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Responsibility for Creation

Sarah E. Brown



Figure 1 - Great Mother of the Ojibway (Nokomis 2006-2015)

When I heard the statement that, “...God is relationships...”, it was the first time I felt a connection to the concept of the existence of God in over nine years (Mary-Phillip 2019, personal communication). Incorporating this definition of God into my worldview has necessitated the understanding that my ‘relationships’ are not exclusive to my close friends and loved ones but are inclusive of ‘relationships’ I share with neighbours, strangers, communities around the globe as well as the environment which surrounds me. Utilizing this definition of God when exploring issues related to climate change highlights the importance of the responsibility we have as human beings to engage in a reciprocal relationship with our environment. Historically, human beings have taken what they needed from the Earth in the form of resources but have not been cognisant of what has been given to the Earth which takes the form of pollution and waste. Dahill (2016) writes, “...our ongoing collective heedlessness to the lives and deaths of the creatures and ecosystems around us, and of the planet that supports us, has convinced me that...we need permission to see and love the natural world precisely as a...manifestation of God...” (Dahill 2016 p. 29). In order to right our relationship with this ‘manifestation of God’ we need to recognize that we have been participating in an abusive one-sided relationship with our environment and take responsibility for the health of the Earth.

This paper will draw connections between Indigenous art, religious texts and the Earth Charter in order to reveal the importance of our interconnectedness with the

environment and provide potential ways in which we can live out our relationship to God. First, a painting by the Indigenous artist, Nokomis will be presented as the art piece which is representative of the interconnectedness of humankind and the environment along with how this depiction connects to what is written in the Earth Charter. Next, a Bible passage will be explored which enriches the understanding and conversation about the selected art piece which will also be connected to what is written in the Earth Charter. To conclude, a reflection on how this impacts the practice of psychotherapy within a multicultural Canadian context will be explored. To begin, it is important to start with an understanding of Indigenous spirituality as depicted in Nokomis' painting *Great Mother of the Ojibway*.

The climate emergency and the importance of environmental action is a salient issue for North Americans, and the impact on the national collective unconscious is reflected in artwork created by Canadian artists. A community that is heavily impacted by the harm being done to our planet is the Indigenous Peoples of Canada. Indigenous spirituality is closely tied to the land and therefore the health of the land is connected to the health of the people. "...The environment is not external...it flows in and through the body...the body and the environment are changing, mutually effecting each other..." (Roosvall & Tegelberg 2013 p.397). Therefore, I believe observing Indigenous art is an important part of learning about humankind's relationship and responsibility for the environment.

The art piece that I felt was representative of this relationship is Nokomis' painting, *Great Mother of the Ojibway*. In her explanation of her work, she writes, "...it's a painting that I did of my namesake the Great Mother of the Ojibwa. She was the [woman] who recreated the world when it was flooded by spiteful water spirits..." (Nokomis 2006-15). When looking at the painting, the viewer sees that Nokomis is surrounded by a blue background as well as blue figures in the likeness of an otter, a duck and a beaver. These 'spirits' are not separate from Nokomis' body in the painting but are inseparable from her being. This is symbolic of the inseparable relationship between human beings and their environment. This connectivity is also stressed within the Earth Charter under the heading: Respect and Care for Community of Life. It states that we must, "...recognize that all beings are interdependent, and every form of life has value regardless of its worth to human beings..." (Earth Charter 2016). Due to the fact that we have a relationship with the Earth, we also have ways of communicating with the Earth as well ways the Earth communicates its needs to us. An example of this can be taken from the religious text of the Bible.

The theological passage which connects to this painting is Job 12:7-10 (NIV) which reads, "...But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish in the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind...". The life and breath of every living creature is at stake when we are discussing the health of our environment. This manifestation of God, as previously discussed, has been attempting to communicate with us what it needs in a multitude of ways. We have discussed many of these in class such as the bleaching of the coral reefs, rising of sea levels and the increase in the severity of major storms. One of the largest indicators of our environmental abuse is evidenced by the 'greenhouse gas effect' in which human activity has exacerbated the creation of, "... certain molecules in our atmosphere – most notably carbon dioxide – [which] block some of the infrared radiation from escaping [from Earth's atmosphere], thus trapping some of the heat and warming the planet (Sakimoto 2018 p.1). With all of these considered, we must recognize that we are responsible for the decline in the health of our beloved environment. It is our responsibility

to repair this relationship. In the Earth Charter this is also stated as, “...accept that the right to own, manage, and use natural resources comes the duty to prevent environmental harm and to protect the rights of the people...” (Earth Charter 2016). Framing our relationship to the environment as God has the ability to unite us with the ‘other’ towards one common goal.

Concepts from Indigenous spirituality are aligned with what is outlined in the Earth Charter, but as we have learned in class, “...it is often the people who contribute the least to climate change who are affected the most...” (Mary-Phillip 2019, personal communication). The largest contributors to pollution are not found in small communities but within large industries and corporations which are motivated by capitalism. This impacts the practice of psychotherapy in a Canadian context since many clients may be experiencing eco-anxiety along with disillusionment with figures of authority who have vowed to take action against climate change but have failed to do so. Validating that this deteriorating relationship with the manifestation of God is extremely stressful and finding grassroots organizations that can be a resource for these clients could potentially be a very important part of therapy. I believe that understanding our interconnectedness with our surroundings as well as listening to what the Earth is communicating to us is vital to us understanding our responsibility and role, we have to work towards healing this manifestation of God.

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