



WHAT IS THE CHRISTIAN LEFT?

08 14-15 2020

SCHEDULE AT-A-GLANCE

FRIDAY, AUGUST 14, 2020

9:00 a.m.

Welcome and Introductions

9:40

Panel 1: Land Justice

Panel 2: Imperialism and Nationalism

10:55

BREAK

11:25

Panel 3: Indigenous Justice / Settler Colonialism

Panel 4: Economic Justice and Biblical Imagination

12:40

BREAK

1:40

Panel 5: Sexuality

Panel 6: Media and Homiletics

2:40

BREAK

3:15

Ernest Crossley Hunter Memorial Lectureship Keynote Presentation
JOERG RIEGER

5:00

BREAK

6:00

Panel 7: Anti-Racism

SATURDAY, AUGUST 15, 2020

9:00 a.m.

Welcome and Introductions

9:40

Panel 8: Ecology

10:40

BREAK

11:25

Panel 9: The Christian Left

12:25

BREAK

12:40

Panel 10: Social Gospel and Social Justice

1:40

BREAK

2:00

Panel 11: The Christian Left and the Pandemic

3:30

Final Remarks

CHRISTIAN LEFT CONFERENCE SPONSORS

KEEP IT SOCIAL!

FRIDAY, AUGUST 14, 2020

9:00 a.m.* Welcome and Introductions

Rev. Dr. Michelle Voss Roberts, Principal of Emmanuel College

Rev. Dr. Cheri DiNovo, Minister at Trinity-St. Paul's Centre for Faith, Justice and the Arts

This is a time to say a quick hello to folks that you may know from other conferences and other schools (or someone from your own school that you have not seen in some time!), as well as get an introduction to the conference format, panelists, and facilitators.

**all times Eastern Daylight Time (EDT)*

9:40 Panel 1: Land Justice

meeting room opens to registrants
(Facilitator – David Montealegre)

9:45 Introductions

9:50 **David Lappano** (he/him)

The Centre for Christian Studies, Winnipeg, Faculty

"The Diggers, Morant Bay Rebellion, and Land Protectors: A Christian Left Today Must Be Grounded"
Nineteenth- and twentieth-century Socialism (Christian or otherwise) is often formulated within the Marxian analysis of labour, especially urban working and housing conditions, and can often obfuscate the centrality of land dispossession and exploitation in materialist history, or the importance of the human relationship to its environment. Answering the question, 'What is the Christian Left ...for today and the

Panel 2: Imperialism and Nationalism

meeting room opens to registrants
(Facilitator – Morgan Bell)

Introductions

Dean Dettloff (he/him)

Institute for Christian Studies, Toronto, PhD Candidate

"Bursting the Dam: Christianity, Canada, and Anti-Imperialism"
In the history of the 20th century, anti-imperialist rallies, protests, and movements were hotbeds for fraternization between Christianity and the radical Left. As liberation theology spread from Latin America, Christians in other parts of the world took a significant interest in the global networks of economic exploitation that made capitalism possible, and the Left began to take a second look at the revolutionary potential of Christianity. In Canada, Christians and Leftists worked together to set up solidarity organizations and independent study groups to examine and publicize the

future?' I want to affirm what is already underway in the resurgent Indigenous activist communities of Turtle Island that are focused on land protection and land reclamation. This paper will link three historical examples of Christian land-based activism in order to highlight a thread within the Christian traditions that can be woven into new movements for social justice. I will explore the diggers of 20th-century England, the Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica in 1865, and I will connect the social-theological themes of these separate events to the contemporary land-based theology and spiritualities in Canadian Indigenous contexts. I will offer that a Christian Left today can come at questions of economic injustice, gender injustice and racial injustice through the lens of land justice. I am not speaking of apolitical environmentalism; instead, looking at our examples I claim that land-based socialism rejects any undemocratic control or use of land, and it insists that people who live in a place are entitled to partake of the full benefits of the land and are responsible together for the wellbeing of that place and its inhabitants.

10:05

Jason McKinney (he/him)

Priest at Epiphany and St. Mark Parkdale, Toronto; Trinity College, University of Toronto, Faculty

"De-Propertizing the Commons"

Gentrification is more than a form of cultural change in urban neighbourhoods. It is a deliberate strategy incited by the financialization of real estate and enacted through colonial modes of dispossession and erasure. Terra nullius, claims Glen Coulthard, has found new life in contemporary urban spaces as urbs nullius. The displacement of

connections between Canada's economy and the dispossession of the Global South.

Though there are remnants of these connections today, they are, like the Left in general, fragmented and thin. The absence is palpable as Canada's imperialist role in the 20th century has become more pronounced: e.g. participating in removing liberation theologian Jean-Bertrand Aristide from the presidency in Haiti, intervening globally to protect the interests of Canada's bloated extraction industry, and supporting coup efforts in Venezuela.

In a famous sermon, Aristide characterized the masses as a flood; much of Canadian policy has been an attempt to dam the floods of the masses among the global poor. In this paper, I argue that if Christians in Canada wish to engage or build the Left, they will need to recover an anti-imperialist impulse, calling on God, with Aristide, to "let the flood descend."

David Seljak (he/him)

St. Jerome's University within the University of Waterloo, Faculty; Department of Religious Studies, University of Waterloo, Chair

"The Christian Left and the New Religious Nationalism"

Despite predictions that globalization would consign both religion and nationalism to the dust heap of history, there has been a resurgence of religiously inspired nationalist movements worldwide. In regions diverse as India, the United States of America, Myanmar, and Eastern Europe, religious nationalism has become a major political force. Because Christianity, like the radical tradition in politics, has always adopted a universalist or cosmopolitan orientation (at least in theory), the Christian

indigenous and other marginalized and racialized communities mimics colonial conquest and extends settler colonial formations.

With reference to the Toronto neighbourhood of Parkdale (where I live and work as an educator, organizer, and minister), this paper argues that movements for the urban commons represent an important, if incomplete, form of resistance to these forces of financialization and erasure. The Community Land Trust (CLT) movement, for instance, aims to counteract the financializing impulses of gentrification through the de-commodification of specific parcels of land; preserving them for community use. Such lands are effectively removed from the speculative real estate market. Further, these lands become spaces for those who would otherwise be displaced. That is, they become sites for affordable housing, food security, community organizing, etc.

And yet, even de-commodified land can remain within what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri call the “republic of property.” A more thorough de-propertization of land requires another lens and other (more-than-) material practices. This paper argues that such a de-propertization requires recourse to the older, deeper, more demanding perspectives on land that can be found in the Christian tradition and in Indigenous ways of being with the land.

Left has been unable to articulate an ethical critique of nationalism, except to ignore it or condemn it out of hand.

Beginning in the 1980s, the Canadian Roman Catholic theologian Gregory Baum articulated an ethics of nationalism by examining the works of religious thinkers who adopted a critical appreciation of nations and nationalism, including the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber, Mohandas Gandhi, the Protestant theologian Paul Tillich, and French Quebecois priest, activist, theologian and sociologist Jacques Grand'Maison. A member of the Christian Left, Baum argued that universalist ideologies ignored the good that nationalist projects might do as well as the potential of cosmopolitanism to justify imperialism. His sensitivity to the moral ambiguity of nationalist projects was inspired as much by his experiences in Germany, Ontario, and, especially, Quebec as by his Critical Theology. Baum's analysis attempted to provide criteria for acceptable forms of nationalist projects. His work, while imperfect, represents a valuable contribution to the Christian Left's ability to respond to a world rocked by the rise of religious nationalism.

10:20

Jaira Koh (he/him)

Boston University School of Theology, Master degree student

"Fucking with the Market / Making Love at Home: Binaries and the Subject of Desire in Landlord Propaganda"

Following a resurgent local movement for rent control, Bostonian real estate capital has responded with its own reactionary talking points. This paper close-reads propaganda from MassLandlords, a landlord trade association, against a series of texts wrestling with desire and desirability, to explore real estate capital's construction of the desirable tenant, and its desire for a particular sort of perfection in the housing market. I offer this in service to the left's broader task of decommodifying housing, work that occurs both in streets and homes, and in rhetorical battles. First, I highlight real estate capital's fetishistic fascination with a utopian free market that operates with a particular sort of perfect beauty, drawing upon Sharon Betcher's work on disability, beauty, and fear. Second, I unearth the implicit ways that real estate understands undesirable tenants as essentially so, and an essential impediment to their utopian project, leveraging Marcella Althaus-Reid's concept of the orgiastic excess as a lens for this analysis. Third, I situate these two particular constructions within the perpetually "unsatisfying" domain of desire-under-capitalism as theorised by Todd McGowan. Ultimately, I argue that they comprise the mutually constitutive, oppositional binary that underwrites real estate capital's moral universe. I conclude by considering how this universe, thus identified and therefore vulnerable, might then be leveraged, undermined, and attacked. Further, I

Ariel Siagan (he/him)

Trinity College, University of Toronto, PhD student; Iglesia Evangelica Metodista en las Islas Filipinas or the IEMELIF Church, Deacon

"The Corpses have Resurrected: Clergy's Conversion to Social Movements"

What does murdered bodies of political activists mean? This presentation examines the conversion accounts of clergies who witness the murder of activists by the Philippine state forces. The interpretations of the murdered bodies of political activists are directed and created by the State and consumed by the public as truth. The interpretations were derived from the formal rationalization of the state and notably it goes back absorbed by the framework of the state's narrative of self-justification and renewal. In scholarly depiction, the murdered bodies are objectified, never recover their subjectivity reflected in Giorgio Agamben's depiction of bare life and Veena Das explication of "descend to the ordinary," where witnesses of violence succumb to uncritically inhabit the program of the state. The corpses are murdered twice, first of their physical bodies and second of their voices.

The conversion accounts of those who have turned their backs from the church and from the state to move deep in the underground and pledged allegiance to subversive organization, have shown that murdered corpses can be resurrected. Their bodies were killed but the voices and stories have inhabited different bodies of the people who convert. The hermeneutical method of the conversion accounts was inspired by Rene Girard's sacrificial mechanism and Allen Feldman's technology of the bodies as a denomination for exchange.

On a practical level, this presentation suggests that the Christian left has to politicize not only the living but also the dead.

reflect upon how the tenants I organise alongside resist these constructions, ultimately designating this paper's project as theology in the mode of Gustavo Gutierrez – the “second step” that is “critical reflection on Christian praxis.”

10:35 LIVE Q&A with Land Justice Panelists

LIVE Q&A with Imperialism and Nationalism Panelists

10:55 BREAK

11:25 Panel 3: Indigenous Justice / Settler Colonialism

meeting room opens to registrants
(Facilitator – Betsy Anderson)

Panel 4: Economic Justice and Biblical Imagination

meeting room opens to registrants
(Facilitator – Miriam Spies)

11:30 Introductions

Introductions

11:35 **Cameron Fraser** (he/him)
St. Andrew's College, Saskatoon, SK, Master degree student

Sheryl Johnson (she/her)
*Graduate Theological Union, Berkley, California, PhD Candidate;
Emmanuel College Alumna*

""What do these stones mean to you?' How Treaty informs my Identity as a Canadian-Settler-Christian, and is forcing me to re-think what it means to be 'One Body'""

This paper uses the image of 12 stones piled by the Israelite people after crossing the Jordan River in the Book of Joshua, as a lens to look at Treaties as a question that demands an answer about one's current identity rather than an historical concept.

Looking specifically at the context of Regina, Saskatchewan on Treaty 4 Territory, and attending to an Indigenous understanding of Treaty through the work of Harold Cardinal and Walter Hildebrandt *Treaty Elders of*

""Progressive Beliefs and Conservative Practices: Embodied Christian Economic Ethics in North American Mainline Protestant Churches""

How should we categorize churches that identify politically and theologically with the “left,” but whose ecclesial practices embody the values of the “right?” This paper will draw upon my dissertation research which focuses on the Christian stewardship literature that is used in many mainline and progressive churches, including those in the Canadian context such as the United Church of Canada. In this paper, I will argue that many churches on the “left” are engaged in economic practices that contradict their stated ethical positions related to economics, demonstrating a rupture between theo-ethical beliefs and practices. This rupture results not primarily from the isolated moral failures of individuals, but rather from a confluence of factors that include church

Saskatchewan: Our Dream Is That Our Peoples Will One Day Be Clearly Recognized As Nations, this paper challenges one to understand what one acknowledges when one acknowledges treaty.

This paper suggests that for Non-Indigenous (or Settler) Christians living in Canada, this is a question that cannot be ignored and forces one to re-define one's identity and subsequent faith and ethical commitments in that light, by forcing a concrete re-definition of what it means for Settler Christians to be part of "one body" (in the Letter to the Corinthians).

An acknowledgement of treaty acknowledges one's place in a relationship that has existing dynamics of injustice that must become core to one's practice of faith and justice-seeking.

11:50

Hyejung Jessie Yum (she/her)
*Emmanuel College, University of Toronto, PhD Candidate;
Christian Left Conference Planning Team*

"Unsettling the Radical Witness of Peace: A Postcolonial Investigation of Mennonite Pacifism in a Settler Colonial Context"

I will present a postcolonial investigation of Mennonite pacifism in a settler colonial context. With a case of Russian Mennonite immigration to Manitoba in the 1870s, I will demonstrate how the Mennonite pacifist witness has been challenged through migration. A large number of Russian Mennonites in the 1870s decided to migrate to Manitoba to avoid their involvement in violence through

decline/secularization, ecclesiological assumptions, and the influence of neoliberal ideologies.

This rupture is significant because churches may be embodying the capitalist, neoliberal practices that their theological statements say are contrary to Christian ethics, and, further, many of these churches/denominations identify economic ethics as central to their theology and ecclesial identity. The need for ideological and practical alignment is not only important for ethical and theological reasons, but also for practical ones. A 2016 Pew Research Study found that one in five people who left their childhood religion did so due to a dislike of organized religion, for reasons including pervasive hierarchy and religious communities operating too much like businesses. Therefore, alignment between belief and action has serious implications, particularly when considering the current rate of church decline and the rise of religious "nones."

Morgan Bell (he/him)
Emmanuel College, University of Toronto, PhD student; Candidate for ordained ministry in The United Church of Canada

"Stunted Imagination and Intractable Capitalism: The Promise of Apocalyptic for the Christian Left"

While diverse, in many popular manifestations the North Atlantic "Christian Left" is often presented as a movement seeking to embody the social teachings of Jesus Christ by way of secular leftist politics so to resist societal injustices and neo-liberal politics/economics. When moving from resistive critique to advancing political and economic alternatives, however, leftist Christian discourses of "inclusion," "social justice," and "transformation" (for example) and its political alternatives often continue to operate within the socio-political bounds set by neo-liberalism.

military service. Despite their pacifist commitment, the migration for the radical witness ironically led them to be complicit in another form of violence toward Indigenous populations. The Mennonites became direct beneficiaries of lands gained through the unjust treaties and became one of the European immigrant privileged groups in the colonial process of nation building in Canada. Through migration, the socio-political position of the Mennonites has shifted from a religious minority to that which is racially privileged. Their decision to avoid violence became contradictory through migration because it necessarily entails a change of the social context in which violence is interpreted and resisted. This contradiction is explained by their limited view of peace as nonresistance and lack of an understanding of colonial violence. From the analysis, I will argue that the lack of Mennonite awareness of the structural and power-sensitive nature of violence has led them to be complicit in the construction and perpetuation of colonial violence in Canada. Therefore, witness for peace in a settler colonial context requires a decolonizing approach to peace, which comes from a critical awareness of colonial violence and investigation to uncover certain asymmetric power dynamics.

12:05 p.m.

John Olthuis

Indigenous Rights Lawyer Olthuis, Kleer, Townshend LLP and a member of Trinity-St Paul's United Church, Toronto

"Structural Justice for Indigenous People and Nations – An Urgent Call to Action"

In large measure, I argue, this failure to break free of neo-liberalism can be traced to the Christian Left's popular self-understanding as a "resistance movement." To position the Christian Left primarily as a form of 'resistance' or 'subversion' implicitly re-inscribes "the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it." (Mark Fisher, 2009, p. 2) 1 In my paper, I propose to engage with the Marxist theorist Mark Fisher to show how the belief in capitalism's intractability has stunted the theo-political imaginary of the contemporary North Atlantic Christian Left. While it portends to resist and "chip away" at global capitalism, the Christian Left presumes the unassailable reality (rather than the socially constructed constitution) of capitalism and its attendant structures.

LIVE Q&A with Economic Justice and Biblical Imagination Panelists

Canada was founded on the basis of a Papal Bull issued in 1493 (The Doctrine of Discovery) which provided the spiritual, and legal justification for colonizing countries to steal land not inhabited by Christians and to enslave, drive out or exterminate legions of Indigenous people who had occupied and used the land for thousands of years. This genocidal policy is alive today and is dressed up, among other guises, in fraudulent treaties, a series of Indian Acts and Residential Schools. More often than not Christian churches and people were and continue to be complicit in this sinful shame by failure to vigorously demand and work for an end to this systemic institutionalized genocide whose legacy for Indigenous people and Nations is stolen land, stolen children, stolen health, stolen futures, stolen lives. Over 50 years of working for justice for Indigenous people and Nations as an activist and lawyer I have learned that my responsibility is to help create the political, judicial, economic, social and cultural space for indigenous self-determination by working to dismantle Canada's oppressive institutions.

My call to action, which flows from my belief that Political love for my Indigenous neighbour includes Justice, is that the Christian left must work together with all Justice seekers for structural reforms that include: 1. Renewal of the fraudulent treaties to restore land and resources to Indigenous Nations and equitable sharing in keeping with the real spirit and intent of those Treaties; 2. Reparations for Indigenous Nations for past injustices; and 3. Legal Acknowledgement that Indigenous Nations can pass their

own laws to govern themselves and their lands and resources.

12:20 LIVE Q&A with Indigenous Justice / Settler Colonialism
Panelists

12:40 BREAK

1:40 Panel 5: Sexuality
meeting room opens to registrants
(Facilitator – Wendy Cranston)

1:45 Introductions

1:50 **Bri-anne Swan** (she/her)
Centre for Christian Studies / St. Andrew's College, Student and Candidate for Diaconal ministry within the United Church; Regional Minister of Social & Ecological Justice for Shining Waters Regional Council, The United Church of Canada

""Keep it Secret. Keep it Safe.'': Exploring The United Church of Canada's 1988 Decision with Mild Indecency"

For many within the United Church of Canada, the 32nd General Council is a defining moment in the history of the denomination. It was at this gathering of commissioners, on August 24, 1988, that the United Church declared in and of itself, sexual orientation was no basis on which members of the denomination could be blocked from seeking admission to the Order of Ministry. There is little doubt that the decision made by the commissioners of the 32nd General

Panel 6: Media and Homiletics

meeting room opens to registrants
(Facilitator – Ben Menghini)

Introductions

Gord Brown (he/him)
Knox College, Toronto School of Theology, PhD Candidate

"Christianity and the Mass Media in the 21st Century"

Mainstream Protestant Churches largely stood in solidarity with African American leaders, especially those from African American Protestant Churches, during the 1960s and the Civil Rights movement. In fact, California Presbyterians voted to support Angela Davis during her criminal trial (which was politely refused). Mainstream Churches also offered support to LGBTQ+ communities. This precipitated an enormous well-funded backlash among conservative elements that seriously damaged the witness and life of Mainstream Protestant Churches. While some of these efforts were internal to the Churches, for example the efforts of the Presbyterian Layman, mass popular outlets like CBS's 60 Minutes were also involved. For a generation, the only "Christian" faces many Americans have seen on television are such extreme right-wing so-called Evangelical figures as Jerry Falwell Jr and Franklin Graham. This same phenomenon is also manifest in Canada where the bulk of mainstream

Council was bold and courageous, especially in light of the highly volatile, anti-queer rhetoric within the height of the AIDS crisis. Despite this, the process through which “the decision” was made, and the direction of conversation surrounding LGBTQ2S+ inclusion in the years afterwards, bears many similarities to Marcella Althaus-Reid’s criticism of Liberation Theology and its gradual tendency towards seeking safety and acceptance within the establishment at the expense of the most marginalized, and often mythologized, people the movement has claimed to support. Indecent Theology contends that while in its earliest days Liberation Theology was unacceptable to Church and state, it has become safe, acceptable and profitable to the broader Church and the North Atlantic academy. In the same way, the United Church of Canada’s approach to questions around LGBTQ2S+ inclusion has been approached from as heteronormative (and white/middle-class normative) a position as possible to cause minimal disruption to the safety of the dominant denominational culture, running counter to the United Church’s self-identity as a progressive and inclusive community of believers.

2:05

Marcus Zacharia

~~"A Progressive Coptic Orthodox Christianity? Virtual Activism and Non-mainstream Organizing in the Coptic Diaspora"~~

Independent Scholar

newspapers are controlled by an ideological and right-wing company. The National Post in particular is always willing to embarrass mainstream Protestant churches and the United Church of Canada in particular whenever given a pretext. Drawing on years of experience as a media consultant and academic researcher, this paper will examine the historical trends around this and the contemporary Canadian manifestation of this situation. It will also look for green shoots and hope as the Church attempts to live into this reality.

Eliana Ah Rum Ku (she/her)

Emmanuel College, University of Toronto, PhD Student

"Biased Preaching: Left Beyond Left"

In this article, I discuss the roles and necessity of lament in preaching not only in crisis but also in ordinary time. I focus on the culture of hatred and how to place hope amid the pain. This article is built on preachers’ struggles about how to preach the suffering in the world. In a world filled

with pain, churches need the voice of mourning as well as hope because genuine hope comes through the time of lament.

I first look at the culture of hatred with the issues of COVID-19. I analyze sermons that do not respect the infected suffering from isolation and a sense of guilt. Also, I diagnose how the epidemic transforms into collective sins with powers and economic dynamics. Second, I pay attention to the action of God in the suffering as an in-breaking power. Then, I invite Christians to offer directions, rather than make a 'to-do list.' Finally, I argue the necessity of lament as biased preaching against hasty proclamations of hope. COVID-19 gives a chance to consider how to preach and live as Christian left beyond left. It may not only promote healing to those who suffer but also reveal the very heart of God standing on the side of the weak and the rejected.

2:20 LIVE Q&A with Sexuality Panelist

Q&A LIVE with Media and Homiletics Panelists

2:40 BREAK

3:15 **Ernest Crossley Hunter Memorial
Lectureship Keynote Presentation**

JOERG RIEGER

Founding Director

Wendland- Cook Program in Religion and Justice

Distinguished Professor of Theology

Vanderbilt University

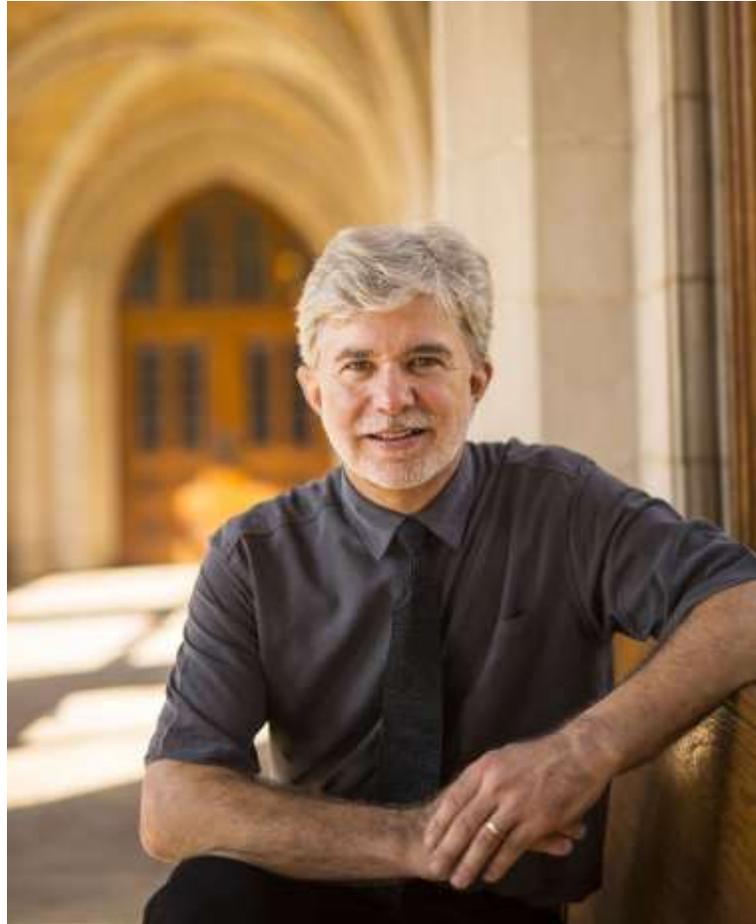
*The Circular Firing Squads of the Left:
Notes for Christians and Other Seekers
Not Looking for Easy Answers*

3:25 Introduction

3:30 **Joerg Rieger's Presentation**

4:30 Live Q&A with Keynote Presenter, Joerg Rieger

5:00 BREAK



Click on photo to watch recording of keynote presentation.

6:00 **Panel 7: Anti-Racism**
meeting room opens to registrants
(Facilitation – Hyejung Jessie Yum)

6:05 Introductions

6:10 **Adele Halliday** (she/her)
*Team Leader of Discipleship and Witness, The United
Church of Canada's General Council Office*

“The Problem with Performative Allyship: When We’re Seeking Salvation, Not Solidarity”

Over the past few months as movements for racial justice swept across the globe, people and organizations began to make prolific statements to profess their alliance with Black Lives Matter and their commitment to racial equality. Some even sought salvation from racialized people who bear the brunt of racial injustice. This paper will explore the problem with performative allyship, and why people of faith should instead be seeking solidarity.

6:25 **Robin McGauley** (she/her)
[Full-time metalsmith](#) and United Church minister

"Racism, Embodiment and Incarnation"

Racism is about bodies. Racism is the systems and structures that restrict movement, that take away freedom and that deny expression of particular bodies based on the colour of the skin. During this presentation, I will invite participants to become aware of how racism is oppression that is embodied and call us to imagine a decolonized theology of incarnation.

6:40

Kenji Marui (he/him)

*Coordinating minister for worship and care, Calvary
United Church*

**“Wrong Destination: The Folly of the Christian Left’s
Journey to Reconciliation”**

Building on arguments by Jennifer Harvey (Dear White Christians) and Walter Fluker (The Ground Has Shifted) that name “reconciliation” as a distraction from the work of reparation and repentance, I’ll share personal experiences from my involvement with General Council 43 (its in-person and on-line meetings) and from studying in Minneapolis-St. Paul when Philando Castile was killed to address the folly of the Christian Left’s journey toward reconciliation.

6:55

Live Q&A with Anti-Racism Panelists

7:10

Good Evening!

SATURDAY, AUGUST 15, 2020

9:00 a.m.* Welcome and Introductions

**All times Eastern Daylight Time (EDT)*

9:40 Panel 8: Ecology
meeting room opens to panelists
(Facilitator – Hyejung Jessie Yum)

9:45 Introductions

9:50 **Natalie Benson**
~~"Zacchaeus' Call for Ecological Reparations"~~
~~Yale Divinity School~~

9:50 **Richard T.G. Walsh** (he/him)
Wilfrid Laurier University, Professor Emeritus

"The Doomsday Clock Shows Humankind Borders on an Apocalypse: What Are Canadian Christians to Do?"

In January the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists set its infamous Doomsday Clock at its lowest point ever – 100 seconds to midnight – to indicate that, although life on Earth remains extremely threatened by the proliferation of nuclear weapons, imminent climate breakdown and irreparable biodiversity-loss render life even more precarious. The scientific consensus is that the ecological conditions essential for sustainability will be beyond recovery by 2030, if societies, particularly the most powerful, fail to make fundamental changes to civilization.

During and after Canada's 2019 election the ruling political parties failed to address the ecological emergency substantively. Despite

protestations of environmental awareness, they stolidly protect an unsustainable economy that suits the short-term goals of big business and investors but imperils environmental conditions, exacerbates socioeconomic injustice, undermines democratic governance, and reduces international relations to trade-deals. As a democratic ecosocialist Christian, inspired by feminist and liberation theology and the historical Jesus scholarship, I offer an aspirational framework, drawing from social ethics and political-economic theory and from experience in electoral politics, social movements, and university teaching and scholarship. I argue ecological sustainability is our moral imperative. It comprises five intersecting dimensions: the environment, the economy, social care (health and mental health, education, child care, etc.), governance, and global relations. Ecologically responsible societies practice biopsychosocial interdependence, lived within ecosystems of publicly owned enterprises, democratically governed by citizen councils, and affirmed by nonviolent direct action. Following Micah, they do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with the Creator. Our predecessors, Indigenous societies, lived interdependently within ecological means.

10:05

HyeRan Kim-Cragg (she/her)

Emmanuel College, University of Toronto, Director of Graduate Studies and Timothy Eaton Memorial Church Associate Professor of Preaching

"Proclaiming the Gospel in an Age of Climate Crisis: An Eco-Justice Homiletics"

In some Christian groups, the alarming news of the climate change and global warming are treated as fake news. The Christian left is

deeply dismayed by modern millennialists and creationists who believe that it is God's will to "burn up" this world. Christian fundamentalists have unalterable views that the world is not to be loved but to be tamed. To them, those including the Christian left who declare a climate crisis and address ecological justice for the healing of the earth as an act of faithful stewardship are idolatrous because they are not truly focused on God's will.

Faced with this kind of climate change denying Christian theology, Lynn White Jr. asked, "Is Christianity the most anthropocentric religion that the world has ever known?" in his article, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" published more than a half century ago. This paper takes up this question and probes the critical roles of preaching in addressing the ecological crisis. It first examines anthropocentrism in relation to androcentrism, colonialism and capitalism from postcolonial feminist theological perspectives. Then it engages a few biblical texts, focusing on "the land," exploring the art of crafting an ecologically just sermon. Ultimately it suggests that an eco-justice homiletics is a preaching that listens to the voices of the earth and lifts up its agency, while recognizing God at work empowering human agency.

10:20 LIVE Q&A with the Ecology Panelists

10:40 BREAK

11:25 Panel 9: The Christian Left

meeting room opens to registrants
(Facilitator – Gustave Ineza)

11:30 Introductions

11:35 **Benjamin L. Menghini** (he/him)
Emmanuel College, University of Toronto, PhD Student

"The Christian Left as a Cultural Nexus"

The Christian Left has been acknowledged in public discourse for several decades yet has eluded detailed definition and identification. This paper argues that the Christian Left is a cultural nexus that appears in the overlap of multiple religious, theological, and political identities, and is best understood as a loosely circumscribed coalition.

I draw on Nestor Medina's proliferation of the "cultural" to express the fluid and even hybrid phenomenon of human life in contrast to the static "culture." This reorientation destabilizes the category of "culture" and engages the reality of plurality, decentering whiteness and its epistemologies and amplifying multiplicity. No religious tradition is a culture in and of itself but is a part of a network of cultural meaning. Religious expression and experience, as well as politics, are mediated through the cultural.

Using the cultural nexus, a framework can then be drawn for the Christian Left as a purposefully intersectional, contextual, and liberative Christian social movement. Such a framework acknowledges that the Christian Left was inaugurated and led by people from marginalized and oppressed communities, and that the tools of the movement come from those communities.

I argue that such a movement must be what Kathryn Tanner calls a "genuine community of argument," marked by those who can

listen and continue conversation in the face of their disagreements. Judith Butler's concept of coalition building can be integrated with the notion of the cultural nexus to explain its non-essentialist foundation of multiple epistemologies.

11:50

Jeff Nowers (he/him)

St. Aidan's Anglican Church, Toronto, Independent Scholar

"Racial Imagination and Multitudinous Risk: An Aspirational Identification of the 'Christian Left'"

The term "Left" is a widely contested designation in various political contexts, owing in part to its confusion with the descriptor "liberal." This confusion is manifested in the realm of religion and faith, especially in the so-called West. At www.TheChristianLeft.org, for instance, visitors are welcomed with these words: "Are you a Christian and a Liberal? We've been searching for you for 10 years!" I propose that the way forward from the confusion of "Christian Left" and "Christian liberalism" is not to draw definitional lines of demarcation between the two, as though to safeguard Leftism from corrupting influences. Instead, my concern in this paper is with an aspirational identification of the Christian Left. My thesis is that the Christian Left, for our time, must be identified at the level of thought by radical imagination and at the level of practice by multitudinous risk. By "radical imagination" I mean ideas of God and the world often held in check by the weight of heresy and orthodox dogma. By "multitudinous risk" I mean broadly shared practices of resistance to sovereignty, unsupported by existing political and ecclesial structures. I explore the form that some of these ideas and practices might take (e.g., rethinking transcendence and organizing general labor disruption) and their ramifications for Christian existence

going forward. If Christian liberals (and others!) find themselves identified by this mode of integrated thought and practice, then the Christian Left will be more visibly recognizable and a more effective agent of the transformation of the world.

12:05 p.m. Q&A LIVE with The Christian Left Panelists

12:25 BREAK

12:40 Panel 10: Social Gospel and Social Justice

meeting room opens to registrants
(Facilitator – Sam Needham)

12:45 Introductions

12:50 **Daniel Saunders** (he/him)

Institute for Christian Studies, Independent Scholar

"From Christian Socialism to Communism: The Class Limits of the Social Gospel"

The Social Gospel movement, which flourished in the United States and Canada during the early 20th century, is often portrayed as the epitome of a robust Christian politics on the left. Through its engagement with progressive and socialist ideas, it was instrumental in articulating a new version of Christianity that sought a more just society, a “Christian Socialism.” However, the Social Gospel had its own limitations when it came to class, and its most radical aims were often checked by its middle-class ideological commitments and the ambiguous role of the institutional church.

This paper examines these class limitations in the Social Gospel and focuses on three Social Gospel figures who consciously left its reformism and membership in various socialist parties for the revolutionary Marxism of communist parties. These figures—the Americans Anna Rochester and Grace Hutchins, and the Canadian A.E. Smith—reveal the political and theoretical conflicts arising out of the Social Gospel and complicate the history of Christianity’s engagement with the left.

Though they left the institutional church behind, these figures nonetheless retained a religious obligation to change the world—an obligation implanted by the Social Gospel’s social theology but

only fully realized, for them, in the scientific socialism of Marxism. Ultimately, this paper raises questions about the project of “Christian Socialism,” suggesting instead that authentic Christian engagement with the left may lie in Christian thought adopting an explicitly class-conscious politics.

1:05

Rev. James Murray

Trinity-St. Andrew's United Church, Renfrew, ON

"Towards an Evolutionary Theology of 'Survival of the Kindest'"

The Christian Right has long used the ethos of 'survival of the fittest' as their hermeneutic for social engagement. Over the past 150 years Social Darwinism has been used to justify imperialism, racism, eugenics and social inequality. It led to Christians developing economic concepts like Malthusianism which was used by the British as their response to the Irish Potato Famine. Christian Social Darwinism led to government policies which criminalizes the poor and punishes the weak. As a result we find ourselves unable to offer a compelling alternative to consumer capitalism, secularism, and the resulting ecological crisis.

Liberal Christianity has long accepted the concept of evolution, but since the rejection of eugenics after the Second World War, mainline Churches have been silent on the matter of evolution. Without an evolutionary theology that encompasses all of life, our spirituality and resulting social engagement withers.

The Process theology of Alfred North Whitehead and the work of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin offers us a panentheistic theology of evolution that does promote the mutual well-being of all people

and the natural world. This alternative cosmological vision creates a more holistic spirituality that has been popularized by Catholic thinkers like Thomas Berry and Ilia Delio, and most recently by the best-selling author Richard Rohr.

This presentation will offer an evolutionary theology of 'survival of the kindest' and its practical applications for our spirituality which results in a deeper rationale for social justice which can heal the world through the transformative power of love.

1:20 Q&A LIVE with Social Gospel and Social Justice Panelists

1:40 BREAK

- 2:00** **Panel 11: The Christian Left and the Pandemic**
meeting room opens
(Facilitator – Betsy Anderson)
- 2:05 Introductions
- 2:10 **Michelle Voss Roberts** (she/her)
Principal, Emmanuel College, University of Toronto
- "Implications of the Pandemic for Theological Education"**
- 2:25 **Rob Dalglish** (he/him)
Executive Minister, EDGE, The United Church of Canada
- "What does the pandemic make possible that didn't seem possible before?"**
- 2:40 **Kyle Gingerich Hiebert**
Director, Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre, Conrad Grebel University College
- "Ruminations on Being a Peace Church in/after a Pandemic"**
- 2:55 **Cheri DiNovo**
Minister, Trinity-St. Paul's Centre for Faith, Justice and the Arts
- "Jesus, the True Communist"**
- 3:10 Q&A LIVE with The Christian Left and the Pandemic Panelists
- 3:30** **Final Remarks:** Good Afternoon and Thank You

CHRISTIAN LEFT CONFERENCE SPONSORS



 Toronto Mennonite
Theological Centre
Conrad Grebel University College

**TRINITY -
ST. PAUL'S**
UNITED CHURCH
FAITH . JUSTICE . ARTS



CENTRE FOR RELIGION AND ITS CONTEXTS

EMMANUEL COLLEGE

 EDGE
a network for ministry development

THANKS FOR JOINING US!

KEEP IT SOCIAL!

[Emmanuel College of Victoria University in the University of Toronto](#)

[Trinity-St Paul's United Church and Centre for Faith, Justice and the Arts](#)

[Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre](#)

[Edge: A Network for Ministry Development](#)

#ChristianLeftConference

#ChristianLeft