

is difficult to shed. It is exacerbated by the fact that Christian doctrine today still fails to accord full and proper respect for Indigenous spiritual belief systems.

If it were the Survivors alone who faced this dilemma, one could argue that they should be able to resolve this for themselves in whatever way they can, including with the assistance of trusted church allies. However, the dilemma of spiritual conflict is more than a personal one to Survivors. It is one that extends to their children and their grandchildren, who, in these modern times, realize that there is much more to their personal histories than what they have inherited from residential schools and Canadian society. They realize that each Indigenous nation also has its own history and that such histories are part of who they are. Young First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people today are searching for their identities, which include their own languages and cultures.

Aboriginal parents want their children raised in a community environment that provides all of this. However, there is often conflict within communities when those who have been influenced by the doctrines of the churches believe that to teach Indigenous cultural beliefs to their children is to propagate evil. There are those who continue to actively speak out against Indigenous spiritual beliefs and to block or prohibit their practice.⁸²

To have a right that you are afraid to exercise is to have no right at all. The *Declaration* asserts that governments (and other parties) now have an obligation to assist Indigenous communities to restore their own spiritual belief systems and faith practices, where these have been damaged or subjected to spiritual violence through past laws, policies, and practices. No one should be told who is, or how to worship, their Creator. That is an individual choice and, for Indigenous peoples, it is also a collective right. However, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people need to be assured that they do indeed have the freedom to choose and that their choice will be respected.

All religious denominations in Canada must respect this right, but the United, Anglican, Presbyterian, and Catholic churches, as parties to the Settlement Agreement, bear a particular responsibility to formally recognize Indigenous spirituality as a valid form of worship that is equal to their own. It cannot be left up to individuals in the churches to speak out when such freedom to worship is denied. Rather, the churches, as religious institutions, must affirm Indigenous spirituality in its own right. Without such formal recognition, a full and robust reconciliation will be impossible. Healing and reconciliation have a spiritual dimension that must continue to be addressed by the churches in partnership with Indigenous spiritual leaders, Survivors, their families, and communities.

Many Indigenous peoples who no longer subscribe to Christian teachings have found the reclaiming of their Indigenous spirituality important to their healing and sense of identity. Some have no desire to integrate Indigenous spirituality into Christian religious institutions. Rather, they believe that Indigenous spirituality and Western religion should coexist on separate but parallel paths.

Elder Jim Dumont told the Commission about the importance of non-interference and mutual respect. He said that the