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# What Does Shalom Mean?

## Comparing Anabaptist and Indigenous Perspectives

Randolph Haluza-DeLay

Peacemaking, that important characteristic of Anabaptist praxis, has been increasingly referred to as *shalom* in recent years. This essay probes what might be meant by the term through comparing the book-length works on shalom of Mennonite theologian Perry Yoder and Indigenous scholar Randy Woodley. Yoder calls shalom “the Bible’s word for salvation, justice, and peace.”<sup>1</sup> Woodley argues for a conception of shalom that extends beyond the realm of humanity to include the entire “community of creation.”<sup>2</sup> As a social scientist, I am interested in how shalom can be applied to living well together in this land. Toward this end, engaging the Indigenous perspective will be particularly helpful for non-Indigenous Mennonites to develop broader notions of discipleship, faith, and peacemaking, especially in light of both Indigenous-settler reconciliation and the global ecological crisis.<sup>3</sup> Yoder’s approach—while a helpful treatise on shalom—remains limited to the levels of human society and existent political structure.

In the phrase “living well together in this land,” ecological sustainability and social justice are intrinsically and inextricably linked, with an open-endedness in terms of working toward a just sustainability.<sup>4</sup> The words encourage us to figure out such questions as “Who is the implied ‘we’?” or “What does ‘living

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1 Perry B. Yoder, *Shalom: The Bible’s Word for Salvation, Justice, and Peace* (Napanea, IN: Evangel, 1987).

2 Randy Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012).

3 For the purpose of deliberate focus on these two specific thinkers and their eminently accessible works, this essay will not examine Jewish understandings of shalom.

4 As a term, “just sustainability” was coined by Julian Agyeman to describe a proactive and normative goal for human societies in terms of both justice and sustainability. See

well’ and ‘living well *together*’ mean?” The components of this guiding principle—living well, together, in the land—all require attention primarily to actual lived relations. As does the concept of *shalom*. Lived relations occur in places.<sup>5</sup> We do not live in abstractions—or, at least, ideas and principles have to be practically enacted. As anthropologist Clifford Geertz asserts, “No one lives in the world in general.”<sup>6</sup> And so a concept like *shalom* or just sustainability becomes what philosopher Charles Taylor calls a “strong evaluation”—an inescapable moral framework of values and practices that orients our relations in real time in a present that leads toward a future.

In Christian terms, we are required to evaluate: Do these actions bring about the wholeness of relations that characterizes *shalom* in the biblical narrative?<sup>7</sup> *Shalom* is the foundation of the Christian message, the intended purpose of the language about the kingdom of God. As Brueggemann writes:

That persistent vision of joy, well-being, harmony, and prosperity is not captured in any single word or idea in the Bible; a cluster of words is required to express its many dimensions and subtle nuances: love, loyalty, truth, grace, salvation, justice, blessings, righteousness. But the term that in recent discussions has been used to summarize that controlling vision is *shalom*.<sup>8</sup>

Woodley will help Anabaptists be more faithful to a mission of reconciliation, primarily because he emphasizes that *shalom* requires decolonization and that *shalom* needs to be extended beyond the human portions of the entire community of creation. Yoder may value creation-care and likely would not disagree about decolonization, but he does not make these notions evident. In-

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Julian Agyeman et al., *Just Sustainabilities: Development in an Unequal World* (London: Earthscan/MIT Press, 2002).

5 Even “cyberspace” is geographically constituted. Web-based relations are only a portion of our relations. Even in the extreme case of lockdowns during the Covid-19 pandemic, relatively few people interacted to a greater extent with new people online than they did with people they already knew through workplaces, schools, homes, and so on. People also felt considerable dis-location during the pandemic. Even a practice such as ordering groceries online still requires locally available delivery, material food to arrive, and a place to consume it. Any item ordered from a “virtual” store is constructed in some other physical place. Materiality still matters.

6 Geertz, Clifford, “Afterword: No One Lives in the World in General,” *Senses of Place*, eds. Stephen Feld and Keith H. Basso (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1996), 262.

7 Charles Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, Philosophical Papers 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985). For an extended discussion, see Randolph Haluza-Del-Lay et al., “That We May Live Well Together in the Land . . . : Place Pluralism and Just Sustainability in Canadian Studies,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 47, no. 3 (2014), 226–56.

8 Walter Brueggemann, *Peace* (St Louis: Chalice, 2001), 14.

stead, he focuses very specifically on the normative bases of socioeconomic and political structures and how, in God's design, such structures are intended to create shalom. Woodley significantly extends this conceptualization of shalom and perhaps challenges a reformist notion that shalom can be easily manifested within a liberal, capitalist, and Euro-Western cultural context.

## Shalom as Described by Yoder and Woodley

Yoder's *Shalom: The Bible's Word for Salvation, Justice, and Peace* and Woodley's *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision* are both short (146 and 166 pages, respectively) and eminently accessible works. Both books can and have been used for adult reading groups and university classes. Both authors are or have been college and seminary professors in the United States, and both have other identities as well that help provide a transnational perspective: Yoder is a Mennonite theologian (now retired), and Woodley is a Cherokee biblical scholar. Yoder's book, as he explains in the preface, is derived from teaching a Bethel College course in the early 1980s.<sup>9</sup> A few years after the course, his family spent time in the Philippines because he was concerned that "*peace is a middle class luxury, maybe even a Western middle-class luxury.*"<sup>10</sup> Woodley's book began as a doctoral dissertation on "the Harmony Way," which he describes as a "shared life-concept that is widespread among Native Americans" and compares favorably to the concept of shalom.<sup>11</sup> And while there is no universal "Native American" (sic) culture, Woodley, like many Indigenous scholars, asserts that there are common Indigenous values or orientations. He believes his book represents one of the expressions of a globalizing, non-European Christianity.

Consistent with his Indigenous cultural lens, in his explication of biblical principles and narratives Woodley prioritizes place over history and orthopraxy (*good* relations instead of *right* relations) over orthodoxy (practice over doctrine). He draws on biblical exegesis and on teaching narratives from various North Indigenous communities. My experience of using the book with Canadian students in senior social science seminar courses at a Canadian Christian university was that Woodley often challenged their conception of Christianity as they had learned it, and because of this some students resisted the book. While Yoder's book is a challenge to reform existing society, Woodley's is a deeper, cultural challenge. He asks readers to alter their thinking, to—in Cree education scholar

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<sup>9</sup> Although Yoder's *Shalom* has been reissued (most recently in 2017), I will be using the original 1987 edition here since it was the one used for an AMBS short-course I took some ten years ago.

<sup>10</sup> Yoder, *Shalom*, 3 (italics in the original).

<sup>11</sup> Woodley, *Shalom*, xiii.

Marie Battiste’s terminology—examine their “cognitive imperialism,” a reference to European-derived (“Western”) cultural ways of knowing having become the standard for knowledge and therefore education, religion, and other ways of teaching about, acting in, and knowing the world.<sup>12</sup>

Colonized peoples and settlers alike have marinated in the colonial ways of thinking and structuring relations between peoples. While “decolonization” can mean the revolutionary movements that removed colonial governments in the twentieth century,<sup>13</sup> Woodley means more by the term—reversing the Eurocentric capture of our minds, sociopolitical and economic systems, and relations between peoples. Yoder also draws heavily on the Hebrew narratives in the Old Testament but argues primarily for a more just social order. Such sociopolitical change is no easy matter, but, as shall be detailed later, it is expanded by the cultural, cognitive, and ontological transformations for which Woodley asks.

Shalom is the central message of the scriptures for both Yoder and Woodley; it is God’s *true* intention for God’s creation. For both scholars, *shalom* is a broad and complex term meaning all that is good, true, just, whole, and leads to wholeness and good relations between God, humans, and other-than human parts of creation. While Yoder tends to use the language of “justice,” Woodley tends to use the language of “harmony.” Both refer to shalom as a Hebrew term comparable to the Greek *eirēnē* and point out that the latter is often translated in the New Testament as “righteousness” but should mean justice and wholeness as well.

Shalom has three “shades of meaning” according to Yoder. “First, it can refer to a material and physical state of affairs, this being its most frequent usage. It can also refer to relationships, and here it comes closest in meaning to the English word *peace*. And finally it also has a moral sense, which is its least frequent meaning.”<sup>14</sup> The first meaning asserts that all people should have their physical needs met. The second is wider and more positive—akin to the notion of peace as not merely the absence of war but rather as processes of maintaining an appropriate goodness in society and well-being for all. The third meaning refers to character and integrity and is foundational to the collective manifestation of shalom.

These three meanings are linked in practice. Shalom is not operating if material needs are not met, injustice exists, and moral integrity and well-being are not present. Yoder argues that the Greek term *eirēnē* in the New Testament (NT) adds a theological dimension—that shalom involves the work of Christ—

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12 Marie Battiste, *Decolonizing Education: Nourishing the Learning Spirit* (Saskatoon: Purlich, 2013).

13 This is the entirety of the meaning of the term in Dane Kennedy, *Decolonization: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

14 Yoder, *Shalom*, 10–11.

to what has so far seemed mostly sociological. It is at this point in his discussion that Yoder adds one of only two references in the book that go beyond the human or human-divine nexus: he commends Colossians 1 as the best NT expression of shalom.<sup>15</sup> In this passage, Christ is the source of shalom; his is the work of “making peace,” and its effect is for more than humanity—it is for the entirety of the universe.

Yoder continues to clarify his understandings of both shalom and justice. Justice is basic to shalom, he says, but shalom goes deeper, certainly beyond both retributive and distributive justice. Shalom is *liberation* of any who are caught in bondage, referring to both the collective and physical as well as the spiritual dimensions of being. The material and spiritual, he notes, are inextricable in the Hebrew worldview. “Passages in the New Testament make clear that the result of the atonement is not only our personal liberation from sin’s bondage into the realm of the lordship of Jesus. This liberation is also marked by the appearance of a new social order which embodies the values of Jesus’ teachings and life.”<sup>16</sup>

In several chapters, Yoder discusses the role of law, the state, and prophets (inspired critics of social structures that fail to create shalom). His discussion shows clearly the insufficiency of charity; shalom requires social systems that provide for well-being, not just charity that ameliorates societal inadequacies. According to Yoder, Jesus’s message was one of social transformation, because if it were not, his “hard sayings” would be dismissible as inapplicable to the present world, and the remaining other-worldly spiritualized message would fit neither the *shalom* nor *eirēnē* meanings of the text. For Yoder, the gospel is about conversion to a new way of life—not conversion to “Jesus” but to Jesus’s way of the shalomic kingdom of God.

Woodley begins with a preface that emphasizes the congruence of the Harmony Way with the biblical sense of shalom—as a “way of living” that includes “practical steps” for “specific action when the harmony or shalom is broken . . . [with] justice, restoration, and continuous right living as their goal.”<sup>17</sup> “Words used to translate *shalem* [the “word origin of *shalom*”] in the NASB,” he notes, “include close, ease, favorable, friend, friendly terms, friends, greet, greeted, health, peace, peaceably, peaceful, peacefully, perfect peace, prosperity, safe,

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15 Particularly the Christological hymn in Colossians 1:15–21 and the following verses wherein the reconciliation wrought by “making peace” via the cross is for “all things.” From this passage, I have tried to conceptualize “making peace with all creation” as an ecological imaginary (expanding Taylor’s [*Human Agency and Language*] explication of a “social imaginary” as the way we imagine and then organize our relations as a society). See Randolph Haluza-DeLay, “Making Peace with All Creation,” *Peace Review* 24, no. 2 (2012): 171–78.

16 Yoder, *Shalom*, 67.

17 Woodley, *Shalom*, xv.

safely, safety, secure, trusted, welfare, well, well-being, and wholly.”<sup>18</sup> Most importantly, both shalom and Harmony Way “originate as *the* right path for living, being viewed as a gift from the Creator.”<sup>19</sup> Shalom is the way life is meant to be, fundamentally as “right relations.”

From the very beginning of his book, Woodley includes “human beings, animals, and plants” in our relationships. Shalom is “greater than the sum of its parts” (the subtitle of the first chapter), originates in God, and is universally expected of all humanity. We can tell when it is being practiced because it is “always tested on the margins of a society and revealed by how the poor, oppressed, disempowered, and needy are treated.”<sup>20</sup>

After describing shalom, Woodley moves into a biblical exegesis that connects first and second testaments and then reframes “the kingdom of God” as “the community of all creation.” This is God’s “first discourse”—that all creation is connected and that “the Scriptures are written from a worldview that does not easily categorize creation into animate and inanimate realities.”<sup>21</sup> In fact, Woodley believes “less relational views of reciprocity between humans and creation are modern misunderstandings, and they have everything to do with modern humanity’s alienation from creation.”<sup>22</sup>

These are not new thoughts; early eco-theology, even from American Evangelical perspectives, demonstrated the similarity between ancient Hebrew and North American Indigenous perspectives of the land and the interrelations of land, Creator, and humans.<sup>23</sup> Many critics inside and outside faith traditions have charged Christianity—*Western, European* Christianity specifically—as dominating and damaging nature, especially as the faith tradition has taken on the characteristics of modernity.<sup>24</sup>

In contrast to what he calls this type of Christianity’s “typically anthropocentric and utilitarian orientation” that excludes most everyday material things from moral consideration, Woodley argues, “As people of faith, we should view

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18 Woodley, 10.

19 Woodley, xv.

20 Woodley, 15

21 Woodley, 47.

22 Woodley, 51.

23 Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, *A Worldly Spirituality: The Call to Redeem Life on Earth* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984).

24 Muslim scholar Seyyed Hossein Nasr refuted the universal claim about Christianity in 1968: “Neither Christian Armenia nor Ethiopia nor even Christian Eastern Europe gave rise to that science and technology which in the hands of secular man has led to the devastation of the globe.” See Nasr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis in Modern Man* (first published 1968), cited in Fazlun Khalid, *Signs on the Earth: Islam, Modernity and the Climate Crisis* (Leicestershire, UK: Kube Publishing, 2019), 20.

every drop of oil . . . [among other things] . . . with a theological eye.”<sup>25</sup> That we do not means our religious worldview is unacceptably contained and only some things are considered worth being religious about. This would not be the way Indigenous religiosity sees the world. Nor is it biblical. Drawing on John, Colossians, Hebrews, and more, Woodley shows the gospel message as shalom for all creation, not just the human portion. Furthermore, he emphasizes the relationality of all parts of the creation, and, because of this, he valorizes the material world.

Woodley then begins to present Indigenous readings of scriptures and theological constructs. Sin, for example, is disruption of relations, and restoration of relations is what the gospel is about. The greatest disruption of relations, Woodley says, was European colonization of the Americas, resulting in a sort of permanent PTSD among Indigenous peoples and internalization of superiority among European settlers and those who came later.<sup>26</sup> Because of colonialism’s underlying mentality and enduring societal structures, shalom requires all people to expend effort to decolonize, to “remove the systemic relationships embedded in colonialism.”<sup>27</sup> And while this would likely correspond to Yoder’s emphasis on shalom as requiring changed social structures, Yoder’s silence on colonialism, specifically, as central to this needed change means that readers and shalom-seekers will miss this crucial and non-shalomic facet of the contemporary world.

Most Indigenous scholars argue that the current politics of “reconciliation” have merely shifted dialogue without substantive change to the existing power relations and other products of colonialism.<sup>28</sup> Decolonization needs to reach into the very center of Christian faith, even to decolonizing the way that the

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25 Nasr cited in Khalid, 52. This is comparable to a point made by a previous Roman Catholic bishop in a pastoral letter about the Alberta oil sands. After a short summary, Bishop Bouchard concluded, “Any one of the above destructive effects provokes moral concern, but it is when the damaging effects are all added together that the moral legitimacy of tar sands production is challenged.” This conclusion generated no little controversy (Nathan Kowalsky and Randolph Haluza-DeLay, “‘This Is Oil Country’: The Tar Sands and Jacques Ellul’s Theory of Technology,” *Environmental Ethics* 37, no. 1 [2015]: 75–97).

26 In my experience, it is usually around this point that some students begin to react strongly to Woodley’s call for *them* to change, to decolonize, so that Indigenous peoples also can flourish and that if they do not change, reconciliation, which is at the heart of the gospel, cannot occur. It has sometimes gotten to the point where I have reminded the students that this is a Christian brother whom they are resisting and that, presumably, the Holy Spirit is active in him also.

27 Woodley, *Shalom*, 92.

28 Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

Bible has been used to oppress.<sup>29</sup> This also means recognizing, then valuing, the witness of the Holy Spirit in other, non-European cultures. Bravely, Mennonite Church Canada has allowed that “Indigenous intrusion troubles the house”<sup>30</sup> and, to some degree, has welcomed the intrusion by continuing to support work on Indigenous relations.

Both the pain of the colonized and the avoidance of the colonizer can become retreats into inaction. Any of those in the dominant group(s) who are unwilling to yield their own privileges (even to the point that structures once benefitting them no longer do so) cannot become true allies or agents of shalom.<sup>31</sup> Such yielding is the Jesus Way.

In subsequent chapters, Woodley shows other cultural differences between Euro-Western and Indigenous cultures and their ways of practicing the Christian faith, as well as the implications of these differences for Christian praxis. He concludes, “If we are to rescue our planet, which is currently bent on a trajectory of destruction, then Christians must begin to live out shalom, even by changing their own church cultures.”<sup>32</sup> In other words, we will know when shalom is being practiced, because it will help the *entire* earth to flourish. *Cultural* change among the majority of North American Christians will be required.

This statement comes directly from discussion of being a church that actively welcomes strangers (newcomers). From an Indigenous Christian perspective, such a focus on good relations is to be carried into all social, political, ecological, and economic relations. Every being on the planet is our neighbor, and shalom flourishes when every being flourishes. The implications of this orientation confront the liberal, humanist, globalized, and capitalist social order with the need for revolutionary transformation.

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29 Steve Heinrichs, ed., *Unsettling the Word: Biblical Experiments in Decolonization* (Winnipeg, MB: Mennonite Church Canada, 2018).

30 Steve Heinrichs, ed., *Buffalo Shout, Salmon Cry* (Kitchener, ON: Herald, 2013), 13. Courage is necessary for self-examination. Undergraduate students have indicated to me that the book unsettled their preexisting views, leaving them a little uneasy.

31 Anne Bishop, *Becoming an Ally: Breaking the Cycle of Oppression in People*, 2nd ed. (Halifax, NS: Fernwood, 2002). Many readers are challenged by Bishop’s high standards for becoming true allies. Too many take solace at the intersectional orientation that we are all oppressors and we are all oppressed. That unfortunately lets them off the hook, so to speak, or lets them lay down their cross before they have traveled very far. It should be clear that we are not all oppressed or oppressors to the same degree.

32 Woodley, *Shalom*, 151. Emphasis added.

## Commonalities and Contrasts

### Commonalities

There are many commonalities between Yoder and Woodley's understandings of shalom. To begin with, both scholars conceptualize the human social relations of shalom similarly and do so in a way that befits their expertise in biblical scholarship and God's vision for the world. For both, shalom is relational, including collective or societal structures and extending into a seamless integrality of spiritual and material dimensions. For neither is shalom utopian; shalom is intended for contemporary times, although changes in attitude and social structures are required. Shalom is therefore, both scholars believe, an ongoing process.

Yoder and Woodley are also in agreement that shalom is tested on the margins by how a society takes care of its weaker, marginalized, and oppressed members. Therefore, shalom is not individual action, because social structures produce either shalom or oppression and social structures are not individualized. Both emphasize that shalom and its justice component are founded in the divine, not created through mere human effort. Shalom is formative for individual and community character and relies on moral integrity implemented in social relations at all levels, from the individual to the societal.

In addition, both Yoder and Woodley emphasize that the Euro-Western worldview does not correspond with a biblical worldview, and they critique the Euro-Western worldview via their explication of shalom. Woodley also compares the Euro-Western worldview to contemporary Indigenous worldviews. That means that he compares and draws wisdom from three worldviews in terms of the practice and characteristics of shalom. This multiplicity of perspectives is representative of the past century, in which the Christian faith has become expressed across an ever-wider swath of the world and its cultures, less encumbered by its millennium of European domination.<sup>33</sup>

### Contrasts

Examining the contrasts between the two authors will improve our praxis of shalom more than just highlighting their similarities. Yoder's emphasis is on sociopolitical justice, while Woodley focuses on relational harmony and rec-

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<sup>33</sup> Often perceived as a European religion, Christianity began in the Orient (the "Middle East") and expanded across Africa and Asia more quickly than in Europe. The faith reached China before it reached Russia and has always sought to express itself in culturally relevant ways. But it then collapsed back almost exclusively into Europe and began to be exported again as handmaiden to the expansion of European empires from the fifteenth century onward.

conciliation, which he also links to social and political relations. However, the most important differences between these two scholars are found in Woodley's extension of the community of shalom to all of the human and other-than-human worlds, and his explication of the significance of the colonial foundations of the contemporary settler nations (both of which will be expounded upon in the next section of this essay). Although Yoder mentions that the remit of shalom/*eirēnē* is for the whole universe, according to Colossians 1,<sup>34</sup> he touches on other-than-human relations only once more, stating, "As we order our economic lives to reflect the values of shalom, then our purchases for example are not based on economic factors alone, like price, but on moral and ecological factors as well."<sup>35</sup>

Yoder's concern for creation-care comes across in his conversation and teaching,<sup>36</sup> but readers will miss this connection because it's not evident in the text. Woodley, on the other hand, writes in such a way that one cannot miss his extension of shalom to *all* creation as a profound break with Euro-Western humanism. It is for this reason that Woodley so assertively presents an Indigenous form of Christian faith and why it becomes a corrective to Eurocentric capture of the Jesus way.

In addition, although both Yoder and Woodley address "land," unless the nonhuman ecology of a place is specified, most readers will consider only the social ecology—that is, the relations among humans and human groups. Nor does Yoder address "indigeneity," which matters because indigeneity includes a dimension of place-connectedness.<sup>37</sup> Land gains meaning by being a "place," full of meanings and histories and known by the people who live there.<sup>38</sup> In

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34 Yoder, *Shalom*, 21.

35 Yoder, 142.

36 A decade ago I took an AMBS short course with Perry Yoder and asked specifically about whether shalom can be extended to human relations with the rest of creation. For years, Yoder has led theologically informed canoe trips, and he presented on the Hebraic view of nature at a 1995 conference. Many of these papers, but not Yoder's, were included in Calvin Redekop, ed., *Creation and the Environment: An Anabaptist Perspective on a Sustainable World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

37 The same processes are operating in contemporary Palestine. Native Palestinians have resided in the land since Old Testament times, but the claim for Israel was represented as "a land without a people for a people without a land"—a standard settler-colonial narrative for acquiring, displacing, and then replacing the Indigenous population. This narrative dominates Israeli national discourses as well as Christian support for Zionism, which is astonishing since Palestinian Christians have seen themselves for centuries as children of the promise made to Abraham. Mitri Raheb, *Faith in the Face of Empire: The Bible through Palestinian Eyes* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2014).

38 See Haluza-DeLay et al., "That We May Live Well Together in the Land," 232, for a summary of social geographical and philosophical meanings of place, places, and

contrast, Woodley emphasizes place while arguing that Western Christianity valorizes history, a charge that is evident in the account of Israel that Yoder unpacks even as he addresses “land.”<sup>39</sup> Woodley argues that Indigenous people’s “view of the land” is the “most precious gift that they have to offer.”<sup>40</sup> He hopes that non-Indigenous peoples will receive the gift, which will enable them to alter dis-located worldviews, think and act more relationally, and work for shalom in terms of healing the land and planet.

Lastly, Yoder emphasizes “kingdom,” although he contrasts earthly kingdoms to a kingdom characterized by shalom. The idea of kingdom is central to Yoder’s explication of shalom since he argues that a sociopolitical system is necessary for the institution of shalom. Taking a broader approach, Woodley insists we should replace “kingdom” with “community” and particularly with “community of [all] creation.” He understands that the connotations of kingdom are substantially different from that of community. Among other features, “kingdom” implies far more hierarchy, law, and codified order than does “community.”

### Woodley’s Two Unique Aspects of Shalom

Woodley prominently presents two aspects of shalom that are not found in Yoder: (1) he extends shalom beyond the human portion to all creation, and (2) he emphasizes the ongoing, shalom-breaking role of colonialism on settlers and colonized alike. Yoder would likely not object to these two themes related to shalom, but, as noted already, clearly identifying these aspects is essential for bringing them to readers’ conscious awareness. Articulation also shows that they are not inessential add-ons but aspects that significantly affect how shalom is conceptualized and brought into action.

Woodley’s extension of the remit of shalom to all creation, and to seeing other created beings as part of a *community*, goes far deeper than most ecologically oriented Christians delve. Despite changing terminology from “stewardship” (a managerial emphasis) to “creation-care” in recent years,<sup>41</sup> Christian environmental discourse still posits fundamental differences between human and other-than-human parts of creation.

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<sup>39</sup> Woodley (*Shalom*, 111–36) writes an entire chapter on the importance of place as the relational nexus for practices of caring consistent with discipleship following the Jesus Way.

<sup>40</sup> Woodley, 128.

<sup>41</sup> Sabrina Danielsen, “Fracturing over Creation Care? Shifting Environmental Beliefs among Evangelicals, 1984–2010,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 52, no. 1 (2013): 198–215.

Without question, ecological degradation is deeply troubling; data on elements of global environmental change related to precipitous biodiversity loss, climate change, water shortages, ocean acidification, and ecosystem decline are more than sobering.<sup>42</sup> Despite decades of overwhelming evidence, existing human systems, institutions and cultural values have so far proved inadequate to reverse the downward trend. Ecological degradation links with other global concerns—and thus, damages to shalom—such as global hunger, poverty, social inequality, inadequate education, gender rights, and other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—all malformations of the biblically expressed intentions for creation.

Woodley's emphasis on relationality fits what we know from both ecology and sociology. Both show all things to be in relationship with other things—we all eat, drink water, live in space, breath air, interact with other species and individuals of our own species, sometimes even through viruses or atmospheric droplets from the respirations of others! To see all things relationally—all of the pleasant and the nasty, the good parts of community and the less-preferred parts, the discourses and the power and the actions of all creatures—is very different from an atomistic vision, especially one that privileges only humanity.

There are many other streams of human-nature relations within the Christian tradition in addition to the stewardship or creation-care forms.<sup>43</sup> Woodley's approach fits what might be called the “partnership with nature” stream. Relationships imply mutual interaction and reaction to each relational partner. Viewing portions of nature (or even the entire planet<sup>44</sup>), however, as capable of action and reaction challenges the humanistic core of modernity, which constrains agency in creation exclusively to human beings. This is one of the characteristic features of “modernity”—the Western worldview that privileges human reason, rationalized social organization, technological capacity, and instrumental valuation of all non-human things. Woodley's Indigenous cultural lens finds congruence with Bruno Latour, one of the preeminent philosophers of science and modernity, who has critiqued the modernist comprehension of other-than-human nature as “objects” instead of having their own agency in interaction—his “actor-network theory/ontology.”<sup>45</sup>

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42 Will Steffen et al., “Trajectories of the Earth System in the Anthropocene,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 115, no.33 (Aug 6, 2018), 8252–59, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1810141115>.

43 Larry Rasmussen, “Toward an Earth Charter,” *The Christian Century* 108, no. 30 (1991): 964–67.

44 E.g., Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2017).

45 I have tried to explain Latour's theory and methodology with focus on his recent work on the earth as reacting to human activity in Randolph Haluza-DeLay, “Anthro-

Would returning to a sense of the creatureliness of the creational community lead to different moral considerations and practical action? The problem is that this alternative way of life cannot even be tested within modernity and Euro-Western culture since their hegemony sets the epistemic and ontological conditions for discourse and ethics. It may be that those concerned about the environment “must find other ways to articulate [their] ethics because the established forms of ethics, in so far as they are representations and embodiments of modernity, will inevitably distort or exclude the values of critics who live or envisage a different form of life.”<sup>46</sup>

Woodley’s Indigenous vision provides such an alternative to modernity yet still sits within a Christian framework. His is one of several new approaches to environmental management being developed that contest basic features of the dominant, Euro-Western understanding of nature. For instance, *The Economist* begins a report with, “It sounds . . . like a ‘pretty nutty’ idea” before explaining that New Zealand designated the Whanganui River a legal person in 2017, three years after a similar designation for the forested area of Te Urewera.<sup>47</sup> Rivers and forests as “persons”? The indigenous Maori believe so and operate in relationship with river and forest as if it were so. The new legal status is another step in redrawing relations among Maori, *pakeha* (non-Maori New Zealanders), and the land.

The links between sustainability, justice, and peacemaking are being elucidated within the field of peace ecology.<sup>48</sup> One Mennonite environmental practitioner declares that the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* expresses an “ecojustice” orientation linking social justice, peace, and ecological sustainability: “The peace God intends for humanity and creation was revealed most

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pocene as Creator, Gaia as Creature: An Extended Review of Bruno Latour,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* XLVIII, no. 4 (2019): 391–401.

46 Mick Smith, *An Ethics of Place: Radical Ecology, Postmodernity, and Social Theory* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001), 25. For example, during the mid-1990s I was part of a grant-funded team writing a series of inserts for church bulletins on environmental matters. I wrote the one on endangered species called “Who is our Neighbor?” The Christian organization that sponsored the project had a lot of farmers involved. The statement about the need to treat animals with moral consideration—as our “neighbors”—led to controversy as the farmers argued they couldn’t make an economic living if they did that.

47 The Economist, “New Zealand Declares a River a Person,” *The Economist*, March 25, 2017, <https://www.economist.com/asia/2017/03/25/new-zealand-declares-a-river-a-person>.

48 “Peace ecology” is a research domain building a body of evidence that “social systems are only viable in a longer-term sense when they promote just and peaceful relations with ourselves, each other, and the biosphere itself” (Randall Amster, *Peace Ecology* [Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2013]).

fully in Jesus Christ.”<sup>49</sup> Such sentiments are laudable, although for shalom to be moved toward, they must obviously be backed by action. For instance, if ecojustice is to occur, notions of sustainability cannot be limited to the mainstream environmental approaches of nature conservation, lifestyle action, and policy reform. Such approaches to sustainability can actually undermine the type of shalom advocated by both Yoder and Woodley. According to the head of the Canadian ecumenical justice organization *Kairos*, environmentalists should struggle also for Indigenous sovereignty, land rights, and reparations for past wrongs.<sup>50</sup> Few do.<sup>51</sup>

This returns us to the horrific rupture of the possibilities for shalom perpetrated by colonialism in North America. Woodley asserts that correcting colonialism means that benefactors of colonialism would have to make restitution. In his analysis, the centrality of colonialism is uncomfortably present for readers. Yoder reminds readers that “the structures and institutions in place often operate to maintain the present system of stratification and exploitation,” implying that systems derived from colonial times need replacement so that exploitation can be remedied rather than reproduced.<sup>52</sup> His silence, however, about colonialism specifically—such a profound element in the earth’s human and ecological history—is deafening.

Colonialism is the domination and control of one people by another. The processes by which it operates include geographical incursion; external political control; destruction of social, spiritual, and cultural systems; economic dependence; social interaction based on racial distinctions; and inferior quality health, social, and other institutional services. Colonization involves forced subjugation by physical or symbolic violence and may lead to internalization of inferiority by the colonized.<sup>53</sup> Colonization affects members of dominant groups too, especially as they absorb the discourses about their superiority and beliefs about their culture’s superior ways of operating.

The specific form of colonialism varied regionally; the British colony of Canada differed from the British colony of India, for instance. In the latter, a

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49 Article 22: “Peace, Justice and Nonresistance,” in *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1995), 81, cited in Luke Gascho, *Creation Care: Keepers of the Earth* (Goshen, IN: Mennonite Mutual Aid, 2008), 70.

50 Jennifer Harvey, “Dangerous ‘Goods’: Seven Reasons Creation Care Movements Must Advocate Reparations,” Steve Heinrichs, *Buffalo Shout, Salmon Cry* (Kitchener, ON: Herald, 2013), 315–29.

51 Lynne Davis, ed., *Alliances: Re/Envisioning Indigenous/non-Indigenous Relationships* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010).

52 Yoder, *Shalom*, 140.

53 This description focuses on sociological processes rather than historical or political details alone.

small number of Europeans utilized a larger bureaucratic corps of Indians to control the entire land. In Canada, colonialism was (and still is) settler colonial, in which the characteristic processes noted above are present but the colonial people come to stay. In other words, they sought and still operate to displace or replace the Indigenous population.<sup>54</sup>

Colonialism is not just historical past; it exists still in hierarchies, privileges, wealth made from the land, and structures of all sorts of social, material, and mental constructions. Furthermore, new forms of the control of land and peoples emerge—neo-colonialisms such as economic colonialism (where political power is replaced by economic control) and environmental colonialism (where external actors use environmental practices as justification to control land).<sup>55</sup> Woodley details the impact and ongoing effects of Christian (sic) Europe's displacement and dissolution of Indigenous cultures in the Americas.

Because settler colonial processes replace local populations with new settlers, the settlers believe the land has been acquired. But because the Indigenous peoples have not disappeared (as they were supposed to), there cannot help but be conflict. Narratives conflict over indigeneity, rights, societal participation, and the land. Contested narratives are also contested legal claims. They are not easily resolved because of the different cultural frames (Euro-Western versus Indigenous) involved. But to do shalom means to address the effects of colonialism, and this inevitably means transformative change rather than mere moderation (reform) of existing legal and historical ideas. Similar struggles against the persistence of colonization are occurring around the world among Indigenous peoples and in places like Palestine.

Woodley could have been even more forceful in this regard. Glen Sean Coulthard argues that most contemporary efforts to decolonize are disingenuous and mostly just reproduce the systems of power they claim to be trying to modify.<sup>56</sup> This is especially true in terms of national and international politics (e.g., Canada's resistance to implementing the waifish United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples). It is also true of land acknowledgments and other efforts at reconciliation that do not address any structural systems. Coulthard wants a more revolutionary solution, including explicitly anti-liberal and anti-capitalist ones. "For Indigenous nations to live," he says, "capitalism must die. And for capitalism to die, we must actively participate

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<sup>54</sup> Eva Mackey, *Unsettled Expectations: Uncertainty, Land and Settler Decolonization* (Halifax: Fernwood, 2016).

<sup>55</sup> Blaine T. Garfolo and Barbara L'Huillier, "Economic Colonialism: The New Empire Building of the 21st Century," *Academy Of Business Research Journal* 1 (2014): 48–55. James Goodman "Is the United Nation' REDD Scheme Conservation Colonialism by Default?" *International Journal of Water* 5, no.4 (2010): 419–28.

<sup>56</sup> Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*.

in the construction of Indigenous alternatives to it.”<sup>57</sup> Most importantly, Coulthard argues that most people—Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike—fail to recognize the way domination operates.

Kathryn Yusoff argues that colonialism and capitalism were both founded on extractive domination—extraction of natural resources from the earth and extraction of labor from African slaves and Indigenous peoples.<sup>58</sup> To do this, imperial modernity had to engage in classification—first “nature,” then “Indigenous,” and then “Black”: “The human and its subcategory, the inhuman, are historically relational to a discourse of settler-colonial rights and the material practices of extraction.”<sup>59</sup> “Race” is a foundation of the modern world because it was similar to and necessary for the extractive geologic of what has now become known as the “Anthropocene”—the dramatic impact of humanity on the planet’s biosphere. More generally, the early twentieth-century sociologist W. E. B. DuBois defined whiteness as the “ownership of the Earth forever and ever.”<sup>60</sup> Yusoff emphasizes that global ecological degradation is not a product of universal humanity (human sin?) but rather a historically precise result of particular human actors—national politicians and elites who coerced others (land, Indigenous peoples, Africans, European laborers) into the project. Yusoff’s observation—“There can be no address of the planetary failures of modernism or its master-subject, Man [that is, Anthropocene degradation] without a commitment to overcoming extractive colonialism”<sup>61</sup>—corresponds to Woodley’s argument. Clearly these analyses by Coulthard, Yusoff, and others support Woodley’s reconfiguring of shalom to account for a transformation that extends even further than Yoder’s version of shalom.

Since shalom is to be a comprehensive and practical (non-utopian) vision of wholeness, justice, well-being, and care for all, Woodley’s orientation becomes an even more profound challenge because it not only undermines the modernist way that Christianity has become manifested (and exported around the world) but also demands an even more transformative project than Yoder envisioned. Is Christianity up to the task?

Gerda Kits, a professor at a Christian university, has recently argued that decolonization should be central to Christian higher education.<sup>62</sup> She builds

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57 Coulthard, 172.

58 Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018).

59 Yusoff, 2.

60 W. E. B. DuBois, *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1920), 54, cited in Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, 26.

61 Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes*, 50.

62 Gerda Kits, “Why Educating for Shalom Requires Decolonization,” *International Journal of Christianity and Education* 23, no. 2 (2019): 185–203.

this argument on Reformed philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff's thesis that Christian education should be "educating for shalom."<sup>63</sup> While I applaud the efforts, there are a few problems that the above analysis makes clear. Kits's version of decolonization does not include a politics of the land or an analysis of power relations. Rather, it is based primarily on the historical process and its impact on Indigenous peoples now, although it also recognizes that settler peoples in the present need to know and understand the historical facts. Without a politics of the land, colonialism is not displaced. Without an analysis of power, liberal multiculturalism remains uncontested. Settlers remain in control, and it is still assumed that Indigenous peoples are to fit into the current sociocultural systems of Canada.

Additionally, Kits does not provide examples of agency by Indigenous actors, and she references few Indigenous scholars. This omission is important because relationality and the presumption of reciprocity indicate that peoples can give to and learn from each other. In Kits's essay, it is not clear whether there are any gift(s) (or learnings) that non-Indigenous Christians can receive from Indigenous peoples.<sup>64</sup>

For both Yoder and Kits, solid steps toward expressing the features of shalom could be improved by analysis and critiques from those who have been "othered" by the dominance of Euro-Western thought and political-economic systems. For persons in dominant social categories, listening to criticisms of the existing world from subaltern others can improve scrutiny of one's own social position and relative privilege and can judge the adequacy of one's own assumptions about the good to which God calls.

## Land and Mission

Shalom is the church's mission, and, as the above comparison has shown, "land" remains a significant element of shalom. Thus, the question of colonial displacement is crucial to Indigenous-settler reconciliation. If shalom is to be practiced in real relations, it must be practiced in real places. That includes those places where Mennonites live on what the settler governments took from Indigenous

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<sup>63</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Educating for Shalom: Essays on Christian Higher Education* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2004).

<sup>64</sup> Let me be clear—I believe the reason some students were so challenged by Woodley was because he asked them to learn from Indigenous peoples; that is, he asked them to change. Kits does express more willingness to be changed by her encounter with advocates of decolonization. Furthermore, she is writing to an audience that may already be suspicious of her project as going too far (Christian higher education), and the article argues strenuously against that view.

peoples.<sup>65</sup> Shalom, Yoder and Woodley both say, involves the correcting of wrongs and restoration of relations. Decolonizing the cognitive imperialism of the world order—which creates hierarchies among human groups and “races” and excludes the other-than-human right out of moral relations—is critical in an effort to address both world problems and the mission of the church. But it is not the only aspect of genuine shalom-like decolonization.

More broadly, one could ask what Woodley’s emphasis on place can mean for the practice of the Christian faith in contemporary churches. “Place” is one of the most complicated terms in human geography, with a wide variety of meanings. It is fundamentally relational,<sup>66</sup> especially when histories and ecologies are combined with social relations among different groups of humans. Despite narratives of “nation,” Euro-Western culture is profoundly inattentive to “place,” especially compared to Indigenous peoples. Mennonite pastor/Cheyenne peace chief Lawrence Hart asserts that the majority of Christian worship is *placeless*, which also implies that Christians will have more difficulty embodying the vision of shalom.<sup>67</sup>

Real relations are embodied and emplaced, meaning that discipleship needs to “stay put” in a place for the development of the “strong ties” and deeply experienced knowing that can create the conditions for collective work for shalom. Being place-based does not guarantee good knowing, of course, but the equal risk is that abstracted knowledge can be “out-of-place.” By being emplaced, we can assess our actions-guided-by-principles for their congruence with shalom in real conditions, Woodley argues.<sup>68</sup>

## Stepping Forward

Clearly the mission of the faithful church is to be shalom and, in concert with the Spirit, to bring about shalom in the place where we have been put. This mission is not to seek what is good only for us but for what allows everyone to flourish. And “everyone” here must be seen as the entirety of creation. We are to use our gifts—including our privileges or advantages, our resources, capital,

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65 Decolonization in the abstract—or only in the patterns of the mind—is disembodied and deplaced. The colonial process that eliminated Papaschase land rights in South East Edmonton, Alberta, holds a great deal of implication for descendants of the Papaschase as well as for the Mennonite church and members living on the same land.

66 Haluza-DeLay et al., “That We May Live Well Together in the Land,” 232, for a summary of social geographical and philosophical meanings of place, places, and placelessness.

67 Lawrence Hart, “The Earth Is a Song Made Visible: A Cheyenne Christian Perspective,” Steve Heinrichs, ed., *Buffalo Shout, Salmon Cry* (Kitchener, ON: Herald, 2013), 153–61.

68 Woodley, *Shalom*, 127.

or power—in this mission that involves changing societal structures that do not embody shalom.

Probably most important, however, for those like me who are of the dominant social groups in society, is to learn to listen more than talk and to step back so others can step forward.<sup>69</sup> This implies the yielding of power and position to those who have not had power, position, or privilege. The redress of colonial displacement probably includes the #LandBack movement (returning land to Indigenous peoples), reparations for slavery (returning the value of some of the extracted labor from which others gained), and/or dramatic reduction in human consumption of planetary resources by those who already have lifestyles considerably beyond the majority of the world's human population. Frankly, for critics like Coulthard, decolonization is about breaking the system of exploitation and domination and building a new system. Like other advocates of place-based social systems,<sup>70</sup> he argues that local economies are inherently *less* exploitative, because people know each other and the land and have more accountability (or ease of revolt). Though Woodley does not go that far, some readers still find his call for change beyond what they can accept.

These examples are practical and material. Steve Heinrichs describes how *Buffalo Shouts, Salmon Cry* began as a form of “two-eyed seeing” wherein participants in the writing process would all take on and combine both dominant Canadian and Indigenous Canadian perspectives.<sup>71</sup> An alternative way to integration might be an attitude of mutual respect and equality enough to learn from each other, while taking on the wholeness of one's own background. That is, settlers do not need to take on Indigenous ways if they can bring some of the gifts of indigeneity to the mission of creating shalom. Settlers do need to yield some of their position—and not just the worst of the lands, as allocated reserves often were—to allow Indigenous peoples to reclaim space and make it place.

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<sup>69</sup> Bishop, *Becoming an Ally*.

<sup>70</sup> For example, Michael Vincent McGinnis, ed., *Bioregionalism* (New York: Routledge, 1999) and Mike Carr, *Bioregionalism and Civil Society: Democratic Challenges to Corporate Globalism* (Vancouver: UBC Press), 2004.

<sup>71</sup> Heinrichs, ed., *Buffalo Shouts, Salmon Cry*, 24.

Decolonization in the abstract is disembodied and deplaced. And how do we even imagine other-than-human nature to also have adequate places? The forces that would rupture shalom are powerful, so all gifts are needed in this work by which Creator called all peoples. In this regard, Woodley offers something of a conclusion:

The way forward is both structural and relational, requiring honest historical and theological rethinking and coming to grips with the following concerns: colonialism and neocolonialism; the way current forms of capitalism resist shalom; the way racism affects our thinking and relationships; the practical implications for living on stolen land; how violence is thought to be needed in order to maintain the present system; what true reconciliation looks like.<sup>72</sup>

All of this is a challenge. In the midst of it, we would do well to remember that the goal is the process of “living well together in the land . . .” If the *community of all creation* is the “we” and *shalom* is equivalent to “living well,” then the land is the site of our mission, and we do it *together*.

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72 Woodley, *Shalom*, 136.