

A Catholic-Indigenous Spiritual Dialogue,
On Religious Experience and Creation

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Introduction

We humans, and our planet, are facing an ecological crisis. Scientists have asserted that the planet Earth is moving toward a mass extinction of species, with this catastrophic event being different from past mass extinctions on this planet in that this one will have been caused by human activity.¹ There is reason for hope, though, as this future eventuality has been referred to as “still-avoidable”.² How might we avoid this looming calamity?

Pope Francis has argued the following, related to dealing with the ecological crisis:

Ecological culture cannot be reduced to a series of urgent and partial responses to the immediate problems of pollution, environmental decay and the depletion of natural resources. There needs to be a distinctive way of looking at things, a way of thinking, policies, an educational programme, a lifestyle and a spirituality ...³

If Francis is right, then the question of how to avoid mass extinction leads to the further question: what is the human perspective, what are the new lifestyle and the spirituality, which are required at this time? An answer to this question, or rather a suggestion regarding where to find the answer, has been offered by Ban Ki-moon, former Secretary-General of the United Nations. Ki-moon stated that “Indigenous peoples can teach the world about sustainable lifestyles and living in harmony with nature.”⁴

The topic that I would like to address, in this paper, is that of religious experience and creation. *Religious experience*, here, will be considered as equivalent to spiritual experience;

¹ Jeremy Hance, “How Humans Are Driving the Sixth Mass Extinction,” *The Guardian*, October 20, 2015, sec. Environment, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/radical-conservation/2015/oct/20/the-four-horsemen-of-the-sixth-mass-extinction>.

² Ibid.

³ Francis, “Laudato Si’,” 2015, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html, paragraph 111.

⁴ Ban Ki-moon, “Secretary-General’s Remarks at Event to Commemorate the International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples [As Delivered] | United Nations Secretary-General,” 2015, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2015-08-10/secretary-generals-remarks-event-commemorate-international-day-0>.

and it can be defined as an experience of the presence of God, that is transformative. A religious experience is a “being-moved” that takes place within a person, with an accompanying awareness of a divine source.⁵ More will be said about religious experience, shortly. The term *creation*, here, will be used to refer to nature or the natural world. I will use the term *creation* rather than *nature*, because the former term assumes the action of a Creator.⁶ Also, in the Christian tradition, God’s creation includes angels, who are purely spiritual creatures, as well as human beings; but I will be using the term to speak of the non-human natural world. Thus my topic, more precisely, is that of human religious experience in relation to, in connection with, the non-human natural world.

I have chosen the topic of religious experience and creation because I suspect that religious experiences outdoors, in the midst of creation, are important for people of today and for the future of our planet. Perhaps such experiences could lead to the new perspective, to the new spirituality and lifestyle, which the Pope has suggested are required today. Along these lines, I have formed the following hypothesis, based on my own experience and on my reading: close connection to creation leads to human religious experience; this experience, an awareness of God, brings about personal transformation and leads to seeing creation as sacred; and such an experience leads to right relations between people and the created world. I will elaborate upon this hypothesis, presently.

⁵ Thomas Hughson S.J., “Creation as an Ecumenical Problem: Renewed Belief through Green Experience,” *Theological Studies* 75, no. 4 (December 1, 2014): 845.

⁶ “In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, the word ‘creation’ has a broader meaning than ‘nature’, for it has to do with God’s loving plan in which every creature has its own value and significance.” In Francis, “*Laudato Si’*,” 76.

The perspective, or method, of this paper will be that of dialogue. The first section of this paper will attempt an explanation of dialogue: what it involves; what are the forms of it; why it is important today; and what is the particular form of it that I consider most relevant, and that will be the approach of the rest of this paper. My explanation of dialogue will largely be based on the Catholic perspective; yet, even at this point I will plan to enter into dialogue on the topic of dialogue, taking into account Indigenous views. This perspective of dialogue is one that I hope to employ, not only in this paper but in my future ministry.

Next, I intend to enter into a dialogue, on my chosen topic, involving two religious or spiritual traditions: the Catholic and the Indigenous traditions. My preliminary reading suggests that the topic of religious experience and creation is present in the Catholic tradition, but has also been neglected at times. My preliminary reading also suggests that this may be a topic about which Indigenous people can teach the Church and the world. Ban Ki-moon mentioned Indigenous peoples teaching the world about sustainable lifestyles and living in harmony with creation; and perhaps these peoples' lifestyles are based on their religious experience and their understanding of creation. That this may be the case is suggested by Indigenous American author Daniel Wildcat, who wrote: "our spiritual ways of life were given to us in creation."⁷

This paper, then, will engage in a dialogue, and will do so through focusing on four particular people. Roughly, two of these people represent the Catholic perspective, and two the Indigenous. We shall see, though, that the lives of some of these people are more nuanced than

⁷ Daniel R. Wildcat, "Just Creation: Enhancing Life in a World of Relatives," in *Buffalo Shout, Salmon Cry: Conversations on Creation, Land Justice, and Life Together*, ed. Steve Heinrichs (Waterloo, Ontario: Herald Press, 2013), 298.

being simply Catholic or simply Indigenous. Also, none of these people can be seen as representing the whole of a tradition. Furthermore, one of the individuals representing each of the two traditions can be seen as presenting an older, more traditional viewpoint; and one from each tradition will reflect on their own more recent experiences.

The second section of this paper will explore the writings of, as well as writings about, St. Ignatius of Loyola; and the writings of Basil Johnston. I have chosen to focus on Ignatius (1491 to 1556) because I am a Jesuit, and because I want to deepen my understanding of Jesuit (or Ignatian) spirituality. As well, I suspect that Ignatius has something important to say about religious experience and creation; and also that this particular topic has not been emphasised very much, in studies of Ignatius. For an Indigenous perspective, we will have a look at the writings of Basil Johnston. I have chosen Johnston (1929 to 2015), not only because he has written extensively about Indigenous traditional beliefs, practices, and stories; but because he belongs to, and writes about, the particular Indigenous group which interests me the most: the Ojibway or Anishinaubae. Indeed, this is the group of people with whom I will most likely be working in the future, as a Jesuit priest.

The third section of this paper will share views presented by Cle-alls (Dr. John Kelly), in conversation with me;⁸ and will also present some of my reflections on my own religious experience in creation. Cle-alls is an Indigenous Christian and an Elder, from the Skidegate Haida community off the coast of British Columbia. I will introduce him further, later on, and will also introduce myself.

⁸ Cle-alls (John Kelly), Interview, February 4, 2017.

The fourth section of my paper will briefly explore this topic of religious experience and creation in the history of the Catholic tradition. Different stages of history will be touched upon. We will hope to get a sense of some of the movements in theological and spiritual thought, in the Church's history, related to our chosen topic. We will ask whether this is a topic which has been neglected in the past, among Catholics; and, if so, why that may have been the case.

The hypothesis, further explained

The hypothesis, mentioned already, is that connection with creation leads to religious experience; that such an experience of God is transformative, and leads one to see creation as sacred; and that such an experience can move a person toward right relations with the natural world.

I have defined religious experience as an experience of the divine, which transforms a person. This human experience can also be described as a fulfilling one, and as an experience of mystery.⁹ It is an experience that transforms in that it "takes over"; and "from it flow one's desires and fears, one's joys and sorrows, one's discernment of values, one's decisions and deeds."¹⁰ It is an experience of religious love and of faith, where faith is defined as "knowledge born of religious love,"¹¹ and where faith acknowledges a divine source. This basic, human experience of faith has been called "primordial faith".¹²

My explanation, here, of religious experience is based on the writings of Bernard Lonergan and Thomas Hughson. Now, these authors are Catholic Christians, and are writing from a

⁹ Bernard J.F. Lonergan S.J., *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 105-6.

¹⁰ Ibid, 105.

¹¹ Ibid, 115.

¹² Hughson, 834.

particular perspective. That being the case, what interests me at this point is the idea that religious experience is a common, human experience, which transcends cultures and religions – and these writers argue that this is the case. Hughson asserts that “religious love and primordial faith together are the religious experience at the root of any specific, concrete historical religion.”¹³

What about the times in our lives when we are situated in creation, when we are in the midst of the natural world: are these moments that are particularly conducive to religious experience? Personally, I would say that I have often experienced the presence of God outside, in creation. I regularly look for opportunities to spend time and to pray outside, preferably in a more natural setting. Along these lines, Cle-all told me that one of his preferred places of prayer is outside, on the front porch of his house. Or, for example, Dollard Senécal has written about times when he experienced a sense of joy, connected with God, while walking through the woods or through fields.¹⁴ Moreover, some have suggested that the experience of connecting with God through creation is a common, normal one. For example, author J. Philip Newell has written:

Do we not all carry within us, for instance, something of the memory of first listening to the waters of a river or to a rainfall, or lying in the grass ... Connected to these moments will be recollections of experiencing at the deepest of levels a type of communion with God in nature ...¹⁵

The arguments presented thus far suggest that the natural world is a favourable place for connecting with the divine; and that religious experience is transformative. Next, the latter

¹³ Hughson, 834.

¹⁴ Dollard Senécal S.J., *La Nature, Source de Vie Spirituelle*, Cahiers de Spiritualité Ignatienne 22 (Sainte-Foy, Québec: Centre de Spiritualité Ignatienne, 1987), 44.

¹⁵ J. Philip Newell, *Listening for the Heartbeat of God: A Celtic Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 3.

portion of my hypothesis asserts that religious experience in creation leads to seeing creation as sacred, and also leads to right relations with creation. Is this the case? It is, according to Hughson. He affirms that “being affected by nature evokes respect close to reverence” and “evokes a sense that the cosmos is already somehow sacred.”¹⁶ He goes on to state that “many people of all religious persuasions and none are convinced about the importance of addressing the ecological crisis;” and that “latent in those convictions is a green experience and interpretation of nature.”¹⁷ What Hughson calls “green experience”, here, can be considered synonymous with religious experience in the midst of creation.

¹⁶ Hughson, 844-5.

¹⁷ Ibid, 844.

Section 1: Interreligious dialogue

In this section, I would like to explore the topic of interreligious dialogue. I will define the term, according to the Catholic tradition, and distinguish it from *proclamation*; explore the goals and bases of dialogue; present some objections to this perspective on dialogue, based on the history of Catholic-Indigenous relations; present some Indigenous views of dialogue; and lay out the approach of the rest of this paper, which will be that of dialogue and of a particular form of it.

Dialogue and proclamation

A definition of *interreligious dialogue*, according to documents of the Catholic Church, is the following: “it means not only discussion, but also includes all positive and constructive interreligious relations ... which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment.”¹⁸ As well, in such a dialogue, each party is rooted in one’s own tradition,¹⁹ and each will hopefully deepen one’s own religious commitment.²⁰

This definition suggests that the goal of dialogue, from the Catholic perspective, is not to convert the other in the sense of encouraging the other to adopt one’s own religious tradition. A distinction can be made, here, between dialogue and proclamation, where the latter does in-

¹⁸ Secretariat for Non-Christians, “The Attitude of the Church towards the Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission, Pentecost 1984” (Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1984), section 3.

¹⁹ Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, “Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflection and Orientation on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,” 1991, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html, section 48.

²⁰ Ibid, 40.

volve, for the Christian, inviting the other to also become a Christian. Dialogue aims at a different kind of conversion, namely a *self*-conversion.²¹ There can be conversion in the sense of deepening, of growth, of each turning ever more toward God. *Proclamation* can be defined as a communication of the Gospel message, with an accompanying invitation to become a follower of Christ.²² It is a message about God's gift of love and mercy for all people, through Jesus Christ.

Dialogue and proclamation are both considered aspects of the Church's evangelising mission. (There are five aspects of mission in all, according to the Church documents: presence and witness; commitment to social development; liturgical life and prayer; interreligious dialogue; and proclamation and catechesis.²³) While my interest and emphasis, in this paper, will be on dialogue, it should be noted that proclamation is considered to be of central importance. Proclamation of the Gospel is considered "a sacred and major duty"²⁴ for the Catholic Christian; and all (other) aspects of the Church's mission are directed toward proclamation.²⁵

There is a tension here. Can dialogue both *not* be aimed at converting the other to one's own religion; and yet, at the same time, be somehow directed toward proclamation, where the latter involves inviting the other person to such a conversion? One response, here, could be that dialogue does not aim at converting the other to one's own tradition; but it is directed toward proclamation because it involves a communication of the Gospel message – and such

²¹ Francis Cardinal Arinze, *The Church in Dialogue* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 331-32.

²² "Dialogue and Proclamation," 10.

²³ "Dialogue and Mission," 13; "Dialogue and Proclamation," 2.

²⁴ "Dialogue and Proclamation," 76; see also Vatican Council II, "Ad Gentes," 1965, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_ad-gentes_en.html, section 7.

²⁵ John Paul II, "Redemptoris Missio," 1990, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio.html, section 44.

communication forms one half of our definition of proclamation. Dialogue, after all, involves a mutual sharing; and what does one share? Hopefully one shares what is dear to oneself; and, for the Christian, this would surely involve a sharing of the Gospel, in some form or other. As well, while the goal of dialogue is not to invite the other to become a disciple of Christ, there may be an implicit invitation: with one's speaking, one's listening, one's behaviour being attractive to the other party.²⁶

The goal and the basis of interreligious dialogue

While dialogue is oriented toward proclamation, from the Catholic perspective, the main goal is mutual enrichment. Such enrichment can take place on (at least) two levels, on the Catholic Church's side of the dialogue: I, personally, can be enriched, through engaging in dialogue; and so can the Church as a whole, through interreligious dialogues of various kinds.

First, I can be enriched, through dialogue. Along these lines, Pope John Paul II has written about a "spirituality of dialogue", and has encouraged efforts to sketch the outlines of such a spirituality.²⁷ Such a spirituality might involve, on the personal level, an attempt on the part of the Christian to enter into dialogue honestly and prayerfully; and to listen thoughtfully and openly, looking for truth and goodness in the other. It might involve being challenged, facing uncomfortable situations or questions – and finding God and deepening one's own faith

²⁶ Perhaps the tension is not fully resolved. There is also the question of whether the person entering into dialogue should intend to invite the other to become a Christian. Gregory Baum has written that "theologians have found it ethically unacceptable to invite someone to an interreligious dialogue while having the secret intention to convert the other to Catholicism." My translation from the French. In "L'Église Catholique et Le Dialogue Interreligieux. Un Magistère Incertain," in *Le Dialogue Interreligieux: Interpellations Théologiques Contemporaines* (Montréal: Novalis, 2013), 221.

²⁷ John Paul II, "To Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue," November 24, 1995, https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1995/november/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19951124_dialogo-interr.html, 5.

through such challenges. It might involve an “internal dialogue,” within a person, which “demands that we be nourished by another way of thinking, feeling, and praying.”²⁸

As well, the Church as a whole can benefit from dialogue. Even though the Church professes “the fullness of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ,”²⁹ there is room for growth and for learning from others. That there is room for growth is suggested by a Vatican II document, which asserts that “Christ summons the Church to continual reformation as she sojourns here on earth.”³⁰ Canadian Catholic bishops, in a message to the Indigenous peoples of Canada, stated: “We recognize in each spiritual tradition there is a mixture of shadow and light.”³¹ This statement implies that there are shadows in our own, Catholic, spiritual tradition.

The Catholic Church, since Vatican II in the 1960s, has promoted interreligious dialogue, and has engaged in dialogue of various kinds and with various groups. In Canada, bishops have expressed appreciation and respect for Indigenous people and their traditions, and have promoted dialogue. Canadian bishops have stated: “we rejoice with you, the aboriginal people of Canada, in the rediscovery, recognition and celebration of your spiritual heritage.”³² The bishops went on to say: “we renew our commitment to the dialogue that has begun between our respective spiritual heritages.”³³

²⁸ Fabrice Bl  e, *The Third Desert: The Story of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2011), 4.

²⁹ “Dialogue and Proclamation,” 32.

³⁰ Vatican Council II, “Unitatis Redintegratio,” 1964, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html, section 6.

³¹ Commission for the Evangelization of Peoples of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Rediscovering, Recognizing and Celebrating the Spiritual Heritage of Canada’s Aboriginal Peoples: A Pastoral Message to the Native Peoples of Canada,” 1999, <http://www.cccb.ca/site/Files/aboriginal.html>.

³² “Rediscovering, Recognizing and Celebrating the Spiritual Heritage of Canada’s Aboriginal Peoples.”

³³ Ibid.

At this point, a basic question is: why should the Church dialogue? Even, why respect people of other traditions, and why respect their traditions? We have explored the standpoint that dialogue can be mutually enriching. This view implies that the Church and her members can enrich others; and that people of other religions, and the religious traditions themselves, have something to offer to Catholics and to the Church generally. Underlying the position of mutual enrichment is the viewpoint that goodness, and truth, and the presence of God, can be found not only within the Church, but in people who are not Catholic Christians; and that these things can also be found not only in individuals, but in the various religious and spiritual traditions.

Certain Vatican II documents spoke of the goodness in people of other traditions, and in the traditions themselves.³⁴ A later Church document expresses it in this way:

God calls all peoples to himself and he wishes to share with them the fullness of his revelation and love. He does not fail to make himself present in many ways, not only to individuals but also to entire peoples through their spiritual riches, of which their religions are the main and essential expression ...³⁵

There are biblical foundations for such a positive estimation of people of other traditions and of their traditions. One would be the creation stories of the book of Genesis, which suggest that all of humankind has a common origin in God. Or, we read in the New Testament about the Holy Spirit, which “blows where it wills” (John 3:8). This verse has been used in Church documents to speak of the presence and action of God outside of the Church and her members.³⁶

³⁴ For example, Vatican Council II, “Lumen Gentium,” 1964, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html, section 17.

³⁵ “Redemptoris Missio,” section 55.

³⁶ John Paul II, “Redemptor Hominis,” 1979, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_04031979_redemptor-hominis.html, section 12.

According to the Catholic Church, then, goodness and the presence of God can be found not only in people of other religions, but in the religions themselves. This is the case because individuals cannot be separated from their traditions – the two are very much intertwined. One of the recent Church documents notes that the spiritual experience of the individual is connected to the tradition, as it is within the different traditions that people find their spiritual nourishment.³⁷ The same document also suggests the opposite: that religious traditions have given expression to, are the result of, individual religious experiences.³⁸

This interlinking of individuals and the spiritual traditions of the group can also be found in writings about the Indigenous traditions of North America. James West, from the Cheyenne nation in the United States, writes that “to be born into the life of a certain tribe is to be born into the spiritual life of that people as revealed to them by Maheo or God.”³⁹ At the same time, on the other hand, “certain visions [of individuals] have developed as revelations ... for a given tribe or nation.”⁴⁰

Furthermore, I have mentioned that interreligious dialogue does not directly aim at converting the other to Christianity. Another basis for interreligious dialogue, and a reason why the Catholic Christian might feel that it is not necessary to try to convert the other to one’s own tradition, in dialogue, is the following: that people can be saved, can attain salvation and heaven, outside of the Catholic Church. We have seen that there is goodness and the presence of God in other traditions, and that people are spiritually nourished within their various traditions. We

³⁷ “Dialogue and Proclamation,” 78.

³⁸ Ibid, 14.

³⁹ James L. West, “Indian Spirituality: Another Vision,” in *Native and Christian: Indigenous Voices on Religious Identity in the United States and Canada*, ed. James Treat (New York: Routledge, 1996), 31.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 33.

can add that one does not have to be a Catholic Christian to be saved, according to the Catholic Church. One of the Church documents states:

It will be in the sincere practice of what is good in their own religious traditions and by following the dictates of their conscience that the members of other religions respond positively to God's invitation and receive salvation in Jesus Christ, even while they do not recognize or acknowledge him as their saviour.⁴¹

Objections

One might question some of the positions that have been attributed to the Catholic Church, above. In the context of Canada and elsewhere, there is a history that suggests that the Church has not always been ready and willing to dialogue. One might object that Catholic Christians have not respected other traditions, have not seen goodness and the presence of God in these traditions. It might also be suggested that, in the past, Catholics have emphasised the need for others to convert to Christianity, and to the Catholic Church in particular, in order to be saved.

In recent decades, Catholic Church representatives have recognised, and apologised for, past mistakes related to missionary activity. Pope John Paul II, upon a visit to Canada in 1984, said that the encounter between Indigenous people and the Gospel “has not taken place without its difficulties and, occasionally, its blunders.”⁴² What, in particular, has the Church apologised for? Among other things, the Church in Canada has expressed regret for “those dimensions of Catholic mission history that were too closely identified with the European forces of expansion and assimilation.”⁴³

⁴¹ “Dialogue and Proclamation,” 29.

⁴² John Paul II, “Speech of Pope John Paul II to Aboriginal and Inuit Peoples: Saint-Anne de Beaupré Shrine, Monday, September 10, 1984,” <http://www.cccb.ca/site/eng/church-in-canada-and-world/catholic-church-in-canada/indigenous-peoples/3196-texts-of-the-holy-see-relating-to-indigenous-peoples>.

⁴³ “Rediscovering, Recognizing and Celebrating the Spiritual Heritage of Canada’s Aboriginal Peoples.”

Dominic Eshkakogan, who was a Canadian Indigenous Christian and a deacon in the Catholic Church, stated in 1991:

The way in which this word [about Jesus] was presented to us in the past creates obstacles for the integration of Christianity and the traditional teachings of the Anishinabe. It was said in the past all our traditions were bad. The Church is now willing to recognize that mistake.⁴⁴

If Christian missionaries in the past saw Indigenous traditions as all bad, then there would have been no room for being enriched by the other; or for seeing goodness, truth, and the presence of God in the tradition of the other. Cle-alls adds: “Perhaps the missionaries would have seen that God had spoken to us, too, over the millennia. He made us what we are. We should have learned about Jesus, but we didn’t need to become like the Europeans.”⁴⁵

My own reading of letters written by Jesuit missionaries in Canada, in the 19th century, suggests that some of these Jesuits had quite negative views about Indigenous traditional practices and beliefs, while others saw goodness and truth in these traditions. For example, presenting a negative opinion, one Jesuit wrote about a “superstitious ceremony of a puerility that passes the absurd.”⁴⁶ Another Jesuit, Father Pierre Chazelle, speaks more positively, saying to an Indigenous chief: “you know the Great Spirit and you know many things that are the truth.”⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Quoted in Achiel Peelman O.M.I., “Interreligious Dialogue and Inculturation: The Future of the Catholic Church Among Canada’s First Nations Peoples: A Personal Appraisal,” *Theoforum* 35 (2004): 50.

⁴⁵ Cle-alls (John Kelly), Interview.

⁴⁶ Lorenzo Cadieux S.J., ed., *Lettres Des Nouvelles Missions Du Canada: 1843-1852* (Montréal: Éditions Bellarmin, 1973), 777.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 258.

At the same time, these letters suggest that even those missionaries who saw positive elements in the Indigenous tradition were trying to convert the Indigenous people to Christianity, sometimes fairly aggressively;⁴⁸ and an important part of the missionaries' motivation for seeking such conversions was a belief that one had to be a baptised Christian in order to be saved. Fr. Chazelle, after telling the chief "you know the Great Spirit", went on to say that the chief does not know the Great Spirit enough, because he does not know Jesus Christ.⁴⁹ This statement suggests that the chief's knowledge and practices are not considered sufficient for salvation, by the missionary. A parallel can be found in the 16th century, in the life and missionary work of St. Francis Xavier, who "was quite pessimistic about goodness and the possibility of salvation outside the Church. There is no doubt that this conviction was one of the driving forces in his life."⁵⁰

As we have seen, based on recent Church documents, the Church does not teach that one must be a baptised Christian in order to attain salvation. Has the teaching of the Church changed, then, with missionaries of past generations following a different teaching as compared with today? An explanation can be found in the principle of the development of Catholic doctrine. A Vatican II document states the following, on this matter: "[the] tradition which comes from the apostles develops in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit. For there is a growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down."⁵¹ We might say, then, that there are truths handed down in the Catholic tradition, that do not

⁴⁸ For example, there is the story of Fr. Joseph Hanipaux trying to convince an Indigenous chief to accept the Catholic religion, "exhausting," as he said, "all of my means of persuasion." In Cadieux, 748.

⁴⁹ Cadieux, 258.

⁵⁰ Michael Collins Reilly S.J., *Spirituality for Mission* (New York: Orbis Books, 1978), 79.

⁵¹ Vatican Council II, "Dei Verbum," 1965, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html, section 8.

change essentially; but that do change insofar as there are new understandings, new insights, regarding these truths.

This concept of the development of doctrine can be applied to the following Church teaching: “there is no salvation outside of the Church”. This is a teaching that dates far back into the Catholic tradition, and has been formally declared by Church councils.⁵² However, one can interpret this statement in different ways. The phrase was directed, in the early Church, particularly at those who had become separated from the Church, suggesting that *their* salvation is not to be found outside the Church.⁵³ The phrase also came to be interpreted as meaning that only baptised Catholic Christians can be saved. This would have been the view of missionaries such as Francis Xavier. Or, instead of being interpreted as answering the question: *who will be saved?*, the phrase can be seen as answering the question: *salvation comes to us how, by what means?*⁵⁴ A Catholic Christian of today can affirm that salvation is through Christ, and through the Church, for all; but that one does not have to explicitly be a believer in Christ or a baptised Christian to be saved.

Indigenous perspectives on dialogue

As noted above, the Catholic Church in Canada now wants to dialogue with Indigenous people. Are Indigenous people also ready to engage in such dialogue? Daryold Corbiere Winkler

⁵² For example, the Fourth Lateran Council declared, in the year 1215: “There is indeed one universal Church of the faithful outside of which no one at all is saved.” In Josef Neuner and Jacques Dupuis, eds., *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, 7th ed. (Bangalore: Theological Publ. in India, 2001), 16.

⁵³ Peter Phan, “L’Esprit Saint Comme Fondement Du Dialogue Interreligieux,” in *Le Dialogue Interreligieux: Interpellations Théologiques Contemporaines* (Montréal: Novalis, 2013), 24.

⁵⁴ Reilly, 185.

has argued that “for many centuries dialogue has been a fundamental dimension of the Aboriginal ethos.”⁵⁵ Yet, in Canada as elsewhere in the world, there has been a history of unjust relations between the Church and Indigenous peoples. Canadian bishops have recently stated that dialogue requires trust;⁵⁶ and perhaps the Church has broken that trust over the years, making dialogue difficult today.

Cle-alls spoke to me of the importance of dialogue, between Indigenous people and Christians; and, in particular, of the importance of a dialogue that is from “heart to heart”.⁵⁷ At the same time, Cle-alls said that not all Indigenous people are ready for such dialogue, the reason being that “many of us now are still speaking through our pain.”⁵⁸ This statement suggests that healing and reconciliation are needed, before dialogue can happen. On the other hand, perhaps dialogue can be seen as a form of reconciliation. In 1983, Chief Harold Cardinal, from northern Alberta, spoke in Ottawa to the gathered Catholic bishops of Canada. He spoke about respect and about the two traditions (Christian and Indigenous) enriching each other. He also connected dialogue with healing, saying that “what we seek is something that might heal the hurts and the wounds that still exist within our communities.”⁵⁹

What kind of dialogue is appropriate today, according to Indigenous people? Cle-alls, as we have seen, talked about a heart-to-heart conversation. Cardinal mentioned the importance of respect, and mutual enrichment. Rev. Stan McKay (Cree), former Moderator of the United Church of Canada, has written about a form of dialogue “which will be one of sharing stories

⁵⁵ Daryold Corbiere Winkler, “The Role of Interreligious Dialogue in the Healing of Canada’s Aboriginal People” (Saint Paul University, 1999), 36.

⁵⁶ “Rediscovering, Recognizing and Celebrating the Spiritual Heritage of Canada’s Aboriginal Peoples.”

⁵⁷ Cle-alls (John Kelly), Interview.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Cited in Peelman, “Interreligious Dialogue and Inculturation,” 50.

instead of dogmatic statements and involves listening as well as talking.”⁶⁰ Another Canadian Indigenous leader, Harry Lafond, has spoken of the Church walking with the First Nations peoples in the struggle for justice.⁶¹ Perhaps such accompaniment can be seen as a form of dialogue. As well, Corbiere Winkler suggests praying together as an important form of dialogue for our current context, with such prayer being conducive to healing.⁶²

Dialogue as the approach of this paper

Pope John Paul II has stated: “even though ‘there is a time for everything’ (cf. Eccl. 3:1-8), prudence and discernment will teach us what is appropriate in each particular situation: collaboration, witness, listening, or exchange of values.”⁶³ On the part of the Catholic Christian, along with other aspects of mission, there is a time for proclamation, and there is a time for dialogue. Today, in Canada, in the relationship between the Catholic Church and Indigenous peoples, dialogue is important. Canadian bishops have sensed this need and encouraged it, as have Indigenous leaders. Dialogue is important today because it involves mutual respect, which sees the good in the other – and this respect has not always been there, on the part of the Christian. When I talked to Cle-alls about dialogue, he not only encouraged it, but said that he wished there had always been dialogue, from the time of the arrival of the Europeans. I see such dialogue, today, as an act of reconciliation.

⁶⁰ Stan McKay, “An Aboriginal Christian Perspective on the Integrity of Creation,” in *Native and Christian: Indigenous Voices on Religious Identity in the United States and Canada*, ed. James Treat (New York: Routledge, 1996), 54.

⁶¹ Chief Harry Lafond, of Muskeg Lake Cree Nation in Saskatchewan, was the only lay person invited to address the Synod of Bishops for America, in Rome, 1997. In Peelman, “Interreligious Dialogue and Inculturation,” 52.

⁶² Winkler, 55.

⁶³ Address of the Pope at the conclusion of the Plenary Assembly of the Secretariat for Non- Christians, 1984. In “Dialogue and Mission.”

As well, as we have seen, dialogue involves mutual enrichment and openness to learning from the other. Through this paper, I will surely learn and grow, through exploring another tradition, as well as by exploring my own experience and my own religious tradition; and I will explore a topic, namely that of religious experience and creation, which I am positing as being one about which the Church can learn from the Indigenous tradition.

Also, there are different kinds of dialogue. Recent Church documents propose four forms of interreligious dialogue.⁶⁴ There is (1) the dialogue of life, which relates to one's way of acting, one's attitude, one's example; (2) the dialogue of action, of collaboration; as well as (3) the dialogue of theological exchange, which involves understanding and enriching the respective spiritual heritages, and appreciating each other's spiritual values. This form of dialogue may also involve applying expertise to important problems being faced in the world, at the time. The fourth form is (4) the dialogue of religious experience, "where persons ... share their spiritual riches, for instance with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute."⁶⁵

The dialogues of everyday life, of collaborative action, and of praying together are all important, and I hope that I will have the opportunity to be a part of such dialogues in the future. As for the dialogue that will take place in this paper, I find aspects of the definitions of the third and fourth forms of dialogue, presented above. I am calling this paper a "spiritual dialogue". What follows will involve a dialogue of religious experience, not in the sense of praying together, but in the sense of sharing and reflecting about religious experience. It will also involve,

⁶⁴ "Dialogue and Mission," 29-35; "Dialogue and Proclamation," 42.

⁶⁵ "Dialogue and Proclamation," 42.

to some extent, dialogue about beliefs related to creation. This dialogue will include what I learn through books, on the topic, from the Catholic and Indigenous traditions; what I have learned through reflecting on my own experience; and what I have learned from Cle-alls, in conversation with him.

Stan McKay, quoted above, mentioned listening as well as talking. This paper will hopefully do both, with an emphasis on listening and learning from others. McKay also mentioned a form of dialogue that involves sharing stories instead of presenting dogmatic statements. Along these lines, the Church's third form of dialogue can be seen as being more on the level of doctrines or teachings; and the fourth form on the level of experience. In discussing the topic of religious experience and creation, this paper will touch on doctrines; but will also focus on the level of experience. As well, when we discuss religious experience, we are hopefully touching on something basic and universal among humans – and so discussing a topic that is a good point of contact and a good basis for dialogue.

Section 2: Ignatius of Loyola and Basil Johnston

Here, we will look at some of the writings of St. Ignatius and Basil Johnston; and, in the case of Ignatius, writings about him. Some of the questions that will be of interest are the following: is creation, are natural settings, conducive to human religious experience? How might we describe this experience? Does religious experience lead to seeing creation as sacred, and to taking care of it?

Saint Ignatius

Iñigo Lopez de Loyola, later known as Ignatius, was born in 1491 of a noble Basque family. At the age of 29 or 30, he underwent a conversion experience as he lay in bed, having been injured in battle. This was not a conversion in the sense of becoming Catholic, as he was Catholic already; but there was a conversion in that he began to discover God's presence in his life, in his soul; and he found in himself a desire to serve God. Ignatius would have further religious experiences, and would endeavour to "help souls" by sharing with others what he had learned from God. With companions from Paris, Ignatius founded the Society of Jesus, which was approved by Pope Paul III in 1540. Ignatius and his companions had also been ordained as priests, and Ignatius was elected as the first Superior General of the Society. He died in 1556.

Ignatius' own religious experiences

The early years of Ignatius' life were spent close to the created world. He grew up in the home of a wet nurse, perhaps until the age of six or seven, and then went to live at Casa Loyola. In both places he would have lived close to farming and animals, and surrounded by chestnut

forests and apple orchards. Eric Jensen writes that “Iñigo’s earliest years were thus endued with an intimate love of the natural world.”⁶⁶

Lying in bed at Loyola, Ignatius’ conversion experience involved reading, reflecting on his thoughts and feelings, and finding God and direction for his life through these reflections. Another kind of religious experience, at this time in his life, was a vision that he had of Our Lady with the child Jesus. As well, there at Loyola, Ignatius had experiences of God in connection with creation. We find recorded, in his autobiography: “The greatest consolation [Ignatius] received was to look at the sky and the stars, which he often did and for a long time, because as a result he felt within himself a very great desire to serve Our Lord.”⁶⁷ The experience here is described as one of consolation. We can infer that this was an experience of *spiritual* consolation, based on the statement that he felt a great desire to serve God. Ignatius defines spiritual consolation in his *Spiritual Exercises*, and we will examine that definition presently. This type of consolation involves a movement out of self and away from selfishness; toward God, and toward other people and all of creation.

Ignatius’ mention of times when he looked at the sky is not the only account of his religious experience in creation. Another key moment of connection with God, for Ignatius, took place at Manresa. On one occasion there, near the Cardoner River, he experienced “so great an enlightenment that everything seemed new to him;” and, as he says, he received more “helps” from God at that one time than in the rest of his life put together.⁶⁸ This experience took place,

⁶⁶ Eric Jensen S.J., “The Six Transformations of Iñigo de Loyola: How Ignatius Became Ignatius.” Manuscript (2017), 10.

⁶⁷ Ignatius of Loyola, *The Autobiography of St. Ignatius Loyola: With Related Documents*, ed. John C. Olin, trans. Joseph F. O’Callaghan (New York: Fordham University Press, 1992), 25.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 39-40.

we are told by Ignatius, as he was sitting by the river and facing the river. We are not told specifically whether it was being near the river, the proximity to creation, which inspired this religious experience. Perhaps this experience could have taken place anywhere: indeed, Ignatius had experiences of God in various settings and situations, such as lying in bed. Perhaps it is not insignificant, though, that what may have been the most profound spiritual experience of Ignatius' life took place in close proximity to creation.

At Loyola, as we have seen, Ignatius looked at the sky and stars "often and for a long time." An early biographer of Ignatius, a member of the Society of Jesus who knew him personally, writes that this was a practice that Ignatius continued throughout his life. The biographer, Pedro de Ribadeneira, wrote:

... In his contemplation of the celestial movements he felt deeply affected by a powerful burning desire to serve God. This remained his habit not only at that time, but during his whole life afterwards. For even in his advanced old age, I often heard him say that, when he had raised his eyes to the sky from a place where he had an open view, and after he had stared upward for a little while, and as tears of joy welled up in his eyes, [he would exclaim,] "Ah, what a drab thing the earth is, when I look up at the sky!"⁶⁹

We should note that Ribadeneira's writings can be used to support the position, which is the view presented in this paper, that Ignatius found God through his connection with creation, and also found God present in creation; but these writings might also be used to suggest a less favourable view of creation.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Pedro de Ribadeneira S.J., *The Life of Ignatius of Loyola*, trans. Claude Pavur S.J. (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2014), 17.

⁷⁰ Another edition of Ribadeneira's work, translated into French by Charles Clair S.J., recounts and interprets the events differently. According to this other edition, the earth is not described by Ignatius as "drab" but as "contemptible" ("méprisable" in French). This other account suggests that Ignatius was not connecting with God through the wonders God's creation; but rather thinking of heaven, and of heaven in contrast to the creation, with the natural world being base and despicable. However, the autobiography of Ignatius should probably be considered more trustworthy than the Ribadeneira biographies. As well, while it is not clear, it appears that the edition

Loving God and all things in God

At Loyola, upon looking at the sky and the stars, Ignatius experienced spiritual consolation, including a desire to serve God. Was it the case that this sight of the sky elicited thoughts of God, connection with God, love of God? Yes, it looks like that was the case. There may also be something else involved here, though: Ignatius' definition of spiritual consolation in the *Spiritual Exercises* suggests that the experience may have involved not only love of God, but love of God's creatures (like the sky and stars he was looking at, or all creatures generally). Here is the first part of Ignatius' definition: "I call it [spiritual] consolation when an interior movement is aroused in the soul, by which it is inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord, and as a consequence, can love no creature on the face of the earth for its own sake, but only in the Creator of them all."⁷¹ A certain kind of love of creatures is mentioned here: not love of a creature "for its own sake", but love of it "in the Creator".

José García de Castro, based on the aforementioned definition of spiritual consolation, argues that an experience of spiritual consolation can involve connecting with God and, at the same time, with creatures and all of creation. Castro writes that "for Ignatius direct experience of God (that is, of God in us) ... is also an experience of the world, a way of *feeling* the world to be a creature like myself."⁷² Castro makes a similar point, later on in his article, suggesting that

quoted in this paper, translated by Pavur, is based on an earlier edition of Ribadeneira's work, and the Clair translation based on a later edition. The Pavur edition, then, may be considered more trustworthy than that of Clair. Moreover, in what follows in this paper, including an exploration of Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*, it will be argued that Ignatius did not consider the creation to be contemptible. For the other edition of Ribadeneira's biography, see *La Vie de Saint Ignace de Loyola*, trans. Charles Clair S.J. (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1891), 22.

⁷¹ Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph*, ed. Louis J. Puhl S.J. (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1951), section 316, page 142.

⁷² José García de Castro S.J., "Ecology and Consolation: The Ignatian Mystical Foundation for Our Option of Ecology," *Promotio iustitiae* 2013/2, no. 111 (2013): 22.

an experience of God leads to seeing the world in a new way: “only when we have attained the viewpoint of the Creator (consolation) do we discover the thousand graces already poured out on *God’s* world.”⁷³ The world around us is experienced, through moments of consolation, as being God’s creature, God’s creation; and as being a place where God’s love and grace are found. The person recognises this as he or she is “inflamed with love”: with love of God and also of creation. We should add, as Castro does, that the experience described thus far is only one way of experiencing spiritual consolation, based on one part of Ignatius’ definition of the term – and there are others.⁷⁴

In the *Constitutions* of the Society of Jesus, also written by Ignatius, we find the following statement:

[All] should often be exhorted to seek God our Lord in all things, stripping off from themselves the love of creatures to the extent that this is possible, in order to turn their love upon the Creator of them, by loving Him in all creatures and all of them in Him, in conformity with His holy and divine will.⁷⁵

Here, Ignatius mentions “stripping off ... love of creatures”, and then states that one should love all creatures in God. These statements may seem to contradict each other. We can reconcile the two phrases, though, based on the definition of spiritual consolation from the *Exercises*, where there is a distinction between loving a creature “for its own sake” and loving it “in the Creator”. Loving a creature “for its own sake”, for Ignatius, involves an attachment to a created

⁷³ Castro, 26.

⁷⁴ The rest of Ignatius’ definition of spiritual consolation, following the part about loving the Creator and loving creatures in the Creator, reads as follows: “It is likewise consolation when one sheds tears that move to the love of God, whether it be because of sorrow for sins, or because of the sufferings of Christ our Lord, or for any other reason that is immediately directed to the praise and service of God. Finally, I call consolation every increase of faith, hope, and love, and all interior joy that invites and attracts to what is heavenly and to the salvation of one’s soul by filling it with peace and quiet in its Creator and Lord.” In *Spiritual Exercises*, section 316.

⁷⁵ Ignatius of Loyola, *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, trans. George E. Ganss S.J. (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1970), part 3, chapter 1, section 26, page 165.

thing that limits one's freedom and one's ability to respond to God's will. Loving the creature "in the Creator" involves an unselfish love of created things, seeing creatures in relation to God, seeing God's love and grace as poured out on creation.

Finding God in creatures, and in all things

I would like to make a distinction, here, between *creatures* and *things*: where *creatures* refers to entities found in the created world, such as stars, or plants, or people; and where *things* will be taken as a broader term and includes human states and situations, such as wealth or poverty, or human encounters. While Ignatius seems to use the two terms (*creature* and *thing*) interchangeably at times, I think the distinction is important and helps to clarify Ignatius' thought. For, it is important for Ignatius, on the one hand, to be free of attachment to *things* such as wealth and poverty, so as to be open to God's will;⁷⁶ and to find God in *things* such as encounters, actions, thoughts, and memories. On the other hand, it is important to note, in the context of this paper, that, for Ignatius, people can experience God in and through such *creatures* as plants, or the sky and stars; and that God is present in *creatures*, thus conferring on them dignity and sacredness.

The passage from the *Constitutions*, quoted above, states that we should "seek God our Lord in all things." That Ignatius' view was that we might search for and find God in all things, where *things* includes but is not limited to the creatures of the earth, is attested to by Joseph Thomas. He wrote that, "for Ignatius, the world, the universe, human society, all people and

⁷⁶ For example, in the "First Principle and Foundation" of the *Exercises*, we find written: "we should not prefer health to sickness, riches to poverty, honor to dishonor, a long life to a short life." Our focus should not be on any of these things, but first and foremost on the "end for which we are created," which is "to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save [one's] soul." In *Spiritual Exercises*, section 23, page 12.

each one of them are the setting of a possible revelation, ever more perfect, of the riches of God. They are the setting for a theophany.”⁷⁷ We can hope to and seek to experience God, to connect with God, through all things. Citing examples taken from the life of Ignatius, we might experience God by looking at the sky and the stars; or, we might be able to discover God speaking to us as we read a book and as we reflect on our own thoughts and feelings.

It is also the case that, for Ignatius, God is found in creatures in the sense of actually being in creation, in all creatures, in some way. That this is so is seen in the *Spiritual Exercises*, in the exercise called the “Contemplation to Attain the Love of God”. There we read that “God dwells in creatures: in the elements giving them existence, in the plants giving them life, in the animals conferring upon them sensation, in man bestowing understanding.”⁷⁸ Ignatius goes on to state that God not only dwells in creatures, but “works and labors for me in all creatures.”⁷⁹ God’s dwelling in creatures suggests that all of creation is sacred. God’s working and laboring in creatures suggests God’s active, loving presence in the world.

Basil Johnston

Born in 1929, Basil Johnston moved with his family at a young age to Cape Croker (now known as the Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation), on the Bruce Peninsula in Ontario. He attended St. Peter Claver School and Garnier High School, residential schools run by the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) in the town of Spanish, Ontario. Johnston would go on to study at Loyola College in Montreal, and at the Ontario College of Education. He married Lucie Desrosches and

⁷⁷ Joseph Thomas S.J., *Ignace, Pèlerin de Dieu: Jalons, Supplément À Vie Chrétienne* 298 (Paris: Vie chrétienne, 1986), 18. My translation from the French.

⁷⁸ *Spiritual Exercises*, section 235, page 102.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, section 236.

had three children. For many years, Johnston worked for the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto. He wrote a number of books, related to Anishinaubae culture and language. His work was intended to preserve the heritage of his people, and he encouraged others to learn their ancestral language and to espouse their traditions, “giving them new meanings and applications in the modern age.”⁸⁰ Johnston died in 2015.

Johnston’s writings allow us to dialogue with the Anishinaubae spiritual tradition, as he wrote about that tradition. As well, in dialoguing with his writings, we also dialogue with the author; and in the context of this paper, which is intended to be a Catholic-Indigenous dialogue, it is worth asking whether Johnston himself was Catholic, as well as Indigenous. Based on an article published in the newspaper *The Globe and Mail*, after Johnston’s death, his relationship with the Catholic Church is not clear. The article quotes Johnston’s son as stating: ““we were Catholic, he raised us Catholic and we learned to forgive. The foundation of Catholicism is forgiveness.””⁸¹ On the other hand, one of Johnston’s daughters is quoted as saying the following: ““after my mother died [in 2001], he could let that stuff go, the religious stuff ... He wanted no priests at his end of life ceremonies.””⁸²

A story of a vision quest

In his book, *Ojibway Ceremonies*, Johnston tells the story of the vision quest of Mishewa-Kaikaik (Great White Falcon). At the age of fourteen, the young man’s father told him that it was time for his quest – something for which the young man had been preparing, for a

⁸⁰ Basil Johnston, *The Manitous: The Spiritual World of the Ojibway* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1995), xxiii.

⁸¹ Judy Stoffman, “Writer Basil Johnston Paved Way for First Nations Literature,” *The Globe and Mail*, September 26, 2015, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/books-and-media/writer-basil-johnston-paved-way-for-first-nations-literature/article26553667/>.

⁸² Ibid.

number of years. He blackened his arms and legs; and, as he was leaving the village, many wished him well: ““Be strong! There’s nothing to fear! Your patron will look after you.””⁸³

Mishi-Waub-Kaikaik walked with his father through a forest, experiencing the silence, peace, and “the quiet mystery of the forest’s existence.”⁸⁴ On arriving at the Place of Visions, the father offered tobacco and said a prayer, addressing the spirits of the place. The Place of Visions was a special place, a mystical place. People entered this space only for the purpose of making a vision quest, and it was thought that the local spirits would aid in the quest. The young man would be spending four days here, with water but no food, and with a small lean-to for shelter.

The young man was alone, and felt desolate and abandoned. That night, he felt afraid as he heard the sounds of animals, and thought of stories he had heard about monsters. This experience led to his learning something about himself, as he experienced and then reflected on these fears. Likewise, later on in his quest, he spent a night preoccupied with feelings of hunger and cold, struggled with that, and learned from that experience. Also, one day he spent some time watching the movements of columns of ants. He learned something, too, based on these observations: “All have a place. Each has a place willed, dreamed, and ordered into being by Kitche Manitou.”⁸⁵

On the evening of the last day of the vigil, Mishi-Waub-Kaikaik fell asleep and received a series of three visions. When he woke up, his father was there, and he said to his father, “I

⁸³ Basil Johnston, *Ojibway Ceremonies* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982), 44.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 48.

think I had a dream.”⁸⁶ His father nodded. They went to see Cheengwun (Meteor), a medicine man, for an interpretation of the dreams. Cheengwun confirmed that it was indeed a vision, and indicated that the young man need go out on vision quests no more. Later on, the visions came true. One of the visions, for example, was about a long trek, and this vision symbolised leadership. Mishi-Waub-Kaikaik later became the chief of his community, a position he held for twenty years.

Places with personality

One thing that is apparent in this story, and that relates to our topic of religious experience and creation, is that a particular place seems to be conducive to the experience of receiving a vision. The description of the forest, which the young man and his father walked through, suggests that it was a spiritual, special place; and even more so was the Place of Visions such a special place.

Perhaps the Place of Visions was special because there were spiritual beings there. The story notes that there were spirits present in this place, whom the father addressed in prayer. Along these lines, Johnston writes elsewhere that the Anishinaubae people felt the presence of manitous (or spirits, or mysteries)⁸⁷ all around them, and that there are some manitous “whose mandate is to preside over plant and animal species.”⁸⁸ This statement suggests that creatures have manitous associated with them, perhaps watching over them. The story likewise suggests that there are manitous connected with people. That this is the case is suggested by the words

⁸⁶ *Ojibway Ceremonies*, 55.

⁸⁷ Johnston states that the word *manitou* has many meanings. He asserts at one point that the best translation is not *spirit*, but *mystery*. See *Manitous*, xxi; *Ojibway Ceremonies*, 30.

⁸⁸ *Manitous*, xxii.

of encouragement spoken to the young man as he leaves the village, with community members stating that his patron would take care of him.

Also, perhaps the place is spiritual because there is a spiritual element to, or in, the creatures that are found there. That such is the case, for creatures such as plants and animals, is suggested elsewhere by Johnston. He states that “Kitchi-Manitou infused everything and everyone with manitoulike attributes and principles.”⁸⁹ Also, at one point Johnston affirms that creatures are made up of an incorporeal as well as a corporeal substance; and that the power of a creature is an extension of the power of Kitchi Manitou.⁹⁰

Yet, perhaps there is still something more to the Place of Visions which makes it special, besides the presence of manitous and besides the spiritual element of particular creatures. There may be something important that is related to the place as a whole, related to the sum of the individual creatures and spirits. Along these lines, Johnston writes that the word *manitouwut* refers to the “sacrosanct mood or atmosphere of a place.”⁹¹ We also find, in Johnston’s writings, the idea that the inner or incorporeal substance of a plant could enter into relationship with other members of its species and with other species, to form a “corporate spirit”. This statement suggests that a place, made up of various individual, natural entities, has a spirit of its own.⁹²

⁸⁹ *Manitous*, xx.

⁹⁰ Basil Johnston, *Ojibway Heritage* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), 49.

⁹¹ *Manitous*, 2.

⁹² *Ojibway Heritage*, 33.

Similarly, in their book *Power and Place*, American Indigenous authors Vine Deloria, Jr. and Daniel Wildcat write about the importance of particular places. They use the following formula, to describe the world around us: power plus place equal personality.⁹³ The idea here is that there is a power, an energy, in a given place, related to the relationship between the creatures found in that place; and that each place has its own personality. One might be able to discern what kind of experiences a place allowed, based on its personality. One might also come to know the personality of a place through familiarity with the particular objects that are found there; and vice versa.⁹⁴

The vision as a religious experience

In our story, Mishi-Waub-Kaikaik has a particular kind of religious experience: he receives a series of three visions. We might ask: how does the young man know that it is truly a vision, without deception? Also, a vision was something that related to one's purpose, one's character, one's gifts and place within the community.⁹⁵ How did the young man know that his vision was one that he should follow, that should provide direction for his life? Here, the visit to the medicine man, after the vision quest, seems important. The medicine man confirms that it was a vision, and helps with the interpretation.

In his book *Ojibway Heritage*, Johnston states that the Anishinaubae people recognised at least three kinds of vision.⁹⁶ With the first kind, the vision is received while awake, during vigil; and the vision is clear, and the meaning complete. The second kind involves lack of clarity

⁹³ Vine Deloria, Jr. and Daniel R. Wildcat, *Power and Place: Indian Education in America* (Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum, 2001), 21.

⁹⁴ *Power and Place*, 2-3.

⁹⁵ *Ojibway Heritage*, 132.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 126.

and completeness. The term for this second kind, *mauzzaubindumwin*, means hazy or fuzzy or vague.⁹⁷ One might receive a partial vision in this way, and then continue to go out to quest for visions. The third kind of vision is clear and complete, like the first kind; but it is received not while keeping vigil, but during sleep. The visions of Mishi-Waub-Kaikaik belong to this third category of vision.

Other kinds of revelation, in creation

Johnston also states the following:

What our ancestor learned from the land, the wind, the fire and the waters, the beetles, the hawks, the wolverines and the otters is revelation, no less than is dream. Through the high places and low, Kitchi-Manitou shows us, speaks to us. Our ancestors watched and listened. The land was their book ...⁹⁸

While Mishi-Waub-Kaikaik received a revelation through a dream, Johnston claims here that there are other forms of revelation. He suggests that Kitchi Manitou, or God,⁹⁹ reveals things to us through our observations of the land and of the creatures around us.

An example of learning, based on watching and listening to the created world, is that of the Anishinaubae people learning about a cure for poison ivy, based on observing the actions of frogs.¹⁰⁰ In the story, presented above, the young man learned a lesson about life, about the world, based on his observation of ants. Johnston states that “the land ... unfolded whatever men and women needed to understand to know about life and being.”¹⁰¹ Included, here, are lessons about right and wrong, about living well.

⁹⁷ *Ojibway Heritage*, 127.

⁹⁸ Basil Johnston, *Honour Earth Mother: Mino-Audjaudauh Mizzu-Kummik-Quae* (Cape Croker Reserve: Kegedonce Press, 2003), xi.

⁹⁹ Johnston uses the terms *God* and *Kitchi Manitou* interchangeably in *Ojibway Heritage*, 23.

¹⁰⁰ *Ojibway Heritage*, 42.

¹⁰¹ *Honour Earth Mother*, 148.

We might grant that people can learn things by observing the natural world; but what makes such knowledge revelation? Perhaps there is revelation, related to the world around us, because our observations of the world can lead to knowledge of Kitche Manitou, the Creator of the world. Johnston does assert that the world manifests the existence of a Creator.¹⁰² However, Johnston is suggesting more than that, when he speaks of revelation that takes place through the world. He is saying that all knowledge, gained through experience of the land and its creatures, is revelation. Thus when one learns a lesson about life by watching ants, for example, this is revelation.

That such an ordinary experience may be considered revelation is reasonable, based on the Anishinaubae understanding of the world and its beings, which we have seen above. If the world is full of manitous, and if all creatures have manitoulike qualities, and if places have power and personality, then it makes sense that the Great Spirit, Kitche Manitou, is revealing things to people through the creation. It makes sense, also, if Kitche Manitou is kind and generous, which is how Johnston describes the Creator.¹⁰³

We might add that there is a general sense, in Johnston's writings, of the Anishinaubae people being very much rooted in, connected to, creation. Thus part of the vision quest experience, before the receiving of the vision, involved surrendering to self and to the place, and being "conjoined with the earth and the animal creatures and plant beings who resided in the place."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² *Honour Earth Mother*, xv.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ojibway Heritage*, 125-6.

Ignatius and Johnston

Perhaps it is unfair to compare Ignatius of Loyola and Basil Johnston, considering that Johnston attempts to sum up an entire spiritual tradition, while Ignatius should not be seen as representing the whole of the Catholic tradition. On the other hand, perhaps the comparison is fair in that Ignatius was not only an individual and part of the Catholic tradition, but was the founder of a religious order and of a particular branch of Catholic spirituality, namely that which is called Ignatian spirituality. Thus the present section of this paper can be seen as a comparison between the Anishinaubae and Ignatian spiritualities. Later, in the fourth section of this paper, we will look more broadly, if briefly, at the Catholic Church's tradition, related to the topic of religious experience and creation. Here, without being exhaustive, I would like to make a few comparisons between, or comments related to, Ignatius and Johnston.

In Johnston's writings, as compared to Ignatius, there is more of an emphasis on natural settings being important and spiritual places, and being conducive to religious experience; and not only natural settings generally, but particular places. For Ignatius, yes, there were religious experiences that took place in proximity to creation; but any place, such as indoors while lying in bed, could be an apt setting for such an experience.

Perhaps comparable to the Place of Visions, of Johnston's story, is the city of Jerusalem as presented in Ignatius' autobiography. Both can be considered special and holy places. In the autobiography, we find the following: "On seeing the city [of Jerusalem] the pilgrim [Ignatius] felt great consolation ... and a joy which did not seem natural. He always felt the same devotion on his visits to the holy places."¹⁰⁵ A city, of course, is a different kind of place, a less natural

¹⁰⁵ *Autobiography of St. Ignatius*, 49.

one, as compared to the Place of Visions, which was a glade in the middle of the forest. For Ignatius, Jerusalem, and more specific sites in and around Jerusalem, were holy by virtue of their connection with the person of Jesus. A link can be made in Indigenous spirituality, as well, between holy places and particular persons or events. Important places can be seen, at least in some Indigenous traditions, as not only possessing power and a certain personality, but as being places where something important happened in the history of the tribe.¹⁰⁶

In the story of Mishi-Waub-Kaikaik, we are not told much about the young man's reaction to his vision. The medicine man, Cheengwun, confirmed that it was a vision; and, based on that confirmation, we can assume that the experience belonged to what Johnston calls the third kind of vision, whereby the vision is clear and its meaning complete. Did the young man feel certain about the vision? For Ignatius, it is important to consider one's own, inner reaction, related to one's experience. Does an experience bring me closer to God, does it give me spiritual consolation? Do I experience a desire to serve God, or a love of all creatures in their Creator? Sometimes, for Ignatius, "God our Lord so moves and attracts the will" that we just know something, beyond doubt.¹⁰⁷ Perhaps Cheengwun helped the young man explore his inner reactions to the vision; or, perhaps it was simply clear to the medicine man that it was indeed a vision, as he listened to the young man's story.

For both Johnston and Ignatius, besides an extraordinary experience such as a vision, there are what might be called everyday religious experiences. For Johnston and the Anishinau-

¹⁰⁶ Vine Deloria, Jr., *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion*, 3rd ed. (Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum, 2003), 65, 120-21.

¹⁰⁷ *Spiritual Exercises*, section 175, page 74.

bae, this experience is quite creation-centered. One learns, one receives revelation, as one observes the earth and its creatures, and as one lives in the midst of a spiritual, powerful world. For Ignatius, the experience can relate to creation, in which God dwells and works. It can also extend beyond creation, to finding God through a book or through a conversation, for example; and by reflecting on one's thoughts and feelings, related to the experience.

As well, for both Johnston and Ignatius, there is a sense of people being connected to creation. Johnston wrote of allowing oneself to be conjoined to the earth and its creatures, in preparation for receiving a vision; and, for Ignatius, an experience of spiritual consolation allows one to love creatures and all of creation, in the right way, in the Creator.

Also for both authors, God or Kitche Manitou is present in creatures. As for the presence of spiritual beings in the world around us, we have noted such a belief, regarding manitous, in the Anishinaubae tradition. A similar sense of the spiritual can also be found in Ignatius' writings and spirituality. In the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius writes about "the good spirit" and "the evil spirit". A commentator has the following to say, regarding these terms:

There can be no doubt that, for Ignatius, this word ["spirits"] referred to the Holy Spirit and to created spirits, both the good ones, those who are commonly called angels, and the evil ones, those who are commonly called Satan and demons. In using Ignatius' rules [for discernment of spirits], we can and should give the term "evil spirits" a broader meaning which, besides Satan and demons, includes the tendencies in our own psyches which spring from egoism and disordered sensuality and also from other individual persons or society insofar as these are an influence for evil in our lives.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Jules Toner S.J., "Discernment in the Spiritual Exercises," in *A New Introduction to the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, ed. J. Dister (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1993), 64.

Creation as sacred, and care for creation

In this section on Ignatius and Johnston, we have looked at views, from two different traditions, related to religious experience and its connection to creation. In relation to the hypothesis, stated in the introduction of this paper, we can say that proximity to creation, in both Ignatian and Anishinaubae spirituality, leads to human religious experience. This is the case especially in Johnston's writings, where everyday experiences of God are very much connected to creation; and where particular, powerful places are especially conducive to religious experience.

Next, the hypothesis supposes that this religious experience, in creation, is transformative and leads to seeing creation as sacred. For both Johnston and Ignatius, God or *Kitche Manitou* is present in all things, and this is one basis for considering creatures to be sacred. Johnston writes that, for the ancestors of his people, "everything was sacred by virtue of its creation by *Kitchi-Manitou*, and everything was sacred because every form of life had an element of mystery."¹⁰⁹ Connected with a belief in the sacredness of creation was a close connection with the spiritual world, and a sense of receiving revelation in creation. For Ignatius, religious experience, while not being limited to natural settings, was something that could move one to spontaneously see the sacredness of creation. Thus, in a moment of spiritual consolation, one discovers God's presence to creation and one can love all creatures in their Creator.

The last part of the hypothesis mentions taking care of creation. One who prays with the *Spiritual Exercises*, such as with the "Contemplation to Attain the Love of God", should be led to a response to God of gratitude, of love of God, and of offering of self to God. While Ignatius

¹⁰⁹ *Honour Earth Mother*, 148.

does not specifically mention a response of caring for creation, a recognition of God's active presence in creation might lead us to desire to cooperate in this action.¹¹⁰ Also, our experience of God, and its accompanying sense of connection with creation, might lead us to see "care of the world [as] a mystical habit."¹¹¹ For Johnston, the Anishinaubae worldview involves a peaceful coexistence with, and respect for, all of creation. He writes, for example, that Kitche Manitou "granted ownership and stewardship of the land to the natives in joint tenancy with the manitous, the birds, the animals, insects, and generations still to be born."¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Thomas, 18.

¹¹¹ de Castro, 26.

¹¹² *Manitous*, xvi.

Section 3: Cle-alls' and my own reflections

Continuing with the topic of religious experience and creation, this section of my paper will involve a dialogue on more of a personal level. There was no research involved, in the preparation for this section of the paper; or, rather, it was a different kind of research. I met, recently, and interviewed Cle-alls; and I have been reflecting on, and praying about, my own religious experience and its connection to creation.

Cle-alls, and Indigenous Christianity

On February 4, 2017, I had the pleasure of spending a few hours with Cle-alls and his wife, Darlene, in their home in Ottawa. With Cle-alls' permission, our general conversation became more of an interview, as I asked him a number of questions. One thing I asked him about was dialogue, and relations generally, between Christians and Christianity, on the one hand; and Indigenous people and their spirituality, on the other. Some of Cle-alls' observations on this topic can be found in Section 1 of this paper. I also asked him questions related to religious experience and creation, and will share some of his responses on this topic here, in this section – again, with his permission.¹¹³

Cle-alls (Dr. John Kelly) was born in California, in 1947. He is a member of the Skidegate Haida community of Haida Gwaii, a territory composed of islands in the Pacific Ocean, off the coast of British Columbia. The name Cle-alls was given to him in the 1990s, by women of the matriarchical Haida society. He has been married to Darlene for six years. Cle-alls has four children, five grandchildren, and one great-grandchild. His work includes being a retired professor and an adjunct research professor in the School of Journalism and Communication at Carleton

¹¹³ Cle-alls (John Kelly), Interview.

University in Ottawa. As well, he is a co-director of Carleton's Centre for Indigenous Research, Culture, Language and Education (CIRCLE). Still at Carleton, Cle-alls is "old enough to function as an Elder," as he puts it, and counsels and helps out with events, in that capacity. Darlene and he are involved with the Capital City Bikers' Church, in the Vanier area of Ottawa.

Cle-alls describes himself as Indigenous Christian – and he sees no conflict between the two, no reason why he should not be both Indigenous and Christian. When speaking about being Indigenous, here, Cle-alls is not only referring to his ethnic background; he says that he is immersed in Indigenous culture. As far as being a Christian, he says that he is catholic but not Roman Catholic. He is interested in the essence, in the basics, of what it means to be Christian. The essence of the Christian message, for him, is that it is a love story, centered on Jesus giving us the gift of being with God forever.

It does not make sense, for Cle-alls, that one might have to give up one's traditional culture and spirituality, in order to become Christian. As he puts it, "why would God want to take away our Indigeneity?" Thus he finds fault with past Christian missionaries, who told the Indigenous people that they should abandon their traditional practices. He wishes that missionaries would have seen the good in Indigenous traditions, and would have looked for parallels between those traditions and the Christian message. His adopted brother, Robert Grey Eagle, a Lakota, once told Cle-alls that "Jesus would have made a good Indian." Grey Eagle also described the sun dance ceremony of his Lakota (Sioux) people as being something that involves taking on the sufferings of the world – and this is just what Jesus did! Finding such parallels is something that not only sees the good in the local traditions, but also helps spread the Gospel message.

Three anecdotes

Participating in sweat lodge ceremonies has had an immense effect on Cle-alls. He participated in such ceremonies in South Dakota, with the ceremonies functioning in accordance with the Lakota tradition. These ceremonies include prayers for peace, for healing and for understanding. Cle-alls sees these traditional ceremonies as a means for God to speak to us.

Cle-alls' first sweat lodge ceremony was particularly significant for him. Through that experience, he felt a sense of connection with the others who had also participated. They had suffered together and prayed together. He felt clean inside, and felt like something had changed. Part of the change involved a recognition that traditional Indigenous ceremonies were a positive thing. There was a waking up to traditional values, here, for Cle-alls.

* * *

Cle-alls was walking along the trails of Table Rock, a semi-circular mesa in southwestern Oregon. He sat down, and looked around, and felt inspired to write a poem. One of the lines of the poem reads: "I think that what people call the silence of God is really just the deafness of humankind." God is always talking to us, he realised. Plants, rocks, and other creatures have a voice, and God speaks to us through them.

* * *

In 1987, a campaign involving a "Cowboy and Indian Alliance", which included local ranchers and Indigenous people, was organised in South Dakota. The group opposed Honeywell Corporation's plan to do munitions testing in the Thunder Eagle Canyon area of the Black Hills. The local settlers referred to it as Hell's Canyon. The tests would have involved pyrotechnic weapons containing depleted uranium, which can burn their way through thick armour on

tanks. The Black Hills generally, and this canyon in particular, were (and still are) considered sacred by the Lakota people. According to a local rancher who was opposed to Honeywell's plan, the dispute revolved around "'a land-based ethic versus a profit-oriented motive.'"¹¹⁴

One day, Cle-alls was driving through the Badlands of South Dakota. He stopped and got out of his car, to pray about the situation related to Honeywell. He prayed that the people might be strengthened in their struggle to protect the land. His prayer began with the words: "Ancestors, hear my prayer." As he prayed, Cle-alls heard or understood something. He did not hear a voice, but something became clear to him, in his heart. What he understood was the ancestors' communication of the following message: that he should not pray about Honeywell, but should pray about doing the right thing. "We have fought the battle for our children and are at rest now," was part of the message communicated; "today is your time." He understood that he, Cle-alls, and his contemporaries, are the ancestors of tomorrow's children, and so should behave appropriately.

Being in creation as conducive to prayer

In all of these episodes from his life, Cle-alls prayed in close connection with creation. At Table Rock and after stopping in the Badlands, he was alone with nature. These settings were conducive to prayer; he connected with God at these times. Similarly, as mentioned in the introduction of this paper, Cle-alls often prays outside, on the front porch of his house. The sweat lodge was a somewhat different situation as compared to the circumstances described in the

¹¹⁴ Cindy Reed, quoted in Bob Sector, "Indians, Ranchers Oppose Black Hills Weapons Tests," *Los Angeles Times*, August 30, 1987, http://articles.latimes.com/1987-08-30/news/mn-4978_1_black-hills.

other anecdotes, but still involved connection to creation. One of the ways that one is connected to creatures and to creation, in the sweat lodge ceremony, is by sitting on the bare ground. In this situation, Cle-alls was not alone but was with a group. There is also a ceremonial aspect to the sweat lodge; and suffering and struggling, within oneself and in communion with others, is part of the prayerful experience.

Cle-alls also mentioned, in conversation, that in the Black Hills in South Dakota, such as at Bear Butte, one can find signs that read: “Indians praying”. These signs refer to specific places that are considered sacred and that are reserved for prayer and for vision quests, in particular. In the Cheyenne language, the word for Bear Butte means “good mountain”. Cle-alls states that you can feel the goodness of this mountain, and that, in this place, “your mind turns toward prayer and toward God almost automatically.” Outdoors, then, in the midst of creation, we find special, sacred places that are conducive to prayer.

The sacredness of creation

The belief that creation is sacred, then, is closely tied to prayer and to experiencing the presence of God. One goes to sacred places to pray; and, on the other hand, one discovers that places are sacred through prayer. Based on Cle-alls’ experience and testimony, we can say that all of creation is sacred and conducive to prayer; and, as was the case for Basil Johnston and for other Indigenous authors, mentioned above, it is the case for Cle-alls that certain, particular places are experienced and described as being especially sacred and prayerful.

One particular place that is considered sacred, for Cle-alls and for the Lakota people, is Thunder Eagle Canyon. This is the original name of the place which is also called Hell’s Canyon. Cle-alls explained why the colonisers of the United States gave the place the name that they

did. As he sees it, these settlers recognised that the place is spiritual, as indeed it is. Their mistake, though, was in seeing this place as spiritual in an evil, even satanic, way – and thus the name “Hell’s Canyon”.

Cle-alls, then, not only prayed in the midst of creation, but saw creation as sacred. That this is the case is clear based on his concern for Thunder Eagle Canyon, including his view that munitions testing would not be appropriate in this place. This view of creation is also apparent in Cle-alls’ poem, written at Table Rock, which expresses that God is present in creation and speaks to us through the natural world.

As well, Cle-alls has connected this understanding of creation with his Christian faith. Thus there are certain verses from Scripture that particularly resonate with him, verses which suggest that creation is sacred. One verse he mentioned comes from the Psalms: “The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it, the world and all who live in it” (Psalm 24:1). He also mentioned a passage from the book of Revelation, which talks about God destroying those who destroy the Earth (Revelation 11:18). We have seen, above, that one can see a parallel between Christianity and Indigenous spirituality in the notions of sacrifice and of taking on the sins of the world; so, here, we find a parallel related to the sacredness of creation.

The “knowing” of religious experience

The anecdotes shared by Cle-alls, related to religious experiences, have in common that each one involved an experience of receiving a new understanding. At one point in our conversation, he talked about “a knowing I gained.” With these spiritual experiences came transformation in the sense of seeing things differently. Thus Cle-alls came to see Indigenous traditions in a new way; and came to understand that God is always speaking to us, through the created

world. Besides such revelations, another gift of God and kind of transformation occurred for Cle-alls during the sweat lodge ceremony, whereby he felt like something had changed and felt “clean inside.”

About myself, and my dialogue partners

This paper, as mentioned earlier, is intended to be a Catholic-Indigenous spiritual dialogue. To engage in this dialogue, I am focusing on four people: St. Ignatius, Basil Johnston, Cle-alls Kelly, and myself (Paul Robson). The intention, here, is to have two people representing the Catholic tradition (St. Ignatius and me), and two representing the Indigenous tradition (Johnston and Cle-alls). These four people can be seen as representatives of the two traditions, but without totalling summing up or encapsulating these traditions.

At the same time, as we have seen already, with the first three of these people, that it is a bit simplistic to categorise them as being “Catholic” or “Indigenous”. Johnston was Catholic as well as Indigenous, although with what seems to have been a rocky relationship with the Catholic Church. Cle-alls is not Catholic but is Christian. To varying degrees or in different ways, their connection with Christianity would have affected them and their views. As well, while St. Ignatius was certainly Catholic, we can say that he was more than that: he was Basque, and grew up in a certain family, had certain unique experiences that affected him, studied at particular universities, etc.

As for me, I am Catholic, and proudly and actively so. I follow Catholic practices, and believe what the Catholic Church believes. As well, though, I think it is fair to say that I am more than Catholic. I also come from a certain family that cared for me and educated me, as I grew

up in Winnipeg. I grew up in a Salvation Army church, and so was influenced by another Christian tradition; and I was influenced by certain teachers at certain schools, such as the University of Winnipeg. I have also spent time among people of other cultures and religions, in Nepal for example. Furthermore, within the Catholic Church, I am also a Jesuit and now a priest, and these are aspects of my life which have affected me and formed me into who I am.

Finding God outside

My experience of finding God in creation is a fairly regular, constant one, thanks be to God. I mentioned in the introduction of this paper that I look for opportunities to pray outside, in natural settings. Many evenings I will walk outside, reflecting and praying about my day. This walk, I suppose, is my equivalent to Cle-alls' prayer on the front porch. The experience for me is often one of calming down, of wonder related to all of God's gifts, and of gratitude. My time of prayer often begins with the following words:

Thank you, Lord, for this beautiful day.
Thank you for creating me, for sustaining me, for loving me.
Thank you for including me, Lord, in your love of all things,
And for being there in all parts of my existence ...¹¹⁵

Often, over the past number of years, these walks have taken place in cities, and it can be argued that cities are not always the most natural of settings. While this may be the case, there is something about being outdoors, under the sky, in the fresh air, which is prayerful for

¹¹⁵ I am not sure whether this is a prayer that I read somewhere and learned, or whether I composed it.

me. I find that a walk outside is helpful for me, in the sense that it facilitates my prayer, facilitates my connection with God. I thus follow a principle of St. Ignatius, by continuing to pray in the way that is helpful for me.¹¹⁶

A three day retreat experience

In the summer of 2009, I spent about twelve days at the Loyola House Retreat and Training Centre in Guelph. I took part in a program that was called the Retreat Directors' Workshop, and as part of that program I made a three day silent retreat. That summer, I had finished my first year of philosophy studies, as a Jesuit, and had one year to go. After philosophy, I would be going on to regency, which is a period of formation through working in a Jesuit apostolate. The following is a summary of some of the key moments from that retreat. Here, I am selecting and rephrasing some of the points noted by me in my journal, at that time.¹¹⁷

July 10, 10 p.m.: I met the woman who would be my director for this retreat, Sister Agnes Bhutia. She recalls having met me before, in India!

July 11, 1 a.m.: Praying in my room, I noticed and prayed that my deep desire, for this retreat, was to be with Christ. Secondly, I mentioned that I was seeking the grace of guidance, related to what I might do during regency, and in the future generally.

10 a.m.: In prayer I felt a sense of reverence for Christ, thought of him as my connection with God. In Matthew 10, the story of Jesus sending out the twelve disciples, Jesus is pushing the disciples out the door. They have power, but are also unprepared and need to trust. I reflected on various experiences I have had as part of my Jesuit formation, and thought of regency as a stage that will involve learning by doing.

12:15 p.m.: I felt tempted for a moment, during my prayer period, to think: why am I spending all this time in prayer, focused on one short Bible passage? There was a special moment at the end of this prayer period, where I felt warmth and a red

¹¹⁶ In the *Spiritual Exercises*, the one who is praying is encouraged to assume different postures, such as kneeling or standing, as one seeks what one desires; but then not to change, when something is helpful. Similarly, one is encouraged to follow whatever method of prayer is helpful. In *Spiritual Exercises*, sections 76-7, page 36.

¹¹⁷ Paul Robson S.J., "Prayer Journal, February 2009 - June 2010."

light, from God, lasting ten seconds or so. This experience almost brought a tear to my eye.

9:30 p.m.: Earlier in the day, I had a great walk, and sat on a bench near the river. It was amazing that a dragonfly landed on my knee and ate a bug, right in front of me. I felt quite consoled, also reflected that desolation would come. Later on in the day, I thought of what Eric Jensen had said about consolation: “loving only God, who’s in all things.”¹¹⁸ To that phrase can be added: ... and so really loving all things!

July 12, 12:30 p.m.: I sat on my favourite bench. There was a cool wind, the experience was not totally pleasant. I worked that experience into my prayer, expressing a desire to be able to take or leave a bit of cold, or heat, or hunger. I imagined Jesus, cold and tired and hungry. There was a real experience of consolation at the end of this time of prayer, as I recognised and expressed a desire to do a certain kind of ministry in the future: namely, to help the poor, to be with people who are oppressed or marginalised. I felt blessed, and relieved, as I expressed this desire. At the same time, I felt that I could be happy doing various kinds of work, in various places.

3 p.m.: I prayed with the “Three Kinds of Humility” from the *Spiritual Exercises*.¹¹⁹ I reflected on my own life, related to the issue of honours and dishonours; and considered different kinds of insults, why I might be insulted, and how I react or how I might react to such situations. In the end, I prayed that I might even desire to be insulted, so as to be like Christ; and might be able to love someone who insults me.

9:15 p.m.: The thought occurred to me: what if were sent to Nepal for two years? My first reaction to this thought was one of fear, related to being away from everyone and everything I know.

July 13, 3 a.m.: I prayed with the story of Jesus feeding the five thousand. I presented the crowd of hungry people, of the story, to Jesus; and prayed for people I know, and for difficult situations around the world.

10 a.m.: Praying with the passage related to Jesus and Peter walking on the water, I felt moved to focus on the verse that states that Jesus “went up into the hills by himself to pray” (Matthew 14:23). I imagined Jesus tired, needing to be rejuvenated through prayer. I felt inclined to pray, and was disappointed when my allotted time for prayer was finished.

¹¹⁸ Eric Jensen S.J. is a member of the Retreat Staff at Loyola House. He is also the author of the book *Entering Christ’s Prayer*, published in 2007.

¹¹⁹ *Spiritual Exercises*, sections 165-68, pages 69-70.

Praying not only in creation, and not only about creation

I have chosen to write about this particular retreat experience because it involved important moments of prayer in the midst of creation, and also prayer about creation. Yet reading this summary of my retreat, presented above, it is obvious that my prayer did not totally revolve around the natural world. Regarding settings for prayer, the summary suggests that I was praying outdoors, in the midst of creation, on at least a couple of occasions. However, it is also true that I often prayed inside the retreat house. In my journal, I did not always note the location or setting of where I was praying, but it would have often been indoors, with my room and the chapel being likely locations. Indeed, while being outside, and especially in more natural settings, can be prayerful for me, it has also been my experience that sitting in a comfortable chair in a comfortable room, for example, can be conducive to an experience of God.

Also, God's creation inspired my prayer, but was not the only thing to do so; and I prayed about creation, but my prayer extended well beyond that topic. My prayer was inspired by my being in the midst of creation, at times; but, more frequently, it was motivated by biblical passages, and by the *Spiritual Exercises*, and by a focus on the person of Jesus Christ. Regarding topics for prayer, my main concern, during the retreat, was not the world and its creatures; rather, I was focused on the two graces, the two desires, that I felt moved to express at the beginning of the retreat: one was for me to be with Christ and to be like him, the other to receive some guidance regarding my future life and ministry. Perhaps one day I will feel inspired to focus a retreat on the theme of God's creation and my relationship with it, but that has not been the case so far in my life.

An important moment

As is often the case for me in the evenings, in the city, so on this retreat I felt inclined to be outside and pray outside. I sat a number of times on a particular bench near the Speed River – a spot which I found particularly prayerful. Probably the most important single moment of this retreat happened at this location. It was a moment of insight, of relief, of consolation, of movement of the will. At that moment, I recognised a deep desire of mine, while also being given the grace of being open to different options and so of not being attached to my own desired outcome.

I will not suggest that this experience of mine was on the same level as that of Ignatius at the Cardoner River, when he experienced a great enlightenment whereby “everything seemed new to him.” However, there are some parallels. As with Ignatius, this important moment for me took place as I sat facing a river. While the revelation was not on the topic of the river or of creation more generally, perhaps this beautiful, natural setting disposed me to connection with God and to having this experience.

Praying with a violent and unpleasant creation

One might think of creation, of the natural world, as being beautiful, or awesome, or full of wonders. I would say that all of these descriptors are true, concerning creation, and that experiencing the world in these ways can be moments of connection with God. At the same time, such was not my experience of creation, on this particular retreat – or, rather, such was not the whole of my experience. Creation can also be experienced as cruel, or as scary, or as uncomfortable. Furthermore, if we should search for God in all things, as Ignatius suggests, then there

is the implication that God can be found in and through more difficult or less pleasant experiences.

On my retreat of 2009, as I sat near the Speed River, one of my times of prayer involved watching a dragonfly eat a smaller insect. Perhaps one could look on such an event and see it as cruel or violent. One might feel sorry for the insect that is dying. My experience, on that day, was one of connection with God; and of seeing the event as amazing and beautiful. Perhaps I thought of this event as a normal part of the natural world.

The next day, again sitting on the bench near the river, I felt uncomfortable because of the cool temperature. I had been hoping for a warmer, more comfortable setting. Yet, the experience became a good one, there was a movement toward God, as I prayed about the unpleasant experience. I thought of Jesus, who surely was cold, or hungry, or otherwise uncomfortable, at times. I prayed with my own ability, or inability, to be content with varying situations. Along these lines, Ignatius writes about “using” different kinds of circumstances, in one’s search for God: “that the exercitant take care to darken his room, or admit the light; to make use of pleasant or disagreeable weather, in as far as he perceives that it may be of profit, and help to find what he desires.”¹²⁰

Creation as sacred, and caring for creation

There was one moment, during this retreat, when I had a prayerful insight that was directly related to creation. This experience occurred later in the day, on the same day that I had felt consolation as I sat and watched the dragonfly eat the bug. Perhaps this earlier experience

¹²⁰ *Spiritual Exercises*, section 130, page 56.

led to the later insight. The insight involved remembering a phrase spoken by Eric Jensen: “loving only God, who’s in all things.” To this phrase, I spontaneously added: and so really loving all things! This train of thought suggests that God’s presence in creatures is a good reason to love creatures; or that an experience of God can be transformative and can enable one to see all things, all creatures, in a new and more loving way.

During this retreat, then, I was blessed with some religious experiences. Some of them took place in the midst of creation, and some were on the subject of creation. Now, the hypothesis of this paper’s introduction asserts that religious experience in creation is transformative, and leads to seeing creation as sacred and to a desire to care for the created world. I would say that such was my experience, in some way, as I watched the dragonfly, and as I was later moved to make an exclamation about loving all things.

In general, I would affirm that I do consider creation to be sacred, and that I do try to care for creation, at least in some ways. Are these views and behaviours of mine based on particular religious experiences, which took place outdoors in creation? It is difficult to pinpoint particular moments of my life that may have affected me in this way. Perhaps there have been things that I have read, that have influenced me. Perhaps my evening walks have gradually affected my view of creation. As well, there are a few particular moments in my life that come to mind, connected to creation, which are memorable and which had an effect on me. These examples are similar to the episode of the dragonfly, involving violence within nature, or sometimes involving human-inflicted violence toward other creatures. These experiences, though, affected me in a different way as compared to the dragonfly episode, causing concern on my

part for the creatures that were being hurt. One such experience took place when I was visiting a farm in France, and witnessed the killing of a couple of sheep by a local butcher.

Cle-alls, me, and the original hypothesis

As I have written, here, about Cle-alls and about my reflections, some connections have been made to this paper's introductory hypothesis. For both Cle-alls and I, it is the case that important religious experiences take place in the midst of creation; and that creation is seen as sacred, and that there is a desire to care for it. It may be difficult to prove that the belief that creation is sacred, and the desire to care for it, are a direct result of religious experiences that took place outdoors, in creation. Yet there are some examples, presented above, that would suggest a more direct connection. Concerning myself, the dragonfly experience seems to be connected to my later exclamation about loving all things. For Cle-alls, a time of prayer at Table Rock led to thoughts of God's communication to us through creation.

On all four dialogue partners

As well, some connections can be made between all four of the people studied so far: Ignatius, Johnston, Cle-alls, and myself. For example, for all of these people, proximity to creation is conducive to religious experience; and for all four the created world is seen as sacred. Also, a common thread is that prayer in the midst of creation can involve various issues and thoughts, and so does not always involve reflection on the topic of creation. There is a certain amount of introspection, of self-reflection, that takes place for all four of us, in the midst of creation.

In some ways, my prayer experience follows more closely the pattern of Ignatius's life and experience than it does the writings of Johnston or the experience of Cle-alls. That this is

the case is understandable, considering that I have been formed as a Jesuit in the Ignatian tradition. Similarly, there are points of connection between Cle-alls and the writings of Johnston, points which are not prominent in Ignatius' life and writings or in my experience. Thus, for both Ignatius and myself, outdoors in creation is one good setting for connecting with God; but so might be lying in bed, or sitting in a comfortable chair. For both Johnston and Cle-alls, there is the suggestion that it is not only all of creation, generally, which is sacred; but that particular places are particularly sacred.

Finally, based on the descriptions presented above, is there anything new in Cle-alls' experience, that we have not seen in the accounts of myself as well as of Johnston and Ignatius? As well, is there anything new in what I have said about my own experience? For the most part, the religious experiences in creation that have been recounted in this paper have been solitary experiences: of being alone in the sense of being without human companionship; of being with creation, and with God, and with the spiritual world. New in Cle-alls' account is the sweat lodge ceremony, which is close to creation and is not solitary, but is communal as well as ceremonial. In my own account of my experience, somewhat new is an experience of prayer that involves an encounter with a natural world experienced as violent and as causing discomfort. This perspective is not totally new, though, based on what we have seen so far in this paper, as Mish-Waub-Kaikaik's vision quest included his struggles with being afraid, and cold, and hungry.

Section 4: A glance through Church history

In the preceding two sections of this paper, the goal has been to engage in a dialogue between the Catholic tradition and the tradition of the Indigenous peoples of North America. The topic has been that of religious experience and creation, touching on the following aspects: whether being in the natural world is conducive to human religious experience; whether God is considered to be present to or present in creation, and whether creation is considered sacred; and whether people respect and care for creation.

These preceding sections suggest that both the Catholic and Indigenous traditions do indeed find God through creation and in creation. However, one of my main reasons for writing this paper was to explore the supposition that, on this topic, the Catholic Church can and should learn something from the Indigenous tradition. If this supposition is true, then there is the implication that the Church and her members may have failed, or may have missed something, or may have not emphasised something enough.

One representative of the Catholic tradition, whose life and writings have been examined above, is St. Ignatius of Loyola. The present section of this paper aims to look through more of the Catholic tradition. We will look briefly at two of the Fathers of the Church, who lived and wrote in the third and fourth centuries; at the Middle Ages and a couple of its representatives; at writings from and about the modern period, which here will be defined as beginning in the West around the year 1500; and, finally, at a more recent Catholic writer.

The following will be a brief survey of Catholic views, related to religious experience and creation. I do not presume to be presenting the most important points or the most important figures of the Church's tradition. Yet, this survey should provide an indication as to whether this

paper's topic has been neglected in the Church in the past. Or, this survey might provide elements of the tradition that the Church might do well to retrieve and to emphasise more in the present. The underlying assumption, here, and the reason for this whole discussion, is the notion that creation is an important avenue for people of today to connect with God; and that such connection leads to respect for and care for our planet.

The Fathers of the Church

St. Basil of Caesarea, also known as Basil the Great, lived in the 4th century CE. He was the Greek bishop of Caesarea Mazaca in Cappadocia, which is in modern-day Turkey. He stated in a homily: "I want creation to penetrate you with so much admiration that everywhere, wherever you may be, the least plant may bring to you the clear remembrance of the Creator."¹²¹ In another homily, he asserts: "If the sun, subject to corruption, is so beautiful, so grand ... if finally, one cannot tire of contemplating it, what will be the beauty of the Sun of Righteousness?"¹²² These quotations speak of the beauty of creation, and suggest that the created world is something for people to admire and to contemplate. As well, there is a direct connection between creation and Creator, with one's contemplation of the natural world leading to recognition of the Creator. Furthermore, God is acknowledged as greater, and as more beautiful, than the creation.

St. Augustine, who lived from 354 to 430, was bishop of Hippo in modern-day Algeria. Augustine has been called one of the great Church Fathers of the Western Church, in contrast to Basil who was of the Eastern Church. In his *Confessions*, Augustine writes: "you [God] were

¹²¹ Basil the Great, in the fifth homily of the *Hexaemeron*. "Hexaemeron - Full Text, in English - 1," trans. B. Jackson, <http://www.elpenor.org/basil/hexaemeron.asp>.

¹²² Ibid, from the sixth homily.

more inward than my most inward part and higher than the highest element within me.”¹²³

Later in that same work, he states:

Late have I loved you, beauty so old and so new: late have I loved you. And see, you were within and I was in the external world and sought you there, and in my unlovely state I plunged into those lovely created things which you made. You were with me, and I was not with you. The lovely things kept me far from you ...¹²⁴

In contrast to Basil, Augustine finds God not through creation but by looking inward, into his own soul. Indeed, the created world is presented here by Augustine as a distraction, as something that prevents him from connecting with God.

The Middle Ages

St. Thomas Aquinas was an Italian Dominican friar, who lived in the 13th century. In his *Summa Theologiae*, he wrote a number of arguments for demonstrating the existence of God. These are arguments based on the created world. For example, based on the fact that things in the world are in motion, we can infer that there is a first cause, a first mover – and that first mover is God.¹²⁵ What Aquinas is doing here can be called “natural theology”, where this term is defined as “the use of reason unassisted by revelation in coming to know God, in particular the existence of God.”¹²⁶

Basil speaks of admiration and contemplation of creation, which leads to God; while Aquinas, here, also reaches God based on creation, but through philosophical arguments. Why does Aquinas do so? According to Neil Ormerod, Aquinas makes these arguments in response

¹²³ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), III.vi.11, page 43.

¹²⁴ Ibid, X.xxvii.38, page 201.

¹²⁵ Thomas Aquinas, “Summa Theologiae: The Existence of God (Prima Pars, Q. 2),” <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1002.htm>.

¹²⁶ Neil Ormerod, “In Defence of Natural Theology: Bringing God into the Public Realm,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 72 (2007): 227.

to a particular historical and cultural context. In Europe at that time, changes were taking place, with people moving into the cities from rural areas, with a movement away from agriculture and toward manufactured goods. At that time there was also a movement “into a world which [was] much more the product of human practicality and intelligence.”¹²⁷

Ormerod states the following, concerning the type of society which Aquinas’ world was moving away from:

A rural, agricultural and subsistence society is more attuned to the rhythms of nature, its cycles and moods. Its closeness to the natural environment is more likely to find the divine within the natural order, and so promote a sense of participation in divine presence through the natural world. Within such a world view the existence of God is hardly an issue, indeed almost self-evident.¹²⁸

It can be argued, then, that in an urban society there is a need to present arguments about God’s existence, as Aquinas does, because that existence is less obvious. As well, Aquinas’ arguments based on human reason can be seen as an appeal to a society which was increasingly relying on such reasoning.

Also in the Middle Ages, St. Francis of Assisi (circa 1181 to 1226) is someone whose connection with nature was less philosophical and more of a religious or spiritual one. Francis lived in close contact with the natural world, and experienced God in and through creation. It has been written of him that his experience of the world was a poetic, affective one, which contained an opening out onto the sacred.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Ormerod, 231.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 230.

¹²⁹ Eloi Leclerc O.F.M., *The Canticle of Creatures, Symbols of Union: An Analysis of St. Francis of Assisi* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1970), 114.

The modern period

St. Ignatius (1491 to 1556) lived in a time of transition, which included a movement into the modern period. As we have seen, Ignatius experienced God in various settings, including in close connection with creation. He considered God to be present in creatures, and also in encounters, and all experiences, and in our interior lives. He stated that we should “love no creature on the face of the earth for its own sake, but only in the Creator of them all.”¹³⁰ This statement suggests that one can love or can be attached to creation in an improper way. A connection can be made here to St. Augustine, who experienced the created world as being something that took him away from God.

According to Anne M. Clifford, Catholic theology in the modern period became very much human-centered. The rest of the world, the rest of creation, was neglected. Non-human creation was seen at times as nothing more than a backdrop for human activity. Theologians stressed salvation, and human salvation in particular, and did not emphasise creation. As well, certain interpretations of the Bible led to humans’ abuse of the natural world. Clifford writes that “directives to ‘subdue’ the earth and to have ‘dominion’ over every living creature (Gen 1:28) were applied uncritically to legitimate human domination of nonhuman nature, as if it were a right given to humans by God.”¹³¹

Understanding the context is helpful, here, as it was in the case of Aquinas. Clifford mentions the challenges posed to Christianity by modern science. Beginning with Galileo Galilei

¹³⁰ *Spiritual Exercises*, section 316, page 142.

¹³¹ Anne M. Clifford C.S.J., “Foundations for a Catholic Ecological Theology of God,” in *“And God Saw That It Was Good”: Catholic Theology and the Environment*, ed. Drew Christiansen S.J. and Walter Grazer (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1996), 21.

(1564 to 1642), and increasing later with Charles Darwin (1809 to 1882) and his theory of evolution, the Church assumed a defensive posture toward science. Certain traditional, literal interpretations of the Bible were challenged by modern science. The result was that theologians emphasised humanity and human activity, leaving the natural world to scientists; and also that believers increasingly turned inward, to the soul, to find God, rather than out to the world.¹³² Thus it appears as though Augustine's stress on praying interiorly, rather than finding God through the exterior creatures of the world, was intensified at this time.

A 20th century theologian, René Latourelle, has written the following:

The man who contemplates creation does not feel called or spoken to; he does not have to respond to a call, but has an object placed before him to decipher. Creation refers to God as to its cause ... it speaks of God, but God himself does not speak, does not enter into dialogue.¹³³

This statement seems to suggest that one does not, or even that one cannot, have a religious experience in connection with creation. This perspective would be in opposition to the Indigenous experience of creation; to certain Catholic figures whom we have looked at above, such as Basil, Francis, and Ignatius; and to my own experience of God in creation. Latourelle, here, seems to be basing his argument on decrees of the Church's First Vatican Council (1869 to 1870), and his approach to creation is in line with the natural theology of Aquinas. As well, he is defending the position that there are truths of the faith that have been revealed by God and that cannot be known by reason alone, such as those pertaining to the mystery of the inner life of God.¹³⁴

¹³² Clifford, 21.

¹³³ René Latourelle S.J., *Théologie de La Révélation* (Montréal: Desclée de Brouwer, 1966), 415. My translation from the French.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 285, 416.

A present-day perspective

Pope Francis' encyclical letter, "Laudato Si'," was published in 2015. In this document, the Pope presents what might be called an "ecological theology". Human care for creation, and connection with it, are presented as important; and these are seen as being closely related to our relationships with God and with other people. In the document, he corrects a misguided interpretation of Genesis 1 which would justify human exploitation and domination of creation.¹³⁵ He also writes about God being intimately present to all creatures,¹³⁶ and about "nature as a magnificent book in which God speaks to us."¹³⁷ His statement that we should approach creation with awe and wonder¹³⁸ suggests an affective, experiential connection to the world around us.

A review of this brief history

Skimming over Church history, related to this paper's topic, has revealed a number of different trends and emphases. Religious experience in creation, finding God in and through creation, is a theme found in Basil, Francis of Assisi, Ignatius, and Pope Francis. Augustine and Ignatius have suggested that there is such a thing as an immoderate, improper connection that people can have with creatures. Augustine also spoke of turning inward, rather than out to the world, to find God; and this emphasis was picked up again later. In the Middle Ages and modern period, there was a movement toward looking at the created world rationally rather than experiencing it more affectively. In the modern period, theology emphasised human activity rather

¹³⁵ Francis, "Laudato Si'," paragraph 67.

¹³⁶ Ibid, 80.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 12.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 11.

than creation as a whole, and abuse of creation was justified. There have been moments of neglect of creation, then, in the history of the Church. There have also been moments of connection with, and appreciation of, creation; and these are moments which the Church can try to reclaim in the present. Pope Francis has tried to do just that, in “*Laudato Si’*.”

As well, a reason for the Church to turn to Indigenous traditions for guidance is suggested in the description of the changes that took place in society in the Middle Ages. At that time, there was a movement from rural to urban living; and Neil Ormerod has suggested that living in the city, living further from the natural world, made religious experience more difficult. Ormerod, based on his reading of Robert Doran, also distinguishes between “cosmological culture” and “anthropological culture”. He places the rural society of the Middle Ages in the “cosmological” category; and he also places Indigenous traditions in that category. On the other hand, Ormerod places the new urban society of the Middle Ages, as well as the predominant culture of the West today, in the “anthropological” category.¹³⁹ An implication that can be drawn, here, is the following: that, in today’s world, Indigenous cultures have something to teach the Western world about living closer to creation and in harmony with it, and about finding God therein.

¹³⁹ Ormerod, 229.

Conclusion

This paper began with a reference to an article which suggested that we and our planet are moving toward a human-driven mass extinction of species. Do such articles inspire people to change their behaviour, so as to care for the planet? Perhaps. As well, within the Catholic Church in recent years, writers such as Pope Francis and Anne M. Clifford have presented ecological theologies. Perhaps such writings will inspire people to respect and to care for the planet. This paper, though, has suggested another solution.

Also in the introduction of this paper, there was the assertion from Pope Francis that what is needed in the world of today is a new lifestyle and a new spirituality. This statement suggests that what is needed is a deep change within people, a change of hearts as well as of minds. I have argued that religious experience is something that is transformative, that changes people's lives; and that being outdoors, in the midst of creation, is conducive to such transformative religious experience. A possible path toward resolving the world's ecological crisis, then, is the following: that human religious experience in the midst of creation can lead to personal transformation, to viewing creation as sacred, and to a desire to care for the world around us.

I have argued that the Catholic Church and her members have made mistakes, in the past, related to a proper understanding of creation. In particular, the modern period of history in the West saw theological justification for abuse of the natural world. Present-day theologians can work to correct these mistakes by, for example, interpreting the book of Genesis in a way that allows for respect for creation. Besides such theological perspectives, however, there is something else, something more important, that the Church can do: she can emphasise and advocate a kind of spirituality, present in the Church's tradition, which finds God in and through

the created world. For example, an Ignatian ecological spirituality could be emphasised. Such a spirituality would encourage time spent in prayer outdoors, in the midst of creation; would assert that God is present and active in all of creation; and would explore how religious experience can change one's perspective, whereby one spontaneously loves God and loves all creatures in the Creator of them all.

The Church, then, can and should recognise and admit past mistakes, and can work to reclaim important elements of her tradition. As well, in today's world, dialogue with other traditions is important. In the context of the Catholic Church in Canada, dialogue with Indigenous people can contribute to reconciliation. As well, as has been argued above, dialogue involves an openness to learning from other people and from other traditions. On the topics of human experience of God through creation, belief in God's presence in the natural world, and living in harmony with creation, the Church can learn from Indigenous traditions. Something that the writings of Basil Johnston and the testimony of Clealls have revealed about Indigenous spirituality is an experiential sense of the spiritual pervading all of creation. Such a lived sense of God and of the spiritual may be something that was part of the lives of Western Christians in the Middle Ages, and that was lost; and may be something that Indigenous people can help Christians to retrieve in the world of today.

Through the writing of this paper, I have learned about Catholic and Indigenous spiritualities; and I have had the opportunity to reflect on and study a particular aspect of these spiritualities, one which I find interesting and important. I have also reflected on the Church's mission in general, and on dialogue in particular; and, through this reflection, I now have a better

sense of what my future ministry should involve. As well, I have been blessed with the opportunity to engage in dialogue through this paper, with this dialogue involving listening to and learning from another perspective; and reflecting on my own experience and on my own religious and spiritual tradition.

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Toward Understanding a Text of Theology from another Culture,
Through Cultural Exploration and Conversion(s)

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Introduction

Bishops in the Catholic Church are expected to review and approve works, written by members of their Christian communities, which relate to faith and morals and are intended for publication.¹⁴⁰ Works of theology are among those that should be evaluated and approved. A bishop might review such works himself; or a person called a *censor* might review the work, and submit his or her opinion to the bishop. It is possible that I, as a Catholic priest, could be asked by a bishop, at some point, to evaluate a theological work. Even if not, I will certainly be interested in reading, appreciating, and learning from texts of theology.

At the local level, I will soon be a parish priest, at the Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve on Manitoulin Island. In that capacity, it is possible that a local parishioner will give me a text that he or she has written, and will ask for my opinion. In addition, being in that place and working with a particular group of people, I will be interested not only in reading texts of theology in general; but especially in reading theology that is related to Indigenous culture and issues, and written by Indigenous people.

How can a bishop, or a censor, or I, evaluate a work of theology, when the text is written by someone who belongs to a different culture (as compared to the reader)? Now, a proper evaluation of a text presupposes an understanding of the text. Understanding precedes judgment, as Bernard Lonergan has explained.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Canon 823, in James A. Coriden, Thomas J. Green, and Donald E. Heintschel, eds., *The Code of Canon Law: A Text and Commentary* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 579.

¹⁴¹ Bernard J.F. Lonergan SJ, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 9.

The question that this paper will explore is the following: how does someone come to an understanding of a text of theology written by a person of another culture? This paper will suggest that such an understanding is difficult; that there are particular challenges related to crossing cultures. The main argument to be presented, here, is that an adequate understanding of such a text is achieved not only through an understanding of what is theology; but through cultural exploration, and a personal journey involving conversions.

Outline

First, there is the question of identifying a text as being a work of theology. To that end, I will consider what theology is, what qualifies as a theological text. The first part of this paper will consider these questions; and will also begin to consider what a text of theology written by someone from a particular culture might look like.

Next, when the person who wishes to understand a text comes from a culture other than that of the writer, the question arises: how significant of a difference is this difference in culture? What might the “cultural gap” involve, and how significant might it be? This paper’s second section will suggest that the difference can be significant, involving a difference on the level of logic or ways of thinking.

The third section will expand on the second. Joseph Couture and Carl Starkloff have argued that there exists what might be called an Indigenous way of thinking, which contrasts with a Western way of thinking.¹⁴² The two contrasting ways will be described. The reader of a text

¹⁴² Throughout this paper, a distinction will be made between Indigenous and Western culture, the Indigenous mind and the Western mind, etc. I realize that the distinction between “Indigenous” and “Western” is debatable. It can be argued that there are many Indigenous cultures in the world, and many Western cultures. Yet, this distinction between Indigenous and Western has been made, by both Couture and Starkloff. Perhaps they are trying to suggest a general and important distinction, without denying that there is a variety of cultures within these broad categories.

from another culture should know that such differences exist and can make understanding difficult. Also, it is helpful for the reader to know what these differences might involve.

This paper's fourth section will provide two examples of people who have overcome a cultural gap. Couture and Starkloff came to understand, and even to live, a second culture. They are people who have undertaken what I am calling *cultural exploration*. We will see what steps they took, toward an understanding and a personal, lived integration of another culture. The one who wishes to fully understand a text from another culture should consider taking similar steps, toward a greater appreciation of the cultural perspective of the text.

The fifth section of this paper will discuss *conversions* as an important part of cultural exploration toward understanding. A personal journey involving conversions underlies and makes possible the discoveries and advances made by the one sets out to explore another culture. Particular reference will be made to Starkloff and his journey, which involved self-discovery along with discovery of Indigenous culture. With reference to Bernard Lonergan, *conversion* will be approached as something of which there are a number of different kinds, including religious and intellectual conversions.

Next, a text written by Rosella Kinoshameg, an Indigenous woman, will be presented (with the author's permission to use it). The reader of this paper will be invited to reflect and respond to Rosella's text, keeping in mind some of the considerations presented so far in this paper. This text is presented as a kind of case study or example of a text written by someone of a particular culture, which a reader from another culture might seek to understand.

The seventh section will provide an example of what a response to a theological text from another culture might look like. What are the challenges involved in understanding such a

text, as exemplified in Rosella's text? What steps might be taken, toward understanding? The response that will be shared is my own, based on my experiences as I read, reflected on, and did some research toward an understanding of, Rosella's text.

The eighth and final section will provide some observations based on this example of a response to a text, relating this particular response to the method and to some of the ideas presented in earlier sections of this paper.

1. The text from another culture as a theological text

Before the question of how to understand a text of theology from another culture, there is the question of identifying a work as being a work of theology. What is theology, then? Also, will theology look different, when written by people of different cultures?

Catholic theology can be defined as reflection about God and God's work in the world, from the perspective of faith, and with Scripture and Church Tradition as sources of revelation.¹⁴³ While it is possible to talk about the theologies of various religions, my definition limits the matter to the Catholic Christian context. Faith and revelation are important here. The Catholic theologian starts from the perspective of faith, believing in God and believing that God is working in the world: through the Bible and through the Church, and especially through the person of Jesus Christ. The world, all of creation, is also seen as God's work and as revelation.

In addition, "among the values that faith discerns is the value of believing the word of religion, of accepting the judgments of fact and the judgments of value that the religion proposes."¹⁴⁴ Thus the theologian, and indeed Catholic Christians in general, believe certain central

¹⁴³ Based on G.F. van Akeren, "Theology," *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (Washington, D.C.: Gale, 2003), 891-2; and Stephen B. Bevans SVD, *An Introduction to Theology in Global Perspective* (New York: Orbis Books, 2009), 165.

¹⁴⁴ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 118.

Church teachings, or doctrines. As Pope Francis stated (before he was Pope), there are certain truths of the faith that make up our “nonnegotiable inheritance.”¹⁴⁵ That being the case, there is also room for variation in how these truths are expressed.¹⁴⁶ Over time, within the Tradition of the Church, there is a development of doctrine, whereby expressions change and whereby there is growth in understanding regarding these truths.¹⁴⁷

Even before considering the fact that there is a variety of cultures in the world, we can note that one will find a variety and development within any one culture. Languages change, ideas evolve, and perhaps even ways of thinking change, within any cultural group. Expressions of doctrine can and should change, as the culture changes. Thus the message, the gospel, the central and unchanging truths of the faith, should be expressed in new and fresh ways, so as to adapt to the changing culture.

The role of the theologian can be described as being the vanguard in the Church regarding new expressions and further understanding of doctrine. Theologians “press beyond traditional and accepted ways of expressing the faith.”¹⁴⁸ Stephen B. Bevans suggests that there exists a healthy tension between theologians and the Church’s officeholders or pastors (such as bishops).¹⁴⁹ The bishop wants to preserve the faith, to ensure that doctrines are accurately represented. Thus we have the practice of the review or censorship of books. At the same time,

¹⁴⁵ Jorge Cardinal Bergoglio, in *On Heaven and Earth*. Quoted in Eduardo Echevarria, “Development of Doctrine or Change in Teaching?,” *Catholic World Report*, October 19, 2014, <http://www.catholicworldreport.com/204/10/19/development-of-doctrine-or-change-in-teaching/>.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ See Vatican Council II, “*Dei Verbum*,” 1965, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html, section 8.

¹⁴⁸ Bevans, 127.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 122.

the bishop and the censor should be open to new expressions and explorations from the theologian, since theology is supposed to press beyond traditional expressions.¹⁵⁰ Furthermore, the reviewer of a text should keep in mind not only that a Church teaching can be expressed in different ways; but that different doctrines are on different levels or carry different weights,¹⁵¹ some being more central than others; and that there are “areas that allow for the expression of legitimate theological opinion.”¹⁵²

Also to consider is whether a text is not just a work of theology, but is *contextual*. Now, Bevens also argues, and rightly so, that all theology is contextual.¹⁵³ Every theologian comes from, and writes from, a particular context that influences him or her. I would like to make a distinction, though, between what I will call *conventional* theology and contextual (or local) theology. Conventional theology can also be called Western, as a Western or European perspective has been the prevailing one for many years: Robert Schreiter argues that a particular, Western form of theology has dominated in the Church from the thirteenth century until quite recently.¹⁵⁴ What Schreiter calls “local theologies,”¹⁵⁵ on the other hand, represent the expressions of groups that are in the minority or that have been ignored in the past. Thus we have, for example, expressions of African, or Asian, or Indigenous theology.

¹⁵⁰ Bevens, 127.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 122; with reference to Richard R. Gaillardetz, *Teaching with Authority: A Theology of the Magisterium of the Church* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1997), 271.

¹⁵² Committee on Doctrine, “The Permission to Publish: A Resource for Diocesan and Eparchial Bishops on the Approvals Needed to Publish Various Kinds of Written Works” (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2004), 10.

¹⁵³ Bevens, 3-4, 165.

¹⁵⁴ Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (New York: Orbis Books, 1985), 4.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, ix, 6.

Connected to the emergence of local theologies is the recognition that cultures, and people of different cultures, can learn from each other. There exists a legitimate, as well as illuminating, variety of beliefs and understandings in our world. Fr. Adolfo Nicolas, who was until recently the Superior General of the Society of Jesus, stated the following: “I am really fascinated by the fact that every culture has its own wisdom. We need the wisdoms, *the wisdoms in plural*, of the world to make our life and our world a little more livable, a little more human.”¹⁵⁶ The same can be said about theology, and about other aspects of the Church’s life and mission: the wisdoms of the world’s cultures can inform the faith and practice of the Church. Along these lines, Achiel Peelman writes that Indigenous Catholics can “produce an original and new response of faith, which would enrich the catholic (or universal) treasure of the Church.”¹⁵⁷

One can expect that a work of theology from a different culture will, like any work of theology, involve new expressions of the faith as well as explorations toward greater understanding of the truths of the faith. One can also expect that a text from a particular culture will apply local wisdoms to theological questions. Now, how else might contextual or local theology differ from more conventional, Western theological writings? Schreiter asserts that “theological procedures ... follow to a great extent the patterns of production of meaning within a given cultural context.”¹⁵⁸ One example of a way of doing theology today, which is appropriate within certain cultures, and which is different from the traditional Western method, is to begin with group discussions in small communities; and another new method involves theology written in

¹⁵⁶ In “Jesuits around the World,” *The Jesuit Curia in Rome*, November 23, 2015, <http://www.sjweb.info/news/index.cfm?Tab=7&Language=1&PubNumID=292>.

¹⁵⁷ Achiel Peelman OMI, *l’Inculturation: l’Eglise et les cultures* (Ottawa: Novalis, 1989), 138. My translation.

¹⁵⁸ Schreiter, 4.

the form of a story, such as an autobiography.¹⁵⁹ Thus theology may look different, depending on the writer(s) and the culture.

The reader of a text from another culture can keep these considerations in mind, and, based on them, should be able to make a preliminary assessment as to whether a text can be considered a work of theology. Yet, as the next section of this paper will explain, there are further challenges involved when one is reading a text from a different culture.

2. The difficulty of inter-cultural understanding

I have argued above that different cultures possess different “wisdoms.” If this is the case, then people may be able to benefit through interaction with people of other cultures. A couple of questions that arise, here, are: what is meant by *wisdoms*? Also, can wisdoms be transferred, be understood by people of another culture?

When we speak of *wisdoms*, are we talking about different *ideas* or *beliefs*? Can people gain wisdom through conversation with people from another culture, where this conversation involves an exchange of ideas? Perhaps the matter is more complicated than that. It has been suggested, regarding Indigenous people, that they have unique *perspectives* which often contradict Western paradigms.¹⁶⁰ Here, again, we must ask: what is meant by *perspective*?

Perhaps different wisdoms and different perspectives are based on different *ways of thinking*. That there is a difference on this level is implied by Schreiter, who argues that “Asian cultures can deal with contradictory data in a conjunctive (both/and) fashion;” and this is in

¹⁵⁹ Schreiter, 4.

¹⁶⁰ Lewis Cardinal, in Joseph Couture, *A Metaphoric Mind: Selected Writings of Joseph Couture*, ed. Ruth Couture and Virginia McGowan (Edmonton: AU Press, 2013), x.

contrast to “Westerners, with their disjunctive (either/or) modes of thought.”¹⁶¹ Similarly, Carl Starkloff asserts that Indigenous people have or follow a *different logic*, as compared to Westerners.¹⁶²

If this is the case, then the stakes are raised. If different people not only express things differently but think differently, if they live by different systems of logic, then there arises the question of how understanding, and even basic communication, are possible. Regarding theology and the question of the evaluation of texts, the same question applies. As we have seen, for Pope Francis there are nonnegotiable truths of the faith. It is possible that people of two different cultures can both believe in the same truths, yet think about them and express them quite differently. Is it possible that something that looks like a doctrinal error to the reader can be justified if one takes into account the culture of the writer? One approach for the person who is evaluating a theological text would be to have a list of doctrines of the Catholic faith, and to go through the text to see if there are any statements that contradict these teachings. However, considering the distinction made above by Schreiter, between *both/and* and *either/or* modes of thought, is contradiction to be seen as something that is a problem only within certain cultures?

In response to these questions, I would offer two considerations at this point. The first is that, at the least, there is a certain level of communication and comprehension that can be expected between people of different cultures. It should be evident, for anyone who has had the

¹⁶¹ Schreiter, 10.

¹⁶² Carl F. Starkloff SJ, “Manitoukaewin: Contemporary Spirituality among Native North Americans,” *The Way Supplement*, 1998, 78-9.

opportunity to interact with people from other cultures, that at least some level of communication and comprehension is possible. The exception may be when two people do not share a common language (although, even then, some communication is possible). The reader of a text from another culture, then, should not assume that the text, its language, and its meaning will be completely foreign. The second consideration is that people can cross, and have crossed, cultural boundaries. People have understood, or have lived, more than one cultural way. Two examples of people who have come to an understanding of another culture, or even have experienced in their own lives a personal integration of two cultures, are Joseph Couture and Carl Starkloff.

An examination of the lives and learnings of Couture and Starkloff will help us to see how one goes about the crossing of cultural boundaries. First, though, I will outline the conclusions that these two men came to regarding what, exactly, the cultural gap involves. Their conclusions relate to two particular cultures: the Indigenous and the Western.

3. Two different systems of logic

Couture and Starkloff both write about two different mindsets or systems of logic. The person who wants to evaluate a text of theology from another culture, then, should be aware that the writer of the text may operate quite differently, may think differently, as compared with the reader. For the reader, a full understanding of the text in question would involve an attempt to enter into the other's way of thinking.

Couture and Starkloff distinguish between the Indigenous and the Western ways of thinking. Couture describes the Western mind as discursive, as rational, as linear. On the other hand, he describes the Indigenous mind as "metaphoric and symbolic in expression, intuitive

and direct in process.”¹⁶³ He distinguishes the reflective and mediated knowledge of the Western mind from the direct knowledge of the Indigenous mind. Describing a particularly important spiritual experience in his own life, Couture describes his “compulsive and apprehensive rational mind.”¹⁶⁴ This compulsive rational mind is the Western mind, for Couture.

As mentioned above, Starkloff asserts that Indigenous people have a different logic, as compared to Westerners. He mentions “linear progression in the sense of traditional Aristotelian logic.”¹⁶⁵ This linear logic can be considered a Western system of logic. In addition, Starkloff describes his own experience of operating in a Western way, when he was operating “predicatively, conceptually, and judgmentally.”¹⁶⁶ On the other hand, for Indigenous people, “experience dwells much more within a space than along a linear time sequence, and it is thus capable of allowing apparently contradictory elements to co-exist.”¹⁶⁷ The logic, here, is not linear but is one of the “interconnectedness of powerful symbolic experiences.”¹⁶⁸

A key distinction made here, by both Couture and Starkloff, involves the linear, on the one hand; and the spatial, on the other. They are not the only writers to make this distinction, when contrasting the Western and Indigenous cultures. John Ralston Saul also argues that European societies have operated based on linear concepts, such as those of progress and growth;

¹⁶³ Couture, 8.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 6.

¹⁶⁵ Starkloff, “Manitoukaewin,” 78.

¹⁶⁶ Starkloff, “Theology and Aboriginal Religion: Continuing ‘The Wider Ecumenism,’” *Theological Studies* 68 (2007): 301-2.

¹⁶⁷ Starkloff, *A Theology of the In-between: The Value of Syncretic Process* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2002), 95.

¹⁶⁸ “Manitoukaewin,” 79.

while Indigenous societies “tend to take a spatial or circular approach.”¹⁶⁹ An aspect of the different ways of thinking, for Saul, is that “humans are part of the whole [for Indigenous people], not elevated above the place and its other inhabitants [as for Westerners].”¹⁷⁰

Thus not only do significant differences exist between cultures, but we now have a better idea of what these differences might involve. The difference between the Indigenous and Western cultures is not only one of having a different way of expressing something; but the thought forms, the ways of thinking, of the two cultures are different.

4. Two examples of cultural exploration

Couture and Starkloff came to an understanding of, were able to describe, two different mindsets. They also seem to have been able to think in both worlds, to switch between the two mindsets, at least to some extent. The following section of this paper will describe what they did, the steps they took, toward an understanding as well as a lived integration of the two cultures. The steps they took may be helpful for the reader of a text from another culture, who seeks to understand the text and the culture behind it.

Joseph Couture (1930-2007) was born in Alberta to a French-Canadian father and a Cree mother. He was a Catholic priest for seventeen years, with the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. He left the priesthood and the Church in 1968. In 1972, Couture received a doctorate

¹⁶⁹ John Ralston Saul, *The Comeback* (Toronto: Penguin, 2014), 18-9.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 19. Interestingly, Saul asserts that Europeans lived by something more like the Indigenous mindset until the early seventeenth century.

degree in educational psychology, thus becoming the first Indigenous person to receive a doctorate in Canada. Among his accomplishments, he is considered to have “profoundly influenced the corrections system by transforming the prison into a place for healing.”¹⁷¹

While Couture was an Indigenous man, he describes his cultural exploration as being one of encounter with the Indigenous tradition. Thus his upbringing, his starting point, was the Western culture. His method for exploring Indigenous culture and spirituality was an experiential one: “he delved into Indigenous knowledge by participating in ceremonies ... and spending a tremendous amount of time listening to and learning from traditional Elders.”¹⁷² A key moment in his life took place in 1971, when he fasted for four nights and three days. At that time, he experienced the same dream three nights in a row. The dream involved the coming together of a chalice and a pipe. Couture interpreted this dream to mean that “he should do his best to bridge the two cultural traditions – Western Christianity and Native spirituality.”¹⁷³

On the occasion of the third night and third repetition of this dream, Couture noticed the following change within himself: “my compulsive and apprehensive rational mind quietly settled into a waiting attentive mode, and with that came trusting acceptance of what began to be a deeply satisfying, in-depth Indian spiritual experience.”¹⁷⁴ Couture had experienced something new, here, which he saw as a movement toward living in more of an Indigenous way. Based on this experience, he gradually came to find in himself, to live by, and to understand two different mindsets – or two different systems of logic. Couture was able to switch back and

¹⁷¹ “Joseph Couture,” *Indspire*, accessed July 12, 2017, <http://indspire.ca/laureate/joseph-couture-2/>.

¹⁷² Lewis Cardinal, in Couture, *A Metaphoric Mind*, xi.

¹⁷³ Ruth Couture and Virginia McGowan, in *A Metaphoric Mind*, xxi.

¹⁷⁴ Couture, 6.

forth between these two different ways, these two different mindsets; and he tried to encourage and facilitate the process whereby others might have the ability to do likewise.¹⁷⁵

Carl Starkloff SJ (1933-2008) joined the Missouri Province of the Society of Jesus in 1952. He lived and worked with the Arapaho people in Wyoming for a number of years, prior to 1981, and with the Ojibway of Ontario after that. He taught at Regis College in Toronto and, later in life, at Saint Louis University. Some of his writings, such as the article "Theology and Aboriginal Religion," outline his own personal journey of conversions and of learning. They also show us his vision of an encounter between Indigenous people and Christians, between Indigenous religion and Christianity, which is enriching for both sides.

In Wyoming, in 1969, a challenging question posed by an Arapaho youth provoked in Starkloff a desire to be more attentive to, and to learn more about, Indigenous spirituality.¹⁷⁶ This desire prompted him to read books by ethnographers and historians of religion, such as Joachim Wach and Mircea Eliade. Wach, for example, writes about elements of religious experience that he claims are common to all people. Starkloff found that such scholars "made it possible to describe ... the tribal religious practices that had left earlier missionaries baffled, hostile, or indifferent."¹⁷⁷ These ethnographers, while being Western, had found ways to understand and to describe other cultures.

While these scholars provided "clues to assist"¹⁷⁸ Starkloff, he soon came to realize that something else was needed in his quest to learn about, and learn from, the Indigenous people.

¹⁷⁵ Couture, 29.

¹⁷⁶ Starkloff, "Theology and Aboriginal Religion," 292.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 294.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

He realized that he still had to get past a certain way of thinking, whereby he was “operating predicatively, conceptually, and judgmentally.”¹⁷⁹ An incident that helped him in this regard took place during a group conversation in Wyoming. The question being discussed was: when someone experiences a vision, does he or she actually see and hear the spirits? As a response, one of the men present simply pointed to his heart. Starkloff recognized this as a meaningful symbolic gesture. He writes that such gestures helped him to focus more on listening than on talking.¹⁸⁰ Regarding group meetings that were later held at the Anishinabe Spiritual Centre in Ontario, Starkloff writes that “the foundation of our ‘common meaning’ ... was in symbolic discourse.”¹⁸¹ The writings of Starkloff suggest that symbolic discourse can occur in a couple of different ways. First, the incident involving the man pointing to his heart suggests a discourse that involves symbolic words and gestures, as well as attentive, empathetic observing and listening. Second, Starkloff suggests symbolic analysis as a particular way of doing theology. It would be a kind of theological reflection to which Indigenous people could relate and in which they could actively participate. Such theology would include deciphering and explaining symbolic language, gestures, and rituals.¹⁸²

Now, the basic methods of cultural exploration, employed by Couture and Starkloff, should also be helpful for others. One of these methods is the reading of works by ethnographers. Such works involve placing, perhaps forcing, cultural data into Western categories¹⁸³ – with the implication that such information can be helpful for Westerners. The other, probably

¹⁷⁹ "Theology and Aboriginal Religion," 301-2.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, 302.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 314.

¹⁸² Ibid, 313.

¹⁸³ Schreiter, 10.

more important method, for Couture and Starkloff, was more experiential than was the reading. One example of learning through experience, through direct contact, is Couture's participation in traditional Indigenous ceremonies; another is Starkloff's spending time with, attentively observing and listening to, Indigenous people.

Reading and direct experience, then, are methods toward understanding a culture. Yet, there is something else, something that underlies these steps. There is another method, or a prerequisite for the methods already discussed. Underlying the process of cultural exploration, for both of these men, was a conversion experience – or, rather, a number of conversions.

5. The method of being open to conversions

Implied by or underlying the stories of Couture and Starkloff presented above are conversion experiences. I am not referring here to *conversion* in the sense of movement from one religion to another – as was the case, for example, when Couture moved away from the Catholic Church and toward Indigenous spirituality. At the same time, I am not denying that Couture experienced religious conversion(s). The definition of *religious conversion* which will be presented here resonates with the experiences described above, of Couture and also of Starkloff.

Conversion here is to be understood in the sense used by Starkloff, with reference to Bernard Lonergan: “by conversion is understood a transformation of the subject and his world.”¹⁸⁴ One's horizons are broadened. One sees things or does things or feels things in a new way. There are a number of different kinds of conversion, with religious conversion being only one of them. Other kinds include intellectual, moral, and psychic conversion.¹⁸⁵ Starkloff finds,

¹⁸⁴ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 130.

¹⁸⁵ Starkloff, “Theology and Aboriginal Religion,” 293, 315; Lonergan, 238. The notion of *psychic conversion* was not explicitly stated by Lonergan, and was developed by later scholars.

looking back on his life, different kinds of conversions that took place. He also speaks of an on-going process of conversion, and suggests that undergoing conversions is a “lifelong project.”¹⁸⁶ Furthermore, according to Starkloff the process of conversions is important, even necessary, for the Christian missionary, and for anyone who wants to enter into conversation with Indigenous spirituality.¹⁸⁷

While I mentioned four different kinds of conversion above, I will dwell on two that are particularly prominent in Starkloff’s autobiographical account: the intellectual and the religious. Lonergan defines *intellectual conversion* as “a radical clarification and ... the elimination of an exceedingly stubborn and misleading myth concerning reality, objectivity, and human knowledge.”¹⁸⁸ Starkloff experienced intellectual conversions as he read the works of ethnographers and listened to Indigenous people. Among the things that changed for him on an intellectual level, in a way that can be called a “radical clarification,” were his views of Christian missionary policies and theology of religions.¹⁸⁹ In addition, Starkloff describes his conversions as involving not only learning, since they also cleared his horizon of obstacles to understanding.¹⁹⁰ Now, for one to be open to the clearing of such obstacles, to be willing to have stereotypes crumble at one’s feet,¹⁹¹ also involves other types of conversion, especially religious conversion.

Religious conversion, according to Lonergan, means “being grasped by ultimate concern. It is other-worldly falling in love.”¹⁹² It is finding one’s deepest desire fulfilled in the love of God.

¹⁸⁶ “Theology and Aboriginal Religion,” 314.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Lonergan, 238.

¹⁸⁹ “Theology and Aboriginal Religion,” 292-3.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, 314.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Lonergan, 240.

Through such experiences of God's grace, one gains the power of love that enables one to accept suffering.¹⁹³ An example of suffering would be the uncertainty and the humility involved in having stereotypes crumble and in admitting what one does not know – which is part of the process of intellectual conversion. Thus religious conversion inspires a person and facilitates other types of conversion.

Along these lines of connecting religious conversion to intellectual conversion, Starkloff refers to Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur puts forward what Starkloff describes as a *kenotic* (or self-emptying) method of theology.¹⁹⁴ Religious conversion involves taking up one's cross, accepting suffering; and suffering is part of the method or process of the theologian who seeks to understand. The same can be said not only of theologians, but of whoever seeks to engage with and to learn about other cultures.

Ultimately, then, the ability and the willingness to explore another culture, so as to understand it, passes through an openness to change that is experienced in various kinds of conversions. For the person who wants to read and understand a theological text from another culture, there is the prospect of a journey involving not only cultural exploration through reading and through experience with the culture; but also involving personal conversions.

¹⁹³ Lonergan, 242.

¹⁹⁴ Starkloff, "Theology and Aboriginal Religion," 317; with reference to an essay by Ricoeur titled "Whoever Loses Their Life for My Sake Will Find It." The essay can be found in Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 284-8.

6. A text from the Indigenous culture

The goal of the arguments presented thus far has been to describe how a reader can come to an understanding of a text of theology, when that text is written by someone of another (and a non-Western) culture. Now, I will present an example of such a text.

The following is a text written by an Indigenous woman, Rosella Kinoshameg. Rosella is from Wikwemikong on Manitoulin Island (which is where I will be working as a parish priest). She is married with children, grandchildren, and a great-grandson; and she has worked in the field of nursing for many years. She is also Catholic, and a member of the Diocesan Order of Service (DOS). The DOS is a group of women who are mandated for ministry in the Church, in the Sault Ste. Marie diocese.

Rosella describes this text as a *story*. The reader of this paper is invited to consider the steps presented in the paper thus far, while reading Rosella's story. The steps presented thus far are, first, to consider whether the story is a work of theology. As mentioned above, Catholic theology provides new expressions and seeks further understanding of the faith. Theology written from a particular cultural perspective will apply the wisdoms of cultures to theological questions, and may be written in a style that is unlike that of most theological texts.

A second step, or perhaps this would be the first step, is to assume that this text was written by someone whose logic or mindset is different, as compared to that of the "Western" reader. The reader, then, should be cautious in making judgments. The reader should also keep in mind, however, that a certain level of communication and understanding is to be expected, across cultures.

The third step is that of cultural exploration, which might involve reading about the culture or more direct experience of the culture. Coupled with this exploration is an openness to, even a hope for, different types of conversions. Now, the reader of this paper is not expected to have time or to take time for such cultural exploration, in relation to this text. Yet, the reader can consider whether there is any particular kind of cultural exploration that he or she could undertake, which might facilitate a better understanding of the story. For example, while cultural exploration could involve reading about Indigenous culture generally, it could also be focused on particular questions. Are there any particular questions that come up as one reads? Is there any particular point that is challenging, in this story?

“The Anishinabe Gospel of Jesus”¹⁹⁵

- 1) *There are stories, myths or legends telling that the Anishinabe were once a very spiritual people. The events from the Creation story, the Sky Woman, Nanabush and Seven Grandfathers and the child will be used to compare events in the Bible: Book of Genesis, story of Noah, Jesus, apostles, death and resurrection and keeping the spirit of Jesus alive.*
- 2) *The Anishinabe creation stories tell of a time when the Great Spirit had a vision, which was fulfilled through the creation of the elements, the earth, the animals and man. The Book of Genesis tells how the universe, earth, animals, and human beings were created by God in six days.*
- 3) *The Great Laws of Nature that were to be followed for well-being and a harmonious way of life did not last as the people began fighting and killing. A great purification process began with water from the rains destroying everything, killing all people, except the water animals, birds and fish. The Book of Genesis tells of a time of purification through a great flood as told in the Noah story.*
- 4) *A woman, “Sky Woman”, who lived alone in the sky, begged the Creator to end her loneliness. Her prayer was answered and she was sent a spirit companion who left after she conceived. Again she begged the Creator to end her loneliness.*

¹⁹⁵ Rosella M. Kinoshameg, “The Anishinabe Gospel of Jesus,” 2012. This story is a revised, shortened version of a text written by Rosella in 1992. I have added numbers marking the paragraphs, for the sake of easier reference to the story later on in this paper.

Again her prayer was answered and again was sent a spirit companion who left after conceiving. The two children she bore, came to hate each other, fought and destroyed each other.

- 5) The remaining water animals persuaded Sky Woman to come and rest on the back of a great Turtle. She asked the animals: beaver, fisher, marten, loon and muskrat to dive down and bring up some soil. All failed except the muskrat, the most humble creature, who brought back a speck of soil. Sky Woman breathed life on this soil and it grew to become "Turtle Island".*
- 6) Sky Woman then gave birth to the second people, the Anishinabe, "beings made out of nothing". The Anishinabe grew in numbers and lived in harmony until many started dying from a disease. A young boy named "Odeamin", (Heart Berry or Strawberry), died and on reaching the spirit world pleaded for life of the people. He was sent back with the message that the Creator would be sending someone to teach the Anishinabe what must be done to live and have a sense of well-being.*
- 7) Nanabush, a half spirit possessing supernatural powers, was sent to live among the Anishinabe, to help them become stronger, to guide them and to make their lives happier and meaningful. He was also to teach healing using the medicines of plants. His life was a combination of wisdom and foolishness. He has been called a trickster but his foolishness was not to be malicious but was to be a medicine of laughter. His mistakes were to be laughed at but they were also to teach great lessons.*
- 8) The Seven Grandfathers, powerful spirits and guardians of the people, realizing that more help was needed sent a helper to choose someone who would be taught how to live in harmony with all of creation. A baby was chosen and this child journeyed with the helper and was taught many things. At the age of seven, the child was returned to the lodge of the Seven Grandfathers for further teachings. Each gave him a gift which he later came to learn as: respect, humility, compassion, honesty, truth, wisdom and love. He returned to his people as an old man and he brought to them teachings to follow a spiritual path using these seven sacred gifts and the four directions for well-being, balance, and harmony. He taught the people to communicate with the Creator using ceremonies.*
- 9) The baby was Jesus chosen by God to help and teach the people. This is how Jesus came to live among the Anishinabe, and how he came to teach them how to communicate with the Creator through use of ceremonies, tobacco, cedar, sage and sweetgrass, and to teach them how to live in balance and in harmony. He taught them about love, humility, prayer and fasting. This is how the Anishinabe became spiritual.*

- 10) *The old man, in turn, gave teachings for guidance and strength, about ceremonies, fasting, visions to a young man and his assistants. Jesus also chose followers to become his apostles. Jesus often used parables to teach just as the Anishinabe used Nanabush stories to teach.*
- 11) *Predictions of the future, prophecies called the Seven Fires, each representing an era of time, told of the physical and spiritual journey of the Anishinabe. They were also prophecies of warning, telling of sadness, struggles and destruction, of elders losing their reason for living if teachings were abandoned.*
- 12) *Native spiritual ways were considered uncivilized and superstitious. Terrified of burning in hell forever and not being able to pass to the spirit world, the Anishinabe turned their backs on their traditional teachings, suppressed their beliefs, hid their sacred bundles, and took their practices and ceremonies underground. Many lost their culture, language and identity as a spiritual people. In spite of this, teachings survived, as they were passed on secretly, but only to a select few.*
- 13) *Jesus was put to death during the time of rejection of Native spirituality, loss of beliefs and loss of identity.*
- 14) *The hiding of the bundles, practices and ceremonies represent the three days of silence and quiet after His death and the time before resurrection. All is quiet and silent, traditional ways being forgotten, repressed or hidden.*
- 15) *People slowly beginning to share and openly practicing their beliefs and ways of communication with the Creator, represents the resurrection. The people who are experiencing visits from Jesus are those who remained faithful and kept their beliefs just as He appeared to the apostles after resurrection.*
- 16) *The people are hungry for the teachings as they search for their identity, roots, language and meaning of the ceremonies. The new teachers are those people who have kept their beliefs, bring strength, meaning and purpose to life, a way of life that is whole having balance and harmony and truly keeping the spirit of Jesus alive.*
- 17) *The Eighth and Final Fire tells of the choice to be made of which pathway to follow. The wrong choice will mean destruction, suffering and death. The right choice will mean the lighting of the eternal fire of "peace, love and brotherhood for all nations."*
- 18) *The need is there for the people as they search for identity, roots, language, and meaning of ceremonies to once again find the key for spirituality, the source of*

spirituality. This means to follow and live the seven grandfather teachings and follow the great teaching of Love that Jesus gave.

7. An example of a response to a text from another culture

Now I will outline what a response to Rosella's story by someone from another culture might look like. The response that I will outline is my own, which took place over a period of a few months. Perhaps the reader of this paper will find that certain questions or points of interest for him or her, related to the story, were points that I likewise considered important. In contrast to the reader of this paper, I have had time to read Rosella's story a number of times, and to engage in a certain type of cultural exploration through research and reflection. Furthermore, an actual experience of someone's engagement with a text might serve to confirm or clarify the steps of the method presented above, or to suggest other possible steps.

(a) My first reading

During my first reading of Rosella's story, one of the phrases that particularly caught my attention was the following, found in the ninth paragraph: "The baby was Jesus chosen by God to help and teach the people." I was surprised to find that Jesus was entering the story at that point. This surprised me because I was reading what I understood to be a retelling, by Rosella, of the ancient myths or legends of her people; and these stories would have predated the encounter of the Anishinabe (or Ojibway) with missionaries who had told them about Jesus. After my initial surprise, though, it occurred to me that Jesus' inclusion in the story, at that point, sends a powerful message: it provides a particular understanding of Jesus, whereby his presence extends broadly to various times, places, and peoples; and it also evokes the value, the dignity of the Anishinabe people and their traditions. I was reminded of certain statements made by Indigenous Canadians as recounted in a book by Achiel Peelman. Peelman quotes a

young man named Jimmy as saying: “In the beginning was the Word. He was there at the beginning of the world. He was also there when the Native people came into the world. He has always accompanied us throughout our history.”¹⁹⁶

The other phrase that stuck me was this one from the thirteenth paragraph: “Jesus was put to death during the time of rejection of Native spirituality, loss of beliefs and loss of identity.” This phrase brought out, for me, the closeness of Jesus to the Anishinabe people, and the notion that Jesus suffers when we do. This section of the story also left an impression on me because of its irony and its critical commentary: while the missionaries came proclaiming Jesus, it was those people who kept to the traditional ways (which were condemned by the missionaries) who were “keeping the spirit of Jesus alive” (paragraph 16).

Also, as I recall, one of my first impressions of the Anishinabe Gospel was that it was similar in some ways to a book I had browsed previously, entitled *The Mishomis Book*.¹⁹⁷ Both books are about the Ojibway people; and both were what I called mythological-historical, where I saw the first part of each work as being mythological and the second part historical. When I used the term mythological, I was thinking of stories that are meaningful, that teach lessons, but that relate events that did not actually happen; and by historical I understood real-life, actual events.

(b) Questions and some research and reflection

After my initial readings and reflections on “The Anishinabe Gospel,” I decided to do some further reading, some background reading, which might contribute to my appreciation of

¹⁹⁶ Achiel Peelman OMI, *Le Christ est amérindien* (Ottawa: Novalis, 1992), 159. My translation.

¹⁹⁷ Edward Benton-Banai, *The Mishomis Book: The Voice of the Ojibway* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

this story. I wanted to know whether Rosella's text could be considered a work of theology. Now, "The Anishinabe Gospel" might not look like theology; but I discovered that theology written from a particular cultural perspective will tend to look different, as compared to more conventional, Western theology. One author has asserted that texts of "native Christian literature ... employ autobiographical narratives as primary methodological techniques for making (and not merely illustrating) theological points, and many of them also make use of stories drawn from a more general, collective, cultural context."¹⁹⁸ Thus it is culturally appropriate, it is fitting, for Rosella to write based on the traditional stories of her people.

Through this story Rosella is also addressing theological topics. She is expressing, in new ways, matters related to the Catholic faith; and such new expressions are appropriate for theological writings. As I have mentioned, my first reading of the text suggested that this story expresses insights regarding the central Church teaching that is the person of Jesus. The story has something to say about who Jesus is, and also about how Jesus relates to all people and to religions and cultures.

Thus I concluded that "The Anishinabe Gospel" is a work of theology, and that it provides a unique and fresh perspective on matters of the Catholic faith. The story has been written in the context of a history in which Christianity was often presented to Indigenous people in a Western way, and in which Indigenous traditions and beliefs were often disparaged by foreigners. Despite that history, Rosella's story not only shows the self-esteem of herself and her people, but suggests that her cultural perspective can inform and can enrich the Church.

¹⁹⁸ James Treat, "Introduction: Native Christian Narrative Discourse," in *Native and Christian: Indigenous Voices on Religious Identity in the United States and Canada* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 13.

Further reading also suggested that my first reading, my understanding of Rosella's text, was incomplete. I read Starkloff's assertion that Indigenous people have a different logic as compared to Westerners. I also read that myth can be understood as involving "an alternative mode of thinking to conceptual discourse."¹⁹⁹ Perhaps I should not presume to understand Rosella's story too quickly, if her way of thinking might be different from mine. Moreover, I had labelled part of Rosella's story as a myth, and perhaps incorrectly so; or, perhaps my label was correct, but my understanding of myth inadequate. In conversation with a friend from my Jesuit community, I spoke about Rosella's story, describing the first part as myth and the second as history. He replied with the suggestion that the Indigenous people might not make the same distinction that I would, between myth and history.²⁰⁰

My next foray toward further understanding, through research, found support for my friend's comment. I had distinguished between myth as a kind of meaningful fiction, on the one hand; and history as describing what really happened, on the other. While there is some truth in that distinction, it may be more accurate to say that myth is based on historical fact but is not too concerned with preserving the factual element. Author Karen Armstrong has written about the mythological thinking or world view of "premodern" Europe.²⁰¹ This premodern European thinking can be considered as similar to the logic of Indigenous peoples.²⁰² For Armstrong, in the premodern world, people "were less interested than we are in what actually happened, but

¹⁹⁹ David Brown, *Invitation to Theology* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 9.

²⁰⁰ In conversation with Justin Glyn SJ, approximately May 13, 2017.

²⁰¹ The premodern period can be seen as ending around the thirteenth or fourteenth century.

²⁰² As mentioned in a footnote above, John Ralston Saul argues that Europeans and Indigenous people had similar mindsets until the early seventeenth century. See also Starkloff's comment on the writings of Joseph Lafitau SJ, in "Theology and Aboriginal Religion," 310; or Neil Ormerod, "In Defence of Natural Theology: Bringing God into the Public Realm," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 72 (2007): 229-30.

more concerned with the meaning of an event.”²⁰³ In addition, “historical incidents ... were thought to be external manifestations of constant, timeless realities.”²⁰⁴ Thus a person might find meaning, or truth, behind or through an historical event; and might focus on the meaning more than on the event.

Mircea Eliade was an ethnographer, or historian of religions, who influenced both Starkloff and Couture.²⁰⁵ Eliade explains myth in a way that is similar to Armstrong, but that is more focused on place than on historical event; and in a way that connects myth to symbol and to religious experience. For Eliade, the world is symbolic, it “speaks” to us directly (for those who have ears to hear); and the symbol always “reveals something deeper and more fundamental.”²⁰⁶ The person thus experiences meaning, through contact with this symbolic world. This meaning is recognized, is experienced, intuitively or pre-reflectively. This experience is none other than a religious experience: “to ‘live’ a symbol and correctly decipher its message implies an opening toward the Spirit.”²⁰⁷ Furthermore, mythological stories are the result of people expressing their intuitive experiences of God and of meaning in the world.

Next, I asked myself whether there might be for me an entry point, a way of connecting, with the Indigenous perspective. Can I connect with that perspective, so as to better relate to Rosella’s story? I am assuming, at this point, that Indigenous people have a different logic or way of thinking, as compared to the Western culture, as Starkloff and Couture have argued.

²⁰³ Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God* (New York: Knopf, 2000), xiv.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Starkloff’s reading of ethnographers, including Eliade, has already been mentioned. Regarding Couture, see *A Metaphoric Mind*, 5.

²⁰⁶ Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Rites, Symbols: A Mircea Eliade Reader*, ed. Wendell C. Beane and William G. Doty, vol. 2 (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), 347.

²⁰⁷ Ibid, 351.

Now, it is helpful for me to know that this difference exists; and I can read descriptions of what this difference might involve. Knowing about this difference can help me not to judge Rosella's story too quickly; but, even better would be for me to be able to connect, somehow, with the Indigenous way of knowing.

One point of connection for me, with Indigenous spirituality and the Indigenous way of knowing, is religious experience through creation. Eliade writes about connecting with God through the world around us, as the world "speaks" to us symbolically and as we experience this intuitively. In my earlier paper (which, along with the present paper, comprises my thesis requirement for the Master of Arts program),²⁰⁸ I wrote of religious experience in and through creation as being a basic and important part of Indigenous spirituality; and as being something that I have experienced and to which I can relate.

Couture makes some points in his discussion of the Indigenous way of knowing and of thinking that resonated with me. In Couture's description of his personal experience of prayer and fasting, he states: "my compulsive and apprehensive rational mind quietly settled into a waiting attentive mode."²⁰⁹ Reading that phrase, I was reminded of my own experience of prayer. I recalled a particular time of prayer, during a retreat, when I wrestled with wanting to look something up and find an answer to a question, on the one hand; and resting in God's presence, allowing God to reveal to me according to God's will, on the other. Couture associates the compulsive and rational mind with the Western mindset. Perhaps I, then, during that retreat, was trying to overcome or to move beyond my Western mindset.

²⁰⁸ Paul Robson SJ, "A Catholic-Indigenous Spiritual Dialogue, On Religious Experience and Creation" (Saint Paul University, 2017).

²⁰⁹ Couture, 6.

Couture also writes that direct knowledge is proper to the Indigenous experience; and he also uses the term “deep knowledge.”²¹⁰ Reading these descriptions of a certain kind of knowledge, I thought of St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, who speaks of *intimate* knowledge.²¹¹ Some Ignatian spiritual writers will use the term *heartfelt* knowledge. I had found, then, certain connecting points which I might keep in mind and apply somehow, in relation to Rosella’s story as I read it again, or during other future encounters with Indigenous people and their spirituality.

I might add that, during this time of research, of further exploration and of reflection on Rosella’s text, I considered another option toward a better appreciation of it: namely, asking the author certain questions I had in mind, about the story. (I have known Rosella for a number of years.) I did meet with her, at one point, and we discussed her story to some extent; but, in the end, I refrained from asking some of the questions that were on my mind. I refrained, I suppose, because I thought that some of my questions would involve a sort of cultural confusion or imposition. Perhaps some of my questions would have been quite theoretical; while her story may have been written on more of a pre-reflective, experiential level. Also, I wanted to heed the advice implied in a statement by Indigenous author Basil Johnston: “Like our words, our stories have several meanings. When our story tellers were done, they went on to the next story, leaving the listener to discover the meanings in their own time ...”²¹²

²¹⁰ Couture, xviii.

²¹¹ Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph*, ed. Louis J. Puhl S.J. (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1951), section 2, page 2; section 104, page 49.

²¹² Basil Johnston, *The Gift of the Stars: Anungook Gauh Meenikooyig* (Cape Croker First Nation: Kegedonce Press, 2010), 13.

(c) *My second reading*

After this time of reading and reflection, related to “The Anishinabe Gospel,” I wanted to return to the story itself; and I had an idea as to how I wanted to approach it, and what I wanted to keep in mind as I read. My reading of Couture had suggested that my own experience of prayer was a good connection point with the Indigenous mindset. Thus I simply decided that I wanted to pray with this story, and see what might emerge from that. I also wanted to keep the notion of *symbols* in mind. Many of the authors whom I had read mentioned the importance of symbolism. Starkloff, for example, suggests symbolic analysis as a good way of doing theology in an Indigenous context. What symbols might I find in Rosella’s story, or which ones might come to mind as I read?

As I prayed with the story, what came to mind were certain Christian images or symbols, not found in the text. That I might apply images from my own experience, from my own tradition, would be appropriate and would be true to who I am; and also would be a normal part of cultural encounter.²¹³ One image that arose, for me, was that of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. I imagined Jesus’ heart being large enough to encompass the Anishinabe people, and all the people of the world. Another image that came to mind is from the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. It

²¹³ In a similar vein, Starkloff writes about the Sun Dance, or Offerings Lodge, of the Arapaho people. This is an Indigenous ceremony which has not incorporated Christian elements into it; yet, Christian Indigenous persons who participate will apply Christian imagery to the event. In *A Theology of the In-between*, 102.

is the image of the Trinity looking down upon the Earth, seeing all the good and bad that is going on, and deciding to send Jesus to be with these people and this world.²¹⁴ These images connected, for me, with Rosella's story and its meaning, saying something about the love of God and about the impact and proximity of Jesus.

Also during this time of rereading the story, I was reminded of a comment I had heard recently. Brother John Hascall OFM, who identifies himself as an "Anishinabe Ojibway priest,"²¹⁵ had said something along the lines of the following: that the history, the journey of his people has been a difficult one; but, then, neither was the cross easy for Jesus.²¹⁶ The image, the symbol of the cross fits with "The Anishinabe Gospel." Moreover, the image of Jesus fits with Rosella's story. In her story, we are presented with the whole story of Jesus: his life, death, and resurrection, and also his continual presence to the world and its peoples. This story of Jesus runs parallel to, and is intimately connected with, the story of the Ojibway people. Besides a connection to Jesus, there is also another connection: "The Anishinabe Gospel" presents a mixing of stories, a mixing of symbols from two different traditions, whereby the story of the Ojibway is connected to the whole of the Bible story.

8. Observations based on this response to a text

How does this response to a text compare to the steps that I have outlined above, in the first part of this paper? How does it compare to the experiences of Couture and Starkloff? Does my response to Rosella's story shed any further light on the process of understanding a theological text from another culture?

²¹⁴ *Spiritual Exercises*, section 102, page 49.

²¹⁵ During a conference given at the Anishinabe Spiritual Centre, Espanola, Ontario, June 13, 2017.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Based on Starkloff's story, the understanding of a culture and the concomitant personal conversions can be seen as a lifelong journey. If that is the case, then my response to Rosella's story is but a small part of a longer journey. Likewise, a full understanding of another culture would involve the ability to take on the mindset of the other, to switch back and forth between ways of thinking, as Couture was able to do. My response to the story did not reach that level of cultural understanding.

However, I would say that my understanding of the story deepened, over a period of time. This journey toward a better understanding included a question from a friend which prompted me to rethink some assumptions. There was a moment of intellectual conversion for me, here. The journey also involved research that brought me to a new understanding of aspects of Indigenous culture, especially that of what is meant by *myth* as well as *mythological thinking*. In addition, the journey involved the idea that there may be aspects of my own way of thinking that are similar to, that might help me connect with, the Indigenous mindset. This insight suggests that, while *Western* and *Indigenous* might be good general categories for describing cultures and ways of thinking, in reality people operate in more complicated ways. Further experience and reflection should help me to see the possible connections between the way I pray, based on the Catholic Christian and Ignatian traditions, and Indigenous spirituality.

The reader of a text from another culture, then, can hope to come to some significant amount of understanding of the text, through cultural exploration and conversions, without needing to completely understand or adopt the other culture. Also, the reader might consider aspects of his or her own tradition, culture, and mindset which might help to connect with the other culture and so with the text.

Conclusions

Much of what has been presented, in this paper, relates not only to texts of theology. I have suggested that the reader have an understanding of what is theology, and of certain basic Catholic principles such as the one which states that there are certain nonnegotiable truths which are part of our Tradition. Beyond that point, the journey involving cultural exploration and conversions can apply not only to a work of theology but to any cross-cultural encounter.

Now, key to this journey is religious conversion. This type of conversion has been described as one that motivates a person and that facilitates other types of conversion. It is possible that religious conversion occurs in many ways, even for those who do not believe in God; and so that religious conversion is always an important part of cross-cultural understanding.

Also, Rosella Kinoshameg and Carl Starkloff are two quite different people, who come from different cultures and who write in different ways. A commonality is that both are theologians. Rosella's story, presented above, has been identified as a work of theology. Starkloff has something to say about what the work of a theologian involves, in a contemporary and intercultural context. He also suggests a culturally-sensitive way of doing theology, which is that of symbolic analysis.

Catholic theology involves new expressions of the faith, and further explorations toward greater understanding. Different cultures can enrich the Catholic tradition by providing different wisdoms and different ways of thinking. In particular, it has been argued that the Church has been overly Western in its approach, for many years. The Indigenous culture, as exemplified by Rosella's story, is in a position now to enrich the treasure that is the Catholic faith and tradition.

As for myself, as a parish priest working in an Indigenous community in the near future, I hope to be sensitive to cultural differences. I also hope to be able to learn, to grow, to be enriched through encounters with Indigenous people and their spirituality. I will soon move, at least to some extent, away from the world of learning and conversion through reading and reflection; and into a more direct and experiential situation. My journey will continue.

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