


the Catalyst

Citizens for Public Justice Summer 2017

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On Canada's 150th, What's Next for Alberta's Oil Sands?

By Kerry Oxford



As Canada marks 150 years since Confederation, I find myself reflecting on Alberta's role in the Canadian economy as an engine. The past few years have been critical to our development and deepening understanding of who we are as Albertans. I am grateful for the opportunities afforded me living in a strong economy. And I am hopeful that our next 150 years will not only be economically strong, but more principled as well.

I moved to Alberta from the UK with my family in May of 1980 just a few days after Mount St. Helens erupted. This event shaped my psyche, teaching me respect for the power of the natural world. Growing up steeped in the culture of the oil and gas industry, I learned the value of opportunity in a strong economy. I was pulled in a tug of war between protecting the environment and landing a great career in oil and gas.

In my thirties I worked as both a welder and an engineering technologist for a local gas compression manufacturer. I was excited about the challenges of the job, but acutely aware of the darkening perception the outside world had for what I helped build. I didn't want people near gas wells getting sick, and I was horrified that they could light their water on fire.

My career choice was not popular with everyone I knew. People suggested I quit the "bad oil companies" to make a difference. But I didn't see how that would change anything. I knew, from my travels in Australia's Tarkine, that sabotaging and vilifying people's livelihoods never ended well.

In 2015, after my second lay off in six years, I was frustrated. I had worked hard, and been praised for what I did, but it made no difference. I watched as my colleagues lives were turned upside down one by one. I knew there had to be a better solution for Albertans than this lopsided hamster wheel.

Around this time several things happened: Alberta elected its first NDP government, and Iron and Earth began working to change attitudes. Iron and

Earth is a platform to talk openly about climate change and enlist the pragmatic nature of Albertans to find a practical solution for both the destructive cycle and the vilified industry upon which we relied.

The shifting sands of time (excuse the pun) revealed a path to the future all Albertans can proudly walk. This radical middle ground sets aside differences, stops alienating people for making a living, and provides practical solutions to real life problems. Problems like how to ensure people in towns losing their only source of income have alternatives in a changing economy, or how to reduce the cost of our education and health-care systems. Our solutions come in the form of joint partnerships between communities, industry, and government to retrain, retool, and re-equip our people and facilities through methods that are economically viable.

Albertans, myself included, are grateful for what we have built. We are not blind to the effects of fossil fuels, but neither are we naive to the importance of petroleum products to the global economy. We have been hit hard these past few years, but we are resilient and forward thinking.

Our work now is in preparing the path for our children and grandchildren to move on to a different, more principled 150 years.

Kerry Oxford is a long time Alberta resident who worked for a number of years in the oil and gas industry. She now runs a business in Calgary and is a member of Iron and Earth's Board of Directors.

In Review

On the Hill

CPJ has been busy on Parliament Hill this Spring. In April, we released *A Half Welcome*, our latest report on refugee sponsorship in Canada, and presented it to both opposition critics for Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship. **Bolu Coker**, our policy intern who wrote the report, and **Joe Gunn** met with NDP critic **Jenny Kwan**. Bolu also joined **Mike Hogeterp** (director of the Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue) for a meeting with Conservative critic **Michelle Rempel**.



CPJ staff also met with Liberal MPs **Joyce Murray** and **Jonathan Wilkinson** (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change), Conservative MP **Dianne Watts**, NDP MP **Linda Duncan**, and Green Party Leader **Elizabeth May** (above) to talk about Canada's climate change policies and our **Give it up for the Earth!** campaign.

In June, we presented **Catherine McKenna**, Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, (below) with the postcards from our **Give it up for the Earth!** campaign. Across Canada, 91 events were held in 56 communities.



Joe Gunn and **Darlene O'Leary** participated in a small roundtable meeting (above) with **Jean-Yves Duclos** (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development) along with other major stakeholders in the anti-poverty movement. They discussed the federal government's consultations on Canada's first federal anti-poverty plan. Over 850 Canadians used our online Dignity for All form to participate in the consultations. Darlene also joined CPJ's partners at Canada Without Poverty to meet with Liberal MP **Julie Dabrusin** and NDP MPs **Sheila Malcolmson** and **Daniel Blaikie**.

In the Community

CPJ participated in the Cahoots Festival in **Ridgetown, Ont.** **Karri Munn-Venn** and **Asha Kerr-Wilson**, with the help of Karri's son **Oscar**, led two workshops.

Shaun Loney delivered the keynote address at CPJ's 2017 Annual General Meeting in **Winnipeg**. Read more about our AGM on page 3.

Bolu Coker, presented CPJ's latest refugee report to refugee sponsoring groups at workshops in **Ottawa, Winnipeg, and Victoria**.

Eugène de Mazenod Medal



Saint Paul University has awarded the Eugène de Mazenod Medal to CPJ's executive director, **Joe Gunn**. The medal, named for the founder of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, honours individuals who have made a significant contribution to the development of human capital in their community, in their environment or in society as a whole.



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Citizens for Public Justice's mission is to promote public justice in Canada by shaping key public policy debates through research and analysis, publishing, and public dialogue. CPJ encourages citizens, leaders in society, and governments to support policies and practices which reflect God's call for love, justice, and the flourishing of creation.

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Reconciliation Needs Problem Solvers

By Bolu Coker

At CPJ's Annual General Meeting in Winnipeg, Shaun Loney delivered a keynote address on the real essence of reconciliation in Canadian society. Loney's book, *An Army of Problem Solvers*, provides deep insights into the connections between reconciliation and economic prosperity in Indigenous communities.

At the AGM, Loney talked about the context in which he wrote his latest book. The notion of an army comprised of problem solvers goes against our contemporary understandings of the military's place in social development. But Loney's goal was to show that ordinary individuals could make a positive impact if given the right tools and resources to work collectively for their community's benefit.

Loney noted that we need to change our approach to reconciliation and development. We must move our focus away from the *problem* to the *problem solver*. Indigenous communities do not have a shortage of problem solvers. However, "we have challenges because problem solvers find it difficult to do their work," he stated.

For decades, the government's approach to problem solving in Indigenous communities has been very punitive. Indigenous men and women make up a large proportion of Canada's prison population. This is troubling because incarceration does not solve the deep-rooted social and economic challenges in Indigenous populations. And it does not address the legacy of residential schools in Indigenous communities.

This has entrenched a strong culture of dependency among Indigenous youth and adults, many of whom depend on social assistance to make ends meet. There are many more kids in government care now than there ever were in residential schools. Loney noted that Indigenous peoples do not want to be given handouts. They want to be self-sufficient, but they require access to opportunities for economic success.

Loney noted that the government's obstructive economic policies that favour multinational food companies are detrimental to Indigenous peoples' lives. He cited the debilitating role of the *Indian Agent* (government administrators) in both the residential school era and today.

Garden Hill, a community in northeastern Manitoba, currently faces a diabetes epidemic. There are more diabetic patients than health care services can afford to treat. And the government has no coherent plan to deal with the diabetic issue that Garden Hill and other Indigenous communities face.

It was not always this way for Garden Hill.

Loney said that the community has no words to describe healthy food, because they traditionally fed on a healthy diet, making it unnecessary to distinguish between what was wholesome and what was not. But processed foods were introduced for economic gain, at the expense of Indigenous peoples' social enterprise and health. The Nutrition North Canada Program was developed to



Shaun Loney speaks to CPJ members in Winnipeg.

provide Northern communities with groceries manufactured from elsewhere. The government will not help to establish a subsidized Indigenous grocery store in Garden Hill because this violates a regulation that requires all "nutritious" groceries and produce in the North be flown in from outside the region. As members of Garden Hill would rather grow their own food, this presents a barrier to their economic prosperity.

Canada's reconciliation efforts will be incomplete without an understanding

of the economic independence of Indigenous peoples, says Loney. There are strong links between reconciliation and the economy that we must understand. Loney also noted that "reconciliation must create the conditions to allow local economies to re-emerge," instead of enabling a structure of dependency that perpetually cripples Indigenous peoples' potential for self-sufficiency. At the meeting, Loney emphasized many times that "Indigenous peoples do not need more money," but the opportunities to realize their socio-economic potential.

"Poverty and privilege go hand in hand," Loney noted. We must understand where our privilege comes from so that we do not dismiss people who find it difficult to overcome daily barriers we consider as easy.

Overall, Loney's talk shed light on the reality of Canada's progress on reconciliation. It reveals that we must work hard to ensure that such efforts are meaningful to the lives of Indigenous peoples, to provide them with an alternative to the status quo of economic dependency. It also shows that the journey to reconciliation is a collective one that everyone must take, and society's collective understanding of power, privilege, and opportunity must be re-examined and challenged.

Read a review of Shaun Loney's book, *An Army of Problem Solvers*, on page 5.



Bolu Coker is a public justice intern at Citizens for Public Justice.

Meeting the Needs of the Dear Neighbour

By Leah Watkiss

On May 12, 60 Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto, along with their associates and partners, gathered to illustrate the faces of poverty and offer solutions. At the Sisters' residence, they hosted *Meeting the Needs of the Dear Neighbour*, a story-telling event in response to the federal government's poverty reduction strategy consultation process. With MPs Julie Dabrusin (Toronto-Danforth) and Rob Oliphant (Don Valley West) in attendance, five Sisters of St. Joseph took a few minutes each to tell stories of those to whom they have ministered over the years.



Left to right: Sr. Gwen Smith, Sr. Anne Schenck, MP Julie Dabrusin, MP Rob Oliphant, Sr. Thérèse Meunier, Congregational Leader Sr. Georgette Gregory, Sr. Sue Mosteller, Leah Watkiss, and Leanne Kloppenborg.

For over 160 years, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto have worked to respond to the needs of the dear neighbour. They have especially focused on those who are experiencing economic hardship and those living in situations which put them at risk. Their response over the years has provided leadership and support in health care, education, and social services. So when they heard about the federal poverty reduction strategy consultations taking place across the country, they knew they had something to contribute.

Sisters Sue Mosteller, Divinia Pedro, Gwen Smith, Georgette Gregory, and Anne Schenck each took a few minutes to talk about their experience. Their stories covered many types of poverty that exist in Canada: people with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, those who are food insecure, those too poor to afford dental care, and those who have housing but lack the funds to furnish it.

What made their addresses so powerful were the personal stories of those they had worked with:

- Parents of children with disabilities desperate not to fall ill for fear that they would be unable to care for their children. They are frantic to know who will love their children and provide a place of belonging and safety for them in the future when they can no longer do so;
- A woman who hadn't smiled in years because of her bad teeth;

- A family with four children in a home with no more than a TV sitting on the floor, two pots, a few forks and spoons, and three small plates;
- Men, women, and children who deal with a lack of food on a daily basis; and
- Indigenous families who are having their land stripped in order to build mines.

Undaunted in the face of the needs of these people, the Sisters responded with love and support, coming up with systemic solutions that the government can copy and build on:

- Respite and support for caregivers;
- Dental coverage for all;
- Furniture banks to distribute gently used furniture that is no longer needed;
- Healthy food gardens and recipes; and
- Prayer groups, drop-in centres, and language assistance in northern communities.

Listening to the Sisters' stories, part of me was overwhelmed. There are thousands of gaps in supports and services in Canada that millions of people are falling through. But a larger part of me was inspired that these women of faith saw a need and responded as part of their baptismal and Congregational call to care for the dear neighbour. They worked with others and found solutions to offer to the government, calling for the systemic change that is required if we hope to eliminate poverty in Canada.

Sr. Sue closed her talk by arguing that "caring for our less fortunate citizens is not simply about money, but about the kind of society we are creating together." In a world that considers self-interest a virtue, faith groups have the opportunity and obligation to demonstrate and promote an alternate worldview that upholds the common good and care for others. We pray that these stories will touch the hearts and minds of our policymakers to help bring about the Kingdom of God.

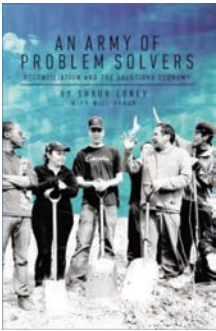
Watch the Sisters' stories on YouTube at www.youtube.com/CSJTO.

Leah Watkiss is the Program Director of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto's Ministry for Social Justice, Peace, and Care of Earth. She is also a member of CPJ's Board of Directors.



Book Reviews

Summer book suggestions from Citizens for Public Justice



An Army of Problem Solvers: Reconciliation and the Solutions Economy

By Shaun Loney
McNally Robinson, 2016

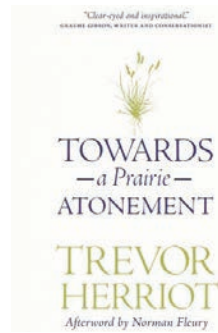
Reviewed by Asha Kerr-Wilson

An Army of Problem Solvers is about empowering people to be the problem solvers of the big social, economic, and environmental problems faced by their communities. Shaun Loney is a social entrepreneur and former civil servant who has worked with and been involved in establishing a number of social enterprises – small-scale community non-profits that aim to address social or environmental challenges using market forces.

This book looks at the potential of a *solutions economy*, one based in social enterprises and other social-minded business, as a key part of reconciliation with Indigenous peoples in Canada. Loney's *solutions economy* is strongly based in social enterprises and building, or in the case of many First Nations rebuilding, local economies. This economy addresses the persistent and long standing social and economic challenges many First Nations communities have faced since colonization. Food and energy security are two of the most persistent and widespread concerns for First Nations communities. Loney's stories show how social enterprises can address these issues in an economically, socially, and environmentally effective way.

Loney also focuses on the challenges that currently stand in the way of implementing these kinds of projects more widely. *An Army of Problem Solvers* highlights how current policies and systems continue to perpetrate colonial practices. They become barriers to reconciliation through systemically barring Indigenous peoples from the economy, creating many of the social issues Indigenous communities face. Loney makes a compelling case for how and why we should remove these barriers to allow the problem solvers to build socially and environmentally healthier communities to the benefit of all.

If you are interested in the intersections of reconciliation, social and environmental justice, and economic solutions, this book offers an insightful exploration of how addressing these in Canada are one and the same. Through stories of challenges and successes, we start to get a picture of what it could look like to empower some of Canada's most vulnerable people to be "an army of problem solvers."



Towards a Prairie Atonement By Trevor Herriot University of Regina Press, 2016

Reviewed by Dennis Gruending

Trevor Herriot is a gifted Saskatchewan writer who has published five acclaimed books within the past 16 years. His grandparents were European settlers on land just north of the Qu'Appelle River, which flows through Southern Saskatchewan into Manitoba. Herriot has staked his literary claim on that region. He has a strong naturalist bent and writes in illuminating detail about what he sees and hears on the ground, and about what has been lost. The prairie landscape, he says, has become one of the most altered on the planet.

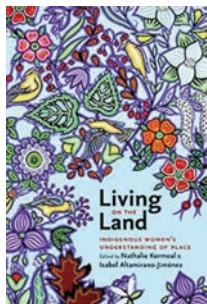
Herriot is loyal to his ancestors but also deeply regretful for settler society's mistreatment of Indigenous peoples. In Herriot's estimation, their dispossession and despoliation of the land have gone hand in hand. That is the theme of his most recent book, *Towards a Prairie Atonement*. In it, he spends a day in the company of a Métis guide at a settlement which was forcibly abandoned in the 1930s.

Forced to the margins by European settlement in Manitoba, a small group of Métis people established a settlement called Ste. Madeleine near the Saskatchewan border. The land was sandy and marginal but in the 1930s the Métis were evicted even from there when governments decided to create a community pasture for grazing livestock. The families were given only short notice to leave before their homes were burned and their dogs shot.

Herriot laments this and other settler outrages. He accepts a share of responsibility, as the descendent of settlers, for what has happened and is still happening. He does so by writing this brief "atonement" and hoping to bring people together in a way that will be friendlier to the land as well. Herriot's effort is especially timely, coming after the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which calls for individuals, governments, and churches to engage in authentic reconciliation. Indian residential schools were only one of the destructive attempts to eradicate Indigenous peoples and culture.

The forced surrender of land was another.

Book Reviews



Living on the Land: Indigenous Women's Understanding of Place
Edited by Nathalie Kermaol and Isabel Altamirano-Jiménez
Athabasca University Press, 2016

Reviewed by Michelle Niewiadomy

Living on the Land is a beautiful and complex collection of perspective, story, knowledge, and wisdom. This book captures the traditional role, depth, and power of the Indigenous women from the Mohawk, Cree, Naskapi, Mayangna, Métis, and Inuit peoples. Not all Indigenous women come from the same narrative. And this book importantly gives each Indigenous woman a distinct voice on where she originates. Her story is meaningful as it is a bridge of knowledge from the ancestral way of being to the modern world in which she lives.

Each chapter casts imagination by giving readers a glimpse of each storyteller's unique culture, teachings, understanding, and worldview even in the midst of colonization. Her way of being and existence still has a place, despite her struggle particularly in a "patriarchal colonial environment."

This book allows the reader insight in understanding the matrilineal culture of Indigenous women and their role of strength in their families and communities. We can appreciate the depiction of Indigenous women as hunters, guardians of family relationships, knowledge keepers, decision makers, fact finders, resource managers, stewards of the land, healers, and storytellers. The inspiration found in each story, each chapter, and each voice is one of courage, determination, and resiliency. The women who contributed to this book give the reader a priceless insight. While it requires careful reading, it is good platform in which Indigenous women's voices can be heard.

As a nehiyaw iskwew (Cree woman) myself, I would have wanted to offer tobacco for the profound knowledge passed on through this book.



Wrongs to Rights: How Churches Can Engage the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
Edited by Steve Heinrichs
Mennonite Church Canada, 2016

Reviewed by Amie Nault

There has been a lot of discussion lately about how to best respond to the calls to action presented in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Final Report. For many of us, we are left with the desire to do something, but remain unaware of what that something is.

Wrongs to Rights presents a positive step in the right direction. This collection of essays from a diverse array of authors tries to address not only the question of how to respond to the calls to action, but also how to engage with the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People*, one of the fundamental documents upon which the calls to action are built.

The diversity of the authors presents not only a plethora of perspectives, but a multitude of places to start the discussion. I highly recommend the first section especially for anyone that wishes to gain a more diverse knowledge of the declaration – not only what is in the document, but the hopes and aspirations that are enshrined in its very creation.

This book represents a good first step – but it is not the only, nor the final, step in the ongoing goal of reconciliation. I encourage everyone to take the time to read further, not only from the further reading list provided, but also from some of the people who have written essays for this collection. It will only lead to a deeper understanding of Indigenous rights, the role of the Church in reconciliation, and the views of Indigenous peoples across Canada going forward.

Reconciliation is an ongoing process, and we need to be engaged in the discussion at every step. *Wrongs to Rights* is a good place to start.



After the Sands: Energy and Ecological Security for Canadians
By Gordon Laxer
Douglas & McIntyre, 2015

Reviewed by Karri Munn-Venn

After the Sands is a fascinating, if dense, history of Canadian energy policy, offered by prominent Alberta political economist, Gordon Laxer.

At its core, *After the Sands* is a call for a fundamental reorientation of government approaches to energy policy and societal understanding of the urgency of the climate crisis.

Laxer makes the case that in order to ensure the long-term energy security of *all Canadians*, the federal government must reorganize Canadian energy policy. This means nationalizing the oil and gas sector and reorienting transportation infrastructure so that Canadian energy needs are prioritized over exports.

By way of his comprehensive, and tremendously helpful, overview of North American pipeline history, he then links the issue of *energy* security with the question of *ecological* security.

As he approaches his conclusion, Laxer identifies the globalized economy, with its emphasis on endless growth, as the primary challenge to climate stability. He advocates for conservation, driven by a spirit of "enoughness," as central to a liveable future. In brief, he says, we must "curb greenhouse gas emissions, conserve remaining natural gas and conventional oil supplies, and leave Sands oil in the soil."

After the Sands is thorough, well-researched, and thought-provoking. Published just prior to Canada's change in government in 2015, it provides a good reminder of how things have changed over the last two years. While the context has shifted, Laxer's recommendations for bold and innovative action remain worthy of consideration.



Better Now: Six Big Ideas to Improve Health Care for All Canadians
By Dr. Danielle Martin
Allen Lane, 2017

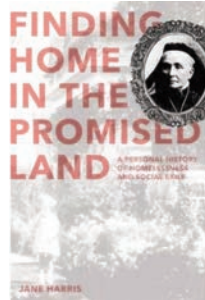
Reviewed by Sally Guy

Better Now will likely find itself preaching to the choir. That is not to say that Martin is ever preachy—in fact, her style is conversational and unpretentious. But those that really need to read this book, sadly, won't. Many of the 'big ideas' would hinge on the participation of all levels of government, and would require a fundamental shift in the way many Canadians understand the rights of citizenship.

The ideas start small and end big. She begins with the importance of primary care relationships, and builds to advocate for building a system that supports the changes we need: a national pharmaceutical program, a plan to reduce unnecessary care and expense, and a basic income for all Canadians.

Martin mixes statistics with stories of lived experience, and her sense of the absurd keeps things fresh. She notes that one patient's medication was so expensive that she required the assistance of "an employee in the hospital's MS clinic whose job it is to figure out how to get medicine for patients with MS" (emphasis the author's own). She also points out that we "find ourselves in the bizarre situation where some Canadians can't access life-saving drugs while others are the victims of overprescribing."

The originality, and the value, of *Better Now* are not necessarily in the 'big ideas' themselves, but in how Martin chooses to display them. It is still a brave and important thing to juxtapose the broad and aspirational beside the personal and the everyday. In a time when many think nothing can be done without the private sector, we need to keep hearing that there is tremendous value in universal, public programs, and that big changes are possible – and practical.



Finding Home in the Promised Land: A Personal History of Homelessness and Social Exile
By Jane Harris
J. Gordon
Shillingford, 2015

Reviewed by Darlene O'Leary

"I fought my way out of the wilderness, but I still wear cuts inside my body and soul."

In *Finding Home in the Promised Land*, author Jane Harris shares her deeply personal story of domestic violence, poverty, homelessness, and social exile. She also offers a narrative and historical glimpse of her Scottish immigrant ancestors, particularly her great-great grandmother. Their struggles in the new "promised land" of pre-Confederation Canada both parallel and contrast Harris's own quest for home.

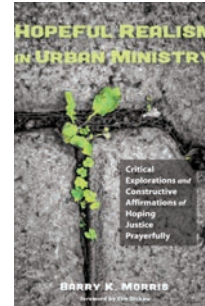
As the book moves between the past and the present, Harris searches for answers about the brutal reality of poverty. She offers an account of her own experience with what she calls the "poverty industry." In the process, she also provides disheartening facts about poverty in Canada and who is most impacted.

Harris is both a victim of and resistant to the deeply held notion that poverty is a personal failure. She recognizes that surviving and thriving in any context requires not just hard work and determination, but it requires social relationships and supports.

Harris's analysis of social and institutional failures is broad ranging, and her personal experiences illustrate these failures powerfully.

In pointing toward solutions, Harris makes a case for more affordable housing, along with a housing benefit for those in need. She also recommends exploring a guaranteed annual income as an alternative to the "shame-based poverty industry."

Ultimately, this book is a personal search for home and an exploration of the social exile of those most vulnerable.



Hopeful Realism in Urban Ministry: Critical Explorations and Constructive Affirmations of Hoping Justice Prayerfully
By Barry K. Morris
Wipf & Stock
Publishers, 2016

Reviewed by Lee Hollaar

To all involved in any seemingly overwhelming ministry, this is an important and refreshing read. While dealing with issues of poverty, marginalization, and the politics of exclusion, it's easy to move beyond naive optimism and approach a sense of futility. While the author looks through the lens of ministry in urban settings, this book speaks with equal cogency to the work of social justice—and any ministry, for that matter.

In the forward, Tim Dickau makes this assertion: "Read this book, because if you do... you will wake up the next day ready to go back to work in the place and parish God has called you with a realistic, prayerful hope." This book delivers. It offers a practical theology which seeks to rise above the big challenges and takes ministry beyond life in the trenches. It addresses the often attendant ennui involved in ministry to those who are more vulnerable, which can often get bogged down in the midst of endless charity.

Inasmuch as the book aptly addresses ministry in general, it informs us of what better serves to make and "keep...ministry—any ministry really—pastorally and prophetically faithful in the long haul." Morris' work is supported by mined ore from the rich deposits of three particular giants on whose shoulders those in social justice should stand, namely Jürgen Moltmann, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Thomas Merton. In doing so the author has examined his findings to form serviceable insight, namely a triad, with justice as its apex. The metals of *hope*, *justice*, and *contemplative prayer* are richly catalogued and the rich alloy of *hoping justice prayerfully* emerges. The conclusion is that each "discipline" in the triad requires practice as an essential part of the pursuit of greater biblical faithfulness.

Book Reviews



How Did We Get Into This Mess?: Politics, Equality, Nature
By George Monbiot
Verso Press, 2016

Reviewed by Joe Gunn

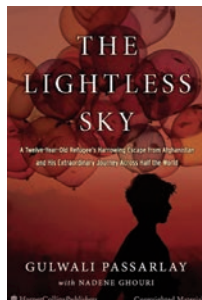
George Monbiot is a maddening writer.

He baits the reader, starting off each of the 50 short essays in this book with a totally outrageous proposition. Then the long-time columnist for the Guardian newspaper describes some unthinkably brutish environmental injustice, military madness, political skulduggery, or economic corruption. And finally he stuffs right into our faces the shame at how we never guessed this could be happening today, under our unsuspecting noses.

What are Monbiot's targets? He trashes consumerism, "man was born free, and he is everywhere in chain stores." The slavish media is "owned by tax exiles who instruct their editors from distant chateaux." Overpopulation is a myth: "It's no coincidence that most of those who are obsessed with population growth are post-reproductive wealthy white men: it's about the only environmental issue for which they can't be blamed." The becalmed trade union leadership is so compromised that they are "turkeys led by chickens, who never stop voting for Christmas."

The reader will disagree with some of Monbiot's overheated rhetorical sorties, like his defense of nuclear power as the environment's saviour, or his assertion that "the primary purpose of most religions is to control women."

Even as we "form an orderly queue at the slaughterhouse," Monbiot reminds us that "to seek enlightenment, intellectual or spiritual; to do good; to love and be loved; to create and to teach: these are the highest purposes of humankind." His writing begs us to believe that, "If there is meaning in life, it lies here."



The Lightless Sky: A Twelve-Year-Old Refugee's Harrowing Escape from Afghanistan and His Extraordinary Journey Across Half the World
By Gulwali Passarlay
HarperOne, 2016

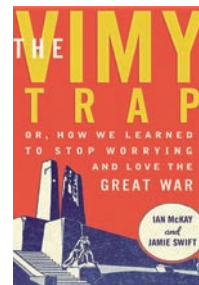
Reviewed by Bolu Coker

The Lightless Sky is an inspiring personal account of a twelve-year old boy's journey to safety from Afghanistan to Europe. Gulwali Passarlay tells a story that brings to life the precarity of refugees' living conditions on their journeys to refuge.

Fearing the Taliban, Passarlay's mother arranges for him and his brother to be smuggled out of the country. The brothers are separated early on, leaving Passarlay at the mercies of smugglers and other refugees he encounters along the way. Upon hearing of his brother's arrival in England, Passarlay defies all odds—smugglers' extortion, multiple imprisonments, and even a near-death experience—to be reunited with his brother.

Gulwali Passarlay's story is a vivid example of the challenges refugees—especially unaccompanied minors, who comprise a large proportion of global refugees—face in their search for safety. He tells of how his young age did not mean much in the face of his struggle to safety, as smugglers exploited him and other refugees, treating them like "just another dollar." Nonetheless, *The Lightless Sky* is full of various moments that highlight the resilience and tremendous sacrifices refugees have and make on their journeys.

It also provides readers with an opportunity to reflect on our perceptions of refugees who seek safety without proper documentation. By relaying stories of life in his family as a boy, Passarlay humanizes refugees and shows that desperation often supersedes all else in vulnerable situations. He shows that anyone, whether from a stable home or otherwise, can become a refugee. He invites us think better of refugees, not as threats or exploiters, but as people whose shoes we could be in, given the circumstance.



The Vimy Trap, or, How We Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Great War
By Ian McKay and Jamie Swift
Between the Lines, 2016

Reviewed by Debbie Grisdale

April 9, 2017 marked the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge where 3,598 Canadians died and 7,000 were wounded, with an estimated 20,000 casualties on the German side.

In this timely book, McKay and Swift focus on the evolution, over the past century, of the remembrance of WWI, and in particular the battle for Vimy. Canada has moved from seeing it as a battle in a horrific, pointless, and costly war to a romantic myth that Vimy in some way represented the "birth of our nation."

They coin the term *Vimyism*, a "network of ideas and symbols that centre on how Canada's Great War Experience somehow represents the country's supreme triumph—a scaling of a grand height of honour and bravery and maturity, a glorious achievement—...and not least because it marked the country's birth." The seeds of *Vimyism*, they assert, were planted in the 1960s, became more pervasive in the 1970s and 80s, and remain prevalent today. They argue that the real history and tradition—one of sadness, loss, and a determination that it never happens again—has been overshadowed. Not mincing words in a radio interview, Swift said that "the way we talk about Vimy Ridge is a patriotic bit of mythology fantasyland."

It is a very readable book—with the occasional injection of wry wit (witness the full title)—and an important contribution to the ongoing discussion of the myths of militarism. In full disclosure, I admit that this book speaks to my own pro-disarmament and peace sensibilities.

The book was short-listed for both the Sir John A. Macdonald Prize and the Shaughnessy Cohen Prize for Political Writing.

A Half Welcome for Refugees

By Rose Dekker

Imagine that you are a member of a church that was so moved by the refugee crisis in Syria that you decided to sponsor a Syrian family. Imagine further that the family you sponsored was not among the first 25,000 to come to Canada after the Liberal government won a majority mandate, and that family ended up waiting four or six months to arrive in Canada rather than the mere days or weeks of the earlier families.

It doesn't take much imagination because this is what happened after February 2016. But let's carry our thoughts further back than the thousands of Syrian refugees who arrived in Canada in late 2015 and 2016. There are refugees sponsored by churches, mosques and other sponsorship organizations in Canada who had submitted applications three, four, and five years ago. Many are still waiting for their applications to be processed by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada at visa posts overseas. While we are gratified at the number of Syrians that arrived in a short timeframe, we are disturbed by the long processing times for many other refugee populations.

CPJ recently published a report, *A Half Welcome*, based on a survey of Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs) in Canada. The purpose was to discover the biggest obstacles to carrying out a sponsorship program that is responsive to global refugee resettlement needs. CPJ's intern Bolu Coker was tasked with carrying out the survey and interpreting the results.

The most disturbing problem cited by most who responded to the survey is the long wait times for arrivals of sponsored refugees. These are people who had completed the complicated refugee applications and have waited for these applications to be processed. This came as no surprise to me. From 2004 to 2014 I worked for World Renew, a SAH. There was no time during that decade, and since, when the average processing times were in an acceptable timeframe of 12-18 months.

The survey found related problems hindering the efforts of SAHs that work with sponsoring groups, including churches. Two main difficulties were inadequate communication between processing officers and sponsoring groups and unfair financial requirements; most refugees must pay back loans given for medical exams and transportation to Canada while some others do not.

In the report CPJ identifies four recommendations to eliminate injustices regarding the private sponsorship program and remove obstacles to efficient resettlement to Canada. The first recommendation encourages the Canadian government to deal with the lengthy processing times.

This issue is more complex than it seems. It is not simply a matter of placing more resources at critical visa posts overseas. The government hopes to eliminate the backlog of applications by

2019, but in order to do so it has placed limits on the number of new applications that may be submitted by SAHs each year. Thus sponsors cannot work to full capacity. Furthermore, they don't know from year to year how many refugees they will be able to sponsor. The government has not provided a three-year levels plan, as was done previously to help sponsors plan for their own staffing and resourcing. The second and third recommendations deal with those two issues.



Refugees who are resettled to Canada, either under the private sponsorship program or through the government assisted refugees program, receive a loan from the Canadian government to pay for required medical exams overseas prior to arrival and for their transportation costs to Canada. Only Syrian refugees who arrived after November 2015 and before March 2016 were exempt. Currently, only government-assisted Syrian refugees are exempt – which is inherently unfair. All privately sponsored refugees and all other resettled populations repay travel loans. As sponsors believe this is unjust, the report finally recommends waiving transportation loans for all refugees resettling in Canada.

Where justice in refugee resettlement is done, thank God and the government. Where that is not the case, pray to God and lobby the government to do better.

A Half Welcome is available at cpj.ca/half-welcome. CPJ has also prepared an advocacy package for this report at cpj.ca/refugee-action.



Rose Dekker is a spiritual director living in St. Catharines, Ont. This article originally appeared in *Christian Courier* (christiancourier.ca).

Energy Poverty Requires Creative Solutions

By Darlene O'Leary

Energy poverty in Canada is not new. I can recall stories from my relatives about winters in their childhood, waking up to thick frost on the inside of their windows and heating bricks in wood stoves to keep their beds warm. That was a while ago, though not that long.

While sufficient and reliable energy use is more common in Canada now, not everyone can access or afford the energy that many of us take for granted.

We have all heard about or know people struggling to pay high monthly energy bills, some costing more than their mortgages. Many have to choose between paying for heating or for basic necessities, like food or shelter. Others are experiencing sporadic blackouts and fuel shortages. Some regions depend more on oil or diesel, while others have added delivery and infrastructure development costs. As energy costs rose over the last several years, public awareness has grown.

But it's important to distinguish a few aspects of the energy poverty discussion. To start, people experience different kinds of energy poverty. Some lack dependable access to energy while others experience increasing and unaffordable energy costs.

Those in the first category are highly represented by Indigenous communities, particularly Inuit and Northern communities. Many simply do not have the infrastructure in place for cheaper, or cleaner, energy use.

There are an estimated 200 communities in Canada that do not have access to an energy grid and rely on diesel and generators for their heating and electricity. Many of these homes are energy inefficient, and communities cannot easily access support programs for renovations.

For these communities, energy poverty is a crisis that impacts their ability to meet basic needs, sustain their economies, and address serious health issues.

The second kind of energy poverty is experienced when households spend 10 per cent or more of their income on home energy costs, or they lack adequate affordable services for their well-being.

While all of us may be experiencing increased energy costs, those who are already struggling to make ends meet are highly vulnerable to additional expenses. Access to affordable and reliable energy is certainly key to addressing energy poverty. The other essential factor to consider is climate change.

Addressing climate change requires urgent action in order to pre-

vent the worst of its impacts. This means both significant reductions in global greenhouse gas emissions and mitigation efforts to protect communities from the impacts that are already being felt.



It also requires transitioning to a green economy and developing sustainable infrastructure – measures that *could* increase energy costs. But if done with care and consideration for both vulnerable populations and the environment, a just transition could address these twin challenges in a way that promotes the well-being of people and the planet. In any case, it is essential that governments make this transition in a way that does not place a further burden on those who are living in poverty.

Climate change already impacts those who are poor and marginalized disproportionately, including people living in Canada's Arctic region.

There are some important steps that governments can take to address energy poverty in Canada, while recognizing that climate action is urgently needed.

1. Address income security issues by offering subsidies and tax credits to those who are unable to afford increased energy costs.
2. Provide support to projects that are using local workers, particularly in remote Indigenous communities, to build sustainable energy infrastructure and energy efficient housing.
3. Regulate energy costs to ensure that households are not subject to spikes in costs, particularly in peak use seasons.
4. Continue to make it easier and cheaper for households to reduce energy costs, through retrofitting and energy efficient appliances, and through low-income energy efficiency programs.
5. Reinstate legislation to support a national low-income energy program.

The experience of energy poverty offers important insights into the ways in which vulnerable Canadians face challenges across a range of issues. However, it also signals how creative solutions, and a holistic approach to public policy, can serve to meet these challenges to the benefit of all.



Darlene O'Leary is the socio-economic policy analyst at Citizens for Public Justice.

How Taxes Can Reduce Inequality

By Dennis Howlett

Canada's tax system can be a powerful tool for reducing inequality and poverty.

We need to tackle inequality at both ends of the income scale. Everyone, even the rich, benefits from a more equal society with better population health, reduced crime, better educational and employment opportunities, and a more vigorous economy.

Recent progressive income tax reforms can only do so much. That's because our tax system continues to be riddled by unfair and ineffective tax loopholes that allow the wealthy to avoid paying anything close to the top marginal rate on much of their income.

And we don't have any real tax on wealth (as opposed to income). The Alternative Federal Budget 2017, which CPJ and Canadians for Tax Fairness (C4TF) have contributed to, proposed that the federal government tax wealth by introducing a minimum inheritance tax of 45 per cent on estates valued above \$5 million. This would net an estimated \$2 billion annually in new revenues.

C4TF has identified over \$16 billion in unfair and ineffective tax loopholes that should be closed. The most egregious ones include the Stock Options Deduction, the Capital Gains Deduction, and the Business Entertainment Tax Deduction.

On the other end of the income scale, Canada's tax system is also able to transfer benefits to low-income Canadians in a very efficient way. It has reduced poverty among seniors and families with children. But we still have high levels of poverty in Canada and we need to do much more.

The federal government has taken a very positive step in reducing child poverty by introducing a new and improved Canada Child Benefit. Campaign 2000 estimates that even after recent improvements in the child benefit, it would still leave a million children living in poverty. Annual increases of \$1 billion to the CCB could do a lot of the heavy lifting and help us achieve the goal of ending child poverty.

Canada has had some success in reducing poverty among Canadian seniors to a low of 3.9 per cent in 1995. However, since then we have been losing ground and poverty rates have risen to about 11 per cent as more Canadians are retiring without adequate company pensions or retirement savings.

Now, there are over 600,000 seniors still living in poverty. The government increased the Guaranteed Income Supplement top-up benefit by 10 per cent in 2016 at a cost of \$670 million. This helped remove about 85,000 single seniors out of poverty. But we shouldn't stop there. There should be annual increases of \$670 million with the goal of eliminating poverty among seniors in the next five years.

The Working Income Tax Benefit was introduced in 2007. It aims to help low-income people on social assistance enter the work force. But benefit levels at \$1,015 a year for single people and about \$1,844 per couple (depending on the province) are too low to do an effective job.

The maximum benefits should be doubled over four years, and the program should extend its reach higher up the income ladder so that it becomes a major income support for Canadians who work but remain poor. This would cost an additional \$250 million a year.

More than 12 per cent of working-age Canadians live in relative poverty. Provincial minimum wages and social assistance rates fall far below the poverty line. While child and senior poverty has been the focus of government anti-poverty initiatives in recent years, very little attention has been given to addressing working age poverty.

The federal government has some tools available that could tackle this problem. A very cost effective and efficient way to deliver benefits to many low-income Canadians would be to boost the GST/HST credit. This benefit now costs about \$4 billion. C4TF recommends doubling this amount for an additional expenditure of \$4 billion a year.

All of these enhancements to current programs would cost about \$6 billion a year. They could easily be funded by closing some of the \$16 billion of unfair and ineffective tax loopholes.



Dennis Howlett is the executive director of Canadians for Tax Fairness.

Moving Beyond Greening and Stewardship

By Rev. Dr. Mishka Lysack

Photo Credit: Michael Coghlan/Flickr.

Many of us are involved in personal or church greening, actions to reduce our environmental impact. And greening is certainly an important way to help protect God's creation. It reduces the actual amount of carbon emissions and other pollution, slowing the rate of environmental destruction. It also decreases the suffering of innocent creatures, giving us valuable time to get to work on making deep changes.

Protecting creation arises out of our direct, ongoing experience of creation, whether we are walking in a forest or working in our garden. Through eating food and gardening, spending time with animals, or enjoying the beauty of a sunset, we develop a love for nature. We learn what the psalmist means when the "forests cry out for joy" (Psalm 96:12), when creation adds its voices in a cosmic doxology to "praise the name of God" (Psalm 148:5), or when the "earth teaches us" (Job 12:8). We learn to experience animals, plants, and creation as the third partner of the covenant community (Genesis 9:17), along with God and humanity.

Greening also sends market signals to the business community that citizens support sustainable business leaders, planting the seeds of the new economy. And it creates spiritual changes in how we see our relationship with creation, and prepares us for the deep changes that we urgently need to make. All good things.

But greening alone is not enough to solve the big problems of climate change, air and water pollution, ocean acidification, and species extinction. The problems lie with how we have organized our economy and designed our buildings and cities, hardwiring our problems into structures that are difficult to change.

Personal greening alone can never adequately address the enormous magnitude of climate change or the environmental crisis, any more than hosting church book clubs about racism could have ushered in effective civil rights legislation at the time of Martin Luther King Jr. Quite simply, it is the wrong scale.

But if we link our greening with talking to politicians and influencing government policy or corporate behavior, that's much better. We need to speak out on behalf of protecting God's creation, by being its advocate, and defend it.

As a ministry, advocacy has deep roots in the Bible. Both Abraham and Moses advocated for others, as Jesus did for his disciples through prayer. Jesus also described the Holy Spirit as an advocate for all believers. If the Holy Spirit is an advocate, then advocacy is a core ministry.

We only need think of the Spirit-filled advocacy ministries of Desmond Tutu in his anti-apartheid struggle or Dorothy Day in her work among the poor of New York. As Wendell Berry wrote in *Life is a Miracle*, "people exploit what they merely conclude to be of value, but they defend what they love."

So how can we, as people of faith, take our efforts to the next level?

One way to do this is to write your MP, MLA/MPP, or City Councillor, or even better, to meet with them. "Talking with People in Power" by MP Robert Oliphant, has several great suggestions.

1. Decide what you want to accomplish. How will you know if your goal is met? How would you define success? Write it down, and re-write it, to make your goals more clear, concise, and specific.
2. Learn about the agenda of the political party and the individual by looking at the platform of the party. Think about the pressures of the economy, politics, and the challenges that the government faces.
3. Advocacy is not about you presenting a problem to the politician to fix, but rather about you providing a solution for a policy challenge they face.
4. Be persistent and patient.
5. Thank them for their time, show interest in their work, and treat them respectfully.
6. Check out CPJ's Advocacy Toolkit (cpj.ca/advocacy-toolkit) and schedule a training workshop for your church or community.

As Wendell Berry reminds us in *The Unsettling of America*, "the care of the earth is our most ancient and most worthy and, after all, our most pleasing responsibility. To cherish what remains of it, and to foster its renewal, is our only hope."

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This article is a re-working of material in CPJ's 2013 book, *Living Ecological Justice*.

