

Mixed Blessings
Indigenous Encounters with Christianity in Canada

*Edited by Tolly Bradford
and Chelsea Horton*



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Introduction: The Mixed Blessings of Encounter

Tolly Bradford and Chelsea Horton

ON SUNDAY, 21 OCTOBER 2012, over three hundred years after her death and nearly a century and a half after campaigns for her canonization began, Mohawk woman Kateri (or Catherine, as she is known to some) Tekakwitha was formally invested as a Catholic saint. During his homily at the Vatican that Sunday, Pope Benedict XVI declared, “Saint Kateri, Protectress of Canada and the first Native American saint, we entrust to you the renewal of the faith in the first nations and in all of North America! May God bless the first nations!”¹ This was a charged statement in light of current investigations into the history of residential schools in Canada, a history in which the Catholic Church is intimately implicated and for which it has yet to issue a formal apology on the scale offered by the Anglican, Presbyterian, and United Churches in Canada.²

Indeed, it is tempting in this context to read the timing of Kateri’s canonization and the pope’s statement as a shrewd political effort to curry sympathy with Indigenous peoples or, perhaps more charitably, as an “act of atonement” for past sins.³ It would also be easy to read Kateri’s biography, which Jesuit missionaries composed as hagiography upon her death in 1680 and settlers of various stripes subsequently deployed to promote the image of the “ecological Indian” and more, as a straightforward narrative of colonial victimization.⁴ After all, this was a woman who lost immediate family members, including her parents, to smallpox, and was herself disfigured by the disease. Displaced from her natal settlement in what is now New York State, Kateri died in the Mohawk missionary village of Kahnawake, near Montreal, at the age of twenty-four. And yet, as her well-documented acts of Christian piety attest, Kateri was an ardent Catholic. And she made Indigenous meanings of Christianity.⁵

Because of her deep Catholic faith, Kateri was largely isolated from her people and remains an ambivalent figure among the Mohawk, a growing number of whom are focused on the resurgence of Haudenosaunee spiritual teachings and nationalism.⁶ At the same time, Kateri is a source and symbol of strength to many Indigenous people, Mohawk and not. Indigenous Catholics, many of

them women, were key advocates for her canonization. And it was the healing of a young Lummi boy in Washington State from a potentially fatal skin infection that finally propelled Kateri to formal saintly status.⁷ This boy, Jake Finkbonner, together with his parents and Indigenous Catholics from across North America, was among the thousands who travelled to Rome to witness Kateri's canonization ceremony in person. So were several Kahnawa'kehro:non (Mohawk people of Kahnawake), including Alex McComber, whose late mother was a long-time devotee of Kateri's. For McComber, the significance of the ceremony extended beyond "the politics of religion" to the people of Kahnawake and "people of spirit." As he was cited in a newspaper article published the day of the canonization, "it makes me feel good knowing that so many indigenous peoples look to Kateri on that spiritual level: that faith, that strength, that positive spiritual energy."⁸

The title of this book, *Mixed Blessings*, is informed by the stories of people like Kateri Tekakwitha and the complex implications of her canonization.⁹ The book's cover image, a detail of a statue at the National Saint Kateri Tekakwitha Shrine, located at the Caughnawaga village site in Fonda, New York, where Kateri lived for several years in her youth, similarly invokes this layered and contested history.¹⁰ Though contributors do not discuss Kateri specifically, this collection is an interdisciplinary effort to explore the meanings and legacies that her living history so effectively limns. It asks how and why some Indigenous people historically aligned themselves with Christianity while others did not. It plumbs processes and politics of religious combination. And it reflects on the role of Christianity in Indigenous communities and Canada today. This is a timely endeavour. Current public discussions concerning the history of residential schools and attendant intergenerational trauma are a stark reminder of Christianity's core role in this country's ongoing colonial history.¹¹ From the time of early contact (indeed, before modern Canada itself), Christian missionaries of diverse denominations were deeply imbricated in efforts to alter the lifeways of Indigenous peoples in North America. Moreover, missionary outreach is ongoing in Indigenous Canada, as is the structural and symbolic violence of settler colonialism. At the same time, many Indigenous people continue to interpret and live Christianity in ways meaningful to them, just as others, and sometimes the same people, persist in the practice of specifically Indigenous forms of spirituality. Christianity, this collection illuminates, has proved a flexible, while always deeply freighted, site of colonial encounter and exchange.

This book is the outcome of a workshop organized by the editors, both of whom are historians of white settler heritage, during which participants spent

three days in close discussion of each other's work. Bringing together emerging and established scholars in history, Indigenous studies, religious studies, and theology, this workshop stimulated rich, sometimes difficult, dialogue about the details of Indigenous interactions with Christianity, diverse disciplinary approaches to the topic, and the pressing imperative of decolonization. Although contributors do not share any one single approach to the process, this project is nevertheless animated by a shared commitment to connect past and present. As editors, we are wary of making a facile claim to decolonization, an emergent process that "centers Indigenous methods, peoples, and lands" and, as contributor Denise Nadeau argues in her chapter here, that bears on Indigenous and settler peoples alike and is "profoundly different for both."¹² In engaging and promoting dialogue across disciplinary boundaries and between Indigenous and settler scholars, peoples, and methodologies, however, we understand and offer this project in a decolonizing spirit and aim to spark ongoing innovative investigation of Indigenous-Christian encounter in Canada.

The Study of Encounter

During recent decades, scholars of colonized territories outside of North America have dissected the intricate and powerful roles played by Christianity in the colonization and transformation of Indigenous societies. Challenging established narratives of the missionary-as-hero and the missionary-as-villain, these critical reappraisals of religious encounter have hinged on such concepts as cultural imperialism, hybridity, and, especially, Indigenous agency and action.¹³ More recently, scholarship about the United States, which on the surface shares so much with the Canadian story, has included similar innovative analysis of Indigenous-Christian encounter. A key work consolidating this shift is the volume *Native Americans, Christianity, and the Reshaping of the American Religious Landscape*.¹⁴ This book, like *Mixed Blessings*, had its seeds in a workshop. Editors Joel W. Martin and Mark A. Nicholas sought out leading scholars from several disciplines whose work they felt reflected a reappraisal of Indigenous-Christian interaction that had been underway in the United States for several years. As Martin explains in the introduction to the volume, although most scholars of American history readily recognize that Christianity and "Native American conversion is inextricably interwoven with a brutal history of colonialism and conquest," there has been a discernible shift towards examining the complex, and often contradictory, role of missionaries and Christianity in the construction of the Native American religious landscape.¹⁵

Some scholars of Canada have shared in such rethinking. In an innovative study of the life of one Innu youth taken from his home and then returned from

France by early-seventeenth-century Recollect missionaries, for example, religious studies scholar Emma Anderson helps shift interpretive focus from white missionary actors and categories to Indigenous peoples and perspectives.¹⁶ As historian Allan Greer illustrates in a compelling “dual biography” of Kateri/Catherine Tekakwitha and Jesuit missionary Claude Chauchetière, this shift in turn promotes deepened understanding of Indigenous and European actors alike.¹⁷ Other scholars of Canada similarly reject restrictive interpretations of religious encounter that reduce Indigenous interactions with Christianity, and conversion especially, to inevitable acts of assimilation or sheer survival strategy. Focusing on regions to the north and west, for example, studies by Kerry Abel (examining the Dene) and Susan Neylan (studying the Tsimshian) show how encounters were shaped by colonial power, Indigenous agency, and spiritual and political dynamics internal to specific Indigenous communities.¹⁸ Still other scholars have effectively examined encounter through the lens of individual Indigenous missionaries and converts.¹⁹ Most of this literature focuses on the early contact period and nineteenth-century contact zones.²⁰ There are some, however, including Muscogee (Creek) religious studies scholar James Treat, anthropologists Frédéric B. Laugrand, Jarich G. Oosten, and Clinton Westman, and the collaborative team of anthropologist Leslie A. Robertson and the Kwagu’ł Gix̱s̱am Clan, who have offered vital insights on more recent events, experiences, and memories of Indigenous interactions with Christianity.²¹

While such works provided important inspiration for this collection, they are few and far between in scholarship about Canada. On the whole, the place of Christianity remains somewhat peripheral to major narrative threads in Canadian Indigenous history and studies. Church historian John Webster Grant’s 1984 book, *Moon of Wintertime: Missionaries and the Indians of Canada in Encounter since 1534*, is still the sole overview text on the subject.²² Canadian historical literature, meanwhile, has tended to either overlook Christianity or reduce its role to one of two dichotomous poles: a wholesale instrument of colonialism or a force with little bearing on the “real” (read: economic and political) vectors of colonial exchange.²³ This volume, then, like the Canadian context more broadly, differs from the consolidation work undertaken by Martin and Nicholas. Where they set out to bring together specific leading scholars to reflect on an interpretive shift well underway in the United States, this book emerged from a gathering that aimed to gauge interdisciplinary interest and approaches to the topic in Canada. In this sense, readers should approach this collection as a reconnaissance project that seeks both to sketch out basic terrain and encourage ongoing research and dialogue.

Another critical issue sets this book, and Canadian scholarship, apart from studies of religious encounter in other colonial contexts. Over the past several

decades, and especially through the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRCC), awareness of the history of Indian residential schools in this country has grown. Canadians, and those studying Canada, have been forced to confront some of the most traumatic moments of Indigenous-Christian encounter in modern history. They must grapple with the TRCC's finding that church-run residential schools were a crucial institution in a wider government policy of cultural genocide that aimed to eliminate Aboriginal peoples as a distinct element in Canadian society.²⁴ In sharing these stories and analysis, the TRCC has helped produce a powerful narrative about religious encounter in Canada, a narrative in which commanding white missionaries suppress and abuse powerless Indigenous children, families, and communities.²⁵ Confronting the histories of violence and abuse associated with residential schools is critical to understanding the workings and living legacies of colonialism in Canada. Yet contributors here seek to complicate singular stories of powerful churches and powerless Indigenous subjects. Indeed, most scholars would now challenge the white colonizer/Indigenous victim binary that tends to be reproduced in the Canadian media's current coverage of residential schools.²⁶ In place of such dichotomous depictions, scholars of Indigenous-Christian interaction, including many in this volume, have increasingly stressed Indigenous agency and explored how Christianity had, and continues to have, real meaning for many Indigenous people. Such arguments, however, can ring hollow, even meaningless, when considered in relation to the experiences and testimonies of former residential schools students. It became apparent during the workshop that led to this collection and during the subsequent editing process that every scholar of Indigenous-Christian encounter in Canada, whether exploring interactions in the seventeenth century or the twenty-first, must reconcile his or her commitment to recognizing Indigenous agency, and the reality of Indigenous Christianities, with the traumatic histories of violence associated with Christian missionaries, churches, and the residential schools. This volume does not offer any single prescriptive method for resolving this tension. In taking up this challenge, however, this collection is concerned with exploring connections across time and with contemplating the roles and responsibilities of scholars of religious encounter.

Sites and Patterns of Encounter

This collection coheres around the concept of encounter. Dictionary definitions of this term carry a certain negative valence (the idea of collision, clash, and hostility) that resonates, in part, with Christianity's colonial histories and legacies.²⁷ Scholars have also engaged encounter as a power-laden process of exchange.²⁸ Not all contributors to this volume explicitly engage this formulation,

and some actively eschew it. Likewise, contributors employ a range of terminologies to identify Indigenous groups. Indeed, the dynamism of this collection derives from its wide-ranging composition and refusal to reduce analysis to any single interpretive approach.

This text is organized according to several shared sites of encounter. Part 1, “Communities in Encounter,” explores how Christianity shaped, often in unpredictable ways, the politics, identities, and organization of Indigenous communities in the past. Here, contributors emphasize how Indigenous communities and leaders interacted with representatives of Euro-Canadian Christianity, how these interactions were informed by particular contexts of colonialism, and how they informed dynamics within Indigenous communities themselves. Part 2, “Individuals in Encounter,” considers how specific individuals in the past – in this case, a white missionary wife, a prominent Métis leader, and a *nêhiyaw* (Cree) Anglican minister and leader – engaged Christianity in creative, even contradictory, ways. This approach allows for the examination of interactions with, and uses of, Christianity from a close, intimate perspective. Here, we learn about not only the political contexts that shape encounter but also the personal motivations and experiences that do so. Part 3 shifts the focus to a trio of present-day sites of exchange. “Contemporary Encounters” grapples directly with the challenge of acknowledging the complex living legacies of Christianity and colonialism among Indigenous peoples in Canada and actively contemplates strategies for reconciliation and decolonization.

Encounters of Power

While highlighting the distinctive nature of community, individual, and contemporary sites of encounter, *Mixed Blessings* simultaneously illuminates several shared patterns of encounter that extend across all three sites. First, contributors are united in the recognition that Indigenous interactions with Christianity were intimately shaped by colonial politics and struggles for power, both spiritual and political, in specific contexts of exchange. Over the past three decades, scholars have come increasingly to explore the political motivations inspiring Indigenous interactions with Christianity.²⁹ While this marks a welcome move away from casting Indigenous converts to Christianity in the role of passive “dupes,” it has also tended to reduce Indigenous response to the pragmatic, parsing the spiritual and the political in a way not in keeping with Indigenous worldviews.³⁰ Chapters in this book reveal that the political and the spiritual were and remain interwoven, and responses by Indigenous peoples to Christianity were shaped by searches for political and spiritual power alike.³¹

This search for power did not and does not occur in a vacuum. In the opening chapter of this volume, for instance, historian Timothy Pearson examines

Indigenous-Catholic interactions in the seventeenth-century northeast through the lens of ritual. Drawing carefully on Jesuit records and other colonial documents, Pearson finds a world animated on all sides by “powerful spiritual forces, potentially both divine and dangerous.” For French missionaries and Huron and Algonquin people alike, he argues, “ritual contributed to the creation of real and metaphorical spaces where people experienced the sacred and negotiated religious and social differences.”³² In this context, religious expression was a process of individual and community definition and thus clearly a political process. Ethnohistorian Amanda Fehr’s chapter about the Stó:lō in southwestern British Columbia in the 1930s advances a similar argument. With the reserve system and the Indian Act as a backdrop, Fehr argues that Stó:lō leaders looked to the I:yem memorial, a Catholic monument, as a way to empower themselves and their community. She underscores, at the same time, that Stó:lō community and identity were in no way static, monolithic entities. In Chapter 7, religious studies scholar Siphwiwe Dube reiterates that encounters with Christianity should never be seen as neutral. In questioning the role of Christian churches, and of Christian discourse more broadly, in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Dube brings into relief the same conundrum faced by the Huron and Algonquin in the seventeenth century and the Stó:lō in the 1930s: that it is nearly impossible to separate the “message” of Christianity from the colonial context in which it is delivered. For Dube, recognition of this conundrum, and the relationship between colonialism and Christianity, is critical if Indigenous and settler peoples in Canada are to move towards a more constructive spiritual and political relationship.

While this emphasis on the political forces framing encounters between Christianity and Indigenous communities is prevalent in most chapters, no contributors reduce the story to one informed by political concerns alone. In fact, one of the novel features of this collection is the concern for taking more seriously the role of spiritual experiences and knowledge in academic writing about Indigenous peoples, Christianity, and colonialism more broadly. At the workshop that led to this collection, some contributors characterized spirituality, both Indigenous and Christian, as something of a “technology” that was, along with furs and firearms, exchanged between European and Indigenous peoples. Writing from her perspective as a historian, Elizabeth Elbourne presents a fruitful framework for how to explore this dynamic. Focusing on Haudenosaunee interactions with Christianity, and Anglicanism specifically, from the late eighteenth century to the early nineteenth century, Elbourne argues that Christianity was seen as a force that had spiritual, political, and economic significance. The Haudenosaunee, argues Elbourne, saw Anglicanism as a source of spiritual power (accessible through baptisms and other rituals)

and a source of secular power that granted them access to military, political, and economic support from the British. She argues, further, that the Haudenosaunee saw danger in Christianity, believing that Christian texts and particularly the Bible could be damaging to the internal strength and unity of their communities. Elbourne explains that for many Haudenosaunee, the encounter with Christianity was mainly about “managing” the religion. The goal of this management was to gain the benefit of the “powers” while avoiding the pitfalls or the “dangers” of Christianity. This framework moves scholarship away from a focus on the question of Indigenous agency alone (did Indigenous people have the ability to respond to Christianity?) and turns our attention to specific methods (how did Indigenous people use their agency to respond?), doing so in a way that more accurately reflects the connected nature of spirituality and politics in Indigenous contexts.

Indigenous studies scholar Tasha Beeds illustrates this interconnectedness in her study of early-twentieth-century *nêhiyaw* Anglican minister Edward Ahenakew. Situating Ahenakew in the context of acute colonial violence and *nêhiyawî-mâmitonêyihcikan* (Cree consciousness/thinking) alike, Beeds demonstrates how Ahenakew contributed to the “preservation of *nêhiyawîwin*” (Greeness) through his engagement with Anglicanism, the English language, and settler education and scholarship. In situating her own self and scholarship within *nêhiyawî-mâmitonêyihcikan* and language, Beeds, who is of *nêhiyaw* (Cree) Métis and Caribbean ancestry, contributes to this process of preservation and resurgence. For Heiltsuk theologian and United Church of Canada minister Carmen Lansdowne, whose chapter is a revealing personal reflection on her experience conducting research in missionary archives, the ultimate goal is to articulate Indigenous Christian theologies. How Indigenous people have managed and experienced the spiritual and political powers of Christianity, and how we as scholars can and should describe this process, are constant themes throughout this book.

Transnational Encounters

Given the global spread of both Christianity and European colonialism during the past several hundred years, all of the chapters in this collection also implicitly or explicitly situate their subjects in a transnational context. That is to say, all of the chapters recognize that encounters between Indigenous peoples and Christianity were shaped by, and shaped, forces and events that extended beyond the local region or national boundaries of Canada. This recognition, broadly informed by a range of scholarship falling under the banner of post-colonial theory, is reflected to varying degrees throughout the chapters in this volume.³³

Historian Cecilia Morgan's chapter on Eliza Field Jones (the English wife of Ojibwa missionary Kahkewaquonaby/Peter Jones), for instance, sheds light on how people that were part of this encounter were living transnational lives themselves. In Morgan's chapter we see that both husband and wife, but especially Eliza, approached the task of mission work in Upper Canada from a transnational (and, more specifically, transatlantic) perspective. Although focused on cultivating Indigenous Christians in Canada, both husband and wife were closely supported and informed by family members and cultural expectations in imperial Britain. For this missionary couple, the encounter between Indigenous and Christian worlds was at once intimate and international, local and global.

Two more historians, Jean-François Bélisle and Nicole St-Onge, likewise employ a transnational and comparative history approach to offer a fresh interpretation of Métis leader Louis Riel leading up to the 1885 North-West Resistance or Rebellion. By re-reading Riel's writings with an eye to the influence of broader hemispheric processes on his thought, the chapter attempts to move beyond the dichotomous depiction of Riel as either political leader or religious visionary. Instead, Bélisle and St-Onge argue that Riel was constructing a "church-state" that reflected not only the neo-ultramontane ideas then current in French Canada, but also those of García Moreno, Ecuadorian statesman and creator of the most comprehensive church-state society in the nineteenth century. By linking Riel with this Ecuadorian context, while also exploring what they describe as the parallel historical example of the Mayan free state known as Cruzob, Bélisle and St-Onge argue that Riel was not unique, nor was his resistance simply the expression of an isolated political or messianic movement. Rather, they suggest that Riel saw himself not just as a Métis nationalist, a champion of western Canadian rights, or an anti-colonial revolutionary, but as a leader in a hemispheric movement to construct a theocratic ultramontane state in the Canadian Northwest. Like Kateri's canonization in Rome or the shrine dedicated to her in Fonda, New York, this repositioning of Riel in a hemispheric context underscores that Indigenous encounters with Christianity were closely interconnected with ideas, events, people, and power outside of Canada as well as inside.

Methodological Encounters

All contributors to this collection recognize that Christianity, and its imbrication in European and Canadian colonialism, has had deep, often devastating, effects on Indigenous people and communities in contemporary Canada. The legacies of the residential school system has made it clear that many of the struggles that Indigenous peoples are facing in Canada today are directly linked

to a long history of colonialism at the hands of Christian missionaries and the Canadian state. However, as became evident during the workshop leading up to this publication, and as we hope is revealed in this book, the actual history of the missionary enterprise is far more complex than first imagined. Encounters between missionaries and Indigenous peoples were multifaceted and replete with contradiction and surprising innovation. As noted above, a challenge for the reader of this collection – and a constant point of discussion at our original workshop – is how to explain (and perhaps reconcile) the subtlety and diversity of Indigenous responses to Christianity while simultaneously recognizing the painful living legacies of Christian missions and colonialism in Canada. Contributors themselves navigate this tension through the application of several distinct, sometimes conflicting, methodologies.

For many of the historians here, focus falls on that space that literary critic Mary-Louise Pratt has influentially dubbed the “contact zone,” a site of colonial encounter shot through with uneven relations of power but also animated by agency and contingency on all sides.³⁴ These historians, further, focus their efforts predominantly on archival research and evidence. Contributors readily recognize the difficulty of accessing Indigenous voices and experiences, especially spiritual ones, in a documentary record overwhelmingly produced by white male missionaries and colonial officials (and populated also by Indigenous “elites” such as the famed Brant family in the case of Elizabeth Elbourne’s chapter). Engaging such sources, Elbourne avers, requires humility. Still, while they acknowledge the limitations of their sources, many here are committed to reading archival records both for what they reveal and for what they obscure. As noted, Bélisle and St-Onge offer fresh perspective on the spiritual state that Riel envisioned by revisiting his abundant writings and positioning them in the context of consonant Catholic developments in Latin America. Morgan similarly situates Eliza Field Jones in a transatlantic context and finds in writings like Jones’s diaries and an 1838 memoir of her niece, Elizabeth Jones, a perspective that at once reproduces and undermines dualism current in other contemporary missionary texts. Working with a much more limited source base, Pearson elects to clearly foreground the contingency of the Jesuit records on which he is dependent by distinguishing between “ritual as it appears in text” and “ritual as it may have originally been performed.” Though her focus is the much more recent past, and she draws on oral as well as archival sources, ethnohistorian Fehr is likewise explicit, and effective, in pointing out the inevitably partial nature of her interpretation.

Other contributors are more explicit in their challenge of established Western research and teaching methods. Denise Nadeau, for example, offers insight into

the context of university pedagogy, detailing her efforts to help decolonize the field of religious studies by incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing and learning into an undergraduate course on Indigenous traditions, women, and colonialism. Nadeau explains that while she engaged contact zone scholarship in early iterations of her course, she found that this literature functioned to turn focus back onto the colonizer rather than foregrounding generative Indigenous agency and action. Her more recent teaching, by contrast, has explicitly centred the historical experiences and contemporary resurgence work and writings of Indigenous women. While the class that this chapter reflects on does not contain “Christian” in the title, this piece is entirely germane to the topic of Indigenous-Christian encounter. It suggests how Christianity, both in the author’s own personal background as a theologian of mixed heritage and in the implicit assumptions and worldviews of other scholars and undergraduate students, continues to inform Indigenous-settler relations in Canada today. It deals directly with the challenge of how to engage students with the living legacies of historical Christian encounters discussed elsewhere in the volume and, through thoughtful and honest reflection on the author’s own teaching practice, offers insights on the process of decolonization that scholars and teachers in many fields stand to learn from.

Carmen Lansdowne’s chapter likewise offers personal reflections that both straddle and challenge disciplinary boundaries. Here, the author herself is both site and subject of analysis. Through the method of autoethnography, Lansdowne offers raw reflection on her experience of seeking out, and her pain and disappointment at not finding, Indigenous theologies in the written missionary record of the Methodist church on the Northwest Coast. Lansdowne’s chapter is in large measure a meditation on her discomfort and dissatisfaction with academic history – a discipline, she argues, that draws insufficient connection between past, present, and colonial power, and in the face of which she fears her autoethnographic reflections will be dismissed as too personal. Like both Lansdowne and Nadeau, Tasha Beeds opens her chapter by declaring her own social and spiritual location, an act through which she positions herself in place and within ties of relationship and responsibility. Beeds writes as “a woman of nêhiyaw Métis and mixed Caribbean ancestry” and situates her work intimately in the inseparable contexts of nêhiyaw Métis land and language.³⁵ She simultaneously draws on the theory of Indigenous scholars of other ancestry as well, stressing, as she did at the workshop that led to this volume, that Indigenous people are producers of knowledge, not simply subjects of study.

While Beeds, Lansdowne, and Nadeau engage Indigenous theories as well as methodologies, and the imprint of postcolonial concepts such as hybridity and

liminality are evident throughout the volume, most chapters in this collection are more applied than theoretical. By contrast, Sipiwe Dube's analysis of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRCC) draws on a range of philosophical and other theories to consider the role of Christian discourse (which he defines, in this case, as both Christian institutions and language) in addressing both aporia and atrocity in the TRCC. For Dube, theory creates potentially liberatory spaces to posit questions and possibilities that do not easily issue from either the historical record or the TRCC as currently articulated. He argues that Christian discourse as used in the TRCC has a double meaning: it is characterized and mobilized as both a colonial tool used in the residential schools to support assimilation and a language that offers hope, forgiveness, and reconciliation. In laying bare such ambiguity, an attribute he extends metaphorically by using an intentionally ambiguous writing style, Dube examines the relationship between Christianity and colonial power addressed in previous chapters. He openly questions whether and how the TRCC can contribute to the process of reconciliation given its use of a Christian discourse that is deeply implicated in colonialism. In so doing, Dube offers an important critical reading of the TRCC and further brings the story (or, better, stories) of Indigenous-Christian encounter into the twenty-first century.

Mixed Blessings

This collection neither aims for nor claims comprehensiveness, and there are gaps in regional, thematic, and temporal coverage. For example, the volume does not consider Indigenous-Christian exchange in the North or the Maritimes, nor does it deal with relatively recent and widespread Indigenous interactions with Pentecostal, Evangelical, and charismatic forms of Christianity or with non-Christian faiths such as the Baha'i religion.³⁶ Rather than providing comprehensive coverage, this collection seeks to convey the energy and dynamism of a specific set of interdisciplinary conversations and case studies, and to spark, in the process, ongoing research and dialogue.

The distinct sites and common patterns of encounter illuminated throughout the pages that follow offer a fresh way forward. Together, the community, individual, and contemporary sites of encounter considered in this collection confirm the exceedingly complex and charged nature of Indigenous-Christian interactions in Canada (interactions, these chapters simultaneously reveal, that were connected with events and processes outside Canada as well). From the moment European Christian missionaries arrived in the territories now known as Canada, encounters were informed by colonial power and Indigenous efforts to engage with new religious frameworks in a way that would allow them to retain, or even enhance, their own spiritual and political strength. These complex

relations persist. The legacies of residential schools, in particular, reminds us that along with living histories of Indigenous agency, resistance, and resurgence are those of colonial violence and affiliated cultural loss and community instability. The challenge for scholars, and the one taken up by this book, is to acknowledge and contemplate connections between these complex pasts and presents and, in so doing, promote a more complete understanding of Indigenous encounters with Christianity in Canada.

Notes

- 1 “Homily of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI,” Saint Peter’s Square, 21 October 2012, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20121021_canonizzazioni.html.
- 2 For a succinct overview of church apologies, residential school history, and current context, including the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, see Erin Hanson, “The Residential School System,” *Indigenous Foundations, Arts, UBC*, <http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/home/government-policy/the-residential-school-system.html>.
- 3 Reporter Eric Reguly employed the language of atonement explicitly: “In An Act of Atonement, Vatican makes Kateri Tekakwitha First Native Canadian Saint,” *Globe and Mail*, 21 October 2012, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/in-an-act-of-atonement-vatican-makes-kateri-tekakwitha-the-first-native-canadian-saint/article4626652/>. Kateri’s canonization drew extensive media coverage from outlets ranging from *CBC News*, *BBC News*, and the *New York Times* to *The Eastern Door* [Kahnawake], the *Montreal Gazette*, and *Indian Country Today*.
- 4 For a thorough biography and analysis of Jesuit hagiography and settler myth making in relation to Kateri, see Allan Greer, *Mohawk Saint: Catherine Tekakwitha and the Jesuits* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). See also Nancy Shoemaker, “Kateri Tekakwitha’s Tortuous Path to Sainthood,” in *In the Days of Our Grandmothers: A Reader in Aboriginal Women’s History in Canada*, ed. Mary-Ellen Kelm and Lorna Townsend (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 93–116. For a Mohawk perspective, see Darren Bonaparte, *A Lily among Thorns: The Mohawk Repatriation of Kateri Tekahkwí:tha* (Akwasasne, QC: Wampum Chronicles, 2009).
- 5 Religious studies scholar Michael McNally uses the language of “making meaning” (in contrast to strictly “making do”): *Ojibwe Singers: Hymns, Grief, and a Native Culture in Motion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 6.
- 6 See the observations of Mohawk scholar Orenda Boucher cited in Cordelia Hebblethwaite, “Kateri Tekakwitha: First Catholic Native American saint,” *BBC News Magazine*, 21 October 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-19996957>. See also Christina Colizza, “A Mixed Blessing: Kahnawake Reacts to Kateri Tekakwitha’s Canonization,” *McGill Daily*, 14 November 2012, <http://www.mcgilldaily.com/2012/11/a-mixed-blessing/>. For context on and call for resurgence of Indigenous (and, more specifically, Mohawk) nationalism, see the work of Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred: *Heeding the Voices of Our Ancestors: Kahnawake Mohawk Politics and the Rise of Native Nationalism* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 1995); *Peace, Power, and Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 1999); *Wasáse: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2005). See also the work of Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life across the Borders of Nation States* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).