

There Were Two Trees in the Garden
(with an Application to Canadian History since 1968)
by Roger Armbruster

Introduction

There were two trees in the Garden of Eden.

1. There was in the Garden the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

At the Fall of mankind, humans partook of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. As we partake of the fruit of this tree, and as we taste, swallow, digest and internalize it, what types of thoughts, words and actions does the fruit of this tree produce in our lives? It causes us to live self-centred lives, where we make judgments and seek to become arbitrators of good and of evil in our own independent judgments, opinions and self-righteous attitudes.

At the individual and group level, it narrows our thinking, our assumptions, our beliefs and our worldview upon the premise that whenever there is a conflict or a misunderstanding, that we are completely “*right*” and that others are completely “*wrong*.” We think, speak and act like what we see is all that there is to see, and we do not acknowledge that we have any blind spots, or that when it comes to fully knowing ourselves and others, we are looking through a darkened glass that sees mainly the dark side in human beings that we do not really like, or that we disagree with.

The truth is that while sin has darkened, marred and distorted the image of God in the soul of every human being, it has not completely destroyed or obliterated that image. There is still something there in every human being that reflects God’s disposition, God’s character and God’s likeness. Because our present knowledge is incomplete and has not come to full maturity, when we speak like we know someone or something fully when we really don’t, our words tend to demean, to discredit and to diminish the image of God that is in other human beings.

“With it (the tongue) we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so” (James 3:9, 10).

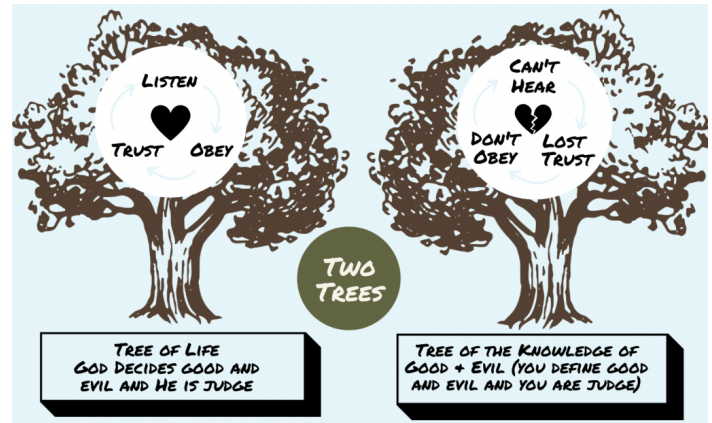
The words that we speak are not just empty or meaningless. There is a spiritual power behind words that will end up either cursing or blessing other humans. A curse is a solemn utterance that invokes a supernatural power to inflict harm or punishment upon somebody, and if we end up cursing those who curse us, we are adding to the pain, the brokenness and the suffering that sin has inflicted upon the human race.

Since Jesus “*by the grace of God tasted death for every man*” (Hebrews 2:9) and rose again into a new creation, what is it that prevents us from seeing other human beings (including those who are hostile to Jesus Christ that He is interceding for) in a more favourable light through the eyes of Christ and through faith in His grace which can save to the uttermost?

“The god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God” (II Corinthians 4:4).

The word blinded there is the word “*tuphloo*,” which means “*to obscure, to create a fog, a smokescreen, to envelope with smoke, to inflate with self-conceit, to be lifted up with pride, high minded.*” Based upon the self-conceit of seeing the images of God in others through a smokescreen, we get lifted up with pride in thinking that part from the grace of God, we are better than others. If something goes wrong, it is always somebody else to blame, because we are high minded in thinking that our viewpoint is the correct one, and that our knowledge is complete.

Over time, our own independent knowledge of good and evil became so inflated with self-conceit that we will argue and debate anybody who suggests to us that we do not see everything and everyone clearly. Our heart becomes hardened over time to our opinions, our beliefs, our perspectives as if it were the whole picture, and we become dogmatic, inflexible, intransigent and legalistic in that narrow opinion which may contain some grain of truth but not the entire truth.



2. There was also in the Garden the Tree of Life.

“A soothing tongue [speaking words that build up and encourage] is a tree of life, but a perverse tongue [speaking words that overwhelm and depress] crushes the spirit” (Proverbs 15:4, Amplified Bible).

The word translated as “*a soothing tongue*” is also translated as “*a gentle tongue*,” “*a wholesome tongue*” or “*a healing tongue*.” This verse highlights the healing and life-giving power of gentle, encouraging speech, comparing it to a tree of life, while contrasting it with the destructive and crushing effect of a cruel or a deceitful tongue.

It was said of Quaker founder George Fox that the measured fulness of his words have often struck even strangers with admiration. Not only did he speak little, but when he spoke, his carefully chosen words rose up from a singularly-focused heart. It was obvious to others that he treasured both God and humans who are created in the image and likeness of God.

Ultimately, Jesus is the Tree of Life! He is the only way back to a relationship with the Father in Heaven that we lost in the Garden, the full truth about the knowledge of God and the part that humans play in His plan and the resurrection life that has defeated death. His life, death, resurrection and exaltation are the perfect image of the God who created humans in His image and likeness. He is the perfect image of a redeemed humanity. He is now ever living to make intercession for us, not against us. How does this truth apply to Canadian history since 1968?

Since our own independent knowledge of good and evil has come into the world, we tend to see human beings in a polarized view of “us” vs. “them.” We are the good guys, and others are the bad guys. Yet God sees the human race as one. We have all sinned and come short of God’s goodness, glory and grace as it was revealed in Christ. Therefore, He has concluded us all (without partiality) in unbelief and disobedience in order that He might show mercy to all. Romans 3:9, 12, 19, 23; 5:18: 8:32; 10:12 11:32.

“Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.” (Romans 5:18, NIV).

“For God has consigned all to disobedience, that He may have mercy on all...I appeal to you therefore, brothers, in view of the mercies of God, that you present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God which is your spiritual worship” (Romans 11:32; 12:10).

It is true that it is only through repentance and believing that our blindness is lifted, and our eyes are opened to the truth of what Jesus did for all humanity so that we can now walk in the light of His redemption for all. As our spiritual eyesight is restored, we start to see the image of God in other human beings in the light of that finished work as well, and we start to intercede for them that their eyes will be opened to a salvation that is already accomplished rather than to remain in the dark.

This ministry of intercession for all people applies especially to kings and to all who are in authority, so that their eyes will be opened to the reality that they are not the ultimate authority, but that they are under the authority of the One who has ascended to the right hand of the Father who is also interceding for them that they might use their authority to welcome the King of Glory into their sphere of rulership.

“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions of authority and government, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.

“This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all...” (I Timothy 2:1-6a).

It seems to be in the area of our relationships to those in authority who hold positions of government that we are the most prone to criticize, to condemn and to complain. This is all a part of our independent knowledge of good and evil without the knowledge of the glory of God that was revealed in Christ! According to our independent knowledge of good and evil, we want to by-pass earthly rulers and authority, and we want to impose our will on others by using the coercive powers of the state on others.

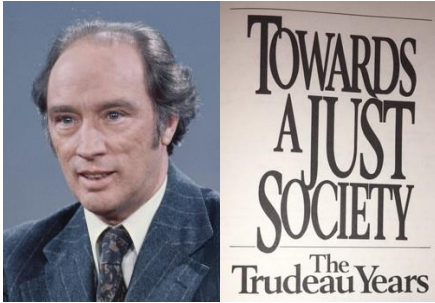
Yet Jesus will only come where He is welcomed and invited, and the rulers of this age need to learn this lesson that we need the type of government that comes by way of the heart rather than by external legislation that imposes and forces people to submit to us. Unless both rulers and subjects become Christ-like, we will continue to be on a power trip where one part of humanity tries to impose its will upon another part by force and by violence.

God’s will is that we respect that part in each and every human life that longs for God, and the type of government that He brings, a government that regards at least some aspect of the image of God in all humans so that we can start to rule and reign together with one another instead of over one another!

The History of Canada After Its First 100 Years or Centennial Since 1968

The Trudeau Years of 1968 to 1884

For the first 100 years of Canadian history, the Canadian government has not really respected the part of God's image that is reflected in all people and in all nations and ethnicities, and therefore tried to impose a European image of God upon all people within our borders, including the Indigenous peoples of the land. This was reflected in such policies as the **Indian Act** of 1876 and the residential school policies that followed, policies based on an intent to "*take the Indian out of the child*" without regard for the many aspects of Native culture which reflect God's image and likeness.



So when Pierre Elliot Trudeau was elected to become the Prime Minister of Canada during the election of June 25, 1968, he was going to change all of that. He was going to make sure that all Canadians were treated as equal and he was going to bring in what he referred to as "*A Just Society*." Terms like "*justice*" and "*equality*" are terms that are also found in the biblical language of what it means for all human beings to be created in the image of God as both *free* and *equal*.

In the pursuit of the lofty goals of both *justice* and *equality*, the left wing of the political spectrum sees the *state* as the most important agent in society in implementing change towards justice and equality, and the right wing sees the *individual* as the most important agent in society. Yet if either approach to governance is taken materialistically without the spiritual element which includes a relationship to a loving, generous Creator in whose image we are made, we invariably end up with one part of society imposing its will on the rest, and we end up with neither *freedom* nor *equality*. Some will end up more "*equal*" than others depending on who holds the coercive powers of the jackhammer of the State.

Frank Buchman of *Moral Rearmament* foresaw this with the emergence of both *Communism* and *Nazism* before, during and after World War II.

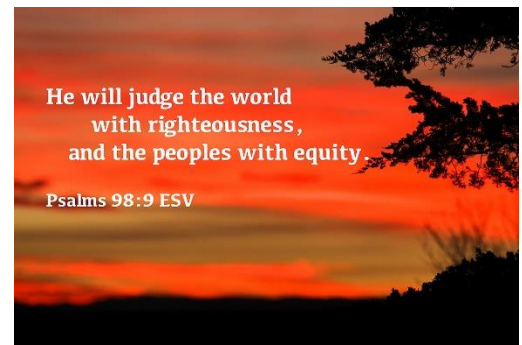
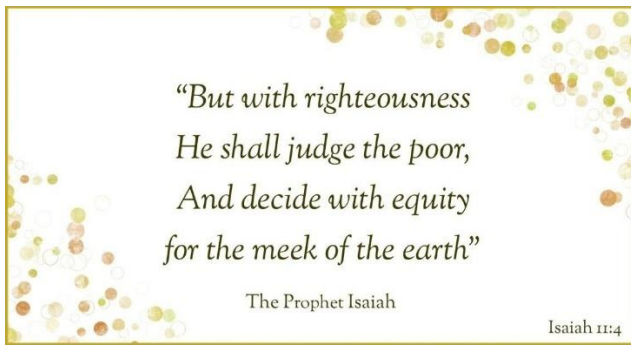


"So we have communism and fascism—two world forces. Where do they come from? From *materialism*, which is the mother of all '*isms*.' Materialism is the spirit that breeds corruption, anarchy and revolution. It undermines our homes, it sets class against class, it divides the nation. Materialism is our greatest enemy." —Frank Buchman of *Moral Rearmament*.

"In a *materialist* ideology, the ultimate authority is mammon, a human will or a party line, and the ultimate basis for change is *force*. In a Christian worldview, the ultimate authority is God's will, and the basis for change is *consent*." --Frank Buchman.

Equality is not something that can be imposed as has been the route to equality taken by those who believe in a Marxist ideology. Pierre Elliot Trudeau showed significant exposure to and early influence by socialist and some Marxist ideas. He was ultimately a liberal democratic socialist and Canadian federalist with a centralized approach to governing.

Biblical Jews and Christians share the view of the equal dignity of the human person. Yet, this human value can never and never will be imposed by governments who control and dominate from the outside in. The equal dignity and worth of every human being is a part of the image of God in every person, but humans are not only *equal*, but they are also *free*, and are destined to rule together over injustice. Where God is supreme, we rule in *complementarity* rather than in *competition* with one another.



There are certainly comparisons between Pierre Elliott Trudeau's "*just society*" and biblical language, but there is still a great difference from between the implementation of a vision where humans rule "over one another" and a society envisioned by the Kingdom of God where humans rule "with one another, not over one another but over selfishness and greed by the power of love."

The essence of Pierre Elliott Trudeau's "*just society*" was a vision for a unified Canada built on the principles of equality, individual rights, and social justice where the centralized state was the key to enforcing justice and equity. It aimed to remove social and economic barriers to ensure all citizens had equal opportunities to succeed and participate fully in the country's development.

The vision emphasized providing better opportunities for regions and groups that had not fully shared in the country's affluence, and for Indigenous populations to assume full rights of citizenship and greater responsibility for their own future. The "*just society*" included an interventionist government approach to address social inequalities through expanded social welfare programs, increased funding for education and healthcare, and other initiatives aimed at reducing poverty through welfare.

Trudeau emphasized the phrase "*participatory democracy*," promoted greater citizen involvement in the political process through public consultations and town hall meetings. In essence, the "*just society*" was a liberal ideal focused on creating a humane and a compassionate nation where the state actively worked to ensure fairness and inclusivity for all its members.

While terms like "*participatory democracy*" are used, it is clear that in Pierre Elliott Trudeau's "*just society*," an interventionist government would ultimately impose solutions through things like social welfare programs which conditioned people to look to the state to look after them rather than to retain their freedom and to take personal responsibility for their lives.

It has been my observation over the years that whenever a Canadian government (either federally or provincially) introduces controversial legislation, that they may hold public "*hearings*" to make it look like they are listening to the people at large, but at the end of the day, legislation is implemented according to the vision of the government of the day, not in a way where all people are really heard and listened to.

Nevertheless, for many Canadians, the arrival of Pierre Trudeau as the Prime Minister of Canada on June 25, 1968, ushered in a new promising era in Canadian politics. This was certainly true in Indigenous affairs. The Ottawa bureaucrats decided that it was time for a new approach to Indigenous rights and the very contentious land claims issues. If Indigenous Peoples would "*become like other Canadians*" by becoming equals, the potentially expensive land claims issues would disappear. There would be integration by equality.



With this in mind, the Liberal government of Pierre Trudeau initiated a series of eighteen consultation meetings across Canada, beginning in Yellowknife on July 25, 1968. A discussion paper called *“Choosing a Path”* laid out choices for equality and self-help.

The new *Minister of Indian Affairs*, Jean Chrétien, had just recently been appointed, and was careful not to make any specific comments about the future policy direction of the government, thus giving the meetings a feeling of real significance and allowing Indigenous leaders a chance to voice their concerns and desires.

Many Chiefs were very happy to participate in the consultations, which were a sudden and drastic change from previous government policies which were imposed by legislation unilaterally without consultation. So with pressure to get on with this *“just society”* by the Prime Minister’s Office, the *Department of Indian Affairs* finalized the new Indigenous policy in early 1969 after the eighteen consultation meetings.

This policy proposed specific measures such as settling outstanding First Nations claims and grievances, extending provincial services to Indigenous Peoples (education and health), abolishing the *Department of Indian Affairs*, repealing the **Indian Act** of 1876, delegating management of Indigenous lands to Indigenous bands, and devising a process for the final termination of treaties.

The *“White Paper”* policy was tabled in the **House of Commons** on June 25, 1969. For Jean Chrétien, it was a direct response to Indian concerns and desires. In his own words at the time:

“From the early days of this country, a trustee relationship of a highly paternalistic nature developed between the central government and the Indigenous people. The Indigenous people should have the right to manage their own affairs to the same extent that their fellow Canadians manage theirs. Under present conditions, they do not have anything like this degree of control over their lands, their funds, or in fact any of their responsibilities. This is the central fact about conditions today, and it must change...I hope the Indigenous people will agree that this system which sets them apart is no longer useful.” --Jean Chrétien, MP and Minister, House of Commons Debate, Hansard, June 25, 1969.



With the release of the **White Paper**, there was a general disbelief on the part of many Indigenous Peoples and even a sense of betrayal. They had been led to believe that the government had consulted them in order to take their views into account.

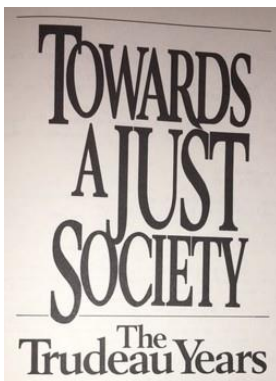
Harold Cardinal, a Cree First Nations writer, negotiator and lawyer from Alberta would later comment: *“Which Indian asked for an end to the treaties, which Indian asked for an end to their reserves?”* --Harold Cardinal quoted in *“Alberta Indians Ready to Fight Federal Policy,”* *Globe and Mail*, July 8, 1969.

The government and Jean Chrétien in particular, was very surprised by the reaction of Indigenous leaders to the proposals of equality contained in the White Paper. By early July, 1969, Chrétien backtracked and declared, *“We will not push anything down anyone’s throat.”* --*Globe and Mail*, July 8, 1969. The **White Paper** may have been a momentary triumph for advocates of *“equality”* by *assimilation*, but the Indigenous reaction forced Chrétien to fall back on an existing policy within *Department of Indian Affairs*.

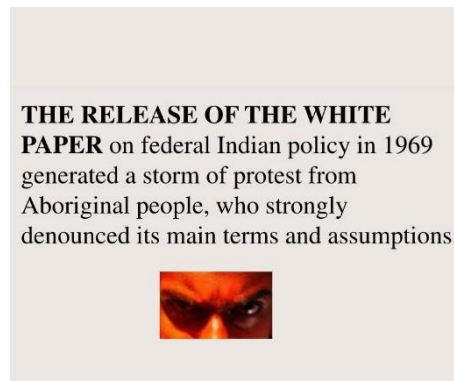
Different Responses to the White Paper tabled in the House of Commons on June 25, 1969

Consider now the timeline in Canadian history following *Canada's Centennial* in 1967.

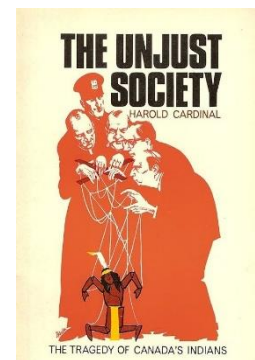
1. Pierre Elliot Trudeau is elected to the office of the Prime Minister of Canada on June 25, 1968, with his vision for a “just society.”
2. The “White Paper” addressing Indigenous issues was tabled in the House of Commons exactly one year later on June 25, 1969.
3. Later in 1969, Harold Cardinal published his first book *The Unjust Society* which was his personal response to the Trudeau government’s *White Paper*. On June 4, 1970, the federal cabinet was presented with the Indian Association of Alberta's response to *The White Paper*, entitled *Citizens Plus*, also known as *The Red Paper* written by Alberta chiefs but mostly by Harold Cardinal.
4. In 1971, First Nations lawyer William I. C. Wuttunee wrote another book called *Ruffled Feathers*, which largely opposed Harold Cardinal’s views, and was in general support in the *White Paper*.



Elected June 25, 1968



June 25, 1969

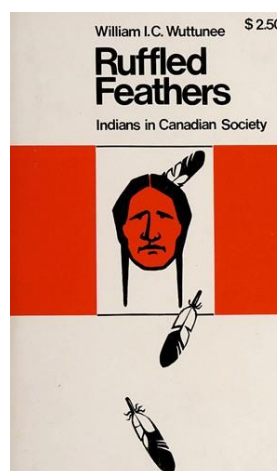


Later in 1969

Red Paper Response (1970)

- In response to White Paper
- Harold Cardinal and the Indian Chiefs of Alberta
- Wanted total rejection of the White Paper
- Supported by all provincial and territorial governments
- Aimed to make revisions to Act, not do away with it

June 4, 1970



1971



2025

We will take a look at the **White Paper** tabled in the House of Commons on June 25, 1969, then at the book **The Unjust Society** by Harold Cardinal and the **Red Paper** written largely by Harold Cardinal in 1970, and then the book **Ruffled Feathers** by William Wuttunee in 1971. I would also like to acknowledge the great work done by William Wuttunee’s daughter Wanda Wuttunee in the recently published book that she has edited—**Still Ruffling Feathers**. I am indebted for much of the information in this essay to her book, and I highly appreciate and honour her contribution.

The White Paper Tabled in the House of Commons on June 25, 1969

The 1969 White Paper proposed to abolish the **Indian Act** of 1876, remove "*Indian*" as a distinct legal status, and transfer federal responsibility for First Nations to the provinces. It also suggested converting reserve lands to private property, gradually terminating treaties, and appointing a commissioner to address land claims. The paper, which was rejected overwhelmingly by Indigenous leaders, was ultimately withdrawn by the government in 1971.

Key proposals of the White Paper

- **Abolish the Indian Act:** Remove the federal legislation that governed First Nations affairs.
- **Eliminate "*Indian*" status:** End the special legal status of Indigenous peoples to achieve equality under the law, treating them as they would any other Canadian.
- **Transfer responsibility:** Move the responsibility for "*Indian affairs*" from the federal government to the provinces.
- **Convert reserve land:** Change reserve lands into private property that bands or band members could sell.
- **Terminate treaties:** Gradually end existing treaties between First Nations and the Crown.
- **Address land claims:** Appoint a commissioner to resolve outstanding land claims.
- **Provide funding:** Offer funding for economic development.

Reaction and impact

- Indigenous leaders and communities rejected the **White Paper**, viewing it as a policy of forced assimilation rather than a path to equality.
- They argued that while the **Indian Act** was flawed, it acknowledged the special status and rights of First Nations, which the **White Paper** sought to erase.
- The strong negative reaction was a catalyst for increased Indigenous political organizing, leading to the formation of new national and regional organizations.

It was the **Indian Act** of 1876 and the treaties signed between 1871 and 1921 that made the First Nations a ward of the state where the relationship of the Indigenous People to the Government of Canada was discriminatory and assimilationist. Further, under that old arrangement, the relationship was a paternalistic one of a parent to a child.

Yet so strong is the desire of the Indigenous nations to preserve their own unique culture and distinct identity that many since 1969 have indicated their preference to live with the **Indian Act** with all its flaws which still needed correcting. Clearly what needs to be resolved concerns whether the identity issue can be bestowed by a secular state rather than around a personal relationship with the Creator God. The "*White Paper*" was a materialist document, and paid no attention to the spiritual element.

Response to the White Paper by Harold Cardinal's Book **The Unjust Society** and the **Red Paper**

During the 1968 federal election campaign, Justin Trudeau had campaigned on the slogan of his Vision of a "Just Society," and so the book written by Harold Cardinal in 1969 was called "*The Unjust Society*" in contra-distinction to the Vision being promoted by Justin Trudeau.

Although the **Indian Act** of 1876 was discriminatory and paternalistic as well as totally invasive, Harold Cardinal noted:

"We do not want the Indian Act retained because it is a good piece of legislation. It isn't. It is discriminatory from start to finish. But it is a lever in our hands and an embarrassment to the government, as it should be."

"No just society and no society with even pretensions to being just can long tolerate such a piece of legislation, but we would rather continue to live in bondage under the inequitable Indian Act than surrender our sacred rights. Any time the government wants to honour its obligations to us we are more than happy to help devise new Indian legislation." –Harold Cardinal, *The Unjust Society*, 1969, page 140.

In another part of his book, he added:

"It is a white paper for white people created by a white elephant." –Harold Cardinal, *The Unjust Society*, 1969, page 161.

Further, he argued:

"The history of Canada's Indians is a shameful chronicle of white man's disinterest, his deliberate trampling of Indian rights and his repeated betrayal of our trust. Generations of Indians have grown up behind a buckskin curtain of indifference, ignorance and, all too often, plain bigotry. Now, at a time when our fellow Canadians consider the promise of the Just Society, once more the Indians of Canada are betrayed by a program which offers nothing better than cultural genocide." --Harold Cardinal, *The Unjust Society*, page 1.

According to the assessment of Bill Wuttunee of Harold Cardinal's book, *The Unjust Society*,

"His book is premised on the thesis that Indians should refuse to negotiate with the federal government until treaties are recognized. This approach is reactionary and conservative. It is not possible to turn back the hands of history or to re-write those hundred-year-old documents." --William I. C. Wuttunee, *Ruffled Feathers: Indians in Canadian Society*, 1971, pages 2, 3.

This assessment would seem to be in agreement with that of the former Grand Chief of the **Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs**, Derek Nepinak in one of his Facebook posts:



*"I used to think nationhood meant that I put on my nicest suit and shirt and fly to Ottawa to meet with the government of the day, enter into a battle of wills and seek concessions and accommodations so that we might exercise our 'nationhood' from within our colonization in the **Indian Act**."*

"Today, I understand that my contribution to nationhood means that I wake up early every morning and do my best to getting my daughter to school on time so that she can learn Anishinabemowin and continue building her identity, her pride in our culture, our history. To those parents who are doing everything in their power everyday to build a strong generation of proud children, you are building the nation.

"If we hope to build nationhood, it starts from the inside and flows outwards to the world. In saying this, I mean that we find self-government by taking responsibility for ourselves, helping our kids thrive by finding meaning and purpose in their lives, then maybe, just maybe, we might find ourselves able to contribute to the families beyond our own home fire. This is how strong communities are built, and this is how strong nations are rebuilt..."

I share these various quotes from authentic First Nations leaders like Harold Cardinal, William Wuttunee and Derek Nepinak to demonstrate how that according to each one's knowledge of good and evil, each one has some legitimacy in their perspective. Deep wrongs have been committed in Canadian history, but it will make all of the difference in the world if we expect the governments of the day to fix this by a materialist, political process rather than by a spiritual process out of a relationship with the Creator.

I turn now to the *Red Paper* that was apparently written mostly by Harold Cardinal, and was presented to the federal Cabinet on June 4, 1970. These Indigenous Alberta chiefs reiterated their opposition to the *White Paper* tabled in the House of Commons on June 25, 1969, and proposed alternative ways to enhance their status.

The main highlights were advocating for self-government and self-sufficiency, emphasizing the sacred and binding nature of treaties as a nation-to-nation relationship, and arguing for the federal government's continued responsibility to First Nations. The paper rejected assimilation and the proposal to abolish the **Indian Act**, instead calling for its drastic alteration to allow for greater Indigenous control.

Key highlights of the Red Paper

- **Self-government and self-sufficiency:** The paper argued for a model of self-governance through economic development and education, empowering First Nations to be more self-sufficient.
- **Recognition of treaties:** It stressed that historical treaties between First Nations and the Crown were made by equals and should be upheld as sacred and everlasting agreements. This countered the White Paper's suggestion that treaties could be terminated.
- **Continued federal responsibility:** The Red Paper rejected the proposal to transfer services to the provinces, arguing that the federal government has a constitutional and legislative responsibility to provide for First Nations, a responsibility that was paid for by the surrender of their lands.
- **Opposition to the *White Paper's* assimilationist approach:** It was a direct response to the White Paper's goal of assimilation and the termination of legal distinctions between Indigenous and other citizens.
- **Alteration of the Indian Act:** Instead of repealing the **Indian Act**, the **Red Paper** called for its drastic alteration to give First Nations greater control, recognizing the Act's paternalistic aspects but not its complete elimination.

These highlights would seem to call for greater self-government and self-sufficiency on the one hand but greater faith in a political process instead of a spiritual process that Elijah Harper talked about in 1995.

Response to the White Paper by William Wuttunee's Book **Ruffled Feathers, Indians in Canadian Society**

It seems to me that while Harold Cardinal took a more left-wing approach to the *White Paper* in that he advocated looking to the state to fix the problem, and therefore was not willing to abdicate the status that they had received from the **Indian Act** and from the **Treaties** with the nation-state of Canada, William Wuttunee took a more right wing approach to the issues, and agreed with the premise of abolishing the **Indian Act** and the **Treaties**. He looked to the premise more of the individuals taking responsibility for their own lives, and relying less on government programs and government welfare.

From my reading of the situation, it seems to be that while **Trudeau's Just Society** and the **White Paper** that his government produced after "*consultations*" seemed to be very much at loggerheads with the approach to governance taken by Harold Cardinal in his book **The Unjust Society** and the **Red Paper**, yet it seems that both sides were actually advocating throwing more money at the issues rather than emphasizing the relational and spiritual component as a point of connection until there was a meeting of the minds.

Consider, the "*just society*" included an interventionist government approach to address social inequalities through expanded social welfare programs, increased funding for education and healthcare, and other initiatives aimed at reducing poverty by throwing money at the problems. A key proposal of the **White Paper** was to offer more and greater funding for educational and economic development.

Without a spiritual foundation, however, this increased funding has generally resulted in increasing the size of government and organizational bureaucracy that has in itself not fully benefited the people in the communities either by way of education or economic development. The strong negative reaction to the **White Paper** was a catalyst for increased Indigenous political organizing, leading to the formation of new national and regional organizations. **The Red Paper** argued that the federal government has a constitutional and legislative responsibility to provide for First Nations, a responsibility that was paid for by the surrender of their lands.

So I would propose that while the White Paper and the Red Paper were seemingly in direct conflict, yet both perspectives were taking the approach of throwing more money at the problems without a spiritual foundation or the spiritual component that Elijah Harper talked about. That spiritual component embraces the concept that in the original traditional knowledge of the First Peoples of the land, that owning land was as alien as owning air, and that the land was owned by the Creator who had placed stewards in this part of the earth to be generous, loving, caring and sharing with what He had entrusted to them. It seems both the **White Paper** of 1969 and the **Red Paper** of 1970 took a materialist approach.



By 1971, William Wuttunee, a trailblazing lawyer who in 1955 at age 26 was the first First Nations lawyer to be admitted to the bar in western Canada, took a clear stand against the foundational principles of the **Red Paper** concerning the role that Indigenous people could play in Canada with the publication of his book, **Ruffled Feathers, Indians in Canadian Society**. In spite of some interpretations of his book, he never says that Indigenous people should be exactly like all Canadians, but he instead asserts that they should participate in Canadian society as its leadership.

He saw the whole theme of the **Red Paper** to be opposed to Indigenous/Non-Indigenous partnerships with a unilateral desire to develop their Indigenous culture and institutions with the aid of federal funds.

In Wuttunee's view, the strong negative reaction of the **Red Paper** to the **White Paper** was a catalyst for increased Indigenous political organizing, leading to the formation of new national and regional organizations in which organizers were now paid out of federal and provincial largesse for their efforts to get equal treatment before the law through Indigenous institutions, organizations and advocacies. In the words of William Wuttunee,

"For many years Indians were struggling on a voluntary basis to establish unity among themselves. Most of the leadership was taken over by people who did so at great personal sacrifice. These people worked for no salary, and so they were able to speak freely and independently.

"However, as soon as the government gave grants to the organizations, these same people were then employed in positions of great power at salaries beyond what they could have commanded before, and they were eager to take this new assistance up. Positions were immediately filled by the voluntary leaders of the past who had been able to speak out in perfect freedom, but who are now muzzled by their leaders.

*"Some of these leaders who have not been used to exercising authority over others, have tended to be over-zealous in protecting their own spheres of authority." --William I. C. Wuttunee, *Ruffled Feathers: Indians in Canadian Society*, 1971, pages 8, 9.*

William Wuttunee was also an advocate for addressing poverty issues not so much as a racial problem as it is a human problem. While it is more prominent in Indigenous communities because of injustices of the past, our real enemy is not the people of another race or colour, but we need to face the enemies of injustice and poverty together as fellow human beings in a collaborative way.

This is what made his approach different from the Marxist approach which pitted class against class, and race against race, rather than to see humans uniting to help one another in eliminating poverty. Yet, at the same time, his views were in alignment with the Communist ideals of standing up for poor people and fighting for their civil rights. When the conditions of all poor people have been improved, the change will naturally also benefit the Indigenous people.

"Red Power advocates must re-channel their energy and efforts, not away from the white man, but, rather, toward helping all the poor of our land. They can join forces with the poor people of Canada, now numbering approximately 5 million people, and thus form an invincible army of 'people power' against neglect, oppression and despair.

*"In doing so, Indigenous leaders must not fall victim to the traditional traps of self-interest and personal aggrandisement. They must watch out for silver-tongued capitalists who would take money from them, the money intended for Indigenous people. Their concern must always be for those people and for their right to choose freely for themselves." --William I. C. Wuttunee, *Ruffled Feathers: Indians in Canadian Society*, 1971, page 1.*

In this way, William Wuttunee advocated for a more *egalitarian* society through leaders who led by example through *self-sacrifice* and *the power of love* rather than through *selfishness* and *the love of power*. He became quite pessimistic about the chances for meaningful recognition of Indigenous treaty rights through the efforts of existing political organizations, both at the long-established band-council level and at the emerging provincial and national levels. He was not against advocacy organizations *per se*. He had set up a three-day Conference in Regina in 1961 to form the **National Indian Council (NIC)** of which he was president until 1965, the forerunner of the **Assembly of First Nations (AFN)**.



Wanda Wuttunee, the daughter of William Wuttunee, a Professor Emeritus in the **Department of Indigenous Studies** at the **University of Manitoba**, has helpfully summarized the views of her father in a book that she has edited and been recently published by the University of Manitoba Press, **Still Ruffling Feathers**. She is, of course, fully aware that her father's book generated considerable controversy when it was released in 1971, as it was an outspoken criticism of the First Nations reliance on what he saw as outmoded treaties, and it argued against treaty mentality and dependence upon federal and provincial government largesse. She and her father continue to use the term "*Indian*" as it continues to have legal meaning, and was the word used by her father in his work and daily conversations regarding Indigenous Peoples in Canada in the 1960s and early 1970s, so it is also used in the book she edited.

According to Wanda Wuttunee, her father's main arguments, using the term "*Indian*" as he did, were as follows:

1. *"The government's reach into the lives of Indians was restrictive and unnecessary. In many ways, the White Paper offered freedom from this overpowering control of every aspect of their communities and their lives. Further, it removed their unhealthy segregation from society.*
2. *"Indian leaders knew how to lead with strength and convictions, but were gravely constrained from doing so by legislation and the 'poor little Indian' mentality displayed by do-gooders. Corrupt leaders, operating for personal gain and causing great suffering for the poor, also needed to be removed.*
3. *"Reserves tended to kill ambition and breed hatred and resentment in young people. Therefore, whenever the opportunity arose, it was better to leave, get an education, get a job, and support a family.*
4. *"The leaders who signed treaties did the best they could, but to hold on to bad and dead promises would impede the advancement of Native Peoples.*
5. *"Indian communities needed to consider integrating into Canadian society with all of its responsibilities (including taxation) and rights of personal freedom, liberty, fairness and justice—rights that were in jeopardy on most reserves.*
6. *"A fulsome integration would bring Indian values such as honesty and reciprocity to Canadian society where they were needed, and could help all people leave poverty behind, regardless of ethnicity."* —Wanda Wuttunee, *Still Ruffling Feathers*, Introduction, 2025, pages 3, 4.

Wanda Wuttunee can attest that in her family of six siblings, they were all raised by their parents to be proud of their heritage, and that they embraced their Cree identity wholeheartedly. She talks about how her father deliberately chose to focus on the beauty of being Cree, and not to promote bitterness and anger towards the rest of society. In spite of some interpretations of his book, he never said that Indigenous people should be exactly like all Canadians, but He instead asserts that they should participate in Canadian society as its leadership. His spiritual convictions were influenced by his *Anglican* upbringing on the reserve, and he eventually established a strong connection with the *Unitarian Universalist Church* in the mid-1960s, which lasted until his passing in 2015.

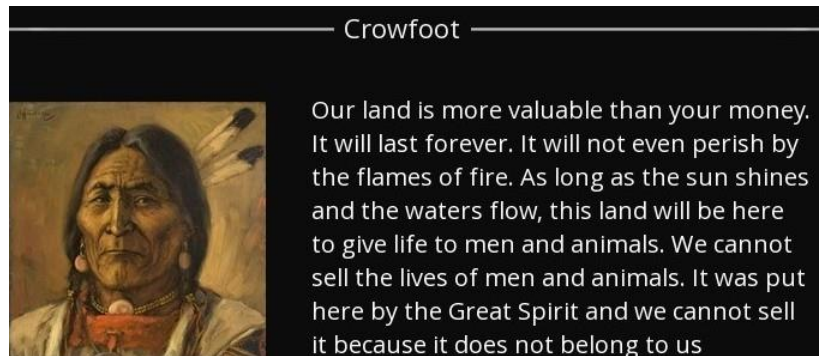
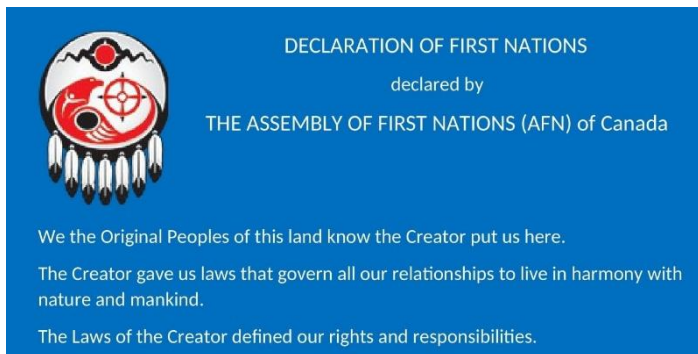
Where is the Spiritual Element in Trudeau's Just Society, Cardinal's Unjust Society, the White Paper, the Red Paper or in Wuttunee's Ruffled Fathers?

There are traces of spirituality in the writings of Harold Cardinal, and in the writings of both William Wuttunee and of his daughter Wanda. I started out this article by referring to the biblical reference to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, a knowledge in which everyone's knowledge is incomplete and partial, and that each perspective carries at least some trace of truth, but is lacking because of a dogmatism in one's perspectives that prevent us from seeing areas where we may all have blind spots.

Wanda Wuttunee has suggested as a suitable starting point, that in the words of Elder Jules Lavalee that *"I know nothing, and understand even less."* –Wanda Wuttunee, *Still Ruffling Feathers*, Introduction, 2025, page 6. She is in the scholarly camp that holds, *"I would rather have questions that can't be answered than answers that can't be questioned."* –Ibid., page xv.

Whether one comes at this from a standing of a traditional spirituality or the Christian faith, people of faith have one thing in common that it is the Creator whom traditionalist call *"the Great Spirit"* or Christians who believe that God is a Spirit who reveals Himself on the earth today by *"the Holy Spirit,"* that the spiritual part is the integrating factor of all knowledge. Theology used to be called *"the mother of the sciences,"* but the more we have turned away from the foundational importance of the spiritual element, the more fragmented and disintegrated our knowledge has become.

While Harold Cardinal's appeal for justice seems to be more of an appeal to *"our father who art in Ottawa"* rather than to *"our Father who art in Heaven,"* yet he does claim to have a spirituality of the Creator (not Ottawa) as supreme that would seem to be consistent with the **Declaration of First Nations** and of Chief Crowfoot's (signatory to **Treaty no. 7**) assessment about land ownership which is crucial to our understanding of the treaties that the land does not belong to any human being.



In the words of Harold Cardinal,

*"In many respects our elders perceived the treaties as a process whereby the white society, with its legal systems, with its system of law, would guarantee to our people the right to continue practicing their beliefs, the right to continue fulfilling their responsibilities to the Creator as agreed upon since time began. Our elders intended that the treaties would tell the guests who came to our country that while we welcomed them to our country, and while we wanted to build a nation in partnership with other nations so that our children could grow up in a better environment, we also by the process of our treaties wanted to let other people know that our first allegiance, our first commitment was not to a temporal power, but to our Creator." --Harold Cardinal, "Treaties Six and Seven: The Next Century," in *One Century Later: Western Canadian Reserve Indians since Treaty 7*, edited by Ian A. Getty and Donald B. Smith, 1978).*

My sense is that this spiritual element has been largely missing in our public quest for justice in Canada. While I fully agree with the sentiments expressed in the statement just cited by Harold Cardinal, I find it difficult to understand why he would prefer to retain a culture of victimhood, and retain the **Indian Act** (rather than abolish it) as a source of embarrassment to the government. He has indicated that he would rather continue to live in bondage under than inequitable **Indian Act** than to surrender his sacred rights.

William Wuttunee, on the other hand, seemed to believe that he could have greater freedom to practice his sacred rights to live in freedom without the **Indian Act**. The very retaining of any portion of the **Indian Act** would continue to be a restraint on the freedoms of Indigenous People to retain their culture and their beliefs freely, because the Source of those rights is not from Ottawa, but from the Creator Himself!

Even though William Wuttunee was raised in the Anglican tradition, my sense is that he may have become quite opposed to denominationalized Christianity as a religion and a legalistic system that was involved in things like the residential schools.

In the book *Still Ruffling Feathers* that she has introduced and edited, Wanda Wuttunee speaks this way of her father:

"Spirituality kept him alive and it is what keeps us together. Christianity has weakened our beliefs, but many Native people have combined both.

"I describe myself as a modern Indian with traditions. My tradition is my song, my prayer. People look at us and expect that we all know our traditions. That is not true at all. Some don't know their culture because of the past contact with Christianity.

"I was raised in a Christian background. I had it knocked into me—one hour in the morning and one hour in the evening. When I went back to the reserve after my family left, I said I was going to join the traditional people. I was discouraged from doing that, but I went anyway.

*"I found that they prayed just as well and even better. To Native people, God is not just on Sunday... he is a spiritual being. We have this relationship with nature that we try to promote. We touch a tree in the morning and give thanks that we are here and that we are meant to be here. Spirituality is real. We will burn sweetgrass or sage and say a prayer when we are on a trip." -- Wanda Wuttunee, *Still Ruffling Feathers*, Introduction, 2025, pages 31, 32.*

In her acknowledgements near the beginning of the book she edited, Wanda Wuttunee writes:

*"It was your faithfulness, Lord Jesus, that saw me through the many valleys I travelled these last years." -- Wanda Wuttunee, *Still Ruffling Feathers*, Introduction, 2025, page xvi.*

William Wuttunee himself demonstrated a life that bore the fruit of bringing together people of all ages and ethnicities in sharing circles that provided a loving and peaceful atmosphere for reflection. His spiritual convictions were influenced by his Anglican upbringing on the reserve, and he eventually established a strong connection with the *Unitarian Universalist Church* in the mid-1960s, which lasted until his passing in 2015.

Elijah Harper's Assessment of What Has Been Missing in the Political and Religious Discussions

Please hear me clearly. I am not suggesting that anyone whose perspectives are contained in this paper has the full revelation of God our Creator as He was revealed Himself in human history. A disciple takes the role of a *learner*, not one whose perspective or knowledge of God our Creator is yet complete. We can pay lip service to Jesus Christ, as the church of the residential schools did, and yet misrepresent Him in many ways because of our lack of a personal, intimate knowledge of Him.

In each one's journey towards the truth that sets us free from bitterness and acrimony, I think that what most everyone is agreed on is that we have rejected the kind of Jesus that was represented in the residential schools rather than the Jesus who died, was buried, rose again and ascended to the highest place in the universe as an Advocate for the entire human race, not as their accuser or condemner.

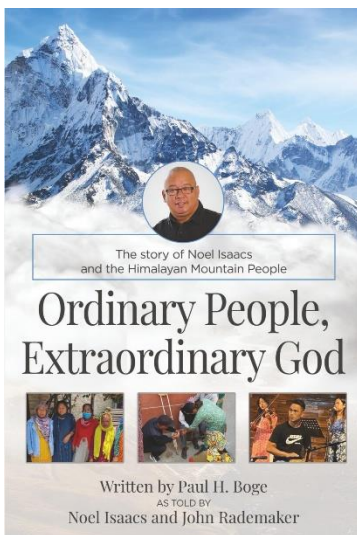


Elijah Harper himself was raised in a Christian home in *Red Sucker Lake First Nation*. He had a very godly father by the name of Alan B. Harper who was a pastor in that community for 54 years. I was honoured to be the speaker at his summer Camp Meeting in August of both 1992 and 1994.

He would request that I publicly uphold his son Elijah in prayer as he had a mysterious sickness that no medicine man, psychic, faith healer, nutritionist or medical doctor could diagnose let alone prescribe a cure. It turned out that there was no physical cure because his sickness was *spiritual*.

Someone had placed a curse upon his life in an effort to abort his destiny to be an influence for good. Elijah also had been impacted by the residential school system, and for a season, he chose the *political* route rather than the *spiritual* route in addressing Indigenous issues. Born in 1949, he got elected to the Manitoba Legislature at age 32, and served as an NDP MLA from 1981 to 1992, and then got elected as a Liberal Member of Parliament from 1993 to 1997 after he had become a national hero when he single-handedly killed the **Meech Lake Accord** in June of 1990.

However, his political popularity could neither diagnose nor provide a cure for his debilitating sickness that came to a head during the years of 1994 and 1995 when he came very close to death's door. It was in July of 1995 that Grand Chief Emeritus Lynda Prince took Elijah Harper to some meetings near Seattle, Washington, where Noel Isaacs' father, James Isaacs, was the speaker.



In a recently published book, *Ordinary People, Extraordinary God*, Noel Isaacs documents the story about how he and his father James were holding some meetings near Seattle, Washington, in July of 1995. They were introduced to Elijah Harper who was struggling for his life. Noel's father, discerning Elijah's condition, said to him twice, "You're not sick." He then added, "*You're suffering from a demonic curse. Your people have cast spells on you to make you die.*" Elijah studied Noel and his father James, and sensed their genuine concern.

Elijah was invited to the church service where James Isaacs would be speaking the next day. The next day, after James had finished preaching, he looked at Elijah, and said, "*Elijah, I want you to stand and come to the front and give your life to Jesus.*" Elijah tried to stand, but was not able. His friend and other people offered to help him. They were told to let him stand by himself.

Eventually, he was able to stand up, and was then asked to take a step towards the pulpit. Elijah began walking with awkward steps, but became surer and steadier the closer that he walked towards the front. As he approached the front, a radical change took place. Noel tried to put together the picture of an invalid Elijah from the night before and the man that he was seeing now. His expression was completely changed. His face looked very different. It was now relaxed, exuberant, radiant and full of life!



Noel's father prayed over him, and asked him if he was willing to take water baptism. He was. Noel Isaks witnessed this as Elijah was baptized in a bath tub back at the local pastor's house.

He sat amazed at the physical transformation that had taken place in less than a day. Elijah had gone from sitting at death's door to shining with the radiance of heaven.

It was then, shortly after his supernatural healing in July of 1995, that Elijah Harper called a **Sacred Assembly** in Canada that drew together some 3,000 delegates, including Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, representatives of all political parties and church denominations, the Grand Chief, other Grand Chiefs, Chiefs, Band Council members, Elders and Youth with representation from all Indigenous groups—Inuit, First Nations and Métis.

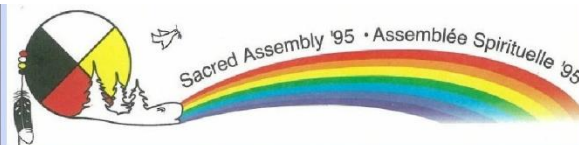


I did a personal interview with Kathryn Boissoneau-Skov who was Elijah Harper's Executive Assistant during those years of 1994/1995 when he was a **Member of Parliament**, representing the riding of Churchill, Manitoba. This interview can be seen and heard at this site:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q7OF5Ug_Brk&t=428s

Kathryn (pictured here with Elijah at the **Sacred Assembly**) personally confirms the huge change that there was in Elijah after he returned from the meetings in Seattle, Washington. After looking like the picture of death itself, he was now calmer, more at peace with a radiant countenance and a soul that was at rest!

Kathryn Boissoneau-Skov attests to the fact that what became clear to Elijah in July of 1995 is that the true source and nature of his debilitating "*sickness*" was not physical but spiritual. At the same time, it became clear to him that the true source and nature of our *nation's social sickness*, and inability to gain traction on the social/economic/environmental issues discussed by the politicians in government and the legal issues before the courts, was because at their *roots*, these issues were not political but spiritual.



"We have a responsibility to maintain the unity of this land, and to sustain the environment.

Our forefathers had difficulty understanding the concept of owning land.

It is alien, like the concept of owning air.

But we understand the need to use the land for the benefit of everybody, not for greed....

It has become more apparent that these things need to be resolved,

and that the political process has failed us.

I believe there is something missing, which is the spiritual element."

Elijah Harper

Sacred Assembly, December 6, 1995

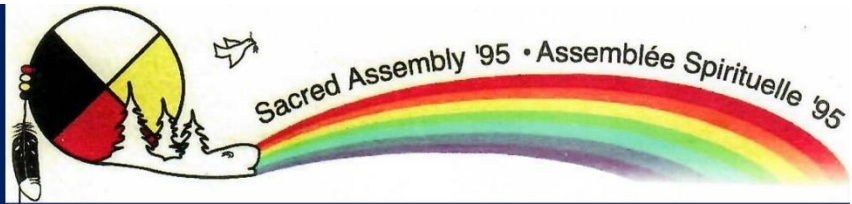
In his opening keynote address at the very beginning of the **Sacred Assembly** that he called for December 6 to 9, 1995, he stated boldly right before the *Prime Minister*, the *Minister of Indian Affairs*, and politicians from all parties and leaders from all religious denominations:

"It has become more apparent that these things need to be resolved, and that the political process has failed us. I believe that there is something missing, which is the spiritual element."

For anyone who had eyes to see and ears to hear, it was evident that at his Sacred Assembly in December of 1995, Elijah Harper was interpreting Indigenous history from a biblical worldview, wherein dignity and worth was given to all human beings, and that it was a vision that involved and embraced “*loving, caring loving and sharing.*” Above all, his Vision recognized and embraced *the supremacy of God, our Creator.*

“I have a vision that lies in the heart and soul of our people for this country we call Canada... above all, this vision embraces the supremacy of God our Creator, and is inherent in the treaties that were made with the newcomers that came to this land...”

—Elijah Harper, Sacred Assembly, December 1995.



“I have a vision for this country we call Canada...This is the vision that is inherent in the treaties that were made with the newcomers that came to this land with their governments. We agreed to respect and to honour each other, to co-exist, to live side-by-side in harmony to share what we have—the knowledge, the land and the resources...

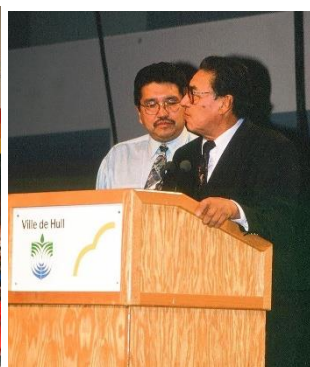
“This vision is not very complicated, but it is strong. It embraces unity, caring, loving and sharing, but this vision has been dormant, and has not been appreciated or understood by many ordinary Canadians...We have a responsibility to maintain the unity of this land and to sustain the environment, but we also understand the need to use the land for the benefit of everybody, not for greed.”

While Elijah’s Vision embraced the well-being of *everybody*, and all were welcome (whether Christian or traditional), yet it was evident that he was approaching the issues from a biblical spirituality. When it came to traditional spirituality, Elijah Harper told me personally that “*some of it is perverted, and some is not.*” The same, however, was also true of the denominational churches who misrepresented Christ in fighting amongst themselves while using fear and punishment as a motivation in the residential schools.

Consider whom Elijah chose to lead and to coordinate the **Sacred Assembly** of 1995. He chose Grand Chief Emeritus Wally McKay, a strong believer, to coordinate the event. He chose his father, Pastor Alan B. Harper to lead the Invocation at the very opening of the event, who declared before the delegates that “*it is important that we do everything in God’s Name, and therefore, upon this Assembly, we invoke the blessing of God the Father, and of His Son and of the Holy Spirit.*” Those who wrote the **Reconciliation Proclamation** that came out of the **Sacred Assembly** did so out of a biblical perspective about ownership.



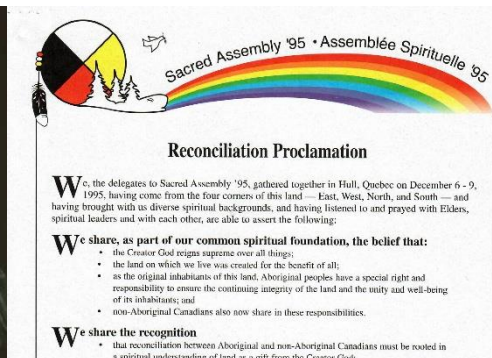
Head Table



Wally McKay & Alan B. Harper



Elijah Harper Giving Opening Address



Reconciliation Proclamation

The most salient points of the **Reconciliation Proclamation** included the following:

1. We share, as part of our common spiritual foundation, the belief that the Creator God reigns supreme over all things.
2. We share, as part of our common spiritual foundation, the belief that the land on which we live was created for the benefit of all.
3. We share the recognition that reconciliation between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Canadians must be rooted in a spiritual understanding of land as a gift from the Creator God.

4. We share an understanding that the starting point for healing and reconciliation lies in personal communion with the Creator God.
5. We share an understanding that while change must take place at all levels of society, it must be rooted most firmly in the communities.

The Challenge made by Then Prime Minister Jean Chrétien

After hearing Elijah Harper's Opening Remarks at the **Sacred Assembly** on December 6, 1995, then Prime Minister Jean Chrétien made the following significant remarks.

"Elijah said it very well in an earlier statement. What has been missing from all of the hard work that has gone into reclaiming indigenous lands and self-government through the courts and the political process in recent years has been the spiritual perspective that lies behind these demands for justice..."

*"These values are **spiritual**, not **political**. They must come through leaders like you (the **spiritual** leaders), but we in the **political** world must help too. As we look to the future, we will need to continue to learn from and about one another.*

"As it was said before, 'When there is justice, God is there,' and I think that Mr. Harper. You have found a new way. Spirituality is missing a lot in our society, and spirituality is absolutely needed to find the right way."

Those historic words bear repeating:



*"Elijah said it very well from an earlier statement, 'What has been missing from all the hard work that has gone...through the courts and the political process in recent years has been the spiritual perspective that lies behind these demands for justice.' These values are **spiritual**, not **political**. And I think, Mr. Harper, that you have found a new way. Spirituality is missing a lot in our society, and spirituality is absolutely needed to find the right way." –Dec. 6, 1995*

This is especially significant coming from a Prime Minister in 1995 who was the *Minister of Indian Affairs* back on June 25, 1968, when the Canadian government with Pierre Elliot Trudeau as the Prime minister of Canada produced a **White Paper** which tried to bring about the *equality* of Canadians by abolishing the discriminatory **Indian Act** of 1976. At the time, Jean Chrétien was surprised to see the storm of protest that came from the Indigenous Community, led by First Nations Chiefs like Harold Cardinal who strongly opposed this **White Paper** in his book, **The Unjust Society** in later in 1969.

As early as July of 1969, this *Minister of Indian Affairs* Jean Chrétien had backtracked and declared, "We will not push anything down anyone's throat." Perhaps the intent of the **White Paper** had been good in trying to produce *equality* for all Canadians, but its fatal flaw was that it was a materialist document that made no effort to resolve these issues from a spiritual perspective.

Now, since the Elijah Harper's **1995 Sacred Assembly**, Jean Chrétien has agreed with Elijah that the spiritual element has been missing from the political and the legal discussions, and that the spiritual leaders, especially the church leaders, are going to have to lead this. Now, 30 years later, are we, the spiritual leaders of Canada, finally willing to take up this challenge to discuss these issues between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Canadians from a *spiritual* perspective that is biblical and that respects our fellow human beings as people with whom we are equal but in complementarity as a free people?