

Wading can be a slow, awkward process. It's not swimming and it's not exactly walking either. It's a kind of laborious trudging against the resistance and weight of the water. It is not easy, and we're bound to get a bit soggy and uncomfortable in the process. But we keep moving, nonetheless, because we are convinced that the many voices—particularly those “from below,” as Christ himself reminds us in Sermon on the Mount—are worth wading through if we are to get any closer to truth, to justice, to love, to harmony, to the glorious vision of the peaceable kingdom articulated by the Hebrew prophets and by Jesus of Nazareth himself.

I close with these beautiful words from María Teresa Dávila—words that, in my view, sum up the goal of this valuable book and the challenge to all who read it: “Knowledge becomes a matter of location, and location becomes a matter of where we choose to see and ultimately what we choose to love” (69).

I commend this book to all who want to have better theological conversations, and who are convinced that these conversations require that we listen most closely to those whom our Teacher and Lord consistently, stubbornly, relentlessly, inconveniently made space for.

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*We Were Children*, directed by Tim Wolochatiuk. National Film Board of Canada, 2012. 88 minutes. \$24.95. Film.

*Yummo Comes Home*, directed by Don Klaassen. Outreach Canada. 2013. 28 min. \$20.00. Film.

Since the beginning of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2009, several films have been made about the Indian residential schools (IRS) that were run by various Christian denominations and the Canadian Government between the 1880s and 1970s. Two of these films are *We Were Children* and *Yummo Comes Home*.

*We Were Children* tells the story of Lyna Hart and Glen Anaquod through interviews interspersed with dramatization of their experiences at the schools. It depicts the complex relationships between indigenous communities and the churches, between parents, church leaders, and children. The film also highlights the essential purpose of the IRS system—to assimilate indigenous children into settler society through conversion to western European Christianity—and narrates the traumatic impact this had on both the children as well as the larger indigenous community (i.e., intergenerational trauma). A strength of *We Were Children* is that it does not present either the Christians or the indigenous peoples as one-sided, but attempts to display the complexities and conflicting realities of the residential school experience.

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*Yummo Comes Home* tells the stories of Isadore Charters, a residential-school survivor, and that of his friend, Mennonite settler Don Klaassen. The men talk about their respective journeys with Christianity, naming the colonial and missional harms that were inflicted, but also the good they came to see in their faith tradition when it was practiced very differently than in the residential schools. Like *We Were Children*, *Yummo Comes Home* addresses the loss of culture, language, and traditions, and the trauma of residential schools while also presenting moments of resistance to colonization and assimilation.

One fascinating aspect in each of the films has to do with the power of names and naming. All three of the indigenous people in the films underwent a forced name change. All three identify this name change that they experienced in residential school as a life-altering experience. In *We Were Children*, the first name that Lyna Hart hears at residential school is “savage,” applied to her body and people by a nun. Soon after, she receives a second identifier: “Number 99.” Glen Anaquod had a similar experience, beginning his story with the number he was given, “118.” Of course, we don’t even see these as names; they are mere digits, which makes them all the more dehumanizing. Similarly, in *Yummo Comes Home*, Yummo tells us the many names he carries: the name given to him at birth by his indigenous community, his childhood nickname (Yummo), and the Christian name given to him at the residential school (Isadore Charters). He remembers feeling happy about his new name when it was given to him. Like any child who puts on a costume and plays pretend, we can imagine that it must have been exciting to pretend to be someone else. But the novelty soon wore off. When Isadore talks about why he felt he had to return to the residential school, he remarks: “I had to bring little Yummo back outta there.”

Settler peoples, like myself, have a hard time grasping how deeply traumatizing the experience of being renamed by others with English Christian names, numbers, and degrading words like “savage” were for indigenous children. Naming is such an important part of how we understand who we are and who others are. Names that we call each other build us up or tear us down. Naming is a practice of power. While watching the scenes of renaming in the films, I was reminded of a poem by the Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hahn. The poem describes the different ways in which Hahn identifies himself with many different ways of being in this world. He writes, for example, “I am the frog swimming happily in the clear water of a pond. And I am the grass-snake that silently feeds itself on the frog.” Hahn identifies with both animals and their very different lifeways. This could mean he sees himself as being, at once, part of life and death, at once victim and perpetrator.

Yummo, Lyna, and Glen all experienced different kinds of trauma during their time at residential school. As Don Klaassen says, “Like so many with childhood

trauma, unless the truth is told and acknowledged as real by others, the trauma just continues.” He adds, “We can’t change the past, but we can change the ongoing effects of the past.” I think one of the ways that we can do this work of healing is by calling ourselves by our true names, whether we are settler Christians, indigenous Christians, traditional indigenous peoples, or immigrants from other cultures and religious traditions. Hahn’s poem seeks to call himself by *his* true names. What would it mean for each of us—and the collective bodies that we are a part of (like the church)—to call ourselves by our true names and to invite others to do the same? What names have we been given by people we trust? What names have we given ourselves? What names have others (including the powers) called us that have been hurtful or empowering?

For myself, it has been important to call myself not only Mennonite, Christian, German, Woman, Disciple of Jesus, but also Settler and Colonizer. I can identify with all of those names. I can see myself in all of those stories. It can be very challenging to identify as a settler but I think it is important to call myself by that true name so that the trauma of that can be acknowledged as real.

At the end of *Yummo Comes Home*, Yummo offers profound words of truth and hope: “We gotta grow together. Don’t feel bad, because you didn’t do it or you couldn’t help then. But now that you know the story [of the IRS] you can help by passing the story on, by walking with us.” I think that calling ourselves by our many “true” names is a way of passing the truth about the trauma of residential schools on to others so that something like that may never happen again, and so that we can enter a path of healing together. As Hahn writes:

Please call me by my true names  
 so I can hear all my cries and my laughter at once  
 so I can see that my joy and pain are one...  
 so that the door of my heart can be left open  
 the door of compassion.

*We Were Children* and *Yummo Comes Home* are important films. They can take us to a place of honesty with ourselves. They can open doors of justice and reconciling restoration in our lives.

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