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## "Right Relationship" and a "Three Day Road"

**Part Three of "What are You Reading This Summer?"**

**An article from the *Cathedral Times***

**by the Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler**

"'Bearing Witness' is the Quaker term for living life in a way that reflects fundamental truths. Bearing witness is about getting relationships right."

So begins a powerful book on sustainable economy, written by Peter Brown and others, called *Right Relationship: Building a Whole Earth Economy*. They note that modern science has moved away from reductionism, and they claim that "physical substances work and exist in terms of highly complex, interdependent, and changeable contexts and relationships." Thus, the authors take the traditional Quaker term "Right Relationship" and apply it more widely to the earth itself, to what it means for humankind to live in right relationship with the earth.

The grand premise of the title is worth the argument of this book. It is as good a primer as any about current "economic sustainability" conversations and issues. Somehow or another, the human race is consuming more of the earth's stored energy than the earth can sustain.

Consider two other fine quotations from the book: "The economy exists for respecting and preserving life, not getting rich. Its frame of reference must be the laws that govern the cosmos as well as the earth" not just, for example, the laws of supply and demand. The economy can grow too big for the earth's ecological limits, which means that endless growth is an irrational goal." And "Economics based on consumerism and obsession with growth has become, in effect, the modern world's state-sponsored religion."

The last chapter of *Right Relationship* contains some ambitious political projects, proposing new governance principles, federations, and courts, ideas about which I must reserve judgment. However, I recommend the first four chapters of the book for their analysis and, in fact, for their theology.

Many of you know that I enjoy spending the summer season in the woods and on the water of northern Ontario, Canada. In fact, it is a place where I continue to learn about the wonder of God's creation, and where I continue to learn about living in right relationship with others and with the earth. I realize humbly that Ojibway and Cree Indians, some of the people whom Canadians consider "First Nations" people, have known about right relationship with the earth for a long time.

*Three Day Road*, the 2005 book by Joseph Boyden hearkens back to Ojibway and Cree First Nations culture, customs, and history, even though it is set during World War I, "the Great War," when Canadians are fighting in Europe. One of the great sharpshooters of that war was a Canadian First Nations soldier, Francis Pegahmagabow, whom the book honors. I highly recommend this book, though it's a war book, with some gruesome and gory images.

*Three Day Road* is also a tender book about the transition sometimes quite tragic from ancient First Nation customs to modern Canada. Its author, Joseph Boyden, represents a bit of that transition. Of Metis descent himself (and Scottish and Irish), he lives in Ontario half the year, and in the other half he teaches at the University of New Orleans. Finally, of course, the book is theological; a "three day road" is quite a journey.

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The Very Rev. Sam Candler

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