Faith Reflections

Truth and Reconciliation

As I write this afternoon, a week before the Review lands in your driveway, I am listening to young aboriginal musicians singing, fiddling, drumming and dancing to honour their elders who are survivors of the Indian Residential Schools. This gathering in Edmonton is the final one in a series which came out of the formal apology that the Canadian government made in 2006, acknowledging the harm that came from separating children from their families, communities, faith, language and culture, a practice that affected several generations and that has on-going repercussions.

Murray Sinclair, one of three commissioners, gave the opening address to this Truth and Reconciliation gathering. He told the gathering and our country that there are four questions we must answer to achieve reconciliation:

1) What is my creation story? Where do I come from?
2) Where am I going? What happens to me when I die?
3) Why am I here? Why was I born at this time in this place? What are my responsibilities to the community?
4) Who am I? Who are we?

These are profoundly spiritual questions and they invite Canadians to reflect on our identity and purpose, both as individuals and as members of a community. They reflect an aboriginal spirituality that grounds an individual’s identity within the created world and within the human community. Where modernity stresses individuality and freedom to choose our own destiny or seek our own happiness, this ancient tradition invites us into another world view where identity is grounded in community and creation, held by a Creator.

My own faith tradition, the Methodist and Presbyterian precursors to the United Church of Canada, ran many residential schools and often the teachers and administrators had good intentions of helping what
they understood was a less sophisticated cultural group integrate into the new nation that was growing. Now we can see more clearly the cultural and religions assumptions that were so destructive of aboriginal communities. We are deeply part of this Truth and Reconciliation process. We have apologized for our actions, attitudes and assumptions, contribute financially to healing programs, and continue to listen deeply to the aboriginal members of our churches and clergy as we walk a path of reconciliation.

Canadians have begun this journey of reconciliation and it is on-going. I hope you will save Murray Sinclair’s questions and, in your families and faith communities and circles of friends, continue the reflection that can help us achieve reconciliation.

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