

Minute for Right Relations – Decolonization- Geez Magazine Fall 2015

Reflection writer: Elizabeth Frazer

“Might this be a time when humility and respect will lead us to new covenants?” – Stan McKay (Geez Magazine-Fall 2015 Page 6)

Geez Magazine, is an award winning Canadian publication self-described as “setting up camp in the outback of the spiritual commons”. Last fall 2015 it devoted its publication to “decolonization”. If part of the work of Right Relations is the recognition of past and on-going injustice in the relationship between indigenous and settler peoples in Canada, having some understanding of our shared colonial history is necessary. Recommendation #59 of the TRC in part calls upon “church parties to the Settlement Agreement to develop education strategies to ensure that their respective congregations learn about their churches role in colonization.” Geez offers us a user friendly and hard hitting guide for our learning.

Through art, poetry and prose, Geez casts a light into the shadows of colonization on Turtle Island, both past and present. Stan McKay, in his article, **“Decommissioning”** sets out the path of decolonization:

“As many First Nations, we will work with the diverse philosophies of life that are in the teachings of our elders. This is a process of reconstructing our families and communities to mark an end to colonization and the history of being objects of mission. We will dream of our call to be keepers of the earth, ‘our mother’. As First Peoples we will acknowledge “all our relations”.

I found many articles challenging, which is probably a good thing whenever there is resistance. In her article **“Settler ‘Response-Ability”**, Elaine Enns who identifies as a Mennonite Christian writes :

“Facing painful history is wrenching. In North America, settler descendants often avoid hard conversations about past and present relationships with Indigenous people.”

Enns goes on to challenge the settler myths common to her own community that the prairies were vacant land free and open; there is no recognition that the land belonged to First Nations. Settler descendants need to understand that such presumptions of European entitlement *still* undergird our rationalizations for the conquest of “uninhabited” territories and colonization of “undeveloped” lands throughout the Americas.

Being immersed in researching my family history, I need to pay attention to this when writing about my dispossessed Scottish and Irish immigrants when they came to Canada. Their “land grants” belonged to First Peoples long before my family acquired them! What Treaty entitled them to settle and what did the Treaty promise about the ongoing relationship between them and the First people? Did we keep our promises?

The Geez “Decolonization” issue sold out quickly and has been reprinted. You can find it on their web-page along with a four page study guide. Maybe Stan McKay is right. This is a time for new covenants.