Why Should Indigenous Peoples “Seize an Alternative”?

Chris Daniels, Ph.D

Process Theologian and Philosopher John Cobb Jr. has argued the importance of an aim toward ‘mutual transformation’ when pursuing inter-religious or inter-cultural dialogue and encounter. Each participant should be open to transforming themselves and their own tradition in light of what they learn from the other. Rather than being a religious pluralist Cobb has often called himself a ‘transformationist’. But as is his custom, when doing so he has also pointed out the potential limitations of this approach.

A primary concern is that the ‘other’ with whom you are in dialogue may not currently be open to such transformation for one reason or another. They may be satisfied with their tradition the way it is and see no need for change—“It works just fine for our community, thank you very much.” Or, it may also be true that the tradition is necessarily focused on sheer survival and not be in a position to consider more change than what has already been forced upon them. Rather, they are deeply immersed in cultural recovery. What immediately comes to mind is the oppression by dominant cultures that has left its mark all over the world, with most traditions continuing to struggle with its ongoing effects. It is also possible that one’s own tradition may have a long way to go in understanding and acceptance before it has anything substantial or beneficial to offer back that could potentially have positive transformational value. When I consider the type of dialogue and encounter that are the hopes and goals of the ‘Seizing an Alternative’ conference, I see potential for a combination of all three stumbling blocks in the Contributions of Indigenous Wisdom track. First of all, although many of the major traditional ways can be traced back a few thousand years, traditional Indigenous traditions as a whole have lasted tens of thousands of years and have shown to be far more successful at coexisting with the

natural world than any of the later developments. There is no pressing need for transformation in that regard. Secondly, as we are all aware, Indigenous traditions the world over are struggling to survive. Indigenous scholars and leaders are immersed in trying to keep their culture, language, and ways-of-knowing intact and relevant. They are struggling to have their communities be treated with common human decency, to have some resemblance of control over what happens to them within society in the present and future, and to be given the same level of respect afforded other communities in today's multi-cultural society. They have to fight to get a voice as equals on committees that have ultimate control over their future, and how their ancestral lands will be used and developed. Aboriginal groups the world over are struggling to develop and implement educational systems that work for their children, while at the same time fighting to keep their languages alive. These are just a few of the ongoing problems faced by Indigenous peoples, but enough to raise the third issue as the question 'Why'. Why should Indigenous scholars and leaders take the time, expense, and effort to attend and participate in a conference such as 'Seizing an Alternative'? What on Earth can we, as Western non-indigenous people, offer that could possibly make it worth their while, when so many similar avenues have failed? What is special about Process thinkers at a Whiteheadian conference? What is different this time?

The biggest obstacle we are faced with when considering this question is something that has been proven over and over for the last 500 years. WE.. DON'T.. GET..IT! Western Euro-American culture in general, and Western academics in particular, do not understand what Indigenous people have been trying to tell us for centuries. Not really. We look at their narratives and see myths and legends that often contradict how we understand the world to work and therefore view them as fanciful, childish, and ultimately false and of no value—childish stories that might have some simplistic moral message, or relay some sort of ancient ancestral

knowledge that may at some point have been useful, but has little value in today's world. They include stories about connection to the natural world and its inhabitants that naïvely attribute life and personhood to inanimate objects, elemental forces, plants, and dumb animals— the Mountain beings, the thunderbeings, the rooted-ones, the fourlegged beings, the wing-ed ones, and Pachamama herself. How does any of THAT make sense in light of what Western science has taught us about the world?

I recall chatting with a fellow student as we were coming out of a graduate course on religious diversity when I was doing my Master's studies. Indigenous religions had been mentioned in the class and as we walked the student stated "Those people worship animals. That's just crazy and I don't get." After my initial shock, I tried to explain how I didn't really think that was the case. Besides the point that 'worship' was a Western concept that did not necessarily apply in this context, I believed Aboriginal people had reverence for the divine as it was expressed through the natural world, which included animals. It was not, I thought, that 'animals' or other aspects of the natural world were worshiped *per se*, but that the divine was present in all creation, so a relationship was possible *through* the natural world. After another pause, the response was: "It still sounds like animal worship to me. That's still crazy and I just don't get it."

What I learned from that exchange was just how far Westerners still needed to go in our understanding of the Indigenous perspective, and just how true George Steiner's observation on translation was when he said "To the baffled ear, the incomprehensible parley of neighboring peoples is gibberish…"(Steiner 56).

One example illustrating our lack of understanding is when Aboriginal scholars and educators tell us that an alternate system of learning is necessary for Indigenous children because

of their different ways of gaining knowledge, the truth of which is borne out with the horrendous failure of residential boarding schools, and the statistics that show the relative scarcity of Indigenous students in higher education. Yet we can't really grasp why that might be. Isn't learning, learning? Aren't facts, facts? Should not an education system be "valueless" in that it is simply transmission of data, and the skills required to manipulate that data? Why should it be any different for children of one culture than children of another? But that goes hand in hand with the rising recognition of the importance of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) that coincides with a widening gulf between the Western scientists and the Indigenous cultures as to what TEK actually entails and how it should be defined and used.

Internal perceptions, sensations, emotions, and conceptions are crucial to Indigenous ways of knowing. But although external relations to the natural world, acquired through sense perception, are certainly important as a source of knowledge about one's immediate environment, it is often taken by non-Aboriginal scholars to be the *only* source of legitimate information, which leads to much confusion and misunderstanding. From this Western perspective which reflects the early-modern materialistic/sensationist worldview, Indigenous Knowledge (IK) and TEK are derived from two sources: knowledge accumulated and transmitted through ancestral lineage in the form of teachings and narratives; and being aware of and interpreting, both consciously and unconsciously, the diversity of environmental cues through the physical senses. For instance, a typical definition for TEK, as provided by David Newhouse, might be:

> For me Indigenous knowledge arises out of careful observation and careful thought carried out within a particular cognitive framework, reflective of an underlying mode of thought or cognitive orientation towards the world. It is also transmitted in a particular fashion under particular circumstances through particular people. (Newhouse 150)

According to Anishinaabe scholar Deborah McGregor, the most commonly used and accepted definition of TEK in Canada is that of Martha Johnson, the former executive director of the Dene Cultural Institute in the Northwest Territories:

> …a body of knowledge built up by a group of people through generations of living in close contact with nature. It includes a system of classification, a set of empirical observations about the local environment, and a system of self-management that governs resource use. The quantity and quality of traditional environmental knowledge varies among community members, depending upon gender, age, social status, intellectual ability, and profession (hunter, spiritual leader, healer, etc.). With its roots firmly in the past, traditional environmental knowledge is both cumulative and dynamic, building upon the experience of earlier generations and adapting to the new technological and socioeconomic changes of the present.(McGregor 385)

These are clear examples of what Spivak calls 'epistemic violence' that the dominant colonializing society has perpetuated on Indigenous ways of knowing (Spivak 280). In this context it can best be understood as the "violence done to the ways of knowing and understanding of nonwestern, indigenous people" (Sharp 111). Western modes of thought, whether religious, scientific, philosophical, economical, or political, become "universalised to the extent that they are often seen as the only way to know. Other forms of understanding and expression are then marginalised and seen as superstition, folklore or mythology"(Sharp 110). These non-Aboriginal definitions emphasize the transmission and accumulation of knowledge through external spatiotemporal relationship with the natural world and biological ancestors, which are certainly an important part of culturally derived knowledge systems, but say nothing of the fundamental relatedness recognized in a radically relational ontology/epistemology. Regardless of how the Indigenous cultures themselves understand or describe their ways of gaining knowledge, definitions are invariably framed within the conceptual and language structures of the dominant Euro-American narrative, thereby making the Western scientific

method the standard against which TEK is evaluated. In the typical Western substantist view, says McGregor, TEK represents a specific body of knowledge that may be useful to the wider society as an alternative to Western science, but not consonant with it (McGregor 397). It is knowledge that is not typically available using normal Western scientific methods, but can be appropriated for use by the wider society. One of the major differences between this perspective and the Indigenous view is that this 'body of knowledge' is something that can be separated from the lived experience of the people and remain useful and relevant. But as McGregor says: "TEK is not just knowledge *about* the relationships with Creation it *is* the relationship with Creation; it is the *way* that one relates" (McGregor 394). Rather than merely inert facts about the world, it is action-oriented in a participatory manner and cannot be separated from the people or the land from which it springs without doing violence to the knowledge, the relationships inherent to the knowledge, and the people themselves.

TEK is itself a recent construct of the mainstream society, developed and grown over the last few decades, largely as an effort to recognize and extract the environmental knowledge of Aboriginal peoples (McGregor 385,402). However, because of its inherent emphasis on universal relationality, as known and experienced through both internal (spiritual/ontological) and external (sense perceptual/spatial-temporal) relationships with the specific environment in which they live, McGregor feels that *all* knowledge from the Indigenous perspective could be considered ecological. In this context, therefore, TEK as a body of knowledge is essentially an empty concept that, outside the framework of the mainstream Euro-American society, has no discrete meaning. Indigenous Knowledge itself defies categorical definition because of its very nature in that different environmental locations and conditions result in different relationships, and therefore different particular strategies in acquiring and accessing information. There is no

monolithic 'Indigenous Knowledge' separate from the people and the land that can be applied to all Indigenous people. Any attempt at identifying instances of Indigenous Knowledge must inherently be tied to the people involved and their own particular relationships with the land and wider universe. Indigenous Knowledge, therefore, is unique to each given culture, and acquired by the local people through daily experience with particular land and environment and is therefore in a constant state of flux (Wilson 55). Conversely, non-Aboriginal TEK methods consist of separating the people from their knowledge so it can be documented and categorized in standard Western research structures as 'data' or 'statistics,' thereby destroying the Indigenous context. Quantifying Indigenous Knowledge as an isolated 'thing' in this manner cannot help but do epistemic violence to Aboriginal cultures.

Rather than attempting such objective definitions, the best that can be done, according to some Aboriginal scholars such as McGregor, Battiste, and Henderson, is a general description of how Indigenous Knowledge might be commonly conceived. Battiste and Henderson summarize their own conception by stating:

> Perhaps the closest one can get to describing unity in Indigenous knowledge is that knowledge is the expression of the vibrant relationships between people, the ecosystems, and other living beings and spirits that share their lands…All aspects of knowledge are interrelated and cannot be separated from the traditional territories of the people concerned…. To the indigenous ways of knowing, the self exists within a world that is subject to flux. The purpose of these ways of knowing is to reunify the world or at least to reconcile the world to itself. Indigenous knowledge is *the way of living* within contexts of flux, paradox, and tension, respecting the pull of dualism and reconciling opposing forces….Developing these ways of knowing leads to freedom of consciousness and to solidarity with the natural world."(Quoted by Battiste and Henderson 390 Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage: A Global Challenge, Purich's Aboriginal Issues Series (Saskatoon: Purich Publishing, 2000), 42.)

Unlike non-Aboriginal descriptions of Indigenous epistemology, Aboriginal descriptions emphasize not only the lived experience of being in relation but also both the internal and

external nature of those relationships as a complex whole. It is the WAY one lives in relationship with each other, the land, and the divine, NOT merely the data that comes from that lived experience. It is dynamic, respectful, reciprocal, and comes with responsibility to the community, both human and non-human. It is not a valueless commodity that can be codified and universalized without being lived. It is refreshed and made new in each moment and each new lived experience.

One example worth discussing in detail that illustrates the difference between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of understanding how knowledge is gained is that of Rupert Ross, a retired Crown Attorney whose territory was the remote First Nations communities of Northern Ontario. Ross relates a story of how he first had personal experience with an Indigenous-type intimate connection to the natural world (Ross 81ff). After eleven summers of being a fishing guide in Northern Ontario while he pursued his education, Ross had become amazed at the ability of the Aboriginal guides to not only predict the type of day it would be, but also which of the various fishing spots would yield the best results. He notes that when asked how they were able to do this the answer was invariably couched in emotional terms such as, "I just had a good feeling about those spots." After years of practice and familiarity with the lake and the environment, Ross increasingly became better at becoming aware of, and interpreting, the variables associated with determining such predictions, a manner of thinking which he calls 'pattern-thought' because it appears to involve conscious and unconscious recognition over time, of environmental patterns. Eventually, without knowing how or why, Ross also began to experience 'hunches' and 'feelings' about where to go, without recognizing any obvious physical patterns or cues. This largely involved getting a 'feel' for the day, visualizing the various fishing spots that he might visit, and then seeing how his 'feelings' of the day changed according to how

he imaged being in each location. Although he finds it difficult to describe or understand, he still attributed such feelings and 'hunches' to an increase in complex sense-perceptual variables which he was unconsciously processing to make each prediction, even though he got these hunches by internally visualizing a distant location rather than being physically present at each. Because he was not physically at these locations, he was still back at the lodge, he was not capable of perceiving the patterns and cues he associated with 'pattern-thinking' except through his imaginative imaging.

His story culminates in an event in which he guided a couple of clients to a particular spot on the exposed north side of the lake. As the day progressed he started having a bad feeling about being in such a location even though, upon reflection, there was no indication of a reason for it. He could detect no changes in the sky, air, temperature, or any other environmental cue which he could associate with such a feeling. Nevertheless, he had learned to appreciate these hunches so moved to a more sheltered location closer to base camp. After continuing to have bad feelings, still without obvious external reasons, and much to the chagrin of his clients, he moved even closer to camp. When a freak hail storm suddenly erupted that, if they had not been so close to a sheltered location would have been disastrous, perhaps even life threatening, Ross was able to easily make it to a safe harbour. To Ross, this is the closest he feels he came to the hunter-gatherer ability to be in tune with the environment. Although he is unable to identify the variables that led to his feelings and predictions, Ross, as a product of normative Western rationality, could only explain such experiences from within the Western scientific paradigm. If the external variables could not be identified, the reason *must be* that they were largely unconscious, significantly complex, but still physical, sense perceptions. Although the 'feelings' were internally generated by his unconscious mind, according to Ross the variable relationships

that served as data could only have been perceived from external physical senses. Even after years of working within the Aboriginal lifeworlds, Ross had little choice but to interpret this Indigenous experience from the perspective of the dominant Master Narrative which only allows for external sense perception.

Even if the normative Western substantive perspective was considered sufficient to explain this particular example using Ross' pattern thinking model, the explanation becomes more problematic when faced with new or unfamiliar circumstances rather than familiar repetition over time. A case in point is one Ellen Bielawski refers to that was set up to provide data on how the Inuit construct knowledge. Bielawski, who worked as a research associate for the Arctic Institute of North America, has argued that the two forms of gaining knowledge, Western scientific and Indigenous, are in conflict with each other in a way which is detrimental to both cultures (Bielawski 2). She refers to the findings of The Traditional Knowledge Working Group, which was created by the Government of The Northwest Territories in order to integrate traditional knowledge into policy, which comments on the difficulties that arise from the misunderstanding of the nature of Indigenous knowledge by Western Arctic scientists:

> The lack of common understanding about the meaning of traditional knowledge is frustrating for those who advocate or attempt in practical ways to recognize and use traditional knowledge. For some, traditional knowledge is simply information which aboriginal peoples have about the land and animals with which they have a special relationship. But for aboriginal people, traditional knowledge is much more. One elder calls it "a common understanding of what life is about." (Department of Culture and Communications, Government of the Northwest Territories 1991:11Quoted by Bielawski 2)

The particular circumstances of the study were, in 1953 and 1955, when the Government of Canada resettled Inuit into an unfamiliar and uninhabited environment. Such a circumstance allowed no past knowledge of the local environment to be helpful or relevant. Although she

points out that Nunavik oral histories are nearly silent on matters about how they gain knowledge, she says that when they have lost context for their knowledge they do provide clues as to their epistemological methodology. In a simple yet enlightening example, she recalls when one hunter was asked how he had figured out the location and movements of caribou herds in this unfamiliar territory he looked at her oddly and said "Because we are Inuit, we can do that." (Bielawski 4) This is typical of how Indigenous people themselves understand that their ways of gaining knowledge differs from how it is viewed by Western scientists. Implied in the hunter's response, and Bielawski's article, is that such knowledge involves more than "simply information which aboriginal peoples have about the land and animals with which they have a special relationship." The Inuit, in this case, had no opportunity to physically investigate the land and animals sufficiently to make an assessment. From an Indigenous perspective it was the Inuit ability to become aware of the internal, or spiritual, connection to the land and animals that allowed the hunter to intentionally gain information directly, thereby knowing the location of the Caribou.

As this example illustrates, the disparity between how Aboriginal cultures view traditional knowledge and how it is understood by Western culture is made strikingly clear in Canada's northern regions. Corporations that are applying to exploit an areas resource, whether through mining, logging, or oil development, often have to conduct a study which involves the TEK of a local First Nations community. This information is inputted into databases with the assumption that it is universalizable and therefore only has to be done once. In fact, the corporations are often never obligated to consult the local communities again, no matter how long in the past the interviews were conducted, or whether the new proposed project bears any relation to what was originally being considered (Houde). They are not even required to consult with the First Nations

as to how that data is ultimately used. Once the data is obtained, sorted and codified, it is considered applicable at all times, in all places, and in all contexts. This, of course, not only directly contradicts how such knowledge is understood by the Indigenous people themselves, but also commits what Whitehead refers to as ‘the fallacy of misplaced concreteness’ and ‘simple location’. It reifies knowledge by assuming the concreteness of something that is actually conceptual, and also assumes that it endures unchanged in different spatial and temporal contexts.

For hundreds of years Indigenous peoples have been trying to contribute their wisdom on how to live in relationship with the natural world, and they continue to do so. And for hundreds of years we generally have NOT GOT IT. Certainly some of us have tried. I would even suggest there are those who have legitimate Indigenous experiences of their own with the natural world, but because their ancestral Indigenous roots are too far in the past they have legitimately and understandably turned to current Indigenous traditions for the proper protocols on how to respectfully and reciprocally deal with such experiences. Those are the few that might actually get it. But the rest of us don’t get it in the same way and it is often difficult to tell the difference between those who are honourably on that committed path and those that are doing it for exploitation, excessive personal financial gain, or are simply on a fragmented, new-age-style quest that changes with each new weekend workshop. Western academics and well-meaning laity have continually appropriated anything possible from Indigenous cultures that they think might help gain value from the natural world, hopefully without paying too high a price or having to actually give something back. Because we do not really understand it, we also do not understand the consequences of such a one-way appropriation. Historically we have not been

interested in the reciprocal responsibility inherent in the committed relationship to the land that is fundamental to Indigenous cultures.

There has, however, been attempts to achieve mutual understanding. A few years ago Willie Ermine of the First Nations University of Canada and a team of Aboriginal scholars compiled a report entitled "The Ethics of Research Involving Indigenous Peoples" in which among other things, they challenged scholars to find an ontological and epistemological paradigm (a worldview and a way of gaining knowledge) that moves toward reconciling the disparity between an adequate Western scientific worldview and the relational and experiential perspective of Indigenous peoples (Ermine, Sinclair, and Jeffery). E. Richard Atleo and Gregory Cajete have both written books dealing with what they call 'Native' or 'Indigenous' Science, in which they want to give Indigenous ways of understanding the nature of reality equal status in the scientific quest for knowledge about the world we live in (Cajete; Atleo). Celebrated quantum physicist F.David Peat has written a book called *Blackfoot Physics* in which he illustrates the astonishing parallels between Indigenous languages and ways of understanding the world from a quantum model of reality, rather than the typical Western, early-modernist perspective (Peat). Peat's observations illustrate where the problem lies. Western Euro-American society is stuck in a metaphysical worldview that cannot allow such a shift. As process scholars such as David Ray Griffin have pointed out, it insists on interpreting and judging everything through an outdated substantist and mechanistic view of the world even though its own physicists suggest that a dynamic relational model of reality may well be more appropriate. The experiential, relational, perspective that Ermine, Atleo, Cajete, Bastien, Deloria Jr. and most other Indigenous scholars describe as integral to the Indigenous worldview and ways of gaining

knowledge is not taken seriously by the dominant culture, and until it is they will continue to Not Get It.

However, that also addresses the 'Why' question posed earlier. Why bother participating in this conference? What is the difference this time? The answer is simple: Because this time we just might Get It! This time the accepted underlying view of the world by many of the participants is also relational and experiential. Whiteheadian process thinkers reject the early-modernist view of the world that insists that reality is mechanistically composed of inert substances that endure through time and space. They embrace an event-based, process view that understands reality as fundamentally derived through relationships. Reality IS the relationships between events that dynamically form in creating each moment of existence. Learning about the world, therefore, can be thought of as learning about and through these relationships. Blackfoot scholar Betty Bastien states that: "In each relationship, in each moment in time, in each thought, in each word, and in each action is a teaching, which contributes to an intricate balance of a cosmic universe"(Bastien 79). For Bastien, it is experiencing the universe as an integral whole that allows for the knower to become one with the known, resulting in a perception of the 'other' as an extension of oneself. It is through this perception of unity that the relationships generate the intuitive knowledge of the 'other'. You can learn about aspects of the world through internal perception rather than merely external sense perception.

From a Whiteheadian perspective this could be an example of what David Ray Griffin refers to as 'retro-prehensive inclusion', or 'prehensive cognition' (Griffin 155). It is action at a distance. It is becoming cognitively aware of what Whitehead calls 'prehensions' which are the primary mode of perception for all entities. In process thought we are all primarily constituted by the perception of the entirety of our past relevant world. If so then it is possible that under certain

circumstances we could become aware of aspects of the world that are not available to the secondary mode of perception that involves our sense organs. In other words, if we are constituted by our relationship with our entire past and present world, it is possible we could gain knowledge *about* the world *through* those relationships, rather than merely through our external senses. Although such awareness may not happen often, says Griffin, a Whiteheadian process metaphysic allows for the possibility.

Although Whitehead's philosophy may allow for it, this view has certainly not been accepted by all Process scholars, such as Donald Sherburne for instance. If we were continuously cognitively aware of our own past entire world, says Sherburne, our experience of the world would be much different than it is (Sherburne 86). We would all be consciously aware of both what was happening in places other than when and where we are, and what would likely happen in the next moment. Vehicle accidents alone provide evidence to the contrary. But Griffin says that just because we are not continuously aware of such perceptions doesn't mean they don't happen. He admits that the overriding intensity of sense data that we are bombarded with would usually preclude such awareness. However, if one was able to focus attention away from sense data, and with the help of creating sympathetic relationships with the world around us, such awareness would be far more probable. Cobb's response to Sherburne was that it seems that people often have these experiences, understanding them as intuition or divine guidance (Cobb Jr. 26). I would suggest that the altered state of consciousness inherent in meditation, prayer, trance, ceremony, sacred dance, visions, and dreams, all of which are vital to Indigenous traditional ways, is ideal for the focused awareness that may facilitate such uncommon ways of gaining knowledge.

This relational way of understanding the world puts a whole new perspective on the wisdom that Indigenous people have been sharing with us for centuries. It helps us to understand *why* Indigenous education requires a different model of how to teach than is currently popular in the dominant society. Within such a model education is far more contextual and experiential. It is a value-laden 'coming-to-know' rather than memorization of dead facts that cannot effectively be relevant in the constantly changing world of a process relational view of reality. Knowledge comes from experience, and one's experience of the world changes in each new situation. The world itself is ever-changing, requiring an educational system that prioritizes *how* to gain knowledge in each new moment as one's relationships change, and the reciprocal responsibility that goes with such knowing, rather than memorizing and universalizing inert data.

This relational way of understanding allows for more sensitivity toward the ancestral land claims and the importance of sacred sites that require ceremony and ritual to renew and strengthen the relationships Indigenous peoples have with the natural world. If Indigeneity is about connecting to the divine and the wider universe through the land, as I would argue, then in a relational world identity creation is bound up with when and where one lives. Severing ties to a particular land base severs the connection to one's own identity as an integral and interconnected part of the family, community, the world, and ultimately the divine. Although *all* land is considered sacred to some degree due to divine immanence, sacred sites, which for centuries have hosted ceremony and ritual to establish and renew the alliances, compacts, and sympathetic relations, can be better understood as unique places in which such relationships are 'more intensively relevant', to use process language. Without renewal at these sites, awareness of such critical relationships may fade.

The narratives, songs, and stories take on new meaning, as does the mythic imagery that represents the ways of knowing embodied in these narratives. Such symbolic reference incorporates knowledge gained through reflection on information gathered through the primary mode of perception—one's relationships with the world and the divine—rather than merely through the secondary mode of our sense perception. There is much more to gaining knowledge about oneself and the world than can be achieved through merely relying on the intense data we receive through our five senses, as important as that is.

It also illustrates the importance of the contribution Indigenous Wisdom can make toward the ecological civilization that is necessary for the survival of the planet. In fact, it puts into perspective Okanagan scholar Jeanette Armstrong's call for the re-Indigenization of the entire human race. We all have Indigenous roots if we look back far enough—my own Germanic and Celtic connections were compromised a couple of thousands years ago, but existed nonetheless. As Armstrong, Bill Pfeiffer, and Jaki Daniels say, to save the planet we all need to re-new the relationship to the earth that we once had, but is now only held in the hands of those who live in a traditional Indigenous way (Pfeiffer; Daniels). We need to widen the definition of what it means to BE Indigenous to include the potential all people have for re-indigenization. Cree Elder Fishwoman (Pauline Johnson) tells a story from her lineage about how the Sacred Pipe came to the First Nations (Daniels 50–51). At first, Creator offered it to all four of the human races—the White, the Yellow, the Black, and the Red. The pipe was a way for the people to unify the relationships of all the directions and communicate more directly with the Great Mystery. However, this offering was only taken up by the Red race. Fishwoman says that although the other three races rejected it at the time, the Red people honoured Creators gift by holding the pipe ready for the other races to take up when they were prepared to come together in a good

way. She feels that because of the state of the world today, perhaps now is the time that the pipe, and the ancient wisdom it represents, is once again made available to all the peoples of the earth. It is now critical for the survival of the planet that the Indigenous wisdom and ways that have been held for so long by First Nations people throughout the world, are passed on to all. But it is just as important that we are able to accept and understand such a gift, and reciprocate in an appropriate way.

Perhaps most applicable to this conference, acceptance of such a relational worldview allows for Indigenous people to participate in inter-cultural dialogue and encounter as equal partners. The obvious and significant parallels between Process thought and the Indigenous worldview answers the question ‘Why’ because it is in a unique position to ‘Get It’—to finally understand, and help move forward, the wisdom Indigenous peoples have been offering. In a very real way Seizing an Alternative toward an Ecological Civilization is not merely accepting the Whiteheadian way of understanding reality, it is the re-Indigenization of humanity so that we can finally understand and implement the wisdom of our current Indigenous peoples, and our past Indigenous ancestors. We all need to make decisions that keep in mind the seven generations that have come before and the seven generations that come after.

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