

The Body and Spirit of Reconciled Diversity

Unity beyond Uniformity, Hierarchy, and Anthropocentrism. A Sámi perspective

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“One Body, One Spirit, One Hope” – the theme of LWF’s Thirteenth Assembly – reflects the message of “unity” as proclaimed in Ephesians 4:4. While a divine gift full of promise, history shows how the notion of Christian unity too often was distorted. This has not least been the experience of Indigenous peoples worldwide. A key insight on the matter was formulated in January 2011, as theological dialogue among representatives from the WCC Indigenous Theologians Network and Faith and Order was facilitated in La Paz, Bolivia.

We have encountered difficulties in translation, not between English and Spanish, but between different discourses: one side [the Indigenous] hears the word “unity” in political terms associated with empire and oppression; the other hears “unity” as communitarian and organic reality, which celebrates and protects diversity and freedom. From an Indigenous Theologian’s perspective “balance and harmony” comes closer to what St Paul affirms when he speaks of the integrity of the body in 1 Corinthians 12.12-31.¹

In Ephesians, unity is portrayed as a foundational reality pouring out of the Triune God, embodying cosmic (Eph 1:10), political (Eph 1:21), ecclesiological (Eph 1:22-23), and inter-ethnic dimensions (Eph 2:14-16). We may ask: How is this *One body* good news to all? In what *Spirit* is the *diversity of the One body* held together? How is the *One hope* a promise to all humanity and all creation?

This chapter invites you to reflect on such questions, mindful of how it speaks to realities within and beyond your own context. In what follows, the experience of the Indigenous Sámi of northern Europe is offered as a lens for constructive engagement with the Assembly theme.

1. One Body: Unity beyond uniformity – reconciled diversity

The unity proclaimed in the Letter to the Ephesians refers to a gracious gift and transformative reality that we are invited to participate in. However, this message of unity can be distorted. It happens not least when “unity” is confused with “uniformity”. The usual result is that “the Others” are forced to give up their uniqueness to conform to a dominant group.

In Norway, Sweden, and Finland, the Indigenous Sámi have been subjected to this through long-lasting, harsh assimilation policies. In Norway and Sweden, the national minorities

¹ “Indigenous Theologians Network in conversation with Faith and Order: Statement of Indigenous theologians from different part of the world, who met in the city of La Paz, Bolivia, on networking with the Commission of Faith and Order and its various working areas” (Word Council of Churches 2011), see: <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/indigenous-theologians-network-in-conversation-with-faith-and-order> (last accessed: May 12, 2022).

referred to as Kvens or Tornedalingar were also targeted. As far as the Sámi are concerned, this policy constituted a late phase of a much longer colonial history in which the Lutheran state churches were heavily involved.² As a response to the Sámi movement and to Sámi voices and allies within the churches,³ the Lutheran folk churches of Norway, Sweden, and Finland have since the 1990s embarked on journeys of reconciliation in relation to the Sámi people.⁴ While starting out as an intra-church discourse,⁵ “reconciliation” has today become a public concern as parliamentary or governmental Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs) are being implemented in all three countries.⁶

These processes raise profound questions about the nature of the “One body”, either we speak of it as an internal church matter (ecclesiology) or relate it to the broader public realm (public / political theology). In both instances, the lesson learned seems to be that expansive projects of “unity as uniformity” violate the dignity of God’s diverse creation. It contributes to the brokenness of the world; the brokenness that God in Christ through the Spirit seeks to restore in the One Body of reconciled diversity.

1.1. The cost of unity as imposed uniformity: A personal narrative

From a Sámi perspective, this history is not abstract or distant. It is family history – in some homes passed on as a living memory, in others hidden under loads of shame. In any case, it is embodied as an inter-generational reality informing contemporary community life at various levels.⁷ My own story may illustrate the thousands of similar accounts that could be told among my people.

My Sámi father’s short story about his school experience left a lasting impression on me as a young boy:

“I only spoke the Sámi language when starting school. We were not allowed to speak Sámi, neither in the classroom nor in the school yard. It took me 3 years to fully understand what was going on. I have 5 years of primary school. That is my education. The only thing we learned was that our Sáminess was a hinderance when entering the Norwegian society.”⁸

² See for instance LINDMARK, D. / SUNDSTRÖM, O. (EDS.); JOHNSEN (2022), p. 43-77; LEHTOLA (2015).

³ As emphasized by SJÖBERG (2020), many Sámi activists of the early 20th century were motivated by their Christian faith.

⁴ See WEST (2020).

⁵ Cf. Ibid; see also JOHNSEN / SKUM (EDS.) (2013).

⁶ The Norwegian Parliament appointed in 2018 “The Commission Investigating the Norwegianization Policy and Injustice against the Sámi and Kvens / Norwegian Finns”, given the short name “The Truth and Reconciliation Commission” (2018–2022, extended to 2023). The inquiry concerns the indigenous Sámi and two national minorities. The Swedish Government appointed in 2020 “The Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Tornedalingar, Kväner and Lantalaïset” (2020–2022), who are a national minority in Sweden; and in November 2021 it decided to set down a truth commission for the Sámi (expectedly 2022–2025). The Finnish Government appointed in 2021 “The Truth and Reconciliation Commission for the Sámi” (2021–2023).

⁷ See MINDE (2005).

⁸ Told by Simon Johnsen (1918–1987).

His older sister, my aunt – who questioned why I bothered to take back the Sámi language at the age of 19, and who was clear that nothing made her more angry than seeing Sámi politicians on TV – eventually approached me after I had acquired proper Sámi reading skills. She handed over several old Sámi magazines, saying: “Look what your great grandfather wrote.” I was amazed to see that he, around the turn of the 20th century, on Christian grounds formulated bold critiques of the Norwegianization policy now being implemented also by the church. Regarding the former parish priest A. Bergland, he wrote: “He was in many ways a good priest, but he was tough in crucifying the Sámi language. He only travelled around, preaching ‘Norwegianize, Norwegianize the Sámi!’”⁹ Having outlined historical developments over four decades, my great grandfather noted: “Those who are taken by force, begin to hate.”¹⁰

While raised in the Sámi diaspora, I returned to my father’s community in Deatnu / Tana in 1998 as the local Church of Norway parish priest. The year before, a local action group named “No to Sámi Land” had mobilized in the municipality as a response to a new Sámi education plan being implemented in public schools due to pro Sámi developments taking place. With support from the congregation board, I started to use some phrases in Sámi in every Sunday service. In some places, I felt the tension behind my back when a prayer for the Sámi Parliament was included in the intercession. Today, more and more of the youth are wearing the traditional Sámi costume in church on their confirmation day. In some instances, their great-grandparents were the last to use it.

While costly and painful lessons, I believe that profound spiritual insights can be drawn from experiences as those rendered above. One is that the Christian notion of *One body* cannot mean unity as uniformity. It must rather be about restoring the dignity and wholeness of God’s diverse creation.

1.2. Sin as “self curved inward on itself” – and God’s laos as reconciled diversity

A reflection on Luther’s definition of sin is relevant in this context. Building on Augustine, Luther defined sin as the “self curved inward on itself” (*incurvatus in se*).¹¹ While primarily applied on individuals, the same dynamic seems to express itself on a collective level. Entire groups may become curved inward on their collective selves. This happens when “we” become turned inward on “us”, “we” revolve around “ours”, in ways devaluating or subjugating others.¹² Such an inward-turned spirit may become structural and systemic, at times faceless, while still destructive or powerful.¹³

⁹ translation. Cf. SAMUELSEN, J. (1906a), p. 50. This article was originally published in three parts in issues 12-14 of Nuorttanaste in 1906.

¹⁰ My translation. Cf. SAMUELSEN, J. (1906b), p. 54

¹¹ Cf. MOE-LOBEDA (2013), p. 58.

¹² Cf. JOHNSEN (2007), p. 113-120.

¹³ See Cynthia Moe-Lobeda’s approach to structural injustice / structural sin from the perspective of “self curved inward on itself” in MOE-LOBEDA (2013), p. 58–60. 64.

On November 24th, 2021 Archbishop Antje Jackelén offered a formal apology to the Sámi people on behalf of the Church of Sweden. While not using the term “sin”, the apology was clearly modelled around Luther’s definition of sin: “We [the Church of Sweden] have been *curved inwards on ourselves*, we have not stood up to racism and abuse of power.”¹⁴ The LWF’s Thirteenth Assembly is given a stark reminder of the existence of collective and systemic sin by the fact that it is convened in Krakow, only 100 kilometers from the former Nazi concentration camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau. Collective and structural forms of sin exist also beyond its most extreme forms, at times hidden behind veils of benevolence.

By alerting us to distorted versions of the *One Body*, Luther’s notion of sin may point us towards healthy alternatives. The *One body* must be about *transcending* self-centered group mentalities imposing itself on others. From a Sámi perspective, reconciliation must involve pushing beyond inherited monocultural notions of being folk churches (and nation states) in the Nordic countries. While much remains to be done, positive change is taking place. An ecclesiological insight emerging in the reconciliation processes in the Nordic countries is that the One body celebrated in the church cannot be grounded in one ἔθνος *éthnos* (ethnic group) curved into itself. Rather, it must be corrected by the perspective of God’s λαός *laós* (the common biblical term for “God’s people”). In the New Testament the latter is transformed into the many ἔθνη *ethnē* coming together as a *reconciled diversity* in the One body of Christ (cf. Eph 2:14-18).¹⁵

2. One Spirit: Unity beyond hierarchical worldmaking - the bond of peace

If the *One body* is about unity in diversity, in what *Spirit* then is this diversity held together? The admonition given in Ephesians 4:3 – the verse immediately preceding the verse inspiring the Assembly theme – suggests that “the unity of the Spirit” is manifested through “the bond of peace”. But what do we mean by peace in the first place?

2.1. Peace beyond imposed hierarchy (*Pax Romana*)

In common speech – at least in English and Norwegian – “peace” tends to draw basic connotations from the “war / peace” dichotomy. Let us start our reflection here, before elaborating on alternatives. Not seldom “peace” is talked about as the *absence* of something else, such as violence, disturbances, conflict, and so on. However, this notion of peace is insufficient since the absence of these things may be the result of subjugation rather than harmonious co-existence. The *Pax Romana* of New Testament times, for instance – that is, the peace that the Roman empire had imposed on its conquered territory by military force – illustrates this point.¹⁶ The Roman empire was without doubt a vast unity tolerating great diversity. Yet, the nature of the “bond of peace” holding its diversity together was more

¹⁴ My emphasis. Cf. Archbishop Antje JACKELÉN: *Speech of Apology*, November 24, 2021, English translation: <https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/samiska/speech-of-apology> (last accessed: May 12, 2022).

¹⁵ Cf. JOHNSEN (2015).

¹⁶ Cf. WASSON, D.L.: Art. "Pax Romana," World History Encyclopedia, https://www.worldhistory.org/Pax_Romana (last accessed: May 13, 2022).

associated with “bondage” than with freedom. The bond of peace referred to in Ephesians 4:3 must be of a quite different nature.

This illustrates how even the notion of unity in diversity can be distorted in structural and systemic ways. An important reason, it seems, is that some worldviews recognize diversity as essential to the whole *by seeing diversity as hierarchically ordered*.¹⁷ Paternalistic, colonial, race-based, cast-based, gender-based, sexuality-based, and anthropocentric worldviews all share in this type of logic in some way or another. Framing “unity in diversity” on such hierarchical premises serves to mask power, facilitate exploitation, and naturalize inequality. Under such conditions, any talk of “peace” easily translates into expectations of accepting your own oppression.

2.2. *The Lutheran tension between hierarchy and equality*

It is nothing new that the Christian church struggles with navigating assumptions seeing diversity as hierarchically ordered.¹⁸ This is evident already in Ephesians in its references to women and slaves (Eph 5:22-24; 6:5-8). Lutherans have wrestled with a tension between “hierarchy” and “equality”, two somewhat competing themes in Luther’s theology.¹⁹

Luther’s hierarchical perception of reality was arguably strong.²⁰ Yet, it is seemingly his egalitarian intuitions that have been celebrated by recent generations of Lutherans.²¹ Since the Lutheran mainstream has shifted its emphasis from hierarchy to equality, some may think that critiquing the hierarchical legacy of Lutheran theology is unnecessary and constructed. I am not convinced. The negative effects of Lutheran hierarchical thinking are likely unequally distributed, depending on whether one is associated with the upside or the downside of history. In certain aspects, the Lutheran story needs to be retold.

A concern addressed in the literature on truth commissions is the need for challenging dominant national narratives. In this context, re-storying and rewriting national history in light of the experiences of those who have suffered injustices is considered integral to truth and reconciliation.²² In the historical confessional Lutheran states of the Nordic region, national narratives and Lutheran narratives were interwoven in fundamental ways. Settling the colonial

¹⁷ See Hiebert’s discussion of how hierarchical versus egalitarian worldview preferences shape worldviews in profound ways in HIEBERT (2008), p. 26f.93.188f.200–202.

¹⁸ Arthur O. Lovejoy’s classic study of the continuity of the Great Chain of Being construct within the Western history of ideas is helpful for an analysis of the matter: LOVEJOY (2009).

¹⁹ Worldview analysis provides tools for explaining this. Hiebert has, with reference to Morris Opler, pointed out that worldviews are not monolithic. Oftentimes, dominant “main themes” are challenged by corresponding “counter themes”. This in-built tension in a worldview explains why worldviews in fact change and may develop in different directions, according to HIEBERT (2008), p. 22. It is fair claim that even though “equality” has become the main theme in mainstream Lutheranism, it was probably rather a counter theme in Luther’s own theology.

²⁰ Cf. SCHILLING (2016), p. 336.461f. 498f.

²¹ Cf. Luther’s teachings on the priesthood of all believers, on the sanctity of family life and regular work of common people, his emphasis on “faith alone” placing the individual directly before God, and on the right to act out of conscience (“Here I stand, and cannot do anything else”).

²² See KLAASEN (2021); JOHNSEN (2021a); 19–40. The matter is also discussed in the Introduction chapter of the same volume, see SOLOMONS ET AL. (2021).

history of the Nordic region will most likely also call for a rewriting of *dominant Lutheran narratives* from a Sámi perspective.²³

The introduction of the Lutheran reformation to Scandinavia in the 16th century coincided with the time of intensified colonization of Sápmi. This is likely the first example worldwide of Lutheranism becoming a dominant force in the colonization of an Indigenous people. Lutheranism contributed to this colonization project in substantial ways, far beyond the ecclesial sphere since Lutheran *theology* shaped the legislations and modelled the states in profound and far-reaching ways.²⁴ Framed in the language of the Assembly theme, Lutheran notions of “*unity*” and “*one body*” had a strong negative impact on the Sámi for centuries, both within the religious and the political realms. The courts, for instance, executed Lutheran theology grounded in Old Testament logic and Lutheran demonology when Sámi *noaidit* (shamans) were persecuted and sentenced to death in the justice system in 17th century Denmark-Norway.²⁵ Another problem concerns how the perception of the “bond of peace” was informed by Lutheran hierarchical intuitions of the world.

Luther’s three holy orders doctrine framed the realms of family, church, and state according to a strict hierarchical logic, which in turn informed Luther’s two kingdoms doctrine.²⁶ Luther’s explanation of the Fourth Commandment essentially instructed all citizens of the Lutheran confessional state to participate in all social realms according to the logic of subordination.²⁷ It is true that Luther, based on the principle of “love of neighbor”, prescribed responsible interaction from all actors within these hierarchies, including the powerful.²⁸ However, the hierarchical orders of society were themselves beyond negotiation. Perceived as creation orders, God was assumed to act in and through them; and rebelling against them was ultimately a rebellion against God.²⁹

The peasant war of Luther’s own time illustrates the point. While the peasants were partly inspired by Luther’s teaching, Luther sided with the princes with brutal outcome.³⁰ The only example of a violent Sámi uprising against Scandinavian colonialism, the Kautokeino rebellion occurring on the Norwegian side of Sápmi in 1852, was inspired by the liberating message of Sámi-Swedish Lutheran priest Lars Levi Læstadius but suffered a similar fate.³¹ The legal settlement following it was a landmark event undoubtedly reinforcing the theologically

²³ See JOHNSEN (2022).

²⁴ See Ibid., p. 45-46, 48-49.

²⁵ See HAGEN (2009; 2017).

²⁶ Cf. LW 37, 364–65 = WA.

²⁷ Cf. MÆLAND (ED.) (1985), p. 281.315.

²⁸ The positive effects of the latter should not be underestimated. John Witte’s analysis suggests that Luther’s theology disciplined state authority in ways that may explain the emergence of the Nordic welfare states, see WITTE (2013).

²⁹ This is particularly evident in Luther’s discussion of Ham’s ridicule of his father Noah (LW 2, 165.167.173 = WA).

³⁰ SCHILLING (2016), p. 283–304.

³¹ See ZORGDRAGER, (1997). The event, involving the killing of the sheriff, the tradesman and almost the priest, is retold in the film “Kautokeino Rebellion” directed by Sámi filmmaker Nils Gaup, 2008.

sanctioned hierarchical order of society with respect to the Sámi.³² Moreover, since Lutheran theology over centuries in effect had contributed to the naturalization of the colonial inter-ethnic hierarchy, this likely masked how this hierarchy became increasingly more justified on race-based grounds during the 19th century. Lastly, the lauded “human first, Christian thereafter” script of Grundtvigianism – emerging as a Nordic version of “manifest destiny” – seems in paradoxical ways to have motivated a more systematic policy and implementation of the race based Norwegianization policy from around the turn of the 20th century.³³

By enduing the colonizing power with divine legitimacy, all Sámi attempts to resist it involved, implicitly or explicitly, wrestling with the hierarchical order prescribed by Lutheran theology. The only Lutheran teaching standing out as an explicit resource invoked in the resistance against the Norwegianization policy (which also some in the Norwegian clergy took part in) seemed to be the teaching on God’s word in the mother tongue.³⁴ Among the magazines I received from my aunt, I came across a letter from 1896, signed by my great grandfather on behalf of the parents of the local school district, written to the municipal school board controlled by Norwegian clergy. Apologizing for violating the call to show humility and obedience to their leaders, the letter pointed out the scandal of taking the Sámi language out of all subjects in school, including the Christian education, and concluded:

Dear priests! If you knew how cold and arrogant you have appeared ..., you would burst out into tears and think that we would rather be *united in a common peace*. Dear Norwegians and soul shepherds! Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord. God help us accomplish this, in our common Jesus Christ.³⁵

Confronted with the hierarchical spirit of the Norwegianization policy, the vision of the Sámi parents regarding being “united in a common peace” in “our common Jesus Christ” turned into a call for repentance. So, if “the unity of the Spirit” is manifested through “the bond of peace”, what is the nature of the *peace* of the Spirit?

2.3. The cosmological significance of “peace”: harmony and balance, shalom, ráfi

Rather than thinking of peace as absence of conflict etc., peace can be conceptualized in terms of relational quality, which in the context of the One body is informed and sustained by the Spirit. The Old Testament notion of שָׁלוֹם *šālôm* (peace) is helpful in the way it offers a substantial, holistic concept of peace, implying wholeness.³⁶ This resonates with the

³² The High Court verdict included thirty-two Sámi, 20 women and 12 men. Five individuals were sentenced to death (eventually reduced to two), eleven to lifetime prison (penal labor), and three to twelve years penal labor. The institutional church, which both represented and sided with Norwegian state interests, continued to patrol the situation. See SIVERTSEN (1955), 77 ff.

³³ While overlooked in previous research, this claim is substantiated in Johnsen (2021b).

³⁴ Cf. Rolf Inge Larsen, “Religion og fiendebilder: Læstadianismen, statskirken og kvenene 1870-1940,” doctoral thesis (Universitetet i Tromsø, 2012), 36-37, 107, 261, 278, 306; see also JOHNSEN (2022), p. 67-68.

³⁵ Emphasized here. See SAMUELSEN (1903), 15.

³⁶ See BRUEGGEMAN (2001).

Indigenous notions of “balance and harmony” referred to in the conversation in La Paz quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Keetoowah Cherokee theologian Randy S. Woodley has pointed out deep-structural correlations between the biblical *šālôm* and “the Harmony Way” of Indigenous North America.³⁷ Insights from Indigenous traditions are offered as a healthy correction to Western Christianity, in ways inviting reconciliation both with the earth and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.³⁸

The Sámi notion of *ráfi* (peace) reflected in North Sámi everyday Christianity may also contribute to a more substantial notion of peace.³⁹ Here, *ráfi* emerges as a concept of cosmological significance, associated with two distinct but interrelated dimensions. First, *ráfi* reflects the concern for well-ordered relations to our immediate surroundings, based on an egalitarian oriented ethos informed by social logic extending to nature in its visible-nonvisible aspects. Second, the cosmological significance of *ráfi* surfaces in relation to *Ipmila ráfi* (God’s peace), which in the enactment of local everyday Christianity tends to be reflected as an ordering power and source of cosmic peace. This is reflected in blessings invoking God’s name.

If the North Sámi concept of *ráfi* is allowed to inform the conversation of “*One body, One Spirit, One hope*”, two contributions may thus be suggested. First, it implies a *relational quality*, where peace reflects the enactment of an egalitarian oriented world. Second, it refers to the dynamic *world-ordering power of God*, that we can call upon and entrust ourselves into.

This reflection of holistic notions of peace has already introduced our last question: How can the One hope be a promise to all creation?

3. *One Hope: Unity beyond anthropocentrism – the unity of all things*

Confronted with climate change and the current nature crisis it is urgent to push beyond anthropocentric interpretations of the Christian faith. Cynthia Moe-Lobeda has pointed out the relevance of the notion of sin as *incurvatus in se* in this context: “We [the human being] became a species ‘turned in on itself’, oriented around humankind and human desire as the centerpiece of earthly reality to the detriment of all else.”⁴⁰ While providing an important perspective, a universalized notion of the human cosmological orientation must be avoided. The hierarchically ordered human / nature dichotomy reflected in this critique has dominated some cultural and philosophical systems, but not all. Its eventual global dominance is to a large extent the result of colonial projects. This comment resonates with a key concern informing the broader argument of this essay, namely, the need for decolonizing Lutheran theology.⁴¹

³⁷ Cf. WOODLEY (2012).

³⁸ Ibid. Among Indigenous theologians of Lutheran background, significant critiques and constructive proposals on the topic have been formulated by Osage theologian “Tink” Tinker; see TINKER (2008).

³⁹ The rationale given here is unpacked theologically through ethnographic study in JOHNSEN (2022).

⁴⁰ MOE-LOBEDA (2013), p. 60.

⁴¹ In postcolonial discourse, “decolonization” is associated with what Frantz Fanon discussed as “colonization of the mind”. The latter expression draws attention to how external colonization processes are accompanied and

The notion of *ráfi* (peace) in North Sámi everyday Christianity provides a window into an alternative *nature-centered Christian paradigm* in which social and natural realms are not separated. Local practices of “asking for permission” (also referred to as “asking for peace” in local discourse) before harvesting nature, putting up your tent, building a house, etc., reflects an Indigenous tradition that has approached nature *as a social realm* filled with agents that must be approached with humility in non-intrusive ways.⁴² To “ask for permission” and to “bless” in this context is about enacting well-ordered relationships reflective of the cosmological order upheld by *Ipmiláhčči* (God the Father, cf. Eph 4:6).⁴³ While basically reflecting ordinary social logic applied on the rest of creation, official Lutheranism, which generally not approaches nature according to this logic, has typically misrepresented it as superstition, paganism, magic, and the like.⁴⁴ The following anecdote is illustrative.

A North Sámi Christian woman from the Norwegian side of Sápmi told me how she had learned from her Christian mother to approach the task of cutting shoe-grass.⁴⁵ When arriving the wet land where this particular grass is growing, she first addresses the place notifying why she has come. Then she says a Christian blessing in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Finally, she cuts a small bundle of grass, rubs her hands with it saying: “Please do not slit my hands.” Then she is ready to start her work. She underscores to me that this is about approaching everything “with humility”. A few weeks later, the same woman shares her traditional knowledge with a Sámi audience. At the end of her presentation, she tells what happened when sharing the above-mentioned custom with a group of Norwegian Lutheran priests. One of them had responded: “This is to worship creation instead of the Creator.” The woman obviously found this offensive, so she addressed her Sámi audience saying: “So you understand. You have to be careful with whom you share these traditions.”

We have reason to believe that similar stories could be told in Sweden and Finland as well, and the Church of Sweden’s apology to the Sámi people formulates an appropriate response:

Within the Church of Sweden, Sámi spirituality was despised. Instead of recognizing the image of God in our Sámi sisters and brothers, we tried to make them in the image of the majority culture ... We did not see your obvious relationship with the Creator and with the lands. We did not understand that Sámi spirituality expresses itself in everyday actions.⁴⁶

supported by parallel intellectual colonization processes. Cf. FANON (1963). Theological decolonization is thus concerned with developing critical awareness about how various aspects of Christian theology may have informed or masked the colonial process and the societal conditions it created, with the aim to develop theological alternatives informed by the experiences and traditions of the colonized.

⁴² See JOHNSEN (2022), p. 94-96, 165.

⁴³ Ibid., 145-46.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 228-30, 242.

⁴⁵ The story rendered is used as a frame narrative in my study of North Sámi everyday Christianity. See Ibid., 2, 86-87, 226-30. The woman wanted to remain anonymous in the study.

⁴⁶ JACKELÉN, “Speech of Apology” (see above, note 14).

The anecdote rendered above illustrates a feature emerging in my own doctoral research. Two different Christian cosmological orientations seem to be negotiated in the North Sámi Christian experience: One shaped by a long historical reception of Christianity filtered through the Sámi Indigenous tradition; another shaped by a Western reception of Christianity filtered through a Greek cosmological construct which basically saw the world as hierarchically structured, from pure spirit on the top to dead matter on the bottom.⁴⁷ In my opinion, the former theological construct is no less Christian than the latter.

Confronted with climate change and the current nature crisis, we must affirm that the *One hope* is encompassing all creation. Indigenous intuitions of the world may inform Christian interpretations of the world in theologically significant ways, pointing towards the “unity of all things” – in which the Spirit creates, reconciles, and renews.

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⁴⁷ JOHNSEN (2022), p. 221-38.

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