NATIVE AMERICAN RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

UNFORGOTTEN GODS

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Preface

Each one possessed a stick of wood. Their dying fire was need of logs.

It was a freezing night.

The first held his back, for in the faces around the fire, he ticed one was black.

The next one saw that one of the group was not of his chur He couldn't bring himself to throw in his and warm that man.

The third, a poor man, his clothes in tatters, held his thin c close to his body. Why should he put his only log to use to wa the idle rich?

The rich man sat quietly, thinking of how to keep the wealth accumulated from the shiftless poor.

The face of the next among them spoke of revenge. The was dying away. Why should he throw on his log when the oth would not? He wanted to spite them.

The sixth man in the forlorn group did nothing except for ga He too would not throw his log on the fire until another did.

The seventh log you hold. The choice is now yours. The oth their logs held tight in death's still grasp, were proof of human They didn't die from the cold without. They died from the c within.

Cherokee Folkt

Jack Forbes (Powhatan/Lenape/Saponi), in his book *Columb Other Cannibals,* observes of religion:

> "Religion" is, in reality, "living." Our "religion" is not what profess, or what we say, or what we proclaim; our "religion' what we do, what we desire, what we seek, what we dream abc what we fantasize, what we think–all of these things–twenty-f hours a day. One's religion, then, is one's life, not merely the id life but life as it is actually lived.
>
> "Religion" is not prayer, it is not a church, it is not "theistic, is not "atheistic," it has little to do with what white people "religion." It is our every act. If we tromp on a bug, that is religion; if we experiment on living animals, that is our religi

> if we cheat at cards, that is our religion; if we dream of being famous, that is our religion; if we gossip maliciously, that is our religion; if we are rude and aggressive, that is our religion. All that we do, and are, is our religion.[2]

In so speaking, Forbes reflects a traditional Native American view that, as I discuss in one of the essays that follows, recognizes no sharp distinction between sacred and profane spheres of existence. Native cultures and religious traditions are in many ways synonymous and coextensive. As Charles Eastman (Sioux) states, "Every act of [an Indian's] life is, in a very real sense, a religious act."[3] It is this intricately intimate relationship between culture and religious tradition that makes the question of religious identity a vital inquiry. It also means that some of the pieces contained herein–which may on their face have very little to do with "religion" as commonly conceived–are nonetheless profoundly religious in their implications.

The dominant culture has always sought to homogenize and essentialize Native Americans. It has tried to determine those things that are "Indian." What do Natives believe about "God," for instance? What are the elements of *the* Native worldview? No universalized essence can encompass the six hundred different tribal traditions, eight major language families, and probably three distinct racial strains lumped together under the collective construct *Native American* or *American Indian.* Often these different traditions differ one from another as radically as the cultures of France and Tibet differ from each other. Their religious systems and beliefs are often as radically divergent as Christianity is from Buddhism or Hinduism is from Judaism.

Nevertheless, it may seem to the reader that writers in this volume engage in a kind of essentialism when they speak about, for instance, *the* Apache teachings about *usen* or concerning *the* beliefs about the Sun Dance. On some level this may be true. It is necessary to essentialize in order to speak about a group's, as opposed to a given individual's, beliefs–in order to say *something* rather than *nothing.* This is what might be called strategic essentialism in speaking of religious identity. As Gayatri Spivak writes, "Identity is a very different word from essence. We 'write' a running biography with life-language rather than only word-language in order to 'be.' Call this identity! Deconstruction, whatever it may be, is not most valuably an exposure of error, certainly not other people's error, other people's essentialism. The most serious critique in deconstruction is the critique of things that are extremely useful, things without which we cannot live on, take chances; like our running self-identikit. That should be the approach to how we are essentialists." Thus we must run "the risk of essence," the "*strategic* use of a positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest."[4]

On another level, however, discussion of, let us say, *Cherokee beliefs* about X is not to engage in essentialism in a critical theory sense. To view it as such is to misunderstand the fundamental differences between Native and Western cultures. Central to a Native's sense of self is the individual's sense of how he or she fits into Native community. Anthropologist Clifford Geertz states that "the Western conception of the person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgement, and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against its social and natural background, is . . . a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world's cultures." Native societies are *synecdochic* (part-to-whole) rather than the more Western conception that is *metanymic* (part-to-part). As Donald Fixico (Shawnee/Sac and Fox/Muscogee/Seminole) notes, Native persons tend to see themselves in terms of "self in society" rather than "self and society." It is an "enlarged sense of self."[5] One is thus able to speak more broadly about commonly shared attitudes and beliefs within a given grouping than is possible in discussing Western cultures.

Red Jacket (Seneca) told an early Christian missionary, "We also have a religion which was given to our forefathers, and has been handed down to us their children. It teaches us to be thankful, to be united, to love one another! We never quarrel about religion."[6] Indigenous religious traditions are not, like Christianity or Islam, proselytizing faiths. Rather, one tribe has its instructions from the Creator and respects that others have their own instructions as well. One group sees no need to convert another to its religious system. As long as both tribes fulfill their responsibilities, all will be well. It is not necessary for sparrows to want to be eagles. This religious pluralism is one factor in Natives' easy initial acceptance of European invaders. They were simply one more set of people with different gods and different ways of organizing themselves.

The impact of the conquest and five hundred years of ongoing missionization and colonialism has created a different kind of religious pluralism among Natives. Today there are practitioners of indigenous religious traditions, Native Christians, and adherents of syncretic religions that blend elements of both Christianity and traditional practice. The pieces in this volume reflect this diversity of religious expression. They also reflect the inevitable tensions that such variety creates.

No effort has been made to disguise our differences. Readers must understand, however, that what they are experiencing is an ongoing dialogue on the issues central to this volume. They are privileged to glimpse, as it were, a snippet of a discussion already in progress. It may seem, for example, that I am highly critical of George Tinker. Critique, however, is not dismissal. And our communities arrive at an approximation of truth and right action as they always have, through honest sharing,

discussion, and consensus. Today the seventh log is in our hands. Will we opt for cooperation and unity, however tenuous and uneasy, or withhold our fuel and let the fire die?

The essays in this volume grew out of discussions concerning Native American religious identity in a post-Christian age. We live today in a world where *post* is attached, often too casually, to a great many modes of existence—*post-colonial, postmodern, post-Christian.* I address the question of the post-colonial in my introductory essay, "From I-Hermeneutics to We-Hermeneutics." Steven Charleston seeks a post-modern vision. *Post-Christian,* however, requires some explanation. Just as the post-colonial may be said to commence at the moment of colonization and continue to the present, so post-Christian could be said to begin at the first moment of Christian/Native encounter, an encounter that altered Native American lives forever. Some of the authors herein interpret the term in such a manner. Perhaps more fundamentally, though, the age in which we live might be described as post-Christian in that Christianity is no longer considered normative, no longer the all-encompassing force it may once have been. In this sense, post-Christian means something akin to post-Christendom.

Before closing, a couple of further words about terminology are necessary. For non-Natives, the issue of what is the preferred term for American indigenes has been a source of no minor confusion. The terms *American Indian, Native American, Native,* or *First Nations* are all inadequate (once again homogenizing diverse traditions and groupings) yet widely in use. Rather than impose a standard vocabulary, I have respected individual authors' choices in this matter and have, in fact, used the terms more or less interchangeably myself. The same is true of terminology regarding White non-Natives. The most common appellation is Euro-American, but I (and, in this, George Tinker follows me) have opted for the use of the term of John Joseph Mathews (Osage), *Amer-European,* as more adequately reflecting the relationship of the progeny of colonizers to the American land.[7]

This volume contains pieces dealing with aspects of life throughout North America. This reflects the many commonalities shared by indigenes in all parts of the hemisphere and is necessary to begin to get some picture, however partial, of Native post-Christian experience here. Many of the contributions are overtly autobiographical (e.g., Freda McDonald's, Donald Grinde's). People telling their own stories represent a kind of modern ethnography. Other articles may seem more "detached" and "scholarly" in a Western, academic sense. When one speaks of religious identity, however, one is dealing with something intimately consequential for Native peoples; thus, even those articles that seem more strictly academic contain an element of autobiography (e.g., those by Leana Hicks or George Tinker). Stories such as those of McDonald or Craig Womack are intensely painful to read, but their

voices must be heard. They, and the other contributions in this volume, reflect the way, to quote Simon Ortiz (Acoma Pueblo) "this America [or this Canada, or this Mexico] has been a burden" to Native peoples.[8]

Finally, this is a work about community, and any Native scholarship, ultimately, must be communal. In addition to the authors, thanks must go to the following persons who participated in the birthing of this project but who, for a variety of reasons, are not represented by contributions: Elizabeth Cook-Lynn (Sicangu Dakota), Laura Donaldson (Cherokee), Joe Iron Eye Dudley (Yankton Sioux), Christopher Jocks (Mohawk), Thomas King (Cherokee), Paul Ojibway (Anishinaabe), Stan McKay (Cree), Anne Marshall (Muscogee), Inés Talamantez (Mescalero Apache), Sammy Toineeta (Lakota), Gerald Vizenor (Anishinaabe), Robert Warrior (Osage). Finally, thanks to *Wicazo Sa Review,* in which a version of my essay "Indian Presence with No Indians Present" appeared prior to publication, and to *Semeia,* which published a version of "From I-Hermeneutics to We-Hermeneutics."

Notes

[1] "The Seventh Log: The Choice Is Yours," *Native Journal* (February/March 1993), p. 19.

[2] Jack D. Forbes, *Columbus and Other Cannibals: The* Wétiko *Disease of Exploitation, Imperialism, and Terrorism* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1979), pp. 26-27.

[3] Charles Alexander Eastman, *The Soul of the Indian* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911), p. 47.

[4] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 3-7.

[5] Jace Weaver, *That the People Might Live: Native American Literatures and Native American Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming), pp. 77-79 (manuscript).

[6] Eastman, p. ix.

[7] Weaver, *That the People Might Live,* pp. 15-16 (manuscript).

[8] Simon J. Ortiz, *From Sand Creek* (New York: Thunder's Mouth, 1981), p. 2.

1.

From I-Hermeneutics to We-Hermeneutics

Native Americans and the Post-Colonial[1]

JACE WEAVER

IRONIC HISTORIES: NATIVES AND CHRISTIANITY

Vignette No. 1: In 1782, Christian Delawares left their homes and their already planted fields in Gnadenhutten and moved into a new "praying town" organized by Moravian missionary David Zeisberger at Sandusky. The move was voluntary, to avoid conflict with Amer-European farmers. When the Natives returned to harvest their crops, however, they were confronted by a patrol of one hundred militia from Fort Pitt. The peaceful band surrendered and explained their presence. The colonel in command ordered them bound and–in order to save ammunition–clubbed, scalped, and burned. According to eyewitness reports, the unresisting Natives sang hymns and prayed as the soldiers went about their grisly work. Twenty-nine men, twenty-seven women, and thirty-four children were killed.[2]

Vignette No. 2: In 1838, in one of the best remembered incidents of the Removal of Natives from the American Southeast, sixteen thousand Cherokees were forcibly marched 900 miles from Georgia to present-day Oklahoma. One-fourth of the Cherokee Nation died en route along what came to be called the Trail of Tears. As they walked, Christian Indians among them sang Christian hymns in their own language. The best known of these was an atonement hymn, "One Drop of Blood," which asks, "Jesus, what must I do for you to save me?" The reply is, "It only takes one drop of blood to wash away our sins. You are King of Kings, the Creator of all things." The Cherokee translation of "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah," also sung on the trail, is equally poignant:

Take me and guide me, Jehovah, as I am walking
through this barren land.
I am weak, but thou art mighty.
Ever help us.

Open unto us thy healing waters.
Let the fiery cloud go before us
and continue thy help.

Help us when we come to the Jordan River
and we shall sing thy praise eternally.[3]

Christian Choctaws, enduring a similar trek, sang too. Theirs, a song of Christian hope, promised that Jesus would save them and stated, "For each of you the heavenly place where you shall dwell is there for you. Follow Jesus to the heavenly place. You will see joy such as you have never seen."[4] Oklahoma proved a heavenly place for neither nation.

Vignette No. 3: In 1862, 303 Sioux were sentenced to die for their roles in an uprising against their brutal treatment led by Little Crow, an Episcopalian. President Abraham Lincoln demanded to review personally the records of the entire proceedings. In the end, he authorized the hanging of 39 men. On the day after Christmas, in Mankato, Minnesota, 38 men (one having received a reprieve) quietly followed the provost marshal to the scaffold. They showed no fear and stood calmly as the nooses were placed around their necks. Then they broke into song. Contemporary newspaper accounts reported that they had sung their Sioux death chant. In reality, a good many were Christian. They were singing the hymn "Many and Great, O God." As the trap dropped, they grabbed for each others' hands and sang, saying "I'm here! I'm here!" It was the greatest mass execution in United States history.[5]

Vignette No. 4: In his book *Custer Died for Your Sins*, Vine Deloria, Jr. (Standing Rock Sioux) describes an encounter in 1967 with the Presbyterian minister in charge of that denomination's Indian missions. Deloria listened to the clergyman describe missionary work among the Shinnecocks of New York's Long Island and then asked how long his church intended to continue such work among a tribe that had lived as Christians for more than 350 years. The impassive reply was, "Until the job is done."[6]

Vignette No. 5: From 1845 to 1848 it was a criminal offense in the Creek Nation to profess Christianity. The penalty for infraction was thirty-nine lashes from a cowhide whip. When less than twenty years old, Samuel Checote was so punished. According to one account, "While blood flowed to his ankles, he was asked 'Will you give up Christ?' He replied 'You may kill me but you cannot separate me from my Lord Christ.'" He later served as chief of the Nation and as a clergyman. He was instrumental in having the ban on Christianity lifted. Out of respect for his people, he never admitted having suffered at the whipping post for his Christian confession.[7]

These five brief vignettes, which could be replicated many times over, attest to what Marie Therese Archambault (Hunkpapa Lakota), herself a Catholic nun, describes as the "terrible irony" of being both Native and Christian.[8] During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, by necessity, Natives in the eastern United States made great efforts to adapt to and accommodate the Amer-European culture that had engulfed them. Many converted to Christianity, the borrowed religion of the foreign invader. They thought that these things would protect them from further depredations. They were wrong. The attempts at acculturation did not matter. The profession of Christianity did not matter. In the end, it only mattered that they were Indian. Their continued occupation of their homelands served as both a rankling reminder of a brutal conquest not yet complete and an impediment to its final completion. In the process by which Natives were dispossessed, Christian missionaries were often no less culpable than those wielding rifle or plow. As historian Homer Noley (Choctaw) states, "On the one hand, church denominations geared themselves up to take the souls of Native American peoples into a brotherhood of love and peace; on the other, they were part of a white nationalist movement that geared itself up to take away the land and livelihood of Native American people by treachery and force."[9]

Though numerous non-Native historians have produced well-documented treatments of the Native/Christian encounter (most notably Henry Bowden's *American Indians and Christian Missions: Studies in Cultural Conflict* and John Webster Grant's *Moon of Wintertime: Missionaries and Canadian Indians in Encounter since 1534*), scholarly discussion of these events by Natives has been lacking. In the early 1990s two volumes attempted to begin to fill this lacuna: *Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide* by George Tinker and *First White Frost: Native Americans and United Methodism* by Homer Noley.[10] Although there are many areas of basic agreement between the two authors, a comparison of the two works yields important differences and provides an illustration of the complexity involved in rehearsing Native religious history.

While Tinker is willing, at least in the case of historic missions, to give missionaries the benefit of the doubt for their good intentions, Noley is less generous in his overall interpretation. Tinker declares, "To state the case baldly and dramatically, my thesis is that the Christian missionaries—of all denominations working among American Indian nations—were partners in genocide. Unwittingly no doubt, and always with the best of intentions, nevertheless the missionaries were guilty of

complicity in the destruction of Indian cultures and tribal social structures–complicity in the devastating impoverishment and death of the people to whom they preached."[11] This was so because "the kerygmatic content of the missionary's Christian faith became confused with the accoutrements of the missionary's cultural experience and behavior."[12] Putting aside the difficulty of attributing intentionality, it must still be noted that the systemic nature of racism, of which Tinker himself makes quite a lot, organizes and structures personal intent (however good) so as to mask the racist ends it may serve. Tinker himself declares, "It would have been impossible for these earlier missionaries to see and acknowledge their own sin in this regard." Yet, elsewhere, he also states with regard to missionary cooperation in Amer-European economic and political power structures, "At some level, they must have known what they were about."[13] Tinker, it appears, wants to have it both ways.

Tinker wants it both ways.

By contrast, Noley asks consistently how the missionaries, whose work, as Tinker notes, was clearly so destructive, could *not* have known what they were doing.[14] He declares, "Given the political intrigues that spanned most of the eighteenth century . . . the integrity of missionaries and their mission was in doubt. The biblical dictum 'You cannot serve God and Mammon' (Matt. 6:24) was set aside as missionaries, on the one hand, offered a religion of love and eternal life, and colonists, on the other hand, were forming militia to kill tribal people or drive them from their homes in order to take their lands and crops."[15] Intellectual and historiographic rigor force the question of how different the missiological experience would have to be before Tinker would surrender his assertion as to the "best intentions" of the missionaries, since such a belief cannot be reconcilable with *any* amount of Native suffering and *any* amount of culpability on the part of the evangelists. In the end, I suspect, Tinker's claim is empty because, given the grimness of the historical record and the role of missionaries in it, absent the improbable "smoking gun" stating baldly a divergence between stated and actual goals, it seems apparent there could be no circumstance, real or imaginary, that would dislodge Tinker from his much-repeated faith in the European and Amer-European bearers of the gospel.[16]

The second major difference between Tinker and Noley, dealing as it does with the way they approach their material, is more fundamental. Tinker limns the history of evangelical activities among Natives by focusing on the stories of four prominent missionaries from different regions and eras (John Eliot in Puritan New England; Pierre-Jean De Smet in the Northwest; Junípero Serra in old California; and Henry Benjamin Whipple, Episcopalian bishop of Minnesota during the second half of the 19th century). Other exemplars could have been chosen, but, for Tinker, the unrelenting sameness of the stories makes further renditions unnecessary.[17] Tinker hopes that his study "becomes a contribution to our understanding of why Native American peoples have

generally failed to enter the American mainstream and continue to live in poverty and oppression, marginalized on the periphery of society. By and large, Indian people have not found liberation in the gospel of Jesus Christ, but, rather, continued bondage to a culture that is both alien and alienating, and even genocidal against American Indian peoples."[18]

Tinker's method, however, has an unintended and unfortunate consequence. By concentrating exclusively on the four non-Natives of his case study, Natives are erased from the picture. In the process Native agency is destroyed and Native subjectivity is damaged. The missionaries are portrayed as the only actors in the story. Indians are passive recipients, merely acted upon.[19] Noley agrees–it would be impossible for him to do otherwise–that Natives

> were not involved in the preliminary discussions and planning sessions that took place prior to the deployment of missionaries to mission assignments. Their lot was to respond to the implementation of strategies that they had nothing to do with in the planning stages. They were not party to the assessments of their needs and the consequent decision making about how to go about meeting those needs. They were not involved in interdenominational agreements about who could work among which people. It is no wonder that they often became incredulous spectators of events that drastically affected their lives and reflected on their status as intelligent human beings.
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> From the very beginning of the major missionary movements, when the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions debated heatedly on the subject of whether to "civilize" the Indian first and then "Christianize him," or vice versa, to Reconstruction Era top-to-bottom mission deployment . . . Native people have generally been unwilling spectators of the frustrating results.[20]

In contrast to Tinker, however, Noley depicts the broad sweep of missiological history. He discusses the many prominent Native missionaries and clergy (e.g., Peter Jones, George Copway, John Sunday, Harry Long) who labored, and continue to labor, effectively among their own people. Natives were, of course, actors in the drama as well. A response *was* required of them. Remarkably, despite brutality, a great many Natives did willingly embrace the alien faith, and some of them went on to carry the message to others. This difference between Noley's and Tinker's accounts is crucial. In it lies the question of whether Natives were (and are) self-determined or selves-determined.[21]

Missionaries, in their colonialist drive to assimilate Natives, told those they converted that to become Christian meant to stop being Indian. An example is the experience of Natives after the purchase of Alaska

by the United States. In 1897, Dr. Sheldon Jackson, a Presbyterian missionary, was appointed the first territorial commissioner of education. With the support of his colleague Dr. S. Hall Young, Jackson set eradication of Native culture and language as a priority and established boarding schools along the Carlisle model. They encountered, however, a basic problem: these Natives did not fit their stereotypes of Indians. Instead of "rude savages," they found Alaska Natives who were already literate and multilingual, already educated in a Western sense, and already Christian and theologically astute. In fact, the Aleuts had been sending missionaries to other tribes for generations.[22] The first response of these "uncivilized" Natives was to send letters of protest to the Russian ambassador in Washington and to President McKinley. It did not work. In the place of the bilingual education system created by the Russians, Amer-Europeans taught the same self-hatred and internalized loathing that characterized American boarding schools.

Today, only between 10 and 25 percent (depending on what set of statistics one chooses to believe) of Natives consider themselves Christian. Missions still often are conducted in a manner unchanged in over a hundred years. Natives are still taught that "Christian Indian" is an oxymoron. For all too many, to become Christian still means to cease being Indian. Because of the intimate connection between culture and religious traditions for indigenous peoples, an additional irony is that converts are often told the same thing by their traditional relatives. For those who choose to practice Christianity, the result can be ostracism and isolation from community, as illustrated by the story of Samuel Checote in vignette #5 above. Referring to the brutal assimilationist methods of Christian evangelism, traditionalist and peyotist Leonard Crow Dog (Sicangu Lakota) states, "Indians became Christian by force. Often they were killed if they did not convert. Indian Christians have a very hard time these days as they are caught between two ways of seeing the world. I feel sorry for those of you who don't know who you are."[23]

IRONIC READINGS: NATIVES AND BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

William Baldridge (Cherokee) confirms these ironic histories as well as their continued contemporaneity:

> Many missionaries served as federal agents and in that role negotiated treaties which left us no land. Most missionaries taught us to hate anything Native American and that of necessity meant hating our friends, our families, and ourselves. Most refused to speak to us in any language but their own. The missionaries functioned as "Christ-bearing colonizers." If it were otherwise the missionaries would have come, shared the gospel, and left. We know, of course, that they stayed, and they continue to stay, and they continue to insist that we submit to them and their definitions. The vast majority of Native people have experienced the missionary system as racist and colonial."[24]

Much of that racism can be traced to the biblical hermeneutics of those who came to colonize the Americas and the theological anthropology that flowed from those interpretive systems. From the outset of the invasion of the continent, the Bible was read in a manner oppressive of indigenous peoples and employed to justify conquest.

In his paper "Native Americans and the Hermeneutical Task" Homer Noley stresses the role of "theological presuppositions and constructions which were put in place by Colonial America to describe Native Americans in the nation's theological themes."[25] Jonathan Edwards was one of many who spoke of the Western hemisphere as a "promised land" whose inhabitants were "wholly possessed of Satan until the coming of Europeans." John Rolfe proclaimed in 1616 that the British were "a peculiar people, marked and chosen by the finger of God" for the colonial enterprise "to possess [the Americas], for undoubtedly he is with us."[26]

Both Alfred A. Cave, in his article "Canaanites in a Promised Land: The American Indian and the Providential Theory of Empire," and Djelal Kadir, in his book *Columbus and the Ends of the Earth: Europe's Prophetic Rhetoric as Conquering Ideology*, have demonstrated that biblical language was used to spawn and spur the colonial enterprise. Cave quotes Sir George Peckham, a prominent Catholic nobleman who envisioned America as a refuge for Catholics, as viewing the Native population as the Canaanites inhibiting conquest of the Promised Land; these heathens would either be exterminated or, like the Gibeonites, submit "as drudges to hewe wood and carie water."[27] Kadir shows conclusively that colonizers crossed the Atlantic convinced that they were exercising their God-given right to lands held in escrow for them from the foundation of the world. Reverend Alexander Whitaker of Henrico, Virginia, exemplified this opinion when he wrote in 1613 that "this plantation, which the divill hath so often troden down, is by the miraculous blessing of God, revived. . . . God first shewed us the place; God first called us hither, and here God by his special providence hath maintained us."[28] Anders Stephanson shows in *Manifest Destiny* that such beliefs did not cease with the end of the colonial experience but persisted in the American Republic well into the nineteenth century.[29] When Natives were not conceptualized as Canaanites, they were viewed simply as part of a hostile landscape that needed to be ordered and tamed by European civilizers, little more than one more type of fauna to be

either domesticated or driven toward extinction. Typical, and illustrative of such a mindset, was the declaration of Eliphalet Stark in a letter to a relative in 1797: "The Yankees have taken care of the wolves, bears, and Indians . . . and we'll build the Lord's temple yet, build it out of these great trees."[30] The roots of such racism were sunk deep in biblical exegesis.

In March 1493, the church was suddenly presented with a problem. Columbus returned home from the "New World" with captives who appeared to be human. The question immediately arose as to how to account for this when the biblical account of creation in Genesis clearly mentioned only three continents (Europe, Asia, and Africa), each populated by the progeny of a different son of Noah after the Deluge. In response, Pope Alexander VI issued his bull *Inter Caetera.* This bull sanctioned the Conquest, reading, "Among the works well pleasing to the Divine Majesty and cherished in our heart, this assuredly ranks highest, that in our times especially the Catholic faith and the Christian religion be exalted and everywhere increased and spread, that the health of souls be cared for and that the barbarous nations be overthrown and brought to the faith itself."[31]

The papal instruction did little, however, to answer the basic questions concerning the humanity and origins of the indigenes of the Americas. Some considered Natives merely human in form but devoid of a soul. Some contended that the newly discovered Natives must be "sons of Ham," the same stock as the "racially inferior" peoples of Africa.[32] Still others, observing the degree of civilization among their cultures, declared the Indians to be the lost tribes of Israel. Though all three ideas coexisted, the last gradually became dominant and persisted relatively unchallenged until well into the nineteenth century. John Wesley, for instance, echoed the prevailing opinions of the day when, addressing the urgency of Christian missions to Natives, he fretted:

> One thing has often given me concern. . . . The progeny of Shem (the Indians) seem to be quite forgotten. How few of these have seen the light of the glory of God since the English first settled among them! And now scarce one in fifty among whom we settled, perhaps scarce one in an hundred of them are left alive! Does it not seem as if God had designed all the Indian natives not for reformation but for destruction? Undoubtedly with man it is impossible to help them. But is it too hard for God? Pray ye likewise the Lord of the Harvest and he will send out more laborers into his Harvest.[33]

The argument over Native humanity itself was not finally resolved until 1512 when Pope Julius II, faced with "mounting evidence of man-

like creatures inhabiting the Americas," declared that Native peoples were indeed human beings, descended from Adam and Eve through the Babylonians.[34] Thus by the grace of God and declaration of the Holy Pontiff, Indians were found to possess divine souls and were thus eligible for salvation.

Europeans' first reaction to inhabitants of the Americas was thus not alterity but sameness. Behind the debate over origins was a belief not only in the literal truth of the biblical witness but also that no people could attain any degree of civilization—even language—unless they could be shown as springing from the same roots as those of the known "Old World." They were not Other but Same. Yet, while the debate over the humanity of indigenes was settled, at least nominally, in the Natives' favor, questions as to the value of their cultures were not so resolved.

Edwards was hardly alone in proclaiming American Natives "wholly possessed of Satan" until the arrival of Europeans. Colonists and missionaries, regardless of the country from which they came, universally regarded Native cultures and religious traditions as pagan and diabolic, to be eradicated and replaced with Western values and ways of life. Even Russian missionaries, who on the whole were more sympathetic to the Native cultures they encountered, could not transcend and escape this Eurocentric bias.

An 1894 letter from Orthodox Bishop Petr discussing the traditional beliefs of the Aleuts and Kodiaks states that the morality and religious views of these people "are in essence similar to the Bible stories." The cleric considers this proof of the common origins of all humanity from a single pair of progenitors as depicted in the Hebrew scriptures. He concludes:

> The incomplete and fragmentary nature of the religious views of the Aleuts and Kadiaks *[sic]* can simply be explained by the fact that they have been too long . . . removed from the direct influence of God's Revelations, which alone can communicate to people in all its fullness the knowledge they need to have about God and the World, whereas originally God's Revelation was limited in all its purity to the European peoples alone. It must be noted that in accordance with God's Holy Revelations the Aleuts and the Kadiaks were not completely bereft of God's Grace, as a result of which there remained with them a sense of morality which prevented them from falling into ultimate sin.[35]

In daring to admit that there was something of the divine in Native religious traditions, albeit fractured and diminished, Bishop Petr was affirming the classical doctrine of the *logos*, which had been interpreted so that the ancient Church could cast itself as the "heir of the pagans" and claim for itself the wisdom of the Greek philosophers—a doctrine

that Edwards and others implicitly denied when they saw only deviltry in indigenous traditions. The Gospel according to John begins:

> In the beginning was the Word [*logos*],
> and the Word was with God,
> and the Word was God.

It then continues that this *logos* is "the true light, which enlightens everyone" and that it became flesh and lived among humanity (Jn 1:1, 9, 14). According to historian Justo González, "Since this Logos enlightens everyone, it follows, so the ancients said, that wherever people have any light, they have it because of this eternal Word of God, who became incarnate in Jesus Christ."[36] If the church had been consistent in its treatment of the *logos*, the doctrine should have provided a means to affirm indigenous cultures. Of course, it was not consistent. González writes:

> If the Word incarnate in Christ is the true light which enlightens everyone, it follows that the Word of God can be found wherever humans have any light whatsoever. . . . Once it attained a position of power within the Roman Empire and Greco-Roman culture–partially through its use of the doctrine of the Logos–it did not even consider the possibility that the same Word may have illumined those whom the "best" of culture considered "barbarians." *They* had no Logos. The Word had to be taken from them. Ever since, Christians seem to have remembered the doctrine of the Logos only when approaching cultures and civilizations they had no possibility of overpowering. When, on the contrary, they faced cultures or civilizations they were determined to overrun, or which had not advanced the art of killing as Western civilization had, they saw in those cultures and civilizations nothing but idolatry and ignorance.[37]

Not until the Second Vatican Council did significant theologians take seriously the notion that indigenous peoples might have something to contribute to the understanding of ultimate reality. In the wake of Vatican II, Italo-German theologian Romano Guardini queried whether truths might not "require their own soil in order to develop." Articulating a doctrine of division of labor among religions, he writes:

> Here too we might discern a kind of division of labor, by which, for example, certain truths became clear in India whereas Europeans had not yet grasped them. Hence we might find in the spiritual realm of the Vedas some insights which could be useful for a deepening of the doctrine of the Trinity, or it might be that in Buddhism–the strict Buddhism of the south–experiences emerged clearly which might be valuable for the problem of the "negative" knowledge of God.
>
> And what of the matter of mythology; indeed the whole question of myth? Shall we simply reject it, and shall those concerned about the purity of the message confine themselves to freeing this message from its mythical elements? Or is it not possible that a way of experiencing and thinking, in which all peoples lived for a time, should contain images which could contribute to a deepening of the Christian faith?[38]

Such expressions, while falling unfortunately short of setting Native traditions on an equal footing with Jewish/Christian traditions, are nonetheless far more accepting than earlier attitudes.

The older ideas, however, persist. Views that see Native religious traditions as worthless and demonic and Natives as the progeny of Ham remain staples of fundamentalist Christianity. The myth of the ten lost tribes remains alive in the Mormon description of American Indians as the Lamanites and continues to recur in popular discourse. Successionist, fulfillment, and anonymous Christ theologies continue to claim a superior position for Christianity over Native cultures. Even conceptualizations of Natives as Canaanites impeding the *eisode* have yet to die out completely. Noley notes that in *The Light and the Glory* Peter Marshall and David Manuel claim that the divine scheme that America should be the "new Jerusalem" was "to be worked out in terms of the settlers' covenant with God and with each other." In such a plan Natives are listed along with droughts, smallpox, and wild animals as "enemies from which God delivered his people."[39] Worse yet, Amer-European missionaries, continuing the ironic history, still teach such theologies and the biblical interpretations that support them to their Native American charges. As George Tinker observes, it is not unusual for entire Indian congregations to remain faithful "to the very missionary theology that was first brought to them, even when the denomination has long ago abandoned that language for a more contemporary articulation of the gospel. One must at least suspect that the process of Christianization has involved some internalization of the larger illusion of Indian inferiority and the idealization of white culture and religion."[40] When such self-hatred has been internalized to its fullest extent, the Conquest will finally be complete.

IRONIC PHILOSOPHIES: NATIVES AND POST-COLONIALISM

For Native Americans, perhaps the most pervasive result of colonialism is that we cannot even begin a conversation without

> referencing our words to definitions imposed or rooted in 1492. The arrival of Columbus marks the beginning of colonial hubris in America, a pride so severe that it must answer the charge of blasphemy.[41]

The idea of the *post-colonial,* referring to "a general process of decolonisation which, like colonisation itself, has marked the colonising societies as powerfully as it has the colonised (of course, in different ways)," has gained a great deal of currency in academic circles and exerted an important influence on the developing discipline of cultural studies.[42] It has been most fully articulated by literary critics. To a certain extent this is natural because "literature offers one of the most important ways in which these new perceptions are expressed and it is in their writing, and through other arts such as painting, sculpture, music, and dance that the day-to-day realities experienced by colonized peoples have been most powerfully encoded and so profoundly influential."[43] Yet this also has posed a limitation for post-colonial analysis because these same literary scholars "have been reluctant to make the break across disciplinary (even post-disciplinary) boundaries required to advance the argument"[44] or, indeed, truly to test its utility as a way of apprehending the lived reality of persons and peoples.

On its face, the concept has much to recommend it to Native scholars engaged in American Indian studies or religious studies, including biblical hermeneutics. As Bill Baldridge's statement above demonstrates, Native cultures were decisively different after the ruptures of invasion and colonization. It is self-evident that they were different from how they would have developed if left in isolation. New and extreme pressures, erratic and oppressive government policies, and the reduction of indigenes to less than 1 percent of the population have led to new constellations of identity.

Stuart Hall, a leading force in cultural studies, observes:

> The argument is not that, thereafter, everything has remained the same—colonisation repeating itself in perpetuity to the end of time. It is, rather, that colonisation so refigured the terrain that, ever since, the very idea of a world of separate identities, of isolated or separable and self-sufficient cultures and economies, has been obliged to yield to a variety of paradigms designed to capture these different but related forms of relationship, interconnection and discontinuity.[45]

While I do not want to be accused of the charge of "banal reductionism," which Hall hurls at critic Arif Dirlik, I do believe that there are potentially troubling aspects of post-colonial discourse that must be

seriously debated before American Natives can determine whether it is useful to hop aboard the post-colonial bandwagon.

If Ella Shohat is correct about the ahistorical, universalizing, depoliticizing effects of the post-colonial, there is nothing in that analysis for Natives.[46] If Ruth Frankenberg and Lata Mani are right in their assertion that too often the sole function post-colonial analysis seems to serve is as a critique of dominant, Western philosophical discourse—"merely a detour to return to the position of the Other as a resource for rethinking the Western self"—then Natives will want little part of it.[47] Unquestionably, as Dirlik states, "post-coloniality represents a response to a genuine need, the need to overcome a crisis of understanding produced by the inability of old categories to account for the world."[48] The "old categories" of Western discourse, however, never accounted for Native worldviews, and since the time of the first contact with Europeans, American Indians' reality has been all too much monotonously the same, controlled by those who conquered them.

A basic question concerning postcoloniality is that raised by Hall in the title of his essay "When Was the 'Post-Colonial'? Thinking at the Limit." Shohat has pointed out the "problematic temporality" of the term. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin contend that the post-colonial is that period which commences at the moment of colonization and continues to the present day.[49] Hall, for his part, maintains that one thing the post-colonial is not is a periodization based on epochal stages "when everything is reversed at the same moment, all the old relations disappear for ever *[sic]* and entirely new ones come to replace them."[50] For him the term is not merely descriptive of *there* versus *here* or *then* versus *now.* Nevertheless, in Hall's thinking, as for many post-colonial critics, the term has a temporal scope much more limited than that given to it by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin. *Post-colonial* truly represents a time *after* colonialism and temporally means that time of post-independence of the former colonial world, even if the struggle for decolonization is not yet complete.

The problem is that for much of that two-thirds of the world colonialism is not dead. It is not living merely as "after-effects," as Hall implies. Native Americans remain a colonized people, victims of internal colonialism. *Internal colonialism* differs from classic colonialism (sometimes called blue water colonialism) in that in colonialism's classic form a small group of colonists occupy a land far from the colonial metropolis (*métropole*) and remain a minority, exercising control over a large indigenous population, whereas in internal colonialism, the native population is swamped by a large mass of colonial settlers who, after generations, no longer have a *métropole* to which to return. Today, Native American life is characterized by the same paternalistic colonialism that has marked it for over a century. The heavy hand of

federal plenary power still rests heavily upon Native American affairs.

An ironic aspect of post-colonial critique for Natives is its relationship to postmodernism. Post-structuralist discourse provides its "philosophical and theoretical grounding," and like post-structuralism, it is "anti-foundational."[51] To understand the irony of this predicament, one must turn back to the previous century. In the late nineteenth century two great rationalizing sciences rose to prominence, sociology and anthropology. The former purported to study that which was normative in the dominant culture. The latter, which Claude Levi-Strauss labels "the handmaiden of colonialism," studied the Other and advised colonial masters in the manners and mores of native peoples that they might be more effectively controlled.[52] In like manner, in the late twentieth century two systems of critical thought have arisen to explain the world. It is no coincidence that just as the peoples of the Two-Thirds World begin to find their voices and assert their own agency and subjectivity, postmodernism proclaims the end of subjectivity. By finding its theoretical roots in European intellectual discourse, post-colonialism continues, by inadvertence, the philosophical hegemony of the West.

Like postmodernism, post-colonialism is obsessed with the issues of identity and subjectivity. Hall writes that

> questions of hybridity, syncretism, of cultural undecidability and the complexities of diasporic identification . . . interrupt any "return" to ethnically closed and "centred" original histories. Understood in its global and transcultural context, colonisation has made ethnic absolutism an increasingly untenable cultural strategy. It made the "colonies" themselves, and even more, large tracts of the "post-colonial" world, always-already "diasporic" in relation to what might be thought of as their cultures of origin.[53]

Putting aside for the moment the diasporic nature of much of modern Native existence, one must nevertheless admit that there is something real, concrete, and centered in Native existence and identity. Joseph Conrad can become a major figure of English letters and Léopold Sédar Senghor a member of the French Academy, but either one is Indian or one is not.[54] And certain genuine consequences flow from those accidents of birth and culture. It is part of the distinction drawn by Edward Said between filiation and affiliation.[55]

The problem is that at base post-colonial discourse *is* depoliticized. As Shohat notes, in its legitimate and sincere effort to escape essentialism, "post-colonial discourse sometimes seems to define *any* attempt to recover or inscribe a communal past as a form of idealisation, despite its significance as a site of resistance and collective identity."[56] Its error, like that of postmodernism, is that it mistakes having deconstructed

something theoretically for having displaced it politically.[57] Jacqueline Rose, in her book *States of Fantasy*, observes that the postmodern in its "vision of free-wheeling identity . . . seems bereft of history and passion."[58] Said responds, "Just so, particularly at a moment when, all over the globe, identities, civilizations, religions, cultures seem more bloodily at odds than ever before. Postmodernism can do nothing to try to understand this."[59] The same case could be made against post-colonialism.

After more than five hundred years of ongoing colonialism, Native Americans wrestle with two different pulls of identity, one settled and the other diasporic.[60] The settled is that of traditional lands and a continent that was once wholly theirs. The diasporic is that of new homes to which they were exiled by their conquerors, of urban existence far removed from even those territories, and a grim realization that their colonizers are here to stay. Only the most winsome dreamer and the most prophetic visionary believe that Amer-Europeans are going anywhere—short of the success of the Ghost Dance or cataclysmic destruction brought upon themselves. Post-colonial critique provides a useful tool for analyzing Native literatures, which reflect these divergent pulls on identity, and for deconstructing the ironic and destructive biblical readings that have been imposed upon us. As long, however, as those readings and the theologies that spring from them are still taught, as long as denominational factionalism and Amer-European missionization continue to divide families and force Natives to choose between their communities and their religion, the post-colonial moment for Native Americans will not yet have arrived.

DISSOLVING IRONY: SEARCHING FOR A COMMUNITY HERMENEUTIC

In his book *The Irony of American History* Reinhold Niebuhr delineates three distinct types of history: the pathetic, the tragic, and the ironic. Pathos is that element of history that inspires pity but deserves neither admiration nor contrition. Suffering resulting from purely natural consequences is the clearest example of pathos. Tragedy is the conscious choice of evil for the sake of good. For Niebuhr, writing at the height of the Cold War, that the United States supposedly had to have and had to threaten to use nuclear weapons in order to preserve itself and its allies was tragic. Irony "consists of apparently fortuitous incongruities of life which are discovered, upon closer examination, to be not merely fortuitous."[61] It is distinguished from the pathetic in that humans bear responsibility for it. It is distinguished from the tragic in that the responsibility rests on unconscious weakness rather than conscious choice. Irony, unlike pathos or tragedy, must dissolve when it is

brought to light. It elicits laughter. American history for Niebuhr is ironic: there is a gap between the ideal of America's self-image and the reality of its history and existence.[62] Natives have been representing themselves in print for more than two hundred years and have striven to bring to light, in the hope of dissolving them, the ironic histories, readings, and philosophies that have been imposed upon them by the dominant culture. Without falling into the post-colonial/postmodernist naiveté of believing that theoretical deconstruction necessarily means ultimate efficacy, they have asserted their own subjectivity and have attempted to develop and spell out their own histories, readings, and intellectual discourse in a way that affirms their personhood.

Noley states, "If the Native American clergy are satisfied with their training, there may not be an interest in a new basis for Native American ministries. If they are not satisfied, there is a place for Native American Biblical scholarship."[63] He remains skeptical, however, because most Native clergy "reflect the fundamentalism of rural white non-Indian Christianity."[64] The remarks are consonant with Tinker's contention that Natives often adhere to the missionary theology first brought to them generations ago. In point of fact, however, at least a few Native clergy and laity always have expressed their dissatisfaction with the transmitted biblical interpretation of the dominant culture.

The work of William Apess (Pequot), writing in the 1820s and 1830s, must be viewed as resistance literature, repeatedly employing indirection and signification to affirm Indian cultural and political identity over against the dominant culture. For example, in his autobiography, *Son of the Forest*, he rejects any use of the term *Indian* as a disgrace. Looking to the Bible, he finds no reference to "indians" "and therefore deduces that it is a word imported for the special purpose of degrading us." He concludes, "But the proper term which ought to be applied to our nation, to distinguish it from the rest of the human family, is that of '*Natives*'—and I humbly conceive that the natives of this country are the only people under heaven who have a just title to the name, inasmuch as we are the only people who retain the original complexion of our father Adam."[65] Here Apess's subversion through rhetoric can be seen clearly. He invokes the language of evangelical Christianity with its appeal to the Bible. In all his writings, he constantly throws up the norms, language, and tools of Christianity into the face of Amer-Europeans in order to expose their racism and to subvert their use of the same material for racist ends.

A key example of Apess's use of signification can be found in his use of the contention that America's indigenes are the ten lost tribes of Israel. As quoted above, Apess states that Indians are the only people with Adam's original complexion, an assertion he repeats, a reference to his belief that Indians were the lost tribes. As such, they, like the Jews, whom he considers people of color, would be Semites and thus

closer to Adam's coloring than the pale Anglo-Saxons. He includes a lengthy appendix to *Son of the Forest*, outlining all the various arguments in favor of this thesis. He returns to the theme in a sermon, "The Indians: The Ten Lost Tribes." Far from using this myth of dominance to slur his own people, however, Apess uses it to claim their common humanity. If Natives are the ten lost tribes, they are every bit as human as their Amer-European invaders. If they are human, they are entitled to equal treatment. Beyond this, if they share a common ancestry with Amer-Europeans, how is there any basis for racism against them? In a scathing pun, Apess looks at Amer-Europeans' complexion and their treatment of Indians and concludes that their Christianity must be only "skin-deep."[66]

Likewise, Peter Jones (Anishinaabe), writing in the decades immediately after Apess, examines the biblical text and employs it against the established order. Jones concludes that Whites have more to atone for in their treatment of Natives than they will ever be able to achieve. In language reminiscent of Apess, he looks to the ultimate judgment, writing, "Oh, what an awful account at the day of judgment, must the unprincipled white man give, who has been the agent of Satan in the extermination of the original proprietors of the American soil! Will not the blood of the red man be required at *his* hands, who, for paltry gain, has impaired the minds, corrupted the morals, and ruined the constitution of a once hardy and numerous race?" Such judgment, however, extends to crimes far more numerous than the introduction of liquor. Jones declares sarcastically, "When I think of the long catalogue of evils entailed on my poor unhappy countrymen, my heart bleeds, not only on their account, but also for their destroyers, who, coming from a land of light and knowledge, are without excuse. Poor deluded beings! Whatever their pretensions to Christianity may have been, it is evident the love of God was not in their hearts; for that love extends to all mankind, and constrains to acts of mercy, but never impels to deeds of death."[67]

One hundred and fifty years later, Marie Therese Archambault declared:

> When we read the Gospel, we must read it as *Native people*, for this is who we are. We can no longer try to be what we think the dominant society wants us to be. . . . We must learn to subtract the chauvinism and cultural superiority with which this Gospel was often presented to our people. We must, as one author says, "decolonize" the Gospel, which said we must become European in order to be Christian. We have to go beyond the *white gospel* in order to perceive its truth."[68]

For Robert Warrior, in his important and widely reprinted article "Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians," the Native experience *is* that of

the biblical Canaanites, dispossessed of their homeland and annihilated by a foreign invader. His argument takes on added force in the case of the tribal groups who were subjected to a genocidal reverse Exodus from country that was for them, literally, the Promised Land. Thus, for Warrior, to read the biblical witness as a Native, as Archambault suggests, is to read it with "Canaanite eyes."[69]

Tinker, trained as a biblical scholar, contends that a Native biblical reading "presents an interesting challenge to the predominant, Eurocentric tradition of biblical scholarship." It will differ, he avers, from "Euro-American" hermeneutics in three ways: "First, the theological function of the Old Testament in a Native American context will differ. Second, the sociopolitical context of Native American peoples will characteristically generate interpretations that are particularly Native American. Moreover, the discrete cultural particularities of cognitive structures among Native Americans will necessarily generate 'normatively divergent' readings of scripture."[70] Each of these points requires some elaboration.

According to Justo González:

> The "modern" worldview is so prevalent, and so successful in its manipulation and the exploitation of the natural world, that in many circles it currently passes for the only rational or reasonable understanding of the world. The net result in theology, and in particular in biblical interpretation, has been the need to demythologize, as Bultmann correctly pointed out–or perhaps better, to re-mythologize into the myth patterns of the twentieth-century Western technocratic myth system. Passages in the Bible dealing with miracles, demons, and divine intervention in human and natural affairs, many of which have been sources of strength for believers throughout the centuries, have become problematic for many in the dominant culture–and, precisely because of the dominant power of that culture, for many in other cultures.[71]

Needless to say, however, the "modern" worldview is not the only possible way of seeing reality, nor is its logic as inescapable as its proponents would have one believe. Michael Oleska points out, "Traditional societies, as have existed since homo sapiens first appeared, have almost universally shared certain common attitudes toward fundamental experience. They perceive time, space, and nature in ways remarkably different from those of the post-Renaissance West."[72] Native worldviews are, in fact, much closer to the worldview of the ancient Israelites than that of the modern West. After all, Yahweh was first and foremost the tutelary, local tribal deity of the Hebrew people, whose acts they recognized in their lives. Stan McKay (Cree), former moderator of the United Church of Canada, writes, "For those who come out of the Judeo-Christian background it might be helpful to view us as an 'Old Testament People.' We, like them, come out of an oral tradition which is rooted in the Creator and the creation. We, like Moses, know about the sacredness of the earth and the promise of land. Our creation stories also emphasize the power of the Creator and the goodness of creation. We can relate to the vision of Abraham and the laughter of Sarah. We have dreams like Ezekiel and have known people like the Pharaoh. We call ourselves 'the people' to reflect our sense of being chosen."[73]

These divergent worldviews will generate culturally relevant and specific interpretations of the biblical text. Native Christians give authority to scripture specifically because it resonates with their experience. Even while reading with Canaanite eyes, they locate themselves and their perceptual experience in the story. They report relating to Moses trudging up Sinai to meet the divine as one about to embark on a vision quest. They recognize Mary, the mother of Jesus, because she is *la Virgen de Guadalupe*, or White Buffalo Calf Woman, or Corn Mother, or *La llorona* refusing to be consoled at the death of her child. They can chuckle knowingly at the exploits of Jacob because he is the trickster familiar to them as Coyote, or Raven, or Iktomi. This is not the hermeneutics of professional exegetes. Rather, it is the folk theology upon which Christianity at the ground level has always thrived as a living faith. This process of appropriation of the text is no different than that which goes on in the lives of ordinary Christians anywhere in the world. Native Christians give authority to the biblical witness because, to paraphrase Coleridge, there is something that "finds them" where they live their lives.

Any post-colonial biblical hermeneutic for Natives must affirm traditional religious expressions, which previously have been denied and denigrated. As Steven Charleston (Choctaw), former Episcopal bishop of Alaska, reminds us: Natives had a covenant with the Creator lived long before missionaries came to them. According to Charleston, that original covenantal relationship forms the "Old Testament of Native America."[74] Yowa of the Cherokee, Wakan Tanka of the Lakota, the Great Energy of the Gwich'in, and countless other manifestations are as much *logoi* as any of the faces of deity in the Jewish-Christian tradition. Noley explicitly rejects the assimilationist, missionary hermeneutic that speaks of Native missions in terms of the parable of the tares (Mt 13:24-30, 36-43).[75] In such an interpretation, the tares sown by the enemy are Natives who continue to adhere to their indigenous religious traditions or those who practice religious dimorphism (a very common occurrence among Native peoples), whereby a person participates in Christianity but also still participates in his or her traditional culture and ways without mixing the two. A post-colonial hermeneutic rejects any interpretation that divides Native community.

A post-colonial hermeneutic also will take seriously the importance of land for Native peoples. This imperative has several layers. First, Natives tend to be spatially oriented rather than temporally oriented. Their cultures, spirituality, and identity are connected to the land—and not simply land in a generalized sense but *their* land. The act of creation is not so much what happened *then* as it is what happened *here*; it is the story of the formation of a specific land and a particular people. Thus, when Indian tribes were forcibly removed from their homes, they were robbed of more than territory. Taken from them was a numinous world where every mountain and lake holds meaning for their faith and identity. For example, the Cherokee word *eloh'*, sometimes translated as "religion," also means, at precisely the same time, "history," "culture," "law"—and "land."[76]

George Tinker, in particular, has written repeatedly about this spatiality. He claims that a Native reading of the Greek scriptures "begins with a primarily spatial understanding of the *basileia*." In the predominant Western biblical scholarship, since the late nineteenth century when eschatology emerged as a central aspect of interpretation of the Greek scriptures, the *basileia tou theou* (the realm of God) has been seen almost exclusively in temporal terms. According to Tinker, "That is, the only appropriate question to ask about the *basileia* has been When?" For Natives, however, thinking spatially, "it is natural to read *basileia tou theou* as a creation metaphor." It is an image of the ideal of harmony and balance. Tinker concludes, "To this extent, the ideal world is the real world of creation in an ideal relationship of harmony and balance with the Creator. It is relational, first of all, because it implies a relationship between the created order of things and its Creator, and, second, because it implies a relationship between all of the things created." It is the real world within which we hope to realize the ideal world of harmony and balance.[77]

Naturally flowing from this is the question of humanity's relationship to the earth as a creation of the Creator. Natives traditionally do not relate to the land as landscape. Landscape is related to the German *landschaft*, "a territory shaped by people, a working country carved by axe and plough."[78] It is a word rooted in a belief that the earth must be subdued by human effort before it has worth. (Though many Natives have "tooled" the land, by irrigating it or clearing it for crops or pasture, for instance, there is not the concomitant view that it is inferior or worthless without such ministrations.) In that sense, it shares a common origin with the injunction of Genesis 1:28 to have dominion over the creation. By contrast, in traditional Native cultures the relationship to the creation is quite different. There is no superiority assumed or claimed for humanity, and humanity is, in some sense, undifferentiated from the rest of the created order. The world around the Native is a

point of communion with the divine because it is a visible expression of the one who created it and still undergirds it.

Finally, when one speaks of land, the issue arises as to ownership. Before the advent of Europeans and the imposition of foreign notions of land tenure, which divided up the land that it might be rendered tame, land was not "owned" in a modern sense. It was held in common by all. It was not property but community. Once again, the affinity with the worldview of the ancient Hebrews is evident. Such a belief compares readily to that expressed in Leviticus 25:23: "And the land shall not be sold in perpetuity; for the land is mine: for ye are strangers and sojourners with me." When he attempted to rally the Native nations into a grand alliance to halt White expansionism, Tecumseh (Shawnee) declared, "The only way to stop this evil is for all the red men to unite in claiming a common and equal right in the land, as it was at first, and should be now—for it never was divided, but belongs to all. No tribe has a right to sell, even to each other, much less to strangers, who demand all and will take no less."[79] This raises the ultimate question of ownership of land; namely, that of how it was wrested from its original occupants. Noley states the matter bluntly, "The fundamental question has never been addressed, even after two hundred years of white presence on this continent: namely, the validity of white presence on a continent already possessed and cultivated."[80] A post-colonial hermeneutic must take account of Native land claims.

The final fundamental, and most basic, element of a post-colonial hermeneutic is its communal character. As is often said, community is the highest value for Native peoples, and fidelity to it is a primary responsibility. Native religious traditions are not practiced for personal empowerment or fulfillment but rather to ensure the corporate good. There is generally no concept of salvation other than the continuance of the people, and the closest approximation of the Jewish-Christian doctrine of sin is a failure to live up to one's obligations to the people. A post-colonial hermeneutic for Natives rejects the individualistic interpretations brought by assimilationist missions in favor of more communal and communitarian methods and understandings.

No professional exegete or theologian can say what a text means, let alone *should* mean, for Native communities. Only the communities themselves, gathered in dialogue (though modern mass communications may permit them to be geographically distant), can perform that task. The community as the proper locus of the hermeneutical task means that what emerges resembles what Justo González, for Hispanics, labeled *Fuenteovejuna* (sheep trough) theology, "meaning . . . a theology undertaken with such a sense of community that it belongs to the community itself, and at the end no one knows who first proposed a particular idea."[81] In traditional cultures the thought that an idea or a story could

belong to an individual—belong to such an extent that he or she could have enforceable proprietary rights to it—would seem as irrational and bizarre as a single person owning the land.

A post-colonial Native hermeneutic, a "we-hermeneutic," however, "goes far beyond the proposal that Scripture is best understood within the circumstances of a community, and when interpreted by a community."[82] Community is not only a tool or a framework for the hermeneutical task but also its ultimate goal.

> Thus, the community is not just a hermeneutical tool and a necessary context in which to understand a text, but also the goal of every interpretation and every text to be interpreted. Without such a perspective, we fall into I-hermeneutics, which fails, not merely because it misinterprets its text, but also because it misinterprets its task. The task of hermeneutics is not merely for an individual—or even for a community—to understand a text, but is even more for building the community.[83]

I have called such an approach *communitist* (a combination of *community* and *activist*). A truly post-colonial we-hermeneutic is communitist because it possesses an active commitment to Native community. The community itself "stands at the very center" of such an interpretive system.[84]

Though such a hermeneutic will, of necessity, be culturally specific (Natives have too long been subjected to the universalizing impulses of Western discourse), as Hall claims for the post-colonial critique in general, it moves beyond the "clear-cut politics of binary oppositions" of "us" versus "them."[85] Though it seeks to be inclusive, as much as possible, of the entire Native American community, it does not stop there. Nor does it stop at the entire human community; rather, it seeks to embrace the entire created order, plants, animals, Mother Earth herself.

In his book *Tribal Secrets* Robert Warrior speaks of the need and ability of American Natives to assert their own "intellectual sovereignty."[86] What exactly a post-colonial we-hermeneutic will mean for Natives must emerge out of the community itself as we critically reflect upon our own communitist commitments. If, however, we are ever to dismantle the colonial paradigm and move to a place "after" and "beyond" colonialism[87] and the imperialist readings it engenders, we must have hermeneutical sovereignty as well.

Notes

[1] I am indebted for this title to a paper delivered in 1988 at the Roundtable of Ethnic Minority Theologians by Stephen S. Kim of the Claremont Graduate School entitled, "From I-Hermeneutics to We-Hermeneutics: A Prolegomenon to Theology of Community from an Asian-American Perspective." That I find

it applicable as a title for this present article attests to the many commonalities people of color have shared in the colonial experience.

[2] David A. Rausch and Blair Schlepp, *Native American Voices* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), pp. 130-31.

[3] Marilyn M. Hofstra, ed., *Voices: Native American Hymns and Worship Resources* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1992), pp. 14-15.

[4] Ibid., p. 39.

[5] Homer Noley, *First White Frost* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), pp. 165-66.

[6] Vine Deloria, Jr., *Custer Died for Your Sins*, 2d ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1988), p. 112.

[7] Noley, pp. 198-200.

[8] In Jace Weaver, "Native Reformation in Indian Country?" *Christianity and Crisis* (Feb. 15, 1993), p. 40.

[9] Noley, p. 85.

[10] Although the history of Natives and Methodism is Noley's primary focus, the volume is much fuller, providing a broad history of Native/Christian interaction.

[11] George Tinker, *Missionary Conquest* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), p. 4; George Tinker, "Reading the Bible as Native Americans," *New Interpreters Bible*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), p. 174.

[12] Tinker, *Missionary Conquest*, p. 4.

[13] Ibid., pp. 10, 18.

[14] Noley, p. 191.

[15] Ibid., p. 43.

[16] See Anthony Flew, "Theology and Falsification," in *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, ed. A. G. N. Flew and A. C. MacIntyre (London: S.C.M., 1955), pp. 96ff.

[17] Tinker, *Missionary Conquest*, pp. 125-26.

[18] Ibid., p. 5.

[19] See John Webster Grant, *Moon of Wintertime: Missionaries and the Indians of Canada in Encounter since 1534* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), p. 239.

[20] Noley, pp. 205-6.

[21] See Holly Folk, "Indian Missionaries Among the Anishinaabe Tribes of the Great Lakes Region: Selves-Determined or Self-Determining," unpublished paper, Columbia University, Spring 1996.

[22] Michael Oleska, ed., *Alaskan Missionary Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), pp. 21-24. The Russian Revolution of 1917 threw Russian Orthodox missions in America into a turmoil that would not end fully until fifty-three years later when the Russian Patriarch recognized the American church as autocephalous.

[23] In James Treat, ed., *Native and Christian: Indigenous Voices on Religious Identity in the United States and Canada* (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 18.

[24] William Baldridge, "Reclaiming Our Histories," in *New Visions for the Americas: Religious Engagement and Social Transformation*, ed. David Batstone (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), p. 25. Baldridge's original title for the article in which this statement appeared was "Christianity after Colonialism."

[25] Homer Noley, "Native Americans and the Hermeneutical Task," unpublished paper, delivered at the Roundtable of Ethnic Theologians, 1988.

[26] Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), p. 119.
[27] Alfred A. Cave, "Canaanites in a Promised Land: The American Indian and the Providential Theory of Empire," *American Indian Quarterly* (Fall 1988), p. 287.
[28] In ibid., p. 288.
[29] Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansion and the Empire of Right* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), pp. 15-65.
[30] In Donald A. Grinde, Jr., and Bruce E. Johansen, *Ecocide in Native America* (Santa Fe: Clear Light, 1995), p. 7; Jace Weaver, *Defending Mother Earth: Native American Perspectives on Environmental Justice* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), pp. 14-15.
[31] In Terry Tafoya and Roy De Boer, "Comments on the Involvement of Christian Churches in Native American Affairs," in Marilyn Bode, *Christians and Native Americans in the Late 20th Century* (Seattle: Church Council of Greater Seattle, 1981), p. 17.
[32] Jace Weaver, "Original Simplicities and Present Complexities: Reinhold Niebuhr, Ethnocentrism, and the Myth of American Exceptionalism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 63:2 (1995), pp. 234-35.
[33] Noley, *First White Frost*, pp. 43-44.
[34] Ibid., p. 18.
[35] In Oleska, p. 71.
[36] Justo González, *Out of Every Tribe and Nation: Christian Theology at the Ethnic Roundtable* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), p. 43.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Romano Guardini, *The Church of the Lord: On the Nature and Mission of the Church* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1966), pp. 8-9.
[39] See Noley, "Native Americans."
[40] Tinker, *Missionary Conquest*, p. 3.
[41] Baldridge, p. 24.
[42] Stuart Hall, "When Was 'the Post-Colonial'? Thinking at the Limit," in *The Post-Colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons*, ed. Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 246.
[43] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 1.
[44] Hall, p. 258.
[45] Ibid., pp. 252-53.
[46] See Ella Shohat, "Notes on the Postcolonial," *Social Text* 31/32 (1992).
[47] Ruth Frankenberg and Lata Mani, "Crosscurrents, Crosstalk: Race, 'Postcoloniality' and the Politics of Location," *Cultural Studies* 7:2 (1992), p. 101; Hall, pp. 248-49.
[48] Arif Dirlik, "The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism," *Critical Inquiry* (Winter 1992), p. 353.
[49] Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, pp. 2, 6.
[50] Hall, p. 247.
[51] Ibid., pp. 255-56.
[52] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), p. 152.
[53] Hall, p. 250.

[54] See Thomas King, *All My Relations* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1990), p. x.
[55] Edward Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp. 19-20.
[56] Hall, p. 251.
[57] Ibid., p. 249.
[58] Jacqueline Rose, *States of Fantasy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).
[59] Edward Said, "Fantasy's Role in the Making of Nations," *Times Literary Supplement* (Aug. 9, 1996), p. 7.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 192), pp. vii- viii.
[62] Weaver, "Original Simplicities," pp. 233-34.
[63] Noley, "Native Americans."
[64] Ibid.
[65] William Apess, *On Our Own Ground: The Complete Writings of William Apess, a Pequot*, ed. Barry O'Connell (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), p. 10.
[66] Ibid., pp. 34ff.
[67] Peter Jones, *History of the Ojebway Indians: With Especial Reference to Their Conversion to Christianity* (London: A. W. Bennett, 1861), pp. 29-30.
[68] In Treat, p. 135.
[69] In Jace Weaver, "A Biblical Paradigm for Native Liberation," *Christianity and Crisis* (Feb. 15, 1993), p. 40.
[70] Tinker, "Reading the Bible as Native Americans," p. 174.
[71] González, p. 48.
[72] Oleska, pp. 7-8.
[73] In Treat, p. 52.
[74] Steve Charleston, "The Old Testament of Native America," in *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theology from the Underside*, ed. Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite and Mary Potter Engel (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), pp. 54-55.
[75] Noley, *First White Frost*, p. 187.
[76] Weaver, *Defending Mother Earth*, p. 12.
[77] Tinker, "Reading the Bible as Native Americans," pp. 176-80.
[78] Stephen Daniels, "This Land Was Made for Us," *Times Literary Supplement* (Aug. 9, 1996), p. 8.
[79] Noley, *First White Frost*, pp. 71-72.
[80] Ibid.
[81] González, p. 53.
[82] Ibid., p. 54; see also Kim.
[83] González, p. 54.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Hall, p. 244.
[86] Robert Allen Warrior, *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), pp. 97-98.
[87] Hall, pp. 253-54.