

# A More Healing Way to See God

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I recently finished reading “Laughing with the Trickster: On Sex, Death, and Accordions” by acclaimed Cree writer Tomson Highway. It is the set of CBC Massey lectures he delivered in 2022, exploring five themes central to the human condition: language, creation, sex and gender, humour, and death.

Highway explores three sets of mythologies—Christian mythology; Classical mythology arising from Greek and Roman philosophy; and Indigenous mythologies. He argues that the first two mythologies have shaped Western thought, life, and religion in significant ways, and that Indigenous mythologies provide another way of seeing life and purpose, providing a unique solution to our modern problems. He argues that “the earth is a garden of joy unlimited, and the reason for existence is to have a blast, to laugh ourselves silly” by following the way of the Indigenous character known as the Trickster.

In Lecture One, he argues that language shapes the way we see the world. This is why we tell stories. Lecture Two about creation asks about how the world we know came into being. Ancient Greeks understood that human beings were placed here to enjoy life. The Christian story tells a linear story with a beginning, middle, and ending. The Indigenous world view offers a different understanding, in that those “who lived before us continue to live with us still, in the very air we breathe.”

Lecture Three on humour introduces us to the Trickster, a “central figure to mythologies of many Indigenous communities across Turtle Island.” “Welcome to pleasure; welcome to fun; welcome to his sense of humour; welcome to our world of rampant insanity.” He indicates that the other two mythologies also contain elements of the Trickster, such as the medieval court jester or the tradition of the holy fool.

Lecture Four rightly criticizes the Christian mythology for its negative views on sex and gender as well as the body. In emphasizing the spiritual, it essentially negates any positive view of the body.

Lecture Five closes the series with the argument that Christianity offers a dismal vision of the afterlife. Classical mythology was somewhat more positive. But Indigenous mythologies offer the view that when we die, we stay right here, “smack in the middle of that circle that is our garden, the one we were given the responsibility to care for when we came into this world as newborns.”

It was a fascinating read. Given my background and interests, what particularly caught my imagination was the way in which he describes Christianity. It was a profound learning experience for me to read how Indigenous peoples internalized the theology of the priests who sought to “convert” Indigenous peoples through fear.

It struck me that many people today have this fearful view of the Christian God, mostly promulgated by Christian leaders who seek to control how their followers live and think. They have an image of God as an “angry old, white, bearded Zeus living on his mountaintop, ready to hurl bolts of lightning at anyone who transgresses” the teachings of these leaders.

It makes me sad to see how prominent this way of thinking has become. It is so much different than the reality which I know and which I name as “God.”

Let me try over the next few weeks to describe a more healing set of images, both for God and for Jesus the Jew, who was so deeply in touch with that God, and who sought to bring that

understanding of God to the forefront in the lives of his followers. Unfortunately, as Tomson Highway describes it, we have lost much of that sense of joy and hope which Jesus brought.

I believe that there is a deep spiritual hunger in the world, even among people who describe themselves as “not religious”. People long for something “more”, however they define that more.

But they are turned off by the church because they have seen too many Christians who portray God as uptight and angry, who gives us rules and commandments and then demands that we live by them in a black-and-white kind of world, a God who hurls anger and judgment at us if we mess up. They rebel against this God who is encountered through abstract propositions and terminology, who tries to control us, who favours insiders and is biased against outsiders, and who invites people to become judgmental, arrogant, and closed-minded.

That is not the God I know.

I am in love with a God who is the author of a truth which is multi-faceted, a God who honours all who seek after truth which is one at its heart. I have encountered this God through amazing stories, intense poetry, beauty, experience, experiment, and community.

I worship a God who is better described as an artist and lover who is passionate about good and evil, justice and injustice, beauty and desecration, hope and cynicism.

God’s heart is marked by self-sacrificing love, compassionate justice, and profound relationships. This God is radically inclusive and reaches out with amazing compassion and shocking acceptance. In God’s realm, there are no outsiders, for God blesses all people, without exception. All are included; all are welcome; all are valued.

It hurts me to know how Christian priests, ministers, leaders, and televangelists have hurt so many people in our world with their negative images of a judgmental God. It strikes me that in a world so bitterly polarized, we need to find more healing images of who God is, and how God relates to our world and all its amazing people and creatures.

I believe if we can learn to see God in more loving, just, compassionate, and healing ways, we ourselves will be healed, made whole, and become more loving.

Each of us has this sense of God within us. Such images of God are important ways to begin discerning a healing purpose in life.