

A GATHERING OF NAVAJO PEOPLE WHO ARE
FOLLOWERS OF THE JESUS WAY

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May 2018

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ABSTRACT

Since contact with missionaries of various Christian Denominations and other religions there has been an attempt to totally eradicate Navajo culture. The most recent attack on Native North American¹ culture was set against Native American and First Nations children. The last Indian War was waged against Indian children. The weapon of choice was education. Boarding schools left plenty of permanent scars on many Navajo people who were often forcefully removed from their homes and coerced to assimilate into mainstream American society.

Even for those who had a relatively “good” experience while attending day or off-reservation boarding school loneliness was a common struggle. The trauma of boarding school permeates the survivor’s lives and is witnessed by those closest to them such as their family. Today, many Native American and First Nations boarding school survivors are coming forward to share their story. There is an increasing number of brave Navajo boarding school survivors who are resisting the paternalistic call to just forget about the past, and move forward. In light of their bravery, and willingness to share their story there is a resurgence of reclamation Native American and First Nations identity, language, culture, traditions, and ceremonies. This paper is merely an introduction to further conversations about trauma, healing, and how to walk in beauty as a Navajo and a follower of the Jesus Way.

¹ The terms Native, Native North American Native American, Indian, American Indian, and Indigenous are used interchangeably. The word “Indigenous” describes tribes in North America and Canada as well as for tribal peoples who live in the different countries of the world.

1. THE NAVAJO GATHERING

The boarding school system was created to civilize the American Indian. In the words of Captain Richard Pratt, Superintendent of Carlisle Industrial Indian School, boarding schools were meant to “Kill the Indian, and save the man.” Subsequently, becoming educated and civilized also meant becoming Christian. What ensued was a systematic eradication of Native American and First Nations culture. Today, many Navajo people want to know Jesus, but they have only been taught a foreign way to worship and know Creator. It is only by gathering and discussing the Navajo way of life with its complexities, cosmology, stories, and language can the Navajo people be who they were created to be AND followers of the Jesus Way. Instead of looking to outsiders as a guide, the Navajo Gathering looked to the Navajo boarding school survivors to guide the conversation. The first Navajo Gathering took place in Gallup, NM in May of 2018.

The Navajo Gathering had been a vision of Donnie Begay, facilitator, ever since he left the Navajo reservation after turning eighteen years old. His hope and desire was to sit at the feet of his elders and hear their stories. Outsiders (non-Navajo) regularly step in unceremoniously to try to speak for Navajo people, without realizing that Navajo people can speak for themselves. “Indians have never lacked voices, in the sense that outsiders have usually been prepared to speak for them, to interpret them to the outside world.”² These outsiders may have the best intentions in speaking for Native people, but outsiders speak from their perspective that differs from Native people in worldview, language, values, and culture.

² Jenkins, Philip. “Dream Catchers.” New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Donnie, as a Navajo person who grew up on the Navajo reservation stepped in as a participant observer for the Navajo Gathering. Before the Gathering letters were sent out by the facilitator (Donnie) inviting people he knew personally, and gave them an opportunity to invite others who might be interested in joining the conversation. Funds for the Gathering were raised through Nations (a ministry of Cru), Cru staff, families, individuals, and Churches.

There was also an element of interviews carried out during the Gathering. The facilitator produced a small guidebook with a list of questions for each session.

- Session 1 – Introductions. In Navajo communities, as with many Native American and First Nations people the introduction is one of the most important aspects of any get together. For the Navajo there is no time limit when it comes to introductions. Navajo people when introducing themselves begin with the name, clans, where they are from, and a little bit about themselves.
- Session 2 – The prereading was a transcript of a podcast entitled, *Replacing Church: Local Spirituality, Innovative Community & Social Change* with Ben Katt. Episode 55, *Mark Charles on Contextualization & Native Communities*. The reflection question – Mark Charles has stated that during the boarding school era Navajo students were forced to accept Christianity and reject their own Navajo culture. Is the Navajo culture bad/evil still?
- Session 3 – Continuation of boarding school. Reflection question – Where do you see points of intersection or agreement between Christian and Navajo ways/traditions/teachings?
- Session 4 – Reading of Matthew 6.14-15 in English and in Navajo.

Matthew 6.14-15 (ESV)	Matthew 6.14-15 in Navajo
<p>¹⁴ For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.</p>	<p>¹⁴ Háálá diné nihich'í' doo ákóq' ádáát'íidii bá yóó'adahidoh'aahgo nihiTaa' yá'aashdi hólóonii bich'í' doo ákóq' ádaot'íidii ałdó' nihá yóó'iidii'aah doo, ¹⁵ nidi diné nihich'í' doo ákóq' ádáát'íidii doo bá yóó'adahidoh'aahgóogo, nihiTaa' bich'í' doo ákóq' ádaot'íidii ałdó' doo nihá yóó'iididoo'áał da.</p>

- Reflection question – Why is there no word for “sorry” in Navajo? What is the traditional understanding of forgiveness? How do we explain this in Navajo and is it translatable into English?

Extensive notes were taken during the Gathering with the participants knowledge that there words and stories would be used to help produce an article after the Gathering. All willing participants signed a General Media Release Form (Appendix 1). Out of respect for Navajo elders, the Release Form said participant may request that only certain stories not be written down or shared in the final article.

Many missionaries and youth workers in Native ministry are constantly trying to increase their learning and cultural competency, so when opportunities arise like the Navajo Gathering there is interest. The Navajo Gathering was open to non-Native, and non-Navajo people, but their role as outsiders was more of an observer. Appendix 2 is the written from of what was expected of non-Native participants.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS:

Donnie Begay | Facilitator | Albuquerque, NM

Ben Yazzie | Albuquerque, NM

Vern Bia | Gallup, NM

Rashawn Ramone | Torreon, NM

Darlene Silversmith | Crownpoint, NM

Richard Silversmith | Denver, CO

Susie Silversmith | Denver, CO

Barbara Smith | Gallup, NM

Orlinda Skyberg | Naschitti, NM

There were also two individuals who participated, but wished remain anonymous. They have been given a pseudonym for this paper.

2. THE NAVAJO

The Sioux maybe the most recognized tribe when it comes to popular literature, and being the stereotype for all things Indian³, but it's the Navajo who are mostly known for having the largest reservation and Native population in the United States. The 2010 U.S. Census counted 332,129 Navajo people living in the United States.⁴ The Navajo Reservation is positioned in the northeastern portion of Arizona, southeast in Utah, and in mostly in the northwestern part of New Mexico. The Navajo Nation is the largest reservation in the United States, and spans nearly ten million acres, or almost fifteen thousand square miles. The states Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island all combined would be equal to the size of the Navajo reservation. The Navajo prefer to call themselves the Diné, which in their language, "The People."

The land of the Navajo is situated between the four sacred mountains and is called Diné Bikéyah. The North mountain is located in Southwest Colorado, Mount Hesperus Peak (Obsidian Mountain) or as the Navajo call it Dibé Ntsaa. Near Flagstaff, AZ to the West are the San Francisco Peaks (Abalone Shell Mountain) or Dook'óíid as the Navajo call it. To the South near Grants, NM is Mount Taylor (Blue Bread or Turquoise Mountains) or Tsoodzil. And, finally to the East is Blanca Peak (Dawn or White Shell Mountain), which hovers above fourteen thousand feet above sea level, in Navajo it is called Sinaajini.⁵

³ Stewart, Omer C. "Peyote Religion: A History by Omer C. Stewart." Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1908. Pg. 174.

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census. American Indian and Alaska Native Summary File. DP-1 - Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics: 2010.

⁵ Iverson, Peter. "The Navajo: Indians of North America." Langhorne, PA: Chelsea House Publishers, 2006. Pg. 3.

The Navajo language is part of the Athabaskan language family. Before settling in Diné Bikéyah some Navajo and Apache people migrated South somewhere from the Northern peninsula, where many other Athabaskan-speaking peoples still live. Upon arrival to the Southwest the Navajo people became known by many names, “For example, the Hopi called them the Tasavuh which, loosely translated, meant “head pounders” because of their habit of killing their enemies by pounding them on the head with a stone axe.”⁶ The word, “Navajo” became universally known thanks to the Spanish. In *The Army of the Navajo*, author Gerald Thompson translates “Navajo” to mean the people with planted fields.⁷ The Navajo and the Spanish continually fought for almost three hundred years after contact in the late 1500s. The Navajo often had the upper hand over the Spanish and resisted the United States for nearly two decades before they were defeated by the U.S. Army in 1864.⁸ The Navajo Long Walk, or *Hwéeldi*, as the Navajo call it is explained more in detail in chapter 3.

It would take another fifty seven years after the return from the Long Walk for the Navajo people to create their own tribal council. John Hunter, in 1927 as Superintendent of the Leupp Agency, began developing local community organizations known as Chapters. “Chapter meetings were designed to bring the Navajos together at a local level where representatives of the tribe, the Public Health Service and the Indian Bureau could discuss problems in an open meeting.”⁹ During this same time by 1928 there were between forty and fifty day schools built on the Navajo reservation. These schools served around 5,000 Navajo children.¹⁰ The prominent Navajo leader Chief Manuelito supposedly said, “My grandchildren, education is the ladder. Tell our people to take it.” Arlene Nofchissey

⁶ Locke, Raymond Friday. “The Book of the Navajo.” Los Angeles: Mankind Publishing Company, 1976. Pg. 7

⁷ Thompson, Gerald. “The Army and the Navajo: The Bosque Redondo Reservation Experiment 1863-1858. Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 1976. Pg. 2.

⁸ Ibid., Pg. 4.

⁹ Ibid., Pg. 441

¹⁰ Szasz, Margret C. “Education and the American Indian: The Road to Self-Determination Since 1928.” Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999.

Williams, Navajo and Ute, would later take Chief Manuelito's words and write the song, "Go My Son."

Go, my son, go and climb the ladder.
 Go, my son, go and earn your feather.
 Go, my son, make your people proud of you.
 Work, my son, get an education.
 Work, my son, learn a good vocation and
 Climb, my son. Go and take a lofty view.
 From on the ladder of an education,
 You can see to help your Indian Nation,
 And reach, my son, and lift your people up with you.¹¹

The Navajo people are one of the most well-known tribes in America, because of how much they have been researched and studied. What is often overlooked or neglected in these studies and research is the oral history and importance of storytelling. White teachers and missionaries altered many of the traditional Navajo legends to fit within quasi-Christian concepts and taught them teach Navajo children.¹² The Navajo passed down their history orally from father to son, and from generation to generation. Variations of the stories may exist from one place to another, but the characters are always almost the same. These variations are clear abstractions for the Navajo, but are difficult for whites (outsiders) to comprehend.¹³ Greg Cajete, Professor at the University of New Mexico has said, "Story is a basic foundation of all human learning and teaching."¹⁴ The Navajo Gathering was a sacred space set aside to share stories of Navajo people who are followers of the Jesus Way.

¹¹ To listen to "Go My Son" go to <http://www.endangeredlanguages.com/lang/6085/samples/4393>

¹² Locke, Raymond Friday. "The Book of the Navajo." Los Angeles: Mankind Publishing Company, 1976. Pg. 56.

¹³ Ibid., Pg. 56.

¹⁴ Cajete, Gregory. *Look to the Mountain: An Ecology of Indigenous Education*. Durango, CO: Kivaki Press, 1994.

3. DISCOVERY & THE INDIAN PROBLEM

Those left to write history are the conquerors, because “nation-building normally requires an epic talk of triumphant wars, heroic figures, and awe-inspiring achievements that elevate the dominant culture while disenfranchising the history of the defeated, or the ‘Other’.”¹⁵ “The reality is that few tribes in the U.S. were conquered in campaigns. Most, but not all, tribes entered treaties with the United States.”¹⁶ Nonetheless, the United States has described their epics and achievements over Indigenous relationships from their perspective. One “awe-inspiring” achievement was the desecration of the Black Hills, which is held sacred by the Lakota. Chief Luther Standing Bear speaks of the emotional loss of the Black Hills, and describes the importance of the sacred lands:

Two lovely legends of the Lakotas would be fine subjects for sculpturing -- the Black Hills as the earth mother, and the story of the genesis of the tribe. Instead the face of a white man is being outlined on the face of a stone cliff in the Black Hills. This beautiful region, of which the Lakota thought more than any other spot on earth, caused him the most pain and misery. These hills were to become prized by the white people for reasons far different from those of the Lakota. To the Lakota the magnificent forests and splendid herds were incomparable in value.¹⁷

The desecration by the conquerors occurred after the United States broke the Treaty at Fort Laramie of 1868, when the U.S. Government couldn't contain land and gold-hungry settlers from encroaching on Lakota lands. The civilizing, Christianizing, and assimilative efforts of

¹⁵ Del La Torre, Miguel A. *Doing Christian Ethics From The Margins*. New York: Orbis Books, 2014. Pg. 48.

¹⁶ Kalt, Joseph P., Singer, Joseph Singer, “Myths and Realities of Tribal Sovereignty: The Law and Economics of Indian Self-Rule” (Symposium, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, December 2003). Pg. 9.

¹⁷ Standing Bear, Luther. “Land of the Spotted Eagle.” Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1933. Pg. 44-45.

first the European nations, then the U.S. Government through churches and missionaries were perceived as a gift, a benevolent offering to Indian savages. It was their way of elevating Indian people to the standard of European thought, worldview, religion, and American society.

The U.S. Government not only broke treaties with Indian tribes, which are supposedly the “supreme law of the land” according to Article VI of the United States Constitution, but also systematically removed and relocated almost all Indian tribes. Abraham Lincoln, the great emancipator, is considered a heroic figure in America who fought for justice and equality, but in a letter, he wrote to the New York Tribune in 1862 would suggest something different when he said, “My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or to destroy slavery.” Lincoln’s paramount objective was not to fight for the equality of slaves, but to save the Union first and foremost. During the same year, Lincoln sentenced thirty-eight Dakota men to death by hanging. After Little Crow’s war, three hundred and three Santees were tried and sentenced to death by hanging. “On December 6 President Lincoln notified Sibley that they should “cause to be executed” thirty-nine of the 303 convicted Santees.”¹⁸ This is the largest mass execution in the history of the United States. The rest of the convicted Santees were sent to prison, and two men hanged were not on Lincoln’s list, but nothing was said of the mistake until years later.¹⁹

Native American history is inextricably linked to the history of the United States of America, but more attention is given to the latter. In 1803, Napoleon, ruler of France, secured Louisiana from Spain and was prepared to take possession his new land, but America was interested in opening up the Mississippi to western commerce.²⁰ President Thomas

¹⁸ Brown, Dee. “Bury My Heart At Wounded Knee.” New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1970. Pg. 59-60.

¹⁹ Ibid., Pg. 61.

²⁰ O’Hara, John P. “A History of the United States.” New York: The Macmillan Company, 1919. Pg. 206

Jefferson directed American minister, Livingston to Paris for talks with Napoleon to cede New Orleans to the U.S. Napoleon, beginning his war in Europe needed money, and signed a treaty at Paris, May 2, 1802, “which secured for Americans the peaceful navigation of the Mississippi and nearly doubled the territory of the United States, at a cost of only \$15,000,000.”²¹ Jefferson soon sent Meriwether Lewis and William Clark on their famous expedition for the primary reason of ‘Discovery.’

Any European nation has the right to ‘Discover’ lands “not possessed or occupied by any person or nation, or that were not being used in a fashion that European legal systems approved, as being ‘vacant’ and available for first discovery claims.”²² “The process of possession, coercion, and enslavement became known as the “Doctrine of Discovery,”²³ an International Law that gave the title of the land to the European nations, and subsequently the United States of America. Native Americans lost “their rights to complete sovereignty, as independent nations,” and only maintained a right of “occupancy in their lands.”²⁴ This Doctrine of Discovery is a prime example of international law, which states, “the foundation for a claim of national ownership or sovereignty, discovery is the finding to a country, continent, or island previously unknown, or previously known only to its *uncivilized* inhabitants (emphasis mine).”²⁵ Native Americans did not hold the title to the lands they occupied, which also applied to all Indigenous peoples not European, because they were not nations or held sovereignty. The European definition of civilization was also an important aspect of Discovery of newly acquired lands outside of Europe. Jefferson sent Lewis and

²¹ Ibid.

²² Miller, Robert. Ruru, Jacinta. Behrendt, Larissa. and Lindberg, Tracey. “Discovering Indigenous Lands: The Doctrine of Discovery in the English Colonies.” New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010. Pg. 260.

²³ Johnson, Troy R. “Red Power: The Native American Civil Rights Movement.” New York: Chelsea House, 2007. Pg., 14.

²⁴ Ibid., Pg., 14.

²⁵ Black, Henry Campbell. “Black’s Law Dictionary: Fifth Edition.” St. Paul, MN: West Publishing CO., 1979.

Clark to reinforce Americas claim to the Northwest under international law, and to deliver the message to Indian nations that American was their new authority.²⁶

The Catholic (which means ‘universal’) Church believed the Pope had a divine mandate to care for the whole world, which includes the affairs of all people, physical and spiritual.²⁷ It was also the Pope who granted *papal bulls* to European nations and their explorers as Christians to invade and take over lands already occupied by Indigenous peoples. European nations such as Spain “considered the hallmarks of a civilized people: literacy, domestic agriculture, fine clothing, and permanent settlements.”²⁸ The assumed superiority of Europeans and European nations sought to define what constitutes ‘Civilization’. The alleged superiority of European civilization meant lands not belonging to other European nations or Christian princes were free for the taking by right of ‘Discovery’. Chief Justice John Marshall in 1831 declared Indian tribes are merely “domestic dependent nations” that exist in a state of pupillage, the relationship between the United States and Native people resembles that of a ward to his guardian.²⁹

Europeans had long held the belief that God had directed them to bring civilization, education, and religion to Indigenous peoples and to exercise paternalism and guardianship powers over them.³⁰ Commissioner of Indian Affairs William Jones explained, “To educate the Indian in ways of civilized life, therefore, is to preserve him from extinction, not as an Indian, but as a human being.”³¹ Jones’ didn’t believe Indians were human unless educated.

²⁶ Ibid., Pg. 70.

²⁷ Ibid., Pg. 9

²⁸ Hackel, Steven W. “Juníper Serra: California’s Founding Father.” New York: Hill & Wang, 2013. Pg. 88.

²⁹ Hagan, William T. “American Indians.” Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961. Pg., 84.

³⁰ Miller, Robert. Ruru, Jacinta. Behrendt, Larissa. and Lindberg, Tracey. “Discovering Indigenous Lands: The Doctrine of Discovery in the English Colonies.” New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010. Pg. 8.

³¹ U.S. Department of the Interior. 1903. *Indian Affairs. Part 1. Report of the Commissioner, and Appendixes.* Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Press, June 20, 1903. Page 2.

H.B. Peairs, Superintendent at Haskell Institute asserted, “A really civilized people cannot be found in the world except where the Bible has been sent and the gospel taught; hence we believe that the Indians must have, as an essential part of their education, Christian training.”³² Peairs suggests people are civilized when they believe in Christianity. During the 1898 commencement ceremony at Carlisle Indian School the keynote speaker, Reverend J.A. Lippincott said, “The Indian is DEAD in you. Let all that is Indian within you die!... You cannot become truly American citizens, industrious, intelligent, cultured, civilized until the INDIAN within you is DEAD!” For Reverend Lippincott “Indianness” does not equate to true American citizenship.

The European divine mission meant the eventual humanization of Native American people. The route to humanity was through education, Christian training and removal of everything that made Native people who they were. Unfortunately, for America the Indians were not easily convinced that they had to accept them as their authority, guardian, and their way of life. This resistance came to be known as the Indian Problem. After the West was opened up it was still occupied by Indian people who wanted to stay on their land. “General Winfield Scott was given the distasteful task of removing them [Cherokees] and went about it systematically. Squads of soldiers were dispatched to surround Cherokee farms quietly and at the point of the bayonet, if necessary, bring the residents into stockade concentration camps.”³³ The forced removal of the Cherokees, the Trail of Tears, became the standard by which to solve the Indian problem.

³² Peairs, H.B. Presidents Address - Our Work: It's Progress and Needs. *Journal of Proceedings and Address*, July 6-10, 1903. Chicago: Chicago Press, 1903. Pg., 1048.

³³ Hagan, William T. “American Indians.” Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961. Pg., 90.

4. THE LONG WALK

Unlike many Native American nations, their military defeat in the nineteenth century resulted in perpetual banishment from the homelands, but the Navajos were not to be forever exiled.³⁴ Many of the chiefs held out as long as possible before surrendering to Colonel Christopher (Kit) Carson, but even then, many would escape Bosque Redondo and head back to their homeland. One chief in particular, Delgadito, persuaded his 1,200 followers to surrender at Fort Wingate and begin their journey towards their new reservation where he believed their flocks would flourish.³⁵ Before the arrival of the Navajo to the new reserve, Bosque Redondo, present day Fort Sumner, around four hundred Mescalero people had already been rounded up by Carson and relocated to Bosque Redondo. When the Navajo started to arrive it quickly became crowded, and soon there was a shortage of food. Many Navajo people died during their forced relocation, and many more died at Bosque Redondo due to the freezing weather and malnutrition.

It was President Abraham Lincoln who approved the *Executive Order Relating to Reserves at Bosque Redondo*, for the Apaches and for a bunch of clans led by Manuelito, Barboncito, Herrero Grande, Armigo, and Delgadito. These leaders led clans who would eventually become the Navajo. It wasn't until the signing of the Treaty of Bosque Redondo in 1868 did the Navajo gain a national identity. U.S. General Carlton, a deeply religious

³⁴ Iverson, Peter. "Diné: A History of the Navajos." Albuquerque: UNM Press, 2002. Pg. 219.

³⁵ Thompson, Gerald. "The Army and the Navajo: The Bosque Redondo Reservation Experiment 1863-1858. Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 1976. Pg. 28.

Christian man, was the architect of the Bosque Redondo reservation where the Navajo people were to be forcefully relocated. It was also General Carlton who ordered Kit Carson to round up the Navajos who would not surrender to Bosque Redondo. Carson's campaign began in the fall of 1863 and dragged into winter. Few surrendered to the American soldiers, instead many Navajo turned themselves in due to the lack of provisions.³⁶ Many of the chiefs held out as long as possible before surrendering. Again, not all chiefs surrendered, and even a few went to Bosque Redondo only to escape and make their way back home. One chief in particular, Delgadito, persuaded his 1,200 followers to surrender at Fort Wingate and begin their journey towards their new reservation where he believed their flocks would flourish.³⁷

Around four hundred Mescalero had already been rounded up by Carson and relocated to Bosque Redondo. When the Navajo started to arrive it quickly became crowded, and soon there was a shortage of food. Many Navajo died during their forceful relocation, and also died at Bosque Redondo due to the freezing weather and malnutrition. Not only were the Navajo relocated, but so were their livestock. On one caravan there were 30 wagons, 3,000 sheep, and 437 horses. During this particular caravan 197 Navajo people died before they reached their cruel destination."³⁸ By the winter of 1864 there was a total population of 8,354 Navajos at Bosque Redondo along with 3,038 horses, 6,962 sheep, 2,757 goats, and 143 mules.³⁹ In 1863, the controversial Bosque Redondo experiment became a major political issue in New Mexico. The issues raised were the Navajo were mostly settled in Arizona, and their relocation and removal should be their problem, not New Mexico's. The other issue

³⁶ Thompson, Gerald. "The Army and the Navajo: The Bosque Redondo Reservation Experiment 1863-1858. Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 1976, Pg. 22.

³⁷ Ibid., Pg. 28.

³⁸ Brown, Dee. "Bury My Heart At Wounded Knee." New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1970. Pg. 28

³⁹ Thompson, Gerald. "The Army and the Navajo: The Bosque Redondo Reservation Experiment 1863-1858. Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 1976, Pg. 72.

raised was the cost of feeding the Indians. General Carlton responded by suggesting “he felt that he was doing his duty as a servant of the Almighty.”⁴⁰

The number of forced relocated Navajo people increased to 8,509 by 1865.

Conditions at Bosque Redondo deteriorated as more Navajos were brought in. Many Navajos escaped Bosque Redondo believing it was worth the risk of their life to return home than stay. Tezbah Mitchell recounts a story of her grandmother in *Navajo Stories of the Long Walk Period*, who escaped Fort Sumner and when she reached some big mountains there she came upon a red (brown) bear.

It appeared friendly. They stood looking at each other for a while. Then, because the bear acted like he was motioning to her to follow him, she did so. The big animal was her guide and protector for three days and nights as they traveled together, he always some distance ahead of her. Sometimes the bear would stop, climb a tree and eat something. It seemed to be a sign to her; so she would sit down and eat a bit of food that she had brought or gathered.⁴¹

There are many other stories about Navajo people leaving and finding guides to take them back to their homeland after escaping Bosque Redondo.

When the Peace Commissioner, Lieutenant General William T. Sherman, visited Bosque Redondo he wrote in a letter to President Grant, “I found the Bosque a mere spot of green grass in the midst of a wild desert, and the Navajos had sunk into a condition of absolute poverty and despair.”⁴² By 1868, after General Sherman witness firsthand the dire conditions at Bosque Redondo and after sitting down to listen to the Navajo leaders he presented the Navajo leaders with a treaty that would release them to return to their country. In the Navajo creation story, they are told not to leave the four sacred mountains or they will live in despair. Bosque Redondo proved that to be true. A few of the articles contained in the treaty were cessation of war, Indians agree to turn over anyone who committed serious

⁴⁰ Ibid., Pg. 69.

⁴¹ Mitchell, Tezbah. “Navajo Stories of the Long Walk Period.” Tsailie, AZ: Navajo Community College Press, 1973. Pg. 252

⁴² Grant, Ulysses S. “The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant. Volume 18: October 1, 1867-June 30, 1868.” Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991. Pg. 258.

crimes, the limits of the new reservation, and among other things the government would build an agency on the new reservation.

On June 1, 1868, Navajo leaders signed in front of General Sherman the treaty on pages cut from an army ledger book. The Navajo became the only nation to use a treaty to reverse their removal and return to their ancestral lands. The government set aside 3.5 million acres of land along the New Mexico-Arizona border for the return of the Navajo.

The Diné [Navajo] experienced wildly conflicting emotions as they finally departed [Bosque Redondo]. Elation mixed with memory; prospect collided with deeply etched recollection. They remembered the terror of the Long Walk; they recalled those who had died. Most of the people had to walk, with fifty-six army wagons carrying the aged and ill. A pitiful remnant of their once great herds also trailed along; 940 sheep, 1,025 goats, and 1,550 horse. “Never mind,” the people muttered, “we are going home.”⁴³

Navajo clan leader Chief Manuelito said some of the elders were weeping and crying when they finally made it back to Diné Bikéyah.

General Carlton believed Bosque Redondo would aid in helping the Navajo people and Apache people in becoming civilized and Christian. Lieutenant General William T. Sherman believed the same, but thought the Navajo would quickly assimilate if they were to go back to their original homeland. Part of agreement made among the Navajo chiefs and the United States government was education. “Navajo parents would send their children to the White Man’s schools to be educated in the White Man’s way of life. Navajo parents were warned not to interfere with the Whites education their children.”⁴⁴ The Navajo people were free to back to their home, but in reality, they were not truly free. Back on the Navajo reservation trouble quickly arose when Navajo people did not comply and send their children

⁴³ Iverson, Peter. “Diné: A History of the Navajos.” Albuquerque: UNM Press, 2002. Pg. 66.

⁴⁴ Begay, Dugal Tsosie. “Navajo Stories of the Long Walk Period.” Tsaile, AZ: Navajo Community College Press, 1973. Pg. 217.

to school. The children who did not go to school stayed home with their parents to take care of the sheep, bring water and wood and do chores around their home.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Zahne, Herbert. "Navajo Stories of the Long Walk Period." Tsale, AZ: Navajo Community College Press, 1973. Pg. 235

5. SUSIE'S STORY

During a conference put on by Nations and Native Intersity called *Would Jesus Eat Frybread* conference, Susie Silversmith spoke to Native American college students from across America about her boarding school experience. Susie is married to Richard Silversmith, and the both reside in Denver, CO. “As young as I was, I heard stories, chanting, singing, and teachings of my parents. They taught me about balance and harmony, taking care of Mother Earth, and to understand the importance of the nature around me. Chant songs, drumming, and rattles are music to my ears. Navajo is my heart language.”⁴⁶ Susie attended Kinlichee Boarding School in Northeast Arizona which lies within the boundary of the Navajo reservation. The Boarding School was located 6 miles north of Ganado, which lies in the Northeastern corner of Arizona, near the New Mexico border. The name of the school was given by the Navajo, Kin Dah Lichi’i Ohta, which means “red house up at an elevation.” The boarding school sat at an elevation of 6,660 feet above sea level. Susie has only recently begun to talk about her experience that occurred decades ago in boarding school. Susie’s sister-in-law Darlene Silversmith asserts, “boarding schools damaged people, and they know it, but they don’t want to talk about it. There is a day to day struggle for boarding school survivors.”

The first few who heard Susie’s story were her grandchildren. One day she sat down with them, and told them with tears streaming down her cheeks, about her boarding school

⁴⁶ Agenda for Synod. 2016. *Christian Reformed Church in North America*. Grand Rapids, MI, June 10-17, 2016. Pg., 526

ordeal. “When we arrived at boarding school... we were give baths, and were dressed in identical clothes and shoes. I was stripped of my Navajo clothes and moccasins, which had been sewn for me by my mother, and they were thrown away.”⁴⁷ Her grandchildren began to cry also as began to hear about their grandmother’s ordeal at boarding school. “Our hair was cut above our ears with bangs. I looked terrible. It was my first haircut. I cried when I saw my long hair on the floor. Tears still well up in my eyes when I remember the way it lay on the floor.”⁴⁸

Susie also remembered being bullied by the bigger kids, and even suffered a black out after a boy hit her from behind for no apparent reason. Susie tells of how she was punished many times, once by being told to sit on the hard concrete on her knees for hours. Susie felt most alone when she was punished by sitting in a dark room all by herself. The events surrounding Susie’s boarding school experience has left a deep impression in her life. “For a long time, I would take her store-bought bread,” Susie explains, “And I would break the piece of bread into four pieces before eating, because that’s what the dorm matrons would us to while I was in boarding school.” When students did not comply with the rules they were punished. This negatively affected how Susie raised and interacted with her children and grandchildren. Susie never felt the affection of a loving parent while in boarding school. This caused her to keep her children and grandchildren at a distance.

As stated under *History and Culture: Boarding Schools*, by the American Indian Relief Council, “Resentment of the boarding schools was most severe because the school broke the most sacred and fundamental of all human ties, the parent-child bond.”⁴⁹ The children who were taken from their families eventually would break the sacred bond with

⁴⁷ Agenda for Synod. 2016. *Christian Reformed Church in North America*. Grand Rapids, MI, June 10-17, 2016. Pg., 527

⁴⁸ Ibid., Pg. 527.

⁴⁹ History and Culture: Boarding Schools" (2016). *ESED 5234 - Master List*. 24. <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/esed5234-master/24>

their own children. “Through extensive counseling, I recognized the abuse I put my family through as a result of my childhood experiences. I did to my children what was done to me: spanking them, never them I love them, being overly strict.”⁵⁰ Susie remembers well the loneliness of being far away from home, from her parents, seven sisters, and four brothers.

I was always lonely. Every chance I got, I would go to the laundry room. It had a bay window, and if I sat in a certain place, I could see the road at the top of the canyon or mesa. I would watch the road to see if my parents were coming to get me. Kinlichee Boarding School was built near a wash and was surrounded by a fence. I tried many times to run away as I got older, but I was always caught. One time at Toyey Boarding School, I crawled through the sagebrush, dirt, trees, and cactus for miles, but they found me and brought me back for more punishment.⁵¹

Eulynda, a boarding school survivor, says, “I knew that the boarding schools had disrupted our traditional life, our place in society, our relationship with what we know and think, our language, and our practices.”⁵² The disruption of traditional life only enhanced the feeling of isolation. The Navajo live within a clan system that make up their identity. A long time ago the Navajo when introducing themselves wouldn’t even say their name, only their four clans. If another person had the same clan, then they were related. Navajo people who are related cannot marry each other, and it also meant a responsibility to each other. For example, long ago if a Navajo owed a debt, then the debt belonged to the entire Navajo clan, and not just the individual.⁵³ Removing Navajo children from their home and family subsequently removed them from their place in society. This was an attack on their identity that left them feeling alone and lost in a new world.

The boarding school experience left Susie feeling resentful and didn’t want anything to do with the Church, any of them. Susie had been baptized by the Mormons, Baptists,

⁵⁰ Agenda for Synod. 2016. *Christian Reformed Church in North America*. Grand Rapids, MI, June 10-17, 2016. Pg., 530.

⁵¹ Ibid., Pg. 529.

⁵² Toledo-Benalli, Eulynda. “Facing the Legacy of The Boarding Schools,” *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, December 2004.

⁵³ Locke, Raymond Friday. “The Book of the Navajo.” Los Angeles: Mankind Publishing Company, 1976.

Catholics, and Presbyterians. This anger fueled Susie's desire to join up with the American Indian Movement and the caravan headed to Wounded Knee during the 1970s. In the end Susie decided to stay in Denver with her sister.

After Susie's boarding school ordeal, she has been able to reclaim her language after her and her people were "forbidden to speak Navajo [in boarding school], and horrific measures were taken to punish [them] when [they] failed to speak English."⁵⁴ For many boarding school attendees, they would be punished if they even spoke one word of their Native language. The common punishment was washing out the child's mouth with soap. Susie now has a hogan, a traditional octagonal shape home Navajos used to live in, that she retreats to when she seeks quietness from city life. "Both my parents are gone now, but I will retire to the place I call home, my hogan on the Navajo reservation. And as I continue my journey, I walk in beauty with Jesus, my savior and my Lord."⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Agenda for Synod. 2016. *Christian Reformed Church in North America*. Grand Rapids, MI, June 10-17, 2016. Pg., 527.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, Pg. 531.

6. THE LAST INDIAN WAR

During the 1800's. the United States government knew how much it would cost to kill Indians and how much it would cost to educate them. They decided on the latter, the more cost-effective route of assimilation of Indian people into American society.⁵⁶ This was the chance for reformers, mostly made up of evangelical Protestants, to attempt to assimilate and eradicate the uncivilized Indian for good and turn them into individualized, civil, educated, and Christian citizens of America. The reformers knew they could not affect the desired change (assimilation) in adult Indian people, but they knew it could begin with Indian children. A new Indian war was about to begin, and David Adams said it best, the last Indian “War would be ideological and psychological, and it would be waged against children.”⁵⁷

Educating Indians for the purposes of citizenship and Christianizing was not a new idea. “In 1819, the federal Civilizing and Education Act mandated education “for the purpose of introducing among the Indians the habits and arts of civilization.””⁵⁸

According to *Indians in American History, an Introduction*: “By 1830, fifty-two schools and more than fifteen hundred students were benefiting from the fund [called the civilization fund for Indians that were given to local churches].”⁵⁹ These schools served the local tribal populations, but often the children would go to school only to return to their way of Indian

⁵⁶ Adams, David Wallace. *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience 1875-1928*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, Pg. 27

⁵⁸ Perry, Barbara. “Silent Victims: Hate Crimes Against Native Americans.” Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2008. Pg., 31.

⁵⁹ Hoxie, Frederick E. *Indians In American History*. Arlington Heights: Harlan Davidson, Inc, 1988.

life back home. For that reason, then Lieutenant Richard H. Pratt and the reformers thought it best to completely remove Indian children from their people, because “In stark terms their task was the total annihilation of Indian culture.”⁶⁰

One of the most infamous first off reservation boarding schools was Carlisle Indian School that opened on November 1, 1879 under the auspices of Richard H. Pratt. Off Reservation Boarding Schools were “Established for the sole purpose of severing the child’s cultural and psychological connection to his native heritage; this unique institution figured prominently in the federal government’s desire to find a solution to the “Indian problem,” a method of saving Indians by destroying them.”⁶¹

Pratt and the reformers knew to some extent that Manifest Destiny and progress meant hardship, removal and ethnic cleansing of Native Americans. They may have known it was morally wrong, but to make up for the nation’s sin they wanted to give the gift of civilization through education. Pratt believed Native American people remained savages because they did not engage and conform to American society. Native people were seen as immigrants who needed to be assimilated.⁶² The United States utilized their military power to remove forcefully Native American and First Nations children from their homes and sent them hundreds of miles away. While Carlisle was in operation between 1879 to 1917 fewer than four dozen Navajo students went to Carlisle, and no Navajo ever graduated from Carlisle.⁶³

When parents refused to send their children to boarding school, Indian agents often withheld rations or used agent police. In 1893 Congress passed a law while making

⁶⁰ Fear, Mary Jacqueline. “American Indian Education: the Reservation Schools, 1870-1900.” PhD Thesis., University College London, 1978.

⁶¹ Adams, David Wallace. *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience 1875-1928*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995. Pg. XI.

⁶² Fear, Mary Jacqueline. “American Indian Education: the Reservation Schools, 1870-1900.” PhD Thesis., University College London, 1978. Pg. 93.

⁶³ Iverson, Peter. “Dine: A History of the Navajos.” Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002.

appropriations for Indian tribes that stated, “if parents refused to send their children to a school for a reasonable amount of time the Secretary of the Interior could withhold rations, clothes or the annuities from the parents.”⁶⁴ According to “law and order” the survival of Indian children, and well-being of Indian people who signed treaties guaranteeing food rations was secondary to meeting the quota for filling up the boarding schools. At Fort Peck, Montana, when the Indian agent was met with resistance, “he sent the police to round up the children, denied rations to the parents, and then, to drive the point home, locked several of the most intractable fathers in the agency guardhouse.”⁶⁵ Many boarding schools also locked up Indian children for resisting attempts to civilize them.

At the Mescalero Apache territory in 1886, when agents failed to reason with the Indians to send their children to boarding school, a detachment of police unexpectedly visited their camp to “seize such children as were proper and take them away to school, willing or unwilling. Some hurried off their children to the mountains or hid them away in camps, and the police had to chase and capture them like so many wild rabbits.”⁶⁶ The off-reservation boarding schools had to meet a quota of Native American children to attend for the viability of the school. Most reservation schools relied on the students to clean the school, make repairs, and mend all school uniforms. Many schools also loaned out students to work for local farmers, only sometimes with pay.

⁶⁴ U.S. Congress. *An Act making appropriations for current and contingent expenses, and fulfilling treat stipulations with Indian Tribes*, 52nd Cong., 2nd sess., March 3, 1893. Ch. 209, Pg. 635.

⁶⁵ Adams, David Wallace. *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience 1875-1928*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995. Pg. 211

⁶⁶ U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs. 1886. *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior for the year 1886*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1886. Pg. 199.

By 1926, nearly 83% of Indian school-age children were attending boarding schools.

- 351 boarding schools in 29 states
- 1900: 20,000 children in boarding schools
- 1925: 60,889 children in boarding schools

Source: *The National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition*:
<http://www.boardingschoolhealing.org>

In 1928 the federal government investigated the policies towards American Indians that also looked at boarding schools in a document known as the Meriam Report. The report found the “labor of children constitutes a violation of child labor laws in most states.” The Meriam report also noticed the “schools are crowded materially beyond their capacity... [and] punishment of the most harmful sort are bestowed in sheer ignorance... The health of the Indians compared with that of the general population is bad.”⁶⁷ A major cause of death of Indian children while away at boarding school was diseases like tuberculosis and trachoma, a disease that causes blindness. Most boarding schools maintained a cemetery where they buried the students who died while in school. Forty years later, in 1969, The United States sent a special committee to investigate Indian Education. Their report was titled *Indian Education: A National Tragedy-A National Challenge*. The report stated, “School environment was sterile, impersonal and rigid, with a major emphasis on discipline and punishment, which is deeply resented by the students.”⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Meriam, Lewis. *The Problem of Indian Administration: Report of a Survey made at the Request of Honorable Hubert Work, Secretary of the Interior, and Submitted to Him, February 21, 1928/Survey Staff: Lewis Meriam...[et al.]*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1928.

⁶⁸ U.S. Congress. Senate. Special Committee on Indian Education. 1969. *Indian Education: A National Tragedy-A National Challenge*. 91st Congress, 1st sess., November 3, 1969.

According to these reports boarding schools caused more harm than good. The goal of “killing the Indian... saving the man” was codified with rigid routines, militarized discipline, and punishment for minor infractions.

Today, when boarding school survivors are asked about their experience, most will gladly share their ordeal. In their story-telling voice, they will belt out how they suffered corporal punishment at the hands of teachers, nuns, missionaries, or dorm matrons. The typical punishment involved washing out kids’ mouth out with soap, being hit with straps on the back, being hit with blunt objects, and abuse of every kind. One boarding school survivor recounted on a popular radio station, "In the 3rd grade, I asked the teacher why she was teaching that Columbus discovered America when Indians were here first. She came over and slapped me across my face. To be humiliated in front of the class, I'll never forget that.” At the Rainy Mountain Boarding School in Oklahoma, the “Commonly administered punishment for runaways included paddling’s, standing on tip-toe with arms outstretched, whippings across the palm of the hands, and kneeling on two-by-four boards for extended periods.”⁶⁹ One Navajo parent in 1892, complained and said, “When I brought my boy to school he had two eyes... The next time I saw him he had only one.” Another Diné reported how the superintendent was catching some of the boys by the throat and covering their mouths with his hand smothering them.⁷⁰

The real tragedy is that corporal punishment was against the rules of Indian schools even before the twentieth century. According to rule 249 of the *Rules for Indian School Service*, “In no case shall the school employees’ resort to abusive language, ridicule, corporal punishment, or any other cruel or degrading measure.”⁷¹ Punishment in various forms were

⁶⁹ Ellis, Clyde. *To Change Them Forever: Indian Education at Rainy Mountain Boarding School 1893-1920*. Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996. Pg. 107.

⁷⁰ Iverson, Peter. “Diné: A History of the Navajos.” Albuquerque: UNM Press, 2002. Pg. 91.

⁷¹ U.S. Office of Indian Affairs. 1898. *Rules for the Indian School Service*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1898. Pg. 31.

deemed necessary to in order to help alleviate the Indian problem. These punishments often disregarded the rules set in place by the Office of Indian Affairs. There may be an argument that off-reservation boarding schools were more strict and severe than on-reservation boarding schools. However, the use of corporal punishment had no boundaries when it came to disciplining Indian children.

7. THEME OF LONELINESS

During the Navajo Gathering the word “loneliness” was used quite a few times, especially from the ones who experienced boarding school. Susie mentioned in her story how lonely she was, especially when she was having a hard time in school and no one was there to comfort her. Susie’s exclaims, “Loneliness is serious—it gnaws at my sense of reality and draws me toward emptiness, sadness, and hopelessness.”⁷² Parents who have attended boarding school tend to pass down their trauma to their offspring, which leads to impaired parenting.⁷³

Elsie, a Navajo woman, grew up on the Navajo reservation near Naschitti, NM during the mid 1900s. Her family raised sheep, and every summer her and her family would go up the mountain, but she didn’t like going very much. Elsie recalls, “My mom and dad signed me up for Tóhaleena boarding school, when I got there at first thing I knew was I was lonesome, and wanted to go home.” She attended both on-reservation and off-reservation boarding schools. Both environments were similar. She remembers having to clean the school, do the laundry and sometimes being asked to clean a school worker’s home for a few dollars. Going to Church and learning about the Bible was mandatory. She does not remember learning much about history, English, or chemistry, but just Bible class. For the most part Elsie’s experience was mostly positive, but she had her share of punishment from

⁷² Agenda for Synod. 2016. *Christian Reformed Church in North America*. Grand Rapids, MI, June 10-17, 2016. Pg., 529

⁷³ Dawe, Ray. “Historical Trauma.” Presentation at Rehoboth Christian School Cafeteria, Rehoboth, NM. May 5, 2018.

teachers and principals. She does wish she reported the bad teachers who would hit students, and treat them bad.

Orlinda Skyberg attended Rehoboth Christian School after it transitioned into more of a day school with dormitories. By this time boarding schools were not as severe as for the previous generations. Orlin shared, “Rehoboth was not severe, but they were very strict at that time. The only bad memory I have was taking a really hot bath.” Orlin said she and her friends would joke about how the school was trying to scrub away their sins. Before the Navajo Gathering a local Navajo man came up and asked what everyone was doing. After being informed of the purpose of the event, he quickly began sharing how his older brother once was hit with a 2x4 while at Rehoboth. Fortunately, he did not suffer the same abuse at school. He said his experience was not too bad at Rehoboth, and he even worked as a Dorm Parent for a little while.

Orlin went on to share, “Everybody was lonely, because none of us could go home, but only on holidays.” Orlin recalls her younger sister (my third oldest sibling Barbara) was six years old and she was crying one day after being dropped off. Our eldest sibling, Eugene, saw her and went up to her to tell her she’d be okay. Even with siblings nearby there was still loneliness because they separated all the children. Boarding schools, even the “good” ones denied the basic needs of children like hugs and someone telling them they are loved and worthy. Orlin continues with tears, “It isn’t until only recently have I built a bond with my family. There are emotional effects from boarding school, and I never really thought about it before.”

Ben Yazzie, Navajo minister with Missions Door, said he remembers having a few positive moments while at boarding school, but he also remembers the loneliness and how it was a heavy burden. He missed his mom, grandparents, and sheep and often wondered who was taking care of his family and sheep. “I was taken care of very well, there was good food,

nice beds to sleep in,” recalls Ben. At the Christian boarding school I was at, “you got spanked for little things, and the Principal would give spankings.” Due to the harsh treatment, and not being able to speak Navajo at school, Ben decided to run away in the middle of night. He made it home by hitchhiking, and refused to go back. In the end it was a horrible experience for Ben.

Running away was pretty common for off-reservation boarding school attendees. In 1927 at the Chilocco Boarding School within a four-month period, one hundred and eleven boys and eighteen girls ran away.⁷⁴ A former boarding school teacher at Fort Mohave recalls, “The pupils ran away in droves, the worst offenders being the wee kindergartners.” For many pupils the only solution to the isolation, loneliness, and homesickness was to run away. They would rather risk the dangers of travel, weather, wild animals, and possible punishment just to get back to mom, dad, grandma, grandpa and the sheep. The late Dennis Banks, Chippewa and one of the leaders of the American Indian Civil Rights Movement, was taken 300 miles away from his home to a boarding school in the early 1940s. Being far from home, the loneliness was only exacerbated by the punishment. Dennis reveals, “You know, the beatings began immediately... It was a terrible experience that the American government was experimenting with.”⁷⁵ Like many others Dennis decided to run away. In 1958 three brothers could not bear going back to Crownpoint boarding school after Christmas vacation. They tried to walk the fifty miles back to their home, but Ronald, 9, and Willie, 13, could not be woken up by their surviving brother, Ray, after sleeping outside in ten below freezing

⁷⁴ Adams, David Wallace. *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience 1875-1928*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995.

⁷⁵ “Native American Leaders Dennis Banks on the Overlooked Tragedy of Nation’s Indian Boarding Schools.” https://www.democracynow.org/2012/10/8/native_american_leader_dennis_banks_on (Accessed August 15, 2018).

temperature. Navajo Nation police officer Stewart Silentman said, “They were lonesome for home and just took off.”⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Donovan, Bill. “50 Years Ago: Boys freeze after running away from boarding school.” *Navajo Times*, January 11, 2018.

8. NAVAJO RESURGENCE

There has been a recent resurgence happening across Native America, especially among the young Native people who desire to return to the original teachings of their people. This is also not only true for Native people in the United States and in Canada, but in other Indigenous communities around the world. Tulio is of the Embera people, also known as Chocó or Katió Indians, they are located in Panama and Columbia. “We are hunter people,” Tulio exclaimed, “As hunter people, we carry a spear, and to leave your spear is similar to saying you want to die.” Tulio grew up learning these truths from his father who would often leave their home to go fish or hunt. Many times, Tuilo’s father would take him along, to learn about the land, the trees, animals, plants, and most importantly how to hunt. For many Embera, colonizers have since taken their spears away. Tulio expressed his fear of his people no longer having and carrying their spear. The spear represents their way of life, traditional teachings, and is part of their identity as hunter people. Tulio’s fear is exactly what many Native North American communities fear, and that is not passing down to future generations the native language, teachings and culture.

Like Tuilo and his Embera people, the Navajo have encountered the same difficulty of keeping the language, teachings, and culture alive among young Navajo people. Of the total Navajo population, 156,823 (47%) resided on the Navajo reservation.⁷⁷ This would indicated about fifty three percent of all Navajo people live away from reservation, and in

⁷⁷ Navajo Division of Health. *Navajo Population Profile 2010 U.S. Census*. Window Rock, Arizona, Navajo Nations, December 2013.

cities like Albuquerque, Phoenix, Denver, Los Angeles, Chicago, Salt Lake City, and many other places. With some many Navajo people moving away from the reservation is it possible to retain their culture, their values, language, and traditions?

Johnny is a Navajo pastor who has a heart to reach the young people on the Navajo reservation. Over the decades of pastoring and working in his rez community, he has noticed how few, if any, young, college age students are in Church. The concern for Johnny is not just having a high number of young people in Church, but who will eventually lead in the future. When Johnny has tried to bring up this conversation with other pastors, he has been met with silence. "I'm going to be patient, loving and wait on the Spirit to show up," recalled Johnny; He continues, "What should worship look like? Do we continue with the white man style, go just on Sunday from 10-12, then leave?" A final plea from Johnny is, "We need to teach our (Navajo) kids what church is, how to worship even if it's different from how I've been taught, pray for God to show us the ancient paths (Jeremiah 6:16), and us old ones have to get out of the way."

Richard Silversmith, Susie's husband, would agree with Johnny's assessment about the old ones needing to get out of the way. "God will move these young people in ways we cannot," exclaimed Richard, "At Denver Indian Christian Center, we go outside the walls of the church for justice work because that's where the young people are." Richard believes in going out into the community and believes this is where the church is headed. Vern Bia is a father of nine and exclaims, "the young people seek to communicate with Creator and others in their own ways, by climbing rocks, riding bikes, nature-oriented stuff." Vern has witnessed his children grow in their spiritual walk with God outside the church walls.

Young people, like new congregants to the church, need to learn the theology, church liturgy, worship, and leadership, but Ty explains, "There [also] needs to be an initiation of the young people into the community which includes the church." For Navajo people, stepping

over the liminal spaces into adulthood, womanhood, and major stages of life are all done in ceremony. These ceremonies are a type of preparation and without it the Navajo will respond as Ben suggests, with, “Yee-yah! (similar to oh-no!); When Navajos are asked to be deacons without any preparation for the position.” As a young man, Ben was challenged by his local pastor to help preach on certain Sundays. This was his initiation into the pulpit. Ben exhorts, “It is necessary to involve young people, and too often we don’t. The first message I gave was at the age of 18 and lasted only seven minutes, but the Pastor said it was the best sermon he had ever heard, and that me made feel so special.”

The resurgence of Navajo ministry methodologies is needed in all areas of ministry, especially in evangelism. Modern evangelistic methods do not always consider the cultural context in which the good news is being proclaimed. Ben retells the story of when he tried to share the gospel with his grandfather. Fresh off the training at Evangelism Explosion,⁷⁸ Ben decided to take his new training, and carry out the call of all Christians to proclaim the good news to ends of the earth. Ben started with his Navajo grandfather and asked him, “If you were to die tonight would you go to heaven or hell?” Ben’s grandfather replied, “What the heck are you talking about, would you go to heaven or hell? You don’t talk to people like that, it’s very disrespectful!” Young Navajo believers and ministers are accustomed to the training and methodologies that are mostly Euroamerican, and as such, they are often ill-suited in reaching all Native people for Christ. Everybody, including young Navajo college students, are on a spiritual journey. They will all be in different stages of that journey, and a universal evangelistic method will not suffice in meeting them where they are at spiritually. The Church and missionaries tend to make reaching non-believers a means to an end without

⁷⁸ Evangelism Explosion is a ministry that trains people how to share their faith in Christ and how to bring people from unbelief to belief. It utilizes a variety of components including prayer, actual on-the-job training where the experienced lead the inexperienced, and the principle of spiritual multiplication. You can find them at <http://evangelismexplosion.org>

first listening to see where the person is at on their journey, or if there is enough trust to talk about something as personal as one's spirituality.

The Navajo language, and concepts are grounded in tribal metanarratives such as the emergence story. The Navajo word "Hozho" is usually translated into English as "balance" or "harmony." But, according to Robert S. Drake, "Hozho" is a "Consideration of the nature of the universe, the world, and man, and the nature of time and space, creation, growth, motion, order, control, and the life cycle includes all these other Navajo concepts expressed in terms quite impossible to translate into English."⁷⁹ The bridge between the gospel and the Navajo worldview, lifeways, culture, and language is accomplished within their own sacred space. The hope is for these teachings to trickle down to the young Native people who decide to follow the Jesus Way.

Rashawn Ramone is from Torreon, NM, and on staff with Intervarsity. Rashawn works at San Juan College in Farmington, NM and has been contextualizing the gospel of Jesus to be more understandable and applicable to the Navajo and Native American students he works with. Rashawn and his group often sing Broken Walls songs on the drum. He and his co-worker Courtland, Intervarsity staff at Fort Lewis College in Colorado use the *First Nations Version*⁸⁰ of the Bible written by Terry Wildman in their Bible studies. In the First Nations Version Ephesians 1.15-17 reads

¹⁵When I heard of the trust you have in Creator Sets Free (Jesus), and your deep love for all of his holy ones, ¹⁶I never stop giving thanks for you and remember you when I send my voice to the Great Spirit. ¹⁷I pray that the Father of honor and beauty, who is the Great Spirit of our Honored Chief Creator Sets Free (Jesus), will gift you with a spirit of wisdom, to know him deeply and understand his mysterious ways.

⁷⁹ Drake, Robert S. "Walk In Beauty: Prayer From The Navajo People." TheTalkingFeather.com. <https://talking-feather.com/home/walk-in-beauty-prayer-from-navajo-blessing>. Accessed July 24, 2018.

⁸⁰ From FirstNationsVersion.com: The First Nations Version of the New Testament is a new translation, attempting to capture the simplicity, clarity and beauty of our Native storytellers in English, while remaining faithful to the original language of the New Testament.

Young ministers who are Native American are resisting the paternalistic instructions of how to do ministry, evangelism, and discipleship from the Euro Western American Church. Stepping into the world of Native American ministry means wading deep into the issues that plague Indian people. Boarding school survivors carry with them the legacy of assimilative attempts that directly attacked their identity as Indigenous people. The repercussions of assimilation and colonialism breeds anger for the dominant culture, and a dissatisfaction of self for tribal people. The trauma of the past lingers in the young folks. They may want to know Jesus, but without dealing with the abuse and trauma their walk with Jesus will not be an abundant life as he promised (John 10:10). It is only in this space of talking about the past, sharing stories, and listening can healing can begin to take place.

9. RECONCILIATION

The residential schools in Canada, based on the model set forth by the United States, purposefully separated Aboriginal children from families to weaken family ties, cultural links and to indoctrinate the children into a new culture.⁸¹ Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, constituted and created by the Indian Residential School Settlement agreement spend six years traveling around Canada, and heard from more than six thousands witness, most of whom survived abuse, physically and sexually.⁸² Indian Residential Schools were poorly made and maintained schools, and the discipline was harsh. Aboriginal children's languages and culture were forbidden and suppressed.⁸³

A reconciliation framework is one in which Canada's political and legal systems, education and religious institutions, the corporate sector and civic society function in ways that are consistent with the principles set out in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, which Canada endorsed. Together, Canadians must do more than just *talk* about reconciliation; we must learn how to *practice* reconciliation in our everyday lives—within ourselves and our families, and in our communities, governments, places of worship, schools, and workplaces. To do so constructively, Canadians must remain committed to the ongoing work of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships.⁸⁴

The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (or UNDRIP), Article 2 states: "Indigenous peoples and individuals are free and equal to other peoples."⁸⁵ UNDRIP

⁸¹ Canada, Manitoba. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. 2015. *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Volume One: Summary*. Toronto: James Lorimer & Company LTD. Pg., V.

⁸² *Ibid.*, Pg. V-VI

⁸³ *Ibid.*, Pg. 3.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, Pg. 21.

⁸⁵ United Nations. 2007. *United Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. Pg., 4.

humanized Indigenous peoples whose rights are to be respected by all signing nations. The Declaration, while non-binding, looks and feels like a hard-law treaty, and only four voted against its adoption.⁸⁶ The four votes against came from Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States. After nine years of the passing of UNDRIP the four countries reversed their position and support the Declaration.⁸⁷ The example of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission is recognizing the rights of Indigenous peoples, and implemented *reconciliation* into every aspect of their lives and to the ongoing work of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships. "The Commission is convinced that genuine reconciliation will not be possible until the broad legacy of the schools is both understood and addressed."⁸⁸

Ty, former educator and outspoken Navajo man, laments about a local Christian School set up by the Christian reformed church over one hundred years ago that began as an Indian Boarding School. "The CRC mission to the Indigenous peoples of the United States originated in 1888 when the Board of Heathen Missions was founded to carry out the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19, specifically to the Indigenous peoples of North America."⁸⁹ In 2003, sincere apologies were given by the Christian Reformed Church and the Rehoboth administration, but the event was not conclusive or comprehensive. "Apologies for misguided policies and individual mistakes cannot adequately address the trauma characteristic of these boarding schools, which the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada goes so far as to

⁸⁶ Hohmann, Jessie, Marc Weller. "The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: A Commentary." United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2018. Pg. 1.

⁸⁷ United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples | United Nations For Indigenous Peoples. UN.org. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples.html>. Accessed January 31, 2019.

⁸⁸ Canada, Manitoba. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. 2015. *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Volume One: Summary*. Toronto: James Lorimer & Company LTD. Pg., 182.

⁸⁹ Agenda for Synod. 2016. *Christian Reformed Church in North America*. Grand Rapids, MI, June 10-17, 2016. Pg., 504

label a form of cultural genocide.”⁹⁰ This trauma is often felt by colonized and oppressed peoples who experience an assault on their dignity as human beings and lose a sense of their identity.⁹¹ For reconciliation to be conclusive and comprehensive the full story must be told, but too often “reconciliation is understood today as assimilation appeasement, a passive peace, a unity without cost, and maintaining power with only cosmetic changes.”⁹² Ty talked about how the reconciliation event should have been the beginning of something more, consistent engaging dialogues and time of sharing of stories. Ty suggested, “There needs to be sessions of conciliation, the building of a new relationship with the students at the school, their parents, and the community.”

Mark Charles, Navajo speaker and activist, has proposed the creation of a Truth and Conciliation Commission in America. Truth and Conciliation describes the process of sharing the truth, told in raw narratives so that conciliation (relationship) may be established. Reconciliation means reverting back to an original and established relationship. In the first book of the Bible, Genesis 1, Adam and Eve are in the Garden of Eden and it’s perfect, but sin severs the original and perfect relationship between man and God. It is only through Jesus, in his life, death and resurrection that man can revert back to the original relationship with God. “Clearly the rationale that Native Americans were being civilized “for their own good” provided very light cover indeed for the deeper, less altruistic motives: greed for land and resources.”⁹³ According to Mark Charles “conciliation” does not assume an original and established relationship, but seeks to overcome distrust and mediation between two disputing groups. Conciliation does not try to bury the past atrocities, but is “a process needed in a

⁹⁰ Agenda for Synod. 2016. *Christian Reformed Church in North America*. Grand Rapids, MI, June 10-17, 2016. Pg., 512.

⁹¹ Boesak, Allan Aubrey, Curtiss Paul DeYoung. “Radical Reconciliation: Beyond Political Pietism and Christian Quietism.” New York: Orbis Books, 2012. Pg., 14.

⁹² *Ibid.*, Pg. 10.

⁹³ Perry, Barbara. “Silent Victims: Hate Crimes Against Native Americans.” Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2008. Pg., 31.

nation that was founded on land stolen from Natives and built on the backs of enslaved African people.”⁹⁴ Truth and Conciliation laments the true history of the disenfranchised Indigenous people of North America.

Native American people have been repeatedly told to forget the past, and just move on. Reconciliation has been used as a weapon to silence the past atrocities committed against them, to forgive and forget. This paternalistic remedy for Native America people is all too familiar. But if, “Reconciliation occurs between equals,”⁹⁵ then reconciliation must take place on both disputing parties’ terms. For Native people they are still dealing with their own traumatic histories of their sacred lands stolen, annihilation warfare, disease, forced removal, assimilation, boarding schools, and loss of identity.

“It was the image of Natives as savages and wild men that allowed their persecution. Drawing on the emerging notions of social Darwinism, Europeans in the Americas constructed Native Americans as less than human. Some went as far as to characterize them as consorts of the Devil. Rather than acknowledge the validity and richness of Native peoples’ spirituality, Europeans characterized them as heathens, to be saved or eradicated. All too often, the latter was the case.”⁹⁶

Native people have come to see themselves through the eyes of their oppressors as

inferior and lacking power. This is antithetical to the gospel message and an affront to the social dignity of all human beings... When persons viewed as objects accept their oppressors’ worldview as their own, they often feel compelled to behave and act according to the way in which they have been constructed by others.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Charles, Marck. “10 Reasons Why I’m Switching from using the term ‘Racial Reconciliation’ to using the term ‘Racial Conciliation’.” *Wireless Hogan: Reflections from the Hogan*, December 2, 2015. <http://wirelesshogan.blogspot.com/2015/12/racial-conciliation.html>

⁹⁵ DeYoung, Curtiss Paul. “Reconciliation: Our Greatest Challenge-Our Only Hope.” Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1997. Pg. 74.

⁹⁶ Perry, Barbara. “Silent Victims: Hate Crimes Against Native Americans.” Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2008. Pg. 31.

⁹⁷ Del La Torre, Miguel A. *Doing Christian Ethics From The Margins*. New York: Orbis Books, 2014. Page 48.

The desire for reconciliation is a desire to reach down to the very roots of injustice, which created the need for reconciliation in the first place.⁹⁸ “Those in positions of power and privilege cannot define reconciliation nor affect it on behalf of others over whom they have power. Reconciliation, like forgiveness, cannot be declared from the thrones of the powerful.”⁹⁹ Reconciliation must flow from the wounds of the Sand Creek Massacre, Battle at Little Bighorn, Pequot War, Red Cloud’s War, Geronimo’s War, the Trail of Tears, The Long Walk, Boarding Schools, broken treaties, stolen lands, desecration of land and water, forced removal, outlawing Indian religion, Indian removal, rape, murder, missing and murdered Indigenous women, denial of human rights, sports team mascots, and every attempt to remove Indian identity.

The word Navajo people, especially the elders, used to talk about non-Navajos is *anaa’i*, which means “enemy.” The potential of crossing over liminal space as an outsider (*anaai’i*) could be through the Navajo concept of *k’é* (clan). Ben Yazzie in his study of *Interpreting Navajo Cultural Strata* says, “*K’é* and its practice is to encompass relational *harmony*, maintaining unity in clan relationships. Moreover, for the sake of *k’é*, forgiveness is extended to maintain clan harmony.”¹⁰⁰ Seeking any kind of reconciliation or *harmony* at least within the Navajo context needs to begin and end with relationship. In the Navajo language there is no word for “sorry,” because in *K’é* they seek to live in harmony with self, others, creation, and the Creator so as not to have to say sorry. If a person is wronged, then instead of just saying “sorry,” the offender seeks to right the wrong. If the offender took the person’s personal belongings, then the offender gives it back or offers something to replace what was taken. If the offense was abstract such as hurting their feelings, then the offender

⁹⁸ Boesak, Allan Aubrey, Curtiss Paul DeYoung. “Radical Reconciliation: Beyond Political Pietism and Christian Quietism.” New York: Orbis Books, 2012. Pg. 18.

⁹⁹ Ibid., Pg. 37.

¹⁰⁰ Yazzie, Ben. “Interpreting Navajo Cultural Strata.” PhD. Diss., Trinity Southwest University, 2016. Pg. 154.

can restore the relationship, in Navajo this is called *k'énáhásdlíí'* (peaceful relationship has been restored). Reconciliation is understood and struggled through in communities that are Navajo or in any other context of Indian nations in North America.

10. CONCLUSION

Traditionally, Navajo children were raised primarily by their families in an informal educational process to prepare them for life. “They were taught what they needed to know to function in their society – the rules and taboos of their culture, the skills to make a living from their flocks and farms, the accepted behavior expected to them and the responsibility they must assume to be respected Navajos.”¹⁰¹ The informal education process included teaching cultural values through stories, ceremonies, and everyday tasks. The process was sound, giving young Navajo people a sense of self-worth, self-respect, and respect for their elders.¹⁰²

The era of boarding schools may have brought some good things to Indian people such as education, system of writing and reading, food, shelter, and an escape from the hardships of the Indian wars. The chance of survival of Indian people in the New World increased with education. However, in the grand scheme of Manifest Destiny and American progress, the original intent had always been to open up the west for white settlers. America knew the cost of trying to kill off the Indian, and decided to go with the cost-efficient approach of education of Indian children. Charles F. Meserve, President of Shaw University from 1895 to 1919, confidently reported, “In a decade or two the Indian agent, the reservation, and the rations system are destined to be as extinct as the dodo.”¹⁰³ The goal of

¹⁰¹ Thompson, Hildegard. “The Navajos Long Walk for Education. Tsaille, Navajo Nation: Navajo Community College Press: 1975. Pg. 26.

¹⁰² Ibid., Pg. 26.

¹⁰³ Peairs, H.B. Presidents Address - Our Work: It's Progress and Needs. *Journal of Proceedings and Address*, July 6-10, 1903. Chicago: Chicago Press, 1903. Pg., 1057.

education was for Indian people to assimilate into mainstream America, then there would be no Indians to lay claim to the treaties where “the Indian would forever be allowed to live unmolested and protected on the tiny reserved remnants of his national homelands.”¹⁰⁴

Most, if not all boarding schools stood on lands, ethnically cleansed of Native Americans, and given to them by the U.S. government. The Doctrine of Discovery suggested non-Christian peoples did not possess natural law rights to the land,¹⁰⁵ but neither did European nations or any explorer. ‘Discovery’ can take place only on lands unoccupied by human beings. Native people have been the stewards of the lands of North American since time immemorial. To right the wrong, and to enact justice, and a potential outcome of reconciliation is to return what was stolen from Native American people. “The Doctrine of Discovery is a dangerous myth that must be acknowledged if ex-English colonies wish to realize respectful reconciled relationships with their Indigenous peoples.”¹⁰⁶ Reconciliation is simply exchanging (*Katallasso*) places with the “other,” and “overcoming alienation through identification, restoring relationships, positive change, new frameworks, and a rich togetherness that is both spiritual and political.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Clifton, James A. “The Invented Indian: Culture, Fictions & Government Policies.” New York, NY: Transaction Publishers, 1990.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, Pg. 8.

¹⁰⁶ Miller, Robert. Ruru, Jacinta. Behrendt, Larissa. and Lindberg, Tracey.. “Discovering Indigenous Lands: The Doctrine of Discovery in the English Colonies.” New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010. Pg. 26

¹⁰⁷ Boesak, Allan Aubrey, Curtiss Paul DeYoung. “Radical Reconciliation: Beyond Political Pietism and Christian Quietism.” New York: Orbis Books, 2012. Pg. 12.

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APPENDIX 1

GENERAL MEDIA RELEASE FORM

I, _____, hereby give consent to my words and/or stories being written down in the form of notes during the Navajo Gathering 2018. Much of the notes taken during the Navajo Gathering will be printed later on as a Journal. Even if you sign this release form you may still request certain stories be left out of the notes and subsequently the printed Journal. The Navajo Gathering Journal will **NOT** be widely distributed.

- Check here if you wish to remain anonymous in the notes and Journal. Instead, a pseudonym will be used for print journal.
- Check here if you **DO NOT** wish to appear on any tagged social media accounts (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, ect.) in the form of pictures and/or quotes.

Print Name: _____ Date: _____

Signature: _____

APPENDIX 2

FOR NON-NAVAJO PARTICIPANTS

Thank you for joining us! You are more than welcome to sit and listen, but your participation is peripheral. Although, you will be *outside* the circle your feedback and questions will be vital in clarifying what people are saying and for concise wording.

Your Role:

1. Pray for participants and their willingness to be part of the discussion. Pray for participants families as they are away from them for this event. Lastly, pray for the Spirit to guide our time together.
2. Actively listen in on the discussion and write down things that stick out to you that is either helpful or would be good information for non-Navajo people to know and understand. This Information could be vital for non-Navajo missionaries, pastors, and church leaders who work in Navajo and/or Native American ministry.
3. Write down any questions you might have about what is being said. Also, write down anything that may need more clarification or additional supporting arguments (Bible references, etc.). This information will very helpful in writing the Journal. How we as Navajo people discuss concepts, theology, and ideas will need to be *translated* for Eurowestern people.