

defence against further government encroachments on their lives. Yet they continued to abide by the terms of the treaties trusting in the honour of the Crown to no avail. They were mortally wounded in mind, body, heart, and spirit that turned them into the walking dead. Recovery would take time, and fortunately they took their sacred traditions underground to be practised in secret until the day of revival that would surely come.... I am happy that my ancestors saw fit to bring their sacred beliefs underground when they were banned and persecuted. Because of them and the Creator, my people are alive and in them I have found my answers.⁷⁹

Jennie Blackbird, who attended the Mohawk Institute in Brantford, Ontario, explained it this way:

Our Elders taught us that language is the soul of the nation, and the sound of our language is its cement. Anishinaabemowin gives the ability to see into our future.... Anishinaabemowin gives us the ability to listen ... to what is going on around us and the ability to listen to what is happening inside of us. Through seeing and listening, we can harvest what we need to sustain ourselves, and to secure the properties that will heal us. Ever since I can remember as a child, speaking my language, it helped me to restore my inner harmony by maintaining my mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being.⁸⁰

Spiritual fear, confusion, and conflict are the direct consequences of the violence with which traditional beliefs were stripped away from Indigenous peoples. This turmoil gives particular urgency to understanding the role of Canada's churches in effecting reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. A number of Survivors spoke to us about the many contradictions they now see between their adult knowledge of Christian ethics and biblical teachings and how they were treated in the schools. These contradictions indicate the spiritual fear and confusion that so many Survivors have experienced. Children who returned home from the residential schools were unable to relate to families who still spoke their traditional languages and practised traditional spirituality. Survivors who wanted to learn the spiritual teachings of their ancestors were criticized and sometimes ostracized by their own family members who were Christian, and by the church. Survivors and their relatives reported that these tensions led to family breakdown—such is the depth of this spiritual conflict. The cumulative impact of the residential schools was to deny First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples their spiritual birthright and heritage. In our view, supporting the right of Indigenous peoples to self-determination in spiritual matters must be a high priority in the reconciliation process. To be consistent with the *United Nations Declaration*, Indigenous peoples, who were denied the right to practise and teach their own spiritual and religious beliefs and traditions, must now be able to do so freely and on their own terms.⁸¹ For many, this is not easily done.

Many Survivors and their families continue to live in spiritual fear of their own traditions. Such fear is a direct result of the religious beliefs imposed on them by those who ran the residential schools. This long-internalized fear has spanned several generations and