readers and scholars to enter the contact zone and risk changing everything.”
-Laura E. Donaldson³

One of the most important questions in post-colonial studies is that of methodology. This includes the principles and categories which govern and organize a discourse and the process by which epistemological and ethical judgments are made within it. Discourses often produce their own methodologies, though the latter are not necessarily internal or inherent to the former; discourses can also be subjected to a variety of methodologies. In order to be clear about my

¹ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 2nd ed. (New York: Zed Books, 2012), 37.

² Andrea Smith, “Decolonization in Unexpected Places: Native Evangelicalism and the Rearticulation of Mission,” 574.

³ Laura E. Donaldson, “Are We All Multiculturalists Now? Biblical Reading as Cultural Contact,” *Semeia* 82 (1998): 94.

purposes, let me identify the primary discourse of this thesis as Western or amer-european Christianity, and the methodology with which I will interrogate it as decolonization.

Decolonization, as a method in academia, is a relatively new term. Growing out of empire, liberation, third world, and post-colonial studies, decolonization seeks to differentiate itself from these in some important ways. Essentially, decolonization is not a concept, not a field of study, but an operation, a method in the truest sense of the word. Decolonization is a procedure, a technique, a practice that is performed on a dominant discourse. The operation of decolonization consists of a number of basic critiques, namely of anthropology, history, and even postcolonialism. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an understanding of the decolonizing methodology I will be employing and how it relates to the dominant discourse of amer-european Christianity. I will begin by outlining the basic critiques decolonization makes and then elaborate on some of the implications or effects of this method on amer-european Christianity.

To begin, I think it is only suitable to address the realities of cultural appropriation and representation of Native culture within the academy (and beyond). First of all, I want to acknowledge that Native peoples have and continue to experience an inordinate amount of cultural appropriation, and that it is offensive and hurtful. This is perhaps most noticeable in the names and mascots of sports teams, as well as the fan paraphernalia. For example, at Washington Redskins and Cleveland Indian games, one can always find (White) fans donning generic regalia, headdresses and warrior face paint, howling and whooping in the stands. Appropriation also frequently occurs in brand names (Pontiac, Dakota, and Cherokee cars) and bookstores which advertise shelves of Native spirituality written by self-proclaimed non-Native shamans.⁴ And of course, the red-face that White halloween goers don each year. Native peoples

⁴ Clara Sue Kidwell, Homer Noley, and George E. "Tink" Tinker, *A Native American Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001), 173-4.

have not only endured oppression through colonization and appropriation, they have also experienced it through a number of other Western academic and pedagogical functions which delegitimize Native philosophies and cultures. I will address three of these here.

The first is anthropology. By far the most common discipline in which Native peoples have been visible is that of anthropology. But Native peoples are most often the objects of scientific-like study rather than the ones producing the research. Many Native peoples have expressed their frustration with this and the detrimental effects it has had on their communities. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Maori) has noted, “there is a very rich history of research which attempts to legislate views about indigenous peoples which have been antagonistic and dehumanizing.”⁵ And further, “the ethnographic ‘gaze’ of anthropology has collected, classified, and represented other cultures” out of existence (effectively).⁶ This reflects the way in which anthropology collaborates with institutions (e.g. museums) to collect, preserve, and classify a culture of the past. At an Idle No More⁷ gathering in Winnipeg, Manitoba, an Ojibwa woman shared a conversation she had had with another woman while traveling in Europe, in which she relayed that she was a practicing Native. The European woman expressed confusion and replied: “I thought the settlers had killed you all!”⁸ The trajectory of anthropology has been one which relegates Native peoples to the past, effectively researching them out of existence.

The second oppressive mechanism of Western academia is the concept of history.⁹ L. Smith contends that the concept of history “is assembled around a set of interconnected

⁵ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 12.

⁶ Linda Smith, 70.

⁷ See <http://www.idlenomore.ca/>

⁸ In Native cultures it is not so important to note specific times of events or even names of people, since their words and thoughts are not understood to be owned in any Western sense of the term. I will therefore adopt this style when referring to stories and wisdom imparted to me by Native peoples with whom I have a personal relationship.

⁹ Vine Deloria Jr. devotes an entire chapter to this in *God is Red: A Native view of Religion*, 30th anniv. ed. (Golden: Fulcrum, 2003). I will take up Deloria in ch. 4.

ideas.”¹⁰The key features she identifies are totality, universality, chronology, development, self-actualization, monolithic, factual and neutral, bifurcation, patriarchal, and textual or written.¹¹ Each of these terms could be explored in a chapter of their own, but suffice it to say that these terms name operations of control and dominance on Indigenous ways of understanding and imparting that knowledge to generations. “The negation of indigenous views of history was a critical part of asserting colonial ideology.”¹² Bound up with enlightenment rationalism, the myth of modern superiority, and a darwinian social theory, Indigenous “views were regarded as clearly ‘primitive’ and ‘incorrect’ [...especially] because they challenged and resisted the mission of colonization.”¹³

The third potentially oppressive discourse in academia is postcolonialism. This will, perhaps, come as a surprise to many who consider themselves critics of imperialism and allies of the oppressed. To be sure, poststructuralists have done notable work in exposing power structures, analyzing ideological systems, and deconstructing the pseudo-universalist claims of particulars. Feminism has also contributed to postcolonial discourse in its arguments against the force of patriarchy in history (or his-story), and liberation theorists have contributed significantly in their critiques of class structures and Whiteness. However, “[t]here is also, among indigenous academics, the sneaking suspicion that the fashion of ‘post-colonial’ discourse has become a strategy for reinscribing or reauthorizing the privileges of non-indigenous academics because the field of ‘post-colonial’ discourse has been defined in ways which can still leave out indigenous

¹⁰ Linda Smith, 30.

¹¹ Ibid., 30-2.

¹² Ibid., 29.

¹³ Ibid., 29. The threat that Indigenous philosophies and especially epistemologies pose to beliefs grounded in the Western tradition will become evident in chapters 5 and 6 when I attempt the task of decolonizing and rereading foundational biblical texts with tools and lenses from Native traditions. It is no wonder that Christian conversion required a total renunciation of any and all elements of one's prior identity and assimilation to Western cultural norms.

peoples, our ways of knowing, and our current concerns.”¹⁴ For example, George Tinker (Osage) argues that liberation theology is insufficient for Native theology because it fails to take the difference between First Peoples and settlers or immigrants into account. Marxist class analysis, while not the only method employed for liberation struggles, is quite prevalent (even if not explicit) in many liberation theories. By casting society in terms of base and superstructure, certain groups can be identified as oppressed and others as oppressors. While class analysis does some of the important work needed in deconstructing power structures and can advocate for a group of people, it is insufficient for analyzing Indigenous struggles because it associates Native peoples with “a much larger colonizer proletariat who are also foreign to [the] land.”¹⁵ Tinker contends that “indigenous peoples are struggling with existence in ways that are not and probably cannot be addressed by class analysis at all. Rather, they are rooted in the economic need of the colonizer to quiet our claims to the land and to mute our moral judgment on the United States’ [and Canada’s] long history of violence and conquest in North America.”¹⁶

Tinker names the struggle against economic and political imperialism. I would add the struggles against epistemological imperialism as described above in the operations of anthropology and history. Thus, while postcolonialism, and its corollary liberation, have provided us with important tools for the deconstruction of dominant systems, I submit that it is the methods, philosophies, and epistemologies of Native traditions that must be received for decolonization to take place. As Audre Lorde wrote, “[t]he master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.”¹⁷

¹⁴ Ibid., 24.

¹⁵ George Tinker, *American Indian Liberation: A Theology of Sovereignty* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2008), 23-4.

¹⁶ Tinker, *American Indian Liberation*, 23.

¹⁷ Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House,” comments at ‘The Personal and Political’ panel, Second Sex Conference, 1979 reproduced in C. Moraga and G. Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back* (New York: Kitchen Table Women of Colour Press, 1981), 98-101 quoted in Linda Smith, 20.

For the purposes of this thesis, I differentiate between postcolonialism and decolonization. The former refers to an academic discourse and field of study (with its own history and etiology) while the latter names a practice, an exercise, an experiment even. At the risk of oversimplifying, postcolonialism is an examination or analysis of imperialism(s) while decolonization is an interrogative and un-settling operation upon them.¹⁸ As outlined in the introduction, the question guiding this thesis is whether Christianity and its scriptures are inherently imperial or whether they can be liberating, just, and decolonizing. Both Native peoples and amer-europeans, Christian and non-Christian, find themselves on a spectrum with regards to this question. Reviewing some of the different voices will provide a sense of the current state of the debate and help to situate my argument and approach among these.

Robert Warrior's (Osage) article on the old testament's exodus and conquest texts has become somewhat of a landmark piece among Native scholars critical of Christianity, especially for those who find nothing redemptive or liberating in the bible for non-Whites suffering under amer-european colonial powers. Warrior's scathing critique of the exodus narrative and the following conquest accounts in Joshua and Judges is based on the understanding that the Christian settlers self-identified with the Israelites. Consequently, the Native peoples were identified with the Canaanites—the pagan, godless nation that must be conquered to make way for Israel, God's chosen people. Indeed, Warrior claims that "[m]any Puritan preachers were fond of referring to Native Americans as Amelkites and Canaanites—in other words, people who if they would not be converted, were worthy of annihilation."¹⁹ Warrior, for one, does not think that the bible can be a source of liberation, but he does put out a challenge to those who still seek to be shaped by it. He writes,

¹⁸ This distinction will become clear as my approach shifts from deconstruction in ch. 3 to decolonization in chapters 4 and 5.

¹⁹ Robert Warrior, "Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians," 1-8.

It was, after all, a Jewish victim of the Holocaust, Walter Benjamin, who said, “There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.” People whose theology involves the Bible need to take this seriously. It is those who know these texts who must speak the truth about what they contain. It is to those who believe in these texts that the barbarism belongs. It is those who act on the basis of these texts who must take responsibility for the terror and violence they can and have engendered.²⁰

Vine Deloria, Jr. (Lakota) similarly argues that liberation theology “was an absolute necessity if the establishment was going to continue to control the minds of minorities.”²¹

Native feminist scholars Andrea Smith (Cherokee) and Laura E. Donaldson (Cherokee) are more hopeful, though not less critical in their analysis of Christianity’s dominant theology. Commenting on Warrior’s article, A. Smith rejects his claim that “the text itself will never be altered by interpretations of it.”²² A. Smith refuses such an essentialist position that considers the bible inherently imperial. Rather, in adopting a poststructuralist approach, she asserts that “there is no objective text that exists outside a community of interpretation. [...T]he bible and other forms of theological discourse are never fixed and always subject to contestation.”²³ Furthermore, she suggests that biblical texts or even theological discourses are “never simply liberating or oppressive.”²⁴ Rather, they must be interrogated, deconstructed, and decolonized for their capacities for resistance and non-dominance.

In a similar way, Laura Donaldson argues that “reading in general and biblical reading in particular is a site of cultural contact.”²⁵ As I suggested earlier, the subject of this thesis, the doctrine of original sin, comes out of a particular context. In order to attend to the effect of this on theology, I take cultural particularity as my primary point of departure for understanding biblical interpretations and theological doctrines. For a particular tradition that has posited itself

²⁰ Ibid., 7. He does not provide a citation for the Walter Benjamin quote.

²¹ Vine Deloria, Jr., *For This Land: Writings on Religion in America* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 100.

²² Warrior, 6.

²³ Andrea Smith, “Decolonizing Theology,” 78.

²⁴ Ibid., 77.

²⁵ Donaldson, “Are We All Multiculturalists Now? Biblical Reading as Cultural Contact,” 79.

as a universal, reading the bible with Native peoples, Native Christians, is an inter-cultural exercise. This cannot be understood as merely exchanging theological ideas, because Western theology is explicitly bound up with colonization.²⁶ Thus by re-reading the texts and interpretations of the dominant tradition with the hermeneutic approaches of another culture, a dynamic interplay of cultures is initiated. As Donaldson puts it, “imagining reading as a negotiation across cultural and historical [and even geographic] boundaries as well as “a form of making contact with otherness”²⁷ always implies a double movement toward the culture of the text and back toward the culture of the reader.”²⁸ Herein both the culture(s) of the text(s) and the cultures of the readers can perform interpretive interventions. This is the work of decolonization (of the dominant, universal). An example of this is Warrior’s article, in which he challenges us to read with Canaanite eyes. Donaldson calls this intercultural approach to reading the bible “polycentric multiculturalism,” in which no cultural voice is privileged over another, in which dominant relations are decomposed within the zone of intercultural contact and recomposed into non-dominant relations.²⁹ “Because this epistemological process takes seriously the logics of different cultures in terms of their asymmetrical power relations, it results in an understanding of culture as a terrain of struggle rather than a composite of discretely consumable entities.”³⁰

Theologians John E. Toews and Joseph Fitzpatrick represent a bit of a different approach on the spectrum. Both are quite critical of the dominant Western notion of original sin and interpretation of Genesis 3, and work to deconstruct these (Toews more historically and Fitzpatrick more theologically). Both scholars suggest alternative interpretations from within the

²⁶Indeed, theological ideas are never neutral to questions of power.

²⁷ Gabriele Schwab, *The Mirror and the Killer-Queen: Otherness in Literacy Language*, Theories of Contemporary Culture (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 4, quoted in Donaldson, “Are We All Multiculturalists Now?” 89.

²⁸ Donaldson, “Are We All Multiculturalists Now?” 89.

²⁹ This is not to suggest pluralism or relativism. I will demonstrate this in chapters 4 and 5.

³⁰ Donaldson, “Are We All Multiculturalists Now?” 93.

Judeo-Christian tradition; Toews draws on the Jewish and Anabaptist-Mennonite traditions, while Fitzpatrick employs hermeneutics from the Greek Fathers.³¹ While Toews and Fitzpatrick engage important deconstructive practices, their work cannot yet be considered decolonizing. Feminist and postcolonial scholar Kwok Pui-lan demonstrates what decolonization of scripture must involve with a brief example. She

observes that the Church has traditionally interpreted the encounter of the Syrophoenician woman with Jesus (Mk 7.24-30; Matt 15.21-28) as a basis for missions to the Gentiles. Indeed, she notes, most interpreters uncritically follow the “salvation history” model by arguing that the Syrophoenician woman’s story legitimizes admitting Gentiles into the Christian community—a model with strong anti-Jewish and Christian imperialist overtones. Furthermore, the woman herself possesses an intricate positionality: marginalized because she is a woman and a Gentile, but privileged because she is Greek-speaking and urban (Kwok: 75). A postcolonial reading must attend to all these complexities, that is, it “must expose and investigate the intersection of anti-Judaism, sexism, and cultural and religious imperialism in the history of the text’s interpretation” (Kwok:79). For Kwok, this means a “single-axis” approach—one that separates culture, race, class, and gender—can no longer suffice. Instead, postcolonialism demands that we adopt a “multiaxial frame of reference” (Kwok:79) and reconfigure biblical reading through a multi-dimensional perspective.³²

Since neither Toews nor Fitzpatrick address the dynamics of race, class, and gender in their readings, or any other feature that would make their work “multiaxial,” their alternative interpretations cannot be considered postcolonial in Kwok’s sense. The work of decolonization involves an extraordinary amount of hermeneutical transformation. Waziyatawin Angela Wilson (Dakota) and Michael Yellow Bird (Sahnish) describe the task of decolonization and warn us of its arduous requirements.

Decolonization is the intelligent, cultivated, and active resistance to the forces of colonialism that perpetuate the subjugation and/or exploitation of your minds, bodies, and lands, and is engaged for the ultimate purpose of overturning the colonial structure and realizing Indigenous liberation...But make no mistake: Decolonization ultimately requires the overturning of the colonial structure. It is not about tweaking the existing

³¹ I am referring to John E. Toews, *The Story of Original Sin* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2013) and Joseph Fitzpatrick’s four article series on Augustine in *New Blackfriars*, “Original Sin or Original Sinfulness.”

³² Donaldson, “Postcolonialism and Biblical Reading: An Introduction,” *Semeia* 75 (1996): 7-8, quoting Kwok Pui-Lan, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2003). The significance of a multiaxial and multidimensional approach will be articulated in chapter 3.

colonial system to make it more Indigenous-friendly or a little less oppressive. The existing system is fundamentally and irreparably flawed.³³

If, as Audre Lorde has suggested, the master's house cannot be dismantled with the master's tools, then the masters (or any others) who want to dismantle the house, require other tools. I would suggest that for theology these must come from outside Western Christianity. I would suggest that the epistemology(s) of Native peoples is something that settlers must learn to receive, in order to participate in the decolonization of Christianity. Because the epistemology of the West seems to have produced colonial realities more than anything else, I submit that amer-europeans listen deeply to our Native sisters and brothers to teach and guide us all in the way of justice and healing, and non-dominant readings of the bible.

Each of the scholars mentioned above has influenced my methodology for this thesis. I employ the approaches of Andrea Smith and Laura E. Donaldson in my own attempt to practice what one might call a hermeneutic of decolonization. I am a settler in this conversation between Native and amer-european Christian theology. But I am also a settler who is learning that her liberation is bound up with all others.³⁴ While I probably have more hope for Christianity and theology than Warrior and Deloria, I take their critiques and challenges very seriously. As Waziyatawin and Yellow Bird warned, decolonization is an arduous task and will be deeply unsettling to our amer-european theology. Indeed, there are apocalyptic tones in their call for decolonization. If there is hope for Christianity, it is an apocalyptic hope; to riff on a phrase

³³ Waziyatawin Angela Wilson and Michael Yellow Bird, *For Indigenous Eyes Only* (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research, 2005), 5.

³⁴ Here I refer to Lilla Watson's famous words: "If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together." Lilla Watson is an Indigenous Australian woman who works as activist, artist. I have been told she attributes the quote to a collective of activists with whom she was working to raise awareness on racism and colonialism in Australia in the early 1970s. See also "About," Lilla: International Women's Network, accessed October 24, 2013, <http://lillanetwork.wordpress.com/about>.

from Jacob Taubes, “I can imagine as an apocalyptic: let it go down. [...] I have no spiritual investment in [Christianity] as it is.”³⁵

Paulette Regan (who is also a settler) wrote a book in which she recounts her journey of becoming unsettled by Canada’s history of colonialism, the Indian Residential Schools, and her experiences with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. At one point she considers the work of Jeanette Armstrong for the possibility of “unsettling the settler within.”³⁶

[She] asks the non-Indigenous to cast a critical eye on the imperial garden we have cultivated with our colonial tools, on the lands and in the lives of Indigenous peoples. She asks us to turn over the rocks and face whatever ugly creatures slither out, examining them honestly and unflinchingly. To challenge the romantic myths we believe about ourselves and to focus our energies on questioning our own identity, values, and experiences as colonizers. To share honestly with Native people [and others] what we learn about ourselves in the process, and more importantly, how we will change our attitudes and actions.³⁷

This is what the chapters that follow seek to do with amer-european Christian theology. Let us now proceed to turn over some rocks in the Garden of Eden.

³⁵ Jacob Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*, trans. Dana Hollander (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 56, 103. The original reads “world” in place of “Christianity.”

³⁶ The phrase is the title of Paulette Regan’s book *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).

³⁷ Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*, 235.

Chapter 2

Original Sin: Augustine, Niebuhr, and their Critics

“Western theology is a series of footnotes to St. Augustine.”
- Jaroslav Pelikan¹

“The doctrine of sin is the only empirically verifiable doctrine of the Christian faith.”
- Reinhold Niebuhr²

Introduction

When one undertakes the question of sin in theology, one quickly finds Augustine looming large in the Western Christian tradition. Born in 354 CE in Thagaste, North Africa, Aurelius Augustinus became a highly influential bishop of Hippo and proponent of Latin Christianity. Augustine is probably most well-known for his conversion to Christianity as narrated in his *Confessions*, but his writing expounds on a wide array of theological matters and constitutes an impressive compendium of over one hundred separate titles. This bishop of Hippo has also influenced hamartiology in Western Christianity more than any other theologian. Though one can trace many shifts in emphasis and modifications of his thought throughout the

¹ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*. See epigraph in Derek R. Nelson, *Sin: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 36.

² Reinhold Niebuhr quoting London Times Literary Supplement, in *Man's Nature and His Communities*. See epigraph in Nelson, *Sin: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 36.

centuries after Augustine, his formulation of the doctrine of original sin has withstood the test of time (for better or for worse). Although he was the first to coin the term and provided a much more thoroughgoing commentary on sin, grace, and human nature than any of the church fathers before him, he did not singlehandedly usher the notion of original sin into Christianity. Indeed, as many authors have noted, the theological anthropology undergirding Augustine's hamartiology is found in the Latin fathers before him, along with certain key turns that anticipate the formulation of original sin. Extensive work has already been done to illustrate this, relieving us of the tedious (though important) burden of providing a thoroughgoing historical analysis of the church fathers.³ For our purposes, it will suffice to identify some of the key turns in the Latin fathers that anticipate Augustine's formulation of original sin. It is also important to note that their contemporaries in the east had substantially different understandings of sin. Indeed, the Greek fathers had no formulation of sin as original or inherited because their theological anthropology could not conceive of such an understanding. It is worthwhile, therefore, to compare the pivotal Latin fathers with their Greek contemporaries, not only to show the particularity of the dominant Western understanding, but also as a potential resource for decolonizing and rethinking sin and human nature in non-dominant ways.⁴ Finally, given the multiplicity of views vying for power, influence, and orthodoxy, it is necessary to provide a sense of why and how the Augustinian notion of sin became prevalent rather than any of the others. It is not within the scope of this chapter to give a full historical account of this, but to provide a sense of the theo-political climate of the 5th Century. Within the operations of orthodoxy, heterodoxy, and heresy, it must be understood that theological ideas carry political

³Probably the most thorough analysis to date is Norman Powell Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin: A Historical and Critical Study* (London: Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd., 1927). For a concise overview see John E. Toews, *The Story of Original Sin* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2013).

⁴This is the work chapters 4 and 5 will do.

freight. The prevalence of one theological formulation over another, therefore, must not only be evaluated on conceptual terms, but also political ones. A review of the Pelagian controversy and a couple of bishop councils will illustrate this. The Latin and the Greek fathers, Augustine's theology of sin, and the theo-political milieu of their time will provide the necessary background for modern and contemporary debates in hamartiology—with which I am primarily concerned.

The second part of this chapter then turns to modern theology in the West with a primary interest in the work of Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971). It is certainly the case that many theologians influenced the modern understanding of sin, but the contributions of Niebuhr stand out among the rest.⁵ I have chosen to focus on Niebuhr's work because he is both representative and influential of 20th century Protestant theology. His understanding of sin is heavily influenced by Augustine's, and while he is critical of Augustine he remains very much in line with the Latin-western tradition. Because of his extensive and systematic work on the sin of pride, Niebuhr is arguably the best source for the trajectory and content of mainline, dominant, Protestant theology in the 20th century West. Additionally, it is reflective of his influence that so many 20th and 21st century critiques of sin are levelled against Niebuhr. Both feminist and latin american theologians have taken him up as a primary interlocutor in their respective critiques of dominant hamartiology. It is evident that Niebuhr's work has set the terms of the debate in significant ways. Thus, I will first consider Niebuhr's understanding of sin and then examine some of the main critiques of his work by feminist, black womanist, and latin american theologians. This review of some of the key figures and theological turns in hamartiology will

⁵Cf. David F. Ford and Rachel Muers, eds., *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology Since 1918*, 3rd ed. (Malden: Blackwell, 2005), 204-12, or James C. Livingston, Francis Schussler Fiorenza, Sarah Coakley, and James H. Evans, Jr., *Modern Christian Thought: The Twentieth Century*, vol. 2, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 175-196.

provide a sense of the current state of the debate and convey the impetus for the contributions of Aboriginal theologians in the remaining chapters.

The Latin and Greek Fathers

On the question of sin, the exegetical differences between the Latin and Greek fathers from the 2nd through 5th centuries are often reduced to the contrasting interpretations of the prepositional phrase *eph ho* in Romans 5:12. Generally speaking, the former relied on its Latin translation as *in quo*, “in whom,” while the latter rendered it “since” or “because” (or the Latin *quia*).⁶ This is, of course, an oversimplification, yet this exegetical difference became a pivotal point of contention between the fathers, which culminated in the Augustine/Pelagian controversy. A salient feature of the Apostolic fathers is their lack of interest in the origins of sin. The popular “fall” narrative of Genesis 3 is absent in their writings. It is striking that the Apostolic fathers—“Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Papias, Polycarp, Barnabas, the anonymous writers of the Didache and the Shepherd of Hermas—[...] do not think it important to write their congregations about the disobedience and sin of Adam and Eve.”⁷ Indeed, Justin Martyr was the first to mention it since the Apostle Paul himself a century earlier. Even then, Justin Martyr refers to sin as a condition of all humans but without any notion of inheritance (essential to original sin).⁸ The Apostolic fathers “[took] for granted that mankind [*sic*] is sinful, ignorant and in need of salvation, but they did not pursue the question of how this state of affairs had come about.”⁹

⁶David Weaver, “From Paul to Augustine: Romans 5:12 in Early Christian Exegesis,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 27.3 (1983): 187, 196, 203.

⁷John E. Toews, *The Story of Original Sin* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2013), 49.

⁸Weaver, “From Paul to Augustine,” 190.

⁹*Ibid.*, 198.

After Justin Martyr, Theophilus of Antioch (ca. 180 CE) and Irenaeus of Lyons (140-200 CE) provide somewhat more substantial or at least articulate understandings of sin in reference to Genesis 3. Both Theophilus and Irenaeus interpret Adam's transgression less as a "fall" than a "misdirection of growth," and that Adam and Eve's transgression was as a result of their childlike, good but mutable, state of existence.¹⁰ In his comprehensive study, *Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin*, Norman P. Williams has concluded that the early eastern church gives us "a picture of primitive man [*sic*] as frail, imperfect, and child-like. [...] It exaggerates neither the height from which, nor the depth to which, the first men [*sic*] are alleged to have fallen. It finds in the inherited disorder of our nature rather a weakness to be pitied than an offence to be condemned."¹¹

Among the early church fathers, Tertullian (ca. 155-200 CE) marks the first major shift from the predominant eastern/Greek understanding of sin. Tertullian accepted the Stoic notion of traducianism which posited that humans passed their entire nature on to their progeny, both the material and immaterial, the body and soul. This, in turn, affected Tertullian's theological anthropology. Stoic traducianism supposed a "material nature of the soul in which the soul is engendered and propagated from one generation to the next along with the body."¹² Insofar as Adam was the first man and all humans are descendants of Adam (in a traducian sense), all humans are also corrupted by Adam's sin.¹³ With this understanding, Tertullian coined the phrase *vitium originis*, "original guilt" or "original moral fault."¹⁴ This phrase introduced the prominent notion of "seminal identity" into Latin-Western theological anthropology

¹⁰ Ibid., 190-91. Cf. Toews, *The Story of Original Sin*, 50-53.

¹¹ Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin*, 200.

¹² Weaver, "From Paul to Augustine," 192.

¹³ Tertullian's traducianism was "expounded in *A Treatise on the Soul [de anima]*, a book written after his adoption of Montanism, a sect which the "orthodox" church declared heretical, but the book none-the-less exercised great influence in the "orthodox" church in the West." Toews, 63.

¹⁴ Toews, 64.

andhamartiology. Tertullian additionally presented a move away from the notion of sin as weakness (*deprivatio*) in the Greek fathers and towards a notion of sin as corruption (*depravatio*). This demonstrated a shift in the primary metaphors for understanding sin: “he showed a strong tendency to view this corruption juridically or forensically, as though it were a crime, rather than medically, as though it were an illness.”¹⁵ The former gained momentum throughout the Latin fathers such that the latter is all but lost by the 5th century.

Tertullian’s contemporaries in the east continued the trajectory of interpretation set out by Irenaeus, the immaturity of Adam and Eve. Both Clement of Alexandria (150-215 CE) and Origen (185/86 – 251/54 CE) affirm the sinfulness of the human race but reject any suggestion that this is as a result of their nature (i.e. inherited from Adam). Origen especially stands in contrast with the West in his understanding of *eph ho* “in a causal sense, meaning ‘since’ or ‘because’.”¹⁶ Thus, humans “become liable to death not so much from nature as from [Adam’s] example.”¹⁷ Continuing in the eastern tradition, the Cappadocian fathers showed little concern for Genesis 3 or the development of any hamartiology. Toews has observed that “[t]hey are agreed that Adam’s sin resulted in death, and that redemption is the rescue for the effects [of] this sin. But they never define the mode of solidarity with Adam nor the nature of the sin which was transmitted.”¹⁸ While they vary somewhat in their anthropological articulation, Basil the Great (330-379 CE), Gregory of Nazianus (330-389/90 CE), and Gregory of Nyssa (335-394

¹⁵ Ibid., 65.

¹⁶ Weaver, “From Paul to Augustine,” 196.

¹⁷ Ibid. This notion of sinning in the example of Adam is picked up in later eastern writings such as Diodore of Tarsus (d. 392), Cyril of Alexandria (376-444), and implicitly in Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428) and Theodoret of Cyrus (393-457). For a summary of their theological anthropology and hamartiology see David Weaver, “The Exegesis of Romans 5:12 Among the Greek Fathers and Its Implication for the Doctrine of Original Sin: The 5th-12th Centuries,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 29.1 (1985):133-159.

¹⁸ Toews, 59.

CE) remain in the eastern exegetical tradition affirming “an inheritance of corruption and death and moral debilitation stemming from Adam’s sin, but no doctrine of original sin.”¹⁹

Meanwhile in the Latin speaking West, there were several notable theological developments towards Augustine’s formulation of original sin. After Tertullian, Cyprian (200-10 – 258 CE) furthered the notion of original moral guilt by associating it with infant baptism (and the salvific effects thereof).²⁰ But the most significant contributions to an anthropology that could bear the doctrine of original sin came from Ambrose of Milan (c.339-397 CE) and Ambrosiaster (late 4th Century). Ambrose was the first to articulate the doctrine of original righteousness or perfection of Adam, painting the paradisiacal picture from which Adam then fell. Instead of the Latin *praevaricatio* (literally walking crookedly), Ambrose referred to Adam’s sin as a *lapsus* (fall). Within this narrative, Ambrose identified Adam’s sin as the sin of pride—his desire for “equality with the Creator,”²¹ and as Ambrosiaster put it, he “wanted to become like God.”²² This turn inward, what Matt Jenson has referred to as *homo incurvatus in se*,²³ places the burden of responsibility entirely on Adam. Additionally, because of the previous notion of *vitium originalis* in the West, Ambrose could easily formulate a notion of hereditary sins (*peccata hereditaria*) and seminal identity, essentially a description of original sin. The explicit articulation is striking: “Assuredly we all sinned in the first man, and by inheritance of his nature there has been transferred from that one man into all an inheritance of guilt. ... So then Adam is in each one of us; for in him human nature itself sinned.”²⁴

¹⁹ Weaver, “From Paul to Augustine,” 199. Cf. Toews, 59.

²⁰ Toews, 65. Cf. Weaver, “From Paul to Augustine,” 193.

²¹ Ambrose, *Expositio Psalmum*, cxviii, Sermon. Xv.36 quoted in Toews, 67.

²² Ambrosiaster, *Commentaries*, 5:14, 42 quoted in Toews, 67.

²³ Matt Jenson, *The Gravity of Sin: Augustine, Luther and Barth on homo incurvatus in se* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006).

²⁴ Ambrose, *Apologia prophetae David*, lxxi quoted in Toews, 68.

Next to Ambrose's theology, Ambrosiaster's exegesis was fundamental for Augustine's work. Ambrosiaster's commentary on Romans "provided the crucial scriptural proof-text and exegesis for Augustine's theology."²⁵ His Latin translation of Romans 5:12d read "in whom all sinned," *in quo*. He additionally notes that the Latin, which is masculine, refers to Adam, concluding "it is plain that all have sinned in Adam as in a lump (*quasi in massa*); for having been corrupted by sin himself, all those whom Adam fathered have been born under sin."²⁶ This passage was at the forefront of Augustine's own formulation. But, as Toews notes, "nearly all modern Protestant and most Catholic commentators have pointed out, Ambrosiaster relied on a Latin version which rendered *eph ho* as *in quo*, 'in whom,' rather than as 'on account of' or 'because of,'" and that this was erroneous.²⁷ Thus we can observe substantial differences between the Greek and Latin fathers over the first five centuries, and increasingly divergent trajectories concerning the understanding of sin. The Greek fathers' basic understanding of sin with relation to Adam is that sin was universal but came about through human imitation of Adam's sin. By contrast, the Latin fathers, culminating in Augustine, posited the inheritance of a sinful nature, in both body and soul, through Adam. Through the Latin fathers, hamartiology in the West became an emphatically metaphysical endeavor.²⁸ The question that remained was how to hold metaphysical sin and human free will together. Augustine resolves this problem in his extensive and complex articulation of sin as original.²⁹ We turn now to Augustine's own writings.

²⁵ Toews, 69.

²⁶ Ambrosiaster, *Commentari Romanos*, v.12 [Toews' translation], quoted in Toews, 70.

²⁷ Toews, 70. In footnote 36, Toews suggests several sources for further inquiry.

²⁸ The way I understand it, the ontological question would be how sin conditions being in general (i.e. fallen world) while the metaphysical question would be how sin conditions our being-in-the-world on a human level. Based on this understanding, the Latin fathers and Augustine in particular appear to be much more concerned with the metaphysical status of sin. One also can logically assume that since Augustine rejected the ontological status of evil he would also reject an ontological notion of sin.

²⁹ Toews, 72.

Augustine

The purpose of this review of Augustine is to understand the main arguments of his doctrine of original sin, to notice how these differed from the Greek fathers outlined above, and the ways in which they continue to feature in Niebuhr's theology addressed later on. It is not the burden of this chapter to provide a thorough examination and explanation of Augustine's hamartiology since the volumes of Augustine scholarship sufficiently accomplish this.

Augustine was the first to use the term *peccatum originale* in Christian history. It appeared in *Ad Simplicianum* (397 CE) in reference to Romans 7:7-25. In the same book he also uses *reatus originalis*, original guilt, building on Tertullian's *vitium originalis*.³⁰ He asserts that "all men [*sic*] are a mass of sin [*massa peccati*], since, as the Apostle says, 'in Adam all die' (1 Cor. 15:22), and to Adam the entire human race traces the origin of its sin against God."³¹ *Ad Simplicianum* defines sin as a "quality which is inherent in human nature, albeit involuntarily acquired."³² According to Toews, Augustine's *Confessions* add to this understanding:

Augustine confesses to God that he was never innocent, not even at the moment of his birth (I, viii). His infant sins were real sins with real guilt which he inherited from his parents even if he could not remember them. Not only Augustine, but all humankind were "sons of Adam" (I, ix) and "sons of Eve" (I, xvi). Sin dwells in him due to the voluntary sin of Adam "because I am a son of Adam" (VII, x). Augustine inherited this sin from his parents by means of reproductive generation (I, vii). Adam is the origin of sin, and the sins that "flowed out of his loins" are the cause of universal humanity's sins (XIII, xx).³³

Augustine's conception of original sin essentially turns upon his categorical understanding of human nature and the historical existence of Adam. Adam's sin corrupted not only his personal nature but human nature in general, because he was the first human. Consequently, all

³⁰ Ibid., 74.

³¹ Augustine, "Second Question: Romans 9:10-29, 16," *To Simplicianum—On Various Questions, Book I* quoted in Toews, 74-75.

³² Toews, 74.

³³ Ibid., 75. Toews cites *Loeb Classical Library*. Cf. Paul Rigby, *Original Sin in Augustine's Confessions* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1987), 4.

descendants of Adam, i.e. the whole human race, inherit this corrupted nature insofar as they share the same nature by virtue of being human.³⁴ In other words, “[h]is sin was ‘our’ sin and ‘we’ sinned when he sinned because in him *natura nostra peccavit*, ‘our nature sinned.’”³⁵ Thus, while Adam “fell” into a state of sin, corruption, concupiscence, and mortality, all humans after Adam are born into that state of fallenness—the state of original sin, originally sinful nature.

The etiology of the doctrinal formulation of original sin is contested by Augustine scholars. Some have argued that while it was latent in the theological anthropology of his earlier works, it was not until the Pelagian controversy that he was compelled to articulate a more systematic understanding of original sin.³⁶ Others have persuasively demonstrated a developed doctrine of original sin in his work prior to the Pelagians. Augustine’s reaction to the Pelagians certainly played a role in the sedimentation of the doctrine, but as Paul Rigby has convincingly argued, it would be difficult to read the *Confessions* and miss his mature understanding of original sin.³⁷ What must be kept in mind, however is the genre and purpose of the *Confessions*: it is thorough but not systematic, it is penitent but not argumentative. “In the *Confessions*, Augustine is not intent to prove the existence of original sin, but rather to confess it.”³⁸ And this is reflective of the deeply personal-experiential character of his theology. Julius Gross has noted that Augustine relies on five primary sources for his understanding of original sin: “scripture, church tradition, liturgy (especially baptism *in remissionem peccatorum*), the *sensus fidelium*, and finally the physical and moral suffering of children. [...A]ll except tradition play a part in the *Confessions*, and scripture is all-important for Augustine’s doctrine of grace and original sin

³⁴ Nelson, *Sin*, 43-44.

³⁵ Paula Fredriksen, *Sin: The Early History of an Idea* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 115.

³⁶ Rigby takes up the work of Athanasius of Alexandria. Paul Rigby, *Original Sin in Augustine’s Confessions* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1987), 3.

³⁷ Rigby, *Original Sin in Augustine’s Confessions*, 3-4.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

in *Ad Simplicianum*.”³⁹ These are all elements internal to Augustine’s understanding of sin (by which I mean that they remain within the orthodox approaches to theology in general and continue the trajectory of the Latin fathers in particular).

There are, however, several other elements that significantly influenced his theology of sin which merit attention. The first of these is his personal experience. Augustine’s *Confessions* are developed along a series of notable events, experiences, or actions in his personal life upon which he reflects and which he scrutinizes. His own disdain for (the sins of) his pre-Christian self becomes a wellspring for his theology of original sin. The well-known confession to stealing pears is exemplary. His analysis of this event or memory leads him to a disturbing conclusion. In an attempt to identify why he stole the pears (i.e. sinned) he realizes that it was not because he desired the pears but because he desired to steal (i.e. to sin). He writes, “I stole something which I had in plenty and of so much better quality. My desire was to enjoy not what I sought by stealing but merely the excitement of thieving and the doing of what was wrong.”⁴⁰ And further, “I had no motive for my wickedness except wickedness itself. It was foul, and I loved it. I loved the self-destruction. I loved my *fall*, not the object for which I had fallen but my fall itself. My *depraved* soul leaped down from your firmament to ruin.”⁴¹ Here his personal experience in effect becomes the evidence for his earlier exegesis in *Ad Simplicianum*. His autobiography demonstrates his theology of original sin.⁴² But this occurs at the level of retrospection, what he refers to as memory. I submit that Augustine’s term “memory” fails to capture the operation actually at work in his confessions in relation to his theology.

³⁹ Julius Gross, *Entstehungsgeschichten des Erbsündendogmas: Von der Bible bis Augustinus*, vol. 1 (München: Ernst Reinhardt, 1960), 301-18, cited in Rigby 11.

⁴⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick, Oxford World Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), II.iv or p. 29.

⁴¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, II.iv or p. 29. Emphasis is mine.

⁴² “He self-consciously presents his personal history as the model for his theology in the *Confessions*.” Paula Fredriksen, “Paul and Augustine: Conversion Narratives, Orthodox Traditions, and the Retrospective Self,” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 37.1 (1986): 24.

As Paula Fredriksen has astutely observed, Augustine's *Confessions* are not merely autobiographical, memories, and most certainly not historical accounts; rather, they are a conversion narrative produced by a retrospective self.⁴³ Augustine does not narrate his conversion event until book VIII and yet the whole of *Confessions* is written in retrospect of his conversion, and ought to be read this way. "Augustine's account of his conversion in the *Confessions*, in other words, is a theological reinterpretation of a past event, an attempt to render his past coherent to his present self. It is, in fact, a disguised description of where he stands in the present as much as an ostensible description of what occurred in the past."⁴⁴ His retrospective conversion narrative enables Augustine to associate the sins or vices of his pre-conversion with a time or state in which he was estranged, separated, deprived of God (privation being his understanding of evil). Combined with his own exegesis and that of the Latin fathers, his conversion narrative (especially his autobiographical identification with Paul) give the exegesis unyielding authoritative status, such that it had not yet had in Ambrose and Ambrosiaster.⁴⁵

Augustine's conversion also required him to rethink his understanding of good and evil in the world, especially in relation to mortality. Rejecting the Manichean ontological dualisms, yet recognizing the corruption of corporeality, Augustine found a solution to this dilemma in Platonism. "The Platonists taught Augustine to conceive of God as a spiritual being. By so doing they taught him to conceive of evil as nothing. Thus, insofar as things are, they are good.

⁴³ Fredriksen, "Paul and Augustine."

⁴⁴ Ibid., 24. He additionally "proves" the correctness of his autobiographical reading by interpreting it, in turn, autobiographically: he personally identifies with the inner struggle he sees Paul ascribing to himself in Rom. 7." Ibid., 26. See her whole article for a full account of why Augustine's self-identification with Paul is a mis-association, and how this plays an important role in his conversion narrative and thereby his theological legitimacy and authority.

⁴⁵No other early Church fathers claimed or confessed such an association. The exegesis of the Greek fathers and Pelagians could not allow it. Thus, Augustine's doctrine had already developed internal dominant theological status when the external challenge from the Pelagians increased the pressure for its sedimentation.

Evil is not; it is nothing; it is an absence.”⁴⁶ At the same time, Platonism provided Augustine with “its vision of the body as the prison of the soul, its celebration of reason, and a robust understanding of the soul.”⁴⁷ This enabled him to reject any ontological notion of evil (affirming the omnipotence of God) while articulating a theology of original sin that affected both body and soul at the most basic and primordial level—that of human nature. Thus the sin of Adam, which separated him from God (absence and evil) is inherited by all his descendants through their human nature, and as a result all humans find themselves estranged from God, their sins a result of this absence (rather than any ontological force)—in short, in a state of original sin (that frustrates their will). The reader will notice how the Platonic influences resonate with Augustine’s own experience. Again, his conversion narrative gives us a picture of an estranged, ignorant Augustine bound to his sin prior to his conversion, and an ascending, knowing Augustine liberated from his corporeal desires after his conversion. If original sin results in a descent of human nature to corruptibility and external desires, then the (Platonic) antidote is an ascent towards the eternal, incorruptible, and a turn inward. Paul Rigby’s summary captures the logic of this move:

Adam fell and was punished with a threefold punishment of ignorance, concupiscence, and mortality. This fall and threefold punishment he propagated from generation to generation [...] The mortality negates [humankind’s] existence ([its] memory); ignorance denies [humankind] knowledge of the truth; concupiscence turns [humankind’s] love into hate. [...] to be healed, fallen [humankind] must ascend in the type of trinitarian ascent Augustine undertakes in his *De Trinitatae*; all the powers of the soul must be redeemed: his existence or memory, his understanding and his will. The teaching of the *Confessions* is that trinitarian ascent [...] can be made only by entering into the humble descent of Christ’s incarnation. *Original sin makes confessio peccati et laudis the only way of ascending to God.*⁴⁸

As I argued with Fredriksen, Augustine’s confessions simultaneously articulate and legitimize his theology, a feature of his writing that I would suggest worked in his favour when the

⁴⁶ Rigby, 103.

⁴⁷ Nelson, *Sin*, 40.

⁴⁸ Rigby, 113-114. Emphasis is mine.

Pelagians challenged the exegetical basis of his doctrine, and ultimately contributed to the sedimentation of original sin in Western Christianity. Let us briefly consider the impact of the Pelagian controversy, and the roles several key confessional councils played in the “doctrinalization” of original sin.

Controversy and Council

To be sure, the Pelagian controversy of the 5th century is filled with complex arguments and nuanced debates.⁴⁹ Concerning the doctrine of original sin, the controversy turns upon the exegesis and theology of Romans 5:12. As noted above, Augustine relied on Ambrosiaster’s Latin translation and commentary which rendered *eph ho* as *in quo*, “in whom.” This translation had gone unquestioned by Augustine who was not well versed in Greek.⁵⁰ In the controversy, Pelagius (fl. ca. 390-418) was essentially concerned that original sin “provide[d] a false excuse for Christians passively to avoid making any moral effort” and effectively exempted one from “a terrifying responsibility on the shoulders of every human being to act according to the highest standards demanded by God.”⁵¹ Following the understanding of the *eph ho* as “because of,” Pelagius and his followers Celestius (late 4th -5th) and Julian of Eclanum (ca. 386-455 CE) (who knew Greek) developed arguments against original sin, affirming the originally innocent and uncorrupted nature of each human and their subsequent sin as an act of the free human will—as it was with Adam. Their arguments echo the conception of imitation found in the Greek

⁴⁹ For more information on Pelagianism see Weaver, “From Paul to Augustine,” 199-204; Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall*, 332-38; Diarmid MacCulloch, *Christianity: the First Three Thousand Years* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), 306-8; Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, Vol.I, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1971), 313-16.

⁵⁰ Weaver, “From Paul to Augustine,” 203.

⁵¹ MacCulloch, *Christianity: the First Three Thousand Years*, 306-7.

fathers.⁵² The Pelagians argued that “the Greek does not and cannot bear the interpretation which Augustine wished to place upon it.”⁵³ By this time, however, Augustine had already developed a mature doctrine of original sin (and a fairly systematic theology in general) based on exegesis, the Latin fathers, and his personal experience. As a result, he attempted to circumvent the problem presented in the Pelagian’s interpretation of *eph ho* “by referring to Romans 5:19 and to the whole thrust of the Christ-Adam typology.”⁵⁴ The effect of this is that any critique of the role of Adam in the typology becomes a threat to the singular and all-powerful salvific role of Christ. Whether or not Augustine was aware of it, it was an inconspicuous (underhanded?) rhetorical-theological move. I have pointed out several ways in which the logic of Augustine’s theology operates to reinforce itself and foreclose critique; his theology is set up in such a way that to question one element essentially forces the critic to deny another (though this may not necessarily be the case).⁵⁵ I submit that the authoritative status of Augustine’s theology as well as his position of power as a prominent bishop played a significant role in the sedimentation of original sin as orthodox doctrine.

Over the next two decades the Pelagians were ultimately condemned as heretics with the movement dying out in 431.⁵⁶ Pelagius was first condemned in Carthage in 412. In 415, he, along with Celestius, were exonerated by two councils, one in Jerusalem and the other in

⁵² “Julian of Eclanum, who knew Greek, understood the *in quo* as a particle providing a causal link—*quia*, because—but he concludes from this that there is not in this text a question of personal sins added by Adam’s children to that of their first father, sin being spread only by bad example (*imitatione*). Augustine, unreliable exegete as he was with regard to detail, had nevertheless better understood the chapter as a whole and the force of verse 19: ‘as by the disobedience of the one man many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one man many will be made righteous.’” Henri Rondet, *Original Sin: The Patristic and Theological Background*, trans. Cajetan Finegan (New York: 1972), 128-9 quoted in footnote 53 in Weaver, “From Paul to Augustine,” 203.

⁵³ Gerald Bonner, *St. Augustine of Hippo* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), 327 quoted in Toews, 85-6.

⁵⁴ Weaver, “From Paul to Augustine,” 203.

⁵⁵ The Pelagian example: Within Augustine’s theology a denial of original sin inherited from Adam equated a denial of Christ’s singular and universal salvific power. This is not, however, a necessary correlation. Indeed, the Pelagians denied the former while affirming the latter, albeit in different terms. See MacCulloch, 306-8.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 201.

Diospolis, “at two African synods, and finally by pope Innocent I himself.”⁵⁷ After Innocent’s death, his successor Zosimus initially recognized Pelagianism within orthodoxy but the Africans soon convinced Emperor Honorius to banish them from Rome. Thereafter, Zosimus changed his mind and eventually exiled Julian of Eclanum from Italy in 421. Pelagians sought refuge among the eastern churches throughout the next decade with Theodore of Mopsuestia and Nestorius of Constantinople, but when Nestorius and Celestius were condemned at the council of Ephesus in 431, Pelagianism disappeared. Nearly a century later, the doctrine of original sin was solidified in the Council of Orange II (529), convened by Caesarius of Arles and backed by pope Felix III. “The triumph of Augustine’s views on sin and grace at Orange represented the culmination of decades of effort by popes and by the Prosper of Aquitaine to remove any vestige of Pelagianism in the Gallic church. [...] Two years later, pope Felix’s successor, Boniface II, gave his approval to the decrees of Orange II.”⁵⁸

It is clear that the doctrine of original sin developed over time in the Western tradition, beginning with the Latin fathers. Tertullian’s traducianism and his introduction of original guilt, Ambrose’s notion of sin as *lapsus* and hereditary, and Ambrosiaster’s translation of *eph ho* as *in quo* along with his influential commentary on Romans, ultimately paved the way for a theological anthropology that could bear Augustine’s formulation of sin as original sin. Augustine essentially believed that all humans were born into a state of original sin, inherited from Adam by virtue of their nature as humans. He further articulated this through Platonic categories, his personal experience, and his retrospective conversion narrative. All of these elements combined gave the doctrine unprecedented legitimacy and authority; by the time the

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Harry Rosenberg, “Orange, Councils of,” *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, ed. Everett Ferguson, 2nd ed. Vol. 2 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997), 831. For a further list of creeds and confessions that carried the doctrine of original sin into modernity, see Toews, 86.

Pelagians came along, the doctrine of original sin was both theologically and politically stacked against them and prevailed as the orthodox understanding of sin in Western Christianity.

Original sin was carried over the centuries through numerous creedal and confessional documents by Catholics and Protestants alike. Although the particular articulations of the doctrine may vary between creeds, the notion of an original, depraved, human condition remains. We can observe this in the work of one of the most prominent Protestant theologians of the 20th century, Reinhold Niebuhr.

Reinhold Niebuhr

With regards to the doctrine of original sin, Reinhold Niebuhr is the theologian *par excellence* of the 20th century, demonstrating greater preoccupation with the topic in his writing than his contemporaries.⁵⁹ As with Augustine, books and articles on Niebuhr's theology are in no short supply. An introduction to his hamartiology will orient the reader to his prominent theological concepts and demonstrate the ways in which he modifies the Augustinian formulation yet remains very much within its tradition. Niebuhr's point of departure for thinking about sin is emphatically not the historical "fall" of Adam but the symbolism thereof for understanding the human condition—or rather, the condition of human nature around him. In the 1949 publication of his Gifford lectures, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, he clarifies that his "present interest is to relate the Biblical conception of sin as pride and self-love to the observable behavior of men [*sic*]."⁶⁰ This is Niebuhr's first obvious departure from Augustine. He rejects the historical reading of Genesis 3 for a symbolic one. "Adam and Eve are now for him *symbols*

⁵⁹ Derek R. Nelson has noted the contributions of influential modern theologians such as Paul Tillich, Eberhard Jüngel, Karl Barth, and Rene Girard, yet the critics of original sin seem to give disproportionate attention to Niebuhr's work. For an overview of these thinkers see Nelson, *Sin*, 53-77.

⁶⁰ Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: I. Human Nature* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), 188.

of the human condition, not any longer *causes* of the situation.”⁶¹ His criticism of the Augustinians is that they “converted the doctrine of the inevitability of sin into a dogma which asserted that sin had a natural history.”⁶² As he points out, “it is significant that Christian thought has always had some suggestions of the *representative* rather than *historical* character of Adam’s sin.”⁶³

For Niebuhr, human sin is not original because it is propagated by Adam through the nature of all humans; rather, human sin is original in the sense that it is inevitable (and universal). Niebuhr’s distinction between the Augustinian notion of inheritance and his own concept of inevitability is crucial. Augustine’s assertion of inheritance offends Niebuhr’s sense of justice and moral responsibility. “Sin is to be regarded as neither a *necessity* of man’s [*sic*] nature nor yet as pure caprice of his will. It proceeds rather from a *defect of the will*, for which reason it is not completely deliberate; but since it is the *will* in which the defect is found and the will presupposes *freedom* the defect cannot be attributed to a taint in man’s [*sic*] nature.”⁶⁴ Since Niebuhr refuses to attribute the cause of universal human sin to the person of Adam (because to do so would be to deny human freedom), he develops a paradoxical relation between the concepts of inevitability and responsibility.⁶⁵ This allows him to recognize the universality of

⁶¹ Langdon Gilkey, *On Niebuhr: A Theological Study* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 134. Emphasis is the author’s own unless stated otherwise.

⁶² Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 260.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 261. Emphasis mine.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 242. Emphasis mine.

⁶⁵ Niebuhr attributes the entrance of evil into the world to the devil, a move more characteristic of the Greek fathers. “Man’s situation tempts to evil, provided man is unwilling to accept the peculiar weakness of his creaturely life, and is unable to find the ultimate source and end of his existence beyond himself. It is man’s unbelief and pride which tempt to sin. And every such temptation presupposes a previous “tempter” (of which the serpent is the symbol). Thus before man fell into sin there was, according to Biblical myth, a fall of the devil in heaven. The devil was a fallen angel who refused to accept his rightful place in the scheme of things and sought a position equal to God. This then is the real mystery of evil; that it presupposes itself. No matter how far back it is traced in the individual or the race, or even preceding the history of the race, a profound scrutiny of the nature of evil reveals that there is an element of sin in the temptation which leads to sin; and that, without this presupposed evil, the consequent sin would not necessarily arise from the situation in which man finds himself.” Reinhold Niebuhr, “Mystery and Meaning,”

sin and corruption while also calling humans to moral responsibility (through their inherent freedom). Niebuhr's understanding of the corrupt human condition (and his theological anthropology in general) is also informed by a representative reading of Genesis 3. The human consists of nature and spirit, and with regards to both of these aspects the human is also free. Human freedom itself is morally neutral, providing the capacity or potential for both creativity and destruction. Here is the decisive point: "Since he [man (*sic*)] is involved in the contingencies and necessities of the natural processes on the one hand [as nature] and since, on the other, he stands outside of them and foresees their caprices and perils [as spirit], he is anxious. In his anxiety he seeks to transmute his finiteness into infinity, his weakness into strength, his dependence into independence."⁶⁶ This compulsion to become more than one is, as represented in Adam, is for Niebuhr the quintessential sin—the sin of pride. Again,

man [*sic*], being both free [in spirit] and bound [in nature], both limited and limitless is anxious. Anxiety is the inevitable concomitant of the paradox of freedom and finiteness in which man [*sic*] is involved. *Anxiety is the internal precondition of sin.* It is the inevitable spiritual state of man[*sic*], standing in the paradoxical situation of freedom and finiteness. *Anxiety is the internal description of the state of temptation.*⁶⁷

Consequently, when in a state of anxiety one pursues temptation (rather than creativity) this constitutes the sin of pride (of which all other sins are derivative).⁶⁸

Niebuhr describes four forms the sin of pride takes: the pride of power, intellectual pride, moral pride, and spiritual pride. The pride of power manifests itself in its attempt at self-sufficiency and mastery to overcome its insecurity and dependence. Intellectual pride is a denial of one's ignorance by claiming ultimate truth. Growing out of this is moral pride, which claims absolute morality. Finally, spiritual pride, or the sin of self-righteousness, attributes God-like

The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr: Selected Essays and Addresses, ed. Robert McAfee Brown (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 245-46.

⁶⁶ Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 251.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 182. Emphasis mine. It should be noted that Niebuhr also emphasizes that anxiety itself is not sin, referring to the double connotation of the term *Sorge* in Heidegger as both *care* and *anxiety*. *Ibid.*, 183.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 186.

status to oneself.⁶⁹ If the attempt of humans to be greater than they are to be constitutes the sin of pride then the attempt to shirk away from this and be lesser than human constitutes what Niebuhr calls the sin of sensuality. “While pride attempts to identify the self with spirit, sensuality attempts to identify the self with nature.”⁷⁰ Sensuality is associated with selfishness, self-love, and base desires. As mentioned above, sensuality too is derived from pride. Niebuhr’s excurses on sensuality is all too brief (a complaint of many of his readers) but we get a sense of it in the following summary:

Whether in drunkenness, gluttony, sexual license, love of luxury, or *any inordinate devotion to a mutable good*, sensuality is always: (1) an extension of self-love to the point where it defeats its own ends; (2) an effort to escape the prison house of the self by finding a god in a process or person outside the self; and (3) finally an effort to escape from the confusion which sin has created into some form of subconscious existence.⁷¹

Niebuhr significantly modifies the Augustinian understanding of original sin by dislocating it from its interpretation as a historical event. Furthermore, instead of identifying sin in the inherited nature of every human, Niebuhr locates original sin in the universal state of anxiety that exists as a result of freedom, present in the spiritual and natural aspects of the human alike. However, Niebuhr still remains within the Augustinian tradition insofar as he maintains a notion of original sin—the inevitable condition of corruption that characterizes the human situation. For him original sin is a defect of the will, which he attributes to the universal and inevitable state of anxiety characteristic of the human situation. One could say then that the state of anxiety is reflective of original sin in Niebuhr’s thought in the way that the state of depravity is reflective of original sin in Augustine’s formulation.

As exemplified by Niebuhr, the Augustinian formulation of original sin has undergone many modifications since the 5th century. However, any notion of sin that maintains originality

⁶⁹ Ibid., 188-203 for a more detailed account of each of these.

⁷⁰ Bob E. Patterson, “‘Original Sin’ Revisited: McClendon, Niebuhr, and Feminist Theology,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 21.7 (2002): 77.

⁷¹ Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 240. Emphasis mine.

can be traced to its roots in Augustinianism. As aforementioned, modern formulations of original sin have received substantial critique from a wide variety of voices. The primary critiques come from feminist theology, black womanist theology, and latin american liberation theology. Reviewing these will give us a better sense of the contemporary state of the debates in hamartiology (and to an extent, theological anthropology).

Critical Voices:

“There is clarity of profound suffering, especially the kind of suffering that results from human brutality and callousness. On the threshold of this awful sanctuary, as Gustavo Gutiérrez observed, the hand should cover the mouth. Here one cannot speculate about whether God is just, as if “no” could be afforded, or as if “yes” would give relief. At this extremity, we can only choose to help or not to help. Familiar theological questions may begin to seem useless or even cruel. For the questions that remain, only change counts as an answer.”

- Kathleen Sands⁷²

Feminist Theology

Some of the most prominent critiques of Niebuhr have come from feminist theologians.⁷³ Valerie Saiving’s 1960 article has become somewhat of a landmark piece for rethinking modern hamartiology and theological anthropology. Her article is premised on the anthropological claim that women’s experience in society is different from men’s. She does not deny that there are common human experiences, but that a gendered account can attend to differences that a “human” one fails to.⁷⁴ Saiving bases her theological reflections on the anthropology of Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead, arguing that boys and girls both differentiate themselves from their mother (their first identity) but do so in varying ways and to varying degrees. A girl *can* take an

⁷² Kathleen M. Sands, *Escape from Paradise: Evil and Tragedy in Feminist Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 87-88.

⁷³ The feminists I have chosen to focus on here are some of the main critics of Niebuhr’s hamartiology and thus provide a good introduction to alternative understandings of hamartiology. Beyond the scope of this thesis, but as a point of further work, one could engage other feminist theologies and consider how they might challenge the arguments I have outlined here.

⁷⁴ The descriptions of the “human situation” also tend to be based on (White) male experience which simply claims universal human status.

active role in her differentiation from her mother, but physiologically does not need to, because her identity as a female remains closer to her mother's. A boy, on the other hand, must realize his differentiation both physiologically and socially.⁷⁵ Saiving suggests that this causes the boy greater anxiety than it does for the girl. "Instead of imitating [his mother], he must relinquish completely his original identification with her. He also finds that, while he is not and never will be a woman, neither is he yet a man."⁷⁶ This creates a greater condition of anxiety in him than in the girl, whose maturation involves physiological events which "have a reassuring aspect [...] for each of them is concrete, unmistakable proof of her femaleness."⁷⁷ As a result, the male's self-differentiation takes him further from nature, the temptation to denounce it altogether is constant—this is exemplary of Niebuhr's sin of pride, the desire to become pure spirit. The antidote for this is self-sacrificial love, as in Christ. The female, however, remains closer to nature, and so her temptation, her sin, is different. In her maternal role, the woman "knows the profound experience of self-transcending love. But she knows, too, that it is not the whole meaning of life. For she learns not only that it is impossible to sustain a perpetual I-Thou relationship but that the attempt to do so can be deadly."⁷⁸ Consequently, her temptation will not be to absolutize spirit but nature. Saiving writes,

For the temptations of woman *as woman* are not the same as the temptations of man *as man*, and the specifically feminine forms of sin—"feminine" not because they are confined to women or because women are incapable of sinning in other ways but because they are outgrowths of the basic feminine character structure—have a quality which can never be encompassed by such terms as "pride" and "will-to-power." They are better suggested by such items as triviality, distractibility, and diffuseness; [...]—in short, underdevelopment or negation of the self.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Valerie Saiving Goldstein, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," *The Journal of Religion* 40.2 (1960): 103-104.

⁷⁶ Saiving, "The Human Situation," 104.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 109.

Susan Nelson Dunfee later referred to his as “the sin of hiding.”⁸⁰

Judith Plaskow, writing twenty years later, takes a similar position, arguing that Niebuhr’s error was not his articulation of the sin of pride, but the universalization of this particularly male experience to a general human condition. According to Plaskow, the corrective is contained within his own theology: Niebuhr identified both pride and sensuality as the sins of the human; he only failed to articulate the latter, instead subordinating it to the primary sin of pride. But as Plaskow points out, Niebuhr’s understanding of freedom and its potential for creativity or destruction in both nature and spirit “clearly allows for two possible misuses of freedom: exaltation or abdication of it.”⁸¹ Put differently, “[t]he refusal of self-transcendence ought to be, if one uses Niebuhr’s categories, no less a sin than pride—a sin against oneself, against other persons, and against God. If pride is the attempt to usurp the place of God, sensuality is the denial of creation in his image.”⁸² In Niebuhr’s anthropology, both spirit and nature have the capacity for creativity or destruction, but spirit is a positive force while nature is a negative force.⁸³ Plaskow sees this association as problematic because it causes him to interpret the temptations of sensuality in terms of pride (merely the negative force, lack, of pride) and this in turn prevents “him from seeing the ways in which creatureliness, differently understood, can curb and discourage human destructiveness.”⁸⁴ She suggests that a much more robust understanding of nature is needed (and its relation to spirit). Women’s experience can ameliorate this deficit in Niebuhr’s theology because it, “in illustrating the link between nature

⁸⁰ Susan Nelson Dunfee, “The Sin of Hiding: A Feminist Critique of Reinhold Niebuhr’s Account of the Sin of Pride,” *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 65.3 (1982): 316-27.

⁸¹ Judith Plaskow, *Sex, Sin and Grace: Women’s Experience and the Theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1980), 63.

⁸² Plaskow, *Sex, Sin and Grace*, 68.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 70.

and spirit in a particularly dramatic way, once again points us to aspects of the *human* situation which need to be an integral part of a whole theology.”⁸⁵

Feminist theology has demonstrated that the state of anxiety fundamental to Niebuhr’s concept of original sin is a particularly male experience. Likewise, the primary sin of pride, which arises out of this state, is a particularly male sin.⁸⁶ Because woman relates differently to nature than man does, her experience is imperative in providing a corrective to Niebuhr’s hamartiology. Her closeness with nature sheds light on dimensions of the sin of sensuality that Niebuhr failed to see and also affirms the creative capacity of creatureliness, of nature.

Black Womanist Theology

In a sense then, we can say that the difference feminist thought makes for theology grows out of women’s experience in their affinity with nature. In its efforts to level the patriarchal theological tradition, however, feminist theology is in danger of universalizing its own claims, not for the “human situation” but for the woman. Here black theology, and especially black womanist theology, produces an intervention in White feminist theology, adding the dimensions of race and class. The difference of gender, and the further difference of race on hamartiology and theological anthropology consistently confuse it, interfering with any temptations towards universalization, absolutization, and uniformity.

Susan Thistlethwaite suggests that “[r]ace and class make a difference in the way we interpret creation. White feminists [...] have assumed that they can know what is ‘natural’ without recourse to social and economic analysis. But different social locations (as well as class

⁸⁵ Ibid., 73.

⁸⁶ Feminist theology has not been the only voice to criticize modern hamartiology’s emphasis on the sin of pride. For an exceptional study of sin at the intersection of theology and psychology see Terry D. Cooper, *Sin, Pride & Self-Acceptance: The Problem of Identity in Theology & Psychology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

and gender locations) carry with them interpretive preunderstandings of what constitutes the natural.”⁸⁷ For black womanist writer Barbara Christian, “the natural” is inextricably bound up with the social and economic experiences of racism. “‘Nature is a disorderly process’ on which housing is imposed. The housing reflects the inhabitant’s ease or dis-ease with disorder.”⁸⁸ The black woman meets the disorder of nature in her socio-economic experiences of racism. In other words, “nature as she finds it has not escaped the deformations of racism. Therefore no assumptions of human capacity, of woman’s capacity, to relate to their ‘sister,’ the earth, can be made without considering the factor of race in a racist culture.”⁸⁹ In black womanist thought and experience, nature and culture are not in dichotomous relation. Inherent to a black womanist understanding of nature is disorder, chaos, change, the simultaneous existence of creative and destructive forces (the disorder of nature is culture and disorder of culture is nature). From Maya Angelou, Thistlethwaite has learned “that good and evil, creation and destruction, evil and good, destruction and creation, are more intertwined than I, as a white Christian feminist theologian, have so far allowed.”⁹⁰

If feminist theology asks what difference gender makes, black womanist theology additionally asks what difference race makes. This question further problematizes the understanding of nature in modern theological anthropology (and hamartiology). White feminist theology is prone to idealize nature and creatureliness in a kind of romantic holism. Black womanist theology forecloses this possibility in its recognition of nature as both creation and

⁸⁷ Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, *Sex, Race, and God: Christian Feminist in Black and White* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1989), 59.

⁸⁸ Barbara Christian, *Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black Woman Writers* (New York: Random House, 1981), 152 quoted in Thistlethwaite, *Sex, Race, and God*, 70.

⁸⁹ Thistlethwaite, 70.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 74.

destruction, order and disorder. This further complicates the impulse of original sin to identify one of these as sin and the other as antidote.

Latin American Liberation Theology

Latin american liberation theologians have taken issue with the consistently individualistic characterization of sin by Western theologians since Augustine. Matt Jenson has termed this tendency “incurvature” from the ancient Latin *homo incurvatus in se*. His detailed study of sin in the works of Augustine and Luther reveals that despite a relational turn in the twentieth century, theological anthropology and hamartiology remain deficient of this relational grammar.⁹¹ Additionally, Derek Nelson has shown that despite the efforts of modern theologians in the West to think sin in its social-relational dimensions, their hamartiology remains individualistic.⁹² The most persuasive and thorough theological work on social sin has come from latin american theologians such as Gustavo Gutiérrez and Justo González.⁹³ Gutiérrez, in many ways representative of the first wave of latin american liberation theology, took issue with the fact that Western theology could write volumes about personal sin without addressing the suffering that sin caused for others. He argued that this suffering—widespread oppression and injustice—could not be reduced to the interior anxiety of individuals but was the result of social sin, of sinful institutions and systems. It is important to remember, as Nelson has noted, that “[t]his shift is not an arbitrary decision rooted in the decision to criticize dominant theology” but

⁹¹ Matt Jenson, *The Gravity of Sin: Augustine, Luther and Barth on homo incurvatus in se* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006).

⁹² Derek R. Nelson, *What's Wrong with Sin? Sin in Individual and Social Perspective from Schleiermacher to Theologies of Liberation* (New York: T&T Clark, 2009). See especially chapters 2 and 3 on Schleiermacher and Ritschl, and Finney and Nevin.

⁹³ The work of countless other latin american liberation theologians could be engaged here to nuance the critique. I have simply chosen to limit myself to Gutiérrez and González here in order to provide a brief overview of some of the earliest and fundamental critiques from latin american liberation theologians.

out of the experience of oppression by latin americans and the theological association of their own suffering with the oppressed in the Christian scriptures.⁹⁴ Indeed,

[t]he poor of Gutiérrez' congregation in Lima were little served by the notions of sin Gutiérrez had studied in Europe. The anxiety of the individual over the myriad choices available to him or her, sexual indiscretion, a [*sic*] temptations toward the absolutizing self—these conceptions of sin could make no sense of the dominant factor in Gutiérrez' ministry: institutionalized poverty. Something deeper was needed.⁹⁵

One can see the deficiency of Niebuhr's theology. For Gutiérrez, sin begins with a transgression against God which always manifests itself as a transgression against the neighbour.⁹⁶ He uses the image of a mirror: "Sinfulness on the personal level, the break with God that debases the human being, is always *mirrored* on the level of interpersonal relations in a corresponding egotism, haughtiness, ambition, and envy."⁹⁷ In turn then, the collectivity of these traits produces injustice at the institutional level, and every level of society.⁹⁸ This is how sinful (i.e. unjust, violent, oppressive) social structures are produced. Gutiérrez clarifies, however, that the relation between the individual sinner and the sinful system is not dialectical. For Gutiérrez, structures do not act back on individuals thereby perpetuating their sin. Because structures do not have agency (as he claims), they are sinful but do not sin; they are derivative of personal and collective sin.⁹⁹ This is a point at which various liberation theologians differ.

Justo González, in contrast, argues that "it is social sin which is primary, and the individual sin which is to be seen as derivative of its social location."¹⁰⁰ González' approach comes from a slightly different angle. He also traces the individualized sin from Augustine

⁹⁴ Nelson, *What's Wrong with Sin?*, 87.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, trans. Robert B. Barr (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1983), 147, quoted in Nelson, *What's Wrong with Sin?*, 86.

⁹⁷ Gustavo Gutiérrez, CELAM Conference, Puebla conference of Latin American Bishops, 1979, para. 328, quoted in Nelson, *What's Wrong with Sin?*, 88. Nelson's emphasis.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Nelson, *What's Wrong with Sin?*, 89.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 97.

through Luther, and the contemporary “atomization of reality into a series of individuals, and the further atomization of the individual into a series of acts.”¹⁰¹ He then articulates the inherent failure of such a framework of sin to address exploitative power, which concerns not the discrete decisions of individuals but the relations between them. He writes, “If sin is an individual matter, and the best way to analyze reality is as a series of disconnected decisions, the sin of the powerful is no different than the sin of the powerless. In each case, sin consists in making the wrong choice, and has little to do with the complex web of human relations in which the powerful exploit the powerless.”¹⁰² Such a framework also lacks the capacity to attend to the suffering caused by such power relations and can too easily conflate the suffering of the oppressed with their own sin. Rebecca Chopp’s work on sin and suffering is especially poignant:

Sin results in suffering, the suffering of creation groaning in travail, the suffering of children without any hope. Sin manifests and embraces suffering, the suffering of lost identity, the suffering of freedom without a future, and the suffering of a future without freedom. Sin extracts its price as the victimization of the poor, the suffering of the tortured, the dispossession of the homeless. These are the victims of sin *not because of moral inferiority or human depravity*, but because they bear the brunt and carry the special burden of the *world’s sin*. In the retrieval of this symbol, sin’s arena is human praxis and its primary realization is massive global injustice.¹⁰³

Theologies of original sin, like Augustine’s and Niebuhr’s, tend to emphasize the suffering of the individual in their state of anxiety and in their sin but have failed to account for the suffering people experience as a result of the individual sin, and more importantly, collective, systemic, and structural sin.

¹⁰¹ Justo L. González, ‘The Alienation of Alienation’, in Andrew Sung Park and Susan L. Nelson, eds, *The Other Side of Sin: Woundedness from the Perspective of the Sinned-Against* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001), 62 quoted in Nelson, *What’s Wrong with Sin?*, 109. Certainly much of contemporary ethical debate is concerned with discrete acts of the individual.

¹⁰² Justo L. González, *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 135-6 quoted in Nelson, *What’s Wrong with Sin?*, 109-10. For a more developed theology of the “sinned against” see also Andrew Sung Park, *The Wounded Heart of God: The Asian Concept of Han and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993).

¹⁰³ Rebecca Chopp, *The Praxis of Suffering: An Interpretation of Liberation and Political Theologies* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1986), 128, quoted in Nelson, 113. First emphasis is mine. Second emphasis is Nelson’s.

Conclusion

The current state of hamartiology and theological anthropology is characterized on the one hand by the modern inheritors of the Augustinian tradition who affirm a concept of original sin in one way or another. The doctrine of original sin, though somewhat varied in its articulations, remains a prominent theological concept in mainstream Christianity in the West—a dominant theology. On the other hand, many critical voices have emerged from the margins of theology, calling these dominant formulations to account. In this chapter, feminist theology, black womanist theology, and latin american liberation theology have effectively disassembled the doctrine's claim to universality by demonstrating the ways in which it is particular. The gendered account of feminist theology teaches us that the doctrine of original sin and original anxiety are not universal but particular to gender (male). Similarly, black womanist theology teaches us that the doctrine of original sin is not universal but particular to race (White). Furthermore, liberation theology teaches us that the doctrine of original sin is not individualistic but particular to social and economic systems. In the next chapter I will argue that Native theology adds a further dimension, teaching us that the doctrine of original sin is not universal but particular to imperialism or dominance (settlers). The difference that indigeneity makes is something that is still largely unrecognized across disciplines, but it is an imperative question for theology because the colonization, the deindigenization of the Americas, was irrefutably Christian. Before I proceed, I want to emphasize that contributions to deconstruction from feminist, black womanist, and liberation theologies thus far is invaluable. However, if Western theology takes the call of its Indigenous neighbours seriously, to unsettle itself, to decolonize its dominant theologies, then contemporary hamartiology and theological anthropology must listen

deeply to the experiences of the Native peoples of Turtle Island (north America) and their traditional understanding of humans and their relationship with nature.

Chapter 3

Cosmology, Spatiality, Relationality: Ojibwa and Lakota Traditions

“A people had [sic] to be born, reborn, and reborn again on a piece of land before beginning to come to grips with its rhythms.”

-Luther Standing Bear¹

“Long before I ever heard of Christ, or saw a White man, I had learned from an untutored woman the essence of morality. With the help of dear Nature herself, she taught me things simple but of mighty import. I knew God. I perceived what goodness is. I saw and I loved what is really beautiful. Civilization has not taught me anything better!”

-Charles Eastman²

Introduction

Throughout the first two chapters I have argued that the doctrine of original sin is culturally particular and arises from a specific anthropology. It follows then that another culture could function on a different anthropology and in turn differ in its understanding of sin. That is the subject of this chapter. Recognizing that there are similarities across Native nations, but also important differences, I have chosen to focus on the Ojibwa and Lakota nations of north

¹ Deloria, *For This Land*, 253.

² From the epigraph in Randy S. Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012).

america.³ I have chosen these two nations because they are prominent in the lands where I reside. The Ojibwa and Lakota peoples both inhabit a large territory unyielding to amer-european maps, identified as the plains (among other land). In this chapter I consider aspects of Ojibwa and Lakota cosmology (which includes anthropology) and suggest an alternative understanding of the Western concept of original sin based on this—one that considers the difference indigeneity makes for hamartiology.⁴ I use the terms anthropology and cosmology in the broadest sense, referring to the social, economic, political, religious/spiritual aspects of human cultures, but also to the relationships between humans and non-human life forms in the shaping of these categories. Thus my consideration of anthropology of Western (Latin) and amer-european culture in comparison with that of the Ojibwa and Lakota includes questions of philosophy, metaphysics, ontology, phenomenology, epistemology, etc. Given that these are Western categories, it should not come as surprise that I use these loosely and not definitely; that is, I do not sort aspects of Native thought accordingly. More often than not, these categories are intertwined. The categories that I do employ follow the lead of Native authors themselves and include spatiality, cosmology, and relationality. I will leave the definition of these terms up to the reader to understand based on their descriptions in the chapter.

³ I usually use the term Lakota because the particular sources of information I am relying on are identified as Lakota, but it important to remember that the Lakota belonged to a larger group called the Sioux. Among these were also the Dakota and Nakoda. Each of these has further sub-tribes. These sub-divisions were primarily based on the territory the particular groups inhabited. Similarly, the Ojibwa also belong to a larger identification with Anishnaabeg speaking Algonquian peoples including the Cree, Oji-Cree, Nipissing, Odawa, and Potawatomi. The primary sub-divisions of the Ojibwa are the Saulteaux and the Mississauga. The Manitoba Saulteaux reside in Winnipeg and area, the land where I was born and raised.

⁴ There are many other Indigenous groups within north america, and across the globe, whose cosmologies might problematize hamartiology, soteriology, and conversion in different ways than I have here. This would be an area of further study that is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Thinking Spatiality

Vine Deloria Jr. has argued that the fundamental difference between Native tribal religions and amer-european Christianity turns upon an essential distinction between spatial and temporal ways of thinking. He contends that Native American cultures think primarily in terms of *space* while *time* is the primary category for amer-europeans. Additionally, Native peoples understand the world and the meaning of life in terms of *nature* in contrast to *history*, which tends to dominate Western thought. Space and nature are indissociably linked in Native thought and experience. Communities are arranged in a circle and according to the four directions (tribal camps opened to different directions, North, South, West, East).

Their sense of time is also determined by spatiality. Time is conceived in the world's *natural* cycles, summer, fall, winter, spring, hunting seasons, planting and harvesting cycles, phases of the moon, etc. Time is the repetition of events that occur in nature, and Native communities orient their life around these spatial repetitions.⁵ By contrast, amer-europeans orient their life towards the future, towards goals, destiny, and final purpose. The cultivation of land and the development of cities were events in space/nature conceived of in terms of time. Progress, development, civilization, colonization, even evangelism and conversion are temporal concepts that reflect a linear view of the world, of life. And *history*, the writing, preserving, and making of history—a chronological account of the world (rather than a cyclical one)—preoccupies and determines amer-european life. History conceives of space/nature in terms of time, while in spatial thinking time/history are oriented by nature.⁶

Deloria argues that Native spatial conceptions and natural orientation are ways of thinking that Western Christianity would do well to take into serious consideration. American

⁵ Vine Deloria, Jr., *God is Red: A Native View of Religion*, 30th anniversary ed. (Golden: Fulcrum Publishing, 2003), 61.

⁶ Deloria, *God is Red*, 62-64.

government is dominated by partisan politics, but, as Deloria contends, where Native-Settler debates are concerned, neither conservative nor liberal Americans can consider themselves in a favourable position. “The basic philosophical differences between liberals and conservatives are not fundamental [...] because both find in the idea of history a thesis by which they can validate their ideas.”⁷ Western Christianity, whether conservative or liberal, is characterized by Enlightenment rationalism, the myth of modern superiority, and a Darwinian social and economic theory. And history names the epistemological mode in which life is understood and value judgments are made. Because of this, temporal and historical ways of thinking are directly related to colonization and the harrowing events that occurred and continue to occur as a result.

Moreover, because Western Christianity is preoccupied with the future, the eschaton, it conceives of the present as a constant progression towards or fulfillment of the final purpose and destiny of humanity, which is not at all related to this world (nature, creation) but looks unrelentingly beyond it to heaven. Deloria’s critique is that “[w]hile Christianity can project the reality of the after-life—time and eternity—it appears to be incapable of providing any reality to the life in which we are here and now presently engaged—space and the planet Earth.”⁸ Because Western Christianity claims that the White human race is the most civilized and superior to the rest of creation, it also endows itself with the religious responsibility of bringing those it colonizes up to par with the cultural particularities presumably inherent to its salvific status. Deloria’s Native theology, in contrast, is non-colonial *by nature* (double meaning intended). Because identity, the communal life, and meaning, are constituted by the repetition of natural events, there is no conception of superiority or hierarchy in creation. Native peoples therefore did not see their responsibility (read ethics) as moving history forward or making it come out

⁷ Ibid., 61.

⁸ Ibid., 74.

right but as living in harmonious and balanced relation with all creation, including other tribes and nations.

This harmony should not, however, be confused with a liberal tolerance that seeks to dilute differences and dissolve identitarian boundaries. The exclusivity of the tribe was important and was determined by a self-referential function vis-à-vis the immediate natural world, and especially the land to which the tribe belonged and was responsible. Native tribal communities are exclusive in their identity. But because this negotiation of identity turns upon their particular relations to the land and nature more generally, in harmonious interplay, it cannot result in dominance or colonization.⁹

Cosmology

Both Christian and Ojibwa creation stories describe the creation of the earth, plants, animals, and finally humans. In both stories humans are created last but the position of the humans vis-à-vis the rest of creation is interpreted very differently. In Christian theology the order of creation is understood hierarchically with humans at the apex of creation, charged with the tasks of naming, subduing, and having dominion over non-human life forms. In Ojibwa thought this hierarchy is unintelligible. “All four parts [of creation] are so intertwined that they make up life and one whole existence. [...] No one portion is self-sufficient or complete, rather each derives its meaning from and fulfills its function and purpose within the context of the whole creation.”¹⁰ Indeed, because humans are understood to be “spontaneous beings,” “beings made out of nothing, because their substances were not rock, or fire, or water, or wind,”¹¹ they were considered less intuitively or instinctively inclined towards living harmoniously with

⁹ Ibid., 210-11.

¹⁰ Basil Johnston, *Ojibway Heritage* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 21.

¹¹ Ibid, 15.

creation and had to learn this knowledge from the plants and animals. Similarly in Lakota tradition, as last in the order of creation, humans were considered the least mature, like infants in the order of creation. As Vine Deloria puts it, “human beings were the “younger brothers” of other life-forms and therefore had to learn everything from these creatures.”¹² Hence the references to grandfather thunder, grandmother moon, mother earth and father sun, and plants and animals as sisters and brothers.¹³

In both the Ojibwa and Lakota traditions all aspects of human life are centered around relationships with the land, geographically/topographically but also to the specific plants and animals inhabiting that same place. Land is always particular and the modes of existence in a nation are in turn particular to the land. Thus each nation has different knowledge of foods, medicines, and sacred places. Knowledge about plants and animals as food and medicine was learned through close observation of the natural world as well as through visions. In both cases, the plants and animals were considered the teachers of this knowledge. Plants were especially respected because all other life forms depended on them. “Without plants, or when their balance is disturbed, the quality of life and existence declines.”¹⁴ Similarly, animals were held in high regard because when humans were helpless at birth, when they were first created, “it was the animals who assisted the spirit woman in nourishing the newborn infants by bringing fruits, vegetables, berries, and drink, while the birds and butterflies brought joy.”¹⁵ Animals also represented ideal characteristics or virtues that humans sought to replicate.¹⁶ For Ojibwa and Lakota peoples this knowledge of the land was indissociable from their spiritual life; it was

¹² Vine Deloria, Jr., *Spirit & Reason: The Vine Deloria, Jr. Reader*, ed. Barbara Deloria, Kristen Foehner, and Sam Scinta (Golden: Fulcrum Publishing, 1999), 50.

¹³ Johnston, 21-58.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 53.

impossible to conceive of them separately. Visions and ceremonies, what anthropologists would call the religious aspects of Native peoples, were imperative for forming and informing daily life, and vice versa.

Land is considered sacred among the Lakota. The sacredness of the land can be experienced in two primary ways: as reflection and revelation. Reflective encounters occur when we experience the grandeur of creation. “There we begin to meditate on who we are, what our society is, where we came from, quite possibly where we are going, and what it all means. Lands somehow call forth from us these questions and give us a feeling of being within something larger and more powerful than ourselves.”¹⁷ One might say that observing lands is akin to seeing the forest among the trees. “We are able to reflect upon what we know, and in reflection we see a different arrangement, perhaps a different interpretation, of what life can mean.”¹⁸ Revelatory encounters, on the other hand, “tell us things we cannot possibly know in any other way.”¹⁹ These are often places where people receive visions and perform ceremonies, which are essential to the life of individuals and the tribe’s camp. “Encountering a holy place always involves the manifestation of a personal spirit of immense and unmeasured power, a real spirit of place with which our species must have communion thereafter.”²⁰ The story of Black Elk, an Oglala Sioux medicine man, illustrates this.

Black Elk was nine years old (1872) when he received a great vision that was to help his people survive the trouble the *Wasichus* (reference to the settlers) would bring upon them. He did not, however, understand the vision, how to use it, until he was 18 years old when he shared his vision with a medicine man named Black Road. Black Road in turn advised him: “You must

¹⁷ Deloria, *For This Land*, 251.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 251-52.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 252.

do your duty and perform this vision for your people on earth.”²¹ Black Elk then performed different parts of his vision for his people over the course of his lifetime. As Black Elk explained the function and significance of a vision to John Neihardt,

a man who has a vision is not able to use the power of it until after he has performed the vision on earth for the people to see. You remember that my great vision came to me when I was only nine years old, and you have seen that I was not much good for anything until after I had performed the horse dance near the mouth of the Tongue River during my eighteenth summer. And if the great fear had not come upon me, as it did, and forced me to do my duty, I might have been less good to the people than some man who had never dreamed at all, even with the memory of so great a vision in me. But the fear came, and if I had not obeyed it, I am sure it would have killed me in a little while. It was even then only after the heyoka ceremony, in which I performed my dog vision, that I had the power to practice as a medicine man, curing sick people; and many I cured with the power that came through me. Of course it was not I who cured. It was the power from the outer world, and the visions and ceremonies had only made me like a hole through which the power could come to the two-leggeds. If I thought that I was doing it myself, the hole would close up and no power could come through. Then everything I could do would be foolish. There were other parts of my great vision that I still had to perform before I could use the power that was in those parts. If you think about my great vision again, you will remember how the red man turned into a bison and rolled, and that the people found the good red road after that. If you will read again what is written, you will see how it was.²²

The performance of the vision in a ceremony conveyed meaning and understanding of it to the people. “It is from understanding that power comes; and the power in the ceremony was in understanding what it meant; for nothing can live well except in a matter that is suited to the way the sacred Power of the World lives and moves.”²³ For a time, Black Elk worked as an entertainer in Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show (1886-89) away from his people.²⁴ He describes this time as follows: “Afterwhile I got used to being there but I was like a man who had never seen a vision. I felt dead and my people seemed lost and I thought I might never find them

²¹ John G. Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), 165. Originally published by William Morrow & Company, 1932.

²² Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks*, 208-9.

²³ *Ibid.*, 212.

²⁴ *The Sixth Grandfather: Black Elk’s Teachings Given to John G. Neihardt*, ed. Raymond J. DeMallie (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 245.

again.”²⁵ Black Elk’s capacity to help his people, to see, to realize the vision for his people was stunted in this place. And with that, he describes himself as dead; the vision is a life-force for the Sioux people.

Basil Johnston (Ojibwa) captures the significance of visions in a similar way in the phrase “No man begins to be until he has received his vision.”²⁶ This phrase “perhaps best expresses the Anishnaabeg’s fundamental understanding of man’s purpose in life and by distinguishing between living and being posits the existence of a moral order. In turn, this basic understanding is predicated upon the concept of the essence and nature of human being.”²⁷ As mentioned earlier, the Ojibwa tradition holds that humans are created from both corporeal and incorporeal substance; they are composite creatures, both physical and spiritual. Moreover, they were created in fulfillment of *Kitche Manitou’s* vision. Because of their composite nature, humans were “endowed with a capacity for vision much like [their] creator.”²⁸ Therefore “[m]an was bound to seek and fulfill vision and as such was a moral being. [...] Men were required to seek vision; moreover, they had to live out and give expression to their visions—it was through vision that a man found purpose and meaning to life and to his being.”²⁹ One can see this in Black Elk’s story. His vision empowered him to work as a medicine man among his people, healing many.³⁰ Some of the greatest, that is, most powerful, visions for Native peoples occurred in specific places. For Black Elk this was Harney Peak in the Black Hills, which are still regarded as sacred and powerful lands by the Sioux. Black Elk’s story and vision express the

²⁵ Neihardt, 221.

²⁶ Johnston, 119.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid. It should be noted that in the Ojibwa tradition it was not necessary for a woman to seek vision in order to live out her purpose as this was already achieved in her natural ability to produce life. Men did not have this capacity and therefore were required to seek vision in order to contribute, sustain, and perpetuate life. Women were, however, allowed to seek vision and sometime did. See for example Johnston, 127-28.

³⁰ Though Black Elk did not fulfill the vision given to him by the Grandfathers.

difference between reflective and revelatory encounters with lands. This is not to minimize the importance of reflection; rather, as Deloria clarifies, “[i]t is the ability to reflect that creates the awareness and sensitivity of peoples to the qualitative intensity of revelatory places. But the distinction is necessary because revelatory places are known only through the experience of prolonged occupation of land, and they cannot be set aside because of the aesthetic or emotional appeal of particular places.”³¹

Notions of space and time are flexible in Sioux and Ojibwa cosmology and this is perhaps best understood in reference to visions. In one Ojibwa story, a man named Eshkebug falls in love with a young maiden of the sky-people. Several young sky-women had travelled to the earth to play and dance in a field where Eshkebug had seen them while he was hunting. He eventually captures the sky-woman and marries her. But she is homesick so he builds her a sky-craft out of birch bark and she returns to the sky with their son. Because their son is both of sky-people and earth-people, he misses his father on earth and entreats his sky-grandparents to bring his father to the sky. Eshkebug then travels to the moon to be with the sky-people.³² This is one example of how space and time function throughout Ojibwa and Lakota traditions. Visions, ceremonies, and stories “involve space that is boundless, relative, flexible, and that is engaged with underlying energy and power. It was not enough for the Sioux to remember the presence of spirits in visions and ceremonies. They believed they could identify where in space those spirits might be. Men describing their experiences in dreams and visions talked about other worlds, equally substantial to our own.”³³ One begins to understand the unique significance of land for the Ojibwa and Lakota peoples. One begins to understand what it means to think spatially.

³¹ Deloria, *For This Land*, 252.

³² Johnston, 94-102.

³³ Vine Deloria, Jr., *C.G. Jung and the Sioux Traditions: Dreams, Visions, Nature, and the Primitive*, ed. Philip J. Deloria and Jerome S. Bernstein (New Orleans: Spring Journal Books, 2009), 88.

Space is understood as “a collection of knowledge, and of experiences of events occurring at specific locations, that appear to violate the normal expectations of secular space and distance.”³⁴ The Sioux “lived as much in the spiritual world as the physical [...] These [sacred] manifestations included expansive and relative space, simultaneous material/spiritual space, and even material/spiritual movements across space.”³⁵ An additional dimension of this understanding of space was its effect on time. Time was not only determined by space in the sense of organizing life around natural/spatial patterns, but also in ceremonies. Because ceremonies (and visions) travelled across space, time was also relative and flexible; in a sense the people lived in “an eternal ‘now’.”³⁶ In the Yuwipi ceremony, all spirits, “human and animal, are actually spirits of those who once lived on earth. Hence the Oglala feel the same sense of continuity between the living and non-living, and their belief that the spirit is simply an extension of the earthly world is reinforced.”³⁷ Not only were all living things interconnected (plants, animals, humans, other life-forms) but so were the living and the non-living. Time was viewed in a circular manner rather than a linear one. Instead of space passing through time, time is circularly, spatially present.

Relationality

Through knowledge from creation, land, plants, animals, ceremonies, and visions, the Ojibwa and Lakota peoples learned how to live in harmony with the land, in balance. Some readers will cringe at these terms, but harmony here is not to be understood as some romantic holism and balance does not refer to the equality of things as if on a scale. Rather, they refer to

³⁴ Deloria, *C.G. Jung and the Sioux Traditions*, 88.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 91.

³⁷ William Powers, *Sacred Language: The Natural of Supernatural Discourse in Lakota* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 96 quoted in Deloria, *C.G. Jung and the Sioux Traditions*, 91.

the habits of attention towards the relations between all created things. This is expressed well in two Lakota terms or phrases. The first of these is *mitakuye oyasin*. Most commonly translated as “all my relations,” this phrase is always said at the end of a prayer or even as the prayer itself. The term is polyvalent referring to nuclear and extended family members, all Lakota, Sioux, and Native peoples, and includes all non-human life forms as well. “Every American Indian who prays this prayer knows that her or his relatives necessarily include the four-leggeds, the wingeds, and all the living-moving ones, including trees, rocks and mountains, fish and snakes.”³⁸ “One Lakota teacher has suggested that a better translation of *mitakuye oyasin* would read, ‘For all the above me and below me and around me: that is, for all my relations.’”³⁹ Because all things were considered relatives, all things were to be treated with respect. Respect did not mean mere tolerance as it does in common amer-european usage. Respect contains connotations of the sacredness of all things, all relations, and the imperative to care for them, to take responsibility for their well-being, in a sense.⁴⁰ In both Lakota and Ojibwa stories, things begin to go wrong for humans (and even animals) when they disrespect other life forms, when they forget who their relatives are, and that life is *mitakuye oyasin*.

The second term that expresses this on a more interpersonal level is the Lakota word *wacekiya*. The term means both “to address a relative” (always in terms of the kinship relation, i.e. “Not “Swift Cloud,” but “*My uncle*, Swift Cloud”) and “to pray.”⁴¹ In interpersonal relations, “a Dakota did not like to deal with another person without first avowing his [*sic*] own

³⁸ Tinker, *Spirit and Resistance*, 92.

³⁹ Tinker, *American Indian Liberation*, 49.

⁴⁰ Here it is important to recall that humans relied on knowledge from other life forms for their survival and well-being. Thus any notion of responsibility must retain this relationship. This is why Native peoples working to prevent the development of oil sands, pipelines, deforestation, and fracking will say things like “we must protect the earth because she is our mother.”

⁴¹ Ella Deloria, *Speaking of Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 28. Originally published New York: Friendship Press, 1944.

status, as a relative mindful of the duties incumbent upon him [*sic*] as such, while also reminding the other of his [*sic*].”⁴² As Ella Deloria explains,

Wacekiya implies that in every meeting of the two minds the kinship approach is imperative; it is the open-sesame to any sincere exchange of sentiment between man [*sic*] and his [*sic*] neighbour or man [*sic*] and his [*sic*] God. Once the channel is clear between the two, a reciprocal trust and confidence are guaranteed. It is tantamount to smoking the peace pipe; in fact, to smoke ceremonially is to *wacekiya*.⁴³

In her discussion of kinship relations, E. Deloria emphasizes that being a good Dakota meant always being aware of and attending to the kinship relations with different people. She writes, “First the Dakota said, ‘Be a good relative. That is of paramount importance!’ And then, ‘Be related, somehow, to everyone you know: make him [*sic*] important to you.’”⁴⁴ This was accomplished through blood kinship ties and then through a social kinship system to ensure everyone was included in “the great Ring of Relatives.”⁴⁵ “Then the Dakota said, ‘Be generous!’ (How unnecessary! Who would withhold that which is good from his very own?) ‘Be hospitable!’ (Why not? Should a man eat while his brother starves?).”⁴⁶ For the Dakota, “being hospitable and being Dakotas—were mystically one; to try to omit either was to destroy the whole, and that was unthinkable.”⁴⁷ The worst thing a Lakota could do was to disregard her or his relations and live only for her or himself.⁴⁸

Origin(al)izing Sin

I recently saw an internet meme depicting an Inuit man with the following text overlay:

Inuit: If I did not know about God and sin, would I go to hell?
Priest: No, not if you did not know.

⁴² Ella Deloria, *Speaking of Indians*, 29.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 48-49.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.

*Inuit: Then why did you tell me?*⁴⁹

This joke captures the sort of humour common among Native peoples exchanged around an often traumatic history of Christian colonization and conversion.⁵⁰

Many authors have noted that Native peoples did not have a word for sin in their language, let alone a notion of original sin, akin to that of amer-european Christianity.⁵¹ The perceptions of the Native peoples that the missionaries had were, however, as sinners, pagans, heathens, and some even went so far as to refer to Native peoples “as Amelkites and Canaanites—in other words, people who, if they would not be converted, were worthy of annihilation.”⁵² The Canaanite identification was key in articulating the notion of sin, and particularly original sin, to both amer-european and Native peoples. As Andrea Smith has astutely observed, “[i]n the colonial imagination, Native bodies are [...] immanently polluted with sexual sin. [...] What makes Canaanites supposedly worthy of destruction in the biblical narrative and Indian peoples supposedly worthy of destruction in the eyes of their colonizers is that they both personify sin.”⁵³ The examples she gives are striking:

Alexander Whitaker, a minister in Virginia, wrote in 1613: “They live naked in bodie, as if their shame of their sinne deserved no covering: Their names are as naked as their bodie: They esteem it a virtue to lie, deceive and steale as their master the divell teacheth them.”⁵⁴ Furthermore, according to Bernardino de Minaya, a Dominican cleric, “Their marriages are not sacrament but a sacrilege. They are idolatrous, libidinous, and commit sodomy. Their chief desire is to eat, drink, worship heathen idols, and commit bestial obscenities.”⁵⁵

⁴⁹ The quote is attributed to Annie Dillard.

⁵⁰ Vine Deloria, Jr. devotes an entire chapter to “Indian Humor” in *Custer Died For Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (New York: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969), 147-67.

⁵¹ Kidwell, Noley, Tinker, *A Native American Theology*, 18.

⁵² Warrior, “Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians,” 7. See also Alfred A. Cave, “Canaanites in a Promised Land,” *American Indian Quarterly* 12.4 (1988), 277-297; H.C. Porter, *The Inconstant Savage* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1979).

⁵³ Andrea Smith, *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* (Brooklyn: South End Press, 2005), 10.

⁵⁴ Alexander Whitaker, quoted in Robert Berkhofer, *The White Man’s Indian* (New York: Vintage, 1978) in Smith, *Conquest*, 10.

⁵⁵ Bernardino de Minaya quoted in David Stannard, *American Holocaust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) quoted in Smith, *Conquest*, 10.

Notice the emphasis on the inherent “sexual perversity” of Native peoples, and this association with inherent (read original) sin. The echoes of Augustine’s autobiography should not elude us here. In addition to inherently sexually perverse, the Native peoples were also considered inherently dirty, based on their life ways.

Native peoples are a permanent “present absence” in the [...] colonial imagination, an “absence” that reinforces at every turn the conviction that Native peoples are indeed vanishing and that the conquest of Native lands is justified. [...] This “absence” is effected through the metaphorical transformation of Native bodies into a pollution of which the colonial body must constantly purify itself. For instance, as white Californians described them in the 1860s, Native people were “the dirtiest lot of human beings on earth.” They wear “filthy rags, with their persons unwashed, hair uncombed and swarming with vermin.”⁵⁶

Dirt, non-western clothing, uncombed hair, nakedness, ceremonies: these are the marks of the inherent (read original) sinful nature of Native peoples according to amer-european colonizers. To be an Indian was to be a sinner. This conflation of Native culture and identity with sin is what produced the missionary task to “kill the Indian, save the man.”⁵⁷

The prominence with which the doctrine of original sin figured in evangelism and the missionary’s conception of conversion is striking. In his study of Protestant missions between 1787-1862, Robert Berkhofer has observed that Protestant mission societies across the board maintained that the teaching of original sin was paramount to teaching salvation. Berkhofer provides countless excerpts from mission reports, and it is worth quoting him at length here:

A sincere belief in the depravity of human nature divided the Christian Indian from his pagan brother just as it did among the whites. Only after an acceptance of human depravity was hope on Christ’s atonement meaningful. In fact, only prior acceptance of man’s fall made Christ’s sacrifice sensible. So important was the concept of sin that the Bishop of Mann in his book, *The Knowledge and Practice of Christianity Made Easy to*

⁵⁶ James Rawls, *Indians of California: The Changing Image* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1997) quoted in Smith, *Conquest*, 9.

⁵⁷ This well-known comment is attributed to Captain Richard H. Pratt. He wrote: “A great general has said that the only good Indian is a dead one, and that high sanction of his destruction has been an enormous factor in promoting Indian massacres. In a sense, I agree with the sentiment, but only in this: that all the Indian there is in the race should be dead. Kill the Indian in him, and save the man.” In Richard H. Pratt, “The Advantages of Mingling Indians with Whites,” *Americanizing the American Indians: Writings by the “Friends of the Indian” 1880–1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 260.

the Meanest Capacities; or, an Essay towards an Instruction for the Indians made his dialogue, “Of the Corruption of Our Nature,” only second to the explanation of God. For this reason missionaries of all denominations endeavored to convince the Indians of their sinfulness. The first missionary sent out by the New York Missionary Society directors was charged to impress on the “rude minds” of the Cherokees “that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God—that by the works of the law no flesh living can be justified—that sinners are justified, freely by God’s grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus—and that his blood cleanseth from all sin.”⁵⁸ One of Kingsbury’s first sermons to this tribe nearly two decades later endeavored to “explain and enforce the doctrine of total depravity.”⁵⁹ In his first sermon to the Nez Percés, Samuel Parker explained man’s fall, the transgressor’s deserts, and Christ’s atonement.⁶⁰ [...] A Methodist missionary to Choctaws explained clearly his successful approach to Indian conversion: “Our plan of preaching to them was, to convince them of their guilt, misery, and helplessness by reason and experience: not appealing to the Scriptures as the law by which they were condemned, but to their knowledge of right and wrong; and the misery felt from the consciousness that they have done wrong. The gospel proffering to them an immediate change of heart, was seized by them as Heavens best blessing of ruined man.”⁶¹ *At the heart of the conversion experience was a deep emotional conviction of one’s depravity.*⁶²

It would be difficult to manufacture a theology and a conversion operation more Augustinian than this. Moreover, in the colonial imagination, becoming Christian meant leaving Native identity behind and conforming to amer-european cultural ideals; becoming Christian meant becoming White. Or, as Berkhofer puts it, “[t]o become truly Christian was to become anti-Indian. The good Indian convert realized that his former religion was superstitious and his former habits slothful and sinful,” and one could add sensual, in reference both to their life ways (dirt) and nature-oriented ceremonies (sexual promiscuity) as described by Smith. It is this construal of sin that I take issue with; the conflation of dirt/nature with sensuality and sin.

⁵⁸ Charge to Joseph Bullen by John Rodgers, March 21, 1799, in *Two Sermons, Delivered before the New York Missionary Society* (New York, 1799), 75-84, italics in the original, quoted in Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., *Salvation and the Savage: An Analysis of Protestant Missions and American Indian Response, 1787-1862* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1977), 52.

⁵⁹ Brainerd Journal, March 2, 1817 American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABC) 18.5.3.I:91, quoted in Berkhofer, *Salvation and the Savage*, 52.

⁶⁰ Report of Exploring Tour beyond the Rocky Mountains, September 6, 1835, ABC 18.3.1.IX:195, cited in Berkhofer, 52.

⁶¹ Alexander Talley to Mississippi Annual Conference, n.d., in *Christian Advocate*, III (March 13, 1829), 110, quoted in Berkhofer, 52-53.

⁶² Berkhofer, 51-53. Emphasis is mine.

The sin of neglect

In the conclusion of his book on sin, Derek Nelson proposes the following summary statements. First, “How does sin relate to the human as soil? The human can succumb to being *less* than one is called to be. Karl Barth called this the sin of sloth. Reinhold Niebuhr called it the sin of sensuality.”⁶³ Second he asks, “How does sin relate to the human as spirit? The human can claim to be *more* than one is called to be. Barth, Niebuhr, and a whole host of others call this the sin of pride.”⁶⁴ I submit that, given the Ojibwa and Lakota cosmology described above, this division of soil and spirit is nonsensical (and an obviously Western, rather platonic one) and that the association of these with being less or more than one is called to be is dissonant with the life ways of Native peoples and their indigeneity.

Most postcolonial theory, insofar as it has concerned itself with empire studies, has focused on the sin of pride—the human desire for domination. This is certainly the sin most attributable to those we consider the oppressors. As a result, the thrust of postcolonial theory has been to deconstruct the dominant structures and systems that work to perpetuate injustice for the sake of their own glorification. But what of the oppressed? Does their situation not then fit that of the sin of sloth/sensuality? One must be careful here: their sin is not in the conditions they experience as a result of the dominant system, nor is this injustice in any way a punishment for the sins of the oppressed. One might think their sin lies in the resignation to evil, to the sin of pride exercised by the powerful. Their sin lies in their acceptance of the unjust system as normative and inevitable. Similarly, the oppressor’s sin lies both in pride and their resignation to the evils of empire and acceptance of dominance and exploitative hierarchical relations between

⁶³ Nelson, *Sin*, 117.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 118.

people and in relation to non-human life forms. The offense against the neighbour is simultaneously the offense against the Creator: the refusal to love the Other.⁶⁵

But in referring to the sins of the oppressed as that of sloth/sensuality, we must take the feminist critiques into account, for they extrapolate far more on what sensuality as sin means than Niebuhr does. Indeed, as I wrote in chapter 2, feminist writing on the sin of sensuality, or hiding, has not only taken gender difference into account, but also the dynamics of race, which is imperative for our concerns here. The race analysis in Susan Thistlethwaite's work is invaluable for our undertaking. The challenge will be not only to attend to the difference race makes (her analysis compares and contrasts White and black womanist writing) but the additional difference red womanist writing/orality (if there is such a category) or more broadly indigeneity makes. For, as Tinker among others has argued, the dynamics of indigeneity exceed the Marxist class analysis so inherent to liberation theologies—theologies of the oppressed.

When we consider Ojibwa and Lakota life ways and understandings of creation we can see that the sins of indigenous peoples cannot be that of pride, a seeking to be more than one is called to be out of either a state of depravity (Augustine) or anxiety (Niebuhr). And we can see that they also cannot be the sins of sloth or sensuality because what amer-europeans identified as sloth and sensuality among the Native peoples was not in fact indicative of being less than they were called to be. Indeed, it was precisely their close attention to and relation with the land and all creation that reflected their being exactly what they were called to be! But because of a series of fundamental dualisms in Western theology (soil/flesh, creation/humans, nature/spirit, body/soul, dark/light, evil/good, sin/salvation, earth/heaven, etc.), the missionaries failed to see that their understanding of sin and salvation vis-à-vis the world/creation was culturally particular, and did not fit the scheme of life on which the Ojibwa and Lakota thrived. In this

⁶⁵ The Other as God and as neighbour. One might think of Matthew 25:40-45.

sense Native peoples were in fact called to “sin” through their respect for and relationality with all creation, something that Western Christianity abhors in its anthropocentrism and can only see as paganism.

Conclusion

At the end of chapter two I argued that it was imperative for us to think the difference race and especially indigeneity makes. If I have understood my Native teachers above, then the difference indigeneity makes turns upon the relations between humans and nature, which sits in stark contrast with the Western theological and philosophical tradition(s). If a notion of sin can be construed at all it must be conceived in rather different terms. George Tinker has suggested that “[s]in from an Indian perspective can be defined as a failure to live up to one’s responsibility [as a relative], sometimes deliberately but most likely as a result of impulsive or unthinking behavior, a mistake.”⁶⁶ Consider the words Black Elk uses to describe the destruction the settlers brought upon his people: they “had forgotten that the earth was their mother.”⁶⁷ To mistreat the land, to disregard its sacredness and one’s dependence on it could be considered a sin. His phrase is but one specific example of the cosmological notion of *mitakuye oyasin*. To forget the earth is one’s mother is to forget that she is a relative. Similarly, to forget or neglect any relatives in creation could be considered a sin. It would be a sin then for an Ojibwa or Lakota to transcend their sensuality, their relation to the soil, to dirt, to nature, and all creation: the two-leggeds, four-leggeds, wingeds, and all the living-moving ones. To put it another way, the difference that indigeneity makes is that culture and nature are immanently related. The temptation for the Ojibwa and Lakota is emphatically not to become less (sensuality as sin) or to become more

⁶⁶ Kidwell, Noley, Tinker, 110.

⁶⁷ Neihardt, 221.

(pride as sin) but not to be a relative, to forget, disregard, neglect the soil and spirit of all creation.⁶⁸ To be a relative in this way was to walk in a sacred manner⁶⁹ or to walk “the good red road,”⁷⁰ as Black Elk put it. Or to seek *mino-bimaadiziwin*, an Ojibwa phrase meaning “the good life” and to walk “in a good way.”⁷¹ This cosmology, based on spatiality and relationality, the immanence of spirituality and creation, culture and nature, will form the conceptual basis for alternative readings of Genesis 3 in chapter 4 and Romans 5 in chapter 5, and a corresponding decolonizing hamartiology.

⁶⁸ Soil and spirit, among other conceptual pairs, represent dualities but not dualisms. They are not oppositional binaries, but dualities that exist in relation. The relationality expressed in the concept of two, or the balance of two things, seems to be what is most important.

⁶⁹ Neihardt, 206.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 280.

⁷¹ Leanne Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence* (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2011). See also Michael Anthony Hart, *Seeking Mino-Pimatisiwin: An Aboriginal Approach to Helping* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2002).

Chapter 4

Conversion & Conquest: Original Sin, Fragmentation, and Genesis 1-3

“[She] asks the non-Indigenous to cast a critical eye on the imperial garden we have cultivated with our colonial tools, on the lands and in the lives of Indigenous peoples. She asks us to turn over the rocks and face whatever ugly creatures slither out, examining them honestly and unflinchingly.”

-Jeanette Armstrong via Paulette Regan¹

“I believe that some forms of experience do more truth than others.”... “[our values] ‘truth,’ so to speak, lies not in how well they depict some ontological structure of reality, but in the forms of experience that commitment to such values engenders.”

*-Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite
and Sheila Greeve Davaney²*

Introduction

In chapter 1 I asked whether, given the history of colonization and ongoing dominance of White (amer-european) theology, Christianity and its scriptures are inherently imperial or whether they can be decolonizing. Following the work of Native feminist scholars Andrea Smith and Laura Donaldson, I argued that because scriptural texts and theological discourses are always bound up with a hermeneutic community, they can always be contested, interrogated,

¹ Paulette Regan paraphrasing Jeanette Armstrong in Paulette Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*, 235.

² Thistlethwaite, *Sex, Race, and God*, 79 and Sheila Greeve Davaney, “The Limits of the Appeal to Women’s Experience,” presentation to the Women and Religion Section of the American Academy of Religion, November 1986, 30.

deconstructed, and decolonized; they are capacious enough for sources of resistance and liberation. Donaldson describes scripture and hermeneutics as a zone of intercultural contact. Furthermore, because hermeneutics and theological discourses are never neutral to questions of power, decolonization necessarily involves attention to the dynamics of gender and race.³ Throughout this thesis I have sought to perform a decolonizing operation on one of the most prominent and lethal doctrines of Western theology: original sin. In chapter 2 I traced the development of the preliminary ideas of the doctrine through the early Latin fathers, culminating in Augustine. I also showed how original sin became sedimented through an autobiographical conversion narrative and political forces. Then I demonstrated the continuous prominence of the doctrine of original sin in mainstream modern theology by turning to the work of Reinhold Niebuhr. Although he diverges from Augustine at some points and articulates the state of depravity in terms of anxiety, the doctrine of original sin remains theologically intact. It is telling that the most substantial critiques of Niebuhr's conception of sin come from feminist, black womanist, and liberation theologies—discourses deeply engaged with realities of power, dominance, violence, and suffering; this is certainly the experience of the Native peoples of north america.

This chapter will take up the question of original sin in Genesis 1-3, the Christian “creation and fall” narrative. This story/text, I will argue, is a conversion narrative in two ways. First, in and of itself, Gen. 1-3 (arguably 1-11) is an origin story, a myth written by a retrospective self—the Israelites in exile—in order to understand the situation of exile, expulsion

³ These are by no means the only differences that require attention, but simply the most prominent ones in my research for this thesis. Others could include class and sexuality—there is some excellent work being done at the intersection of queer theory and power, politics, colonialism, and indigeneity. I thank Brandy Daniels for these exceptional recommendations: Andrea Smith, “Queer Theory and Native Studies: The Heteronormativity of Settler Colonialism,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 16.1-2 (2010): 41-68; Qwo-Li Driskill, Chris Finley, Brian Joseph Gilley, Scott Lauria Morgensen, eds., *Queer Indigenous Studies: Critical Interventions in Theory, Politics, and Literature* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2011).

from their homeland, the pervasiveness of evil, injustice, and suffering. In short, it is a response to the question: how did we get here? Gen. 1-3 narrates the conversion of the Israelites from Eden into exile through Adam and Eve. But what are the objects of conversion here? Whether Adam and Eve or the Israelites, from what to what are they converted? That is a question the text does not answer in any definitive way. This is the function of the second way in which we can speak of Gen. 1-3 as a conversion narrative: the conversion is figured by another retrospective self, indeed many others. The first of these I will examine is Augustine, secondly theologian Joseph Fitzpatrick, and thirdly Cree elder Ernest Tootoosis. Both Augustine and Fitzpatrick follow a linear or temporal logic in their figuration of conversion in Gen. 1-3 and their corresponding understanding of sin, Augustine as descent and Fitzpatrick as ascent. By contrast, elder Tootoosis figures the alteration spatially as a movement from wholeness to fragmentation—an image of a broken hoop (rather than either a fall or an ascent). Expanding on elder Tootoosis, I will critique both Augustine and Fitzpatrick, and attempt to begin to decolonize the dominant understanding(s) of original sin from Gen. 1-3 by figuring them spatially, specifically from the space/experience of missionary conquest. Finally, I will suggest alternative understandings of sin and the relation between God, humans, and creation in Ojibwa and Lakota cosmology and in the work of Randy Woodley (Keetoowah Cherokee).

Augustine's Fall

Augustine's understanding of original sin is based on a literal-historical reading of Gen. 1-3. Following the Latin fathers before him, Augustine posited the fall of the human race from a paradisiacal state to a depraved one. Adam's fall affected his descendants on two levels. First, Adam's sin is propagated through the entire race by virtue of all humans sharing in the nature of

Adam as human. Secondly, while each individual is born into a natural state of sin, this “fall” also repeats itself within each individual. As noted in chapter 2, Augustine’s reflection on stealing the pears illustrates this. Realizing that he desired not to steal *the pears* but the act of *stealing* itself he writes: “I loved *my fall*, not the object for which I had fallen but *my fall* itself. My *depraved soul* leaped *down from your firmament* to ruin.”⁴ Note his double reference to his “depraved soul” (state of original sin inherited from Adam) and his own fall leaping down (the repetition of Adam’s fall in the individual). He writes elsewhere:

I say that there was the free exercise of the will in that man who was first formed...But after he freely sinned, we who descend from his stock were plunged into necessity...For today in our actions, before we are implicated by any habit, we have free choice...But when by that liberty we have done something [evil]...and the pleasure of that deed has taken hold of the mind, the mind by its own habit is so implicated that it cannot afterwards conquer what it has fashioned for itself.⁵

One can see how Augustine “linked moral choice to Adam’s fall and to the individual’s psychological and moral development: those two historical events—one distant, one proximate—necessarily impinged.”⁶ Adam’s fall causes a state of original sin in the human on the species level and perpetuates sin at the personal level, what Augustine refers to as a divided or conflicted will, by which he narrates his own fall from God’s firmament.

One will also recall from chapter 2 that Augustine’s *Confessions* constitute a conversion narrative by a retrospective self. I argued with Paula Fredriksen that his reflections are not ostensive descriptions of his life, but that the conversion narrative serves a particular illustrative and authorizing function vis-à-vis his theology, especially that of original sin. His personal experiences and feelings about his life become evidence for his exegesis. In the pear incident he identifies a causal relationship between the species effect of Adam’s sin and his own sin, yet also

⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, II.iv or p. 29. Emphasis is mine.

⁵ Augustine, *Fortunatus*, 22 quoted in Paula Fredriksen, “Two Souls and the Divided Will,” with G.G. Stroumsa, *Self, Soul and Body in Religious Experience*, ed. A. Baumgarten (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 211.

⁶ Fredriksen, “The Two Souls and the Divided Will,” 211.

links his individual sin as evidence for the effect of Adam's fall. The logic goes both ways: Adam's fall causes Augustine's fall, and Augustine's sin proves/is the effect of Adam's sin. This is how Augustine narrates the conversion that takes place in Gen. 1-3. To summarize, the *conversion is figured as a fall* from a prior state of perfection. Humans continue to sin because of a personal divided will. This situation can only be ameliorated through Christ, the second Adam, and a parallel conversion towards God. If the sin of Adam is figured as a fall, then the conversion to Christ must be figured as an ascent. Moreover, because the trajectory of this double conversion narrative (fall-ascent) is historically situated, it is figured temporally.⁷ For Augustine, sin and salvation are located on a linear, upward diagonal that ultimately moves from earth to heaven. As Fredriksen writes, "Augustine insisted that the Kingdom of God would not come on a transformed earth. The heavenly Jerusalem, God's city, remains "above," supramundane; and it is to this celestial and immaterial place that the saints and their raised fleshly bodies will ascend."⁸ The figuration of conversion (Gen. 1-3, Augustine's own fall, Second Adam, Augustine's ascent) can be summarized as the schema of perfection—fall— ascent and figured in historical-temporal terms. Joseph Fitzpatrick offers a critique of this schema, but as we will see, continues to figure the conversion narrative of Gen. 1-3 in temporal terms.

Fitzpatrick's Ascent

Joseph Fitzpatrick has written a four-part article series on Augustine's doctrine of original sin, Genesis 1-11, and the theology around the fall narrative in general. As I argued in the introduction to this chapter, the alteration in Gen. 1-3 (or 1-11) is not figured in a definitive

⁷ Temporal in the sense of time, as opposed to space/spatial, not temporal vs. eternal.

⁸ Fredriksen, "The Two Souls and the Divded Will," 216.

way or according to a definitive schema. Thus, while Augustine's schema and figuration are dominant in the Christian tradition, they are by no means necessitated by the text itself.

Therefore, at least in theory, an infinite number of revisionist schemas and figurations might be produced (though all would certainly be interrogated by a variety of hermeneutical devices).

Thus, where Augustine submits a paradise—fall—ascension schema with a historical-temporal figuration, Fitzpatrick suggests an alternative that I will demonstrate later on. First, I will consider some of the ways in which Fitzpatrick's critiques of Augustine aid us in deconstructing and eventually (in the following sections) decolonizing the Augustinian hold on Gen. 1-3 and Christian hamartiology.

Fitzpatrick's main critique of Augustine, one which I concede, is his confusion of ontology and psychology, i.e., the nature of evil (as privation) and a conflicted will (depravation). Augustine recognizes that these are different but is inconsistent in his articulation thereof. Since Augustine projects a paradisiacal original creation, one must ask: "Can a human being sin if the conditions that make sin *psychologically possible* are absent? The negative route of *privatio* might explain evil but lapsation or failure of the will, albeit necessary, is not sufficient to explain sin in a world where sin is not known. Lapsation of the will requires in addition a cause or reason for lapsing."⁹ Augustine blames the serpent for this, the devil, a fallen angel, but this still does not answer the question of how sin came into a sinless creation, it only displaces it from humans to the prior level of angels.¹⁰ Fitzpatrick nicely summarizes the problem: Augustine

attempts to argue that what he should designate as a consequence of original sin, namely human pride and the distortion of the human will, is in fact the initiator and cause of the first sin. Augustine seems to be confusing before and after at this juncture: while it

⁹ Joseph Fitzpatrick, "Original Sin and Original Sinfulness, 1: Augustine on Original Sin," *New Blackfriars*, no. 1028 (July 2009): 462.

¹⁰ Fitzpatrick, "Augustine on Original Sin," 462.

makes sense to say that pride was a consequence of sin it cannot with consistency be argued that his same pride was the instigator or cause of the first sin. [...] If there were no evil before man sinned then there could be no sinful pride. Augustine fails to prove his case. Furthermore, if man was guilty of sinful pride before the “original sin” of disobedience, he must have come from the hand of his creator as one already inclined to pride. In other words, Augustine’s argument fails to protect God from being implicated in human sin.¹¹

Fitzpatrick’s first critique of Augustine is the inconsistency of his discussion of the origin of evil on the one hand and the original sin of humans on the other. Though he distinguishes between the ontological and psychological, Augustine’s arguments are not internally coherent because he confuses the logic of his two arguments.

Fitzpatrick’s second significant contribution is his disavowal of the literal-historical reading of Gen. 1-3. Indeed, he views it as an “aetiological myth, a tale that explains how things are by explaining how they came to be that way.”¹² The purpose of these myths (Gen. 1-11) is to “introduce, briefly but tellingly, the themes and motifs we shall encounter in the longer and more detailed [historical] work that is to come; [...] they depict patterns and schemes and disclose moral and spiritual insights that we come to recognize as typical in the biblical narrative.”¹³ Rejecting both the historical analysis provided by Augustine and his formulation of a fall, Fitzpatrick understands Gen. 1-3 as a myth that illustrates a change in the human (Adam and Eve as figures of humanity as opposed to historical beings). Instead of an ontological or psychological change, Fitzpatrick purports an existential change. Specifically, this change turns upon a distinction of the human from the animal.

First we must note that Fitzpatrick assumes the typical hierarchy of creation: from the lowest initial things in creation (sky, water, land) to plants and animals, and finally humans. He considers humans the highest form of createds, set apart as such by God, who not only made

¹¹ Ibid., 463.

¹² Joseph Fitzpatrick, “Original Sin or Original Sinfulness, 2: Genesis 1-11,” *New Blackfriars*, no. 1029 (September 2009): 563.

¹³ Fitzpatrick, “Genesis 1-11,” 560.

them in God's image but blew breath into them for life. Drawing on the work Mary Douglas has done on the function of the clean and unclean, holy/profane in the Hebrew scriptures, Fitzpatrick argues that Adam and Eve were created holy (set apart) and eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil would (and did) render them unclean. Eating from the tree was a disobedience of God's command, but more significantly a transgression that compromised the initial holiness of humans. Moreover, "[b]ecause holiness is associated with completeness, wholeness and oneness, hybrids and the confusion of classes [clean and unclean] are regarded as abominations."¹⁴ Consequently, in eating of the tree, Adam and Eve were rendered hybrid creatures, anomalies, contaminated. In the holiness tradition, such contamination posed a danger to others as well. Because impurity is not always visible, it can easily be passed onto others who come into contact with an impure person. One can begin to see how this interpretation maps out onto the notion of original sin of Adam and Eve and how it came to be a universal attribute of humans. Mary Douglas continues: "A polluting person is always in the wrong. He has developed some wrong condition or simply crossed some line which should not have been crossed and this displacement unleashes danger for someone...Pollution can be committed intentionally, but *intention is irrelevant to its effect—it is more likely to happen inadvertently.*"¹⁵ Thus Fitzpatrick argues that Adam and Eve's transgression is one of holiness to an unclean, hybrid state of existence. But the question remains, what sort of anomalous creature has the human become? Fitzpatrick's answer lies in the fruit of the tree itself—the acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil, which Gen. 3 identifies as becoming more like God. Just as the human was holy, so also the tree was set apart, not to be eaten from. Eating from this tree represents a transgression though not a fall. Rather, in eating from the tree, Adam and Eve

¹⁴ Ibid., 568.

¹⁵ Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: explorations in cosmology* (Cresset Press, 1970), 38 quoted in Fitzpatrick, "Genesis 1-11," 569. Emphasis mine.

acquired something of *divine* proportions; the knowledge of good and evil made them greater than before (though simultaneously also separating them from God because it was a transgression).¹⁶ The resulting theological anthropology is one that puts humans in a state of abnormality, separated from God, longing for completion through full/final ascent to God. While the effects of this acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil are dangerous and have adverse effects in the world (i.e., sin, suffering, evil, etc.), it is ultimately incorporated into God's plan.

Echoing the Greek fathers, Fitzpatrick notes the association of maturation with the acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil. He refers to Hebrews 5:14: "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic elements of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food; for everyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is unskilled in the word of righteousness. But solid food is for the mature (*teleion*), for those whose faculties have been trained by practice to distinguish good from evil."¹⁷ "This reference back to the knowledge of good and evil suggests that this is a knowledge that can be acquired, developed and refined over time, not a once and for all gift or acquisition; its proper use requires regular practice, resulting in growth and maturation [in faith]."¹⁸ Additionally, Fitzpatrick notes that in the new testament "the word for 'perfect' (*teilos*) appears more self-consciously developmental, to include the idea of becoming or growing to perfection; one becomes more like Christ over time and in this way more like God."¹⁹

Fitzpatrick's revisionist reading is quite compelling, especially with the attention it pays to the holiness tradition. His disavowal of Augustine's psychological and ontological categories

¹⁶ Joseph Fitzpatrick, "Original Sin or Original Sinfulness, 3: A Tale of Two Trees," *New Blackfriars*, no. 1030 (November 2009): 701.

¹⁷ Hebrews 5:12b-14, NRSV.

¹⁸ Fitzpatrick, "Genesis 1-11," 575.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

for understanding sin and the historical reading of the conversion narrative of Gen. 1-3, leads him to an innovative interpretation that shifts the sedimentation of Augustine's formulation of original sin. Fitzpatrick employs the language of the holiness tradition for both the pre and post conversion states of the human. Not auto-biographical in any obvious way, he commits to the language of scripture throughout his interpretation. Adam and Eve are created holy but they render themselves abominations by transgressing the order of purity God had established by eating of the tree that was set apart from them. By eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Eve acquired something of divine properties but also separated themselves from God by transgressing. Because Fitzpatrick relies on the holiness tradition, the matter of the conflicted will, desire for the fruit or desire to sin/transgress that so preoccupied Augustine effectively dissolves; impurity, the crossing of the holiness boundary, as Douglas notes, is usually accidental and inevitable, and intention has no influence on the dangerous effects of this. This transgression turns Adam and Eve into hybrids, part animal and part divine. It is this ambiguous existential state that allows for sin, suffering, evil, etc. (rather than the ontological or psychological gymnastics Augustine offers). Because the human is now in an incomplete state, s/he yearns for completion and further ascent to God via the tree of life.

The only internal problem with Fitzpatrick's interpretation is with the difference between ritual and moral impurity in the holiness tradition. If Fitzpatrick wants to remain consistent, he must affirm that the transgression in the garden was one of ritual purity to ritual impurity, the consequence of which was prohibition from the temple until one was ritually pure again.²⁰

Moral impurity, on the other hand, is constituted by sinful behaviours such as "certain sexual

²⁰Jonathan Klawans, "Concepts of Purity in the Bible," in *Jewish Study Bible*, ed. A. Berlin et al (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 2042-2043. Sometimes this required specific acts of ritual cleansing and other times simply waiting for a given period of time.

sins, idolatry, and bloodshed.”²¹ It concerns the way in which people conduct their lives across all aspects of society or communal life (social, economic, political, legal, house hold, etc.). Moral impurity differs significantly from ritual impurity in that it is avoidable. Secondly, moral impurity not only affects the individual sinner, but is propagated to “the land of Israel, and the sanctuary of God.”²² Collectively, moral impurity has some dire consequences for the people of Israel—namely, exile. However, Klawans submits that the morally impure, although identified as sinners, are in no way excluded from the sanctuary (though their collective sin results in exile).²³ The sin of Adam and Eve is interpreted as moral sin throughout Western Christianity. But Fitzpatrick suggests that their sin was ritual, that they became tainted because they transgressed a holiness boundary. Following the holiness code, ritual impurity would not result in banishment from the garden. Fitzpatrick affirms that moral sin follows from this transgression, from the impure, anomalous state of the human, yet this is an inconsistency with his reliance on the holiness code. He fails to clarify this distinction between ritual and moral impurity. This aside, elements of his revisionist reading are quite useful for our purposes.

We are a long way from Augustine by now. Fitzpatrick’s deconstruction of Augustine’s inconsistent understanding of the psychological and ontological aspects of sin and his rejection of Augustine’s historical reading begin to chisel away at the foundations of the doctrine of original sin. Instead of using paradisiacal language, Fitzpatrick employs the terms of the holiness code, describing Adam and Eve as initially innocent, holy, whole. Next, where Augustine speaks of a fall, a descent of humankind, Fitzpatrick argues for an ascent, albeit partial. For Fitzpatrick, the sin of humans is located in this partial existence between animal and divine, the human condition as an anomalous creature, in contrast with Augustine’s state of utter

²¹ Klawans, “Concepts of Purity in the Bible,” 2045.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 2045-46.

depravity. Finally, both Augustine and Fitzpatrick posit the *telos* of humans to an ascent with God. The main difference here then is how the alteration in Gen. 3 is figured: as a fall by Augustine, as an ascent by Fitzpatrick. Recall Augustine's schema of perfection—fall—ascent. Fitzpatrick's schema can be summarized as whole—partial ascent—final ascent. Fitzpatrick's work is useful for taking us out of Augustine's fall and an understanding of sin as an utter, original, inherited state of depravity. However, both Augustine and Fitzpatrick figure their schema temporally through the movement of descent—ascent on the one hand and partial ascent—full ascent on the other. If one recalls chapter 3, Ojibwa and Lakota cosmologies characteristically conceive of all things in natural-spatial terms, even notions of time and history. A reading of Gen. 3 that does so will produce very different schemas and figurations of the alteration.

Missionary Conquest and Fragmentation

[W]e can think of [western Christianity] as being like concrete in the city. It covers almost everything. It is heavy and seemingly unmovable, and it paves the world. But the daily wear and tear produces cracks, and in those cracks, plants grow—weeds, grass, sometimes a flower. Living things have no business growing up out of concrete, but they do. They resist the totality of the concrete. [...] I am trying to live in the cracks of the concrete.²⁴

Much of our discussion so far has concerned ontological, psychological, metaphysical, and existential questions. I turn away from those now towards phenomenology—not merely the subjective experience as Husserl defined it, but also a consideration of objective conditions, as any good analysis of social power does. When one asks the phenomenological question, “what is the experience of Native peoples of Christianity? Of conversion?” a very different picture begins to emerge than the one painted so far by Augustine, Niebuhr, and even Fitzpatrick. This

²⁴Robert Jensen, “Patriarchal Sex,” in *Philosophy and Sex*, 4th ed. Robert B. Baker and Kathleen J. Winger (New York: Prometheus Books, 2009), 426. I have replaced the original term “patriarchy” in the quotation with “western Christianity.”

is the question of resistance and resurgence asked by feminist, black/womanist, liberation theologies (ch. 2), and Native theologies. The phenomenological question, responded to by the marginalized, has the capacity to disrupt the system, stall the imperial machine, and in our case, overturn the dominant figurations of the Gen. 1-3 conversion narrative. When the oppressed begin to tell their stories, the injustice, the suffering, the violence, reverberate under the colony; the vibrations of their voices shake the foundation and the concrete cracks, revealing the defiled yet sacred ground, the body of our Mother: earth.²⁵

Let us recall that Augustine's figuration and schema of the conversion narrative in Gen. 1-3 was based both on the fall of Adam and his literal-historical representation of the human, and human nature, but also on Augustine's personal experience of a fall from (first conversion) and ascent (second conversion) to God. Albeit in a different way, Niebuhr's hamartiology was also coloured by experience (though not auto-biographical), namely that of a White man. And the critiques of dominant hamartiology offered in chapter 2 also came from experiences—from the various margins of feminist, black/womanist, and latin american liberation experiences with regards to sin, suffering, evil, violence, injustice, and so on. The calls for decolonization do not come from nowhere either, but from the Native people's experience of missionary conquest. This thesis is not in search of a hamartiology with a view from nowhere or *sub species aeternitatis*; we do not escape our particularities, our subjectivities. Rather, the phenomenological question allows us (or perhaps confronts us) to problematize the dominance of certain particularities, to interrogate their claim to universality and expose it as false. These are the stories of the underground, rumbling beneath the concrete, cracking the foundation, decolonizing the settlement: these are the stories from the earth herself.

²⁵For brilliant reflections on the sonics of healing see John Paul Lederach and Angela Jill Lederach, *When Blood and Bones Cry Out: Journeys Through the Soundscape of Healing and Reconciliation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Cree elder Ernest Tootoosis tells such stories. In an old interview elder Tootoosis speaks about God and creation from his experience, one that resonates throughout Native nations.

Our story, the way the older people tell us, it's very close to something like Adam and Eve, but it just happens that a North American Indian never disobeyed in his garden. That's why by 1492 they found us livin' on this land and God was takin' care of everythin'. We let him run the business and we didn' have to work like the white man did. He provided our food in the air, on land, and in water. And all we had to do was live in harmony with (t)his creation and respect God above all. And this is holy land, this is land where Man has never disobeyed God—that is to live against nature, eh, to be building dams, to tear the land, and, uh, to try and conquer nature. We never did. And this is holy land. This water running down here, the cutknife creek here, and then there's the northbattle river runs down there, and the old people tell us that these are the right hand instruments and servants of God; it's the sun, the wind, and the water, and the fire. These are holy things, spiritual things. We're supposed to live with those things.²⁶

Elder Tootoosis' words are brief but telling. If Augustine and Niebuhr experienced original sin as depravity and anxiety, then the difference for Native peoples, the difference indigeneity makes, is a stark contrast: they experienced deprecation and anxiety as a result of the White man. As I discussed in chapter 3, it was the european settlers who brought original sin to the Native peoples. The separation from the Creator, from their sacred lands that the Native peoples experienced, was not as a result of their own disobedience to God as it was for Augustine, Niebuhr, and the settlers. Rather, it was the european settlers with their theology who brought these horrific realities of deep fragmentation upon Native peoples! With elder Tootoosis' understanding of the Gen. 1-3 narrative, it is not difficult to see how the other characters line up. If Adam and Eve are the people of the earth, the Native peoples of Turtle Island, then the settlers are the snake, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil could include Western Christianity, “industrialism, modern technology, and transnational, capitalist corporations, [...] hetero-patriarchy, Enlightenment ideology, and secular science,” to name a few aspects of

²⁶My transcription of the video interview. Ernest Tootoosis speaking in *Man Alive: The Great Spirit*, DC Documentaries, episode contributors Alison Moss, Gail Cochran, Leo Rampen, Roy Bonisteel, and Sig Gerber (Canada: CBC, 1975).

Colonialism.²⁷ And the fruit? This could also be a number of things, indeed the whole colonial, amer-european cosmology. For our analysis, it is also and especially the notion of original sin. Recall the primacy of the doctrine for missionaries, the necessity of accepting original sin, a state of depravity in oneself, as one's primary identity, as the prerequisite for conversion and salvation. Missionary conquest also functions in a double conversion: conversion to a state of original sin followed by conversion to Christ—the fall of the Indian and the ascent of the (White) man. Vine Deloria, Jr. puts it poignantly: “One of the major problems of the Indian people is the missionary. It has been said of missionaries that when they arrived they had only the Book and we had the land; now we have the Book and they have the land. An old Indian once told me that when the missionaries arrived they fell on their knees and prayed. Then they got up, fell on the Indians, and preyed.”²⁸

These are the Western Christian schemas and figurations of Gen. 1-3, imposed as original sin, a totally depraved state of human nature (exemplified by Native peoples—recall the association with promiscuity and dirt in ch. 2). This was, and still is, the dominant understanding of Gen. 1-3. But this is not necessary. This is merely the claim of one particularity to universality. I say *merely* not to undermine the trauma of colonization, but because resistance and resurgence is taking place. The blood and bones cry out from the sacred burial grounds beneath our cities and the foundation begins to shake. Do you hear them? The stones cry out from the earth under Babylon and the concrete cracks. Do you see them?

²⁷ Waziyatawin, “A Serpent in the Garden: An Unholy Worldview on Sacred Land,” *Buffalo Shout, Salmon Cry: Conversations on Creation, Land Justice, and Life Together*, ed. Steve Heinrichs (Waterloo: Herald Press, 2013), 216.

²⁸ Vine Deloria, Jr., *Custer Died For Your Sin: An Indian Manifesto* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1969).

The Hoop is Broken

As I have argued, both Augustine and Fitzpatrick figure the conversion narrative of Gen. 1-3 in temporal terms (the former historical and the latter existential). Both install a hierarchy of creation in which the human stands above the other animals, even after sin. In their fall the human is still above the animals because of its order in creation, made in the image of God (Augustine) and in their ascent to the hybrid animal-human, their further differentiation from animals is a sign of increasing divinity (Fitzpatrick). Already before any disobedience, at the very beginning of creation, humans are allotted superior status in Western Christian thought. This is a major point of contention with Native cosmologies. If we recall from ch. 3, for both Ojibwa and Lakota traditions, the creation of humans in last place signals precisely the opposite: their immaturity, childlike status, total dependability upon the rest of creation. Additionally, creation is non-hierarchical. The images of time and age represented in grandmother/father in creation, father sun and mother earth, and the older siblings of plants and animals, do not signal a linear-temporal order of creation; rather, the kinship names represent the life cycle, a natural circle of birth, life, decay, and death. All things in creation are bound to each other in a circle.

Another major difference is that Native thought/theology does not narrate its experience of suffering, injustice, fragmentation, “sin” by producing a conversion narrative akin to Gen. 1-3. Psychological, ontological, metaphysical, existential questions are therefore markedly absent from discussions of “sin” among Ojibwa and Lakota peoples.²⁹ Indeed, most Native traditions are quite unconcerned with establishing the first cause of sin or evil but focus rather on how to mend the results of sin, how to restore balance and harmony. This is emphatically natural

²⁹ The same is true for Keetoowah Cherokee, Dakota, Osage, and many others. The basic cosmologies are so similar across nations that many Native theologians simply generalize. I try to use the specific nations in order not to homogenize, but when I use the term “Native theologies” or “Native thought” I am referring to the commonalities of the nations I have been working with throughout this thesis, not all of the ones that exist.

(nature oriented) and spatial. A Cherokee story about the origin of strawberries illustrates this emphasis well.

The story begins by describing a man and a woman who live in harmony. Then they begin to quarrel. Neither one can remember what exactly started the quarrel but the argument has been long and tedious. Finally the woman leaves, walking off to the Sun Land in the East to seek comfort. The man follows her, alone and grieving. The woman walks ahead of the man, not looking back. The Creator has pity on the man and asks if his heart is still hardened toward the woman. He says “it is not.” The Creator wants to know if he wants her back. He says, “yes.” So, without asking either party about the nature of the quarrel, or who is to blame or punish, the Creator, intent on healing them, displays different berries along the path where the woman is walking. A patch of huckleberries come into view but the woman passes them by. A clump of blackberries catch her eye but she refuses them. Other trees with fruit and red service berries spring out begging for her attention but she keeps on. Finally a patch of strawberries, the first of its kind ever known, catches her attention and holds it. As she stoops to eat them her face turns toward the West. The memory of her husband comes back to her. As she sits and eats the desire for her husband becomes stronger. Finally, she gathers more strawberries and walks back along the path to give them to him. He meets her kindly and they go home together.³⁰

As one can see, there is very little preoccupation in the story with the conflict itself, its cause and its just deserts. The concern is rather with healing, which the Creator reveals and initiates through the creation of strawberries. The Ojibwa word for strawberries is *ode-imin*, heart shaped fruit (*ode*, meaning heart). Eating the strawberries signifies a return to the heart and the healing that comes with compassion. As Liz Levesque explains, this story illustrates that “reconciliation is not about assigning blame so some quarrel can be fixed. It’s about a lifestyle that involves walking a path toward restoration. *Every time the relationship gets broken, everyone gets back on the path and walks it out.*”³¹

The emphasis on individual sin and salvation and anthropocentrism in Western Christianity is another point of contention between Western and Native theologies. The picture Tootoosis paints might seem utopic or nostalgic, suggesting that there was an edenic time

³⁰ Liz Levesque, “A Native Christian Matriarchal View of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Review of Romans 5:6-8,” *North American Institute for Indigenous Theological Studies* 5 (2007): 107-108. She cites Selu Awiakta, *Seeking the Corn-Mothers Wisdom* (1993).

³¹ Levesque, “A Native Christian Matriarchal View of Reconciliation,” 108. Emphasis mine.

without conflict, suffering, violence, evil and so on before the european settlers arrived. This is not the case. Woodley clarifies the difference:

It is not that [Native peoples] don't recognize the concept of sinfulness, even though many Native American traditions say they have no word for sin in their language. But sin looks different to Native Americans than it appears in traditional European doctrinal conceptions. Sin needn't be inherited or permanent for it to be present in everyone. [...] Among traditional Native Americans, restoring broken harmony is less individualistic, being more about restoring the community—less guilt ridden, not inherent, more tangibly rectifiable, and much more oriented toward restoring harmonious relationships in all of creation, rather than simply obtaining human forgiveness.³²

This is akin to the Lakota phrase *mitakuye oyasin*, all my relations. In such a cosmology sin names the fragmentation of any and all kinship relations. This certainly occurred before the settlers arrived, in the forms of neglect or disregard for ones relatives, if one acted rashly or thoughtlessly towards any two leggeds, “the four-leggeds, the wingeds, and all the living-moving ones, including trees, rocks and mountains, fish and snakes.”³³ In this sense sin is much closer to the ancient Israelite holiness code, the unintentional acquisition of ritual impurity. Acting like one had no relatives was often unintentional and simply a result of not paying attention to or forgetting ones kinship relation to any given created. This includes ignoring ones dependability on and interconnection with all of creation. Such

[r]eliance on ourselves instead of the Creator can take the form of direct acts of selfishness or systems based on selfishness, but it can also develop by disregarding God's natural abundance on earth. Pollution of the earth, air, and water; species depletion; overuse of natural resources; genetically altered foods; foods infused with toxic chemicals—all are choices that bend toward a trajectory of *human ingenuity over trusting God's provision*.³⁴

There is a rejection of futurity here that will no doubt stir discomfort and interjections from amer-europeans: what about the good GMO foods can do? Aren't there responsible ways to use the earth's resources? This is not the place for these conversations about natural resources,

³² Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation*, 69. Woodley sees many similarities between Native understandings of harmony and the notion of shalom among the ancient Israelites in the old testament.

³³ George Tinker, *Spirit and Resistance: Political Theology and American Indian Liberation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 92.

³⁴ Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation*, 80. Emphasis mine.

technology, sustainability, social responsibility, and so on. Suffice it to say that the arguments and justifications for progress are infinite. I simply want to observe the emphatic concern for the present; the lack of futurity in such a statement as Woodley's. This too is a characteristic difference between Native and Western cosmologies. A natural/spatial/circular understanding of life and creation is emphatically oriented on the present while historical/ temporal/linear conceptions tend to be primarily concerned with the future.³⁵

This difference also affects the way we think about sin. Both Augustine and Fitzpatrick posit sin and salvation on linear paths. Though sin goes in opposite directions for them, it is equated with the earthly, bodily, animality, sensuality. In other words, there is a dualism at work here that holds the created world as lesser-than a posited spiritual world that is hoped for. For both, the final antidote for sin is an ascent to God, in space and time. More often than not, Western theology has yearned for another world, a distant place, far from the earth that God created good. This, along with the superior status of humans and the emphasis on the individual, has all too often justified the destruction and exploitation of non-human life forms—the very act and posture that the Ojibwa and Lakota conceive as the essence of sin, the neglect of ones relatives, all creation. As Redbird Smith once remarked, “Th[e traditional] religion does not teach me to concern myself of the life that shall be after this, but it does teach me to be concerned with what my everyday life should be.”³⁶ This does not mean that Native theologies have no regard for life after their own. Indeed, quite the opposite. Because life is circular, they see themselves in a much larger circle of generations. Thus the purpose to care for all relations is not oriented towards the future on a line, but in order to maintain the circle, the harmony and

³⁵ I will elaborate on this in ch. 5.

³⁶ Redbird Smith, Chief of the Nighthawk Keetoowah, 1917, <http://www.cherokee.org/Culture/70/Page/default.aspx>, last accessed on May 31, 2011 quoted in Woodley, *Shalom and the Community*, 77.

balance of all things. To ensure that the circle is presently in balance is to ensure harmony for the circles of generations, reaching behind and ahead.

On a line, balance is understood as a teeter-totter or a weigh scale, maintaining the equal level of two separate things. This is what you see in the Western narrative of sin and salvation: the conversion to sinful humanity and the conversion to Christ to level it out. But as a friend of mine, Ojibwa elder Norman Meade once said, “when we talk about balance, this is not like balance on a teeter-totter; it is balance with all things.”³⁷ I did not quite understand what he meant at the time but I suspect it has something to do with the circle. A circle balances in a number of ways. No matter how you turn it there is no hierarchy, no one is at the top or at the bottom, and there is no beginning or end. One can also think of the circle as a hoop and the way a hoop balances when one throws it. But the hoop does not balance when it is broken. When Black Elk looked around at the devastation brought upon his people he said that the hoop was broken.³⁸ This is a powerful image among the Lakota for how to conceive of sin and salvation. One begins in a whole hoop, neglect and self-reliance cause the hoop to break and go out of balance, rectifying those errors and performing ceremonies of healing mend the hoop and it balances again. This is an ongoing pattern in communities, which are circular like the hoop itself. If one can speak of a Native or Ojibwa and Lakota understanding of Gen. 1-3 then I would identify a schema of whole—broken—whole, or balance—fragmentation—healing, which is a natural-spatial figuration of the alteration that occurs in the garden. But there is no conversion narrative, neither for sin (neglect/fragmentation) nor for salvation (healing/balance). And though “sin” is universal, it is not original, inherited, or permanent; there is no state of depravity, or anxiety, or abominable animal-human hybridity that causes humans to sin. And

³⁷ This is a paraphrase of what he said to me that day.

³⁸ Neihardt, 221.

there is no concern for the lack of explanation for how sin first entered the world. Like Gen. 1-3, Ojibwa and Lakota creation stories and other stories are myths that tell us about our lives, help us to understand where we are and how we got there, not historically speaking but figuratively or symbolically.

Conclusion

This chapter has thought about the various ways in which conversion operates in Western Christianity and presents a refusal to think of conversion and colonial conquest separately. Theology is always bound up with politics and power, and Christianity is abhorrently deficient in attending to the way in which this has functioned with regards to Native peoples. The call coming from Native peoples (both theologians and others) is for decolonization. Decolonization necessarily involves attention to race, specifically the difference indigeneity makes for theology and interpretation of scripture. As I have argued, the Gen. 1-3 text concerns analteration but does not itself offer a conversion narrative as many theologians have suggested. This conversion narrative concerning Adam and Eve has been figured in numerous ways, the most prominent of which is Augustine's "fall." Augustine develops an understanding of original sin from the conversion narrative along the schema of paradise—fall—ascend and figures it along historical-temporal lines. Although Fitzpatrick rejects both the fall and the historical elements of Augustine's theology, he also figures the conversion narrative temporally but along the schema whole—partial-ascend—full ascend. Finally, I argued that both of these conversion narratives imposed on the Gen. 1-3 text are conceived from a Western cosmological vantage point that assumes a hierarchy of creation, individualism, and progress and futurity, concepts that are non-existent or non-important in Native cosmologies like the Ojibwa and Lakota described in ch. 3.

Instead of taking an ontological, metaphysical, or existential approach to the text, I have taken a phenomenological one. Following the words of elder Tootosis, I inquired into the experience of Native peoples with conversion and conquest, specifically as related to the Western understanding of original sin (as a requirement for salvation). The contrast between Augustine's conception of original sin and the importance of his personal experience and the understanding of sin, and the experience of Native peoples is striking. "With Augustine this "fall" is intensely personal: he sees it as a field of forces in the heart of each man [*sic*], an agonizing weakness that forced him to flee from himself, a "fall", a "wandering", that showed itself in a hundred precise incidents of his past life."³⁹ For Native peoples, the experience of a fall, of wandering, is a result of colonization, not any personal disobedience to the Creator. The politics of conversion and conquest, along with the natural-spatial cosmology of the Cree, Ojibwa, and Lakota peoples, led me to suggest an alternative understanding of sin. Drawing on the work of Keetoowah theologian Randy Woodley, I articulated sin as fragmentation and self-reliance, in addition to notions of neglect for and forgetting one's kinship relations (ch. 3). Instead of understanding the experience of brokenness in the world as a result of original sin, I suggested that Black Elk's description of a broken hoop was more accurate and de-colonial, along the schema whole—broken—whole, or balance—fragmentation—healing. For the Native theologians I have relied on so far, the path to balance and healing is not an equality out of one conversion with another one (the first Adam and the second Adam, the fall into sin and the ascent to Christ). Indeed there is no conversion narrative at all, but a spatial movement of *mending* the circle. Black Elk calls this to "*go back into the sacred hoop*" or to "*find the good red road.*"⁴⁰ Randy Woodley calls it *the harmony*

³⁹ Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), 169 quoted in Ribgy, *Original Sin in Augustine's Confessions*, 20.

⁴⁰ Neihardt, 280, 208-9.

way.⁴¹ Some Anishnaabeg call it *mino-bimaadiziwin*.⁴² The old testament calls it *shalom*. As Dakota scholar and activist Waziyatawin wrote:

As Indigenous communities across the Americas and the globe seek resurgence, it is not Christianity that will show us how to live *in a good way* on this land, but our own ancient and sacred traditions. Christians have *demonstrated* that there is something profoundly wrong with their cosmology—that it is in need of radical reformation of core convictions to learn how to live with *reverence* for nonhuman and non-Christian life-forms. Perhaps that is why the Christian priest and eco-theologian Thomas Berry said, in all seriousness, that it would be wise for Christians to forget Jesus and shelve their Bibles for a while so that they can reconnect to the *earth, the primary revelation of the Creator*. Maybe then they will stop crucifying the planet and the Creator who is in “all things.”⁴³

This chapter has certainly left some questions unanswered which the next chapter will hopefully clarify. I turn now to questions of the first and second Adam, redemption, and decolonization in another prominent text for Augustine’s doctrine of original sin: Romans 5.

⁴¹ Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation*.

⁴² Sometimes translated as “the good life” or “continuous rebirth,” Winona LaDuke, “Minobimaatisiwin: The Good Life,” *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, 16.4: 69-72 and *All Our Relations: Struggles for Land and Life* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2004), 4, 132.” Cf. Leanne Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle’s Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence* (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2011), 142; Michael Anthony Hart, *Seeking Mino-Pimatisiwin: An Aboriginal Approach to Helping* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2002). And Jordan Bighorn, a friend of mine who works for a local organization in Winnipeg, MB called Mino-Bimaadiziwin.

⁴³ Thomas Berry paraphrased from Ilia Delio, Keith Warner, and Pamela Wood, *Care for Creation: A Franciscan Spirituality of the Earth* (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Press, 2008), 10, cited in Waziyatawin, “A Serpent in the Garden,” 223. Emphasis mine.

Chapter 5

Conversion & Assimilation: Redemption, Resurgence, and Romans 5-8

“Grace has left their bodies...They now tread heavily upon the back of their mother. Lunging from place to place, they plant seeds but don’t bother to watch them grow. They water nothingness as though this water will somehow recreate life without their participation...Their world has lost its future. Cut off from considering their past they list in the momentary context of the present...They mark time. Time is the enemy of the dispirited. [They] wander aimlessly, killing time in small pieces.”

-Lee Maracle¹

“Conversion is never now...If conversion happens, then the now does not.”

-Daniel Colucciello Barber²

Introduction

In chapter 4 I argued that Genesis 1-3 functions as a conversion narrative in Western Christianity and that its dominant schema as a fall figured in historical-temporal terms produces and maintains Augustine’s formulation of original sin. As I alluded to in the previous chapter, salvation corresponds to this, figured as an ascent to Christ. The primary texts for Augustine with regards to this are in Romans 5 and 7, but I will extend this to include chapters 5-8 for our purposes here. In Augustine, Gen. 1-3 is figured as a conversion narrative from perfection to

¹ Lee Maracle, *Daughters are Forever* (Vancouver: Raincoast, 2002), 25.

² Daniel Colucciello Barber, “The Immanent Refusal of Conversion,” *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 13.1 (Winter 2014): 142.

fall. The parallel in Rom. 5-8 is also figured as a conversion narrative but from fall to ascent. It can be said then that these two texts work together as a larger single conversion narrative: Gen. 1-3 is a fall narrative and Rom. 5-8 is a redemption narrative. It must also be noted that the conversion that takes place in the first narrative is always effaced for the efficacy of the second narration. This is accomplished in the formulation of sin as original. By designating the status of original sinners to all Adam's descendants, the second conversion—to Christ—is seen as the only conversion, the necessity of which is established through the inherited state of original sin in every human. In this way, adherence to the doctrine of original sin obfuscates the way in which the first and second conversion work together to establish the necessity for conversion (i.e. the notion of original sin required for conversion to Christ), for as Paul wrote: “God proves his love for us in that while we were still *sinners* Christ died for us.” (Rom. 5:8, NRSV) By beginning with the discourse of original sin(ners), Western Christianity since Augustine has been able to articulate its message of redemption through a simple typological interpretation of Rom. 5 based on the inherited, universal state of depravity (which it treats as a given). Ch. 4 examined the work that Gen. 1-3 does when interpreted as a conversion narrative, particularly in relation to colonialism, and suggested alternative ways to understand the passage from various north american Indigenous perspectives. This chapter will proceed in much the same way only now taking the second conversion passage as our subject of analysis. I will begin by rehearsing the significance of Rom. 5-8 in Augustine's formulation of original sin. Then I will consider some comments on Augustine's interpretation by Joseph Fitzpatrick. Next I will draw attention to the effects of the rhetoric of Rom. 5-8 on Native peoples, especially in the experience of Indian Residential Schools. Finally, drawing on the exegetical work of philosopher Giorgio Agamben, scholar Leanne Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg), and the life and vision of Plenty Coups

(Crow), I will suggest what it might mean to decolonize the dominant redemption narrative in Western interpretation of Rom. 5-8 and its relation to the doctrine of original sin.

Inheriting Augustine

Next to Gen. 3, Rom. 5 is arguably the most important passage for Augustine's formulation of original sin. As noted in ch. 4, Augustine's interpretation of Gen. 3 and his own experiences, lead him to formulate a notion of sin as utterly depraved fallen human nature which is evidently passed on to all Adam's descendants. It is Rom. 5 that confirms this for Augustine, and enables him to attach the notion of seminal identity to original sin (something he inherited from Ambrose). This connection hinges on Rom. 5:12. Relying on Ambrosiaster's exegesis and translation of the letter, Augustine read Rom. 5:12 as "*in whom* all have sinned" (the Latin *in quo*). Rendered as "in whom," the passage supports Augustine's theory that sin is not only universal, but that it is so on account of its inevitable heritability through the reproductive process. This also leads him to interpret Rom. 7:7-25 as a claim that "sin originated in the transgression of Adam and became ingrained in human nature through the transmission of physical heredity."³ Original sin "defines a sinful quality which is inherent in human nature, albeit involuntarily acquired."⁴ The role Augustine's own experience plays in his theology cannot be overstated. As his interest in Christianity peaked, his conflicted will kept him from converting: "In this way I understood through my own experience what I had read, how 'the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh' (Gal. 5:17). I was split between them, but more of me was in that which I approved in myself than in that which I disapproved. In the latter case it was 'no more I' (Rom. 7:17), since in large part I was passive and unwilling rather

³Toews, 74.

⁴Ibid.

than active and willing.”⁵ Furthermore, in his *Confessions*, he identifies himself with Paul in Rom. 7:22-25. He writes:

But ‘At once, at once’ never came to the point of decision, and ‘Just a little longer, please’ went on and on for a long while. In vain I ‘delighted in your law in respect of the inward man; but another law in my members fought against the law of my mind and led me captive in the law of sin which was in my members’ (Rom. 7:22). The law of sin is the violence of habit by which even the unwilling mind is dragged down and held, as it deserves to be, since by its own choice it slipped into the habit. ‘Wretched man that I was, who would deliver me from this body of death other than your grace through Jesus Christ our Lord?’ (Rom. 7:24-25).⁶

By associating, even identifying, himself with Paul, Augustine secures unprecedented authority for his theology of original sin. As Paul Fredriksen has observed, Augustine “demonstrates the truth of orthodoxy’s claims about Paul through his public application of (the Catholic) Paul’s story to his own past. Not incidentally, this has the added polemical advantage of affirming that the tradition of Paul, of the Church, and of Augustine are all one.”⁷

As long as Rom. 5:12 is rendered “in whom,” Augustine’s concept of original sin is secure and the redemption typology in Rom. 5:12-21 can be read as a conversion narrative that maps out not only in Augustine’s life but in anyone’s—indeed everyone’s—life.

Adam fell and was punished with a threefold punishment of ignorance, concupiscence, and mortality. This fall he propagated from generation to generation [...] to be healed, fallen man must ascend in the type of trinitarian ascent Augustine undertakes in his *De Trinitatae* [...] The teaching of the *Confessions* is that trinitarian ascent [...] can be made only by entering into the humble descent of Christ’s incarnation. *Original sin makes confessio peccati et laudis the only way of ascending to God.*⁸

To put it differently, Augustine’s doctrine of original sin via Gen. 3 and Rom. 5 prefigures a certain understanding of the Adam-Christ typology: if Adam’s disobedience propagates sin as a *fall* throughout all humanity, then Christ’s obedience must extend salvation as an *ascent* throughout all humanity. Therein lies the (second) conversion to Christ as an ascent from

⁵ Augustine, *Confessions*, VIII.v.11 or 140.

⁶ *Ibid.*, VIII.v.12-vi.13 or 141.

⁷ Fredriksen, “Paul and Augustine,” 25.

⁸ Rigby, 113-114. Emphasis mine.

human's sinful state. The Romans typology thus functions as a conversion narrative, but not only that, it is specifically a redemption narrative. What is unique about the redemption narrative in Rom. 5-8 is that it employs typological relation (the first and second Adam) and familial relation: Rom. 8:14-24 uses the word *adoption* (the Greek *huiiothesia*) to describe the new life humans receive in Christ. Conversion to Christ makes us "children of God" (8:16, 19, 21). Conversion to the second Adam effaces our former status as original sinners, estranged from God, and we overcome this former identity for one in which we can call God "Abba, Father" (8:15). The typology closes the gap of estrangement caused by the sin of the first Adam and obliterates the sinful nature of all those between the two Adams; this is its redemptive quality, one that is essential to Augustine's theology, though perhaps not always explicit. We have already established that conversion for Augustine (and likewise redemption) requires an upward movement characterized by a change from an old identity to a new one. Augustine recounts this on a personal level in *Confessions*, but it is the basis for his soteriology as much as his hamartiology. Sin and salvation are figured as a conversion narrative, the redemption narrative highlighting the effect of the conversion (on identity). This entire regime of redemption hinges on the interpretation of Rom. 5:12 as "in whom," since it is seminal identity vis-à-vis sin that makes the typology sensical and necessitates the familial adoption to ameliorate the estrangement experienced as a result of original sin. But as scholars have long argued, "in whom" is a mistranslation of Rom. 5:12.

Since the late second century, the Greek fathers have understood 5:12 as causal. Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and the Cappadocian Fathers all affirmed the universality of sin, death, and corruption on account of Adam but no inheritance of sinful nature through him. Additionally, Pelagius, Celestius, and Julian of Eclanum argued with Augustine that the Greek in

Rom. 5:12 could not be rendered “in whom” as Augustine had inherited it from Ambrosiaster, but should be understood as “because of.”⁹ Julian translated the Greek *eph ho* as *quia* in Latin, “because,” “in accordance with the Pelagian doctrine of sin as always being a free and therefore punishable act: all died “because” all sinned. Nonetheless, Augustine was able to exploit the weakness of the “individualist” interpretation of the Pelagians by referring to the whole thrust of the Christ-Adam typology.”¹⁰ Scholar Henri Rondet articulates some of the complexity of the debate:

Julian of Eclanum, who knew Greek, understood the *in quo* as a particle providing a causal link—*quia*, because—but he concludes from this that there is not in this text a question of personal sins added by Adam’s children to that of their first father, sin being spread only by bad example (*imitation*). Augustine, unreliable exegete as he was with regard to detail, had nevertheless better understood the chapter as a whole and the force of verse 19: ‘as by the disobedience of one man many will be made righteous.’ The root of the problem is in the doctrine of the two Adams. Christ is the new Adam; if all men die in Adam, all will be made alive in Christ (1 Cor. 15:22).¹¹

An essential aspect of Augustine’s hamartiology relies on the translation of the *eph ho* as “in whom.” Without this his theory of seminal identity is nonsensical. “In whom all have sinned” draws a historical-temporal line through all humanity. Just as Christ was a historical person, so was Adam, and as a type of Adam, the new, obedient Adam, Christ reaches back along this historical-temporal line to redeem the sins of all. Thus we can see how the mistranslation affects the entire schema of original sin and redemption (i.e. conversion’s fall—ascend). Similarly, a translation of Rom. 5:12 as “*because of whom* all sinned” can lend itself to a different understanding of sin and salvation.

Joseph Fitzpatrick offers a critique of Augustine in this regard. He takes issue with three conclusions Augustine draws based on the mistranslation:

⁹ The politics around this controversy and which translation won out as orthodox are outlined in ch. 2 of this thesis.

¹⁰ Weaver, “From Paul to Augustine,” 203.

¹¹ Henri Rondet, *Original Sin: The Patristic and Theological Background*, trans. Cajetan Finegan (New York, 1972), 128-9 quoted in Weaver, “From Paul to Augustine,” 203, n. 53.

first, that just as Christ is a real person, so Adam must be understood as a real person; second, that Paul clearly sees Adam's action of eating from the forbidden tree as an original trespass or sin, in which all of us are implicated, which is responsible for all subsequent moral evil; and third, that as a consequence of these two, the incident described in Genesis 3 *must be interpreted as a fall from a higher to a lower state since it has called forth Christ's saving act of redemption aimed at restoring us to something approaching our former status.*¹²

Recalling that Gen. 1-3 serves a mythological function, Fitzpatrick argues that Paul's reference to Adam in Romans is also figurative, that Adam, both in Genesis and Romans is a "mythical prototype." The typology therefore is not a historical one but a "literary device."¹³ Additionally, following his interpretation of Adam's transgression as an illustration of the sins of the Israelites, Fitzpatrick reads Paul's reference to Adam's trespass as a reference to the universality of Christ's obedience and redemption. As a non-historical figure of the nature of sin and its universal effects, the type "Adam" evokes the universal effect of the historical Christ. Thirdly, Fitzpatrick argues that since there is no reference in the typology to the fall of humans from a prior paradisiacal state, there is no basis on which to assume Christ's act as a restoration of humans to such a higher state. As he observes, "Paul makes no comparison between Man's [*sic*] new status and the condition of Man [*sic*] before the 'Fall,' nor does he for that matter ever speak of a 'Fall.'¹⁴ Fitzpatrick's rejection of the *in quo* for the *quia* is not only a rejection of Augustine's notion of seminal identity but the doctrine of original sin in its entirety. By following the *quia* Fitzpatrick disavows any historical reading of the Rom. 5 typology with regards to Adam, while still affirming the universality of sin. By unhinging the typology from its historical interpretation, Fitzpatrick opens the way for an interpretation of Christ's redemptive act that is not bound to Augustine's linear portrayal of a recapitulation in chronological space-time.

¹² Fitzpatrick, "Original Sin or Original Sinfulness? 4: Restoring Roots," *New Blackfriars*, no. 1031 (January 2010): 72-73. Emphasis mine.

¹³ Fitzpatrick, "Restoring Roots," 73.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Indeed, this is a key turning point for our thinking about both sin and salvation, brokenness and healing. Recall my suggestion that Rom. 5-8 is the parallel conversion narrative to Gen. 1-3 for Augustine. The fall requires an ascent. Sin requires redemption. In ch. 4 I thought through some of the experiences the Gen. 3 conversion narrative produced, origin(al)zing sin, origin(al)zing a fallen state to Native peoples. I alluded to the way in which this first conversion to original sin set up the necessity for this second conversion to Christ. I conveyed the stark parallels between the fall/original sin and Native culture on the one hand and ascent/redemption and White Christian amer-european culture on the other. The first conversion was the condemnation of Native culture and the second was the redemptive nullification of it, for becoming Christian meant becoming White. Similarly, we must now consider the experiences Native peoples had of this second conversion to Christ, the redemption from their depravity, and their adoption into the church as children of God. Or, to put it differently, we must ask again what difference indigeneity makes for the redemption narrative in Rom. 5-8.

Redemption, Adoption, Assimilation

“What then should we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet, if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin, I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.” But sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law sin lies dead.” (Rom. 7:7-8)

“So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit of bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” (Rom. 8:12-16)

“for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have

the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.” (Rom. 8:20-23)

It is no secret that the Christian churches in north america were at the forefront of the most “successful” work not only of religious conversion but of cultural conversion—that is, assimilation. To convert to Christianity, to be redeemed from one’s sinful nature, one had to become White, and this was most effectively accomplished through Indian mission schools. Many of these schools were residential boarding schools located off-reserve. Many of the children who attended these schools were dropped off by their parents in hopes of giving them opportunities and skills for their future in what was quickly becoming the White-man’s-world. Others were gathered up by school officials and transported to the schools. To the surprise and great despair of many of these children and parents, they did not see each other for years, some never again. In that sense these children were *adopted* into another family—the Christian family that called God “Abba, Father.” Adoption into these new families of the church entailed many things including typical education in the English language, geography, science, math, and music, but essentially they were schools of conversion (for the purpose of redemption). As Berkhofer’s survey of mission school curricula demonstrates, “[b]ible and catechism were reading textbooks as in White schools. In both day and boarding schools, prayer and hymn singing were frequent, and attendance was required at Sabbath services.”¹⁵ When the use of “secular” textbooks increased across subjects, “a teacher requested some science apparatus from his society in order to demonstrate that the earth was neither flat nor borne on the back of a turtle and that two benevolent forefathers did not create and carry the sun and moon.”¹⁶ Teachers creatively inserted Christian teaching into all courses, because the world, as they saw it, was essentially Christian: “The instructors hoped geography and natural history would batter down the bulwarks

¹⁵ Berkhofer, 31.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

of savage cosmology preparatory to the invasion of Christian sentiments.”¹⁷ Christianity de facto nullified Native cosmology.

Initiation into the new family also required an outward change (which was more easily accomplished, much to the dismay of many missionaries). Upon their arrival at Indian mission schools, Native children were washed, children had their long hair cut short, they were given new European style clothing, and last but not least, they were given a new English name. This process of receiving a new identity evokes baptismal imagery, but it is haunting rather than celebratory. The giving of a new name is an especially powerful gesture. The power to name is the power to identify, and to determine the terms of identification—that which counts as identity and that which does not. Naming here is an act of domination.¹⁸ This should also invoke the Western interpretation of Adam’s naming of the animals in Genesis as a sign of human dominion over all creation (i.e. permission to exploit, control, organize, etc.).¹⁹ As if that were not enough, the new names given to little Indian boys and girls directly signified and reinforced White power (over identity). “From the viewpoint of the mission societies’ directors, beneficiary naming was a method of obtaining contributions, for upon the donation of a stipulated sum per year, the donor had an Indian child named after him or for someone else. The donor received a brief letter annually from the teacher or directly from his namesake.”²⁰

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ I qualify this statement to its particular situation, that of Western Christian colonialism. Naming itself is not necessarily an act of dominance. Indeed, many traditions of naming in Native cultures function very differently. As mentioned in ch. 3, the names by which people are called include their kinship relation. This reinforces a circle of relations rather than a hierarchy as it does in the West. Furthermore, the giving and receiving of names, especially spiritual names, is often associated with ceremonies of healing in Native cultures. Cf. Fred Kelly, “Confession of a Born Again Pagan,” in *From Truth to Reconciliation: Transforming the Legacy of Residential Schools*, ed. Marlene Brant Castellano, Linda Archibald, and Mike deGangé (Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2008), 37.

¹⁹ Here again this interpretation is particular to Western Christianity. The Ojibwa creation stories also include a ceremony in which the Creator names all things in creation, but there is no understanding of dominion. Cf. Fred Kelly, “Confession of a Born Again Pagan,” 34.

²⁰ Berkhofer, 37.

In an article published by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (AHF) of Canada, Ojibwa elder Fred Kelly writes about some of his experiences in St. Mary's Residential School (Kenora, ON) and St. Paul's High School (Lebret, SK) where he lived from age four to fourteen. Astutely titled "Confessions of a Born Again Pagan," elder Kelly delineates the specific ways in which the logic of conversion I have been discussing played itself out in all aspects of the schools, while the format of the article itself follows the form of a Catholic confession of sins. Indian Residential Schools (IRS) were operated in Canada from 1831 to 1996. Backed by government policies for assimilation they were run by churches with their agenda of conversion. "To missionaries and their patrons, in fact, the criterion for measuring the success of the schools in transforming savage attitudes was the number of conversions among the students."²¹ Many IRS in Canada began on or near reserves as day schools, "but by 1900, it became evident that the policy of assimilation was not working. The children had to be taken away from the pagan influence of their parents."²² To ameliorate this, "legislative changes to the *Indian Act* in 1920 allowed for children between the ages of seven and fifteen to be forcibly removed from their parents and placed into these schools. [...] It then [also] became punishable by law, not only for the children to be out of school, but also for parents to withhold children from attending these schools."²³ IRS were therefore not the new families for Native children in a figurative sense but in a literal-historical sense, and even in a legal sense. Elder Kelly explains:

Restrictions on their civil rights meant that "Indians" were not "persons" under the law and therefore had no means of challenging intrusions on their families and communities. For all intents and purposes Indians were considered to be 'wards of the government,' and this made it possible and easy for churches to assume legal custody of Indian children in the residential schools. Thus, care and treatment of the children were at the total and unquestioned discretion of the churches and their personnel.²⁴

²¹ Ibid., 43.

²² Fred Kelly, "Confession of a Born Again Pagan," 23.

²³ Ibid. In a footnote he adds: "Forced attendance was legislated in 1920 for children aged 7-15, although there are stories of children as young as age five being taken as well as accounts of forced removal before 1920."

²⁴ Ibid., 24.

Both legally and theologically Native children were “adopted” into the church to become children of (a White) God. What is so striking about the conversion/assimilation that occurred in IRS is the inseparability of the theological language and the atrocities committed. I will not attempt to summarize these or convey the trauma experienced by IRS survivors. Elder Kelly is one of these and he speaks for himself:

Immediately upon entry into the school, the staff began to beat the devil out of us. Such was my experience. We were humiliated out of our culture and spirituality. We were told that these ways were of the devil. We were punished for speaking the only language we ever knew. Fear stalked the dark halls of the school as priests and nuns going about their rounds in black robes passed like floating shadows in the night. Crying from fear was punished by beatings that brought more crying and then more punishment. Braids were immediately shorn. Traditional clothing was confiscated and replaced by standard issue uniforms. Our traditional names were anglicized and often replaced by numbers. Those who ran away were held in dark closets and fed a bread-and-water diet when they were brought back. Any sense of dignity and self-esteem turned to self-worthlessness and hopelessness. We came to believe that ‘Indian’ was a dirty word, oftentimes calling each other by that term pejoratively. Many of us were physically beaten, sexually fondled, molested, and raped.

The future seemed hopeless. We were incarcerated for no other reason than being Indian. We were deprived of the care, love, and guidance of our parents during our most critical years of childhood. [...]

*Father, I tried to rationalize what I saw and experienced. The treatment of children, as horrific as it was, must have been our normal lot for having been the pagan sinners we had been.*²⁵

To use the language of Paul, to receive a spirit of adoption, was to receive a new White identity. To receive a new White identity was to be redeemed from one’s old pagan/sinner identity. “To become truly Christian was to become anti-Indian. The good Indian convert realized his former religion was superstitious and his former habits slothful and sinful.”²⁶ The resonances with Rom. 7:7-8 are noteworthy. It was the law of White Western Christianity that made the sins of Native peoples known to them, that identified them as sinners. Indeed, apart from this law of Christian civilization, their “sins” lay dead.

²⁵ Ibid., 24-25.

²⁶ Berkhofer, 122.

The logic of conversion/assimilation and its redemption narrative concern bodies. In Rom. 8:12-16 those who have received Christ's redemptive grace live by his Spirit while those who have not live according to the flesh. In the IRS, living by the Spirit was living according the law and grace of amer-europeans while living according to the flesh was that of Native traditions. It becomes quite evident how the logic of conversion first condemns Native existence through the narrative of original sin and then effaces it through the redemption narrative. The Native children of God may now call God "Abba, Father" but that paternalistic relation runs much deeper, along racial lines. If the fathers of these children are White, and God is Abba, then God is White. Or, to riff on Mary Daly, "if God is [white] then [white] is God."²⁷ These changes in conversion, assimilation, are what we can call spatial aspects of conversion, the changes in identity. Indeed, change of identity, from one to another, is the aspect of conversion that receives the most attention, it is almost the definition of conversion. But it is not the only aspect of conversion, for between one identity and another there must be *movement* for it to be considered conversion,²⁸ and movement has to do with time. We must ask then about the time, the temporality of conversion. If, as I have suggested, we abandon the *in quo*, "in whom," translation of Rom. 5:12, which holds Augustine's formulation of sin and salvation together, then we must also think about the temporality of the Adam-Christ typology in another way, in a non-linear way.

In Christian colonialism the "Abba, Father" spoken by converted (read assimilated) children of God establishes a hierarchical, paternalistic relation both between children and

²⁷ Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 19. Her original phrase is "if God is male then male is God."

²⁸ Barber, "The Immanent Refusal of Conversion," 142.

adults/teachers and between Native and amer-european.²⁹ In an Augustinian reading of the redemption narrative in Rom. 5-8 it is conversion that moves one from a life in original sin to a life in the grace of Christ, from a depraved identity to a redeemed one, from estrangement to adoption. Or, to put it differently, in an Augustinian interpretation, the second Adam effaces the difference that sin makes (i.e. death, concupiscence, ignorance, for Augustine). The trouble with this interpretation is not redemption from sin as such, but that indigeneity is equated with sin and amer-europeans with redemption. In other words, interpreted this way, the second Adam effaces the difference of indigeneity, or the difference indigeneity makes. Since it is the law that makes sin knowable, and that law is conceived in racial terms (White), it is by this law that indigenous laws and life become known as sin. Or so goes the colonization narrative. But we forget that sin here is not something objective revealed as sin by the (White) law; rather, indigeneity is *produced as sin* by the (White) law.³⁰ Thus conversion's redemption narrative in an Augustinian typology effaces the world of difference (i.e. sin) between the first and second Adam *in the name* of reconciliation with God. But what this means, as the theology of IRS experiences have shown us, is that the Western redemption narrative effectively effaces the world of difference marked by indigeneity. Conversion effaces indigenous existence *in the name* (i.e. adoption) of Christ (i.e. redemption). However, following the claims of Andrea Smith and Laura Donaldson, this reading is not essential to the text itself. There are other ways of understanding the Adam-Christ typology in Romans and the broader vision for the healing of all creation in Rom. 5-8.

²⁹ Berkhofer has observed that even Native peoples who had "fully" converted to Christianity and amer-european culture were still considered inferior by their Christian compatriots, and traitors by their Native communities. Thus he refers to them as "Jehovah's Stepchildren." Cf. Berkhofer, 107-124.

³⁰ I demonstrated conversion's origin(al)izing of sin in chapters 3 and 4 with reference to Genesis 1-3.

The Time of Conversion

As I discussed in chapter 3, one of the fundamental differences between Lakota and Ojibwa cosmologies on the one hand and amer-european cosmologies on the other is the conception of space and time. As Vine Deloria has demonstrated, Native peoples tend to think and live primarily in spatial terms while time is the primary category in Western cosmology(s). Additionally, these categories correlate with the concepts of nature and history respectively. Time and history are conceived of in spatial and natural terms in Native cosmologies while space and nature are subordinate to time and history in the West. In Western cosmology, space and nature are interpreted as a series of events on a timeline we call history. Think even of the literal historical sequence of creation—fall—redemption in Augustine’s theology. In Native cosmologies the natural movements in space, or the spatial movements of nature itself produce concepts of time. Seasons, lunar phases, and life cycles are circular and/or cyclical notions of time and in turn history.

In chapters 4 and 5 I argued that both original sin and its counterpart redemption are aspects of the same logic of conversion, and as such, it is not accidental that they are figured in temporal, linear ways (by Augustine, Fitzpatrick, and indeed any scholar who figures Gen. 1-3 and Rom. 5-8, sin and salvation as or dependent upon *conversion*). Indeed, a linear temporality is internal to the logic of conversion and this is necessarily so. Conversion requires the identification of an old and a new self and produces these through the linear (often historical) establishment of a before and after (conversion). The following reflection by philosopher Daniel Barber captures the logic of conversion:

Conversion is never now. Conversion is often narrated as a moment of turning, a turning that happens in an ineffable instant, and this gets us in the habit of linking conversion to the now. [...] But conversion does not happen this way. [...] To convert is to move, but it is simultaneous to identify or to position, for conversion is a movement from one identity to another. *Movement requires the emplotment provided by at least two positions, and*

*these positions gain their meaning through the narration of the movement between them. All this is to say that movement and identity depend on one another, and that their dependence is articulated as a narrative.*³¹

The conversion narrative of Western Christianity establishes the identities of sinner and child-of-God and the linear movement of the before and after, the old and the new. The redemption narrative of the Adam-Christ typology is paradigmatic of this. It produces at once these identities and their movement, their position in time, narrating the position of the convert as in a moment between the past sins of Adam and the redemptive futurity of Christ—the moment of conversion. But as Barber writes, this is not a present moment; “conversion is never now.”³² We can be sure of this when we take into account the difference indigeneity makes, because difference is a question of the now, of presence. Western Christianity’s conversion narrative is not somehow merely theological, neutral to questions of power, of race. As I have tried to show throughout this thesis, Christianity’s essential narrative, creation—fall—redemption, is narrated in racial terms. And in this conversion narrative the movement of identities is from sinner/Indian to child-of-God/White. How many times must I say that for Native peoples becoming Christian meant becoming White? And that this is essential to colonial Christianity. And that colonization is essential to conversion.

This is the legacy of Western interpretations of Gen. 1-3 and Rom. 5-8. I have focused quite a bit on the change of identities in conversion, in original sin and redemption, but I have not yet sufficiently addressed the movement.³³ For the purposes of this thought experiment let us think of identities as spatial and movement as temporal (recognizing that identification also happens in time and movement in space). In the conversion narrative the identities are sinner

³¹ Barber, 142. Emphasis mine.

³² Ibid.

³³ To be sure, identity and movement operate together, inseparably, but I make a heuristic distinction here to draw out some of the distinct features of how the movement operates.

and child-of-God in theological terms and Native and White in racial terms, these terms being inseparable in Christian colonialism. The second identity conceals the first, but it is the time in between these that is disappeared. We can call this movement *effacement*. Conversion is the time it takes to move from one identity to another; conversion is the time it takes to efface one identity for another. Here we can reintroduce the spatiality of the movement. The movement is the effacement of difference, specifically the difference indigeneity makes. This difference is neither in the past nor in the future but in the present, which is why it must be disappeared in order for conversion to happen. As Barber puts it, “if conversion does not happen now, if conversion never happens now, then this is because conversion denies the now, because conversion never wants the now to happen, or because conversion wants the now never to happen. If conversion happens, then the now does not.”³⁴ We can see this logic, and this temporality of the movement of conversion at work. If conversion happens then indigeneity does not, because conversion denies and effaces Native existence. If indigeneity refuses conversion, if Native existence happens, then conversion does not. Indigenous existence is in the now. Yet Christianity has been “successful” in colonization, in conversion. Thus, *presently*, indigenous existence is wrought with trauma and cultural devastation.

Effacement: after this, nothing happened

The life and vision of Crow chief Plenty Coups is one of cultural devastation as well as resistance, or rather resurgence, to the effacement of colonial conversion brought upon the Crow people. Plenty Coups’ experience of colonization can help us to understand the effacing movement of conversion, for colonization and conversion are but two sides of the same coin. Similar to how Black Elk told his story to John Neihardt, Plenty Coups passed on some of his

³⁴ Barber, 142.

story to a friend named Frank B. Linderman, also a White man. Before the Crow were confined to a reservation of land, they lived nomadically, hunting buffalo.³⁵ In his book on Plenty Coups, Jonathan Lear draws attention to one of the most striking comments Plenty Coups made to Linderman:

Plenty Coups refused to speak of his life after the passing of the buffalo, so that his story seems to have been broken off, leaving many years unaccounted for. "I have not told you half of what happened when I was young," he said, when urged to go on. "I can think back and tell you much more of war and horse-stealing. But when the buffalo went away the hearts of my people fell to the ground, and they could not lift them up again. *After this nothing happened.* There was little singing anywhere. Besides," he added sorrowfully, "*you know that part of my life as well as I do. You saw what happened to us when the buffalo went away.*"³⁶

The phrase "after this nothing happened" will certainly sound esoteric to Western ears. What could Plenty Coups possibly mean by this claim? Had the Crow reached the end of history? Was there an event that marked the end of all events? A time, a point at which nothing afterwards could be counted as a happening? What is a happening, anyway?

Clearly, we can say that in no objective sense did history exhaust itself. Thus one way to understand this claim would be psychologically, that life on the reservation (after the buffalo went away) was so depressing, traumatic, meaningless, oppressive, despairing that what happened there was not worth recounting because it was a death of sorts, and happenings seem to require life. But Lear's analysis goes further. While many of these psychological experiences may be true, he suggests that a "happening" refers to the lived presence of Crow life. Or rather, Crow existence is the precondition for happenings. Thus when the buffalo went away and reservation life began, this change marked a time of cultural devastation. Or, we could say, this

³⁵ It is worth noting that the Crow managed to retain a much larger portion of their land for reservation than most other Native American tribes did and thus also more of their traditions. Plenty Coups' vision played a large role in this. The effects of colonization were still deleterious though, as Plenty Coups suggests.

³⁶ Frank B. Linderman, *Plenty-Coups: Chief of the Crows* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1962), 308-309 quoted in Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 2.

conversion disappeared Crow existence itself. This is emphasized by the last line: “you know that part of my life as well as I do. You saw what happened to us when the buffalo went away.”

But even such an anthropological interpretation is not quite enough, though it is that too. What Lear wants to know is this:

What is it about a form of life’s coming to an end that makes it such that for the inhabitants of that life things cease to happen? Not just that it would *seem* to them that things ceased to happen, but what it would *be* for things to cease happening. [...] It is one thing to give an account of the circumstances in which a way of life actually collapses, it is another to give an account of *what it would be* for it to collapse. And it is yet another to ask: How ought we to live with this possibility of collapse?³⁷

I have discussed the first question at length with reference to various aspects of Christian colonialism in north america. I want to address the second question here with regards to conversion, movement, and time. The third question will be taken up later in consideration of resistance and resurgence movements.

The Crow were essentially hunters and warriors, both of which made their existence possible. “[I]n traditional Crow life, *everything* counted either as hunting or fighting or as preparing to hunt and fight.”³⁸ Everyday acts were given meaning within the greater purpose of hunting and fighting which constituted existence culturally but also literally (hunting for sustenance and fighting for territory where the buffalo were). Without this larger scheme of life (which the reservation deprived) even every day acts ceased to be meaningful or even intelligible.³⁹ Lear illustrates:

Imagine an evening in 1860: a young Crow woman wanders by another’s teepee, sees her stirring a pot on an open flame, and asks her, “What are you doing?” She answers, “I’m getting my husband and family ready for tomorrow’s battle.” In the context, this answer is a real possibility. She is preparing a meal, but she identifies the act by locating it in a larger scheme of purposefulness. It is this larger scheme that is suddenly wiped out—and with it goes the possibility of identifying the act in this way. In 1890, it is still possible

³⁷ Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 8-9.

³⁸ Lear, *Radical Hope*, 40.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 34-41.

for a member of the Crow tribe to stir a pot outside a teepee, and such stirring can count as cooking a meal. But there are no longer any circumstances in which an appropriate answer to the question “What are you doing?” is “Getting my family ready for tomorrow’s battle.”⁴⁰

The conversion of Crow life to reservation life was devastating. Not only did it efface cultural practices, the entire scheme of existence in which anything or anyone could be identified as Crow was disappeared “when the buffalo went away.” *After this nothing happened... You know that part of my life as well as I do.* Like other Native nations, the Crow conceived of time in terms of space: lunar patterns, the seasons, especially related to buffalo migration. The temporality of Crow life was determined by the hunt and the fight. And the conversion nullified, rendered obsolete, the temporality of Crow life by foreclosing the possibilities for a time to hunt, a time to fight, and a time to prepare for these.

We mark change with a *now*—a now that divides the change into a before and an after. But to grasp this now we need to understand it as a *now-when*: a now when *this change* is occurring. But in the situation as we are envisaging it, the Crow ran out of *whens*: the categories that would normally have filled in the blanks lost their intelligibility. It could no longer be a *now-when-we-are-hunting-buffalo*. And nothing could any longer count as *now-when-we-are-preparing-for-such-a-hunt*. Similarly for battle. But all Crow temporality had fitted within these categories—everything that happened could be understood in these terms—and thus it seems fair to say that the Crow ran out of time.⁴¹

The effacement of Crow culture. The disappearance of a time of Crow existence. The movement from nomadic life on the land to the confines of the reservation and the disappearance of the buffalo. The settling down, settlement of nomadic life. This is the colonial conversion (which, we cannot for a moment forget, is Christian). The temporality of conversion moves from one identity to another, from a before to an after, as if in an instant, without delay, foreclosing the possibility of Crow existence in the present. In other words, “Crow subjectivity collapses.”⁴² As a Crow person, “[t]he concepts with which I would otherwise have understood myself—

⁴⁰ Ibid., 39-40.

⁴¹ Ibid., 41.

⁴² Ibid., 49.

indeed, the concepts with which I would otherwise have shaped my identity—have gone out of existence,” as Lear puts it.⁴³ But this is not a matter of the exhaustion of a culture, the dwindling off of a people; disappearance is always produced. As Barber argued, “conversion denies the now, because conversion never wants the now to happen, or because conversion wants the now never to happen. If conversion happens, then the now does not.”⁴⁴ That is, conversion does not happen in the present. Because conversion is always narrated by a retrospective self, the movement from one identity to another does not happen in the present, but is only conceived as such *afterwards*, once the new identity differentiates itself from an old one. Thus conversion and the now do not happen at the same time; their temporality is different. One can see this not only in the conceptual distinctions Vine Deloria makes but in the temporality of the Crow in contrast to the temporality of conversion (which is White and Christian). We can say then that the difference indigeneity makes is not only spatial but temporal, and this temporal difference is what concerns us regarding Rom. 5-8 and its decolonization. Just as we thought sin and Gen. 1-3 without a conversion narrative in chapter 4, we need to think redemption/salvation and Rom. 5-8 without conversion.

Recapitulation: decolonizing redemption

*In the face of cultural devastation,
it's about time that we did something.
It's about time that I do something.
That is, I'm going to do something about time.
What am I going to do about time?*

Space

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Barber, 142.

In his commentary on Romans, philosopher Giorgio Agamben suggests that the apostle Paul is not concerned with establishing a new identity that overcomes those of Greek and Jew, what we might today anachronistically call Christian.⁴⁵ Indeed, Christ is not as important to him as a historical figure (Jesus of the Gospels) but as a messianic one. That is, what is important in Agamben's reading of Paul (and the typology) is not any notion of a new identity constituted in Christ but the effect of the messianic on identities. In terms of conversion, Paul is not concerned with identities but with their movement, or the movement between them. With regards to the Rom. 5 Adam-Christ typology, Agamben writes, "What matters to us here is not the fact that each event of the past—once it becomes figure—announces a future event and is fulfilled in it, but it is the transformation of time implied by this typological relation. [...] The messianic is not just one of two terms in this typological relation, *it is the relation itself*."⁴⁶ Whether the terms are Adam—Christ, Jew/Greek—Christian, sinner—child-of-God, Native—White, Paul is concerned with what I have been marking with a dash, the movement of identities, the time in between. Agamben calls this relation, this movement, messianic time. This text is commonly read as an example of the already-but-not-yet fulfillment of the Kingdom of God. The "already" referring to redemption in chronological time (human, historical time) and the not-yet referring to the future fulfillment of this redemption at the end of time, the eschaton. But Agamben argues that there is another temporality at work in this typology (messianic time) that is neither

⁴⁵ My choice of Agamben as a decolonizing interlocutor warrants some explanation. Although he is an Italian continental philosopher situated very much in the western philosophical tradition, he is also positioned antagonistically within it. That is to say, he is a subversive and anti-imperialistic figure with regards to western philosophy and theology. It might be useful to approach Agamben in a similar way as I have Augustine and/or Fitzpatrick, but Agamben's influence is hardly comparable with Augustine's on Western Christianity, and such an inquiry is beyond the scope of this thesis.

⁴⁶ Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 74.

chronological nor eschatological. Rather, it is “the time that remains between time and its end [...] it is a remnant, the time that remains between these two times.”⁴⁷

For Agamben, Christ, the messianic figure, does not constitute an identity (in time) but an interruption or contraction of identification, i.e., a movement. “[F]or Paul, *the messianic* is not a third eon situated between two times; but rather, it is *a caesura* that divides the division between times and introduces a remnant, a zone of undecidability, in which the past is dislocated into the present and the present is extended into the past. [...] messianic time is neither the complete nor the incomplete, neither the past nor the future, but the *inversion* of both.”⁴⁸ By refusing the identification with *chronos* or *eschaton*, messianic time resists the terms, the very logic of conversion. In Western Christianity, the conversion or reidentification from sinner to child-of-God in the typology occurs along a chronological and eschatological temporality—the already and the not-yet-fully. But Agamben argues that another temporality is at play (messianic time) which interrupts and contracts this temporality. In a sense, messianic time puts a spoke in this temporality, and because the linear progression is stalled, the identification (conversion’s operation) is stalled. Because the messianic produces a caesura, a cut, in time, the movement of conversion is interrupted, inverted even. The messianic refuses the *identitarian* terms of conversion and through its *inversive movement*, the messianic thus produces not another identity in time, but a time that remains—a remnant—when one identity is not effaced for another. Conversion is the time, the movement from one identity to another, and successful conversion is the fulfillment of this time. In other words, the fulfillment of time is the effacement of one identity for another. Without the remnant, without messianic time, the first identity would cease to exist according to conversion’s redemption narrative. But the refusal of conversion inverts

⁴⁷ Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 62.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 74-75. Emphasis mine.

this time, producing the time that remains, a remnant of time, the rest of time, time left over. Messianic time, therefore, does not produce a convert, a new identity, but a remnant. The time that remains is present time, now-time. By contrast, the time of conversion is not now but narrated by the retrospective self. The refusal of conversion thus *makes present* the remainder, the rest of the time that conversion had begun to bring an end to, to efface. The messianic is “the present as the exigency of fulfillment, what gives itself ‘as an end.’”⁴⁹ In our case, what gives itself as an end (purpose) is an end (refusal, stop) to conversion. I will return to this notion of the remnant and the now, messianic time and making-present, later.

For Agamben, the typological relation is animated by Paul’s term *anakephalaiōsasthai*, recapitulation. Unlike the historical, linear, totalizing movement/temporality of conversion, the movement/temporality of the messianic is *recapitulation*. The word recapitulation evokes connotations of repetition, retrieval, and return,⁵⁰ and I would add *resurgence*. Recapitulation is a sort of looping back. The example Agamben gives for this is the sestina, a type of poem with a distinct interplay of rhyme and repetition—in short, a temporality. The last word in the last line of the first stanza becomes the last word in the first line of the second stanza. In the third stanza, this same word is the last word of the second line. Meanwhile the last word of the last line in the second stanza becomes the last word in the first line of the third stanza. This occurs over the course of six stanzas. The final stanza recapitulates all of the end words in another form.⁵¹ Very different than linear, historical time, Agamben calls this “cruciform retrogradation, an alternation between inversion and progression.”⁵² Recapitulation as messianic temporality resonates with Lakota and Ojibwa understandings of time. Recapitulation is not accurately described as

⁴⁹ Ibid., 76.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 75.

⁵¹ Ibid., 79-80.

⁵² Ibid., 81-82.

chronological or eschatological but it also does not occur somehow apart from these; it does not come from somewhere else. Rather, cruciform retrogradation is internal to the sestina in the way that time is spatial or history is conceived of in terms of nature. That is, messianic temporality is immanent in creation (nature) and this produces a very different scheme of life than the conversion narrative's creation—fall—redemption.

The logic of conversion in Augustine and Western Christianity's redemption narrative relies on a movement, a temporality that I have characterized as historical, linear, progressive, and future oriented. The temporality of the messianic, however, a different reading of Rom. 5, is rhythmic, cyclical, and recapitulating. For Agamben, recapitulation is still oriented towards the future albeit in a significantly different figuration. His exegesis provides us with a way of thinking redemption/salvation without conversion. The rhythmic, repetitive, recapitulating dimensions of messianic time resonate deeply with Ojibwa and Lakota cosmologies, yet this temporality must be thought more emphatically spatial and oriented by nature. The sense of futurity is revoked in a making-present that attends to the past. This is because Ojibwa and Lakota and Crow recognize in immediate ways that “[t]he past is never dead. It’s not even past.”⁵³ Drawing on Agamben’s messianic time, I want to suggest that recapitulation is a temporality of making-present, a temporality of the now, because not only does it defy conversion in its caesura and looping back, it also produces a remnant, a remaining time that conversion effaces. It is in that sense, then, that we can think of the temporality of recapitulation as the now. When conversion happens, the now does not. When the now happens, it happens as a caesura, as recapitulation, as resurgence. When the now happens, conversion, redemptive futurity, does not. Agamben writes:

⁵³ William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun*, reprint edition (New York: Vintage International, 2012), 73.

We are used to hearing that in the moment of salvation one has to look to the future and to eternity. [Echo Augustine.] To the contrary, for Paul recapitulation, *anakephalaiōsis*, means that *ho nyn kairos* [the time of the now]⁵⁴ is a contraction of past and present, that we will have to settle our debts, at the decisive moment, first and foremost with the past. This obviously does not imply attachment or nostalgia; quite the opposite, for the recapitulation of the past is also a summary judgment on it.⁵⁵

When Plenty Coups remarked that after the buffalo went away, nothing happened, we can understand this as the colonial operation of conversion, the temporality of which effaces the now, the existence of Crow life through its redemption narrative (whether as salvation, civilization, development, progress, etc.). And yet colonization did not wipe out the Crow people. By the wisdom of a vision Plenty Coups had, they managed to survive.

Making-Present: radical hope and resurgence

Before the arrival of the settlers, Plenty Coups had a vision in which he saw the disappearance of the buffalo, the appearance of spotted buffalo, and was told he needed to become like the chickadee.⁵⁶ The elders interpreted his dream to mean that he would witness the death of the buffalo, replaced by the White man's cows. The significance of the chickadee was to listen and watch the White man's ways closely.⁵⁷ "Plenty Coups was told in the dream that, to survive, he must follow the example of the Chickadee. The Chickadee is a bird that learns from others. But exactly what he needed to learn was left unclear."⁵⁸ In the face of colonization, Plenty Coups was able to see that a way of life, the time of Crow existence as he knew it, was coming to an end. Similar to Black Elk's vision, Plenty Coups was to do something to help his people survive the cultural devastation, the end-of-time. To some extent this meant learning the

⁵⁴ Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 61.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 77-78. Emphasis mine.

⁵⁶ For a description of the vision see Lear, 70-71.

⁵⁷ Lear, 72. See also Plenty Coups' claim, "With what the white man knows he can oppress us. If we learn what he knows, he can never oppress us again." Timothy P. McCleary, "Afterword," in Linderman, *Plenty-Coups*, 175 quoted in Lear, 138.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 75.

ways of the settlers—converting to some degree, one could say, out of necessity.⁵⁹ But this did not mean that the Crow had *resigned* themselves to their “new” life. On the contrary, Plenty Coups’ vision allowed him to hold out hope for an intelligible Crow existence to resume, though it would not be identical to their previous nomadic life. Lear suggests that it is “[p]recisely because Plenty Coups sees that a traditional way of life is coming to an end, that he is in a position to embrace a peculiar form of hopefulness. It is basically hope for *revival*: for coming back to life in a form of life that is not yet intelligible.”⁶⁰ But such “revival,” such radical hope (as Lear calls it) should not be understood in terms of a redemptive futurity. The notion of hope for something yet unknown reminds us of Rom. 8:24-25: “For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.”

Western Christianity understands this as Christ’s not-yet, the future redemption, the eschatological fulfillment. I would suggest that this hope belongs not in a linear temporality but a circular, cyclical, recapitulating one. The passage is situated amidst a larger passage on death, decay, and re-birth of all creation. Only a temporality inattentive to the temporality of nature, creation herself, could read this hope in such a linear, progressive way. Indeed, as Laura Donaldson has argued, death and decay make possible, make space, for life again.⁶¹ The temporality of nature (space) is a circle in most Native cosmologies. In a circle, the past makes present; the circle makes the past present again and again and again.

Agamben writes:

⁵⁹ Some Native peoples saw some aspects of amer-european life as good and better than their own. Cf. Ella Deloria, *Speaking of Indians*, 75-135. But, it is all too clear that as a whole, colonialism was a deeply traumatic experience for Native peoples.

⁶⁰ Lear, 95.

⁶¹ Cf. Laura E. Donaldson, “Theological Composting in Romans 8: An Indigenous Manifesto on Paul’s Rhetoric of Decay,” *Buffalo Shout, Salmon Cry: Conversations on Creation, Land Justice, and Life Together*, ed. Steve Heinrichs (Waterloo: Herald Press, 2013), 142-148.

What Paul says here is that insofar as messianic time aims towards the fulfillment of time—(*plērōma ton kairōn*; note that it says *kairoi* and not *chronoi*! cf. Gal. 4:4: *plērōma tou chronou*)—it effectuates a recapitulation, a kind of summation of all things, in heaven and on earth—of all that has transpired from creation to the messianic “now,” meaning of the past as a whole. [...] This recapitulation of the past produces a *plērōma* [fullness] when God “will be all in all.” Messianic *plērōma* is therefore an abridgement and anticipation of eschatological fulfillment.⁶²

This God “being all in all” resonates deeply with Ojibwa and Lakota understandings of the Creator manifesting itself in all creation. This is the notion of wholeness, harmony, balance discussed by Randy Woodley, Black Elk, and Elder Norman Meade. What Western Christianity interprets as a redemption narrative belonging to conversion is decolonized by a temporality that is spatial and natural. The redemption narrative is shown to be a particular interpretation and a traumatizing, dominating, but by no means necessary one. Reading Rom. 5-8 with Ojibwa and Lakota cosmologies in mind, and the experience of IRS survivors and the Crow, decolonizes the text and Western soteriology. Refusing the logic of conversion, its narrative of redemptive futurity (and thereby also its doctrine of original sin), refusing the effacement of the not-White, indigeneity makes a difference. Even in the face of cultural devastation, even under colonization, indigeneity produces its own recapitulating temporality that interrupts history’s progress and makes space for indigenous life, again. Indigeneity, through its own spatial temporality, makes-present its life again. The time that refuses conversion, no matter when it does so, produces a remnant that resists both redemptive futurity and original sin because it loops back, recapitulating the past. As Agamben writes, “[it is] by means of this caesura, this interpolation of the [differential] present into the inert homogeneity of linear time, the contemporary [the now,] puts to work a special relationship between the different times,” namely

⁶² Agamben, *The Times That Remains*, 75-76.

a non-dominant, non-effacing one.⁶³ Moreover, “it is the contemporary who has broken the vertebrae of his [colonial] time [...] he also makes of this fracture a meeting place, or an encounter between times and generations.”⁶⁴ Despite conversion’s dominance and effacement, indigeneity, because of its difference, causes a caesura. Despite conversion, when indigeneity happens, it happens now. When recapitulation happens, the now happens, the caesura happens, and conversion does not. As I wrote earlier in this chapter,

*In the face of cultural devastation,
it’s about time that we did something.
It’s about time that I do something.
That is, I’m going to do something about time.
What am I going to do about time?*

Space

When conversion does not happen, colonialism does not happen. When colonialism does not happen, Whiteness does not happen. But what does happen when conversion does not happen? More specifically, what happens when assimilationist redemption does not happen? Resurgence happens. And resurgence always happens in the now. When the now happens, resurgence happens. Resurgence, I submit, is “making present that which has [been] disappeared, and doing it now, with all of the instability this involves.”⁶⁵ As Lear writes about the Crow, “It is one thing to dance as though nothing has happened; it is another to acknowledge that something singularly awful has happened—the collapse of happenings—and then decide to dance.”⁶⁶ This is the movement of resurgence, how resurgence movements happen.

⁶³ Giorgio Agamben, “What is the Contemporary?” in *What is an Apparatus? And Other Essays*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 52. The “contemporary” is basically synonymous with what I have been calling the present and the now.

⁶⁴ Agamben, “What is the Contemporary?”, 52. Here one ought to think of the intergenerational relationality of indigenous life.

⁶⁵ Barber, 150.

⁶⁶ Lear, 153.

In her exceptional book, *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence*, scholar and activist Leanne Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishaabeg) recounts a movement of resurgence. During the 20th anniversary of the Oka Crisis a curator, performance artist, and story tellers created an exhibition called "*Mapping Resistances*."⁶⁷ I retell one piece of performance art from her book here:

Belmore's presence was a political, intellectual, spiritual and emotional innovation strategically designed to infuse a colonial space with non-authoritarian power, presence and connection. The entrance to Price Chopper faces a large parking lot, and along the sidewalk is a long, large, brown concrete wall. The audience gathered across the street facing the wall. After a short while, Belmore and two other people—a Nishanaabeg woman and a white man with a trumpet dressed in in historic military uniform—drove a black pick-up truck blaring classic rock music up onto the side walk. Belmore got out of the truck and methodically placed four purple pillows on the sidewalk with four rocks on each pillow. She then proceeded to unload dozens of single litre plastic bags of milk and lined them between the pillows. When the milk was lined up, she aggressively and violently ripped open each bag with her teeth, and filled up a large bucket. When all the bags were open, she took a long paint roller and began to paint three large Xs on the brown concrete wall. The other Nishnaabeg woman methodically washed each X off with a garden hose, while the military man played sad music on his trumpet. This went on for several minutes. *Presencing and erasing*. Eventually, the three packed up their belongings, hosed off the sidewalk and left in the black truck.

The performance itself was dense, with references to other work (including the other festival performances) and Nishnaabeg metaphor: colonizers have taken our land and our sustenance, and through the process of capitalism, industry and manufacturing, *they have used our own sustenance, represented as milk, to erase*.⁶⁸

As Simpson reflected on the performance she noted its impact on her, its resurgent power:

"Downtown Peterborough, like any other occupied space in the Americas, is a bastion of colonialism as experienced by Nishnaabeg people. But for twenty minutes in June, that bastion was transformed into an alternative space that provided a fertile bubble for envisioning and realizing Nishnaabeg visions of justice, voice, presence and resurgence."⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Leanne Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence* (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2011), 96.

⁶⁸ Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, 96-97. Emphasis mine.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 97.

Conclusion

I have argued that Augustine's hamartiology depends on a conversion narrative figured as perfection—fall—redemption/ascent. This is characteristic of Western Christianity in general. In Augustine, this scheme contains a double conversion within itself, first from a paradisiacal state to original sin, and then from original sin to redemption. These two narratives are interdependent and necessitate each other. One of the primary texts for Augustine's doctrine of original sin is Rom. 5:12 and how this relates to the Adam-Christ typology. He grounds his notion of seminal identity in this verse reading it as "in whom all have sinned." The Latin, *in quo*, makes it possible for Augustine to interpret the propagation of sin from a historical Adam throughout all his descendants through the reproductive process. Since the fall is figured in a linear historical-temporal way, the redemption narrative is interpreted as an ascent in the same manner. As long as Rom. 5:12 is rendered "in whom," Augustine's formulation of original sin and redemption is secure since the Adam-Christ typology can then be read as a conversion narrative that maps out universally. Original sin identifies all humans as sinners and estranged while redemption makes us children of God and adopted in Christ. Seminal identity makes this conversion necessary and determines the temporality of the typology as historical and linear.

Such an Augustinian understanding of original sin and redemption is deeply troubling. In reality, because original sin is the starting discourse, the redemptive aspect of conversion is seen as the only conversion in Christianity. By making sin original for all Adam's descendants, conversion is immediately and solely associated with redemption. Furthermore, because original sin is universally inherited, redemption is also universally required and justified in this way. Throughout this thesis I have sought to interrogate Western notions of original sin with Native theologies, cosmologies, and phenomenology. One of the primary questions I have asked is

what difference indigeneity makes. Among other things, this question focuses on the experience of Native peoples with Western Christianity, specifically with regards to narratives of fall and redemption. By origin(al)izing sin for Native peoples, amer-european missionaries forced Native peoples to accept an utterly depraved status and seek redemption. But because sin and redemption were conceived of in racial terms, Native culture was sinful and amer-european culture was redemptive, becoming Christian meant becoming White. Christianity's redemption narrative was operated through Indian mission schools/IRS. The redemption from sinful Native culture involved often violent assimilation to Western cultural ideals. Thus the redemptive rhetoric of adoption in Romans played out as cultural devastation; conversion was assimilation. Decolonization therefore requires us to think without conversion, to resist conversion's redemptive futurity.

I have suggested that there are ways of thinking the Adam-Christ typology, Rom. 5-8, and redemption/salvation that do not rely on or posit conversion. Agamben's understanding of messianic time as a remnant, as the time that remains as difference between chronological and eschatological time is helpful in this regard. His notion of recapitulation allows us to understand the temporality of the Adam-Christ typology (and the relation between sin and redemption, brokenness and healing) in non-linear terms. Because recapitulation loops back, contracting the past and the present, I suggested that this resonates with Ojibwa and Lakota cosmologies which privilege circular and cyclical understandings of creation, time, and all relations. Indeed, in a circular understanding of Rom. 5-8, the adoption language can be understood as non-hierarchical kinship language as in the Lakota phrase *mitakuye oyasin* (all my relations) rather than the paternalistic turn it took in IRS. Additionally, the production of a remnant in messianic time allows us to stall the redemption narrative and resurgence to make present again (cycle) what

conversion sought to efface, namely Native existence. Recapitulation enables us to think of redemption not in terms of conversion but as resistance and resurgence in the face of cultural devastation and fragmentation. A theological understanding of Rom. 5-8 as resurgence instead of redemption dismantles Augustine's notion of original sin by refusing the terms of *identification* of sinner/Native and child-of-God/White and the *movement* of conversion as effacement of one identity for another. This refusal makes present that which conversion effaces through resurgence, an alternate space and time.

Epilogue

“...from the perspective of the Onkwehonwe struggle, the enemy is not the white man in racial terms, it is a certain way of thinking with an imperialist mind.”

-Taiaiake Alfred¹

In essence, this thesis is framed around the question of imperialism. This includes the literal colonization of a place and people by another people (let us call this its economic and political dimensions), but it also refers to much more covert epistemological functions, which undergird its topography, its visible manifestations. At its most basic, imperialism is about power, specifically about the power to control, to dominate, to subjugate. At the epistemological level, imperialism exercises the power to define, arbitrate, order, impose, transcend, to make the rules, and to state the exceptions.² All of these elements are at play when one considers various colonizations throughout history. But imperial regimes are not all the same. What ultimately distinguishes them is their religiosity, their particular metaphysical and ontological beliefs—in short, their particular “regimes of truth.”³

¹ Taiaiake Alfred, *Wasáse: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 102.

² One will be reminded of Carl Schmitt’s famous dictum here: “Sovereign is he who states the exception.”

³ A phrase I borrow from Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 33.

The religiosity of European colonization of the Americas was unmistakably Christian. Among all its other functions outlined above, imperialism's most overlooked mechanism is its universal/absolute claim to Truth and its accompanying power/drive to convert that which is other-than-itself to itself. One might consider the systematic conversion of the geography of America from forests to colonies, from grasslands to farms, as analogous to the conversion of pagans to Christianity, Native to Amer-European, red to White. North American colonialism operates precisely on this logic of conversion, the effacement of one identity for another, which is securely rooted in the theological and exegetical tradition of the West. The fundamental schema of a creation—fall—redemption, conceived in racial terms, was used to justify the assimilation and genocide of millions of Indigenous peoples. Colonial Christianity and its capitalist economics are the master's house that Audre Lorde claims "will never be dismantled with the master's tools."⁴ And yet as Andrea Smith, Laura Donaldson, Randy Woodley and others suggest, the house can be dismantled nevertheless, with the tools of decolonization, and something else can be made in its place through resurgence.

I have tried to articulate some of the possibilities for the decolonization of dominant Western texts that were prominent in supporting the doctrine of original sin, the basis of the creation—fall—redemption narrative that conversion heralds. But the astute reader will have noticed that I do not use the term "decolonization" in the past tense. This is because decolonization is not complete. Whatever it is that I have done with regards to reinterpretation without the logic of conversion, it should not be understood as the arrival at a destination that we can properly call decolonized or post-colonial. But this is not cause for despair, lament perhaps, but not despair. As the epigraph above suggests, decolonization has to do with changing

⁴ Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007) 110-114. First published in 1984.

imperial habits of thought. As such, decolonization is not a project, or a solution to a problem; it does not warrant a social engineering approach to righting wrongs and pursuing justice and healing—that is still a way of thinking with an imperial mind, one that seeks to control and bring about order out of difference and the conflict it believes differences produce. This sort of thinking, this false decolonization, is merely a replication of conversion in another form. As Andrea Smith has suggested,

decolonization movements can exist in unexpected places. One such place is the Christian mission field, which has brought Native evangelicals into conversation with evangelicals from colonized nations around the world. In what would seem to be purely a site of religious and cultural imperialism, a politics of decolonization has emerged that *threatens to reshape the boundaries of Christianity itself.* How decolonization discourse within Native evangelicalism will develop and to what effect remains to be seen. But the emergence of decolonization within what would seem to be an intrinsically colonial evangelical discourse perhaps speaks to the *inherent instability* of colonization itself.⁵

When we begin decolonizing, we find ourselves in the broken hoop. As Black Elk saw it, the healing of the hoop, was a return to the form of a circle, and to walk its path, the good red road, in a sacred manner. What does that mean? To walk as relatives. To walk as *mitakuye oyasin*, in a way that honours all our relatives, all creation. The teachers in this thesis have taught us that it is by walking in the circle, with all our relations, where we learn decolonization, justice, and healing. A friend of mine and an elder to me, Adrian Jacobs (Cayuga from Six Nations) often speaks to groups about colonialism and Indigenous justice. The most common question White people ask him after his talks and workshops is “what can we do?” His response to this question is, “listen to our stories until you are reduced to a puddle of tears. Then sit there, stay there, and wait for God to resurrect you. And when God does, you will find yourself standing in solidarity, hand in hand with Native peoples.” This is also the position in which the round dance is danced, by many Aboriginal peoples across Canada.

⁵ Andrea Smith, “Decolonization in Unexpected Places: Native Evangelicalism and the Rearticulation of Mission,” *American Quarterly* 62.3 (September 2010), 588. Emphasis mine.

*Round and round we go
we hold each other's hands
and weave ourselves in a circle.
The day is done.
The dance goes on.⁶*

⁶ These words from an anonymous camp song I learned as a child seem to capture the spirit of the round dance, the healing circle, and the path of decolonization.

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