
Journeys to Justice: Reflections on Canadian Christian Activism by Joe Gunn. Toronto: Novalis, 2018. 174pp. ISBN 978-2-89688-467-4

In part one of *Journeys to Justice*, Joe Gunn presents ten chapters consisting of an introduction to a particular area of social concern, followed by a univocal, edited, and transcribed interview with a Canadian Christian activist associated with a prominent campaign within that area. The ten interviewees for this section, entitled, “Where We Have Been”, were chosen based on a desire to be inclusive. However, Gunn admits he fell short of that ambition in terms of regional and, most significantly, ethnic diversity. The reason he cites for missing the mark in this regard is that during the second half of the twentieth century, most of the relevant groups profiled positively in this book were headquartered in Toronto and lead by white Canadians. Nonetheless, the chapters forming part one are not purely retrospective. The presented selections concentrate on the topic at hand, but also invariably turn to current events as the majority of the interviewees remain active in social and, now also, ecological activism.

Part two of the book, focusing on “Where We are Going”, consists of three contributions authored in response to part one. These elements are tied together by Gunn’s introduction, taking the form of a letter to two of his adult children. Both of these twins have volunteered for Citizens for Public Justice, headquartered in Ottawa, where Gunn is now Executive Director. In this introductory-styled letter, Gunn lays out the premises that inform his research project. These include the conviction that the stories of Christian activism from the 60s, 70s, 80s, and 90s are worth re-telling to a new generation, and that there are continuing needs for such faith-inspired service in support of public justice. In support of these premises, for example, Gunn asserts that, “the antidote to poor theology is good theology (not the abandonment of theology)” (p. 10). This is an increasingly important assertion for future generations of community-engaged scholars and activists, who may under-appreciate the transformative potential in faith-inspired activism, not the least because of the many failings of Canadian Christians and their churches in standing for public justice. Perhaps the most pointed example of this failure is the history of churches and Catholic religious orders forming partnerships with the state to enforce colonialist policies, including the cultural genocide manifest in the Indian Residential School system.

In order to demonstrate the healing potential of theologically-sound ecumenical efforts in addressing social challenges, despite the problematic legacy of Canada’s Christian communities, Gunn turns to his interviewees. The subject matter of their chapters is focused, although not exclusively, on ecumenical (often styled in the historic coalitions as “inter-church”) efforts to change government and corporate policies to better reflect the common good. The first two chapters are concerned with ecumenical activism in regards to displaced persons—specifically, the welcoming of Chilean refugees in the 1970s, and how that paved the way for the private sponsorship of refugees during the latter part of that same decade. This activism, however, was also informed by a realization of the need for structural change. For example, as Bill Janzen emphasizes, private sponsorship can be read as relieving the Canadian government of

its internal human rights duties. Moreover, he continues, “bringing refugees to resettlement countries” can never be a long term solution to the “the problems of the world” (p. 40).

A number of the other chapters in this section focus on economic justice both at home and abroad. Notable here is the description and reflection upon the work of the Canadian Ecumenical Jubilee Forum which, amongst other programming, drew on biblical concepts to successfully organize some 640,000 churchgoers in petitioning the G8 countries to ease the debts of countries in the global south during the run-up to the new millennium. The work of the forum also touched on other topics featured in this section, including addressing ecological and gender debt, along with the intimate connections amongst overcoming racism, realizing Indigenous rights, and achieving anything approaching public justice. Covering these topics, section one of this book includes discussions of ecumenical cooperation to: end apartheid in South Africa, decrease violence against women in the Canadian North, increase gender equity worldwide, defend Medicare, and support Project North’s work to promote Indigenous Rights, while also walking in solidarity with Dene people to block the construction of the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline in the 1970s.

Section two begins with an informative unfolding of the increasingly evident reality that ecumenical activity is no longer sufficient for working for public justice from a faith-inspired perspective in Canada. Herein, David Pfrimmer argues for “multifaithism” as a contextual necessity in work such as the “public accompaniment” (p. 145). This is particularly pressing for Canadian churches, having become all too clear during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission process in this country. For Pfrimmer, “public multifaithism changes the faith communities themselves just as they come together to change the world” (p. 152).

A comparable transformation in both the mode and focus of faith-inspired activism is carried forward in the fine chapters by Christine Boyle and Leah Watkiss that end the *Journeys to Justice*. Watkiss plainly points out that many of the retrospective stories shared in part one of the volume are not part of the collective memory of her generation of religious adherents in Canada. She problematizes some assumptions underlying these actions as they are recounted in this volume, and calls for a deep solidarity consisting of “doing with”, rather than the “doing for” motif which is so prominent in Christian activism. For her part, Christine Boyle speaks poignantly of how what some bemoan as a regrettable loss of status by Canadian churches, in fact represents an opportunity for prophetic community engagement that at its best can benefit from “...ancient stories. Stories that are older than this electoral system, older than this economic system”, to co-create a powerful “reframing of what a good life looks like” (p. 155). In the wake of events like the inauguration of Donald Trump, and all the challenges to public justice he represents, her articulation of this reframing coincided exactly with Boyle’s final interview to be approved for ordination in the United Church of Canada.

Each of these chapters provides a generally accessible, suitably nuanced, and praxis-informed discussion of public justice in Canada, inclusive of treatments of the tensions and promises active therein that will hold appeal for engaged scholars. This feature is buttressed by the fact that many of the interviewees hold advanced degrees and have read, communicated, and contributed to public scholarship in this country and further afield. These chapters will

also be of interest to younger readers concerned with public justice, as per Gunn's vision when conceiving of his engaged research project. Taken together, these qualities mean that *Journeys to Justice* will be a welcome addition to libraries located at both places of worship and within institutions of higher learning.

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