

Healing from “Lies that make us crazy”: Practices of Restorative Solidarity



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Crazy Horse, it says in my American Heritage, was “killed while resisting arrest.” This is not the first lie I have discovered in the dictionary, but I wish it was the last. What would the last lie look like?... Lies can make you crazy... The dictionary tells us the root for craze is *krasa*, Old Norse meaning “to shatter.” This is not a lie.

– Christina Pacosz

Some Winded, Wild Beast, 1985

Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its Creator. In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew... barbarian or Scythian (Colossians 3:9–11).

The *Doctrine of Discovery* was an ideological tapestry woven by late medieval European rulers from threads of entitlement and assertions of sovereignty. After more than a half millennium – while untold violence and

injustice were carried and covered over by this fabric – it is being unraveled as a tapestry of *lies*. We see now that its very warp and weft were determined by the lethal fantasy of White supremacy.

These “Old World” lies have been so intricately knit into the cultural, religious, and political history of the “New World” (itself a fabrication!) that they are almost invisible, especially to those who still wrap themselves in this cloth. The *Doctrine* continues to exert profound influence on our imaginations, often unconsciously. And those lies, as poet Pacosz puts it, make us crazy, shattering us both personally and politically.

Biblical Cosmology Against Lies of Discovery

Under the deceit of an older empire, the epistle to the Colossians urged early disciples of Jesus to resist the temptation to lie to one another. Christians were to live against the self-aggrandizing “spin” of imperial society, and instead, they were to “clothe” themselves (a baptismal metaphor) in the “true consciousness” of Creator’s image. *That* image was reflected in *every* tribe and tongue: Jew, Greek and “foreigner” (the Greek *barbaros* suggested a Native who spoke a strange language; see I Cor 14:11; Acts 28:2).

In the traditional worldview of the Bible, Creator placed human beings in a good creation. The first ancestors were birthed *in, from, and for* their primeval “garden” (Gen 2:7, 15). This archetype also appears in many Indigenous creation narratives, which describe the people’s “emergence” or “formation” from a beloved homeland.

Genesis also recognizes the diversity and dispersion of peoples across the earth in their respective native lands (Gen 10). Such a “map” of Creation is echoed by the apostle Paul:

From one blood God made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they might search for [Creator], feeling about for and finding God – though indeed [Creator] is not far from each one of us (Acts 17:26–27).

This worldview spells out a fundamental equality of peoples, wherever they are placed: all blessed and beloved (as well as fallen and flawed).

Colossians understands discipleship as defecting from a culture of lies about the world (the Greek word is *pseudomai*, meaning to falsify) to the “renewal of consciousness” about the original design of Creation. This sheds cold light on the *Doctrine* as pseudo-theology/anthropology. Its conceit that one people “discovered” another arrogantly applauded the “discoverer,” objectified the “discovered,” and rationalized the conquest of one by the other. Driving this was the European presumption of ethnic superiority and entitlement to the land and resources of others. None of this, however, conforms to the biblical perspective.

Notably, the verb “to discover” is scarce in scripture, and it only concerns how God “finds us out” (see Ps 44:21; Jer 31:19, 50:24). Though both Testaments speak of “chosen” people, they exhibit a decidedly checkered history. Even the Israelites’ (re)inhabitation of the traditional homeland of the Canaanites was considered a divine gift to a people who had survived slavery, and their tenure was contingent upon their fidelity to a covenant of justice and mercy.

Repenting, Revising, Remembering

The *Doctrine*’s tapestry of lies continues to shape and shatter our identities as Settler and Indigenous communities on Turtle Island. For example, the discourses of “discovery” and “entitlement” still determine the politics and economics of resource extraction around the globe, causing ongoing displacement and destruction. For North American Settler Christians, therefore, it is of utmost importance that we *stop lying to ourselves*. Colossians’ exhortation to “strip off the old” fabric means repudiating the *Doctrine* in all its historic

and contemporary manifestations, and renewing ourselves in the truth of creation and redemption. Given how profoundly the *Doctrine*’s fabric of lies has obscured the biblical good news, this is difficult work.

For starters, neither personal nor denominational verbal rejections of the *Doctrine* are sufficient. Like formal apologies for past wrongs, such declarations are necessary. But they are the *beginning* of our discipleship as “Treaty Christians” – that is, as those who recognize that we live on land bound by historic (if flawed) covenants between Settlers and First Nations.¹ Our next steps require repentance and a journey toward what we call “restorative solidarity.”

Restorative solidarity invites Settlers into two essential disciplines:

- Learning the stories of Indigenous communities victimized by historic (and current) injustices rooted in the *Doctrine*; investigating our complicity in them; and “turning around” the attitudes, behaviors, institutions and social systems that perpetuate the culture and politics of colonization.
- Listening to how Indigenous communities are identifying harms, needs, and responsibilities, and then working with them to make things as right as possible through practices and covenants of accountability, restitution, reparations, and even reconciliation.

There are many obstacles to embracing such “responsibility.” Here we will focus on the self-legitimizing myths, distortions, and silences that persist in our Settler communal narratives and self-perceptions. Our task is to navigate these “blind spots” – most of which have spiritual roots in the *Doctrine* – critically, courageously, and creatively. We believe this is best done through disciplines of *re-membering* (piecing together that which has been shattered by lies) and *re-vising* (“looking again” at how stories of our peoplehood have been distorted and *de-vised*).

Our communal narratives of Settler history are a patchwork, stitched together from fragments including local legends, heroic (or tragic) tales, “official” accounts (generated by news accounts, academic histories, or government documents), and regional and national myths. These narratives are imprinted onto our psyches and souls through family traditions, race and class-based

1 We recognize that not all lands in Turtle Island have been treated. Much of present-day British Columbia, for example, was settled without any such agreements. Nonetheless, the covenant solidarity practices that we are envisioning would still apply in such lands alongside the clear need for Settlers to pressure their governments into treaty relationships of respect and mutuality.

cultures, the education system, and the dominant media. While some of this lore is precious and even sacred, many of the stories we tell ourselves function to *de-vise* and *dis-member* (that is, render invisible or unimportant) First Nations' history and tradition.

For example, it is still common to hear comments regarding the Settler legacy such as: "There was really no one here when our people came," or "My ancestors worked to develop lands that weren't being used." Yet these are simply variations on the older *Doctrine* assertions of *terra nullius* – a key thread in the tapestry of lies. On the other hand, our Settler literacy in the deep histories and sophisticated lifeways of First Nations peoples is meager at best. Nor is there much incentive from the dominant culture to improve it. For treaty people, such norms and assumptions must be transformed by true encounters.

The hard work of *re-vising* what has been *de-vised*, and *re-membering* what has been *dis-membered*, includes:

- Piecing together the whole truth about our immigrant histories – *where* we came from (and its cultural remnants), *why* we migrated (forces of push and pull), and *how* we arrived in North America (social and economic circumstances). This is particularly crucial work for ethnic Europeans who have assimilated into "Whiteness."
- Identifying problematic tendencies within our Settler narratives such as *heroism* (e.g. hardships endured or "bringing Progress"), *entitlement* (e.g. the "just desserts of hard work" or "the land belongs to those who develop it"), and/or *superiority*.
- Critically acknowledging the structural and cultural *privileges* our people received in the past and continue to benefit from (including land grants, government subsidies, military backing, market advantages, favourable political bias, and educational opportunities). But we also need to probe storylines of trauma and dysfunction that have wounded or deformed us.
- Learning a more complete and honest history of our places that gives priority to the suppressed narratives and perspectives of Indigenous peoples. This includes "stories the land holds" from a Native point of view.

The rest of this article now turns to illustrate this work with a few examples of those trying to facilitate these practices.

Expressions of Restorative Solidarity

Elaine has experimented with workshops with fellow Canadian Settler Mennonites who are seeking to explore this delicate but important terrain. The group begins by building a community altar consisting of family heirlooms and symbols representing their desire to build authentic relationships with Indigenous neighbours. Next comes an exercise that retraces the steps of our ancestors through migration stories and a timeline of settlement based on the above questions. A second exercise focuses on what participants know about Indigenous history in the area where they grew up or now live. Participants must wrestle with what is missing from their stories and timelines, focusing especially on how these gaps correlate to Settler privilege or Indigenous dispossession, and with how they undermine efforts to build relationships with First Nations communities. The process closes with healing rituals involving focused breathing and body movement.

We have been impressed with an ecumenical project called "Healing Minnesota Stories," which focuses on learning "stories the land holds," as Mahican pastor Jim Bear Jacobs puts it.² Inspired, we decided to investigate the "hidden history" of a particular site of past trauma a few miles from our home in southern California. A simple historical plaque beside a freeway tells almost nothing of the real story of that place, so we are interviewing local Chumash elders to learn the deeper narrative. We are working with them and a graduate student in Fine Arts to discern how we might publicly depict a more truthful and healing narrative. In the process, we are learning about the struggle of these elders to achieve laws that will ensure respect for and preservation of ancestral remains.

A more well-developed engagement in restorative solidarity is work around Stoney Knoll, Saskatchewan (see Alain Epp-Weaver's account in this volume). We have watched this process closely, particularly two initiatives. One effort is by Mennonite Central Committee Saskatchewan to establish a land trust to which church folk can contribute money to help the Young Chippewyan and other landless and federally unrecognized bands establish a tribal base. It's like "a treaty appreciation fund," says Ray Funk, "to which Settlers can contribute 1 percent of our gross income for example, or 10 percent of capital gains on property." Raising awareness and funds is also the goal of a related Indigenous-Settler collaboration: the annual Spruce



2 see "Healing Minnesota Stories" at goo.gl/OwBjrn

River Folk Festival. Through such events, Mennonites and Lutherans have raised over \$60,000 for Young Chippewayans to do genealogical research in order to establish their heritage. These modest, highly relational experiments in reparation broach the contentious but crucial issue of ongoing socioeconomic disparities between Settler and Indigenous communities.

A different example is the "Return to The Earth" project, animated in 2005 by Mennonite pastor and Cheyenne Peace Chief Lawrence Hart. Its mission is to "support Native Americans in burying unidentifiable ancestral remains now scattered across the United States, and enable a process of education and reconciliation between Native and non-Native peoples." Congregations have been invited to build cedar boxes and sew muslin cloths to be used to transport and bury repatriated ancestral remains. Elder Lawrence encourages churches to learn from the Indigenous descendants in their place and support their efforts to preserve and steward cultural property and legacies.

Lastly, many of our faith-rooted activist friends have stood with Indigenous groups who are non-violently resisting pipelines and other forms of resource extraction.

For example, Christian Peacemaker Teams has a longstanding commitment to the Grassy Narrows First Nation in Ontario. Anglican and evangelical colleagues joined Coast Salish people to protest the Kinder Morgan pipeline at Burnaby.

Each of these examples represents small but meaningful practices of restorative solidarity. Our commitments to repudiate the *Doctrine* and weave a new fabric of justice must become habitual. It is important, for example, to acknowledge the First Nations stewards of every space in which we worship and work. We should support local Indigenous small businesses, arts programs, language and cultural rehabilitation efforts, etc. Church folk can show up at powwows and invite Native cultural groups to share in churches. A worshipping community that has crafted a wide spectrum of local restorative solidarity practices is the Anglican-ecumenical Salal and Cedar Watershed Discipleship Community in BC.³

There are "too many lies in the world," laments poet Pacosz. "We must chase them to the sun, again and again, no matter how tired we think we are." Another early church epistle makes a similar call: "So then, putting away lies, let all of us

speaking the truth to our neighbours, for we are members of one another" (Eph 4:25). This is our discipleship commission, the only way to healing and wholeness.

Mountain in B.C. in 2014. And recently, Lutheran friends in Duluth joined with others to stand with Sioux and other tribal activists at Standing Rock, North Dakota – a dramatic and successful demonstration.

INDIAN LAND FOR SALE

GET A HOME
OF
YOUR OWN
*
EASY PAYMENTS



PERFECT TITLE
*
POSSESSION
WITHIN
THIRTY DAYS

FINE LANDS IN THE WEST

IRRIGATED GRAZING AGRICULTURAL
IRRIGABLE DRY FARMING

IN 1910 THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR SOLD UNDER SEALED BIDS ALLOTTED INDIAN LAND AS FOLLOWS:

Location	Acres	Average Price per Acre	Location	Acres	Average Price per Acre
Colorado	5,211.21	\$7.27	Oklahoma	34,664.00	\$19.14
Idaho	17,013.00	24.85	Oregon	1,020.00	15.43
Kansas	1,684.50	33.45	South Dakota	120,445.00	16.53
Montana	11,034.00	9.86	Washington	4,879.00	41.37
Nebraska	5,641.00	36.65	Wisconsin	1,069.00	17.00
North Dakota	22,610.70	9.93	Wyoming	865.00	20.64

FOR THE YEAR 1911 IT IS ESTIMATED THAT 350,000 ACRES WILL BE OFFERED FOR SALE

For information as to the character of the land write for booklet, "INDIAN LANDS FOR SALE," to the Superintendent U. S. Indian School at any one of the following places:

CALIFORNIA: Hope	MINNESOTA: Otter	NORTH DAKOTA: Fort Totten	OKLAHOMA - Gen. Slocum, Ft. Payne, Muskogee, Wagonwheel	SOUTH DAKOTA: Cheyenne Agency, Crow Creek, Greenwood, Lower Sioux, Pine Ridge	WASHINGTON: Fort Simons, Fort Spokane, Tule, Tula
COLORADO: Ignacio	MONTANA: Crow Agency	OKLAHOMA: Muskogee	OREGON: Klamath Agency, Pendleton, Roseburg, Seitz	WISCONSIN: Okeech	
IDAHO: Lapwai	NEBRASKA: Macy, Santee, Winnebago	OKLAHOMA: Muskogee, Ft. Payne			
KANSAS: Bartles, Madaw					

WALTER L. FISHER,
Secretary of the Interior.

ROBERT G. VALENTINE,
Commissioner of Indian Affairs.

Lies like this require reparation. United States Department of the Interior advertisement offering Indian Land for Sale (c. 1911). The Native American portrait used is Not Afraid of Pawnee (Yankton Sioux).
IMAGE: CALIE.ORG / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS