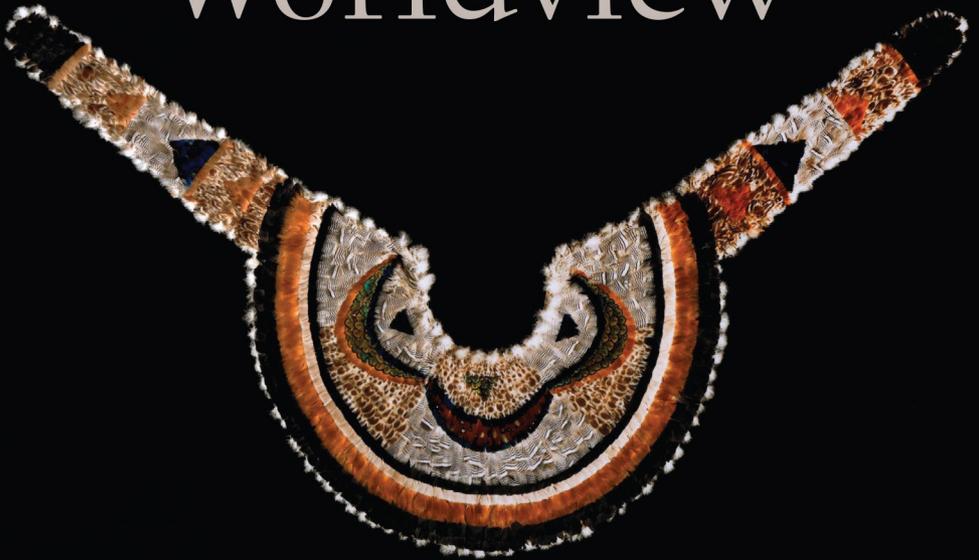


Indigenous  
Theology  
and the  
Western  
Worldview



A Decolonized Approach to Christian Doctrine

Randy S. Woodley

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# Preface

## Pedagogy

As a way of setting a proper context for the book, it is necessary that I mention a few particularities concerning an Indigenous pedagogy, which is rooted in Indigenous values. Even the word *pedagogy* implies teaching from a place of unequal positions or the problem of the subject/object paradigm. You will notice the dialogical nature of my style, especially in the question and response sections following each chapter. I feel that, when teaching or presenting, it is paramount to hear all the other voices in the room, not just my own. Although the Hayward Lectures are created in a very Western style, I tried to bend that style toward a more Indigenous platform. The word *pedagogy* technically implies a learning style resembling an adult teaching a child. Pedagogy implies that one person, the teacher or adult, has knowledge to share with the other, the receiver or child. In my graduate and undergraduate courses, I have always referenced my students (another word that implies the former inequality of position) as co-learners. Co-learners, short for “collaborative learners,” implies we are positionally

equal, learning together. Yes, I likely have more years of study in the subject matter than many of them, but knowledge, not applied, does us little good. I have found that most learning experiences stick best when we bring not just knowledge but our own truth and experience to the conversation. As co-learners apply the knowledge that I help them bring forth, making it real in their own contexts, we learn from one another. Thus, real knowledge, that which is real to each one's experience, is shared together as co-learners in collaboration with the subject matter.

Much has been written about adult learning or what some of us call “anthrogogy,” and I need not repeat it here.<sup>1</sup> Master teachers such as Paulo Freire, bell hooks, and Myles Horton have influenced my teaching style, but suffice it to say, the ideas of democracy and teaching from an egalitarian anthrogogy were on this continent long before Europeans arrived. Indigenous teaching styles embody a respect for co-learning without diminishing the authority of the teacher and without objectification of the co-learners. I always cherish conversations when people speak from their hearts, even if I disagree with them. Over the years, I have learned to face a reality in my own life—namely, there are few areas in which I have no opinions or at least have no leanings, and therefore my assumptions are best challenged in groups by others who are thinking on the topic in a different way.

In many of our Native American traditions we have a prayer that often goes something like, “Have pity/understanding on me Creator and remember, I am just a human being.” The idea behind this prayer is that perfection is the enemy of attainment.

1. Just a few of those who compare adult learners with children include Marie Battiste, *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2000); Donald L. Fixico, *The American Indian Mind in a Linear World* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

We are all simply human beings, imperfect but learning from our mistakes. Those mistakes make us human. And being human by climbing out on a limb in order to reach others is the most spiritual state of being in which we may find ourselves. When those special moments come, everyone in the room feels like we have experienced something together that is truly sacred. Perhaps promoting knowledge among co-learners in an atmosphere of sacred space is the most important role I have as a scholar and a spiritual leader.

## Narrative

In this book you will also notice what may seem to some to be an abundance of stories, both of a traditional Indigenous style and my own personal stories. Narrative theology, like anthropology, has been used as a primary communication tool among Indigenous peoples from time immemorial. Traditions are passed on orally, often through story, reinforcing the values developed over time among Indigenous peoples. Included in those values is an understanding that spoken words have primordial power. Tribal stories, then, are considered sacred and are not to be used lightly. These sacred stories reinforce other Indigenous values, much in the way ceremony and songs do. Naturally, stories, both shared tribal stories and one's own personal stories, are a primary vehicle for teaching and sustaining life.

In juxtaposition, most Western communicative practices rely on story as a filler or as a way of emphasizing propositional communications. The idea is that brief propositions, especially those alliterated, are an efficient communication tool. Unfortunately, humans do not seem to find themselves in propositions well. Yet they do find themselves in story. As a former pastor, I

can objectively say that the message was rarely taken to heart through my days of propositional communication but people always found themselves in story in a personal and practical way. Often forgetting the sermon, they would remark on the earlier children's story. Story has been a primary communication tool among Indigenous people all over the world for that reason, and it is for that reason that I use stories here.

## Biography

I chose to begin with the biographical section of the Hayward Lectures called "The Red Couch Conversation" (although I found the couch to be more of a burnt orange color). Traditionally among Indigenous North Americans, when introducing ourselves we are supposed to tell who our people are and where we are from. Tribes such as the Navajo have even formalized this process. Not only does this practice give the listener an idea of who the person is and who the people are from whence they come, but it grounds them in a particular place. Granted, in a very transitory society of mass and frequent migrations, this practice proves itself to be difficult.

Part of the colonial project is to universalize place and uproot our particularities and blur our homage to a particular place. In an integration of both place-based and relational theologies, I try to tell the story of my own identity and sense of place. Hopefully, it will matter to you how who I am relates to what and how I teach. We are all, in many ways, influenced by our environment. We owe it to those people and those places to recall their important effect on our lives.

# Opening Interview

*The following conversation took place as part of the Red Couch Conversation in conjunction with the MacRae Centre for Faith and Culture.*

**How would you introduce yourself if someone asked, “Who is Randy Woodley?”**

Well, in our Keetoowah tradition, I was taught we’re not actually supposed to talk about ourselves, so I wouldn’t introduce myself if I had the choice, but I can do so here. I would say, first of all, that my wife and I are farmer/planters, and we grow our food and seeds, so that others can grow their own food.

**And, if someone asked, “Why are you giving lectures? Are you lecturing on food?”**

I would say, I can’t understand why people keep asking me to give lectures!

**What is your role at Portland Seminary?**

I received tenure a couple years ago, and then this year I moved down to three-quarter time, and for the next several years I’m teaching online only. I wanted to begin to transition from a more academic setting to a more accessible setting for our

Indigenous people and for others who want to think differently. You know, academia is good in some ways. It is supposed to open us to new ideas and all that, but our original vision at Eloheh Indigenous Center for Earth Justice<sup>1</sup> was to reach people who really can't afford a formal education or who aren't able to enroll because of adverse life conditions or other reasons that prevent them from undertaking the rigors of academia. So, that's the type of education we want to get back to. I guess I have climbed the academic mountain, stood at the top, and looked over the whole enterprise, and now I'm coming back down on the other side.

### **Can you tell us where you grew up and how you came to meet Jesus?**

I'm from the United States. They say my third great-grandfather was a Chickamauga chief who fought against the United States in a nineteen-year war and then made peace with them. In my own background I have mixed loyalties, I guess you'd say. I'm also a person on two sides of the American culture. Both my parents are assimilated mixed-blood Cherokees, so I'm a person who has all through his life struggled with identity. I think a lot of Native folks, and also just people in general, struggle with identity. We're always in this fast-moving, cosmopolitan, urbanized world, coming to understand differently who we are at different times. Most of us don't have the luxury of remaining in one place anymore, and so it's been a unique process for me to understand who I am. So, when you start asking those identity questions, the answers could get long and involved. But I guess I'll start with my parents.

1. "Indigenous Center for Earth Justice," Eloheh, accessed May 24, 2021, [www.eloheh.org](http://www.eloheh.org).

My Dad is a veteran of World War II. After the tragedy of Pearl Harbor, he left his parents' farm in Mississippi the day after he graduated high school, and he joined the Navy. When the war was over, he moved to Birmingham, Alabama, to his sister's home, got a delivery job at Sears, and met my mom. Mom was working at the Sears candy counter. My mom's people were very poor. She was raised in the coal mining camps. She had to quit school when she was thirteen and move to the city to live with an aunt, so she could work and send money back home to her family. She was the oldest daughter. Her older brothers didn't have to do that, just the girls—totally unfair.

Just a little digression here. I was speaking a few weeks ago to a congregation I'd never met before, and I said, "You know, women are smarter than men, right?" They looked at me quizzically, and I said, "You know how I know that?" And one of our female friends who was there yelled out, "Because Edith told you!" Okay, I agreed, but the thing about women being smarter in life, of course, is what anthropologists call Indigenous Cosmopolitanism. This refers to the ability to understand and act from two different worldviews or the ability to operate in multiple ethnic cultures. But, I thought to myself, unfortunately, it's still a "man's world" and women are oppressed, still being denied equal rights or fair treatment. Women have had to think with both a male and a female worldview all along in order to make it in this world. Men, well, we have the privilege of just having to think like men. As a result, women must be smarter than men.

I am an Indigenous Cosmopolitan; one who can operate in both a Western worldview and an Indigenous worldview. I was exposed to both cultures, and other cultures as well, throughout most of my life. My folks got married, and they became part of what historians call the Great Migration, which

was, as it's thought of sociologically, the movement of six million Black people from the rural South pouring to cities in the North, Midwest, and West for work in factories and other somewhat demeaning jobs, but with much better pay than they had previously. But it wasn't just Black people in the migration. There were a lot of poor Native Americans, Whites, and others who also migrated. My dad went to work for Ford Motor Company, and after a while he saved enough money to start his own seat-cover business, working for himself while still in the booming automobile industry. He made seat covers for seventeen years, and then he became a home builder, still owning his own business. Early on, my mother went to beauty school and became a beautician.

I first went to school in a place called Willow Run, Michigan, which is outside of Ypsilanti, which is outside of Ann Arbor. Most people know where Ann Arbor is because it's home to the University of Michigan, but Ypsilanti is sort of the underside of Ann Arbor, and then Willow Run is the underside of Ypsilanti. I grew up in a very rough and poor place. Willow Run was multi-racial, multicultural, and multiethnic, with lots of working-class poor. I was able to garner a wider perspective than many of the people I met later in life as a result of this social and cultural richness. All this diversity led me to have a passion for understanding other people, especially people different from me. I was a typical teenager of the '60s and '70s in that I was highly involved in drugs and rock 'n' roll bands and all those things. I met Jesus at age ten, and then again when I was nineteen. I went to Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti on the pass/fail program, but I flunked out my first semester. So I'm a PhD who is also a flunky. Maybe some people will be encouraged by that.

I wanted to move back home when I flunked out, and I asked my parents if I could, and they said, "Maybe!" Now, my folks

are Baptist and Baptists are big among Cherokee. I have a friend who is a traditional Cherokee stomp dancer, and he half-jokingly says that the Baptists have been around us for so long that Cherokees just consider them one of our traditional religions.

My parents' church had just had a revival. In the United States, Baptists bring a preacher in once a year in the fall for a week of preaching revival meetings. It was October, and I had just missed their revival meetings. My folks were probably thinking the whole time, "If we could have just got Randy here, he could have been saved!" So they saw their opportunity when I was flunking out of school and asked to move back home. They told me I could move back home on one condition: I must promise to go to the revival with them the next fall. Okay, I said. Simple enough, right?

I didn't know it then, but my mom was organizing people praying for me all over the world! And for me, that year was the roughest year of my life! I had a drug overdose, some of my friends were killed, and a family member was killed, and after one long, hellish year, it was finally the last night of the revival, and I promised them I'd go, and they wouldn't take no for an answer. So I finally got in the car with them, and this is how I know the Spirit is real, because about the time I shut the car door, my heart started pounding in my throat. And by the time I got to the church, it was pounding so loud I thought other people might even be able to hear it. And by the time the altar call came, well, I don't even remember walking down to the altar. I think I might have actually floated down the aisle!

I had known Jesus as a younger child, having been introduced at ten years old at a church camp. I was led to Christ then by a full-blooded Ojibwa man. I was probably just as fascinated with him as I was with Jesus at the time because we were all

mixed-bloods, and I wanted to see what “real Indians” were like! I spent a lot of time with him that week of camp and in the end, he led me to Jesus. He also taught me to harvest sas-safra and steer a canoe.

So, at nineteen, I’m actually coming back to Jesus, and I just want to be left alone to pray. I spent maybe forty-five minutes to an hour back there in a back room praying, and the only thing I remember is that I said, “Jesus, if you can deliver me from these drugs”—because I hadn’t been able to get off them by myself—“I’ll follow you the rest of my life, and I’ll never look back.” And it felt like I got hit on the head with a sledgehammer. Then I got up, and I walked away, and I knew that Jesus was real, and I knew that my life was going to be different from that point on. And it was! I went to all my friends, and I told them I couldn’t hang with them anymore, that I was following Jesus and needed to change. Some of them said, “Well, good for you.” Following Jesus took me on a series of journeys all around the country, doing stuff like marrying a very interesting person named Edith. Now we’ve got four kids and five grandkids.

My parents were farmers or planters of a sort. When you come from farmers or gardeners who had gardens the size of some people’s farms, farming and gardening just come naturally. I grew up with that, and so there was always the love of the earth and the love for watching things grow. When Edith and I got married, well, we discovered that farming and gardening weren’t very natural for her. Edith was raised on the Wind River Indian Reservation in Wyoming, and her family had horses and cattle, but I had this vegetable background, and so we eventually merged those two backgrounds together and became farmers. We now have our own seed company, and we are trying to preserve open-pollinated, organic seeds, many

native species, and heirloom seeds, and that's all very important to us. I would say every bit as important as our theological work because I don't see a difference between them. I guess that's me.

**How do you go from the background you described to becoming a theologian? Do you identify as a theologian, and at what point did you decide to or decide not to?**

I like to say that everyone is a theologian. It's just that some are good, and some are not so good.

**What determines good and not so good?**

Perhaps how well we understand who God is? My academic training is really in missiology, and I've always had a love of church history. I've always loved thinking about these things. I try to think deeply about everything, and so if you're a follower of Jesus, that also helps us. I fell in love with a lot of the stories in scripture and just wanted to understand those more. Because I think deeply about God, some people call me a theologian. I think the way that my theology may be different from other people's is that, for me, everything begins with the earth and then we go from there.

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# 1

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## The Myths of History and Progressive Civilizations

### Seeking a Blessing on Indigenous Land

One of the things that was said in the introduction to the Hayward Lectures that made me feel quite at home were the words *disruptive ideas*.<sup>1</sup> The Hayward Lectures seek to amplify “disruptive ideas.” When I heard that I thought, “Oh, good! I can be myself in these lectures.” Thanks to Danny Zacharias and the rest of the folks, the Hayward family and others who’ve invited me here and especially to Tammy, the local Indigenous representative who welcomed us to this land. It’s an honor to be in this beautiful land.

Edith and I travel a lot and have done so for years. We spent four years where we just traveled around from reservation to

1. “The Hayward Lectures advances its vision by inviting world-class scholars to Acadia in the aforementioned disciplines to address the community each October on their freshest work and emerging or disruptive ideas in the formats of lecture, conversation, and writing.” “Hayward Lectures,” Acadia Divinity College, accessed June 15, 2021, [www.aciadiativ.ca/hayward-lectures/](http://www.aciadiativ.ca/hayward-lectures/).

reservation across the United States and Canada and mentored a number of people. We also did a lot of speaking during those four years. We homeschooled our kids, and we had the rich experience of our whole family being around all kinds of Native people from almost everywhere on Turtle Island.<sup>2</sup> Those were probably the richest experiences of our lives.

We've been doing Native American work, serving our own Indigenous peoples, for over thirty years. I consider those years the most valuable times among all my learning experiences. I'm going to share a story with you from those years because I know Canada has a wonderful practice of recognizing the host peoples of the land. Wherever we went to speak, we always sought the blessing of the host people whose land we were on because that's what we were taught by our elders. So we were going to the Ojibwa reservation near Hayward, Wisconsin. When I got there, I asked the group that had invited me, the YWAM Native leadership base, "Who welcomed you on the land?"

They had invited us to come up for a week and teach an Indigenous Leadership course, so I wanted to be sure all was being done in a good way. Unfortunately, no one had really invited them on the land, so I said, "Well then, we can't speak." This type of problem has actually happened a couple of different times, but we've always been able to work through it. Creator has always made a way for us to receive the local blessing and speak. But in Hayward, we had just learned of the problem, so we had to tell our host that we won't speak unless the host people welcome us somehow.

Now, it just so happened that day that this young Ojibwa kid from Seattle, not yet in his twenties, was hitchhiking on the

2. *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Turtle Island," by Amanda Robinson, last modified November 6, 2018, [www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/turtle-island](http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/turtle-island).

reservation. The young man and his brother were adopted out when he was about two years old and were raised in Seattle by a White family. He had recently experienced an LSD trip where he saw Jesus, and Jesus told him, “I want you to go back to your reservation.” The young man knew he was from a reservation somewhere, way out in Wisconsin. Well, it just so happened that the director of the YWAM base saw him hitchhiking on the road and picked him up. The director asked him if he knew who his people were, but he did not. He told Dave, the director of the YWAM base, that while on LSD, Jesus told him to come out here. Then Dave asked if he had any place to stay. He did not. Dave told him he could stay with them, so they fed him and gave him shelter. We got there later that same day.

Naturally, I took the opportunity to include this Ojibwe young man and had him stick with me all that day so he could learn something from it. I knew enough to know that he wasn't there by accident. “I want to teach you some things,” I told him, and he said, “Okay.” I told him whenever we go to someone else's land, even now, my elders told me, even when driving down the road, to stop and put tobacco down, because that is someone else's land and we need to respect it. But to be completely honest, I need to tell you that when driving I haven't always done that, just because we travel through so many places, we'd be stopping constantly. But we have asked for permission wherever we teach or exercise any sort of spiritual influence. And so it was important that we do this right that day, especially now that we had a young person trying to find himself and his Indigenous identity. After some thought was given to this, we figured out who the elder was we should speak with. He was one of the two leaders of the Midewiwin Lodge, their tribal religion, and he was also a tribal elder and elder representative to the tribal council.

We went to the local store, and we made a traditional elder basket that consisted of flour and tobacco, a flashlight and coat hangers, sugar and coffee, fresh fruit, and all the kinds of things that elders like. After tracking down his address, we went to his house and knocked on the door, and his wife answered. I guess people visit him often for advice so she very naturally said, “Oh, come in and set the basket down, he’s on the phone right now.” Finally, he came back and asked respectfully, “Who are you guys and what do you want?” So I explained to him who we were and that we were going to be teaching on spiritual matters to Indigenous leaders there. He said, “Well, what are you going to be teaching?” I explained how we do things according to our traditional teachings, but we follow Jesus. We were calling it “contextual Native ministry” at the time, but I don’t really think of it like that anymore. We just live the life we are supposed to be living. Now we’re just Indians being Indians.

Then he started telling us some pretty interesting stories. He said, “You know what you all believe and what we believe is not that different?” Then he told us of a couple of subtle differences concerning hell and the devil. He said, “You know, when I was a younger person, I wanted to find out what you Christians believe, so I enrolled for a semester in this college. It’s called Moody Bible College, you ever heard of that?” We were surprised and talked about that for some time. But every now and then he would keep interrupting his own story, which meant he was trying to get a point across, and he said, “You know, my uncle told me to never disrespect Jesus, because Jesus is a great spirit and I talk to him.” And he would go on and he’d tell us more and more, and then he would say this thing about his uncle again. He told us about how he had just come back from a big meeting of Gichi Dowan, big medicine people from around the United States and Canada. These Ojibwa spiritual

leaders were all trying to decide how they could get along better with the Christians. And he told us some stories about all this.

We sat there for maybe two hours, and at least six or seven times he said this thing about his uncle and respecting Jesus. Then at one point he said, “My uncle trained most of the spiritual leaders around this area. He lived to be over a hundred years old, and my uncle would tell me all these stories about Jesus. So I asked my uncle one time, I said, ‘Uncle, how do you know all this about Jesus? Did you go to residential school?’ He said, ‘Oh no! No! I never did that.’ Then I asked him, ‘Did the priest teach you?’ And he says, ‘No, I have never been to church.’ Then I said, ‘But you tell me all the stuff about Jesus. Have you been reading the Bible?’ My uncle said, ‘No, just remember what I told you in the past: don’t disrespect Jesus ’cause he’s a great spirit, and I talk to him.’ I said to my uncle, ‘Well yeah, you talk to him, but how do you know all these things he’s done?’ You know my uncle looked at me so quizzically, and then he said, ‘Well, when I talk to him, of course he talks back.’ And then the elder said, ‘I’m going to pray for you now,’ and then our time was over.”

The message was simple to understand: It’s just like when I used to pastor and I would tell the children’s sermon before the regular sermon. I would tell them, “If you understood the implications of what I just said in the children’s story, you don’t have to stay for the adult preaching—you can go on home.” If you understood the story I just told about the visit with this elder, you understand my message, because it holds the core of it.

## Privilege and Heritage

I’ll be talking about White privilege in this chapter. But first I will share a bit about my own privilege, because I have some.

We all do. I'm a male, I'm straight, I'm educated, light-skinned, and of copious body size, so I take up a little space in the room. I'm an able-bodied, middle-class, Native American legal descendant recognized by the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma. I was raised in a working-class poor family. I'm the first, maybe of a thousand cousins, to get a PhD. We are first-generation non-coal miners, on my mom's side. We come from working-poor, union-organizing people. I was educated later in life. After many years, I finally got my PhD, and I'm feeling it in my body as well as in my mind. I was raised in a very multicultural, multiracial atmosphere, and I've experienced racial oppression in some pretty severe ways at different times and places.

Winston Churchill said, "I consider that it will be found much better . . . to leave the past to history, especially as I propose to write that history myself."<sup>3</sup> He did write history, and it was kind to him. Why? Because whoever interprets history also influences theology and gets to name the myths that underlie a mythologized society, creating them into their own worldview. So "the winners write history," as is often said. I teach my co-learners (students) in our history classes that there is no such thing as history; there are only histories. So even under the best of circumstances, it is often the case that "might makes right."

The following is a quotation from Indigenous Canadian author and professor Taiaiake Alfred.<sup>4</sup> He writes about Indig-

3. Winston Churchill, speech in the House of Commons, delivered January 23, 1948, quoted in *The Yale Book of Quotations*, ed. Fred R. Shapiro (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 154.

4. Gerald Taiaiake Alfred is an educator, author, and activist. He was born in Montreal in 1964. Alfred is an internationally recognized intellectual and political advisor, and he is currently a professor at the University of Victoria. Alfred grew up in Kahnawake and received a BA in history from Concordia University and an MA and a PhD from Cornell. He served in the US Marine Corps in the 1980s. Alfred currently serves as director of the Indigenous Governance Program. He was awarded a

enous education, but I want to substitute the word *religion* for the word *education* for our current context. He states:

The machinery of Indigenous [religion] may simply replicate European systems. But even if such [religion] resembles traditional Native American systems on the surface, without strong and healthy leaders committed to traditional values and the preservation of our nationhood, they are going to fail. Our children will judge them to have failed because a [religion] that is not based on traditional principles of respect and harmonious coexistence will inevitably tend to reflect the cold, calculating and coercive ways of the modern state. The whole of the decolonization process will have been for nothing if Indigenous [religion] has no meaningful Indigenous character. Worse, if the new [religion] does not embody a notion of power that is appropriate to Indigenous cultures, the goals of the struggle will have been betrayed. Leaders who promote non-Indigenous goals will embody non-Indigenous values and are simply used by the state to maintain its control.<sup>5</sup>

I have seen this happen numerous times in both educational and church spheres.

There is an image created by the University of Tennessee, a rendering of a Cherokee village as it would have looked in its day. Today, that village now lies beneath the Tennessee River.

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Canada Research Chair from 2003 to 2007. In addition, he has received a National Aboriginal Achievement Award in education. Among decolonization theorists, Alfred fits closest to Memmi in that he believes the colonizer is as much caught in a trap as the colonized, and both must be liberated. He sees no point in violent revolution, such as is advocated by Frantz Fanon, because it reduces the colonized to the same level as the colonizer. To Alfred, indigenization is the action of freedom that moves one out of victimization.

5. Gerald Taiaiake Alfred, *Peace, Power, Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 1999), xiv.

Although the town is completely under water now, from the archaeological evidence they were able to reconstruct an image of how it might have looked. The image I'm thinking of is the former town of Tellico. This was one of the villages where my third great-grandfather resided, my ancestors' home. But it's not here anymore, or at least no longer visible, fulfilling the American mythological angst of the disappearing Indian.<sup>6</sup>

When I lived in the American South, I would visit a natural spring every chance I had. As a Cherokee person, I would take my children to water ceremony there. It's called the Blue Hole. The Blue Hole is my favorite sacred place in the world. I won't be able to have my ashes spread there because that's not allowed, as it's a state park, but my place of rest and peace is that spring right there, and those are two things that are very meaningful to me—rest and peace. At this spring, I can think back clearly about who I am and where I come from. The location of the Blue Hole is also the location of one of the last meetings of Cherokees before the removal so it also has sad memories. Rest and peace and sadness and identity can all come together in our Indigenous reality.

Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, “Our nation was born in genocide. We tried, as a matter of national policy, to wipe out its Indigenous population. Moreover, we elevated that tragic experience into a noble crusade. Indeed, even today we have not permitted ourselves to reject or feel remorse for the shameful episode.”<sup>7</sup> Canada has moved more on this front than

6. Depictions in literature such as *The Last of the Mohicans* and in art such as *The End of the Trail* show Native Americans as a people who are disappearing. Andrea Smith, “Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy,” in *Color of Violence*, ed. INCITE! (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 66–73.

7. Martin Luther King Jr., *Why We Can't Wait* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 121–22.

the United States in the apology to Indigenous peoples and the process of Truth and Reconciliation.<sup>8</sup>

John F. Kennedy, one of our great and most beloved presidents, said, “For a subject worked and reworked, and one considered so often in novels, motion pictures and television, American Indians remain probably the least understood and most misunderstood Americans of us all. Collectively, their history is our history and should be part of our shared and remembered heritage. When we forget great contributors to our American history, when we neglect the heroic past of the American Indian, we thereby weaken our own heritage. We need to remember the heritage our forefathers found here and from which they borrowed liberally.”<sup>9</sup> These are lessons that we’re still trying to learn in the United States.

### Terrapin and the Wolves

I want to tell you a story, a Chickamauga story. The Chickamauga are a particular group of Cherokee to which my ancestors belonged. When the “Revolutionary War” broke out, about half of our Cherokee people remained neutral. The other half fought with the British. Among those who fought with the British, and who continued to fight for seventeen years after the British surrendered, were my ancestors who were Chickamaugans. From what I can surmise, my third and fourth great-grandfathers fought in the Revolutionary War against tyranny—against the United States! So that group became what’s known as the Chickamaugans, and those are my people.

8. See Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *A Knock on the Door: The Essential History of Residential Schools from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2016).

9. John F. Kennedy, quoted in Alvin M. Josephy, ed., *The American Heritage Book of Indians*, 3rd ed. (New York: American Heritage, 1961), 7.